

## Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

### *Introduction*

The first chapter introduced the study and described the context of the superintendent and board relationship, beginning with the significant paradigm shift in public education from universal access (1893) and equal opportunity (1954) as its primary goals to universal proficiency (1983, 2002). Structural change of public education has been fundamentally ignored. Federal, state, and local communities demand the fit of proficiency goals (along with access and opportunity) into familiar schools structured on elitist models using agrarian timetables and having little relation to schools structured for proficiency (Spady, 2001). Leaders of change have been prejudiced by the conflict between community perceptions of what traditional schooling *ought* to look like and the structural change needed to accomplish proficiency (Lunenberg, 2002). Reform efforts have therefore fallen far short of accomplishing change for proficiency and have increased the levels of stress between the school board and superintendent (American

Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1992; Lunenberg, 2002; National Association of School Boards [NASB], 1996).

The governance and leadership of a school district controls the conditions for student success, yet there is inadequate understanding of the influences on the relationship between school boards and superintendents (Spady, 2001; Houston, 2004a). This has inhibited conceptualization and assumption of new models for change (Lunenberg, 2002). A basic component of any new model appears to be school board adoption of a superintendent evaluation method (NSBA, 2000) that promotes communication, goal setting, and total team involvement (Petersen & Fursarelli, 2001).

One repercussion of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was a trend toward articulation of specific national standards for educational personnel (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2004; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2004).

Superintendent competencies were established by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 1993), which drew focus from accomplishment of unique district needs to the satisfaction of national standards. How a school board chooses to

evaluate its superintendent appears to be pivotal in the development of a positive relationship between them (NSBA, 2000).

This chapter will present the relevant literature and primary research that informed this study in three sections: (a) contextual literature, (b) literature surrounding the variables, and (c) literature and logic supporting the relevance of this study.

First will be the literature surrounding the context as discussed in chapter 1. The first section will examine (a) the elitist model school structure in terms of a proficiency goal and public resistance to structural change, (b) the relationship between the board and superintendent as *key* to student success, and (c) the role of superintendent evaluation in the development of the relationship between the board and the superintendent. This section will conclude with a brief contextual explanation of state-level governance of public education in Michigan.

Second, the literature that underlies the creation of the variables in the survey instrument and the Strength of Relationship Scale will be examined. Current thinking on the elements of the relationship between the board and superintendent include

(a) the district political climate, (b) topics of conflict such as the finance of public education, (c) the influence that superintendents wield in their school districts, (d) the training of board members, (e) methods of teaching and learning in the district, and (f) demographic influences. Research to date on (g) superintendent evaluation will conclude the section that supports the variables of the study.

Finally, the researcher will discuss (a) the broader relevance of this study of superintendent evaluation and (b) school leadership's ability to make intentional and informed choices in governance in order to create higher levels of student success in the current climate of proficiency demands.

### *Contextual Literature*

#### *Model T Schools and Demands for Proficiency*

William Spady (2001, p. 9) described the "outmoded" elitist-model American school structure only partially in humor:

Specific students must learn specific content on a specific schedule in a specific classroom with a specific teacher out of a specific textbook to pass a specific exam on a specific date with a specific score that qualifies them to get on to the next

specific grade, classroom, teacher, and book the next year to repeat the pattern over and over for a specific number of years in order to collect a specific credential that allows them to attend 'higher' education. (Spady, 2001, p. 10)

This description is familiar to most American-schooled adults and forms the basis of the expectations our communities hold for the educational process. This model of schooling was developed in 1893 by a group of university presidents called the Committee of Ten. Four years of English, three years of math, four years of social studies, and three years of science was the formula for secondary education (Spady, 2001). The *what* of teaching was more important than the *how* of teaching. The fact that all students must attend was more important than whether students learned.

School organization was conceived as an industrial production line (Lunenburg, 2002) in what Cubberly (1920) called the struggle of educators to become *true* professionals. Students were the *product* of school *education factories*, and they were either successful or not. Just as line-inspectors culled flawed output, so it was expected and accepted that some students never learned (Spady, 2001).

Beginning with the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), school *reform* became the nation's obsession. The resulting spate of educentric standards-based reform initiatives essentially reinforced the old industrial-age structure of boxes in boxes. William Spady described recent reform efforts as

- Primitively narrow in the conception of learning, standards, performance and assessment,
- Rigid in curriculum and organizational structures,
- Insensitive to the characteristics or needs of individual students,
- Hierarchical in the control structures,
- Punitive in orientation,
- Archaic in the endorsed instructional methods,
- Intimidating and de-professionalizing to educators,
- Committed to sorting and selecting students, and
- Severely constrained in opportunities for learning and success.

