Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions of Community Engagement

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Alabama School Board Presidents about community engagement in school board decision making. An exploratory research design was used and data were collected by survey. The survey was mailed to 128 school board presidents representing the 128 school districts statewide (as of 2006). Sixty surveys were completed, returned and analyzed, yielding a 47% return rate. Demographic information was collected and used as a variable when analyzing other data. Quantitative survey responses were analyzed using analysis of variance and frequency of distribution, and an emergent theme approach was used when analyzing the open-ended responses.

Findings suggest the majority of the school board presidents participating in this study valued the opinions of administrators, teachers, and staff most when making school board decisions and valued the opinions of people in the community without children least. When communicating with administrators, teachers, and staff the most commonly used approach was email then via local media. The most common way of communicating with people without children was through the local media and then via community presentations. School board presidents reported that overall there was limited community engagement included in their decision making.

These findings are troubling because school boards serve as a link between the school system and their community. According to some researchers (Harmon & Dickens, 2004; Meier, 2003a, 2003b) school board members' responsibility includes reaching out and helping all

populations of the community learn how to be invested in the education system. School board

members should consider providing opportunities for all sections of the population to have a

sense of ownership in the school system and the education of our future by teaching the public

how to be more involved in the decision-making process for their school system.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Strong educational systems are essential to the overall health of communities, having a strong impact on the potential for community and economic development and sustainability of these efforts. (Kochan & Reed, 2005, pg. 3)

Introduction and Overview

School boards should serve as a bridge between the school system and the community. The National School Boards Association (NSBA) states, "All school boards have identical responsibility: to represent the wishes of the people and to exercise lay control of educational goals and direction" (NSBA, 1996, pg. ix). The role of a school board member entails being a representative and spokesperson for the community while making decisions based on the best interests of students. One of the primary responsibilities of a school board president is to "work with the superintendent and board to plan and develop policies and programs that provide educational opportunities for students" (AASB, 2003, pg. 3). While a school board president or school board member's role does not include running a school system, a large responsibility is creating policy that guides decision-making. School board composition differs across the state and nation because of the complexity of the community and personalities of board members, which are intended to be representative of their community (NSBA, 1996).

This research explored Alabama school board presidents' perceptions about community engagement. The overarching goal of this research was to determine how Alabama school boards are engaging the community in decision-making. The Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB, 2003) reported that building partnerships with community representatives builds a larger

stakeholder group and provides potential resources for the school district. The review of

literature used to frame this study includes research on the history of school boards (including

the history of the Alabama Association of School Boards), the roles of school board members

(specifically pertaining to community engagement), the training that is available for school board

members on community engagement, and examples of community engagement occurring in

Alabama school districts. "In a time when children come to school with more problems than ever

before, schools must sometimes acknowledge that they cannot meet all these needs alone. The

NSBA (1996) reminds us that we need community partners to collaborate with and draw from

their resources. These partnerships dually benefit the children and the community.

Efforts to Enhance the Status of Community Engagement in Districts

The AASB (2009) states that our school districts can only be as good as the quality of the

leadership within the district. To address the issue of providing quality leadership, AASB offers

comprehensive and extensive training at annual conferences, regional meetings, and specialized

training at the local district. Publications are provided on the AASB website to assist with topics

of interest for school board members. These publications include literature on the No Child Left

Behind Act of 2001 and a variety of other topics related to decision making on the school board.

Alabama does not require school board members to have designated levels of training (AASB,

2009b). Although Alabama does not have mandatory school board training requirements, most

Alabama school boards support school board training and professional growth. However, there

are other districts that do not participate at all in professional development which results in many

districts not having well informed school board members.

School board training has not been mandated by the state; however, membership in the

AASB is required for all school boards statewide. This membership allows all school board

members to be invited to participate in training events, receive current literature in order to stay abreast of issues, and have the opportunity to request more specialized training. AASB offers a variety of venues for school board training.

On the heels of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, President Obama has created an Office of Public Engagement. The goal of the office is to ensure that government remains inclusive, transparent, accountable, and responsible (Office of Public Engagement, 2009). The office focuses on improving dialogue with community stakeholders in our increasingly diverse communities. The Office of Public Engagement website houses articles that include examples of how the community is reaching out to make a difference in our nation. In many districts emphasis has not been placed on community engagement, but it is not because efforts are not being made at the state and national level. These efforts could provide the training and leadership necessary to reach out and involve community members.

Problem Statement

School boards across the nation struggle with best practices for getting the community involved and in many cases providing community voice in decision making. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* legislation requires that communities be involved in decision-making and planning to help improve schools. In order to strengthen community engagement in school board decision making the school board leadership must be equipped with the necessary tools. School board members come from all walks of life which mean that appropriate training becomes increasingly important in order to provide the quality leadership necessary for districts.

Conceptual Framework

Research supports the claim that community engagement improves school systems (Chadwick, 2004), but due to the amount of time required to meaningfully involve the

community this is not done in many circumstances. The reputation of a community or city has a direct correlation to the school in the community (Duncan, 2009). As the U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan states, "Schools play a pivotal role in the social and economic vitality of cities. In today's global economy, the reputation of a city's schools can either be a deadly deterrent or a potent drawing card for business, workers, and families (Duncan, 2009, p. 30).

Limited research has been conducted in Alabama on the importance of community engagement in school board decision-making and what kinds of community engagement is actually talking place (Chadwick, 2004). The AASB has provided training opportunities on community engagement. While extensive training is provided to school board members, only those districts and school board members that place importance on professional growth in their leadership responsibility and/or who can afford to attend the offerings.

Hall (2008) states that "the biggest challenge is informing people that we are doing great things and we can do even greater things with the help of our community" (p. 54). To effectively engage community members in the decision making processes in their school district, school board presidents need to interact with at least the following populations within the community:

1. Administrators, teachers, and staff

2. Parents/grandparents

3. Business leaders

4. People with no children or grandchildren in the school system

These groups are important because they are representative of the major stakeholders most directly affected by public school board decision making.

The biggest challenges that are faced in schools are connected to the community and the city where the children live demonstrating the importance of schools building bridges with the

organizations, institutions, citizens, and all other stakeholder groups within the community (Hatch, 2009). Sometimes community knowledge is not factual and other times there is a lack of trust from decision makers. Both of these situations result in the public demanding more accountability. Community trust can be built by authentically involving a wide range of community representatives in the decision making, creating a collaborative partnership for effective schools.

Study Overview

This exploratory research is based on specific research questions and four groups of populations within the community; administrators, teachers, and staff; parents/grandparents; business leaders; and people with no children or grandchildren in the school system. The research examines perceptions of school board presidents on community engagement in decision-making. Survey questions were framed around the research questions, designated populations and how community engagement is perceived by school board presidents.

The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore Alabama school board presidents' perceptions about community engagement. In preparation for this study the following guiding questions were addressed through the literature review and answers were used in the development of the survey:

1.   What is the history of school boards (including the history of the Alabama Association of School Boards)?

2.   What is the role of school board members (specifically community engagement in decision-making)?

3.   What training on communications and public engagement is provided for school board members?

4.   What specific examples of on-going community engagement with school board members exist?

Overview of Research Methods

The basic purpose of this study was to explore the Alabama school board presidents' perceptions of community engagement. An exploratory research approach was used. Surveys were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected from a survey distributed to 128 school board presidents representing the 128 Alabama school districts at the time of survey distribution. All school board presidents were mailed surveys and invited to participate in the study. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study through the Auburn University Human Subjects Research protocol process (see Appendix A). Sixty participants responded from a pool of 128 surveys distributed yielding a 47% return rate.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1.   When making decisions, how much emphasis do school board presidents give to input from administrators, teachers, and staff, parents/grandparents, business leaders, people with no children or grandchildren in the school system?

2.   Is there a relationship between the demographics of School Board Presidents and the value placed on input of others when making school board decisions?

3.   How do school boards communicate with stakeholders?

4.   How does stakeholder current level of involvement compare to the Board's desire for involvement in planning, advising, and decision making?

5.   What are the barriers to community engagement with School Boards and School Districts?

6.   What are the motivating factors affecting community engagement with School Boards and School Districts?

Assumptions for the Study

The following assumptions were made in this study:

1.   The person to whom the surveys were sent actually completed the surveys.

2.   Answers reported are accurate and honest.

3.   Factual demographic information was reported.

Limitations of the Study

Results should be viewed in light of the following:

1.   One should not draw broad generalizations to a greater population beyond Alabama. Regional differences may occur.

2.   Alabama has both elected and appointed school boards. States with only elected schools boards may not be comparable to states with other school board compositions.

3.   There is great variance in school board presidents' experience and/or education level.

4.   Although attempts were made to include all school board presidents there is a possibility that only those that were more actively involved actually completed and returned the survey based on their attitude towards the opportunity to provide input.

5.   Responses may be espoused and not actually in use. Participants were asked to self-report and beliefs are held close to one's heart.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms and acronyms are offered to provide the reader an understanding of the context of this study. They are used throughout this study but may vary in other contexts based on the experiences and/or beliefs of the research and referenced researchers.

Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB): Alabama Association of School Boards is a federation of local school boards. It was the 39th state school board association formed in the United States. In 1955, the Alabama Legislature designated AASB as the "organization and representative agency of the members of the school boards of Alabama."

Appointed School Board: Appointed school boards are comprised of a group of lay people, which are appointed by a governmental entity within the district (County Commission or City Council) to represent the community.

Community: In this research, community is defined as administrators, teachers, and staff, parents/grandparents, business leaders, and people with no children or grandchildren in the school system.

Community Engagement: Public processes in which the general public and other interested parties are invited to contribute to particular proposals or policy changes. Community engagement has the potential to go beyond merely making information available or gathering opinions and attitudes. It entails a more active exchange of information and viewpoints between the sponsoring organization and the public, however this public is defined.

Community Schools: "Using schools as a hub, community schools bring together public and private organizations to offer a range of services, supports, and opportunities that strengthen and support schools, communities, families, and students—before, during and after school" (Eye on Research, 2005, p. 8).

Elected School Board: Elected school boards are comprised of a group of lay people, which is elected by the community, which they represent.

National School Boards Association (NSBA): National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a federation of state school board associations. The mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership. The mission is achieved by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to state associations of school boards and local school boards throughout the nation.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (*NCLB*): The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 places major emphasis on parent involvement, flexibility, accountability and teacher quality as factors in improving student achievement. NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

School Board: Comprised of a group of lay people, which represent the community and assist in adopting policies and procedures for the school system.

Significance of the Study

More research is needed to determine school board members' perception of community engagement, to identify what community engagement is being implemented and to identify the degree of implementation. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) requires parents and communities be more involved in the education of children. Limited research has been conducted in Alabama on the importance of community engagement in school board decision-making and identification of what community engagement is actually taking place. This research may help school board members learn new strategies and purposes for interacting with the public. Findings

from this research may also be useful when developing training materials for school board members.

Summary

This study explored the perceptions of Alabama school board presidents on community engagement. The research utilized an exploratory research design. Research questions and an overview of the research design were offered to help readers better understand the purpose of the study. Assumptions and limitations were presented to reveal possible stumbling blocks that might have been encountered while conducting the study and to allow readers to make more informed interpretations of what they read. Definitions of terms were provided to offer insight into the language used throughout the study. The significance of the study was presented. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature used to frame this research.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

"As representatives of their communities, school boards mirror the diverse democracies they serve." (NSBA, 1996, p. ix)

Introduction

Despite the demands for more community involvement there seems to be limited engagement between the community and the school board. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education reminds us that if schools are not properly functioning the school district and the city suffer. Schools are vital in the social and economic pulse of the community. Reputations of school districts draw home buyers and build the economic capacity of the district (Duncan, 2009).

This chapter presents a review of the literature used to create a framework for the study of school board presidents' perceptions of community engagement. This review does not, however, cover all of the literature on community engagement in school board decision making. The chapter contains sections designed to define and provide background information on the school board concept, the role of a school board, the importance of community engagement, and examples of community engagement in school board decision-making. The barriers, benefits, and concerns of community engagement as discussed in the literature are also reviewed.

School Board Concept

According to the National School Board Association (NSBA, 1996), school boards originated after a push from citizens for representative government. Leadership by lay people

stems all the way back to the town meetings in the New England settlements. The settlers rated the importance of schooling directly under food, safety, and religion. The job of leading schools was originally assumed by the town governmental officials, but later committees were named to assume this duty. According to the NSBA (1996),

> These early school committees, in other words, exercised many of the same roles as today's school boards: policy, planning, supervision, assessment, personnel evaluation, textbook adoption, plant maintenance, and community relations. But they achieved their goal of keeping the schools close to the people and the people close to the schools. (p. x)

The school committee concept spread from New England to all of the United States of America.

School boards, operationalized today, originated to overcome the political nature of mayoral control in prior eras (Duncan, 2009). "From 1850 to the 1920s, mayors typically had direct control of city schools" (Duncan, 2009, p. 30). As boards began to micromanage individual schools communities seemed to settle for status quo. School boards that become a player of political games, focus on gains for adults, and have frequent turnover, suffer academically and financially (Chadwick, 2004; Duncan, 2009). The structure of individual school boards varies based on their "hands on" or "hands off" approach to leadership or a mixture. It takes partnerships between all governmental agencies to make the pieces properly fit to better educate our children and prepare them for the world of work and citizenry.

The challenges in a school district are directly related to and compounded by the community happenings. Schools are forced to face issues created externally as well as internally (Hatch, 2009). "Moreover, without the connections, support, and expertise that come from interacting with a host of people, organizations, and institutions on the outside, schools cannot

develop the goals, staff, or productive work environment they need to be successful" (Hatch, 2009, p. 17).

National School Boards Association (NSBA)

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit organization comprised of school board members from across the United States of America. Its mission is to foster a sense of excellence and equity in public education through leadership to school boards (NSBA, 1996). The NSBA supports school boards in their efforts to build and work towards a vision for education in the community, create policies so that a structure is in place to support students as they reach their fullest academic potential, provide accountability to the community, and be advocates for the students of the district, the state, and the nation (NSBA, 2006). The NSBA helps to do this by providing professional development, maintaining an up-to-date and easy-to-use website, and by providing information needed by school board members. As explained by NSBA, "NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of grassroots democracy. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community" (NSBA, 2006, p. 3).

The NSBA was founded in 1940 and currently represents 95,000 local school board members, almost all of whom are elected. "These local officials govern 14,890 local school districts serving the nation's more than 47 million public school students" (NSBA, 2006, p. 4). Organizational policy is determined by the delegates elected from local school boards. The NSBA is housed in Washington, DC, and is comprised of state level associations that provide services and professional development to district level school boards.

Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB)

The Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) is an organization founded in 1949. It was organized to support local school boards.

> In 1955, the Alabama Legislature designated AASB as the 'organization and representative agency of the members of the school boards of Alabama.' The Code of Alabama Section 16-1-6 authorizes local boards to cooperate with the association, pay membership fees and reimburse board members for expenses incurred while participating in AASB programs. (AASB, 2006)

The AASB is based in Montgomery and is supported by membership dues and proceeds from Association activities. It is served by a small professional staff under the guidance of an executive director who is hired by the Board of Directors of the AASB. The original name of the association was the Alabama Association of Members and Executive Officers of County and City School Boards. According to the AASB's website,

> AASB's initial membership totaled 128 individuals, from 40 county and 13 city school boards. Today, our membership includes all 128 local school boards, as well as several special school boards and associate, honorary and professional sustaining members. The Alabama Education Association, often AASB's adversary in the legislative arena, helped draft AASB's first constitution and bylaws. (AASB, 2006)

Role of School Board Members

The school board must continually reach out to the community and maintain ongoing, two-way communication with community stakeholders if there is to be support for public schools (Vermont School Board Association, 2006). According to the Vermont School Board Association (2006),

These are challenging times for public education, and even more challenging is the work

of local school board members. Today's local board of education is the leader on the

front lines of public education. The board is responsible for putting in place the proper

keystones for students to learn and achieve at the highest level possible. Most board

members' primary agenda is raising student achievement and involving the community in

the attainment of that goal. (p. 2)

The role of board members includes keeping a pulse on the community and the school system

and identifying concerns and suggestions proactively. Research conducted by the Learning

Network (2002) indicated that school board members want to remain informed but not be seen as

micromanagers, therefore, creating a very delicate line for how they operate. School board

members serve as a voice for the community they represent. Their primary role is to make

policies for school/system improvement and not to micromanage the school or system. Through

policy and decision making, community stakeholders need to see that school district staff are

authentic and have human souls (Reed, Lamar, Adams, & Henton, 2005). This is likely true for

school board members, too.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA, 1996) has "identified four fundamental

leadership roles that equip local school boards to achieve public education's mission to educate

each and every child to the fullest of his or her potential: vision, structure, accountability and

advocacy" (p. xii). These leadership roles, coupled with the responsibility of ensuring that the

school system abides by all federal and state legislation, gives school board members a huge

responsibility. NSBA further indicated effective school boards are comprised of lay people and

professionals from all walks of life working together for one common cause—ensuring high-

quality education in a district (NSBA, 1996). School boards should be the leader in speaking up

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for their school districts (Vermont School Board Association, 2006). School board members must be a voice for all of the community members they represent and remain advocates for the children of the district. "Informing citizens about the schools' accomplishments, problems, and needs is an essential part of school board leadership" (NSBA, 1996, p. 3). Many times school board members take it for granted that the community knows what goes on in the system when in actuality they know little about the daily operations and programs that take place (Vermont School Board Association, 2006; NSBA, 1996).

