The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work With the Political Styles of Board Members

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The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work With the Political Styles of Board Members

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work with the Political Styles of Board Members

by Susan Andreas-Bervel

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

Methodology: This study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design. Quantitative data were collected through surveys to determine how superintendents perceived their own political style and the political style of their board members. Qualitative data were collected through standardized, semistructured interviews to identify the strategies exemplary superintendents use to work with the political styles of board members.

Findings: Exemplary superintendents use a variety of strategies and adapt their strategies to the political styles of their board members. They invest time in getting to know their board members to build relationships and trust and focus on establishing open and proactive communication. Governance was found to be an important strategy that
worked with all political styles of board members. The exemplary superintendents were politically savvy and brought a positive attitude to working with the board.

**Conclusions:** It was concluded that superintendents must have an understanding of political styles, and develop, adapt, and use political strategies that will allow for positive and trusting relationships with their board members. Superintendents must establish open communication, devoting time into communicating with the board. Superintendents who invest time in governance will have boards who understand their role and operate as a governing unit. Superintendents who view their board as an asset will improve their effectiveness, longevity, and survivability in their position.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations for further research included a meta-analysis of the political styles thematic dissertation, political strategies used by superintendents during crisis, strategies for working with assertive political styles, and replicating the study in the public sector.

Key Words: Superintendent-board relationships, politics, political style, strategies, governance, building relationships; trust; communication; coherence.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study superintendent and board member political styles in multiple types of school districts, 10 doctoral students, in collaboration with two faculty members, developed a common interest in exploring the strategies exemplary superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of 10 doctoral students. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study was designed using the nine political styles identified in the political styles framework from *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016). Each researcher administered a survey to five exemplary superintendents to identify their own political style as well as the political styles of their board members. The researcher then interviewed the same five superintendents who completed the survey to identify the strategies they use with the different political styles and strategies that work with all political styles. In order to ensure consistency and reliability across the thematic, the team of researchers collaboratively developed the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, survey instrument, interview questions, and study procedures.

Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* was used to refer to the researchers who conducted the thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplary superintendents with the following populations in California school districts: Bradley D. Tooker, unified superintendents in Northern California; Jeffrey D. Tooker, high school superintendents; Roni Jones, rural superintendents in Northern California; Susan Andreas-Bervel, suburban elementary superintendents in Southern California; Regina Green, Latino superintendents; Leisa
Winston, female suburban superintendents; Tammy Blakely, suburban unified superintendents in Southern California; Maura Murabito, female ROP superintendents; Reggie Thompkins, unified superintendents in Southern California; and Chris Sinatra, small school district superintendents.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Politics is not a new concept, beginning in ancient Greece over 2,000 years ago. Sleat (2016) stated, “Politics is a particular sort of human activity” (p. 254), and “is an attempt to provide order via authority and legitimate coercion in conditions of disagreement” (p. 255). Individuals and coalitions alike seek to achieve their goals through the use of influence and political power. The essence of politics is power: power to use toward and through others to achieve goals (White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).

Politics exist internally and externally with all organizations, and school districts are no exception. The political challenges faced within the public sector are intense and give rise to conflict amidst heightened scrutiny and increasing demands (White et al., 2016). School districts operate in a turbulent political environment of continual change, legislative pressure, accountability, concern for school safety, limited resources, immigration, new technologies, inadequate leadership, and demands from an increasingly diverse community (Brierton, Graham, Tomal, & Wilhite, 2016; Deluca, 1999; Mintzberg, 1985; Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005; White et al., 2016).

School districts must operate within this dynamic social and political environment, led by a governance system of elected officials (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Although candidates for school board officially run on a nonpartisan basis, each trustee comes to the school board with a unique perspective and individual ideas about how to change or improve the system (Hess & Meeks, 2010; Mountford, 2004). Once elected, board members are charged with governing effectively to fulfill the promise of a tuition-free public education, provide equal opportunities and equitable resources, ensure high expectations and accountability, and teach democratic values and principles. When
school boards govern effectively, they ensure an equitable education by aligning policy and resources to meet the basic needs of all students, offer full access to all programs, fulfill legal mandates, and proactively support success for each and every child (California School Boards Association [CSBA], 2020; Campbell & Fullan, 2019).

Devarics and O’Brien (2011) determined that “effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (p. 3). Superintendents, charged with providing daily leadership and management, must navigate an increasingly complex political landscape, responding to state and local board priorities, expectations of parents, needs of teachers and principals, changing demands for student outcomes, and diminishing resources (Bjork, 2005; Petersen & Williams, 2005; White et al, 2016). School boards have become increasingly politicized and seek more involvement in the daily running of the school district, leading to confusion in roles and conflict for the superintendent (B. C. Fusarelli, 2006). According to Cuban (1988), “Determining the ebb and flow of competing interests and expectations, while simultaneously handling the inevitable crash of conflicting interests, in order to avoid gridlock becomes a superintendent’s major task” (p. 139).

Although much research has been conducted on effective governance and board-superintendent relationships, there is still a need for further research in this area (Harmeier, 2016; Hill & Jochim, 2018; P. A. Johnson, 2012; Kellogg, 2017; Peterson, 2017; Summers, 2015). Many studies have focused on effective practices; however, little research addresses factors of effective board governance and board-superintendent relationships related to the individual board member (Briggs & Buenrostro, 2017).
Superintendents must be politically astute to determine the political power configurations at play with their board members and adjust their strategies (Bjork, 2005). Understanding the political strategies that superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members will contribute to the body of research for superintendent-school board politics and relationships (Briggs & Buenrostro, 2017; White et al., 2016).

**Background**

Political theories are shaped by the important cultural, economic, social, and intellectual philosophies and events of the time, and the academic study of political science has thrived for the past few centuries (Sabine, 1937). Politics touches every aspect of people’s lives as there are shifts and changes in culture, social norms, education, economic conditions, and most often today, technology. The influence of social media bots on the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election has received much attention over the past few years, and with Mark Zuckerberg facing both houses of Congress to provide testimony regarding the Cambridge Analytica scandal, one does not need to look far to see how technology, government, and politics are intertwined at the forefront of people’s lives (Confessore, 2018).

Modern times have been marked by numerous political movements worldwide, such as socialism, Marxism, fascism, communism, dictatorships, and the welfare state. Although Ryan (2012) stated, “The art of self-government remains fragile” (p. 1011), the United States has endured as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (Lincoln, 1863, para. 3). Citizen oversight exists over every major public institution across the nation. Citizens are elected to serve and govern at all levels—city, county,
region, state, and national—forming the cornerstone of democracy. Citizen boards and committees oversee all aspects of public life, including “sewers, police, roads, firefighting, rivers, libraries, airlines, prisons, forests, military—every government function: all staffed by experts, without exception; and all governed by civilians” (Brickell & Paul, 1988, as cited in CSBA, 2007, p. 3). Democracy is a foundation that has not only survived but thrived through all the political movements, change, and turbulence since this great nation was founded (Brickell & Paul, 1988; CSBA, 2007).

**Governance and Public Education**

The education system in American was founded upon principles of democracy, and for over 200 years, public schools have been political arenas in which citizens have disagreed and debated, expressing both hopes and fears about issues that shape the larger context of local and national education policy (Pulliam & Van Patton, 2003; Tyack, 2001). Tyack (2001) stated, “When citizens deliberate about the education of the young, they are also debating the shape of the future for the whole nation” (p. 2). Public schools were seen as democratic institutions because they taught correct political principles, which would produce virtuous citizens, while allowing adults to participate in the exercise of local control over the education of the youth within the community (Tyack, 2001).

The concept of local control endures today as a foundational expectation of public education. In 2013, when the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was signed into law in California, the legislation was upheld as a reform that returned decision-making to the local level (Fullan & Lovenburg, 2017). Districts are tasked with designing specific services to increase student outcomes and close gaps in achievement that exist depending
on unique local demographics (Wolf & Sands, 2016). The new requirements uphold expectations of local control and accountability for school leaders and school boards, requiring local decision-makers to seek the input of their stakeholders to determine how best to meet the unique local needs of their students (Fullan & Lovenburg, 2017). Given this shift to local control, it is interesting to note that politics has become the most significant factor that superintendents think inhibits their job performance (Finnan et al., 2015; Wolf & Sands, 2016).

Theoretical Foundations

According to Farazmand (1999), “Rarely have organizational theorists embraced political theory in the development of organizational theory” (p. 323). Organizational theory has been developed in parallel with political theory, without any consideration of the other. Looking at the way organizations are organized and administered through the lens of political theory will support understanding of how power is exercised in political organizations (Farazmand, 1999).

Elite theory. Elite theory holds that there is one group in charge and another group subject to its authority; the group in charge is the one with the power (Tittenbrun, 2013). The “elites” hold powerful positions and control resources, both material and symbolic (Lopez, 2013). Elites are strategic and able to affect political outcomes (Higley, 2008). Although they make systematic use of their concentrated power in a top-down manner, elitists are acutely aware of the nonelitists; in order to cultivate and sustain their power, elitists must maintain support by aligning with the interests or political orientation of the nonelites (Pakulski, 2012).
**Pluralist theory.** Pluralist theory holds that power is broadly, however unequally, spread among different fraternal, community, or advocacy special interest groups in society. These special interest groups compete to influence or control public policy (Baskin, 1970; P. M. Johnson, 2005). Pluralist theory holds that there is no single power elite; instead, there are many competing power elites with different backgrounds, values, and support within society (P. M. Johnson, 2005).

**Rational choice theory.** Rational choice theory holds that people are aware that there are different choices available to them, and that they will select the best option that they believe will produce the expected results (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Cizikiene & Urmanaviciene, 2018; Walsh, 2017). In decision-making situations, a person “considers a finite set of alternatives, ascribes consequences to them, orders these consequences according to their importance and value, and makes an optimal choice among available alternatives” (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016, p. 196). It is assumed that the person will know all the available alternatives and choose the best action based on the possible consequences or benefits of the choice (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Cizikiene & Urmanaviciene, 2018; Walsh, 2017).

**Normative theory.** Pietrzyk-Reeves (2017) stated that “normative theory is concerned with norms or normative principles” (p. 177), which provides a general directive about what people should or should not do. Normative theory has roots in ancient Greece, where Plato and Aristotle wrote about the focus on the common good of the political community (Baubock, 2008; Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017). Normative theory provides a standard through “prescriptive or evaluative statements,” which are treated as propositions that must be consistent and stand up to opposing views, unlike opinions,
which are subjective and whose validity cannot be determined through discourse (Baubock, 2008, p. 41).

**Social contract theory.** Social contract theory holds that the moral and political obligations of citizens are dependent on a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. Although social contract theory has roots in the political writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, it remains one of the most influential theories in modern history (Friend, 2018). The social contract establishes a state of nature as the starting point, where all humans are free and equal, and any limitation on that freedom and equality must be justified. This tradition of the social contract establishes the fundamental liberal principle, which holds that all restrictions on liberty must be justified (Friend, 2018; Gaus, Courtland, & Schmidtz, 2018).

**Social inequity theory.** Social inequity theory evolved from cognitive dissonance, exchange, and social comparison theories in making predictions about how people manage their interactions and relationships with others (Adams, 1963; Festinger, 1957; Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Inequity exists for a person whenever their inputs or outcomes appear to be psychologically opposite to what is perceived to be the inputs or outcomes of another person in a relationship (Adams, 1963). Social inequity theory asserts that everyone is equally sensitive to equity. However, the greater the inequity that is perceived, the more distress is felt by the individual. Social inequity theory also holds that the greater the distress that is experienced, the harder the individual will work to restore equity and relieve the distress (Huseman et al., 1987).
Theoretical Framework: Elements of Political Styles

White et al. (2016) set forth a theoretical framework that combines an analysis of one’s goal-orientation and political initiative into a matrix of “The Nine Political Styles” (p. 71). This research built on the work of DeLuca (1999), based on the theory that developing political competence depends on self-understanding of one’s own political style (White et al., 2016). Every person has a political style, even when they avoid politics and political situations. Each superintendent and board member will have a predominant style, and each organization will have a diverse representation of the various styles. White et al. (2016) provided a framework for understanding differing political styles so that leaders can “function deliberately” (p. 79) in ways that will best benefit the organization.

The nine political styles matrix is formed at the intersection of the goal-oriented and initiative continuums. The initiative continuum has three levels of political initiative: “assertive,” “engaged” and “passive,” which are aligned with three categories of goal allegiance: “self-interests,” “blended interests,” and “organizational interests” (White et al., 2016, pp. 69-71). The resulting matrix identifies nine political styles: analyst, adaptor, supporter, planner, balancer, developer, challenger, arranger, and strategist (White et al., 2016).

School Board Governance

According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), governance is “a basic function of the organization, an integral part of the system, setting the direction of the district, assuring the achievement of the strategic goals and the moral imperative, holding the district accountable and providing leadership to the community” (p. 16). Devarics and O’Brien
(2011) determined that “effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (p. 3). The governance team is responsible for establishing the organizational mission, setting expectations, holding management accountable, and taking responsibility for outcomes (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

A growing body of research examines the role of school district governance, especially the relationship between the superintendent and the board. The most common reason cited for conflict within the superintendent-board relationship is the confusion of roles between members of the board and the superintendent (Mountford, 2004). To lead effectively, the superintendent and the board members must share an understanding and commitment to their roles and responsibilities. An effective superintendent will recognize the role of the board as a governing unit as well as understand and respect the role of the individual board members and their responsibility to their constituents (Witherspoon, 2008).

The superintendent cannot accomplish much without maintaining a working majority of support on the board. The board ultimately hires and fires the superintendent, and there is no denying that new board members may have been elected by running on a platform to terminate the superintendent. Although superintendent termination may seem to come unexpectedly, there are often clues that indicate the board was considering a change. The reasons can be diverse and often have little to do with leadership skill or accomplishments (Stratton, 2018). Superintendents find themselves in situations where the board informed them of changes that were needed, but those changes upset staff and the community, who then complained to the board. Due to the community pressure, the
superintendent becomes the person who takes the blame. The superintendent may fall victim to the dynamic of “they just don’t like you anymore” or “your shelf life is up” (Stratton, 2018, p. 2). Superintendents must be aware of local politics and continually work to maintain the strong board support they experienced upon hiring to increase their survivability (Stratton, 2018).

**Superintendent-School Board Relationships**

According to B. C. Fusarelli (2006), the literature “highlights the tension between boards and superintendents and the political nature of school boards” (p. 50). Over the past few decades, school boards have become increasingly politicized and seek more involvement in the daily administration and operations of the school district, which can make it difficult for the superintendents to navigate their role. School boards can appear dysfunctional because individual board members are unclear about the board’s role, and the board, as a collective body, has difficulty establishing the vision and direction for the district. When initiatives are unsuccessful, boards and superintendents often place blame on the other party, resulting in a lack of overall accountability to community stakeholders (B. C. Fusarelli, 2006).

In contrast, P. A. Johnson (2012) reported a different relationship between the boards and their superintendents in effective districts. In these districts, the governance team built a positive, trusting relationship, which enabled them to “play strong, interdependent leadership roles, to examine and challenge each other’s views, to study data and confront existing realities, to ask probing questions, and to scrutinize each other’s performance in ways that strengthened and mobilized the entire team” (P. A. Johnson, 2012, p. 100). These superintendents and board members viewed their role with
“a unity of purpose, a clear mission, and a shared sense of responsibility” (P. A. Johnson, 2012, p. 99), which supported a collaborative relationship to govern effectively.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Nationally, school districts are governed by close to 14,000 school boards, which are elected to be responsible for the employment and evaluation of approximately 14,000 superintendents. These governance teams are responsible for educating 52 million students, conducting budget oversight of approximately $600 billion per year, and providing employment to 6 million employees. Effective governance plays a major role in meeting educational needs at a local level and sustaining the long-term improvement efforts of a school district (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). The school board is responsible for establishing the organizational mission, setting expectations, holding management accountable, and taking responsibility for outcomes (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

Superintendents must navigate a complex political landscape, and the relationship between the superintendent and the school board has a significant impact on the overall culture of the district, the quality of the educational program, and ultimately, the success of the superintendent (L. D. Fusarelli, 2005). Superintendents must work with elected board members, and the relationship can be one of chaos, where the superintendent must respond to the diverse interests of board members representing various constituents within the community (Hill & Jochim, 2018). Although most board members seek office because they genuinely care about the education of children and want to work collaboratively with the superintendent, “there’s no denying that some board members have one-issue agendas or seek to build their own reputations at the superintendent’s expense” (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 3). If a superintendent lacks the political acuity,
interpersonal skills, and leadership qualities to bring a board together around a core vision, the result can be conflict and mistrust within the school community and may lead to superintendent turnover (B. C. Fusarelli, 2006).

Grissom and Anderson (2012) researched factors that contributed to superintendent turnover, challenging former research conclusions, which highlighted public disharmony and conflict on the school board. They determined that “districts with high-functioning school boards tend to have much less superintendent turnover” (Grissom & Anderson, 2012, p. 26). Higher board function also resulted in decreased rates of nonretirement exits from the district by the superintendent (Grissom & Anderson, 2012).

Superintendents who have poor relationships with the board, whose tenures were marked by board ineffectiveness and conflict, were important predictors of superintendent exits (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Peterson (2017), in a study on superintendent stress, cited the necessary skills and competencies needed for a successful superintendency; however, it is interesting to note that the skills and competencies fail to include any form of political acuity or savvy (Konnert & Augenstein, 1990). In addition, there is a broad base of literature on how superintendents effectively navigate their expert and moral leadership roles, but little in the way of the political relationships with the board, with whom they must use persuasive tactics in order to be successful (Hill & Jochim, 2018). If superintendents can develop or increase their own political skill, they may be able to work effectively with their board individually and collectively to navigate the political climate in ways that will improve superintendent-board relationships. The superintendent and the board are interconnected and interdependent, so having political
strategies to effectively work with board members can improve the overall effectiveness of the superintendent and positively impact the educational program for students (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; P. A. Johnson, 2012; White et al., 2016).

**Purpose Statement**

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

**Research Questions**

1. How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?

**Significance of the Problem**

Nationally, school districts are governed by close to 14,000 school boards, which are elected to be responsible for hiring approximately 14,000 superintendents, govern the educational program for 52 million students, oversee budgets of approximately $600 billion per year, and provide employment to 6 million employees. Governance is responsible for establishing the organizational mission, setting expectations, holding
management accountable, and taking responsibility for outcomes (Hess & Meeks, 2010). There is an urgency to improve the education system and ensure that schools are socially just and fulfill the responsibility of the moral imperative to the children and the community (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014; Campbell & Fullan, 2019).

The pressure on public education continually evolves, as do the expectations for meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The world is constantly changing, and public education holds at its core the moral imperative to uphold equality, equity, and justice for all students. The current political climate places pressure on the school system to address changes in society, such as growing inequities due to social class, physical and mental health challenges, student disengagement, drugs, violence, racial tension, and the overall erosion of trust in the government (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 global pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges for school leaders to implement distance learning, address inequities in technology access, respond to pressures for increased safety and cleaning protocols, increase awareness of social-emotional vulnerability in students, and deliver services to students with disabilities via the internet. School district efforts to address challenges require careful planning and sustained attention, but the short tenure of the average superintendent leaves improvement initiatives vulnerable (Briggs & Buenrostro, 2017; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Stratton (2018) reported that the average tenure of a superintendent in California is only 2.7 to 3 years. According to Grissom and Anderson (2012), 45% of the superintendents turned over within 3 years for 90% of the school districts representing the first nine deciles in size. Furthermore, 71% of the superintendents turned over in the
largest 10% of the districts in California during those same 3 years. There is an inverse relationship between district wealth and superintendent turnover; increased superintendent turnover is associated with student poverty. Briggs and Buenrostro (2017) reported, “Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the pressures associated with large and low-income school districts, these were more likely to report high-conflict school boards with poor superintendent relations” (p. 32).

Despite the best intentions for district reform, superintendent turnover can be disruptive to improvement efforts. Ambitious improvement initiatives will often require multiyear timelines that could outlast the tenure of the superintendent. Superintendent turnover could potentially disrupt established plans to reform the system, if the new leader discontinues the initiative instead of building upon the good work that has happened (Briggs & Buenrostro, 2017; McAdams, 2006).

Administrator preparation pays little attention to the politics of education, placing superintendents at a “conspicuous disadvantage” for dealing with the board and managing conflict (Bjork, Bell, & Gurley, 2002, p. 296). This inattention can have an impact on the governance of the school district and the career of the superintendent. According to L. D. Fusarelli (2005), “Many superintendents are politically naïve when dealing with school boards” (p. 182), viewing themselves more as professional educators than politicians. As a result, there can often be a disconnect between the political characteristics of school boards and how the superintendent works with them. Each superintendent’s experience will be unique, depending upon circumstances; the politics, problems, and opportunities within each district will differ. No matter the situation, every superintendent needs to build support with their board to increase their
survivability and be effective at leading their district; even new superintendents must build coalitions to reduce their vulnerability in the event of a shift in the board (Hill & Jochim, 2018). Any superintendent who believes that politics are not of importance “accepts unnecessary limits to their ability to improve education and serve children” (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 10).

Although politics is often thought of in a negative context, politics means to be “expedient, advisable, prudent, tactical or wise” (White et al., 2016, p. 119). Superintendents must be politically intelligent, mindful of the different stakeholders, their interests, and the real and potential impact on the superintendent’s leadership (White et al., 2016). Superintendents cannot prepare for a role that is not well understood (Hill & Jochim, 2018). Conducting a study to identify and explain the strategies that superintendents use to work with the different perceived political styles of board members will contribute to the body of research by supporting superintendents in understanding the political forces at play and identifying strategies for superintendents to work with their board members. When boards and superintendents work well together as a governance team, it creates a climate of trust and confidence, which enables staff to feel supported and positive about the future of the district. This shift in climate unifies everyone around the work to support the students in their learning and fulfills the moral imperative (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; CSBA, n.d.-c).

**Definitions of Terms**

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 interest. The styles are listed are based on levels of self-interests, blended interests, and organizational interests for each level of initiative: passive, engaged, and assertive.

**Passive Political Styles**

**Analyst.** Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interests over organizational interests. 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-interests 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 they 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 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, 1997; 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; 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; 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 (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Brierton et al., 2016; DeLuca, 1999; Duffy, 2006; White et al., 2017).

Political strategy. Political strategy is the approach or tactics a leader uses in pursuing a desired goal or objective. It considers both internal and external issues, situations, and changing dynamics in adapting a plan of action (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. It is the way in which a leader uses power to engage with individuals, groups, and circumstances. It is the combination of an individual’s commitment to organizational interests versus self-interests and the level of initiative and energy they devote to
pursuing those interests (DeLuca, 1999; Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013; 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**

This study was delimited to five exemplary suburban, elementary school district superintendents in Southern California. An exemplary superintendent in this study is a school district leader with a minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent in their current district, and demonstrates at least three of the following seven criteria:

- Shows evidence of positive governance team relationships.
- Was identified by a county superintendent as exemplary in working with the board.
- Was identified by a panel of experts who were knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- Has received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).
- Has received recognition by his or her peers.
- Has a membership in professional associations in the field.
- Has participated in CSBA’s Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
Overview of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I was an overview of the study that provides background information, the significance of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and delimitations. Chapter II contains an extensive review of the body of literature, which relates to the study of the politics of superintendent-board relationships, including a historical perspective of politics, foundational political theories, the roles of superintendents and school boards in governance, and the theoretical foundation for the study. Chapter III provides the research design and methodology of the study, including the sample population and process for identification of “exemplary” superintendents. Chapter IV presents a detailed analysis of the data collected and the findings of the study. Chapter V concludes the dissertation with a summary of the study, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research on superintendent-board political relationships.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II provides a review of the literature on politics, school board governance, and the role of the superintendent in working with the board to accomplish organizational goals. The literature review begins with an overview of the history of politics from ancient times to the present. The literature review examines different political theories and how those theories play out in modern-day politics, which impact the work of the school board and superintendent. The review of literature also includes an analysis of the roles of board members and superintendents and how conflict arises when roles are not clearly defined or respected. Finally, the review of the literature includes the theoretical framework for the study and the strategies that superintendents use to work with board members.

Brief History of Politics

Politics is not a new concept, beginning in ancient Greece over 2,000 years ago. Sleat (2016) stated, “Politics is a particular sort of human activity” (p. 254), and “politics is an attempt to provide order via authority and legitimate coercion in conditions of disagreement” (p. 255). The academic study of political science has thrived for the past few centuries. Political theories are shaped by the important cultural, economic, social, and intellectual philosophies of time and place (Sabine, 1937). Politics touches every aspect of people’s lives as there are shifts and changes in culture, social norms, education, economic conditions, and most often today, technology. The influence of social media bots on the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election has received much attention over the past few years, and with Mark Zuckerberg facing both houses of Congress to provide testimony regarding the Cambridge Analytica scandal, one does not need to look
far to see how technology, government, and politics are intertwined at the forefront of people’s lives (Confessore, 2018).

The origins of politics began with the ancient Greeks, where the passion for freedom, independence, and self-government began. The society of the Greeks was centered within the polis, numerous city-states of relatively small geographical size that functioned independently. Modern political thought is rooted in the trading economy of Athens, where the citizens realized that their culture was organized very differently from other city-states of their time (Bevir, 2010; Klosko, 2006; Ryan, 2012). Early political philosophy is rooted in the teachings and writings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, giving birth to Western political thinking (Ryan, 2012; Klosko, 2006). During this time, citizens expected to be paid for their civic contributions, such as serving in the assembly or jury duty. The business of politics was taken over by a new class: the professional politician (Ryan, 2012).

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Empire was in decline and the unifying force in Western Europe was the Catholic Church. Medieval political ideals rested on a descending theory of authority, where all authority comes from God to popes and kings, and then is handed down to their dependents. Since a diocese is a geographical region, this structure soon gave rise to conflict between the roles of kings and religious leaders, as the kings viewed the church to be under their authority. This confusion of authority resulted in power struggles where the church could uphold threats of excommunication if members of the royal family failed to comply, giving birth to the long-standing conflict between church and state (Ryman & Alcorn, 2009; Ryan, 2012).
Beginning in the 14th century, people knew they were living in an extraordinary age, focusing on a revival of classical antiquity, especially in philosophy and the arts. The invention of the Gutenberg moveable type printing press created a publishing explosion, allowing for increased communication and the rapid dissemination of new ideas throughout Europe. This rebirth of knowledge allowed people to think for themselves, using their intellect to form their own opinions and determine how best to act (Bristow, 2017). The concept of liberty emerged, setting forth expectations that people have rights that are independent of specific societal laws, such as the right to life, freedom, and property (Cahn, 1997; Tuckness, 2018).

Modern times have been marked by numerous political movements worldwide, such as socialism, Marxism, fascism, communism, dictatorships, and the welfare state. Although Ryan (2012) stated, “The art of self-government remains fragile” (p. 1011), the United States has endured as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (Lincoln, 1863, para. 3). Citizen oversight exists over almost every major public institution across the nation. Citizens are elected to serve and govern at all levels, city, county, region, state, and national, forming the cornerstone of democracy. Citizen boards and committees oversee all aspects of public life, including “sewers, police, roads, firefighting, rivers, libraries, airlines, prisons, forests, military—every government function: all staffed by experts, without exception; and all governed by civilians” (Brickell & Paul, 1988, as cited in CSBA, 2007, p. 3). Democracy is a foundation that has not only survived but thrived through all the political movements, change, and turbulence since this great nation was founded (Brickell & Paul, 1988; CSBA, 2007).
Evolution of Politics

The struggle for power provides an explanation for how political systems have evolved; social goals are the primary drivers for reform (Corning, 1996). Human societies have always existed in environments where access to fresh water, food, shelter, land, or other resources could be a source of competition and conflict. The degree to which humans choose to cooperate ultimately determines the consequences as well as the costs and benefits to those involved. According to Corning (1996), “It is one of the ironies of human evolution that every new technology has created a new dependency” (p. 112).

Weber (1918) defined politics as “the leadership, or the influencing of the leadership, of a political association, hence, today, of a state,” and defined state to mean a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (as cited in Tucker, 1995, p. 9). Within these communities, there exists the role of the constituted political leader, a person who seeks power by socially prescribed methods, and who often seeks to further enhance his power upon becoming a constituted leader. However, there are also the nonconstituted leaders; these political leaders have great influence without possessing any power or holding any prominent political position. These nonconstituted leaders can leverage their informal power through their connections and influence with the constituted leaders. Throughout history, the philosophers who analyzed or criticized the current political state and called for reform demonstrated nonconstituted leadership (Tucker, 1995).
Importance of Politics

Although it is often assumed that organizations exist with a top-down structure of authority, most organizations have a complex network of freewheeling coalitions, based on various relationships and alliances that negotiate and compete for influence over decisions and resources. According to Bolman and Deal (2017), organizations are political by nature, “competitive arenas of scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage” (p. 23). Politics lies at the center of decision-making in all organizations, as politics is a real process used to make decisions and allocate resources, especially in the context of scarcity and competing interests. Holding a negative view of politics seriously threatens individual and organizational effectiveness, as politics, power, conflict, and control are normal dynamics in daily organizational life. Bolman and Deal (2017) developed a political frame for organizational understanding and decision-making that operates from five essential assumptions:

1. Organizations are coalitions of different individuals or interest groups.
2. Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—deciding who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (p. 184)
Politics are inevitable, and coalitions will form because the members need one another, even when their concerns only slightly overlap. When there is an alignment of values, beliefs, and culture, obtaining agreement is easier. However, during times of disharmony, political alliances form because members will find they have common interests and believe they can get more accomplished if they work together. These alliances will often become more visible due to the diversity within the coalition membership. When resources diminish, politics often get more intense and transparent, as management struggles to economize and make tough decisions in the face of conflict and difficult political dynamics that may not be well-understood. This interplay of “differences and scarce resources make power a key resource” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 186). A tight connection exists between power and dependency, as individuals and groups need things from one another, making the power relationships “multidirectional” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 186).

**Sources of Power**

According to Tucker (1995), “Politics is in essence the pursuit and exercise of power—in the interest of those who pursue and exercise it” (p. 1). Power is a difficult concept to define. People seem to identify it when they see it, but they may have a difficult time specifying or expressing exactly what it is. The sociologist Max Weber defined power as “the possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behavior of another” (Philo & Walton, 1973, p. 336). In his book *Three Faces of Power*, economist Kenneth E. Boulding (1990) referred to power as people’s capacity to get others to do things that contribute to what they want. Pfeiffer (1992) defined power as “the potential ability to
influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do” (p. 30).

Bolman and Deal (2017) called out multiple sources of power, such as position power, which refers to legitimate authority as bestowed based on attaining a position. Position power alone is not enough to achieve organizational goals. Constituents come with multiple and varied sources of power supports, which can make it possible for them to circumvent decisions and policy. According to Bolman and Deal (2017), “Officeholders who rely solely on position power generate resistance and get outflanked, outmaneuvered, or overrun by others more versatile in exercising multiple forms of power” (p. 194). Therefore, power often lies in “zones of indifference” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 195). Zones of indifference are areas that few people care about, but those few care greatly and have tremendous political clout. The zone of indifference can change quickly, depending on how the organization is performing in the mind of a few, but powerful, constituents. To be politically successful requires tactical leadership, requiring leaders to track changes in the political landscape to avoid missteps that could result in unintentional criticism and resistance within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017; White et al., 2016).

**Conflict**

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), “Conflict is normal and inevitable. It is a natural byproduct of collective life” (p. 196). Conflict should not be viewed negatively, but rather is healthy to promoting change within organizations. Although conflict can be a barrier to a leader’s effectiveness, too little conflict can lead to apathy and lack of responsiveness in organizations. Therefore, conflict requires savvy management to either
intensify or suppress, depending on the situation. When conflict is managed poorly, it can cause infighting and power struggles that are ultimately destructive; however, when managed well, conflict can lead to creativity and innovation that will move the organization forward (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Kotter, 1985).

**Ethics, Morals, and Politics**

White et al. (2016) defined ethics as “a set of principles determining that which is right or wrong in human conduct” (p. 106). Although political dynamics can be “sordid and destructive,” they can also “be a vehicle for achieving noble purposes” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 216). Such political leadership can have an elevating purpose, by operating at a need and value level higher than that of the potential follower and exploiting conflict and tension within value structures (J. M. Burns, 1978). Michael Josephson (2002), in *Making Ethical Decisions*, stated, “Ethical decision-making requires more than a belief in the importance of ethics. It also requires ethical sensitivity to implications of choices, the ability to evaluate complex, ambiguous and incomplete facts, and the skill to implement ethical decisions effectively” (p. 3).