(Spady, 2001, p. 10)

The failed attempts at school reform have taken their toll on public perception of American public education.

Along with the myriad of stagnant reform efforts came the push for standardization and measurement of student achievement but few efforts to restructure schooling to achieve universal proficiency. The state of school reform today appears to be that the body politic demands proficiency from schools where the goals are access and opportunity in a community climate that resists structural change (Lunenburg, 2002). Teachers in particular have come under attack for failing to produce proficient students as measured by flawed state standardized tests, the outcome of which can be accurately predicted by socioeconomic status of the districts (Malone, 2002).

Policymakers appear to be operating under the assumption that student scores on standardized tests provide valid and reliable information regarding the quality of schools and school districts. If socioeconomic factors act as reliable predictors of school or district test scores, the legitimacy of that assumption is called into question, in that factors beyond the schools' control (socioeconomic status) are associated with test scores. (Malone, 2002, p. iv)

A cogent example of this less-than-successful process is the State of Massachusetts's 1994 effort known as *Education Reform*. In 1994 the state established the Common Core Learning Commission to model a statewide conversation on the future of public education. The assignment was ambitious but inclusive of potential for structural change:

1. Sort through the Information Age glut of facts and data to determine skills critical for graduating students,
2. establish lean and suggestive set of curriculum content to be learned and assessed through a variety of means and modalities, and, above all,
3. align daily business of schools, students, and teachers with abundant research from the last quarter century on human intelligence and organizational theory. (Myatt & Kemp, 2004, pp. 139-140)

Ten years later, educational leaders of Massachusetts lamented that most of the dialog and many of the structures and resources intended to support...school renewal have been co-opted, have been neutralized, or have vanished...The No Child Left Behind Act...has ushered in an unprecedented level of federal

intervention into the workings of local schools, [and] mandates a high-stakes testing regimen that, wittingly or unwittingly, has locked in outdated educational practice.

(Myatt & Kemp, 2004, p. 140)

Many states have undertaken such educational *reform* efforts and surfaced with equally empty results, which has further frustrated educators, politicians, and the public, for example, Education YES in Michigan and Edison, Inc. in Pennsylvania.

More important, this dichotomy has disenfranchised both students and teachers. Across the nation, both high-achieving and low-achieving students report that school is boring, stressful, and unrelated to more important issues in their lives and to what they will need in the future (Pope, 2001; Myatt & Kemp, 2004).

Furthermore, “the *test*, whether an AP exam or a state achievement measure, exerts an extreme influence on what and how teachers teach” (Myatt & Kemp, 2004, p. 141). Massachusetts, reflected by the experience of most state school reform efforts, floundered with complex issues that have not been surmountable.

These realizations and disappointments brought school leaders to seek change strategies that might overcome the old

structural paradigm, overcome the numbing mandated assessments, overcome the political climate issues, and overcome the resulting conflict from inside and outside the board and superintendent relationship. Educational leaders seek these strategies in order to achieve meaningful and successful education for the future of today's students. Given the atmosphere of demand for change and frustrated reform efforts, what do educational leaders and prior research say about the effect of the board and superintendent relationship on student success?

*Board and Superintendent Relationship and Student Achievement*

“Strong school board [and] superintendent leadership, governance, and teamwork are the foundation for raising the achievement of every child in America” (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000, p. iii). Goodman and Zimmerman's (2000) report for the New England School Development Council (NESDC), *Thinking Differently: Recommendations for 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Board/Superintendent Leadership, Governance, and Teamwork for High Student Achievement*, reiterated the link between board and superintendent relations and student achievement. Their report was a

seven-case-study follow-up to the 1997 national study of school board and superintendent collaboration for high student achievement, published by NESDC and the Educational Research Service (ERS). *Thinking Differently* stated a belief in the exigency of teamwork and leadership in effective school governance. The National Advisory Committee for the report included 36 nationally recognized educational leaders who discussed and debated findings to compile the *Thinking Differently* document.

The recommendations ...in this report are all based on one idea, that school districts cannot effectively raise student achievement without strong leadership and teamwork from school board and superintendent . . . that effective school board/superintendent leadership, based on teamwork, communication, and trust, is key to quality education for America's students. (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000, p. iv)

Little scientific data supported that assumption although within the report, most educators seemed to accept that central administration and school boards can and do affect student achievement. Richard Elmore's review of research (Elmore, 1993) reported that

district-level administration and governance did not typically coordinate policies to influence what happens in the classroom. When superintendent evaluation was considered, the evidence was even less significant. Candoli, et al., (1997) reported that on the basis of research evidence as of 1997, “it cannot be said that a majority of board members or superintendents perceive performance evaluations as contributing to the overall effectiveness of the superintendency and the school system” (Candoli et al., 1997, p. 63).