According to the School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century survey by Frederick Hess (2002), the average length of service among board members is 6.7 years. When the turnover is so rampant, consistency of vision is sometimes hard to manage. Meier (2003a) notes,

> On the surface there is strong support for greater public engagement between school boards and the public. Seventy-six percent of school board members say the schools need to do a better job of listening to the concerns of community residents, and sixty percent of the general public says they would like to see more community involvement in the schools. (p. 1)

Meier (2003a) further states,

> At the same time, sixty-six percent of board members believe that community residents have the responsibility to state their concerns and educators can't constantly be expected to seek their input. Many question who should be the one to take the first step in community engagement. Two-thirds of the general public (66%) says they are comfortable leaving school policies to educators. Fully thirty-eight percent say they don't even know if school officials listen to and take into account what people in the community care about. (p. 2)

Meier's research (2003a; 2003b) indicates there may be a difference in how school boards perceive the desire of the community to be engaged when compared to the reality of the community's perceptions. Building trust between school districts and those who have limited contact with schools is essential (Meier, 2003b). Many times this population is only targeted at tax time and they only know what the media relays about the educational status of their district and state (Meier, 2003a). Engaging the community can serve as a way to gain support for education funding, policy making, or projects in the district (Dawson, 2005). The Oregon School Boards Association (2005) states,

> The key to changing community attitudes about your schools is not necessarily more communication. It's changing the focus of your existing efforts to make sure you are showing your communities:
>
> - What students are accomplishing in classrooms;
> - How parents and community members are actively involved in that education; and
> - How students are actively involved in volunteer and work opportunities in the community. (p. 1)

Many believe that school boards and districts are not implementing opportunities for community engagement (Harmon & Dickens, 2004; Meier, 2003a, 2003b). Some researchers claim school boards create meaningful opportunities for parents and the community to be involved, especially in areas where poverty is more prevalent (Harmon & Dickens, 2004). However, getting some parents to have a desire to be involved is difficult due to prior negative school experiences of their own (Chadwick, 2004). Others believe that school boards are not trained to know how to truly engage all segments of the community (Harmon & Dickens, 2004).

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Gaps may exist between what is actually taking place and what is espoused by the school district board members when creating meaningful parent and community engagement opportunities (Harmon & Dickens, 2004; Meier, 2003a, 2003b). Harmon and Dickens (2004) presented ten action steps that school boards could implement to encourage genuine commitment:

1. Assess the extent of parent and community involvement at every school in the district. How do teachers and principals communicate with the public? How much volunteerism is taking place in the schools? How involved are senior citizens and childless adults or families in school improvement efforts?

2. Make sure board policies encourage parent and community involvement in each school. Are parents and community member's partners in school governance, including shared decision making?

3. Set expectations that teachers will know and use research-based practices in working with parents and community members. Do teachers advertise school or classroom events in ways for parents to respond with comments suggestions, contributions, or questions?

4. Encourage principals to support the involvement of parents and community members in school improvement efforts. Do they help staff members receive training in effective parent and community involvement practices?

5. Search out customized training and support for teachers and administrators about how to work effectively with parents and community members. They should emphasize the value of parent and community involvement as it relates to student achievement.

6. Expect your superintendent and central office staff to actively encourage parent and community involvement in all schools. Do central office employees respond promptly and accurately to questions from parents and community members?

7. Support hiring and promotion practices that reinforce high expectations for parent and community involvement in each school and the district as a whole.

8. Approve budgets that provide money for schools to involve parents and community members in academic achievement initiatives.

9. Recognize outstanding parent and community involvement achievement. Do you recognize or reward employees who participate in community –service activities? Hold a special yearly meeting to recognize faculty, staff, parents, and community members who conduct successful parent and community involvement activities. Send out press releases on outstanding parents and community members and call parents and community members to give them a personal "thanks" for being active in a school.

10. Maintain a positive relationship with the public. Do you react to criticism in a positive and professional manner? Does your board provide parent and community members with enough information to keep them informed? You could conduct a customer satisfaction survey to evaluate your performance, and each board member can be a visible advocate for meaningful involvement of parents and community members in schools. (Harmon & Dickens, 2004, p. 30)

Professional development for school boards, school board staff, administrators, and educators may be needed to make a paradigm shift in order to authentically engage the community. "Changing the status quo means embracing the school board's legitimate role of

building a culture that supports and sustains such engagement" (Harmon & Dickens, 2004, p. 31). Some claim that creating an engaging culture heightens student achievement, parent involvement and each community's opinion of the local school system (Harmon & Dickens, 2004).

Importance of Community Engagement

Willona Sloan (2008b) reminds us that during this time in our economy administrators are trying to find ways to fund equipment, activities, and academic programs. "But, even more than monetary gain, business partnerships can supply schools with volunteer tutors, mentors, and other positive role models to support students" (Sloan, 2008b, p. 1). The Learning Network (2002) states that "educators often view parents and community members as a factor to deal with rather than as essential collaborators. Fortunately, effective schools are abandoning this attitude at the same time parents are abandoning the old hands-off one" (p. 1). Working hand-in-hand with the community is an important role of the school board and a critical piece in ensuring that the community is involved. School reform has the best chance of being successful when all stakeholders are involved from the beginning (The Learning Network, 2002). If authentic engagement is a reality then the community must know that they are true partners in making a difference in the life of children and that their input is valued. When the public serves as a partner in the education of our children, we might be surprised by the improvement in student achievement (Chadwick, 2004). "More involved parents and community members mean more adults working together to educate children both within and outside the classroom" (Chadwick, 2004, p. ix).

Research from the Kettering Foundation (2006) compares community engagement to watching a baseball team play baseball:

The work of playing baseball makes the group into something that they weren't as

individuals, a team. The individuals only become a team by playing together. That is very

similar to the way a public is created, by citizens joining in collective efforts. (Kettering,

2006, p. 5)

Citizens working together have the potential to serve as the conduit for change and improvement

in public education. Citizens are more invested if they can easily sense a connection to their own

world of family and environment (Kettering, 2006). Through deliberation and community

conversations the community members can find connections to their own lives which give the

initiative to help solve a problem or make the community a better place.

In order to fully take advantage of a strategic planning opportunity the community must

be a participant in determining the vision of the community. Representatives from all stakeholder

groups should participate in building the vision of the district in a proactive manner that helps to

strengthen the vision as well as the relationship between the district and the public (Oregon

School Boards Association, 2005a). When authentic engagement takes place the involvement is

no longer espoused, but is actual. Community engagement is not a one-time activity that takes

place annually (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005b). In order for the community to

experience a shift in attitude towards the process of community engagement the school board and

district must allow opportunities for that engagement to be demonstrated.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defined parent involvement as

… the participation in regular, two-way, meaningful communication. It also requires

schools to ensure parents play an integral role in assisting their children's learning. In

short, the law underscores that parents and schools are partners, each with responsibility

for the educational endeavor. (AASB, 2006b, p. 11)

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Value Given to Community Input

David Mathews, Kettering Foundation President, has studied the relationship between Americans and their public schools. Mathews (2006) determined that it is unlikely that schools make drastic changes unless there is a paradigm shift in the community and the mindset of community members. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) conducted research on the importance of establishing a power base to hold schools accountable and to re-establish public ownership of schools (2005). Harmon and Dickens (2004) report that "reams of research and anecdotal evidence show that the most effective school districts have a strong partnership among the schools, the community, and the home" (p. 29). Research supports that community engagement has the potential to improve students, schools, and districts. The Federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires that parents be involved in the schools or at minimum, provided the opportunity for involvement. Parents have been given rights by the legislation requiring they know when their child is being taught by a teacher that is not highly qualified and they are provided choice when their child is zoned to attend a failing school.

McKnight (2003) found that decision making through association involvement creates more citizenry than when citizens are viewed as a client. When citizens vote they are delegating their authority but when they are a part of the decision making they are involved. There are so many associations or groups that are involved in assisting public education or would be if asked. In associations people voluntarily work together for a cause because they care about the issues at stake (McKnight, 2003). This is a paradigm shift from working for the clients to working with citizens to make our public schools better.

Many times stakeholders are called together because of a requirement for a grant, application for funding, or federal plan. This is a start but this does not necessarily create

sustainable partnerships focused on improving our educational system. The stakeholders in many cases continue to feel as though they are outsiders coming to help rather than true partners in the educational process. "Instead of treating these groups as outsiders with whom they have to deal, schools can treat them as insiders who have useful information and expertise, can take on key roles and responsibilities, and can help the school expand its network" (Hatch, 2009, p. 20).

Regardless of how different the definition of community engagement might be it is obvious that it involves more than schools and the public having one-way communication opportunities (Chadwick, 2004). "If, after being asked for their opinions, the public believes that they have not been heard, the resulting damage is greater than if educators had proceeded without any public input" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 12). Some believe that many times the only engagement solicited from the community is uni-directional where information is presented but there is little, if any, opportunity for the community to provide input (Chadwick, 2004). When the trust factor has been betrayed, the healing of that violation may not ever take place. The publication *Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement* (2005) states,

> … effective communication requires a two-way flow of information. While most schools develop efficient structures for getting information out—such as newsletters, web sites, and press releases—far fewer develop similar structures to ensure that feedback from parents is actively solicited. (p. 2)

Engagement of the community is not just educating the community, but actually allowing them opportunities to provide input and taking that input into consideration when making decisions within the district.

Many times the only way that school boards solicit input from the community is through a public invitation to attend school board meetings. It is a mandatory requirement for school

boards to offer public notice of these meetings. "They must bring together the entire community—parents, community groups, and others concerned about schooling—in effective and responsible ways to initiate and sustain lasting reform of the schools" (NSBA, 1996, p. 4). Once again, many believe that if the community is invited to sit and listen, this is not engagement and is not even allowing an avenue for engagement.

> Educational leaders must create spaces to listen to all parents and others in the community and be willing to be part of the group. This may require going to places where people congregate rather than expecting community members to come to the schools. (Reed et al., 2005, p. 18)

When school board members are being elected the public must take great care in making that decision because they are their voice and their representative in making policies that guide the school district. Mathews (1994) states, "the responsibilities for defining the public interest, describing the purposes and direction consistent with those interests, creating common ground for action, generating political will, and creating citizens are undelegatable.… We can elect our representatives, but not our purposes" (p. 11). Mathews (1994) firmly believes that we must focus on having a public before we can have truly public schools.

In order to educate the public, citizens must be trained and prior to that the school boards and district staff must be trained on how to train the public so they can become effectively involved (Chadwick, 2004). "Research shows well-designed programs can boost academic achievement—and can even raise low-income students' test scores to levels expected for middle-class kids" (Jones, 2001, p. 1). Traditional engagement opportunities are driven by unidirectional communication opportunities allowing for limited, if any, opportunities for give and take communication (Sokoloff, 1997).

The Kettering Foundation is an organization that studies the nature of the work citizens do when they work collaboratively to solve community problems. The Kettering Foundation (2005a) wants school boards to have parents as active partners in the education of children. They want partners who speak up and are advocates for their children as well as all of the children in the district. They offered parental rights workshops and started helping parents in schools. The Kettering Foundation has increasingly seen everyday people become engaged in the work of school systems and move from feeling disconnected to feeling respected (Kettering Foundation, 2005a).

For example, when Michelle Rhee, Public School Chancellor in Washington, DC, decided to close a beloved community school she found that emotion is what it takes to get the community to rally behind something. In this case, they were rallying against her because the school had memories and history and not because it was producing results in student performance. Michelle Rhee knew that "nine percent of the kids at the school are proficient or advanced. What it made me realize is that we have a job to do" (Varlas, 2008, p. 7). Before making an announcement she needed buy-in from the community and she could do this by being open and honest. She said that she needed to "educate and inform them better, to be taking the data to them to say" (Varlas, 2008, p. 7). The stakeholders needed to see that if the children continued as they were they would never be on grade level.

Benefits of Community Engagement

The concept of "it takes a village" is still alive and well and community involvement is one aspect that we cannot lose sight of in the educational arena (Hall & Cordell, 2008). Henderson and Mapp (2002) have studied cases of community engagement since 1995 to determine the strength of family influence on school achievement which carries over into life.

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They found the ripple-effect that develops from strong public schools affects many areas of the community and the future of the community. "It may be necessary to educate the public on the value that all of us received from strong public schools, such as increased property values, safer communities, and a more robust economy supported by a skilled workforce" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 53). Families gravitate to school districts with a reputation for having a strong school system. In order for districts to view community engagement as a priority they have to understand the reasons for becoming involved. "When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own" (National PTA, 2004, p. 22).

Community partners with more input, more knowledge, more buy-in, more responsibility, more accountability, and more contact yields more allies. Having partnerships promotes more individuals that can go out and be an advocate for the educational process. They can also serve as advocates when demands are made from higher authorities that are not in the best interest of students. Community engagement can provide benefits when true collaborative partnerships are built (Hatch, 2009). Many times the piece of school reform that is neglected is the community engagement piece. Programs are purchased, financial resources are garnered, and the capacity is not there to sustain the reform. Hatch (2009) tells us that "to succeed on a wide scale, school-based improvement initiatives have to be accompanied by a concerted effort to create more favorable economic, social, and political conditions that will give all schools a better change to manage the external environment" (p. 21). Collaborative partners have a vested interest because research illustrates that an emerging skills gap could create great problems for American employers (Sloan, 2008b). This gap impacts the community and the nation. Sloan (2008b) reminds all stakeholders that a critical point is to "secure buy-in from the highest levels of both

the business and school leadership, as well as other stakeholders such as school board officials,
parents, teachers, and others who will be integral to implementation of the project" (p. 7).

<div align="center">**Concerns about Community Engagement**</div>

There seems to be an engagement gap of people who are insecure or had a problem with
school or just do not feel that they are political enough or have the knowledge to stand up to the
decision makers (Varlas, 2008, p. 7). Meier (2003b) points out that what students do not have in
today's society is a linkage to roots in any multiage community. Meier speaks in great detail
about the importance of developing trust within the school district. She claims the following as
the first steps to building trust:

1. Building community-wide consensus about the essential purposes of schools and
   education—about what comes first.

2. Agreeing on what to do about minority viewpoints that can't comfortably fit
   under the same roof—on how to provide the needed choices.

3. Selecting the key educational leaders to carry out the work in ways that honor the
   view of both families and professional staff.

4. Providing these leaders with the kind of respect and freedom they need to do the
   job (Meier, 2003b, p. 5).

Trust involves keeping the public informed. The public bases what is occurring many
times on perception rather than fact. Public perception may be formed around "nostalgia, rumor,
what's in newspapers and on television.… Or it could just be a gut feeling.… Everything a
school district does—and some things it doesn't do—contributes to how it is perceived by the
public" (Cook, 2003, p. 1). Some believe it is the school board's and school district staff's job to
educate the community as well as the students. The community needs to be educated and stay

abreast of the changes in the educational system in order to understand the reality of the

educational situation and have authentic buy-in (Cook, 2003).

> Chadwick (2004) notes that community engagement carries some risk that
>
> … they will tell you, and you may not like it. The public will expect to see that their input
>
> has played a role in decision making. The school district risks greater damage by asking
>
> people what they think and then doing nothing about it, than if educators made no attempt
>
> to engage the public at all. (p. 36)

A paradigm shift could occur by allowing actual input and truly having a desire to know how the

public views public school education and what suggestions and concerns they have. "What is the

ultimate criterion for decision making in education? Most would probably say student

achievement. But how is that defined and measured? Again, the situation faced by educators is

more complex than in most businesses" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 52).

Hall and Cordell (2008) have identified four distinctive overlapping categories of

involvement which include active, silent, financial, and time donors. Hall and Cordell (2008)

found it to be a huge challenge to authentically transfer the knowledge of the great things

occurring in the schools and relate them to the things that could happen with community

involvement. "Newspaper articles about failures in adequate yearly progress seem to always

feature prominently, while articles about school achievements often are obscurely placed (Hall &

Cordell, 2008, p. 54).

Training for School Board Members on Communications and Public Engagement

School board members are usually laymen and not professional educators so they

typically speak jargon that the community understands in reference to education but may not

know how to communicate and engage the community (Kettering Foundation, 2005a). In hopes

of assisting the schools boards in their efforts, the NSBA created the *Key Work of School Boards*, a framework for raising student achievement through community engagement. This framework was designed to give school boards a guide to focus on excellence in the classroom that begins with excellence in the boardroom (Vermont School Board Association, 2006). In order for the school board to be invested in community engagement it may take professional development. "Even a board that is philosophically committed to community engagement may need practical assistance from an outside resource to get started" (Kettering Foundation, 2005a, p. 13). LuAnn Bird (2008) reminds school board members of their defined role of providing the leadership for improved learning by spending time on governing issues such as setting policy, monitoring school system performance, engaging the community and setting school system goals. The superintendent should handle daily operations of the district.

The professional development of teachers, administrators, and school boards is extremely important. "To be successful, the administration must set broad goals and require a broad range of accountability measures, so the public can monitor its schools. Transparency should be as much of a goal for this administration as transformation" (Hardy, 2009, p. 19). Community partnerships sometimes become a requirement that is checked off rather than something that is truly embraced and practiced in school districts (Huber, 2009). "In this climate of dwindling resources and increasing expectations, educational partnerships are suddenly on the radar" (Huber, 2009, p. 32). Partnerships are tied to specific outcomes that help to create accountability for all stakeholders. "The idea of joining resources to produce something richer, deeper, and more wonderful than one could offer alone is ingrained in our collective psyche with 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' rolling off the tongue" (Huber, 2009, p. 32). High performing/high poverty schools do not make progress alone.

They build positive and productive relationships with students' families and the broader

neighborhood and community. In partnership with the city of Saint Paul and the Amherst

H. Wilder Foundation, Dayton's Bluff Elementary provides students and families with a

recreational facility and the services of a nurse-practioner, dentist, and social worker at

the school. (Parrett & Budge, 2009, p. 27)

Many times using school facilities as a community center requires school board policies or

procedures. Parrett and Budge (2009) found leaders engaged stakeholders in various ways—"for

example, hiring a school/family/community liaison, offering adult mentoring and community

service learning programs, ensuring two-way communication between the school and the family,

and using the school as a community center" (Parrett & Budge, 2009, p. 27).

Examples of Community Engagement with School Board Members

In Chicago, when the community began to work with the school board on school reform,

students benefits through rising graduation rates, increased college enrollment, and improved

state student achievement scores (Duncan, 2009). Creating the collaborative input process

required the school board to be meeting with the community as a whole. McLaughlin (2002) tells

us that once the audience has been established and objectives are set then school boards must

"establish a format for gathering information. Formats include surveys, focus groups, voice polls,

advisory group reports, town meetings, and school board hearings" (p. 2). There are a variety of

strategies for engaging the community. These are briefly described in the following pages.

