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Urban School Board Members' Perceptions of Their Roles in Improving Student Achievement

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Amberton University, 2013

BS, University of Texas at Arlington, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The problem explored in this study was that the state education agency recommended school board members of low-performing school districts participate in a governance training called student outcomes governance to address student achievement, yet no data suggested the training changed school board members' understanding of how to create policies advancing student achievement. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how urban school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement using the new model. General board theory and the theory of adaptive leadership informed this study. Six school board members who had completed the student outcomes governance training agreed to participate in semistructured interviews online. A combination of open and axial coding was used to generate themes. Key themes included narrowing focus on student achievement, micromanaging behaviors, and evaluating superintendents using student achievement data. Participants reported changes in their behaviors such as focusing more time in board meetings on student achievement, self-reflecting on behaviors such as micromanagement that could hinder student achievement, and working to improve their school districts by practicing governance to partner with superintendents and ensure objective evaluations. Given the increasing diversity found in urban school districts and the challenges of school governance during a worldwide pandemic and related issues, a focus on effective school board governance and improving academic achievement needs to coexist with safeguarding the physical and emotional safety of students. Positive social change for all students includes urban school board members having and understanding the tools necessary to enhance student achievement.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this to my sons, my wife, my parents, my siblings, my grandparents, my community, and my ancestors. I dedicate this to my sons because they fully supported me on this journey. I want them to know education is more than reading, writing and arithmetic…it much teach you who you are and whose you are. I dedicate this to my wife, Anita Ramos. She was my biggest champion and has always supported my dreams. I am successful because you love me and hold me accountable. I dedicate this to my parents. As immigrants from Mexico, I honor them and their journey to the United States so my siblings and I could have the opportunity to achieve more than they were able in their native land. I dedicate this to my siblings. They have been a source of love and support throughout my life. I dedicate this to my grandparents. They sacrificed so much for their children modeling true love and perseverance which in turn was given to me. A special dedication to Don Manuel. He instilled the importance of education in my most formative years while working hard labor in a field in Diamond Hill. I also dedicate this to the late Father Stephen Jasso, my pastor, priest, and shepherd. Undoubtedly the biggest advocate for education in my community. I honor my ancestors. I hope to make you proud. I have felt your presence, your love and your guidance throughout my academic journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

While there is plenty of research on superintendents, administrators, and teachers as actors who influence student achievement (Ellis, 2016; Hooge et al., 2019; Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2019), research on any links between school board governance and student achievement is in its early stages. The lighthouse inquiry is one of the first studies with findings to link school board governance to student achievement (Delagardelle, 2008). More recently, there has been research focusing on school districts' characteristics that could be associated with student achievement (Ford & Ihrke, 2019a; Hooge et al., 2019; Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2019) as well as research describing the behaviors of school boards in relation to differences in characteristics between low-achieving and high-achieving districts (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Alsbury and Gore (2015) suggested that school boards with a focus on clear student achievement goals improves the likelihood of successfully achieving the goal of improve student achievement. With school board governance research in its infancy, this study of school board members in the state of South Central State (SCS) offered an opportunity for seminal research of new regulations being applied in the United States.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through student outcomes governance. In Chapter 1, the school board construct in education and background leading to the study are provided. This chapter contains the sections addressing the foundation for the study, such as the problem statement and purpose of the study. The initial aspects of the study design are introduced and include

the research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations. The definitions of terms guides readers throughout the document. The importance of the study is highlighted in the significance of the study. The chapter concludes in a summary.

Background

School boards originated in 1789 in Massachusetts by way of state law that mandated each town to open their own public school. The statute authorized each town in Massachusetts to have a school board govern the school. Boston became the first town to elect a board, and soon thereafter, the rest of the colonies followed suit (Callahan, 1975). The original school boards were designed to protect the schools from public scrutiny, hire an educational leader, and fundraise on behalf of the school (Eliot, 1959).

Today, there are over 90,000 people serving on 13,809 elected or appointed boards in the country (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2019). According to Johnson (2012), school boards used to have complete authority over the entire school system when they were first formed. Over the years, most school boards have seen their authority narrowed down to policy making, hiring a superintendent, and approving the district budget (Spain, 2017). As a result, Johnson (2012) noted that "board members often become confused as to where their energies should be focused" (p. 88). Public school board authority is further limited as policies affecting public schools are usually written at the state and federal levels (Diem et al., 2019; Spain, 2017).

School board members may be elected or appointed to serve at-large or to represent specific geographic areas within districts (National School Boards Association

[NSBA], 2018). At-large elections coupled with the time of the year school board elections may contribute to a lack of diversity and proportional community representation (Kirst, 1994). Elections allow special interests to finance candidates that favor their policies and can politicize the process (Kirst, 2008). Some school board members run to use the seat as a steppingstone to a higher-ranking political office (Danzberger, 1994).

Each board member brings their own mental model to their role as a board member. Senge (2010), described mental models as a person's worldview perspective composed of assumptions, beliefs, and life experience. Board members' perceptions of student achievement can guide their behavior. Singleton, the author of *Courageous Conversations About Race,* noted that "a person's beliefs drive their behavior, which dictate their results" (G. Singleton, personal communication, September 30, 2016). School board members' mental models dictate their conceptions of student achievement and how student achievement policies should operate.

School boards are entrusted with two of their community's most precious resources; their children and allocated local, state, and federal funding sources (Gore & Nyland, 2015). Achievement gaps are a hot topic in public school education and the conversation of equity as an avenue to address the gaps is on the horizon (Allvin, 2018). Children who have student achievement gaps tend to be low socioeconomic, children of color, in English Language Learning (ELL) programs, and are from other marginalized communities (Turner, 2015). Some communities have access to more resources for their schools that exacerbate the inequity problem when other communities' school continue to function with less funding (Equity Center, 2019). The conversation of equity for school

boards is a topic that presents a challenge like never before. The current educational system was not designed to adapt quickly to the changing demographics that affect student achievement in public schools (Colgren et al., 2015).

Even though academic achievement was not the stated priority when school boards first originated (Eliot, 1959), school boards have been placed under the microscope for having the responsibility to ensure academic achievement policies help close gaps between students of diverse background but also school boards must overcome perceptions as micromanagers who only serve political or personal agendas rather than the needs of their districts (Land, 2002). Early research on school boards focused on power dynamics and political struggles between school board members and/or the superintendent (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971; Wirt & Kirst, 1992). Johnson (2012) described research acknowledging school boards do not directly cause student achievement but can have an effect through policy on the school conditions for educators to improve student achievement.

Alsbury and Gore (2015) noted research that has begun to focus on connecting effective school board governance and student achievement. These are the two of the main concepts of this framework. There has been a recent effort to study the relationship between school board governance and student achievement as a result of school board scrutiny (Ford, 2015). Dervarics and O'Brien (2016) listed characteristics of ineffective boards. They tend to:

- Be only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives, and seldom be able to describe actions being taken to improve student learning.

- Be focused on external pressures as the main reasons for lack of student success, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation.
- Offer negative comments about students and teachers.
- Micro-manage day-to-day operations.
- Disregard the agenda process and the chain of command.
- Be left out of the information flow, with little communication between the board and superintendent.
- Be quick to describe a lack of parent interest in education or barriers to community outreach.
- Look at data from a "blaming" perspective, describing teachers, students, and families as major causes for low performance.
- Have little understanding or coordination on staff development for teachers.
- Be slow to define a vision.
- Not hire a superintendent who agreed with their vision.
- Undertake little professional development together as a board. (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2016, p. 41)

School board governance in connection to student achievement is a phenomenon that in recent years has begun to gain more attention in academic literature (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Critical constructs that affect school board governance that have been

considered in recent research include student demographic shifts, school board member characteristics, ties between school board and student achievement. Additionally, state education agencies have generated models for school boards to follow as part of improving student achievement with equity. These topics are presented to provide scope of understanding about the problem addressed in this study of school board governance.

Shifting Student Demographics for Nation and State

Public school boards serve a population of students reflective of a major demographical shift (Bryant et al., 2017; Gandara & Mordechay, 2017; Sampson, 2019b; Turner, 2015; Welton et al., 2015). The United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse and has produced increasing gaps economic inequality (Bischoff & Tach, 2018). The demographic shifts pose challenges and opportunities for school systems to address student achievement (Bryant et al., 2017). Nationally, public schools have seen a decrease in the enrollments of White and Black students between the years of 2000 and 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). White student enrollment has decreased from 61% to 49%, and Black student enrollment has decreased from 17% to 15%. Asian/Pacific Islanders have seen a slight increase in public school enrollments from 4% to 5%. Conversely, students representing two or more races was recorded at 3% in public schools. Data were not recorded for this population in 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). The biggest increase in public school enrollments occurred for Hispanic/Latino students, whose representation in public schools has increased from 16% to 26% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). Hispanic/Latino student enrollments have increased in every state in the United

States, with the exception of New Hampshire (Bryant et al., 2017). Table 1 provides a summary.

Table 1

Public School Enrollment in the Nation by Student Race/Ethnicity for 2000 and 2015

Student Race/Ethnicity	% 2000	% 2015
White	61	49
African American/Black	17	15
Hispanic/Latino	16	26
Asian	4	5
Two or more races	N/A	3

By 2025, 25% of all public school students were estimated to be ELL, and most ELL students were expected to have been born in the United States (Van Roekel, 2015). There were 4.9 million ELL students in public schools (Jimenez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017), with the majority attending urban elementary public schools (Bialik et al., 2018). The majority of ELL students come from homes where Spanish is their first language (Gandara & Mordechay, 2017).

There are more children of color living in poverty than their White counterparts. Black students and Native American/Alaskan Native students have the highest percentage in poverty at 34%. Hispanic/Latino students live in poverty at a rate of 28%. White

students live in poverty at a rate of 11% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

In SCS, the demographics have shifted as well. According to the State Education Agency (SEA, 2020) the student enrollment for academic year 2011-2012 was a total of 4,998,579 students. White students made up 1,527,203 (30.5%), Hispanic students made up 2,541,223 (50.8%), and Black or African American students made up 640,171 (12.8%). In 2018-2019 was a total of 5,431,910 students. White students made up 1,490,299 (27.4%), Hispanic/Latino students made up 2,854,590 (52.5%) and Black or African American students made up 685,775 (12.6%). Table 2 provides a summary of the race/ethnicity percentages for SCS school students.

Table 2

Public School Enrollment in SCS by Student Race/Ethnicity for 2011-2012 and 2018-2019

Student Race/Ethnicity	% 2011-2012	% 2018-2019
White	30.5	27.4
African American/Black	12.8	12.6
Hispanic/Latino	50.8	52.5

SCS has a high percentage of ELL students at 17% (Bialik et al., 2018). According to Sugarman and Geary (2018), the largest number of ELL students in SCS school districts for school year 2017-2018 were in SCS Urban District 1 (69,311), followed by SCS Urban District 2 (67,000), SCS Urban District 3 (27,000), SCS Urban District 4 (23,000), and SCS Urban District (22,000). Spanish (90%) is the language most spoken in homes by SCS school students, followed by Vietnamese (2%) and Arabic (1%).

School Board Member Characteristics for Nation and State

The demographics of students in US public schools are not typically reflected in the board room (Sampson, 2019b). Nonetheless, school board members tend to be held more accountable for White student achievement than students of color (Flavin & Hartney, 2017). Historically, voters have not held school board members accountable on student achievement (Kogan et al., 2016). The exception has been on presidential election years where the voter turnout is greater (Payson, 2017). The electorate does not usually reflect the student population where achievement gaps are the greatest between White students and students of color (Kogan et al., 2020). Local elections have a lower voter turnout than national elections (Warshaw, 2019). The timing of school board elections tends to promote a higher voter turnout of voters who are senior citizens, homeowners, White, and people without children in the school system (Kogan et al., 2018).

The demographics of school board members in the country are most commonly assessed by surveys conducted by the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2018). The most recent ones were 2010 School Board Circa survey (Hess & Meeks,

2010) and Today's School Boards and Their Priorities for Tomorrow (NSBA, 2018). Respondents surveyed by NSBA showed a balance of representation in gender on school boards. Women represented 50% of the school board members which contrasted with other elected seats (NSBA, 2018). The median age of school board members was 59. Out of the 1,388 school board members responding to the survey, the majority identified as White. The breakdown was 70% White, 10% African America/Black, 3% Hispanic/Latino, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native (NSBA, 2018). Among the school board members responding, 40% were retired, 32% had children in school, most were elected, and the average length of service was 8.6 years. The frequencies for annual household income of school board members were 8% for $25,000 to $49,999, 30% for $50,000 to $99,999, 36% for $100,00 to $200,000 and 13% for more than $200,000 (NSBA, 2018).

Women and people of color are underrepresented in local government, particularly in city council and mayoral seats (Warshaw, 2019). Upon making an open records request, State Association of School Boards (SASB, 2020) shared the latest school board demographics for school boards based on survey responses in 2019. SASB (2020) received responses for 4,528 school board members. The majority of respondents identified racially as White at 73% and as male at 69%. African American/Black school board members were represented at 6%, and Hispanic/Latino school board members were 20%, while 9% of school board members identified as retired (SASB, 2020).

Table 3

School Board Compositions Nationally by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	NSBA 2018	SASB 2019
White	70%	73%
African American/Black	10%	6%
Hispanic/Latino	3%	20%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	0.2%

School Board and Student Achievement Research for Showing the Gap

The lighthouse inquiry provided an instrumental, seminal study that led to further research on school board behaviors and student achievement (Rice et al., 2000). Although it is difficult to measure a school board's impact on student achievement that does not mean they are not expected to have an impact on schools (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). There is growing research that supports school board behavior having a relationship to creating the positive conditions for school systems to improve student achievement (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019a; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Plough (2014) portrayed higher performing school boards as governing bodies that spend most of their time on improving student achievement. Boards that set clear student achievement goals and focus on governance policy can be effective in creating a positive school environment (Curry et al., 2018).

With new research, stakeholders are beginning to hold their school boards accountable by requesting proof the district is addressing academic achievement (Honingh et al., 2018). Ford and Ihrke (2015) noted school board members are expected to be held accountable by their constituents and if they serve on a school board that does not perform well, they may risk losing their seats on the board. Leithwood and Azah (2017) analyzed recent research that found no direct impact of school boards and administration on student achievement. It described the complexity of having to consider other factors that impact student achievement outside of school leadership's influence. Factors such as family backgrounds can make it challenging to improve student achievement system wide in a short time span (Levin, 2010). There is a need for more research to connect school board governance and student achievement as well as more research on how to support school boards on becoming more effective in influencing student achievement (Saatcioglu, 2015).

A culmination of the literature review resulted in the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) designing a school board governance framework in 2014 and calling it student outcomes focused governance (CGCS & Crabill, 2020). They designed the framework to align school board governance with school board behaviors to achieve desired student achievement targets. The modules developed by the leadership team at the CGCS were enhanced by Crabill, a school board trustee representing the Kansas City, Missouri public school district. Upon completing his second term as a trustee, Crabill was recruited to SCS by the state's new education commissioner of the SEA, Mike Morath, to implement a statewide school board governance model (Williams, 2016). The student

outcomes focused governance was adapted for meeting SCS public school districts' needs as a school board member training program (SEA, 2019).

The work surrounding the development and implementation of professional development connecting school board governance and student achievement is in its infancy stages. Not only is there a gap in knowledge surrounding the effective school board governance behaviors but also a gap in knowledge in best practices. SEA launched the student outcomes governance training to bring the praxis by utilizing the latest research to work with school boards in addressing student achievement. The training provides a manual entitled Student Outcomes Governance Integrity Tool (SOGIT; SEA, 2019). The study is needed to add to the body of literature on school board governance in SCS. This study could be one of the first on student outcomes governance since its inception in 2016.

Student Outcomes Governance Model and Integrity Tool

There is a need on a national level for professional development for school board members as well as an assessment tool to measure school board effectiveness (Levine & Buskirk, 2015). The SOGIT encompasses current research to provide school boards and superintendents with a framework to implement practices and self-assessments to improve student achievement rates. The tool provides five parts that assist boards and superintendent teams to evaluate themselves. They are: (a) vision, (b) accountability, (c) structure, (d) advocacy, and (e) unity. Each part has its own description. The first part of SOGIT has the following four vision elements the SEA (2019) expected school boards to adopt:

1. Student achievement goals,
2. Goal progress measures (GPMs) aligned to each student achievement goal,
3. Constraints, and
4. Superintendent constraint progress measures (CPMs).

The second part of the integrity tool in the (SEA, 2019) governance model addresses two forms of accountability as follows:

1. Investing at least half of the board's time on improving student achievement and
2. Evaluating, but not interfering with, progress toward improving student achievement.