Morally and ethically responsible leaders can appropriately mobilize power within their organizations by recognizing motives and goals, understanding how to appeal to those motives and goals through words and actions, and working through political and ethical dilemmas in a way that will provide the political support necessary to move the organization forward (Burns, 1978; White et al., 2016). Organizations can establish responsible values and hold employees accountable by operating within an ethical framework and establishing a moral dialogue about making ethical choices. Morally responsible leaders will ensure that all parties operate under the same understandings,
follow a principal of moral conduct, foster a culture of transparency and openness, show concern for the legitimate interests of all stakeholders, and choose political strategies that are consistent with personal values and in the best interests of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2017; White et al., 2016). This leadership will “extend awareness of human needs and the means of gratifying them, to improve the larger social situation” (J. M. Burns, 1978, p. 449).

**Theoretical Foundations**

According to Farazmand (1999), “Rarely have organizational theorists embraced political theory in the development of organizational theory” (p. 323). Organizational theory has been developed in parallel with political theory, without any consideration of the other. However, this exclusion of political theory from organizational theory has resulted in the presentation of only one side of the “organizational reality,” which is the “technical reality” (Farazmand, 1999, p. 323). Political theory forms the other side of all organizations, especially those in the public sector. In similar fashion, political theory tends to exclude the existence of organizational theory. Looking at the way organizations are organized and administered through the lens of political theory will support understanding of how power is exercised in political organizations (Farazmand, 1999).

**Elite Theory**

Elite theory revolves around the concept that there is one group in charge and another group subject to its authority; the group in charge is the one with the power (Tittenbrun, 2013). The “elites” hold powerful positions and control resources, both material and symbolic (Lopez, 2013). Elites are people “who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect
political outcomes regularly and substantially” and “with the organized capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly repressed” (Higley, 2008, “Elites,” para. 4). Although they make systematic use of their concentrated power in a top-down manner, elitists remain mindfully aware of the nonelitists; in order to cultivate and sustain their power, elitists must maintain support by framing their appeals to align with the interests or political orientation of the nonelites (Pakulski, 2012). Rather than focus on the community at large, Smith (1974) highlighted that it is “important to analyze the interests, motives and values of the policy-makers” to understand the social and political attitudes of the elites who develop and define policy (p. 1007).

Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory holds that power is broadly, however unequally, spread among different fraternal, community, or advocacy special interest groups in society, and these special interest groups compete to influence or control public policy (Baskin, 1970; P. M. Johnson, 2005). Some special interest groups will dominate in several areas while others will dominate in other areas; leaders of these groups seldom overlap; however, when there is a connection between different areas of struggle, the overlap comes from elected officials (P. M. Johnson, 2005). These elected officials exercise leadership in a number of policy areas due to their positions, and the government serves to continually shift the balance between these groups (Baskin, 1970; P. M. Johnson, 2005). Pluralist theory holds that there is no single power elite; instead, there are many competing power elites with different backgrounds, values, and support within society (P. M. Johnson, 2005). Democracy through elected representatives is supposed to reflect the will of the citizens; however, the representation will not be able to represent every aspect of the
constituency, and failure to do so can subject the representative to “veto” upon the next election (Hirst, 1993, p. 32).

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory holds that people are aware that there are different choices available to them, and that they will select the best option that they believe will produce the expected results (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Cizikiene & Urmanaviciene, 2018; Walsh, 2017). In decision-making situations, a person “considers a finite set of alternatives, ascribes consequences to them, orders these consequences according to their importance and value, and makes an optimal choice among available alternatives” (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016, p. 196). It is assumed that the person will know all the available alternatives and choose the best action to achieve the desired outcome based on the expectations they consider about the possible consequences or benefits of the choice (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Cizikiene & Urmanaviciene, 2018; Walsh, 2017). A fundamental concept of rational choice theory is that people will pursue their own personal values and self-interest, aware of and in spite of others who are rationally pursuing their own self-interests and values (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016). Furthermore, it holds that people have the time and resources to gather information about their different options according to preferences and beliefs; however, “familial, culture, and legal constraints exist that inhibit most people from behaving entirely according to their own desires and appetites” (Walsh, 2017, Overview section, para. 3). The primary limitation with rational choice theory is that in everyday situations, people lack sufficient time or resources to gather complete information and truly assess all possible effects of
their actions; instead, they may settle for an option that they believe has worked for them in the past (T. Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Walsh, 2017).

**Normative Theory**

Pietrzyk-Reeves (2017) stated that “normative theory is concerned with norms or normative principles” (p. 177), which provides a general directive about what people should or should not do. Normative theory has roots in ancient Greece, where Plato and Aristotle wrote about the focus on the common good of the political community (Baubock, 2008; Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017). Normative theory provides a standard through “prescriptive or evaluative statements,” which are treated as propositions that must be consistent and stand up to opposing views, unlike opinions, which are subjective and whose validity cannot be determined through discourse (Baubock, 2008, p. 41).

**Social Contract Theory**

Social contract theory holds that the moral and political obligations of citizens are dependent on a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. Although social contract theory has roots in the political writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, it remains one of the most influential theories in modern history (Friend, 2018). The social contract establishes a state of nature as the starting point, where all humans are free and equal, and any limitation on that freedom and equality must be proven to be right or reasonable. This tradition of the social contract establishes the fundamental liberal principle, which holds that all restrictions on liberty must be justified (Friend, 2018; Gaus et al., 2018).
Social Inequity Theory

Social inequity theory evolved from cognitive dissonance, exchange, and social comparison theories in making predictions about how people manage their interactions and relationships with others (Adams, 1963; Festinger, 1957; Huseman et al., 1987). Inequity exists for a person whenever their inputs or outcomes appear to be psychologically opposite to what is perceived to be the inputs or outcomes of another person in a relationship (Adams, 1963). This dissonant relationship is determined by historical and cultural circumstances. Each person will have individually learned experiences, but the extent to which an individual learns from people sharing a similar culture, such as values, social norms, and language, the psychological reactions will be similar. The larger the cultural group, the greater the number of individuals who perceive and react similarly to the relationship between input and outcomes (Adams, 1963).

Social inequity theory asserts that everyone is equally sensitive to equity, and that each individual will have a preference for equal inputs and outcomes in others. However, the greater the inequity that is perceived, either in the form of overreward or underreward, the more distress is felt by the individual. Social inequity theory also holds that the greater the distress that is experienced, the harder the individual will work to restore equity and relieve the distress (Huseman et al., 1987).

Historically, the prevailing perspective was that inequity within organizations stemmed from discrimination; however, a perspective that is considered less often is that social inequity in organizations results from systematic gains and privilege (Rosette & Tost, 2013). Rosette and Tost (2013) suggested viewing social inequity as “dominant group privilege” (p. 1420), which enhances the support from members of the dominant
group for social policies that reduce inequity. It is important to note that individuals will simultaneously occupy multiple places in various social groups, where a person could be a member of a dominant social group in one area and a subordinate social group in another area. The individual experience of a member of a subordinate group can be a catalyst to understanding and acknowledging one’s own experiences with social privilege (Rossette & Tost, 2013).

**Theoretical Framework: Elements of Political Styles**

White et al. (2016) set forth a theoretical framework that combines an analysis of one’s goal-orientation and political initiative into a matrix of “The Nine Political Styles” (p. 71). This research built on the work of DeLuca (1999), based on the theory that developing political competence depends on self-understanding of one’s own political style (White et al., 2016). Every person has a political style, even when they avoid politics and political situations. Each superintendent and board member will have a predominant style, and each organization will have a diverse representation of the various styles. White et al. (2016) provided a framework for understanding differing political styles so that leaders can “function deliberately” (p. 79) in ways that will best benefit the organization.

**Goal Allegiance Continuum**

White et al. (2016) believed that goal allegiance is a strong determinant for leaders in their commitment to advancing organizational goals. Figure 1 shows the goal allegiance continuum, a spectrum which includes three categories of political initiative: “self-interests,” “blended interests,” and “organizational interests” (White et al., 2016, p. 69). Although people move on the continuum depending on situations or circumstance, political
style is associated with where on the continuum one focuses most consistently (White et al., 2016). Goal allegiance is determined by analyzing how one behaves when the situation forces a choice between individual and organizational interests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Interests</th>
<th>Basis for Goals</th>
<th>Organizational Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blended Interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Goal allegiance continuum. From The Politically Intelligent Leader: Dealing With the Dilemma of a High-Stakes Educational Environment, by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, & S. L. Fox, 2016 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield). Note. The goal allegiance continuum sets forth a spectrum along which one tends to operate, “from an exclusive focus on goals associated with self-interests to an exclusive focus on goals associated with organizational interests” (White et al., 2016, p. 69).*

**Initiative Continuum**

In addition to understanding political allegiance to goals, one must determine how best to proceed in politically-charged situations. According to White et al. (2016), people respond along a continuum depending on their comfort with acting during times of stress and change. Figure 2 shows the initiative continuum, a spectrum which includes three categories of political initiative: “passive,” “moderately engaged,” and “assertive” (White et al., 2016, p. 70). People with a passive level of initiative are reluctant to get involved or take risks in politically-charged situations, preferring the comfort of the status quo within the organization. At the other end of the continuum are people who are eager to initiate innovation, disdainful about indecision, and assertive in the need for change. As with goal orientation, people move across the continuum depending on the situation; however, they may feel more comfortable “closer to one end or the other, and their styles may be shaped in part by their proclivity toward assertiveness or passivity—especially in times of stress” (White et al., 2016, p. 70).
The political initiative continuum sets forth a spectrum along which one tends to operate, from “passive” to “assertive” (White et al., 2016, p. 70).

**The Nine Political Styles**

The research by White et al. (2016) was inspired by the work of DeLuca (1999), who “developed nine political styles based on action orientation and ‘attitude toward politics’” (p. 68). White et al. (2016) believed that goal allegiance, rather than one’s attitude toward politics is a “much stronger determinant” (p. 69). Political style is formed at the intersection between the goal-oriented and initiative continuums. The matrix aligns three levels of political initiative: “assertive,” “engaged,” and “passive” with three categories of goal allegiance: “self-interests,” “blended interests,” and “organizational interests” (White et al., 2016, p. 71). Figure 3 displays this intersection into a matrix, resulting in the identification of 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>

*Figure 3. Political styles matrix. The nine political styles represent the intersection between a person’s goal orientation and initiative. From The Politically Intelligent Leader: Dealing With the Dilemma of a High-Stakes Educational Environment, by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, & S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 72 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).*
The nine political styles were used in the study to identify the strategies exemplary superintendents use to work with the perceived political styles of their board members. The nine political styles were defined in Chapter I, as developed collaboratively by the team of researchers. Each style has advantages and disadvantages, and how each style is used ultimately determines the value to the organization, stakeholders, and individuals (White et al., 2016). White et al. (2016) stressed that it is important to recognize the political style in others, which will help one “understand what they need, want, and disdain” (p. 81).

**Passive Political Styles**

**Analyst.** Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interests over organizational interests. 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). When working with an analyst, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies: “build trust, use concrete examples, approval of power structure, go slow to go fast, chits, many messengers, co-option, command, broken record, meet their needs, and link agendas” (p. 84).

**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-interests and organizational interests (Bobic et al., 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016). When working with an adaptor, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:
build trust; go slow to go fast; agenda linking; praise and recognition; many messengers; command; broken record; meet their needs; simple messages; do your homework; use norms; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; create a benevolent environment; where snipers dwell, plan meticulously; know who trusts whom; and conflict strategy of smoothing. (p. 85)

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

- build trust, testimonials from trusted sources, approval of power structure, go slow to go fast, agenda linking, superordinate goal, expand the pie, many messengers, problem solving, meet their needs, simple messages, do your homework, celebrate everything, use norms, management by walking around, and benevolent environment. (p. 87)

**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). When working with a planner, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- win-win; agenda linking; chits; many messengers; command; broken record; meet needs; simple messages; never let ‘em see you sweat; do your homework; respond
positively to perceived danger; count your votes; use norms; dig the well early; create a benevolent environment; and where snipers dwell, plan meticulously.

(White et al., 2016, p. 88)

**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). When working with a balancer, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- build trust, go slow to go fast, win-win, agenda linking, superordinate goal,
- expand the pie, include all sides, accordion process, conflict strategies, problem solving, political vision, meet their needs, simplify your message, do your homework, know each decision maker’s agenda, be aware of political blind spots, coalition building, working the community, build networks, respond positively to danger, count your votes, use norms effectively, management by walking around,
- be open to ideas, empower others, create a benevolent environment, know who trusts whom, and float the idea. (p. 90)

**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). When working with a developer, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- build trust; go slow to go fast; win-win; agenda linking; superordinate goal;
- expand the pie; include all sides; accordion process; problem solving; create a
political vision; meet their needs; simplify and clarify message; do your homework; know each decision maker’s agenda; be aware of political blind spots; coalition building; working the community; build networks; respond positively to perceived danger; celebrate everything; use norms effectively; dig the well before you’re thirsty; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; empower others; create a benevolent environment; know who trusts whom; float the idea; and where snipers dwell, plan meticulously. (p. 92)

**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, 1997; Meyer et al., 2005; Polletta, 2004; White et al., 2016). When working with a challenger, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- include all sides; win-win; agenda linking; chits; many messengers; ability to compete, intention to cooperate; broken record; never let ‘em see you sweat; do your homework; know each decision maker’s agenda; be aware of political blind spots; coalition building; plan meticulously where sniper dwell; working the community; build networks; respond positively to danger; dig the well early; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; know who trusts whom; use the accordion approach; and count your votes. (p. 95)
**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). When working with an arranger, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- build trust; win-win; agenda linking; superordinate goal; expand the pie; include all sides; accordion process; conflict strategies; problem solving; political vision; meet their needs; do your homework; know decision makers’ agenda; be aware of political blind spots; coalition building; working the community; build networks; ability to compete, intent to cooperate; respond positively to danger; count your votes; celebrate everything; use norms effectively; dig the well early; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; empower others; know who trusts whom; float the idea; accordion approach; and where snipers dwell, plan meticulously. (p. 97)

**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). When working with a strategist, White et al. (2016) identified the following strategies:

- build trust; include all sides; win-win; agenda linking; superordinate goal; expand the pie; accordion process; ability to compete, intent to cooperate; dialogue;
strategies; problem solving; political vision; simple, clear message; do your homework; know decision makers’ agenda; be aware of political blind spots; coalition building; working the community; build networks; respond positively to danger; count your votes; celebrate everything; uncover informal norms; dig the well early; link agendas; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; empower others; benevolent environment; know who trusts whom; float the idea; and use the accordion approach. (p. 99)

Politics and Public Education

Citizen oversight of government entities is foundational to the principles of democracy. Citizen boards and councils provide oversight of numerous government agencies at the local, county, state, and national levels. Therefore, it is appropriate to entrust the governance of the local schools to citizens who are elected within their community to provide oversight of the school system (CSBA, 2017).

History of School Governance

Early settlers to the United States wanted education for their children, and the founding fathers believed that the new republic could survive only if citizens were properly educated. They also believed in having the freedom to design and operate their local schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Sell, 2005; Tyack, 2003). The concept of oversight of the education system was specifically omitted from the Constitution and was left up to the individual states to determine their needs and establish their own school systems (Sell, 2005). In the late 1700s, Massachusetts was the first state to establish elected school boards as the manner in which to manage the local schools, and later became the first state to create a state board of education (Institute for Educational...
Leadership, 1986; Land 2002; Sell, 2005). This was a controversial move at the time, as the general public was cautious about giving up local control of their schools, so most of the governing power and responsibility remained at the local level (Land, 2002; Sell, 2005).

When the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791, the Tenth Amendment gave states the power to create and govern their schools by default, due to the fact that those powers were not delegated under the Constitution (Munson, 2013; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). This has created a dynamic in which “there is continued conflict over what powers rightfully belong to the federal government, to the states, and to local school boards” (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003, p. 118). The politicizing of a national platform for education has evolved over the years, with the initiation of such federal education legislation as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) and the release of *A Nation at Risk*. The national agenda continued in the 21st century, with the passage of No Child Left Behind, continuing the trend to limit the power of local school boards (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003; Reaves; 2001; Sell, 2005).

Despite all the changes over the years in the political landscape, school boards fulfill an important responsibility in this society. Nationally, nearly 100,000 trustees serve as school board members, making up the largest category of elected public officials in the United States. Those citizens who have answered the call to serve as school board members within their communities are tasked with raising student achievement and closing gaps in equity and access. These board trustees govern to fulfill the promise of a free and appropriate public education system, which educates all students and prepares
them to be productive citizens within a democracy (Briggs, Buenrostro, Maxwell-Jolly, Flint, & Macklin, 2017; CSBA, 2007).

**School Board as Community Leaders**

According to Brierton et al. (2016), “School boards are one of the closest democratically elected entities to the community” (p. 66). School board members are elected to serve their local communities as “stewards of the public trust,” responsible for the necessary oversight and decision-making to “ensure all students have access to high quality learning experiences in efficient and well managed environments” (National School Boards Association, 2011, p. 2). The word *public* infers that it is the local citizenry who controls the local school system through the election process. The public selects the candidate, a resident of the school district, to represent their interests (Brierton et al., 2016). In every community, it is likely that there are varying opinions about the quality, programs, and services within the local public school system. Although board members are trustees elected to be public officials acting on behalf of all those residing within the school district, “in practice, they are much more likely to be delegates advancing their personal agenda or the agenda of supporting political groups” (Kowalski, 2005, p. x).

**School Leaders and the Board**

School boards establish policy and provide the direction for the professionals within the organization as well as uphold accountability to their constituents. There are two basic principles that affect school leaders when working with the board: (a) All school district leaders are agents of the board, required to carry out established board policies and procedures; and (b) all school district leaders “must have a clearly developed
personal moral and ethical framework” as they work with the board (Brierton et al., 2016, p. 53). These principles are critical to the success of board operations, governance, and administrator effectiveness.

**Politics, Conflict, and the Superintendency**

Those within the community who hold political power can influence the board and those who implement policy (Bjork, 2005). According to Tucker (1995), a political leader’s basic task is to “define the collective situation, to design ways of dealing with it, and to mobilize support for the diagnosis and proposed mode of response” (p. 114). A lack of clear understanding between the role of the board as “vision-setters and policy-makers,” and the superintendent as the implementer of the vision and policy, can result in conflict (Briggs et al., 2017, p. 36). Mountford (2004) found that superintendents were often forced to “walk a tightrope in determining which issues get priority and the consequences of not addressing a particular board member’s agenda,” describing the relationship as often “difficult, strained and even tumultuous” (p. 735).

**School District Governance**

Nationally, school districts are governed by close to 14,000 school boards, which are elected to be responsible for the education of 52 million students, oversee budgets of approximately $600 billion per year, and provide employment to 6 million employees. Governance is responsible for establishing the organizational mission, setting expectations, holding management accountable, and taking responsibility for outcomes (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Devarics and O’Brien (2011) determined that “effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (p. 3). According to Campbell and Fullan
(2019), governance is “a basic function of the organization, an integral part of the system, setting the direction of the district, assuring the achievement of the strategic goals and the moral imperative, holding the district accountable and providing leadership to the community” (p. 16).

The Moral Imperative

The success of democracy depends on the character and competence of the citizenry, and “public schools are the place where we develop the character and competence of young people” (Maricle, 2014, p. 2). Schools also teach how democracy works, preparing students to participate and engage as democratic citizens. School boards provide another important focus to the future of democracy; through modeling, teaching, and engaging in the democratic process, school boards can fulfill the democratic goals of this society by preparing the next generation to appreciate and willingly assume the responsibilities of citizenship (Maricle, 2014).

Campbell and Fullan (2019) emphasized the importance of “a governance system, school board, and superintendent working together as a cohesive unified team with a common vision driven by a shared moral imperative” (p. 2). This perspective assumes that governance is a basic function of the school district, setting the direction and strategic goals, ensuring accountability to the community, and fulfilling a responsibility to all children (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Governance plays a role in sustaining long-term improvement, and Campbell and Fullan upheld the fundamental premise that “the vast majority of school board members want to improve the public education system” (p. 3).
According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), “A shared moral imperative—a relentless commitment to the learning of all students, no exceptions—must drive the work of the board and its individual and collective action” (p. 18). School boards must ensure that public education fulfills the promise of providing a tuition-free education, equal opportunities and equitable resources, high expectations and standards, and accountability, and that it teaches democratic values and principles. When school boards govern effectively, they ensure an equitable education that fulfills the moral imperative by aligning policy and resource allocations to meet the basic needs of every child, offer full access to all programs, fulfill legal mandates, and proactively support success for each and every child (CSBA, 2020).

**Roles and Responsibilities of the School Board**

According to the California School Boards Association (CSBA, 2017), the primary role of the school board is “to be responsive to the values, beliefs and priorities of its community” (p. 1). The CSBA highlights “three distinct and sometimes conflicting roles that boards and board members must balance in their governance work” (Maricle, 2014, p. 7). First, school boards have a representative role, as they are elected or appointed to serve the community, so “individually and collectively board members have a responsibility to ensure that their governing work is guided by the values and interests that the community has for its schools” (Maricle, 2014, p. 7). Second, boards have an instrumental role, ensuring that the district is legally compliant regardless of public sentiment or personal beliefs. Third, boards have a fiduciary role, to ensure the fiscal health and financial stability of the district (Maricle, 2014).
In a 2017 governance brief, the CSBA outlines five responsibilities for board members: (a) “set the direction for the district,” (b) “establish structure through policy,” (c) “provide support for implementation,” (d) “ensure accountability through oversight and monitoring,” and (e) “act as community leaders” (Briggs & Buenrostro, 2017, p. 5). While each board member will bring a unique style, perspective, and background to the position, the CSBA (2018) developed standards to communicate the importance of board members’ relationships with one another, the superintendent, staff, and the public, which has an impact on the overall effectiveness of district governance. The standards emphasize the importance of confidentiality, dignity and the impact of public demeanor and behavior, professional learning, understanding the distinction between roles, and unity of purpose with the superintendent. However, the CSBA (2018) stressed that effective board members ultimately focus on student achievement and closing persistent achievement gaps, viewing the school programs through a lens of equity, to make certain resources are allocated in a way that ensures the public schools truly serve all students.

Neither the California Education Code nor the Government Code grant any authority to individual school board members. The board’s power is as a collective body only, during meetings that are open to the public. Effective boards lead as a united team with the superintendent. Although board members have many complex relationships within the school district and the community, “the most important are the relationships board members have with one another and with the superintendent” (Maricle, 2014, p. 11).
Roles and Responsibilities of the Superintendent

The literature is extensive on the role of the superintendent. The research about the superintendency is often less about instructional leadership and more about managing “the range of personalities, priorities, and politics in a dynamic system of limited resources and competing wants and needs” (Tremblay, 2014, p. 21). Superintendent and board relationships have deteriorated in recent years as a result of an increasingly political landscape and dissatisfaction by stakeholders (Alsbury, 2003). The CSBA took action to address relationships between superintendents and boards by forming a committee of superintendents to develop Superintendent Governance Standards, which provide guidance in understanding the work of the superintendent. The governance standards focus on the importance of the superintendent to accept “leadership responsibility and accountability for implementing the vision, goals and policies of the district” (CSBA, n.d.-b, para. 11). In addition, the standards emphasize that the superintendent must recognize and respect differing perspectives and styles of board members to ensure that there is a diverse range of views that inform board decisions. This requires superintendents to be adept at politics and working with the different political views of board members, in addition to separating the board’s role in governance from daily operations of the district (CSBA, n.d.-b).

Politics of the Superintendent and School Board

Superintendents are responsible for complex organizations, and the role of the superintendent is continually changing to respond to the political landscape that must be navigated within school districts (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). In addition to educating students, school districts are often the largest providers of
food, transportation, and health services within their community as well as a primary employer (Harvey & Wallace, 2013). The sheer complexity of school district organization provides context to the “toil, turmoil, and turnover” that superintendents experience, and superintendents report the frustrations of working with challenging board members who want to micromanage instead of providing democratic oversight (Harvey & Wallace, 2013, p. 75).

**Board and Superintendent Effective Relationships**

The relationship between the superintendent and the school board has a significant impact on the overall culture of the district, the quality of the educational program, and the success of the superintendent (L. D. Fusarelli, 2005). The relationship between the board and the superintendent is also critical to a superintendent’s success in managing and implementing change (B. C. Fusarelli, 2006). L. D. Fusarelli and Petersen (2002) asserted that if a “precarious relationship” (p. 283) begins to exist, the resulting dynamic can hinder school improvement efforts and negatively affect the overall quality of the educational program. In addition, when conflict increases over district goals, the morale and stability of the district weakens. As a result, the superintendent’s credibility and trustworthiness with the board begins to deteriorate, which negatively impacts the long-range planning and collaborative vision of the district, often leading to the “revolving door syndrome” of inevitable superintendent turnover (B. C. Fusarelli, 2006, p. 52).

P. A. Johnson (2012) cited, “In reviewing 20 years of scholarship, Land (2002) found only two rigorous studies of school board effectiveness: one by Hoffman (1995) and one by the Iowa Association of School Boards, known as the Lighthouse Study” (p. 51).
The Lighthouse Study highlighted that the school boards of both effective and ineffective districts had peaceful relationships with one another and were able to disagree without making it personal. They were also well-satisfied with their superintendent (Rice et al., 2000).

**Superintendent Satisfaction With the School Board**

The 2010 and 2015 AASA studies of the American superintendent found that most superintendents are satisfied with their school boards. The 2010 study reported that 91.3% of superintendents were *highly satisfied or moderately satisfied* with their boards. These results were mirrored in the 2015 AASA mid-decade update, where 83.4% of superintendents expressed that they were *very satisfied or satisfied* with their school boards. However, the 2015 AASA study offered the criteria of *neutral*, selected by 5.2% of the respondents, a response option not provided in the 2010 AASA study. Only 10.7% of the 2010 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their school boards, the same percentage reported in the 2015 update (Finnan et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2011).

**Superintendent Turnover**

In a 2012 study on superintendent turnover, 71% of the superintendents in California’s largest school district left their positions before their fourth year. Also, 43% of the superintendents in California left their position within 3 years. Briggs et al. (2017) cautioned that this information could be misleading. Although student poverty was one characteristic associated with higher superintendent turnover, the most common reason cited for the superintendent leaving was retirement. In those districts that experience turnover not associated with retirement, superintendents most often left to further their
career prospects, moving on to districts with a higher salary or prestige (Briggs et al., 2017).

Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that most superintendent turnover is “apolitical” in nature (p. 33), consistent with previous studies (Alsbury, 2003; Briggs et al., 2017). The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) mid-decade update to the study on American superintendents asked participants to candidly report the reasons for leaving a previous superintendent position (Finnan et al., 2015). The respondents cited conflict with the board and wanting a new challenge most often as to why they left their previous position. Some respondents reported contentious relationships and working conditions, while others cited family dynamics as the reasons for seeking change (Finnan et al., 2015).

Superintendent turnover is inevitable and can ultimately disrupt the momentum and sustainability of district improvement efforts. Professional development focused on key areas of governance can help keep the governance team working in the same direction and maintaining healthy relationships (Briggs et al., 2017, Campbell & Fullan, 2019). According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), “there is a direct relationship between purposeful board superintendent engagement, a shared moral imperative, a collaborative, trust-based governance culture, and sustainable, long term success” (p. 72). It takes hard work and a continual focus on building and sustaining relationships, but a strong governance system can be nurtured to help increase sustainability of the district vision, mission, and goals, as well as the tenure of the superintendent (Briggs et al., 2017, Campbell & Fullan, 2019).
**Motivation for Board Membership**

Board members seek office for a variety of reasons. Hess and Meeks (2010) found that 50.3% of board members reported that their primary motivation for board membership was to ensure that the local schools were the best they could be. Following in second place, 22.4% of respondents replied that their motivation was driven by a sense of civic duty, to give back to the community. All other responses came in below 10%, including addressing specific issues, representing a constituency in issues, developing as a public leader in the community, ensuring another candidate did not get elected, and being recruited to run for office.

Mountford (2004) researched board member motivation for office through the lens of the board member’s concept of power. The study determined that there was a strong pattern between the concept of power and the motivation for board membership. Approximately half of the board members sought election due to altruistic reasons, while the other half were motivated to join the board for personal reasons. Personal motivations cited in the study included interests regarding their own children, ego, belonging, prestige, the seeking of formal power, discontent with current leadership, or future political aspirations. If the board members viewed power as “power over” on a power continuum, they were more likely to be motivated by personal reasons; whereas if the board members viewed power as “power with,” they were likely to have been motivated by altruistic reasons to seek board membership. Although there was a predominate reason, either personal or altruistic, for seeking board service, most board members in the study were motivated by a mix of the two motivations (Mountford, 2004).
The Superintendent and Challenging District Politics

Superintendents face competing demands from stakeholders on a daily basis that set the stage for politically turbulent times. For a number of decades, reports such as *A Nation at Risk* have perpetuated the perception that education has failed the nation’s children and put the nation at jeopardy for losing status in the worldwide economy (Bjork et al., 2002; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). During 2018, approximately 400,000 teachers nationwide went on strike, and more teachers took part in work stoppage than in the previous 25 years combined. At the same time, *Education Week* released the annual Quality Counts report, giving 26 states a grade of “F” for the lack of adequate and equitable funding to local school districts. In Greenwich, Connecticut, the local school district has employed 14 superintendents or interim superintendents over the last 20 years, with some of the exiting superintendents citing toxic board relationships and the political challenges of leading a wealthy district as the reason for leaving (Nyland, 2019).

School closures due to the coronavirus pandemic, race relations, and lack of internet connectivity and adequate devices for distance learning bring issues of equity to the forefront as districts grapple with providing instructional and social-emotional supports to the most vulnerable student populations (Duarte, 2020; Lavadenz & Armas, 2020).

Through difficult times, “Superintendents are typically the only ones who see the big picture” (Nyland, 2019, p. 17). Teachers express concern over salary, increased professional demands, and meeting the needs of more diverse learners. Principals want to increase staffing, while the board and community leaders expect the superintendent to maintain fiscal solvency. Parents want up-to-date textbooks, increased access to technology, and varied enrichment activities and opportunities. Members of the
community expect the superintendent to be a good steward of public monies and to minimize their tax liabilities. In affluent communities, superintendents must be prepared for high expectations in educational outcomes, demands by stakeholders for immediate access when they have an issue, and readiness for legal representation and litigation. Pressures of increased special education costs and serving a more diverse student population in inclusive ways can cause controversy when demographics shift, along with resources allocated to close gaps in achievement (Davis, 2019; Groves, 2019; McGee, 2019; Nyland, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 global pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges for superintendents to implement distance learning, address inequities in technology access, respond to pressures for increased safety and cleaning protocols, increase awareness of social-emotional vulnerability in students, and deliver services to students with disabilities via the internet. According to James Harvey, executive director of National Superintendents Roundtable, “The sense you get from the discussion is that [superintendents] all share similar problems, but they manifest themselves in different ways” (Davis, 2019, p. 22).

The 2015 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) mid-decade update to the study on American superintendents examined the factors that the superintendents believed inhibited their job performance, and politics led the responses by a significant margin (Finnan et al., 2015). The size of the district was irrelevant. The study further inquired into the issues that have generated the greatest political action within school districts. Most of the reported political activity was centered on school funding, student assessment, the Common Core, bullying, safety, and teacher evaluation, which is not surprising given recent media attention to these topics. Yet, the frequency of
citizens seeking to influence board policy decisions through overt political action was rated as rarely with 43.1%; however, the frequency of the activity was found to increase as the size of district enrollment increased. Superintendents overall believed that they were influential in working with the board and in making decisions, and despite sometimes contentious relationships, saw the contributions of board members as an asset (Finnan et al., 2015). McGee (2019) stated, “Superintendents owe it to their students to develop positive working relationships with all board members because without board support, leaders cannot help students or staff, schools or communities” (p. 30).

The Superintendent and Effective Leadership

According to the Education Consulting Research Analytics (ECRA) Group (2010), historically school boards and the community defined the effectiveness of the superintendent “almost exclusively by the leader’s ability to manage fiscal, physical, and personnel resources; recently, though, the emphasis has shifted to vision, and the ideal of the current model superintendent is one who communicates strongly, builds relationships, and demonstrates political acumen” (p. 3). The focus on relationships highlights the need for collaboration, coalition building, and leveraging motivation to ensure the efficacy of outcomes and initiatives, and the superintendent must “build trust, focus attention to the process, and employ political savvy to ensure buy-in” from stakeholders (ECRA, 2010, p. 8). An effective superintendent will share the leadership throughout the organization, where teams and collaboration help to define and commit to a common vision, a culture of respect and transparency, and to the protocols for decision-making to ensure an equitable education for all students. In addition, “quality school board-superintendent partnerships are also essential to effective governance in a school district; the results-
driven superintendent works side-by-side with board members during the goal-setting process to determine performance targets and monitor progress” (ECRA, 2010, p. 8).

Although there is a significant body of research on how superintendents can successfully navigate their leadership role, there is little research on how superintendents “can persuade people whom they can’t control but on whom their success depends” (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 2). Superintendents must be able to respond to the diverse interests and political orientations of school board members who may be representing special interest groups or differing constituents within the community. Superintendents need to form allies on the board, using political skill to understand and demonstrate concern for what individual board members care about, in order to maintain a favorable majority on the board to stay focused on the vision, mission, and goals of the organization (CSBA, n.d.-b; Hill & Jochim, 2018).