The West Virginia Center for Civic Life (2006) presents the following three approaches

to community involvement:

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Approach 1: We should let educators do their jobs and only serve in a supportive

        capacity.

Approach 2: We should give the community a meaningful role in public education and

        the decisions that are made by engaging the community.

Approach 3: We should let parents guide the decision making because they know best.

        Parents should have the right to pick the best school for their child. (p. 5)

These three approaches offer three different views of the importance and way that community can be involved in public schools.

Business partnerships vary from formal to informal. An example of a formal business partnership would be the Jaguar Joe project that a school used to learn the operations of a coffee business from manufacturing to marketing. The entire school was involved in various aspects of the project. This provided students an authentic learning experience in order for them to make application of their knowledge and skill set (Sloan, 2008b, p. 3).

Formal and information communication. There are both formal and informal ways of communicating with the community. Formal communications could include district web sites, school web sites, television shows from the district, newspaper articles, speeches and presentations, written and electronic announcements, bulletins, flyers, memos, handbooks and other publications. Informal communications include personal interactions and relationships, membership in organizations, telephone conversations, responses to individual questions and concerns, and open houses (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005a). Surveys can provide quantitative information but they miss the richness of description unless they are designed to include open-ended response opportunities as well (Chadwick, 2004). "Surveys, needs assessments, and other polling tools won't provide the depth or reveal underlying thinking the

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way community conversations or study circles do" (Oregon State Boards Association, 2005b, p. 2). There are many ways to communicate with parents and the community.

Other opportunities to communicate would include listing a free parent workshop series in church bulletins, in district newsletters, recruiting through Head Start, and writing newspaper articles from time to time (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005b). "Communication techniques should be both formal (public hearings, newsletters, official school district publications), and informal. As one board member remarked, 'I don't need to take a survey of parents in my district—all I need to do is go to the grocery store" (NSBA, 1996, p. 9). Schools can involve assistance from local employers to include tips on parent involvement printed on employee paychecks, receipts, or utility bills. Many find that athletics is the draw of the community and they take advantage of this opportunity to inform the public. "Realizing how the public flocked to football games, one school even arranged for the team cheerleaders to play math games with the crowd during halftime" (Harmon & Dickens, 2004, p. 30). Although some of these may be unidirectional approaches, they still may create interest in being engaged in school district decision-making at another time.

Hall and Cordell (2008) tell of an example where a local hardware store heard that a community business had donated physical education equipment. This prompted the hardware store owner to donate a shed to store the equipment. When the company delivered the shed they became inspired and decided to volunteer to read to struggling readers. This example highlights that once the momentum builds in communities it is hard to slow them down. When communities do not know or do not care, it is sometimes difficult to get the community snowball rolling.

Educational leaders can build relationships with internal and external stakeholders through collaboration (Kochan & Reed, 2005). There are multiple techniques to engage the

community, but it takes desire on the part of the school board as well as knowledge about how to engage the community. "Some schools have started handing out 'parent report cards,' and others are writing up contracts outlining what's expected of parents. In many school districts, the attitude seems to be: any strategy that involves parents has to be good for test scores" (Jones, 2001, p. 1). Without knowing what to expect from school districts and without school districts relaying what is expected from parents how will parents and the community know how to be engaged? Engaged communities are essential to strong democracies. Sokoloff (1997) reminds us,

"A democracy needs a strong public for at least three reasons.

1.   Only the public can create and define the 'public interest.' We elect people so they can take the public's expression of its interest and translate it into public policy initiatives.

2.   Only the public can build common ground. The public must find ways to recognize where it agrees and use those agreements to build solutions to common problems that we are willing to accept.

3.   Only the public can support consistent government over the long term. The school board majority shifts from election to election." (p. 2)

Local school boards are representatives of the community and bring different experiences and passions to the school board meetings.

Dialogue opportunities focused around school board meetings. The Kentucky School Board Association has for some years emphasized the importance of "school board agendas including a period of dialogue with a variety of different audiences" (Kettering Foundation, 2005a, p. 5). Yet, board members feel more at ease about going into a predictable board meeting (Kettering Foundation, 2005a). When the public is allowed opportunities for dialogue and

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deliberation in a public forum, there is no way to predict the result of the meeting. Focus groups are comprised of eight to ten people who have conversations focused on a specific topic or question. The ultimate goal of a focus group is to talk to a cross section of the population (Jacobs, 2009).

Holifield and Flood (2005) described the Yellow Ribbon Task Force that was created with members including key communicators, supporters, skeptics, and tough questioners. The task force reviewed data and made suggestions and recommendations on how to meet the needs of their growing student population. The group kept the community informed on the dialogue that was taking place through updates at school board meetings and information sessions on a weekly basis. "One thing became clear: the more people knew about the plan, the more likely they were to support it" (Holifield & Flood, 2005, p. 52). After the process was over the board summarized the activities into a 12-page document and mailed it to every household in the area. "Every household" included all populations whether someone had a student in the school system or not. Efforts toward developing relationships with community members and the media were extremely valuable. Because of these efforts, the relationship will last long after the first day of school (Holifield & Flood, 2005).

Dialogue opportunities focused around a community setting. Sokoloff (2006) suggests that when creating a forum it should have a diverse population, have issues that are framed in terms of three and four choices, have a structure that encourages deliberation, and have clear outcomes. Colgan (2003) shares that their district placed all information on the Internet for public access and followed it by hosting a series of public forums which gave the community members an opportunity to provide input. The comments received from the community were complementary giving the community an open opportunity to share and ask questions. Chadwick

(2004) shared an idea from one school district which was, coffee with the community, where the superintendent meets at a designated community location allowing the community to have coffee together and informally talk about the issues facing the public schools. Community forums and town meetings allow the public the opportunity to ask questions or share comments and should be organized in an authentic manner.

"Community conversations are designed to allow a dialogue among citizens, covering a broad range of ideas and mixture of interests. Citizens are asked to weigh options, analyze benefits and tradeoffs, and identify common ground for action" (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005c, p. 2). Focus groups designed in a qualitative manner provide insight from understanding at a deeper level, resulting in rich description. However, the data collected may not be "statistically representative of the larger population" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 58) and therefore, may not adequately represent the voices within a community.

Study circles. Another approach to community engagement is a study circle. Study circles are defined as small groups that utilize the deliberation process. Typically, a group is comprised of 10–15 members that meet over a designated period of time to address a critical public issue (Dawson, 2005; Farley, 2005; Oregon School Boards Association, 2005a). Study circles are focused on solving problems through public dialogue (McCormick, 2005). The creation of study circles involves bringing together a diverse group, dividing them into small groups, educating them on the process of study circles, and then allowing them time to brainstorm. The three stages of study circles are organizing, dialogue, and action (Jacobs, 2009). "Once ideas have been generated, the groups collectively prioritize those ideas into workable action steps that lead to change" (Dawson, 2005, p. 1). The facilitators must remain neutral during the entire process. In the study circles they found that when the district allowed

themselves to let go of the control the participants in the study circles were comfortable participating. In an example that McCormick presented the district went through a huge growth process through the use of study circles, soliciting voice and collaboration from the community. The goal of study circles is to find common ground and not to come to consensus. Farley believes that "people support what they help to create" (2005, p. 1).

Team concept. Harmon and Dickens (2004) offer an example of the community engagement team concept. The teams helped to dissolve barriers that many parents face when it comes to being involved in those schools. Harmon and Dickens (2004) offer examples of collaborative parental and community involvement such as building an outdoor science lab and creating an outdoor theater/classroom with the help of local community organizations. These efforts helped to boost the math and science curriculum through the use of the outdoor classroom facilities. Henderson and Mapp (2002) reported that community organizing resulted in "upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, higher quality learning programs for students, new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum, and new funding for after school programs and family support" (p. 57).

Café conversations. Café conversations can be conducted with between twelve and twelve hundred participants. These begin with stating the purpose and the context for the meeting. The large group is divided into groups of four or five and talk about questions that build on each other. At the end of the session there is time to share and a facilitator scripts ideas, themes, insights and outcomes (Jacobs, 2008).

Open space technology. Open Space Technology is a model that is based on invite everyone and whoever comes is the right people, whatever happens should be the outcome, a focus of the present and not the past and embedded in creativity. This model of community

engagement can be used for between 5 and 1,500 people. The agenda focuses on a question or focus and the group creates the agenda. Participants sign up for the topic that interests them individually (Jacobs, 2009). Future Search Conference involves around sixty participants and takes place over three consecutive days. The group creates ideal future scenarios and creates an action plan to get there (Jacobs, 2009). Whichever community engagement model is used there needs to be an agreement that if the end turns out differently than you had expected that has to be acceptable. Jacobs (2009) gives an example of a gentleman who had a plan and then decided he would bring in the community. When he did the plan that he presented to the board was completely different but he had community buy-in and they had brought up several issues that he had not addressed. He realized that he had been focused on running an institution and had not taken into account that the institution was part of the community and he admitted that he had not been a good neighbor (Jacobs, 2009). Using inquiry rather than advocacy is a key factor (Jacobs, 2008).

Physical plant organization. Community schools are structured so they serve as the hub of the community. Bogle and Diamond (2004) stress that

> … defining buildings to benefit adults as well as children gives community members
> good reason to become better stewards of public education. And locating public libraries,
> recreational facilities, family resource centers, and health and human services in school
> buildings is an efficient way to stretch public tax dollars. (p. 2)

This serves as a way to engage the community by making access to services more easily available to families. "Community schools have measurable impact on student performance, parent and family involvement, school functioning, and community capacity" (Eye on Research, 2005, p. 2).

The entire community must work together if the students are to be successful

academically and in the future (Eye on Research, 2005). Community schools incorporate

community resources, both tapped and untapped, and find creative ways to make things happen.

Leaders of community schools are taking their schools and communities in new

directions, forming partnerships and coalitions to achieve results that matter. They are

breaking down the barriers that have separated schools from local government agencies

and nonprofit organizations for too long. They are beginning to see the rewards of their

work, including improved student attendance, discipline, and achievement; greater parent

and community involvement in schools and other community activities; and

neighborhoods that are revitalized around their schools. And they are affirming, once

again, the importance of leadership in uniting communities so that all young people have

opportunities to succeed. (Eye on Research, 2005, p. 9)

The district leadership must have a vision of education beyond the schoolhouse walls if

community schools are going to actually serve as a center of the community (Bogle & Diamond,

2004).

Barriers to Community Engagement

Dawson (2005) relates a scenario that evolved from a study circle where a parent that had

been intimidated by "big words" and the "important people in the school system," ended up

making the statement that "it's worth it to stick it out and not to be intimidated by people who

seem important to me, like teachers, or people who use big words because they went to college. I

learned that my opinion was just as important as theirs and they wanted to listen to it" (p. 7).

Statements and feelings like this have the potential to change the mindset of community

members. The document *Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement* (2005) reminds us that,

> If families don't have reliable access to the Internet, email won't work. A phone message in English won't communicate much to parents who speak only Spanish. The bottom line as viewed by many for schools is to communicate using strategies that convey what is important in a way that can be heard by parents and families and invites them to respond. (p. 2)

If there is a language barrier we should strive to ensure that the non-English speaking community members still have an opportunity to be engaged. For example, if there is a large Spanish speaking population in our community they know their needs but may not know how to access the resources necessary to meet those needs.

"Leaders in schools, both public and private, as well as citizen leaders play important roles in shaping the dialogues and agendas of our schools. However, many citizens perceive a deep disconnect between the public and public schools" (Reed et al., 2005, p. 2). Reed et al. (2005) found that staff in one school system at one time were engrained in the community in which they worked. Therefore, ownership of the school and system was present, but now employees may drive in from another town and not have a vested interest in the community where they work.

Another lesson gleaned from Reed et al.'s (2005) research was that school success was defined by the results of the high stakes testing and this is not what the community thought was most important. For example, the community also wants to ensure that the students are prepared for the workforce when they graduate. Mathews (2006) stresses the importance of rebuilding communities and engaging the public by creating forums for voices from the community

allowing citizens to become meaningfully involved in public education. Harmon and Dickens (2004) found that the organized and highly structured meetings tend to fit the schedules of school staff and not parents or community members. "These meetings were not likely to attract and keep parents who might not have fond memories of their own school days and aren't comfortable in such settings" (Harmon & Dickens, 2004, p. 29).

The media may have the greatest impact over influencing the perception of the public (Cook, 2003). Many see the reality of the situation that we can have our positive or negative news in the homes of millions of people almost instantly via the Internet and public television. "Building partnerships—and explaining how today's schools are different from those of your parents—is critical…" (Cook, 2003, p. 6). This is one way to alter public perceptions about schooling.

There are multiple barriers that society and life choices pose on community members that might make it difficult to be engaged in the decision-making process. Putnam's (2000) four main factors responsible for the decline in social capital:

- Pressures of time and money

- Commuting to the workplace

- Privatization of free time through electronic measures

- Replacement of the civic-minded generation (born between 1901 and 1924) by less involved children and grandchildren. (p. 4)

Putnam's (2000) research supports the theory that in places with higher socioeconomic levels there is greater student achievement partially due to less time watching television and more time in formal and informal learning opportunities. Thirty years of research suggests that when families are more involved in their children's education they do better in school and student

attendance is better (Chadwick, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Many find family involvement

contributes to the gap in educational successes and experiences. "Studies show that community

members—including those without children in school—want to be involved in making their

schools better. However, these same community members cite lack of communication as a major

barrier to increased involvement" (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005, p. 2).

Involvement in Planning or Advisory Capacity

The community may need to be asked to actually step up, assume responsibility, and

become engaged.

> If community members are to feel they own the schools, then there must be meaningful
>
> opportunities to be engaged in the work of the schools. Years back, parents were
>
> expected to contribute coal or wood to keep the school fires burning. It was a tangible
>
> expectation and everybody was asked to contribute. (Reed et al., 2005, p. 20)

However, "If school officials really want community involvement, then there must be concrete

opportunities for parents and others to contribute. A key to meaningful engagement is

reciprocity—the ability to engage in mutually beneficial relationships" (Reed et al., 2005, p. 20).

District personnel and the school board must present opportunities that are win-win in nature so

that the community sees value in the dedication of their time and effort contributed to the efforts.

Sokoloff (1997) suggests using district advisory committees to help build stronger connections

with the community. The advisory committees might be comprised of formal and informal

community leaders, gathered for the purpose of improving communication within the school

system and community. School personnel often feel that parents do not want to be involved when

many times they simply do not know how to be involved (Comprehensive School Reform and

Improvement, 2005). This perception may be a barrier that keeps community members from becoming engaged in meaningful ways with their schools.

Overtime partnerships grow to become natural and authentic and in times of crisis those stakeholders are advocates. If partnerships are created in a way that has goals, and accountability, and trust then the true essence of partnership is at the forefront. Partnerships are built by surveying members of stakeholders to find common interest, using the gleaned information to stimulate conversation surrounding critical community issues, and pursuing appropriate issues that can be tackled (Hatch, 2009).

Summary

As Sokoloff (1997) reminds us,

The school board structure is an expression of a community's hopes and dreams for its present and future. Students and parents have the most immediate stake in the quality of local schools, but the community also has significant and legitimate interests in its schools. (p. 2)

Everyone in a community benefits from having a strong public school system in their community. Strong public schools help to sell homes, strong public schools bring business opportunities, and strong public schools prepare children for an uncertain future. Meier (2003b) reminds us that "we cannot hope to raise a generation of thoughtful citizens in schools where adults are not themselves viewed as thoughtful citizens" (p. 5). As members of a school board and school district we can elect to blame the community or we can find ways to actively engage the community (Meier, 2003a). McLaughlin (2002) reminds us that "public participation won't make all our constituents happy, but it will give those who want to get involved the opportunity to be heard" (p. 5).

Attitudes toward community collaboration need to change. Communities, students, and families can work together and "improve student learning and strengthen the fabric of their communities" (Eye on Research, 2005, p. 1). It is important to know how school boards are reaching all populations in the community and how much value is placed on their input. To better understand these relationships, it is essential to gain insights into the beliefs of school board members about the value of community engagement and the practices used to effectively engage the community. School board presidents, as the primary spokesperson for each school board, provide an appropriate point of contact for conducting this research.

> It takes more than a school to educate a student. It takes a city that can provide support from the parks department, health services, law enforcement, social services, after-school programs, nonprofits, businesses, and churches. And it takes a group of caring, committed individuals—the mayor, the city council, and the school board—working together. (Duncan, 2009, p. 30)

School boards must decide who they are and what they stand for and then determine the non-negotiables in the educational arena and find the partnerships and opportunities for community needed to make it all come together (Huber, 2009).

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Educational researchers also frequently employ surveys to learn about how specific variables,
such as leadership belief systems, are applied in the real world.
(Ross, 2006, p. 984)

This chapter offers a description of the research conducted in this study, a brief

discussion of the background of the study, a presentation of the problem statement, purpose, and

research questions, and an overview of the research process utilized. The No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that parents and communities be more involved in the education of

children. Limited research has been conducted in Alabama on the importance of community

engagement, particularly regarding the involvement of school board presidents and their roles

with the community.

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze the perceptions of Alabama school

board presidents on community engagement. Since little research exists in this area, an

exploratory research approach was used. Surveys were used to collect both qualitative and

quantitative responses. Data were collected from a survey distributed to 128 school board

presidents representing the 128 Alabama school districts. All school board presidents were

mailed surveys and invited to participate in the study. The researcher obtained permission to

conduct the study through the Auburn University Human Subjects Research protocol process.

Sixty participants responded from a pool of 128 surveys distributed yielding a 47% return rate.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the framework for this study:

7.   When making decisions, how much emphasis do school board presidents give to input from administrators, teachers, and staff, parents/grandparents, business leaders, people with no children or grandchildren in the school system?

8.   Is there a relationship between the demographics of School Board Presidents and the value placed on input of others when making school board decisions?