The exception was the *Lighthouse Study* undertaken by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) in 2000. The IASB study compiled extensive interviews in six Iowa school districts (three high-achieving, three low-achieving). The districts were demographically balanced so that the only apparent difference was level of achievement as measured by Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students. The study found that the differences between high student achievement and low student achievement were (a) the attitude and beliefs of the school board and superintendent team, (b) communication between the central office team and the staff, and (c) action taken on a consistent basis.

Ann Bryant, the Executive Director of the NSBA, reflected on the IASB *Lighthouse Study*:

The study demonstrates the two very different philosophies and practices [of school boards and superintendents] between high and low achieving districts. High-achieving school districts do not accept limitations, but view them as challenges. These districts are moving in the right direction and can be models for other districts across our country.

(IASB, 2000, p. 7)

The IASB study (2000) connected board and superintendent relationships with higher student achievement. The study was based on a small sample of six schools and did *not* conclude that board and superintendent action *caused* improved performance. Rather, it suggested that board and superintendent actions were a key part of the *culture of improvement*. There were no studies that attempted to statistically connect board and superintendent relationships with higher student achievement on the basis of data.

Prior research has shown repeatedly that a weak relationship between the superintendent and board discourages school improvement (Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1992); affects the quality

of the curriculum and programs (Nygren, 1992); weakens the morale and stability of the district (Renchler, 1992); negatively influences the superintendent's credibility with the board members (Petersen & Short, 2001); impedes reform efforts, such as district restructuring (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995); collaborative long-range planning, and visioning (Kowalski, 1999); and results in the shortened tenure of district leaders (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001).

*Superintendent Evaluation as Central to the Board and Superintendent Relationship*

At its best, superintendent evaluation carries the power to promote and improve performance, facilitate planning, generate collaboration, use specific objectives, focus on results, and increase motivation (AASA, 1980; NSBA, 1980). Strong superintendents want clear goals and good evaluation, yet school boards often put off performance evaluation (AASA, 1992). "Some boards perceive evaluation as an invitation to spoil their relationships with . . . negative or critical review . . . Many boards are surprised when superintendents want to be evaluated" (AASA, 1992, p. 83). Ruth Paige, former executive secretary of the New Jersey School Boards

Association, reminded us that “the board must recognize that the school system can be no better than the board...that the best superintendent can go no further than the limitations of the board” (AASA, 1992, p. 87).

The AASA (1992) report *Building Better Board-Administrator Relationships* made it clear that the secret of successful board and superintendent relationships begins with strong hiring practices and effective ongoing superintendent evaluation and board self-evaluation. These practices have developed trust, communication, and a bond of shared learning and decision making focused on educational accomplishment:

The importance of local school leadership in creating successful schools cannot be overstated. As long ago as 1958, political scientist Neal Gross called for more research into the roles of boards and superintendents because their relationship ‘is at the heart of any educational problem and its solution.

(AASA, 1992, p. 4)

### *Governance of Public Education in Michigan*

To achieve some clarity of the underpinnings of the influence of conflict and political climate in school district relationships, the

researcher added here a brief overview of the governance of public education in Michigan for the benefit of the reader.

*The state constitution.* The governance of public education in Michigan is described in the *Constitution of Michigan of 1963, Article VIII*. The “Encouragement of Education” general statement derived from the original state constitution (1835, Article X) and read, “Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (State of Michigan, 1963, Article VIII). Article VIII provided for free and public education and prohibited aid to nonpublic schools (Section 2). The responsibility to support a free public elementary and secondary education system was specifically assigned to the state legislature. Article VIII provided for a State Board of Education and a State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

*Local school governance.* State law has established local school districts. Voters in each district elect 5-9 members of a local school board that appoints a superintendent of schools to administer the district. School boards have been made responsible for all legal actions of the district and the formation of district policy. The

school board trustees and the superintendent are considered to be *public* officials.

This first section of this chapter discussed the structure of schooling as being in conflict with the demand for proficiency. The literature surrounding the board and superintendent relationship in relation to student achievement was explored. Superintendent evaluation was argued as central to the board and superintendent relationship. Finally, the governance of public education in the State of Michigan was outlined. Next, the literature surrounding the variables used in this study was examined.

#### *Literature in Support of Variables*

The researcher examined prior research as a basis for inclusion of variables in the survey instrument. These areas of study include

1. Destabilizing factors
2. Influences on the board and superintendent
3. Factors that incite conflict
4. Political climate indicators
5. Influence of the superintendent on the district
6. Training of board members

7. Teaching and learning styles in the district
8. Demographic influences
9. Superintendent evaluation method

#### *Factors That Destabilize The Relationship*

The NSBA report *Urban Dynamics* (1992) surveyed superintendents and board members in urban districts and identified the factors that destabilize the relationship between board and superintendent. In rank order, they are “members not understanding role differences, poor communications, personal agendas of board members, distrust, and lack of clearly defined goals” (NSBA, 1992, p. 26). Questions regarding these destabilizing factors were included in the survey instrument.

