Political Styles and Strategies Used by Midsized Elementary School District Superintendents to Work With School Board Members

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Political Styles and Strategies Used by Midsized Elementary School District Superintendents to Work With School Board Members

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University
Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

May 2021

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May 2021
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This journey began with a 14-year-old girl sitting at the dining room table one early Saturday morning, before sunrise, planning out each step toward achieving a doctoral degree. Upon completion of my second master’s degree, I postponed entering a doctoral program. The years went by, and I had yet to begin my journey. Each time I met someone who had completed their doctoral degree, I felt a new push toward realizing my dream. I finally entered Brandman University to earn my doctorate in Organizational Leadership.

There were many people who encouraged and supported me along the way, and I would like to recognize and give my thanks to all of them. First, I would like to thank my husband Philip Sinatra who patiently provided me with the time to pursue my dream. He gave up many weekends and family time so that I could attend classes and immersion weekends as well as work on my dissertation. I also owe a lot of gratitude to my brothers and sisters, Michael Hoskins, David Hoskins, Robin Hoskins, Beth Hoskins-Magee, and Jonathan Hoskins, who have supported me throughout the years and encouraged me to never give up. They too understood when I could not travel home to Monterey for family get-togethers.

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ABSTRACT

Political Styles and Strategies Used by Midsized Elementary School District Superintendents to Work With School Board Members

by Christine L. Sinatra

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

Methodology: This study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory research design to collect quantitative data through an electronic survey to identify and describe the political styles of each superintendent and their board members. An in-depth qualitative interview process further explored each superintendents’ lived experience with using different political strategies with each of their board members’ political style.

Findings: A careful review of the mixed methods data from the 5 school districts participating in this study revealed a variety of findings. The major strategies used by the exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents to work with their board members included providing continual communication, meeting needs of their board members, building trust, empowering others, and knowing and communicating their political vision for the school district.

Conclusions: It was concluded that midsized elementary school district superintendents who want to ensure positive working relationships with board members of all political styles must commit to open, transparent communication as a bedrock strategy, meet the
needs of their board members by developing both professional and personal relationships with individual board members, build trust through authentic actions that create a united front for working toward district goals, create opportunities for board members to be empowered to work within their area of expertise, and share the district vision in a clear, concise vision statement.

**Recommendations:** Further research is recommended to explore the various options available to aspiring superintendents who may obtain positions as a superintendent early in their career and learn on the job instead of the more traditional track, study superintendents who are from organizations other than educational institutions, and explore a study comparing the various political strategies used by both superintendents and board members as they work together toward a common vision and goal attainment.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study the political styles and strategies of superintendents and school board members in a variety of school districts, 10 doctoral students, in collaboration with faculty members, developed a common interest in exploring the political styles and strategies that exemplary superintendents use to work with school 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 with a focus on nine political styles identified by White, Harvey, and Fox (2016). Each researcher administered a survey to at least five superintendents to identify the political styles of the superintendent and board members. The researcher then interviewed each of the five superintendents who participated in the survey to determine the political strategies that they use to work with school board members. To ensure thematic consistency and reliability, the team collaboratively developed the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, survey instrument, interview questions, and study procedures.

Throughout this study, the term peer researchers was used to refer to the researchers who conducted the study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied the political styles and strategies of superintendents and school board members with the following populations in California K–12 school districts: Bradley Tooker, Reggie Thompkins, and Tammy Blakely, suburban unified school districts; Jeffrey Tooker, high school districts; Regina Green, school districts led by Latino superintendents; Susan Andreas-Bervel, small suburban school districts; Leisa Winston, suburban unified school districts led by female superintendents; Maura Murabito, ROP
school districts led by female/minority superintendents; and Roni Jones, rural school districts.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The concept of politics has evolved throughout history whenever groups of people were competing for limited resources and power over those resources. Although many have attempted to define it, a fundamental component of politics is bound in the relationships of two parties and how they affect one another in their attempts to make and implement decisions.

The educational arena is not exempt from politics as there are many current issues and reforms at the national, state, and local levels that superintendents and school boards must be aware of and address. In 2019, some of the major political issues to be aware of included the continued implementation and oversight of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), new reforms from Congress, the debate over the country’s immigration policy, and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). These highly controversial issues often contribute to discord between the superintendent and stakeholders, including school board members. At the state and local levels, superintendents and school board members must continue to address declining funding while pressured to do more with less. New demands for public accountability add stress to the relationships at the top. The California School Dashboard depicts how well students are scoring on statewide assessments. The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) outlines the district’s goals and action plan to leverage resources to meet those goals (California Department of Education, 2019). These mandates require consensus to be successful, and yet members of the governance team of school boards and superintendents may have competing priorities.
In order to address the current political climate in education, superintendents and school board members must work in unison to lead teachers, parents, and communities toward producing 21st-century lifelong learners who, in turn, become productive citizens of the world (Kellogg, 2017; Townsend, Brown, & Buster, 2005). As a result, the relationships, daily interactions, and political motivations of school leadership play a large role in making important changes.

According to national commission reports and various other state task force reports dating back to 1983 and through the present day, the quality of public schooling is linked to the well-being of this country in this highly competitive global economy (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). These findings have emphasized the need for higher expectations in schools’ instructional practices and, as a result, major reforms in how schools are organized and governed. These findings have also emphasized the importance of the leadership not only of the school but also of the district.

As the chief executive, the superintendent’s complex and dynamic role is critical in creating a well-run successful school district. School board members have the authority to set policy that directs the work of their superintendents and consequently have the power to either continue their support or end their contract. The role of the superintendent has shifted from one of manager to one of political leader where the expectation is that he or she will possess an expanding inventory of skills and capacities in order to balance economic constraints, social problems, and accountability to the community and school board (Antonucci, 2012; Townsend et al., 2005; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005).
While superintendents and school boards have been researched between the 1960s and early mid-1970s, “Fusarelli and Petersen (2002) were disturbed by the lack of recent theoretical research on school boards and superintendents” (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005, p. 182). In the politically turbulent atmosphere of the 21st century, it is of the utmost importance that both the superintendents and the school board members develop and maintain strong, positive relationships to jointly navigate clear roles of policy making and administrative duties (Henrickson, 2018; Kowalski, 2013; Townsend et al., 2005). The “moral imperative” of leaders is to help to change the context and establish new principles that will impact new behavior for the better (Fullan, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, more research is needed on how successful superintendents use their political skills and strategies to work in unison with school boards toward common goals to meet the needs of this ever-changing world and the expectations for future graduates.

**Background**

The origin of the term *politics* (derived from “polis” meaning city and state) can be traced back to Ancient Greece. It was used to describe how society was divided into independent city-states that had their own system of government. In modern-day versions, politics is defined as what concerns the state (Leftwich, 2004). Therefore, when people enter the arena of public office, they are considered to be in politics (Leftwich, 2004).

The position of the school superintendent is considered a political entity as those occupying this position are responsible for overseeing multimillion-dollar budgets and the management of all human resources in a school district. Furthermore, they are charged with having expertise with curriculum and ensuring that all students receive a
high-quality education. Additionally, their role extends outside the school district to develop relationships with the community and other agencies in an effort to coordinate resources (Harmeier, 2016; Kowalski, 2013; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; Townsend et al., 2005).

Evolution of the Superintendent

The first school superintendent was hired in 1837. The position called for the coordination of programs, alignment of instructional practices among teachers, management of business practices, maintaining financial records, and developing purchasing processes among the schools. The superintendent was technically considered a secretary to the board of education (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Jackson, 2016; Kowalski, 2013). The first two administrators were employed as superintendents by large city school systems (Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky) in 1850 (Bjork et al., 2014).

By the 1900s, the role of the superintendent had emerged. At one time considered secretaries, they were now being recognized as teachers and scholars (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Jackson, 2016; Kowalski, 2013). During this time, most city school districts had established the position of district administrator. Kowalski (2005) stated that the need for an executive was in response to many changing conditions including the consolidation of rural school districts into larger ones, an establishment of state-mandated minimum curricula, passage of compulsory attendance laws, demands for increased financial accountability, and the press for efficiency. From these humble beginnings, the role of the superintendent continued to grow into a highly respected position throughout the 20th century in response to social and political changes within the United States.
In today’s increasingly political climate, becoming a superintendent calls upon the ability of that person to demonstrate expertise in the areas of leadership, pedagogy, policy making, school reform, federal and state accountability measures, finances, and politics and having the ability to build a system that supports student achievement. Additionally, the superintendent’s role has shifted from being that of a manager of the district to one of becoming a leader with a process-oriented approach emphasizing communication, connection, collaboration, community building, curriculum, and student advocacy within the school district (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Henrickson, 2018; Jackson, 2016).

**Importance of Politics**

Politics, when employed judiciously, can help to build up both the staff and the organization in order to attain a shared vision and goals (Townsend et al., 2005; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016). The relationships between board members and superintendents historically have been negative with the status of the superintendent being “at the pleasure of the board” (Harmeier, 2016, p. 26). Therefore, superintendents have found themselves managing the district based on the will of the board members and their political aspirations (Jackson, 2016). It is often in these circumstances, that the superintendent must delicately balance the politics of running an educational entity and satisfying the goals of the school board. When working together to align their values and goals, they can create a culture where those values and goals are more secure. Furthermore, when superintendents and school boards develop the kind of relationships where shared leadership emerges, it strengthens the foundations of the school district (Hurley, 2006; Townsend et al., 2005). More information is needed on the style and strategies superintendents use to forge this kind of relationship with their boards.
Theoretical Foundations

Throughout history there have been many philosophers, beginning with Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli who have contributed to defining and adding meaning to the term politics. Most can agree that the focus of politics is on power defined as the ability of one political actor to get another actor to do what he or she wants. Many philosophers have attempted to define its parameters based on the state of affairs at the time of their rule (Roskin, 2016). Over time, many theories have been developed to define the source and control of such power. Theoretical foundations are guidelines giving the researcher direction in empirical inquiry identifying the research, which may yield reliable knowledge (Leftwich, 2004). The following overview explains each theory and how power is utilized.

Elite theory suggests that every society has a select ruling minority that holds all the decision-making power. These select few are determined through “elite recruitment” (Lopez, 2013, p. 1). Pluralist theory is based on a democratic model whereby anyone can influence political decisions; usually individuals form groups around common causes. These groups are not bound by ideology or long-range objectives (Kowalski, 2013). Rational choice theory is a social phenomenon assuming that the “rational choice of the actor” is based on “macro-micro transition,” which is defined as the actor choosing among alternatives that he or she believes will maximize the desired social outcome (Sato, 2013, p. 1).

Normative theory relies on what is morally right or just (Zakhem & Palmer, 2017). Empirical theory is based on observation and experiment, derived from a sense of data that can be tracked back to the earliest days of political thought (Leftwich, 2004).
Finally, power theory is the ability of one actor in the relationship to carry out their will regardless of the resistance on the part of the other actor (Leftwich, 2004). These theories form the foundation for the power and influence that are part of today’s organizational politics and are elaborated upon in Chapter II.

**Theoretical Framework**

The framework used for this study was based on the *The Politically Intelligent Leader* by White et al. (2016). Organizational politics is “the use of power toward and through other people in an environment inside and outside the organization” (White et al., 2016, p. ix). As previously mentioned, a central role of the superintendent is to build relationships with stakeholders both within the organization and in the community.

To attract supporters and lead them toward a common vision, a leader must be able to articulate their beliefs in a way that motivates others to work toward a common goal. An effective leader has the ability to convert ideas and beliefs into action through political intelligence. The politically intelligent leader has the ability to lead the organization in the right direction while considering the needs, values, emotions, and motivations of the stakeholders (White et al., 2016). Political intelligence helps the superintendent navigate through the many demands of leading a school district and working with the various entities to develop an organization that not only provides quality education to all students but can rise to the many political challenges that face today’s schools. White et al. (2016) proposed that there are five things that must be mastered in order to become a politically intelligent leader: (a) know and analyze the situation, (b) know what the correct strategies are and how to apply them, (c) readjust as needed, (d) use a moral compass as a guide during difficult times, and (e) know that there
will be times when things will require some special strategies. While these strategies seem straightforward, they require insight, preplanning, and time.

Casserly, Snipes, Horwitz, and Soga (2008/2009) stated that “superintendents must unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose” (p. 1). Superintendents must be able to balance these highly politicized groups while maintaining the power to bring them together for a common purpose. There are many factors that contribute to the success or failure of superintendents; however, balancing relationships within these political contexts seems to be a prime indicator (Jackson, 2016; Townsend et al., 2005). As a result, politics is a factor that all leaders must understand and become comfortable with in order to wield their power toward a mutually agreed upon vision.

**The Political Styles Matrix and Continuum**

All leaders possess a political style that influences their actions and which drives how they respond to others as well as their level of involvement in the work environment. White et al. (2016) developed a matrix of nine political styles and two continuums based on goal orientation and personal initiative that will serve as the framework for this study. The nine political styles are identified as “1. The analyst, 2. The Adaptor, 3. The Supporter, 4. The Planner, 5. The Balancer, 6. The Developer, 7. The Challenger, 8. The Arranger, 9. The Strategist” (p. 71). The goal orientation continuum identifies the leaders’ commitment to self-interests, blended interests, or organizational interests. The political initiative continuum determines their level of energy and inventiveness (assertive, engaged, or passive) in working toward their goals. The use of this matrix and continuums can help both superintendents and board members understand their own
styles and how to utilize the political styles and strategies to help move toward common goals and desired outcomes.

**School District Governance**

School districts are governed by elected school boards and superintendents who are appointed by the respective school board. The school board plays a key role in setting policy, monitoring performance, and formulating organizational strategy. The functioning of the relationship between the school board and superintendent can have significant implications for the district’s ability to meet its goals (Grissom, 2010). Building a culture of shared leadership begins with the relationship between the board and the superintendent. All stakeholders including the board, administrators, teachers, parents, and the community need to work together to develop strong relationships that foster a culture of mutual respect and trust (Hurley, 2006).

**The Role of the Board**

The governing school board provides oversight and plays a key role in setting policies, monitoring performance, and formulating organizational strategy. The board sets the direction for the district through the identification of expected results and the careful analysis of data to determine if the results have been achieved (Grissom, 2010; Townsend et al., 2005). The school board also has the authority to reinforce the work of the superintendent and consequently has the power to either continue the school board’s support or terminate the superintendent’s contract.

**The Role of the Superintendent**

The superintendent’s role is to implement and manage the policies, procedures, and legal mandates from the government and to oversee all of the employees within the
school district. The diverse role of the superintendent requires him or her to interact with many different levels of stakeholders as well as answer to the school board. Butcher (2014) stated that both superintendents and board members agree that the superintendent must have “a vision for the school district, establishing effective and ongoing communication systems regarding their role in leading the district, and in being a model for moral and ethical decision-making” (p. ii). Therefore, the superintendent must work closely with the board to communicate and develop political strategies.

**The Politics of the Superintendent and the School Board**

Although much of the research focuses on the dysfunction of the relationship between superintendents and school boards, more current research indicates that an effective board is one that impacts student achievement. This requires a well-crafted working relationship with all stakeholders, especially the superintendent (Devarics & O’Brien, 2011). Moody (2011) maintained that an important step in building trustful relationships begins with boards and superintendents viewing themselves as a team and carefully crafting and clarifying their roles, responsibilities, and expectations of their respective roles.

Becoming a successful superintendent in the 21st century will be determined by those who can develop and maintain harmonious working relationships with their boards and community groups. Their success will be determined by their excellent communication skills, their ability to understand the instructional process, and their ability to form coalitions that ensure educational and financial survival of the public school system (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). While the body of current research supports developing strong, collaborative relationships between school boards and
superintendents, it has been noted that additional research is warranted in the area of identifying strategies for superintendents to solidify trusting relationships with school board members (Bowers, 2016). Superintendents who are unwilling or unable to accurately read the organizational culture of the school system and surrounding community and are unwilling to invest time cultivating relationships with key stakeholders are unable to lead because no one will follow them, including the board (Fusarelli, 2006).

The degree to which the school board and the superintendent function well together can have significant implications for the organization’s management and its ability to reach its goals (Grissom, 2010). Therefore, having a thorough understanding of the political influences between the superintendent and the school board will provide insight into how the relationships between the two entities share this important power structure (Mountford, 2004).

Mountford (2004) cited a growing body of research that depicts the relationship between the school board and superintendent as being controversial, arduous, and challenging. However, other researchers depict a successful leader as one who can bridge divides between boards, communities, staff, and parents by developing a core vision around school improvement (Fusarelli, 2006).

While understanding the historical perspective of the political relationships between superintendents and school boards provides a foundational context, researchers must continue to discover how this intricate relationship can be solidly forged so that schools may continue to meet their goals and serve the ever-changing diverse populations. School boards and superintendents must recognize that team building and
A collaborative effort is an ongoing process (Moody, 2011). The context of future research needs to focus on (a) understanding the context of educational leadership within the current political climate, (b) building cooperative work relationships to foster a common vision and goal setting, and (c) learning how to utilize political differences to strengthen the leadership base (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005).

Current research has focused on school principal leaderships largely due to the fact that they outnumber superintendents in educational systems. There is far less theoretical research focused on superintendents and school boards, although the relationship between the superintendent and the school board has a significant influence on the quality of a district’s educational program (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985; Fusarelli & Petersen, 2002; Petersen, 2005).

**Statement of the Research Problem**

The role of the school district superintendent has been shaped over time by economic, social, political, and technological changes; therefore, it has emerged to meet the needs of the communities that are served. The district’s school board, consisting of five to nine community-elected citizens, has the responsibility of making policy and providing oversight of the district’s day-to-day operations (Bjork et al., 2014). The board also has the authority to hire and oversee the school district’s superintendent. As legal representatives of the state government, school boards are charged with ensuring that regulations and laws are followed as well as setting policy. The superintendent makes recommendations, oversees enforcement, and provides leadership to the district and schools in order to ensure that the policies are adhered to. Therefore, a positive
relationship between the superintendent and school board is vital to the success of the school district (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011).

Politics is an inevitable fact of any organization including school districts. Superintendents must forge the way through developing strong and mutually trusting relationships so that they can make recommendations to resolve problems, plan budgets, and build teams both inside and outside of the organization. Within the context of superintendents as political representatives of their state, communities, and boards, it becomes paramount that these leaders not only understand their own political styles and strategies but also the strategies and styles of those that with whom they are working (White et al., 2016). Crowley (2011) suggested that getting to know what motivates and inspires people, both personally and professionally, allows one to become a more effective leader. The balance between politics and professional relationships between superintendents and their boards relies upon the ability of the superintendent to build and maintain relationships and identify strategies that open the lines of communication and build management strategies (Jackson, 2016).

Although the literature has pointed to the relationship between the superintendent and the school board as being central to the success of the school district, this relationship has not been the focus of well-designed research studies (Bowers, 2016). Primarily, the research focuses on developing strong relationships and communication and defining the roles for superintendents and board members as well as building trust (Bowers, 2016; Hanover Research, 2014; Jackson, 2016). Petersen and Fusarelli (2005) reiterated their findings from 2002, that they believe that the majority of research on this topic was done
between the late 1960s and early-mid 1970s. They further asserted that subsequent studies completed were based on constructs that are decades old.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon current researchers to develop new conceptual terrain to expand the research of the past few decades. For example, Petersen and Fusarelli, (2005) suggested that further research in the area of how superintendents and board members view the power dynamic of their roles may help these actors better understand and leverage the power relationships in order to attain their goals. Researching and developing new constructs of political styles and strategies is needed to expand the understanding of the relationship between the superintendent and the school board.

**Purpose Statement**

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

**Research Questions**

1. How do midsized elementary school superintendents perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies midsized elementary school superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members?
Significance of the Problem

The work of school district superintendents continues to become more and more complex as they are charged with developing a shared vision, open communication, and collaborative efforts with their school board members. When working together to align their values and goals, both entities must create a culture where those values and goals are secured (Hanover Research, 2014; Harmeier, 2016; Moody, 2011). In 2011, Devarics and O’Brien indicated that having positive school outcomes was directly related to a positive and stable relationship between school boards and the superintendents. This relationship between the superintendent and school board has often been described as involving turmoil and disagreement. Although the literature points to the fact that there are clearly defined roles for both superintendents and school board members, much of this turmoil can be attributed to role confusion or lack of adherence to defined roles (Hanover Research, 2014; Jackson, 2016; Moody, 2011).

Additionally, the connection between the superintendent and the board is critical when forging a productive working relationship (Eadie, 2008; Hurley, 2006; Moody, 2011). As a result of the current political climate of increasing accountability measures and balancing the district’s governance between the superintendent and the school board, it has become even more critical for the two entities to develop a relationship where strengths, emotional intelligence, and differences in political styles can be utilized to enhance goal attainment (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Rath, 2008; White et al., 2016).

In a survey conducted between 2006 and 2009, it was concluded that many superintendents leave their positions after just 3 years citing many reasons including conflicts with the school boards (Jackson, 2016). Given the current changes in
educational reforms and politics, superintendents need the backing of their boards if they are to endure such complex changes. According to Becca Bracy Knight, Executive Director of the Board Center for the Management of School Systems in Los Angeles, the board and the superintendents must agree on the changes they want to see and what they are willing to and/or prepared to give up in order to get there (Frey, 2012). Shared leadership between the superintendent and the school board provides a firm foundation for healthy democratic decision-making by aligning values and goals and creating a common culture (Hurley, 2006). The relationship and political constructs between the superintendent and board affect not only the district but also the local community (Kowalski et al., 2011; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Another primary role of the superintendent is to make recommendations to the board for adoption and implementation. The board’s acceptance or rejection of such recommendations has far-reaching implications for the district and the community. Therefore, how the recommendations are presented is reliant upon the ability of the superintendent to know and read the will of the various board members and to utilize political strategies that will promote common goals and values (Hurley, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2011).

This study provides research in understanding how politics affect the interactions between district superintendents and school board members in the day-to-day operations of the schools. The study will assist superintendents in identifying the political strategies that are most effective with various styles used by school board members and how to use political strategies to reach common goals. This study may also provide the context for developing future professional development programs that would assist both superintendents and school board members to gain an awareness of their own political
styles and to learn how to use ethical political strategies to work toward common goals.

Professional associations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the California School Boards Association (CSBA) may also utilize this information to develop professional learning opportunities that explore the political styles and strategies for both superintendents and board members. This study may also contribute helpful information for executive coaches to provide further opportunities for school leaders to continually hone their political strategies and skills. Finally, universities offering administrative credentialing programs and doctoral programs may use these findings in coursework, fieldwork, and to continue with future research.

**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 interests. The styles are listed as self-interests, blended interests, and organizational interests 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 they make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (California School Boards Association [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, which 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 (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, Graham, Tomal, & Wilhite, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; Duffy, 2006; White et al., 2016).

**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 he or she devotes 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 stakeholders.
to accomplish organizational goals (DeLuca, 1999; Fairholm, 2009; Tucker, 1995; White et al., 2016).

**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to five midsized elementary school district superintendents (serving 4,000 to 11,000 students) in Orange County, Los Angeles County and San Diego County. An exemplary superintendent in this study was a school district leader who had served at least 3 years in their school district, had positive governance team relationships, and demonstrated at least four of the following five criteria:

- The superintendent was identified by a panel of experts as knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- The superintendent had received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization such as ACSA.
- The superintendent had received recognition by their peers.
- The superintendent held memberships in professional associations in their field.
- The superintendent had participated in CSBA “Masters-in-Governance” training or other governance training with at least one board member.

**Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I provided an overview and theoretical foundations of politics and its relationship to superintendents and their school boards, study variables and definitions, statement of the research problem, the research purpose, research questions, significance of the problem, and the delimitations. Chapter II provides what is known about the...
relationships between the superintendent and school board and the political strategies that they may use in working together. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology as well as the study population and sampling procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings and analysis of the study. Chapter V presents the findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores the importance of understanding how the political styles of superintendents and their board members impact their work in leading the district by identifying aligned political styles that are most likely to achieve common organizational goals. An extensive review of the literature included the following topics: (a) the evolution of politics, (b) the importance of politics in leadership, (c) theoretical background on five foundations of politics, (d) effective leadership and its relationship to school district governance, (e) the roles of the superintendent and school board, and (f) a theoretical framework for political styles and strategies (White et al., 2016). The chapter concludes with a summary of all topics explored.

Politics

Politics is the activity through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live. As such, it is essentially a social activity, inextricably linked, on the one hand, to the existence of diversity and conflict, and on the other, to a willingness to cooperate and act collectively. Politics is better seen as a formal set of procedures and actions whereby people agree to resolve differences and conform to public policies to pursue common purposes (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004).

Evolution of Politics

A review of the history of politics is critical in understanding how legitimate power has been defined, distributed, and justified since its earliest conception. The importance is derived from understanding how politics and political power are exercised and restrained to shape the lives of individuals who reside and work in various political institutions within their communities (Barker, 2012; Leftwich, 2004; Sheehan, 2015).
Furthermore, Sheehan (2015) illuminated two imperatives that link the ancient roots of histography and politics that have contributed to the foundations of the modern-day political climate. The first imperative is the need to affirm the identity of the political community by studying its roots, while the second imperative allows the researcher to glean the lessons learned from the past in an effort to help solve the political problems of the present.

Many ancient philosophers such as Confucius in China (551-479 BC), Kautilya in India (300 BC), and historian Ibn Khaldun in North Africa (1332-1406) have all contributed to the study and analyses of politics in the Arabic-speaking world (Barker, 2012; Leftwich, 2004; Roskin, 2016). They tended to view the world through a lens of the religious realm based on faith and trust. While the Greek philosophers Plato (428/427-348/347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) have been credited with the explication of politics in the West, their view was through the lens of thought and reason (Barker, 2012; Leftwich, 2004; Roskin, 2016). The Greeks had a sense of value for the individual, which may have led to the concept of a free citizenship in a self-governing community. This concept formed the Greek city-state (polis) producing growth and political thought regarding the conditions of its subjects. Each city-state had its own form of government, the largest of which was Athens often referred to as the cradle of democratic government (Barker, 2012; Leftwich, 2004). Politics was understood to refer to the affairs of the state translating to the modern definition of what concerns the State. Therefore, when people hold public office, they are said to be “in politics” (Leftwich, 2004; Roskin, 2016). Both Plato and Aristotle focused on perfecting the polis (city-state), which they defined as both society and the political system.
Next, Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), a student of Aristotle, conquered the Mediterranean world and the results of his conquest produced new political forms where society and the political system were beginning to be viewed as separate entities (Roskin, 2016). After his death, his empire became divided among his generals and this shift also brought about a shift in thought, which produced a new understanding of politics. This new idea became thought of as the idea of a natural law that was applied to all human beings equally. Afterwards, many early Christian thinkers such as St. Augustine (354-430) embraced the idea of dual loyalty of Christians to both God and temporal rulers implying that the heavenly city was more important than the earthly one (Roskin, 2016). This led to the feeling of contempt for politics, and the knowledge that originated through Aristotle’s teaching was lost for 8 centuries until St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) argued that kingly authority should be limited by law and used for the common good. Dante (1265-1321) and the philosopher Marsilius of Padua (c. 1280-c. 1343) argued for a single world government and secularization placing state over church as the originator of laws (Barker, 2012; Roskin, 2016; Sheehan, 2015). Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) completed the secularization of politics that had been introduced by Marsilius, by introducing the modern idea of power, specifically, how to get it and how to use it. This viewpoint became the essence of politics shared by rational choice theorists as well as others (Leftwich, 2004; Roskin, 2016). The ideas and teachings of these ancient philosophers laid the foundations for modern-day politics.

Throughout time, politics has been understood in many different ways by philosophers and historians whose experiences were shaped by many different traditions. Politics has been viewed and explained as concerns of the state; conduct and management
of public matters; the use of debate and compromise to resolve conflict; and finally, the production, use, and distribution of resources (Barker, 2012; Leftwich, 2004). Therefore, the importance of politics and how people interact in various environments is explored next.

The Importance of Politics

The Greeks and Romans described politics as involving people within the community actively working together both politically and freely, as citizens, to achieve common goals or outcomes. This history is very important as lives can be limited or shaped by how the community exercises or restrains its power (Leftwich, 2004; Sheehan, 2015). Leftwich (2004) illustrated the importance of not only understanding the definition and history of politics but also developing political literacy. This term embodies having the knowledge, skills, and values (effective advocacy and cooperation) to be effective in public life. Furthermore, he argued that political behavior is intrinsic and can be found in every part of human behavior including collective activities whether private or public (Leftwich, 2004). Therefore, it can be said that if all human interaction involves some form of power and resource distribution, then politics actively exists in all aspects of people’s lives including the workplace.

Organizational politics exists as the daily governance of an institution and often involves both internal and external politics. Internal politics includes activities such as goal setting, creating change, building capacity for implementation, resolving conflict with employees and developing processes for accountability and feedback. External politics involves forces outside of the institution such as the local community (Leftwich, 2004; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; White et al., 2016). Furthermore, politics is an
inescapable feature of all organizations defining behavior as well as decision-making processes. Therefore, the importance of organizational politics and those who engage in its processes to gain influence and power can become the defining factors for either success or failure of an organization (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

**Leadership and Politics**

The term *organizational politics* has often been associated with a negative connotation and therefore many leaders shy away from becoming political within their organizations often leading to a lack of leadership and goal attainment. Instead of labeling politics as either “good” or “bad,” a well-rounded leader recognizes that politics is at the heart of all human interaction both within a social context and within the natural environment and therefore should be considered a value-neutral process that can be leveraged in a leader’s pursuit for organizational goal attainment (Fairholm, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Leftwich, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016; White et al., 2016).

However, it must be mentioned that some forms of political action, such as coercion, intimidation, ingratiating, and manipulation, can have detrimental effects on both the morale of the workers and the goal attainment of the organization (Fairholm, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016). Organizational power politics is a part of all institutions and it characterizes human behavior, interactions, and interpersonal communications. The key to leveraging the positive aspects of power is to know how to effectively use it to achieve a desired outcome or future goals.
The use of influence can be very powerful when a leader understands their own political style and available strategies. Behaving in an ethical manner (motives and values of the user) can promote the use of power as a tool to achieve positive outcomes (Fairholm, 2009; White et al., 2016).

Effective leaders recognize that politics exists at every level of the organization and these leaders work toward developing the political skill that will leverage their ability to encourage more productive relationships within the workforce to obtain organizational goals (Fairholm, 2009; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016; White et al., 2016). Fairholm (2009) further illustrated that people in all levels of the organization participate in the politics of rulemaking, decision-making, and the use of power. Some examples of these processes are promotions and transfers, delegation of authority, and facilities and equipment allocation as well as work evaluations. Leaders are presented with opportunities to lead on a daily basis, which may give rise to pushback or being undermined. It is at this juncture that a leader must choose to jump into the political arena and take risks to attain goals far beyond material gain or personal advancement.

Political people consider the cause and the strategies that they utilize to be pertinent but not controlling. Developing political skill is defined as a leader’s ability to understand those with whom they work. Utilizing this knowledge, the leader influences their employees to act in a way that helps to obtain organizational objectives. Political skill has also been linked to organizational success through the leader’s ability to understand which tactics to use to bring about the desired outcome or goal (Fairholm, 2009; Ferris et al., 2005; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).
In summation, politics are present in all that leaders do as an inherently human response to scarce resources and goal attainment both personally and professionally. It is essential that today’s leaders accept this fact and develop the skills and ability to understand not only their own political styles and strategies but also those of the entire organization (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016; White et al., 2016). Viewing organizational politics as a neutral tool to help leverage action can lead organizations toward positive outcomes.

**The Importance of Political Skill and Will**

The realization that politics does exist in every organization requires a leader to be actively involved. This idea can best be summarized by the following quote from the Greek philosopher Plato: “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors” (McAllister, Ellen, Perrewe, Ferris, & Hirsch, 2015, p. 25). Therefore, understanding that politics is neither good nor bad, but rather a neutral activity in which all players engage confirms the importance of developing and effectively using political skill (McAllister et al., 2015; White et al., 2016). As previously described, political skill is “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). Ferris et al. (2007) further described political skill as containing four critical dimensions:

1. “Social astuteness” (p. 292). Individuals with this dimension are described as having a heightened sense of social situations where they can accurately interpret their behavior as well as the behavior of others and have the ability to identify with others to obtain things for themselves. They are seen as being ingenious and clever in dealing with
others. Individuals with this dimension are said to have a powerful influence over others and are able to adapt their behavior in various situations to exert influence over others to achieve their goals. They are often seen as flexible individuals.

2. “Networking ability” (p. 292). This dimension helps individuals to develop friendships easily to build strong, beneficial alliances and coalitions with diverse contacts and networks that possess needed assets for personal and organizational goals. These individuals are viewed as being strong negotiators and are skilled in conflict management.

3. “Apparent sincerity” (p. 292). These individuals are associated with being honest, forthright, authentic, sincere, genuine and they also possess high levels of integrity. This is a critical dimension if the leader’s influence over others and situations is to be accepted and successful.

While these dimensions are interrelated, they remain individual constructs that, when utilized by the politically skilled individual, provide a sense of self confidence, inspired trust, and increased credibility (McAllister et al., 2015). Therefore, political skill can lead to valuable organizational outcomes with leaders being characterized as high performers (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

Political will, as defined by Treadway (2012), is “the motivation to engage in strategic, goal-directed behavior that advances the personal agenda and objectives of the actor that inherently involves the risk of relational or reputational capital” (p. 533).

Kapoutsis, Papalexandris, Treadway, and Bentley (2015), created an eight-item psychometric measure, the Political Will Scale (PWS), which focused on two distinct factors driving political will as the primary motivators in mobilizing personal resources to
achieve political goals. Their findings resulted in two fundamental aspects of political motivation: (a) self-serving political behavior described as motivated by personal benefit to act politically to obtain/secure resources; and (b) benevolent political behavior described as taking political action to benefit other individuals, groups, or the organization (Kapoutsis et al., 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

Together, political skill and political will, as described by Mintzberg (1983, 1985), are two necessary components that are needed by individuals to effectively operate the political climate of all organizations (Kapoutsis et al., 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

**Theoretical Foundations**

The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle initiated the concept of “political thought” by viewing their world in the realm of thinking about the things that were visible and man’s interaction with nature and their institutions. Rather than taking things on faith, they attempted to develop a perspective of reason and how politics developed a sense of community and citizenship (Barker, 2012; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Leftwich (2009) proposed that if it is customary to view politics as rising from the concern of the city-state relationship, and concern for its citizens, then political theorists will attempt to clarify questions about the nature of social justice and the rights and duties of citizens. Theories about politics provide a foundation and direction for research as well as the framework to understand empirical inquiry. Next, several theories are explored and defined in terms of how they relate to organizational politics.
**Elite Theory**

The foundation of elite theory is that in every society there are a select few who hold all the decision-making power and enjoy privileges and protections above and beyond the majority of its citizens. Higley and Burton (2006) defined political elites as “persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially” (p. 7). These key positions and power networks allow the elites to control all of the resources, whether material or symbolic, implementing their will against the will of others (Higley & Burton, 2006; Lopez, 2013).

**Pluralist Theory**

Pluralism is viewed as a foundational component to modern-day democracy (Gunnel, 1996; Mihut, 2012). Political pluralism contends that there are many sources of legitimate power and authority at its core. Pluralistic theory is aimed at providing an explanation for the balance between determining public policy and the maintenance of public order within the competing interests of society’s group forces (Baskin, 1970; Mihut, 2012). Groups are formed around common interests or causes and are not bound by ideology or long-range plans (Kowalski, 2013). Since there are no power elites dominating any one resource, the power of influence is not easily transferred from one interest group to another (Baskin, 2012). The modern-day pluralistic theory has been described as one of the most vital intellectual movements of the modern era that has inspired thought around key issues such as multiculturalism and network governance, which are structural paradigms within American society (Bevir, 2012; Mihut, 2012). Therefore, pluralistic theory can best be utilized to gain an understanding around the
formation of fraternal special interest groups that form to influence public policy and compete with other groups within society for resources (Baskin, 2012; Bevir, 2012).

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory (RCT) has played an important role in the social sciences in terms of both a psychological and individualistic theory. It is psychological in the sense that it considers a person’s actions in terms of mental states assuming that the actor chooses among the best actions available given their preferences and beliefs. It is also considered an individualistic theory in light of its application directly to the individual and their personal preferences (Huddy, Sears, & Levy, 2013; Satz & Ferejohn, 1994). Furthermore, RCT can also be defined as individuals “choosing the course of action that best maximizes one’s expected utility” (Huddy et al., 2013. p. 5). In other words, an individual will be motivated to act in ways that will yield the highest economic self-interest in respect to their personal goals and beliefs (Chong, 2000; Huddy et al., 2013).

RCT is based on a set of three methodological assumptions: (a) discrete purposeful actor assumption maintains that human beings are discrete entities capable of acting purposefully; (b) utility theory assumption provides a mathematical summary of the choices or decisions people expect actors to make; and (c) the rationality assumption, closely related to utility theory, defines actors optimizing their choices regardless of the obstacles they may face (Lovett, 2006).

However, there are some criticisms of RCT that should be noted. Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) noted the following misunderstandings. First, it is based on the assumption that the actor calculates expected consequences of their actions and chooses among the most positive outcomes. This lack of realism is illustrated through the social
research depicting that people often act impulsively, emotionally, or by habit, and thus RCT does not explain what a person will do in a particular situation. The second criticism is focused on the motivational assumptions that both individual values and structural elements are of equal importance in determining outcomes. However, empirical evidence places a higher value on social structural determinants. Other critics continued to challenge RCT into the 21st century stating that it simply mathematized the obvious by searching only for universal patterns, after the fact, without taking into consideration cultural contexts.

Ultimately RCT provides two major explanatory factors that may have been overlooked by political scientists: (a) Actors or politicians are habitually opportunistic, and (b) all decision-making takes place in some form of an organizational setting; therefore, the organization’s structure presents opportunities to the actors helping to explain their actions (Lovett, 2016; Roskin, 2016). Although RCT may not be able to completely depict how someone will act given a certain set of circumstances, personal goals, and beliefs, it is useful as a set of tools that can be used to develop causal explanations of social phenomena. It may also be useful in helping to define the structure of organizational environments. Finally, RCT can be useful in helping leaders understand and evaluate the decision-making process of individuals in terms of their individual action in a given situation based on individual goals (Lovett, 2016; Satz & Ferejohn, 1994).

**Normative Theory**

The foundations of normative political theory can be traced back to the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. This theory has been used to address social phenomena
such as human purpose, intention, and motivation. It is concerned with normative principles that dictate how people should or should not act by providing meaning assigned to social patterns (Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017; Vidaver-Cohen, 1998). Pietrzyk-Reeves (2017) argued that normativity helps people to evaluate or judge whether others are meeting their expectations or not. Furthermore, normative theory can help to critique and understand societies’ existing norms and institutional structures as well as their sources. It therefore provides a firm grounding and understanding of existing norms.

The empirical foundation of normative theory provides a connection between moral conduct and motivation. Within the organizational setting, this relationship between moral conduct and motivation can be quite complex and have an effect on organizational culture, climate, and industry routines (Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017; Vidaver-Cohen, 1998).

Hasnas (1998) described the “normative theory of business ethics” as a generalization of the aspects of human life that involve business relationships providing human beings with ethical guidelines while working in their capacity as businesspeople.

**Power and Influence Theory**

Power is not only a part of every organizational entity, it is also the basis of all human interaction. Therefore, organizational power can be seen in all interpersonal communications, and it is an essential element in all organizational actions (Fairholm, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Pfeffer (1992) maintained that the concepts of power and organizational politics are related. He further defined organizational politics as the “exercise or use of power, with power being defined as ‘potential force’” (p. 33). When used as a means to an end, power and political processes can be used to accomplish great things. Furthermore, a more sophisticated and realistic view of power is “an important
social process that is often required to get things accomplished in interdependent systems” (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 35). Fundamentally, power and influence allow a person to have an impact on the organization. When viewed as a necessary and valuable tool that leaders must use to successfully navigate today’s ever-changing global society, it becomes obvious that power and influence must be recognized and cultivated carefully (Fairholm, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2017; Pfeffer, 1992).

**Effective Leadership**

According to Heifetz and Linsky (2017),

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility. (p. 2)

Leadership has been defined in many different ways, especially when it comes to school administrators. Aristotle made the distinction between the knowledge necessary to make things—referring to being rational and technical—and the knowledge necessary to make the right choices—referring to the practicality embedded in values and beliefs (Kowalski, 2013). A more recent definition states that “leadership is the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members” (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010, p. 66). Being able to influence others to reach common goals is mentioned throughout the literature (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2019; Saleem, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016). The effective leadership and governance of the school district is dependent upon how well the superintendent is able to influence others to work toward the district’s vision and goals.
The Importance of School District Governance

Governance is often used synonymously with the term *government* often implying that any public policy issue must be fixed by the government. However, a more precise definition offered is that “governance is a process whereby societies or organizations make important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account” (Graham, Amos, & Plumptre, 2003, p. 1). Governance therefore is a framework or system for a process to employ high-quality leadership throughout the organization/school districts (Graham et al., 2003; Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006). The success of a school district governance team rests upon the ability of the school district superintendent and school board to be able to navigate today’s ever-changing political environment and provide direction to all stakeholders in order to meet its goals (Bridges, Knickman-Plancher, & Downey-Toledo, 2019; California School Boards Association, 2017; Kowalski, 2013).

Educational Politics Affecting School District Governance

School districts have experienced and continue to experience massive transformations due to drastically reduced state budget allocations, changing demographics, a shifting local tax base, and increased accountability from reforms such as No Child Left Behind of 2001 (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), in addition to the economic downturn affecting many students and families within the district community (Petersen & Fussarelli, 2005; Plough, 2014). In 2013, the law included the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which fundamentally changed public school financing in California. It provided for school districts to become more transparent to the local communities through creating a document, the Local Control and
Accountability Plan (LCAP), to show how school districts were spending their funds (Affeldt, 2015). Affeldt (2015) articulated the importance of a district’s ability to lay out a well-designed community-owned LCAP that focuses on how the district will align and deliver standards-based instruction including Common Core State Standards in order to produce students who are college and career ready. It is therefore recognized that a well-governed school district is associated with positive student outcomes (Bridges et al., 2019; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Effective school district governance in the 21st century requires leaders who possess the ability to make strong and good decisions (Plough, 2014). In order to identify and provide effective governance in a school district, the roles of both the superintendent and the board members are explored next.

**The Evolution and Role of the School District Superintendent**

The role of the school district superintendent had its humble beginnings in the early 1800s when some school boards retained clerks to handle the daily business of schools. Later, superintendents were assigned to the role as school inspectors. They were assigned routine tasks and had very little authority (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, 2013). By the 1900s, most city school districts had established the position in response to rapidly changing conditions (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). This role continued through the first few decades of the 20th century because other political entities wanted the public to see the role of superintendent as being one of a servant rather than a leader (Kowalski, 2013).

Over the past 200 years, the role of the superintendent has continued to evolve and become more important mirroring the politics, government regulations, and reforms driving public education as it is known today (Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011;
Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Furthermore, today’s superintendent must enter into a political power structure that allows them to sustain reform for their school district by developing a high level of political acuity, moral principles, and the ability to effectively communicate and collaborate with stakeholders across the district and community (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). Therefore, the 21st-century school district superintendent position has become a politically charged entity requiring leaders in this capacity to recognize a variety of political styles, both in themselves and in the board members that they serve, to employ appropriate political strategies that develop a collective vision while working toward common goals for the good of the organization (Kowalski, 2013; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; White et al., 2016).

As the position evolved, five role conceptualizations were developed: (a) teacher-scholar, (b) business manager, (c) democratic leader, (e) applied social scientist, and (f) effective communicator. Together, these role conceptualizations provided the framework for understanding the role complexities as well as the required knowledge and skills needed to be a successful superintendent (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011). Table 1 provides a description of each role conceptualization and how it is used in current-day practice.

These five role conceptualizations illustrate that no matter the size of the school district, the role of the superintendent is complex, evolving over time, and requiring skills and knowledge to meet the day-to-day challenges found within the school district (Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011). As the chief executive officer, the superintendent is responsible for reviewing, recommending, and implementing board policies. He or she also informs the board in all matters regarding district operations,
status of community-school relations, and student academic progress as well as leading the strategic planning of the school district (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005).

Table 1

Five Role Conceptualizations of School District Superintendents—Current Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Current practice example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher-scholar</td>
<td>Implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers. The intended result was to assimilate students into American culture through a uniform set of subjects and courses which required centralized control and standardization.</td>
<td>“Providing instructional leadership for school improvement; evaluating curriculum and instruction” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Business manager</td>
<td>Revolving around the Industrial revolution, by 1920, superintendents were expected to be both instructional leaders and competent mangers by focusing on time and efficiency.</td>
<td>“Controlling human and material resources; ensuring school safety” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Democratic leader</td>
<td>Equated with statesmanship, this role was grounded in both philosophical and political needs. During the 1930s, superintendents engaged in directly lobbying state legislatures for scarce fiscal resources.</td>
<td>“Engaging stakeholders in strategic planning, especially visioning; acquiring scarce resources for schools” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Applied social scientist</td>
<td>The emergence of this role was as a result of a mix between societal and professional forces and a growing public dissatisfaction with schools. This role required a change in academic preparation and practice.</td>
<td>“Making data-based decisions; identifying and solving complex problems” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Effective communicator</td>
<td>In the 1980s, communication climates changed from a closed system to one that required superintendents to engage in relational communication as a result of a rapidly changing information-based society.</td>
<td>“Building relationships; enlisting public participation and support” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 26).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Becoming an effective leader in a school district is very challenging as it continues to evolve to meet the changing demands of students and communities. The
role of a district superintendent requires him or her to wear many hats as was described previously with the five conceptualizations of the role. To attain and sustain effective leadership, the superintendent must be astutely aware of the political climate and educational reforms, the diversity of the local community and the ability to respond to their needs, have the ability to influence stakeholders to follow a common vision and create goals around that vision, and become the face and role model of the district (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

As the role of the superintendent continued to expand, so did the definition of administrative leadership. Superintendents need to master skills in both how to do things—referred to as management and making decisions—and what-to-do—referred to as leadership. In other words, leadership is the part of administration that focuses on what needs to be done—vision and planning—for the effectiveness of the district (Kowalski, 2013; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Bjork and Kowalski (2005) suggested that today’s superintendents need to have a formal political power structure in order to negotiate and sustain reform in their districts. Political leadership is now and in the future considered a requisite skill needed to effectively mobilize the students, teachers, administrators, staff, and the community (Bjork & Gurley, 2003; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005).