The final three parts of the SOGIT follow:

1. For structure, the school board functions to allow the Superintendent to accomplish the vision,
2. For advocacy, the school board promotes the vision of the district,
3. For unity, the school board operative collaboratively together and with the district's superintendent to attend the vision (SEA, 2019).

The SEA (2019) provided six additional tools provided to help school boards and their superintendents focus on student achievement. They are: (a) time use tracker, (b) quarterly progress tracker, (c) board's staff use tracker, (d) monitoring calendar, (e) student outcomes goal tracker, and (f) constraints scorecard (SEA, 2019). The time use tracker is designed to assist a board with monitoring the number of minutes it focuses on student achievement related outcomes. The goal is to spend 50% of the board's time on student achievement. The quarterly progress tracker helps school boards evaluate themselves with a point system based on the five components of the integrity tool.

Board's staff use tracker allows boards to track the time spent in preparation for school board meetings. Boards are encouraged to equate the time in terms of money to become aware of how much time and resources are spent in anticipation of board meetings. A monitoring calendar is encouraged so boards can monitor student achievement outcomes each quarter. The student outcomes goal tracker allows the school board to keep track of data on the goals and goal progress measures. The constraints scorecard allows the school board to monitor its goals related to board constraints and superintendent constraints.

A constraint includes specific operational actions or classes of actions that are allowed and aligned with the vision and grounded in the community values of the school district or that are disallowed and not aligned with the vision and grounded in the community values of the school district (SEA, 2019). A board constraint is a specific operational action or class of actions the Board places on itself or its members that support behaviors that maintain focus on board work being aligned with the vision and grounded in community values. An example of a board constraint involves a policy stating the board does not direct staff on day-to-day operations (SEA, 2019).

A superintendent constraint is a specific operational action or class of actions that involves expecting the superintendent to behave according to the vision and community values of the school district (SEA, 2019). A superintendent constraint also can be directed toward prohibiting the superintendent from behaving in ways that contradict the vision and community values of the school district. An example of a superintendent constraint is: The superintendent shall not allow the effective teacher turnover rate to increase or remain the same (SEA, 2019).

School boards in low performing districts in SCS have been encouraged by the state commissioner of education to participate in training to apply the state's student outcomes governance model for school boards. Public school districts in SCS have been tasked to develop policies for improving student achievement. However, the degree of understanding that school board members have related to the improvement of student achievement is unknown (SEA, 2017). School board members' lack of understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement may contribute to the ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model. School board members' perceptions could be used to generate additional guidance to urban school boards seeking to improve student achievement.

Problem Statement

According to Plough (2014) and Johnson (2013), a school board member's perspective about student achievement has an impact on how school board members govern and school districts overall academic performance. Plough (2014) noted school board governance has, until recently, largely gone unnoticed in effective school systems research. Researchers have begun to find links between student achievement to school board governance (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Most state-mandated school board training is focused on school law and school finance (Lee & Eadens, 2014).

The underlying problem explored in this study was that the SEA had recently recommended low performing school districts' school boards to participate in governance training called student outcomes governance for developing policies to address student

achievement; however, school board members' understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement may contribute to ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model. The SEA began requiring school boards to follow the student outcomes governance model that the SEA published in 2016 as part of an initiative to engage school boards in improving student achievement throughout the state. student outcomes governance model involves providing training to school board members who learn to apply the SOGIT. No studies, to date, have been conducted to capture school board members' perceptions of the student outcomes governance model's influence on their governance behaviors and policies enacted for improving student achievement. The gap in practice was supported by the literature, and I addressed involved the need for empirical study with urban SCS school board members recently tasked with applying the student outcomes governance model in their policies regarding student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a basic qualitative study as enabling researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. The basic qualitative study involved conducting interviews with school board members to gain an understanding of urban SCS school board members perceptions of their roles after they have completed the student outcomes governance training. The study findings may be used by SCS school boards who must

make student achievement policy under the student outcomes governance model throughout SCS.

Research Question

The research question is designed to align to the purpose of the study that followed from the identification of the problem related to school governance in SCS. The literature as provided by contemporary researchers on school board governance and student achievement (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017) informed the problem and purpose. The following question guided the study: How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement from the student outcomes governance framework. The framework applied to this study is general board theory (lighthouse inquiry) with the theory of adaptive leadership. The integrated general board theory and adaptive leadership framework align with the purpose of the study because they represent concepts inherent in the role of a school board member, school board members' participation in training to apply the student outcomes governance framework and tools necessary for improving student achievement. Half of the student outcomes governance training is focused on shifting school board members' mindsets and challenging them to consider the power they have to change the trajectory of their school

system's student achievement outcomes (SEA, 2017). Previous researchers applied the concepts of connecting effective school board governance and student achievement (Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Plough, 2014; Rice et al., 2000; Shober & Hartney, 2014).

The conceptual framework is formed by the work of Rice et al. (2000) and Heifetz et al. (2009) to offer a comprehensive opportunity to understand the data provided by the urban school board members in SCS who underwent student outcomes governance training. One of the first school board governance theories attempting to connect governance and student achievement was introduced by Rice et al. (2000) in the lighthouse inquiry study. Several researchers have included the Rice et al.'s framework as a way to connect school board governance and student achievement (e.g., Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Land, 2002; Plough, 2014). Rice et al. applied their general board theory to school districts with board governance behavior that either had "moving districts" or "stuck districts" (p. 52). Rice et al. (2000) considered general board theory as the following nine dimensions of governance behavior: (a) focus on students; (b) promotion of shared vision; (c) development of high expectations; (d) execution of shared decision making; (e) promotion of new ideas, initiatives, and assessment of effects; (f) provision of resources for innovation; (g) flexible use of resources; (h) enlistment of the community's support; (i) interagency cooperation.

Additionally, school board members operate as leaders of school district, so logic suggests applying a leadership theory within the general board governance model. Adaptive leadership is the practice of equipping people with the ability to address

adaptive challenges and expand their organization's adaptive capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leadership theory is based on understanding the relationship between leadership, adaptation, systems thinking, and organizational change (Heifetz et al., 2009). There is a difference between adaptive leadership and authority. Adaptive leadership is a leader's ability to adapt to a challenge and being able to distinguish between leadership and authority. Authority does not necessarily equate to leadership and leadership is seen more as a verb rather than a title. Adaptive leadership utilizes authority when there is an understanding that authority has been granted to a leader voluntarily and with the understanding the power and influence are used to benefit the people granting authority. The adaptive leader is seen as champion or a representative providing a service (Heifetz et al., 2009). An adaptive leader is constantly identifying triggers and loyalties and seeking to better understand roles (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders seek to model effective interventions, lean into conflict, hold themselves accountable, and create a sustainable leadership pipeline (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Student outcomes governance model represents an application of lighthouse inquiry and adaptive leaders with SCS school board members (leaders) to learn how to identify behaviors (adapt) and assess their school district's student achievement (systems thinking) to improve student outcomes (organizational change). The student outcomes governance model includes opportunities for self-reflection, self-assessment, and organizational assessment as well as tools that are adaptive and technical and can be used to improve student achievement. The perceptions urban SCS school board members have of their roles in improving student achievement and how school boards should address

student achievement through the recommended student outcomes governance presents the opportunity to incorporate adaptive solutions for adaptive challenges. School boards' members may have different perceptions of how school boards should address student achievement in SCS. Also, each school board member may explicate a different experience after participating in student outcomes governance. Chapter 2 contains a more thorough presentation of the conceptual framework.

Nature of the Study

This study followed a basic qualitative study design. A basic qualitative study design is most common in the field of education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In basic qualitative design, the researcher focuses on the meaning the participant attributes to their experiences and how they make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative design is useful when seeking seminal information about a new phenomenon (Teherani et al., 2015).

The SEA coordinates the school board governance training for school districts in SCS required to follow the student outcomes governance model. SCS began requiring school boards to follow the student outcomes governance model that the SEA published in 2016 as part of an initiative to engage school boards in improving student achievement throughout the state. The student outcomes governance model is a new policy in SCS requires study to capture school board members' perceptions of its influence on their governance and policies for improving student achievement.

For conducting the basic qualitative study, I conducted individual interviews with six urban SCS school board members and collect their perceptions of how school boards

should address student achievement within the student outcomes governance model (SEA, 2017). As the researcher, I recruited the six urban school board members in SCS using a purposeful, convenience sampling method. The primary data collection tool was the researcher who followed a semistructured interview protocol that included guiding questions and allowed for asking follow-up and clarification questions aligned to answer the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) represented semistructured questions as the middle between structured and unstructured interviews. Semistructured interviews have a list of questions but allow flexibility for the researcher to adjust to the responses of the respondent. The flexibility allowed for exploring issues and creating the space for new ideas. I recorded each interview and transcribed the data. I analyzed the textual, qualitative data by coding and categorizing data for thematic analysis.

Definitions

Achievement gap: This term is derived from the 1960s to study the disparities in student achievement across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Colgren et al., 2015).

Improvement required (IR): This term represents the lowest of three ratings in SCS's old accountability system which meant a school was failing to meet standard. The other two ratings were *met standard* and *met alternative standard* (Marfin, 2019).

Student outcomes governance: This model was implemented in 2016 by SEA (2017) to help school boards and superintendents collaborate to focus on student achievement.

School board governance: This term represents how school board members set the school district's vision, mission, and policies, and work together to support the district's achievement of all goals (Ford & Ihrke, 2016b).

Student achievement: This term encompasses student academic performance measured by the dropout rate, college and career readiness standards, subject area assessments, and aptitude testing scores (Handford & Leithwood, 2019; Land, 2002).

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided the study. Assumptions are part of the *epoche* process where a researcher withholds judgement, places biases on the forefront, and consciously examines the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The assumptions enabled the research to be conducted as fairly and unbiasedly as possible. The first assumption was that school board members constructed their own meanings about their roles in the school districts they serve. Second, school board members wanted to improve student achievement in their respective districts and would be honest in their responses to the interview questions. The third assumption was that the SEA's list of school board members who met the criteria for the study was not biased. The participants were assumed to have completed the entire student outcomes governance training as recommended by SEA because their participation information was shared by the agency as part of finding participants who met the selection criteria. The final assumption was that the school board members sought to improve student achievement in SCS.

Scope and Delimitations

The student outcomes governance model's tools were recently implemented in SCS in 2016, and the model tasked school districts with improving student achievement. No studies, to date, have been conducted to capture school board members' perceptions of the student outcomes governance model's influence on their governance behaviors and policies enacted for improving student achievement. As the student outcomes governance model is expanded throughout the state, the study has the potential to add to the body of literature and promote further refining of the of student outcomes governance model's tools that are used by school board members.

The scope of the study involved focusing on six urban school board members who completed the training for following the student outcomes governance model. The sample size was only focused on urban school districts in SCS preventing findings from specifically transferring to districts of other sizes, such as suburban and rural. Delimitations required the participants met the following selection criteria: (a) serving as board members in SCS from only urban public school districts and (b) having completed the student outcomes governance training program. School board members who received other forms of school board professional development were excluded from eligibility for participation. No superintendents, school administrators, nor community stakeholders were sought for participation in the study.

The conceptual framework was based on how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through student outcomes governance. The aspects of the framework included general board theory as conveyed by

Rice et al. (2000) and the adaptive theory of leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). The conceptual framework for this study was structured as student achievement focused school board governance. There was no universal theoretical framework used in the current literature on urban school board members' roles in improving student achievement.

In the lighthouse inquiry, general board theory was applied to school districts with board governance behavior that either had "moving districts" or "stuck districts" (Rice et al., 2000, p. 52). Several recent researchers cited Rice et al.'s (2000) framework as part of their literature review connecting school board governance and student achievement (Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Land, 2002; Plough, 2014). Other researchers cited board governance theories and frameworks without making connections between theory and student achievement because their focus was primarily on school board members' relationships with superintendents and communities (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971; Wirt & Kirst, 1992; Zeigler & Jennings, 1974).

Dissatisfaction theory was one of the earliest theories presented on governance (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). However, dissatisfaction theory was not applicable to this study because voter behavior to remove an elected official from office was the focus of dissatisfaction theory. Dissatisfaction theory was more aligned with community participation, school board turnover, and superintendent turnover rather than student achievement.

Another early framework was introduced to understand school boards and influencers on school boards (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). The framework portrayed a

community with the following four power structures: (a) dominated, (b) factional, (c) pluralistic, and (d) inert. The community's behavior influences the way the school board operates, such as dominated, factionalized, status-congruent, or sanctioning. The school board's functioning in turn influences the superintendent's navigation of the political structure as a functionary, political strategist, professional advisor, and decision maker. However, the McCarty and Ramsey (1971) model did not align with this study due to its focus on the power dynamics between the community, school board, and the superintendent rather than on student achievement.

Another theory cited in research was decision-output theory (Wirt & Kirst, 1992). Decision-output theory was based on the idea that engagement and complaints (inputs) from the community influence school board policy decisions (outputs). The theory did not align with this study as its primary focus involved community engagement and boardroom-made decisions not specific to student achievement. Finally, Zeigler and Jennings (1974) presented the continuous participation theory for addressing the level of community engagement measured as voter turnout, incumbents challenged, and backgrounds of school board members. Voter turnout being low, incumbents not being challenged in local races, homogeneity in political ideology, and higher levels of socioeconomic status demonstrated lower levels of community engagement. This theory did not align with this study because it focuses on community engagement in the democratic process rather than student achievement. Therefore, Rice et al.'s (2000) general board theory with its consideration of student achievement by school board members represented the most appropriate approach for this investigation of school board

members' roles in promoting student achievement. By using a framework focused on the parameters of interest, there was a greater likelihood of the findings having transferability to across school district's boards in SCS.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. The sample size was small and only focused on urban school districts in SCS preventing findings from specifically transferring to districts of other sizes, such as suburban and rural. The school board members self-reported their perspectives and the constructions of meaning they provided might not transfer to school board members of other school districts regardless of those districts' applications of the tools of the student outcomes governance model. The responses were the sole source of data and could be biased, further limiting the findings from transferability throughout urban school districts in SCS. Sampling bias could represent another limitation as the method in which the school board members are identified. The potential participants list came from the SEA that regulates school districts' use of the student outcomes governance model. The findings represented urban school districts and might not generalize to suburban or rural school boards in SCS.

Finally, I, the researcher, was, at the time of the study, a current school board member in a large urban district in SCS who completed the student outcomes governance training. I worked to reduce bias that could limit the finding by maintaining a journal, engaging in epoch, and remaining aware of my positionality within the phenomenon. I also asked the participants to review the themes that emerged for accuracy as part of

member checking and engaged in peer debriefing during coding and analysis to enable the findings to be as bias free as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Significance

The gap in the literature that I addressed was the need for empirical study with urban SCS school board members recently tasked with applying the student outcomes governance model in their policies regarding student achievement. The student outcomes governance model was introduced to school boards in SCS in 2016 as an approach to promote school board members' focus on improving student achievement outcomes (SEA, 2017). The findings could help urban school board members decide how to use the student outcomes governance model at the local level and inform policy at the state agency level concerning issues related to effective implementation of student outcomes governance and improved board focus on student achievement.

This study could support practical application of school board governance in SCS. School boards could benefit by highlighting perspectives on how student outcomes governance might be likely to influence academic achievement. School board members did not have to have a certain level of education to be elected nor did they have to run on a platform that focuses on academic achievement. Professional development for any human being, regardless of level of education, could benefit local communities because school board trustees need to understand their role as a school board member. Positive social change would be transformational for school systems if school board and superintendent teams could turn their school systems around by closing achievement gaps and learning how to create the culture for positive student outcomes.

Summary

Local school boards have been charged to govern and oversee school systems responsible for educating every child. At the time of this study, school boards were expected to develop a mission, vision, and sets of policies to positively impact student achievement. The underlying problem explored in this study was that the SEA had recently recommended low performing school districts' school boards to participate in governance training called student outcomes governance for developing policies to address student achievement; however, school board members' understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement might contribute to ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model. The following question guided the study: How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model? This chapter also conveyed the scope and nature of the study, defined the terms applied in the study, introduced the conceptual framework. Chapter 2 elaborates on and critique the literature regarding school boards and student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The underlying problem explored in this study was that the SEA had recently recommended low performing school districts' school boards to participate in governance training called student outcomes governance for developing policies to address student achievement; however, school board members' understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement might contribute to ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model (SEA, 2017). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceived their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model. The gap in the literature that I addressed was the need for empirical study with urban SCS school board members recently tasked with applying the student outcomes governance model in their policies regarding student achievement (Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Hanberger, 2016). Most research to date was primarily based on self-reporting surveys, rather than interviews, of school board members (Honingh et al., 2018).

