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School Board Leadership and Student Achievement: An Investigation of the Potential Relationship

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SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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in the Department of the Center for Leadership and Learning
College of Education

May 2017

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Program: School Leadership

Degree: Doctor of Education

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Dedication

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Abstract

The following question was used to guide this study and to assist in better understanding the impact that school boards have on district achievement: What is the relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS), and district achievement as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System? This quantitative research study employed correlational analyses and Independent Samples *t*-Tests to explore the relationship between effective school board leadership practices and district student achievement in Arkansas. Participants selected for the sample consisted of board members in 32 districts where at least three of the board members and their superintendent completed the survey. Analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant relationship between the school boards' total mean self-rating scores on the EBLPS and the 2-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts. This study offers implications for prescribed professional development for school boards members and superintendents as well as suggestions for future research.

Keywords: dissertation, school boards, student achievement

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

This research study examined school board leadership practices in the state of Arkansas. The study investigated whether there was a correlation between school board leadership practices and student achievement in Arkansas. There are very few studies on the effect of school board practices on student achievement, although there are some studies that identified characteristics of highly effective school boards. These identified characteristics can be used to inform school board professional development in an effort to build stronger school boards that have a clear understanding of their role (Danzberger, 1994; Delagardelle & Lamonte, 2009; Ford, 2013; Arkansas Code § 6-13-629, 2014). This study was undertaken in efforts to add to the limited body of research in this area. The results of this study offer some potentially useful information that can be used to guide school board training as well as some suggestions for further study.

Background of the Problem

Data from the Institute of Educational Leadership studies in the late 1980's suggested that school boards are dysfunctional and struggle with leading their school districts because of the lack of a common understanding of the role of the board and its individual members (Danzberger, 1994). Later research in the form of school board case studies conducted by Rotherman and Mead (2012) continues to support the fact that a key cause of school board dysfunction is conflict about respective roles. Rotherman and Mead (2012) concluded that school boards are most effective when they have clearly defined and limited roles.

School board researchers suggest that mandatory school board training focused on helping board members understand their roles and responsibilities be written into state law (Danzberger, 1994; Delagardelle, 2001; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Kansas City Consensus, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Although school boards are often viewed as ineffective in their roles and are not comprised of professional educators, they have responsibilities that directly impact educational policies and practices, and consequently student achievement in school districts (Delagardelle, 2008; Maeroff, 2010; Resnick & Bryant 2010). An even bigger part of the problem is that school board members are often unclear about what their role is in relation to student achievement (Bracey & Resnick, 1998; Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

Educational reforms coupled with highly publicized dysfunctional boards have caused citizens to question the role of school boards and put boards at risk of becoming irrelevant (Kansas City Consensus, 2001). True reform requires a change in governing behaviors and clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of school boards. Some states such as Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Tennessee have passed legislation to define the role of school boards (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Reforms that most states have enacted to remove, improve, or take over school boards, have ignored the need to redefine board expectations, roles, and responsibilities – a need that is essential for changing school boards into governing bodies that can lead systemic reform and ultimately increase student achievement (Ford, 2013; Hess & Meeks, 2011). Education reform efforts, ranging from the implementation of new state standards and high stakes

testing to charter school legislation and school takeover, have all failed because they have ignored school board governance (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

The evidence in existence shows that while school boards do not impact student achievement directly, their actions impact the conditions for success or failure within the district (Delagardelle, 2008; Lorentzen, 2013). There is also a body of evidence that shows that boards in districts with high student achievement govern quite differently than their counterparts in lower achieving districts (Delagardelle, 2008; Lorentzen, 2013). While researchers have investigated the effect of school boards on student achievement, there is still a limited body of quantitative and qualitative research available on school boards; much more research is needed on what makes school boards effective (Land, 2002).

Significance of the Study

The quality of education and level of student achievement impact the economics of society as a whole and influence the business decisions made in small communities. States can improve their economies by improving education and ensuring a well-educated workforce (Berger & Fisher, 2013). The primary role of the local school board is to create an environment conducive to ensuring high levels of student achievement in their school district (Bracey & Resnick, 1998). The future of local control over public education through school board governance could depend on identifying the characteristics and specific actions that would enable boards to improve student achievement (Land, 2002). Results from this study offer information about potential professional development opportunities that can be used to support the work of school boards in Arkansas as well as implications for additional research.

Research Question

The following question was used to guide this study and to assist in better understanding the impact that school boards have on district achievement: What is the relationship between school board practices as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (Johnson, 2013) and district achievement as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System?

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey, and district achievement, as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating System.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is a relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey, and district achievement, as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating System.

Scope of the Study

This quantitative study examined the relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (Johnson, 2013), and district student achievement, as determined by the Arkansas Department of Education's A-F Rating System. Every public school district in the state received a link to the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS), inviting the superintendent and all board members to participate. The unit of analysis for this study was the school board. Data from each districts in which three or more school board members and the superintendent chose to participate were compared to the district's student achievement

score as determined by an A-F Rating System based on that employed by the Arkansas Department of Education for assessments administered during the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic years. For purposes of this study, districts that received a rating of “B” or above were categorized as “high performing”, while those who received a rating of “C” or below were categorized as “low performing”. A correlation between each district’s score on the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (Johnson, 2013) and that district’s assigned A-F rating was used to determine the nature of the relationship between school board practices and student achievement.

Definition of Key Terms

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

“*Governance*” refers to the responsibility and accountability for specific tasks within a system (Kansas City Consensus, 2001). The focus of governance is on school board members and how they govern their school districts.

“*Student Achievement*” is defined by the two-year average A-F rating based on the system that was employed by the Arkansas Department of Education in response to the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 assessment data. The rating formula includes up to four components: Weighted Performance Score, Growth Score, Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, and Gap Adjustments. The components of the rating and the determination of challenge points that schools may earn in addition to the other four components are explained in Appendix “A” of this paper (School Rating System Annual Reports Act, 2016).

The term “*High Performing*” was used to describe school districts where the majority of the schools received a combined average rating of “B” or above as defined by the A-F school rating system.

The term “*Low Performing*” was used to describe school districts where the majority of the schools received a combined average rating of “C” or below as defined by the A-F rating system.

Delimitations

This study focused on data collection from school board members and superintendents in Arkansas’ public school districts. Although multiple attempts to ensure maximum participation were employed, only data from those school districts in which the superintendent and at least three board members chose to respond to the survey were included. Survey data used in this study were delimited to include only completed surveys from said districts.

Limitations

Data collection was limited to school board members and superintendents who chose to respond during the time period of the survey. Data on school board leadership effectiveness, as measured by the EBLPS, relied on board members’ self-ratings of their performance as a board. Additional limitations included the A-F Rating System measure of district achievement due to a change in the A-F rating system used by the Arkansas Department of Education, along with a change in the state assessment used to measure student achievement. Act 696 of 2013, passed by the Arkansas Legislature, required the state to implement an A-F grading system for public schools. However, three consecutive years of data from 2013-2016 using the same assessment were not available. Students

were assessed using three different assessments during the last three years, prompting the Arkansas Legislature to pass an act to suspend the requirement to assign an A-F rating to public schools in the 2016-17 school year. Therefore, the degree to which the A-F rating system accurately reflects district achievement could be questioned. Every public school district in Arkansas, however, was impacted by the same assessments and reporting criteria.

Chapter Summary

School board members are faced with many obstacles such as tight budgets, advocacy from groups with self-serving agendas, and at times, their own personal wishes that get in the way of keeping their focus on student achievement (Ward, 2004). Research from the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) revealed that conflicts and dysfunction within school boards are a result of a lack of clarity about board members' roles and responsibilities (Danzberger, 1994). Educational reforms, along with highly publicized instances of school board dysfunction, have caused citizens to question the role of boards and put school boards at risk of becoming irrelevant (Kansas City Consensus, 2001). Although school boards have garnered much criticism over their inability to improve academic achievement, they remain an important form of local governance. The challenge that school boards face is to figure out what actions and priorities will produce the desired outcome of improved academic achievement (Land, 2002). Results from this study provide information that can be used to focus professional development opportunities in Arkansas in an effort to support the work of all school boards and assist them in better understanding their role.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Literature Search Strategy

The following is an extensive review of the available literature published in the last three decades on the history, roles, and effectiveness of school boards. Initially, a search of Arkansas Tech University's collection and databases was conducted using the FINDIT Search Engine and the keywords "school boards." The search yielded 132,384 results, 22,682 of which were peer-reviewed journals. The search criteria were narrowed further to focus only on peer-reviewed journals that were published between 2005 and 2016, yielding 9,928 results. As there were few qualitative and quantitative studies that focused on the history of school boards, their roles, and effectiveness, the search was subsequently adjusted to include earlier publications, to eliminate the requirement that journals be peer reviewed, and to add the terms "student achievement." Additional literature was needed and additional searches ensued focusing on the role and history of school boards, their professional development, and the characteristics of effective school boards.

Introduction to the Literature

School boards are one of the longest running forms of citizen government in the United States, dating back as far as 1642. During this time period, the citizens themselves governed schools through town meetings. As the business of running schools became more complex, the townspeople relied on elected representatives known as selectmen to govern their schools. By the early 1800s, schools were run by school committees separate from other forms of local government. By 1826, Massachusetts established the model of electing officials to represent the townspeople and have authority over all of the schools

within a town. This model of school governance spread throughout the nation and is still the basis for our local school boards today (Garn & Copeland, 2014). These boards are increasingly being viewed by education reformers as ineffective, inadequate, and unnecessary, and are in danger of losing their power and influence to state and local officials in the wake of lagging test scores (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014). For the time being, however, have the power to set local policy and shape educational reform (Howell, 2005; Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014).

About 93% of the nation's 14,000 school boards still have elected members, with the members of the other 7% being appointed (Garn & Copeland, 2014). Most of these board members are neither unintelligent nor incapable of leading their districts, but appear to have limited capacity to govern due to their incomplete knowledge of district conditions and a lack of academic focus (Schober & Hartney, 2014). They need to be trained in order to lead effectively. School board members who have adequate training on how to conduct board business have a greater capacity to help their districts excel academically, despite such district characteristics as high poverty and large minority populations (Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Schober & Hartney, 2014). Unfortunately, the only common requirements that most states have for school board members are residency and voter registration (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). National School Board Association (2012) research showed that only 23 states mandate school board training, and of that number only 16 require training of all of their board members. Krinsky (2014) cited Lieberman's 1960 book, *The Future of Public Education*, as a still-accurate reflection of school boards today. Lieberman portrayed school board members as elected amateurs who should not be setting policy because they were neither knowledgeable, fair, nor

capable. His words of over 50 years ago reflect the view of boards today as a group of political neophytes lacking the tools to effectively run schools (Krinsky, 2014; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Mizell, 2010).

The problem is that although school boards are often viewed as ineffective in their roles and are not comprised of professional educators, they have responsibilities that directly impact education in school districts (Delagardelle, 2008; Maeroff, 2010; Resnick & Bryant 2010). Research from the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) revealed that the root of the problem with school boards is that they do not have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This lack of clarity in their roles often leads to conflict and ultimately contributes to dysfunctional school boards (Danzberger, 1994). Delagardelle (2006) found that board members are especially confused about their roles in relation to student achievement. Education reform attempts, ranging from the implementation of new state standards and high stakes testing to charter school legislation and school takeover, have all failed because they have ignored school board governance. True reform requires a change in the governing behaviors and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of school boards (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Schober & Hartney (2014) found that districts with board members who prioritize improving student achievement are much more academically successful. School boards are faced with the challenge of identifying the actions and priorities on which they should focus to improve student achievement (Land, 2002).

The role of the school board is pivotal because board members are in the position to enact policies that will catalyze the coordination of resources necessary for successful school reform (Usdan, 2010). School boards create policies that affect the learning

opportunities of every child (Hochschild, 2005). Federal court decisions, influential interest groups, and other stakeholders have inserted themselves into the educational policymaking process, making the role of school boards today even more complex (Dimartino, 2014; Frankenberg & Diem, 2013). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002), coupled with other state and local requirements that hold local education agencies accountable for school failure, further changes the role of school boards from a focus on managerial duties to an emphasis on student achievement and standards based reform (Usdan, 2010). NCLB's successor, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act titled the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (ESSA), could further complicate the role of the local school leadership. ESSA reverses many of the mandates of NCLB. Gross and Hill (2016) quoted the act's chief sponsor Senator Lamar Alexander's description of the law as "the single biggest step toward local control of public schools in 25 years...It will unleash a flood of innovation and student achievement across America, community by community and state by state" (p. 311). Although ESSA still focuses on outcome data, the risk of federal deregulation is its continued reliance upon state and local level capacity. "Indeed, low levels of participation in school board elections, in meetings of school boards, and in various local school events suggest that local democracy in education is not quite the wellspring of civic participation that Tocqueville found it to be in the 1840s" (Mintrom, 2009, p. 348). Gross and Hill (2016) cited the lack of motivation and intellectual capacity of local leadership as a big area of concern when considering progress under ESSA, especially in low-performing districts.

Regardless of the legislative changes, leaders in the standards-based reform movement have mostly ignored school boards instead of recognizing the crucial role they can play in leading and sustaining positive change (Usdan, 2010). Despite the need to improve schools, the school boards in the nation's 14,000 school districts have seen few changes to their roles and responsibilities (Usdan, 2010). Although school boards have numerous responsibilities, they have little preparation, and, in some cases, no required training (Hochschild, 2005). In fact, Roberts and Samson (2011) reported, in a multi-state research study, most states have minimal educational requirements for school board members. States allow elected school board members to run their schools, but many do not require professional development for them once elected. Hess (2002) stated that one in five board members would like to receive the training they need on areas such as student achievement and resource allocation (as cited by Lee & Eadens, 2014). Usdan (2010) speculated that it might be time to reassess the roles and responsibilities of school boards and make explicit efforts to strengthen them so they can play a more active role in school improvement efforts.

Several states, including Arkansas and Texas, have recognized the need for their school board members to participate in professional development (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Arkansas requires at least nine hours of in-service training for new board members, and Texas requires 18 hours, with an additional eight hours after the first year. In both states, the in-service training focuses on such topics as school law, school operations, and the powers, duties, and responsibilities of school board members; Texas adds the additional focuses of team building and how to conduct meetings. Roberts and Sampson (2011) further stated that knowledge of the traits of both effective and

ineffective school boards is necessary to plan the required professional development that boards need to make an impact on their districts. The Lighthouse Inquiry (2000) provided seminal research on the effect of school boards on student achievement and identified common characteristics of effective school boards that can be described and learned by others through professional development. Roberts and Sampson (2011) concluded that school board members should be required to participate in professional development that equips them to make quality decisions affecting the education of the children they serve.

Research shows that although board members want the student achievement in their districts to improve, they are often unclear about their role in meeting that objective (Danzberger, 1994). The purpose of this study was to identify which leadership practices and patterns of organizational behavior are common among school boards that govern high-performing school districts in Arkansas. The results may be used as a guide to help board members understand their roles and responsibilities as they relate to improving district achievement. This literature review summarizes current research surrounding the changing roles of school boards, the current school board training requirements, and the patterns of organizational behaviors that exist in effective and ineffective school boards, as well as the impact of board behavior on student achievement.

History of Local Control of School Boards

Historically, America has wanted to keep school boards under local control, in part due to the distrust of state and federal government. This long-standing distrust started as far back as Colonial times, when colonists were ruled by distant governments that knew nothing about their lives in their local communities (Danzberger, 1994).

During the early 1800s, schools were exclusively controlled by the local community with no state or federal government interference (Kansas City Consensus, 2001).