Superintendents symbolically represent their school district at all times whether they are serving in an official capacity or not. This representation becomes more important when they reside within the community in which they serve. The superintendent must always model the district’s strategic plan and vision while
enthusiastically educating the community about the district’s needs if he or she is to retain their credibility (Kowalski, 2013).

Democratic leadership, involving the community voice as they are the lawful owners of the district, is described in the following three tenets:

1. Relationships between a leader and the organization’s members are bound by collaborative efforts to achieve mutual goals.
2. Leaders understand that organization’s members grant them the authority to act on their behalf, and further this authority may be withdrawn.
3. Leaders have the moral responsibility to fulfill social contracts with the organization’s members. (Kowalski, 2013. p. 209)

Therefore, understanding the role of the school board, who are all members of the community elected to represent the organization’s members, is presented next.

Role of Effective School Boards

School boards have been charged with governing the nation’s educational process and providing effective community oversight for the past 2 centuries. According to Townsend et al. (2005), “The board’s role is to set the direction for the district, identify expected results, request information that enables it to determine whether the expected results are achieved, and define the relationship between the board and superintendent” (p. 16). One of the greatest challenges faced by school boards is to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn (Hess, 2002; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Kowalski (2013) lists five characteristics that effective school boards are thought to possess: (a) they focus on student achievement, (b) they allocate resources to needs, (c) they watch
the return on public investments, (d) they rely on data to make important
decisions, and (e) they engage with the communities they serve. (p. 109)
Additionally, the local school board has the responsibility of assuming control through
the function of policy decisions, which should represent both external and internal needs.
Campbell and Greene (1994) explained,

In light of persisting disagreements about the school boards roles, the National
School Boards Association attempted to define these responsibilities concisely.
More than two dozen specific duties were identified in these four broad
categories: (a) Establishing a long-term vision for the school system;
(b) Establishing and maintaining a basic organizational structure for the school
system, including employment of a superintendent, adoption of an annual budget,
adoption of governance policies, and promotion of a climate that promotes
excellence; (c) Establishing systems and processes to ensure accountability to the
community, including fiscal accountability, and collective bargaining;
(d) Functioning as advocates for children and public education at all levels to
include community, state, and national levels. (p. 392)

Figure 1 provides an outline to summarize the previous four categories for external and
internal role expectations.

Blumsack and McCabe (2017) provided the following description of what they
call “seven practices of highly effective boards” (p. 21). The first practice is to remember
that although one is elected as an individual, board members are part of a team, and their
success is tied to the success of the team. The three main areas the board is responsible
for are (a) legislative, which is the board adoption of policies that provide direction to the
superintendent and staff to manage the school district; (b) administration of the budget and monitoring contracts and evaluation of the superintendent; and (c) judicial responsibility involves hearing formal appeals brought forth by staff, students, and parents. The second practice is to have respect and work in collaboration with all board members. Once decisions have been made, the board should move forward together and model collegiality and collaboration to build confidence across the district and community. Thirdly, the board should refrain from the management responsibilities of the superintendent. The primary reason for this very critical distinction is the board must be able to hold the superintendent accountable to reach the goals set forth by the board. The fourth practice is the ability to be flexible and compromise in the ever-changing arena of education. Once boards make difficult decisions, they must move forward to together and model the standard for communication within the district. Because the
board is responsible for serving as the bridge between educators and local communities, the fifth practice of effective board members is to come to board meetings prepared to engage in discussion and ask a lot of questions. Gathering background information before the board meeting will help in making policy decisions. The sixth practice as an elected official to this public office is to maintain confidentiality by respecting the sworn oath to uphold the laws pertaining to public education. The seventh practice is to continue learning through professional development and to have a clear understanding of the district’s vision, goals, and policies.

In summation, school district governance is at the heart of a successfully run school district (Townsend et al., 2005). There must be a balance between both the school board and the superintendent in terms of their roles, responsibilities, and collaboration to meet the demands of staff, students, and community. Next is a brief discussion of the challenges encountered by both sides.

**Challenges of the School Board and the Superintendent**

The dynamic between the school board and the superintendent not only contributes to the success of the school district but also plays a key role in whether or not the public has confidence in the overall governance of the district (Bridges et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2005; Kowalski, 2013). The literature points toward role confusion and micromanaging from the board as one of the most challenging aspects between the superintendents and their boards (Bridges et al., 2019; Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011; Townsend et al., 2005). As mentioned previously, the board’s role is to set the policy and provide direction while the superintendent is charged with making sure that the district follows the policy by leading staff from a common vision. Ineffective
decision-making can occur as a result of lack of preparation by the board or avoiding asking the challenging questions and coming to the meeting with preconceived outcomes in an effort to speed the meetings up. This can also lead to a breakdown in communication between the superintendent and board members, resulting in diminished trust between all stakeholders including the community. Conflicting values and competing agendas can create instability among district policies and practices leading to leadership turnover (Bridges et al., 2019; Kowalski, 2013). Therefore it is incumbent on both the superintendent and the board not only to define their roles within the organization but also to understand the relevance of their relationship and behavior toward one another in the context of how they communicate and interact within their roles and as representatives of the school district (Kowalski, 2013; Townsend et al., 2005).

**The Superintendent as Influencer of Effective Governance**

While there are many challenges to the superintendent’s role including board relations, superintendents have the unique opportunity to play a key role in creating opportunities from such challenges. The success of the superintendent within a democratic school governance relies upon their ability to be a leader or influencer of good governance. Influencer-superintendents can navigate through challenges by employing the following key strategies: utilizing key inflection points, focusing on interaction with board members, and creating a process of transparent accountability to build both the capacity of the governance team and the public’s expectations for a good governance team (Bridges et al., 2019).
Leveraging Key Inflection Points

One of the most important responsibilities of the board is to choose the right leader as superintendent. During the selection process, a superintendent influencer candidate uses this opportunity to screen the board and determine if this will be a good fit. They often research the board’s effectiveness and history prior to the first interview. They review long-term election results, board tenures, board actions, and how meetings are conducted in order to develop strategic questions that demonstrate to the board that the candidate understands what makes good board governance. For the novice leader applying for their first position, this research allows him or her to be prepared for challenges and to devise an immediate plan to build relationships that foster trust and influence. For more experienced candidates, this research provides them with the background necessary to determine if this will be a good fit. The second opportunity for influence is when a new board member joins the group. The superintendent influencer may take this opportunity to quickly reach out to develop a relationship with the new member to learn of concerns or ideas that he or she wishes to bring to the board. In both cases, the superintendent gains knowledge to help develop a long-range strategic plan to help navigate upcoming challenges.

Focus on Interaction

By focusing on their interactions with board members, the superintendent influencer implements effective practices in communication and decision-making leading to the development of structures that foster trust and collaboration. Openly discussing the roles and governance processes helps to mitigate confusion and dysfunction for the long term. When board members understand their roles and engage in advanced planning
through strong communication processes with the superintendent, trust between the two is grounded.

**Transparent Accountability**

Transparent accountability between the superintendent, the board, and the community begins with a well-thought-out plan. First the district sets goals with the board and superintendent outlining clear links between the goals and board expectations of how the superintendent will achieve the goals and how the board will support progress through policy making. Second, an annual governance plan including a master calendar to include reoccurring decision points that provides clarity between the superintendent and the governance members allows the board to make positive sustaining change for students. Thirdly, the governing goals should be included in the district’s public accountability plan to promote connection between board actions and community expectations (Bridges et al., 2019).

These strategies take time and commitment from the superintendent influencer for good governance. However, taking the time to intentionally promote trust and collaboration as well as transparent accountability through a democratic decision-making process are all strategies that will allow the superintendent to work to support the board and the expectations of the community (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Bridges et al., 2019; Kowalski, 2013).

**Political Strategies Used by Superintendents**

The position of the school district superintendent is multifaceted and is influenced by a plethora of factors including role expectations, personal needs, meeting the needs of a diverse and ever-changing population, school reforms, and the political interests of the
community to name a few. Not only do superintendents need to have strong managerial skills, but the position also requires higher levels of political acuity to meet such challenges (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, 2013; Townsend et al., 2005).

Leadership strategy refers to the leadership behavior that one exhibits based on long-term patterns formed by organizational socialization both formally and informally introducing the new member to the culture of the organization and to the ways of administration (Kowalski, 2013). As a result, superintendents must not only embrace politics as part of their role, but they must also identify strategies that they can use to respond to their various stakeholders. Some of the most common strategies used by superintendents to respond to political influences are identifying key stakeholders, deciding the best course of action, networking and forming coalitions, and communication and trust (Melton, Reeves, McBrayer, & Smith, 2019; White et al., 2016).

**Identifying Key Stakeholders**

The identification of key stakeholders is paramount to accomplishing goals and identifying potential sources of conflict that may disrupt the effectiveness of the superintendent. The key stakeholders identified are board members, the community powerbase, parents, sometimes students in high school districts, and teachers. Understanding and working with these stakeholders is very important, especially when implementing change.

**Deciding the Best Course of Action**

Although the superintendent is ultimately responsible for deciding the best course of action, it is generally recognized that collaborating with stakeholders both internally
and externally allows for communication, transparency, agenda building, and the ability to build consensus while anticipating conflict and resistance.

**Networking and Forming Coalitions**

Understanding the political landscape and knowing who is connected to whom is critical when networking and forming coalitions. This strategy requires a combination of identifying key stakeholders and deciding the best course of action. The most important coalition identified was with board members although parents, teachers, and the community are also very important. Cultivating relationships with all board members is also very important rather than building alliances with single board members. Petersen and Short (2001) noted that it is essential for superintendents to develop and maintain cooperative relationships with all board members and the community.

**Communication**

Communication is the process of transmitting information and developing a common understanding between people. The Latin root word “communis” means “common” and therefore emphasizes the need for a common understanding of the information being exchanged. Without this common understanding, there is no communication (Lunenburg, 2010). Communication with both internal and external stakeholders, through various modes, provides accessibility, transparency, team building, honesty, and integrity. When communicating one must be clear about what the goals and objectives are. Lunenburg (2010) further emphasized that communication between school administrators leads to organizational effectiveness. Open, clear communication also leads to trust building.
Trust

Building trust may be the single most important strategy on which all other strategies can be built. Superintendents must build trust with their board members and other stakeholders in order to be an effective leader. Trust involves being open and transparent as well as valuing the perspectives and opinions of others as a means of developing an environment where stakeholders have clear, defined roles and feel safe to present ideas that will be considered and discussed (Covey, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; White et al., 2016). Harvey and Drolet (2006) believed that trust is built on how one behaves as a leader. They contended that there are five political trust-building behaviors: (a) interdependence—having a mutual need that both sides can support; (b) consistency—behavior needs to be consistent with the spoken word, another way of putting it is “walk the talk”; (c) honesty and integrity—develop a solid reputation for being honest about everything; omitting the facts is dishonest; (d) affability—being genuinely likeable supports trusting relationships; (e) extension of trust—“those who give trust get trust” (p. 23). Extending trust cautiously builds relationships and communicates that the leader is a valued member of the team. Leaders who demonstrate a high level of trust are considered credible and are therefore able to advance the goals of the organization (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Covey, 2018; Wodarczyk, 2019).

Political Frames

Effective leadership is understanding the current situation and developing a well-drawn map in which to navigate the landscape (Sowcik, Carter, & McKee, 2017). Bolman and Deal (2013) called such maps frames and offered the following description: frames are a set of ideas and assumptions that help us understand and negotiate different
challenges. Since leadership is complex and occurs in many different environments, the authors provide four frames, the human resource frame, the symbolic frame, the structural frame, and the political frame, to act as a guide to respond proactively to changing goals, technology, and external demands. The political frame views “organizations as coalitions composed of individuals and groups with enduring differences who live in a world of scarce resources” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 209). Leaders observing situations through the political frame are able to better understand the power structures within the organization and utilize strategies to reframe the situation.

**Theoretical Framework: Becoming a Politically Intelligent Leader**

School districts were established by state governments to carry out the system of public education. As such, school districts function as political subdivisions of the state and are subject to the will of the state legislatures (Kowalski et al., 2011; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Politics are an inevitable part of all organizations including school districts. It is well documented in the literature that organizational politics is the use of power, either directly or indirectly, to maximize influence over others to gain engagement, support toward personal/organizational goals, and to gain control over scarce resources (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015; Pfeffer, 1992; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010; White et al., 2016). Today’s superintendent is expected to wear many different hats and is also expected to know how and when to transition among the various roles. As the chief executive officer of the district, the superintendent must balance working effectively with community and board power structures requiring political acuity and skills (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, 2013; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Therefore, the focus of this study is to identify and understand the political styles and potential
strategies that midsized elementary school superintendents use to work with their school boards based on the nine political styles framework presented in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* by White et al. (2016). As defined in Chapter I, political intelligence, politically intelligent leader, and political style are further reviewed along with their relevance to the role of a superintendent.

**Political Intelligence**

Political intelligence has been described and defined by many researchers over the last 2 decades. Bolman and Deal (1991) described leaders as political advocates who value realism and pragmatism spending much time networking, creating coalitions, building a power base, and negotiating compromises. DeLuca (1999) described organizational political strategies as including the power and influence of people involving their personal interests and agendas. DeLuca also believed that becoming politically savvy required leaders to understand themselves and their own political style. Political intelligence has also been referred to as “political skill characterized as a comprehensive set of social competencies, which reflect cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations and which demonstrate effects on self and others” (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 313). A politically intelligent leader must first recognize the inevitability that politics does exist at every level of the organization, and secondly they must possess the political acumen to accurately read and understand all situations (Brouer, Douglas, Treadway, & Ferris, 2012). In 2017, Bolman and Deal developed a political frame that emphasized political skill as competition and power, identifying effective management through appropriate use of influence and power to regulate organizational effectiveness. Therefore, 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 stakeholders to accomplish organizational goals (DeLuca, 1999; Fairholm, 2009; Tucker, 1995; White et al., 2016).

**Politically Intelligent Leader**

The politically intelligent leader as defined by White et al. (2016), is “one who uses a moral compass to lead the organization in the right direction while considering the wants, needs, values, motivations, and emotions of followers and stakeholders” (p. 3). A politically savvy leader also understands the delicate balance between internal politics (key players, culture, potential blinds spots, and strategies used to produce action) and external politics (things outside of the organization such as local politics, networking opportunities, and power relationships) as a means of developing the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the success of the organization (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; White et al., 2016). Table 2 shows both the internal and external strategies. These strategies may be used separately or together for added advantages in dealing with the organization as a whole. The important concept to remember is that these strategies come with the “moral imperative” to use them for a “good purpose” to accomplish “noble goals” in an ethical manner (White et al., 2016, p. 64).
Table 2

*External and Internal Political Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External political strategies</th>
<th>Internal political strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Create a political vision.</td>
<td>2. Uncover the informal norms ASAP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. You’ll need to meet their needs; or they will never meet yours.</td>
<td>3. Do your homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Simplify and clarify your message.</td>
<td>4. Dig the well before you’re thirsty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Never let ‘em see you sweat.</td>
<td>5. Link agendas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Know each decision maker’s agenda.</td>
<td>7. Be open to their ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Be aware of political blind spots.</td>
<td>8. Empower others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Coalition building is a long-term and necessary strategy.</td>
<td>9. Make use of the chit system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. “Working the community” is usually interesting nor fun, but it’s necessary.</td>
<td>10. Expand the pie with “out of the box” thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Don’t wait to build networks ‘til you need them.</td>
<td>11. Many messengers-same message bigger impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Include all sides.</td>
<td>12. Be aware of internal political blind spots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Count how many of your natural constituents are voters.</td>
<td>16. Knowing who trusts whom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Celebrate everything.</td>
<td>17. Float the idea..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The theory of small wins.</td>
<td>18. Use the accordion process to increase involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Use conflict resolution techniques.</td>
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</table>


**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 he or she devotes to pursuing those
interests (DeLuca, 1999; Grenny et al., 2013; Petersen & Fusarelli; 2005; White et al., 2016). The first step in developing one’s political style is self-awareness and understanding that leadership is an observable set of traits, abilities, values, preferences, and priorities that are reflected in behaviors and attitudes that can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced by motivation, desire, practice, and feedback (DeLuca, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; White et al., 2016).

Utilizing the foundational work of Joel DeLuca (1999) on the nine political styles based on action orientation: “attitude towards politics,” White et al. (2016) found that a much stronger determinant of style for educational and public sector leaders focused more on “goal allegiance” or commitment toward advancing goals whether it be their own or that of their organization (p. 69). These leaders tend to operate on a continuum ranging from a single focus on self-interests to a single focus on organizational interests as depicted in Figure 2. Most people move back and forth along the continuum depending upon the circumstances. One’s political style is dependent upon where he or she focuses most consistently along the continuum and their goal allegiance is determined by how he or she react not only when things are easy but also when challenges arise.

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

*Figure 2. Goal allegiance continuum. From The Politically Intelligent Leader (2nd ed.) by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, and S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 69 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).*

White et al. (2016) developed a second continuum (Figure 3) based on a leader’s political initiative ranging from being passive to reluctant to take risks or getting involved
with challenging situations, to assertive, willing to put themselves on the line with their opinions and ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Initiative</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Moderately Engaged</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Figure 3. Political initiative continuum. From The Politically Intelligent Leader (2nd ed.), by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, and S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 70 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).*

Together, goal allegiance and political initiative constitute one’s political style. The political styles matrix (Figure 4) was developed by White et al. (2016), reflecting a blend of the degree of initiative and goal allegiance for each of the 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 4. Political styles matrix. From The Politically Intelligent Leader (2nd ed.) by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, and S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 71 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield).*

Political style is a combination of a person’s goal allegiance either to self or to the organization as well as the level of their commitment to accomplishing the goal ranging from passive to assertive action. Most leaders have a style to which they default; however, this model recognizes that a leader chooses other styles depending upon the situation he or she encounters (White et al., 2016). White et al. (2016) also pointed out that a leader must also have a keen awareness of the values, priorities, preferences, behavior, and attitudes of others in order to predict their reactions toward ideas and
proposals as well as the strategies that they may use to either support or sabotage ideas or projects.

Political intelligence is an essential component for today’s leaders. The foundations of political intelligence are self-awareness, being reflective, and self-managing. It is not only critical to know and understand one’s own political style but also to know the political styles of others in order to be proactive and plan for organizational success. Understanding the everchanging political climate within the organization is necessary to be able to move seamlessly through the various styles in response to new events and challenges (White et al., 2016).

**Gaps in the Research of Political Styles and Strategies**

The research is clear about the fact that politics is a part of all organizations including school districts. What is also well researched is the history and relationship between the superintendent and the school board districts (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Fairholm, 2009; Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011; Leftwich, 2004; McAllister et al., 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016; White et al., 2016). However, what is missing in the literature is how superintendents use political intelligence through understanding the political strategies that board members utilize to exert power and influence and how they can develop their own strategies to equally influence the political process as presented in the framework by White et al. (2016). The use of political skill and will is presented in the literature as a way to obtain power and influence others to act in ways that promote personal and organizational goals (Doldor, 2011; Ferris et al., 2007; McAllister et al., 2015; Mintzberg, 1983). The operation of school districts today requires superintendents to navigate rapidly changing environments
that include technology and increased needs of students both culturally and educationally. Superintendents are often forced to make tough decisions based on scarce resources all the while trying to meet the goals of the board, the community, and the students. The relationship between the superintendent and the school board becomes the cornerstone for obtaining and balancing power in order to move forward. The leadership skills that the literature presents as being paramount to success include communication, trust building, developing a common vision and goals, and building board relationships and community relationships to name a few. While the research points out that district size directly influences the roles and responsibilities of superintendents, it mainly focuses on very large urban districts and very small rural districts (Kowalski et al., 2011). More information is needed on the political strategies used by superintendents with their boards especially at the midsized elementary school level.

**Chapter Summary**

Politics can be traced back to the beginning of when mankind started to gather in social contexts and began to compete for scarce resources and therefore can be seen as a process for conflict resolution of public matters or concerns of the state (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004). Politics is an inevitable component to all organizations where all employees, at every level, are immersed in its processes whether they recognize it or not (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004; McAllister et al., 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016; White et al., 2016). Organizational politics revolves around the daily governance of the institution and defines behavior and decision-making processes for those who engage in it to gain power and influence defining either success or failure of the organization (Fairholm, 2009; Leftwich, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).
School districts are public organizations that are politically charged and therefore require leadership that can navigate the current political climate and work together successfully with their boards toward the ultimate goal of student success. Both the superintendent and the school board need to develop political acuity and strategies that help to develop the overall vision and goals of the district. Developing the political intelligence, understanding one’s own political style as well as that of the board members, is paramount to the success of the superintendent and the school district. The list of skills and abilities for a well-rounded superintendent are well documented; however, what is not well documented is how the superintendent can develop political strategies to work with each board member. White et al. (2016) provided a framework for identifying nine political styles and the strategies that can be used to work with each style in an effective and proactive manner. This framework was utilized to study the styles and strategies of exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents as they worked with their respective board members to lead their school districts toward success. Chapter III, the methodology, describes the research design as well as the study population and sampling procedures for data collection and analysis for this study. Chapter IV presents the findings and analysis of the study. Chapter V presents the findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Research is an orderly process that involves collecting and analyzing data in a logical sequence to increase people’s understanding of a particular topic or issue or to provide an evidenced-based answer to some question or phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Educational research is an evidence-based process that is guided by the following six principles: (a) presenting significant questions, (b) linking research and theories to conceptual frameworks to show the relationship with the phenomenon to be studied, (c) using methodology that provides empirical data, (d) connecting relationships of all aspects of the study directly, (e) allowing other researchers to be able to replicate or generalize findings across other studies or settings, and finally, (f) using professional peers to evaluate the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Chapter III provides an overview of the purpose of the study and the research questions. The research design and methodology are defined and connected to the population and sample. Next, instrumentation design and data collection methods are discussed. Data analysis, study limitations, and a summary complete this chapter.

Purpose Statement

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

1. How do midsized elementary school superintendents perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies midsized elementary school superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members?

Research Design

Research design can be defined as a systematic inquiry process that utilizes data collection procedures that are purposeful and used to carefully analyze the data to answer research questions (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). When choosing a research design, the researcher must carefully match both the approach to the research problem and the intended audience in relating their experiences to the design. The two most common approaches in research design are quantitative and qualitative. This study used a mixed methods design. The use of a mixed methods research design is becoming more popular as the two approaches used together provide a more comprehensive investigation (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014).

Quantitative Research Design

Quantitative research designs maximize objectivity by utilizing numbers, statistics, structure, and control when measuring and describing phenomena. Another advantage to using a quantitative research design is that a researcher can reach a larger participant base in a short amount of time when employing objective measures such as anonymity and quantifiable questionnaires (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014). Patten (2014) also emphasized that quantitative researchers carefully plan out their procedures in detail, follow the plan very closely, and apply statistics when
analyzing the data. This approach allows researchers to generalize results to the larger population.

**Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that seeks to understand a research problem from the perspectives of the population involved in the study. Much like quantitative research, qualitative research provides a systematic plan for the researcher to investigate and answer research questions through data collection and analysis. It is very effective in providing information about the human perspective in terms of beliefs, opinions, emotions, relationships, and even contradictory behaviors (Creswell, 2012; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014). Results are often reported in a narrative of participant responses, and conclusions are usually limited to those who participated in the study (Patten, 2014). Its strength lies in its ability to provide a textual description of the experiences of those who participated in the study. When researchers combine both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the data can be used to better understand the complex implications and realities of a given situation (Mack et al., 2005).