The literature review begins with the literature search strategy that overviews the emergent strands of inquiry found in the school board literature. Next, the conceptual framework that guided all aspects of conducting the basic qualitative research study of urban school board members in SCS is conveyed. Third, the information related to the key strands of literature is explicated. Fourth, a synthesis and critique of the empirical literature precedes the summary of the knowledge found in the major strands as well as the relevant conclusions about the literature reviewed.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary search engines used were from the Walden University library. Education articles and journals were located through Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, ProQuest Central, and Academic Search Complete. Currently, the literature review is composed of 104 citations and 74 of them are citations from the last 5 years. Google Scholar was also used to identify other scholarly work that may have been missed through the databases in Walden's library. Scholarly work located in Google Scholar was then located in Walden's library by the exact article title. The following keywords were used for each database to refine the search: *school board, board of education, regents, school trustees, school governors, governance, student achievement, academic achievement, academic success, student success, academic success, politics, bureaucracy, superintendent, turnover, elections, local, achievement gap, equity,* and *public schools*. Examples of combinations of keywords used in searches include *governance* and *politics* and *public school*, *bureaucracy* and *superintendent turnover* and *local elections, student achievement* and *public schools* and (*school trustees* or *school board*), *achievement gap* and *equity* and *school governors*, and (*student achievement* OR *academic success*) and (*governance* OR *school board*).

The search process revealed approximately 87 sources available for consideration that were published no less recently than 2016. The total number of sources found during was 169 available for the last 20 years. The research strands with the least available recent (since 2016) research were power struggles (one out of five), micromanagement (two out of five), influence of special interests (three out of 10), personal agenda (three

out of five), and conflict in the school board room (four out of eight). Research on school board with greater availability about half of the sources tended to be from the recent years since 2016 addressed the areas of the role of the school board (five out of 15), confusion about school board member roles (eight out of 17), effective governance (nine out of 18), professional development (nine out of 18), and governance focus (eight out of 17). The research studies on school boards with most representation since 2016 addressed the shift in demographics (18 out of 23). The conceptual framework is introduced prior to focusing on the presentation and evaluation of the current study.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework that guides this basic qualitative study was formed from two theories. The conceptual framework was based on how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement from the student outcomes governance framework. The framework applied to this study was general board theory (i.e., lighthouse inquiry) with the theory of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). The rationale for the two theories as appropriate for applying to this study is conveyed.

The conceptual framework for this study enabled the researcher to focus on student achievement through the lens of school board governance. There was no universal theory for governing public school districts available in the current literature. Other researchers applied board governance theories and frameworks that were not directly connected to student achievement and were primarily focused on school board

members' relationships with their superintendents and communities (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971; Wirt & Kirst, 1992; Zeigler & Jennings, 1974).

The 1970 dissatisfaction theory by Iannaccone and Lutz was not applicable to this study because the theory focused on community voters seeking to remove an elected official from office due to dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction theory is more aligned with community participation, school board turnover, and superintendent turnover. Further, the framework introduced by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and known as the community power model did not align with the study. The community power model was focused on the power dynamics between the community, school board, and the superintendent. This model portrayed a community with the four power structures of dominating, factional, pluralistic, and inert. Depending on how the community reacts, school boards operate as dominant, factionalized, status-congruent, or sanctioning. School boards influence the way the superintendent navigates the political structure as a functionary, political strategist, professional advisor, and decision maker (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

Another model that was not chosen was the decision-output model because it was based the use of engagement and complaints (inputs) from the community to influence policy decisions by school boards (outputs). The decision-output model did not align with this study as its primary focus is community engagement and decisions made in the boardroom (Wirt & Kirst, 1992). The Wirt and Kirst theory did not align with this study because of its focus on community engagement within the democratic process. Meanwhile, Zeigler and Jennings (1974) presented continuous participation theory focused on the level of community engagement by way of voter turnout, incumbents

challenged, and backgrounds of school board members. Voter turnout being low, incumbents not challenged in local races, homogeneity in political ideology, and higher levels of socioeconomic status demonstrated lower levels of community engagement. Continuous participation was similarly inappropriate for guiding this study.

One of the first school board governance theories attempting to connect governance and student achievement was introduced by Rice et al. (2000). Several researchers have included the Rice et al.'s framework as a way to connect school board governance and student achievement (e.g., Ford & Ihrke, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Land, 2002; Plough, 2014). Rice et al. applied their general board theory to school districts with board governance behavior that either had "moving districts" or "stuck districts" (p. 52).

The lighthouse inquiry is composed of case studies of school districts with similar demographics that formed its general board theory (Rice et al., 2000). Although the school districts shared similar demographics, they produced differences in student achievement outcomes. The case studies showed common features in high-performing school districts where governance behaviors were focused on student achievement outcomes and school board members worked as a collective governing body and shared common goals. In contrast, low-performing school districts generally had school board members that blamed outside factors for poor student achievement, did not work as a collective governing body, and did not share common board goals. Rice et al. considered general board theory as the following nine dimensions of governance behavior: (a) focus on students; (b) promotion of shared vision; (c) development of high expectations; (d) execution of shared decision making; (e) promotion of new ideas, initiatives, and

assessment of effects; (f) provision of resources for innovation; (g) flexible use of resources; (h) enlistment of the community's support; (i) interagency cooperation.

Additionally, school board members operate as leaders of school district, so logic suggests applying a leadership theory within the general board governance model. Adaptive leadership theory is based on understanding the relationship between leadership, adaptation, systems thinking, and organizational change (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leadership is a journey with the theory emphasizing the relationship between leadership and adaptation. There is a difference between adaptive leadership and authority. Adaptive leadership is a leader's ability to adapt to a challenge and being able to distinguish between leadership and authority. Authority does not necessarily equate to leadership and leadership is seen more as a verb rather than a title. Adaptive leadership utilizes authority when there is an understanding that authority has been granted to a leader voluntarily and with the understanding the power and influence is used to benefit the people granting authority. The adaptive leader is seen as champion or a representative providing a service (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Leadership and adaptation then connect to a systems thinking approach. A systems thinking approach calls on leaders to diagnose the system which includes working though adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges are difficult because they push leaders to address organizational values, beliefs, and loyalties. A technique used in adaptive leadership is called *get on the balcony* (Heifetz et al., 2009). The technique involves a leader taking a step back, assessing the system, observing patterns, questioning one's own perspective, and continuously debriefing with colleagues to reflect on the

actions used to address challenges. Being on the balcony includes a leader seeing themselves as a system and within the larger system. An adaptive leader is constantly identifying triggers and loyalties and seeking to better understand roles (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive leaders with a systems thinking approach can bring organizational change by mobilizing the system by making interpretations, designing effective interventions, acting politically, orchestrating conflict, and building an adaptive culture (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders welcome different perspectives, stay connected to adversarial perspectives, and seek to understand other stakeholders ’perceptions of a problem. Adaptive leaders seek to model effective interventions, lean into conflict, hold themselves accountable, and create a sustainable leadership pipeline (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The integrated general board theory and adaptive leadership framework align with the purpose of the study. Adaptive leadership is the practice of equipping people with the ability to address adaptive challenges and expand their organization’s adaptive capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009). Student outcomes governance represents a way for SCS school board members (leadership) to learn how to identify behaviors (adaptation) and assess their school district’s student achievement (systems thinking) to improve student outcomes (organizational change). The student outcomes governance model includes opportunities for self-reflection, self-assessment, and organizational assessment as well as tools that are adaptive and technical and can be used to improve student achievement.

Adaptive leadership theory has been used before on school boards. Prier (2019) used adaptive leadership as his conceptual or theoretical framework while studying how a school board composed of all Anglo Americans serving a community populated mainly by African Americans worked to rename an elementary school in honor of Rosa Parks. Prier referenced Ronald Heifetz's (1994) concept of utilizing adaptive leadership to address adaptive challenges. Adaptive leadership theory allows the researcher to analyze how different school board members' perceptions vary or show a pattern on how they explicate school board governance and student achievement and how school boards should address student achievement.

The lighthouse inquiry model (Rice et al., 2000) and adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009) fit into the SEA's (2019) student outcomes governance tool. The Rice et al.'s (2000) main components of governance behaviors are the basis for the first half of student outcomes governance. The student outcomes governance manual is referenced as the SOGIT and serves a compilation of the latest school board governance research with the tools believed to help school boards focus on student outcomes (SEA, 2019).

The perceptions urban SCS school board members have of their roles in improving student achievement and how school boards should address student achievement through the recommended student outcomes governance presents the opportunity to incorporate adaptive solutions for adaptive challenges. School boards' members may have different perceptions of how school boards should address student achievement in SCS. Also, each school board member may communicate a different experience after participating in student outcomes governance.

Student outcomes governance contains mindset applications labeled as “I am the genesis of transformation” and “common pretending” that align with adaptive leadership theory. The mindset training is designed to push school board members to acknowledge the role they play in the current accountability status in their school districts. That ackowledgement includes school board members recognizing their own power, purpose, diagnoses of the system, mobilizations of the system, and views of themselves as a system. Thus, aadaptive leadership theory involves recognizing the power of purpose and collaboration (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive leadership theory aligns with viewing academic achievement as an adaptive problem for school boards that have challenges unique to their school systems. One of the concepts from adaptive leadership theory that aligns with the study is the “illusion of the broken system” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 17). The illusion concept illustrates organizations that appear to be dysfunctional but are actually generating the results needed from the system. There are influencers with the ability to maintain the current climate who do what they can (even if they state otherwise) to keep it that way (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Much the same way, student outcomes governance by the SEA (2019) presents the concept of common pretending as nonintegrity plus excuses leads to access to goals. Common pretending presents the notion that school board members’ lack of integrity coupled with making excuses for breaching their integrity would give them access to their goals. The concept challenges school board member’s mindset to understand that a breach of integrity is a pattern that runs parallel to results.

For example, when school board members are late to a meeting and make excuses for why they were late, they cannot expect the pattern to give them the desired result of being on time to the meeting. The concept involves the idea that for each breach of integrity, there is a cost and a benefit. Being late to a school board meeting may have the benefit that allowed a board member to finish a conversation with a loved one with the cost of being late to the school board meeting causing colleagues to wait to begin the meeting. Common pretending and the illusion of a broken system align. A board member's breach of integrity plus excuses keep the pattern intact even though they may state they want change. The concept applies to student achievement. Although school board members state they want improved student outcomes, their actions might align with actually changing their own behavior to bring about change or they might make excuses and not accept responsibility.

Key concepts inherent in the student outcomes governance model listed as necessary for improving student achievement include the role of a school board member, school board members' participation in training to apply the student outcomes governance framework and definitions of student achievement, and the SOGIT. Half of the student outcomes governance training is focused on shifting school board members' mindsets and challenging them to consider the power they have to change the trajectory of their school system's student achievement outcomes (SEA, 2017). Previous researchers applied the concepts of connecting effective school board governance and student achievement (Land, 2002; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Plough, 2014; Rice et al., 2000; Shober & Hartney, 2014). The framework formed by Rice et al. (2000) and Heifetz et al.

(2009) offer a comprehensive opportunity to understand the data provided by the urban school board members in SCS who underwent student outcomes governance training.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

A lack of empirical evidence has been generated regarding the connection between school board governance and student achievement (Honingh et al., 2018). Studies are now being conducted to connect school board governance and student achievement (Ford & Ihrke, 2016b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Additionally, new studies are beginning to work towards frameworks for evaluating local school board governance (Hanberger, 2016), school board trustee professional development and the effects on student achievement (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015) as well as how school boards are responding to changed demographics in American school systems (Turner, 2015).

Overview of the History of School Boards

School boards originated in 1789 in Massachusetts by way of state law that mandated each town to open their own public school. The statute authorized each town in Massachusetts to have a school board govern the school (Callahan, 1975). Kirst (2008) portrayed Horace Mann as a founder of the American school system. Mann (1847) called on schools to be operated at a local level, accessible to everyone, funded at the local and state level, and nonpartisan. Danzberger (1994) referred to local school boards as part of the nation's value system in the early years. The concept of being ruled from a distance by foreign governments was something the colonies did not want to keep.

School boards began to lose the public's faith at the turn of the 20th century, particularly in the urban cities, when corruption ran rampant (Danzberger, 1994). Contracts awarded due to political favors and partisan politics led to a push for reform (Kirst, 2008). Reform came in the form of a more centralized approach, elections at-large, and attempts to remove politics from the school board room (Kirst, 1994). Reform was led by predominantly white businessmen of Protestant background, and they became the favored candidates in urban settings because they had the resources to run at-large (Kirst, 2008). Tyack (1974) noted the reformers believed their White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) values should be imbedded in the American educational system. Reform was not universally implemented. The South created county boards to maintain influence over the schools after the Civil War and uphold their values around segregation. Some states kept their local mayor as a key person in the financial affairs and other states created school boards for grades of kindergarten through eighth grade and for ninth through 12th grades (Kirst, 2008).

Although today some school board members are appointed, most are elected. At-large elections and off-cycle elections can hinder working class citizens and people of color from being elected to school boards (Hess, 2008). As a result, the majority of school boards are made up of white school board members and do not always reflect the student demographics in their school districts (Hess, 2010; NSBA, 2018). Politically driven candidates that are well funded may use the seat as a stepping-stone in their quest for higher office (Danzberger, 1994). Political aspirations could bring partisan efforts

with organized efforts that may increase campaign costs and a push for agendas from special interest groups (Diem et al., 2015).

Role of the School Board

Today, there are over 14,000 school boards in the country (Diem et al., 2015; Kogan et al., 2020; NSBA, 2018). There is no requirement of prior knowledge in understanding governance, addressing student achievement, or addressing inequities when running for a school board seat (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Effective professional development could increase school board members' understanding of improving student achievement and their particular role as trustees (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). School board members that do not understand their roles may become problematic. Educational leaders can hinder an educational system and its leadership (Diem et al., 2015). Rhim (2013) noted "The challenge facing school districts striving to improve is figuring out how to leverage largely volunteer boards of lay citizens, generally with limited time to devote to board work, to develop coherent and innovative policies in a climate that frequently reduces their role to that of tracking the 'killer B's' (e.g., buildings, buses, books, and budgets)" (p. i). School board member's roles can become less clear when they struggle to navigate their local politics and find a balance to addressing their constituents needs (Diem et al., 2015).

Part of the confusion with school board members is what they can and cannot do when they do not understand their role. According to Ford (2015), school board members have the power to hire and fire a superintendent, approve the budget and set priorities, and adjust policy that is not prohibited by state or federal law. SASB (2019) added

adopting goals/priorities and monitoring success as well as reviewing policies for effectiveness. Traditional school boards hire a superintendent to lead the district and carry out the board's vision. Some superintendents in some states such as Florida, Alabama and Mississippi are now elected (Ford & Ihrke, 2016a). A challenge school districts have is that superintendents stay for an average of 3 years and have a high turnover rate (Alsbury, 2008; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Tekniepe, 2015). Dysfunctional school boards can contribute to the high turnover rate when they step out of their role (Tekniepe, 2015).

A common misconception by some school boards is that the superintendent should provide the vision for the entire school district. Setting the vision is the responsibility of the school board and it is up to the superintendent to make it a reality (Gelber & Thompson, 2015). The board reflects the values of the community and is tasked with developing student outcome-based goals. Effective school boards vet the measurable goals through the community (Alsbury & Miller-Jones, 2015). The superintendent and his or her team is responsible with implementing strategies to reach the goals set by the board. When boards allow superintendents to set the vision and goals, they give up power that can lead to further confusion and a power struggle (Gelber & Thompson, 2015).

High functioning boards begin with board members' understating their role and their role orientation. Healthy board members incorporate a role of oversight with a balanced governance lens. They understand their role orientation may fluctuate between a trustee and a delegate. A trustee orientation is a school board member who perceives their

role as representing the community as a whole and artificial harmony in the boardroom when conflict arises. A delegate orientation is a school board member that perceives their role as representing special interests and the groups that got them elected. They welcome diverse perspectives at the expense of artificial harmony. A balance of the two role orientations that keeps the focus on the district as a whole and seeking multiple perspectives are signs of a stabilizing board (Alsbury, 2015).