Local school boards were formed in Massachusetts over 200 years ago when local selectmen governed the schools exclusively, until they needed to be relieved of the burden of running both town governments and schools as their communities grew. Although local control remained in place, separate school districts were formed, and the states began exercising more constitutional authority over primary and secondary schools. It was not, however, until 1837 that Massachusetts formed the first state-run board of education, replete with a state superintendent – a structure still replicated by states today (Danzberger, 1994). The next round of increased oversight was in the 1930s when states began consolidating schools and setting district boundaries, but still basically leaving schools under local control (Kansas City Consensus, 2001).

For many years, local school boards served the nation's schools with little to no oversight. For more than two centuries, approximately 90% of America's workforce was educated in schools led by school boards that were accountable to the public (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Several important events set the stage for the reduction of local control of public schools by school boards. Events such as the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the Russians' launch of Sputnik in the 1950s, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in the '60s and '70s, and the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in the '80s caused the federal government to play a much larger role in the governance of public schools (Danzberger, 1994; Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Kansas City Consensus, 2001).

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 brought with it the first wave of major education reform that ignored the role of school boards. However, by the end of that decade, it was apparent that the reform movement had fallen flat and left even more questions about the effectiveness of schools in the changing economy (Kirst, 2010). The limited improvement in student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) contributed to growing impatience among business leaders and politicians as well as growing economic uncertainty (Kirst, 2010). These failed reform initiatives in the 1980s led to another wave of education reform that questioned everything about schools and left doubts about the ability of school boards to lead the change necessary to improve schools (Danzberger, 1994).

Moreover, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 thrust public education into the political arena as a leading electoral issue. From 1983 to 1984, 34 states increased the rigor of their high school graduation requirements and made additional curricular demands on their public schools (Kirst, 2010). Each subsequent reauthorization of ESEA up through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 brought increased federal control of schools and increased accountability for student achievement for the local school board (Bankston, 2010). The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), however, reversed the trend of increased federal control and significantly reduces the federal government's influence, relying instead on states to decide how to hold schools accountable and develop systems for school improvement. ESSA's intent is to return policy authority back to state and local control (Gross & Hill, 2016).

“Negative public opinion has been a crucial underlying driver of K-12 policy change and that policy and practice change is externally driven by actors who are not

professional educators or employed by local school systems” (Kirst, 2010, p. 1). The more dissatisfied the public becomes with student achievement, the more reforms are introduced. K-12 education reform has become one of the lures used by state governors to help attract more businesses and jobs in the wake of economic rivalries between states.

An additional side effect of increased federal involvement in education has been the expansion of state education agencies and their capacity to intervene in local school district affairs (Kirst, 2010). Since the early 1980s, 24 states have passed laws allowing for school takeover as a sanction for low performing districts; between 1991 and 2010, over 40 states passed laws to increase parental choice through options like charter schools and private school vouchers (Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Kirst, 2010).

More and more diversity, changes in the economy, and alternatives to public schools have caused major challenges to local school boards that had not seen a change in their roles and responsibilities in over a century. A number of players, including federal and state courts, legislatures, teachers’ unions, and even school based governing groups, are infringing upon the authority that local school boards once held exclusively. Local discretion has been undermined by the increased power of the states, courts, federal government, and even the influence of business and private interest groups such as the Gates Foundation (Kirst, 2010).

Increased accountability and the introduction of school choice demands that boards shift their focus from buses, buildings, budgets, rules, and regulations to a concentration upon improving student achievement, because – whether they have realized it or not – their actions certainly influence student achievement (Danzberger, 1994; Kansas City Consensus, 2001, Lorentzen, 2013). Although school boards have garnered

much criticism over the inability to improve academic achievement, they still continue to be valued as an important form of local governance with the potential to improve academic achievement (Land, 2002). Research has shown statistically significant relationships between school board actions, such as providing responsible school district governance, and student achievement (Lorentzen, 2013). “It is at the community level that the American public can have the greatest impact on education. And it is at their own community level where citizens most want the schools to succeed” (Bracy & Resnick, 1998, p. 23).

History of Federal Attempts at School Reform

Viteritti (2013) provided a detailed account of the federal role in school reform in his essay published in the *Notre Dame Law Review*. Viteritti (2013) focused on the evolution of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from its inception in 1965 through the lack of reauthorization during President Obama’s first term in office. This historical account explained how ESEA came about as an attempt by President Lyndon B. Johnson to incentivize school districts to comply with the federal desegregation mandates brought about by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Up until this point, education was a state and local function, and local control was the historical norm. The passage of the ESEA in 1965 marked the first time that the federal funds spending-incentive approach was used to affect policy at the local and state level (Viteritti, 2013). The focus of the initial ESEA was to provide extra funding for educational opportunities aimed at poor, minority, and special education students through Title I and to require desegregation plans from school districts in order to receive federal funding (Viteritti, 2013).

A research study by Martin and McClure (1969) concluded that ESEA fell short of the goal of improving education for poor children due to a misuse of Title I funds; and the first longitudinal study of the ESEA program in 1984 showed that gains by students who benefited from Title 1 funds were not sustained over time (Viteritti, 2013). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which alerted the nation that we were falling behind the world in academic achievement, was the catalyst for the next wave of major school reform. This publication forced state executives to realize the need for better schools by ranking the states by performance and showing a need for change (Viteritti, 2013).

Viteritti's (2013) historical account of the evolution of ESEA showed how President George H. W. Bush first met with the National Governor's Association to create a National Education Goals Panel that took into account the recommendations of *A Nation at Risk*. Another notable feature of President Bush's plan was a focus on school choice. Although the Bush plan failed in a democratic controlled congress in 1991, President Clinton introduced "Goals 2000" in 1994, a plan that strongly resembled Bush's earlier plan. This plan that focused on adopting rigorous standards and assessments was rolled into the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA, titled The Improving America's Schools Act. The Improving America's Schools Act was very similar to the Bush plan sans School Choice; but by the end of 2001 only 19 states had complied with the requirements and there were no sanctions for those that did not (Viteritti, 2013).

The next major reauthorization of the ESEA was a bipartisan effort to mandate testing and standards as a condition of federal funding in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 (Viteritti, 2013). Under NCLB, states were required to

administer annual assessments in grades three through eight with the goal of every child reaching proficiency by 2014. States were required to disaggregate data by race, gender, free and reduced-price lunch status, special education status, and English Language proficiency, and each group was to meet adequate yearly progress. If schools did not meet the state performance objectives, they were identified as being in need of improvement. If they continued to fall below requirements they were at risk of being closed, converted to charter status or taken over and reorganized. States could set their own standards and definitions of proficiency, however, which ultimately led to wide discrepancies between performance standards from state to state and a skewed view of proficiency (Viteritti, 2013).

By the time President Obama moved into the White House in 2009, NCLB had officially expired and Congress made no move to reauthorize ESEA. After multiple attempts to get Congress to reauthorize ESEA, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan availed themselves of Congress' inaction. They used the opportunity to press their own policy agenda through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) passed in 2009, and the subsequent granting of waivers from the burdens of NCLB in 2012. These two undertakings granted Secretary Duncan more power to shape educational policy than any other federal official in history, enabling unprecedented federal oversight in education through funding controls (Viteritti, 2013). The focus of the Obama administration's school reform was to incentivize states to adopt national standards and aligned assessments, improve the recruitment, retention and compensation of educators, and implement school turnaround with a focus on using student achievement data as a means of evaluating educators (Viteritti, 2013). The

largest and most publicized incentive for states to revamp their current educational policies under ARRA came in the form of the four point three billion dollars allocated for Race to the Top funds. Secretary Duncan, was given the power to decide, with no input from congress, which states could compete for and ultimately receive the competitive grant funds based on their compliance with guidelines reflecting the Obama administration's educational agenda (Hayes, 2010).

Each subsequent reauthorization of ESEA and attempt at federal reform of education has increased the amount of federal funding available to public schools, but a recent report from Stanford University shows that the achievement gap between rich and poor students has grown, not closed as was the original focus of ESEA (Viteritti, 2013). Education reform efforts, ranging from the implementation of new standards and high stakes testing to charter school legislation and school takeover, have all failed. These failures may be at least partially attributed to ignoring the governance role of the school board (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). The latest reform attempt, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), emphasizes deregulation and more state and local control. The success of the ESSA reform movement hinges on the ability of states to build the leadership and problem-solving capacity of local school leaders (Gross & Hill, 2016).

The Role of the School Board

Gottlieb (2009) explained that ultimate accountability for how well a school district performs rests with the school board. Roberts & Sampson (2011) found, though, that board members are often elected with no knowledge of or training on how to run school districts. Researchers have just begun to focus on determining what the role of

school boards should be and there has been very little research on the role of school boards in supporting student achievement (Johnson, 2013). The available research showed mixed opinions on the various roles of school board members (Johnson, 2013; Krinsky, 2014; Maeroff, 2010; Sell, 2006; Stringfield, 2008; Weiler, 2015; Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2015).

Maeroff (2010) listed the duties that every school board oversees such as personnel, curriculum and instruction, facilities and managerial tasks, but he made the point that they often oversee these duties by voting with no real authority. The “mantle of public accountability” is there, but school boards are often operating in more of a ceremonial manner than actually wielding any power through their roles, Krinsky (2014, p. 290) surmised. Sell (2006) reported the most important roles that school board members engage in are hiring and evaluating the superintendent, tending to the fiscal responsibilities of the district, and creating policies. Although they are held accountable for improving student achievement, in many districts board members are made to feel they should not involve themselves in educational issues (Tucker, 2010). School boards have, in some cases, become “increasingly marginal” to the teaching and learning that occurs in schools at a time when they are being held more accountable for student achievement (Usdan, 2010, p. 9).

Because of the perceptions that some have about the ineffectiveness of school boards when it comes to matters of student achievement, policymakers have taken steps that limit and sometimes remove the local school board’s authority (Lee & Eadens, 2014). The attention given to a handful of chronically weak districts has caused concern that the nation’s 14,000 school boards are incapable of supporting districts in developing

the skills needed for a 21st Century Education (Resnick & Bryant, 2010). Hess (2010) countered that fewer than 1% of school boards fit that description. The changes to federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, apply pressure to school boards making it more difficult for them to master their roles, and causing them to often show a lack of initiative in regards to issues such as equity. The only way to assist school boards in an effort to improve schools is to train them to develop a vision, and adopt heretofore-atypical behaviors such as unity and a focus on instruction. School boards should set a vision for the direction in which they want the school district to go, and focus on the goals and objectives needed to reach the vision (Mizzell, 2010; Ward, 2004).

Historically, local board members have relished the roles of preparing budgets and reports, campaigning for bond issues, and other legitimate school board functions. Although these are important managerial functions, the primary role of the school board should be setting educational policy that creates the environment conducive to high levels of student achievement (Bracey & Resnick, 1998). The Kansas City Consensus School Governance Task Force was established in 2001 to determine which governance procedures contributed to highly effective public school districts as measured by student achievement. The task force consisted of a diverse group of citizens selected from over 100 applicants who were passionate about improving the system of governance in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. One of the recommendations from the Kansas City Consensus Research was to pass legislation setting improving student achievement as the primary role and focus of school boards (Kansas City Consensus, 2001).

Danzberger (1994) suggested that state policy makers should define expectations of local school boards and propose legislation to redefine the roles and responsibilities of board members to meet the expectations they set. Goodman & Zimmerman (2000) recommended that state laws make the roles and responsibilities of school board members clear and that their main focus should be on student achievement: “When board members and superintendents are unclear about who is responsible for which duties, conflict, inefficiency and frustration are inevitable” (p. 14). Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) further suggested that the law delineate the roles and responsibilities specific to the school board, the roles and responsibilities specific to the superintendent, and the roles and responsibilities they both share as a team. Without state reform of local school boards, attacks from multiple arenas will add to the dysfunction that currently exists and decrease the public’s trust in their ability to govern schools. True reform requires a change in governing behaviors and clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of school boards (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Weiss et al., 2015).

School Board Training

Developing a culture of professional development for school boards focused on defining a vision for success is critical for effective school board governance (Adamson, 2012). The Lighthouse Project (Delagardelle, LaMonte & Vander, 2007), a groundbreaking multi-year research study conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards, revealed that high-achieving school districts offered formal training for their school board members as a group on specific topics focused on district improvement.

Lee and Eadens (2014) pointed out the disconnect between the number of days of professional development required of school district employees versus the very minimal

training requirements of the school board members who are leading the district. Their research on the effectiveness of school board meetings led to a recommendation of mandatory, target-enhanced school board training, especially for board members from low-performing districts.

In most states, school board member training is not mandatory, although professional development is crucial for board members to effectively perform their roles (Adamson, 2012). Research by the National School Boards Association (2012) revealed that only 23 states mandate training for school board members, and that of that number, only 16 require training of all board members. Training requirements for new board members vary by state and range from a minimum of 4 hours of initial training in Illinois to 21 hours of initial training as required in Tennessee. Kansas's law does not list any requirements regarding board training, and while Missouri law requires board members to complete 16 hours of training, there are no consequences if they do not comply. Although some states require their board members to get training, the focus of the training is rarely related to issues of moving the schools toward academic growth. The training generally focuses on school law and finance, but does not address allocating resources in such a way as to enhance academic achievement (Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Lee & Eadens, 2014).

In Arkansas, school board members are required to take nine hours of training in their first 15 months of service, and an additional six hours each subsequent year. The training must include topics relevant to school law and operations, and the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the board according to Arkansas State Statute A.C.A. § 6-13-629 (2012). In 2011, Arkansas Legislators proposed an amendment to the school board

training law, Act 1213, requiring school board members to receive training on how to read and interpret an audit. The amendment did not, however, increase the number of training hours required of school board members. The Arkansas School Boards Association (Arkansas School Boards Association [ASBA], n.d.a) provides much of the training in Arkansas, focusing on such things as school laws and regulations, improving student achievement, finance, community relations, school operations and effective governance.

Federal initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's Race to the Top use funding as a means of federal leverage over local school districts and to hold local education agencies ultimately accountable for high educational achievement and responsible for any shortcomings (Bankston, 2010). While most school board members are generally concerned about the quality of education of the students in their districts, they are often left out of training that helps them develop the shared visions, missions and goals needed to improve the quality of education (Fink, 2013). School boards need attention through additional professional development, and cannot maintain the status quo if they intend to improve student outcomes (Maeroff, 2010). Ongoing training is a must for board members because their effectiveness as boards is tied to the amount and quality of leadership development in which they participate (Hess & Meeks, 2010). The major training needs of school boards include but are not limited to orientation of board members on what a school board is and detailed training on the role of the board as well as continuing education to develop the skills they need to perform at a high level. Therefore, board members must receive professional development, not only in such basics as Robert's Rules of Order, and state "Sunshine

Laws”, they also need ongoing training on how to operate as a unit and how to address district-specific issues. This training is the key to a successful board and consequently a successful school district (Eadie, 2009; Zorn, 2008).

Board governance will not be improved by a few hours of state mandated training alone. States must use their powers to help boards redefine their roles and responsibilities if they are to be successful in leading their districts towards greater academic success. Although state school board associations have attempted to change their professional development to address the roles and responsibilities of board members, those who need the training are less likely to devote the time to attend (Danzberger, 1994). Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) suggested that state legislative reform should address mandatory orientation programs for school board members and ongoing education for board members alongside their superintendents. The focus of the ongoing education should be on the roles and responsibilities of the team and on learning about team building and collective governance as a means of improving student achievement.

States such as Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas and Massachusetts have already implemented reforms to help their school boards focus on increased student achievement. Kentucky requires up to 12 hours of professional development on school board policy. Massachusetts and Tennessee each have laws that specify that the day-to-day running of the school is the role of the superintendent. The law in these two states also requires seven hours of professional development on policy, board/superintendent relationships, and a vision for excellence and advocacy for children. In addition, Texas requires all board members to participate in team building sessions annually and spells out the

requirements of continuing education in law (Goodman & Zimmernam, 2000).