**Mixed Methods Research Design**

The mixed methods research design allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. This research design is often used when the combination of both kinds of data will provide a more complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, Creswell (2012) maintained that the use of both quantitative data and qualitative data provides the opportunity to produce numerical scores that can be
statistically analyzed to assess the frequency and magnitude of trends, while the use of qualitative data offers many different perspectives to provide a more complex picture of the study. Triangulation of the data is defined as when the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data at about the same time and then integrates the two sources of information to strengthen the findings of each data source for the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Once it has been determined that the study is a mixed methods design, the researcher must examine the following considerations: (a) How much weight or consideration will be placed on both methods or will they be treated equally, (b) how is the sequence of data collection (quantitative or qualitative first or concurrently) determined, (c) how will the data be analyzed, and (d) where or when will the data be mixed in the study (Creswell, 2012)?

This study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory research design to first collect quantitative data through an electronic survey to identify and describe the political styles of each superintendent and their board members as perceived by the superintendent completing the electronic survey (see Figure 5). Next, the researcher conducted an in-depth qualitative inquiry process by interviewing each superintendent allowing him or her to elaborate and fully explain their lived experiences. The quantitative data and results provided a broad picture of the research problem while the qualitative data collection helped to explain, refine, extend, and generalize the problem (Creswell, 2012). Artifacts and observations were used to triangulate the data collection process.
**Population**

The population of a research study is defined as the total group of individuals who possess a common set of characteristics to which the results of the study can be generalized (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). All school district superintendents share common characteristics as the chief executive officer of a school district. Superintendents must be effective leaders who work well with all stakeholders in building valuable relationships. They are required to comply with state and local laws in accordance with the California and federal education codes. Finally, all superintendents work with and are accountable to their governing board, which consists of five to seven elected members of the community. According to the California Department of Education (2018-2019), there are a total of 1,037 unified, elementary, high school, and other public school superintendents in California. The population for this study included all unified, elementary, high school, and other public school district superintendents in California.
Target Population

The target population, often referred to as the sampling frame, chooses specific study participants who possess a more finite set of criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The target population for this study was narrowed down to include midsized elementary school district superintendents located in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. For the purpose of this study, midsized elementary school districts are defined as having between 4,000 and 11,000 students.

Sample

The study sample is a subgroup of the target population from which the researcher can make generalizations about the target population (Creswell, 2012). The researcher should take great care in choosing the sample population to ensure that the subjects provide a variation of responses to the key variables of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher must also choose a sampling method that is aligned with the purpose of the study. The two main categories of sampling approaches are probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. Researchers determine sampling methodology based on the desired amount of rigor they wish to employ in their study, target population attributes as well as participant availability (Creswell, 2012).

Probability sampling is often used in quantitative research because a smaller sample can be drawn from a larger population in such a way that results can easily be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Nonprobability sampling does not require any kind of random sampling from a larger population. Instead, the researcher draws upon accessible subjects or those who possess certain characteristics (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Convenience sampling, another form of nonprobability
sampling, allows the researcher to choose participants based on their willingness to participate and their availability and is commonly used in qualitative and quantitative studies when there are “practical constraints on efficiency and accessibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 137). Purposeful or purposive sampling is another form of nonprobability sampling whereby the researcher chooses specific characteristics from the population to further explain the research topic or phenomena being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This mixed methods sequential explanatory study utilized a purposeful sampling technique by first defining a set of characteristics that exemplary superintendents must possess and that were aligned with the purpose of the study. Next, convenience sampling allowed the researcher to choose subjects based on their location and availability to participate in the study. Figure 6 depicts the sampling procedure used by the researcher to illustrate how the sample population was chosen.

*Figure 6. Study population, target population, and sample.*
Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three and five for mixed methods research when the focus of the research was on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size added valuable information on this chosen topic (Myers, 2000).

Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of superintendents working effectively with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained, rather than from the total number of participants in research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Five exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents were purposefully and conveniently selected from Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. An exemplary superintendent in this study was a school district leader who had served at least 3 years in their school district, had positive governance team relationships, and demonstrated at least four of the following five criteria:

- The superintendent was identified by a panel of experts as knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- The superintendent had received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization such as ACSA.
- The superintendent had received recognition by their peers.
- The superintendent held memberships in professional associations in their field.
- The superintendent had participated in CSBA “Masters-in-Governance” training or other governance training with at least one board member.

Upon receiving approval of the study proposal from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB), a panel of experts was contacted to help identify
midsized elementary school district superintendents in each county that were recognized as exemplary (possessing at least four of the five previously stated criteria) by these professional peers. This panel of experts included both retired and actively working superintendents who were also identified as exemplary and were knowledgeable about the work of the midsized elementary school district superintendents in their respective counties and were therefore a primary resource for identifying potential study participants.

Instrumentation

Both quantitative and qualitative instrumentation and data analysis were used in this explanatory sequential mixed methods research design to elicit further detail through qualitative research from the initial quantitative statistical results (Creswell, 2005). A quantitative survey design was developed in collaboration with expert university faculty members and the thematic team peer researchers followed by a semistructured qualitative interview (Appendices A and B). The survey was designed to obtain descriptive data to address the quantitative research questions and was followed by the qualitative interview process to further refine the results from the quantitative data (Creswell, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In-depth interviews were conducted with exemplary superintendents of midsized elementary school districts to obtain more detailed and extended information about the superintendents’ perspectives and lived experiences with their board members in relationship to the research questions (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Mack et al., 2005; Patton, 2015). Data were triangulated through observations and artifacts acquired from each superintendent’s district.
**Quantitative Instrumentation**

Quantitative data collection provides a cross-convergence of different types of data collected and helps the researcher to identify recurring patterns as well as provides validity across all data sources (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher may use an instrument such as a questionnaire or survey to measure variables in the study such as opinions, attitudes, and trends of the study sample to obtain numeric descriptive data that can be used to generalize the results from a small sample to the general population (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey instrument included definitions of each of the nine political styles described in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016). Using the survey instrument definitions, the superintendents identified the political styles that best represented their style and then the styles of each of their board members. Each peer researcher conducted a field test of the electronic survey with a superintendent that met the established criteria. In addition, each field-test participant provided written feedback on the clarity and practicality features of the instrument. Upon completion of the field test, the peer research team met with the faculty chairs to review the feedback from the pilot survey and made adjustments to the survey based on the feedback. The survey instrument was finalized for use with the five participants in this study (Appendix B) and deployed via an online SurveyMonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com), which provided descriptive data from which the mean and mode were analyzed.

**Qualitative Instrumentation**

This mixed methods sequential explanatory study utilized the same study participants from the quantitative data collection phase for the qualitative semistructured...
interview phase. The interview questions sought to provide further explanation and insight from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The intent of the semistructured interview was to provide consistent questions to draw out individual responses from each participant but also to provide standardization with additional probing questions to obtain comprehensive information from each participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The team of peer researchers in collaboration with the faculty chairs developed the semistructured interview questions to address the research questions and purpose of this study. A panel of experts reviewed the interview questions to ensure that they were aligned to the research questions and study purpose and would provide consistency (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The survey instrument was also field-tested with the same superintendent who participated in the online survey field test. In addition, a neutral field observer, who had experienced the interview process and held a doctorate, provided each field-test researcher with feedback on the process. The team of peer researchers, in collaboration with the faculty chairs, made adjustments to the questions based on the field-test participants and expert panel feedback. The interview protocol was then finalized (Appendix A).

**Validity**

The validity of a research instrument is defined as the degree to which the instrument actually measures what it has intended to measure and is considered to be trustworthy. Researchers often use a combination of strategies to cross-check the “evidence and use” of the instrument to ensure the validity of the data collection (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010).
Data were collected in collaboration with 10 peer researchers utilizing a common research protocol (Appendix A). The content for the survey instruments was based on the political styles described in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016). The survey instruments were developed and reviewed in conjunction with the faculty advisors who were experienced superintendents, had worked with the California School Boards Association in board governance training, had written and presented nationally about politics in education, and had more than 50 years combined experience in research at the university. Additionally, peer researchers reviewed the transcription of each interview, which added to the validity of the results. Both quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated using cross-method strategies, such as artifact collection (minutes, memos, brochures), field observations (meetings), and interviews (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Field-Testing**

**Quantitative Field-Testing**

The online quantitative survey instrument was field-tested by 10 peer researchers with a superintendent who met the delimited criteria for the study. Procedures were developed and standardized to reduce variation and increase validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The field-test participants were provided the same introduction, instructions, and questions for the survey through a confidential process (Appendix B). The results of the online survey were provided to each researcher through the SurveyMonkey software application. Written and verbal feedback were provided on the survey instrument by each participant. The peer research team in collaboration with the faculty chairs reviewed all of the feedback and refined and re-evaluated the survey.
instrument for validity and reliability prior to distribution to the study participants. The peer research team deployed the final survey to 50 superintendents in the state of California.

**Qualitative Field-Testing**

The qualitative interview questions were also field-tested by each peer research team member. The field test allowed the researcher the opportunity to further refine and adjust her interview procedures as well as the questions and determine the best setting for the interview (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted with a team of 10 peer researchers and 10 current or retired superintendents. The feedback results from these pilot tests were compared, in collaboration with the peer research team and faculty chairs, resulting in edits and revisions to increase reliability as needed. Additionally, a qualified professional with a doctorate using interview protocols observed the interviews and provided feedback to ensure that they were conducted validly.

**Reliability**

Reliability refers to the stability and consistency of the scores when the researcher administers the instrument multiple times at different times (Creswell, 2012; Patten, 2014; Roberts, 2010). In other words, does the instrument elicit “close to the same” responses over time where there is no intervention (Cox & Cox, 2008. p. 39). Reliability may also be enhanced through the use of tape recording and transcribing detailed field notes, which also allows the use of computer programs to aid in the coding process (Creswell, 2013).
Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder agreement is based on the use of multiple coders to analyze the transcript data. Reliability in qualitative research is also enhanced by involving a peer reviewer(s) in performing a review of 10% of the transcript and reaching 80% consistency on the coding of identified themes (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2013). In this study, the 10 peer researchers all used the same study purpose, research questions, variable definitions, and instrumentation to increase reliability of the researcher’s coding when compared with intercoder reliability. When the peer reviewer coded the data (themes) he or she found 85% consistency.

Data Collection

For this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, the researcher used a combination of an electronic survey instrument, followed by an interview, observations, and finally, the collection of various artifacts. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that an explanatory design is used to provide follow-up analysis through qualitative methods to allow for a broader explanation of the quantitative findings. Upon receiving BUIRB approval and completing the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification for the protection of human research participants (Appendix C), data collection began on September 5, 2020, and was completed by September 29, 2020. The collection methods used by the researcher included an online SurveyMonkey instrument (Appendix B) sent to the five identified exemplary superintendents followed by an online interview via Zoom—an online meeting platform, observations of meetings via Zoom, and the collection of various artifacts to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data. All data collected through the online surveys, interview recordings, and field notes were
maintained by the researcher in a secure online file to be destroyed within a year of the final defense of the dissertation. Prior to beginning the survey and interview process, each study participant received an introductory e-mail from the researcher with the following documents: Informed Consent (Appendix D) and the Brandman Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix E).

**Survey Process**

Each participant received a SurveyMonkey link and participation code. The survey instrument and invitation (Appendix B), which included a brief introduction to the study that included how and why they were selected to participate and an electronic consent. The actual survey included the definitions of the nine political styles to be studied, a style matrix for participants to identify their own political style, and the political styles of each of their board members. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by utilizing participant codes for superintendents and numbers and/or pseudonyms, chosen by the participants, for board members. The results were compiled by the SurveyMonkey instrument and sent electronically to the researcher.

**Interview Process**

Upon completion of the online survey, each superintendent participated in a one-to-one online Zoom interview with the researcher. As an added support during the interview process, each participant was provided an Interview Support Document (Appendix A) that included the style definitions and the political styles matrix/continuum that was identified through the survey for the superintendent and each of the board members to refer to during the interview. Each of the participants was asked the same questions for each board member even if he or she identified the same political style for
other board members, in order to ensure validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Each of the five interviews was recorded using a digital recorder that produced an audio recording of the interview and was downloaded and transcribed into a written record. Each of the five interview transcripts was carefully reviewed by the researcher to identify common themes. The themes were then coded and analyzed using NVivo—a web-based software program. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the interview to assist as a way to reformulate questions and probes as well as record nonverbal forms of communication for complete data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Observations

Observation allows the researcher to experience firsthand what is naturally occurring in the field and includes descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, organizational processes, or any other observable human experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The researcher observed each of the five superintendents either at a board meeting via Zoom or through a video recording. The researcher took field notes that were then uploaded to NVivo for analysis, coding, and identification of common themes.

Artifacts

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined artifacts as “tangible manifestations that describe people’s experience, knowledge, actions, and values” (p. 361). The researcher collected at least one artifact from each superintendent and analyzed both internal and external artifacts through district websites, online resources, publications, and written correspondence for each of the five school districts. The artifacts included board meeting agendas/minutes, public relations documents from the superintendent and
board members, district memos, district’s (LCAP), news, letters, and handbooks. The artifacts were analyzed and coded for themes using NVivo. Patton (2015) purported that triangulation, combining several kinds of methods or data, and strengthens the study. The artifacts collected by the researcher increased the reliability and validity of the data through triangulation of all data sources.

**Data Analysis**

A mixed methods explanatory research design was used for this study to provide a more in-depth investigation of the research problem (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately and then triangulated with corroborating data collected from each of the participants (Creswell, 2012, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative researchers collect data through a system that allows a numeric value or score to be assigned to each category, question, or response. Next, the data are prepared and organized for statistical analysis. The data are then analyzed through a descriptive analysis process such as descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode) to describe trends in the data (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative descriptive data were collected from five participants via a semistructured survey utilizing SurveyMonkey prior to the online Zoom interviews. Descriptive data are the most fundamental way to summarize data that focus on “what is” in respect to the sample data and indispensable when interpreting the results of quantitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The collection of these descriptive data answered the first research question: “How do
midsized elementary school district superintendents perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?”

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is an inductive process through which the researcher systematically organizes the data into categories that can then be coded and interpreted into common themes elucidating a phenomenon of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Once the data are collected, the researcher must make sense of the data through careful analysis and interpretation. This analysis entails “taking the data apart” to identify individual responses and then “putting it back together” to summarize them, and finally, drawing conclusions about the findings (Creswell, 2012, p. 10).

Furthermore, Patton (2015) stated,

> The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the amount of raw information, sifting the trivial from the significant, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. (p. 521)

After the patterns and themes were identified, this data were used to answer the second research question: “What are the strategies that midsized elementary school superintendents use to work with the different styles of school board members?”

**Data Organization and Transcription**

Each of the five interviews was given a number and all data collected were coded for easy identification and organization. Each interview was electronically transcribed by downloading the content to a Word document. After each interview was transcribed, a
copy was sent to the participants to reflect upon their answers for accuracy and final thoughts to ensure that the transcription accurately captured their true meaning.

**Theme Identification and Coding**

The researcher read each transcript multiple times to begin identifying potential themes. Each interview transcript was uploaded to NVivo, a web-based software program, for analysis and the coding of emerging themes for all five interviews. Next, artifacts were uploaded to NVivo for analysis and coding of emerging themes. The emerging themes were then coded with the NVivo software. These themes were used to organize and portray a broader understanding of the data, thereby deepening the complexity of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

Finally, triangulation of all data sources including online surveys, interview transcripts, one observation of each superintendent, field notes, and at least one archival artifact from each superintendent was utilized to cross-validate the findings and provide an understanding of how superintendents perceive the political styles of their board members as well as how they utilize their own political styles to work with them.

**Limitations**

The limitations of a study are those factors or potential weaknesses identified by the researcher that may affect the generalization of the findings (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). For this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, the intent was to identify the political styles of individual superintendents and their board members in an attempt to explain how the individual superintendents utilized this information about political styles to work with each board member and the collective board. The
limitations for this study included sample size, researcher bias, time, distance, and subjective assessment of interviewees.

**Sample Size**

Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three and five for mixed methods research when the focus of the research was on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size provided valuable information on this chosen topic (Myers, 2000). Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of superintendents working with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained rather than the total number of participants in research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

The sample size for this researcher was limited to five exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents from San Diego County, Orange County, and Los Angeles County; however, nine other researchers on the thematic dissertation team also interviewed five superintendents in their selected area of expertise for this study. A total of 50 exemplary superintendents were interviewed using the same instruments and methodology.

**Researcher Bias**

Researcher bias refers to influences that the researcher may have on the participants that can be both deliberate and unintentional (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher may introduce such bias by using reassuring body language, tone of voice, or simply by looking for selective answers that may support preconceived ideas. To mitigate researcher bias, the exact same instruments and questions were used for each
of the five interviews and online surveys. The researcher also conducted a field test of
the survey and interview instruments that incorporated an experienced doctoral-level
colleague to observe one interview and to provide feedback to eliminate any potential
bias from the researcher (Appendix F). The participants also provided written feedback
to ensure that the instruments were reliable and valid (Appendix G).

**Time**

School superintendents have very tight schedules requiring their presence at many
school sites as well as meetings before, during, and after school hours. These time
constraints may have limited the depth of their responses to the interviews. In an effort to
be respectful of each superintendent’s time, the SurveyMonkey survey was sent to the
participants in advance, and their responses were provided to them during the 1-hour
interview to remind them of what they answered for each board member. In addition,
upon receiving the transcription of each interview, a copy was sent to the participants to
reflect upon their answers for accuracy and final thoughts.

**Geography of Study Participants**

At the time of this study, there were 1,037 school district superintendents in
California, with 38 of these superintendents serving midsized elementary school districts,
in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. The sample was
narrowed to five midsized elementary school district superintendents in order to gain
accessibility to potential participants and increase the opportunities of conducting online
Zoom interviews, conducting observations, and collecting artifacts. However, this
limited the generalization of findings to superintendents in the larger population of
California.
Summary

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study used a quantitative online survey followed by an in-depth, online zoom interview process to provide a comprehensive picture of the political styles identified and used by superintendents to work with their board members. This chapter identified the alignment among the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research design, and methodology, and provided an in-depth explanation of the data collection methods and data analysis of the findings. The limitations of the study included sample size, researcher bias, time, and geography of the participants. Chapter IV provides an in-depth analysis of the research findings. Chapter V lays out a comprehensive discussion of the conclusions, implications of the research, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS

Overview

Politics is an inevitable fact of any organization including school districts. Within the context of superintendents as political representatives of their state, communities, and boards, it has become most important that these leaders not only understand their own political styles and strategies, but also the styles and strategies of the board members with whom they work (White et al., 2016). An effective leader needs to understand what motivates and inspires people both personally and professionally (Crowley, 2011). The ability to balance politics and personal relationships between superintendents and their boards is reliant upon the ability of the superintendent to build and maintain relationships by employing strategies that open the lines of communication (Jackson, 2016).

Chapter IV summarizes the purpose, research questions, methodology, population sample, and demographics of the participants. The findings are presented as they relate to the research questions and the key findings are briefly summarized.

Purpose Statement

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

Research Questions

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

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

The mixed methods research design allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. This research design is often used when the combination of both kinds of data will provide a more complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, Creswell (2012) maintained that the use of both quantitative data and qualitative data provides the opportunity to produce numerical scores that can be statistically analyzed to assess the frequency and magnitude of trends, while the use of qualitative data offers many different perspectives to provide a more complex picture of the study. Triangulation of the data is defined as when the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data around the same time and then integrates the two sources of information to strengthen the findings of each data source around the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory research design to first collect quantitative data through an electronic survey to identify and describe the political styles of each superintendent and their board members, as perceived by the superintendent completing the electronic survey. Next, the researcher conducted an in-depth qualitative inquiry process by interviewing each superintendent via the online platform Zoom, allowing each of those superintendents interviewed to elaborate and fully explain their lived experiences. The quantitative data and results provided a broad picture of the research problem while the qualitative data collection helped to explain,
refine, extend, and generalize the problem (Creswell, 2012). Artifacts and observations were used to triangulate the data collection process.

**Population**

The population of a research study is defined as the total group of individuals who possess a common set of characteristics to which the results of the study can be generalized (Creswell, 2012; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). All school district superintendents share common characteristics as the chief executive officer of a school district. Superintendents must be effective leaders who work well with all stakeholders in building valuable relationships. They are required to comply with state and local laws in accordance with California and federal education codes. Finally, all superintendents work with and are accountable to their governing board which consists of five to seven elected members of the community. According to the California Department of Education (2018-2019) there are a total of 1,037 unified, elementary, high school, and other public school superintendents in California. The population for this study included all unified, elementary, high school, and other public school district superintendents in California.

**Target Population**

The target population, often referred to as the sampling frame, chooses specific study participants who possess a more finite set of criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The target population for this study was narrowed down to include midsized elementary school district superintendents located in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. For the purpose of this study midsized elementary school districts are defined as having between 4,000 and 11,000 students.
The study sample is a subgroup of the target population from which the researcher can make generalizations about the target population (Creswell, 2012). The researcher should take great care in choosing the sample population to ensure that the subjects provide a variation of responses to the key variables of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher must also choose a sampling method that is aligned to the purpose of the study. Researchers determine sampling methodology based on the desired amount of rigor they wish to employ in their study, target population attributes, and participant availability (Creswell, 2012).

Convenience sampling, a form of nonprobability sampling, allows the researcher to choose participants based on their willingness to participate and their availability, and is commonly used in qualitative and quantitative studies when there are “practical constraints on efficiency and accessibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 137). Purposeful sampling is another form of nonprobability sampling in which the researcher chooses specific characteristics from the population to further explain the research topic or phenomena being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This mixed methods sequential explanatory study utilized a purposeful sampling technique by first defining a set of characteristics that exemplary superintendents must possess and that were aligned with the purpose of the study. Next, convenience sampling allowed the researcher to choose subjects based on their location and availability to participate in the study.

Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three to five for a mixed methods research when the focus of the research was on analyzing qualitative data.
This smaller sample size allowed for the gathering of thick, rich information on this chosen topic (Myers, 2000).

Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of superintendents working effectively with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained, rather than from the total number of participants in research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Five exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents were purposefully and conveniently selected from Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. An exemplary superintendent in this study was identified as a school district leader who has served at least 3 years in their school district, has positive governance team relationships, and demonstrates at least four of the following five criteria:

- The superintendent was identified by a panel of experts as knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- The superintendent had received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization such as ACSA.
- The superintendents received recognition by their peers.
- The superintendents held memberships in professional associations in their field.
- The superintendent had participated in CSBA “Masters-in-Governance” training or other governance training with at least one board member.
Demographic Data

Five exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents who met at least four of the five criteria were selected to participate in this study. Tables 3 and 4 present the exemplary criteria and demographic information for each of the five exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents respectively. All of the professional and personal information for the superintendents who participated in this study remained confidential by assigning numbers 1 to 5 to each participant. This study does not identify districts, schools, or participants’ names.

