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**The Characteristics of
Selected Superintendents' Perceptions
of Incumbent School Board Member
Election Defeats in the State of Washington in 1995**

**David Stanley Engle
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By

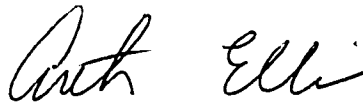
David Engle

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

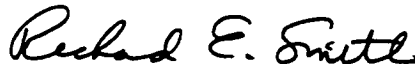
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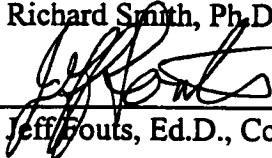
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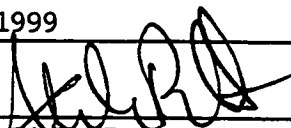
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their patience, support and advice during the course of my work to complete this study, I would like to thank Dr. Arthur Ellis, Dr. Jeff Fouts and Dr. Richard Smith. In addition, I owe Dr. Gene Sharratt an immense debt of gratitude for his counsel, encouragement and support over the course of this study. Also, I must express my gratitude to Dr. David Jones and Dr. Cynthia Jones for their friendship, support and advice throughout this journey. To my beloved children, Aaron and Erica, go my thanks for helping me balance fatherhood with scholarship. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the long, unfailing love and support freely given to me by my wife, Margaret Bullock Engle, over the long course of this project.

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Seattle Pacific University

Abstract

The Characteristics of
Selected Superintendents' Perceptions
of Incumbent School Board Member
Election Defeats in the State of Washington in 1995

By David Stanley Engle

Chairperson of the Dissertation Committee: Dr. Arthur Ellis, School of Education

The local school board is a unique, grassroots American institution. The model of the locally elected school board is common throughout the United States and Canada. Although there are variations on the model, the locally elected school board is the ultimate authority for public school governance in the community served by those schools. Elected school board members, once considered holders of stable positions, are increasingly finding it difficult to reconcile the diverse, contending interests of their constituents in a rapidly changing society. This study gathered and described the data associated with incumbent school board member defeats in the State of Washington for the 1995 general election. This study utilized a survey instrument called the School Board Election Issues Inventory to gather information regarding incumbent school board member election defeats in the sixty-two districts of Washington State where incumbents were defeated. Data gathered in the course of this study were used to describe the issues affecting the outcome of school board elections in the State of Washington in 1995 and the influence of these issues on incumbent school board member election defeats: groupings of factors that may have contributed to the incumbent school board member

defeats which were not selected from the listing of issues in Section I of the School Board Election Issues Inventory; campaign factors affecting the election outcome, unique conditions or demographic factors that may have contributed to the incumbent defeat, and a comparison of the 1995 election results with data compiled during the previous six school board elections in Washington State. As reported by district superintendents in those elections where incumbent board members were challenged and defeated, four issues were found to be most influential in those defeats. These were, in rank order: (1) a lack of action or visibility on the part of the incumbent school board member, (2) negative relations between the incumbent school board member and the community, (3) conflict between the incumbent school board member and organized interest groups, and (4) the board members stance on issues such as boundary changes or district focus.

During the 1995 school board elections in the State of Washington, the major reasons reported for incumbent defeat were a community's perception that the incumbent did not take an active role in helping direct the actions of the school district and the sense that the incumbent did not work to build strong and effective board and community relationships. These two themes, positive accomplishment and successful relationships, appear to be critical to successful reelection. Sitting board members who wish to retain their seats when challenged in an election should focus their energies in these two areas. As long as a board member is seen as actively working to help direct the actions of a school district without alienating community members and shows an ability to communicate positively with his/her constituents, this study suggests that the chances for reelection are high.

Chapter 1

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics surrounding incumbent school board member election defeats in the State of Washington in 1995. A secondary purpose of this study is to describe the historical trends in school board incumbent member defeats in Washington State since 1983, when information relating to this study was first gathered in a systematic way.