9.   How do school boards communicate with stakeholders?

10.   How does stakeholder current level of involvement compare to the Board's desire for involvement in planning, advising, and decision making?

11.   What are the barriers to community engagement with School Boards and School Districts?

12.   What are the motivating factors affecting community engagement with School Boards and School Districts?

Research Methods

This section on research methods provides a description of the research design and describes the participants in the study. A detailed description of the survey instrument used in the study, including information on validity and reliability, is provided. Finally, the processes used for data collection and analysis are presented.

Research Design

Exploratory research was conducted to explore the perceptions of Alabama school board presidents on community engagement in school board decision making. Data were collected using a survey distributed to 128 school districts in Alabama. Sixty surveys were returned and analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. Emergent themes were drawn from the open-ended responses (Merriam, 1998). Data were collected to determine Alabama school

board presidents' perceptions on community engagement across the state. They reported their perceptions about what were occurring and the degree to which community engagement was being implemented. Demographic information was collected in order to better analyze the responses of participants by subgroups. Findings include the differences in perceptions and the range of community engagement opportunities being offered across the state in addition to the perceived value of their activities in the decision making process.

Participants

The participants in this study were Alabama school board presidents from 60 of the 128 school districts (47% return rate). There was great diversity reflected among the participants. The study participants included a total of 35 (58.3 %) males and 25 (41.7 %) females. Demographic information collected for this study included years of service on the school board, whether they were elected or appointed, gender, highest level of education, local tax contribution, number of school board members in their district, race/ethnicity, whether the superintendent was elected or appointed, student enrollment, classification of district, and whether the district had a local education foundation. Approximately 78 % of the participants were White and 22 % were non-White. Years served on the board ranged from some who were in their first year to those who served more than 15 years, with almost 37 % of the participants having served on the board five years and 63 % serving more than five years. Approximately 58 % (35) of the participants were elected and the other 41.7 % (25) were appointed. The largest percentage of participants had a graduate level degree or doctorate (50 %). Seventy-five percent of the participants held at least a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

Approximately 73 % of the participants were from schools with appointed superintendents. The participants represent every category of student enrollment. Approximately

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63% of the participants had less than 5000 students and 33 % had more than 5000 students. A majority (48.3%) of the participants classified their school district as rural, 20 % were urban and 27 % were suburban. Approximately 65 % of the participants reported having a local education foundation established. Seventy-five percent of the participants were presidents of school boards which had five members. Seventy percent of the participants had less than 20 mil local tax contributions.

The only criterion for participation in this study was that the participant was currently serving as school board president. There were no direct benefits to participants or compensation for participation in the research.

Instrument

A survey titled "Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement" (see Appendix 1) was developed by the researcher to identify the types of community engagement taking place in school board decision-making. The survey instrument content was developed based on a review of literature on community engagement and addressing the questions guiding the research. Content information for survey questions was gleaned from the review of the literature, training opportunities and documents provided through the NSBA and the AASB. The questions were designed with a neutral voice in hopes of not influencing the process being studied. This triangulation helped to minimize researcher bias. The survey (see Appendix 1) included questions requesting demographic information for descriptive purposes. For one group of question items, respondents were asked to select the number on the 5-point scale that corresponded to the degree to which they agreed with the statements. The scale was a Likert-type scale, with 1 representing no/little weight and 6 representing considerable weight. The respondents were also given the choice to respond "Don't Know."

Survey Validity and Reliability

Initially, a panel of four experts reviewed the survey to establish evidence of content validity (see Appendix 3). The panel of experts included representation from a local school board, the state board association, the state administrator association, and the Alabama State Department of Education. Recommendations from the panel included rewording on specific items, providing rationales for specific items and the deletion and/or addition of items. The survey instrument was modified to incorporate recommendations and the final draft of the instrument was prepared for distribution.

Internal consistency for reliability was not necessary because the items addressed had separate and distinct content (Trochim, 2000). A panel of four experts reviewed the survey to establish face and content validity. Grounded in literature on community engagement in schools (Kettering Foundation, 2005), survey questions were mapped to ensure direct connections to the specific guiding questions on the chart (found in Appendix 2) titled "Question Mapping". The draft survey was then distributed to four school board members for review to establish evidence of content validity (Appendix 3).

Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study through the Auburn University Internal Review Board (IRB) process (see Appendix 4). Support was obtained verbally from the Executive Director of the Alabama Association of School Boards. Data collection spanned over a three-month period. Packets were distributed to 128 Alabama school board presidents representing each Local Education Agency (LEA) in the state. Each packet included an information sheet, the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of the survey. The school board presidents were free to complete the surveys at the place and time of their

choosing. Participants were asked to not put any identifying information on materials returned to the researcher. The researcher entered the quantitative survey data into SPSS11.0 for analysis. The qualitative survey data were entered into Word, Version 2007, and then were categorized and coded so the researcher could identify emerging themes.

Mailing labels for current school board presidents were obtained from the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) to ensure that all school board presidents were sent surveys and invited to participate (Appendix 5). Each of the school board presidents was sent a recruitment letter from the researcher via US mail announcing the study and alerting them that the survey packet (Appendix 6) would arrive in the next couple of days. After the surveys had been mailed and a reasonable amount of time had lapsed for participants to receive the survey, a reminder/thank you letter was sent to all participants (Appendix 7).

Surveys were sent directly to the researcher in the self-addressed envelope enclosed with the survey packet that had the researcher's address for both the return address and the recipient's address. This ensured that the participant did not put their own address as the return address. Immediately after opening the envelopes they were discarded. Informed consent signatures were not required because all data gathered remained confidential and anonymous.

Data Analysis

Sixty of the 128 surveys distributed were completed and returned. The researcher entered the quantitative survey data into SPSS11.0 for analysis. The findings are presented in Chapter Four. The open-ended question responses were chunked then analyzed and coded for emergent themes by charting frequency of answers. Emergent themes and categories were then identified from the data. The categories were specific enough that they did not allow for overlap in responses (Merriam, 1998).

Triangulation

Triangulation of data sources helped to ensure grounded analyses. Merriam (1998) suggests triangulation as a strategy to help improve internal validity. Triangulation for this study was established through the use of closed and open-ended responses for survey questions and analysis of documents and training materials provided through the National School Board Association (NSBA) and the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB). The combination of closed and open-ended responses allowed the school board presidents flexibility in their response style. The survey also had an "other" category so those wishing to give an answer not provided on the survey had that flexibility.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher describes herself as an educator, school board member, Alabama State Department of Education employee, active community member, and a parent. Prior to the research, through self-reflection, the researcher took her biases into consideration when organizing the design of the study in such a way that the opportunity for bias to appear would be limited. All of the data were derived directly from the surveys containing a combination of open and closed ended questions. The researcher was careful to identify and reflect on her own biases and re-examined the initial data analyses to ensure they were as accurate as possible. Triangulation of data sources helped to ensure grounded analyses.

Summary

Chapter III provided a comprehensive overview of the research methods used in this study. The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology used in this study, describe the participants, describe the procedure used in designing the instrument and collecting

the data, and provide an explanation of the procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter IV

presents the study findings.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Adults appreciate serving as a learning resource because they bring considerable experiences and background to the teaching and learning environment.
Maria Martinez Witte (personal communication, January 12, 2010)

This chapter presents the findings from the study. An overview of the research methods used is presented, along with a description of the demographics of the participants, and the results of the data analysis. The data in this study represents sixty completed surveys out of 128 mailed out to Alabama school board presidents, for a 47 % return rate.

An Overview of the Research Methods Used

A survey titled "Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement" (see Appendix 1) was developed by the researcher to identify the types of community engagement opportunities taking place as school boards engage in decision-making. Survey questions were grounded from literature on community engagement in schools. The draft survey was then distributed to four school board members and four state level experts who reviewed it for content and clarity to establish evidence of content validity (see Appendix 3). Changes, described in Chapter III, were made to the wording of the survey due to the feedback collected from these experts. The first part of the survey instrument included eleven questions requesting demographic information which was used for descriptive purposes. For one group of survey items, respondents were asked to select a number on the 6-point scale that corresponded to the degree to which they agreed with the statements. The scale was a Likert-type scale, with 1

representing no/little weight and 6 representing considerable weight. The respondents were also provided the choice to respond "Don't Know."

<h3 style="text-align:center">Demographic Information</h3>

Although all participants were school board presidents, there was great diversity reflected among them. The characteristics of the study participants included a total of 35 (58.3 %) males and 25 (41.7 %) females. Demographic information collected for this study included their years of service on the school board, whether they were elected or appointed, their gender, highest level of education, local tax contribution, number of school board members in their district, race/ethnicity, whether the superintendent was elected or appointed, student enrollment, classification of district, and whether the district had a local education foundation. Approximately 78% of the participants were White and 22 % were non-White. Years served on the board ranged from some who were in their first year to those serving more than 15 years, with almost 37% of the participants having served on the board five years and 63% serving more than five years. Approximately 58% (35) of the participants were elected and the other 42% (25) were appointed. The largest percentage of participants had a graduate level degree or doctorate (50%). Seventy-five percent of the participants held at least a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

Approximately 73% of the participants were from schools with appointed superintendents. The participants represent every category of student enrollment. Approximately 63% of the participants had less than 5000 students and 33% had more than 5000 students. A majority (48.3%) of the participants classified their school district as rural, 20% were urban and 27% were suburban. Approximately 65% of the participants reported having a local education foundation established. Seventy-five percent of the participants were presidents of school boards

which had five members. Seventy percent of the participants had less than 20 mil local tax

contributions.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants Represented by Survey Items 1 to 11

Demographic Category	Number	Percent
Years		
Less than 5 Years	22	36.7%
Over 5 Years	36	63.3%
Elected/Appointed		
Elected	35	58.3%
Appointed	25	41.7%
Gender		
Male	35	58.3%
Female	25	41.7%
Education		
High School	15	25.0%
BA	14	23.3%
Graduate or Doctorate Degree	30	50.0%
Other	1	1.7%
Local Tax		
Less than 20 mils	42	70.0%
More than 20 mils	17	28.3%

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Demographic Category	Number	Percent
Members		
5 members	45	75.0%
> 5 members	14	23.3%
Ethnicity		
White	47	78.3%
Non-White	13	21.7%
Superintendent		
Elected	16	26.7%
Appointed	44	73.3%
Students		
<5000	38	63.3%
>5000	20	33.3%
Classifications		
Suburban	16	26.7%
Urban	12	20.0%
Rural	29	48.3%
Foundation		
Yes	39	65.0%
No	21	35.0%

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative survey data for question 12 (found in Table 3) is anchored by no/little

weight = 1 and considerable weight = 6. Table 2 displays data revealing that school board

presidents tend to place more value on the opinions of the administrators, teachers and staff, and the least value to people without children. Participants placed considerable weight on administrators, teachers and staff opinion with a mean rating of 5.16 and reported valuing the input from parents/grandparents secondly with a mean rating of 4.1.

Table 2

Value Provided to the Opinions of Four Community Groups

Value of	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Staff	4	6	5.16	0.65
Parents/Grandparents	2	6	4.31	1.1
Business	1	6	3.88	1.04
People w/out Children	1	6	3.26	1.24

The quantitative survey data for question 13 (found in Table 3) was either marked as yes or no. The data reveals that the most common communication devices used with administrators, teachers and staff were email (87%), local media (77%), a district website (70%), and school newsletters (60%). The most frequent communication devices used with parents/grandparents were local media (97%), school newsletters (78%), and community presentations (65%). The most frequent communication devices used with business leaders were local media (92%), community presentation (67%), and district website (58%). The most frequent communication devices used with people without children were local media (95%), community presentations (68%), and district websites (52%).

Avenues for communicating with the public noted by participants under the category of

Other included documents (memos, city newsletters, notes home with children, regular mail,

newspaper, community newsletter) noted 6 times; meetings (PTA/PTO Meetings, business

leaders workshop, staff meetings) noted 8 times; community relationships (Chamber of

Commerce and speaking at civic meetings) noted 5 times; use of an automatic calling system

was noted once; telephone calls was noted twice; media was noted once; professional

development was noted once; and special committees was noted twice.

Table 3

Frequency of Communication Devices School Boards Use with the Four Community Populations

	Community Presentations	District Newsletter	District Website	emailing	Local Media	School News letter	Other
Admin/Staff	27	14	42	52	46	36	11
	45%	23%	70%	86%	76%	60.00%	18.33%
Business Leaders	40	11	35	16	55	17	9
	67%	183%	58%	26%	91%	28.33%	15.00%
Parent/Grandparents	39	13	35	21	58	47	5
	65%	21%	58%	35%	96%	78.33%	8.33%
Those with no children/	41	8	31	7	57	7	5
grandchildren	68%	13%	57%	11%	95%	11.67%	8.33%

The quantitative survey data for question 17 (found in Table 4), which asked how the district currently solicits input for school board decision making from each community population, was answered as either yes or no for each of the choices that applied to the participant. The choices provided were community forums, surveys, district website, school board meetings, email, and phone calls. These data indicate that school boards most frequently communicate with administrators, staff and teachers (95%), parents/grandparents (87%), business leaders (80%), and people without children (75%) through school board meetings.

Table 4

Frequency of Ways the School Board Solicits Input

	Community Forum	Board Meetings	Survey	Email	District Website	Phone Calls
Admin/Staff	25	57	31	26	21	35
	42%	95%	52%	43%	35%	58%
Business Leaders	36	49	16	16	21	36
	60%	80%	27%	27%	35%	60%
Parent/Grandparents	34	52	25	19	36	36
	57%	87%	47%	32%	60%	60%
Those with no	33	45	10	9	19	29
children/	55%	75%	17%	15%	32%	48%
grandchildren						

The quantitative survey data for question 18 (found in Table 5), which asked respondents to check the areas in which parents or other citizens are involved in a planning advisory capacity in your school district was answered either yes or no for each of the choices that applied to the participant. The choices given were: objectives and priorities for the school and district, evaluation of programs, program changes, fund raising, new curricular programs being considered, strategic planning, student activities, school-based decision making, student behavior, rights and responsibilities, finance and budget, school calendar, other, and not applicable. Data indicates that school boards most frequently involve parents or other citizens in a planning advisory capacity in the school district through fundraising (78%). The next most frequently cited method was through student activities (68%). The least frequent methods used were through evaluation of programs (38%) and school-based decision-making (40%).

Other means for involving parents or other citizens in a planning advisory capacity were noted by participants under the category of other and included Capital Planning (1), Advisory Council Members (1), and serving on the Textbook Committee (1). None of these were mentioned frequently enough to be included in the table. They were each only noted once.

Table 5

Ways School Boards Involve Parents or Other Citizens in Planning Advisory Capacity

	Used as Method to Involve Others	Percentage
Fund Raising	47	78%
Student Activities	41	68%
Objectives	36	60%
Strategic Plan	33	55%
Program Change	32	53%
Calendar	31	52%
Student Behavior	28	47%
Finances	27	45%
New Curriculum	26	43%
Decision Making	24	40%
Evaluation of Program	23	38%
Other	2	3%

The quantitative survey data for question 19 (found in Table 6), which asked what are the barriers for involving the community in school board decision making was answered as yes or no for each of the choices presented that applied to the participant. The choices provided were superintendent attitude, lack of power, district/school climate, community priority, school board's attitude, lack of communication, and other. Data indicates that school boards most frequently identified barriers for involving the community in school-board decision making was

it not being a community priority (45%) and lack of communication (45%). The least frequently

identified barriers were lack of power (15%) and school board's attitude (13%).

Barriers in involving the community in school board decision-making under the category

of other included NA (2), public participation (1), under federal court order(1), professional

unions (AEA) (1), lack of power (1), citizen apathy (1), politics (1), lack of time (2), lack of

understanding (1), lack of interest (2), no barriers (3), "disgruntled more likely to participate and

often don't represent majority" (1), "barriers that might be are self imposed" (1).

Table 6

Perceived Barriers when Involving the Community in School Board Decision-Making

	# Believing it is a Barrier to Involvement	%
Lack of Communication	27	45.00%
Community Priority	27	45.00%
Other	15	25.00%
Superintendent Attitude	13	21.67%
District/School Climate	12	20.00%
Lack of Power	9	15.00%
Board's Attitude	8	13.33%

The quantitative survey data for question 20 (found in Table 7), which asked what keeps

people or organizations from becoming more involved in district decision making was answered

as yes or no for all of the choices that applied to the participant. The choices provided were

superintendent attitude, lack of power, district/school climate, community priority, school

board's attitude, lack of communication, and other. Data indicates that school board presidents' most frequently identified response hampering people or organizations from becoming more involved with district decision-making was engagement being a community priority (43%). Community priority was defined as the community placing great importance on being a pulse of the school system and the underlying decision making process. The next reason was lack of communication (43%). Data indicates that school board presidents' least frequently identified reasons were district/school climate (15%) and the school board's attitude (8%).

Ways that people or organizations are hampered from becoming more involved in school board decision making included N/A noted twice; no interest noted once; public participation noted once; federal court control noted once; educator unions (AEA) noted once; large number noted once; private schools noted once; "majority of middle class Whites have left system and see no need to support Public Education" noted once; apathy noted 4 times; perceived lack of power noted once; lack of time noted 3 times; district/school climate noted once; lack of interest noted 3 times; and desire to be involved noted once.

Table 7

Hampers People or Organizations from Becoming More Involved

	# Believe it Stops Involvements	Percentage
Community Priority	26	43.33%
Lack of Communication	26	43.33%
Other	15	25.00%
Superintendent Attitude	11	18.33%
Lack of Power	11	18.33%
District/School Climate	9	15.00%
Board's Attitude	5	8.33%

The quantitative survey data for question 21 (found in Table 8) which asked what motivates people to become engaged with the districts or schools was either marked yes or no for each of the choices that applied to the participant. The choices provided were superintendent attitude, lack of power, district/school climate, community priority, school board's attitude, lack of communication, and other. Data indicates that school board presidents' most frequently identified motivators for people becoming engaged in districts or schools were a school board's attitude (60%), superintendent's attitude (58%), community priority (58%), and district/school climate (57%).