Table 3
Criteria for Exemplary Midsized Elementary School Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Identified by expert panel</th>
<th>Recognition from a professional organization</th>
<th>Recognition by peers</th>
<th>Professional association membership</th>
<th>Governance training CSBA or other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent 5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All five of the participating superintendents had at least 3 years of experience in their current school district and were identified as exemplary by an expert panel. Two of the five have received recognition from a professional organization while all five are members of a professional organization. All of the superintendents in this study have participated in CSBA or other governance team training and have been identified by an expert panel as having positive relationships with their governance team as identified by a panel of experts who are familiar with their work.
Two of the five superintendents who participated in this study were female with one ranging in age from 51-60 and the other from 61-70. The remaining three superintendents were male with two between the ages of 51-60 and the other 41-50. Three of the participants had a doctoral-level degree and the other two had a master’s-level degree. All five participants had experience ranging from 3.5-6.0 years in their current district as a superintendent. Board members are elected by area for three of districts while the board members of two districts are elected at large.

**Presentation and Analysis of the Data**

The presentation and analysis of data collected for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study include both the quantitative data obtained from the online survey, which was designed by the 10 peer researchers under the advisement of the faculty chairs, and the qualitative data obtained through the in-depth interviews and observations conducted through the online platform Zoom. In addition, artifacts were collected from each participant and information was obtained from the internet and district websites. The data from these sources are presented and analyzed for each of the research questions for this study.
**Research Question 1**

*How do midsized elementary school district superintendents perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?*

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study was based on the theoretical framework of the nine political styles matrix presented in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016) and the literature review to create a quantitative descriptive semistructured survey. The survey allowed the superintendents to identify their own political style and the political styles of each of their board members. The survey was then followed up by an in-depth one-to-one interview. Table 5 provides a visual of the self-identified political styles for each of the five exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents participating in the study. As depicted in Table 5, all five or 100% of the superintendents who participated in the survey identified themselves as strategists who put organizational interests first.

**Table 5**

*Political Styles of Exemplary Midsized Elementary School Superintendents*

<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></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>Supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the five superintendents identified the political strategy used by each of their five board members. Table 6 illustrates the perceived political strategy of all 25 board members as perceived by their superintendents.
Table 6

Political Styles of Board Members as Perceived by Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political style</th>
<th>Superintendent 1</th>
<th>Superintendent 2</th>
<th>Superintendent 3</th>
<th>Superintendent 4</th>
<th>Superintendent 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</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>

The following styles were identified as being used by board members:

- Supporter (24%) as identified by four of the five superintendents.
- Challenger (20%) as identified by two out of the five superintendents.
- At least three of the five superintendents identified the political styles of adaptor, arranger, balancer, and developer (12% for each style) as being the third most used by their board members.
- Only one of the five superintendents identified planner as a style used by at least 8% of their board members.
- No superintendents identified their board members as using either analyst or strategist styles.

These data may also be viewed as a “goal/initiative” chart. Table 7 further elucidates how the combination of one’s goal allegiance to either self, blended, or the organization, with the level of commitment ranging from passive, engaged, or assertive,
determines the political style that each board member may engage in, as perceived by the superintendent.

Table 7

Political Goal/Initiative of Board Member as Perceived by Mid-Sized Elementary School Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/initiative</th>
<th>Self-interests</th>
<th>Blended-interests</th>
<th>Organizational -interests</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Challenger 5 (20%)</td>
<td>Arranger 3 (12%)</td>
<td>Strategist 0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Planner 2 (8%)</td>
<td>Balancer 3 (12%)</td>
<td>Developer 3 (12%)</td>
<td>8 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Analyst 0 (0%)</td>
<td>Adaptor 3 (12%)</td>
<td>Supporter 6 (24%)</td>
<td>9 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
<td>9 (36%)</td>
<td>9 (36%)</td>
<td>25 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 7, nine of the 25 board members (36%) were identified by their superintendents as having blended interests, both personal and organizational, utilizing the styles of arranger (assertive), balancer (engaged), and adaptor (passive). The superintendents also identified nine of the 25 board members (36%) as being driven by organizational interests with the styles of developer (engaged), supporter (passive). The last seven of the 25 (28%) of board members were identified as having self-interests with five of the 25 (20%) challengers (assertive), and two of the 25 (8%) planners (engaged). The superintendents perceived that the majority of their board members assume passive roles while promoting organizational interests and that assertive roles are driven primarily by self-interests with some blended interests. Those board members identified as engaged are motivated equally by blended or organizational interests while only two (8%) of the engaged board members rely on self-interests as a primary style.
Upon completion of the online survey, the researcher contacted each superintendent by e-mail to set up a 1-hour, one-on-one interview via the online platform Zoom. Each interview provided an in-depth, personalized view into the day-to-day interactions and relationships between the superintendents and each of their board members. Next, the qualitative data collected during these interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts are presented and analyzed in alignment with Research Question 2.

**Research Question 2**

*What are the strategies midsized elementary school district superintendents use to work with the different styles of school board members?*

Descriptive data are the most fundamental way to summarize data that focus on “what is” in respect to the sample data and are indispensable when interpreting the results of quantitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, the qualitative descriptive data were collected through one-on-one interviews with each participating superintendent. The interview questions (Appendix A) were developed by 10 peer researchers with guidance from the faculty advisory chairs. Each question was designed to be open-ended to obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of each superintendent and the relationships they have developed with each of their five board members. The same questions were asked of each participant to maintain the fidelity of the study.

The interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. After each interview, each superintendent was sent the transcription of the interview in order to review and confirm the information. The researcher read each transcript multiple times and coded the data to identify common themes. To enhance reliability in qualitative
research, the data were reviewed by a peer researcher to ensure consistency on the coding of identified themes (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2013). A peer researcher in this thematic group coded the data for 20% of the interviews with 85% agreement.

The researcher observed at least one board meeting for each superintendent via the online platform Zoom and recorded it using handwritten notes. Artifacts such as weekly board letters, memos, governance team protocols, presentations, board agendas, and news articles were collected from each superintendent to support the data collected from the interviews.

The data collected from the surveys, interviews, observations, and artifacts were carefully studied and analyzed for emerging themes from the seven political styles identified and defined by the peer research team. These styles included the following:

1. Passive political styles—analyst, adaptor, supporter.
3. Assertive political styles—challenger, arranger, strategist.

This was elicited from interviews as responses to Research Question 2. However, because only seven of the nine styles were identified in this study (adaptor, supporter, planner, balancer, developer, challenger, arranger, and strategist) the themes generated are discussed and summarized in relationship to the data collected in the surveys, interviews, observations, and artifacts elicited from the five superintendents as responses to Research Question 2.

**Passive political styles.** This section includes analyst, adaptor, and supporter 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). In this study, there were no board members identified as having the political style of analyst.

**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 et al., 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016). Three of the 25 board members (12%) in this study were identified as adaptors by their superintendents. The three superintendents, reporting at least one adaptor on their board, referenced that these board members have very strong beliefs and opinions about topics to which they have a personal reference. For example, Superintendent 1 stated that his board member was “part of the early Math Wars,” which is what led her to becoming a board member. “She’s very much a pragmatist.” Superintendent 3 indicated that his board member’s wife “also works within the district as a union member and he has some very strong opinions about negotiating union contracts.” Superintendent 5 referenced her board member as being very pragmatic with finances: “He is very smart when it comes to the budget and the reserve. The other board members rely on him to take the lead and maintain fiscal solvency.”

Although these board members have been identified as having strong opinions, all three were also identified as listening to all sides, reviewing the data, and adapting to the
situation. Superintendent 1 described his board member as having “very traditional values” and was opposed to integrating social workers on every campus to address the growing social emotional needs. She was quoted as saying, “Despite how I personally feel, I feel that way, but I am going to vote to support this because it’s good for kids.” Superintendent 3 described his board member as having a perception of what things should be, but he’s willing to say “okay” and adapt back to where the group is focused as a whole: “He looks to adapt to the environment he is in.” Superintendent 5 mentioned that her adaptor is a very authentic person with a lot of interesting stories that provide a deep dive into who he is. All three of these adaptors have been long-standing members of their boards with one being on the board for 20 plus years and another for 33 years.

**Effective strategies.** Each superintendent was asked which strategies they thought were effective in working with their adaptor board members. Working with these “adaptor” board members nine strategies were described by the three superintendents as being effective and are summarized in Table 8 along with the frequency in which they occurred.

Table 8

**Effective Strategies Used With Adaptor Board Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agenda linking</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build trust</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet needs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise/recognition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve early</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoothing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your homework</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common goals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent Environment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All three of the superintendents described strategies that lead to creating an environment where all board members feel acknowledged, respected, and part of the process. Getting board members involved early on was referenced 14 times across the three interviews. Superintendent 1 stated that when working on governance issues it was best to involve the adaptor early on as a “sound board” to explain the facts and solicit her advice to gain her support:

I would do one of these; “Hey, I am thinking of doing ‘this,’ I need your feedback because I know this is near and dear to your heart.” It is always very successful, especially with her (fiscal conservative) to align her goal to the board’s goal.

Superintendent 3 referenced providing plenty of time to prime the pump, plow that ground and nurture it when making a big shift. . . . If at all possible I make sure they see the information at least 4 weeks prior to it ending up on the board agenda. [For example,] if we are going to shift from a half day Kindergarten program to a full day program, there is a lot of prep work and information before we actually take action, and that helps us to make sure we avoid going down the wrong path.

Superintendent 5 mentioned giving her adaptor board member (as well as all board members) a “heads-up” through a weekly Friday letter and follow-up phone calls. The next two highest frequencies recorded are meet their needs and praise/recognition, both of which were referenced 13 times during the interviews. These two themes were framed by allowing the board member the time they needed to feel a part of the process and express themselves freely either during the board meeting or in personal meetings outside of district business. Being acknowledged for knowledge and past experience was noted
as being very important to these adaptors. Building trust, mentioned 10 times, included honoring traditions and heritage as stated by Superintendent 3, “We acknowledge what worked in the past so that when times change we can stand on the shoulders of those before us.” Not dismissing the past helps to build trust by honoring the work of others. Agenda linking, referenced nine times, was described by Superintendent 1 as “finding common ground and relating it to what we want to do”; for example, “with my board member because she really loves my story, and we find that we have commonalities.” When it came to the board’s focus goal of diversity, this board member was described as feeling so strongly and was like “in your face.” She stated, “No that is why we have a Latino superintendent, and his goal is to make sure that we have staff members that are reflective of the community.” Creating common goals was referenced six times in the interviews as a cornerstone for agenda linking and as a way of honoring the individual’s focus as it is aligned with what is best for the district. Both Superintendents 1 and 3 made reference to creating a benevolent environment in order for people to feel safe and share their ideas or disagree in a constructive manner. When asked how conflict was handled, both Superintendents 1 and 3 stated that on occasion they have had to intervene by having conversations with at least one of the board members involved in the situation to let them know what was coming or to provide a conflict resolution so both parties felt heard and respected. Superintendent 1 stated that doing one’s homework included knowing the board members individually, following up with questions, and doing research so that they can provide data to back up what they say. Superintendent 3 stated several times “listen, listen, and ask learning questions” a part of the daily homework.
Ineffective strategies. When asked what strategies were considered ineffective for these adaptors, the superintendents responded with the following:

1. Not providing information in advance. For example, “just surprising her with no heads-up. If I get lazy and wait to provide information, I will have to deal with the emotional aftermath.”

2. Reacting too quickly. “Jumping to conclusions versus making sure you understood what was said.”

3. Not allowing enough time for the board member to share stories. “I have to make sure that if I make a call with this board member I have enough time to let the conversation be very free flowing.”

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).

Four superintendents identified six of the 25 (24%) board members as supporters. Superintendents 1 and 3 shared that their board members whom they identified as supporters are both new to their boards and were described as being more passive, just listening, and still learning. Both Superintendents 4 and 5 identified having two board members each as supporters. The two board members for Superintendent 4 were described as having innate belief and trust: “They are supportive because they believe that when we bring a recommendation forward, that we have vetted it to the highest extent possible.” Superintendent 5 stated that one of her supporters is quiet but a strong
advocate for students, while the other supporter was described as “being very communicative and likes to share personal stories about our families.”

**Effective strategies.** Eleven strategies were named as being effective with the six supporter board members and are detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequency</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet needs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda linking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplify messages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonials from trusted sources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approval of power structure</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go slow to go fast</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Win-Win</td>
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</table>

The strategy that was identified the most was “do your homework” and was mentioned 10 times during the interviews. Next, “building trust” was revealed nine times; eight during the interviews. Using norms, meeting their needs, and agenda linking were evident throughout the interviews with a frequency of 6. Next, the effective strategies used with supporters were simplify messages, utilize testimonials from trusted sources, and go slow to go fast, all with a frequency of 4 as evidenced in interviews. Having approval of the power structure was mentioned twice by two of the four superintendents and creating a benevolent environment was also mentioned twice by one
superintendent both receiving a frequency of 3. Finally, using a win-win strategy was stated by Superintendent 5 one time during the interview.

All four superintendents utilized all of the above effective strategies with their supporter board members. Superintendent 1 stated that he had only spent 2 weeks with his new board member and had only interacted in one board meeting, one board workshop, and a governance meeting at the time of his interview. He explained that he was still trying to “get to know” the board member and “figure him out” and that he had been very quiet, “just taking it all in” as a new board member. He also stated that, “because he is a former police officer I know safety is strong and I believe that safety is important to him, and I can only deduce what I know will resonate with him, which is safety.” He also communicated that he thought this board member may have more conservative leanings, so he uses a lot of data with him so that the board member does not think they are just making things up. For example, “Here’s what the CDHP guidelines state.” This board member has been complimentary and supportive to date because “I believe safety is important to him,” which has been a top priority since he has been on the board.

The supporter board member for Superintendent 3 is also fairly new. He described her as being quiet and passive with “not very strong opinions” but also listening to learn: “As with all of them, I over communicate everything; everybody gets the exact same information, and they get tons of it.” We try to reach out to her and ask if she has specific questions. Sometimes she does not say anything, so we overtly ask her “Well what do you think?” At least she knows “we are assertively caring enough to want
to know her opinion, hear her concerns and go through the same process.” We then check for understanding and ask her questions.

Superintendent 4 described both of his supporters as being heavily involved with the community: “Both have children who ran through our district, they have a rich history of being connected to this school district, one of them was a former employee before they were a trustee. They are very well connected.” He also added that the community is small and very conservative. These two board members are very careful; because they are connected they really “weigh out stepping too far on the ledge with something that would be controversial.” He provided the example of the California Healthy Youth Act where we have to “go a little slower” with a lot of communication going out to the community.

Superintendent 5 also described her supporter as “the quieter member of the group.” The strategy used with this board member is constant communication: “Because she does not share much in a group often, it’s very important that I make sure she feels and knows, that I hear her voice. I know where she is coming from.” She also shared that with this board member it was very important to “make sure that I have the why behind the decisions that are being made, and that I use the data that I have, for the decisions that have to be made.”

Ineffective strategies. The strategies that were not effective with supporter board members are not following up with them, not providing them with a feeling that they are valued, and not providing information up front.

Moderately engaged political styles. This section includes the planner, balancer, and developer 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).

One superintendent identified two of the 25 (8%) board members as planners. She stated that identifying her Board Member 3 as a planner was very easy; however she struggled with Board Member 4 because he is her more “immature” board member. She described Board Member 3 as being a very meticulous reader because “he reads every item that I ever submitted down to the board agenda and the back-up. Who reads the backup?” She also stated that he finds every little “typo” in the backup: “The backup is usually from other organizations; somebody else’s contract. And I am like ok, no more typos, and you have got to go back to those people, and they need to change their documents to get it right.” She also described both of them as being new politically and in the learning phase: “Board Member 3 calls me and asks, ‘Hey this thing on the agenda, this is how he would do his homework.’” Board Member 5 called a long-standing board member who had recently retired. The superintendent then stated, “Thank goodness I still keep in contact with him. He will text me and be like, “Hey, just so you know, so and so is going to ask questions about these things.”

Effective strategies. Five strategies were identified as being effective with these two planner board members and are shown in Table 10.
The effective strategy used most frequently for this superintendent is to plan meticulously mentioned five times in the interview. Meeting their needs was also a significant strategy as evidenced by four mentions during the interviews. Providing information was discussed three times in the interview. Norms were stated two times during the interview.

This superintendent takes planning meticulously and meeting their needs through providing the information very seriously. She explained that strategically writing a “board bulletin” weekly helps her make sure that she is planning, answering questions, and predicting what is needed by each board member:

I need to be ahead of them all the time. The weekly Board Bulletin is my time to emphasize certain things. I know a lot of superintendents who have their assistants do it and I don’t. I have departments give all their information and Friday night I sit down and complete it all. I have been doing this for 6 years, that’s my date night, sitting with the computer.
She described one of the planner board members as sometimes resembling a challenger: “He calls unions before every board meeting and asks, ‘I’ve learned this now, how do I help you?’” She also explained that he is very misinformed and gullible. Therefore, she is starting to “tread lightly” and plan ahead for his questions and actions. When asked what strategies she felt were most effective with her planners, she replied, “They’re are both new to the board, so I try to educate them so they both learn how to navigate.” She further explained that one listens and follows the norms and the other does not and that is why she feels that he is moving from a planner to a challenger at times. The other effective strategy she has used with this particular board member, who does not listen, is to have many messengers:

I told you about the retired board member who he calls. Well, I applied a little gentle pressure by calling him and asking him to write a letter on behalf of the vote for contracts. I was losing this board member and another one and was not sure how it would go, so I asked him to write a letter. Another way she has used many messengers is to have the lawyers vet the information and provide a statement for the board ahead of time.

*Ineffective strategies.* The strategies that were not effective with these two planner board members are trying to persuade them to her side when they are presenting as a definite “no.” She provided the following example of Board Member 3’s opposition when the contracts for her cabinet were up for renewal.

Board Member 3 is very solid in his perception. I had always known he was going to be a “no” vote. He has a belief that there should be nobody in a school
district who makes over $100,000. He just believes it is public service and people
shouldn’t get paid what they do.

**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
equanimit (Sheehan, 1989; White et al., 2016).

Three of the superintendents identified three of the 25 (12%) board members as
having the balancer style. Superintendent 3 described his balancer board member as the
strongest member of the group: “She is definitely the alpha-female.” She tends to listen
carefully and wants to know all the peripheral information before drawing conclusions.
Superintendent 4 shared that his balancer board member brings harmony to the room by
ensuring everyone has been heard, presenting new perspectives, and he takes on the role
of helping the board to understand why they need to stay together as a team. Board
Member 5 stated that her balancer board member sees the bigger picture and works
toward providing equity and stability.

*Effective strategies.* The five most effective strategies that these superintendents
use to work with their balancer board members are listed in Table 11. Empowering the
balancer board members was mentioned six times in the interviews by two of the three
superintendents. Superintendent 3 makes sure that his balancer receives all of the up-to-
date information, has the opportunity to ask questions, and understands the background
so that she can lead the others to consensus. When there are controversial topics to
discuss with the board, she can help keep the others on track by saying, “The topic we are
discussing is ‘A.’ I understand, based on A, B, and C, we should go in this direction.

The other board members respond, ‘ok,’ and off we go.” For example,

Table 11

*Effective Strategies Used With Balancer Board Members*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know their agenda</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use conflict strategies</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build trust</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We did our first bond since 1906 a year and a half ago. It’s our first bond in 100 some odd years. And for us, we’re very fiscally conservative. We recycle everything. The chairs, everything in my office was donated. We do not buy anything. So, we passed the bond. It’s then looking at what we do with our campuses and the construction staff. Well, construction can be like special ed.; it’s a little fuzzy. This one went up and that one went down. So, when it comes to some of those key pivotal points about whether we are going to paint the buildings while we are fixing the roofs, we make sure, she’s understanding the “why” in the budget part of it because then she helps us head down that way.

The balancer board member for Superintendent 4 has a background in education:

He knows this world in a deep level, and he can see what happens with the staff and parents. He uses that, insider knowledge to help pose arguments and bring new perspectives to the table. He helps to keep the board together, when there are disagreements, ensuring that there is still respect and harmony among the board
members. He enjoys being a trustee, “I think he gets great gratification when the
system runs well.”

The strategy of “knowing their agenda” was mentioned once by each board
member in the interviews. Some examples given throughout the interviews included:
know what they are passionate about so that it can be used to help guide the rest of the
board, listen first and then ask “learning questions.”

The use of “conflict strategies” was mentioned by two superintendents twice for a
frequency of 3. Superintendent 4 provided a detailed explanation of how he uses conflict
strategies with all board members including his balancer:

We discuss that conflict is normal in great organizations and that we shouldn’t be
afraid of it. We also engage in book studies such as The Advantage, by Patrick
Lencioni, Culture Code, The Power of Moments, and Strength Finders 2.0 (with a
consultant). And so, they are, I’d say enamored with studying great companies,
great teams, and so forth. They want to apply those tenets to their own work.

Superintendent 5 described a situation where one board member was less succinct than
the balancer, which caused some conflict. The strategy she used with this balancer was
private conversations discussing ways to deal with the other board member who did not
have the same communication style as the balancer.

“Building trust” and “simplify the message” were discussed twice by
Superintendent 5. Superintendent 5 used frequent, consistent, and simplified
communication with this board member because, “it is very clear where she is coming
from and what she says is definitely what she means.”
*Ineffective strategies.* The strategies that were not effective with balancers were going into too much detail, not front-loading them, failure to provide all information in advance. Superintendent 5 explained that although she must use clear and consistent communication with her balancer board member, “if I go into too many details I lose her opinion on the situation.”

*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).

Two superintendents identified three of the 25 (12%) board members as having the style of developer. Both superintendents described their developer board members as being very deep and high-level thinkers who have local and global political insights. They work behind the scenes with all stakeholders to move things forward.

*Effective strategies.* Table 12 depicts the five most effective strategies used with the developer-style board members.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your homework</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda linking</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both Superintendents 4 and 5 referred to building trust through getting to know their board members both personally and professionally and really understanding who they are and what they stand for with a total frequency of 10, discussed eight times in the interviews. Superintendent 4 described one board member as interested in knowing the strategies he is using and who is “super fascinated” with “insider knowledge” and leadership: “I think she has grown a ton, in the time we’ve been together, at understanding, or better understanding her role as a leader.” His other developer board member was described as a “leader in his work.” Superintendent 4 said, “We talk a lot about things like core values, culture, having hard conversations with folks when necessary, and building team collaboration.”

Superintendent 5 described similar strategies for building trust with her developer board member. She connects with him on the success of his children and goes to him to consult and talk about his thinking due to the research he must do for his job. She has a lot of respect for him. She ensures that she is transparent with her data to back up her decisions and this also helps to build trust with this board member. She also uses lots of communication, listening and processing time with him to build trust.

The next theme, do your homework, received a total frequency of 7, mentioned five times during the interviews. Superintendent 4 does his homework through lots of research on the topics to be presented to the board and makes sure his developer board member gets the information and data to “help them budge on something.” He explained, “There are some trustees where you give them the rationale and it makes sense and they’ll trust you. There are others that just need more evidence. I’d say with my two
developers I use the data.” Superintendent 5 uses transparency through data to support decisions with her developer board member.

The next theme mentioned three times during the interview was know their agenda. Superintendent 4 recalled a time when he needed to get these two developer board members on track with a very important bond issue. He shared the following example of knowing their agendas and working toward linking their agendas (mentioned twice) to the organization’s goals:

We do know people. We have a feeling for how they feel about certain topics. So, there’s times, with both of them, where I’ve had to push them out of their comfort zone and say, “I need you, this is not going to work without you, so what can we do? What do we need to do to possibly get you to shift or move on something that would make our whole organization run more effectively?”