**Political Strategies Used by Superintendents**

Superintendents must navigate an increasingly complex political landscape, and the relationship between the superintendent and the school board can ultimately determine the success of the superintendent in leading the district (Alsbury, 2003; Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985). While not thinking of themselves as politicians, superintendents often realize the political nature of their work and navigate accordingly (DeLuca, 1999; L. D. Fusarelli, 2005). Superintendents and board members have varying degrees of commitment and initiative to either self-interests or organizational interests; however, “the goals that drive them will determine the direction of their political action and may even influence how assertive or passive they will be in a given situation” (White et al., 2016, p. 71). Many leaders go through their daily work unaware of their political
style and the impact on their organization, career, and relationships. Improving the awareness of one’s individual political style also allows for an understanding of the political style of others. This awareness can help predict how others act in political situations, develop strategies to navigate politically, and win the support necessary to lead effectively (White et al., 2016).

**Coherence**

According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), “A unified board is made up of individuals, complete with different beliefs, styles and personalities working together with a shared moral imperative in a collaborative cooperative fashion toward a common goal” (p. 88). Coherence is important to achieving the district’s vision and goals for student achievement. This work runs more deeply than simply having the board come to agreement on the mission, vision, and goals of the district. The superintendent, the board, and the schools must work on coherent governance jointly in order to reach agreement on the moral imperative. The board plays a critical role in fostering coherence and supporting the district to stay focused, which gives the board unity of purpose (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; CSBA, 2017).

Superintendents who support coherence make governance a high priority and approach the work with “a thoughtful, analytical, and purposeful manner” (Campbell & Fullan, 2019, p. 56). Houston and Eadie (2005) stated,

One of your primary responsibilities as superintendent and CEO of your district is to play a leading role in building and maintaining strategically significant relationships, and the one that is at the heart of your district’s strategic policy-
level leadership—and most critical to your effectiveness as CEO—is between you and your school board. (p. 73)

A coherence-minded superintendent also focuses on the human dimension of the board-superintendent partnership, viewing the relationships as “a precious and fragile bond that can be easily broken if not conscientiously and continuously maintained” (Houston & Eadie, 2005, p. 13). Superintendents can ensure that the psychological needs of board members are met by purposefully building their feelings of belonging, ownership, and commitment (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Houston & Eadie, 2005).

**Political Acuity and Savvy**

Superintendents must think about their opportunities to influence and the need to build support in order to move their organization forward. A politically savvy superintendent understands that a primary focus of their work includes managing conflict and maintaining a good relationship with their board (Cuban, 1985; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009). Cuban (1985) stated, “Since conflict is embedded in the very nature of the superintendency, a school chief who wishes to be perceived as effective must, to some degree, be a politician” (p. 29).

According to Bjork et al. (2002), superintendents who realize that conflict can advance or destabilize district efforts will be more successful if they “have the political acuity to adjust their ways of working with boards” (p. 295). When superintendents assume that their work is apolitical in nature, failing to pay attention to the politics of education within their local communities, they will often be placed at a disadvantage. Local community politics are often aligned to school board power configurations, and Bjork et al. cited that superintendent success and longevity is often a reflection of the
superintendent’s ability to understand the politics of the board and the community. Superintendents must be aware of how board members are connected to different stakeholders in the community. A politically savvy superintendent may take a more neutral stance on issues that divide the board, allowing them to align their support on issues with board majority, while having the political acuity to maintain an amicable working relationship with the remaining board members. The superintendent who understands that, over time, the majority could change, can be more fluid and flexible in managing conflict and navigating the political complexity of the work (Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985).

A politically savvy superintendent brings the right attitude to the work, viewing the board as an asset and a partnership that can be utilized in leading the district. Houston and Eadie (2005) emphasized that the majority of elected board members truly want to do a good job of governing the schools, believe in ensuring a high-quality education for students of the community, and are committed to public service. Superintendents can nurture support by finding appropriate ways to involve their board in district activities, engage them in agenda-linking to accomplish goals, work to build coalitions within the business community, network with local government leaders, and ensure that the board receives favorable press (Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009). In addition, a politically savvy superintendent recognizes and respects the various perspectives represented by board members and other stakeholders, and ensures opportunities for adequate input that represent diverse viewpoints, which will help inform board decisions (CSBA, n.d.-b; Tallerico, 1989).
Building Relationships

According to Townsend et al. (2007), “Establishing a trusting and collaborative relationship between school board members and between the board and superintendent is one of the highest and most essential priorities for the superintendent” (p. 22). The superintendent’s ability to form strong relationships with the board collectively, as well as with each individual board member, is important to the success of the governance team and the district. Building a relationship with each member of the board is foundational to teamwork, and the board can get through challenging and uncertain times when they have established interpersonal relationships and can focus on the district vision and unity of purpose (Townsend et al., 2007).

To build effective relationships, superintendents should spend time with individual board members, to learn about their priorities and make governance a rewarding experience for them. Superintendents should listen to and demonstrate concern over the issues that are of importance to their board members because these are important insights into the constituencies that the board represents. In addition, a superintendent should look for ways to allow the board to be publicly visible and share in the credit of the district’s accomplishments. Involving the board in awards ceremonies, highlighting successes at board meetings, and supporting attendance at local events will help spotlight the board in a positive light in the community (Gorman, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Townsend et al., 2007).

Trust

Campbell and Fullan (2019) stated, “Trust is an elusive concept. It is very difficult to get and very easy to lose” (p. 93). CSBA’s (n.d.-b) Superintendent
Governance Standards refer to “trust and integrity” (para. 10) as an essential characteristic of the superintendency. Likewise, Dervarics and O’Brien (2011), in their study of school board effectiveness, found that “effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their perspective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (para. 7). Establishing trust with and among a school board of individuals elected and representing different perspectives from the community could be challenging, especially following an election where trustees may have campaigned against incumbents, the superintendent, or the board as a whole. Proving oneself trustworthy requires competence and reliability, that that person can follow through and keep their word, because “trust is more an outcome than a precondition” (Campbell & Fullan, 2019, p. 93).

Campbell and Fullan (2019) explained that trust is more about respect and understanding and has little to do with mutual agreement, claiming, “Most people begin to trust someone when they feel listened to, understood, and respected” (p. 93). It is possible for members of the governance team to disagree yet still find common ground on organizational goals. When members of the governance team can believe that their colleagues are honorable, ethical, and honest, they can build the foundation for trust by understanding and respecting differences within the shared vision and values of the organization (Campbell & Fullan, 2019).

The superintendent can establish trust by protecting the board members and their public demeanor through establishing a culture of no surprises (Houston & Eadie, 2005). CSBA’s (n.d.-b) Superintendent Governance Standards emphasize that a superintendent act with dignity, civility, and respect, understanding the importance of demeanor and
behavior. In addition, a superintendent will communicate openly, recognizing the importance of being both anticipatory and responsive. When building the board agenda, the superintendent should thoroughly research the item, in addition to anticipating the board’s perspective on the issues. Houston and Eadie (2005) emphasized,

> When a matter is likely to become controversial, the superintendent must work with the district staff and other key advisors as well as the board president to ensure there are no surprises that can result in embarrassment for the board and the district. The trust that careful planning and consistent communication with all board member engenders is immeasurable. (p. 76)

**Governance Mindset**

According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), “School board members and superintendents must continually develop a governance mindset individually and together to become the unifying force for fulfilling the moral imperative of raising the bar and closing the gap for all students” (p. 10). Effective superintendents understand the importance of implementing the principles of effective governance and make governance a priority (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Townsend et al., 2007). These superintendents devote approximately 20 to 25% of their time to becoming experts in governance and working with the board, employing strategies that build the capacity of the board and provide support for working on policy and goal setting (Houston & Eadie, 2005). Campbell and Fullan (2019) found that high-performing superintendents are purposeful in their work with their boards, highly transparent with information, and see governance as an integral part of their work. In addition, high-functioning superintendents support the board in developing systems thinking and strategic planning,
leading the board in establishing norms and protocols for understanding roles and responsibilities, ensuring accountability, collaborative decision-making, maintaining confidentiality, and managing public manner and demeanor (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Maricle, 2014; Townsend et al, 2007; Witherspoon, 2008).

**Building Board Support for District Goals**

In a meta-analysis study conducted by Mid-continental Research for Education and Learning (McREL), Waters and Marzano (2006) set out to determine factors of superintendent leadership that strongly correlate to student achievement. The researchers determined that effective superintendents focus on creating a district culture, which is goal-oriented, and one of the effective practices was “board alignment and support of district goals” (p. 4). The identified effective practices by superintendents included establishing agreement with the board president on the type and nature of conflict within the district and the political climate of the school district (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Hill and Jochim (2018) emphasized the importance of bargaining and building coalitions within the district, especially with the school board. Bargaining and building coalitions depends on the superintendent’s professional reputation, “which can be enhanced by having clear goals, being resilient, being a trustworthy and reliable ally, and following through” (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 2). Although most board members will care about their students and will be open to collaboration, some board members will have individual agendas. The politically savvy superintendent will work to understand the primary concerns of each board member and demonstrate concern for those issues. The most valuable strategy for learning about board concerns is face-to-face meetings, which can provide insight into the community constituents and bring possible conflicts to the
surface. This can allow the superintendent and board member to find solutions and come to agreements or tradeoffs (Hill & Jochim, 2018).

**Clarify Board-Superintendent Roles**

Superintendents and board members need to know and understand that the board is responsible for the “what” and the superintendent is responsible for the “how” (McGee, 2019, p. 28). Often, the board recognizes that they are responsible for governance, policy, finance, and evaluating the superintendent, and that the superintendent is responsible for leadership, management, accountability, and evaluation of staff. However, it is not uncommon for the board to overstep the recognized areas of responsibility. The CSBA (2020) emphasizes the importance of the board in setting the direction for the district, and providing the “leadership and inspiration to achieve the district’s unity of purpose” (p. 71). The board has the responsibility to develop, review, and revise the district’s vision, mission, and goals, and update the priorities based on the progress reports provided by the staff. Effective superintendents understand the importance of focus and consistency, and keep their board fully informed and engaged at a strategic level during implementation (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Regular conversations around the superintendent’s goals and evaluation, as well as establishing and reviewing protocols, ensures that there is mutual agreement and acceptance of the board and superintendent roles (McGee, 2019).

**Superintendent-Board Communication**

Antonucci (2012) researched the leadership skills superintendents believed to be the most critical in the 21st century and found that “the ability to effectively communicate is perhaps the most important” (p. 152). ECRA (2010) opined that
successful superintendents are “the voice of the district” (p. 5), good communicators who provide timely and relevant information with clarity and frequency, so the mission and values of the organization are understood and supported by all stakeholders, especially the board and staff (AASA, 2006, 2007; ECRA, 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2007). CSBA’s (n.d.-b) Superintendent Governance Standards emphasize that communication is foundational to building relationships and establishing trust with the board, by providing all board members with access to information, and recognizing the importance of proactive and responsive communication. In addition, communicating a common vision is an important component of working with the board as part of a governance team. According to Axley (1996), “Communication gives rise to culture, which gives rise to communication, which perpetuates culture” (p. 153).

McAdams (2009) echoed these sentiments, stating, “Communicate, communicate, communicate” (p. 8), as the board wants to stay informed, know what the superintendent is considering, and be involved in planning. Communication protocols will support a positive board-superintendent working relationship, and a commitment to proactive communication ensures a culture of no surprises. Protocols can include how to handle inquiries of staff or the receipt of complaints as well as expectations around superintendent updates. Superintendents can implement weekly formal updates with current information on activities, addressing questions that have come from the board, as well as sharing of ideas or initiatives that may be coming up, to keep the board informed (Gorman, 2018). In addition to training board members on how to handle complaints, McAdams (2009) emphasized the importance of resolving constituent complaints quickly. When the district can establish a culture of customer service that responds
efficiently and effectively to parent or community concerns, the result will be the avoidance of board members becoming directly involved in problem-solving.

**Board Member Onboarding and Training**

Superintendents also need to work with new board members during times of board turnover, which will make the implementation of existing initiatives more successful. The superintendent and the district will be better served when candidates are informed and prepared about the district focus and work prior to the election. Spillane and Regnier (1998) stated, “Lay board members . . . frequently come to their position with minimal understanding of the policy role of the board or the role of the individual members of a governing board” (p. 209). Superintendents can increase a new board member’s opportunity to be successful by carefully gathering materials and structuring presentations to help the candidates learn what will be expected of them if they are elected (McAdams, 2009; Townsend et al., 2007).

By establishing a positive and open relationship with all candidates, the superintendent supports the successful candidate in appearing confident in their role, understanding the culture of the district, and being prepared to join the governance team. Superintendents can work with sitting board members to implement an onboarding process that supports the orientation for new board members, establishes a plan for professional development during the first year, and sets a tone for collaborative working relationships (Briggs et al., 2017; McAdams, 2009; Townsend et al., 2007). The CSBA (2017) recommends that new board member training focus on key areas, such as the role of the board and superintendent, vision and goals, and a summary of the prior and future work of the district to support long-term transformation (Briggs et al., 2017).
Research Gap

Although there is a significant body of research on how superintendents can successfully navigate their leadership role, there is little research on the political strategies superintendents use to work with their board members, “people whom they can’t control but on whom their success depends” (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 2). Although significant research exists on the importance of the relationship between the board and the superintendent, more research is needed to explore the political complexity of the board-superintendent relationship (Moody, 2007; Muhammed, 2012; Vaughn, 2010). Specifically, there is a gap in the research as to how superintendents use political strategies to work with the different political styles of their board members (Finnan et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2011; Muhammed, 2012; White et al., 2016). Superintendents must be able to respond to the diverse interests and political orientations of their school board members, who are often representing special interest groups or differing constituents within the community (CSBA, 2018; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Kowalski, 2005; Witherspoon, 2008). Bjork and Lindle (2001) advised conducting more research into effective political strategies because conflict can increase between the superintendent and the board over dealing with these special interest groups and constituencies.

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study will provide valuable information on the political styles that superintendents use to work with the different perceived political styles of their board members. The findings and conclusions from this study will inform strategies to support superintendents in building collaborative, positive, and productive relationships with their board members, individually and collectively. If superintendents can increase their political awareness, learn about political styles, and
implement strategies to work with their board members, the result will be improved superintendent-board relationships, increased superintendent longevity, and decreased turnover. As the superintendent and board work together with a unity of purpose, the governance team will positively impact the educational program, provide equity for all students, and fulfill the moral imperative to the community they serve.

Summary

Chapter II provided an overview of the political theories that have been shaped by important cultural, economic, social, and intellectual philosophies over time. Politics is not a new concept, and understanding how shifts and changes in culture, social norms, economic conditions, and technology underpin the conflict and challenges faced by every superintendent. The superintendent and the board are interconnected and interdependent, so understanding politics and political styles, as well as identifying strategies to work with the different political styles, can improve a superintendent’s ability to work with the board, thereby improving overall organizational effectiveness (White et al., 2016).

Chapter III provides the research design for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, including the population, sampling frame, and selection of the sample population of the suburban elementary superintendents who are considered to be exemplary. Chapter IV presents the analysis for both quantitative and qualitative data collected through this study, summarizing the findings and results of the research. Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings and conclusions, which address the research questions, as well as recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides a review of the methodology used to determine how suburban elementary superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and that of their board members; and the strategies superintendents use to work with the perceived individual political styles of their board members. Chapter III provides the research design for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, including the population, sampling frame, and selection criteria of the sample population of the suburban elementary superintendents considered to be exemplary. The instrumentation, validity, and reliability are described, followed by the data collection and analysis methods. Chapter III concludes with the limitations of the study and a summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

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

Research Questions

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

**Research Design**

The research design describes the general plan for how the research is set up, including the procedures for conducting the study and the methods for collecting data. The purpose of the research design is to define the processes and procedures selected by the researcher to collect, analyze, interpret, and report empirical data that will answer the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The purpose of this thematic study was to identify the political styles of superintendents and school board members as perceived by the superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members. After considering various research methodologies, the method selected as most appropriate to the thematic study was a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design.

The sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was selected because using both quantitative and qualitative methods provided the most comprehensive information necessary to meet the purpose of the study and address the research questions, as well as enhance the credibility of the study. In mixed methods research design, the researcher collects and analyzes data and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative methods within the same study, gaining more insight into the research questions. In a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, quantitative methods are followed by qualitative data collection, which are used to further explain the
quantitative results. Data from artifacts are then collected to provide triangulation through qualitative cross-validation among the multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

**Quantitative Research Design**

Quantitative research design emphasizes objectivity by measuring and describing phenomena, either through experimental or nonexperimental design. In quantitative research, the researcher gathers data “in such a way that the data are easy to quantify, allowing for statistical analysis” (Patten, 2014, p. 9). The results are then presented as statistics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014).

The quantitative portion of this mixed methods study was conducted as a survey of five exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents to determine how the superintendents perceived their own political style and the individual political style of each board member. In a survey, the researcher administers a questionnaire to collect data on the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or behaviors of the sample population. The survey results generate descriptive statistics, which are useful to summarize the current status of a variable, and to describe characteristics of the sample population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014).

**Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research is more personal in nature, as the researcher collects the data directly from the source. Qualitative inquiry utilizes evaluation and interpretation to study and make judgements about how people construct meaning. The researcher must qualitatively study the way things work by “getting inside the phenomenon of interest to get detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in what goes on and the
implications of those variations for the people and processes involved” (Patton, 2015, p. 6). The understanding and explanations are complex, providing multiple perspectives that are synthesized to identify themes and generate data to answer the research questions. Qualitative studies contribute to the body of research by providing descriptions and analysis of practices, processes, and events related to the specific phenomenon of study (Patton, 2010, 2015).

In qualitative research design, the methods used are just as systematic as quantitative methods, but they are distinguished by the emphasis on gathering data from “naturally occurring phenomena” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 23). Qualitative research results are reported as discussions of trends and themes based on words rather than statistics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The qualitative inquiry was conducted through standardized, semistructured interviews. In standardized, semistructured interviews, “participants are asked the same questions in the same order, thus reducing interviewer flexibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 355). Following the survey, the researcher utilized a standardized, semistructured protocol to interview the same five exemplary superintendents who participated in the survey, to identify and explain the strategies they use to work with the perceived political styles of school board members. The use of explanatory sequential mixed methods provided the researcher with the opportunity to use qualitative data to further explain the quantitative data collected through the survey.

**Triangulation**

According to Patton (2015), “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology, constitute a particularly
rich source of information” (p. 376). In today’s world, the work of superintendents and school boards easily leave a paper trail of communications, media coverage, social media, or internet archives that can be “mined” as part of fieldwork (Patton, 2015, p. 376). These documents provided the researcher with rich information about the political relationship between the superintendent and their board members.

**Rationale for Methodology**

The use of a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design allowed the researcher to make explicit the implicit theories that guide research studies, providing comprehensive information sufficient to meeting the purpose of the study and addressing the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Roberts (2010) stated, “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single method complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth” (p. 145). The use of the explanatory sequential mixed methods design provided the researcher with the opportunity to use qualitative data to further explain the quantitative data collected through the survey. According to Creswell (2014), the interpretation of the data involves the reporting of quantitative results, followed by a second qualitative reporting. This design involves a third level of interpretation, which is how the qualitative data explain the quantitative results, with the intent of not merely merging the two forms of data, but rather providing more depth and insight into the quantitative results (Creswell, 2003, 2014). Figure 4 provides a graphic representation of the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design and how the qualitative results are used for a further level of interpretation to provide more depth and insight into the qualitative results (Creswell, 2003, 2014).
The qualitative data were triangulated through multiple data sources, which provided a more comprehensive set of data as well as enhanced the credibility of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Patton (2015) stated, “Triangulation of data sources across different qualitative methods means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means from interviews . . . and documents” (p. 662). Triangulation included checking interviews against documentation and other written evidence that corroborated what was reported during the interviews. Triangulation yields either consistency in the overall patterns within the data from various sources or provides reasonable explanations for differences in the data, contributing to the overall credibility of the research (Patton, 2015).

**Population**

The population is a group that researchers intend to study and to whom they intend to generalize the findings. In addition, the population is a group of individuals who have one or more distinguishing characteristics that differentiate them from other groups and are of interest to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2010). The population of this study was school district superintendents.
As the top executive officer of a school district, superintendents are hired by and report directly to a locally elected school board (Martens, 2012). Superintendents are responsible for implementing the board’s vision through daily decision-making about the educational programs, personnel hiring and management, allocation of fiscal resources, facilities, and risk management. To be effective, superintendents must work through district and site leadership to meet the district goals and serve the needs of all students. In addition, superintendents must respond to the demands of stakeholders, constituents, special interest and advocacy groups, parents, and employee unions, oftentimes balancing competing interests from within the community in order to achieve the best results for students (Harvey & Wallace, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011; Martens, 2012). Serving as a school district superintendent is challenging, complex work, and managing the relationship with the board is a central aspect of the superintendency since the board is the employer and supervisor of the superintendent (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

Nationally, there were approximately 14,000 school districts in the United States at the time of this study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This means that there were approximately 14,000 school district superintendents employed to lead those school districts. It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups, so the population was narrowed geographically to focus on superintendents employed within school districts in California. In 2020-2021, there were 1,097 school districts within the state of California (California Department of Education, 2021). This population was still too large to reasonably survey and interview, so the population was further narrowed to a target population, which was feasible for the researcher to study.
Target Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a target population for a study is the entire group or set of individuals chosen from the overall population who conform to specific criteria for which the study data can be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings of the study are intended to be generalized. It is important that the target populations are carefully and clearly identified and defined for the purposes of a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group. Patten (2014) stated, “When it is impractical to study an entire population, researchers draw a sample, study it, and infer that what is true of the sample is probably also true of the population” (p. 53).

Superintendents serve in a variety of educational settings. Of the 1,097 school districts within the state of California, 522 were elementary districts, 344 were unified school districts, and 76 were high school districts. Elementary school districts made up the most significant group, at 47.6%, of public school districts in the state (California Department of Education, 2021). Table 1 provides summary data for the number of school districts within the state of California in 2020-2021.

To make the study more reasonable, the researcher focused on the 522 elementary school districts in California. This population of elementary school districts was narrowed geographically to elementary school districts in Southern California, located in Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties (California Department of Social Services, 2002). As of January 22, 2021, the
California Department of Education Public Schools and Districts Data Files identified 101 elementary school districts in Southern California.

Table 1

*Number of School Districts in California by Type in 2020-2021*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District by type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Office of Education (COE)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school district</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school district</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-school locations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Occupational Centers and Programs</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Board of Education charter</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State special schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide benefit charter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified school district</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total school districts in California</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,097</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher further narrowed the target population to suburban elementary school districts in Southern California. Within the 101 elementary school districts in Southern California, 61 school districts were located in suburban areas. The National Center for Education Statistics defines suburban areas as a territory outside of a principal city, and inside an urbanized area, with a population that can vary from over 250,000 to less than 100,000 people (NCES, 2018). In 2012-2013, 46.2% of California public school students attended schools which were considered to be located in suburban areas, educating the largest percentage of students when compared to city, town, or rural schools (Ballotpedia, 2018).

According to Holme, Diem, and Welton (2014), suburban school districts have experienced tremendous change in the demographics of students enrolling in the public schools over the past several decades. This demographic shift has created challenging political dynamics for school districts to navigate. More diverse populations of families
have moved out of urban areas to the suburbs in search of better educational opportunities for their children. In addition, many newly arrived immigrants have also settled in suburban areas. Schools have been required to create more inclusive cultures to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic student population. From 1990 to 2010, the Caucasian population in suburban communities decreased from 81% to 65%, the Hispanic populations increased from 8% to 57%, and the African American population increased by 10% (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014; Holme et al., 2014). This shift in suburban demographics has resulted in conflict as suburban school districts grapple with curriculum changes, school boundaries, discipline disproportionality, and many other politically-charged situations in an effort to respond to the challenges of serving a more diverse student population while still meeting the demands of middle class Caucasian families (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014). Figure 5 shows the sampling procedure utilized by the researcher to identify the target population of suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California.

Figure 5. Sampling frame for research study. Note. The process used by the researcher to narrow the population from total school districts within California to the target population of 61 eligible school districts.
Sample

Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. The sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population that the researcher intends to generalize. Sampling is selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The study used purposeful sampling for both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposeful sampling is when the researcher selects a sample that is representative of the population or that includes subjects with needed characteristics. The researcher makes judgements about which subjects should be selected for the study, based on which subjects could provide the best information to address the research questions. Purposeful sampling was chosen as the method of sample selection based on the criteria of being considered an exemplary superintendent.

The study sample for this mixed methods study included five exemplary superintendents from the target population. The nature of qualitative inquiry often requires an in-depth focus on relatively small samples, unlike quantitative methods, which depend on larger, randomly selected samples for generalization to the general population (Patten, 2014). For mixed methods research, Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size of between three and five participants. This research explores the depth of perception, knowledge, and experience of exemplary superintendents in working with the different political styles of board members, so the importance of analysis comes from the comprehensive data obtained through qualitative inquiry, rather than the number of participants in the study (Creswell, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
The researcher utilized a concept/theory-based sampling strategy, by selecting “information-rich persons” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326) who are known to experience the concept under study. The sampling strategy was reported within the findings in such a manner as to protect the confidentiality of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 327). By selecting only superintendents who met the criteria of “exemplary,” the researcher purposefully utilized information-rich cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 264).

The thematic team collaborated to determine the criteria to be used in identifying exemplary superintendents for inclusion in the study. Exemplary superintendents in this study had a minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent in their current district and demonstrated at least three of the following seven criteria:

- Shows evidence of positive governance team relationships.
- Was identified by a county superintendent as exemplary in working with the board.
- Was identified by a panel of experts who were knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- Has received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).
- Has received recognition by his or her peers.
- Has a membership in professional associations in the field.
- Has participated in CSBA’s Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
Sample Participant Selection Process

The sampling strategy utilized in this study included reputational case, where the researcher obtained “the recommendation of knowledgeable experts for the best examples” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326) of participants who provided information to answer the research questions. Recommendations for the exemplary superintendents to participate in the study were obtained by county superintendents and county office consultants in Southern California, a retired superintendent who works with the North/South Superintendent’s Group, and a retired superintendent who works with a search firm and is familiar with superintendents within the Southern California area. The researcher also reviewed artifacts, such as district websites, board meeting agendas, minutes, publications, articles, and published recognitions from professional organizations, such as ACSA. The data collected were reviewed with a retired superintendent from the North/South Superintendent’s Group. Through this process, five exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents were identified for participation in the research study.

After the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the proposed research study (Appendix A), the five superintendents identified through the selection process were contacted regarding participation in the study. The five participants were asked to participate in both the electronic survey and an in-person interview as a requirement of the study. The researcher conducted the following process for contacting the participants:

1. The researcher contacted the participant by phone to explain the purpose of the study and the selection process for identifying the participant. The researcher confirmed the
anonymity of the study and also was available to answer any questions. The researcher then confirmed the participation of the superintendent in the study.

2. After agreeing to participate, the researcher sent the participant an Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix B), the Brandman University Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix C), an informed consent form (Appendix D), and a link to the electronic Political Styles Matrix Survey (Appendix E).

3. The researcher then scheduled a 60-minute interview with each participant. Prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the participant a copy of the interview questions, and a copy of the nine political styles definitions contained in the Political Styles Interview Protocol (Appendix F).

**Instrumentation**

According to Patten (2014), instrumentation describes the measurement devices used for the research study. For this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, the researcher conducted a survey of exemplary suburban elementary superintendents to determine how the superintendent perceived their individual political style and the political style of each board member. The researcher then followed up with in-depth standardized, semistructured interviews to determine the strategies that each superintendent used to work with the perceived political styles of their board members. The researcher concluded the study with collection, review, and analysis of artifacts to triangulate the information gained through the surveys and interviews.

**Quantitative Instrumentation**

Due to the explanatory sequential nature of this mixed methods research, quantitative data were collected and used to inform the qualitative design approach.
Quantitative instruments are used to generate numerical data, usually from surveys, tests, or questionnaires, which can then be analyzed to develop findings. If developed and implemented properly, quantitative instruments will produce reliable data that are useful in answering the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The Political Styles Matrix Survey was developed and served as the quantitative instrument and informed the development of the interview plan for the qualitative instrument.

The quantitative instrument, the Political Styles Matrix Survey, was developed collaboratively by the thematic team of researchers, in collaboration with Brandman faculty advisors. It utilized the nine political styles identified as part of the Political Styles Matrix in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016). The survey asked superintendents to identify their own political style and the perceived political style of each board member by identifying where they fall on the Goal Allegiance and Initiative continuums. The Goal Allegiance Continuum has three descriptors: *self-interests*, *blended interests*, and *organizational interests*. The Initiative Continuum has three descriptors: *passive*, *engaged*, and *assertive*. By cross-referencing the two continuums, individuals are identified as having one of nine political styles: *analyst, adaptor, supporter, planner, balancer, developer, challenger, arranger, or strategist* (White et al., 2016).

The selected exemplary superintendents responded to the survey via SurveyMonkey. The quantitative survey instrument, the Political Styles Matrix, began with a brief introduction, which explained the purpose of the research and the framework for the study, followed by the informed consent. The survey then asked the respondent for demographic information, including years of experience, gender, age, education, and
participation in governance trainings. The participants were then provided with definitions for each of the nine political styles and asked to respond with a political style for themselves and each of their board members. The Political Styles Matrix Survey provided the researcher with data on the political style of the superintendents and the political style of their school board members, as perceived by the superintendent (see Appendix H). The survey instrument collected the data necessary to answer Research Question 1.

**Qualitative Instrumentation**

In qualitative research, there are five major data collection methods; observation, interviews, questionnaires, document review, and use of audio-visual materials (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is important in qualitative studies to align the method of data collection with the purpose statement and research questions through determining the qualitative tradition used for the study. For the purposes of this study, a traditional social science research inquiry framework was used, which emphasizes the use of “standardized questions and consistency across interviews and interviewees” (Patton, 2015, p. 433). In addition, the researcher maintains a professional and neutral relationship with the participant, using the standardized questions with nondirective follow-up probes to ensure that each participant receives the same stimulus, reducing interviewer bias (Patton, 2015).

The thematic team worked with Brandman faculty to research and develop the Political Styles Interview Protocol. The Political Styles Interview Protocol was designed to answer the research questions by exploring the strategies the participating superintendents use to work with the perceived political styles of their board members, as
identified through the Political Styles Matrix Survey. The thematic team utilized a standardized, semistructured interview protocol, so the precise wording of the questions, as well as the sequence in which they are asked, was determined in advance to reduce the flexibility of the interviewer (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The Political Styles Interview Protocol ensured that the script contained semistructured questions with additional prompts that could be used to elicit more meaningful responses when necessary.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that an important characteristic of a qualitative study is that the research is conducted in the field within a natural setting for the participant. This allows the researcher to collect the data in a way that is comfortable for the participants so they can respond naturally and honestly. The researcher allowed the participants to select the location of the interview. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was a complete outsider, “totally detached from the naturally occurring behavior and activities of the participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 348).

The researcher utilized the standardized, semistructured Political Styles Interview Protocol to interview the same five exemplary superintendents who participated in the Political Styles Matrix Survey. These five exemplary superintendents from suburban elementary school districts in Southern California were interviewed to determine the strategies they use in working with perceived political styles of board members. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes in duration. All interviews were recorded using an Easy Voice Recorder IOS application for an iPhone, held via Zoom in an environment selected by the participant to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Following the interview, the interviews were transcribed to yield a text version of the interview.
The interview transcript was sent to each participant for their feedback and verification of accuracy. The transcripts were analyzed using NVivo, identifying common themes and coding the scripts of the transcribed interviews. The data from the interviews were summarized into a frequency table, which provided the data to answer Research Question 2. The interview protocol is included under Appendix K. Transcriptions of all interviews are included under Appendix L.

**Pilot Testing**

Pilot testing by multiple researchers with subsequent revision to the instruments and protocols is an effective way to increase the reliability of the instruments (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Each member of the thematic team conducted a pilot test of the survey, interview protocol, and interview instruments prior to beginning the research. The survey was piloted by this researcher with a retired superintendent who had served in a suburban elementary school district in Southern California, with 6 years of superintendent experience and knowledge of working with various political styles of board members. The pilot survey included a semistructured response item to request feedback on the survey instrument. In addition, the researcher utilized a survey critique developed by the thematic team for the participant to provide feedback on the length, clarity, directions, and descriptions contained within the survey protocol. Feedback from all thematic participants provided information to the thematic team for alterations to the final survey instrument.