#### *Influences on School Boards*

Today, school boards are “quasi-corporate bodies established by legislative action” (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996, p. 114). “As agents of the state, they must carry out state law, while generating ‘laws’ of their own by establishing local district policies” (Schaffer, 1999, p. 26). The representative nature of local school boards results in regular change in membership; new members are elected and veteran members retire or are voted out in a continuing

cycle. The educational level of these members varies, experience with boardmanship varies, and opinion on community needs, personal agendas, and beliefs vary (Price, 1994). Very small numbers of voters participate in school board elections; rarely is there a clear mandate from the community at large. This is evidenced by the perception of *large* voter turnout in local news reports when 3-5% of registered voters participate in school board elections (Shimke, 2000). This compares to national elections, where near 50% turnout is considered *low* (Keith, 2004). In other words, the general expectation of school board elections is for low voter participation. In addition, there is no continuing commitment of elected members to their original constituencies, as most board members are elected at large. Therefore, coalitions are fragile and personal idiosyncrasies abound. These factors, and others, ensure that the school board and superintendent relationship remains in a state of flux. Questions regarding these influencing factors were included in the survey instrument.

### *Influences on Superintendents*

The influences on the modern superintendent included

(a) the ever-changing nature of the role, (b) leadership style, (c) educational philosophy, and (d) district needs (Price, 1994). All of these influences, or pressures, directly affect the function of the superintendent as creator of culture, and, thus, creator of change and improvement.

Usdan, McCloud, Podmostko, and Cuban (2001) articulated this complex state of the changing role of the superintendent clearly and concisely.

District leaders are in an arena that is perpetually besieged by a *potpourri* of often conflicting forces: state laws and regulations, federal mandates, decentralized school management, demands for greater accountability, changing demographics, the school choice movement, competing community needs, limited resources, partisan politics, legal challenges, shortages of qualified teachers and principals, and a general lack of respect for the education profession. (Usdan et al., 2001, p. 26)

Larry Cuban (1998) claimed that superintendents struggle to create coherence out of the numerous and sometimes-incompatible goals that the public sets for schools (Cuban, 1998). Indicative of

unsettled roles for superintendents is that 93 % of AASA surveyed superintendents reported a collaborative relationship with the board, while 70% believed that the current governance structure should be restructured or replaced (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The above factors were incorporated into the survey instrument.

### *Conflict Between School Boards and Superintendents*

It is evident that board and superintendent conflict is a characteristic of the superintendency in this era of accountability (Lashway, 2002b). Scores of anecdotal observances in professional journals delineated several types of conflict that ranged from role definition and fulfillment to money-related issues to political judgments and responsibility for student achievement. Although this arena reflects a broad and universal palette of conflict, superintendent and board conflict is no trivial issue. Responses to conflict or negative momentum between boards and superintendents range from superintendent resignation or firing to superintendent suicide (Purdy, 2001).

In years past, board members considered their role as community service, and the line between administration and policy-makers was clear. Board members accepted the

professional opinions of the administrative staff without question. The issues facing schools are [now] more complex, creating at times a public agenda that can be hostile. Today the line between roles is blurred, making governance more complex and combative. (Ondrovich, 1997, p. 12)

Larry Cuban (1998) claimed that conflict is the “DNA of the superintendency” (p. 1).

The literature makes clear that conflict must be a factor in any research surrounding the board and superintendent relationship, specifically conflict focused on roles and finance.

*Funding of public schools in Michigan.* In order to better explain the results of this study pertaining to conflict between the board and superintendent in the realm of finance, a brief explanation of Michigan’s school funding scheme will be given here.

Prior to 1994, the state legislature provided that each school district should tax itself for educational purposes to the level deemed locally appropriate. This universally took the form of tax on the value of property. Section 11 of Article IX as amended in March 1994 (commonly referred to as Proposal A) dramatically changed that principle and provided a guarantee of school funding, a

state-regulated source, and distribution by the state rather than by individual communities. The existing school-aid fund took on unprecedented importance in funding local education at all levels. Property tax for homeowners (*homestead*) was universally set at 6 mills (6 dollars per 1,000 in value as assessed by the state, which equals approximately 50% of cash value). Business property tax (*non-homestead*) was universally set at 18 mills. The other sources of revenue for school aid included

- 60% of all sales taxes imposed at a rate of 4% on retailers and
- 100% of proceeds of sales and use taxes imposed at an additional rate of 2%.