Ways that people or organizations are motivated to become involved in school board decision making under the category of other included desire to make a difference noted twice; hot topics/issues noted twice; children participation noted once; perceived problems noted once; effort to engage the community noted once; change noted once; "family history—grew up with

an expectation that you would be involved" noted once; student problems (behavior or academics) noted 3 times; good parents noted once; having children in the system noted twice; success noted once; pride noted once; controversy noted once; meetings (PTA/PTO) noted once; personal interest noted once; communication with teachers and administrators noted once; "parents priority on education" noted once; and "willingness to be best school system in county noted once."

Table 8

Motivation for People Becoming Engaged

	# Believe it Motivates Involvement	Percentage
Board's Attitude	35	58.33%
Community Priority	35	58.33%
Superintendent Attitude	34	56.67%
District/School Climate	33	55.00%
Other	20	33.33%
Lack of Communication	3	5.00%
Lack of Power	3	5.00%

T-tests and ANOVAs were run using demographic characteristics as the independent variable and the value for input in decision making (survey items 12a, 12b, 12c, and 12d) from all four community groups as the dependent variable. Based on the two ANOVAs and the nine t-tests, two significant differences were indicated. Type I error was taken into consideration because the study was exploratory but the possibility of a Type I error does exist.

Table 9 illustrates that statistical significance was found with the number of board members and the input given to parents and grandparents. School board presidents' serving on boards with more than 5 members gave significantly more weight to input from parents and grandparents than those with only five members. School board presidents serving on boards with more than five members had a mean rating of 4.85 and a mean rating of 4.14 for those with 5 members.

Table 9

Number of Board Members Effect on Value of Input from Parents and Grandparents

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance							95% Confidence Interval of the Diff	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tail)	Mean Diff	St Error	Lower	Upper
Value of Parent/ Grandparent Input	4.292	.043	-2.53	27.7	.017	-.71	.28	-1.28	-.14

Table 10 illustrates that significance was found when looking at whether the superintendent was elected or appointed and the weight given to input from people without children. School board presidents serving on boards with an appointed superintendent gave significantly more weight to input from people without children than those school board presidents serving on boards with an elected superintendent. School board presidents with appointed superintendents had a mean rating of 3.5 and a mean rating of 2.63 for those with an elected superintendent.

Table 10

Elected or Appointed Superintendent Effect on Value of Input from People with No Children

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance							95% Confidence Interval of the Diff	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tail)	Mean Diff	St Error	Lower	Upper
Value of People with No Children Input	.06	.81	-2.520	55	.015	-.88	.35	-1.57	-.18

Qualitative Analysis

The open-ended question responses were chunked, then analyzed and color-coded for emergent themes. The frequency of answers was charted. Categories were color-coded for easier analysis. Blue, yellow, green, and purple represented the themes that emerged from the responses for questions 14, 15, and 16. Question 14 responses were coded as no/little effort (blue), uni-directional communication (yellow), multi-dimensional communication (green), and innovative communication (purple). These categories were identified after reading all responses to the question and grouping responses by the types of communication used. Question 15 responses were coded as no/little involvement (blue), basic involvement (yellow), more involvement (green), and innovative involvement (purple). Decisions about what type of involvement each response represented were made after reading all responses to the question and grouping responses by type of involvement. Question 16 responses were coded as no desire for more involvement (blue), common input/school level (yellow), district-wide involvement (green), and innovative involvement (purple). Decisions about these responses were made by after reading all responses to the question and grouping responses by level of involvement.

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Question 22 yielded seven themes which were coded as Community, Academics/Technology, Reputation, Climate/Culture, Extracurricular, Leadership, and Finances. These themes were identified after reading all responses to the question and grouping responses.

Ways Citizen Participation is Sought

The qualitative survey data for question 14 (found in Table 10), which asked in what ways is citizen participation sought, was analyzed and color-coded for easier interpretation. Four themes emerged. The responses were coded as no/little effort (blue), uni-directional communication (yellow), multi-dimensional communication (green), and innovative communication (purple). Unless there were only a few or especially unique responses the themes are presented as generalized statements, summarizing the types of comments made.

The responses coded blue represented no/little effort in communication defined as either being pleased with the lack of communication currently in place or not seeking input. Although few responses were provided in this category, those provided tended to solicit minimal information and usually that was also from a select group rather than the public at large. Approximately 3% (2 participants) of the responses were coded as no/little effort. The comments presented were "Generally citizen participation is only included in instances where it is required." Then, principals (18 schools) usually submit names of those he/she thinks "can understand the policy involved." The other comment stated that "in my opinion, we do not actively seek citizen participation."

The responses coded yellow represented uni-directional communication efforts defined as traditional means of communication required of the school board. The responses provided tended to solicit information in a traditional manner. For example, inviting the public to board meetings represented a primarily uni-directional communication pattern. Approximately 18% (11

participants) of the responses were coded as uni-directional communication effort. The comments included responses such as seeking involvement when citizens are invited to board meetings through personal letters, opportunities serving on committees, through telephone communications, and encouraging participation in local school programs.

The responses coded green suggested greater efforts in communication which was defined as being more involved than the traditional means of communication required of school boards. The responses provided tended to solicit information in a multi-directional or very explicit manner. Approximately 37% (22 participants) of the responses were coded as more involved effort. The efforts presented included opportunities for volunteering at school functions, service on teacher/parent advisory boards, partnerships with community organizations, attending community meetings, and involvement in specific committee work.

The responses coded purple were innovative involvement efforts in communication defined as more innovative means for communicating with the community. The responses provided tended to solicit information in a more non-traditional and multi-directional manner. Thirty percent (18 participants) of the responses were coded as innovative effort. The efforts presented included participation in community forums, community workshops, service on education advisory boards, community-wide invitations to school events, seeking comments on improvement, participation through church social events, all board committees have at least two community members, Golden Pass allowing Senior Citizens to attend all functions free, articles about school activities in the newspaper, community presentations, and a school board agenda item to hear from the public. A listing of all participant responses is found in Appendix 8.

Ways Community is Currently Involved in School System Decision-Making

The qualitative survey data for question 15 (found in Table 10), which asked what ways community is currently involved in school system decision-making, was analyzed and color-coded. Four themes emerged. The responses were coded as no/little involvement (blue), basic involvement (yellow), more involvement (green), and innovative involvement (purple). Unless there are few or unique responses the themes are presented as generalized statements, summarizing the types of comments made.

The responses coded blue were no/little effort in involvement defined as no or very little involvement from the community and being satisfied with that level of involvement. Although few responses were provided they tended to encourage minimal, if any involvement. Approximately 9 % (5 participants) of the responses were coded as no/little involvement. The specific comments pertaining to ways of involvement presented for this area were "only by serving on committees when asked", "electing all BOE and Superintendent", board members stay involved in the community and take phone calls, "other than the city council members. I wouldn't say that the community is involved."

The responses coded yellow were basic involvement defined as traditional means of involvement usually required of the school board. Approximately 26% (16 participants) of the responses were coded as uni-directional communication effort. The comments presented included citizens being involved through committees, volunteering, interaction with school administration, local radio and newspaper, open meetings, and input to administration.

The responses coded green included efforts that were more involved than traditional means of involvement and were represented by yellow. The green responses were defined as more involved approaches of involvement above the required level of involvement opportunities

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that must be provided by school boards. The responses provided tended to solicit involvement in a multi-directional manner. Approximately 35% (20 participants) of the responses were coded as more involved effort. The efforts presented included committee/subcommittee structure, 5-year plans, pilot involvement programs, community forums and town meetings, committees, letters to local paper, tax referendums, good communication with all officials, and citizens provide feedback on points of interest.

The responses coded purple were innovative involvement efforts defined as more innovative means for involvement with the community. The responses provided tended to solicit information in a more non-traditional multi-directional manner. Approximately 16% (9 participants) of the responses were coded as innovative effort. The efforts presented consisted of the vision committee, policy workshop, educational foundation, community committee to help determine if we need a tax increase, superintendent's moment (open door meeting with the community), public presentations, community meetings on specific issues, sit in on administrator interviews, roundtable discussions, and completing questionnaires. Participant responses are found in Appendix 8.

Ways for the Community to be More Involved in Decision-Making

The qualitative survey data for question 16 (found in Table 10), which asked what ways you would like for the community to be involved in decision-making, was coded and four themes emerged. The responses were coded as no desire for more involvement (blue), common input/school level (yellow), districtwide involvement (green), and innovative involvement (purple). Unless there are few or unique responses the themes are presented as generalized statements, summarizing the types of comments made.

The responses coded blue represented no desire for more involvement which was defined as no or very little involvement from the community and being satisfied with that level of involvement. Although few responses were provided they tended to only encourage minimal, if any, involvement. Fourteen percent (7 participants) of the responses were coded as no or very little involvement. The ways of involvement presented for this area were "honestly, I can't think of any at the moment", "our system seems to work well the way it is. Our superintendent, board administrators, teachers and personnel along with a few invited parents and business leaders seem to have good results in decision making".

The responses coded yellow were common input/school level defined as traditional means of involvement which was usually involvement encouraged at the local school level. Twenty percent (10 participants) of the responses were coded as common input/school level involvement. The comments presented included school board presidents wanting the community to be more involved by reading to the children, more involved in their child's education, offer more positive suggestions, more parent involvement, volunteer worker in the school, better attendance at all school functions, dollar commitment, time commitment, and more participation in school activities.

The responses coded green were districtwide involvement efforts defined as more school board presidents wanting the community to be more involved district wide. The responses provided tended to solicit involvement in a multi-directional manner. Thirty-six percent (18 participants) of the responses were coded as more involved effort. The efforts presented consisted of more attendance at board meetings, volunteering to participate in the decision-making process, more involvement of city leaders, advisory committees needed, and citizens provide feedback on points of interest.

The responses coded purple were innovative involvement efforts defined as more innovative means for involvement with the community. The responses provided tended to solicit information in a more non-traditional and multi-directional manner. Eight percent (4 participants) of the responses were coded as innovative effort. These school board presidents would like for the community to be more involved by building partnerships with business and community where they feel that public school benefits, re-establish key communication programs in each school, strategic planning involving all segments of community, business communicating needs—especially to high school, and the community to come together as a team to help by making decisions for more at-risk families. Participant responses are found in Appendix 8.

Table 11

Summary of Frequency Responses for Questions 14, 15, and 16

Question 14: Ways Citizen Participation is sought	No/little effort	Uni-directional communication	Multi- dimensional communication	Innovative communication
	2	11	22	18
Question 15: Ways community is currently involved in school system decision making	No/little involvement	Basic involvement	More involvement	Innovative Involvement
	5	16	20	9
Question 16: Ways you would like for community to be more involved	No desire for more involvement	Common input/school level	District wide involvement	Innovative involvement
	7	10	18	4

Most Important Things that Draw People to This School District

The qualitative survey data for question 22, which asked "What are the three most important things that draw people to the school district", was coded and seven themes emerged. Participants were asked to select three items reflecting the most important things that draw people to the school district. There were a total of 165 responses. The responses were coded as

Community, Academics/Technology, Reputation, Climate/Culture, Extracurricular, Leadership, and Finances. The seven themes emerged from the analysis of the responses given for this question. This was an open ended question so themes had to be identified and responses chunked under each theme. The themes that emerged were very obvious and it was easy to chunk the responses under the themes presented. Unless there were only a few or very unique responses, the themes are presented as generalized statements, summarizing the types of comments made.

The responses coded as community were defined as the involvement of parents, businesses, and community members in the individual schools and school system. Nineteen percent (32) of the responses were provided in this category, those provided focused on the dynamics of the community the majority of the time. The comments presented included location, community support, socioeconomic status of the community, parent involvement, "few blacks and Hispanics", business support, diversity, crime rate, "community with same passion for excellence", and community spirit.

The responses coded as academics were defined as the academic offerings of the school system. Approximately 39% (65) of the responses were provided in this category, those provided tended to focus on the academic offerings in schools as well as the quality of the staff in the schools and district. The comments presented included quality of the academic programs, excellent teachers, new curriculum programs, academic successes (top scores, awards), challenging curriculum, unique programs to attract the middle-upper class back into the system, special education program, highly qualified teachers, hope for future improvements, fine arts program, clear successes for each child, and technological excellence.

The responses coded as climate/culture included the facilities as well as the discipline and culture of the schools and system. Approximately 14% (23) of the responses were in this category, those provided tended focus on condition of the facilities and the discipline within the schools. The comments presented included appearance of campuses, small classes, student behavior, safety, quality of facilities, size, personal involvement with students' parents, safe/learning environment, communication, "community feel of schools", and overall school climate.

The responses coded as extracurricular were defined as athletics and other extracurricular activities. Approximately 7% (12) of the responses were provided in this category, and most of those tended focus on athletics. The comments presented included extracurricular activities, athletics, and co-curricular program.

The responses coded as finance spoke to the financial status of the school system. Approximately 1% (2) of the responses was provided in this category. The comments presented included "finance and budget" and "locally funded and supported."

The responses coded as leadership were defined as the administration of the school district and school. This included the Superintendent, principals, school board members, and other leadership present in the district. Approximately 8% (13) of the responses were provided in this category. The comments presented included general administration (friendliness, strength, and communication), friendly communication, strong leaders (superintendent and principal), strong political leaders, board members (attitude, change in members), and caring faculty and staff.

The responses coded as reputation were defined as the reputation of the community, the district and the individual schools. Approximately 12% (19) of the responses were provided in

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this category. The comments presented included overall reputation (low crime, high testing, unity, image, tradition, and credibility of system) excellent schools, "well-to-do folks and area", "parents went to public school and want their children to experience diversity of a public school", "best high school tech school in the state", "system that strives to serve the needs of every child" (transfer, transient), history of excellence (sports, scholar's bowl, and Science Olympiad). Participant responses are found in the Appendix 8.

Other Comments

Question twenty-three allowed participants the opportunity to give general comments that they had not had the opportunity to provide through the survey questions. Some participants offered wishes of good luck with the study and expressed their desire to view the results while others shared comments related to community engagement in school board decision-making as well as the construct of the survey. Some of the comments that stood out were:

- "We broadcast our board meetings and forums. We have hired former TV anchors to produce a host magazine style program featuring our programs, students, and teachers."

- "On question #17 I marked Community forums and board meetings on all three because all are invited—however, few people attend board meetings."

- "People, for the most part, leave school business and decisions to the board. Only when an issue directly affects them do they engage the board. As much information as the board puts out on these decisions, it still doesn't seem to reach the public."

- "In getting community involvement, the greatest obstacle is the political motives many groups have as their main agenda. Very rarely do they offer solutions to problems; they simply want to have the press hear their complaints without any

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substantiation of the perceived issue/problem and rarely if ever do they offer in answers. Lack of parental involvement is a problem affecting many districts and students suffer greatly because of it. Yet no one in the communities where this apathy occurs wants to assist with solutions; the simply many times blame teachers and administrators for the children's issues caused by poor parenting."

- "Usually people in the community get involved when they see, or think they see, something negative for them."

- "This questionnaire was hard for me to complete, because of the selected answers. #17 didn't have an "other" space. Climate and attitude can be good and bad…both affect work differently. You need to include that as a choice."

- "When things are going well the school board rarely hears from the community. If a coach or principal is being hired or fired, people get involved. Parents and the community want a good system, but they would rather (for the most part) sit on the sidelines."

- New President election, school district funds, community priority

- We rarely have any people at our meetings.

- Our children have to be our top priority.

- A large percentage of our schools population is economically disadvantaged. We also have two other school systems and two private schools in our county. This makes community school support watered down.

- 	The community as a whole is very supportive at our school system. They support the many fundraising events that we have. This is a huge financial boost. But, unless

the members of the community have children or grandchildren in the system, I don't

feel that they are interested.

The comments were insightful and many participants provided comments that helped offer

richness to the research.

Table 12

Frequency of Responses by Themes for Question 22

	Community	Academics/ Technology	Reputation	Climate/ Culture	Extracurricular	Leadership	Finance
Question 22: What are three most important things that draw people to this school district?	32	65	19	23	12	13	2

Summary

Chapter Four provided a detailed description of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

The areas of significance found were presented and described. Findings are discussed in Chapter

Five in relationship to implications of the study, recommendations, and suggestions for further

research.

CHAPTER V. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER

RESEARCH

Citizens must feel a sense of ownership for public schools to thrive and, in times like these, even survive.
Dr. Sally Howell, AASB Executive Director (personal communication, January 14, 2010)

The purpose of this study was to explore the Alabama school board presidents'

perceptions about community engagement to determine how Alabama school boards are

engaging the community in decision-making. The following research questions provided the

framework for this study:

1.	When making decisions, how much emphasis do school board presidents give to

input from administrators, teachers, and staff, parents/grandparents, business leaders, people with

no children or grandchildren in the school system?

2.	Is there a relationship between the demographics of School Board Presidents and

the value placed on input of others when making school board decisions?

3.	How do school boards communicate with stakeholders?

4.	How does stakeholder current level of involvement compare to the Board's desire

for involvement in planning, advising, and decision making?

5.	What are the barriers to community engagement with School Boards and School

Districts?

6.   What are the motivating factors affecting community engagement with School Boards and School Districts?

The role of board members includes keeping a pulse on the community and the school system and to identify concerns and suggestions proactively. This chapter provides a discussion of the key findings and emergent themes presented in Chapter Four and implications of those findings. The chapter also includes a discussion of areas for future research. The following quote reminds us why these findings are so important.

> Today's local board of education is the leader on the front lines of public education. The board is responsible for putting in place the proper keystones for students to learn and achieve at the highest level possible. Board members' primary agenda is raising student achievement and involving the community in the attainment of that goal. (Vermont School Board Association, 2006, p. 2)

Review of Findings

Quantitative data interspersed with qualitative data helps to develop a richer, more accurate picture of community engagement (Reeves, 2002). After conducting an analysis of the survey data both qualitatively and quantitatively it appears that very little authentic input is solicited from the community, and even less so from those community stakeholders who do not have children or grandchildren in school. The perception of a majority of the school board presidents who returned surveys was that community involvement should take place at the school level through PTO, fundraisers, athletic/extracurricular events, or other traditional venues. Very few school board presidents reported that they solicited input from stakeholders except through the use of committees that required community participation or by posting an

announcement about the school board meeting. There were several school board presidents who did solicit innovative input from community members but those survey results were minimal.