Superintendent 5 shared how she works with her board member to know what is important to him and his agenda as well as how to approach other board members when linking agendas:

With the movement of “The Black Lives Matter” knowing that all of my board members have a passion for “The Black Lives Matter,” and through many conversations with this board member, we determined how to approach our staff, our community, and our board. Many districts were doing resolutions and we determined not to do a resolution, instead we came to the outcome that we needed to do more work as a district.

She further explained that the decision not to do a resolution on this topic that was very important to all of her board members, was derived from the realization through the
many conversations with this developer board member, that a resolution was simply
“words on paper,” and her district needed more. Her final recommendation to the board
was to continue the work on this topic.

Both superintendents empower their board members, mentioned twice, by staying
in constant communication, providing information, and reinforcing organizational values
that link to their own values. Superintendent 4 stated that it was important to keep them
connected by sharing both the “good stuff and the bad stuff” and allowing them to work
through it together. He commented, “When you call them about the good stuff, and then
you have to tell the bad stuff, then they are in it with you.” When you do this, they are
“all great.”

Ineffective strategies. Both Superintendents 4 and 5 stated that not providing data
and being transparent with their developer board members was very ineffective.
Superintendent 4 shared, “There are certain trustees where you give them the rationale
and it makes sense; they just trust you. Others need more evidence. I use the most
research and data to get them to budge on an issue.”

Assertive political styles. This section includes challenger, arranger, and
strategist 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 et al., 2005; Polletta,
2004; White et al., 2016).
Two superintendents identified five of 25 (20%) identified board members as challengers. Superintendent 1 has two board members with the political style of challenger and describes Board Member 2 as seeing herself as a “disruptor.” Superintendent 1 said, “She would like all board meetings to have a lot of action.” When she joined the board she proclaimed, “I want people coming to our board meetings and yelling at us and screaming at us, because that’s what democracy is all about.” He further shared that when the board meetings would go well, she would state, “No, there is not enough action in them.” Board Member 3 is also a challenger and very unique. He became a board member at the end of an incident where another board member had been convicted and had to leave the board all together. He sees himself as “saving” the district. Superintendent 1 thought that he had something to prove. The board member stated that “this district needs work, so I am going to come in and save it. I am going to come in and change it.” Superintendent 3 identified three of five board members as challengers. She identified one as being “me-centric,” meaning all about him; the second was described as being “a very caustic individual”; and the third challenger board member was described as the “lone female” and does not get along with the second challenger board member. This superintendent stated, “I think superintendents spend a lot of time analyzing their board members, trying to figure out their style, and what they can do to help” as she does with these three challengers.

**Effective strategies.** While both superintendents use a lot of strategies with their challenger board members, the top five most effective strategies are depicted in Table 13 with their frequencies and sources.
Table 13

Effective Strategies Used With Challenger Board Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Know their agenda</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan meticulously</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
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<td>Meet often individually</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond positively to danger</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Include all sides</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

Knowing the agenda of the board members was mentioned 13 times during the interviews between both superintendents as being an effective strategy to use with challenger styles. Superintendent 2 reflected on how much time she spent with each of her board members individually, outside of the meetings and workday, getting to know them personally, listening carefully, and learning about how they want things to be presented and where they stand on the issues at hand. She manages each challenger according to their own agenda and offered the following examples. The first challenger needs to be heard and validated as he believes he is always right. Superintendent 2 said, “I spend a lot of time with him meeting his emotional needs, otherwise it gets worse.”

“The lone female” board member is insecure and views herself as a victim which drives her agenda. Superintendent 2 said, “I spend a lot of time meeting her emotional needs and reassuring her.” Finally, her third challenger board member has kids in the district. For him, “it’s all about the kids.” She summed it up by saying, “I know this sounds really weird, but at the root of what causes each of them to be this type of board member, is something that they are working through.” Her final thoughts on this topic were, “I am honest with them, I meet with them individually outside of the board room and meet their
needs.” Superintendent 1 described his first challenger, previously described as the “disruptor” as constantly challenging everything on the agenda because she wants action in the board meetings. Also, she is a union representative, so she challenges any item that is linked to nonteacher classroom support as her information comes directly from the teacher’s union. His second challenger previously worked in a large governmental system and therefore is used to running things and challenges the “status quo.” Both superintendents have learned to stay in front of the personal agendas of these individuals by anticipating where they will go on any given topic and providing them with what they need to be able to nudge them toward the agenda of the entire board and district.

Planning meticulously was mentioned eight times in the interviews as an effective strategy. Again, both superintendents referred back to getting to know the board member’s perspectives and what was important to them and how they need the information to be presented. Superintendent 1 prepared meticulously on how to handle his first challenger at the board meeting when they were discussing issues around teachers. Since he knows what triggers this board member, he planned to show her that he cares about the culture of the district and the teachers by celebrating and cheering them on any chance he can get. He shared, “I promoted the teachers, I cheered on the teachers, and I let her see that I did care about the teachers and the culture. I had to highlight those moments where we are focused on being collaborative at the table.” Knowing what is important to her and planning on how to highlight those areas has brought her around to being his “biggest fan.” Superintendent 2 described the planning that she goes through for her board member who can be quite combative. She discovered that he has an auditory processing disorder and needs to be frontloaded more than once as
well as to have the material presented in a different way. This superintendent plans meticulously to meet his needs by creating a special agenda just for this board member. She explained, “I have had to use my teacher tools to create an accommodation for the agenda; color coding, blocking, and all sorts of things.” Her biggest challenge with this board member is that she has to constantly remind him of what they have already gone over due to his disability. When planning to reopen schools after the COVID-19 shut down, she spent 15 hours a week discussing it with him because he keeps forgetting what they have discussed previously.

Another effective strategy used by both of these superintendents is to meet often with each board member individually outside of the board meetings. This was mentioned seven times in the interviews with a frequency of 8. Examples have been interwoven with other strategies as this strategy seems to be the cornerstone of many other strategies. Both superintendents stressed its importance and how they effectively used it.

The next effective strategy was to respond positively to danger, which was mentioned six times. Superintendent 1 described a time when his female challenger board member came to him with her concerns about some information that she had received from the teacher’s union. He responded positively by encouraging her to come to him and let him know her concerns. “I would listen; I’d always listen. Because she was concerned, now I was concerned. I let her know that I was concerned and that I needed to hear about the concerns.” By following the protocols and encouraging her to come directly to him with her concerns, he was sending the message that she could not do this on her own and that he would be her biggest ally. Superintendent 2 recalled a situation that occurred between the two board members the Sunday before a board
A misunderstanding regarding who should speak at a political community event threatened the peace and harmony of the board and the upcoming meeting on Tuesday evening. Superintendent 2 said, “I remember thinking, I have to listen, listen, and calm her down, I have to soothe the situation.” She also received a call from the other superintendent who was involved. She responded, “and so then I had to put my superintendent hat and establish my position.” She reminded them of the board protocols and policy and provided them both with the same information to calm them down. As a result, the board meeting was uneventful as she was able to give their report in a respectful manner while getting their messages across to all without a big blowout.

Including all sides was mentioned five times during the interviews. Both superintendents use this strategy effectively by sending a common message to all, providing the same information to all, and involving all board members in the conversation. Both superintendents use a weekly update to the board answering their questions and providing information that they have requested. They both stated that all information is provided to each board member even if they did not ask the question. By including all sides, everyone has the opportunity to be heard and participate equally.

Ineffective strategies. The strategies that were deemed to be ineffective with the challenger board members were not closing the loop in a timely manner and providing too much information. Board Member 1 stated, “I usually give myself some time to think, but if I don’t get back to them in a timely manner it tends to backfire, and then I have to restore the relationship.” Although it is a lot of work, he stated that “I either put in the work in the front end or I am going to do it in the backend. So, just do it.” Superintendent 2 explained that she has learned to just answer the question they ask, and
not provide additional information. She gave the following example, “With board member 1, I have learned to say less with him because he uses my words and he weaponizes them.” She further elaborated, “Sometimes as the superintendent you think, ‘I am going to inform them of everything.’ Sometimes that backfires on you, so I have learned to say less and just answer the question.” Both of these superintendents stick to their vision and work with their challengers individually to ensure that they understand that their role is to support the vision of the district.

**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).

Two superintendents identified three of 25 (12%) board members studied to have the political style of arranger. Both superintendents described their arrangers as being well connected with the community and the groups that they identify with, having the desire to be involved with everything, and all were described as being focused on organizational goals rather than personal goals. Two out of the three were described by both superintendents to be politically driven based on their political affiliations and political ideologies. The third arranger was described as wanting to “get to the bottom line of the business and get it done fast.”

**Effective strategies.** The superintendents identified five effective strategies for working with arrangers. Table 14 presents the strategies, sources, and the frequencies.
Table 14

*Effective Strategies Used With Arranger Board Members*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empower others</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be aware of political blind spots</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond positively to danger</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the decision makers agenda</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Total:</td>
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</table>

“Meet their needs” was the theme that was identified most often with a frequency of 12, followed by “empower others” with a frequency of 9, “beware of political blind spots” with a frequency of 9, “respond positively to danger” with a frequency of 8, and finally “know the decision makers agenda” with a frequency of 6 as evidenced during interviews. Superintendent 1 referred to his board member as “Mr. Arranger who has his hands in every little pocket.” This board member needs more of the superintendent’s time in order to feel special and needs to be involved. The superintendent offered the following example of how he works to meet the needs of this board member: “I have to think about it. What is it that he needs? He’s a teacher at the high school district, he grew up in the community.” This board member also needs to feel like he is part of the solution. The superintendent involves him in this process by engaging him to a much deeper level than the others. The superintendent empowers him by saying,

> I need your help. I want to talk to you as someone who may have a little bit more insight. I give him some space and then I ask, “If you were me what would you do?” It empowers him to say, “Ok, let’s think about this”; then we start engaging.
The superintendent may use one or two suggestions from his arranger and then makes sure that he thanks him and lets him know that it was helpful to him. At other times this arranger appears to be trying to “broker a deal,” which the superintendent identified as being dangerous. He feels like the board member is always out trying to “rally votes.” The superintendent responds by building consensus through understanding, which he believes happens at the “dais.” He also uses problem-solving strategies with this board member when he raises the alarm bells as illustrated in the following example:

Because he has the ear of the teachers I get emails from him and he says, “Ok, I am really concerned because someone is unhappy.” It’s like, hey danger, danger Wil Robinson someone is unhappy. I have to get to the bottom of it by asking if it is just one person or a lot of people, then I put it into context and ask him to give evidence or show me the data. Then I talk him off the ledge.

Superintendent 3 identified two of his board members as arrangers with one being more politically based and the other more educationally based. They both find it important to build connections with people in the community. For the board member who is more politically inclined, he described him as being very interested in state and national elections as well as the local elections. The following example of political agenda was offered by the superintendent:

When he was running for the board and someone ran against him, his mission in life was to make sure that he knocked on every door of every home in his area. He didn’t want to just win, he wanted to crush his opponent. Crush them so they don’t get any votes.
His second arranger is the teacher. “She is brass-tacks, bottom line; what are the facts and data.” This sometimes leads to challenges and conflicts with the others. For example, one of the more senior board members likes to share stories from 30 or 40 years ago. She wants to just get on with it stating things like, “I don’t want grandpa stories.” He has to remind her that “having 30 years of experience means that you get a little extra give.”

The superintendent feels strongly about honoring tradition, “where we came from.” He feels this is important because as he stated, “Someday we will all be there telling 12 stories and hoping someone doesn’t dismiss us.”

He also stated that what is most interesting is that these disagreements on “agendas” have nothing to do with the operation of the district, it has more to do with the operation of the group. The most effective strategy that he uses with both of them is to stay quiet and listen. If their behavior needs to be addressed this is done in private.

**Ineffective strategies.** Both superintendents were asked about the strategies that they believed to be ineffective with the arranger style. Superintendent 1 shared that he has to be very careful with this board member because he can be volatile. He further stated that what has not worked well is not picking up the phone and calling him when he gets upset. It is not necessarily what is ineffective but rather all of the strategies he uses to work with that board members that count. Superintendent 3 stated that “never catching them off guard” is key to avoiding ineffective strategies with his arrangers as they do not like it when they do not have all of the information.

**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). None of the 25 board
members were identified by the five superintendents as having the political style of
strategist.

The Strategist Superintendent

When the participating superintendents were asked to reflect on their own
political style, they all identified themselves as strategists. When asked what they had
learned about their own political style in working with their boards, their responses
included that knowing their own political vision; who they are and what they stand for
was very important. Viewing things through the lens of the individual board members,
communicating that it is “our agenda,” as well as knowing which political strategy to use
with each board member allows these five exemplary midsize elementary school
superintendents to work effectively and collaboratively with their board members as
described by the nine effective strategies, mentioned by all superintendents, during the
interviews (see Table 15).

Table 15
Effective Strategies Used by Strategist Superintendents With Their Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Be aware of political blind spots</td>
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</table>
**Float the Idea**

The strategy “float the idea” with the frequency of 13 was mentioned 11 times during the interviews. All five of the superintendents shared that when they have an important agenda item coming up, they often put the idea out to the board months in advance before any action is needed.

**Dialogue**

The superintendents all described using the strategy of “dialogue,” mentioned nine times during the interviews as an effective way of letting the board know the direction in which they would like to go.

Superintendent 1 shared, “If we are going to do a course correction, I am very explicit with them, and everyone else, that we are changing direction, this is why, and this is what it looks like.” He further explained that this helps everyone get on board so that they can move forward in the future.

Superintendent 2 stated that she is always planning months in advance. The following example was given to illustrate her point: “We had to buy a $14,000.00 car for an employee. I started putting it on the agenda 4 months in advance, I talked about it for 4 months. When that item came up, there were no questions asked.”

Superintendent 3 described sharing an item that he described as “tectonically changing our world,” 9 months in advance using dialogue to get input and gain support.

Superintendent 4 shared that as a strategist, “I try to think 6-12 months ahead, and sometimes 24 months ahead depending on the item.” This allows the board time to “talk about the item, talk about the need, and then we talk about a process for talking about it, and finally we can start communicating about the process and move the item forward.”
Superintendent 5 explained that she provides all of the same information for new ideas to all of her board members in advance and provides opportunities for dialogue both in and out of the board room to gain a common understanding.

The next two strategies, “include all sides” and “meet their needs,” are explored together because each superintendent used similar strategies to ensure that all sides were sought out, heard thoroughly, and all needs were met through both personal and written communication.

**Include All Sides**

This strategy was employed by all five superintendents and was mentioned eight times during the interviews, for a frequency of 9.

**Meet Their Needs**

All five superintendents placed great importance on taking time each month, if not each week, to spend individual, quality time outside of the board room with each of their board members to understand their motivations, and get to know them on a more personal level. This strategy was mentioned six times.

Superintendent 2 keeps a weekly log of all board requests for more information. The log includes who made the request, when they made the request, and how she provided the information to all board members. She shared that each Friday night is her “date-night” with her computer following up with the board’s requests for information. She also described “putting on her teacher-hat” when making sure that she is meeting all the individual needs of her board members. For her board president who has dyslexia, she customizes the agenda for him with sections and color coding.
Superintendent 3 also uses a weekly bulletin to keep all board members informed. He also believes in “learning by doing.” For example, when the other administrators participated in a leadership book study, he also had his board participate. This resulted in connecting conversations with using the same terminology and strategies. He shared that “they felt included, they got to be part of the team.” Also, when an incident came up 2 years later, they were able to recall the evidence-based practices presented and work smoothly through the situation with all sides.

Superintendent 4 illustrated how each board member requires something different, and it is up to him to meet their individual needs. He shared,

Some need more data, some need more conversation and relational components, some need more follow-up, and some want more information about the organizational leadership. It’s really just knowing them as people and trying to have conversations with them that fit their own . . . currency? And, so it’s trying to find and use strategies when necessary on big items that meet their currency and also allows us to stay together as a team.

Superintendent 5 also uses what she refers to as a “Monday Memo.” She described it as a detailed explanation for all items: “If one board member asks a question then they all get the answer.” She also puts all answers in red, so they stand out.

**Build Trust**

This effective strategy was mentioned by all five superintendents with a frequency of 6. Superintendent 1 builds trust through his intentional communications with all board members both in person and in writing. He shared, “I have had to learn to
be very self-confident, have consistent messages, as well as being intentional with my communication and the direction I intend to take them” in order to build trust.

Superintendent 2 builds trust through her open and honest communication with all. She believes honesty and the ability to apologize when things do not go well help her to build trust. She also shared that another strategy she uses is to “take the heat for my people.” She shared the following story to illustrate how she supports those under her in order to build trust:

We had, at the request of a board member, they wanted the Title I principals come and speak because their test scores were so low. They were not so low when you compared them to other Title I schools in the state. One board member asked who they would fire if the test scores didn’t go up? So, I immediately got up and I went to the floor so that I could be one of them. I went straight to the podium and said, “I just want to remind the board members that you have one employee and that’s me. You can only fire me.

She further detailed that this was in an open session in front of everyone. She felt that she needed to be a “barrier” between that board member and everyone else. She summed up this experience as “not always valued or appreciated but it’s part of my ethic and it helps me sleep at night to know that I am protecting people, and that’s what I do.”

Superintendent 3 exhibited trust with his board when a special education teacher was not following the IEPs which they all knew was not good for kids. His response was, “We told them we’re going to do something about it, and we’re going to follow the law.” Once the board ensured that they had dotted their I’s and crossed their t’s they
were ready to act. He felt that they trusted what the superintendent had shared because he provided evidence and gained their trust that this was the right thing to do.

Superintendent 4 shared that he had built trust as the assistant superintendent and provided the following example:

I know them—I know who they are, I know their families, I know their thoughts, and for the most part, I know the way they are going to think on something. Because of the ongoing dialogue and the willingness to be at their disposal and engage them in the work, there is tremendous respect.

Superintendent 5 uses clear and consistent communication with all board members as her strategy for building trust. Even though they all require a different level of communication, the one thing she believes that they all require from her is “showing them that I care about them and value them.” This helps to build trust with all five of her board members.

**Political Vision**

All of the participating superintendents place a high value on knowing their own “political vision,” noting a frequency of 10, as mentioned in all interviews.

**Be Aware of Political Blind Spots**

Having a clear vision has also helped each superintendent to recognize and “be aware of political blind-spots,” which they mentioned five times frequency of 6. Superintendent 1 shared that first he needed to know who he was and what he stood for, and then let that be known. He is very purposeful and stays true to the course only adjusting when the data suggest a needed change.
I needed to know myself and what I was going to tie my decisions to. I needed to be very clear with the “why” with my board. I had to quickly get them to see the unity of purpose and get them on board with the board focus goals. We go back to them year after year, and I say, “Is this still resonating with you and the direction I intend to take this district?”

He further shared that he did not want to be “flapping in the wind” and going with every political style. He needs to be very aware of his board members’ political affiliations as he has experienced a wide variety of boards over the years as he explains next: “I’ve gone from my board being completely well-balanced, when I first got here, from liberal and conservative, to completely conservative, to now, with the majority being very liberal, and we haven’t changed course.”

Superintendent 2 uses her vision to stay grounded in “who she is.” She has learned to stand firm and provide data and information to support her vision. She is vigilant about providing the same clear message to all while balancing how to disagree publicly and move forward.

One political blind spot Superintendent 2 has found is that there is a lot of dysfunction in her current board that they do not recognize. As a result, she believes a big part of her job is to protect the district from the “elected” because they are “lay” people and they do not fully understand the details of how the district works. She said, “So I have to be the barrier between my board and everybody else.”

Superintendent 3 began building and sharing his vision as the assistant superintendent. When he became the superintendent, the board knew who he was and what he stood for. His go-to strategy is to communicate and ask learning questions to
keep all informed as well as to recognize potential political blind spots. The following illustrates his communication strategy:

First, over communicate. Second, restate what I think they know, or what I think they said. Third, ask a lot of learning questions, and then fourth, make sure that I ask those questions that enable me to guide them in the direction that logic is going to take us. Also be willing to say, “Well, it is not the time to do this right now because they are not ready to go.” I am not going to start some initiative, or start some program, or do something if they are not on board, just because I think it is important.

This strategy and style are also evident in the “Weekly Board Letter” which clearly outlines the work toward the vision of the superintendent and his board members. It also serves to help the superintendent identify blind spots by paying careful attention to the questions being presented by each board member.

Superintendent 4 is very transparent about his vision and making sure that his board understands that he is a strategist and is always thinking ahead, but he also allows for their input which may result in a change of course. Although he has planned multiple steps in advance and the board knows that he has a vision, he shared the following example:

I am very clear with them. Ultimately, I work for the board and I will do what they want. This isn’t my agenda, it is our agenda. They will often tell me that they know I have already figured out Step 3 and 4, but please share Step 2 with us. So, I think that they appreciate that that’s the way that I work with them.
Another example of how this superintendent communicates his vision while leading his board and governance leadership team was found in an artifact of a governance and leadership professional development power point.

Although he described his board as having relatively little conflict or political issues, he described calling each board member on the morning of the board meeting to let them know of a topic he wanted to address. He explained that this gave them plenty of time to process before the meeting so that they could have a productive dialogue and not get caught unawares. When asked about the political climate of his board members he recalled a time when he had to remind them of the following:

I remind them that the trustees are a bipartisan group. We don’t vote along party lines every time we do something. We use information, data, and judgement in conversation, and deliberation and argument. We serve all political parties with the interest of doing what is best for children.

He further described having to ask individual board members to step out of their “conservative” or “liberal” realm to arrive at a common outcome where the board and the district can be successful. He strives for “harmony,” which he finds reduces conflict. He summed it up by saying, “That doesn’t mean that you don’t have conflict, but they are completely exclusive of each other. You can’t have conflict while you also have levels of harmony.”

Superintendent 5 not only makes her vision known through her written and oral communications with her board members, as evidenced by artifacts from the district website, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but also by “walking the talk.” She made the following statement in describing why she believes that she is a strategist: “Great leaders surround
themselves with better leaders. I have surrounded myself with great leaders who are phenomenal and together we do great things.” Her personal style of communicating her vision is to get to know each board member on a personal level outside of the district. This allows her to share her vision and learn the vision of the board members in order to shape the vision of the district. This close communication also provides information regarding potential blind spots that might otherwise go undetected. She utilizes keynote speakers to work with the board to draw out their leadership so that they can model the leadership vision for the entire district. She also hired an outside agency to work with her and the board to develop “protocols” on how they would interact with each other and disseminate information. Later these protocols became “norms” to which both she and the board adhere. When asked to describe the most effective strategies that she uses with all board members, she made the following statement: “I think the strategies are making sure that they all know that they have a voice and that they are heard, but yet there are protocols that we have to follow as a board.”

**Empower Others**

“Empower others” was identified a total of five times in four interviews. Superintendent 2 empowers her individual board members by teaching them to think strategically so that she can anticipate the questions they may ask and then she knows where to focus more of her time. For example, she has one board member who she knows is in constant communication with the union. She strategically talks with the union first and then has a conversation with the board member empowering him through the conversation all the while getting in front of the situation. She also utilizes the weekly board bulletin to empower their participation in problem solving by including
sections that identify potential problems and provide the board with the opportunity to problem solve to resolve it.