Shift in Demographics and School Boards

The United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse and has produced increasing gaps economic inequality (Bischoff & Tach, 2018). The demographic shifts pose challenges and opportunities for school systems to address student outcomes (Bryant et al., 2017). Diem et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative case study noting the challenges school boards and superintendents have in educating diverse populations of students in heavily politically influenced communities. School boards have a new challenge in addressing student achievement with a shift in demographics in the country (Bryant et al., 2017; Gandara & Mordechay, 2017; Sampson, 2019b; Turner, 2015; Welton et al., 2015) and the literature is limited on how school boards can address the achievement gap through policy and effective school board governance (Sampson, 2019a).

The shift in demographics has brought challenges for school boards. School board elections tend to hold school board members more accountable for the student outcomes for White students than Black and Hispanic/Latino students (Flavin & Hartney, 2017). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 required academic achievement data to

be broken down by race, socioeconomic status, and other social conditions associated with educational disparities. As a result, the achievement gap has become a focal point with increased attention to equity (Noguera, 2016). Singleton (2014) reiterated that the achievement and opportunity gap between students by race is pervasive in American society, including the educational system. Race, in particular, is a daunting topic because most find it hard to discuss if even acknowledge its significance in educational disparities (Carter et al., 2017).

While there are more people of color being elected to school boards in the country (Superville, 2017), representation is still not reflective of the student demographics (Flavin & Hartney, 2017; Kogan et al., 2020; Sampson, 2019b). School board candidates with access to more financial resources tend to run and make it harder for diverse populations to gain a seat in the school board room (Bartanen et al., 2018). The timing of school board elections tends to have a higher voter turnout of senior citizens, homeowners, White, and voters without children in the school system (Kogan et al., 2018).

Many school systems across the nation have schools where most of the students are of color and the majority of the school leaders and educators are white (Rodríguez et al., 2016; Welton et al., 2019). School board members' identities can play a significant role in how they perceive their role. The diversity that may come from different identities could lead to more conflict, but a functioning school board could use the different perspectives to their advantage (Blissett & Alsbury, 2018).

Racial and ethnic school board representation does not necessarily equate to racially conscious educational leaders equipped to address equity (Sampson, 2019b). School leaders that shift from colorblindness to color consciousness are more likely to authentically engage in conversations about race and student achievement. Those that do not and decide to avoid the topic or stay race-neutral can do more harm (Welton et al., 2015). Racially conscious people of color are faced with exploring techniques to speak their truth and learn how to keep the topic of race at the center (Childs & Johnson, 2018).

School boards may experience increased tension when they discuss race and other social factors impacting student achievement. There is a need for professional development and greater understanding of how to address educational inequities (DeMatthews, 2016; Sampson, 2019a). Part of the challenge for school systems is overcoming a deficit framing and low expectations for students associated with the achievement gap (Liou et al., 2017). There is little evidence that school systems have found solutions to closing the achievement gap (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Noguera, 2016).

School Board Governance Focused on Student Achievement

When school boards were initially formed, academic achievement was not the overall priority (Eliot, 1959). The lighthouse inquiry helped pave the way for more research on school board behaviors and student achievement (Rice et al., 2000). Although it is difficult to measure a school board's impact on student achievement that does not mean they are not expected to have an impact on schools (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). There is research highlighting how school district leaders, including board members are

influencing student achievement (Hooge et al., 2019; Leithwood et al., 2019). There is more scholarly literature working to directly connect school board behavior having a relationship to creating positive conditions for school systems to improve student achievement (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Higher performing school boards as governing bodies spend most of their time on improving student outcomes (Plough, 2014). Boards that set clear student outcome goals and focus on governance policy can be effective in creating a positive school environment (Curry et al., 2018).

Balanced governance is a relatively new concept derived from existing literature on school board governance (Alsbury & Gore, 2015). The term involves school board members finding a balance between being a disengaged board member and a micromanaging board member. The balance is being a board member who governs and monitors student achievement through informed oversight. Balanced governance encompasses a collaborative approach with other school board colleagues and the superintendent by establishing student outcome goals that are monitored regularly. Balanced governance is achieved based on the balancing of a board member's attitudes and beliefs related to student achievement (Alsbury & Gore, 2015).

With new research, stakeholders are beginning to hold their school boards accountable by requesting proof the district is addressing academic achievement (Honingh et al., 2018; Kogan et al., 2016). Ford and Ihrke (2015) noted school board members are expected to be held accountable by their constituents and if they serve on a school board that does not perform well, they may risk losing their seats on the board.

Leithwood and Azah (2017) analyzed research that found no direct impact of school boards and administration on student achievement. Considering other factors that impact student achievement outside of school leadership's influence is complex (Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Levin, 2010). Factors such as family backgrounds can make it challenging to improve student outcomes system wide in a short time span (Levin, 2010).

The literature identified school board behaviors likely to positively influence student achievement outcomes. Alsbury (2015) described high achieving school systems attribute certain behaviors in board work that correlate to positive student outcomes that involve engaging the following:

- Clear goals and measurable targets for improving student learning
- Extensive use of data to inform and monitor improvement efforts
- An infrastructure within the school and district that supports collaboration, innovation, and research
- Support for ongoing professional learning that is focused on collaborative inquiry into teaching and learning
- High levels of engagement with parents and the community
- Strong leadership at all levels of the system to guide and protect the work. (p. 19)

In addition to school boards being held accountable, the school boards are expected to hold superintendents accountable. Boards can prioritize student achievement by incorporating it in the superintendent's evaluation. School boards can evaluate superintendents by determining if their districts attain stated Specific, Measurable,

Achievable, Resources, and Time Bound (SMART) goals that include student achievement targets. School boards have the potential to push the system to focus on data revolving around student achievement by working together to implement an evaluation process for the superintendent that allows the rest of the system to be clear on the expectations (Gore & Nyland, 2015). There is a need for more research to connect school board governance and student achievement as well as more research on how to support school boards on becoming more effective in influencing student achievement (Saatcioglu, 2015).

School Board and Superintendent Relationship

The relationship between the school board and the superintendent has been cited in literature as one that can become an obstacle to having a high functioning school system (Bridges et al., 2019; Heisler & Hanlin, 2019; Land, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2019; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2008; Shelton, 2015). There is little research on the effect the relationship between the superintendent and the school board has on student achievement (Shelton, 2015). Superintendent turnover is associated with lower performing school systems (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Superintendents stay for an average of 3 years (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Tekniepe, 2015). High performing districts tend to have school boards that have a positive relationship with the superintendent and district leadership (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2016).

Roles of the superintendent and the school board are often confused or misunderstood (Delagardelle, 2008; Dolph, 2016; Shelton, 2015). The role of the board is to set the vision, and the role of the superintendent is to use the resources to make it

happen. Role confusion on who sets the vision can lead to misalignment and a power struggle (Gelber & Thompson, 2015). Shelton (2015) emphasized the importance of school boards creating the space for superintendents to focus on student achievement as well as a collaborative relationship for both parties to focus on student achievement.

Role confusion can lead to a breakdown in communication and keep a board/superintendent team from focusing on addressing district goals (Dolph, 2016). The literature included accounts of problematic school board members who micromanage superintendents and operate as individual trustees with their own agendas (Bridges et al., 2019; Dolph, 2016; Lorentzen & McCaw, 2015). On the other hand, Alsbury and Gore (2015) addressed the problem of a disengaged board. Disengaged board members tend to relinquish too much authority and power to the superintendent (Bridges et al., 2019).

Competing agendas not only pose potential conflict between board members, but also between board members and the superintendent (Bridges et al., 2019; Lee & Edens, 2014). Grier (2016) noted that effective superintendents share power with board members and do not play politics with the board. Some superintendents acknowledge the position is political. School board members are among the influencers on superintendents that try to influence their day-to-day responsibilities (Melton et al., 2019).

Common complaints superintendents have of school board members include a lack of respect and power struggles. Common complaints school board members have of superintendents include behavior that leads to a lack of trust, being unresponsive and poor leadership skills (Dolph, 2016). Growing research shows the role board presidents can play in mediating, improving, or maintaining positive relationships between the

board and the superintendent. The relationship between the board president and the superintendent can be a strong variable (Webner et al., 2017).

School boards that understand the role of the board and the role of the superintendent tend to be better prepared when interviewing for a superintendent. Effective boards know how to maintain a relationship with a superintendent by staying in their lane and not micromanaging. They know how to share responsibilities respective to their role and focus their time in monitoring the school district's data (Tripses et al., 2015).

School Board Professional Development

There are organizations in the United States focused on providing professional development for school board members. The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) are two national organizations designed to support school board members. CGCS (2019) was founded in 1956 and NSBA (2019) was founded in 1940. Both host annual conferences for school board members, superintendents, legal counsel, and administrative leaders. They also offer publications, annual reports on student achievement, resources/tools, research, and legislative updates for its members. SASB (2018) provides training and resources to educate school board members on their role and responsibilities.

There is a need for professional development and assessments to measure effective school boards. Effective professional development could assist school board members' gain a better understanding of how they can create the culture to improve student outcomes by being clear on their role as trustees (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015;

Levine & Buskirk, 2015). There is a need for structures and processes to be updated so governance models can be more aligned with desired student outcomes and provide an opportunity to counter dysfunctional school board behavior (Heisler & Hanlin, 2019). Governance is a topic that can be misunderstood or interpreted differently by school board members. Depending on their interpretation, the governance approach may vary (Ford & Ihrke, 2016d). While school board members' required number of professional development hours vary from state to state, most entail learning about school law and finance. If school board members are not made aware of how they can hinder the daily duties of a superintendent and school administrators by micromanaging the day-to-day operations, then it may go unchecked for their entire term (Lee & Eadens, 2014).

According to Ford and Ihrke (2017), urban school board conflict can have more negative effects on student achievement than non-urban school boards. It is partially attributed to more diverse student populations, big city politics, and complex governance challenges. Netflix CEO, Reed Hastings, described school board members in urban areas as problematic. He believes they push superintendents out and push their own political agendas (Jacobs, 2015). Professional development geared towards urban school boards may be warranted that focuses on serving a different population and more challenging political environment (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). Blissett and Alsbury (2018) conducted a study and noted a school board member's personal identity could influence their political ideologies as well as their decisions in the board room. Professional development on how personal identities may influence decision making and a greater understanding of how it impacts their role could lead to inclusive policy geared towards student achievement. A

concept known as collaborative governance could serve as a counter to promote the idea of diversity and trust for school boards (Siddiki et al., 2017).

School board members could benefit from learning how to interact with their constituents and community, how to build a relationship with the superintendent, and how to work with the entire board (Alsbury & Gore, 2015). School board candidates could also benefit from school board training. Candidates may end up hurting a school board's stabilizing process if they run on topics or special interests that work counter to effective school board governance (Alsbury, 2015).

An onboarding process and assignment of a mentor could help a new trustee become acclimated. Professional development that includes reading assignments about board governance and leadership, team building workshops and skills related to conflict resolution could help prepare a trustee (Heisler & Hanlin, 2019). Another crucial opportunity for professional development includes school boards learning how to set district goals, monitor the goals through data, and evaluate the superintendent on the goals. Problems arise between the school board and the superintendent when the evaluation is not aligned with the district's goals with clear expectations on student achievement (Gelber & Thompson, 2015).

School Board Dysfunction

There is significant literature that focuses on the dysfunction of school boards (Blissett & Alsbury, 2018; Diem et al., 2019; Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Heisler & Hanlin, 2019; Wirt & Kirst, 1992). Dysfunctional boards can improve if they go through a stabilization process which brings a culture of working collaboratively and becoming

more efficient and effective. In some boardrooms, stability comes after school board member turnover. A stable board includes stability of board operations, board working relationships, board expectations for district personnel, and goals for student achievement (Alsbury, 2015).

Although school boards can be perceived as more of an obstacle to addressing student achievement, school board members have growing research defining their role to improve board relations (Ford, 2015). Addressing school board dysfunction begins with school board leadership. One single board member can negatively impact a school board room (Alsbury, 2015). Effective school board leadership is able to manage conflict and view conflict as an opportunity for growth through constructive techniques (Heisler & Hanlin, 2019).

Despite the negative perceptions about school boards in the literature, a majority of people in the United States of America across party lines still prefer school board above other forms of governance and entrust school boards to oversee educational reform at the local level (Blissett & Alsbury, 2018; Land, 2002). New research is emerging comparing traditional public school boards and nonprofit charter school boards. A study of nonprofit boards in comparison to public school boards in Minnesota showed differences in the way they perceived prioritizing the general public, levels of conflict and financial responsibility (Ford & Ihrke, 2016c).

Dysfunctional school board members could possibly be held accountable when they are up for re-election. However, boards fail as a whole and each individual election can make it difficult to hold the entire board accountable at the same time. Poor academic

achievement is a way to determine if their dysfunction is hindering their ability to govern (Ford, 2015). Holding school board members accountable is not as easy as it sounds. Payson (2017) studied student achievement scores in California and their correlation to school board incumbents winning their races for re-election. Conditions are favorable during presidential election years when the voter turnout is higher (Payson, 2017; Warshaw, 2019). When elections are held in mid-term and off-years they can be susceptible to special interest groups' political influence (Kogan et al., 2018).

Effective Governance by School Boards

School boards that are able to govern effectively tend to share characteristics connected to higher achieving school systems (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2019). The Rice et al. (2000) were among the first researchers to begin to link effective governance to student outcomes. They found common attributes in high performing districts. The attributes included school board members who believed in high expectations, common goals, community engagement, and a focus on governance behaviors (Rice et al., 2000). Good governing boards are able to push school policy that creates a positive school climate so that students can learn and result in positive student outcomes (Hanberger, 2016).

A mixed-methods study was conducted in British Columbia regarding the effects of the nine characteristics on student achievement. Handford and Leithwood (2019) found that all nine characteristics had some effect on student outcomes. The nine characteristics included a widely shared mission, vision, and goals; coherence in instructional guidance at all levels; use of relevant data for consistent decision-making;

organizational improvement processes designed around continuous improvement; all-inclusive professional development across the district; alignment between mission and goals and the use of personnel and allocation of budgets; comprehensive leadership development, assignment, and succession planning and execution; district trustees who focused on policy; productive, collaborative working relationships between educators, administrators, and stakeholders.

Research with comprehensive attributes of effective school boards has been performed. Effective school boards find a balance in governance with their colleagues, in community engagement, and in their relationship with their superintendent. Dervarics and O'Brien (2019) established the following eight characteristics of an effective school board:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision
2. 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
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. 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.

5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. 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. (p. 3)

Productive school boards reflect the community's values and engage their community in a manner that builds trust and maintains credibility (Ford & Ihrke, 2019a). Both the community and the board play specific roles that support the vision for improved student outcomes (Lorentzen & McCaw, 2015). High performing school boards understand their role (Alsbury & Gore, 2015). Lorentzen and McCaw (2015) described the role of an individual trustee and the transition to operating as part of a collective board. Effective school boards are composed of individual trustees that do not push campaign promises over the board's collective vision and do not strain the relationship with district leaders by making demands that are unrealistic. School boards that are clear on the superintendent's role are able to align value systems to focus on student achievement, respect the superintendent's time to stay focused on student achievement

versus politics, and implement an evaluation system that is aligned to student outcome goals (Gore & Nyland, 2015; Shelton, 2015).

Effective school boards incorporate a self-assessment tool for individual school board members and for the board as a whole. Boards have not historically been required to conduct evaluations for effectiveness (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Gore and Nyland (2015) proposed elements for a board evaluation tool that research cites as characteristics found in highly effective school boards. The ten characteristics were vision-directed planning, community engagement, effective leadership, accountability, using data for continuous improvement, cultural responsiveness, climate, learning organizations, systems thinking, and innovation and creativity.

Governance teams who function with a narrowed focus that prioritizes district goals demonstrate better results (Hooge et al., 2019). Effective boards establish student outcome goals and monitor them. These boards also engage the community to ensure the goals align with the community's values (Alsbury & Miller-Jones, 2015; Gelber & Thompson, 2015). School boards that are forward thinking can ensure they maintain a highly effective school system by implementing strategic planning with student focused outcomes (Ford & Ihrke, 2019b). Effective boards are data savvy, establish district three to five goals that are 3 to 5 years long, ensure the goals are attainable with a timeframe (Dolph, 2016). Longer serving school board members that understand their role and adhere to their role tend to have a positive effect on the district's ability to positively effect student achievement (Alsbury, 2008). Additionally, school boards that practice effective governance have an opportunity to improve their school district's social capital

by focusing on district educational goals that represent the values of the community (Gelber & Thompson, 2015; Hooge et al., 2019).

Synthesis and Critique of the Research

The common themes identified in the literature review are the confusion regarding school board member and superintendent roles, conflict in the school board room, micromanagement by school board members, personal agendas, the influence of special interests, and power struggles. The literature pertaining to these topics has been explicated. However, in this section, the literature is evaluated on its merits for proving the gap that led to the need for this basic qualitative study of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student outcomes through student outcomes governance.