Following administration of the pilot survey, all members of the thematic team conducted a pilot interview. This researcher conducted the pilot interview with the same retired superintendent who completed the survey. A pilot interview allows the researcher
to practice and gain experience with the interview process. According to Patton (2015), the interview is an interaction and a relationship; the skill and experience of the researcher can and does affect the quality of the interview. It is important for the researcher to listen carefully, show interest, be present, and ask the appropriate probing questions (Patton, 2015). The researcher utilized an observer, a doctoral graduate with qualitative research experience, to provide feedback on the overall interview process, the interview questions, probes, follow-up questions, and researcher behaviors that could potentially lead to bias. Follow-up questions or probes were utilized as needed to clarify information gleaned from the standardized questions.

The thematic team created a Field Test Participant Feedback Questions document, which was used with the participant to provide feedback to the thematic team on the interview content and process (see Appendix I). In addition, the thematic team developed a Field Test—Observer Feedback protocol and Interview Feedback Reflection Questions (see Appendix J). These tools provided support to the researchers in gaining insight necessary to make any improvements or adjustments to the interview process.

After all pilot interviews had been conducted, the thematic team utilized the feedback tools from the participants and observers to inform changes to the survey and interview protocol. Modifications and edits were made to the survey and interview protocol by the thematic team, and submitted to the faculty advisors for review and approval. The final survey and interview protocol was then distributed to all members of the thematic team for use in their individual research.
Collection of Artifacts

Artifacts are documents and relics that form “tangible manifestations that describe people’s experience, knowledge, actions and values” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 361). Patton (2015) stated, “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology, constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (p. 376). Organizations and entities generate significant amounts of public records, available either through hard copy, digital format or online, which can be evaluated as part of research studies. Qualitative research often involves locating, identifying, analyzing, and interpreting various artifacts, which will be used to corroborate the data from interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher collected, reviewed, and analyzed artifacts both internal and external to the five suburban elementary school districts in the study. The majority of the information was collected from the district websites, including board agendas, minutes, governance handbooks, superintendent newsletters, and superintendent or board communications to the school community. Other documentation included media reports, publications, and social media involving the superintendent, the school board, and school board members. Through a triangulated approach using a variety of sources for data, the researcher used surveys, interviews, and artifacts to describe the strategies superintendents use to work with the perceived political styles of their board members.

Validity and Reliability

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “The term validity means the degree to which scientific explanations of phenomena match reality” (p. 104), leading to
findings which are truthful and trustworthy. Patten (2014) stated that validity is relative to the purpose of the research, emphasizing that the purpose must be clearly identified. Validity also refers to the property of an assessment tool to measure what it is intended to measure and perform the function it was designed to perform (Creswell, 2014; Patten, 2014; Salkind, 2017).

According to Roberts (2010), “Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (p. 151). This statement is supported by other researchers who describe reliability as the ability to obtain consistent results from an instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patten, 2014). In addition, an instrument used in a study is considered to be reliable when the data collection, data analysis, and the results are consistent (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). In this study, the researcher used field-testing, an electronic survey instrument, consistent interview questions, and interview protocols to enhance the reliability.

The survey and the interview instruments were reviewed by Brandman faculty and field-tested by the thematic team to increase validity of the study. In order to increase the reliability of the quantitative data, the survey was consistently administered to all participating superintendents using an electronic survey instrument. To enhance reliability for the qualitative interviews, a script was utilized to ensure that all participants received consistent directions and interview questions in the same manner. In total, the surveys and interview protocols were consistently administered by 10 members of the thematic team to a total of 50 participating superintendents, collecting data on the strategies they use with approximately 250 board members, adding to the reliability of the research. The data were triangulated through review of artifacts to add validity to the
study, building a “coherent justification” for the identified themes, as “converging several sources of data . . . can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200).

Intercoder reliability is an appropriate strategy to use with standardized, semistructured interviews. Intercoder reliability occurs when a third-party evaluator analyzes and codes the data, and reaches the same conclusions with the coding as the researcher (Patton, 2015). In general, intercoder agreement and reliability is attained when there is an agreement of 80% or higher between the coding of the researcher and that of the third-party evaluator (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher utilized a peer researcher from the thematic team to independently code a sample of the data to have two sources of results to compare. This process ensures the consistency of the identified themes and the reliability of the data. Over 10% of the data were coded by both sources with an accuracy percentage higher than 80%.

**Data Collection**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), providing precise and detailed descriptions of the data collection processes, including the methods and data recording techniques, is important for future inquiry. Data were collected for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study through two means: quantitative data collection through surveys and qualitative data collection through standardized, semistructured interviews. Triangulation occurred through collection and analysis of artifacts to cross-check and corroborate the consistency of information provided through the interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
Prior to the start of data collection, the researcher obtained approval from the Brandman University IRB to conduct the study. Participants’ rights and privacy were protected throughout the various stages of the mixed methods research. Informed consent was provided to all participants and agreement to participate was obtained prior to beginning data collection.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

The researcher collected quantitative data through the survey designed and piloted by the thematic team. The survey was conducted online through SurveyMonkey. All participants were sent via email the informed consent form, the link to the survey, and an individual access code. Participants were required to give consent and acknowledge they were voluntarily participating in the study prior to taking the survey. The survey consisted of the Political Styles Matrix, which provided a response option item for the superintendent and up to seven board members, to determine how the superintendent perceived the political style of each member of the governance team. The survey included definitions of all nine political styles, based upon the work of White et al. (2016), to assist the participants in identifying the perceived political style.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

After the quantitative data were collected, the researcher then collected qualitative data through interviews and collection of artifacts. Patton (2015) stated, “Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (p. 390). Qualitative interviews consisted of the researcher conducting in-person interviews intended to elicit the perspectives of the participating superintendents regarding the strategies used to work
with the perceived political styles of board members. Artifacts were collected for analysis of the strategies the participating superintendents use with their board members. Using multiple sources of data provided triangulation of the identified themes and allowed the researcher to validate and cross-check the findings (Patton, 2015).

**Standardized, semistructured interviews.** The researcher conducted standardized, semistructured interviews with each participating superintendent who had completed the survey. The interview protocol was designed and piloted by the thematic team and reviewed by Brandman faculty. The interview protocol consisted of five questions that were repeated for each political style represented among the board members, followed by four questions that asked the superintendents about their individual political style, and the strategies the superintendents believed were effective with all or only one political style.

The participating superintendents were provided with the informed consent document and the audio recording release form, which were signed prior to beginning the interview. The researcher read the interview directions and the standardized, semistructured questions, utilizing the follow-up prompts included in the protocol. The interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and recorded using Rev Voice Recorder. The full interview was then transcribed using the Rev Voice Recorder confidential online transcription service. The transcript was sent to each participating superintendent to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the interview documentation. Once the participating superintendent had reviewed and approved the transcript, the digital recordings of the interviews were erased.
**Artifact collection.** Qualitative artifact collection consisted of locating public documents, web-based communications, and media regarding the superintendents and their board members. Collecting artifacts enabled the researcher to collect data in an unobtrusive and convenient manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher collected public documents and reviewed materials in the form of board meeting agendas and minutes, governance handbooks, district websites, and media reports.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher first analyzed quantitative data, followed by qualitative data, for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study. The quantitative data were collected first through a survey sent to five exemplary suburban elementary superintendents to determine how they perceived their political style and the political styles of their board members. The qualitative data were acquired through interviews of the same five exemplary superintendents in the study, then followed by artifact collection to triangulate the data. Upon the completion of the collection of all quantitative and qualitative data, the data were then analyzed to answer the research questions.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Surveys were sent to the five suburban elementary superintendents identified as exemplary according to the sample criteria. Quantitative data were collected through the completion of the survey through SurveyMonkey. These exemplary superintendents were asked to provide demographic information at the beginning of the survey. The survey then prompted the participating superintendents to identify their own perceived political style on the Goal Allegiance and Initiative Continuums. Superintendents were also asked to identify the perceived political style of each board member.
Through the results of the survey, the researcher was able to collect objective demographic data, such as age, level of education, and years of experience as a superintendent. The researcher then collected data on the perceived political style of the superintendents and the perceived political style of their board members. The data from the quantitative analysis was used to answer Research Question 1, “How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?” The data collected were analyzed and presented as descriptive statistics, as a way of summarizing the data so they can easily be understood and comprehended (Patten, 2014).

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

After the quantitative data were collected, the researcher then collected qualitative data through interviews and collection of artifacts. The researcher conducted standardized, semistructured interviews with each participating superintendent who had completed the survey. The interviews were recorded using Rev Voice Recorder. The full interview was then transcribed using the Rev Voice Recorder confidential online transcription service. The transcript was sent to each participating superintendent to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the interview documentation. The researcher collected public documents and reviewed materials in the form of board meeting agendas and minutes, governance handbooks, district websites, superintendent and district social media, and media reports.

The goal of the qualitative data analysis was to organize the data in a way that informed the identification of patterns and themes to answer Research Question 2, “What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in
Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?” The data analysis process began with the researcher first organizing all the qualitative data, which included transcriptions of interviews and artifacts. The researcher then read and reviewed all interview transcripts and information contained in the artifacts. This review provided a general sense of the overall information and gave the researcher an opportunity to reflect on the overall meaning of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

According to Patton (2015), “Computers and software are tools that assist analysis. Software doesn’t really analyze qualitative data. Qualitative software programs facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking—but human beings do the analysis” (p. 529). The data were then uploaded into NVivo qualitative research software, which would provide the location to house, compare, and code the data during the study. The researcher then began coding the data.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks of information and assigning a theme to that information. Data coding begins by identifying small segments of data that can stand alone because they contain a single idea or piece of relevant information. The data segments for this study were words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs of the transcript that could be used for classification (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Codes with the greatest frequency were considered to contribute to a theme.

After the researcher coded the interview transcripts, a peer researcher from the thematic team also reviewed 10% of the data with an 80% level of agreement to establish intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability is an appropriate strategy because a third-
party evaluator compares the data and reaches the same conclusions with the coding as the researcher (Patton, 2015). This process ensured the consistency of the identified themes and improved the reliability of the data.

The data were summarized using descriptive statistics presented in frequency distribution tables. Descriptive statistics summarize the data in a way that makes it easy to comprehend. Frequency distributions display the data to clearly indicate how many times a certain theme or code was exhibited within the research study (Patten, 2014). The codes and themes identified were utilized to analyze all of the qualitative data and offer insights into the strategies that exemplary suburban elementary superintendents use to work with the perceived political styles of their board members.

**Limitations**

Limitations of a study are characteristics of the research design or methodology that place constraints on generalizability of findings (Brandman University, 2018). According to Roberts (2010), the researcher often has no control over certain areas of the study, and knows that specific features of the design or methodology could possibly impact the results and the researcher’s ability to generalize the findings to a larger population. All studies have some limitations, and the researcher has a responsibility to disclose them so others can determine for themselves how the limitations affected the study (Roberts, 2010). The limitations of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study included the size of the sample, researcher bias, time, distance, and subjective assessment of the interviewees.
Size of Sample

The sample population was limited to five superintendents from suburban elementary school districts in Southern California. Each superintendent was selected based on a set of criteria that identified the participant as exemplary and the superintendent’s willingness to participate in the research study. The small sample size may affect the overall generalizability of the study.

Researcher Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of the study. Critics of qualitative research raise concerns about the subjectivity of the approach due to the fact that the researcher is the instrument of data collection, interprets the data, and makes judgements about what is meaningful (Patton, 2015). The researcher in this study was the instrument used to conduct the interviews as well as collect and review artifacts that were believed to be relevant in answering the research questions. The researcher had served as a superintendent for 6 years at the time of the study. This experience as a superintendent created a potential for bias due to personal perceptions from prior experience in working with different political styles of board members and the board as a whole.

Time

Quantitative data collection could not begin until approval from the Brandman University IRB. Qualitative data collection could not begin until after the participating superintendents had completed their quantitative surveys. Superintendents have highly impacted schedules, so interviews were scheduled for only 60 minutes in duration to encourage participation in the study. In addition, triangulation of data had to take place
as soon as possible after the completion of the interview. Not all board meetings are created equal, so the board meeting agendas and corresponding minutes may not provide adequate opportunity to further the researcher’s understanding of how the participating superintendents use strategies to work with the perceived political styles of their board members or the board as a whole, depending upon the political climate of the district at the time.

**Distance**

In 2020-2021, there were 1,097 public school districts within the state of California, and 522 were elementary districts, making up 47.6% of school districts in the state (California Department of Education, 2021). Because of fiscal and time constraints, it was not feasible to survey and interview the entire population of elementary school district superintendents; therefore, the population was further narrowed to identify a target population of suburban elementary school districts. The researcher limited the study to Southern California, which consists of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties (California Department of Social Services, 2002). Due to proximity, placing these geographical constraints allowed the researcher to conduct the interviews within a reasonable length of time.

**Subjective Assessment of Interviewees**

In the quantitative portion of the research design, the participating superintendents were asked to identify their perceived political style as well as the perceived political style of their board members. The superintendents were provided with the White et al. (2016) Nine Political Styles Matrix and definitions of each political style. The perception of the political styles of the superintendent and board members served as the foundation
for the qualitative portion of the study. White et al. provided a self-assessment tool for understanding one’s political style; however, that tool was not utilized for the study by the thematic team. The political style assessment is rather lengthy and could impede a superintendent’s willingness to participate in the research study. Asking for the superintendent’s perception of the political styles of themselves and their board based on descriptors expedited the research process but created a limitation in that the information related to the political styles was subjective in nature.

**Summary**

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used to determine how exemplary suburban elementary superintendents perceive their political style and the political styles of their board members, as well as to identify strategies that these exemplary superintendents use to work with the individual political styles of their board members. The study began with quantitative research by conducting a survey of five superintendents who had been identified as exemplary through established criteria. The survey collected data on the political style of the superintendent and board members as perceived by the superintendents. The qualitative portion of the mixed methods design followed, with the researcher conducting standardized, semistructured interviews with the participating superintendents to collect data on the strategies used with the perceived political styles of board members and the board as a whole. The qualitative data were triangulated through the collection of artifacts.

Chapter III provided the research design for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, including the population, sampling frame, and selection of the sample population of the suburban elementary superintendents who are considered to be
exemplary. The instrumentation, validity, and reliability were described, followed by the data collection and analysis methods. Chapter III concluded with the limitations of the study and a summary of the chapter. Chapter IV presents the analysis for both quantitative and qualitative data collected through this study. Chapter V presents the findings, provides a discussion of the conclusions, which address the research questions, and details implications as well as recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter IV provides a summary of the purpose, research questions, methodology, data collection procedures, and population sample for the study. The demographic data of the participating superintendents are summarized. The chapter provides a synthesis and report of the findings of the data as they relate to the research questions. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the data and strategies the exemplary superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members.

Purpose Statement

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

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?
2. What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was selected as most appropriate to the thematic study because using both quantitative and qualitative methods provided the most comprehensive information necessary to meet the purpose of the study and address the research questions, as well as to enhance the credibility of the study. In a mixed methods research design, the researcher collects and analyzes data and draws inferences using both quantitative and qualitative methods within the same study, gaining more insight into the research questions. In a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, quantitative methods are followed by qualitative data collection, which is used to further explain the quantitative results. Data from artifacts are collected to provide triangulation through qualitative cross-validation among the multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Quantitative Research Design

The quantitative portion of this mixed methods study was conducted as a survey of five exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents to determine how the superintendents perceived their own political style and the individual style of each board member. In a survey, the researcher administers a questionnaire to collect data to describe the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or behaviors of the sample population. The survey results generate descriptive statistics, which are useful to summarize the current status of a variable, to describe characteristics of the sample population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014).
Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is more personal in nature, as the researcher collects the data directly from the source. Qualitative inquiry utilizes evaluation and interpretation to study and make judgements about how people construct meaning and determine what is meaningful. The researcher must qualitatively study the way things work by “getting inside the phenomenon of interest to get detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in what goes on and the implications of those variations for the people and processes involved” (Patton, 2015, p. 6). The understanding and explanations are complex, providing multiple perspectives that are synthesized to generate data, which describe or identify themes that answer the research questions. Qualitative studies contribute to the body of research by providing descriptions and analyses of practices, processes, and events related to the specific phenomenon of study (Patton, 2010, 2015).

In qualitative research design, the methods used are just as systematic as quantitative methods, but they are distinguished by the emphasis on gathering data from “naturally occurring phenomena” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 23). Qualitative research results are reported as discussions of trends and themes based on words, rather than statistics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). For this study, qualitative findings are based on two kinds of data: (a) standardized, semistructured interviews; and (b) printed and web-based communications, board meeting documentation, social media, or media coverage to determine the strategies exemplary superintendents in suburban elementary school districts in Southern California used to work successfully with the different political styles of school board members.
The qualitative inquiry was conducted through standardized, semistructured interviews. In standardized, semistructured interviews, “participants are asked the same questions in the same order, thus reducing interviewer flexibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 355). The researcher utilized a standardized, semistructured protocol to interview five exemplary superintendents in five suburban elementary school districts in Southern California on the strategies used to work with the different political styles of school board members.

According to Patton (2015), “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology, constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (p. 376). In today’s world, the high volume of internet information, electronic communications, media coverage, and social media that exists online easily leaves a record that can be “mined” as part of fieldwork (Patton, 2015, p. 376). These documents provided the researcher with the opportunity to analyze the information found in public documents along with the information gleaned from the interviews as evidence of the strategies the exemplary superintendents used to work with their board members.

**Rationale for Methodology**

The use of a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design allowed the researcher to make explicit the implicit theories that guide research studies, providing comprehensive information sufficient to meeting the purpose of the study and addressing the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Roberts (2010) stated, “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single method complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth” (p. 145).
The use of the explanatory sequential mixed method provided the researcher with the opportunity to use qualitative data to further explain the quantitative data collected through the survey. According to Creswell (2014), the interpretation of the data will first involve the reporting of quantitative results, followed by a second qualitative reporting. However, this design involves a third level of interpretation, which is how the qualitative finds help to explain the quantitative results, with the intent of not merely merging the two forms of data, but rather providing more depth and insight into the quantitative results (Creswell, 2003, 2014). Figure 4 (repeated here for ease of reference) provides a graphic representation of the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design.


The qualitative data were triangulated through multiple data sources, which provided a more comprehensive set of data as well as enhanced the credibility of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Patton (2015) stated, “Triangulation of data sources across different qualitative methods means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means from interviews . . . and documents” (p. 662). Triangulation included checking interviews...
against documentation and other written evidence that corroborated what was reported during the interviews. Triangulation yields either consistency in the overall patterns within the data from various sources or provides reasonable explanation for differences in the data, contributing to the overall credibility of the research (Patton, 2015).

**Population**

The population is a group that researchers intend to study and to whom they intend to generalize the findings. In addition, the population is a group of individuals who have one or more distinguishing characteristics that differentiate them from other groups and are of interest to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2010). The population of this study was school district superintendents.

Nationally, there were approximately 14,000 school districts in the United States at the time of this study (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). This means that there were approximately 14,000 school district superintendents employed to lead those school districts. It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups, so the population was narrowed geographically to focus on superintendents employed within school districts in California. In 2020-2021, there were 1,097 public school districts within the state of California (California Department of Education, 2021). This population was still too large to reasonably survey and interview; therefore, the population was further narrowed to a target population, which was feasible for the researcher to study.

**Target Population**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a target population for a study is the entire group or set of individuals chosen from the overall population who conform to
specific criteria for which the study data can be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to whom the findings of the study are intended to be generalized. It is important that the target populations are carefully and clearly identified and defined for the purposes of a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group. Patten (2014) stated, “When it is impractical to study an entire population, researchers draw a sample, study it, and infer that what is true of the sample is probably also true of the population” (p. 53).

Superintendents serve in a variety of educational settings. Of the 1,097 public school districts within the state of California, 522 were elementary districts, 344 were unified school districts, and 76 were high school districts. Elementary school districts made up the most significant group, at 47.6%, of school districts in the state (California Department of Education, 2021). Table 1 (repeated here for ease of reference) provides summary data for the number of school districts within the state of California in 2020-2021.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District by type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Office of Education (COE)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school district</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school district</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-school locations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Occupational Centers and Programs</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Board of Education charter</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State special schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide benefit charter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified school district</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total school districts in California</strong></td>
<td>1,097</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To make the study more reasonable, the researcher focused on the 522 elementary school districts in California. This population of elementary school districts was narrowed geographically to elementary school districts in Southern California, located in Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties (California Department of Social Services, 2002). As of January 22, 2021, the California Department of Education identified 101 elementary school districts in Southern California. The researcher further narrowed this number to suburban elementary school districts in Southern California. In 2012-2013, 46.2% of California public school students attended schools that were considered to be located in suburban areas, educating the largest percentage of students when compared to city, town, or rural schools (Ballotpedia, 2018). Within the 101 elementary school districts in Southern California, 61 school districts were located in suburban areas. Figure 5 (repeated here for

![Sampling frame for research study. Note. The process used by the researcher to narrow the population from total school districts within California to the target population of 61 eligible school districts.](image-url)
ease of reference) shows the sampling procedure utilized by the researcher to identify the target population of exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California.

Sample

Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. The sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population to whom the researcher intends to generalize the findings. Sampling is selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The study used purposeful sampling for both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), *purposeful sampling* is when the researcher selects a sample that is representative of the population or that includes subjects with needed characteristics. The researcher makes judgements about which subjects should be selected for the study, based on which subjects could provide the best information to address the research questions. Purposeful sampling was chosen as the method of sample selection based on the criterion of being considered an exemplary superintendent.

The study sample for this mixed methods study included five exemplary superintendents from the target population. The nature of qualitative inquiry often requires an in-depth focus on relatively small samples, unlike quantitative methods, which depend on larger, randomly selected samples for generalization to the general population (Patten, 2014). According to Patton (2015), “What would be a ‘bias’ in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength” (p. 264).
The researcher utilized a concept/theory-based sampling strategy, by selecting “information-rich persons” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326) who are known to experience the concept under study. The sampling strategy was reported within the findings in such a manner as to protect the confidentiality of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). By selecting only superintendents who met the criteria of “exemplary,” the researcher purposefully utilized information-rich cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 264).

The thematic team collaborated to determine the criteria to be used in identifying exemplary superintendents for inclusion in the study. An exemplary superintendent in this study was a school district leader who had a minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent in their current district and demonstrated at least three of the following seven criteria:

- Shows evidence of positive governance team relationships.
- Was identified by a county superintendent as exemplary in working with the board.
- Was identified by a panel of experts who were knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- Has received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).
- Has received recognition by his or her peers.
- Has a membership in professional associations in the field.
- Has participated in CSBA’s Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
Sample Participant Selection Process

The sampling strategy utilized in this study included reputational case, where the researcher obtained “the recommendation of knowledgeable experts for the best examples” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326) of participants who provided information to answer the research questions. Recommendations for the exemplary superintendents to participate in the study were obtained by county superintendents and county office consultants in Southern California, a retired superintendent who works with the North/South Superintendent’s Group, and a retired superintendent who works with a search firm and is familiar with superintendents within the Southern California area. The researcher also reviewed artifacts, such as district websites, board meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings, publications, articles, and published recognitions from professional organizations, such as ACSA. The data collected were reviewed with a retired superintendent from the North/South Superintendent’s Group. Through this process, five exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents were identified for participation in the research study.

After the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the proposed research study (Appendix A), the five superintendents identified through the selection process were contacted regarding participation in the study. The five participants were asked to participate in both the electronic survey and an in-person interview as a requirement of the study. The researcher conducted the following process for contacting the participants:

1. The researcher contacted the participant by phone to explain the purpose of the study and the selection process for identifying the participant. The researcher confirmed the
anonymity of the study and also was available to answer any questions. The researcher then confirmed the participation of the superintendent in the study.

2. After agreeing to participate, the researcher sent the participant an Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix B), the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights (Appendix C), an informed consent form (Appendix D), and a link to the electronic Political Styles Matrix Survey (Appendix E).

3. The researcher then scheduled a 60-minute interview with each participant. Prior to the interview, the researcher emailed the participant an Audio Recording Release form (Appendix F), a copy of the interview questions, and a copy of the nine political styles definitions contained in the Political Styles Interview Protocol (Appendix G).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Prior to the start of data collection, the researcher obtained approval from the Brandman University IRB to conduct the study. Participants’ rights and privacy were protected throughout the various stages of the mixed methods research. Informed consent was provided to all participants and agreement to participate was obtained prior to beginning data collection. The researcher collected quantitative data online through SurveyMonkey using the Political Styles Matrix Survey. After the quantitative data were collected, the researcher then collected qualitative data through interviews conducted using the Political Styles Interview Protocol and collection of artifacts.

The researcher first analyzed quantitative data, followed by qualitative data, for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study. Through the results of the Political Styles Matrix Survey, the researcher was able to collect objective demographic data, such as age, level of education, and years of experience as a superintendent. The researcher
then collected data on the perceived political style of the superintendents and the perceived political style of their board members. The data collected were analyzed and presented as descriptive statistics, as a way of summarizing the data to answer Research Question 1.

After the quantitative data were analyzed, the researcher then analyzed the qualitative data generated through interviews and collection of artifacts. The goal of the qualitative data analysis was to organize the data in a way that informed the identification of patterns and themes. The researcher then read, reviewed, and coded all interview transcripts and information contained in the artifacts. Data coding begins by identifying small segments of data that can stand alone because they contain a single idea or piece of relevant information. The data segments for this study were words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs of the transcript that could be used for classification (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Codes with the greatest frequency were considered to contribute to a theme.

The data were summarized using descriptive statistics presented in frequency distribution tables. Frequency distributions display the data to clearly indicate how many times a certain theme or code was exhibited within the research study (Patten, 2014). The codes and themes identified were utilized to analyze all of the qualitative data and offer insights into the strategies that exemplary suburban elementary superintendents’ use to work with the perceived political styles of their board members. For the purposes of analysis, the researcher identified five themes for the data: (a) building relationships and trust, (b) coherence, (c) communication, (d) governance, and (e) political savvy. The following definitions are provided for clarification of the themes.
Building Relationships and Trust

Build relationships and trust refers to the strategies a superintendent uses to manage the interpersonal, human side of the board-superintendent relationship. Houston and Eadie (2005) emphasized that board members are often “high-achieving, influential, and occasionally demanding and impatient people” (p. 17). An effective superintendent must be adept at managing interpersonal relationships in order to build trust and create feelings of ownership and commitment for district goals and initiatives. In addition, effective superintendents spend time with their board members and look for ways to make governance a rewarding experience (Houston & Eadie, 2005; Townsend et al., 2007). Strategies that supported a theme of building relationships and trust included: (a) know your board members, (b) transparency, (c) culture of no surprises, (d) finding connections, and (e) work with them individually.

Coherence

Coherence refers to the strategies the superintendent uses to achieve the district’s vision and goals for student achievement. This work runs more deeply than simply having the board come to agreement on the mission, vision, and goals of the district. The superintendent must work with the board to reach agreement on the moral imperative of serving all students. The board plays a critical role in fostering coherence and supporting the district to stay focused, which gives the board unity of purpose (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; CSBA, 2017). Strategies that supported a theme of coherence included (a) stay focused on facts, not personalities; (b) remind of primary responsibility to kids; (c) collaboration around the goals/plans; (d) find common ground, get everyone on the same page; and (e) show the benefit.
**Communication**

Communication refers to the strategies the superintendent uses to provide timely and relevant information with clarity and purpose so that the mission and values of the organization are understood and supported. Effective superintendents recognize the importance of proactive and responsive communication, providing all board members with access to information, and establishing communication protocols (AASA, 2006, 2007; CSBA, n.d.-b; ECRA, 2010; Gorman, 2018; McAdams, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2007). Strategies that supported a theme of communication included (a) understand the amount and kind of information to give them, (b) use active listening skills, (c) open communication, (d) frontload, and (e) validate their point of view.

**Governance**

Governance refers to the strategies the superintendent uses to support the board in setting the direction, establishing structure, assuring that goals are achieved, and providing accountability to the community for the fiscal and programmatic administration of the school district. Boards govern effectively when they act collectively with transparency, informed by recommendations from the superintendent or staff. Governance is more than just approving policy; it is how the superintendent works with the board to form a cohesive team to lead the district (CSBA, 2020: Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Strategies that supported a theme of governance included (a) manage the board, educate on role, parameters, boundaries; (b) make governance a priority, handbook and protocols; (c) make sure they have information to make informed decisions; (d) use legal counsel, educate on the law/liability; and (e) provide them all with the same information at the same time.
Political Savvy

Political savvy refers to the strategies the superintendent uses to influence and gain board support, manage conflict, and view the board as an asset to district leadership. Effective superintendents realize the importance of understanding how board members are connected to various constituencies in the community and that diversity of viewpoints is essential to making informed decisions (Bjork et al., 2002; CSBA, n.d.-b; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Tallerico, 1989). Strategies that supported a theme of political savvy included (a) anticipate and be proactive, (b) understand their priorities and who they represent, (c) bring the right attitude, (d) use the board president and other board members, and (e) make them part of the solution.

Demographic Data

In this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, five exemplary superintendents from the target population were selected due to meeting the established criteria. The participating superintendents participated in the survey and interview. As part of the survey, demographic information was collected about the five participating superintendents. There were three female and two male superintendents, and all five superintendents were between 51 and 60 years of age. Two superintendents held doctoral degrees and three held master’s degrees; two of the superintendents with master’s degrees were currently enrolled in doctoral programs. The superintendents had between 6 years and 15 years of experience as a superintendent. The five participating superintendents had served between 5 years and 11 years as superintendent of their current school district. The superintendents had between 5 years and 18 years of experience working within their current school district. Superintendents 1 and 2 held subordinate positions within their
current school district prior to their appointment as superintendent. Table 2 presents the demographic information for the five participating superintendents for the study.

Table 2

Demographics of Superintendents Participating in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of terminal degree</th>
<th>Total years of service as a Superintendent</th>
<th>Years as superintendent in current district</th>
<th>Years of experience in current district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>M.A./M.S.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>M.A./M.S.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>M.A./M.S.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, all five participating superintendents had completed CSBA’s Masters in Governance training. All five participating superintendents had five-member boards. Three districts had trustees elected through trustee areas and two districts had an at-large election system. The superintendents served elementary district populations that ranged from 2,000 to 22,000 enrolled students. Table 3 summarizes the governance information for the school districts of the participating superintendents.

Table 3

Governance Information of Superintendents Participating in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Years as superintendent in current district</th>
<th>CSBA governance training</th>
<th>Trustee election system</th>
<th>Number of board members</th>
<th>District enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>By area</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>At large</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>By area</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>By area</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>At large</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation and Analysis of the Data

The presentation and analysis of the data begins with the quantitative data from the surveys and follows with the data from the qualitative inquiry, conducted through standardized, semistructured interviews. Due to the sequential explanatory mixed methods design, the researcher administered the surveys first, and then followed up with the qualitative data collection. The data were used to further explain the quantitative results. Data from artifacts were then collected to provide triangulation through qualitative cross-validation among the multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The data are organized and presented through the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1

*How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?*

The intent of Research Question 1 was to ask superintendents to identify their own political style and the perceived political styles of each of their board members. The quantitative instrument, the Political Styles Matrix Survey, utilized the nine political styles identified as part of the Political Styles Matrix in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016). The survey asked superintendents to identify their own political style and the political styles of each board member by identifying where they fell on the Goal Allegiance and Initiative Continuums. The Goal Allegiance Continuum has three descriptors: *self-interests, blended-interests,* and *organizational interests.* The Initiative Continuum also has three descriptors: *passive, engaged,* and *assertive.* By cross-
referencing the two continuums, individuals were identified as having one of nine political styles: analyst, adaptor, supporter, planner, balancer, developer, challenger, arranger, or strategist (White et al., 2016).

Table 4 presents a summary of how the participating superintendents perceived their own political style. The data were collected utilizing the Political Styles Matrix Survey. Three of the superintendents identified themselves as strategists, one superintendent identified as a developer, and one identified as a planner. None of the superintendents identified as an adaptor, analyst, arranger, balancer, challenger, or supporter.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Styles of Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 presents the political styles of the school board members, as perceived by the participating superintendents. The data were collected utilizing the Political Styles Matrix Survey for 25 board members because all five superintendents served five-member boards. Both arranger and supporter had seven board members identified, which represented 28% of the board members in each category. Three of the 25 board members
were identified as challengers, representing 12% of the board members. Adaptor, balancer, planner, and strategist each had two board members identified, representing 8% of the board members in each category. There were no board members identified as analyst or developer.

Table 5

Political Styles of Board Members as Perceived by Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Style</th>
<th>Supt. 1</th>
<th>Supt. 2</th>
<th>Supt. 3</th>
<th>Supt. 4</th>
<th>Supt. 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 organizes the data on the political styles of board members according to political initiative. Political initiative is the comfort level that a person has with taking risks, getting involved in complex situations, or engaging with others. Political initiative is defined as either assertive, moderately engaged, or passive. People with assertive political initiative are quick to move and anxious to get things happening, often frustrated by indecision. People with passive political initiative are more comfortable with the status quo and are reluctant to take risks (White et al., 2016). Assertive political styles are identified as challenger, arranger, and strategist. Twelve board members were identified as having assertive political styles, which represented 48% of the board members. Moderately engaged political styles are identified as planner, balancer, and
developer. Four board members were identified as having moderately engaged political styles, which represented 16% of the board members in the study. Passive political styles were identified as analyst, adaptor, and supporter. Nine board members were identified as having passive political styles, representing 36% of the board members.