The demographic information gathered from the returned surveys indicated that a majority of those returning the surveys had been a board member for more than 5 years (63.3%), had a bachelor's degree or higher (75%), their ethnicity was White (78.3%), their superintendent was appointed (73.3%), and they had a local education foundation established (65%). The long tenure of participants illustrates the majority of experienced school board members felt that it was important enough to return the survey, in essence suggesting that the research might be fruitful. Several organizations and board members have requested a copy of the study findings. This implies that those who are in the position and feel confident in that role did not want to miss an opportunity to provide input on this issue. Based on the responses of elected board presidents, they are a population that seems to feel they were elected to make decisions and they should not be making huge efforts to involve the community in "their" role as school board president.

Weight School Board Presidents Give to Input from Stakeholders

School board presidents tend to place more value on the opinions of the administrators, teachers and staff, and the least value on opinions from people without children. Participants placed considerable weight on opinions of administrators, teachers and staff with a mean rating of 5.16 and reported valuing the input from parents/grandparents secondly with a mean rating of 4.1. The mean rating for those without children/grandchildren in the schools was 3.26.

School Board Presidents' Demographics and the Value of Input from Stakeholders

The data illustrates that school board presidents serving on boards with more than 5 members gave significantly more weight to input from parents and grandparents than did those school board presidents serving on boards with only five members (mean ratings of 4.85 and

4.14 respectively). This finding, while significant statistically, does not have practical significance. The rating of four indicates the high end of "some weight" and the rating of five indicates the low end of "considerable weight". Given that the mean difference is only .72 points and both ratings fall between four and five, more research would need to be done to determine if there is any practical meaning to this finding.

School board presidents serving on boards with an appointed superintendent gave significantly more weight to input from people without children than did those school board presidents serving on boards with an elected superintendent (mean rating of 3.5 and 2.63 respectively). This statistically significant difference has practical meaning given the 1.34 mean difference, indicating that while those boards with elected superintendents place no/little weight on input from those without children, those boards with appointed superintendents place some weight on their input. This finding is interesting in that based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), 41% of those reported were without their own children. This is a large percentage of our population to be "least involved" in the decision-making process. Possibly it takes more effort to reach out to those community members who do not have a direct link to the school system. Although this group is the majority when it comes to voting on all issues including those related to education, there does not appear to be a concern about soliciting their involvement in school decision making. Perhaps an issue related to this situation could be that when they are ready to vote on educational issues their only reference was when they were in K–12 education which could have occurred decades ago.

School Boards Communication with Stakeholders

Data indicates the most common communication devices used with administrators, teachers, and staff were email (86%), local media (76%), district websites (70%), and school newsletters (60%). The most frequently used communication devices with people without children were local media (95%), community presentations (68%), and district websites (57%). All of these strategies use uni-directional communication, allowing the school board to share information with others, but limiting the amount of input the school board receives from those groups. Dawson (2005) states, "community engagement is also the way to garner support for district projects, funding initiatives and policy changes" (p. 1). The Oregon School Boards Association (2005a) reminds us that the goal of changing attitudes in the community is not necessarily more communication. Uni-directional communication is not engagement and does not always provide opportunities for an exchange of ideas or opinions. School boards miss out on innovative ideas or important points of view that could be offered to them if more active engagement with the community and other stakeholder groups were to occur.

Stakeholder's Current Involvement as Compared to the Board's Desire for Involvement in Planning, Advising, and Decision Making

Data indicates the most frequently used way the school board solicits input from all populations studied was at school board meetings. Many times school board members believe that they are involving the community when they advertise the time and location of the monthly board meeting. Attending a board meeting does not mean that the attitude towards community engagement is present in the school board, the superintendency, the school system or even the community.

We need to build trust between schools and those whose only contact with schools is

likely to come at tax time—those who seem to know only what the hypercritical media

publicize about the schools and what state and federal officials with a privatization

agenda focus on. (Meier, 2003b, p. 5)

The most frequently used ways school board presidents reported involving parents or other

citizens in a planning or advisory capacity in the school district was fundraising (78%).

Fundraising is another uni-directional approach. Parents' role in the planning or advisory role

with fundraising occurs only as they determine the type of fundraising that will take place and

most times they have the opportunity to determine what the funds will be used for based on need.

Barriers Affecting Community Engagement with School Boards and School Districts

The most frequently identified barriers for involving the community in school-board

decision making was the lack of community engagement being a community priority (45%) and

the lack of communication (45%). The Learning Network (2002) states

… educators often view parents and community members as a factor to 'deal with' rather

than as essential collaborators. Fortunately, [research suggests that leaders of] effective

schools are abandoning this attitude at the same time parents are abandoning the old

hands-off one…. Involving all stakeholders from the beginning of your school reform

effort ensures the best chance of success, just as presenting a detailed plan to your

community as a 'done deal' will probably spell failure. (p. 1)

These are the same reasons explaining barriers that keep people or organizations from

becoming more involved with district decision-making. "Boards should view community

engagement as a strategic, proactive opportunity to strengthen their school systems. Part of that

strategic opportunity may be to develop a better understanding of the public's needs, concerns,

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and expectations" (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005a, p. 1). "Community engagement is a long-term fix, not a single event" (Oregon School Boards Association, 2005, p. 1). Community engagement is a process not an activity and it is a process that may take extensive professional development for the school board members so that they can provide a culture that cultivates engagement. In this study, forty-five percent of survey respondents said that community engagement was not being viewed as a community priority and that it this view was the greatest barrier for being involved with district decision-making. Ironically, 45% of survey respondents said that the greatest barrier was lack of communication, yet most board communications identified in this study were uni-directional, limiting opportunities for community and other stakeholder engagement.

Motivating Factors Affecting Community Engagement with School Boards and School Districts

The data indicates that the most frequently identified motivators for people becoming engaged in districts or schools were a school board's attitude (58%), viewing engagement as a community priority (58%), superintendent attitude (57%), and district/school climate (55%). Harmon and Dickens (2004) report that "reams of research and anecdotal evidence show that the most effective school districts have a strong partnership among the schools, the community, and the home" (p. 29). "To be successful, the administration must set broad goals and require a broad range of accountability measures, so the public can monitor its schools. Transparency should be as much of a goal for this administration as transformation" (Hardy, 2009, p. 19). Being transparent to the community, building relationships and growing trust has huge potential within all school districts. If research supports the fact that community engagement has the potential to

improve students, schools, and districts, then why aren't school districts making great efforts to engage them?

This research data indicates community not viewing community engagement as a priority as the top barrier for engagement. Ranking second as a barrier was lack of communication. These barriers could indicate a range of issues from having trust in the decision-makers, not knowing how to be engaged, or not really thinking that their engagement is important. School board attitudes and superintendent attitudes were the top motivators for community engagement. Based on these findings if the attitudes are not positive then there may be a decline in community engagement. Therefore, this research leads one to believe that school districts where the school board and superintendent do not have collaborative attitudes with the community may need additional training on how to encourage community engagement. Training may change the mindset of the superintendent and school board and result in the creation of a more positive attitude which may lead to community engagement becoming more of a priority. Through professional development and training community engagement could be encouraged and valued as a beneficial tool to improve our educational system and our community. The community may rally behind the district in greater ways because of their engagement in the decision-making and the school system. People tend to be more invested when they are a part of the vision.

Perhaps school board presidents assume that the community is engaged if they are participating at the local school level and possibly they do not really know how much involvement is taking place in the schools. Community engagement at the district level must be encouraged and supported. At the district level it appears that engagement is not viewed as necessary until the passage of legislation mandates this approach. When the community is engaged and stays engaged then they may become an advocate for the district. The community

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can then begin to tell the educational story from their perspective and identify areas of success and need that may not be apparent to educators and board members. Willona Sloan (2008b) reminds us that during this time in our economy administrators are trying to find ways to fund equipment, activities, and academic programs. "Even more than monetary gain, business partnerships can supply schools with volunteer tutors, mentors, and other positive role models to support students" (Sloan, 2008b, p. 1). Assuming that parent and community engagement is taking place at the school level yet not providing opportunities at the district level may very well mean that limited engagement is taking place in the entire district. The survey comments were interesting especially concerning engagement and the value placed on community being part of decision making. One respondent commented, "Our system seems to work well the way it is. Our Superintendent, board, administrators, teachers and personnel along with a few invited parents and business leaders seem to have good results in decision making."

Yet, many questions remain regarding who determines good results? Is the community aware of the decisions being made, do they not care, or do they place all trust in the selected decision-makers? Community engagement carries some risk. As Chadwick (2004) reminds us,

> … they will tell you, and you may not like it. The public will expect to see that their input has played a role in decision making. The school district risks greater damage by asking people what they think and then doing nothing about it, than if educators made no attempt to engage the public at all. (p. 36)

A paradigm shift in the way that business as usual takes place must occur in order to allow for actual input and creating an attitude of school board members truly desiring to know how the public views public school education. There must be a willingness to hearing the suggestions and concerns they have.

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Based on the survey data, school board presidents' perceptions of the community's desire to be involved in decision making is that they do not really want to be involved. Would the community be involved if they were given an opportunity to provide multi-dimensional input or have they been given opportunities and did not take advantage of them? Uni-directional input might not be viewed as being of great value for community members and may increase the sense of disconnect (Mathews, 2006) and distrust they have for school officials.

Another important question remains; are the perceptions of school board presidents authentic or espoused? If the community is provided a forum for regular input then the decisions of the school board are not always "cut and dried." An environment where actively inviting input from all stakeholders is common and welcomed might make school board decision making more time consuming. Yet hopefully the time would be viewed as being of great value if the collaboration and communication were taking place across the district. Community engagement can provide benefits when meaningful collaborative partnerships are built (Hatch, 2009).

Another concern may be the role expectations that school board members have for themselves and that community members have for those board members they select or elect to make policy and financial decisions for the school system. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, reminds us that if schools are not properly functioning the school district and the city suffer. Schools are vital in the social and economic pulse of the community. Reputations of school districts draw home buyers and build the economic capacity of the district (Duncan, 2009). Based on the research findings, school board members may think they were elected to make decisions and the input of the community is not necessary at the district level. Maybe community members trust board members to make the decisions or maybe they do not know how to be involved. What we do know, though, is that education impacts the community and the

reputation of the community for years. Research shows that building relationships, being transparent, and having trust can improve the district (Hatch, 2009; Meir, 2003b). There is a possibility that community members do not believe that it is their job to be engaged in the decision making. If all taxpaying citizens showed an interest in their investments by being involved in the success of the school district, the schools, and whether students are graduating college and/or career ready, there might be a stronger sense of trust in schools as a formal organization.

The data in this study indicate that all community groups are not authentically engaged in school board decision-making a majority of the time. Community members may be given opportunities to listen but not to respond. If a response is made it may or may not be taken into consideration. A bottom line is that many times community engagement is the piece of school reform that is neglected (Hatch, 2009). One school board member stated that "the community had little input and they liked it that way." Providing limited or no avenues for multi-directional input allows a few to control the majority of the decisions made in the district. Based on the survey data there are districts where this is the case and they appear to be happy with the situation and the results they yield.

The data presents a natural link to research discussed in chapter two. In order for the school board to be invested in community engagement it may take training from a well respected external agency or individual. "Even a board that is philosophically committed to community engagement may need practical assistance from an outside resource to get started" (Kettering Foundation, 2005a, p. 13). In summary, based on the data from this research, Alabama school boards are not engaging the community in school board decision making and there is research

that indicates that engagement has the potential to make a huge difference in the success of students.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the data the majority of the school board presidents participating in this research valued the opinions of the administrators, teachers, and staff most when making school board decisions. The data further illustrated the opinions of the people without children are valued least and their opinions are least solicited. The data illustrated that school board presidents serving on boards with an appointed superintendent gave significantly more weight on input from people without children. School board presidents with appointed superintendents had a mean rating of 3.5 and a mean rating of 2.63 for those with an elected superintendent.

The lack of community engagement may help to explain why it is difficult to get education legislation or bond issues passed in many areas of the state. When communicating with administrators, teachers, and staff the most commonly used device was email and then local media. The most common way of communicating with people without children was local media and then community presentations. All of these strategies may provide information but do not allow easy avenues for seeking clarifications, asking additional questions, or offering suggestions. These results are somewhat frightening due to the fact that many times there is a dependency on local media to spread the good news about school systems. Good news does not make people tune in to watch…good news does not sell newspapers. It is critical that in every district the superintendent and school board members create a working relationship with the media, especially if there is such a strong reliance on the media to provide communications to the public about the school system. As a school board member, I believe it is our job to sell our school system and that we should not wait on someone else to do this for us. School districts

need to keep their web pages updated and have opportunities posted for involvement. There are ways to have community members sign up so that they are electronically notified of news, updates, needs, and more. This would help to build connections and relationships. The cost for this is usually minimal because of the electronic world in which we now live. A regularly updated website allows many community members opportunities to make informed decisions and have informed conversations on the street about the public schools. Because not all community members may have easy access to computers and the internet, though, it would be important to continue to use multiple avenues of communication for notifying the public about special events and opportunities to become involved.

The data in this study reveals that the most frequently used way the school board solicits input from all populations studied was through school board meetings. It is mandated that the public be advised of monthly school board meetings. This is not an innovative technique or approach to soliciting input and if the structure is not different than the traditional school board meeting it might at best be a way to educate or inform the public, but certainly it is not an avenue to engage them. The majority of the time when the community is invited to attend a typical board meeting they are there as an observer and not asked to participate or provide input. There are rare examples of board meetings for special purposes where dialogue occurs. At best, the community comes when there is a hot issue and they are allowed to speak for an allotted time but typically they do not get a response to their concern or issue. One respondent did share that their school board meetings were televised on public television allowing the public the opportunity to stay informed. A recommendation is that public input be listed as an agenda item for every board meeting whether there is someone speaking that night or not. This allows the public to see that the public opinion is valued and desired. Yet, this does not provide a forum for most people—

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and especially it is not an appropriate forum for people who are already disconnected from the system for various reasons This research data indicates that the top motivators for engagement were school board attitude and superintendent attitude. If there is a continuous line on the agenda, it may demonstrate that the public's opinion is important to the board. School board agendas do not always include community input as an action item unless there appears to be approval prior to the meeting. It is a mandatory requirement for school boards to offer public notice of school board meetings but it is not mandatory for them to have input. The more involved people are the more they support a plan (Holifield & Flood, 2005). An example of community involvement would be a focus group reviewing district data and making suggestions and recommendations on how to meet the needs of their growing student population. The school board could use special meetings as a way for the group to present updates to the district and the community and keep them informed on the dialogue that has taken place and solicit additional input.

There were some innovative ways of involving the community presented in the data that could work in most school districts. The surveys revealed that some districts have "strategic planning involving all segments of the community", some even have community representation on interview panels, hosting policy workshops, and others have "roundtable discussions with parents, city leaders, etc." There are innovative engagement opportunities taking place in Alabama, but the opportunities are limited according to this research. Town meetings could allow the public an open forum to identify needs and develop engagement from a grassroots level for the school system.

The data revealed that the most frequently used ways school boards involved parents or other citizens in a planning or advisory capacity in the school district was fundraising (78%). The

community should be more involved than only being charged to raise money and determine how

that fundraiser money can be used to benefit children. When 78% of the respondents identified

this as the greatest way that parents are involved in a planning or advisory manner, it could lead

one to believe that stakeholder input on academics and student achievement are not solicited or

valued. Rather, this situation could suggest that school board members are more concerned about

controlling or limiting input and finding ways for the public to do things that directly benefit the

school board's already established agenda. The community at large should be involved in a much

greater sense not only so that when tax referendums or policy changes or drastic system structure

changes occur they are a part of the pulse of the decision making and can make informed

decisions, but because they want to stay informed and serve the school district. Citizens are

more invested if they can easily sense a connection to their own world of family and

environment (Kettering, 2006). Through deliberation and community conversations the

community members can find connections to their own lives which give the initiative to help

solve a problem or make the community a better place. Engaging citizens benefits schools and

communities. In Chicago, when the community began to work with the school board on school

reform, students benefitted through rising graduation rates, increased college enrollment, and

improved state student achievement scores (Duncan, 2009). Creating the collaborative input

process required the school board to be meeting with the community as a whole. McLaughlin

(2002) tells us that once the audience has been established and objectives are set then school

boards must "establish a format for gathering information. Formats include surveys, focus

groups, voice polls, advisory group reports, town meetings, and school board hearings" (p. 2).

There are a variety of strategies for engaging the community.

For community engagement to be a priority there must be paradigm shifts in communities where it is not. This involves giving the community opportunities to provide input and authentically wanting their input. Everyone in a community benefits from having a strong public school system in their community. Strong public schools help to sell homes; strong public schools bring business opportunities; and strong public schools prepare children for an uncertain future. Meier (2003b) reminds us that "we cannot hope to raise a generation of thoughtful citizens in schools where adults are not themselves viewed as thoughtful citizens" (p. 5). As members of a school board and school district we can elect to blame the community or we can find ways to actively engage the community (Meier, 2003a). McLaughlin (2002) reminds us that "public participation won't make all our constituents happy, but it will give those who want to get involved the opportunity to be heard" (p. 5).

Getting some parents to have a desire to be involved is difficult due to prior negative school experiences of their own (Chadwick, 2004). It is a school board's job to sell the value of education and to help this value grow as a priority within the entire community. Our society will support children financially forever if we do not build them up today and prepare them for their future careers and roles within society. In many cases a culture shift must take place before the educational system will change (Harmon & Dickens, 2004).

Data from this study reveals that the most frequently identified motivators for people becoming engaged in districts or schools were a school board's attitude (58%), community priority (58%), superintendent attitude (57%), and district/school climate (55%). This strongly suggests that if the school board and superintendent have attitudes that support the importance of community engagement then it will motivate people to become engaged. Slowly over time

engagement becomes a community priority, shifting the culture paradigm and changing the dynamics between the school system and the community.