Improving school board governance through effective professional development is the key to improving student achievement (Ford, 2013).

Characteristics of School Board Members

A survey sample from the National School Boards Database (Hess & Meeks, 2010) revealed that nationally approximately 80% of board members are white, 12% are African American, and 3% are Hispanic, with larger districts more likely to have racially/ethnically diverse membership. Females comprise 44% of all board members nationwide. More than 60% of board members nationwide are between the ages of 40 and 59. Nearly 75% of all board members nationwide have at least a bachelor's degree, and the same percentage of board members serve with no salary. The overwhelming majority of school board members nationwide (94.5%) were elected to their positions; only 5.5% were appointed. It is important to note that nine out of every ten board members surveyed expressed concern about the lack of focus on student achievement (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

The 2015 Member Survey administered by the Arkansas School Boards Association revealed that the demographics of Arkansas School Board Members align closely with the national data with the exception of gender (ASBA, n.d.b). The majority of Arkansas board members are white males ranging from 40-60 years old. Approximately 70% of Arkansas Board Members are male and 79% of the board members are white. African Americans make up 16% of board members and Hispanics are fewer than 1% of the membership. Nearly 60% of all board members in Arkansas

hold a bachelor's degree or above. Only 5.1% of Arkansas Board Members were appointed to their positions.

Characteristics of Effective School Boards

Several researchers have lamented the lack of available research literature on the impact of school boards on student achievement (Alsbury, 2008; Delgardelle, 2008; Hess, 2010; Johnson 2013; Viadero, 2007). Johnson's (2013) review of literature yielded only seven empirical research studies meeting those criteria and only one, *The Lighthouse Project*, was conducted in the last decade. Lee and Eadens (2014) attempted to fill a gap in the research by spending six months observing 115 board meetings using the School Board Video Project Survey to determine the effectiveness of school board meetings in high and low-performing districts. A review of literature yielded a couple of smaller research studies peripherally related to school boards and student achievement. For example, Marino (2011) utilized survey research to examine the extent to which school board presidents used school improvement practices, and Arcemont (2007) completed a synthesis of research on effective board skills.

The most recent empirical research on school boards and their effect on student achievement is *The Lighthouse Project* (Johnson, 2013). The Iowa School Boards Foundation has been researching the impact of school boards on student achievement through *The Lighthouse Project* since 1998 (Hardy, 2008). *The Lighthouse Project* research basically focused on answering the following two questions (Delagardelle & Lamonte, 2009): Are school boards in high achieving districts different from their counterparts in low-achieving districts? If so, how can all school boards become more like those in high achieving districts? Results of this study showed a connection between

forward-thinking school boards and student achievement. It also revealed that board members in high-achieving districts had different attitudes, training and practices than their counterparts in low-achieving districts (Delagardelle, 2008).

The common characteristics of board members in high achieving districts cited in *The Lighthouse Project* included the following:

- board members that expressed an “elevating” view of students;
- board members focused on data to direct the work and build autonomy;
- board members that supported the distributed leadership model;
- board members with the knowledge of what it takes to achieve change;
- board members with a vision for where to lead the district;
- board members with an understanding of how policies, priorities, decisions, and actions are tied to the culture of the district; and
- board members who know how instruction and student engagement are tied to improving learner outcomes (Delagardelle & Lamonte, 2009).

Arcement (2007), from his synthesis of research on effective board skills, also developed a list of characteristics that effective board members possess. His list focused on four major components: meeting dynamics, community relations, board dynamics, and team-building skills. He concluded that board members must know how to conduct themselves in public meetings, keep the community informed about school board issues, and have a “big picture” view of what needs to be done that impacts their decision making, demonstrate strong leadership abilities, and be able to work with each other and the members of the district ethically and respectfully.

The Centers for Public Education (Dervarics & Obrien, 2011) conducted a meta-analysis of the existing research to identify eight characteristics of highly effective school boards. The identified characteristics are as follows:

- Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
- Effective school boards have strong, shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
- Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
- Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
- Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
- Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
- Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
- Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

Additional research by Lorentzen (2013) cited specific actions such as evaluating the superintendent on expectations for student learning, developing a plan for improved student achievement, working together as a collaborative team and setting the conditions for district-wide success as common practices of school boards in high-performing districts. Schober and Hartney (2014) further supported the fact that board members who have an academic focus and work together as a team are associated with districts with higher student achievement. Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) conducted a nationwide study of school board/superintendent collaboration for student achievement and recommend seven key strategies to strengthen the work of the school board/superintendent team: Developing a definition of student achievement that includes a variety of educational goals, unified leadership focused on providing quality education, focusing community and staff on high student achievement, training boards and superintendents together as a unified team, raising the public's awareness about student achievement, and establishing a national leadership center responsible for providing training and carrying out research to support the leadership team and proposing new state laws about school district governance. Ultimately, school boards have to work together to put aside differences and focus on student achievement as a governing body in order to be effective. The first thing a school board should do is set a vision for the direction of the school district and focus on the goals and objectives needed to reach the vision (Ward, 2004).

Measuring school board effectiveness. Johnson (2013) conducted an extensive review of available literature on the characteristics of effective school boards and synthesized the findings to create the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

(EBLPS). The survey focused on the following 12 board leadership practices associated with student achievement: Vision setting, utilizing data, setting goals, engaging the community, staff development, developing policy with a focus on student learning, unified governance, creating a positive climate, demonstrating commitment to the vision, creating a sense of urgency and monitoring progress and adjusting accordingly. The survey relies on board members' self-assessment of their level of effectiveness as a board in relation to these practices. Multiple researchers (Bol, 2011; Golman & Bhatia, 2012; Grand & Przemeck, 2012; Murphy, 2008) agree that when raters are unclear about the evaluation criteria or if they are uncertain about their performance, they tend to be more lenient in their evaluations. In a meta-analysis comparing self-evaluation with supervisor ratings of job performance, Heidemeier (2005) found that in almost every instance self-ratings were more lenient. Johnson (2013), in his recommendations for further study cautioned researchers to allow the superintendent to rate the board's performance for comparison. Predictive validity was established by comparing the EBLPS mean scores of higher-achieving districts with those from their lower achieving counterparts. The results showed a statistically significant difference between districts with higher student achievement and those with lower student achievement in regards to the leadership practices they used as measured by the survey. The results also indicated that school board members in higher achieving districts rated themselves as participating in governance practices on the EBLPS to a much greater extent than their counterparts in lower achieving districts.

Ineffective Boards

Danzberger (1994) reported that critics of local school boards agree that ineffective boards share some of the same characteristics, such as micromanaging districts, failing to evaluate their own performance, lack of training, failure to focus on leadership for reform, and serious problems in their relationships with superintendents, to name a few. These are all problems that should not be ignored and are part of the reason there is such an outcry for reform of local school governance (Danzberger, 1994).

Research from *The Lighthouse Project* (Delagardelle, 2008) also yielded twelve similar characteristics of boards in ineffective districts:

- a lack of focus on school improvement initiatives;
- blaming external factors such as poverty and no parental support for a lack of student success;
- making negative comments about students, faculty members and each other.
- micromanaging daily operations;
- disregarding the agenda process and chain of command;
- a lack of communication between board and superintendent;
- board members were quick to describe parents' lack of interest in students' education;
- board members looked at data from a blaming perspective;
- little understanding of staff development;
- a lack of board professional development;
- not developing a vision.; and
- hiring a superintendent who wasn't in line with the vision.

In his research study of Montana School Boards, Lorentzen (2013) listed micromanagement, making unrealistic demands, and abdicating to the administration as three major practices that school boards should avoid. Hess (2010) cited four common shortcomings of school boards: Lack of voter attention – allowing special interest groups to control which members are elected; boards too often controlled by teacher union politics; high turnover leading to a lack of continuity, coherence and discipline; and boards operating in silos separate and apart from local, political and civic leadership. Often school board elections are held at odd times, playing on voter apathy and leaving the field open to those with an agenda to vote in their candidates (Hess, 2010). Hess (2010), citing information provided by Public Agenda in which 62% of adults and 48% of parents could not name one school board member in their community, illustrates voter apathy in relation to school board elections. This type of apathy leaves the door wide open for special interest groups such as teacher unions, whose ultimate goal is to elect board members to influence contract negotiations.

Another issue plaguing school boards is board turnover. At any given time up to a quarter of the school board members could be serving in their first term leading to a lack of coherence, continuity, and purpose. Therefore, often unclear in their role, board members sometimes micromanage or act as a rubber stamp (Hess, 2010). Mizell (2010) concurred that school boards that favor some constituencies over others, prioritize educator's prerogatives, and focus more on operations and managerial tasks than student achievement were more of a problem than an asset.

Loring (2005) shared four additional reasons that school boards are losing local control over issues such as student achievement: lack of focus on results, no clear

mission, fear of failure, and blaming others for poor results. Mizzell (2010) concluded that when board members come into their position for the wrong reasons such as anger, political ambition, recognition, or, in some cases, advocating for a particular constituent group, learning loses out. The only way for boards to turn this around and assert themselves in an effort to improve schools is to adopt atypical behaviors like unity, vision, and a focus on instruction.

A qualitative study by Weiler (2015), designed to identify lessons learned when even one school board member is there to advance a personal agenda, revealed that board members can disrupt a district and waste time better spent on the primary goal of educating students by shifting the focus to their antics. In this particular study, Weiler (2015) showed that in less than one month, one board member made 20 requests apart from the board agenda that required over 230 hours of staff time. Major lessons learned from Weiler's (2015) study were that there was very little recourse for getting rid of a disruptive board member, and the best way to react was to work in unity and follow predetermined rules and agendas at all times.

A-F Achievement Ratings

Then Governor Jeb Bush is credited with beginning the movement to assign letter grades to Florida's public schools in the late 1990s. According to Wagner (2015), Florida's formula initially relied exclusively on a single assessment measure, but was "tweaked" over and over again to the complex formula that exists today. At least 15 other states have followed Florida's lead, introducing legislation to implement similar models of A-F accountability reporting according to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (National Association of Secondary School Principals

[NASSP], 2016). Many states have chosen to implement this system of accountability as one of the requirements needed to apply for waivers from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy demands (Howe & Murray, 2015). Arkansas cites the NCLB policy as the rationale for legislating the A-F rating scale for its public schools (School Rating System Annual Reports Act, 2016).

The Arkansas Legislature passed ACT 696 in 2013, requiring the Arkansas Department of Education to assign letter grades to each school in Arkansas beginning with the 2015 school year (see appendix A). Research conducted by the Education Commission of the States (Mikulecky & Christie, 2014) recommended the following five essential indicators that every state should include in their A-F calculations:

achievement, growth, achievement gap closures, graduation rate and college and career readiness. Arkansas' Report Card is a compilation of the following four components:

1. *Weighted Performance.* Proficiency rates only consider whether a student scores above or below the proficiency cut point. Weighted performance gives additional consideration to other cut points. Schools earn points for students scoring Basic rather than Below Basic, as well as Advanced rather than Proficient.
2. *ESEA Improvement.* Schools earn points by meeting ESEA Flexibility targets, Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in up to six categories, depending on size and grades served: Literacy – All Students, Literacy – Targeted Assistance Gap Group (TAGG) Students, Math – All Students, Math – TAGG Students, Graduation – All Students, and Graduation – TAGG Students.
3. *Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate* (where applicable).

4. *Gap Adjustments* (where applicable). Schools with above-average gaps between TAGG and non-TAGG students on achievement and/or graduation receive a penalty. Schools with smaller-than-average gaps receive a bonus. Schools with average gaps receive no adjustment.

Proponents of the A-F rating systems cite the need to provide parents and the public as a whole with a simple, relatable means of understanding how well the public schools in their communities are performing (Howe & Murray, 2015). Most proponents cite the same rationale for implementing an A-F public school rating system: empowering parents and the community with the information needed to rate, improve or choose schools in a way that is clearly communicated and transparent (Howe & Murray, 2014).

Schools serving populations of students with lower poverty rates are often at an advantage when student achievement is used as an indicator in the state's accountability reporting system. In an effort to combat this concern, some states incorporate growth measures, graduation rates, and other metrics to compose their ratings (Mikulecky & Christie, 2014). Wagner (2015) cited the Public School Forum Report's data in which high poverty schools may have brought test scores up over time, but still received lower report card grades due to the limited effect of growth overshadowed by demographics and wealth discrepancies. The National Education Policy Center (Howe & Murray, 2015) identified an array of problems with the use of school letter grades as a measure of accountability and school quality ranging from a lack of precision in relation to the A-F scale to a lack of clarity about the meaning of a single grade as it relates to various indicators of school quality. Another major fallacy of the A-F school grading scales of

particular concern is that the composite score contributing to the rating excludes many factors that contribute to school performance such as socioeconomic status, absenteeism and discipline rates (Howe & Murray, 2014). In fact, numerous studies have shown that socioeconomic status is the best predictor of a student's success or failure on standardized assessments (Blazer & Romanik, 2009; Coleman & Department of Health USA, 1966; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Tienken et al., 2017). The Education Commission of the States (Mikulecky & Christie, 2014) found, in a review of 13 state accountability reporting systems, that when it comes to using an A-F rating to label schools, there is no perfect accountability formula, and there is always room for improvement.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers Saatcioglu, Moore, Sargut, and Bajaj (2011) applied the theory of social capital to their study of school boards to show a link between board practices and district outcomes. Social capital refers to the relationships, norms, and trust within a group that allows the group to operate effectively within society (Comer, 2015). The social capital of a group such as a school board can be broken down into the categories of bonding and bridging. Bonding is the quality of the group interactions within the group, and bridging refers to the group's interactions with outside groups that increase their resources and influence (Saatcioglu et al., 2011).

Saatcioglu et al. (2011) cited three major reasons that boards with high levels of bonding and bridging would have higher student achievement. First of all, boards that trust each other and work together towards a shared vision are more likely to channel all resources toward a common goal of improved student achievement. Secondly, boards

that exhibit high levels of bonding are more likely to monitor academic progress and hold stakeholders accountable for reaching their goals. Thirdly, boards that are good at bridging will likely form relationships with agencies such as universities, other districts, and community groups that will be beneficial to them as they learn new strategies for improvement and implement legislative mandates.

Shared vision and trust, characteristics of bonding social capital (Comer, 2015), are also two of the eight characteristics of highly effective school boards (Dervaricks & O'Brien, 2011). Trust among board members leads to sharing of information, which is likely to lead to communication and building a shared vision (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Bonding measures such as trust and building a shared vision have a larger effect on student achievement than bridging (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). Social capital is integral to the acquisition of education (Comer, 2015).

John and Miriam Carver (2001) shared an overview of the Policy Governance Model, touted as one of the best-known modern theories of governance. This theory of governance is applicable to all types of governing boards, including school boards. In this theoretical framework, the board exists for only one reason, and that is to make sure that the organization it governs works (Carver & Carver, 2001). The following foundational concepts are integral to boards following the Policy Governance Model:

1. The boards are responsive to the community who owns the organization; thus, their primary relationships exist outside the organization rather than with the people within the organization
2. The board acts only as a group and recognizes that individual members have no authority other than to contribute to the actions of the board as a whole.

3. The board has only one employee—the CEO—and the job of the board is to hold the CEO accountable to the very clear performance expectations they set.
4. The board is focused on the ends or end results defined by the board, and only makes policies that determine which means are unacceptable to meet the ends.
5. The boards do not offer advice unless it is solicited, and the board only seeks information that is necessary for decision-making.
6. The board, not the CEO, calls board meetings, and the focus is on the need for the board to work together to make a decision, or to learn together to improve themselves. The focus of meetings is about long-range planning for the betterment of the organization.