Confusion Regarding School Board Member and Superintendent Roles

Role confusion is a common challenge for superintendents and school board members (Alsbury & Gore, 2015). Honingh et al. (2018) noted previous research that emphasizes the importance of school board members and superintendents knowing their roles. In one qualitative case study of school board and superintendent roles, Curry et al. (2018) looked at the change in governance and their perceived ability to positively influence student outcomes. They found role confusion could lead to hindering school leaders from being able to achieve the board's desired student outcomes.

In another qualitative case study, Jefferson County Public Schools and Wake County Public Schools were the school districts of interest (Diem et al., 2015). Diem et al. (2015) presented the political context of school board policy making between these

two school districts. They found political influences can have an effect on how school board members choose to govern which in turn adds to the confusion of their roles. This latest research expanded on previous research (Johnson, 2012; Kirst, 2008; Land, 2002) that connected political influences in school board rooms to the confusion of school board roles. The superintendent understanding his or her role and school board understanding their role is vital to building a cohesive team (Delagardelle, 2008; Dolph, 2016; Gore & Nyland, 2015; Shelton, 2015).

Conflict between the board and the superintendent may arise when trying to determine how much the community should be involved. Webner et al. (2017) conducted a study that found a difference in priorities by school board presidents and the superintendents. In the study, board presidents perceived public engagement and involvement more important. They felt the community should play a role in the district's goal setting. The superintendents prioritized recruiting, developing strong educators, and putting an evaluation process in place higher than did board presidents. The misalignment can lead to conflict and further confusion of expectations. Conflict between the board and the superintendent

Student outcomes governance was designed to help school board members be clear on what their role is and how to govern in partnership with the superintendent (SEA, 2017). Role confusion as to who sets the vision for the district is a common misconception by some school boards the superintendent. The vision is the responsibility of the school board, and it is up to the superintendent and their administrative team to make it happen (Gelber & Thompson, 2015).

The SOGIT is designed to assist school boards and the superintendent demonstrate growth by setting three to five district goals, monitor the goals, and evaluate the superintendent based on the goals. The goals begin with the board's vision. The SOGIT also pushes boards to evaluate the superintendent only on the district goals (SEA, 2019). A board evaluating a superintendent based on data pertaining to the district goals keeps political influences, such as special interest groups, from adding confusion to school board members' roles. Conflict could be minimized on roles if boards evaluate superintendents on SMART goals focused on student achievement. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resources, and Time Bound (Gore & Nyland, 2015). Consequences of role confusions and conflict include superintendent turnover with an average tenure of 3 years (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Lee & Eadens, 2014; Tekniepe, 2015).

Conflict in the School Board Room

Conflict between the board and conflict between the board and the superintendent makes it harder for a school system to move a district forward (Dolph, 2016). Urban districts are presumably more complex due to the politics and diverse student body. Most of the research of conflict in the board room is in the form of case studies. Weiler (2015) described lessons learned from one school board member in the Verde Mountain school board. The lessons learned were from people that had to deal with one board member's explosive personality. He exhausted time and district resources to find a lack of focus on district goals, a focus on student outcomes, and evidence of managing conflict in a productive manner. Alsbury (2015) noted one single board member's values and beliefs

could disrupt an entire school boardroom because there are two types of role orientation of trustee and delegate.

The trustee orientation is a school board member that prefers to operate with a lens of the entire district, does not succumb to special interests, votes based on what they believe is best for the community as a whole, does not like open debates at the board meetings and prefer unanimous votes (Alsbury, 2015). Conflict may arise with a delegate orientation. A delegate lens means the school board member represents special interests, votes based on their special interests wants or needs, prefers public debate, and seeks different perspectives at board meetings and do not seek unanimous votes (Alsbury, 2015).

The62ecisionnship between a board president and a superintendent has a significant effect on a board room's functioning (Petersen & Short, 2001, 2002). A superintendent's trustworthiness and interpersonal skills can help in building a positive relationship with his or her board. A board president can help with the relationship between the entire board and the superintendent (Webner et al., 2017). However, a key board position is missing in the literature, the board president. More research is needed to explore the implications of board conflict derived from personal identities and the impact on policy outcomes and decisions (Blissett & Alsbury, 2018). Ford and Ihrke (2017) called for more research on urban school board conflict.

Micromanagement by School Board Members

Conflict can arise when board members try to manage the day-to-day operations of the schools in the district (Curry et al., 2018). They are described as micromanagers.

Micromanaging school board members operate in the details of a school system and do not adhere to an effective governance framework. They are known to visit school campuses and try to influence the campus leader's decisions. They also step out of their lane by trying to influence how a superintendent does their job (Alsbury, 2015). Effective school boards stay out of the day-to-day operations of a school district. They invest the time and resources on the front end to focus on policy that clearly defines the values and beliefs of the board as one governing body (Gelber & Thompson, 2015).

School boards that clearly state their expectations and what they do not want the superintendent to do tend to avoid becoming micromanagers (Gelber & Thompson, 2015). The SOGIT incorporates constraints as a way a school board can do exactly that by evaluating the board's values and beliefs and translating them into board and superintendent constraints. Constraints are what the superintendent and board cannot do (SEA, 2019). They can be political landmines specific to the board members' respective districts. By clearly stating what the board wants and does not want, the superintendent can navigate the internal and external politics with precision.

Student outcomes governance promoted governance that discourages micromanagement by training school board members to understand their role and the superintendent's role (SEA, 2019). It introduced the concept of proximity. Proximal conditions are the factors that most directly impact student learning and distal conditions are the factors that are more removed from student learning (Alsbury, 2015). The concept of governance and focusing on how school boards can influence student achievement is what new research is bringing to the forefront. Governance involves seeking to connect

how to connect distal conditions to proximal conditions through policy and school board behavior.

Personal Agendas

School board candidates run for office for a multitude of reasons. Altruistic public servants are needed rather than public servants with a personal agenda (Alsbury, 2015). Competing agendas can interfere with a superintendent's ability to focus on moving the system to address student achievement. Board members may fall victim to pressures of not being re-elected if they do not push their agenda or special interests' agendas (Bridges et al., 2019).

There is a lack of research examining school board members personal identities and their personal agendas in policy making (Blissett & Alsbury, 2018). Warshaw (2019) hinted at possible agendas from marginalized groups such as women and people of color with no empirical evidence. For example, Warshaw regarded African American board members as more likely to push for more liberal policies than White board members. Warshaw noted women and people of color might be more inclined to push for the hiring of more people that share their common identities.

There is a need for quality professional development for school boards. Professional development for school boards could include teaching board members the concepts of learning organizations and systems thinking (Alsbury & Miller-Jones, 2015). The two concepts help an individual assess how they fit into the overall picture and how they might be affecting the overall process. The training could help school board

members reflect on their behaviors, uncover truths about themselves, and provide a space for a commitment to changed behavior.

Influence of Special Interests

School board members tend to be influenced by their internal relationships in the school boardroom and the external relationships with stakeholders (Saatcioglu, 2015). Alsbury's description of a delegate role orientation is geared towards adhering to special interests versus a trustee role orientation where a school board member answers to general interests (Alsbury, 2015). Special interests and their influence in school boardrooms are cited in the early research. Special interest groups have the ability to influence decisions in a school boardroom and who gets elected to the school board (Kirst, 1994; Land, 2002; Rice et al., 2000). Election cycles can create the timing for interest groups to play a bigger role in off-cycle elections because voter turnout tends to be much lower than presidential election cycles (Kogan et al., 2018). They can also create school board member confusion on their role (Diem et al., 2015). There is research noting that superintendents may not be prepared for the politics or the influence of special interests in a school board room (Melton et al., 2019). More research is needed on the influences of special interest groups in urban districts (Trujillo, 2013).

Some special interest groups might be interested in new research that is beginning to explore the impact school boards have on their communities such as it relates to segregation. Macartney and Singleton (2018) examined school boards and student segregation. Party lines show up in the research and their influence on school board races. There are implications when special interest groups get involved.

Power Struggles

There are concepts related to influences on school board members such as closure and brokerage (Saatcioglu, 2015). Closure is the quality of the relationships board members have inside the board room. Lower levels of closure can result in isolated, divisive, and self-absorbed school board members. They can lead to power struggles in the school boardroom.

Another power struggle may be between the superintendent, parents, teachers, and the community (Melton et al., 2019). Brokerage is the quality of the relationships with external stakeholders. School boards that have healthy brokerage are able to create an external support system that informs the board of external influences and regularly solicits the external stakeholder's feedback. It can help provide an internal and external balance to a school boardroom. School boards that are practicing high levels of closure and brokerage are said to be practicing *structural autonomy*. They are boards that are functioning well internally and externally.

Balanced school boards work as a collective board and minimize power struggles. They understand the importance of having a positive working relationship with the community. That includes representing the entire community and listening to the needs of the community so the community's values are reflected in the boardroom. School boards also understand and value their relationship with the superintendent. That includes respecting each other roles and not micromanaging the superintendent. By minimizing powers struggles, school boards have the ability to recruit, support, and retain an effective superintendent (Lorentzen & McCaw, 2015). On the other hand, continued power

struggles between the board and the superintendent can lead to boards pushing their agenda and further straining relationships (Trujillo, 2013). Effective school board members differentiate between a mindset of *power over* and *power with* when utilizing power. Power over is when a school board member bullies their way through and power with is when a school board member works collaboratively with high levels of closure and brokerage (Alsbury, 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

Substantial research findings that suggested school boards can positively affect the school environment to improve student achievement (Ford & Ihrke, 2016b; Johnson, 2013; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). The common themes identified in the literature review were confusion regarding school board member and superintendent roles, conflict in the school board room, power struggles with fellow trustees and the superintendent, micromanagement by school board members, personal agendas, and the influence of special interests. The shift in demographics in the country was shown to represent an important, more recent challenge for educational leaders. Some of the themes contained in the literature called for more research, including board self-evaluations, superintendent evaluations, quality school board professional development, and governance tools that lead to higher student outcomes. An example of a governance tool that could be applied in empirical research is the student outcomes governance model.

Urban school board members can operate based on research to learn about best practices that lead to high performing school districts. Research addressing school board governance needs to include a focus on student outcomes. School board behaviors

associated with higher performing school districts provide a path for lower performing school districts. Professional development is needed that clarifies board and superintendent roles, encourages working as a team, enhances conflict resolution skills, and narrows a trustee's focus to student-based outcome goals. Thus, the research supported the current study's purpose of gaining an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model. Chapter 3 provides the details of the methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The underlying problem explored in this study was that the SEA had recently recommended low performing school districts' school board members participate in the student outcomes governance training for developing policies to address student achievement. However, school board members' understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement might contribute to ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model. The gap in the literature that I addressed was the need for empirical study with urban SCS school board members recently tasked with applying the student outcomes governance model in their policies regarding student achievement. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model.

Chapter 3 contains the research design and rationale and the role of the researcher. The methodology is a major section that details the participant selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment of participants, and data collection; and data analysis plan. Additional elements of Chapter 3 include ethical procedures and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for the study was: How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model? A basic qualitative study was used to gain an understanding of urban SCS school board members after they have completed student outcomes governance. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative study

allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding participants' experiences and to ascertain the meaning the participants attribute to their experiences. Basic qualitative design is useful when seeking seminal information about a new phenomenon, such as the 2017 student outcomes governance model affecting school board members who make student achievement policy in SCS (Teherani et al., 2015).

The design allowed for collecting data through interviews to understand the urban SCS school board members' perceptions about their roles in improving student outcomes after participating in training for following the student outcomes governance model. I chose a qualitative study over a quantitative study because a qualitative study is used to understand a phenomenon in depth rather than to predict an outcome. Quantitative studies focus on quantity, use inanimate instruments for data collection, and have predetermined or structured design characteristics while a qualitative study focus on quality, use researcher as primary instrument, and design characteristics are flexible and evolving (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative study fit the current study best as it allowed for examining how school board members construct their reality around their experience with student outcomes governance.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher engages with the data directly through data collection, such as interviews. The researcher represents the primary instrument who interviews the participants. I fulfilled that role as the primary instrument when interviewing the participants. I was a current school board trustee in a large urban district in the state and involved in statewide professional associations. I was also a director on

the State Association of School Boards (SASB), Chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), and director on the National Association of School Boards (NSBA). There was a high likelihood of me knowing some of the trustees recommended by SEA. However, I have no supervisory relationships with other school boards' members in SCS as we are colleagues and work independently with our respective school districts.

I did not have any source of power over any participants; nonetheless, a new and recent challenge was my process in becoming a student outcomes governance coach in the last 6 months, prior to data collection. At the time of data collection, I had completed the certification process and could train school boards and superintendents in student outcomes governance. Therefore, I did not interview school board members whom I could personally train to remove any conflict-of-interest risks. I kept a journal throughout the process to create the space for self-reflection to minimize bias.

Methodology

The methodology includes participant selection and the instrumentation. The procedures for recruitment of participants and data collection are included. The instrumentation and data analysis plan for the study are conveyed also.

Participant Selection

The population was the urban school board trustees in SCS. This population was predominately White and male (SASB, 2020). In SASB's 2019 survey of 4,528 responding school board trustees, 73% identified as White, and 69% identified as male. Also, the SEA listed 11 school districts as major urban districts, and each school board

had seven to nine members, suggesting the maximum population of all trustees ranges approximately from 77 to 99.

Participants were recruited if they met the inclusion criteria of being a board member of an urban school district in SCS who had completed student outcomes governance. Out of the 11 major districts, six districts' boards completed the student outcomes governance training. Therefore, 46 school board trustees represented the population who met the inclusion criteria of completing the student outcomes governance training and serving a major urban school district as of August of 2020 (SASB, 2020). Due to COVID-19, the student outcomes governance training program was paused until September 1, 2020, when it resumed training school board members. Even thought it was possible that there could be more than the current population of 46 trained urban district trustees by the time the study was approved through the Institutional Research Board, the population size did not increase. The SEA was asked to provide a list of school board members from SCS urban districts who completed student outcomes governance training.

With the list of eligible school board trustees who met the student outcomes governance training completion criterion in hand, I randomly selected six names for invitation by email. This sample size was appropriate for achieving saturation because the population was small, and six participants represented 13% of the population. Furthermore, smaller sample sizes are common in qualitative research due to its focus on in-depth data analysis and saturation that can be achieved with as few as one to five participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Robinson (2014) justified smaller samples as appropriate for achieving the idiographic aims of a basic qualitative research design. The

sample had geographical homogeneity (Robinson, 2014) because the participants represented major urban districts in the SCS, suggesting saturation could be more easily achieved. In particular, I performed an in-depth study of the perceptions of school board members in SCS who completed student outcomes governance and could represent any one of the 11 major urban districts in SCS.

School board members from the urban school district on which I currently served were not considered for participation in the study. This delimitation reduced my pool of potential participants considering my district was one of the six urban districts having completed student outcomes governance. The delimitation reduced the population of eligible major urban school board members to 35. I eliminated from consideration any names of potential participants whom I knew; therefore, when a name I knew emerged from the recruitment list, I removed that name from consideration and randomly chose an alternate name. Saturation with the participations who represented a population of 35 could be achieved with only six interviews.

Because I recruited trustees who did not represent the same school district as mine and whom I did not know, I formally introduced myself and my reason for contacting them via email. I asked them if they wanted to participate in the study. If they agreed to participate, I scheduled an interview. Because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic during which the government of SCS required educators to remain at home and avoid in-person interactions, I conducted the interviews using a web-conferencing platform with secure password protection for entering the web conference, such as Zoom. Web conferencing with Zoom offered the opportunity to share information face to face and interact as of

virtually together in the same space. For participants who prefer to simply be interviewed by telephone, I used my cell phone to make the call to the participant.

Instrumentation

It is necessary to prepare for interview research. It begins with ensuring the interview questions are formulated with the guiding research question in mind (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). By doing so, researchers seek to gain an understanding of the respondents' lived experiences versus merely collecting answers to close-ended questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative study allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding participants' experiences and to ascertain the meaning the participants attribute to their experiences.

An interview protocol was utilized with the participants over a web conferencing platform, such as Zoom. The interview questions appear in Appendix A. The interview questions were adapted by the researcher and based on findings and recommendations from contemporary researchers of school board governance and student achievement (e.g., Alsbury & Gore, 2015; Ford, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2016b, 2019b; Honingh et al., 2018; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). The questions for the interviews were aligned to the research question and the conceptual framework which includes Rice et al.'s (2000) lighthouse inquiry and Heifetz et al.'s (2009) adaptive leadership.