Based on the combination of the literature review and the research results, it is clear that the community must force themselves into the picture. Whether the public realizes it or not, the schools are not someone else's problem … they hold our future. Margaret Mead states, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Wikiquote, 2010). This is a critical point because, as a school board and school staff, it is our job to reach out and help all populations of the community be fully invested in the education system. This means far more than engaging parents in fundraising efforts. Margaret Mead also states, "If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place" (UCLA Lab School, 2010). If education were a quilt, one could say that each member of society has a thread to contribute. That contribution is what makes the quilt so unique and not the same as anyone else's quilt. In systems where input is actively solicited, valued, and expected the quilt is so detailed and elaborate, but unfortunately, in the majority of the school systems across Alabama, the quilts are only created with threads from the school boards and superintendents … with limited or no involvement from stakeholders. The process of engaging the community can offer great opportunities for providing them a voice of involvement for collaborative purposes. School boards must allow all sections of the population to have ownership in the school system and the education of our future and teach the public how to be truly involved in the decision-making process.

Areas for Further Research

Limited research has been conducted in Alabama on the importance of community engagement in school board decision-making and the types of community engagement that are taking place. The following recommendations for additional research are made after reflecting on the research process and findings of the study:

1. The study could be replicated to include all school board members and not limit the participants to the school board president. Perhaps other school board members, particularly those newly elected or selected, would have different perceptions about the importance of community engagement The survey return rate might be greater if surveys were distributed and collected during a statewide conference.

2. The study could be replicated from the community's perspective and compared to the perception of the school board president's perspective. It is important to determine if communities actually want to be engaged or whether that is espoused. Another important factor is whether there is a disconnect between school boards believing that parents are engaged and what is actually occurring. Focus groups might provide more in-depth data and provide richer results and clarification that can result from opportunities to ask probing questions.

3. Further studies should be done to determine the impact or lack of impact community engagement plays in school improvement. If it is clearly shown that community engagement does positively influence school improvement, there will be greater urgency for determining high-quality ways to address that lack of engagement, especially in low performing school districts.

4. Further studies should be done to further clarify the difference that exists in the amount of weight school boards place on input from parents and grandparents based on the number of board members and what that difference, if it exists, means.

5. Further studies should be done to determine why school boards with elected superintendents place less weight on the input from people without children than those with appointed superintendents. Qualitative research approaches will likely be appropriate for this exploratory study.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to determine how Alabama school boards are engaging the community in decision-making. While research supports that community engagement benefits the students (citations), this study revealed that Alabama school boards do not provide a variety of opportunities for engagement. However, in fairness to school board officials, the community, at least in most cases, does not argue against these non-inclusive practices.

Conclusion

Based on what was learned though the literature review and the research results, it is increasingly clear that the community must force themselves into the picture if they wish to be involved in school board decision making. Dr. Sandra Sims-deGrafenried states,

For public schools to thrive—perhaps even for them to survive—our citizens must feel a sense of ownership. To make that a reality, school boards must continually work to get input from parents and non-parents, their own employees and those who will employ their graduates and from the students themselves. More than that, school boards must take that input into consideration as they make the decisions that impact the lives of the

children they serve and the teachers and staff who work for them. (Sims-deGraffenried,

S., personal communication, November 1, 2006)

Many times community members say they do not have a vested interest in the public schools. This is rarely true because the products of public schools are our employers, our dental hygienists, our cashiers, our doctors, our teachers. We should all be concerned about the educational preparation of today's students and tomorrow's citizens. As members of the community, we must make the best of our investment for the future.

We live in a democratic society, yet based on this study, it seems that most school districts are led by only a few chosen officials. Whether the public realizes it or not, as taxpayers the public educational system is part of our investment. We would not trust someone with our personal finances without asking questions. Why are we not as concerned about the future of our community and society by being a partner in the educational process. As a school board and school staff it is our job to reach out and help all populations of the community learn how to become involved and develop the desire to be invested in the education system. The process of engaging the community has great opportunities for providing them a voice of involvement for collaborative purposes. Schools are vital in the social and economic pulse of the community. Reputations of school districts draw home buyers and build the economic capacity of the district (Duncan, 2009). Yet, community partnerships sometimes become a requirement that is checked off rather than something that is truly embraced and practiced in school districts (Huber, 2009). "In this climate of dwindling resources and increasing expectations, educational partnerships are suddenly on the radar" (Huber, 2009, p. 32).

Researcher Reflections

Through this research I found that school board presidents report that overall there is limited engagement and they like it that way. It is disturbing to me that the school board presidents do not truly want an engaged community and feel that the community does not have enough to offer for them to provide that opportunity. The concept of "it takes a village" is still alive and well and community involvement is one aspect that we cannot lose sight of in the educational arena (Hall & Cordell, 2008).

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APPENDIX 1

ALABAMA SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Survey

Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement

As you begin the survey, there are two important points we want you to keep in mind:

1. This survey is confidential. <u>No one in your school system or community will ever see your answers to any of the questions.</u> The researchers are the only people who will ever see the completed surveys. Your responses will be combined with those from other surveys, so your answers will never be looked at individually.

2. This survey is voluntary. We appreciate your participation. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer, you may leave them blank.

Demographics:

Please fill in all bubbles completely (questions 1-11), rather than marking your answers with a ✓ or an X.

1. Years served on the school board:

- ○ First year
- ○ 2-5 years
- ○ 6-10 years
- ○ 11-15 years
- ○ More than 15 years

2. Were you:

- ○ Elected   ○ Appointed

3. Gender:

- ○ Male   ○ Female

4. Highest Level of Education:

- ○ High School/GED
- ○ Associates Degree
- ○ Bachelor's Degree
- ○ Graduate Degree
- ○ Doctorate
- ○ Post-Doctorate
- ○ Other: _____

5. Local tax contribution to system:
- ○ Less than 10 mils
- ○ 10-20 mils
- ○ more than 20 mils

6. Number of members on your school board:

- ○ 5   ○ 7   ○ 9   ○ Other: ____

7. How would you describe your ethnic background? *(Fill in the bubbles for all that apply)*

- ○ White (not Hispanic)
- ○ Black/African American
- ○ Hispanic/Latino
- ○ African
- ○ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ○ Other (please specify)
  _____

8. Is your Superintendent:

- ○ Elected   ○ Appointed

9. Approximate student enrollment in school system:

- ○ Less than 1000 students
- ○ 1000-3000 students
- ○ 3000-5000 students
- ○ 5000-7000 students
- ○ More than 7000 students

10. Primary Classification of school system:
- ○ Suburban
- ○ Urban
- ○ Rural

11. Do you have a local community based education foundation?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Responses:

12. When you are making school board decisions how much value do you give to the following sources: (circle response)

	Don't Know	No/Little Weight		Some Weight		Considerable Weight	
a. Administrators, teachers, and staff	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Parents/Grandparents	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Business Leaders	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. People without children or grandchildren attending the school system	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

13. How does your district currently communicate with the following community populations (Please check all that apply)?

a. Administrators, teachers, and staff:
- ❏ District newsletters
- ❏ School newsletters
- ❏ Other (please list): _____
- ❏ District website
- ❏ Email
- ❏ Local media
- ❏ Community presentation

b. Parents/Grandparents:
- ❏ District newsletters
- ❏ School newsletters
- ❏ Other (please list): _____
- ❏ District website
- ❏ Email
- ❏ Local media
- ❏ Community presentations

c. Business Leaders:
- ❏ District newsletters
- ❏ School newsletters
- ❏ Other (please list): _____
- ❏ District website
- ❏ Email
- ❏ Local media
- ❏ Community presentations

d. People without children or grandchildren attending the school system:
- ❏ District newsletters
- ❏ School newsletters
- ❏ Other (please list): _____
- ❏ District website
- ❏ Email
- ❏ Local media
- ❏ Community presentations

14. In what ways do you seek citizen participation? (Please print clearly)

_____

_____

15. In what ways is your community currently involved in school system decision-making? (Please print clearly)

_____

_____

_____

16. In what ways would you like for the community to be more involved in decision-making? (Please print clearly)

_____

_____

17. How does your district currently solicit input for school board decision making from the following community populations: (check all that apply)

   a. Administrators, teachers, and staff:

   ❑ Community forums   ❑ Surveys   ❑ District Website

   ❑ School Board Meetings   ❑ Email   ❑ Phone calls

   b. Parents/Grandparents:

   ❑ Community forums   ❑ Surveys   ❑ District Website

   ❑ School Board Meetings   ❑ Email   ❑ Phone calls

   c. Business Leaders:

   ❑ Community forums   ❑ Surveys   ❑ District Website

   ❑ School Board Meetings   ❑ Email   ❑ Phone calls

   d. People without children or grandchildren attending the school system:

   ❑ Community forums   ❑ Surveys   ❑ District Website

   ❑ School Board Meetings   ❑ Email   ❑ Phone calls

18. Check the areas in which you involve parents or other citizens in a planning advisory capacity in your school district. (check all that apply)

   ❑ Objectives and priorities for the school and district   ❑ Evaluation of programs

   ❑ Program changes   ❑ Fund raising

   ❑ New curricular programs being considered   ❑ Strategic planning

   ❑ Student activities   ❑ School-based decision making

   ❑ Student behavior, rights and responsibilities   ❑ Other: _____

   ❑ Finance and budget   ❑ N/A

   ❑ School calendar

19. What are the barriers for involving the community in school board decision making? (check all that apply)

   ❑ Superintendent's attitude   ❑ Lack of Power

   ❑ District/School Climate   ❑ Community priority

   ❑ School Board's Attitude   ❑ Other: _____

   ❑ Lack of Communication   ❑ Other: _____

20. What keeps people or organizations from becoming more involved with district decision making? (check all that apply)

   ❑ Superintendent's attitude   ❑ Lack of Power

   ❑ District/School Climate   ❑ Community priority

   ❑ School Board's Attitude   ❑ Other: _____

   ❑ Lack of Communication   ❑ Other: _____

21. In your opinion, what motivates people to become engaged with the district or schools? (check all that apply)

❑ Superintendent's attitude   ❑ Lack of Power

❑ District/School Climate   ❑ Community priority

❑ School Board's Attitude   ❑ Other: _____

❑ Lack of Communication   ❑ Other: _____

22. In your opinion, what are the three most important things that draw people to this school district? (Please print clearly)

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

23. Other comments: (Please print clearly)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! ☺

APPENDIX 2

QUESTION MAPPING CHART

Question Mapping

Guiding Questions	Data Collection Questions	Method/ Strategies	Data Sources	Data Analysis
When making decisions, how much emphasis do school board presidents give to input from administrators, teachers, and staff, parents/grandparents, business leaders, people with no children or grandchildren in the school system?	12	School Board Survey	# Surveys	Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |
| Is there a relationship between the demographics of School Board Presidents and the value placed on input of others when making school board decisions? | 12 | School Board Survey | # Surveys | Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |
| How do school boards communicate with stakeholders? | 13 | School Board Survey | #Surveys | Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |
| How does stakeholder current level of involvement compare to the Board's desire for involvement in planning, advising, and decision making? | 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 | School Board Survey | # Surveys | Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |
| What are the barriers to community engagement with School Boards and School Districts? | 19, 20 | School Board Survey | #Surveys | Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |
| What are the motivating factors affecting community engagement with School Boards and School Districts? | 21 | School Board Survey | #Surveys | Coded written responses for emerging themes

Input data into SPSS 11.0 and analyzed data |

APPENDIX 3

DRAFT SURVEY ESTABLISHING CONTENT VALIDITY

Title: Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement

Overarching Question to be answered:
How are Alabama School Board Members engaging with the community?

Research Questions:
1. When making decisions how much weight do school board presidents give to input from administrators, teachers, and staff?
2. When making decisions how much weight do school board presidents give to input from parents/grandparents, business leaders, people with no children or grandchildren in the school system?
3. How do school boards communicate with parents/grandparents, business leaders, and people with no children or grandchildren in the school system?
4. In what ways do school board members actively seek citizen participation in district decision-making?
5. How do school board members involve parents and other community members in a planning or advisory capacity?
6. What are the barriers for involving the community in district decision-making?

Survey Feedback Form

Start time: _____   End time: _____

Comments on the survey:

Ease of completion: _____

_____

Construction of the questions: _____

_____

Time for completion: _____

_____

Other comments: _____

_____

APPENDIX 4

PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT SURVEY FROM AUBURN UNIVERSITY

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849

February 21, 2006

MEMORANDUM TO: Tammy Starnes
Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement"

IRB File: #06-040 EX 0602

APPROVAL DATE: February 18, 2006
EXPIRATION DATE: February 17, 2007

The referenced protocol was approved "Exempt" from further review under 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2) by IRB procedure on February 18, 2006. You should retain this letter in your files, along with a copy of the revised protocol and other pertinent information concerning your study. If you should anticipate a change in any of the procedures authorized in this protocol, you must request and receive IRB approval prior to implementation of any revision. Please reference the above IRB File in any correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before February 17, 2007, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than February 1, 2007. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to February 17, 2007, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Niki L. Johnson, JD, MBA, Director
Office of Human Subjects Research
Research Compliance Auburn University

cc: William Spencer
Cynthia Reed

APPENDIX 5

INFORMATION SHEET

THE TRUMAN PIERCE INSTITUTE

2195 Haley Center • Auburn University, AL 36849-5228

(334) 844-4488 • FAX (334) 844-0558

INFORMATION SHEET
for Research Study Entitled

ALABAMA SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

You have been invited to participate in a research study exploring Alabama School Board
Presidents' perceptions on community engagement. This study is being conducted by Tammy
Hallman Starnes, Doctoral Candidate, under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Reed, Director of the
Truman Pierce Institute in the College of Education at Auburn University. You were selected as
a possible participant because of your position as your local school board president. The
individuals invited to participate in the study will be the 133 Alabama School Board Presidents.

If you decide to participate, you will complete a survey on your perceptions of community
engagement that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey is attached.

You are asked not to include any identifiable information on the survey. A possible risk of
breach of confidentiality does exist. Every effort will be made to keep your responses
anonymous. Please do not write your name on the survey or return envelope.

Community engagement is strongly supported in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*
legislation. This research will explore perceptions and allow analysis of what community
engagement is occurring across the state. Alabama communities and school systems may benefit
from this research by the potential development of policies and practices to improve community
engagement. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Information collected through your participation is being used to fulfill an educational requirement to completing my dissertation. Results of the research may be published in a journal or presented at a conference. All information published will be anonymous. Participants may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty, however anonymous data will not be able to be withdrawn because it can not be identified with the researcher.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, Auburn University Department of Educational Leadership and Technology, Truman Pierce Institute or your local school system.

If you have questions, you may contact Tammy Hallman Starnes (334) 361-0801 (starnes332@aol.com) or Dr. Cynthia Reed (334) 844-4488 (reedcyn@auburn.edu) and we will be happy to answer them. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO.   THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

_____
Investigator's signature   Date

APPENDIX 6

RECRUITMENT LETTER

THE TRUMAN PIERCE INSTITUTE

2195 Haley Center · Auburn University. AL 36849-5228

(334) 844-4488 • FAX (334) 844-0558

March 2006

Dear Alabama School Board Presidents,

My name is Tammy Hallman Starnes and I am a doctoral student at Auburn University. I currently serve on the Autauga County School Board. I am in the process of preparing to collect data for my dissertation entitled, "Alabama School Board Presidents' Perceptions on Community Engagement." I will be mailing surveys with self-addressed return envelopes within the next couple of weeks to all school board presidents. I have tried to keep the questions brief to eliminate a large amount of time on survey completion. The survey should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. I need your assistance with this collection of data so I request that you to promptly respond when you receive the survey if you choose to participate. I am in hopes that the data may benefit school systems across the state in relation to community engagement.

If you have questions, you may contact Tammy Hallman Starnes (334) 361-0801 (starnes332@aol.com) or Dr. Cynthia Reed (334) 844-4488 (reedcyn@auburn.edu) and we will be happy to answer them.

Sincerely,

Tammy Hallman Starnes

APPENDIX 7

REMINDER/THANK YOU LETTER

THE TRUMAN PIERCE INSTITUTE

2195 Haley Center • Auburn University. AL 36849-5228

(334) 844-4488 • FAX (334) 844-0558

April 2006

Dear Alabama School Board Presidents,

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete the survey you recently received soliciting input on Alabama School Board Presidents' perceptions on community engagement if you have already submitted your survey. If you did not take the time to complete the survey please do so as soon as possible. The more data submitted the stronger the possibility of impacting school systems across the state in relation to improving community engagement in decision-making.

If you have questions or need another copy of the survey, you may contact Tammy Hallman Starnes (334) 361-0801 (starnes332@aol.com) or Dr. Cynthia Reed (334) 844-4488 (reedcyn@auburn.edu) and we will be happy to offer assistance.

Sincerely,

Tammy Hallman Starnes

APPENDIX 8

LISTING OF ALL PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Question 13:   How does your district currently communicate with the following community populations? Responses for other.

#	Comment
1	Other: memos
2	Other: city newsletter
8	Other: a. meetings
8	Other: b. PTA/PTO Meetings
16	Other: business leaders workshop
18	Other: notes home with children
20	Other: Chamber of Commerce Relationship
25	Other: a. staff meetings
25	Other: c. work with Chamber of Commerce directly
27	Other: c. Meetings they are invited to attend
28	Other: b. phone (automatic calling system)
28	Other: c. regular mail
36	Other: c. special committees
36	Other: d. special committees
37	Other: b. phone
43	Other: b. newspaper
44	Other: a, b, c, d. community newsletter
44	Other: c. Chamber of Commerce
46	Other: a. meetings, professional development, etc.
48	Other: c. speak at civic meetings
49	Other: a, b. telephone
50	Other: a. staff meetings
54	Other: d. Media
56	Other: a. group meetings
56	Other: c. speaking engagements
2	Other: NA
2	Other: NA
1	Other: Desire to make a difference

Question 14: Ways the school board seeks citizen participation?