This model is an alternative to boards that are dysfunctional as a result of lack of role definition. It provides a way for school boards to be accountable for accomplishing their goals (Carver & Carver, 2001).

Nobbie & Brudney (2003) conducted a research study on an array of boards that implemented the Policy Governance Model and found that full implementation of the model improved the performance of the boards and helped them to define their purpose and better understand their governance role. Additional findings in this study showed that this model kept board members from micromanaging and helped focus the organization on a clear path to achieving the mission developed for the organization. Gregory (1996) touted the effectiveness of the Policy Governance Model as being the way for boards to carry out their responsibilities to the public in a more efficient and effective way. He found that this model enabled new board members to more quickly assume their role because of the clear definition of those roles. The model, in fact, is so

effective that Gregory (1996) found that no board that had fully implemented it ever returned to the old ways of running their board. He did caution, however, that it is only effective with proper training.

Conclusion

In his review of the history of federal control of public schools, Bankston (2010) contended that educational policy and education in general should be left in the hands of members of the local community. Bankston's (2010) historical account of public schools showed that from the inception of public schools up to World War I, schools were so closely tied to their local communities that there was never a concern about any higher levels of government intervention. Even though public schools were in place nationwide by the early 20th Century, they still remained under the control of school board members. By the early 1960s, the use of federal funds as a means of controlling public schools had begun to take root through legislation with the initial adoption of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Each subsequent reauthorization up through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 brought increased federal control of schools and increased accountability for student achievement for the local school board. The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that was signed into law in December 2015, reversed the trend of increased federal control and focused instead on increasing state and local control of public schools. The concern with this trend towards deregulation is that some states might adopt a "laissez-faire" approach towards local districts and put the students with the highest needs at the largest risks for failure in districts with limited capacity for leadership at the local level (Gross & Hill, 2016).

The United States has seen heightened accountability through such measures as school takeover and reconstitution of failing schools, often leading to board dismissal and remission of control to the state (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Ravitch, 2010). Gottlieb (2009) contended that the ultimate accountability for how well a school district performs rests with the local school board. However, school boards are made up of elected local community members who receive very little, if any, professional training on how to address instructional issues or plans for academic district improvement (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Findings from the Institute of Educational Leadership studies showed that although board members wanted the student achievement in their districts to improve, they were unclear about their role in meeting that objective (Danzberger, 1994). Roberts & Sampson (2011), in their research on professional development for school board members, found that school board members' lack of education had an effect on student achievement. They concluded that board members should be required to attend professional development in order to make quality decisions impacting the district they serve.

The Iowa Association of School Boards' (IASB) research study, *The Lighthouse Inquiry* (Delagardelle, 2001), focused on the extreme differences of school board members' knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs in school districts with historically high achievement as opposed to the attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge and beliefs of school board members in lower achieving districts. This seminal body of research revealed that the actions of school boards have an impact on student achievement. The second *Lighthouse Research Project*, conducted by the IASB, focused on how school boards learned to lead their districts, while the third and ongoing research focuses on

building board leadership to improve student achievement (Delagardelle & LaMonte, 2009). Johnson (2013) identified measurable, essential school board leadership practices from such seminal research as *The Lighthouse Research Project* among others and incorporated them into The Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey. The survey can be used to measure the leadership practices school boards have in place that are shown to have a positive influence on student achievement.

The local school board is one of the most important, often overlooked factors in education today (Mizzell, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). School boards have the power to impact student achievement in either a positive or negative way, depending upon the practices in which they engage. “Just as teachers and administrators are called on to implement research-based practices, school boards must also do so to obtain maximum student achievement results” (Marino, 2011, p. 27).

Chapter III: Methodology

This research study examined school board leadership practices in the state of Arkansas. The study investigated the possible correlation between school board leadership practices and student achievement in school districts in Arkansas. There are very few studies on the effect of school boards on student achievement, although there are some studies that identify characteristics of school boards that have been deemed highly effective. This study was undertaken in efforts to add to the limited body of research in this area. The results of this study offer some potentially beneficial information that can be used to guide professional development for school board members and superintendents in Arkansas.

Research Question

The following question was used to guide this study and to assist in better understanding the impact that school boards might have on student achievement: What is the relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (Johnson, 2013), and student achievement, as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating Scale?

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey, and student achievement as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating Scale.

Hypothesis

H₁: There is a relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey, and student achievement, as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating Scale.

Research Design and Rationale

Quantitative methods were used to analyze the survey data collected. A correlational analysis was employed to determine the relationship between school board actions as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (Johnson, 2013) and outcomes as measured by the A-F ratings. The A-F ratings are a compilation of the following four components:

1. *Weighted Performance.* Proficiency rates only consider whether a student scores above or below the proficiency cut point. Weighted performance gives additional consideration to other cut points. Schools earn points for students scoring Basic rather than Below Basic, as well as Advanced rather than Proficient.
2. *ESEA Improvement.* Schools earn points by meeting ESEA Flexibility targets, Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) in up to six categories, depending on size and grades served: Literacy – All Students, Literacy – Targeted Assistance Gap Group (TAGG) Students, Math – All Students, Math – TAGG Students, Graduation – All Students, and Graduation – TAGG Students.
3. *Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate* (where applicable).
4. *Gap Adjustments* (where applicable). Schools with above-average gaps between TAGG and non-TAGG students on achievement and/or graduation receive a

penalty. Schools with smaller-than-average gaps receive a bonus. Schools with average gaps receive no adjustment.

The Arkansas Department of Education set cut scores to the overall score to determine letter grades as follows:

A=270-300 points

B=240-269 points

C=210-239 points

D=180-209 points

F=Less than 180 points

The letter grade assigned to each district was based on an average of two years of student achievement data. The initial intent was to base the overall letter grade on a combined average of A-F designations from three years of achievement data. However, the assessments on which the scores for the letter grades were based changed for three consecutive years. A-F Ratings for the 2013-14 School Year were based on assessment results from the Arkansas Benchmark, End of Course, and Alternate Portfolio exams upon which the *ESEA School Improvement* component of the rating compared student growth from the same exam the prior year. A-F calculations for the 2014-15 School Year presented a challenge in that the state transitioned to the PARCC and NCSC Exams, thus limiting the option for the school improvement component of the rating. The transition also eliminated baseline data used for setting school improvement targets for the next year. The state adjusted the formula to include a statistical Value Added Model (VAM) to address these issues. The A-F grade designation for each of the first two years was based on two slightly different formulas: one that included actual student growth, and the

other that used “predicted” growth based on the student’s score history. Due to a third change in assessments for the 2015-16 school year, the Arkansas Department of Education abandoned the A-F Rating in year three of its mandated implementation. Multiple attempts were made to obtain the adjusted rating based on the ACT Aspire Assessment administered in the 2015-16 school year for the purposes of this study. The written requests for this data received no response. For the purposes of this study, the letter grade assigned to each district was derived by averaging the scores for each school in the district for both the 2013-14 school year and the 2014-15 school year, then taking the combined average to determine the overall cut score grade designation. Districts with an average letter grade of “A” or “B” were designated as high performing. Districts with an average letter grade of “C”, “D,” or “F” were designated low performing. The corresponding scale score for each of the grade designations was used to run the correlational analysis.

The predictor variables included in this research design were district characteristics such as size and location (region of the state), demographics, free and reduced-price lunch percentages, and school board and superintendent survey results including information on the characteristics of those surveyed. The criterion variable in this study was the A-F grade designation of the school district.

The Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) (Johnson, 2013) was used to collect survey data on characteristics of participating school board members. Superintendents in those same districts completed the survey as a means of confirming the work board members self-reported as undertaking. The survey focused on the following 12 board leadership practices associated with student achievement: vision

setting, utilizing data, setting goals, engaging the community, staff development, developing policy with a focus on student learning, unified governance, creating a positive climate, demonstrating commitment to the vision, creating a sense of urgency, and monitoring progress and adjusting accordingly. The survey results yielded an overall composite board score as well as a composite score for each of the 12 board leadership practices. A correlational analysis was conducted with each variable to determine a correlation between variables that measure the same construct between the superintendent and the board. Pearson Product-moment correlations were computed between each superintendent's scores on the variables and the average of their corresponding district board's scores. Responses from multiple members of the same school board in each district were averaged to form a single board score for each district as well as a single board composite score for each of the 12 board leadership practices. In an effort to further analyze the relationship between board effectiveness and district ratings, an Independent Samples *t*-Test was employed to compare the EBLPS mean board and superintendent scores of districts designated as high performing to the mean board and superintendent scores of districts designated as low performing.

Population

The target population for this study was the approximately 600 school board members in the state of Arkansas and their superintendents. The unit of analysis for this study was the school board. Participants sought consisted of the school board members and superintendents in each of the 238 public school districts in Arkansas. Participants selected consisted of board members in districts where at least three of the board members and their superintendents returned completed surveys. School boards in

Arkansas may be composed of five, seven, or nine members, depending on the size of the district.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The sample was taken from the population of board members and superintendents in Arkansas who completed the survey. Each public school district superintendent in Arkansas received a link to the survey via email. School board and superintendent members of the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) who attended either the ASBA New Board Member Institute or the ASBA Annual Fall Conference in 2016 had the opportunity to complete the survey during those events.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

An email from the director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA) was drafted asking superintendents in every district to participate in and administer the electronic survey using *Survey Monkey*© to their school boards during a fall school board meeting. The email contained specific instructions and information about protecting the anonymity of the participants. The AAEA Director forwarded the email and embedded *Survey Monkey*© link to each public school superintendent in the state on October 28, 2016 with a request to complete the survey by November 18, 2016. A reminder email encouraging participation was sent out two weeks later on November 11, 2016. This survey attempt yielded 96 responses.

The Director of the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) granted permission for survey data to be collected during two state conferences for Arkansas School Board Members. A separate *Survey Monkey*© link was established for each of the two conferences and the AAEA email solicitation.

The first opportunity to collect survey data face-to-face was during the New Board Member Institute on October 17, 2016. Typically, school board members, along with many of their superintendents, attend this Institute in their first year of service on the local school board. Board members with more than one year of service who were in need of additional professional development hours were also in attendance at the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) New Board Member Institute. There were a total of 220 people in attendance. The survey data were collected electronically using a link to *Survey Monkey*© on laptop computers set up near the registration desk for the conference. The conference attendees were directed to one of five laptop computers to complete their survey once they picked up their conference materials. The laptops were set up to begin the survey and the participants were directed to read the initial information and consent page prior to proceeding. They were then asked to be sure to identify the name of their school district and whether they were a board member or district office personnel. There was no place on the survey that identified the participant by name. A dozen or so board members appeared willing to participate in the survey, but uncomfortable with the technology utilized for data collection. Several of these board members requested assistance to complete the online survey. This initial face-to-face attempt to collect survey data yielded 61 responses.

The final face-to-face opportunity to collect survey data was during two days of the ASBA Annual Fall Conference on December 7 and 8 of 2016. A large majority of school board members and superintendents in Arkansas were in attendance at this conference. The same procedure used during the October conference was utilized at this conference, with the exception of location. At the previous conference, the laptops were

set up in an optimal location right in front of the elevators and the entrance to the conference room, which yielded more traffic. This conference was much larger, and the survey table was set up across from the registration booth and near the entrance of the exhibit hall. The first day of data collection was very slow because participants were registering and heading to an area away from the survey area. The second day was optimal because participants had multiple breaks built into their day in which to visit the exhibit hall near the survey station. Because this was one of many attempts at collecting data, board members were asked to complete the survey only if they had not completed it previously. During each face-to-face encounter, a dozen or so board members expressed their discomfort with technology. Nevertheless, this attempt at data collection yielded 147 responses.

Follow up email attempts at data collection were sent to targeted districts in which only a few more responses were needed to meet the criteria for inclusion in the research. There were a total of 317 individual responses from 136 of the 238 districts in the state. For the purposes of this study, however, not all responses are included because the unit of analysis was the district school board. Participants selected consist of board members in districts where at least three of the board members and their superintendent completed the survey. There were a total of 32 districts in which responses were received from both the superintendent and at least three board members. Although multiple attempts were made to collect useable data from each of the 238 districts in the state, the sample consists of only 13% (32/238) of the districts in the state. The districts used in this study were, however, representative of the various sizes, demographics and regions of the state.

Archival Data

The archival data used were the results from statewide data on district demographics, A-F ratings used to rank districts in the state, free and reduced-price lunch percentages, and school district location and size. These data were accessed online through the Arkansas Department of Education Data Center. The data are public information and, therefore, no permission to access it was required.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Johnson (2013) penned an extensive review of available literature on the characteristics of effective school boards and synthesized the findings to create the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS). The survey focused on the following 12 board leadership practices associated with student achievement: vision setting, utilizing data, setting goals, engaging the community, staff development, developing policy with a focus on student learning, unified governance, creating a positive climate, demonstrating commitment to the vision, creating a sense of urgency, and monitoring progress and adjusting accordingly (*Appendix B*).

Johnson (2013) conducted a study to establish the validity and reliability of the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS). The Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey was designed to measure the leadership practices of school boards that impacted student academic achievement. Johnson (2013) used the two-step process of conducting an extensive literature review and getting judgment from an expert panel to establish content validity. This process identified 12 exemplary board leadership practices that serve as the basis for the 33-item survey hereafter referred to as the EBLPS.

The EBLPS was originally administered in Ohio in 34 districts. Half of the districts that participated in the survey were designated as high performing and half were lower performing based on data from the Ohio Department of Education. A factor analysis on the results of the survey revealed six factors that accounted for 80.72% of the total variance in the original variables. The identified factors were: Creating and Supporting a Vision, Focusing on Improvement, Valuing Learning and Instruction, Practicing Shared Governance, Using Data and Policy to Support Learning, and Focusing on Professional Development to Improve Instruction. Johnson (2013) used Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal reliability on the full survey. An alpha of .94 was obtained, suggesting that the instrument has relatively high internal consistency. Predictive validity was established by comparing the EBLPS mean scores of higher-achieving districts with those from their lower achieving counterparts. There was significant difference between districts with higher student achievement and those with lower student achievement in regards to the leadership practices they used as measured by the survey. The results showed that school board members in higher achieving districts rated themselves as participating in governance practices on the EBLPS to a much greater extent than their counterparts in lower achieving districts. "These results support the content, construct, and predictive validity, as well as the internal reliability, of the EBLPS as a tool for measuring school board members' perceptions of board leadership practices" (Johnson, 2013, p. 481).

Johnson (2013) cautioned that due to the small number of participants, the generalization of results, as well as the application of factor analysis, is not as strong. However, since most of the factors in this study have four or more loadings above .60 in

absolute value they are deemed reliable. Johnson (2013) recommended using the survey with a larger sample for more generalizable results. He further recommended collecting information from superintendents in addition to school board members to help corroborate the degree to which the school board actually impacts student achievement. “The initial evaluation of the psychometric properties of the EBLPS revealed that this measure has solid internal consistency and an interpretable factor structure” (Johnson, 2013, p. 481).

Data Analysis Plan

A correlation analysis between each school board’s averaged self-rating and the district’s assigned letter grade was used to compare school board action with district student achievement. Correlations between the school board’s averaged self-assessment ratings and each district’s letter grade were the main focus of the data analysis. The districts were labeled as high performing or low performing depending on the corresponding A-F rating assigned by the Arkansas Department of Education. Districts with a two-year average rating of an “A” or “B” were categorized as high performing and districts with a two-year average rating of “C”, “D” or “F” were categorized as low performing. Independent Samples *t*-Tests were used to analyze the differences in the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) mean scores of school boards in high and low performing districts. Additional analyses were conducted using the collected demographic information to further describe the characteristics of the participating school boards.