I validated the interview guide by seeking feedback on the interview protocol from experts on school governance with terminal degrees and experience working in education policy. This validation process strengthened the interview protocol's reliability and trustworthiness. I received feedback from two academic experts in education familiar

with student outcomes governance. I reached out to two terminal degree holders whose primary expertise was school board governance. One expert was a top-level state school board association executive. The other was a top-level executive within the SEA. They provided feedback to identify gaps in the protocol, adjusted the questions for clarity and achievement of the study's purpose, as well as offered advice to enhance my approach to the context for urban school board members.

The interviews were semistructured to allow for asking follow-up questions and for having a conversation with each participant. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) presented semistructured questions as the middle between structured and unstructured interviews. Semistructured interviews have a list of questions but allow flexibility for the researcher to adjust to the responses of the respondent. The flexibility of semistructured questions allowed me as the researcher to explore the research question and create the space for new ideas. The unstructured interview was not appropriate for the delimited aims of the study pertaining to student outcomes governance training as applied to the role of school board trustee of a major urban district in SCS.

The interview guide was designed to answer the research question and to follow the four-part protocol. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested using a four-part protocol to construct an inquiry-based conversation: "a) interview questions written differently from the research questions; b) an organization following social rules of ordinary conversation; c) a variety of questions; d) a script with likely follow-up and prompt questions" (p. 813). The interview guide contained the questions asked of the participants and was designed to support answering the research question. Understanding that research questions

differed from interview questions, I asked interview questions designed to take each participant's context into account.

I used the Zoom web conferencing platform with secure password protection for conducting interviews. Zoom offered the option to record the interview. For participants who preferred to simply be interviewed by telephone, I used my cell phone to make the call to the participant. The password secured digital recording application known as Rev was used to record and transcribe the phone interviews. The audio recordings from the Zoom interviews were uploaded to the Rev platform for transcription. Both data collection instruments allowed the entire interviews to be recorded to minimize losing important data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

SEA assisted in identifying school board members that have completed student outcomes governance in urban school districts. The list from SEA encompassed the population. Sample homogeneity included geographical homogeneity (Robinson, 2014) because I randomly selected six names of SCS trustees who represented urban school districts from the SEA list. The study had an idiographic aim to capture the local urban school board members in SCS that have completed student outcomes governance. Robinson (2014) noted an idiographic aim justifies a smaller sample of an average of 3 to 16 participants to grasp a part of the bigger picture. It creates opportunities for cross-case generalities and an intensive look at each participant.

School board members I did not know were sought to minimize bias and reduce risk. Six urban school boards out of 11 have completed student outcomes governance,

representing a population total of 46 school board members. More urban school boards might have participated when the training resumed after September 1, 2020. Inclusion criteria required a participant to be a trustee who completed student outcomes governance and represented an urban school district in SCS. An email requesting participation in the study was sent to the randomly selected SCS urban district trustees who completed student outcomes governance. If an inadequate number of trustees responded to the request for an interview, I reserved the option to revisit the recruitment plan with SEA.

I collected the data by interviewing the school board members. As the primary research instrument, I formally introduced myself and my reason for contacting the trustees via email. I asked the contacted trustee if they want to participate in the study. If they agreed to participate, I scheduled an interview to be conducted via the Zoom web conferencing platform or by telephone call. I did not need a budget to travel to and from any trustee's district to my hometown in SCS. The six interviews occurred over approximately 1 month.

The preferred interview method was a one-time 45-60-minute Zoom-powered interview with the interview recorded with the online platform. During the Zoom-powered interviews, I took interview notes in written format and recorded the participants' responses with the digital audio-recording application known as Rev.com to ensure the transcribed form of the interview data would be accurate. Rev.com allowed for secure transcription of the data. The Zoom platform allowed for the session to be recorded and to reduce errors in data collection. During the interviews on Zoom, I still used the secondary Rev.com digital recording application on my phone to record the

interview. It was possible that a technical error in one or the other recording mechanisms could have caused data to be lost, so having two mechanisms for recording data improved the odds that the data collected would be error free.

I took notes in addition to collecting the audio recordings. My notes included my observations of the participant's facial expressions or any visible body language, if applicable. I wrote my personal thoughts and reflections regarding each interview once it ended. Each interviewee's references to self and locality were coded so that each participant's identity could not be determined based on district, city, or school name references.

The web conference via Zoom format for interviewing allowed for visual face-to-face opportunities. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) noted some benefits to conducting qualitative research online. The online platform allowed for flexibility and convenience on both the researcher and respondents side. The online platform allowed for verbal and non-verbal cues to be observed better than a phone call would have. Limitations included limiting the verbal and non-verbal cues to the upper part of the body for the most part. Zoom is viable based on the assumption the participants have the technology and digital citizenship to conduct the interview via an online platform.

There were circumstances where a phone interview might have been a better option than a web-based Zoom format. Acknowledging that in-person interviews have been the preferred method for qualitative data collection, circumstances required using web conferencing with Zoom or telephone calls for the interviews. Some circumstances included financial and time cost to the researcher for travel, safety concerns that include

risks during a pandemic, and interaction effects. For pandemic conditions, meeting in-person was unfeasible due to concern about safety. For participants who preferred interviewing by telephone, a phone call allowed a respondent to disclose more because they might be less concerned with the appearance-driven impression they made on video. Distance and speaking via a phone from a more comfortable location could give the respondent a sense of anonymity. Both the context for the researcher and the respondents were considered in planning the data collection process (Oltmann, 2016).

If recruitment resulted in too few participants, I sent another email to the list of possible participants. I called trustees from the list provided by SEA. If I did not get responses from emails or phone calls, I contacted the school board president to verify correct phone numbers. I solicited the assistance of the board president and school board secretary.

Following the interviews, I sent the participants the transcripts to review for accuracy. This process was a form of data validation. I contacted each participant and sought their feedback. Adjustments to the transcript were made if the participant respond that a change was needed. If adjustments needed to be made, I revisited the data with them individually and asked follow-up questions. Participants exited the study once the interviews were complete and they had reviewed the transcribed data. Participants could elect to exit the study by stopping the interview at any point, and their recorded data and any notes taken would be deleted immediately.

Each participant's data were kept confidential. Any paper copies of data were secured a locked cabinet in my home. All electronic files were maintained behind

password protected firewalls. The data were scheduled to be destroyed at the appropriate time 5 years following the presentation of the final report according to the Institutional Research Board requirements of Walden University.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis was focused on the participants' perceptions of governance, role in addressing student achievement, and how school boards should address student achievement through student outcomes governance. I recorded each interview with a digital recording application to transcribe the data. I analyzed the textual, qualitative data by coding and categorizing data for thematic analysis. The password secured digital recording application Rev was used to audio record and transcribe the interviews. I utilized Nvivo software for data coding and identifying patterns in the language used by the participants in the interviews. NVivo operated as a tool for organizing and making sense of the data in the effort to answer the research question. When using Nvivo, the researcher makes the coding decisions, but the computer application offers a means for notating the codes; organizing the data between codes; and using the codes, or nodes as such labels are called in the proprietary platform, for converging them into categories axially and for generating thematic findings.

The data were coded to organize and identify categories. Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) described coding as simply designating shorthand descriptions or symbols to identify data. They also noted researchers in qualitative research might want to consider analyzing data and paying attention to patterns while collecting data to avoid being overwhelmed at the end of the process. Coding also presented opportunities to adjust the

approach to the data analysis to ensure the findings would be relevant to answering the research question.

I generated tentative categories and moved from inductive to deductive analysis. I followed the recommendations for using open coding then axial coding to form categories and themes, as discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The findings became exhaustive, mutually exclusive, as sensitive to the data as possible, and conceptually congruent. This study took an inductive approach with open coding and a comparative approach with axial coding and category formation. The approach was used to make sense of the data by consolidating codes and converging them into organized, descriptive categories. The categories became the basis of the thematic findings.

If any data appeared to diverge from the themes emerging, they might represent a lack of saturation or represent a case that was discrepant from the other participants' data. If a participant provided discrepant data, I used peer debriefing to determine if the data represented a phenomenon pertinent to the research question that needed to be investigated further or if the data were not pertinent to the research question. The discrepant data could have revealed suggestions for future research (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Robust qualitative research design needs rigor and a process where the researcher and the participants co-construct meaning. The important part is for the researcher to be self-aware and acknowledge bias to not ensure authentic meaning from the participants is revealed in the findings (Lietz et al., 2006). Positivist researchers argue qualitative

research done by interpretivist researchers cannot be scientifically sound. Positivists focus on the validity, reliability, and generalizability of data and findings while interpretivists welcome flexibility for finding the meaning in the participants' experiences (Carcary, 2009). Therefore, the role a researcher plays in the study is important to note.

Trustworthiness is achieved when the research findings align accurately with the true meaning as revealed by the participants in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are four tasks needed for trustworthiness that involve establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Koch, 2006). I engaged in several activities for ensuring the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that led to the trustworthiness of the findings.

Credibility

I kept a journal throughout the interview process and analysis of the data. This effort was used to create the space for self-reflection to minimize bias (Fischer, 2009; Sorsa et al., 2015). This represents reflexivity and involves researchers being reflective on how their worldview and perspective influences the study's processes. For Shufutinsky (2020), "use of self" is a tool a researcher can use in qualitative research that involves:

> A capacity for reflection, feedback, and mindful consideration regarding what occurs when we attempt to influence problems, people, or situations, and that resulting level of awareness of presence is key to driving solutions and action in diverse scenarios and roles, including in organizational research. (p. 50)

The journal I kept represented an effort for ensuring credibility. I kept a journal of the research experience and became self-aware as to how the researcher role is coming across to participants and in the context of presenting the study (Koch, 2006). Also, to establish credibility, I used Ravitch and Carl's (2016) preferred the method of *participant validation* and defined it as checking in with the participants throughout the study to ensure accuracy of data, incorporate a collaborative approach, and create the space to challenge the researcher's transcripts. The participating urban school board members' feedback was crucial to ensure their responses were captured accurately. The member data validation checks included sending each participant's interview transcript for review and to discover of the participant may want to add further data or make clarifications. The final member checks involved sending the data interpretations to the participants for their review and asking for follow-up discussions about the interpretations, should the participants want them.

Transferability

The second strategy used in this study was thick description to establish transferability. Transferability can be established when others can find meaning in the study and apply it to similar contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). That would require thick and rich description so enough information could be analyzed and applied in other contexts. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted thick description in interview-based studies might "involve contextualizing participants' responses so that readers can understand contextual factors in which quotes are presented and discussed" (p. 200).

Dependability

Dependability was established by asking for an audit of the data by another researcher using a decision trail. I engaged peers for debriefing during the coding process to ensure my biases did not affect any emergent findings by sharing the decision trail. The peer reviewer researchers could review the research process and the data to the point that they arrived at a similar conclusion or found discrepancies in the data that must be addressed before presenting any findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). A decision trail could be used to illustrate each decision in the study and make distinct connections to from each major part of the study (Koch, 2006). I incorporated a decision trail to account for the major 84ecisionns connecting each major part of the study. I asked an expert with a doctoral degree, such as the Ph.D. or Ed.D., who worked in the field of school board governance to review the decision trail. This level of peer debriefing during the coding process ensured the findings' dependability and lack bias. The entire research process was also documented for audit by the peer reviewer to show the dependability of the process.

Confirmability

Confirmability happens when a researcher has established credibility, transferability, and dependability. The presentation of the entire study represents as an audit trail for documenting and connecting major decisions and actions made before and during the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Trustworthiness was assured through member checks, contextualization, thick and rich descriptions, peer debriefing, a decision trail, and an audit trail.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research has the potential to invite bias without parameters from the very beginning of the data collection process (Chenail, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I worked within the guidelines provided by Walden University's Institutional Research Board (IRB) to adhere to ethical considerations and received IRB approval number 03-18-21-0728882 prior to the recruitment of any participants or collection of any data. Policies ensuring confidentiality were followed by not allowing the final report to identify any of the participants by names or school districts. Consent forms were obtained with signatures from the participants.

I utilized ethical procedures for data collection such as an interview protocol to maintain consistency with each participant. The same script was used to introduce myself and the same open-ended questions. The data collected were kept on a password protected Google Drive on spreadsheets and Word documents. I documented the data anonymously so the identity of the participants would not be exposed. I disposed of the data within 5 years of completing the study.

I addressed ethical concerns related to data collection if participants refused to participate or withdrew early. Refusal to participate was handled by not soliciting their participation anymore and deleting them from the list of potential participants. If a participant withdrew early for any reason, the data were deleted, and their responses were not included in any part of the study. I assured any refusing participants of their confidentiality, thanked them for allowing me to approach them, and deleted them from the list of potential participants I received from the SEA. I provided each participant with

a pseudonym, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. I did not use their names nor their districts' names. Their districts were masked to align with the corresponding participant number, such as District 1 for Participant 1, District 2 for Participant 2, and so on.

The data collected were kept on a password protected Google Drive on spreadsheets and Word documents. I documented the data with codes, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth, so the identities of the participants would not be exposed. I will dispose of the data within 5 years of completing the study.

No participants in the study had a prior relationship with the researcher. I did not consider trustees I knew if SEA recommended them as eligible for the study. I was, at the time of data collection, the President of one of the six urban districts listed by SEA as having completed student outcomes governance. I was also the President of the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA) and the national Chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE). I did not recruit any trustees from the urban districts that served on the MASBA or CUBE boards under my leadership.

An important aspect of research is promoting beneficence, justice, and respect of persons. The benefit of the study of the school board members' experiences with the student outcomes governance model to promote school board members' focus on improving student achievement outcomes (SEA, 2017) involves helping urban school boards needing to use the student outcomes governance model at the local level. The findings might benefit the efforts of policymakers at the state agency level who seek the effective implementation of student outcomes governance and an improved focus on student achievement by school boards throughout the state.

This study could enable school board governance in SCS to have social justice and provide respect for persons. School boards could benefit by highlighting perspectives on how student outcomes governance is likely to influence academic achievement as a form of social justice that benefits the state and shows respect for persons. School board members do not have to have a certain level of education to be elected nor do they have to run on a platform that focuses on academic achievement. Professional development for any human being, regardless of level of education, could benefit from understanding their role as a school board member. Positive social change would be transformational for school systems if school board and superintendent teams could turn their school systems around by closing achievement gaps and learning how to create the culture for positive student outcomes.

Summary

The chapter included the research design, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter also addressed how the participants were selected and interviewed. The data analysis plan conveyed the tools used to gather, transcribe, and interpret the data. Chapter 4 and 5 include the analysis of data and reflections of the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model. The basic qualitative study involved conducting interviews with school board members to gain an understanding of urban SCS school board members perceptions of their roles after they have completed the student outcomes governance training. The findings could help urban school board members decide how to use the student outcomes governance model at the local level and inform policy at the state agency level concerning issues related to effective implementation of student outcomes governance and improved board focus on student achievement. This study could support practical application of school board governance in SCS. School boards could benefit by highlighting perspectives on how student outcomes governance is likely to influence academic achievement.

In Chapter 2, I provided the literature review. Chapter 3 featured the research design used for this study. Chapter 4 is organized to answer the research question: How do urban SCS State school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model? The detailed results of the study are presented from the data collected via interviews with participants. This chapter contains a description of the setting of the study, demographics of the participants, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness, and research findings.

Setting

Six participants who completed student outcomes governance training were recruited from urban districts in SCS to participate in interviews. Each participant represented a different urban district, and all six participants were school board members at the time of their participation in the study. None of the trustees described organizational and personal experiences that could influence the interpretations of the study results based on their interview responses.

Three participants represented districts in the northern part of SCS. Two participants served in central SCS urban districts. The final participant served in a western SCS urban district. Four of the six participants were men, and two were women. Two participants self-identified as African American or Black, two participants self-identified as Mexican American, and two participants self-identified as White. At the time of participation in the study, the most tenured trustee had served 6 years. The years of service ranged from 2 to 6 years, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

The Six Participants' Characteristics

Participant	Area	Gender	Ethnicity/Race	Years of Service
1	North	Male	Mexican American	6.0
2	North	Female	Black	3.0
3	Central	Female	Mexican American	3.5
4	North	Male	White	5.0
5	Central	Male	African American	2.0
6	West	Male	White	6.0

Data Collection

Upon IRB approval, I conducted the research. I randomly selected eight school board members from a list of urban school districts having completed student outcomes governance to recruit for interviews. The SEA reported that 8 of 11 urban school districts had completed student outcomes governance by April of 2021. The eight school board members were sent an overview of the study via an email and invited to participate in the study. Three school board members responded within the first week and agreed to participate. After 10 days, I emailed the other five school board members a follow up message with the overview of the study. Three more school board members responded to the follow up email agreeing to participate. Two responded they would not participate

due to time constraints. With six participants, I had met the minimum number of participants. I decided to not randomly select more trustees from the two districts unless the data did not achieve saturation. I sent thank you emails to all eight who replied. The six respondents agreeing to participate were emailed a consent form. They responded via email that they consented to participate in the study.

Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that continued to cause restrictions on in-person contact throughout SCS in April of 2021, each of the six participants willing to participate were asked to schedule the virtual interview at a time and date based on their convenience. Each participant was informed the Zoom interview could last 45 to 60 minutes. The six participants were also notified the interview would be recorded via the Zoom virtual platform and on my phone with the digital audio-recording application Rev.com to facilitate the transcriptions of the interviews.

Once schedules were aligned and interview appointments were made, I sent each participant an email with the link to a Zoom virtual meeting. Each virtual meeting was assigned a unique link, a password, and a virtual waiting room feature so no one other than me and the participant could enter the virtual room. I also locked the room from outside entry when both the participant and I had logged in. Each participant was able to use their computer and camera to conduct the interview. All six participants completed their virtual face to face interviews.

Before formally conducting each interview, participants were greeted and engaged in a light conversation to try and make them comfortable. They were informed they could exit the study at any time and that their data would be destroyed if they chose

to stop the interview at any time. The intention of the study and the interview was discussed, and each participant was provided with an opportunity to ask any questions. Once questions were answered, participants were asked for their affirmative response to proceeding with the interview. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix A) via the Zoom chat box so they could read the questions in case a problem with hearing me ask the question through the Zoom audio occurred. A semistructured interview format was used to allow flexibility during the interview so that I could ask follow-up questions and seek clarifications. The semistructured format allowed me to explore the answers to the interview questions and create the space for new ideas.

Once the interviews began, I took written notes. I wrote down key phrases and noted facial expressions as well as changes in participants' vocal tones. I did find it difficult to notice body language due to the computer cameras being primarily focused on participants' faces.

I asked probing questions and inquired with follow-up questions when I noticed an opportunity to gain more depth or a need for clarification. The interviews lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. Taking written notes was helpful in documenting the interviews and was done in case I had technical difficulties. As I completed each interview, I immediately downloaded the transcription from Zoom.

I also uploaded the Rev.com audio for transcription. I found it helpful to compare the two transcriptions along with my written notes so I could identify any errors in the transcriptions. Once I transcribed the interviews for each participant, I emailed them their

transcription for review and validation. Each transcription was assigned a number and did not contain any identifying names nor school district information to ensure data confidentiality and to protect the participants' identities.

When I sent the transcriptions, I asked the participants if they had additional comments, any questions about the transcription, or needed to make any corrections to the data. None of the six participants made additional comments, asked any questions, or offered any corrections after receiving their transcripts for data validation. There were no variations in data collection from chapter 3. I did not experience any unusual circumstances during the data collection process. There were no technical difficulties during the interviews or challenges with transcribing the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews with six school board members, I placed the transcribed interviews on Microsoft Word documents and saved them under the participants' assigned numbers and not with the participants' names. I uploaded the transcribed interviews to Nvivo software. Once I had the transcriptions in Nvivo, I was able to review each transcription and identify data coding and identify patterns in the language. The software allowed me to organize the data and make sense of the data to answer the research question. I completed the coding and generated the tentative categories. I moved from inductive coding to deductive analysis by transitioning from open coding to axial coding over the course of several rounds of coding. I consolidated codes and converged them into organized, descriptive categories. These descriptive categories became the basis for the thematic findings of the study.

Specific codes emerged as I read and re-read the transcripts to identify patterns in terms (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Table 5 displays a summary of the codes and their resulting themes. Examples of the major codes derived from the data (see Appendix B) follow: (a) narrowing focus to student achievement, (b) paying more attention to student achievement progress reports, (c) not interfering with day-to-day operations, (d) micromanagement, (e) data reflect the superintendents' performance, and (f) evaluating the superintendent more on student achievement goals. The codes allowed me to identify patterns, and I organized them into descriptive categories. Examples of the categories included: (a) student outcomes governance provided a common language, (b) moving away from focusing on non-student achievement agenda items, (c) board member role confusion, (d) board dysfunction, (e) evaluating a superintendent, and (f) prioritizing student outcome goals and data. Three themes emerged from the descriptive categories to form the findings and are the following: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b) micromanaging behavior, and (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. Specific quotes justifying the themes appear in the results section below.

Table 5

Themes Based on Their Associated Codes

Themes	Codes
Narrowed focus on student achievement	Conversations about student achievement Language to move the board forward Narrowing focus Refocus on students Paid more attention to student achievement progress reports Narrowed focus on student achievement
Micromanaging behavior	More hands-on and being too involved Not interfering with day-to-day operations Lacking knowledge of governance work More time spent on vendors and contracts than on student achievement Micromanaging behavior Spent too much time on nonstudent achievement matters
Evaluating superintendents on student achievement data	Data reflects the superintendent's performance Evaluation based on student outcomes Goals looking at data Placing performance metrics in the superintendent's contract Placing district goals into the superintendent evaluation Evaluating the superintendent more on student achievement goals

Results

Each participant was given the opportunity to answer 13 interview questions. The 13 questions were aligned with the research question asking: How do urban South-Central State school board members perceive their roles in improving student

achievement through the student outcomes governance model? The six participants' responses were consistent with one another, suggesting saturation had been achieved. This section contains the results from the codes and themes that emerged from the data.

Three themes emerged from the interviews with six school board members having completed student outcomes governance and serving on an urban school board. They were: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b) micromanaging behavior, (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. Each is discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Theme 1: Narrowed Focus on Student Achievement

All six participants described their understanding of school board governance and a need to narrow their focus to student achievement resulting in Theme 1: narrowed focus on student achievement. Participant 4 described student outcomes governance as a training that provided an opportunity for their board to refocus on students by having a framework to better understand their role, noting the board needed "to refocus the conversation on what helps kids" which "we've kind of built that as a board. Most of us have built that collective muscle to refocus the conversation where it needs to be" on student achievement." Participant 6 described the significance of the training by mentioning the word "focus" several times:

> [student outcomes governance] was eye opening. It just focused. I keep using the word focus because that's what it did. It narrowed my focus to the students and the achievement of the students instead of shot-gunning everything and playing

> catch up and focusing on things that really weren't important and had no bearing on student learning or student achievement.

For Participant 6, the board was able to apply student outcomes governance by narrowing its focus by removing nonstudent achievement distractions from its discussions.

The training was also helpful to Participant 2, who indicated an appreciation of it helping the board by establishing a common language to become better board members by focusing on student achievement:

> Because at that point, it was polar opposites almost when we initially went through student outcomes governance, and so I appreciated the training because it allowed me to, one, refer back to something, a training that we were all aware of, and then, two, it gave me the language to move the board forward.

The focus on student achievement as described by Participant 5 meant school board members could pay "more attention to the reports that come out that shares the progress in the specific areas that we are looking at in terms of student achievement." This ongoing activity meant Participant 5 was "not waiting for a year to look at the superintendent and say, 'did you do this or did you not do this?'" Participant 5 appreciated the guidance to monitor the academic data regularly versus waiting for the arrival of the accountability data annually.

Theme 2: Micromanaging Behavior

All six participants described board behaviors of role confusion and behaviors of board members interfering with day-to-day operations as elements of Theme 2: micromanaging behavior. The training helped board members understand the importance

of spending more time on student achievement. Participant 3 recalled becoming an elected school board member and not knowing the role of a school board trustee, which meant "really, I had little-to-no knowledge of governance work because I came straight on as a teacher and having no experience in politics." Participant 4 noted that board members can micromanage when they are focused on vendors and contracts:

> Having a framework with goals and objectives sort of down the horizon of what we need to move forward towards has been really, really helpful for us. And in particular, I would say that the guidelines around how much time, like what percentage of the time, [should be] allocated during your board meetings, should be spent talking about student outcomes, has been pretty enlightening for our board and has prompted a lot of discussion because prior to student outcomes governance, we were nowhere near the suggested milestones for what percentage of your time in a board meeting should be spent talking about student outcomes. We were kind of upside-down, if you will, on that metric, spending the vast majority of our time talking about vendors and contracts and a lot of adult issues that were not directly related to student performance.

Participant 4 learned that all these "adult issues" detracted from emphasizing student achievement.

Regarding the superintendent's role in the micromanaging, Participant 5 explained:

> The superintendent is so afraid of board members that she presents items to us in workshops that breed micromanaging questions. They breed micromanaging

> questions and then they flow after that door is open. And so I had heard that there was a divided board before I got on the board.

Student outcomes governance helped Participant 5 learn how to redirect the board when the superintendent unintentionally contributes to micromanaging culture by fearing the board members.

Theme 3: Evaluating Superintendents on Student Achievement Data

All six participants described the information from student outcomes governance as influencing their understanding of how to evaluate a superintendent in Theme 3: evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. The participants noted the importance of using student achievement data to evaluate a superintendent. According to Participant 1, student achievement data reflect how well a superintendent has done the job of leading a school district:

> When I saw the data, I was a little bit frustrated. I didn't know what we were lacking between Black and Brown kids and White [kids]. And what I gained from that is when we have a superintendent, the data is [sic] what reflects her job performance. And we didn't used to talk about data.

Participant 2 shared their board adopted a "new evaluation tool" for their superintendent "primarily based on student outcomes" because student outcomes governance encourages boards to shift from a subjective guidance approach to an objective guidance approach based on student outcomes data. Participant 5 added:

> Our goals became more student achievement goals rather than reduce the budget by so much and pay the teachers so much. And it was a focus thing. It just changed our whole thinking about what we were supposed to do.

Subsequently, the shift in having student outcome goals connected to data points helped the six participants report that their boards become more focused on promoting student achievement and evaluating their superintendent with student achievement data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were utilized to achieve trustworthiness for the study. Four efforts to minimize research bias and achieve trustworthiness involved establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Koch, 2006). The data derived from interviews with six urban school board members having completed student outcomes governance.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I followed the process as described in Chapter 3. I implemented strategies such as journaling and member checks to ensure the credibility of the study. I implemented reflexivity by keeping a journal throughout the study and data analysis. Journaling provided an opportunity to self-reflect on how I may have been coming off to the participants (Koch, 2006) and to be mindful of how to minimize bias (Fischer, 2009; Sorsa et al., 2015). I took notes of personal observations and added them to my journal for comparison with the transcribed data.

I used transcript review and member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After each participant's interview was transcribed, I emailed the transcript to the participant. I asked

each participant to review the interview transcript. No participant responded to receiving their transcript with any suggestions for corrections nor suggesting I needed additional information within a week following their interviews. After sending the data interpretations, I offered the opportunity to visit with each participant to review the data interpretations, and none of the participants requested to meet and discuss the data interpretations.

Transferability

Thick, rich descriptions were used to establish transferability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The findings in the study provide the detailed description of the data and the data analysis so the reader can make meaning of the contextual factors. Rich, thick description of each school board members' perception was provided. The semistructured interview was guided by 13 questions probing the participants for responses so I could collect detailed data. The three findings could be used by other researchers to analyze and apply in their own contexts, which would bolster the likelihood of transferability.

Dependability

Dependability was established by using a decision trail. A decision trail allows other researchers to review the research process and data to see if they arrive at a similar conclusion (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). I engaged a researcher with a Doctor of Education degree to review the decision trail. The researcher did not have a specialty in school board governance, as was expected and described in Chapter 3, but did work in the field of K-12 education. The peer reviewer researcher did arrive at similar conclusions as

described in the findings. Dependability was also established by using a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A) with each participant.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability, the entire study serves as an audit trail where documentation and connections of major decisions and actions were made before and during the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The documentation included the methodology and data collection and analysis procedures with the decision trail that led to the findings. Documentation of the study including journaling, member checks, contextualization, thick and rich descriptions, the decision trail, and the audit trail helped establish confirmability.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the findings of the basic qualitative study based on the RQ: How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model? I answered the research question upon conducting the study, collecting the data, coding the data, organizing the data into categories, and generating three themes from the data. Six urban school board members having completed student outcomes governance training participated in the study. The semistructured interviews were conducted on a secure online platform, Zoom. The interviews were also uploaded to Rev.com for audio transcription. The Zoom interviews were uploaded for transcribing to nVivo software. Each transcription was analyzed, coded, and categorized so themes could be identified. Three themes emerged from the data. They were: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b)

micromanaging behavior, and (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. Trustworthiness was established by journaling, member checks, contextualization, thick and rich descriptions, a decision trail, and an audit trail. Each participant was emailed their respective transcript for review. None of the participants had corrections nor additional data. Chapter 5 has the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future study, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The underlying problem explored in this study was that the SEA had recently recommended low performing school districts' school boards to participate in governance training called student outcomes governance for developing policies to address student achievement; however, school board members' understanding about how to generate policies benefitting student achievement may contribute to ineffective application of the student outcomes governance model. The gap in practice was supported by the literature, and I addressed involved the need for empirical study with urban SCS school board members recently tasked with applying the student outcomes governance model in their policies regarding student achievement. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model.

The basic qualitative study involved conducting interviews with school board members to gain an understanding of urban SCS school board members perceptions of their roles after they have completed the student outcomes governance training. I conducted individual interviews with six urban SCS school board members. As the researcher, I recruited the six urban school board members in SCS using a purposeful, convenience sampling method. The primary data collection tool was the researcher who followed a semistructured interview protocol that included guiding questions and allowed for asking follow-up and clarification questions aligned to answer the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The semistructured interviews were conducted on a secure online platform, Zoom. The interviews were also uploaded to Rev.com for audio

transcription. The Zoom interviews were uploaded for transcribing to nVivo software. Each transcription was analyzed, coded, and categorized so themes could be identified.

I completed the coding and generated the tentative categories. I moved from inductive coding to deductive analysis by transitioning from open coding to axial coding over the course of several rounds of coding. I consolidated codes and converged them into organized, descriptive categories. These descriptive categories became the basis for the thematic findings of the study.

The data showed urban school board members emphasized the importance of narrowing their focus on student achievement. Three themes emerged from the interviews with six school board members having completed student outcomes governance and serving on an urban school board. They were: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b) micromanaging behavior, and (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data.

Interpretation of the Findings

The conceptual framework was considered when addressing the findings of the study. The conceptual framework was formed from two theories. The framework for this study was general board theory (Rice et al., 2000) and the theory of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). Rice et al. (2000) described nine dimensions of governance behavior: (a) focus on students; (b) promotion of shared vision; (c) development of high expectations; (d) execution of shared decision making; (e) promotion of new ideas, initiatives, and assessment of effects; (f) provision of resources for innovation; (g) flexible use of resources; (h) enlistment of the community's support; and (i) interagency

cooperation. Heifetz et al. (2009) described adaptive leadership as understanding the relationship between leadership, adaption, systems thinking, and organizational change. Adaptive leaders can self-reflect, analyze their challenges, and find new ways to lead. The interpretation of the findings is focused on the relationship between the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and how the themes confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline.

Theme 1: Narrowed Focus on Student Achievement

The six participants gave their perspectives on school board governance and their experience participating in student outcomes governance. They each described the importance of focusing on student achievement. The training created a common language creating the space for the participants to connect with their school board colleagues and superintendent to narrow their focus on student achievement. The literature reviewed described barriers keeping urban school boards from being able to focus on student achievement, so the training provided the participants with the means for maintaining a focus on student achievement. The training appeared to counteract what Ford and Ihrke (2016d) noted as school board governance being misunderstood by different school board members approaching it differently. Effective school boards tend to have shared characteristics focusing on student achievement (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2019).

Urban school boards have challenges such as more diverse student populations, big city politics, and complex governance challenges (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). Dysfunctional school board behaviors can be countered when governance models are better aligned to narrowing a board and superintendent team's focus on student outcomes

(Heisler & Hanlin, 2019). Each participant described some sort of conflict in their board room and how they felt it affected their ability to stay focused on student achievement. They described their journeys of going through the training with their colleagues and superintendents. The training helped focus or refocus their attention as a collective team on student achievement. The participants spoke about their ability to focus or re-focus on data.

There is a relationship between general board theory and the participants' descriptions of their experience in student outcomes governance. Focus on students, development of elevated expectations, and enlistment of the community's support were described by participants when they spoke of their narrowed focus on student achievement. Their ability to work as a team to focus on student achievement began with personal mindset training and transitioned to understanding their role as an individual school board trustee. Once they understood their role, they collaborated with their colleagues to understand the importance of setting three to five student outcome focused goals based on the student data.