More important, the amendment guaranteed that the amount of per-pupil funding should never be less than the level provided in 1994-1995 (State Foundation Grant), including a caveat that any operating funds provided locally through local assessment on homestead and non-homestead property would be deducted from the State Foundation Grant per-pupil amount. Thus, an increase in tax revenue from growth of non-homestead assessments did not result in greater operating revenue for local schools. (State of Michigan, 1994)

The net result of this system of finance was that operating funds became static or decreased as the Michigan economy declined, which prevented districts from hiring and keeping highly qualified teachers and reducing class sizes (K-16 Coalition for Michigan's Future, 2004). This method of financing the per-pupil State Foundation Grant (flat property tax and sales tax) has resulted in decreased per-pupil funding for public schools over the last four years as the Michigan economy has suffered setbacks. School boards and superintendents have been forced to make cuts in operating budgets at the same time that external state and federal mandates demand higher student achievement. The reported issues of conflict that related directly to finance were hiring of staff, school of choice, achievement, mandates, and staff negotiations (see chapter 4 for analysis of reported conflict).

#### *Political Climate Variables*

Donald McCarty and Charles Ramsey's 1971 study of power and conflict in American public education was the definitive work on the political climate in school districts. The weight of this seminal study was clearly delineated by Roald F. Campbell in his forward to the McCarty and Ramsey book, *The School Managers* (1971):

This [work] contributes significantly to the literature of educational administration and to our knowledge of local government....Board members and superintendents are viewed in this study in terms of the community context in which they work. Building upon studies of community decision making, the authors posit four community types: dominated, factional, pluralistic, and inert; each one of which tends to be reflected in its school board and in the role the superintendent can play with the board and the community. (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971, p. xi)

The current study used the political context as defined by McCarty and Ramsey (Dominated, Factional, Pluralistic, Inert) as one tool to assess the strength of the relationship between the board and superintendent. Table 1 summarizes nomination of board members, the perceived function of the board, the function of the superintendent, and the dominant direction of policy by political climate type.

Table 1

*McCarty and Ramsey Political Climate Model Summary \**

Power structure	Board nominations	Board function	Superinten't function	Policy
Dominated	Board control of nominations	Dominate Board	Functionary	Education serves local needs, taxes kept low
Factional	Factionalized	Factionalized	Political Strategist	High conflict, policy changes with factional change
Pluralistic	Nominating Caucus	Status-Congruent	Professional Advisor	Based on research and community input
Inert	Superintendent controlled	Sanctioning	Decision maker	Basic education, avoid conflict, controlled by Superintendent

\* (McCarty &amp; Ramsey, 1971)

*Dominated.* The criteria for domination of a school district by its board are based on *behind-the-scenes* manipulation to prevent certain issues from arising:

Board members in dominated communities represent whatever powers are in control; their policies tend to express the values associated with those in charge. The men who exercise control over community affairs are particularly sensitive to the dangers of prolonged controversy and seek to maintain the status quo. Change is slow and incremental.

Domination...is a highly sophisticated, perhaps unconscious, mechanism for enhancing one set of values against those preferred by someone else. Because of the skill and essential public posture of those who dominate, the resultant effect may be much stronger and more pervasive than the exercise of overt pressure. (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971, p. 56)

Further, McCarty and Ramsey recognized that rarely do local school boards recognize their own identities as dominating. Therefore, small numbers of districts reported a dominated political climate. The superintendent became a functionary in the dominated district.

*Factional.* A factional board was a split board where all major decisions were destined to be decided by the group that mustered a majority vote. The role of the board chairman became central as the agenda and the meetings were highly orchestrated and manipulated with parliamentary procedure.

The distinguishing characteristic of the factional board is a state of high friction. To be elected in a factional community it is usually necessary to campaign hard and to accuse your opponents of impure motives. It is no wonder that a typical board meeting is filled with hostile rhetoric; both factions try to outdo the other in dispensing invective. While the press may report the choicest retorts, the average citizen cannot help but have a distorted image of the actual proceedings. (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971, pp. 100-101)

The superintendent in a factional district was, of necessity, a political strategist aligned with the current board president.

*Pluralistic.* Board members in pluralistic districts paid consistent attention to community sentiment. Their debate often changed votes, and a board member's status was congruent with his ability to articulate a position. Awareness of the positive function of

conflict was a characteristic of a pluralistic community; confrontations that emerged did not destroy the community. The superintendent became the professional advisor to the board. Frequently these districts were found in suburban areas, where people's values and lifestyles were similar.