School board action was measured by the school board’s averaged scores on the EBLPS. The EBLPS is based on the characteristics of effective board members. The

EBLPS consists of a demographics section and 12 statements describing board leadership practices. Each of the 12 statements was followed by a series of related questions that allowed participants to select one of four answers on a Likert Scale from the following choices: “to a great extent”, “to some extent”, “very little”, or “not at all,” assigned values of 1 through 4 respectively. Responses from multiple members of the same school boards in each district were averaged to form a single board score for each variable and for an overall composite score. SPSS Software was used to analyze the entire survey as well as to conduct a microanalysis on the 12 corresponding subsections of the EBLPS. Responses by the superintendents in the district were used as a means of cross checking the board members’ responses for validity.

The districts’ assigned letter grade, representing the level of student achievement in the district, was based on the combined average of the Arkansas Department of Education A-F grade assignment of all schools in the district for the first two years of data.

The school board’s scores on the EBLPS along with board and district demographic information were the predictor variables. The criterion variable was the letter grade and corresponding cut score assigned to the district. Correlation values were determined with an alpha level of .05% significance. Statistically significant correlations found offer information about the relationship between board action and district student achievement.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity include a reliance on self-rating of effectiveness on the EBLPS. Whereas this tool was designed for use by school board members to rate

themselves, superintendents were also asked to rate their school boards as one means by which to further validate the responses of their board members. Instrumentation posed a threat to internal validity due to a change in the A-F rating system used by the Arkansas Department of Education, along with a change in the state assessment used to measure student achievement. Act 696 of 2013, passed by the Arkansas Legislature, required the state to implement an A-F grading system for public schools. However, three consecutive years of data from 2013-2016 using the same assessment were not available. Students were assessed using three different assessments during the last three years, prompting the Arkansas Legislature to pass an act to suspend the requirement to assign an A-F rating to public schools in the 2016-17 school year. Every public school district in Arkansas, however, was subject to the same assessments and reporting criteria.

Ethical Procedures

Permission to conduct the research was secured from the Institutional Review Board at Arkansas Tech University prior to collecting any data (*Appendix C*). Permission to use the EBLPS was secured from the author of the survey, Paul A. Johnson (*Appendix D*). The director of the Arkansas School Boards Association granted permission for survey data to be collected from school board members during both fall conferences scheduled in 2016 (*Appendix E*).

There were no known risks associated with participation in the survey. Prior to participating in the survey, participants were informed in writing that the survey was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw from the survey at any time. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions either via email or phone prior to participating in the emailed survey, or in person when participating in the survey during a conference.

Participants indicated consent by clicking to proceed with the survey beyond the initial information page. School board members participated anonymously and the names of the districts, though collected, have not been released. Individual responses of all participants remain completely confidential. The only identifier requested from participants was that of district affiliation. District affiliation was used for the sole purpose of gathering demographic and achievement data with which to compare the results of the survey. Districts have not been identified at any point during the reporting of data. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Once the data were collected from the surveys, access to the data links in *Survey Monkey*® were deleted. The researcher and the research chairperson were the only people to have access to the initial survey data. Immediately upon completion of the research publication, the researcher destroyed the survey data. The archival data used are available to the public.

Summary

This chapter explained the methods that were employed throughout this research project. This research study sought to better understand the relationship between school board action and district achievement by analyzing a collection of self-assessments from school board members as well as the superintendents' ratings of their school boards on the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) Likert Scale, and conducting a correlation study between the combined self-ratings in each district and that districts' average achievement scores. The superintendent in each district completed the same instrument as his or her respective school board. The school board members' ratings

were combined to yield an average rating for each school board, the predictor variable.

The superintendents' ratings of their respective school boards were collected for purposes of comparison. Once that data was collected, it was analyzed for a correlation with the school district's assigned letter grade, the criterion variable. The data were examined for any additional trends that emerged as well as to identify questions for future study. The data collected along with a deeper analysis of said data is presented in the following chapters.

Chapter IV: Results

There is a growing body of research that shows how school board actions impact the conditions for success or failure in school districts. Additional evidence suggests that boards in higher achieving districts govern differently than their counterparts in lower achieving districts (Delagardelle et al., 2000; Delagardelle, 2008; Lorentzen, 2013). The purpose of this research study was to examine the extent to which specific board actions might correlate with student achievement in school districts in Arkansas. This study used quantitative correlational analysis to answer the question: What is the relationship between school board practices, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) (Johnson, 2013), and district achievement, as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between school board action, as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS), and the corresponding district student achievement scores, as designated by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Rating System. The ratings provided by individual school board members were combined with those from the other members of their respective boards to yield an average rating for each school board; the combined score served as the predictor variable. The superintendents' ratings of their respective school boards were collected for purposes of comparison.

The survey results yielded an overall composite board score as well as a composite score for each of the 12 board leadership practices identified by Johnson (2013) on the EBLPS. An analysis was conducted with each variable to determine a correlation between variables that measure the same construct between the superintendent

and the board. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between each superintendent's scores on the variables and the average of their corresponding district board's scores. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare the EBLPS mean scores of board members and superintendents in high performing districts with their counterparts in lower achieving districts. Additional correlational analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between A-F ratings and demographic information such as poverty rate. Data collection and analysis procedures, descriptive and demographic characteristics, as well as representative qualities of the sample are also discussed in this chapter.

Data Collection

The survey data used in this study were collected through an electronic replication of Johnson's (2013) Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) using the *Survey Monkey*® online format. This 37-item survey consisted of three demographic questions and 34 statements related to Board Leadership on a four-point Likert Scale asking "to what extent does your board participate in the following?" The Likert Scale answer choices were coded as follows: "1" to a great extent, "2" to some extent, "3" very little, or "4" not at all. The 34 statements were aligned with 12 board leadership practices associated with student achievement. Board members, identified only by district, were allowed to self-report their effectiveness ratings anonymously. Superintendents in each of the districts were asked to rate their school boards as one means by which to further validate board responses.

Multiple attempts were made to collect survey data from each of Arkansas' 238 school districts between October 17, 2016, and December 16, 2016. A different link to

the survey was set up for each separate attempt in an effort to track the number of respondents. The first attempt at survey data collection occurred on October 17, 2016 during the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) New Board Member Institute in Little Rock, Arkansas. Participants were directed to the five laptops at the survey table and asked to participate in the survey once they received their registration packets. There were approximately 220 board members and superintendents in attendance at this conference of whom 61 participated in the survey.

The second attempt to collect data was through an email sent to every public school superintendent in the state from the director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators on October 28, 2016, requesting a completion date of November 18, 2016. The email contained a brief request for superintendents to participate in the study with their school board members as well as an embedded link to the survey. A reminder email was sent out to the superintendents on November 11, 2016, one week prior to the deadline. This attempt yielded an additional 96 responses. The data collected to this point were reviewed to determine the districts in which the superintendent and at least three board members had already responded. Districts in which there was a partial response were placed on a list that was displayed at the registration booth and announced during the ASBA Annual Conference opener in an attempt to solicit additional participation.

The next attempt at survey data collection occurred during two days of the ASBA Annual Conference, December 7 and 8, 2016. This face-to-face solicitation of board members and superintendents yielded an additional 147 responses. A review of the data collected to that point prompted a follow up email attempt targeting specific districts in

which only one or two responses were needed in order to include the district in the research. The follow up attempt at survey data collection yielded an additional 12 responses. There were a total of 316 individual surveys submitted with participation from 136 of the 238 school districts in Arkansas.

The unit of analysis for this research was the district school board and participants selected consisted only of those board members in districts where at least three of the board members and their superintendent completed the survey. Only completed surveys were used. There were 31 school districts in which both the superintendent and at least three members of the school board participated in the survey. Each of these districts was included in the sample. One additional district in which all board members participated was included in the sample without that district's superintendent. The only identifier included in the survey was the name of the district with which the participant was affiliated. The district designation, though not reported by name, was used to describe the sample and determine the A-F rating with which to compare the survey responses.

The 32 districts included in the sample represent 13% (32/238) of the districts in Arkansas. Of the 32 districts selected, there were seven from Northwest Arkansas, seven from Southwest Arkansas, six from Central Arkansas, five from Northeast Arkansas and six from Southeast Arkansas, representing each region of the state from the urban areas to the Delta. Districts of various sizes were also included in the sample. The majority of the districts in Arkansas (121 of the 238) have a student enrollment of 1,000 or less and are considered small districts. There are 101 mid-sized districts in Arkansas with an enrollment between 1,000 and 5,000 students, and there are 16 districts that are considered large because they have an enrollment of over 5,000 students. Eleven of the

32 districts included in this sample were small, 17 were mid-sized and four were large.

The United States Department of Education report on the “*Condition of Education 2016*”

(Kena et. al, 2016) defined high poverty districts as those with a free and reduced-price lunch rate above 75%, mid-poverty districts as those with a free and reduced-price lunch rate from 50.1% to 75% and low poverty districts as those with a rate below 50%.

Eleven of the districts included in the survey meet the definition of high poverty, 18 are considered mid-poverty districts and three have very low poverty rates. A little over half of the districts (19) included in the sample have a student demographic of more than 70% Caucasian, six districts have a student demographic of more than 70% African American, and the other seven districts are racially diverse.

Table 1 shows the length of board service of the school board members included in the sample as well as the years of experience of each superintendent included in the sample. Of the 114 board members included in the sample, the vast majority of them (68.4%) have at least three years of service on the school board, and well over half of them (57%) have served five years or more. The majority of the superintendents included in the sample (64.7%) have more than three years of experience in their respective roles.

Table 1

Years of Experience of Superintendents and Board Members Included in the Sample

Years of Service	Superintendents (n = 34)	Board Members (n= 114)
Less than one year	(4) 11.8%	(11) 9.6%
1-3 years	(8) 23.5%	(25) 21.9%
3-5 years	(7) 20.6%	(13) 11.4%
5-10 years	(6) 17.6%	(36) 31.6%
10 or more years	(9) 26.5%	(29) 25.4%

Data Analysis

The Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) contained 34 statements relating to 12 exemplary board leadership practices. Each of the 12 practices was followed by a series of related statements (34 total) that allowed participants to select one of four answers on a Likert Scale from the following choices: “to a great extent,” “to some extent,” “very little,” or “not at all,” assigned values of 1 through 4 respectively. The overall survey was designed to measure school board leadership practices that impact student achievement. Participants also selected their district name from a drop down menu and identified themselves as either a superintendent or board member at the beginning of the survey.

Survey data from 114 school board members and 34 superintendents representing 32 districts were used to conduct the analyses. The data were imported from *Survey Monkey*© into *Microsoft Excel*© and *SPSS22*© statistical software. The Likert Scale responses from each participant as well as the district names were recoded to numerical data using *Microsoft Excel*©. Each of the 32 districts was assigned a separate number (1-

32) and each of the 34 statements was assigned values of 1 through 4, corresponding to the answer selection. The data were then uploaded to *SPSS22*© for the rest of the re-coding, calculations and analyses. Superintendents and board members were coded separately but each shared their corresponding district number. Board members' scores were merged to form a single score (mean) on each of the 34 statements for each of the 32 school districts. The mean scores for each of the 34 statements were combined to form a total board mean for the EBLPS. A mean board score was also calculated for each of the 12 leadership practices for each district. There were two districts in which the assistant superintendent and the superintendent returned surveys. These responses were merged to create a mean score for superintendents in those districts. The scores for each of the 34 statements were combined to form a total superintendent mean score for the EBLPS. A superintendent mean score was calculated for each of the 12 leadership practices as well. These district mean scores were used to conduct correlational analyses to measure the relationship between school board effectiveness as reported by the EBLPS and the districts' student achievement rating. Additional correlation coefficients were calculated to measure the relationship between school board and superintendent mean scores on the EBLPS.

Archival data from the Arkansas Department of Education Data Center (Arkansas Department of Education, [ADE], 2017) was used to calculate the two-year average achievement ratings for each district. Districts with a two-year average achievement rating of "A" or "B" were coded as "High" performing, and districts with a two-year average achievement rating of "C," "D," or "F," were coded as "Low" performing.

Independent samples t-Tests were used to compare the EBLPS mean scores of high performing districts with their lower performing counterparts.

Study Results

The Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) was designed to measure school board leadership practices that impact student academic achievement. The EBLPS identified 12 exemplary board leadership practices that serve as the basis for the 34-item survey. The 12 leadership practices are identified, described and linked to the corresponding statements from the survey in Table 2. A combination of the mean scores on the 12 leadership practices was used to determine the overall score on the survey.

Table 2

The 12 Leadership Practices of the EBLPS

Leadership Practice	Description	Corresponding Statements
Practice 1	Creating a Vision	4, 5, 6, 7
Practice 2	Using Data	8,9
Practice 3	Setting Goals/Strategic Planning	10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Practice 4	Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action	15, 16
Practice 5	Creating Awareness and Urgency	17, 18
Practice 6	Engaging the Community	19, 20
Practice 7	Connecting with District Leadership	21, 22
Practice 8	Creating Climate	23, 24, 25
Practice 9	Providing Staff Development	26, 27, 28, 29
Practice 10	Developing Policy with a Focus on Student Learning	30, 31
Practice 11	Demonstrating Commitment	32, 33
Practice 12	Practicing Unified Governance	34, 35, 36, 37

Table 3 presents data from all 32 districts on the correlation between the total board mean and the total superintendent mean on the EBLPS, reporting Pearson's r (*correlation coefficient*) and p (*significance*) values. All calculations use a 95% confidence interval. Pearson's r correlation coefficients were calculated between total board and superintendent means to determine how closely related their responses were. The correlation between the total board mean and the total superintendent mean on the EBLPS was $r(30) = .489^{**}$, $p = .005$ which shows a significant correlation, meaning that there is a moderately strong relationship between the school board self ratings and the superintendent's rating of his/her board on the EBLPS.

Table 3

Summary of Correlation Between School Board and Superintendent Total Mean Scores on the EBLPS.

Pearson r	.489**
Significance (p)	.005
Number (n)	32

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The research question upon which this study was based focuses on the relationship between school board practices as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) and district achievement as measured by a letter grade rating score assigned to each school district.

Pearson product moment correlations were computed to assess the relationship between the school boards' mean scores on the EBLPS (overall scores and scores on the 12 leadership practices) and the districts' A-F ratings. Table 4 summarizes those results.

Table 4

Summary of Correlation Between School Board Mean Scores on the EBLPS and District Two-Year Average A-F Rating Scores

EBLPS Mean Score Area	Correlation (<i>r</i>)	Significance (<i>p</i>)
Total Board Score	.116	.526
LP1 Vision	.152	.406
LP2 Data	-.072	.694
LP3 Goals	.119	.516
LP4 Progress	.269	.136
LP5 Awareness	.011	.953
LP6 Community	.271	.133
LP7 Leadership	-.120	.512
LP8 Climate	-.213	.241
LP9 Professional Development	.373*	.035
LP10 Policy	.033	.857
LP11 Commitment	.142	.438
LP12 Unity	.040	.828

Note: The school board (n=32) is the unit of analysis for this correlation. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). LP= Leadership Practice. **Negative correlations, though not significant, indicate that board effectiveness scores in that area were decreasing (indicating higher effectiveness) as district achievement scores increased.**

Of note here is the fact that lower scores on the EBLPS denote higher self-ratings of effectiveness, whereas higher scores on the district A-F rating denote better ratings.

There was no significant relationship between school boards' total mean self-rating scores on the EBLPS and the 2-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts,

$r(30) = .116, p = .526$. The only statistically significant positive correlation was a moderate relationship between the school boards' mean rating on Leadership Practice 9 (Professional Development) on the EBLPS and the 2-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts, $r(30) = .373, p = .035$. This correlation signifies that a higher board rating on the leadership practice area of providing staff development (meaning a lower effectiveness in this area on the EBLPS) was moderately associated with a higher grade on the A-F rating scale.