There is a relationship between adaptive leadership theory and the participants' descriptions of their ability to adapt to a new governance framework. Transitioning from some understanding or no understanding of school governance took a willingness to adapt to the new way to govern in an urban school district. Heifetz et al. (2009) described technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges are where is a solution is already known versus an adaptive challenge is where a solution is not clear. The urban school board members seeking to change student outcomes were challenged in

student outcomes governance training to self-reflect on their mindsets about what decisions they made in recent times that may have kept their students from being successful. A narrowed focus on student achievement was introduced in the training manual with the following statement: “Student outcomes won’t change until adult behaviors change” (Council of the Great City Schools & Crabill, 2020, p. 1). Heifetz et al. (2009) described the approach as getting on the balcony and reflecting on the view. The participants described their journeys as individuals and what they witnessed from their colleagues as they were all challenged to self-reflect on how their behavior might have kept their students from being successful.

Theme 2: Micromanaging Behavior

The six urban school board members described micromanaging behavior in the school board room. They believed it took time away from focusing on student achievement. The student outcomes governance training recommended boards aim for at least 50% of their time spent being focused on monitoring student outcomes. The participants described their own behaviors as well as their colleagues’ behaviors as keeping them from monitoring student achievement data. Some examples included focusing primarily on personnel, budgets, vendors, contracts, and day-to-day operations. The training supported ensuring that high functioning boards understand their roles as trustees and collective teams (Alsbury, 2015). Role confusion and delegating too much power to a superintendent can lead to power struggles (Gelber & Thompson, 2015). It can also lead to a breakdown in communication further complicating efforts to focus on student achievement (Dolph, 2016). Dervarics and O’Brien (2019) described effective

boards as spending less time on operational issues and more time on improving student achievement.

The participants supported Rice et al.'s (2000) general board theory in which a board should promote a shared vision, execute shared decision making, and promote current ideas, initiatives, and assessment of effects. The student outcomes governance training provided clarity on school board member roles and the superintendent's role. The training described the relationship between superintendent work and school board member work. The school board sets the vision, and the superintendent uses district resources to achieve the goals set by the board (Gelber & Thompson, 2015). Dolph (2016) described the vision as achievable through use of data, and savvy boards that set three to five goals to be accomplished in a 3-to-5-year timeframe while monitoring data regularly. The student outcomes governance training reinforced the same notion by encouraging the boards to set the goals in collaboration with the superintendent and monitor each goal quarterly.

There is a relationship between adaptive leadership theory and the participants' descriptions of adhering to a novel approach to pull away from micromanaging behaviors. The student outcomes governance framework included a board self-evaluation that allows board members to monitor their ability to move toward a student outcomes focused approach and to do away with micromanaging behaviors. Heifetz et al. (2009) described adaptive leaders as seeking to model effective interventions, lean into conflict, and hold themselves accountable. The participants described their willingness to better

understand their role and adopt adaptive behaviors that allowed them to spend more time on student achievement.

Theme 3: Evaluating Superintendents on Student Achievement Data

Each participant described the importance of evaluating the superintendent. The board and superintendent relationship is a key relationship described in the literature (Bridges et al., 2019; Heisler & Hanlin, 2019). The participants described the significance of allowing the superintendent to do their job of focusing on student achievement. Shelton (2015) as well as Gore and Nyland (2015) asserted the same in the literature by describing effective boards as respecting their superintendent's time to stay focused on student achievement and implement an evaluation focused on student outcome goals. Dervarics and O'Brien (2019) noted effective school boards are data savvy, embrace and monitor data, are accountability driven, and collaborate with the superintendent. Each participant described their growth in understanding the significance of monitoring the data on student achievement quarterly, so they would not be surprised at the end of the school year.

There is overlap in the participants responses and general board theory. All nine characteristics in the theory come to fruition. The board sets the goals or vision based on student outcomes for a student focus. They set realistic goals with high expectations and work collaboratively by execution of shared decision making with the superintendent to align the goal progress measures influenceable by the superintendent and their team as part of promotion of new ideas, initiatives, and assessment of effects. The board gives the superintendent the space to be bold and innovative as a provision of resources for

innovation by aligning the superintendent evaluation to the board goals and pushing for funds to be laser focused on funding the district goals but also allowing for the flexible use of resources.

The district goals should be vetted by the greater community including students, parents, educators, and community at-large as part of the enlistment of the community's support and interagency cooperation. All nine are embodied in the process leading to the superintendent's evaluation so there is transparency and clarity in the community what the board's expectations by way of the goals and vision. The student outcomes governance training recommended the superintendent evaluation be 100% based on the goals and constraints so the evaluation could be objective. The measurable data points for the goals and constraints should speak for themselves and allow the board to demonstrate to the community they are either improving or not improving on student outcomes.

In alignment with Heifetz et al.'s (2009) promotion of diagnosing and mobilizing the system by understanding where a leader stands within the system, student outcomes governance training adds a second guiding statement: "I am the genesis of transformation." It essentially encourages school board members to embrace their personal and positional power and to stop blaming students, teachers, community, board members, poverty, race, and so forth for the district's poor academic student achievement scores. It challenges school board members to diagnose the system by using data, self-reflection activities, board self-evaluation. The next step is to mobilize the system by setting the vision and goals, monitoring the data quarterly, and evaluating the superintendent solely on student outcomes and board/superintendent constraints.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations as described in Chapter 1 were the small sample size of six participants and the sole focus on urban school districts that suggest the construction of meaning may not transfer to other school board members' experiences, regardless of their districts' applications of the tools of student outcomes governance model. The six participant responses were the only source of data and could be biased, and the potential participant list could present sampling bias as participants were identified from a list of districts the State Education Agency (SEA) noted as having completed the student outcomes governance training. The findings were reflective of urban school board members and might not generalize to suburban or rural school boards in SCS.

Another limitation might be my current role as an urban school board trustee at the time of the study who completed student outcomes governance training. I worked to reduce bias by maintaining a journal, engaging in epoch, and remaining aware of my positionality within the phenomenon. I asked the participants to review the themes as part of member checking and engaged in peer debriefing during coding and analysis to enable the findings to be as bias free as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Recommendations

The experiences of the six urban school board trustees who completed the student outcomes governance training produced three themes: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b) micromanaging behavior, (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. These themes and the limitations of the study can be used to make recommendations for additional research. A recommendation for further research is

conducting a quantitative research study or mixed methods study and collecting data such as through surveys and focus groups to further refine the themes identified in this study. By using the three findings in future studies, researchers could analyze and apply them in their own contexts to bolster the likelihood of transferability. A quantitative study with a larger sample size could also enhance generalizability.

All participants described a need to narrow their focus on student achievement as school board trustees. The resulting recommendation would be to explore the influence of this narrowed focus on student achievement in their respective districts. Additionally, a further study could be conducted on how the student outcomes governance framework, in which the focus at least 50% of their time and staff time with the tracking tool, is helping boards stay focused on student achievement.

All participants described behaviors where board members micromanage their superintendents and school districts. A future study could target understanding of how the student outcomes governance model facilitates school board members' efforts to change their micromanaging behaviors and focus on student achievement. The study could be descriptive by applying the student outcomes governance framework's modules of Progress and Accountability and Systems and Processes. Progress and Accountability contains a self-evaluation process with board self-evaluation tool to assist boards with tracking their improved behaviors through a point system where they evaluate themselves quarterly and within 45 days before they evaluate the superintendent. Under the module named Systems and Processes, the student outcomes governance framework encourages boards to adopt behaviors where the board does not average more than three board

meetings per month, do not average more than 2 hours per board meeting, do not pull items from consent agenda, and do not edit agenda items 3 days prior to the board meeting. Retrospective tracking of the use of these tools could yield in-depth insight into the model's influence on board behavior change.

All the participants described the importance of evaluating the superintendent. A recommendation for further research could be to see the impact the student outcomes governance framework is having on the relationship between the board and the superintendent. Further research could be correlational between the superintendent evaluation and student achievement. The student outcomes governance module named Synergy and Teamwork, which applies a point system allowing the board to gauge how it is taking ownership of their role and collaborating with the superintendent while staying focused on student achievement, could be used as the independent variable for this study.

Implications

The basic qualitative study's findings have the potential to influence efforts for promoting positive social change in individual school board members, educational systems, and communities. The six school board members' experiences and descriptions how the student outcomes governance training and model changed their perspectives of their roles and increased their understanding of how to govern have the potential for promoting positive social change. Based on the findings, the school board members now reported focusing on student achievement, self-reflecting on their behaviors such as micromanagement that could hinder student achievement and working to improve their school districts by adhering to a governance model that provides clarity on the

importance of how they partner with their superintendents and ensure objective evaluations.

The educational system has the potential for positive social change should school board members use a governance framework that creates alignment from the board room to the classroom. The negative school board behaviors which lead to board dysfunction, superintendent turnover, hostile elections, unequitable policies, and personal agendas could be redirected with a governance framework designed to counter these very behaviors having negative impacts on student achievement. The student outcomes governance model demonstrates this opportunity and could be expanded and applied in other states.

The communities in which the school districts intend to serve as well as society at-large could see positive social change by a term in student outcomes governance called *parallel processing*, involving shared behaviors between superintendents and board members. When a school board member displays a negative behavior with a school board colleague or the superintendent, then the school board should not be surprised when a superintendent demonstrates the exact same behavior with district administrators. In addition, a school board should not be surprised when a district administrator displays the same behavior with a campus leader. Also, when a campus leader displays the same behavior with a teacher and finally when a teacher displays the same behavior with a student. The term parallel processing suggests school board members are elected and seen as leaders who influence the behavior of other leaders in a school district. Leaders demonstrating behaviors that cause chaos and a culture of disrespect and appear self-

serving can negatively impact the educational system and hurt a school district's relationship with the community. The educational system is embedded in the community and needs parents/guardians to be involved in the work of ensuring student achievement. Students attending a great educational system would ideally have a good opportunity to succeed academically. A well-educated student could be a positive social change agent.

Considering this to be one of the first studies of the student outcomes governance framework derived from the Council of Great City Schools, this study has the potential to add to the evolving literature on school board governance because student outcomes governance is rooted in the latest school board research. The findings could help with the continued efforts to improve professional development for school board members.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the findings from the basic qualitative study based on the six participants' responses. Four themes arose from the study: (a) narrowed focus on student achievement, (b) micromanaging behavior, (c) evaluating superintendents on student achievement data. The results and themes are rooted from the research question that guided the study: How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model?

Urban school board members are tasked with governing in school districts with an increased focus on improving student achievement with diverse populations, political dynamics, and increased shortage of resources. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic where academic gains over the last decade were lost and set back further than where they were started. Inequities in resources such as access to technology,

safe environments for learning and access to academic support were exacerbated by the pandemic. School boards have even less room for error. A focus on effective school board governance and improving academic achievement now runs hand in hand with ensuring the physical and emotional safety of a student more than ever.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
How do urban SCS school board members perceive their roles in improving student achievement through the student outcomes governance model?	1. How do you perceive your role as a school board trustee in your urban school district: a. before student outcomes governance? b. after student outcomes governance? 2. How long has it been since you completed student outcomes governance? 3. How did your district decide to participate in student outcomes governance? 4. How would you describe your experience in student outcomes governance? 5. What particular skill set did you gain from participating in student outcomes governance that you did not have before it? 6. What was a regular school board meeting like before participating in student outcomes governance? 7. What has changed in school board meetings following participation in student outcomes governance? 8. How has student outcomes governance impacted the relationship between the board and the superintendent? 9. Did student outcomes governance influence the way the board evaluates the superintendent? 10. What is your definition of student achievement? 11. What role do you believe you play in improving student achievement in your district? 12. How has student outcomes governance affected your perception of your role in improving student achievement? 13. Since completing student outcomes governance, what have you done differently to improve student achievement?

Appendix B: Data Excerpts and Associated Codes

School Board Member Data	Codes
Participant 1: We had the courageous conversations that we didn't have as a board. It was things we really needed to be talking about, like student achievement, closing the gaps, things that we need to work on as a board personally and professionally.	Conversations about student achievement
Participant 2: Because at that point, it was polar opposites almost when we initially went through [Student Outcomes] Governance, and so I appreciated the training because it allowed me to, one, refer back to something, a training that we were all aware of, and then, two, it gave me the language to move the board forward.	Language to move the board forward
Participant 3: I guess one good thing that [Student Outcomes] Governance -- well, I guess, narrowing the focus, I think, might be the one good thing that I can say has been maybe a way to be able to utilize [Student Outcomes] Governance	Narrowing focus
Participant 4: We need to refocus the conversation on what helps kids. And so I think we've kind of built that as a board. Most of us have built that collective muscle to refocus the conversation where it needs to be.	Refocus on students
Participant 5: I have paid more attention to the reports that come out that shares the progress in the specific areas that we are looking at in terms of student achievement. I am not waiting for a year to look at the superintendent and say, did you do this or did you not do this?	Paid more attention to student achievement progress reports
Participant 6: Well it was eye opening. It just focused. I keep using the word focus because that's what it did. It narrowed my focus to the students and the achievement of the students instead of shotgunning everything and playing catch up and focusing on things that really weren't important and had no bearing on student learning or student achievement.	Narrowed focus on student achievement
Participant 1: Before we did [Student Outcomes] Governance, I was perceived more of hands-on, being too involved, which I shouldn't have.	More hands-on and being too involved
Participant 2: And I think although we did not have a full-fledged board, [Student Outcomes] Governance training again, by having that relationship with the [Student Outcomes] Governance coach, was able to get us back on track. And so as a result those coaching sessions, the board has created the board goals, which has given the superintendent more of a task associated with the board being a monitoring role and not necessarily interfering with day-to-day operations.	Not interfering with day-to-day operations
Participant 3: Really, I had little to no knowledge of governance work because I came straight on as a teacher and having no experience in politics.	Lacking knowledge of governance work
Participant 4: Having a framework with goals and objectives sort of down the horizon of what we need to move forward towards has been really, really helpful for us. And in particular, I would say that the guidelines around how much time, like what percentage of the time allocated during your board meetings, should be spent talking about student outcomes has been pretty enlightening for our board and has prompted a lot of discussion because prior to [Student Outcomes] Governance, we were nowhere near the suggested milestones for what percentage of your time in a board meeting should be spent talking about student outcomes. We were kind of upside-down, if you will, on that metric, spending the vast majority of our time talking about vendors and contracts and a lot of adult issues that were not directly related to student performance.	More time spent on vendors and contracts than on student achievement
Participant 5: What's going on is the superintendent is so afraid of board members that she presents items to us in workshops that breed micromanaging questions. They breed micromanaging questions and then they flow after that door is open. And so I had heard that there was a divided board before I got on the board.	Micromanaging behavior
Participant 6: We spent too much time on personnel matters and budget matters and maintenance matters. We really didn't focus our time on what could make the kids' achievements better.	Spent too much time on non-student achievement matters
Participant 1: When I saw the data, I was a little bit frustrated. I didn't know what we were lacking between Black and Brown kids and White. And what I gained from that is	

School Board Member Data	Codes
when we have a superintendent, the data is what reflects her job performance. And we didn't use to talk about data. Participant 2: Thankfully, it has allowed for a new evaluation tool that the board has adopted, that is primarily based on student outcomes. Participant 3: So I think if we did have a permanent superintendent or no, I mean, I guess even this interim superintendent, when we are placing goals that are looking at numbers, superintendents want to jump through hoops to be able to meet those facts and figures. Participant 4: I've kind of been a champion for changing our evaluation system for our superintendent to align with [Student Outcomes] Governance. And we have five board goals with KPIs along the way. And this last contract with the superintendent was the first time that (my district) has put performance evaluation metrics in the superintendent's contract. And we've also done some incentive pay on top of the salary that the superintendent receives, that the amount of incentive pay is tied to successful completion of some KPIs that are of highest importance to the board. Participant 5: We have been given the tools and we workshopped the process of evaluating the superintendent. When I look at the [Student Outcomes] governance, structurally speaking, in terms of what its goals are into the space of Superintendent evaluation, I think it's a good model. And we've got a good document that we can use when we evaluate a superintendent under those areas. Participant 6: Our goals became more student achievement goals rather than reduce the budget by so much and pay the teachers so much. And it was a focus thing. It just changed our whole thinking about what we were supposed to do.	Data reflects the superintendent's performance Evaluation based on student outcomes Goals looking at data Placing performance metrics in the superintendent's contract Placing district goals into the superintendent evaluation Evaluating the superintendent more on student achievement goals