*Inert.* The dominant characteristic of an inert school district was the board's abnegation of its formal responsibility for policy. This condition appeared most often in districts lacking any apparent power structure. An inert district exhibited a flow of power opposite to that of the other three district political types. The superintendent was the decision maker and quietly set policy and saw that it was implemented. He was viewed as the expert by a weak and uncertain board that consistently sanctioned his actions. The survey instrument for this study attempted to define district political climate on the basis of the McCarty and Ramsey terms.

#### *How Superintendents Exert Influence*

In 1992, Crowson and Morris explored a small group of suburban superintendents near Chicago. They sought to define the ways in which superintendents influence school districts. The four main dimensions defined by that study were "relationships with the

community, dynamics of governing board/superintendent relationships, risk-taking, and relationships with building principals” (Crowson & Morris, 1992, pp. 69-88). These four dimensions were incorporated into survey questions in the General category of the strength of relationship.

### *Teaching and Learning*

Two works influenced questions of teaching and learning in this study. Newman, Secada, and Wehlage’s (1995) work on authentic instruction and assessment was used in formulating questions for this study. Of interest was that their book, *A Guide to Authentic Instruction and Assessment: Vision, Standards, and Scoring* (1995), and its principles were used to formulate the State of Michigan K-12 Curriculum Standards, which are considered among the most rigorous in the nation. This team positioned the issue succinctly.

Why should we be concerned about *authenticity* in education?...The problem is that the kind of mastery required for students to earn school credits, grades, and high test scores is often considered trivial, contrived, and meaningless by both students and adults. This absence of meaning breeds

low engagement in schoolwork and inhibits transfer of school learning to issues and problems faced outside of school.

(Newman et al., 1995, p. 7)

The principles embodied in their work focused on disciplined inquiry. “Disciplined inquiry consists of three main features: 1) use of a prior knowledge base, 2) striving for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness, and 3) expressing conclusions through elaborated communication” (Newman et al., 1995, p. 9).

The second book of interest is *Learning in Overdrive* (Mitchell, Crawford, & The Chicago Teacher’s Union Quest Center, 1995), which describes the application of standards within the framework of authentic teaching and learning proposed by Newman et al. (1995). The authors provide a rationale for the teaching structure they suggest, including assessment rubrics, printable forms, and plenty of examples from teachers themselves.

The current study inquired whether authentic learning in the classroom correlates with the school board and superintendent relationship. The two works discussed here shaped the formulation of the questions used to investigate teaching and learning in the survey for this study. Interestingly, the only model of

superintendent evaluation that in itself encompassed elements of authentic teaching and learning as proposed by Newman et al. (1995) was the Data-driven model identified by Candoli et al. (1997).

### *Changing Demographics of School Districts*

*Definitions.* The term *demographics* is a colloquialism that derives from demography, the study of the characteristics of human populations (Rothembuhler, 2004). Demographics can be used to sort data about people for the purpose of descriptive analysis. The demographic mix of a community has a strong effect on the options available to educational leaders. Districts of different size (urban, suburban, rural) often demonstrate different political climates, that is, different types of conflict and pressure on the district leadership:

The most obvious [benefit associated with demographic analysis] is that the data permit analysts to calculate marginal, rather than average effects; it acts as an important scientific safeguard, because it permits others to replicate important findings; it...reveals data quality and processing anomalies; and...data permit policy makers to pose and answer complex questions...of their own choosing. (Lane, 2003, pp. 1-2)

Socioeconomic status affects funding levels in education, such as those of the federal Title I and other state-funded programs.

*Source of data.* In 1993 the State of Michigan, under the leadership of then-governor John Engler, contracted with the accounting firm Standard and Poor's, Inc. to create, maintain, and analyze a database of demographic and performance data on each and every school district in Michigan. (Standard and Poor's, 2003) In 1995 the database came on line. Certain demographic data from this database were used in this study:

- District size, as indicated by the student head count
- Socioeconomic status, as indicated by the free and reduced-priced lunch percentage
- Student achievement as reported by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores
- State Foundation Grant status, as the amount per pupil granted to each district by the state

These data were used to estimate a correlation effect when paired with other influences on the board and superintendent relationship.

### *The Research on Superintendent Evaluation*

In light of the strong and varied influences on school boards and superintendents, as previously discussed, the researcher reviewed research studies on evaluation of superintendents. Research on superintendent evaluation has universally focused on identification of frequency, purposes, criteria, and methods of evaluation. Here, the researcher summarized the findings of the major studies and related them to the focused objective of this paper.