There were three leadership practices areas on the EBLPS on which board mean scores and A-F ratings had non-significant negative correlations. The leadership practices with a non-significant negative correlation to the A-F ratings were as follows: Leadership Practice 2 (Using Data), $r(30) = -.072, p = .694$; Leadership Practice 7 (Connecting with District Leadership), $r(30) = -.120, p = .512$; and Leadership Practice 8 (Creating Climate), $r(30) = -.213, p = .241$. Although the correlations were not significant, they indicate a relationship in which the lower effectiveness score on the EBLPS (denoting higher effectiveness) was correlated ever so slightly with higher grades on the A-F rating scale.

Overall, the calculations of the Pearson's r correlation coefficients and two-tailed tests of significance indicate that there were no significant relationships between the majority (11 out of 12) of the leadership practices or the overall board score on the EBLPS and the district A-F ratings. The null hypothesis was that there is no relationship between school board practices as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey and district achievement as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education A-F Grading Scale. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected. There was only one

statistically significant positive correlation indicating a moderate relationship between the school boards' mean rating on Leadership Practice 9 (Professional Development) on the EBLPS and the 2-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts, $r(30) = .373$, $p = .035$. In this one instance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Additionally, a Pearson product moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the superintendents' overall ratings of their respective school boards on the EBLPS and the district achievement scores as measured by the two-year average A-F rating scores. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(30) = .224$, $p = .225$. Again, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected in this case.

Additional Analyses

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores on the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) of board members and superintendents in high achieving districts to their counterparts in lower achieving districts. The *t*-tests were used to compare mean scores of both the total EBLPS scores and the total scores of each of the 12 Leadership Practices, as well as the poverty level between high and low achieving districts. The results of the school board analyses are reported in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Comparison of High and Low Achieving District Board Mean Scores on the EBLPS

Variable	<u>High (10)</u>		<u>Low (22)</u>		t(30)	p	<u>95% CI</u>		MD
	M	SE	M	SE			LL	UL	
TotalBM	1.61	0.06	1.5	0.06	.710	.241	-0.14	0.28	0.07
LP1 Vision	1.41	0.05	1.39	0.05	.190	.077	-0.178	0.215	0.01
LP2 Data	1.74	0.09	1.71	0.09	.172	.355	-0.284	0.336	0.02
LP3 Goals	1.79	0.09	1.61	0.06	1.510	.617	-0.063	0.424	0.18
LP4 Progress	1.89	0.14	1.70	0.08	1.223	.848	-0.126	0.503	0.18
LP5 Awareness	1.57	0.07	1.54	0.08	.160	.188	-0.257	0.301	0.02
LP6 Community	2.26	0.10	1.99	0.08	1.775	.225	-0.039	0.566	0.26
LP7 Leadership	1.34	0.08	1.39	0.08	-.370	.244	-0.288	0.200	-0.04
LP8 Climate	1.26	0.05	1.39	0.08	-1.024	.063	-0.396	0.131	-0.13
LP9 PD	1.69	0.08	1.52	0.06	1.461	.824	-0.066	0.400	0.16
LP10 Policy	1.47	0.11	1.47	0.09	-.007	.571	-0.318	0.315	0.00
LP11 Commitment	1.64	0.07	1.56	0.08	.582	.132	-0.203	0.365	0.08
LP12 Unity	1.47	0.10	1.42	0.08	.411	.846	-0.241	0.353	0.05

Note: The unity of analysis is the school board (32). Higher mean effectiveness scores equate to lower board effectiveness.

The Independent samples *t*-tests referenced in Table 5 show that, on average, board members in higher achieving districts rated themselves slightly lower in effectiveness on the overall EBLPS ($M = 1.6$, $SE = .06$) than their counterparts in lower achieving districts ($M = 1.5$, $SE = .06$). This difference, 0.07, 95% CI (-0.14, 0.28), was not significant $t(30) = .710$, $p = .241$; equal variances assumed because the significance value was larger than .05. On average, board members in higher achieving districts rated themselves

slightly lower than their counterparts in lower achieving districts on nine of the 12 leadership practices. School Boards in higher achieving districts and lower achieving districts had the same mean score ($M = 1.47$) on Leadership Practice 10 (Developing Policy). Although there is no statistical difference between the two group means, it is of interest that based on the numeric values of the means, school boards in higher achieving districts rated themselves slightly higher on the following EBLPS Leadership Practices: LP7, Leadership ($M = 1.34$, $SE = 0.08$), and LP8, Climate ($M = 1.26$, $SE = 0.05$) than their counterparts in lower achieving districts LP7, Leadership ($M = 1.39$, $SE = 0.08$), and LP8, Climate ($M = 1.39$, $SE = 0.08$). On average, superintendents in high achieving districts rated themselves slightly lower in effectiveness on the EBLPS [$M = 1.7$, $SE = .08$] than their counterparts in lower achieving districts [$M = 1.6$, $SE = .08$]. This difference was not significant $t(29) = .591$, $p = .599$, equal variances assumed. Overall, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean ratings of school board members in lower achieving districts than their counterparts in higher achieving districts.

Table 6

Comparison of Poverty Rate on High and Low Achieving Districts

Variable	<u>High (10)</u>		<u>Low (22)</u>		t(30)	p	<u>95% CI</u>		MD
	M	SE	M	SE			LL	UL	
Poverty	0.900	.179	1.409	.125	-2.287	.029	-0.963	-0.054	-.509

An Independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare poverty rates in high performing and low performing districts. The results of this *t*-test, referenced in Table 6, show that on average, high achieving districts have a lower rate of poverty [$M = 0.900$,

SE = 0.179], than lower achieving districts [$M = 1.409$, SE = 0.125]. This difference, -0.054, 95% CI {-0.963, -0.054}, was significant $t(30) = -2.287$, $p = .029$.

Summary

The research question that this study sought to answer was – What is the relationship between school board practices as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) and district achievement as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System? This chapter presented the results of the analyses conducted in an attempt to answer that question. Pearson product moment correlations were conducted to determine the relationship between the mean board scores on the EBLPS and the 2-year average A-F achievement ratings. The data suggests that there is no significant relationship between school board effectiveness as measured by the EBLPS and district achievement; therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was only one statistically significant positive correlation indicating a moderate relationship ($r = .373$, $p = .035$) between the school boards' mean rating on EBLPS Leadership Practice 9 (Professional Development) and the 2-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts. Additional analyses were conducted comparing the mean scores of high achieving districts to the mean scores of their lower achieving counterparts. Overall, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean ratings of school board members in lower achieving districts than their counterparts in higher achieving districts. These results along with conclusions related to their meaning are presented in chapter 5 for a more thorough examination of their implications for further research in this area.

Chapter V: Conclusions

Summary

The research question on which this quantitative study was based – What is the relationship between school board practices as measured by the Effective Boards Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) and district achievement as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System? – was addressed through a correlational analysis of the relationship between school board members' self-ratings on the EBLPS and the two-year average rating score assigned to the district by the Arkansas Department of Education. Pearson product moment correlations were conducted to determine the strength and direction of this relationship. All calculations assumed a 95% confidence interval and statistical significance was determined with a p value of $\leq .05$. Analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant relationship between the school boards' total mean self-rating scores on the EBLPS and the two-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts. Additional correlations explored the relationship between district achievement and each of the 12 leadership practices measured by the EBLPS. These analyses yielded one statistically significant positive correlation and three non-significant negative correlations.

In an effort to further explore the relationship between school board effectiveness and district achievement, independent samples t -tests were used to compare the mean scores on the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) of board members in high achieving districts to their counterparts in lower achieving districts. For the purposes of this study, districts who received an average two-year rating score of a "B" or above were designated "high" achieving and those who received a rating of "C" or below

were designated as “low” achieving. The *t*-tests were used to compare mean scores of both the total EBLPS scores and the total scores of each of the 12 Leadership Practices, as well as the poverty level between high and low achieving districts. There was no statistically significant difference between high and low achieving districts in the average effectiveness rating on the overall EBLPS or on any of the 12 Leadership Practices. There was, however, a statistically significant difference in the poverty level of high and low achieving districts. Higher achieving districts had lower poverty rates than their lower achieving counterparts.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership practices associated with school boards in higher achieving districts in Arkansas. Data analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the school boards’ total mean self-rating scores on the EBLPS and the two-year average A-F rating scores assigned to the districts. Multiple researchers support the conclusion that the actions of school boards have a significant impact on student achievement, mainly because the school board creates the conditions conducive to ensuring high levels of student achievement (Bracey & Resnick, 1998; Kansas City Consensus, 2001; Lorentzen, 2013; Usdan, 2010). The present study, however, was unable to determine a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported actions of the school board as measured by the total score on the EBLPS and student achievement. There are several potential reasons that no statistically significant relationship existed between the school board members’ combined self-ratings and the A-F ratings assigned to their districts: One possibility is that A-F calculations are not necessarily the most comprehensive measure of a school or district’s

academic performance (NASSP, 2016). Another potential reason could be the board members' lack of clarity regarding the leadership practices themselves, as well as the degree to which they are actually enacting them. This lack of clarity seems to have manifested itself in the high EBLPS ratings that the school board members assigned to their work.

Lack of role clarity. The majority of the school boards gave themselves unusually high effectiveness ratings on the survey. Of the 32 school boards in the sample ten were in high achieving districts, scoring a two-year average rating of "B" or above; and 22 were in lower achieving districts, scoring a two-year average rating of "C" or below. The total scores of four school boards in the sample, two lower performing districts and two higher performing districts, indicated that there was very little implementation of effective school board leadership practices among their members. The remaining 28 school board scores on the EBLPS indicated that those school boards implemented effective leadership practices to a great extent. The overwhelming majority of the school boards in the survey rated their implementation of effective leadership practices highly on the overall EBLPS. District superintendents' ratings of their respective school boards were used as a means of comparison. There was no statistically significant difference between the superintendents' overall rating of their boards' performance on the EBLPS and the school board members' self-ratings.

The measure of school board effectiveness, the EBLPS, consisted of school board members' self-rating of their board's performance on the leadership practices. Multiple researchers (Bol, 2011; Golman & Bhatia, 2012; Grund & Przemeck, 2012; Murphy, 2008) agreed that when raters are unclear about the evaluation criteria, or if they are

uncertain about their performance, they tend to be more lenient in their evaluations. The overwhelming majority of the board members included in this study assigned high ratings to their boards on the EBLPS overall. Several questions arise as to why this might have occurred: Should the expectations for high effectiveness ratings in each of the areas have been made clearer for board members? What was their level of familiarity with the leadership practices measured by the instrument in relation to their roles as board members?

If what we are seeing is a lack of awareness of these practices by the board, it was not for a lack of familiarity with their position, as the majority of the board members in the sample had over five years of experience and were serving in at least their second term. Another possible explanation for the consistently favorable effectiveness ratings could be attributed to the theory of social capital that is based on relationships and trust that would allow a board to bond together more effectively in their work towards higher student achievement (Saatcioglu et al., 2011). As many of the board members in the sample have worked together for two or more terms as a board, their perceptions of their performance could be skewed by their favorable perceptions of how well they work together as a board.

The consistently high self-ratings by school board members could be attributed to a lack of understanding about what they should be doing and/or a lack of role clarity. Indeed, much of the available research reflects mixed opinions about the various roles of school board members (Johnson, 2013; Krinsky, 2014; Maeroff, 2010; Sell, 2006; Stringfield, 2008). Lack of a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to actions attributing to student achievement is listed as a major contributor to the

dysfunction of school boards (Danzberger, 1994; Delagardelle et al. 2000; Delagardelle, 2006;). Multiple researchers (Bol, 2011; Golman & Bhatia, 2012; Grund & Przemeck, 2012; Murphy, 2008) also agreed that when raters are unclear about the evaluation or performance criteria they tend to be more lenient in their evaluations. The 2016 Southern Regional Education Board Report, “*State Actions to Advance Teacher Evaluation*” (Ganda & Baxter, 2016), revealed that the majority of teachers in their study, including Arkansas, received high ratings on newly implemented evaluation instruments regardless of how well their students performed academically. If the board members surveyed did not have a clear sense of their roles in relation to effective leadership practices, it would be difficult for them to accurately report how well they were performing as a board.

The A-F rating system and poverty. The National Education Policy Center (Howe & Murray, 2015) identified an array of problems with the use of school letter grades as a measure of accountability and school quality ranging from a lack of precision in relation to the A-F scale to a lack of clarity about the meaning of a single grade as it relates to various indicators of school quality. Another major aspect of the A-F school grading scales of particular concern is that the composite score contributing to the rating excludes many factors that contribute to school performance such as socioeconomic status, absenteeism, and discipline rates (Howe & Murray, 2014).

Based on the data analyzed in this study, the letter grade assigned to schools was much more a factor of socioeconomic status than anything else. The A-F Rating was very well correlated to the level of wealth in the district. Multiple studies, from the *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report of 1966*, better known as the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) to more recent research projects conducted by the United

States Department of Education (2001) have concluded that student achievement is strongly correlated to socioeconomic status. Most recently, Tienken et al. (2017) found that middle school standardized test results could accurately be predicted using the variables of socioeconomic status and degree attainment. Mikulecky and Christie (2014) concluded that when it comes to using an A-F rating to label schools, there is no perfect accountability formula and there is always room for improvement.

Further compounding the issues around the A-F rating scale in Arkansas is the fact that the rating for each of the two years included in the research study was based on two different assessments, which could account for another possible explanation for a lack of relationship between the variables explored. At this point, it is nearly impossible to find a clear, comprehensive means of adequately measuring student achievement in Arkansas due to multiple changes in both assessments and curriculum in the past three years. There is definitely need for improvement.

Additional findings. The quantitative findings in this study do not appear to support the seminal body of research from the *Lighthouse Project* (2008), which had found that school boards in higher achieving districts had different practices than their counterparts in lower achieving districts. As previously noted in the results of this study, there was no statistically significant difference between the self-reported school board actions of districts in high achieving and low achieving districts in Arkansas. However, of great interest, when observing the numeric value of the means of the two groups, is the fact that higher achieving districts, on average, rated themselves as slightly less effective in their overall use of effective leadership practices than their lower achieving counterparts. Although there was no statistical difference between the higher and lower

achieving districts mean scores, it was of great interest that based on the numeric values of the means, school boards in higher achieving districts rated themselves slightly more effective in their implementation of the following EBLPS Leadership Practices:

Connecting with District Leadership, Using data to make decisions, and Creating a Climate characterized by participatory decision-making. This might well be attributed to the fact that the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA, n.d.a), in which the participants are members, has focused much of its professional development on school board and superintendent relationships, collaborative decision-making, and effective governance. These leadership practices are those of which board members appeared to have been much more cognizant and therefore more thoughtful in their assessment of their performance on said practices.

Oddly, the one statistically significant relationship identified in this study was between the school boards' rating of effectiveness in the area of providing staff development. This is odd, because the data revealed that the higher the school board rating on the A-F scale, the lower they rated themselves on effectiveness as a board in the area of supporting and providing quality professional development for all staff focused on improving student achievement. This finding, as it is at such odds with all available research, prompted further scrutiny of individual statement scores in this category from the higher achieving districts. Many of the high achieving districts indicated that their boards had very little or no participation in district professional development as a unit, nor had their board as a whole board participated in professional development beyond the state requirements. These same boards did, however, indicate that they supported

professional development for staff, and that their board members did participate in the mandatory professional development hours required by the state.