Table 6

*Political Initiative of Board Members as Perceived by Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political initiative</th>
<th>Political style</th>
<th>Number of board members</th>
<th>% of Board members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive:</td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total assertive</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately engaged:</td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total engaged</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive:</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total passive</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 organizes the data on the board members according to goal allegiance. Goal allegiance is determined by how a person acts during times when a situation makes it difficult to choose between furthering one’s own goals or the goals of the organization. Goal allegiance is driven by self-interests, blended interests, or organizational interests (White et al., 2016). Political styles identified as self-interests are challenger, planner, and analyst. Five board members, representing 20%, were perceived to have a goal allegiance of self-interest. Political styles identified as blended interests are arranger, balancer, and adaptor. Eleven of the board members were perceived to have a goal allegiance of blended interests, representing 44% of the board members. Political styles
identified as organizational interests are strategist, developer, and supporter. Nine of the board members had a perceived goal allegiance of organizational interests, representing 36% of the board members.

Table 7

*Goal Allegiance of Board Members as Perceived by Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal allegiance</th>
<th>Political style</th>
<th>Number of board members</th>
<th>% of Board members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-interests:</td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended interests:</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational interests:</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 2**

*What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?*

The intent of Research Question 2 was to use qualitative research methods to further explore the quantitative data from Research Question 1. The researcher conducted semistructured interviews with the five exemplary suburban, elementary school district superintendents via Zoom. The interview questions were based on the research literature from White et al. (2016), regarding the nine political styles formed by
the goal allegiance and political initiative continuums. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each.

Strategies Superintendents Use With Different Political Styles of Board Members

For this study, the thematic team of peer researchers collaboratively developed definitions for each of the political styles used in this study. The definitions are based on the political styles matrix from White et al. (2016), regarding the nine political styles formed by the goal allegiance and political initiative continuums. The styles listed are based on levels of self-interests, blended interests, and organizational interests for each level of initiative: passive, engaged, and assertive.

The researcher utilized the standardized, semistructured protocol to interview five exemplary superintendents from suburban elementary school districts in Southern California to determine the strategies for working with different political styles of board members. The thematic team worked with Brandman faculty to research, develop, and pilot the design of the thematic interview protocol. The interview protocol was designed to answer Research Question 2 by further exploring the political styles of individual board members and the strategies that the superintendents use to work with each board member. The following analysis is presented based on the collection of data from the interviews with exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California.

Arranger

Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing 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).

Four of the five superintendents in the study worked with board members they perceived to be arrangers, for a total of seven, or 28%, of the board members included in the study. Superintendents highlighted the struggle they experienced when board members felt pulled by their personal convictions, pressure from special interest groups, or the goals of the district. Superintendent 3 stated,

I have a board member that has to always remember that the Christian aspects of his faith have to be separated from leading in a district. There have been some things like board policies on sex ed and having sex education. I had to do a lot of work with supporting the board member to know that there’s an obligation; we have Ed. Code that we must follow, even though maybe your Christian faith doesn’t support that.

Superintendent 4 shared,

This is my most challenging board member. I love her to death. She’s been on the board 12 plus years. She’s weathered the financial storm, the firing of the superintendent prior to me. She has the biggest heart and means well, and wants to help everyone possible. . . . She is extremely close with our union president. The union president’s kids have grown up with her kids. They all know each other and they’re very connected. . . . So that’s the challenge. That’s something I always have to be thoughtful of.

Superintendent 5 viewed the arranger through a different lens, seeing the political connection as an asset to the school district. She stated,
The arranger is highly political, he is strategic, and he also is good at bringing things together from different organizations, different groups. He sees the world as political. He’s a political being, but he’s valuable because he can see both sides. . . . He’s about what’s true, right, and just, and will stick to that no matter what. . . . He brings together groups from the city or other political entities. He’s more systemic in his thinking, so he sees how the whole system works and what our role is as a school district within the city, within the county. He’s always looking at even the higher picture. So that’s how we work together well. When I’m needing something or there’s a political legislative agenda that we need to go with, and he does the same with me. We really look at the political lens of the school district.

**Strategies used with arrangers.** As shown in Table 8, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with arrangers was political savvy. The themes of communication, building relationships and trust, and governance also had a high number of coded responses. Across all themes, the following were the codes with the highest frequency: (a) anticipate and be proactive; (b) understand their priorities and who they represent; (c) bring the right attitude; (d) manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries; (e) use the board president and other board members; and (f) open communication.

**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, the strategy of “anticipate and be proactive” was overwhelmingly deemed to be important as the most frequently coded strategy. The next most important strategy was “understand their priorities and who they
Table 8

*Summary of Strategies Used With Arrangers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arranger</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political savvy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the board president and other board members</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlist experts/others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link agendas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships with the people/political players connected to the board</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility; include them in celebrations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use active listening skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validate their point of view</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontload</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow upon concerns or requests for more information</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information in a way they can easily understand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Build relationships and trust</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know your board members</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding connections</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree to disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat the respectfully/professionally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask them for advice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with all of them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage the board; educate on role,</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parameters, boundaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build their capacity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make governance a priority; handbook and</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>protocols</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use legal counsel; educate on law/liability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish governance goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure they have information to make</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stay focused on facts, not personalities</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaboration around the goals/plans</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Find common ground; get everyone on the</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>same page</td>
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<td>Show the benefit</td>
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represent.” Also highlighted were the strategies of “bring the right attitude” and “use the board president and other board members.”

Anticipate and be proactive. The strategy of “anticipate and be proactive” was overwhelmingly deemed to be important as the most frequently cited action, accounting for 35% of the political savvy strategies. Superintendent 3 stated, “You’ve got to anticipate your board members, you’ve got to anticipate their strengths. You’ve got to anticipate as if you’re thinking what they are.” Superintendent 1 shared that she will “coach up” her cabinet before a board meeting in anticipation of possible information that the board will request or questions they may ask. She said, “You never know how the conversation is going to flow, but I know personally that I like to have everything available that I think I might need.”
Understand their priorities and who they represent. The superintendents indicated that they need to be aware of the areas of interest or priority to their board members, as well as the constituents to whom they are connected, such as parent groups, certain schools, or the unions. Superintendent 1 stated, “Sometimes they are wanting to make sure you understand what they are hearing from a constituent.” Superintendent 4 shared the challenge of working with a board member with close ties to the union:

I’ve got to figure out who’s been in her ear, then I know the strategy to work behind it. Sometimes, she thinks they are innocent and well-intentioned, but I know differently. I have to be able to gently share with her that they are coming from a different perspective.

Bring the right attitude. The superintendents stressed the importance of bringing the right attitude to working with the board. Superintendent 3 summed up her appreciation by saying, “I have a very good board. I am very blessed.” She explained that she needs to be patient, understanding that the board does not always have in-depth knowledge or understand the superintendent’s view; she said, “I have to just be patient and repeat myself again. I have a little saying I tell myself, ‘They’re just board members.’”

Superintendent 4 emphasized that it is important to respectfully allow board members to be themselves; he shared, “Sometimes she’ll get on her soapbox and preach, and sometimes, it’s self-centered. Rather than try to change that, you have to just accept who people are and allow them some of that time on occasion.” He advised, “You have to be careful as a superintendent, because you’re supposed to treat them all equally and
fairly. Some are aligned with your direction and your vision, or what you’re proposing at the time, and others aren’t. You have to still try to treat them all equally.”

*Use the board president and other board members.* The superintendents discussed that an important strategy was to use the board president or other board members in anticipation of potential conflict or difficult decisions. Superintendent 3, who had four arrangers on her board, said, “I talk to the board president to anticipate we will have a problem. . . . I meet with our president all the time, and we talk about what are some of the things that people will be asking.” With another arranger, Superintendent 3 emphasized that it is important to keep the board president informed of what was occurring, saying, “I spoke to her, then I spoke to the board president, just to let him know the concern.” Superintendent 4 shared that he uses other board members to help give advice on how to work with his arranger when she was not supportive of the superintendent’s recommendation, saying, “Fortunately, I had board members that had worked with her that could give me some pointers.”

*Communication.* Under the theme of communication, “open communication” was the strategy with the highest frequency. The next highest frequency was “use active listening skills.” Also highlighted as important was the strategy of “understand the amount and kind of information to give them.”

*Open communication.* Superintendent 3, who has four arrangers on her board, continually mentioned the importance of talking with her board members to keep an open line of communication, especially to avoid conflict. She said, “We talk about it. That’s one of the strategies, we talk about it. If I don’t talk to them, then I have a problem.” In speaking of another board member, she said, “She’s very good. I wouldn’t know what
was coming . . . and she tells me what’s going on.” She added, “We really don’t have conflicts with her because she’s really good about listening, but we talk through it.”

*Use active listening skills.* Using active listening skills was emphasized as a strategy for working with arrangers. Superintendent 1 said, “You have to listen. You have to say, ‘Okay, I hear you.’” Superintendent 3 said, “My effective strategy of working with that board member is I listen. I make sure I listen to her, and I don’t cut her off.”

*Understand the amount and kind of information to give them.* The superintendents stressed that it is important to understand how to provide the appropriate amount of information in the most appropriate format to support their board members. Superintendent 1 stated that it was important to “provide the appropriate level of information for them to comfortably make an informed decision.” She said,

> It is extremely important that I have the visuals, supporting documentation. If I don’t have those things, I already know it’s going to be a dealbreaker. I already know, I’m probably setting myself up for more of a problem because once you get that defense mechanism up, you can come back with all the good stuff, but now you still have to get around this, as opposed to coming in with this when there is no defense. So, I think that that’s lessons learned.

*Building relationships and trust.* Under the theme of building relationships and trust, the highest frequency was “work with them individually.” Also highlighted as important was “know your board members,” “culture of no surprises,” and “finding connections.” Superintendent 4 emphasized the importance of working individually with board members early on to establish a relationship and get to know them. He stated, “I
wanted her to get to know me as me, as a person, because I know she is relationship oriented.” He said, “She has a big heart and wants to believe the best in people. So it’s really about understanding her perspective, making sure it’s about relationships and those connections.”

**Governance.** Under the theme of governance, the highest frequency was “manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries,” accounting for approximately half of the governance strategies, followed by “build their capacity.” Superintendent 4 said of her arrangers, “I’m very fortunate that most of my board members have lots of governance training, and I’ve gone through governance training as well. So, I’m able to use that to remind them of their obligation.” Superintendent 5 discussed how she helps to build the capacity of her arranger, who was having some issues in getting along with other board members. She shared, “In many ways, I mentored him as to how to go about getting what he wanted from other board members. I said, ‘What if you went this way instead . . . what if you said this?’”

**Coherence.** Under the theme of coherence, the most frequently coded strategies were “remind of primary responsibility to kids” and “stay focused on facts, not personalities.” The superintendents discussed that it is important to be factual and remind the arrangers of the obligation to serve all students. Superintendent 3 expressed the challenges she experiences when an arranger wants to get certain benefits for her child’s school. She said, “I will say, ‘Well, I just think we need to remember that we need to think of all [schools]. I know this is a need at [school], but I’m not sure that’s fair to the others.’”
The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with an arranger, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies:

- build trust
- conflict strategies
- problem solving
- meet their needs
- do your homework
- know decision makers’ agenda
- be aware of political blind spots
- coalition building
- working the community
- build networks
- respond positively to danger
- count your votes
- celebrate everything
- use norms effectively
- dig the well early
- be open to their ideas
- know who trusts whom
- where snipers dwell, plan meticulously. (p. 97)

Ineffective strategies. When asked what strategies were not effective, the superintendents highlighted the need for patience in working with an arranger. Superintendent 1 said that “being too dismissive” was not effective. She said,

“Sometimes this board member needs a little more time and likes to have that perceived control or authority. I have to remind them of what exactly their authority is and their role is, but not in a dismissive way.” Superintendent 3 said it was not effective when “I don’t have patience.” She added,

Sometimes, I want to say to myself, “She should know better.” But I can’t do that. Even though I told her this 100 times, I just have to repeat. When I’m not patient, it’s going to bite me . . . I have to have heart and empathy to realize they’re just coming from a place of trying to serve.

Superintendent 4 shared about the learning curve he experienced in working with his arranger. He said,
She [is] very strong willed, so if you don’t have a good rationale or it’s not supported by people she respects, it’s not going to get through. But it took me a while to figure that out and to learn that, maybe the hard way a few times.

**Supporter**

Supporters are characterized as risk-averse, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s vision and goals. Supporters seek harmony and hesitate to take sides, though they make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016). Three of the five superintendents in the study worked with board members they perceived to be supporters, for a total of seven, or 28%, of the total board members included in the study.

Superintendent 2, who has three supporters on his board, highlighted how one supporter always looked for the good within the district. He said, “There have been situations where things may not have been going well, but they always highlight the good, and tell us something to remember: ‘Hey, look, you’ve accomplished so much, we need to continue supporting.’” In soliciting this board member’s support, Superintendent 2 shared, “It’s been a nice way for me to approach this individual board member, explain what’s going on, and ultimately get the support, so they’re not fighting me or asking for answers right away, because sometimes, you need a friend.”

Superintendent 1, who also has three supporters on her board, shared a story about a time when the board was faced with a difficult decision regarding termination of an employee, and a supporter was able to make a decision in the best interest of the organization. She said,
I was making a recommendation for termination of an employee that had some inappropriate actions occur, and this particular board member knew this person personally. So, it was hard for him to see the person in the light that was being presented or to believe that they would do something inappropriate. When faced with the evidence, they were very supportive of the actions that I was proposing and recommending, and the action that I felt needed to be taken to protect students and protect the district. As a result, we were able to continue to move forward in taking appropriate actions, even in light of the fact that the individual had a personal relationship with the person in question.

Superintendent 4 highlighted his supporter’s need for harmony while supporting the district goals. He shared,

He struggles sometimes to make a decision, because he doesn’t want to hurt the feelings of one side or the other. He’s very intelligent, very thoughtful, takes in all the information he can. He’s always looking for a win-win, always. And you know, sometimes you can’t find that win-win. He’s always trying to mediate, and always trying to bring the groups together, and to find common ground. And he too is very committed to the district. He appreciates and supports what we do.

**Strategies used with supporters.** As shown in Table 9, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with supporters was communication. The themes of political savvy and building relationships and trust also had a high number of coded responses. Across all themes, the codes with the highest frequency were the following: (a) understand their priorities and who they represent; (b) know your board members; (c) use active listening skills; (d) build their capacity;
Table 9

Summary of Strategies Used With Supporters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supporters</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use active listening skills</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frontload</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up on concerns or requests for more information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Validate their point of view</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be responsive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide information in a way they can easily understand</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redundancy of message</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Give them talking points</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

| **Political savvy** | **Total** | 69 |
| Understand their priorities and who they represent | 29 |
| Bring the right attitude | 11 |
| Anticipate and be proactive | 10 |
| Link agendas | 7 |
| Make them part of the solution | 5 |
| Enlist experts/others | 3 |
| Visibility; include them in celebrations | 3 |
| Use the board president and other board members | 1 |

| **Build relationships and trust** | **Total** | 53 |
| Know your board members | 18 |
| Culture of no surprises | 6 |
| Transparency | 6 |
| Finding connections | 5 |
| Avoid conflict | 4 |
| Treat the respectfully/professionally | 4 |
| Spend time with all of them | 3 |
| Assume good intentions | 3 |
| Work with them individually | 3 |
| Agree to disagree | 1 |
Table 9 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Make sure they have information to make informed decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
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<td>Stay focused on facts, not personalities</td>
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<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Find common ground; get everyone on the same page</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Show the benefit</td>
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(e) bring the right attitude; (f) understand amount and kind of information to give them;
(g) anticipate and be proactive; and (h) stay focused on facts, not personalities.

**Communication.** Under the theme of communication, “use active listening skills” was the strategy with the highest frequency. The next highest frequency was “understand the amount and kind of information to give them.” Also highlighted as important was the strategy of “frontload.”

*Use active listening skills.* Superintendent 1 emphasized that practicing active listening skills is important for superintendents, no matter the source of the interaction. She said, “I can’t respond to perhaps what the real issue is if I don’t take the time to listen and truly understand, and then confirm that I did some clarification.” She continued, “I’m very good at listening not just to the board, but to the constituents and stakeholders, because I need to make sure I’m in front of whatever the hot topics are, so that the board is informed appropriately.”
Understand the amount and kind of information to give them. Superintendent 1 emphasized the importance of understanding how to present information to the board. She said,

One of the things that I have realized is that most of my board members are visual learners, and I’m a visual learner. I always know I need supporting documents to put in front of them to be able to see the comparison or tell the story. I’ll have the documents, and I will pass it out and walk them through it . . . for the most part, you can have it. You can feel it. You can make notes on it. We’re going to talk about it . . . and you can ask questions.

She continued,

Sometimes we just want to talk at people, but if that’s not their best way of processing information, then we should be sensitive to that and be very smooth in making sure that you are sharing information in the way that people process.

Superintendent 4 discussed the importance of spending time with his supporter to ensure he had the information necessary to support district decisions:

For him, it’s all about information. He’s an analytical person; so, he needs information, and he needs to understand it. It’s really just spending time, giving him resources and information. If I email things to him, he’ll digest it and read it, and have questions. He’s really good about asking those follow-ups. So, it’s really about giving him the information to help him.

Frontload. Superintendent 1 discussed the importance of frontloading the board, especially when the board may hear about issues from employees, parents, or other constituents. She said, “It’s especially important to frontload them with information
around hot topics, because I know how they will get ahold of the information, and it is
definitely going to be presented in a one-sided manner.” In addition, she addressed the
importance of frontloading the board before a board meeting, to prepare for public
comments or statements from the bargaining units. She said,

Instead of them going in cold . . . they have all the information for both sides.

When some of those elements of what they are saying matches what we are
talking about, there is confidence instilled in what we are doing and why we are
doing it.

Superintendent 2 stressed the importance of frontloading his supporters to
maintain a working majority on the board:

You just have to frontload them. I can’t just assume they’re in support. Even if
they like what we are talking about . . . maybe they have somebody on the inside
who has already told them something different. So, I just have to stay on top of it,
and ensure that the transparency is there.

**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, the strategy of “understand
their priorities and who they represent” was deemed to be important as the most
frequently cited action. The next most important strategy was “bring the right attitude.”
Also highlighted was the strategy of “anticipate and be proactive.”

*Understand their priorities and who they represent.* “Understand their priorities
and who they represent” was overwhelmingly the top political savvy strategy,
representing 42% of the codes. The superintendents who identified board members as
supporters highlighted the close association that often exists between board members and
constituent groups, especially members of the bargaining units. Superintendent 1 stated,
“I try to really be cognizant of and honor the fact that I know people have different priorities and different interests.” Superintendent 2 also noted, “Each board member has a particular area that they like.”

Superintendent 2 shared about one of his supporters, “This particular supporter knows that in order for him to have support, he needs union support. So anything having to do with union support, contracts . . . that’s going to catch his attention.” Having multiple supporters on his board, Superintendent 2 shared the importance of spending time with each board member, to learn about their priorities, especially by taking them on visits to schools. He said, “Walking around the campuses, I get to experience and learn from them what they like and don’t really like.” He shared about one of his board members,

This individual is very supportive of teachers and classified staff, but like things very clean. Extremely clean. And even though she’s supportive of employees, she demands high-quality services when it comes to the physical, the appearance, the way schools look, whether the landscape looks clean, whether the cafeteria looks clean.

Superintendent 2 views this ability to understand the priorities of board members, whose support can be leveraged when needed, as an asset. He explained,

I want to go in the direction of, let’s say, putting some pressure on an employee, she’s very supportive. The moment I say, “Well, this individual’s not getting the end in mind, and that is I want to have nice, clean-looking schools. So I need support.”
He will take his board member to schools where he knows there is a problem, to gain her support,

I take her with me to schools, in which I know that she’s aware there are union people . . . but I start with what the issue is. I have to carry a notepad with me to write down everything that bothers that individual.

In turn, he has the support to hold employees accountable.

Superintendent 1 also viewed how understanding a board member’s priorities and connections can be leveraged to understand the current political landscape. She stated, “Sometimes our teacher’s union will reach out to the board members personally, especially if they feel that they have a sympathetic ear. I know this, and that’s okay.” She further explained, “When it comes to those teacher issues, negotiations issues, I sometimes look at this person as a barometer, because he’s closely connected and sympathetic to teachers.”

*Bring the right attitude.* The superintendents were overall very supportive and understanding of the role board members play as public officials elected by their constituents. Superintendent 1 summed it up by simply stating, “They are public servants.” Superintendent 4 was appreciative of the support received from his board members; he stated, “I’m blessed. I have a really good board. I’m really blessed.”

Superintendent 1 explained how she understands the role board members serve in the community and how she supports them with transparency around the work of the district. She said, “People stop them in the stores. They reach out to them in their neighborhoods. If everything is a secret, then that’s not going to be well-received by them about my leadership, and it shouldn’t be.” She added,
My job is not to change people, and it’s not to change their priorities or their mind, or to judge or make any kind of value judgment. It is what it is. So, I need to recognize it, acknowledge it, honor it, and move on, and still get the work done. If I believe this is the right work, and what we’re doing is the right thing, then I have nothing to be concerned about.

Superintendent 1 emphasized the importance of her attitude in working with board members to ensure they feel equipped and supported as elected officials navigating their role as district leaders. She said, “They’re not here every day, and they don’t understand the operational side [of the district] in the same way.” She further explained, “None of us knows everything about everything. We don’t want them to be in a position where they feel that maybe they were asking a question that they shouldn’t be asking, or they should know the answer to.”

Superintendent 2 cautioned about not taking supporters for granted and continually working with them to be able to accomplish district goals. He said, I continue communicating, because in my mind as a superintendent, you’re always thinking three. Well, three will get you the support and approval. Sometimes, it’s sort of a dangerous number, because if one of them gets persuaded away, the item will fail to pass or the program will fail to pass.

Anticipate and be proactive. The superintendents emphasized anticipating problems and how giving thought, time, and attention to proactively working with the board was important to keeping the board informed and maintaining their support. Superintendent 1 shared, “You have to invest the time to be strategic.” Superintendent 2, who has three supporters on his board, also emphasized the importance of strategy,
I try to get a game plan in my head, how I’m going to approach each one of them, in what style when I call . . . in what way. I have to change the way I speak to them individually, based on who I’m talking to.

Superintendent 1 discussed the importance of anticipating what the board may hear in the community or what could come before them at a board meeting. She said,

If there are going to be some rumblings, if I expect an angry parent, if I expect a bunch of teachers to show up . . . if there is a problem with negotiations . . .

Frontloading different things with the truth and/or giving them talking points around hot topics in the community is an effective political strategy, because none of the board members want to be caught off guard.

Build relationships and trust. Under the theme of build relationships and trust, the highest frequency was “know your board members.” Also highlighted as important were the strategies of “culture of no surprises” and “transparency.”

Know your board members. “Know your board members” was overwhelmingly the top strategy for build relationships and trust, representing 34% of the codes. The superintendents emphasized the importance of getting to know each board member and building relationships with them personally as well as understanding their leadership style, priorities, and preferences. Superintendent 1 stated, “You have to invest the time to know your board members, to build relationships with your board members.”

Superintendent 2 said,

Sometimes board members just want to get the facts, just cut to the chase. With other board members, I have to start with, “How’s Mom? How’s the family?
How’s everybody doing?” At some point, I start bringing into the conversation what I need to touch upon, but in such a way that we can relate to each other.

As Superintendent 2 has three supporters on his board, he highlighted the importance of understanding their unique personalities and preferences in working with them. In regard to his first supporter, he said,

When we get a chance to talk, it might be about food, we like the same kind of food. We like the same kind of activities on the weekend. Not that we’re hanging out together, but we can talk about the same type of cooking, same type of food or celebrations.

He continued, “We have dinner in closed session, and I make sure that individual gets the type of food that he likes. So, as long as that happens, that’s a great way to have a support that goes back and forth.”

For the second supporter, Superintendent 2 shared it was important for the board member to see him as a humble individual. He said, “She was a teacher in our school district, and she wants to know that I feel comfortable walking into a class, into her buddy’s class, and saying hello.” He further explained, “With this particular individual, it’s been about building a relationship to show I’m human. I go to the swap meet. I go to Walmart. I don’t see myself as someone above you.” He also emphasized the importance of including her in ways that allow her to be in the spotlight:

Ultimately, she likes to talk in front of the parents, so I’ll introduce her. She’ll say hello and talk to everybody. She likes to do that sort of thing. We share some of the responsibility when we go out to a ribbon cutting or a back-to-school night.
She likes that sort of thing, so I’ve been able to place her in situations that give her that attention.

With the third supporter, Superintendent 2 said, “With this board member, requesting early meetings did not work well at all. She likes late meetings, and I’m talking like 10, 11 o’clock at night meetings. Early meetings don’t work for her. She’s on a different schedule.” He knows that he needs to invest time and effort in communication with her; he said, “This is another individual that I call and almost need to sit down and have tea with her. I just can’t call for five minutes.” He added, “I have to listen . . . and that is to listen attentively. I’ve got to keep my eye looking at her, because she sees that as very disrespectful that I’m not paying attention and that I’m not allowing her to speak.”

He also highlighted a story of how providing her with support in one of her priorities gained him credibility when she first was elected to the board:

She likes the little kids in the early childhood program. She likes to work with the parents. She came to me and said, “I want to start a parenting class. I’m working with individuals in the community, and we need your support.” I said, “Sure, what do you need?” They wanted some books, and so we have tons of books that we give away. So, I put together some books and some marketing items from human resources. We give those away anyway. They were thrilled, and she went to her group and said, “Oh my God, the superintendent, look at everything that he’s given us!” From then on, she became very supportive.
Culture of no surprises. The superintendents impressed that establishing a culture of no surprises was important to building trust within the district, beginning with the board. Superintendent 1 stated,

It always helps when they’re not surprised. I always tell my folks, I don’t like surprises. Don’t surprise me. So make sure I know, even if it doesn’t go anywhere. . . . I don’t want to hear from somebody else about some problem before I hear from you.

She puts effort into frontloading her board with information, to ensure “people aren’t blindsided.” She stated, “They trust that if there’s something they need to know, I’m going to make sure they have that information beforehand.” She further indicated that the board would not respond favorably to being caught off guard, emphasizing what the board response might be: “You’ve been doing this long enough where you know or should know to reach out to us or let us know.” She went on to say that she tells her board, “If somebody confronts you in the public, I want you to know more about this.”

She summarized her belief in a culture of no surprises when working with her board: “No board member, as an elected official, wants to be put on blast in a public meeting or embarrassed.”

Transparency. The superintendents discussed the importance of being forthright and transparent when communicating with their board as the foundation to building trust. Superintendent 2 said, “I just have to stay on top of it, and ensure that the transparency is there.” When gaining the support of the board, he said, “I am able to talk about the support that we need for the item, and be transparent about it. Sometimes, I bring somebody along with me to explain it better than I can.”
benefit of having a supporter on the board, “There have been situations where things may not have been going well, but they always highlight the good, not the ugly part.” He said, “I’ve been able to accomplish other things, by just going to key individuals that will follow my lead, so if I need support, I go to the supporter.”

**Governance.** Under the theme of governance, the highest frequency was the strategy of “build their capacity,” representing 54% of the governance codes. Superintendent 1 said, “I tell them all the time, because they’re an elected board member, I make sure to do things to educate them and build capacity.” She went on to say, “That’s part of the job of the superintendent is building capacity of your board members, making sure they understand.” When it comes to working with the supporters to build their capacity, she said, “I would say . . . communication, listening, and then agreeing to get some additional information. Follow up with that individual, providing them with some additional information that will help to expand their perspective.” She also further emphasized the importance of providing the board with additional information, including presentations, study sessions, or workshops to build capacity: “If they do want to have a follow-up question or make a comment, it will be a well-informed comment that’s truly applicable.”

**Coherence.** Under the theme of coherence, the highest frequency was with the strategy of “stay focused on facts, not personalities,” which represented 59% of the coherence codes. Superintendents highlighted the conflict that can arise around personnel issues due to the relationships between board members and employees. Superintendent 1 shared that it is important to listen, but depersonalize the concern; she said,
I can’t respond to perhaps what the real issue is if I don’t take the time to listen and truly understand. . . . Let me make sure I understand what their concern is, and then being able to address the concern, and not the person.

Superintendent 2 emphasized that it is important to stay connected to the goals of the district in times of conflict: “First . . . what are we trying to accomplish?” He added, We have a teacher who’s not following through, we have a teacher who has very little classroom management skill, we have a teacher who’s not going to training, we have a custodian who is nowhere to be found at lunch, we have a secretary who was mean on the phone. We start with what the issue is, because ultimately, you’re going to need the support.

He cautioned that board support can waiver when they feel a personal connection to people involved:

Some people can change their mind, because now they are dealing with an individual. But if it comes to the fact that we’ve proven that this individual is not in it for the right reasons . . . they’re very supportive.

The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with a supporter, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies: “build trust; testimonials from trusted sources; agenda linking; superordinate goal; many messengers; problem solving; simple messages; do your homework; and management by walking around” (p. 87).

**Ineffective strategies.** Superintendent 2 warned that it is important to follow up on feedback from his supporter. He said,
The strategies I use that were not effective was ignoring the request, thinking it will go away. . . I want to make sure that she’s aware that we are trying our best and making sure that the staff follows through. It’s a lot of work, but I don’t want her walking around and trying to tell my staff what to do. I’m the one that’s going to tell the staff what to do.

Superintendent 1 warned about not taking a supporter for granted. She said that it was not effective to “just go through the motions, as far as letting things go through without giving it the attention and the frontloading.” Superintendent 1 also cautioned about becoming too casual: “I think that forgetting, and sometimes making a comment that could be perceived as a personal comment about a group that they’re connected to” could create a conflict. She continued,

Don’t get pulled into or relaxed with your supporters. You can get friendly . . . you still have to maintain that business level, not get too comfortable, and continue to be mindful of what you say, how you say it, and about whom you’re talking, because you want to build relationships. But you can’t get too comfortable. It’s easy to get really comfortable with your supporters, because they’re supporters, but still, they’re board members.

**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). Three of the five superintendents in the study worked with board members they perceived to be challengers, for a total of three, or 12%, of the board members included in the study.

Superintendent 1 shared about how working with a challenger can present a challenge, not just for the superintendent, but for the rest of the board as well. She said that there was a time when the district was embarking on a modernization project, and the challenger “had a lot of questions, and questions about the process, in addition to questioning the item itself.” As a result, she now looks over all agenda items more thoroughly and asks, “This is going to be scrutinized why?” In addition, she shared that her challenger “has great difficulty taking orders . . . there’s going to be strong words and emotionality,” which can be the source of conflict.

Superintendent 3 shared that her challenger had a background in accounting, and would always be questioning what he saw in the budget. She said, “We know that school finance is different. But he will often think that his way of looking at the math is correct . . . his self-interest is that he always wants to try and figure it out.” She explained that he will often challenge what he sees in the budget, saying, “Why is the number like that?” She said, “He doesn’t understand it, because the accounting is different.”

Superintendent 5 experiences ongoing challenges in dealing with her challenger. She said, “She thought that getting on the board is getting what you want or getting what you said you were going to do. But she hasn’t let go of it, and it’s been three years.” She discussed some of the situations that she deals with on a regular basis, saying, “She’s just that personality. She tries to direct staff. She likes to tell me what is wrong with what I’m doing on a regular [basis]. She feels she’s the expert in everything.” Superintendent
described her challenger as “Machiavellian.” She said, “She will do things if no one is watching. She’ll get in my face and start yelling. . . . It’s kind of a narcissistic way of seeing the world through the lens of her, no one else’s.”

**Strategies used with challengers.** As shown in Table 10, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with challengers was political savvy. The themes of communication and building relationships and trust also had a high number of coded responses. Across all themes, the following codes had the highest frequency: (a) anticipate and be proactive, (b) use the board president and other board members, (c) give accolades, (d) proactive communication, (e) understand the amount and kind of information to give them, (f) transparency, (g) bring the right attitude, and (h) use active listening skills.

**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, “anticipate and be proactive” was the most frequently coded strategy. Other strategies that were coded more frequently included “use the board president and other board members,” “give accolades,” and “bring the right attitude.”