#		Comment
17	Blue	Generally citizen participation is only included in instances where it is required. Then, principals (18 schools) usually submit names of those he/she thinks can understand the policy involved.
56	Blue	In my opinion, we do not actively seek citizen participation
1	Green	Long-range planning committee. Textbook committee. PTO. Booster Club
3	Green	Volunteer, community leader, church group
4	Green	Committees (i.e. steering, search)
5	Green	Mainly through school functions (PTO, etc.) at the local level. Our philosophy is to push as much decision making and flexibility at the local level (school as is possible)
7	Green	By encouraging them to volunteer at school functions
10	Green	Invite input…thoughts-ideas
12	Green	Return all phone calls, solicit their attendance and participation at board meetings. Seek out community leaders to solicit their support on school programs
13	Green	Personal contact, radio
14	Green	PTA Council, committees, chamber
20	Green	Hearing of public at board meetings, direct communication with constituents, strengthening with civic/business groups, meetings with the city council
21	Green	Public comment and questions are allowed at all board meetings, community members are asked to serve on committees
22	Green	PTO, teacher/parent advisory board
25	Green	We have had numerous committees; some district wide, while others for specific schools. Some are permanent others were established for specific goals/projects.
27	Green	Have announced public meetings, visit PTO functions, open to phone calls
28	Green	Committees on specific issues; Readers at elementary school; Volunteers of any kind
29	Green	Community involvement committees; PTO
31	Green	Invite by phone or in person
42	Green	PTA, PTO, Boosters Clubs, Education Committees
48	Green	Citizens serve on a number of committees/textbook selection, calendar, policy reviews, etc. Encourage business participation with local schools
50	Green	Solicit to serve on committees, parental involvement day, community meetings
52	Green	Task force committees (i.e. calendar), textbook, facility analysis, 5 year plan
54	Green	PTO meetings, speak to civic clubs
2	Purple	We communicate with the community regularly. We make sure that the identity of the school system and the identity of the community is one in the same.

#		Comment
8	Purple	Attending local neighbor meetings and PTA/PTO meetings, through local radio programs talk shows
9	Purple	Appoint citizens to board/school committees and subcommittees; Encourage attendance at work sessions, school programs. Supt. attends Chamber of Commerce meetings, etc. Special recognition of volunteers, retired teachers, etc.
11	Purple	Community forums, PTSO meetings, media
16	Purple	Community workshops
26	Purple	Education advisory board; foundation board; communitywide invitations to school events
32	Purple	Parent advisory committee, open board meetings (board arrives early to meet and greet), PTA, Have board meetings at each school
34	Purple	By seeking out their comments on what we can do better.
35	Purple	Church social events
36	Purple	All board committees have at least two community members. Golden Pass— allows Senior Citizens to attend all functions free.
37	Purple	We hold annual meetings at every school. We invite and encourage people to attend our meetings
39	Purple	Advertise open forums; encourage attendance at board meetings, make an effort to have articles about school activities in newspaper
41	Purple	Community meetings
44	Purple	Forums, post board member email addresses on all correspondence
46	Purple	Actively promote local school activities and needs through one-to-one communication. Community presentation. District and local school websites.
49	Purple	Public meetings. Trustees, Advisory Councils, PTO
51	Purple	Survey, BOE committees, PTO
53	Purple	Local public forums, budget hearings, school board agenda item to hear from public
6	Yellow	All citizens are invited to board meetings
18	Yellow	Phone calls, invite to school board meetings, attend PTO meetings, athletic events, academic events, invite to serve on various committees
19	Yellow	As an elected school board we are always "open to the public". Board Meetings, town hall type meetings have also been used.
23	Yellow	Meetings
24	Yellow	Ask public to attend meetings
40	Yellow	Encourage attendance at all public meetings, games, etc.
47	Yellow	We encourage attendance at board meetings
55	Yellow	Volunteer work, donations
57	Yellow	Personal letters, telephone
58	Yellow	Encourage local school programs
59	Yellow	Volunteer services, serve on committees

Question 15: Ways the community is currently involved in school system decision-making?

Number	Keyword	Comment
17	Blue	Only by serving on committees when asked.
22	Blue	Elect all BOE and Supt.
55	Blue	Very little
56	Blue	Other than the city council members. I wouldn't say that the community is involved.
58	Blue	All board members stay involved with the community and take all phone calls.
9	Green	Committee/subcommittee structure; PTA and PTA Council; Booster Clubs. Public comments during board meetings (according to board policy). Supt. and Board members attend community forums and town hall meetings
12	Green	We are devising a 5-year plan, will pose it to the Chamber of Commerce and City Government for Input. In May will institute joint program with Chamber of Commerce for work keep testing and training of non-college bound students. This will be a pilot…first in the state.
13	Green	PTA; Community planning committees; strategic planning
14	Green	Strategic planning committee; superintendent advisory committee
16	Green	Input at town hall meetings
18	Green	Capital improvement plan—community members. Federal funding committees, individual school advisory boards; textbook committees.
20	Green	PTA input, Chamber of Commerce dialogue, Communication with board members/board employees
21	Green	The board will hold public meetings and public forums to get the community involved in closing a school or proposing a tax increase.
26	Green	Members of community formed ½ of strategic planning team in December 2005
27	Green	Voice their concerns direct to school board members, letters to local paper, attend meetings, through PTO
28	Green	Recently finished strategic planning session parents are on all school committees
29	Green	Recent tax referendum…textbook committee
31	Green	Local athletic clubs and contacting local board members and PTOs
32	Green	Advisory committee for business leasers and separate one for parents, input to school board by email, letters and phone calls
36	Green	Calendar, Strategic and Capital Plans
41	Green	Community people are serving on numerous committees that influences policy making decisions.
44	Green	Partnerships with local businesses thru our chamber
46	Green	Good communication with city commissioners, business leaders, parents, and citizens of community
53	Green	Local public forums, budget hearings. Community is invited to board

Number	Keyword	Comment
		meetings, citizen representation on calendar and textbook committees
59	Green	Citizens attend meetings—they provide feedback on points of interest
1	Purple	Vision committee. Policy Workshop
2	Purple	PTA, goals committees, Educational Foundation. We also had a community committee to help determine if we needed a tax increase.
8	Purple	School board meetings/community voice; superintendent's moments (open door meetings with the community)
11	Purple	Emails, forums, public presentations
25	Purple	We have held community meetings in addition to the normal PTA groups in order to get input on a variety of issues from school consolidation to rules for governing cheerleader tryouts, dress code, etc.
34	Purple	By receiving questionnaires about such things as our school calendar, dress codes, etc.
37	Purple	Often times someone from the community will be asked to sit in on interviews of administrators
40	Purple	Roundtable discussions with parents, city leaders, etc.
52	Purple	Foundation board development, task force on technology issues. 5-Year Strategic Plan and textbook committee
3	Yellow	Volunteer
4	Yellow	Word of mouth, committees, PTO
5	Yellow	Primarily through interaction with principals/superintendent and board members
19	Yellow	Citizens are involved on the committee level in most things we work on and once again. WE are out in public an easily approachable to most stakeholders in our system.
23	Yellow	Committees
24	Yellow	Serve on advisory panel
35	Yellow	Local radio station and local newspaper official
39	Yellow	Volunteers help with co-curricular activities teachers' chores, etc. We are a small city and many citizens willingly offer advice
43	Yellow	Open meetings
47	Yellow	Through input to administration and board
48	Yellow	Building plans for new schools
49	Yellow	Committee members parent teacher organizations…School trustees
50	Yellow	Comments to administrators and board members
51	Yellow	PTO, Booster Club, and BOE Committees
54	Yellow	City council and school board meetings
57	Yellow	PTO, Community meetings, attending board meetings.

Question 16: Ways the school board presidents would like for the community to be more involved in decision-making?

Number	Keyword	Comment
2	Blue	Honestly, I can't think of any at the moment.
4	Blue	No comment
15	Blue	None
17	Blue	Our system seems to work well the way it is. Our Supt., board administrators, teachers and personnel along with a few invited parents and business leaders seem to have good results in decision making.
29	Blue	Not sure
49	Blue	I am pleased with degree of community involved at this time
51	Blue	NA
1	Green	More public attendance at regular board meetings to find out what is going on in order to have input.
6	Green	Attend board meetings
11	Green	Attend board meetings, have more than 40 people at community forums
13	Green	Volunteering to participate in the decision-making process
14	Green	More involved in committees; surveys; town hall meetings
18	Green	Attend school board meetings, be more involved with academic programs at local schools.
19	Green	Attendance at board meetings and budget meetings would help the public understand some of the complexities of our decisions
23	Green	Attend more board meetings
26	Green	Ask for more involvement of city leaders (city council, mayor)
27	Green	To listen to the facts before voicing an opinion. More calls or visits to board meetings/public meetings.
31	Green	Textbook selection, Curriculum selection and school calendar planning
35	Green	By attend more school business meetings
38	Green	Better BOE meeting attendance
47	Green	Better attendance at board meetings
53	Green	Attend Forums
57	Green	Advisory committees needed, especially financial advisors
58	Green	Come to board meetings to see what goes on
59	Green	Citizens attend meetings—they provide feedback on points of interest
12	Purple	Need to build partnership with business and community where they feel that public school benefits them. WE have such large number of private schools that community seldom thinks of public schools as "their schools."
20	Purple	Re-establish key communication program in each school. Strategic planning involving all segments of community
32	Purple	Businesses communicating needs—especially to high school
46	Purple	Would like for our community to come together as a team to help by making decisions for more of our at risk families

Number	Keyword	Comment
3	Yellow	Reading to the children, student behavior
5	Yellow	Becoming more involved in their child's education. More volunteer workers in the school.
7	Yellow	Offer more positive suggestions
10	Yellow	In every way
22	Yellow	More parent involvement
28	Yellow	On a school by school basis. I'd like to see parents and businesses focus on what they can share with students to make school stronger…not fundraising
36	Yellow	Time commitment and Dollar commitment
39	Yellow	I wish citizens would explore the facts before making suggestions
41	Yellow	Better attendance at all school functions
50	Yellow	More participation in school activities, more committee participation

Question 21: In your opinion, what motivates people to become engaged with the district or schools? Response to other

Number	Comment
1	Other: Desire to make a difference

Question 22. In your opinion, what are the three most important things that draw people to this school district?

9		No Comments
12	Academics/Technology	School system is now trying to offer unique programs that will attract middle-upper class back into the system. We are now at 55% minority for entire system but in elementary and middle school 60-80% minority. Unsure if we can reverse the trend.
1	Academics/Technology	Academic Program
2	Academics/Technology	Excellent teachers
2	Academics/Technology	Quality of the educational experience
3	Academics/Technology	New curriculum programs
4	Academics/Technology	Academics
5	Academics/Technology	Education Opportunities
7	Academics/Technology	Top scores
7	Academics/Technology	Top teachers
10	Academics/Technology	Good education
14	Academics/Technology	Challenging curriculum
14	Academics/Technology	Student achievement
16	Academics/Technology	Very great school system with strong test scores
17	Academics/Technology	Best High School Tech School in the State
18	Academics/Technology	Improved test scores
18	Academics/Technology	Special education program
19	Academics/Technology	Academics and curriculum
19	Academics/Technology	Highly qualified teachers
20	Academics/Technology	Hope for future improvements in academic excellence
20	Academics/Technology	Specific/unique programs
21	Academics/Technology	Advancement
22	Academics/Technology	Good School
22	Academics/Technology	Good teachers
23	Academics/Technology	Academics
24	Academics/Technology	Good Schools
24	Academics/Technology	Good Teachers
25	Academics/Technology	Advanced Academic Offerings
25	Academics/Technology	Fine Arts Program
26	Academics/Technology	A system that demonstrates clear successes for each child
27	Academics/Technology	Quality of education over an extended period—starts with the staff
27	Academics/Technology	Special Education Programs
27	Academics/Technology	Courses and Programs Offered
28	Academics/Technology	Quality Academics

31	Academics/Technology	Academic Scores
32	Academics/Technology	Academic Accomplishments
32	Academics/Technology	Teachers
33	Academics/Technology	Quality of education
33	Academics/Technology	Educational Successes
36	Academics/Technology	Test Scores
37	Academics/Technology	Strong Academics
38	Academics/Technology	Overall School Test Scores
39	Academics/Technology	High academic standards
40	Academics/Technology	Educational excellence
40	Academics/Technology	Outstanding mix of academics/athletics
41	Academics/Technology	Academic Status
42	Academics/Technology	Excellent Teachers
43	Academics/Technology	Quality of education
43	Academics/Technology	Good teachers
44	Academics/Technology	Passion for academic excellence
45	Academics/Technology	Excellent academic standards
45	Academics/Technology	Technological excellence
46	Academics/Technology	Level of education
47	Academics/Technology	Quality of Education
48	Academics/Technology	Excellent teachers
48	Academics/Technology	Variety of curriculum
51	Academics/Technology	Academics
51	Academics/Technology	Strong Curriculum
52	Academics/Technology	High academic standards
54	Academics/Technology	Curriculum
56	Academics/Technology	Curriculum
57	Academics/Technology	Quality of education provided
59	Academics/Technology	Excellent curriculum
49	Academics/Technology/ Extracurricular	Academics/Sports Program
53	Academics/Technology	Extra programs: IB for high school, art, music, sports, special ed., etc.
1	Climate/Campus	Appearance of Campuses
2	Climate/Campus	Small classes
3	Climate/Campus	Student Behavior
4	Climate/Campus	Safety
5	Climate/Campus	Excellent facilities
21	Climate/Campus	Its small
28	Climate/Campus	Small class sizes
31	Climate/Campus	Personal involvement with students' parents
33	Climate/Campus	Safe/Learning Environment
35	Climate/Campus	Newsletters
37	Climate/Campus	Strong Discipline
38	Climate/Campus	Poor school up-keep

39	Climate/Campus	Safe environment
42	Climate/Campus	Small Schools
42	Climate/Campus	Good discipline
43	Climate/Campus	Safety of schools
46	Climate/Campus	Safety
47	Climate/Campus	Facilities
48	Climate/Campus	"Community" feel of schools
54	Climate/Campus	Facilities
56	Climate/Campus	Facilities
57	Climate/Campus	School climate
59	Climate/Campus	All schools have great discipline
1	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Support
6	Community/Parent Involvement	Location
7	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Involvement
8	Community/Parent Involvement	Good housing
8	Community/Parent Involvement	Jobs/Transportation
11	Community/Parent Involvement	Low taxes
12	Community/Parent Involvement	Can't afford private schools cost
14	Community/Parent Involvement	Parent involvement
17	Community/Parent Involvement	Few Blacks and Hispanics
18	Community/Parent Involvement	Rural atmosphere
20	Community/Parent Involvement	Community support for schools
22	Community/Parent Involvement	Rural Area
25	Community/Parent Involvement	Schools closest to homes of many students
34	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Involvement
35	Community/Parent Involvement	Business Letters
36	Community/Parent Involvement	Diversity
38	Community/Parent Involvement	Lack of area jobs
40	Community/Parent Involvement	Illegal Aliens (GoldKist Poultry Processing Plant)
41	Community/Parent Involvement	Economic Status
41	Community/Parent Involvement	Crime Rate
44	Community/Parent Involvement	Community with same passion for excellence
44	Community/Parent Involvement	High parental involvement
45	Community/Parent Involvement	Strong community/parental support in supports and other school activities
46	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Involvement
49	Community/Parent Involvement	Availability /Transportation
49	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Schools
50	Community/Parent Involvement	Small communities
50	Community/Parent Involvement	Job market
52	Community/Parent Involvement	Location
54	Community/Parent Involvement	Community Spirit
55	Community/Parent Involvement	PTO
57	Community/Parent Involvement	Housing
4	Extracurricular	Extracurricular Activities

10	Extracurricular	Good athletics
13	Extracurricular	Sports
13	Extracurricular	Student activities
29	Extracurricular	Extracurricular
32	Extracurricular	Athletics
34	Extracurricular	Sports
39	Extracurricular	Good co-curricular program
47	Extracurricular	Sports
51	Extracurricular	Athletics
55	Extracurricular	Sports
5	Leadership	Administration
16	Leadership	Strong leaders (superintendent, principal)
16	Leadership	Strong political leaders
31	Leadership	Friendliness of administrators
34	Leadership	Good Leadership
35	Leadership	New Board Members
37	Leadership	Strong Leaders
52	Leadership	Qualified Leadership
56	Leadership	Staff
58	Leadership	Great superintendent
58	Leadership	Great staff
58	Leadership	Great attitude of school board
59	Leadership	Caring faculty and staff
3	Money	Finance and Budget
53	Money	Locally funded and supported
6	Reputation of School	Reputation of School
8	Reputation of School	Excellent schools
10	Reputation of School	Well-to-do folks and area
11	Reputation of School	Excellent
11	Reputation of School	Low Crime, High Testing
12	Reputation of School	Parents went to public school and want their children to experience diversity of a public education
13	Reputation of School	Friendly communication
17	Reputation of School	Good schools
19	Reputation of School	Unity
23	Reputation of School	Image
23	Reputation of School	Tradition
24	Reputation of School	Good Facilities
26	Reputation of School	Reputation of School/credibility of system
28	Reputation of School	History of excellence—sports, Scholar's Bowl, Science Olympiad
29	Reputation of School	School Reputation of School
36	Reputation of School	Reputation of School
50	Reputation of School	Good school Reputation of School

53	Reputation of School	Excellent Reputation of School
26	Reputation of School /Academics/Technology	A system that strives to serve the needs of every child, i.e. Transfer, transient

Question 23: Other comments.

Number	Comment
1	Good luck
5	I would like to see the end result of your work.
10	Good survey-Hope this helped!
14	We broadcast our board meetings and forums. We have hired former TV anchors to produce a host magazine style program featuring our programs, students, and teachers.
17	On question #17 I marked Community forums and board meetings on all three because all are invited—however, few people attend board meetings.
19	People, for the most part, leave school business and decisions to the board. Only when an issue directly affects them do the engage the board. As much information as the board puts out on these decisions, it still doesn't seem to reach the public.