An unexpected, yet interesting finding, that materialized during the data collection process was the lack of familiarity of a number of board members with the technology used to complete the survey. When physically present, I was asked by 20 or more board members to assist them with the technology; many did not seem comfortable with the online survey or with using the computer. Several board members in this number verbalized their lack of familiarity with laptops and using the Internet. Questions that arise as a result of these observations are: How does this lack of familiarity with technology impact school board members' ability to interpret online data, budget, conduct paperless board meetings, and communicate more efficiently? Should board members be issued laptops for the duration of their term? A possible implication could be the provision of professional development for school board members tailored to the digital novice and differentiated for those with more than a basic grasp of current technology.

This study does not conclusively determine the specific actions that, if undertaken by the school board, will impact student achievement. One thing is clear, however: school board members in Arkansas believe both that they have the ability to impact student achievement and that they are doing a good job of it. This may well be attributed to the specific professional development focus that the ASBA has placed on the board's role in improving student achievement. The local school board is one of the most important, often overlooked factors in education today (Mizzell, 2010). School boards have the power to impact student achievement in either a positive or negative way,

depending upon the practices in which they engage. “Just as teachers and administrators are called on to implement research-based practices, school boards must also do so to obtain maximum student achievement results” (Marino, 2011, p. 27). Board governance will not be improved by a few hours of state mandated training alone. States must use their powers to help boards redefine their roles and responsibilities if they are to be successful in leading their districts towards greater academic success (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). The leadership practices identified by Johnson’s (2013) review of literature and included on the EBLPS would be a great place to focus professional development efforts for board members. A deeper understanding of each of the leadership practices of highly effective school boards could greatly impact the school boards’ ability to accurately rate their performance as a board, and clarify their role as it relates to student achievement.

Implications for Practice

Ultimately, the results of this research could be used to identify specific leadership practices common among higher achieving districts. Although a conclusive identification of these practices did not occur, some trends did emerge leading to the following possible implications for practice:

1. School board members should have a clearly defined understanding of their roles as school board member. School board members and superintendents need clear indicators of the implementation of effective leadership practices with which to measure board performance. The Arkansas School Boards Association, educational advocates, and

policymakers might use identified effective leadership practices from the literature to develop a detailed rubric for school board effectiveness.

2. The Arkansas School Boards Association and other professional development providers might focus some professional development sessions on differentiated technology skill development. Additionally, school districts might consider supplying their school board members with laptops with which to conduct school board business for the duration of their term.
3. Policymakers, educational advocates, and other stakeholders might use the results of this study to advocate for the development of clear, consistent, comprehensive and continuous means of evaluating district effectiveness in Arkansas. Hopefully, as the Arkansas Department of Education responds to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), multiple measures of student success will be employed as a means of evaluation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given that the relationship between school board members' self-ratings on the EBLPS and district achievement as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education's A-F rating scores didn't prove significant, yet the majority of the board members' self-ratings indicated that they considered themselves highly effective as a board, additional research might focus on a qualitative study in which interviews and direct observation of board actions are conducted to further validate the accuracy of the ratings. Future research might also focus on determining how the school boards' self-ratings on the EBLPS compare to ratings by employees and parents in the districts they represent.

Another recommendation would be to replicate this study with a focus on more continuous measures of district effectiveness utilizing three years of data. Additional studies should be undertaken only after Arkansas has employed a single consistent measure for no fewer than three years.

Data collection appeared to be impacted by the reluctance of some to participate in an online survey as evidenced by the reactions of some board members during face-to-face solicitation. Based upon personal encounters with board members during data collection, there were a number of board members who were willing to participate, but were intimidated by the technology that they would need to use in order to do so. As there was a group in the sample who required assistance with the use of available technology, questions arise about the school board's use of technology in the various districts throughout the state. Future studies might be conducted to measure the use of technology by board members to do such things as analyze data, electronically vote, or even communicate with constituents via email.

Of great interest in this study was the fact that, although the majority of board members included in the sample rated themselves relatively highly effective on the EBLPS, board members in higher achieving districts tended to rate themselves slightly lower in effectiveness than their counterparts in lower achieving districts. This finding was inconsistent with Johnson's (2013) research in which he used the same instrument to compare higher and lower performing districts. Future research might focus on replicating this portion of the study with a larger sample size. Other follow up studies might focus on why higher achieving districts appeared to rate themselves lower in effectiveness on the EBLPS than their lower achieving counterparts. The question of

whether board members in higher achieving districts have a greater awareness of the leadership practices and/or higher expectations of themselves relative to implementation of said practices, warrants further study.

This study focused on the relationship between school board governance, as measured by the EBLPS, and student achievement, as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System. The EBLPS allowed board members to self-assess their level of implementation of effective leadership practices. Future studies might focus on a survey that also includes practices that negatively impact student achievement such as the characteristics of ineffective boards identified by *The Lighthouse Project* (Delagardelle, 2008; Delagardelle, LaMonte, & Vander, 2007).

The ultimate goal of this research study was to identify the school board leadership practices that would allow school boards to have the most positive impact on district achievement. Given that the results of this study didn't prove significant, further research is needed to identify which specific leadership practices, if any, higher achieving districts in Arkansas utilize that separate them from their lower achieving counterparts. One thing from the research involving this sample, however, is clear: school board members believe that their actions matter and that they have an impact on student achievement.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The results of this study show that there was no significant difference between the self-assigned effectiveness ratings of school board members in high-achieving districts and school board members in lower achieving districts. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between school board action as measured by the Effective Board

Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) and student achievement as measured by Arkansas' A-F Rating System.

School board members included in the sample consistently assigned high ratings to their performance as a board on the EBLPS. Therefore, we do not know how effective a tool this instrument was for rating school board effectiveness. When I began my research on school boards, Dr. Tony Prothro, director of the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) presented me with a cartoon slide used in my research proposal presentation (*Appendix F*). The cartoon satirically portrayed board members as needing to identify whether they had performed as a board “*brilliantly*,” “*extremely well*,” “*stunningly*,” “*outstandingly*,” or “*all of the above*”. This bit of tongue-in-cheek humor proved quite true-to-life. All of the members surveyed indicated that their boards implemented effective leadership practices to a great extent regardless of the student achievement ratings assigned to their respective districts. Board members who do not have a clear sense of what their roles are, however, cannot accurately report how well they are performing in their roles.

Professional development is crucial for board members to effectively understand and subsequently perform in their roles (Adamson, 2012). School board members and superintendents need systemic professional development related to clearly understanding the role and performance indicators of effective school boards. The Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA, n.d.) has already begun providing professional development for Arkansas school board members focused on improving student achievement, community relations and board governance. The National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2015) recently revised the *Key Work of School Boards* framework for

professional development to focus on the following five leadership practices: developing a clear vision for student success, developing policy focused on serving the needs of students, ensuring accountability for student outcomes, and strengthening relationships with the community and superintendent. Expanding these professional development opportunities to include additional leadership practices and clearly defined indicators of effectiveness is an important recommendation resulting from this study. Once this has occurred, school board members will be able to more accurately rate their level of implementation of effective leadership practices. Hopefully, by that time, the Arkansas Department of Education will have developed and implemented a plan to comply with ESSA's prescription that multiple measures be employed to assess student achievement. After such plans have been employed for at least three years, this study may be replicated.

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**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RULES GOVERNING
THE PUBLIC SCHOOL RATING SYSTEM ON ANNUAL SCHOOL REPORT
CARDS (EMERGENCY RULE) – Effective _____, 2016**

1.1 REGULATORY AUTHORITY

- 1.2** These rules shall be known as the Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing The Public School Rating System On Annual School Report Cards (“Rules”).
- 1.3** The Rules are enacted pursuant to the State Board of Education’s authority under Ark. Code Ann. §§ 6-11-105, 6-15-2105, 6-15-2106, and 25-15-201 *et seq.*

2.00 PURPOSE

The purpose of these Rules is to set forth the process and procedures for calculating a letter grade for each public school in accordance with Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-2105.

3.1 DEFINITIONS

- 3.2** **Department** means Arkansas Department of Education.
- 3.3** **Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate** has the same definition as set forth in 34 C.F.R. § 200.19(b)(1)(i)-(iv).
- 3.4** **Non-mobile student** means a student continuously enrolled at a school from October 1 of the school year through and including the initial date of testing.
- 3.5** **“TAGG” (Targeted Achievement Gap Group)** includes students with membership in any or all of the following ESEA subgroups: Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners (EL), or Students with Disabilities (SWD).
- 3.6** **Value-Added Model (VAM).** A student growth model describes the _____ change in student achievement over time. A student growth model becomes _____ value-added when students’ growth is attributed to a particular entity such _____ as a classroom, a program, or a school, for example. There are many _____

- 3.7 different VAMs. The VAM used for 2015 is a simple longitudinal student growth model that uses a students' score history (as many years of prior achievement as are available) to predict how that student will perform in the current year. The student's actual performance is compared to his/he predicted performance to provide a difference score (residual). The difference score, averaged at the school level, is considered the Value- Added Score (VAS) for the school.

3.7

4.1 **SCHOOL RATING SYSTEM**

- 4.2 Effective with the 2014-2015 school year, each school will receive a letter grade score of "A," "B," "C," "D," or "F."

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- 4.3** using the model set forth in Appendix “A.”
- 4.4** If a school district has an Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) and the ALE has a Local Education Agency (LEA) number, the school district shall, for purposes of a letter grade assignment pursuant to these rules only, include the ALE students in their respective area schools.
- 4.5** Each school’s score shall be published annually by the Department and by the school district, and shall be available on the Department’s and school districts’ websites.

Emergency Clause

Whereas, Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-2105 requires each school to receive a letter grade score of “A” through “F.”

Whereas, Ark. Code Ann. § 6-15-2106 authorizes the Arkansas State Board of Education to adopt rules to establish the method for determining the letter grade for each school that takes into consideration levels of performance and improvement, and the State Board has done so in these rules.

THEREFORE, the State Board of Education hereby determines pursuant to Ark. Code Ann.

§ 25-15-204 that immediate peril to the welfare of Arkansas public schools and students will result without the immediate promulgation of these rules.

Model for Calculation of Overall School Scores for Determination of School Letter Grades

The 2015 A – F School Rating formula includes up to four components: *Weighted Performance Score*, *Growth Score*, Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (where applicable)¹ and *Gap Adjustments* (where applicable). In addition to these components, schools may earn Challenge Points that are added to schools’

overall score when applicable. The components of the Rating and the determination of Challenge points are explained in this appendix.

¹ Throughout this document, the term “graduation rate” refers to schools’ Four---Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate as calculated by the Arkansas Department of Education.

School Performance Component—the Weighted Performance Score

Schools earn points toward the performance portion of their overall score through the *Weighted Performance Score*. Points are earned based on the number of students at each performance level. Schools earn the following points or credit based on students performance levels:

- Partial credit for students scoring at the lower performance levels,
- Full credit for students scoring at the performance level that represents meeting grade level expectations, and
- Bonus credit for students scoring at the performance level that represents exceeding grade level expectations.

Bonus credit is earned for the number of students exceeding grade level standards that is greater than the number of students at the lowest performance level (did not meet standards). For the number of students at the exceeding standards performance level that is less than or equal to the number at the lowest performance level, the school earns a full credit for each student at the exceeding standards performance level.

Test Scores and Students Included in the Weighted Performance Score

Grades 3 through 8 and high school required state assessments in Math and ELA are used in the *Weighted Performance Score*. For 2015 these assessments included the PARCC Math (Gr. 3 – 8) exams, PARCC Algebra 1 and Geometry End of Course exams, PARCC ELA (Gr. 3 – 10) exams, and the NCSC Math and ELA exams (Grades 3 – 8, & 11).

Highly mobile students are excluded from the *Weighted Performance Score*.

Student Performance Levels and Points Earned

The PARCC Exams and the NCSC Exams have two different sets of performance levels to represent students level of achievement relative to grade level standards. The following table indicates the performance levels for each exam and the points earned for those levels.

<u>PARCC Performance Levels</u>	<u>Points Earned</u>	<u>NCSC Performance Levels</u>	<u>Points Earned</u>
<u>PL 1</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>PL 1 where Scale Score = 1200 (raw score of 0)</u>	<u>0.00</u>
<u>PL 2</u>	<u>0.50</u>	<u>PL 1 where Scale Score > 1200</u>	<u>0.50</u>
<u>PL 3</u>	<u>0.75</u>	<u>PL 2</u>	<u>0.75</u>
<u>PL 4</u>	<u>1.00</u>	<u>PL 3</u>	<u>1.00</u>
<u>PL 5 for the # of PL 5 students < = # of PL 1</u>	<u>1.00</u>	<u>PL 4 for the # of PL 4 students < = # of PL 1 students where</u>	<u>1.00</u>
<u>PL 5 for the # of PL 5 students > # of PL 1 students</u>	<u>1.25</u>	<u>PL 4 for the # of PL 4 students > # of PL 1 students where</u>	<u>1.25</u>

To get the total Weighted Performance Score (WPS) add all points earned for students in math and ELA, divide by the number of nonmobile students with test scores in math and ELA, and

multiple by 100 to determine the total points earned. The WPS equation is below. N represents the number of nonmobile students in math and ELA at that performance level).

School Improvement or Growth Score

The transition between Arkansas's Benchmark, EOC, and Alternate Portfolio Exams to the PARCC and NCSC exams limits the options for the school improvement component of the Rating in 2015. Direct comparisons of schools' prior performance (% proficient on Arkansas standards) to current performance (% meeting college and career ready grade level standards) are not appropriate. Also, the transition in assessments meant that baseline data were not available to set improvement targets for 2015. Despite these limitations, stakeholders indicated a high value for including a growth or improvement component in the A--F school rating. Options for calculating growth during transitions in assessments are available using several statistical methods.

Stakeholders were consulted through a series of meetings over several years to learn about and evaluate the use of a student---level growth model during the transition from Arkansas Benchmark Exams to the new exams that assess students' college and career readiness. Simply stated, a student growth model describes the change in student achievement over time. A student growth model becomes *value---added* when students' growth is attributed to a particular entity such as a classroom, a program, or a school, for example.

Two value---added methods were modeled and presented to stakeholders: the Student Growth Percentile (SGP) and a longitudinal student growth Value---Added Model (VAM). There are many different VAMs. The VAM referenced here simply uses a students' score history (as many years of prior achievement as are available) to predict how that student will perform. The student's actual performance is compared to hi/hers predicted performance. The difference is considered *value---added*.

Both models may be used across different tests because both models assess and describe student growth in a relative manner, rather than in a criterion---referenced manner (growth toward a particular standard). In addition, both models provide student level growth values that can be aggregated to various levels to communicate about typical student growth in classroom, grade, or school, for example.

These models differ in how students' relative growth is measured and described by resulting the growth score. Scores from these two models answer slightly different questions about student growth.

- SGP answers the question—How much did this particular student grow compared to other students who performed like this student in prior years (students with similar score histories)?
- The longitudinal growth VAM answers the question—How much did this student

grow compared to how much we thought the student would grow based on what we know about this student's performance in prior years (the student's score history)?

The results of both models correlate very highly, meaning they lead to similar conclusions about student growth, thus leaving the choice of one model over the other to other considerations. The VAM was selected based on policy considerations such as which question about student growth is meaningful to students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Another consideration was the flexibility to easily accommodate additional data about the student and other factors or entities that impact the student in the event that VAM is used for TESS, LEADS, and school accountability.

Value-Added Scores for Student Growth

VAM scores for schools growth are based on student level growth. VAM assesses "student growth" relative to the student's *individual score history and the student's expectation of growth (predicted score)*. It reflects the difference between the observed performance and the performance expected (predicted) for each student in a group of students. The computation of the students' Value-Added Scores (VAS) which is the difference score (residual) is carried out in two steps.

In the first step, a longitudinal individual growth model is run to produce a predicted score for each student. The individual growth model uses as many years of prior scores for each student to maximize the precision of the prediction (best estimate) and accounts for students having different starting points (random intercepts). In VAM, each student's prior score history acts as the control/ conditioning factor for the expectation of growth for the individual student.