**Anticipate and be proactive.** Superintendent 1 shared that it was important to plan ahead and be proactive in presenting new proposals to avoid problems with a challenger. She said, “I really try to think ahead, and think about the timing, not only for the presentation and the adoption, also the rollout, acquisition, implementation. So, all of it is planned out before we bring it.” Superintendent 3 also stressed the importance of anticipating and planning ahead; she said, “I anticipate that he’s going to have a question.” She discussed her strategy: “I take the time to communication ahead of the
Table 10

Summary of Strategies Used With Challengers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Challenger</td>
<td>Political savvy</td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use the board president and other board members</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give accolades</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enlist experts/others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use active listening skills</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frontload</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow upon concerns or requests for more information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Validate their point of view</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Preferred method of communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build relationships</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>and trust</td>
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<td>Transparency</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Assume good intentions</td>
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<td>Know your board members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build their capacity</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make governance a priority; handbook and protocols</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide them all with the same information at the same time</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish governance goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use legal counsel; educate on law/liability</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay focused on facts, not personalities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration around the goals/plans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
board meeting by two weeks, so that he can read it and give me his questions, so I can work through that with him.”

*Use the board president and other board members.* Superintendent 5 described her strategy in enlisting the help of other board members in working with her challenger. She said that it is most effective “having more than one person work at it at the same time.” She said, “I get the balancer to help me work with her.” She added, “Working with the balancer and me, and talking in advance to other board members, to kind of say, ‘This is what we need to do. This is how it’s going to work,’ and laying the stage,” is most effective. She described the dynamics that cause conflict on the board with her challenger: “When there’s been conflict, the one who has the most conflict on the board is the strategist. That’s not surprising. The strategist, she can’t stand her. The challenger can’t stand the strategist.” She discussed how she elicited the support of her balancer to help manage conflict on the board. She said, “I work with the balancer to try and help me, so between the two of us, we try to manage what’s going on, just the relationship part, the communication.” She went on to describe the tactics the balancer uses: “He’ll say, ‘Let’s summarize this. So, what I’m hearing you say is . . . ’ and using all his amazing communication skills, because sometimes, it can’t just be me . . . we kind of double team her.”

*Give accolades.* Two of the superintendents acknowledged that their challengers responded positively when they were given accolades for their contributions. Superintendent 1 said, “Being able to publicly affirm the perspective, the questions, and publicly let everyone know that we did follow up. This is what we learned has worked very well.” She continued, “The person can see those change in the practices, and the
recommendations. It’s like, ‘Okay, we followed up on this and voila, this is what happened. Thank you very much.’” She further stated, “It’s one thing to follow up, but to also say, ‘Thank you very much. We can do better.’ That’s huge.” Superintendent 5 discussed how she uses positive accolades to keep her challenger moving in the right direction. She said, “I pull those things that make sense, and try and guide her away from the things that don’t make sense, to try and kind of leverage her enormous need for self-accolades. She has tremendous need to be acknowledged. So, I use that.”

*Bring the right attitude.* Superintendent 5 reflected on the importance of having an open mind when working with her challenger. She said, “It’s been interesting, because she’s made me be very self-aware, very reflective, and very intentional about the work I do with her. Because a lot of the time, she has good ideas.” Superintendent 5 commented on the importance of bringing a neutral attitude to working with her challenger: “I try very hard to be fair and equitable, and not be biased against her, because that would just make things worse.” She continued, “In her strange way, she means well. She’s not evil. She really is just a challenger. She sees the world through her eyes and how it reflects on her.” She summarized, “It is quite challenging to the other board members. I’ve actually learned to work with her rather well, considering where we started.”

*Communication.* Under the theme of communication, “proactive communication,” “understand amount and kind of information to give them,” and “use active listening skills” were the most frequently coded strategies.

*Proactive communication.* The superintendents all emphasized that being proactive in communicating with their board was important for working with their
challengers. Superintendent 1 said she proactively looks at everything carefully to think through how it will be scrutinized by her challenger. As a result, she has started providing more thorough rationales for board items in addition to providing “additional supporting documentation,” a lesson that she said she learned along the way.

Superintendent 3 said she believes in proactive communication with her board, because “every day, things are happening, they know what’s going on because I really don’t ever want them to be surprised.” She went on to say about her challenger, “I feed him answers before he asks the question.” She also shared that she does not provide her board with a weekly update, explaining,

I don’t do a Friday update because I email my board every day. I just flood them, and that’s why I don’t do a Friday update, because they don’t need a Friday update. They get it all through the week.

Understand the amount and kind of information to give them. Superintendent 5 explained the importance of understanding the appropriate amount and kind of information to provide to the board, especially her challenger. She emphasized that it was important to ensure that the most relevant information was provided to the board for agenda items. She said, “Making sure that everything we attach was going to help tell the story better than what we had been doing.”

Superintendent 3 discussed how it was important to provide more detailed budget information to her challenger because he was an accountant by profession. She said, “I’m more detailed than probably any superintendent would be on the [budget documents], just to make sure he understands.” She continued, “I make sure all five
board members have [detailed budget information], so they all know. Sometimes, they know why I’m doing this . . . they can figure it out.”

*Use active listening skills.* Superintendent 5 said that she spends time listening to her challenger; she said, “Some of the questions were very legitimate . . . maybe we can do things differently. Maybe it’s not as transparent as it could be.” She said it was important “listening and learning from that, and making sure people have as much information on the front end.” Superintendent 1 shared that she pays close attention to her challenger during presentations at board meetings to help gain board support for new initiatives. She said that she provides a presentation for the board at a meeting prior to approval of an item because it gives “the board an opportunity to ask questions and process the information, and giving me an opportunity to observe faces, and hear if there’s anything that we missed, that we need to address before we bring it back for approval.”

*Build relationships and trust.* Under the theme of building relationships and trust, “transparency” was the most frequently coded strategy. Other strategies that were coded more frequently included “assume good intentions” and “know your board members.”

*Transparency.* Superintendent 1 shared her strategy for preparing for new information that will be presented to the board to ensure transparency:

One of the things that I do, and have done for quite some time, if I want to get something approved, a contract or a service . . . I’ve trained my folks. You go through the thing. “How many different proposals and quotes did you get? Did
you look at different vendors? Did you have demos? The one that we’re recommending, show me the comparison between all of these.”

She gave further details of her strategy, a three-step process for board approval: “We do a presentation . . . and keep it at 10 minutes. Do an overview so that they understand what the product is and why we need it; how it’s going to be of benefit or value to the district.” At the next board meeting, the item is agendized for discussion: “Giving the board an opportunity to ask questions and process the information . . . and hear if there’s anything we missed that we need to address before we bring it back for approval.” She talked about what happens at the third board meeting: “So, then I bring it back for approval the next time” and “it will get unanimous approval.” She cautioned that if an item is brought forward for presentation and approval on the same agenda, or without a presentation at all, it may not get approved. She said, “You can do more damage than good by bringing something too early and having it go badly, because it’s hard to recover from a bad experience. It’s much easier to present it and have questions.” She also said that the three-step process allows for time, that “if someone from the audience is going to reach out” to voice concerns to a board member, it gives time for that to happen and does not present a problem with final approval.

Assume good intentions and know your board members. Superintendent 5 emphasized the importance of knowing her challenger while also assuming good intentions behind the often-challenging behavior. She said, “She is so unreasonable . . . that the first thing out of anyone’s mouth would want to be, ‘No.’ But a lot of what she says makes sense.” However, she said that one strategy she uses is, “I don’t meet with her by myself. I will not engage in any discussion. If she wants to have that discussion,
then I meet with the other board members.” She added, “The best way to win an argument with her is not to have it.” Despite the complicated relationship, Superintendent 5 still works to understand the challenger’s perspective and see something positive behind the difficulties. She said, “In her strange way, she means well. . . . She does have good intentions.”

**Governance.** Under the theme of governance, “manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries” was the most frequently coded strategy. Other strategies that were coded more frequently included “build their capacity,” “make governance a priority; handbook and protocols,” and “provide them all with the same information at the same time.” Superintendent 5 said of her challenger, “She needs boundaries. If you just keep agreeing with her, she’ll just take another inch, then take another inch, take another inch.” She discussed the importance of setting boundaries: “She wants to attend [superintendent] committee meetings. . . . So, what works with her is you need to set boundaries with her, and sometimes you just have to say no.”

Superintendent 1 discussed the importance of building the capacity of her challenger. She said that she will tell her cabinet, “I need some training to be done on this topic, so that when I bring this forward, they will understand.” She also uses experts or outside consultants; she said, “One of the strategies was to bring in outside consultants to do a presentation, or build capacity, before bringing in the next piece,” to ensure the board has a thorough understanding of their proposal and the expected benefit to the district.

Superintendent 3 also shared the importance of building capacity and ensuring that all her board members get the same information:
I take the entire SACS [budget] book that I give all of them before we adopt a budget. . . . I look to see my percent[age] changes . . . I literally write in the SACS [budget] document why the percent[age] is different and what’s happening. I do that throughout the entire document and I give it to them two weeks ahead of the board meeting to look at.

She said that, while “all five get it,” he said of her challenger, “I do that for him particularly.”

**Coherence.** Under the theme of coherence, “stay focused on facts, not on personalities” was the most frequently coded strategy, followed by “collaboration around the goals/plans.” Superintendent 5 shared that it is important, when working with a challenger, to look objectively at the situation, especially, trying to “eliminate the personality from the request.” She said, “I spend a lot of time thinking, ‘Well, what if so-and-so had made that request?’ or ‘What if so-and-so was thinking about this?’ meaning, ‘another board member with whom I had a better relationship?’” She understands the importance of separating the personality, to be able to see the concepts that could support the district’s goals. She said, “What I’ve tried to do is pull those threads of good thinking and use them, to have her help me reach out, and do certain initiatives I’ve been wanting to do for quite a while.”

The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with a challenger, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies:

- Do your homework; know each decision maker’s agenda; be aware of political blind spots; coalition building; plan meticulously where snipers dwell; working
the community; build networks; respond positively to danger; dig the well early;
be open to their ideas; and know who trusts whom. (p. 95)

**Ineffective strategies.** When asked what strategies have not been effective with a
challenger, Superintendent 5 stated, “If you give in to her, she’ll just keep stepping on
you . . . So I don’t give an inch.” Superintendent 3 shared that not anticipating her
challenger and failing to frontload was ineffective. She explained, “I would wait until the
board meeting when I was first a superintendent. And realizing, ‘Oh, that’s not going to
work.’ Therefore, I wasn’t anticipating the conversation, and so that’s where the problem
came.”

When Superintendent 1 was asked what strategies were ineffective with a
challenger, she responded, “Treating this person like a supporter. And when I say that, I
don’t want there to be a misunderstanding, because the person is very supportive, but also
challenges the status quo and will be quick to voice a concern.” She continued,

When I say treating them like a supporter, I really look at information now to
make sure there’s information in the board back up, to make sure that it is crystal
clear. Because we’re asking board members to look at two or three sentences and
bless something that is going to have a huge impact. If we don’t provide them
with the appropriate information, and training, if necessary, and additional
information from vendors, if we don’t give them enough information to make an
informed decision, shame on us, and that would be a big mistake.

**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-interests and organizational interests (Bobic et al., 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016). Two of the five superintendents in the study worked with board members they perceived to be adaptors, for a total of two, or 8%, of the board members included in the study.

Superintendent 4 discussed how his adaptor exhibits the characteristics: “He’s always very cooperative. He’s always about team decisions. He’s always about allowing the district staff to do their job and trust in what we’re doing.” Superintendent 4 shared an anecdote about his adaptor, and how his political style played out when he took a “middle of the road” approach:

He supported the organizational structure. He wanted to make sure that it validated the organization’s need to move forward, but was challenged by some of the pressures for the cost from others. So, he kind of was caught in the middle from time to time.

Superintendent 5 described her adaptor as “cooperative and passive” in her style. Although she came onto the board as a change candidate with another board member, who was a challenger, Superintendent 4 explained that she was able to work with the adaptor to bring her along until the challenger left the board. At that point, she said her adaptor became “a whole new person.” She discussed her adaptor’s political style, “She still protects her self-interest and her relationship with the associations is still very important.”

**Strategies used with adaptors.** As shown in Table 11, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with adaptors was governance.
### Table 11

**Summary of Strategies Used With Adaptors**

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<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<td>Governance</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use legal counsel; educate on law/liability</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Masters in Governance</td>
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<td>Build their capacity</td>
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<td>Make sure they have information to make informed decisions</td>
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<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Make governance a priority; handbook and protocols</td>
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<td>Establish governance goals</td>
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<td><strong>Political savvy</strong></td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
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<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
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<td>Give accolades</td>
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<td>Link agendas</td>
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<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Build relationships and trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree to disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finding connections</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Treat the respectfully/professionally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give them talking points</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Validate their point of view</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coherence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration around the goals/plans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Show the benefit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The theme of political savvy had the next highest number of coded responses, followed by building relationships and trust, communication, and coherence. Across all themes, the following were the codes with the highest frequency: (a) use legal counsel; educate on law/liability; (b) understand their priorities and who they represent; (c) Masters in Governance; (d) bring the right attitude; (e) build their capacity; (f) give them talking points; (g) make sure they have information to make informed decisions; and (h) manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries.

Governance. Under the theme of governance, “use legal counsel; educate on the law/liability” was the most frequently coded strategy. Other strategies that were coded more frequently included “Masters in Governance” and “build their capacity.” Superintendent 4 discussed conflict that arose from the proposal of a resolution around immigration and safe haven. According to Superintendent 4, the resolution was “basically just reassuring our community that we were going to uphold the law.” He said, “We weren’t going to let the federal government intervene on our campuses, and we were going to protect the rights of our children, their confidential information, and so forth.” The purpose of the resolution was “just reinforcing that we were following those laws.” However, the adaptor “really took a stance, and actually ultimately voted no on the resolution, because it conflicted with his personal belief.” Superintendent 4 explained, “As hard as I tried to explain that it wasn’t adding anything we were enforcing, it was just following the laws as they were set, and reassuring our families, it still conflicted with his personal beliefs.” In the end, they professionally respected one another, and Superintendent 4 said, “We agreed to disagree. He had the right to vote the way he did.”
Superintendent 5 highlighted a conflict with the challenger that included the adaptor: “She was in the middle of all that conflict . . . so in that particular case, I brought in an attorney.” She further explained,

I had to explain to them that they could be legally liable with some of their behavior. It was not okay to discuss closed session items . . . That was one way of dealing with the conflict, using authority, an authoritative outside voice.

Superintendent 4 believed that Masters in Governance training was the most important strategy for working with his adaptor. He said,

I think what’s really helped with [the adaptor] and all of these board members, actually, is going through that training, understanding what their roles and responsibilities are. Then it allows me to be able to kind of gently nudge them and say, “You’re down in the weeds. You’re into the staff work.”

**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, the most frequently coded strategies were “understand their priorities and who they represent” and “bring the right attitude.” Superintendent 5 shared that she is very aware of the adaptor’s connections to the bargaining units and can leverage that relationship to accomplish goals. She said, “I just have to respect that and then use that. I can go to her and say, ‘Hey, this is what we need.’ And she goes off and makes the connection with the association.”

**Build relationships and trust.** “Agree to disagree,” “finding connections,” and “treat them respectfully/professionally” were the strategies coded most frequently.

Superintendent 5 discussed strategies for working with her adaptor:

A lot of data, a lot of information, a lot of showing her how it could be, and how she could meet the interests of both her political self-interest and the
organizational interest. Finding those connections between those things was a way to work with her.

Superintendent 5 also shared how working individually and treating her board members with respect were important strategies in building relationships and trust:

I think it’s working with her one-on-one, being supportive, acknowledging her, acknowledging her skills and the gains that she’s made, and treating her professionally. She is not as educated as the other board members. The others are all professionals. But, she has a lot of wisdom, a lot of heart. So that’s important to make sure that she is acknowledged for the gifts she does have.

**Communication.** Under the theme of communication, “give them talking points” and “understand amount and kind of information to give them” were the most frequently coded strategies. Superintendent 5 stated that providing talking points and providing information was important in working with her adaptor. She said, "When you can lay it out and explain it, so that she can explain it. . . . So, what I do is give her talking points so she has the words to explain how it makes sense.”

**Coherence.** “Collaboration around goals” and “show the benefit” were the most frequently coded strategies. In working with his adaptor, Superintendent 4 said,

Really, it’s about giving information and being transparent, making sure there were no hidden motives. . . . So, really trying to work with him to make sure he saw the true reasons why we were doing it. And with that, he was supportive.

He discussed that reminding his adaptor to focus on goals kept his adaptor from micromanaging the daily work of the district: “Remember, stay up here and help set the goals and the direction, and we’ll do the work.”
The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with an adaptor, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies: “build trust; agenda linking; praise and recognition; many messengers; simple messages; be open to their ideas; and know who trusts whom” (p. 85).

Ineffective strategies. Superintendent 5 discussed the ineffective strategies with her adaptor:

This board member does not do well with stress or threats. You can’t threaten their personal risk. You have to be kind of even and put things out there and help her see the alignment between her interests and the organizational interests. Then she’s okay. When I haven’t done that, and I say, “This is the way it is,” that doesn’t work.

Superintendent 4 discussed issues that arose around an immigration resolution, and how he felt his strategies working with his adaptor were not effective:

I guess I feel like it wasn’t effective in that I was just trying to show that we weren’t doing something different other than just enforcing the laws as they were written. You might disagree with the law, but our obligation is to follow the law in the school district. So, it wasn’t successful . . . When you come up against someone’s personal belief system, you’re not going to change that.

Balancer

Balancer 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). Two of the five superintendents in the study worked with board members they perceived to be balancers, for a total of two, or 8%, of the board members included in the study.

Superintendent 4 described his balancer as, “She is one of my rocks. . . . She is always trying to find that balance for everyone. . . . She’s kind of always in the middle ground, at least publicly.” Superintendent 5 described her balancer as follows:

He is the one who is able to work with the challenger. This is the person I go to when I have a particular crisis or if something is happening with our challenger . . . He’s able to see both sides and is able to help. . . . He’s able to get her attention and then get her to focus. So, oftentimes, when I have a particular challenge with her or something’s going on, I will call him for advice.

**Strategies used with balancers.** As shown in Table 12, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with balancers was build relationships and trust. The theme of political savvy had the next highest number of coded responses, followed by governance, communication, and coherence. Across all themes, the following were the codes with the highest frequency: (a) make governance a priority; handbook and protocols; (b) make them part of the solution; (c) use the board president and other board members; (d) anticipate and be proactive; (e) build their capacity; (f) culture of no surprises; and (g) work with them individually.

**Build relationships and trust.** Under the theme of build relationships and trust, the most frequently coded strategies were “culture of no surprises,” “work with them individually,” “finding connections,” and “know your board members.” Superintendent 4
### Table 12

**Summary of Strategies Used With Balancers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balancer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Build relationships and trust</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finding connections</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know your board members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ask them for advice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be genuine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Treat the respectfully/professionally</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political savvy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use the board president and other board members</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>Make governance a priority; handbook and protocols</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build their capacity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure they have information to make informed decisions</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masters in Governance</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Board member orientation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frontload</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coherence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
emphasized the importance of ensuring that his balancer is never caught off guard. He said,

I make it really clear that I try not to have any surprises. I think that’s a protocol that we have or a norm in our handbook, that I don’t provide any surprises and they don’t provide any surprises. I am really good about letting them know if we’re going to have contentious groups coming to our board meeting with issues.

Superintendent 5 also stressed the importance of keeping the balancer informed. She said, “They are very much more aware of our social presence than I am. So, I have to be sure that I’m sharing with them in advance what’s going on so they’re not surprised. Surprise, he doesn’t like surprises.”

Superintendent 4 spoke of the importance of working individually with his balancer. He shared that there were times when she became especially frustrated with the challenger on the board. He said, “We’ll have private conversations. . . . I will sometimes suggest to her, “Maybe you could go back and talk to Board Member 4.”

Superintendent 4 also shared the importance of supporting his board members in building relationships with him, as well as each other. He said,

When we had some contentious times, we all agreed that when we had a rough board meeting, that maybe was a 3-2 split or something, we agreed that we would go out after the board meeting. We would go somewhere and maybe have a drink or have some dessert . . . just to remind us that we’re all individuals, that we’re all people, we all like each other, and that we don’t take it personal how the vote went.
Political savvy. Under the theme of political savvy, the most frequently coded strategies were “make them part of the solution,” “use the board president and other board members,” “anticipate and be proactive,” and “bring the right attitude.” Superintendent 5 shared that it is important to elicit the balancer’s help: “Working with him in advance . . . making sure he’s part of the solution, giving him a role in the solution I think is effective.” She explained that the balancer is especially helpful in working with the challenger during board meetings, and discussed how they strategize ahead of time. She said, “I ask him, during the board meeting, based on me saying a certain word or a look . . . he jumps in. He’s able to turn the conversation around.”

Superintendent 4 shared how he will encourage his balancer to talk with other board members to minimize conflict on the board:

I would sometimes ask her, “Maybe you could go back and talk to Board Member Number 4, because it really didn’t go the way we all wanted in the board meeting.” We have a protocol that if there is a disagreement or some tension between board members, that they would try to first reach out and just have a one-on-one, so each side could share their viewpoint. It’s not a public display that way, in the middle of a board meeting, taking a side. . . . When I offer that as a strategy, she was really good about that, wanting to talk to other board members.

Governance. Under the theme of governance, the most frequently coded strategies were “make governance a priority; handbook and protocols,” and “build their capacity.” Superintendent 4 said of his balancer, “She’s always really good about following protocols, asking questions, and asking for more information. . . . She’ll give
me a heads up and say, “Hey, I’m going to ask this question, because I want the public to hear it.” He also highlighted the importance of building capacity, when he stated,

When she first started with us, she was a stay-at-home mom. Super intelligent lady. To help her understand all the ins and outs and intricacies of what happens, because I think, from a parent perspective, you don’t always see that.

Understanding the political dynamics that go on amongst board members, amongst unions, amongst parent groups, some of that was just to help enlighten her as to these moving parts behind the scenes.

*Communication.* Under the theme of communication, the most frequently coded strategies were “proactive communication,” and “understand the amount and kind of information to give them.” Superintendent 5 shared that her balancer is “very organized and wants to know information in advance.” Superintendent 4 stated that he puts a great deal of effort into proactively communicating with his balancer, “Helping her understand why we’re doing it, how it impacts our kids or our staff, and giving her all the information to be able to digest it . . . being really transparent.” He added, “That’s a recurring theme with me, just being open and honest about what we are trying to accomplish.”

*Coherence.* Under the theme of coherence, the only strategy coded was “remind of primary responsibility to kids.” Superintendent 4 stated that using this coherence strategy was the most effective way to reach a successful outcome with his balancer. He said, “Helping her understand why we’re doing it, how it impacts our kids and staff” was important to moving the work of the district forward.
The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to some of the strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with a balancer, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies: “build trust; superordinate goal; do your homework; respond positively to danger; use norms effectively; be open to ideas; and float the idea” (p. 90).

**Ineffective strategies.** Superintendent 5 reiterated the importance of her balancer not being caught off guard. She said, “Not sharing, surprising him, him having to read something. And it happens, and he’s very gracious about it, but I can tell that he doesn’t like it.” Superintendent 4 discussed his encouragement to his balancer, to try and work out disagreements with the challenger. He said, “Well, not in every case did she take my advice.” He continued, “Sometimes it’s uncomfortable. . . . So, I had to respect that and let it go. All you can do is provide that advice and guidance. They can take you up on it or not.”

**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). One of the five superintendents in the study worked with two board members perceived to be planners, for a total of 8% of the board members included in the study. Superintendent 2 described his first planner:

This [board member] wanted to have a plan for our facilities. One day, he said, “We’ve got to get the work done, but we need a plan.” So, we sat down and created some goals, and we went out to see some schools that look like the school
we wanted. We took a lot of time to survey, make sure we had the funding, and to ensure that at the end of the task, we had a plan. We are starting the sixth year with our facilities master plan.

This anecdote aligns with White et al. (2016), in that planners are very cautious and careful, very aware of their own need for security. They will ask a lot of questions in order to get the information necessary to develop plans that will help them accomplish their goals. Superintendent 2 shared information about his second planner:

She has some experience, and wants to always think about her experience and how it applies to this situation. Things such as, they were going to close schools. What are we going to tell the parents and the staff? Then, what’s going to happen after that? Are we asking [the staff] to come in? There’s always that process of planning.

According to White et al. (2016), planners have respect for those who pay close attention to detail and can describe how details will be handled. Planners are organized and like to know that their leaders have done their homework and gathered the data so they can examine it for themselves.

**Strategies used with planners.** As shown in Table 13, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with planners was political savvy. The theme of communication had the next highest number of coded responses, followed by building relationships and trust, coherence, and governance. Across all themes, the following were the codes with the highest frequency: (a) bring the right attitude; (b) proactive communication; (c) build relationships with the people/political players connected to the board; (d) anticipate and be proactive; (e) find common ground; get
Table 13

Summary of Strategies Used With Planners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Political savvy</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build relationships with the people/political players connected to the board</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility; include them in celebrations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be fluid and flexible</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be responsive</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give them talking points</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide information in a way they can easily understand</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow upon concerns or requests for more information</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred method of communication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships and trust</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Know your board members</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finding connections</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Treat the respectfully/professionally</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Find common ground; get everyone on the same page</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay focused on facts, not personalities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masters in Governance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
everyone on the same page; (f) know your board members; (g) make them part of the solution; (h) transparency; and (i) understand their priorities and who they represent; and (j) manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries.

**Political savvy.** Within the theme of political savvy, “bring the right attitude” and “build relationships with the people/political players connected to the board” were the strategies with the highest frequency count. Superintendent 2 shared how he brings a positive attitude to working with his second planner, who brings expertise to her position and attends all local and state school board association meetings:

> Sometimes, I’ve got to go watch [another] Zoom meeting, and she’ll tell me, “This is what is happening at the meeting.” It’s nice for me that I don’t feel threatened by it, but instead say, “Thank you for the information. If you find anything else, let me know.”

However, he stressed the importance of staying current with information, especially in times of rapid change. He said, “I have to stay sharp, and I have to plan that there’s no mistake, and stay ahead of them.” He further elaborated,

> There was a new announcement regarding the current status of reopening [after COVID-19]. I have to be the first one to get that, because I know that this board member already heard and is telling me, “Hey, did you hear this? Did you hear that?” So, I have to be able to interpret [the information] so she’s not always in front of me. I want to make her feel that I’m always leading, and she can bring and add value to my play. But I always have to stay in front of this individual.

He further explained that it is important to have confidence in one’s leadership: “Some people will think she’s trying to run things, but she’s not trying to run it. She’s just trying
to give me ideas based on her experience. That’s the way I look at it, and I don’t feel threatened.”

Superintendent 2 discussed the importance of understanding the political landscape and investing time to build relationships with the various constituents and political players connected to board members. He described the dynamic of working with his first planner who may have other aspirations driven by self-interest:

I’m not running for city council. I’m not running to be mayor or the representative. I respect you if that’s what you want to do. I’ve been able to bring that out, so that they can focus on what we’re trying to accomplish.

He explained his strategy in staying connected politically within the community:

“Because these board members are connected throughout this city, I’ve got to build relationships with people that surround them.” He explained further,

Politicians will see a board member as an authority figure, and they’ll go to the board member before they come to me. So, I’ve always approached it this way: I have to get to know the players in the city, the mayor of the city. Also, the city manager or local representative, because I need to build enough of a relationship with them, so they can come to me and feel that the superintendent is reliable, he’ll follow through.

**Communication.** Under the theme of communication, “proactive communication” was the most frequently coded strategy, followed by “be responsive,” “give them talking points,” “open communication,” and “provide information in a way they can easily understand.” Superintendent 2 discussed how proactive communication was important to avoiding conflict with his first planner. He said, “I just make sure I call right away and
intervene before it gets bigger.” He tells his board member, “If you’re not happy with something, let me know, because I want to address it right away.” In addition, he puts forth effort into ensuring that communication stays open with his first planner, as he shared,

Sometimes it’s staying up late calling him, or calling him early, or on the weekends . . . but you don’t want to go a couple of days mad with a person that can be your best ally, or your worst enemy.

To ensure his board member is equipped to answer questions from constituents, he makes sure he has information: “I try to give them some talking points and then get some evidence, pictures, videos, and what have you, because ultimately, they live in this community.”

**Build relationships and trust.** Under the theme of build relationships and trust, the most frequently coded strategies were “know your board members” and “transparency.” Superintendent 2 emphasized that is it important to know his planners personally, including their work preferences, and their schedules. He said that he tries to take advantage of days where his planners may be free from other commitments, so he can update them on the progress made on district plans. He shared that he will invite them to accompany him on visits to schools or departments: “I’ll say, ‘Hey, come and see the progress. I want to show you.’” He also will include them when he goes out to a celebration or to thank employees. He said,

If we’re celebrating or thanking somebody, if I’m showing them the school, I also walk in with donuts or food. Just this morning, we went over to the welcome center, thanking the ladies for registering our families. I said, “Hey, we brought
you some donuts. Keep up the good work.” I bring a couple of cabinet members.

I brought this board member. The employees are happy, and they’re happy. It’s a good strategy.

In addition, Superintendent 2 shared that it is also important to know one’s board members on a personal basis and find out about their interests. He said his first planner “is very passionate about gardening. So, I benefit from the gardening. I get the hot peppers, I get the tomatoes, and I love it. I make salsa and bring it in.” This bond that they formed over gardening helps him to build a more personal relationship with his planner. He shared,

Lately, because of COVID-19, I am even taking the time to build my own garden. I haven’t planted anything, but the garden is there. We’re able to talk about it, and they can give you suggestions on what grows right now. And that’s kind of a nice way to build that relationship. We have other things to talk about, not just the business of education.

Superintendent 2 also discussed the role of transparency in building relationships and trust with his planners. He said, “I am transparent, but I am going to be upfront.” He talked about how the relationship and trust had evolved from the time he was first hired:

They didn’t know me that well; I didn’t know them that well. The first night, we connected and talked about things that were important to both sides. . . . They were asking questions, the questions lasted like two years. Then after that, they trusted.

Superintendent 2 also shared that the board trusts him to handle difficult situations and media coverage during times of crisis:
They know when the cameras show up at the main district office, they don’t want to face the cameras, so they send for me. I’m it. I’m the guy that is going to open the door and answer the questions. And the board feels comfortable about that.

**Coherence.** “Find common ground; get everyone on the same page” was the most frequently coded strategy under the coherence theme, followed by “remind of primary responsibility to kids” and “stay focused on facts, not on personalities.” Superintendent 2 said of working with his planners,

> I bring out the best in them. This is one of the things that I keep saying is, “You hired me. What is the end in mind, and I’ll give you the end in mind.” And I am very clear . . . it is the children. I’m here for the children.

He further explained that staying focused on the plans helps move the work forward with the support of the board. He shared,

> I always have to bring it back to the plan. “Remember, this is your plan, this is what you’ve asked me to do. . . . I just want to make sure that you’re happy and you have some evidence, some pictures maybe, some video, to show and justify why we keep moving forward with the plan, and the implementation of the plan.

> Why is it that I need additional funding? That is in the plan. It is not my plan, it’s our plan, the plan that we sat down and created together.”

**Governance.** “Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries” was the most frequently coded strategy, followed by CSBA’s “Masters in Governance” training. Superintendent 2 stated the importance of keeping his planners in a role of governance, so they do not get into the daily management of the district. He said,
Many times, because we’re a bigger school district, my number-one goal is to manage the board so they allow my staff to do their work. I don’t want them to micromanage, and so I’ve been able to keep them away from the daily functions and the daily routines of the school district.

He discussed his strategy as a new superintendent, coming into the district preparing to work with his second planner specifically, in addition to the entire board. He said, “That was one of the strategies that I used right off the bat, and I said, ‘I’ll be happy to take it over; however, if you all go to the governance courses with me.’” He then talked about approaching his second planner, who carried a lot of experience:

As soon as I was appointed, this is the first board member that I approached and said, “The only way that I’m going to be successful is if you all follow me and take the CSBA governance courses. We can do this together; we can do it individually. Ultimately, I’ve already defined what your role is, and so you have to understand what my role is as superintendent.”

The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with a planner, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies: “many messengers; simple messages; do your homework; respond positively to perceived danger; use norms; dig the well early; and where snipers dwell, plan meticulously” (p. 88).

Ineffective strategies. When asked what strategies were not as effective with his first planner, Superintendent 2 said, “You can’t ignore him. You can’t just say, ‘Well, it’s going to go away.’” He continued, “He’s thinking ahead. What’s going to happen in a month? What’s going to happen in six months? What’s going to happen in a year?”
Instead, you have to be “able to sit down and talk about some of the possible solutions, so
then work together on it.” With his second planner, Superintendent 2 said,

You cannot assume things with this board member. You just have to tell it like it
is. You can’t just say it’ll be fine. You have to say, “These are the potential
downs,” and then this person will start giving you ideas.

**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). Two of the five superintendents in the study worked
with board members they perceived to be strategists, for a total of two, or 8%, of the
board members included in the study.