*The Candoli, Cullen, and Stufflebeam meta-study (1997)*. The scope of the analysis placed the book *Superintendent Performance Evaluation: Current Practices and Directions for Improvement (1997)* at the center of the discussion of superintendent evaluation. Stufflebeam directs research in educational evaluation at the Center for Research on Educational Accountability and Teacher Evaluation (CREATE) at Western Michigan University. He and his colleagues presented a comprehensive overview and analysis of the research on superintendent evaluation up to 1997. The CREATE archive and the data from studies by Glass (1992) and Robinson and Bickers (1990) were incorporated into the report.

A comprehensive review of the archive by the researchers at CREATE identified seven categories of research on superintendent evaluation:

- 1) Extent and frequency of performance evaluation;
- 2) Purposes of performance evaluation;
- 3) Criteria are used in evaluation;
- 4) Methods used in superintendent evaluation;
- 5) Qualifications of those who conduct evaluations;
- 6) Stakeholder groups provide into the evaluation process; and
- 7) Importance of evaluation to the effectiveness of the system.

(Candoli et al., 1997, pp. 45-64).

According to the meta-analysis of prior studies by Candoli et al., (1997), researchers have a good comprehension of the nuts and bolts of superintendent evaluation.

The main models currently used to evaluate the performance of school superintendents fall into three categories: Global judgment, Judgment driven by specific criteria, and Judgment driven by data (Candoli et al., 1997). Global judgment includes the board *gut feeling*, descriptive narrative reports often by outside consultants, oral exchanges about performance, and stakeholder

evaluation. Judgment driven by specific criteria consists of printed rating forms, report cards, Management by Objective, performance contracting, and duties-based evaluation. Finally, judgment driven by data includes goal setting and superintendent portfolio, student outcome measures, and district accreditation (Candoli et al., 1997). These basic categories of evaluation were applied in this research study, and the evaluation types were labeled *Global*, *Judgment*, and *Data-driven*.

*The Glass, Bjork, and Brunner study (2000)*. The researcher examined *The Study of the American School Superintendency: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium* (Glass et al., 2000). The majority of superintendents continued to be evaluated with formal procedures (53.7%), while 32.3% reported a combination of formal and informal methods. The report card or checklist remained the most common instrument for evaluation. Board members continued to be the main evaluators, and evaluations were done in closed executive session as mandated by law in most states. The researcher concluded that very little change had occurred in the eight years prior to the study.

*The DiPaola and Stronge study (2003)*. Michael DiPaola and James Stronge, both professors of education at the College of William and Mary, conducted a study of the 50 states to assess current policies and practices in superintendent evaluation. The method was to inquire through telephone interviews with each state education department and each affiliate of the AASA and the NSBA as to state legal requirements and affiliate guidelines and recommendations. The researchers then performed a content analysis. They sought first to identify whether policies and recommendations conformed to the AASA's *Superintendent Competencies* and second to attempt to match recommendations and guidelines to the three evaluation categories of evaluation proposed by Candoli et al., (1997). Eight states reported having no guidelines and providing no recommendations to their constituents. All of the other 42 states provided recommendations and materials.

The methodological difficulties became apparent when the results of the analysis were reported out as characteristics of *current use and practice* rather than as characteristics of the *guidelines and recommendations* that were collected (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). It appeared that the authors interchanged the terms

*norms and practices.* Despite this difficulty, assessing the results as *guidelines and recommendations* produced interesting results. Eighty-nine percent of the 42 states recommended use of some variation of printed rating forms. Sixty-eight percent embedded Management by Objective (MBO) in recommended forms. The authors observed that the vast majority of recommended evaluation processes were rooted in scientific management.

*The Marcus, Mayo, and McCartney (2003) research.* The Marcus et al., (2003) research was a study of preferences and was the first research that began to quantify *conflict* between the board and the superintendent. The superintendent and the board president from the Parkland School District in Pennsylvania joined with R. M. Marcus, a professor at Lehigh University, to examine superintendent preferences for performance evaluation on a national level. Two questions of inquiry motivated the study. First, were superintendent evaluation procedures fair, effective, and consistent with superintendent preferences? Second, were superintendent evaluation procedures performance based? These data may not be as statistically robust as the authors might have hoped (N = 12,604 superintendents nationally, n = 1,125 selected

randomly, n = 492 responses), yet the findings were nevertheless intriguing, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Superintendents' Preferences for Performance Evaluation*

Do you prefer:	Preferred %	Actual %
1. To have at least half the board members trained in evaluation	91.0	28.7
2. To have the board evaluation by objective	92.2	56.9
3. To have very helpful board suggestions for improvement	77.3	16.9
4. To have the board and the superintendent set evaluation criteria together	90.1	61.2
5. To have some expectations expressed at hiring	62.7	62.5

*Note.* These data are from the work of Marcus, Mayo, and McCartney, 2003

Accountability remained as superintendents' perceived reason for evaluation. Checklist-type evaluation accounted for 82% of evaluation methods. Superintendents perceived that the first criterion for performance was board/superintendent relations. They would have preferred it to be the last criterion. Overall, current evaluation procedures employed by most school districts raised questions about fairness and effectiveness. The procedures were not performance based although most superintendents' preferred performance based evaluation. Most board members were perceived to be inadequately prepared to evaluate the superintendent.