In the second step the student's predicted score in 2015 is subtracted from his/her actual score for 2015 to generate the student's value-added score ($\text{Actual} - \text{Predicted} = \text{VAS}$). Values of VAS indicate the degree to which students did not meet, met, or exceeded expected growth in performance.

- If the student has a VAS with a positive value the student's performance exceeded expectations for the year. The student had higher than expected growth. The greater the value above zero, the more the student exceeded expectations.
- If the student has a VAS value of zero the student's performance met expected performance. The student grew at least as much as expected.
- If the student has a VAS with a negative value the student did not meet expectations for growth in performance for the year meaning the student did not grow as much as expected in achievement. The lower the value of the VAS, the larger the degree to which the student did not grow as much as expected.

VAS for School Growth

Student VAS are averaged for each school to provide a school-level VAS. School VAS indicate, on average, the extent to which students in the school grew compared to how much we thought they would grow based on how they had achieved in the past.

- School VAS answers the question—On average, did students in this school meet, exceed, or not meet expected growth?

School VAS scores in math and ELA are averaged to produce a value that describes the average student growth for the school across both subjects. Before school VAS can be included in the A--F school rating the values must be transformed to a scale that will work within the total point scale for the rating system. The VAS were transformed using the equation below.

$$\text{School Growth Score} = (\text{school VAS} \times 35) + 80.85$$

School growth scores are capped so that the minimum school growth score is 70 and the maximum school growth score is 95. This transformation places schools whose students are meeting expected growth on average (VAS ~ 0) at 80.85.

Thus, for this transition year, only schools with less than expected average growth values score a C value for this component.

Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

Schools with at least 25 expected graduates may earn points for their graduation rate. The All Students four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is added to the Overall School Score for schools with at least 25 expected graduates. These rates are calculated by the ADE. The graduation rate used in accountability determinations usually lags one year behind the year of the test scores used in the accountability determinations.

Adjustments for Achievement Gaps and Graduation Gaps

A school's numeric scores in Weighted Performance and Graduation Rate are adjusted for the size of a school's performance and/or graduation rate gap between TAGG and non-TAGG subgroups within each school. This adjustment can result in schools earning a bonus if the gap is relatively small, a penalty if the gap is relatively large, or no change if the gap is average.

Note: Schools that do not have a TAGG or non-TAGG group of 25 or more students (i.e., do not have a within-school achievement gap) are given a zero for Gap Adjustment.

- A school's achievement gap is the difference between the percentage of TAGG and non-TAGG students meeting or exceeding standards in math plus literacy.
- A school's graduation rate gap is the difference between the TAGG and non-TAGG graduation rates.

Achievement Gap Adjustment

The achievement gap is measured at the school level using the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level standards (Levels 4 and 5 for PARCC; Levels 3 and 4

for NCSC).

All schools with at least 25 tested students in each category (non---TAGG and TAGG) are then ordered on the size of each school's gap, from those with the largest percentage point gap to those with the smallest. Schools with the largest gaps earn a penalty. Schools with the smallest gaps earn a bonus. Schools with typical gap sizes receive a zero or no adjustment.

Gap Adjustments are determined by dividing the ordered list of all schools with achievement gaps into five groups or quintiles with equal numbers of schools in each group. Based on this classification, Gap Adjustments for achievement are assigned. The table below provides the gap sizes and gap adjustments for 2015.

	<u>Largest</u>	<u>Larger</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Smaller</u>	<u>Smallest</u>
Gap	-6	-3	0	+3	+6
<u>Achievement Gap Range</u>	<u>30.64%</u> or	<u>24.43--</u> <u>30.63%</u>	<u>19.79--</u> <u>24.42%</u>	<u>14.88--</u> <u>19.78%</u>	<u>Less</u> <u>than</u>

Round the school achievement gap to the nearest hundredth before comparing the values in the table.

Graduation Rate Gap Adjustment

The graduation rate gap is measured at the school level using the difference in graduation rates between a school's non---TAGG and TAGG student populations.

All schools with at least 25 expected graduates in each category (non---TAGG and TAGG) are then ordered on the size of each school's gap, from those with the largest percentage point gap to those with the smallest. Schools with the largest gaps earn a penalty. Schools with the smallest gaps earn a bonus. Schools with typical gap sizes receive a zero or no adjustment.

Schools with graduation rates but with too few non---TAGG or TAGG students (< 25) to be eligible for a penalty or bonus are given a score of 0. Gap Adjustments for graduation rate are determined by dividing the ordered list of all schools with graduation rate gaps into five groups or quintiles with equal numbers of schools in each group. Based on this classification, Gap Adjustments for graduation rate are assigned. The table below provides the gap sizes and gap adjustments.

	<u>Largest</u>	<u>Larger</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Smaller</u>	<u>Smallest</u>
Gap	-6	-3	0	+3	+6
<u>Graduation Gap Range</u>	<u>16.21%</u> or	<u>10.75--</u> <u>16.20%</u>	<u>6.90--</u> <u>10.74%</u>	<u>3.66--</u> <u>6.89%</u>	<u>Less</u> <u>than</u>

Round the school graduation gap to the nearest hundredth before comparing the values in the table.

Challenge Points

Schools earn extra points for current year performance when the performance of students in the school exceeds the expected performance considering the schools' level of challenge. A simple statistical analysis of covariance is used to determine schools' performance (% meeting or exceeding grade level standards) adjusting for schools' level of challenge based on the schools' poverty rate as measured by the percentage of students economically disadvantaged. The challenge points are calculated separately for math and ELA. The points are based on the difference between expected current year school performance considering the school's level of challenge and the actual current year school performance. If the difference is positive the school outperformed expectations and earns Challenge Points.

- Schools receive 3 Challenge Points for math and/or ELA if the school has a positive difference that is in the top quartile among all schools.
- Schools receive 2 Challenge Points for math and/or ELA if the school has a positive difference that is in the third quartile among all schools.

Challenge points provide schools with an opportunity to earn extra points for outperforming expectations.

Overall Score Calculation

A school's overall score is calculated by applying the gap adjustment to Weighted Performance and/or Graduation Rate and summing over all the components as indicated below. Schools without graduation rates receive a multiplier to put all schools' overall scores on a scale of 300 possible points.

Schools without graduation rate:

For schools without a graduation rate, both components of the overall score will be multiplied by 1.5 which puts the Overall School Score for these schools on the same possible points scale as schools with a graduation rate.

Applying Cut Scores to the Overall Score to Determine Letter Grades

Schools' final scores are calculated by summing its scores on each component. The sum of these scores is capped at 300 possible points. Letter grades will be assigned as follows.

A = 270 – 300 points

B = 240 – 269 points

C = 210 – 239 points

D = 180 – 209 points

F = Less Than 180 points

Appendix B: EBLPS Survey

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

Welcome to My Survey
Principal Investigator: Tiffany Bone

This survey is being distributed to every school district in the state of Arkansas. Your participation in this survey is VOLUNTARY, but we would greatly appreciate your assistance. You may withdraw from this study at any time.

We invite you to take part in a research study, Building Better School Boards at Arkansas Tech University, which seeks to understand the governance practices of school board members in Arkansas and how they relate to academic outcomes. The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between school board leadership practices and student achievement in school districts in Arkansas. You are being offered the opportunity to take part in this research study because of your role as either a school board member or district level leader in a public school district in Arkansas.

Please be assured that your individual responses will remain strictly confidential. No superintendent or board member information will be released. The only identifier requested is the name of the district you are affiliated with. This is for the sole purpose of gathering demographic and achievement data with which to compare the results of the survey. The information reported will NOT include district names. There are no known risks associated with this survey. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Before making the decision to participate in this research, you should have reviewed the information in this form and had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. If you decide to participate in this survey, you will give your consent by pressing the "Next" button below.

The questionnaire should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. We are confident that you will find the overall results of our study interesting and applicable to improving school governance in our state. Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or general questions or concerns about the research, please contact Tiffany Bone a graduate student working under the supervision of Dr. Christopher Trombly at 501-772-9809, or Contact Dr. Christopher Trombly at 339-236-4475.

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

Demographic Information

Please complete the following information.

* 1. District: Select your district from the dropdown menu.

* 2. Role

- ☐ School Board Member
- ☐ Superintendent or District Office Administrator
- ☐ Other

* 3. Years of Experience in your current role

- ☐ 0-1
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 3-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10 or more

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

Board of Education Leadership Questionnaire

Directions: Below you will find 12 statements (I-XII) describing board leadership practices. After reading each statement, please respond to the questions that follow and rate each one according to the following scale:

1-To a great extent

2- To some extent

3- Very little

4- Not at all

I. Creating a Vision: The board is actively involved with district leaders and the community in creating a clear vision for the district that is based in the belief that students are capable learners and that the district staff have the capacity to impact student achievement.

* 4. To what extent is your board actively involved with district leaders in creating a vision for the district?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 5. To what extent is your board actively involved with the community in creating a vision for the district?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 6. To what extent does your district's vision express the belief that all students can learn?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 7. To what extent does your district's vision express the belief that district staff can impact student achievement?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

II. Using Data

The board uses data to set goals, monitor progress, and inform decision-making regarding student achievement.

* 8. To what extent does your board use data to inform its decision-making?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 9. To what extent does your board use data to apply pressure for change?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

III. Setting Goals/Strategic Planning

The board, in collaboration with district staff and the community, establishes specific goals for student achievement and classroom instruction and allows district staff to be responsible for the methods used to accomplish these goals.

* 10. To what extent has your board established written district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 11. To what extent has your board involved district staff in the establishing the district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 12. To what extent has your board involved the community in establishing district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 13. To what extent do the goals relate to student achievement?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 14. To what extent has your district formulated a current, written comprehensive strategic plan?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

IV. Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action

The board monitors, in collaboration with district leadership, progress toward district goals and takes action when progress is not evident.

* 15. To what extent does your board monitor progress toward the achievement of district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 16. To what extent does your board take corrective action when progress toward district goals is not evident?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very Little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

V. Creating Awareness and Urgency

The board creates a sense of urgency and awareness about the gap between student achievement data and the district's student achievement goals.

* 17. To what extent does your board create a sense of urgency about the gap between student achievement and district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 18. To what extent does your board advocate for changes in district conditions to improve student achievement?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

VI. Engaging the Community

The board actively engages the community in pursuit of the district's goals by insuring two-way communication with students, staff, parents and community.

* 19. To what extent does your board engage the community in the pursuit of the district's goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 20. To what extent does your board engage the community in the policymaking process?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

VII. Connecting with District Leadership

The school board actively supports the superintendent in ways that complement the superintendent's efforts to achieve the district's goals.

* 21. To what extent does your board support accountability by ensuring proper evaluations for all personnel, including the superintendent?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 22. To what extent does your board set policy and subsequently allow the superintendent and district leadership team to run the daily operations?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

VIII. Creating Climate

The school board provides leadership in creating a district climate characterized by participatory decision making, a focus on the needs of staff and students, and a commitment to high quality teaching and learning.

* 23. To what extent does your board encourage participatory decision-making at all levels of the district?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 24. To what extent does your board focus on the needs of staff and students?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 25. To what extent is your board committed to high quality instruction?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

IX. Providing Staff Development

The board understands, supports, and provides quality professional development for all staff that is focused on improving instruction. The board engages in required staff development.

* 26. To what extent does your board support professional development for staff that focuses on improving classroom instruction?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 27. To what extent does your board participate in mandatory professional development for school board members?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 28. To what extent does your board participate in board professional development beyond the state requirements?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 29. To what extent does your board participate in district specific professional development as a unit?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

X. Developing Policy with a Focus on Student Learning

The board focuses on policy issues that impact student achievement and classroom instruction.

* 30. To what extent does your board focus on policies that impact student achievement?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 31. To what extent does your board focus on policies that impact classroom instruction?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

XI. Demonstrating Commitment

The board demonstrates commitment to the district's vision and goals by ensuring that district resources (time, money, staff, programs) support district goals and by spending time together learning about district programs, initiatives and issues.

* 32. To what extent does your board ensure that district resources (time, money, staff and programs) support district goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 33. To what extent does your board spend time together learning about district programs, initiatives and issues?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey

XII. Practicing Unified Governance

The board practices unified governance in which the board and superintendent have complementary roles in policy development and implementation that lead toward achieving the districts vision and goals.

* 34. To what extent do your board and your superintendent share a common vision for the district?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 35. To what extent do your board and your superintendent work together to achieve the district's goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 36. To what extent does the leadership role of your board and the leadership role of your superintendent complement rather than conflict with each other?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

* 37. To what extent does your board spend time with the superintendent evaluating the district's work toward accomplishing the district's goals?

- ☐ 1. To a great extent
- ☐ 2. To some extent
- ☐ 3. Very little
- ☐ 4. Not at all

Appendix C: IRB Approval

**Academic Affairs**

Administration Room 200
1509 North Boulder Avenue
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-968-0319
Fax: 479-968-0644
www.atu.edu/academics

10/10/16

To Whom It May Concern:

Tiffany Bone's IRB application "Building Better School Boards" is approved and assigned approval code Bone_100616. The approval expires October 6, 2019.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jack Tucci".

Jack Tucci, Ph.D.

IRB Chair

Appendix D: Permission to Use EBLPS

On Wed, Aug 17, 2016 at 7:43 AM, Paul Andrew Johnson <pjohnso@bgsu.edu> wrote:
Dear Tiffany,

You have my permission to use the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) in your study.

Paul

Paul Johnson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Coordinator, Educational Administration and Supervision Programs

College of Education and Human Development

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership & Policy

515 Education Building

Bowling Green State University

Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0250

[419-689-1441](tel:419-689-1441) (C)

[419-562-7101](tel:419-562-7101) (H)

[419-372-8448](tel:419-372-8448) (Fax)

2/13/2017

Gmail - Permission to use School Board Leadership Survey



Tiffany Bone <mrstiffanybone@gmail.com>

Permission to use School Board Leadership Survey

Tiffany Bone <mrstiffanybone@gmail.com>
Draft To: Paul Andrew Johnson <pjohnso@bgsu.edu>

Mon, Feb 13, 2017 at 1:07 PM

On Wed, Aug 17, 2016 at 7:43 AM, Paul Andrew Johnson <pjohnso@bgsu.edu> wrote:

Dear Tiffany,

You have my permission to use the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS) in your study.

Paul

Paul Johnson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Coordinator, Educational Administration and Supervision Programs

College of Education and Human Development

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership & Policy

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[419-562-7101](tel:419-562-7101) (H)

[419-372-8448](tel:419-372-8448) (Fax)

Program Info:

www.bgsu.edu/edadministration

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

John Quincy Adams

Appendix E: Permission to Collect Data ASBA Conference

Tiffany,

Got your card today. No need for a 'thank you'. It is my job to encourage and support good leadership. You definitely fit in that category. Anne and I discussed yesterday the set-up of your materials and electronics for the ASBA conference. You should be placed in a level of high visibility by the registration area.

See you next week.

Thank you,

Tony Prothro Ed.D.
Executive Director
Arkansas School Boards Association

2/13/2017

Gmail - Card



Tiffany Bone <mrstiffanybone@gmail.com>

Card

Tony Prothro <tony@arsba.org>
To: Tiffany Bone <mrstiffanybone@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 29, 2016 at 4:03 PM

Tiffany,

Got your card today. No need for a 'thank you'. It is my job to encourage and support good leadership. You definitely fit in that category. Anne and I discussed yesterday the set-up of your materials and electronics for the ASBA conference. You should be placed in a level of high visibility by the registration area.

See you next week.

Thank you,

Tony Prothro Ed.D.
Executive Director
Arkansas School Boards Association

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Appendix F: Cartoon of School Board Ratings



"NEXT ITEM - CARRYING OUT OUR OBJECTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT"