Superintendent 4 highlighted the strong focus on organizational interests typical
of strategists. He said,

She is very much always trying to support the organization’s interests first,
always trying to help people see her side . . . sometimes, she just tends to have a
short fuse, because people don’t see her perspective. She might get a little
rambunctious but, always, her heart is in the right place. She’s committed to the
district. Her children have gone through there. She lives there.

Superintendent 5 described her strategist, focusing on her astute ability to elevate
the organization’s goals through her vision, ability to engage diverse stakeholders, and
empowerment of others:
When we do board comments at a board meeting, she goes last. She’s the board president, and she takes in the comments. . . . We have a lot of ritual, a lot of students . . . coming and making speeches. We honor teacher of the year, student of the year, school by school at every board meeting. She hears that, she hears all of our colleagues, she hears what the unions say. Then she sums it all up . . . and elevates all those into another level, so she’s a synthesizer. She’s able to say, “You know what? I heard there’s a common theme about supporting others,” or “There was a common theme.” It really is a talent that she has. So that’s how I see her being very strategic, because she takes in information, puts it together, and is able to bring people along, whatever her goals are, whatever her thinking is, or whatever the particular organizational focus is at the time. I really do see her as being politically gifted.

**Strategies used with strategists.** As shown in Table 14, the theme with the highest number of coded responses for strategies used with strategists was political savvy. The theme of governance had the next highest number of coded responses, followed by building relationships and trust, coherence, and communication. Across all themes, the following were the codes with the highest frequency: (a) collaboration around goals; (b) manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries; (c) make governance a priority; handbook and protocols; (d) anticipate and be proactive; (e) bring the right attitude; (f) link agendas; (g) use the board president and other board members; and (h) Masters in Governance.
Table 14

Summary of Strategies Used With Strategists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>Political savvy</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Link agendas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use the board president and other board members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be fluid and flexible</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give accolades</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make them part of the solution</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make governance a priority; handbook and protocols</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masters in Governance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build their capacity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New board member orientation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships and trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know your board members</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finding connections</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Treat the respectfully/professionally</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work with them individually</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration around the goals/plans</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay focused on facts, not personalities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow upon concerns or requests for more information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frontload</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Redundancy of message</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Validate their point of view</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, “anticipate and be proactive,” “bring the right attitude,” “link agendas,” and “use the board president and other board members” were the most frequently coded strategies. Superintendent 5 discussed how to leverage the strategist in furthering the work of the district. She shared that it was important to “work with her ahead of time. . . . She likes things done well and in advance.” She discussed the importance of linking agendas, especially in her role as board president: “It’s nice to collaborate with her, because she sees the big picture right away, and she sees where I’m going.” She further elaborated, “In a board meeting, I can say something and she knows I’m laying the groundwork for something we’re going to say in an item way later. So, we’re able to work very well together.” Superintendent 4 was appreciative of his strategist, stating, “She’s very conscientious.” The strategies he has found to be important are “just really encouraging and being positive, and praising her for the way she operates.”

**Governance.** Within the theme of governance, “manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries” and “make governance a priority, handbook and protocols” were the most frequently coded strategies. Superintendent 4 shared a challenge in working with his strategist when overstepping on a priority project: “The strategy that I used is to remind her of her training, and remind her of getting down in the weeds.” He explained that the norms and protocols established by the board provide support as well, to keep her from overstepping, “If she has a question, she knows I have no problem with going to our CBO or assistant [superintendent]. She’s always conscientious about cc’ing me so I’m aware of it.”
**Build relationships and trust.** Under the theme of build relationships and trust, “assume good intentions” and “know your board members” were the most frequently coded strategies. Superintendent 4 spoke of a challenge with his strategist, but how he always assumes that she is well-intentioned: “She was very much always trying to support the organization’s interests first, always trying to help people see her side of it.” He said, “It’s very helpful that she knows we’re always well intended. So, even if she questions something, it’s not from a bad place. It’s to help understand or get clarity.” Superintendent 5 shared about her strategist, “She’s very focused.” She spoke about the board member’s ability to “look at the higher purpose.”

**Coherence.** Under the theme of coherence, “collaboration around the goals/plans” was the most frequently coded strategy. Superintendent 5 shared how she works with her strategist when the board member has an idea for a new initiative:

She starts out with letting me know first, and we talk. She will say, “I know there’s a lot going on, but I think this is really important. What do you think about this?” I say, “Yes, that makes a lot of sense. So, let’s see how we can incorporate it or where it makes sense to fit in.”

Superintendent 4 shared that sometimes it is best to “let the process play out” to ensure collaboration around the district goals. A priority project of the strategist had not proceeded smoothly, ultimately ending in a divided decision on the board, and “we weren’t sure exactly where we wanted to go.” The board then created a strategic plan committee, which resulted in a new vision and mission for the district, and aligned it to the LCAP goals. The end goal was to be able to bring the priority project back again, and “align it around that strategic vision and mission,” to improve the chances of success.
**Communication.** “Follow up on concerns or requests for more information,” “frontload,” “redundancy of message,” “understand the amount and kind of information to give them,” and “validate their point of view” each had one frequency code from the interview. Superintendent 4 stated, “Even if something maybe is off, or she has a question about, she’s really good about calling and asking. . . . I always make sure I make time for her to answer her questions or give clarification.” Superintendent 5 emphasized that it is important to provide the right amount and kind of information. She said, “Providing her with data, providing her with what she needs, is the best way to go about it.”

The strategies highlighted by the superintendents in this study align to strategies in the theoretical framework. When working with a strategist, White et al. (2016) recommended the following strategies:

build trust; agenda linking; superordinate goal; problem solving; do your homework; know your decision makers’ agenda; be aware of political blind spots; working the community; respond positively to danger; celebrate everything; dig the well early; link agendas; be open to their ideas; know who trusts whom; and float the idea. (p. 99)

**Ineffective strategies.** Superintendent 4 shared that, early on, he would remind his board member to stay in the realm of governance and not meddle in the daily operations of the school district. He would tell her, “You’re down in the weeds. This is something that is a full board decision.” He said, “In the beginning, she kind of wanted what she wanted. And she heard me, but she didn’t hear me. So, I guess that would be what didn’t work at first. But eventually, it came back around.”
Superintendent 5 shared an anecdote about the importance of proactive communication with her strategist:

I can’t think of a particular time where she and I have had a disagreement, other than she doesn’t like to be surprised. So, there have been times where, inadvertently, something got out to staff, and that means it’s on Facebook, before it got to the board. I could tell she didn’t like that. She never says anything negative, but I know she thought, “We should have known first.” So, I’m careful to do that. I’m very conscious of that and make sure that they have information.

**Analyst**

Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interests over organizational interests. 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). None of the 25 board members in this study had a perceived style of analyst; therefore, there are no data to present for analysis.

According to White et al. (2016), analysts respond well to the following strategies: “build trust, use concrete examples, approval of power structure, go slow to go fast, chits, many messengers, co-option, command, broken record, meet their needs, and link agendas” (p. 84).

**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
None of the 25 board members in this study had a perceived style of developer; therefore, there are no data to present for analysis. When working with a developer, it is important to use the following strategies:

- build trust; go slow to go fast; win-win; agenda linking; superordinate goal;
- expand the pie; include all sides; accordion process; problem solving; create a political vision; meet their needs; simplify and clarify message; do your homework; know each decision maker’s agenda; be aware of political blind spots;
- coalition building; working the community; build networks; respond positively to perceived danger; celebrate everything; use norms effectively; dig the well before you’re thirsty; management by walking around; be open to their ideas; empower others; create a benevolent environment; know who trusts whom; float the idea;
- and where snipers dwell, plan meticulously. (White et al., 2016, p. 92)

**Political Strategies for Use With All Political Styles**

The theme with the highest coded frequency for strategies for working with all political styles was governance, with 22 coded frequencies (see Table 15). Communication was second, with 15 coded frequencies, followed by building relationships and trust with 10 coded frequencies. Both coherence and political savvy had seven coded frequencies for strategies which work with all political styles. The strategies across all themes with the highest frequency were (a) provide them all with the same information at the same time, (b) proactive communication, (c) transparency, (d) bring the right attitude, (e) build their capacity, (f) use legal counsel, and (g) remind of primary responsibility to kids.
Table 15

*Summary of Strategies Used With All Political Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Styles</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide them all with the same information at the same time</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build their capacity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use legal counsel; educate on law/liability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure they have information to make informed decisions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Proactive communication</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frontload</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give them talking points</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Follow upon concerns or requests for more information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand amount and kind of information to give them</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume good intentions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be genuine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of no surprises</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know your board members</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Remind of primary responsibility to kids</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Show the benefit</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political savvy</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Bring the right attitude</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
Within the theme of governance, the strategy with the highest frequency was “provide them all with the same information at the same time,” representing 50% of the governance codes. This was followed by the strategies of “build their capacity; and “use legal counsel; educate on law/liability.” Within the theme of communication, the strategies with the highest frequency were “proactive communication” and “open communication.” Under the theme of build relationships and trust, “transparency” was the strategy most frequently coded. Under coherence, the strategy of “remind of primary responsibility to kids” was most frequently coded. Within the theme of political savvy, “bring the right attitude” was the strategy most frequently coded.

**Governance.** Under the theme of governance, “provide them all with the same information at the same time” and “build their capacity” were the strategies most frequently coded. Superintendent 2 said, “You try to build a community of board members so they become used to getting the same information.” He added, “If an individual board member asks me a question, I’ll say, ‘Do you want an answer?’ And they will say, ‘Yes.’” He will tell them, “Okay, my answer’s going to go to everybody, all five of you.” He explained to his board,

If you want me to answer, you’re getting privileged information. The others want to have it. They need to have it. . . . This way they become very accustomed to thinking, “What would the others want to know and then we all get the same answer.”

Superintendent 4 emphasized the importance of building the capacity of the board through providing training opportunities. He said,
I go to all of those things with them, just to show my commitment and how much I value their training along the way. I think they see that, and they know that I’m trying to help make them the best board member they can be.

**Communication.** Under the theme of communication, “proactive communication” and “open communication” were the strategies with the highest frequency. Superintendent 1 said, “I can’t stress enough the importance and the value of not only open communication, being very intentional about capacity building, and . . . making sure they have the information that they need to make informed decisions.”

Superintendent 3 said, “My board loves that I communicate. . . . They’ve always told me, ‘If you ever left and we got someone else, I don’t know if they can keep up with what you communicate.’ I really kill myself to over communicate every day.”

**Build relationships and trust.** “Transparency” was the strategy most frequently coded within the theme of build relationships and trust. When asked what strategies work with all political styles of board members, Superintendent 4 stated,

> I think transparency, being forthright in what you’re trying to accomplish, certainly providing as much information as possible . . . it’s about trying to help them understand, trying to get them the information they want, and being honest and open with them.

**Coherence.** Within the theme of coherence, “remind of primary responsibility to kids” and “show the benefit” were the two strategies that were coded. Superintendent 5 discussed the importance of connecting the board to the vision and mission of the district.

She said,
Making sure to always remember their higher purpose, because you can always tell them why we’re all here. “I know you’re here because you care so much about kids.” For some of them, you’re reminding them, and for some of them, it’s what they may aspire to one day. So being aspirational is one way to remind them of their vision, and to point out where the connection is between the work they do and what they’re seeing happen in the district. Because of your work around this policy and focus, we were able to do X, Y, and Z. Now the students have this, and now the families do this. So, I spend a lot of time making those connections between them and our LCAP goals. Every board meeting is really focused around the work of the district in teaching and learning.

**Political savvy.** Under the theme of political savvy, “bring the right attitude” was the most frequently coded strategy. Superintendent 1 said, “I am truly blessed with a wonderful board, and they are truly well-intentioned. They are truly student-centered and family focused.” Superintendent 3 believes in always giving the board credit for district accomplishments. She said, “I always give it back to the board that it was their idea. That’s how I do it. I really don’t care. I just want to get it done.” Superintendent 3 also discussed that she tries to anticipate when her board may get a call from the press, and prepares them. She said, “I want to be their voice for them . . . I want to make sure I’m ahead of it.” She emphasized, “I’m very protective of them. I protect my board . . . and they know that.”

**Triangulation of Data**

The qualitative data were triangulated through multiple data sources, which provided a more comprehensive set of data as well as enhanced the credibility of the
study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patton (2015), “Triangulation of data sources across different qualitative methods means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means from interviews . . . and documents” (p. 662). Triangulation included checking interviews against documentation and other written evidence that corroborated what was reported during the interviews. Triangulation yields either consistency in the overall patterns within the data from various sources or provides reasonable explanations for differences in the data, contributing to the overall credibility of the research (Patton, 2015).

The most frequently coded theme for strategies to use with all board member styles was governance, followed by communication. District websites for the participating superintendents were reviewed to determine if the board web page had governance goals, handbooks, or other documentation of the strategies the superintendent has used with the board. All five districts had dedicated websites for the board members, which included individual biographies of every member. This focus on the expertise, experience, and community connection provides evidence of the way the five superintendents use political strategies to work with all their board members. This highlighting of the board members demonstrates political savvy, as the superintendents “bring the right attitude” to the work and “understand their priorities and who they represent” by embracing the political platforms and constituency that board members represent in their role.

Three of the superintendents—Superintendent 1, Superintendent 4, and Superintendent 5—had current board governance handbooks posted on the district websites. All handbooks showed a board adoption date within the previous 12 months.
The governance handbooks reflected the commitment of the board to view the superintendent as part of the governance team. The handbooks supported strategies from the interviews, such as “make governance a priority; handbooks and protocols,” “manage the board; educate on role, parameters, boundaries,” “provide them all with the same information at the same time,” “make sure they have information to make informed decisions,” and “new board member orientation.” The protocols established by the board and superintendent through their governance handbook included expectations and procedures for communication, including “follow up on concerns or requests for more information,” “follow up on concerns from constituents,” and “give them talking points.”

Superintendent 2 did not have a formal board governance handbook; however, documents for board of trustees’ goals, board of trustees’ responsibilities, and the CSBA (2019b) Professional Governance Standards for School Boards were posted on the Board of Trustees webpage. Definitions within these documents aligned to many aspects of the governance handbooks from other participants. The goals for the board supported coherence, as the focus was placed on providing strategic direction and support to ensure that all students achieve at high levels. The Board of Trustees’ Responsibilities supported governance, with an emphasis on hiring the superintendent, and setting policy and direction for personnel, curriculum, the budget, and collective bargaining. This documentation validated information from the interview, as the governance documents supported the strategies used by the superintendent, such as, “remind them of their primary responsibility to kids,” “build their capacity,” and “give them talking points.”

Superintendent 3 had the usual board meeting calendar, agendas, minutes, and board policies posted on the board webpage; however, there was no governance
handbook or other governance documents available. A review of board agendas for 3 months showed unanimous 5-0 votes for all agenda items except one, where a board member abstained on the approval of the meeting minutes. Comments made by three board members during the meeting welcomed the new board member, which provides an explanation for the abstention from approving the minutes. The board president also thanked Superintendent 3 for preparing the new board member for her first meeting. This validated the examples that the superintendent provided during the interview as to the political strategies used with all board member styles, including “build their capacity,” “make sure they have information to make informed decisions,” and “frontload.”

The researcher also conducted a review of the most recent board meeting agendas and minutes for 3 months. This review and analysis provided valuable insight into the functioning of the board of trustees from the five participating districts. All meeting minutes reflected unanimous votes by the board, with the exception of the previously mentioned example of the new board member. In several cases, board members presented acknowledgements or awards during the board meeting. In addition, board member reports and comments were primarily focused on acknowledging and thanking staff for their work and contributions. There were no observed remarks requesting more information or items to be placed on future agendas. This review supports the strategies of a “culture of no surprises,” “transparency,” and “visibility; include them in celebrations.”

**Summary**

Chapter IV provided a presentation and analysis of the data collected by the researcher through the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design. The
presentation and analysis of the data included the quantitative data collected through surveys and the qualitative data collected through standardized, semistructured interviews. Due to the sequential explanatory mixed methods design utilized in this study, the researcher administered the surveys first and then conducted the interviews to further explore the information gleaned from the survey responses. The presentation and analysis of the data was organized to respond to the research questions used in the study.

1. How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?

Three of the superintendents identified themselves as strategists, one superintendent identified as a developer, and one identified as a planner. The political styles of the 25 board members, as perceived by the superintendents, were seven arrangers, seven supporters, three challengers, two adaptors, two balancers, two planners, and two strategists. There were no board members identified with the political style of analyst or developer.

The political strategies utilized by the superintendents were organized into five themes: governance, build relationships and trust, coherence, communication, and political savvy. The strategies for each style were analyzed to identify the most frequently coded themes, the most frequently coded strategies within each theme, and the most frequently coded strategies across all themes. Table 16 provides a summary of the
political strategies the superintendents use with the different political styles of their board members.

Table 16

**Summary of Strategies Across All Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political style</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arranger</strong></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive; understand their priorities and who they represent; use the board president and other board members; manage the board/educate on role, parameters, boundaries; open communication; be prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporter</strong></td>
<td>Understand their priorities and who they represent; know your board members; use active listening skills; build their capacity; understand amount and kind of information to give them; bring the right attitude; anticipate and be proactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenger</strong></td>
<td>Anticipate and be proactive; use the board president and other board members; give accolades; proactive communication; understand amount and kind of information to give them; transparency; bring the right attitude; use active listening skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptor</strong></td>
<td>Use legal counsel, educate on law/liability; understand their priorities and who they represent; Masters in Governance; bring the right attitude; build their capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balancer</strong></td>
<td>Make them part of the solution; use the board president and other board members; make governance a priority, handbook and protocols; culture of no surprises; work with them individually; anticipate and be proactive; build their capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planner</strong></td>
<td>Bring the right attitude; proactive communication; build relationships with the people/political players connected to the board; anticipate and be proactive; make them part of the solution; understand their priorities and who they represent; know your board members; transparency; find common ground, get everyone on the same page; manage the board, educate on role, parameters, boundaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategist</strong></td>
<td>Manage the Board, educate on role, parameters, boundaries; collaboration around the goals/plans; make governance a priority, handbook and protocols; anticipate and be proactive; bring the right attitude; link agendas; use the board president and other board members; Masters in Governance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyst</strong></td>
<td>No board members in this study were identified as analysts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developer</strong></td>
<td>No board members in this study were identified as developers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although there were many strategies that worked with different political styles, there were some strategies that superintendents found to work with only an individual board member, and they needed to be astute in their ability to adapt their strategies. In addition, the superintendents highlighted the delicate balance that must be attained when working with the entire board, to account for the needs of the individual board members, while moving the district forward. Superintendent 4 summed up this complexity of working with the board:

It’s ever evolving. Any board member could be an attorney or in law enforcement, or somebody that I’d have to think about a different approach with. So, I would say in this role, and using the political styles, it’s always going to be ever evolving depending on each individual. And you have to look at them differently. What works with one doesn’t necessarily work with the other.

You’ve just got to have a full tool belt.

Chapter V presents and discusses the major findings of this study in greater depth. The researcher also presents implications for action and recommendations for further research. Chapter V concludes with remarks and reflections on the research into how superintendents perceive their political style and the political styles of their board members, and the strategies that superintendents use to work with the individual political styles of their board members.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter V provides a summary of the purpose, research questions, methodology, data collection procedures, and population and sample for the study. The demographic data of the participating superintendents are summarized. The chapter also provides a synthesis and report of the findings of the data as it relates to the research questions. The chapter concludes with conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Purpose Statement

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

Research Questions

1. How do exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?
2. What are the strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of their school board members?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was selected as most appropriate to the thematic study. In a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, quantitative methods are followed by qualitative data collection, which is used to further explain the quantitative results and answer the research questions. Data from artifacts are then collected to provide triangulation through qualitative cross-validation among the multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

The quantitative portion of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was conducted as a survey of five suburban elementary school district superintendents to determine how the superintendents perceived their own political style and the individual style of each board member (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014). The qualitative inquiry was conducted through a standardized, semistructured protocol to interview the five exemplary superintendents in five suburban elementary school districts in Southern California on the strategies used to work successfully with the different political styles of school board members (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Board agendas, meeting minutes, governance handbooks, and district websites provided the researcher with rich information to triangulate the data about the political relationship between the superintendent and board members (Patton, 2015).

Population

The population is a group that the researcher intends to study and to whom the findings are generalized. In addition, the population is a group of individuals who have one or more distinguishing characteristics that differentiate them from other groups and
are of interest to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2010). The population of this study was public school district superintendents.

Nationally, there were approximately 14,000 school districts in the United States at the time of this study, which means that there were approximately 14,000 school district superintendents employed to lead those school districts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups, so the population was narrowed geographically to focus on superintendents employed within school districts in California. In 2020-2021, there were 1,097 public school districts within the state of California (California Department of Education, 2018). This population was still too large to reasonably survey and interview, so the population was further narrowed to a target population, which was feasible for the researcher to study.

**Target Population**

Superintendents serve in a variety of educational settings. Of the 1,097 school districts within the state of California, 522 were elementary districts, 344 were unified school districts, and 76 were high school districts. Elementary school districts made up the most significant group, at 47.6%, of school districts in the state (California Department of Education, 2021). To make the study more reasonable, the researcher focused on the 522 elementary school districts in California. This population of elementary school districts was narrowed geographically to 101 elementary school districts in Southern California (California Department of Education, 2021; California Department of Social Services, 2002). The researcher further narrowed the target population to the 61 suburban elementary school districts in Southern California.
Sample

The study sample for this mixed methods study included five exemplary
superintendents from the target population. The thematic team collaborated to determine
the criteria to be used to identify exemplary superintendents for inclusion in the study.
An exemplary superintendent in this study was a school district leader who had a
minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent in their current district and
demonstrated at least three of the following seven criteria:

- Shows evidence of positive governance team relationships.
- Was identified by a county superintendent as exemplary in working with the board.
- Was identified by a panel of experts who were knowledgeable of the work of
  superintendents.
- Has received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional
  organization, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA).
- Has received recognition by his or her peers.
- Has a membership in professional associations in the field.
- Has participated in CSBA’s Masters in Governance training or other governance
  training with at least one board member.

Demographic Data

In this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, the exemplary
superintendents from the target population who were selected for participation in this
research met the established criteria. The five participants were between 51 and 60 years
of age and consisted of three female and two male superintendents. The superintendents
served elementary district populations that ranged from 2,000 to 22,000 students.
Major Findings

The purpose of the sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify how exemplary superintendents perceive their own political style and the political styles of their board members and to identify and explain the strategies these exemplary superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members.

There are several major findings from this research that evolved from the themes that were identified through the data collection and coding process. The major themes include political savvy, communication, build relationships and trust, governance, and coherence.

**Finding 1: Exemplary Superintendents Have the Political Acuity to Adjust Their Strategies in Working With Their Boards**

The exemplary superintendents in the study recognize that each board member has an individual style, varied needs, and unique interests, and they adapt their strategies to fit the political style and perspective of each board member as well as the situation. Although Superintendents 1, 2, and 3 all had multiple board members with the same political style, they could easily discuss how the strategies used with each board member would differ. The superintendents in the study all emphasized the importance of getting to know their board members so they could adapt their communication style and work with them individually. The superintendents in the study also stressed the importance of knowing the type and amount of information to provide to their board members, both individually and collectively, so the board would feel confident that they were making informed decisions. These exemplary superintendents also spoke of the importance of
knowing the constituency groups and the individual interests of each board member and leveraging those connections when needed to accomplish goals or maintain district focus.

Across all interviews, the three top-ranked strategies involved political savvy: “anticipate and be proactive,” “understand their priorities and who they represent,” and “bring the right attitude.” This was followed by the building relationships and trust strategy of “know your board members,” and the communications strategies of “understand amount and kind of information to give them” and “proactive communication.”

Superintendents have opportunities to influence and build board support in order to move the organization forward. A politically savvy superintendent understands that a primary focus of their work includes managing conflict and maintaining a working majority on their board. The superintendent who understands that, over time, the majority could change, can be more fluid and flexible in managing conflict and navigating the political complexity of the work. Superintendents must have the political acuity to adjust their strategies in working with their boards, as superintendent success and longevity is often a reflection of the superintendent’s ability to understand and work within the politics of the board and the community (Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009).

**Finding 2: Exemplary Superintendents Invest Time Getting to Know Their Board Members in Order to Build Relationships and Trust, Which is Foundational to the Superintendent-Board Relationship**

After political savvy, “know your board members” under building relationships and trust was the most frequently coded strategy across all interviews. Exemplary
superintendents understand the importance of knowing their board members, personally and professionally, as well as knowing their schedules and preferred methods of communication. All superintendents emphasized that they invest time every week in reaching out and connecting to their board members, both collectively and individually. This focus on building interpersonal relationships builds the foundation of trust, which facilitates good communication, a culture of no surprises, and connectedness to the work of the district.

The superintendent’s ability to form strong relationships with the board collectively, as well as with each individual board member, is important to success of the governance team and the district. Building relationships is foundational to teamwork, and the governance team can get through challenging times when they have established interpersonal relationships and can focus on the district vision and unity of purpose (Townsend et al., 2007). To build effective relationships, superintendents should learn about their individual priorities, as these are important insights into the constituencies that the board represents. In addition, a superintendent should look for ways to allow the board to be publicly visible in positive ways, share in the credit of the district’s accomplishments, and make governance a rewarding experience (Gorman, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Townsend et al., 2007).

Establishing trust with and among school board members can be challenging, especially following an election when there is turnover on the board. Campbell and Fullan (2019) explained that trust has little to do with mutual agreement and is more about respect and understanding. Trust is established when people feel listened to, understood, and respected. When members of the governance team can believe that their
colleagues are honorable, ethical, and honest, they can disagree yet still find common
ground through the shared vision and values of the organization (Campbell & Fullan,
2019). The superintendent can further establish trust by protecting the board and their
public demeanor, through establishing a culture of no surprises, carefully working behind
the scenes to ensure that there is no public embarrassment for the board and the district in
controversial situations (Houston & Eadie, 2005).

Finding 3: Exemplary Superintendents Focus on Establishing Open and Proactive
Communication With Their Board Members

The superintendents in the study emphasized that it is important to know their
board members so that they can understand and prepare for the amount and type of
information they need. As board members come to the board with a variety of
backgrounds, skills, and preparedness, it is important to provide them with the level of
information they will need to make informed decisions and respond to questions from the
community. The superintendents also stressed the importance of proactive
communication with the board so their board members are kept informed and frontloaded
for what they may hear in the community. They also emphasized that it is important to
have open communication with board members and to use active listening skills, so they
can listen to their concerns or be able to understand what they are hearing from
constituents.

The ability to effectively communicate, to provide timely and relevant
information with clarity and frequency, is perhaps the most important skill a
superintendent needs (AASA, 2006, 2007; Antonucci, 2012; ECRA, 2010; Waters &
Marzano, 2007). CSBA’s (2018) Superintendent Governance Standards emphasize that
communication is foundational to building relationships and establishing trust with the board, by providing all board members with access to information and recognizing the importance of proactive and responsive communication. In addition, communicating a common vision is an important component of working with the board as part of a governance team.

McAdams (2009) echoed these sentiments, stating, “Communicate, communicate, communicate” (p. 8), because the board wants to stay informed, know what the superintendent is considering, and be involved in planning. Communication protocols support a positive board-superintendent working relationship, and a commitment to proactive communication ensures a culture of no surprises. Protocols can include how to handle inquiries of staff or the receipt of complaints as well as expectations around updates from the superintendent. McAdams emphasized the importance of resolving constituent complaints quickly. When the district can establish a culture of customer service that responds efficiently and effectively to parent or community concerns, the result will be the avoidance of board members becoming directly involved in problem-solving.

Finding 4: Exemplary Superintendents Are Purposeful in Their Work With Their Boards to Establish a Governance Team

The superintendents in the study ranked governance as the top strategy for working with all political styles. Across all interviews, the superintendents reflected that managing and educating the board about their parameters and boundaries was the core of the superintendent’s work that kept the board functioning in the role of governance. Working with the board as a whole depends on governance, to ensure that board
members understand their role and the importance of governing as a body. Working with the board on governance will help to ensure that board members are equipped when they are out in the community as an individual. The superintendents emphasized that it is important to provide all board members with the same information at the same time, to build their capacity, to use legal counsel and educate them on the law and liability, and to make sure they have the information they need to make informed decisions.

Campbell and Fullan (2019) found that high-performing superintendents were purposeful in their work with their boards, highly transparent with information, and saw governance as an integral part of their work. In addition, high-functioning superintendents supported the board in developing systems thinking and strategic planning, leading the board in establishing norms and protocols for understanding roles and responsibilities, ensuring accountability and collaborative decision-making, maintaining confidentiality, and managing public manner and demeanor (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Maricle, 2014; Townsend et al., 2007; Witherspoon, 2008).

**Finding 5: Exemplary Superintendents Bring a Positive Attitude to Working With the Board**

Political savvy was ranked in the top two themes across all political styles. Exemplary superintendents recognize that board members are often elected to the board with limited knowledge and experience in the daily operations of school districts but with the desire to make a positive impact in their communities through public service. These exemplary superintendents view the board as an asset and a partnership that can be utilized in leading the district and see their responsibility to build their capacity and
educate them in governance. In addition to onboarding, exemplary superintendents are committed to the ongoing education of their board members, investing the time to provide them with the appropriate information they need in order to make informed decisions.

Houston and Eadie (2005) emphasized that the majority of elected board members truly want to do a good job of governing the schools, believe in ensuring a high-quality education for students of the community, and are committed to public service. Superintendents can nurture support by finding appropriate ways to involve their board in district activities, engage them in agenda-linking to accomplish goals, work to build coalitions within the business community, network with local government leaders, and ensure the board receives favorable press (Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009). In addition, a politically savvy superintendent recognizes and respects the various perspectives represented by board members and other stakeholders and ensures opportunities for adequate input, which represents diverse viewpoints that will help inform board decisions (CSBA, n.d.-b; Tallerico, 1989).

**Finding 6: Exemplary Superintendents Rely on Political Strategies When Working With Board Members Who Have an Assertive Political Style or Are Driven by Self-Interest**

Fourteen of the 25 board members in the study were perceived to have assertive political styles of challenger, arranger, or strategist, or they were perceived to be motivated by self-interest, identified as challengers or planners, making up 56% of the board members in the study. Political savvy was the most frequently coded strategy for working with political styles that are assertive or motivated by self-interest. Strategies
for political savvy that were most frequently coded across these politically assertive and self-motivated political styles were “anticipate and be proactive,” “understand their priorities and who they represent,” “bring the right attitude to the work,” and “make them part of the solution.” The strategy of “use the board president and other board members” was highlighted as an effective strategy with all of the assertive political styles of board members. In addition, “anticipate and be proactive,” “understand their priorities and who they represent,” and “bring the right attitude to the work,” were the most frequently coded strategies across all interviews, making these high-leverage strategies to use with all political styles of board members.

A politically savvy superintendent understands that a primary focus of their work includes anticipating and proactively managing conflict in order to maintain a good relationship with their board and move their district forward (Cuban, 1985; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009). Cuban (1985) stated, “Since conflict is embedded in the very nature of the superintendency, a school chief who wishes to be perceived as effective must, to some degree, be a politician” (p. 29). According to Bjork et al. (2002), superintendents who realize that conflict can advance or destabilize district efforts will be more successful if they pay attention to the politics of education within their local communities.

Politically savvy superintendents are aware of how board members have differing priorities and are connected to different stakeholders in the community because board membership often reflects the interests and priorities of the community they serve. A politically savvy superintendent may take a more neutral stance on issues that divide the board, allowing them to align their support on issues with board majority, while having
the political acuity to maintain an amicable working relationship with the remaining board members. The superintendent who understands that, over time, the majority could change, can be more fluid and flexible in managing conflict and navigating the political complexity of the work (Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985).

**Finding 7: Superintendents Use the Board President and Other Board Members to Manage Conflict on the Board, Especially With Board Members Who Have Assertive Political Styles**

The superintendents in the study enlisted the help of the board president and other board members to manage conflict within the board. Superintendent 3 emphasized that she personally never had a conflict with one of her arrangers, but stated, “I made sure I spoke to the board president about what I was doing with this board member before the board meeting.” She further said, “I coached the board president on how we’re going to work to support this board member to get through this.” Superintendent 4 shared his experience in working with his arranger:

She’s very strong willed. If you don’t have a good rationale or it’s not supported by people she respects, it’s not going to get through. It took me a while to figure that out and to learn that, maybe the hard way a few times.

He learned to rely on his board members who had history with the arranger, and could give him advice on how to work with her. Superintendent 5 relied on her balancer to help manage conflict between the challenger and strategist. She stated, “He’s able to see both sides and is able to help.” She further explained that the balancer is able to assist in maintaining good working relationships on the board: “He is the one who really is able to
work with the challenger. So this is the person I go to when I have a particular crisis or if something’s happening with our challenger.”

Conflict on the board can jeopardize coherence efforts. When the board is experiencing difficulty in finding common ground, Campbell and Fullan (2019) emphasize that, “It is extremely important for the board not to give up but to take the time to try and work together, even in the face of deep differences and difficulties, to forge professional, respectful relationships” (p. 22-23). To govern effectively, the board and superintendent must act on behalf of the children they serve, which is a profound responsibility and fulfills the moral imperative.