This second section focused on the literature that supported the inclusion of certain variables in the survey instrument for this research study. Factors that destabilize the board and superintendent were discussed. Influences on both the board and the superintendent were examined. Conflict, in terms of money and roles, was delineated along with district-level political climate. The ability of superintendents to exert influence in their districts was explored. The literature surrounding methods of teaching and learning was presented. The necessity for the use of demographic

data as dependent variables was explained. Finally, the relevant and current research surrounding superintendent evaluation was explored in detail.

The final section of the review of literature will discuss the relevance of this study and its potential impact on the field of knowledge.

### *Relevance and Meaning*

#### *Changing Roles and Superintendent Evaluation*

The role of the superintendent is continually changing (Price, 2001), and the pace of that change is accelerating as time passes and political agendas fluctuate (Dolan, 1994; Wheatley, 1999). Empirical evidence bearing on the importance of superintendent performance evaluation is minimal and conflicting. “But at present it cannot be said that a majority of board members and superintendents perceive performance evaluation as contributing to the overall effectiveness of the superintendent and the school district” (Candoli et al., 1997, p. 66). None of the prior research showed that methods of superintendent evaluation adapt and evolve to reflect or even keep pace with change. One might ask how

superintendent evaluation can be purposive and meaningful if it is disconnected from district relevance.

### *Conflict Arising from Financial Constraints*

The state of school finance in the State of Michigan is critical to levels of conflict between board and superintendent (see chapter 4). Operating budgets are steadily decreasing with no local recourse for taxation to recover the difference. Class sizes have increased, as districts have had no choice but to reduce operating expenses. This has translated to fewer teachers, less support staff, and narrowed administrative leadership (K-16 Coalition for Michigan's Future, 2004). In the survey, which is the center of this study, the effect of financial crisis, in terms of per-pupil funding and conflict, is measured against the superintendent and board relationship.

### *Disconnect Between Board and Superintendent Expectations*

Prior research makes it abundantly clear that the expectations of superintendents for how they should be evaluated do not match the apparent historic norms of evaluation as practiced by school boards (Glass et al., 2000; Marcus et al., 2003). Most superintendents desire a job that allows them to transform the district culture and to focus all energies on teaching and learning

(Marcus et al., 2003). Before the superintendent can begin to incubate the change, the superintendent is faced with a critical conflict with the board. The superintendent's view of the best method and relevant purposes of evaluation are diametrically opposed to those practiced by the board (Marcus et al., 2003). The common belief held by educators is that the school board and superintendent relationship is key to district climate (AASA, 1990; NSBA, 1990). The critical importance of issues of superintendent evaluation supports the timeliness of this study.

### *Structural Change*

It is striking that none of the prior research suggested how superintendent evaluation might become part of or motivate wider structural change. There is no conclusion that current leadership practice leads anywhere or fulfills any significant purpose relating to teaching and learning. Researchers repeatedly concluded that reform efforts were ephemeral without structural change (Oakes, 1990). Yet, change cannot occur without strong collaborative relationships between school boards and superintendents, successful communication with staff, and community involvement (IASB, 2000).

### *Terms of Debate*

The search for an effective means to foster collaborative school board and superintendent relationships is decisive in the current climate. Ian Jukes, educator and futurist, stated, “We must prepare our students for their future, not our past” (Jukes & McCain, 2001, online). What is at stake is nothing less than a generation ill-prepared to meet the challenge of their own future and ill-prepared for citizenship in a democracy. Furthermore, a flood of classroom reforms cannot be maintained when we ignore our schools’ outmoded structure. It is time to move the debate beyond frequency, purposes, criteria, and methods of superintendent evaluation and to seek the practice that furthers authentic learning through intentional means of superintendent evaluation.

### *Summary of Chapter 2*

In this chapter, the researcher examined access model schools in terms of proficiency and public resistance to structural change. Current thinking and influences on the elements of the relationship of the board and superintendent were explored. Research to date on superintendent evaluation was reviewed. In an effort to

contextualize the influences, the researcher discussed the governance and finance of public education in Michigan, the political context of the board's functions, and demographic influences.

In chapter 3, the researcher will report the methodology and procedures used in collecting survey data from Michigan's superintendents and board presidents. The method of creating constructed variables for analysis will be presented.