Superintendent 3 utilizes the concept of inclusion to empower his board members. He is a strong advocate for communication because he has experienced that when the board feels that they are really heard and have a voice, “it puts the power in their hands.” It allows them to realize that “he wants to listen” and therefore “they want to tell him” what they are thinking. They have all had the opportunity to verbalize their thoughts and opinions and in the end, 99% of the time, they vote yes because they were empowered. Finally, sharing the tough decisions with the board also empowers them by providing all sides of the decision-making process so that when it comes time to make the difficult call, they fully understand and own the decision.

**Ineffective strategies.** All of the participating superintendents were asked what strategies they found to be ineffective with all board member styles.

Superintendent 1 explained that he found that none of his five board members responded well when they were presented with surprises, or he failed to close the loop on certain agenda items or areas of communication, or if he did not respond in a timely manner. He stated that if he does not do the “up front” work, he will have to deal with the “emotional aftermath.”

Superintendent 2 explained while she knows that providing information up front to all board members is an effective strategy, she has also found that there is a balance between just the right amount of information and too much information. She shared that she has learned to “just address the question” and not share too many details all at once. She has learned to speak less as she has found that her words have been “weaponized”
against her by some board members. “Becoming friends” with all of her board members is another area that she has found to be ineffective. She approaches each situation individually but has come to this conclusion for herself and certain board members:

There are some superintendents that I hear that they are really good friends with their board members. I don’t feel like I can do that only because of the nature of the majority of them. With the exception of one, everyone else has political aspirations. So, they are all here for a little bit of time and I have to be careful on all of that stuff because it’s messy when you go into the city and whatnot. I think everything works until it doesn’t.

Finally, she found, for her board, that hiring an outside consultant for leadership training was very ineffective. Her colleagues suggested that she bring in someone from CSBA to do some training with the board as they had found it to be very effective.

So, my first 2 years I tried very hard to do that and the board refused to engage. I had a facilitator from CSBA come in, nice gentleman, highly recommended by my two colleague superintendents. He challenged my board, my board challenged them. At the end one board member said, “Well this is a huge waste of time, you are very ineffective in your role. Next I tried a board self-study to help them identify their dysfunction, another board member refused to engage.”

Superintendent 3 has found that “reacting too quickly before checking for understanding is very ineffective with his board. As mentioned previously, communicating and asking learning questions is very important to this superintendent and board.
Superintendent 4 attributes ineffective strategies to not treating all board members the same and frontloading all of the them with the same information in a timely manner.

Superintendent 5 has found that when a board member is “silent” it is ineffective to assume that they have no opinion. Conversely, when you ignore the history that a board member has to share, this too can lead to ineffective strategies. The most ineffective stance a superintendent can take is not to communicate.

**Effective strategies used with all political styles.** Seven political strategies emerged as being most effective across all styles and all superintendents. Table 16 identifies the strategies and their sources and frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Total frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build trust</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet their needs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda linking</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political vision</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your homework</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>193</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Build trust” was mentioned 32 times during the interviews with all superintendents for a total frequency of 35. The next two effective strategies mentioned were “communication” and “meet their needs,” both mentioned 30 times in the interviews. Next, “agenda linking” was described 16 times. “Empowering others” was described as being an effective strategy 14 times during the interviews. Knowing and articulating one’s “political vision” was discussed by all superintendents 10 times.
Finally, “do your homework” emerged 10 times during the interviews. These effective strategies were often described together as supporting evidence of their importance when working with board members.

Superintendent 1 began by espousing the importance of having a solid vision and being able to communicate that vision as a way of developing common ground to ensure building trust and meeting the needs of all board members:

I had to start with the things that I am really passionate about and that I believe we need to do. I have had to learn to be self-confident, be clear in my communication; both my written communication and my soundbites. The consistent message I have is, that every time they see me, they know what I am going to be about. It’s just being intentional with my communication, and the direction I need to take them. The first 2 years, I had this feedback, “We don’t know what the vision is.” Oh Boy!

The kids can recite the vision and it is ingrained in us now.

This exemplary superintendent stays connected with the board members and the community through written communication as evidenced through board communications, social media platforms, and a podcast illustrating his vision and the work of the district. He also attends community functions and gets to know the community showing them that he is there for them.

Superintendent 2 puts herself in the shoes of the board members and tries to see things through “their lens.” She uses a weekly board communication to share what is happening in the district by collecting input from each department as well as answering the individual questions of each board member. She does her homework by researching and obtaining data before sitting down each Friday evening to write her board
communication. She even shares any problems that have surfaced so there are no surprises and so that they know that she has worked with them to solve it. She believes that doing this each week herself, instead of delegating it to her administrative assistant, provides opportunities to connect with her board, build trust, and meet their needs. She further explained, “It’s been a very useful tool. I don’t leave things to chance. That is why I describe myself as a strategist.”

Superintendent 3 describes the effective use of communication as being the center of all that he does with his board members. Throughout the interview process, he stated and restated the importance of “overcommunicating” by listening first, asking learning questions, restating what you think you heard, and continuing this process until everyone was on the same page. The following statement made by this exemplary superintendent sums it up for how he builds trust, empowers others, and meets their needs.

I’ve become more highly aware of the power of words; the power of speaking things into action. So, you are kind of working with consensus. With five board members, it’s even heightened more with that silent agree or disagree, where you have to speak it out, and that kind of accountability that I actually spoke it out.

Superintendent 4 explained the “human” aspect of leadership as follows:

I open my head to them a lot and let them know what I am thinking before I say something, as a way of frontloading before a big decision. As I alluded to earlier, some need more data, some need more communication, some need more follow-up, and some need more relational components. A strategy I have used to make them feel connected is, you can do celebrations, you can do social things with
spouses where board topics are not discussed—the little things where you allow them to be human beings.

He believes that he and his board have gotten a lot of positives out of these team-building strategies—“building the human connection.”

Superintendent 5 also described communication at the center of all other strategies that she uses to build trust, empower others, meet their needs, and share a common vision. This exemplary superintendent uses a weekly “Monday Letter” to the board. Each board item is broken down into separate components with explanations, especially for the consent and action items. As described previously, if one board member asks a question, the answer is shared with all five through this weekly communication. Another strategy that includes all board members and the seven previously mentioned strategies is that this superintendent hires an outside entity to come and facilitate her evaluation with the entire board:

They provide reflection tools and direction for the board through a closed session. Then they write the evaluation in collaboration with the board president and finally send it to the other board members for input and to ask questions or discuss it further. By January we have a very detailed document and we discuss it in closed session for approval.

Although the original idea came from other superintendents, she had taken the idea and “tweaked” it to match her own style and to meet the needs of her board. She finds it to be very effective in providing an objective process for all to own.
Two other areas that emerged through the interviews were building effective relationships and involving all board members in the governance process. As stated numerous times, communication was paramount in the success each of these areas.

First, building relationships outside of work was discussed by each superintendent as important to providing opportunities to get to know the board members and understand their position, vision, and what was important to them from a “human” aspect. Each superintendent spends a good amount of time each week reaching out and communicating with their board members.

Superintendent 1 believes “like any relationship, you’ve got to keep working at it.” His approach is to determine how much “outside of the boardroom time” each of his board members require. He stated that some need a lot of time while others prefer to let him know when they need additional attention. He utilizes phone calls, e-mails, social media platforms, and individual meeting times to meet the needs of each board member. He explained, “When I don’t hear from them I know it is time for me to pick up the phone and ask, “How are you doing?,”” How are things going?” He explained it is constant relationship building with them individually and collectively.

Superintendent 2 shared that although she utilizes relationship building as a strategy, “becoming friends” with her board has not served her well. Instead she builds relationships through being honest and treating each board member equally. The second strategy she uses is to try to meet their individual emotional needs by understanding “where they are coming from” as individuals. She makes herself available immediately if a board member needs to speak with her and she spends the time that each board member needs to be heard. She shared that she believes that her board members need her to be
“strong” for them and in this way they feel cared for and part of the process. She builds her relationships by standing up for the board and balancing what each person needs.

Superintendent 3 builds relationships through “leading with heart.” He believes in approaching individuals in a respectful, loving, kind, and transparent but straightforward manner.

Superintendent 4 makes himself accessible to his board 24/7. He offered the following example: “If you need me at 11 o’clock at night, you call me at 11 o’clock at night. It’s fine, I am here for you.” He also stated that he believes that they appreciate that he is always accessible, and always thinking: “The truth is, it is rare that they do call, but the fact that they know that they have you, I think they appreciate it.” He also gets to know them individually as evidenced by this statement, “I know them, I know who they are, I know their families, and I know their thoughts.”

Superintendent 5 meets with each board member monthly anywhere from 1 hour up to 5 to 7 hours outside of the work contract. She utilizes what she refers to as “meal of the month.” She schedules either breakfast, lunch, or dinner (their choice) with each board member monthly. She utilizes funds from her personal accounts, not district funds. She stated that these monthly meals are very important and offered these words to summarize:

During these monthly meals I would say they are probably 25% school district business, 75% world issues, their family, and my family. I try to keep them away from school issues unless I need to plant a seed on a direction that we’re going. Then I use that time to plant that seed.
When asked how governance issues were handled with the board members, two of the five superintendents identified the use of outside agencies to facilitate governance-related workshops for their boards. Superintendent 2 stated that she found, with her board, that the outside facilitator approach did not work although she had tried it a few times. Another strategy mentioned by three of the five superintendents was that they use yearly leadership book studies so that the entire board has common language. The use of a private facilitator to conduct the yearly evaluation of the superintendent was also mentioned by two of the five superintendents. Superintendent 1 shared,

Lots of workshops. Getting them to talk. I tried to do a workshop where I was the facilitator; it did not work. Using a facilitator worked because they were all able to participate, and I was a participant. The most powerful ones are the board self-reviews. They get to evaluate me, and then this is an opportunity for them to evaluate the work. It’s great when there is progress, they feel so good about that.

Superintendent 2 summed it all up by stating, “The consultant part has totally backfired on me. Everyone says hire a consultant, and I say no, don’t hire a consultant.”

Superintendent 3 has found great success in using leadership book studies for the same reason mentioned by Superintendent 1:

We don’t spend a lot of time talking because people go, blah, blah, blah. So, we will read a book, and then we will, as part of a conversation, use the terminology. We don’t talk about the book, we use it to implement. It’s learning by doing.

Superintendent 4 spoke about doing a lot of workshops early on and how he believed that it helped align the board members’ belief patterns as well as their core values. Although they may have different political views outside of the board room, he
believes that the workshops have helped to decrease the variances when it comes to
district business. His final statement on workshops was, “If they won’t do the
workshops, we just can’t be effective.”

Superintendent 4 has conducted over 20 board workshop sessions over the 5 years
of his being the superintendent: “They are really in-depth conversations, with consultants,
on who they are as individuals, what their priorities are, what they want their legacies to
be, and how they see us being best as a team.” He shared that he is very grateful because
he has seen boards that act as a board and view the superintendent as being “outside” of
the board. He concluded, “We always see ourselves as a governance team. Like I sit
with them at the dais. They want the community to see that the six of us are working
together to do this work.” This superintendent also uses leadership book studies with his
governance team and a consultant as well as studies of great teams and great companies.
He stated, “They are, I’d say, enamored with studying great companies, great teams and
so forth. They want to apply those tenets in their own work.”

Superintendent 5 has found great success with utilizing an outside facilitator to
guide her board through her evaluation as previously discussed. She shared, “They all
know that they have a voice and that they are heard.”

**Ineffective strategies.** The strategies that were deemed to be ineffective with all
board member styles were failure to provide “heads up” leading to surprises, no follow
up or “closing the loop,” reacting without the facts, failure to meet their needs, and not
honoring the history of the board or board members.
Triangulation

Artifacts

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined artifacts as “tangible manifestations that describe people’s experience, knowledge, actions and values” (p. 361). Patton (2015) further described triangulation as combining several kinds of methods or data that strengthen the study. Artifacts were collected from each participant and are displayed in Table 17.

Twenty-four artifacts were collected and included five weekly board letters, six memos to the board, five board agendas/minutes, one governance power point, two news articles from social media, and five district websites. All five superintendents provided a “weekly board letter” which includes recognition to the board for their vision and hard work, updates from all departments, recommendations from principals, future meetings, and again closing with gratitude to the board helps to keep all board members updated prior to the board meeting.

Memos to the board and board agenda/minutes were collected from all five superintendents and the district website. All of these artifacts provide the superintendent with a vehicle for ongoing communication, providing requested information and presenting ideas in advance to the board which empowers the board members by providing early involvement. Giving praise and recognition to the board can be found in these artifacts. The superintendent’s political vision is communicated throughout all of these artifacts and specifically stated on each district website. Superintendent 1 ensures that all stakeholders not only know his vision but can restate it through his constant communication efforts demonstrated in these artifacts.
### Table 17

**Artifacts to Support Political Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly board letters</td>
<td>• Float the idea</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meet needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Simplify the message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do your homework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos to the board</td>
<td>• Float the idea</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve early</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empower others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board agendas/minutes</td>
<td>• Communication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Praise and recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance power point</td>
<td>• Build trust</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News article/social media</td>
<td>• Include all sides</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Political vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meet often individually /outside of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>board room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District websites</td>
<td>• Political vision</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Norms and trust are also communicated through governance trainings, memos, and the visibility of the superintendent in the community as evidenced in a news article of a superintendent attending a breakfast with two other superintendents, board members, city council, and students. These 24 artifacts embody the ever-challenging work of
exemplary superintendents as they balance their relationship with the board members and the work of the school district.

Observations

Observation allows the researcher to experience firsthand what is naturally occurring in the field and includes descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, organizational processes, or any other observable human experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The researcher observed all five superintendents during a board meeting via the online platform Zoom and recorded handwritten notes.

The observations lasted from 45 minutes to 3 1/2 hours. All board meetings followed a similar protocol beginning with a call to order, the Pledge of Allegiance, roll call to ensure all board members were present. Next, they all had public comments either with the public on the online platform Zoom, or the board president read the comments aloud as was seen in two observations. Praise and recognition during the meeting was evident in at least one board meeting. The board agenda was provided through e-mail or on the district website by all five superintendents. Norms appeared to be present and followed by all board members and superintendents. The superintendents presented information about the current COVID closures as well future plans for school reopening in a clear, concise, and informative manner. For example, during the observation of the board meeting, Superintendent 1 responded to the individual board members’ needs and was recognized by the board president as responding to his current responsibilities with strong leadership, resolve, and calm. The superintendent was observed to speak with
empathy but was also strategic in responding to the board’s need for information and guidance.

All superintendents appeared to be at ease with their board members, which may be attributed to the relationships that they have built both through district activities and individual time spent outside of the district and board room.

**Key Findings**

The quantitative data including the online survey and the qualitative data including interview transcripts, artifacts, and observation notes were coded, and several key findings emerged. First, the data collected from the quantitative survey provided demographic information for each participant and classified how the superintendents identified their own political style and the political styles of each of their five board members. The qualitative data obtained through the interviews provided a more in-depth accounting of the political strategies used by the superintendents in working with their board members. The artifacts and observation notes provided evidence for triangulation of the data.

**Political Styles of Superintendents**

1. All five (100%) of the exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents identified their political style as “strategist.”
2. Of the superintendents, 100% identified with being “assertive” in their initiative.
3. Of the superintendents, 100% identify as having a goal orientation of “organizational interests.”
Political Styles of Board Members

4. Of the 25 board members, three (12%) were identified as “adaptors,” three (12%) as “arrangers,” three (12%) as “balancers,” five (20%) as “challengers,” three (12%) as “developers,” two (8%) as “planners,” and six (24%) as “supporters.”

5. There were no (0%) board members identified as either “analysts” or “strategists.”

6. Eight (32%) of the 25 board members were identified as being assertive, eight (32%) were identified as being engaged, and nine (36%) were identified as being passive in their initiative.

7. Seven (28%) of the 25 board members were categorized as motivated by self-interests, nine (36%) were categorized as motivated by blended interests, and nine (36%) were categorized as being motivated by organizational interests.

Political Strategies Used With All Board Member Styles

8. The strategy, “communication” was the demonstrated by all superintendents with a total frequency of 50, mentioned 30 times during interviews, found in 15 artifacts, and observed five times.

9. “Meet their needs” with a total frequency of 42, mentioned 30 times during interviews, found in eight artifacts, and observed four times was also used by all superintendents with all board member styles.

10. “Build trust” with a total frequency of 35 was mentioned in all interviews and found in two artifacts.

11. “Agenda linking” was mentioned 16 times by all superintendents, found in four artifacts, and observed one time with a total frequency of 21.
12. “Empower others” with a frequency of 18, mentioned 14 times, and found in one artifact; “political vision,” with a frequency of 15, discussed 10 times, found in five artifacts; and “do your homework,” with a frequency of 12, mentioned 10 times, found in one artifact, and observed once were strategies used by all superintendents with every board member style.

13. “Relationship building” was mentioned by all superintendents for all styles.

Summary

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify the political styles of exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents and their school board as well as to identify and explain the political strategies used by the superintendents when working with the various political styles of their school board members. Quantitative data were collected through an online SurveyMonkey survey and included demographic information about the superintendent, the self-identified political style of the superintendent, and their identification of their board members’ political styles. Qualitative data were collected through five in-depth interviews, 24 artifacts, and five observation notes. The data from all sources were analyzed, coded, and triangulated to validate the findings. This chapter identified 28 political strategies followed by an in-depth discussion of those political strategies used by superintendents when working with their board members. The key findings were identified and summarized. Chapter V summarizes the major findings, conclusions, and implications for action, and provides recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This mixed methods study was completed in collaboration with nine peer researchers and two faculty chair advisors. This thematic study included 50 exemplary superintendents throughout California. Each peer researcher interviewed five exemplary superintendents. The purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology were designed in collaboration with the nine peer researchers under the direction of the faculty advisors. Quantitative data were collected via the online SurveyMonkey platform. Qualitative data were collected via in-depth one-on-one interviews through the online meeting platform Zoom. Each interview was recorded and professionally transcribed and then shared with the participants for their final approval. The researcher conducted observations and took notes and collected between one and five artifacts from each participant to triangulate and validate the findings. All data were coded for themes. A peer researcher reviewed 10% of the data to obtain an intercoder reliability of 85%. Procedures were developed and put into place to protect and ensure the anonymity of each participant and district. Twenty-eight themes and 13 key findings were identified and discussed in this study. Chapter V begins by reviewing the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology. Next, a full discussion of the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research are followed by concluding remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

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

**Research Questions**

1. How do midsized elementary school superintendents perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies midsized elementary school superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

The mixed methods research design allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. This research design is often used when the combination of both kinds of data will provide a more complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, Creswell (2012) maintained that the use of both quantitative data and qualitative data provides the opportunity to produce numerical scores that can be statistically analyzed to assess the frequency and magnitude of trends while the use of qualitative data offers many different perspectives to provide a richer picture of the study. Triangulation of the data is defined as when the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data at about the same time and then integrates the two sources of information to strengthen the findings of each data source around the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory research design to first collect quantitative data through an electronic survey to identify and describe the political styles of each superintendent and their board members, as perceived by the
superintendent completing the electronic survey. Next, the researcher conducted an in-depth qualitative inquiry process by interviewing each superintendent via the online platform ZOOM, allowing each of those superintendents interviewed to elaborate and fully explain their lived experiences. The quantitative data and their results provided a broad picture of the research problem while the qualitative data collection helped to explain, refine, extend, and generalize the problem (Creswell, 2012). Artifacts and observations were used to triangulate the data collection process.

**Population**

The population of a research study is defined as the total group of individuals who possess a common set of characteristics to which the results of the study can be generalized (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). All school district superintendents share common characteristics as the chief executive officer of a school district. Superintendents must be effective leaders who work well with all stakeholders in building valuable relationships. They are required to comply with state and local laws in accordance with California and federal education codes. All California school district superintendents work with and are accountable to their governing board, which consists of five to seven members elected of the community. According to the California Department of Education (2018-2019), there are a total of 1,037 unified, elementary, high school and other public school superintendents in California. The population for this study included all unified, elementary, high school, and other public school district superintendents in California.
**Target Population**

The target population, often referred to as the sampling frame, includes specific study participants who possess a more finite set of criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The target population for this study was narrowed down to include midsized elementary school district superintendents located in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. For the purpose of this study, midsized elementary school districts are defined as having between 4,000 and 11,000 students.

**Sample**

The study sample is a subgroup of the target population from which the researcher can make generalizations about the target population (Creswell, 2012). The researcher should take great care in choosing the sample population to ensure that the subjects provide a variety of responses to the key variables of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher must also choose a sampling method that is aligned with the purpose of the study. The two main categories of sampling approaches are probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. Researchers determine sampling methodology based on the desired amount of rigor they wish to employ in their study, target population attributes, and participant availability (Creswell, 2012). Probability sampling is often used in quantitative research because a smaller sample can be drawn from a larger population in such a way that results can easily be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Nonprobability sampling does not require any kind of random sampling from a larger population. Instead, the researcher draws upon accessible subjects or those who possess certain characteristics (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Convenience sampling, another form of nonprobability sampling,
allows the researcher to choose participants based on their willingness to participate and their availability, and it is commonly used in qualitative and quantitative studies when there are “practical constraints on efficiency and accessibility” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 137). Purposeful sampling is another form of nonprobability sampling in which the researcher chooses specific characteristics from the population to further explain the research topic or phenomena being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This mixed methods sequential explanatory study utilized a purposeful sampling technique by first defining a set of characteristics that exemplary superintendents must possess and that were aligned with the purpose of the study. Next, convenience sampling allowed the researcher to choose subjects based on their location and availability to participate in the study.

Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three to five for a mixed methods research when the focus of the research was on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size allowed for the gathering of thick, rich information on this chosen topic (Myers, 2000).

Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of superintendents working effectively with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained, rather than from the total number of participants in research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Five exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents were purposefully and conveniently selected from Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Diego County. An exemplary superintendent in this study is a school district leader
who has served at least 3 years in their school district, has positive governance team relationships, and demonstrates at least four of the following five criteria:

- The superintendent was identified by a panel of experts as knowledgeable of the work of superintendents.
- The superintendent had received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization such as ACSA.
- The superintendent had received recognition by their peers.
- The superintendent held memberships in professional associations in their field.
- The superintendent had participated in CSBA “Masters-in-Governance” training or other governance training with at least one board member.

**Major Findings**

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study was conducted to determine the political styles of exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents and the strategies used by those superintendents to work with the political styles of their board members. An online survey instrument was used to collect the quantitative data, which included the demographics and political styles of the superintendents and the political styles of the board members as perceived by the superintendents. Qualitative data were collected through semistructured interview questions, artifacts, and observation notes. The data were analyzed and coded to reveal common themes among the strategies used by the superintendents when working with their board members. In Chapter IV, the themes were explored and discussed resulting in the identification of 13 key findings. The following five major findings emerged from the key findings as mentioned by all
superintendents as strategies that they use most often with all board member styles and
had frequencies of at least 27 ranging to 50.

1. The use of communication strategies was mentioned 50 times and emerged as being an
   important strategy used by all superintendents with all political styles.

2. Exemplary superintendents work to meet the needs of all board members, as was
   mentioned 42 times.

3. Building trust between the superintendent and the board, as well as among each board
   member, was found to provide a safe environment that promotes a healthy exchange
   of ideas, as indicated with a frequency of 35.

4. Promoting inclusive ownership of the decision-making process was used by all
   participating superintendents and had a frequency of 27.