Facilitating effective deliberation and managing conflict are some of the most important responsibilities of the board president, and an effective superintendent builds a positive, productive working relationship with the board president to facilitate a high-functioning governance team (CSBA, 2019a; Houston & Eadie, 2005). The work is complex and navigating conflict requires patience and resolve (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). When the board is experiencing conflict with a trustee, Campbell and Fullan (2019) recommends reserving judgement, using good listening skills to remain open to diverse opinions, stay focused on the content of the message, and not taking disagreement personally. However, Campbell and Fullan (2019) caution that, at some point, the board cannot allow a dissonant voice or disruptive behaviors to be a barrier, and the board must move forward in fulfilling their governance responsibilities to the students they serve.

**Unexpected Findings**

There were four unexpected findings from this research study. First, the superintendents were politically assertive and engaged but were motivated more by
organizational interest than the board members. The second unexpected finding was that all three female superintendents in the study identified their political style as strategist. The third unexpected finding was that the one superintendent who identified as a planner was an outlier in the thematic study. And lastly, the final unexpected finding was that coherence was ranked as the lowest strategy across the board member political styles.

**Unexpected Finding 1: Superintendents Are Politically Assertive and Engaged but Are More Likely to be Motivated by Organizational Interest Than Board Members**

Three superintendents in the study identified as strategists, which is characterized by politically assertive and motivated by organizational interests. One superintendent identified as a developer, politically engaged and driven by organizational interests. Only 36% of board members were perceived to have a political style that was focused on organizational interests, compared to 80% of the superintendents. This disconnect could present a potential blind spot for superintendents, so it is important for superintendents to understand the political orientation of their board members and develop strategies to work with them.

**Unexpected Finding 2: All Three Female Superintendents in the Study Identified as Strategists**

The superintendents in the study included three strategists, one developer, and one planner. All three strategists were female. This finding aligns with those of other members of the thematic team, who identified the primary political style of female superintendents as strategists (Winston, 2019). Strategists display courage in support of the organization’s goals, take reasonable risks, empower and involve others in collaborative decision-making, and are skillful in planning ways to gain support.
However, strategists can also be so dedicated to the organization that they “suffer burnout” (White et al., 2016, p. 76). It is important for a strategist to surround themselves with a strong team, which can help them maintain the work and a positive outlook (White et al., 2016).

**Unexpected Finding 3: The Superintendent Identified as Driven by Self-Interest is an Outlier**

One superintendent, a male, identified as a planner, engaged politically and driven by self-interests, which is an outlier to the other superintendents in the study, who were driven by organizational interests. Across the thematic study, superintendents were overwhelmingly driven by organizational interest, primarily self-identifying as strategists and developers. Planners are moderately engaged politically and focus more on self-interests. Before taking action, “planners assess risk to their own security” and “are very careful and vigilant in the way they go about their political activity” (White et al., 2016, p. 73). Planners have excellent attention to detail, understand the law, regulations, and policy, and are diligent about creating timelines and success indicators on projects and plans. However, they may withhold information if they feel it personally puts them at risk, even if it would benefit the organization (White et al., 2016).

**Unexpected Finding 4: Coherence Was Not Ranked as a Highly Implemented Strategy Across the Board Member Political Styles in this Study**

Coherence refers to how a school system focuses and develops a shared understanding that guides the work and fulfills the moral imperative to students. Although all five superintendents in the study used coherence strategies, overall coherence was ranked as the lowest strategy used with five of the seven political styles.
reflected in the study: arrangers, supporters, challengers, adaptors, and balancers. Furthermore, coherence was ranked next to the lowest strategy with planners, strategists, and all political styles.

**Conclusions**

**Conclusion 1: Superintendents Who Do Not Have a Deep Understanding of Their Own Political Style Will Not Be Able to Adapt Their Strategies to Maintain Positive and Productive Working Relationships With the Different Political Styles of Their Board Members**

It is concluded that superintendents who do not have a deep understanding of their own political style will not be able to adapt their strategies to maintain positive and productive working relationships with the different political styles of their board members. Failure to understand one’s own political style and not consciously seek what influences, external or internal, are at play in the decision-making process could result in political blind spots. A politically savvy superintendent can discern the political orientation and interests of board members, understanding that anticipating and proactively managing political situations will help to avoid conflict, maintain good relationships with their board, and move the district forward (Cuban, 1985; DeLuca, 1999; Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009; White et al., 2016). The superintendent who understands that over time the majority could change, can be more fluid and flexible in managing conflict and navigating the political complexity of the work (Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985).

Politically savvy superintendents are aware that board members have differing priorities and are connected to different stakeholders in the community. A politically
savvy superintendent may take a more neutral stance on issues that divide the board, allowing them to align their support on issues with a board majority, while having the political acuity to maintain an amicable working relationship with the remaining board members. Superintendents who realize that conflict can advance or destabilize district efforts will be more successful if they can learn to navigate those political situations within their local communities (Bjork et al., 2002; Cuban, 1985).

**Conclusion 2: Superintendents Who Invest Time in Building and Maintaining Relationships Will Establish Trust With Their Board Members**

It is concluded that superintendents who invest time in building and maintaining relationships will establish trust with their board members. Exemplary superintendents understand the importance of knowing their board members, personally and professionally. This focus on interpersonal relationships builds the foundation of trust, which facilitates good communication, a culture of no surprises, and connectedness to the work of the district.

Establishing trusting relationships on the governance team is an essential priority for a superintendent. The superintendent’s ability to form strong relationships with the board collectively, as well as with each individual board member, is important to the success of the governance team and the district. The superintendent and board can get through challenging and uncertain times when they have established positive, respectful relationships and can focus on the district’s vision and unity of purpose (Townsend et al., 2007).

Establishing trust with and among a school board of individuals elected and representing different perspectives from the community could be challenging, especially
following an election where there may be turnover in the board. Establishing trust requires respect and understanding, as most people begin to trust someone when they feel listened to, understood, and respected. The superintendent needs to nurture a team dynamic that allows members of the governance team to disagree yet find common ground on organizational goals. When members of the governance team can believe that their colleagues are honorable, ethical, and honest, they can build the foundation for trust by understanding and respecting differences within the shared vision and values of the organization (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). In addition, a superintendent should look for ways to allow the board to be visible and share in the credit of the district’s accomplishments. Involving the board in awards ceremonies, highlighting successes at board meetings, and supporting attendance at local events will help spotlight the board in a positive light in the community (Gorman, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Townsend et al., 2007).

Conclusion 3: Superintendents Who Invest Time and Energy in Establishing Open Communication With Board Members, Individually and Collectively, Will Be Effective in Working With the Board

It is concluded that superintendents who invest time and energy in establishing open communication with board members, both individually and collectively, will be effective in working with the board. By understanding the amount and type of information to provide the board as a whole, as well as understanding each board member’s individual needs, the superintendents can work effectively with their board to ensure transparency and informed decision-making. Board members come to the board with a variety of backgrounds, knowledge, and preparedness; it is important to provide
them with the level of information they need to feel that they are making informed
decisions. In addition, it is important that superintendents establish open communication
with their board, frontload them with information, and use active listening skills. This
allows for the superintendent to be aware of what board members are hearing from their
constituents and to provide them with the information or talking points to support the
board in responding to questions in the community.

The ability to effectively communicate is a critical skill for superintendents. The
superintendent is responsible for communicating the vision, mission, goals, and values of
the district, ensuring that the entire school community understands and supports the
direction in which the district is moving, especially the board and the staff. Successful
superintendents communicate timely and relevant information with clarity and frequency

Communication is foundational to building relationships, establishing trust with
the board, and building an effective governance team. When the superintendent provides
all board members with access to information, recognizes the importance of proactive
and responsive communication, and communicates a common vision, it positively
impacts the overall culture of the district (Axley, 1996; CSBA, n.d.-b). Board members
want to be informed, know what the superintendent is considering, and be involved in
planning. Proactive communication supports a positive board-superintendent working
relationship by ensuring a culture of no surprises. Effective superintendents implement
procedures, routines, and protocols to keep the board regularly updated with current
information, to frontload on potential issues, address questions that have come from the
board, and share ideas or initiatives. In addition, when superintendents respond quickly
to resolve constituent complaints and concerns, board members can stay focused on governance and are less likely to become directly involved in the daily operations of the school district (Gorman, 2018; McAdams, 2009).

Conclusion 4: Superintendents Who Invest in Governance Training and Clarification of Roles With the Board Will Be Effective in Creating a Productive Governance Team

It is concluded that superintendents who invest in governance training and clarification of roles with the board will be effective in creating a productive governance unit. Superintendents must manage and educate the board about their parameters and boundaries to keep the board functioning in the role of governance. Working with the board as a whole depends on governance to ensure that board members understand their role and the importance of governing as a body. To nurture a strong governance team, superintendents utilize strategies to support the board in understanding their role and to ensure that the board has the information needed to make informed decisions. Educating the board on governance ensures that board members are adequately equipped when they are out in the community as an individual.

Campbell and Fullan (2019) found that high-performing superintendents were purposeful in their work with their boards, highly transparent with information, and saw governance as an integral part of their work. In addition, high-performing superintendents supported the board in developing systems thinking and strategic planning, leading the board in governing as a unit, not trying to lead as individual board members with individual agendas. A superintendent who understands the importance of governance will work with the board to establish norms and protocols for understanding
roles and responsibilities, to ensure accountability, engage in collaborative decision-making, maintain confidentiality, and manage public manner and demeanor (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; Houston & Eadie, 2005; Maricle, 2014; Townsend et al., 2007; Witherspoon, 2008).

Effective superintendents support their board members in understanding the differences between their roles. They recognize, educate, and remind their board members that the board is responsible for governance, policy, finance, and evaluating the superintendent, and that the superintendent is responsible for leadership, management, accountability, and evaluation of staff. Effective superintendents involve the board in setting the direction for the district, developing, reviewing, and revising the district’s vision, mission, and goals, and updating the priorities based on the progress. Effective superintendents understand the importance of this focus and consistency and keep their board fully informed and engaged at a strategic level. Furthermore, effective superintendents hold regular conversations concerning the superintendent’s evaluation, ensuring that there is support for achieving goals and mutual agreement of the board and superintendent roles (Campbell & Fullan, 2019; CSBA, 2020; McGee, 2019).

**Conclusion 5: Superintendents Who View Their Board as an Asset Create a Partnership That Can Be Leveraged to Successfully Lead the District**

It is concluded that superintendents who view the board as an asset create a partnership that can be leveraged in successfully leading their district. Although board members may lack the educational experience or expertise to have in-depth knowledge of the school district, the politically savvy superintendent understands that board members often seek board membership out of a desire to serve and make a positive impact in their
communities. Superintendents must bring a positive attitude to their work with the board, viewing the board as an asset and a partnership that can be leveraged. They also must understand their responsibility to build capacity and educate their board members in governance. In addition to onboarding, superintendents must commit to the ongoing education of their board members, investing the time to provide them with the appropriate information they need in order to make informed decisions.

Houston and Eadie (2005) emphasized that the majority of elected board members truly want to do a good job of governing the schools, believe in ensuring a high-quality education for students of the community, and are committed to public service. Superintendents can nurture support by finding appropriate ways to involve their board in district activities, engage them in agenda-linking to accomplish goals, work to build coalitions within the business community, network with local government leaders, and ensure that the board receives favorable press (Hill & Jochim, 2018; Houston & Eadie, 2005; McAdams, 2009). In addition, a political savvy superintendent recognizes and respects the various perspectives represented by board members and other stakeholders and ensures opportunities for adequate input that represents diverse viewpoints, which will help inform board decisions (CSBA, n.d.-b; Tallerico, 1989).

**Conclusion 6: Superintendents Who Understand the Goal Orientation and Initiative of Their Board Members Will Be Effective in Working With Assertive Board Political Styles**

It is concluded that superintendents who understand the goal orientation and initiative of their board members will be effective in working with assertive board political styles. As public officials elected by the community they represent, board
members bring varying degrees of political orientation and initiative to their role.

Assertive political styles, especially challengers, can be difficult for both the superintendent and other board members to navigate. When provided with political styles as a point of reference, the politically savvy superintendent understands that the challenger is not rogue or a bad board member but instead displays some very specific characteristics. Challengers are decisive, enjoy getting credit for accomplishments, and respect someone who can compete but also cooperate. The politically savvy superintendent will be able to recognize these characteristics and deal with the challenger through proactive and careful planning. It is important for the superintendent to be aware of their political blind spots, plan meticulously, and thoroughly prepare. The superintendent can use strategies to work with a challenger by building support within the board, using the board president and other board members to maintain the vision and priorities of the board as a whole, and letting the challenger know that there is a broader power base at play if deciding to resist or discredit the superintendent’s proposal. Most importantly, when the superintendent has a political lens and is equipped with some strategies, they may find that the challenger has some good ideas that will work for the organization (White et al., 2016).

Working with assertive styles, especially challengers, can be daunting, if the political style is not well-understood or the superintendent is driven by organizational orientation. This disconnect could present a potential blind spot for superintendents, so it is important for superintendents to understand their own political style, as well as the political orientation of their board members, to develop strategies to work with them. Superintendents who can be assertive while also demonstrating cooperative intentions
will gain the respect of challengers who do not generally respect less assertive styles and may become more aggressive if they think the superintendent is weak. The superintendent who can remain open to listening to the challenger may find some good ideas and may be able to revise plans based on suggestions and critique. In addition, superintendents can leverage support through the arrangers and strategists by finding ways to link agendas and networks within the community (White et al., 2016).

**Implications for Action**

Superintendents must be politically intelligent and savvy, possess an understanding of their own political style, and have the ability to identify the political styles of their board members so they can have strategies to work with them. Survivability in the superintendency is based on the ability to maintain board support for goals; the most well-intentioned superintendents will find themselves struggling to survive if they do not know how to navigate the politics of the board. Based on the findings and conclusions in this study and supported by research, the following implications for action are necessary to support superintendents in understanding politics and building their capacity to work effectively with their board members, both individually and collectively.

**Implication 1: Professional Development in Political Styles During Aspiring Superintendent Academies**

Aspiring superintendents must have a knowledge of their own political style and have an understanding of the political styles of others. In addition, aspiring superintendents must be equipped with strategies to navigate and work with different
political styles in others. It is imperative that professional development for identifying political styles and learning about strategies be provided to aspiring superintendents.

The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) holds academies for new or aspiring superintendents to support the development of fundamental skills, such as district management, human resources, instructional leadership, and policies and procedures, which includes finance, education code, and superintendent contracts. The academy is “regarded as the ‘fast track’ into the superintendency,” which allows the participants to gain practical knowledge, build networks, and “avoid the pitfalls” (ACSA, 2020, para. 5). Although the content includes superintendent-board relationships, it lacks any reference to understanding political style and the politics of working with the board and community. The addition of political styles content to the aspiring superintendent academy curriculum will provide participants with an understanding and opportunity to apply the knowledge while in subordinate positions. The political styles content will increase awareness and provide an opportunity for aspiring superintendents to gain confidence in their ability to navigate political styles and explore strategies before they are thrust into the superintendency unprepared.

Implication 2: Professional Coaching for New Superintendents

New superintendents must be assigned an experienced, retired exemplary superintendent, knowledgeable in political styles, as a professional coach during their first 2 years in the position. ACSA must ensure that professional coaching support be included in the standard language of superintendent contracts. Furthermore, county superintendents can ensure that all new superintendents are provided with professional coaching by an experienced superintendent knowledgeable in political styles. Finally,
search firms must assist in attaining board support by negotiating a new superintendent’s contract terms to provide coaching support in the initial contract.

The role of the superintendent is unique, and too often, new superintendents learn the hard way. Subordinate positions are inadequate preparation for working with the board. As Superintendent 1 stated, “No matter how prepared you are, until you sit in the chair, you are not prepared.” The board is the superintendent’s primary responsibility, and a professional coach knowledgeable in political styles will support the new superintendent with strategies for building relationships and trust, communication, goal-setting around the superintendent’s evaluation, and establishing protocols for governance.

**Implication 3: Governance Training**

It is imperative that all governance teams commit to ongoing training during the duration of the superintendent’s contract. Requiring board training in operating as an effective governing team will set the direction and conditions for achieving coherence throughout the district. In addition, search firms must facilitate the work with superintendents and boards to encourage them that ongoing board training is included in the superintendent’s initial employment contract.

Although there are other opportunities for governance training, all governance teams should complete CSBA’s (2020) Masters in Governance training. CSBA provides outstanding training to governing teams, and the professional development is powerful because it is developed and driven by board members and their superintendents. CSBA focuses on nurturing governance skills, building capacity, and providing information on current critical issues that impact local decisions. Superintendents must encourage all
members of the governing team to commit to certification in Masters in Governance through CSBA.

**Implication 4: Board Governance Norms, Protocols, and Handbook**

All governance teams must come to agreement on the norms and protocols for how the board conducts business. The norms and protocols must detail how the board operates during meetings, handling concerns from staff or members of the public, initiating new ideas, requesting agenda items, and responding to requests for information. Once established, the norms and protocols can be incorporated into a governance handbook. In addition, it is critical that the norms, protocols, and governance handbook be reviewed annually or at any time there is a change in the board or superintendent.

The norms, protocols, and handbook should be developed during a board workshop, which could be facilitated by CSBA, a governance consultant, or the superintendent, to ensure a collaborative process that allows input from everyone on the governance team. The handbook must include the board’s mission, vision, and goals, in addition to the formalized board agreement on the norms and protocols for conducting board business. The handbook must also incorporate the roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent as well as the board’s processes for self-evaluation. Once finalized and adopted during a regular meeting of the board, the handbook should be published on the district website.

**Implication 5: New Board Member Onboarding Process**

Superintendents should work with their board president and other members of the board to develop a comprehensive onboarding process to prepare new board members for service. There is a common saying among superintendents, “New board member, new
board.” The board governs as a collective body, so the addition of a new board member changes the composition and dynamics of the governing team. Board members come from all walks of life from the community where they were elected to serve and may take office with only a limited understanding of the role of the board or superintendent (Briggs et al., 2017). The governance team should schedule board workshops to revisit the established vision, mission, and goals, the work that the board has accomplished to date, and the governance handbook. This will allow the new board to make adjustments and ensure that the new governance team is prepared to move forward with a unity of purpose that positively impacts coherence and equity for students. The superintendent should also continually build the capacity of the board, conducting board workshops in targeted areas, sharing articles of interest with weekly updates, and encouraging attendance at all state and local CSBA events.

**Implication 6: Political Styles Matrix to Identify the Political Style of Others**

Using the brief descriptions developed by the political thematic team for this study, a comprehensive political styles tool/matrix should be developed to assist in identifying the political styles of others. *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016) includes an Inventory of Political Styles and a scoring tool for analysis and self-evaluation of one’s own political style but does not have any such tool or matrix for identifying the political style in others. During this study, the exemplary superintendents were presented with brief descriptions of each political style, which were developed by the thematic team of researchers, to assist in the determination of the perceived style of each board member. Developing a comprehensive matrix, which has embedded attributes and descriptors from *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016), will
assist in analyzing and evaluating the perceived political style of others. This matrix will support the identification and implementation of strategies, especially in politically charged situations.

**Implication 7: The Politically Intelligent Leader Modules for Book Study**

The theoretical framework from this study, *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016), would be further enhanced by the development of presentation materials and a book study guide with activities for reading, whole and small group discussion, and reflection opportunities. *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016) is a valuable asset to anyone who seeks a superintendency or leadership position. The book contains much information that is easily understood and provides easily implemented strategies to work with other political styles. Professional development modules for a book study would support superintendent collaboration opportunities or allow superintendents to use the book for team building with their cabinet to promote a cohesive and coherent approach to handling internal district politics, such as dealing with the unions or special interest groups.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This research on political styles and the strategies that superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members serves the important purpose of looking into the dynamics of superintendent-board member relationships through the lens of politics. The findings and conclusions of this research, combined with those of the other nine peer researchers, can have a positive and profound impact on the field of school district governance, new and veteran superintendents, and
superintendent search firms. Based on the findings and conclusions in this research, there are several recommendations for further research in this area.

Recommendation 1: Meta-Analysis of the Political Styles Thematic Team

Dissertation Studies

It is recommended that a meta-analysis be conducted of the dissertations in the political styles thematic study. The thematic team was made up of 10 researchers who conducted a study on the perceived political styles of superintendents and their board members, and the strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members, using the political styles matrix of White et al. (2016) as a framework. Each researcher of the thematic team studied a different target population. Some studied urban, suburban, or rural school districts. Others focused on elementary, high school, or unified school districts. Other researchers focused on female or Latino superintendents. Some target populations were limited geographically. A meta-analysis would allow for a large amount of data to be analyzed, which could lead to new findings. These findings would lead to new conclusions that would add to the research on political styles and inform best practices as to the strategies that are effective with the different political styles of board members.

Recommendation 2: Political Strategies Used by Superintendents During Crisis

It is recommended that a phenomenological qualitative study be conducted to look at the political strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members during crisis. Superintendents are facing every-increasing times of crisis. Wildfires, school shootings, union activity, student suicide, and dealing with a worldwide pandemic that forced school closure to millions of students have required
superintendents to deal with politically-charged situations that continue to evolve.

Although this study was conducted during the midst of COVID-19, the superintendents in the study did not use any of the politics around school closure or dealing with the pandemic in their anecdotes about the strategies used with their board members. Perhaps the crisis was still too new and evolving, which could be why the superintendents utilized and reflected on examples from the past. Conducting a study on the strategies superintendents use during crisis management could add to the body of research and provide information for the professional development of superintendents.

**Recommendation 3: Superintendent Political Style and Career Longevity**

It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted to explore the relationship between political styles of superintendents and longevity. The researcher could seek to explore and explain the reasons for superintendent turnover to determine if change is due to the goal orientation and political motivation of the superintendent. It is further recommended to research the superintendent’s political style, in light of the age of the superintendent and the stage of their career, to determine if the superintendent’s political style varies at different phases of their career, which could possibly impact turnover.

Research shows that high numbers of superintendents are exiting their districts in less than 3 years, but little is known about the reason for superintendent turnover. Rapid superintendent turnover is regarded as a sign of dysfunctional governance team dynamics. A mixed methods study of political style during times of superintendent turnover could provide data regarding the reasons for the superintendent leaving and
whether the exit is due to the goal orientation of the superintendent to seek a position with increased enrollment, more pay, or elevated professional status.

**Recommendation 4: Political Strategies Study Conducted With Board Presidents**

It is recommended that a sequential explanatory mixed methods study be conducted with past and present board presidents to determine the strategies they use to work with the superintendent and other board members to form a united governance team. The superintendents in the study indicated that using the board president was a strategy they utilized when dealing with individual board members and governance issues. Conducting a study of the strategies board presidents use to work with the superintendent and other board members could help inform board member governance training to support effective governance teams.

**Recommendation 5: Strategies Used by Board Members Who Completed Governance Training**

It is recommended that a sequential explanatory mixed methods study be conducted with exemplary board members using completion of Masters in Governance training as a criterion to determine the strategies they use to work with other board members to form a united governance team. The superintendents in the study indicated that Masters in Governance was a strategy they believed in, and several repeated the training whenever they had a new board member. Conducting a study of the strategies board members use to work with other board members to form a cohesive governing team could help inform board member governance training.
Recommendation 6: Political Strategies for Working With Board Members Driven by Self-Interest

It is recommended that a phenomenological qualitative study exploring the strategies that superintendents use to work with challengers, planners, and analysts be conducted. Throughout the interviews, superintendents discussed the challenges of working with challengers and planners, the board members who were identified with a goal-orientation of self-interest. Conducting a study targeted at the strategies superintendents use to work with the political styles driven by self-interest would provide an in-depth understanding of these political styles and inform best practices for working with them effectively.

Recommendation 7: Political Styles and Gender Differences

It is recommended that a comparative study of the strategies that male and female superintendents use to work with the political styles of their board members be conducted. Although two members of the thematic team studied female superintendents as the target population, all other thematic team members included both male and female participants in their target population for their study. The data from this study could be analyzed for the strategies male and female superintendents use to work with the different political styles of their board members to see if men and women use different strategies when it comes to building relationships and trust, communication, or political savvy. The results of this comparative study could inform professional development for professional organizations such as ACSA, which provide specific trainings and venues for female administrators.
Recommendation 8: Replicate the Study Within Municipal Government

White et al. (2016) highlighted examples in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* from education, public sector, nonprofits, and private enterprise, showing that politics exists within all organizations. One needs only to turn on the news or pick up the local newspaper to become aware of conflict between the city manager and the city council, turmoil at the local water district, or the board of supervisors taking action to change the policies set by the county health department. This thematic study was limited to superintendents and board members; however, the same challenges of working with elected boards exist in all public entities, as citizen oversight over all aspects of government is foundational to the principles of democracy. Replicating this study with municipal government entities would add to the body of research and inform professional development opportunities for other managers and boards/councils in the public sector.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Politics are everywhere, infused into every aspect of our lives. As an experienced administrator with 34 years in the field of education, I was always one of those people who did not like politics on the job and felt that playing politics was unethical. Being included in this thematic study has been some of the most difficult days of my life, as I have grappled with my experience, my political orientation, and trying to understand how the political framework has played out in my career. With struggle comes growth. Simultaneously, being part of this study has afforded me the tremendous opportunity to delve deeply into the research, reflect upon my own political practices, and analyze how political strategies could be utilized in the pursuit of equity for students.
The time spent with exemplary superintendents was invaluable, and I learned from their individual and collective wisdom. As an experienced superintendent, I completely agree with Superintendent 1 who stated, “No matter how prepared you are, until you sit in that chair, you are not prepared. It’s going to be very different from anything that you think you have prepared for.” As a new superintendent, I was well-prepared to handle the daily management of the school district; however, I was not prepared for the work with the board, and especially for navigating the complexity of political issues, which is at the heart of a superintendent’s work. When faced with those who are motivated by self-interests, I had a political blind spot and I found myself ill-prepared to have strategies to deal with the situation. I can honestly say that I wish I would have read *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016) about 5 years earlier. I now feel compelled to support administrators within my influence to learn about the political framework and learn to navigate in ways that will benefit our students.

As I bring this research to a conclusion, I am thankful to have truly learned through this experience to be a more politically-aware, politically intelligent leader, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this important work. I have an appreciation for those who make the noble choice to run for office and make a difference, and I approach my work with an understanding that, no matter our goal orientation or level of assertiveness, we have the obligation to work together to fulfill the moral imperative of education for all students. The superintendent is critical to making that happen. The very future of education depends on it.
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Strategies for developing and maintaining good relationship with your board.


APPENDIX A

Brandman University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

March 20, 2020

Dear Susan Andreas-Bervel,

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

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

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

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

Invitation to Participate

Letter of Invitation

Study: The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work with the Political Styles of Board Members

March ____, 2019

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a sequential explanatory mixed methods research study about The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work with the Political Styles of Board Members. The main investigator of this study is Susan Andreas-Bervel, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a superintendent within a suburban elementary school district, who met the criteria for this study because of your known expertise as a superintendent who works effectively with school board members.

Five suburban elementary school district superintendents from Southern California will participate in this study through an electronic survey and an interview. This is part of a larger study being conducted by a team of researchers studying 50 exemplary superintendents in California. Participation in the survey should take 15-20 minutes. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time. Both are entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

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

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an email link to the electronic Survey Monkey survey. Participants will complete the survey and submit their responses. A face-to-face interview will be scheduled that will last approximately one hour. For the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a superintendent regarding strategies you use to work with the different political styles of board members. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose online surveys will also be used in order to facilitate responses.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the strategies superintendents use to work effectively with the different political styles of board members. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

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

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at sandreas@mail.brandman.edu. You can also contact Dr. Keith Larick by email at larick@brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

Susans Andreas-Bervel

Susan Andreas-Bervel
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University
APPENDIX C

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

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

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

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

Brandman University IRB

Adopted

November 2013
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

Date: 
To: 
From: Susan Andreas-Bervel, Doctoral Candidate 
Re: Informed Consent for Research Study 

INFORMED CONSENT FORM INFORMATION ABOUT: The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work with the Political Styles of Board Members 

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Susan Andreas-Bervel, Doctoral Candidate 

PURPOSE OF STUDY: This research study is being conducted by Susan Andreas-Bervel, a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study is to identify the political styles of exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents and school board members in Southern California as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies exemplary suburban elementary school district superintendents in Southern California use to work with the different political styles of school board members.

The research is based on the theoretical framework of White, Harvey and Fox (2016), which identifies nine political styles which are based on intersection of goal-orientation and assertiveness continuums. The quantitative data collection will be through a survey instrument, asking the participating superintendents to identify their own political style and the political style of their board members. The qualitative data collection will take place through individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore how the superintendents work with the different political styles of their board members.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted by in person. In addition, participants will complete an electronic survey using Survey Monkey. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Completion of the electronic survey and individual interview will take place March through April, 2020.

I understand that:

1. The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at my office or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience. Electronic surveys will also be utilized that will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.
2. I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to determine effective strategies that superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members. The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants at the participant’s request.

3. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Susan Andreas-Bervel, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Ms. Andreas-Bervel may be contacted by phone at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or by email at sandreas@mail.brandman.edu. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Keith Larick at larick@brandman.edu.

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

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

6. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent obtained. I understand that 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 Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-9937.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Participant or Responsible Party</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Political Styles Matrix 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, 2016.

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.

The survey will not open for responses unless you select 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.

Tell us a little about yourself.

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

* Years of experience as superintendent in this district

* Years of experience in this district

* Gender
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary

* Your current age

* 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; Bougie, Cohen, 2001; DeLuca, 1999; Rowe & Bougie, 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. (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; Poletta, 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).
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>
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<tr>
<td>Superintendent (self)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Board member 2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Board member 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member 7</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</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.
APPENDIX F

Audio Release

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Politics of Superintendent-Board Relationships: The Strategies Exemplary Suburban Elementary School District Superintendents Use to Work with the Political Styles of Board Members

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

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

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

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

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

_____________________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party Date
My name is Susan Andreas-Bervel, and I have worked in the public education for 33 years, and am currently serving for my 6th year as a superintendent. I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I am a part of a team conducting research to understand the political styles of superintendents and identify strategies exemplary superintendents use to work with different political styles of board members. The nine political styles used in this study are depicted by White, Fox, and Harvey’s (2016) framework of politically intelligent leadership, which you have already used in a survey to identify the political styles of your board members.

Political styles, as used in this research, are composed of a set of values, preferences, and priorities that are reflected in leader behaviors and attitudes in working with individual board members. Political strategies are actions or methods used to influence the behavior of others.

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview on political strategies and participating in our electronic survey prior to this interview. This interview is intended to further explore the information which you provided in the electronic survey. For your reference, I am providing you with the matrix of political styles, showing where you placed yourself and each one of your board members. I also brought a description of the different political styles for your reference that you may use at any point during the interview.

Our team is conducting approximately 50 interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you share, along with the others, will hopefully provide a clear picture of the thoughts and strategies exemplary leaders use to work with different political styles of board members in their organizations and will add to the body of research currently available.

The questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. The reason for this is to try to guarantee, as much as possible, that all interviews with participating superintendents will be conducted in a consistent manner.

**Informed Consent**

I want to remind you 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 not, 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? Then, let’s get started, and thank you so much for your time.

**Important Note for the Interviewer:** To ensure the 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:** The intent is to ask about each board member recognizing that it is possible, but not likely, that they could all be identified as having the same style. Asking for a story for each separate Board Member will enrich the data.

1. Board Member (#) has a style identified as ____________. Can you share a story about a time when this/these Board Member(s) 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 other occasions that posed 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?”

Political Styles (White et al., 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Goal Initiative</th>
<th>Self-Interest Goals</th>
<th>Blended Interests Goals</th>
<th>Organizational Interests Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>Developer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Political Style 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 interest. The styles are listed as self-interest, blended interests and organizational interest for each initiative: passive, engaged and assertive.

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; 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. (Hackman, 2002; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; White et al., 2016).
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**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**

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**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).
APPENDIX H

Political Styles Matrix Survey Feedback Form

Survey Critique by Participants

As a doctoral student and researcher at Brandman University, your assistance is so appreciated in designing this survey instrument. Your participation is crucial to the development of a valid and reliable instrument.

Below are some questions that I appreciate you answering after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the survey items. You have been provided with a paper copy of the survey, just to jog your memory if you need it.

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

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

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

4. Were the directions easy to understand, and you understood what to do? _____ If not, would you briefly state the problem?_____________________________ ________________________________________________

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

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

Thank you so much for your help.
APPENDIX I

Field-Test Participant Feedback Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

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

National Institutes of Health (NIH) – Protecting Human Research Participants

Certificate of Completion

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

Date of Completion: 05/15/2018

Certification Number: 2819353

National Institutes of Health
Office of Extramural Research