5. Superintendents who identified as being strategists know their political vision and
   communicate it through daily interactions with their boards and other stakeholders, as
   indicated by all five (100%) of participating superintendents.

Unexpected Findings

There were two unexpected findings that emerged during the research. First, all
five of the superintendents in this study identified themselves as having the political style
of “strategist.” The second unexpected finding was the amount of time superintendents
spend with board members to maintain productive relationships. Superintendents make
themselves available to board members throughout the day and night and spend a lot of
personal time building relationships outside of the board room.
Unexpected Finding 1

*All five (100%) participating superintendents identified themselves as having the political style of strategist.*

Kowalski (2013) stated, “Superintendent’s leadership strategies and styles are influenced by a wide array of factors, including role expectations, personal needs, and work contexts” (p. 194). Leadership strategies are the patterns that a leader has developed over time and that have been influenced by the culture of the organization, and leadership style is described as how the superintendent interacts with the board (Kowalski, 2013). The political style a leader uses most frequently is the one that they feel most comfortable with because it either works well or it is the style with which they have the most practice. In addition, most leaders have other styles that they may use depending upon the situation. For these reasons, it was surprising that all five superintendents, who are at different levels of experience in their careers, have different cultural experiences within their districts, and work with various types of boards, strongly identified with the political style of strategist.

The political style of strategist is considered an assertive style with the interests of the organization at the forefront. Strategists are known to be visionary, open to new ideas, and collaborative. They empower others and model the organization’s values (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White et al., 2016). They are also known to “walk the talk” and are open to the ideas of others. All five of these exemplary superintendents shared that at the center of all that they do is what is best for the students of the district they serve as well as being of service to the board. Superintendent 1 espoused the following sentiment he shared with his board:
I am very pragmatic with them I just say, I am here to do want you want me to do. I represent the community. You hired me to do a job. What we want to make sure is first, that we are in concert with each other and that we are resonating in the direction I intend to take this district.

Superintendent 2 believes she is a strategist because she must “consider everything through their lenses.” She shared that because she has a “super complex” board, she needs to be ahead of them all of the time: “I am rarely surprised with how they vote. I feel like I know them so well. I know their questions; I know if it is going to be a tight vote or not.”

Superintendent 3 is strategic by including all voices through listening and really understanding all points of view in order to guide them toward his vision. He involves all sides so when there is a big decision to be made, they are not shocked.

Superintendent 4 shared, “They are very well aware that I am a strategist. They know that I am always thinking 6 to 24 months ahead.

Superintendent 5 shared why she confidently identified herself as a strategist superintendent and summed it up with the following:

When I read the strategist, it was very clear that that was me. I didn’t waiver. I think I would say that all of the qualifications of the strategist, not to say that the other ones are not as powerful, but as a superintendent you need to have all these qualities. If you are a supporter, developer, adaptor, or balancer as a superintendent, it is of my opinion that it is not all-inclusive of your job. More of a strategist as the old saying goes, great leaders surround themselves with better leaders. I have surrounded myself with great leaders. I have a cabinet of seven
and they are phenomenal. Together we do great things. So, that is where I think the strategist comes from.

**Unexpected Finding 2**

Superintendents make themselves available to their board members throughout the day and night and spend their personal time outside of work hours in order to build relationships with their board members.

A leader demonstrates their political intelligence through considering the wants, needs, values, motivations, and emotions of all stakeholders to accomplish organizational goals (DeLuca, 1999; Fairholm, 2009; Tucker, 1995; White et al., 2016). All five of the participating superintendents exhibit a high level of political intelligence when it comes to relationship building and considering the needs and emotions of their board members. As strategists, they put the organizational interests above their self-interests. What was most unexpected was how much of their personal time and resources were put toward relationship building. Superintendent 1 makes himself very visible in the community attending events that involve all stakeholders as well as strategically utilizing social media platforms including a podcast. He spends the time that each board member requires developing strong relationships and finding “common ground” with each of them. Superintendent 2 also puts in hours of personal time making herself available to her board to answer questions, provide information, and to “meet their emotional needs.” Superintendent 3 makes the time to talk and really listen to all of his board members whenever they reach out to him. He wants all board members to feel like they are “loved and that he has cared enough to reach out to them.” Superintendent 4 makes himself available to his board any time of the day or night: “I
think that they have seen sacrifice a lot of, let’s just say personal and private time with family to execute something in their vision.” He also plans social events and invites families to attend. Superintendent 5 spends many hours of her personal time, 7 days a week, as well as her personal funds to have a monthly meal with each board member. The board members get to choose the time and place. She finds that spending this time with each board member strengthens their relationships and helps them to discover commonalities. The amount of time above and beyond the traditional workday and workweek that superintendents invest in building relationships with their boards and responding to their questions and needs is surprising to those who are several steps removed from that position.

Conclusions

Upon careful review of the key findings of the political styles of exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents, the political styles of board members as perceived by the superintendents, and the political strategies used by the superintendents to work effectively with the various political styles of the board members, five major findings emerged from all five superintendents. The following conclusions were drawn as a result of the study.

Conclusion 1

Superintendents who want to ensure positive working relationships with board members of all political styles must commit to open, transparent communication as a bedrock strategy, providing frequent, consistent information to all board members and providing opportunities for board members to express divergent views in a safe environment.
All five (100%) of the exemplary midsized elementary school district superintendents stated that clear, concise, ongoing communication was essential to building a strong foundation with their board members. All superintendents shared that they communicate weekly with all board members by providing answers to questions submitted, updates, and information about future agenda items through a weekly board letter. Each superintendent takes ownership for completing their own letter and sending it out to the board members. One superintendent shared, “If one board member asks for information, they all get the same information.” The literature confirms that superintendents need to continually engage all board members in the process of mutual understanding through transparency of providing information in advance so all board members can understand it before they need to make decisions (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Townsend et al., 2005; White et al., 2016). Each superintendent also engages with individual board members through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, and e-mails. The mode and frequency of the communication is dependent on the board member and adjusted to fit their individual style. Sharing the same information with all also ensures that each board member can fully participate in the decision-making process. Additionally, engaging in healthy discussions that allow for disagreement ensures that the final decision represents the consensus of the board.

Conclusion 2

Superintendents who want to meet the needs of their board members must develop professional and personal relationships with them by investing time with them, understanding their needs and priorities, and respecting them as individuals.
Developing relationships outside of the board room was important to five of the five superintendents. The superintendents shared that by taking their personal time to engage with each board member on an individual basis, they developed strong, caring relationships that have served them well in the long run. Superintendent 1 shared, “Like any relationship, you’ve got to keep working at it.” He develops relationships by taking the time to understand what is really important to each board member so that he can unite the board toward the common goals of the district. Superintendent 2 believes it is important to meet the “emotional needs” of all board members and spends time outside of the board room with each of them to achieve this balance. Superintendent 3 “leads with heart” and shows caring through honoring individuals and through time-honored history. Superintendent 5 builds her relationships through spending time with each board member and sharing commonalities. She uses this time to really get to know each board member and rarely discusses district business at these meetings. Finally, Superintendent 4 enjoys taking part in social activities outside of the district where family members can join in. He has a strict rule of “no district business” at these events.

Showing personal interest in the lives of the board members helps superintendents meet their needs through investing time, understanding viewpoints, and honoring them as individuals. Building positive relationships and meeting the needs of the board members can determine the relational context in which superintendents and board members communicate and act toward each other and with other board members (Kowalski, 2013).
Conclusion 3

It is essential that superintendents who want to develop a united front to work towards district goals build trust with their board members by honest, transparent, and authentic action.

All five superintendents stated that developing trust with all board members and between the various board members was foundational to promote a safe and collaborative environment to work toward attaining the vision and the goals of the district. Transparency, honesty, and seeing others as individuals were mentioned as strategies used to develop trusting relationships. Superintendent 2 stated, “One strategy I use with all of them is to be honest. I share the same information with all of them.” Superintendent 5 emphasized that she uses “constant communication” with all board members to help build trusting relationships. They all shared that this is a continual work in progress as board members come and go, changing the group dynamics requiring shifts in power and relationships. Today’s leadership requires having a new vision and the ability to demonstrate a high level of trust whereby the superintendent can influence and advance the goals of the district (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Covey, 2006, White et al., 2016; Wodarczyk, 2019).

Conclusion 4

Politically intelligent superintendents must promote inclusive ownership of the work and decision-making process among all board members.

Ownership of the agenda and decision-making by all board members is paramount to getting things done in the interest of the organization. A common thread throughout all five of the interviews was to provide the same information in advance to
all board members and to link the agenda items to the interests of each board member allowing them to share their passion and skills in achieving board goals. For example, Superintendent 5 links her fiscally savvy board member to budget-related agenda items and seeks out his advice and expertise. Another example from Superintendent 1 included enlisting the support of a board member to help talk to the other board members about and agenda item that was important to him. Empowering others to respond to political influences and help determine the best course of action builds strong coalitions (Melton et al., 2019, White et al., 2016).

Conclusion 5

Superintendents who want to be strategic in delivering the vision for their school district must clearly define and communicate it through regular and frequent interactions with their board.

A superintendent’s ability to influence the board to work toward common goals is dependent upon how well they are able to project the vision for the district (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2019; Saleem, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016).

All five of the superintendents who participated in this study believe that they must be strategic long-range planners to be effective in their positions. All five superintendents believe that they are there to serve the board and place organizational priorities first. Possessing a clear political vision that focuses on the “whole” of the organization is critical to leadership effectiveness (White et al., 2016). For example, Superintendent 1 knows who he is and what he stands for, and he lets that be known in a very purposeful manner. He is very clear about his vision with his board and focuses them on their board goals. Superintendent 2 shared, “You have to be grounded in who
you are,” as another example of knowing your vision. Superintendent 3 relies on the strategy of communicating all aspects of his direction and vision to the board. In one example, he stated the following: “Let me tell you the background and how we got here and how we are going to cowboy up and get her done.” Superintendent 4 stated that being a strategist, he communicated his vision and how he will get things done in advance as he guides the board toward this vision. Superintendent 5 succinctly summed up her vision in her news article introducing herself as “a leader of leaders” and her focus on “students mastering the skills needed to be critical thinkers and respectful members of the community.”

**Implications for Action**

The research in this study of exemplary midsized elementary school superintendents provides a glimpse into the political strategies used by superintendents in working with their various board members. The ability to implement appropriate political strategies requires the superintendent to know and understand their own political style and then be able to identify the political style of each of their board members. Although the existence of politics in education is recognized as a key factor in the superintendent’s role that requires knowledge and skill development to be successful, there is not much insight into how one becomes politically astute and develops the needed acumen to become a successful leader. While there is a great deal of research surrounding politics and how it effects leadership, what is missing in the literature is how superintendents use political intelligence through understanding the political strategies that board members use to exert power and influence, and how they can develop their own strategies to equally influence the political process (White et al., 2016). The
literature presents certain leadership skills, such as communication, trust building, developing a common vision, and goals building board relationships and community relationships as being essential for success. However, more information is still needed to help superintendents and their boards learn how to navigate politics and understand and implement political strategies that promote goal attainment and success. The following calls to action were developed as a result of this study:

**Action 1**

*Administrative programs and professional associations should offer coursework that develops political intelligence to help superintendents and board members identify political styles and appropriate strategies that support the organizational vision.*

To support the learning and skill set for aspiring superintendents, colleges should use this study as a context for developing future professional development programs that will enable them to identify their own political style and those of their board members in order to apply appropriate strategies that promote common goals and values. In addition, professional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the California School Boards Association (CSBA) may also be able to use this study to develop professional learning opportunities for both superintendents and board members.

**Action 2**

*Executive coaches can use the findings in this study to provide guidance to new superintendents who wish to hone their political skills in the day-to-day activities of running a school district.*
Executive coaches working with superintendents who are new to their positions, or seasoned superintendents who are developing new skills, will find this study to be a useful outline in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful as a school superintendent.

**Action 3**

*Universities offering administrative credentialing programs and doctoral programs may use these findings in coursework, fieldwork, and to continue with future research.*

This study provides the foundations to the inner workings of the dynamic relationship between the superintendent and the board. It provides the context of politics and how it is intricately intertwined in this relationship. Understanding political actions from an interpersonal and strategic point of view will provide the needed skill set to navigate through the inevitable challenges between the superintendent and board.

**Action 4**

*Superintendents should use this study to develop a self-study with their board to identify and further understand their own political styles and strategies used by both the superintendent and board members in order to navigate how they work together as a team toward a common vision and goals.*

As the primary leader of the school district, the superintendent must know their own vision, align it with the vision of the stakeholders, and develop long-range plans to work toward common goals. The board’s role is to request information, identify expected results, and define the role between the board and superintendent (Townsend et al., 2005). Engaging in a mutual self-study, utilizing the concepts of this study, will
enable the superintendent and board to become more in alignment on the vision and goals.

**Action 5**

*The thematic team should use all of the research obtained from each study and write a book elaborating on how superintendents can develop political intelligence to identify their own political style and how to effectively use political strategies to work more effectively with their boards.*

The research points out that district size directly influences the roles and responsibilities of superintendents. It mainly focuses on very large urban districts and very small rural districts (Kowalski et al., 2011). Each peer researcher on the thematic team studied superintendents from a variety of school district settings. Each study produced different strategies used by superintendents as well as different board member styles. Combining all research findings in one book would result in a more comprehensive look at the superintendent-board relationships and how political strategies can be used effectively in any district setting or size.

**Action 6**

*Additional training should be developed to provide superintendents with opportunities to identify and adapt their political style to changing situations.*

White et al. (2016) maintained that styles and strategies must be matched to the right situation in order to be effective. Situations change and require leaders to alter their approach and apply strategies to allow for effective leadership through each situation.
Action 7

The researcher of this study should present the findings from this study to professional organizations conferences and journals.

The findings from this study can be utilized by the researcher to develop and present professional earning opportunities sponsored by ACSA, AASA, CSBA, or colleges and universities. The findings from this study can also be used in articles for scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on midsized elementary school superintendents who had between 3.5 and 6 years of total experience as a superintendent. One superintendent was in the age range of 41-50 years of age, three superintendents were in 51-60 years of age range while only one was in the range of 61-70 years of age. There were two females and three males. Three superintendents obtained an Ed.D. while two had obtained an M.A./M.S. degree. Finally, this study focused solely on the perspective of the superintendent. Based on these study qualifications, further research is recommended with studies to explore the perspectives of aspiring superintendents who may be younger than 41 years of age and just entering an advanced degree program, superintendents with 7 or more years of service, noneducator superintendents. A study is also recommended to explore the political styles and strategies of board members, one that uses the complete “Inventory of Political Styles” (White et al., 2016, p. 181). Finally, a study could be conducted comparing the political perspectives of superintendents and board members and the political styles they use.
Recommendation 1

Many superintendents followed the traditional route from becoming a teacher, then an administrator at the school level or district level before entering the position of superintendent. In today’s rapidly changing environment, many aspiring superintendents begin their journey toward becoming a superintendent within 2 years of becoming a teacher. They follow the route of obtaining an administrative credential, then becoming an administrator by their late 20s and early 30s and entering into an advanced degree program in the hopes of becoming a superintendent before they are 40 years of age. On this expedited journey they often do not have the life experience that helps more experienced superintendents navigate the turbulent flow of leading a district with a board of seasoned community members. Further research with this population, who may have had more exposure to political intelligence coursework, trainings on vision and goal setting, and interpersonal relationships before entering their positions as superintendents, would provide more varied and rich data on the impact of the preparation of becoming a superintendent with this training as part of their advanced degree program in comparison with learning through on-the-job experience.

Recommendation 2

The longevity of a superintendent is often short lived due to the many and varying roles that they must play as the leader of the district. They face many demands from the district’s many stakeholders and their board members. Many superintendents leave their positions within the first 3 to 5 years. Therefore, a study focusing on superintendents who have been in their position as the superintendent for 7 or more years would add to the
body of research on how a superintendent adapts their political style and strategies given more years of experience on the job.

**Recommendation 3**

Although the majority of people who end up as the superintendent of a school district began their journey as teachers and administrators, there are some who began their career in some other capacity or organization. Duplicating this study with these noneducator superintendents would provide more data about how leaders develop political acumen in other organizations.

**Recommendation 4**

The focus in this study was on the perspective of the superintendents and how they perceived their board members. It would add to the body of research to extend this study to board members to obtain their perspectives on how they identify their own political style, the political style of their superintendents, and the strategies they use to work with their superintendents.

**Recommendation 5**

This study focused the superintendent identifying their most dominant political style. The knowledge of knowing one’s political style and the use of the various strategies can vary depending on the situation. This study should be duplicated using the complete “Inventory of Political Styles” (White et al., 2016, p. 181) to identify the superintendent’s top three political styles and how they may vary as the superintendent navigates through political changes.
**Recommendation 6**

Conduct a comparison study of both superintendents and board members’ political styles and the strategies they use to work with each other in attaining a common vision and goals for the school district.

**Recommendation 7**

This study should be duplicated with a larger population in other states across the United States to provide even more information on how superintendents develop working relationships with board members using the knowledge of political styles and strategies presented in this study.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

As I approach the end of this dissertation, I offer some reflections of the process, how I have grown professionally as a result of this process, the insights I have gained about superintendents, and how I plan to use the knowledge gained from this research.

I now understand that every assignment I have completed was one step closer to finishing this dissertation. Each assignment taught me how to approach each section separately and then how to put it all together in a seamless fashion that provides insight into the world of the school district superintendent. I became very aware of the amount of time needed to focus on each step and that I needed to immerse myself fully in the research in order to gain knowledge and understanding. The writing process provided the structure and direction for further research to bring ideas to fruition in a manner that was clear and concise. My dissertation chair and my committee members guided, questioned, and provided me with the tools to be more succinct and complete in my thoughts and final product. For this, I am ever more grateful to all of them.
My professional goals have always been to aspire to a leadership position where I can support others in creating learning environments that meet the needs of all students. Through this process, I have learned about myself, and I have realized my strengths and identified areas in which I need to continue working. I have always shied away from “politics,” or so I thought. However, what I have learned is that politics is in every aspect of life and how you engage, or not engage, makes all the difference. As I researched the political styles framework from *The Political Intelligent Leader* (White et al., 2016), I realized that when I started this research, I was the political style of supporter, which is defined as follows:

Supporters are characterized as risk-aversive, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s vision and goals. (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016)

As I delved deeper into the research and my professional life as a director of special education, I saw myself evolving into more of the political style of a strategist, which is characterized as being 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 process new initiatives, engage diverse stakeholders, elicit commitment, and make purposeful decisions. (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White et al., 2016)

Moving from a passive political style to an assertive political style has enabled me to better support my vision of empowering others to provide learning opportunities to inspire others toward lifelong learning. I also view the actions of other leaders in a
different way. I now have the knowledge to identify their political style and, as a result, choose strategies that I know will engage them toward the end goal.

The road to becoming a superintendent is not only challenging but it also can be very rewarding. Not only must the superintendent have a vision that they make known to all, be a role model of that vision at all times, lead all levels of the district toward that vision with common goals and outcomes, but they must also balance the desires of the school board members who represent the community in which they serve. Although some of the superintendents stated that they needed to be available to their board members throughout the day and night, 7 days a week, it is important to note that the superintendent candidate must negotiate the time commitment required by the board and come to a mutual agreement in order to set boundaries to which both parties can adhere prior to entering into the position. The rewards that they receive are developing close relationships with their boards, which leads to working in unison toward the school district’s vision, providing resources for teachers to shine in their capacity, and finally, watching the students become successful as they navigate the educational system.

I have always been a teacher at heart, even before entering the profession. I now understand how leadership can be developed and recognized at each level of the organization. Upon receiving my Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership, I will pursue teaching at the university level as well as seeking opportunities to present the findings from this dissertation. I have always aspired to writing a book and will look for opportunities to work with colleagues to put our collective knowledge into writing.

One final thought as I close. I never thought that I would want to become a superintendent. Upon the conclusion of this experience, I now believe that I have the
skills, knowledge, and insight to become a superintendent. My mind and heart are open to whatever opportunities may come my way!
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https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mup043


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol and Questions

“My name is Christine Sinatra and I am the Director of Special Education for the Lakeside Union School District. 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 explore further information which you provided in the electronic survey. For your reference, I am providing you with the matrix of political styles, which was previously provided for your participation in the survey. 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.
Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document? If so, would you be so kind as to sign the hard copy of the IRB requirements for me to collect?

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

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

Questions

Repeat questions for each of the styles on the Board. For each political style the superintendent identifies on his/her 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 1 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 1 and 4 have been identified as ___________. Can you share a story about a time when Board Member 1 demonstrated some of the characteristics of this style and then share a story for Board Member 4?

2. What strategies did you use to respond?

Conflict and Strategies

3. On other occasions that posed potential conflict with this/these Board Member(s), either with you or other Board Members, what strategies did you use before, during or after?

Effectiveness

4. What strategies did you use that were not effective with this/these Board Member(s)?

Effective Political Strategies

5. Having worked with this/these Board Member(s) 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>
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<th>Blended Interests</th>
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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).

**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).
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.

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

* Years of service 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

* Board members in this district are elected...(select one)
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; Bougarides & Cohen, 2001; DeLuca, 1999; Rowe & Bougarides, 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 & Wadlawski, 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, 1999; White et al., 2016).

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

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

• **Arranger.** Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing their goals that are a blend of both organizational priorities and their own self-interests. They build a power base by connecting with many people. Arrangers will take risks to advance their goals and are strategic in combining resources (DeLuca, 1999; Effelsberg, Soliga, & 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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent (self)</td>
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<td>Board member 1</td>
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<td>Board member 2</td>
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<td>Board member 3</td>
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<td>Board member 4</td>
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<td>Board member 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board member 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board member 7</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 C

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Certification

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

Date of Completion: 05/19/2018

Certification Number: 2823615

Screen Capture of the National Institutes Of Health (NIH) certification in protecting human research participants, provided to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brandman University on July 8, 2020. This certifies that doctoral candidate Christine Sinatra has successfully completed the “Protecting Human Research Participants” training.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release

INFORMATION ABOUT: To identify and explain the political styles and political strategies exemplary superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Christine L. Sinatra, M.A., M.S.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Christine L. Sinatra, M.A., M.S., a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify the political styles of superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and explain the political strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members using the Inventory of Political Styles Matrix developed by White, Harvey & Fox, 2016. This study will fill in the gaps in the research by developing an in depth understanding of how politics affects the interactions between district superintendents and school board members in the day to day operations of the schools and interface with the local community.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an electronic survey using SurveyMonkey followed by a one-to-one interview with the identified student researcher. The online survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The in-person interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The survey and interview questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will remain confidential. Each participant will be given an identifying code and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purpose only.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer or password protected digital file that is available only to the researcher.

b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-reddacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Christine L. Sinatra at csinatra@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 619.246.4028; or Dr. Patricia White (Advisor) at pwhite@brandman.edu.
d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. 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 of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

___________________________________ Date:_________________________

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

___________________________________ Date:_________________________

Signature of Principal Investigator
APPENDIX E

Research Participant’s Bill Of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brandman University IRB   Adopted   November 2013
APPENDIX F

Observer Feedback - Field Test

Field Test – Observer Feedback

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

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

Participant Feedback - Field Test

Survey Critique by Participants

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

Below are some questions that I appreciate your answering after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the survey items.

You have been provided with a paper copy of the survey, just to jog your memory if you need it. Thanks so much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thanks so much for your help