This study will contribute to the limited research base on school board elections in general and more specifically to the scarce information available regarding the issues surrounding the defeat of incumbent school board members in Washington State. This study will offer ideas for future research about school board elections and the defeat of incumbent school board members within those elections. Additionally, this study will test several of the theoretical models that have been developed by researchers to explain and predict incumbent school board member election turnover. An awareness of the issues involved with incumbent school board member defeats provides a useful understanding of the continuity and stability of school governance issues, while providing the catalyst for school board member training and the maintenance of organizational well-being.

The Importance of the Local School Board: Background

The local school board is a unique, grassroots American institution. As early as 1642, the General Court of Massachusetts concluded that parents were neglecting the training of their children as they ordered the selectmen of every town in the colony to require that all parents and masters undertake the education of their children. However,

as this dictum did not suffice, in 1647 the General Court passed its famous Old Deluder Satan Act. This law required that every town set up a school or pay a tax to a neighboring town to do so. The supervision of these schools was charged to the local minister and the selectmen of the town. According to Pulliam (1976), “New England colonies made laws requiring education of the children, but left details to local communities – thereby creating the traditions of local autonomy and the district system” (p. 29). The district system with its decentralization and local control continued to dominate New England schools before and after the Revolution, and the idea of free, compulsory, universal education was central to the ideal of self-government there. As quoted in Tyack (1967), Aaron Gove, superintendent of schools for Denver, Colorado, put the formula for local control into the following words when addressing the National Education Association in 1904:

The people are represented in the administration of a school system by a body of men and women whom they elect for that purpose. In that body rests necessarily all effective power and direction. That body selects an officer whose sole business is to execute the plans prepared by the people through their representatives, the board of education (p. 336).

This enduring tradition of local lay control and lay governance of public schools is deeply embedded in our history and widely accepted in our political and social culture (Danzberger, Carol, Cunningham, Kirst, McCloud and Usdan, 1987). As the centrality of schooling in American life has intensified over time with nearly a quarter of all Americans working in public schools as students or staff (Tyack and Cuban, 1995), it

becomes imperative to know more about the governance of such a widespread and commonplace institutional reality.

Significance of the Study

Strangely, given the ubiquitous nature of elected school boards in most American communities, information about the representational dynamics of locally elected school boards is largely non-existent. This is likely due to the very nature of local control. Records of local school board elections are generally kept locally and are often difficult to access for researchers. Many states do not require central reporting of local school board elections, leaving the official recording of the election results in the hands of the county auditor. Washington is such a state.

The model of the locally elected school board is common throughout the United States and Canada. Although there are variations on the model, the locally elected school board is the ultimate authority for school governance in the community it serves. The quality of this leadership can enhance or degrade the educational experience of young people in a community. Moreover, the continuity and stability of educational leadership is essential to the efficient management of a school organization. Publicly elected school board members play a central role in the leadership equation of a local school district. Despite calls by some for the dissolution of local school boards as they now exist (Wagner, 1992) the importance of this leadership role continues and is likely to remain a feature of public education well into the future.

Elected school board members, while once considered holders of stable positions, are increasingly finding it difficult to reconcile the diverse, contending interests of their

constituents in a rapidly changing society. Especially of interest to school leaders, such as superintendents, is the research done by Walden (1976), which showed that the school superintendent is usually replaced within three years after the entry of a successful insurgent (a candidate representing a dissimilar political viewpoint than the incumbent) on the school board, and that turnover is usually an involuntary one. Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) found that the defeat of an incumbent school board member by an insurgent candidate signaled a new policy mandate for the board, and would lead to a redirection of district policies. Iannaccone and Lutz hypothesized that the defeat of an incumbent school board member reflected a public sense that the school governance system had become closed and no longer represented the interests of the larger community. These conclusions are examined in this study using data gathered from the 1995 general election results.

More frequently, partisan, vested-interest groups elect school board representatives. For this reason, there has been a growing professional interest in exploring and describing the underlying reasons for incumbent school board member defeats in the State of Washington. This study concerned itself with establishing a descriptive baseline of information regarding the nature of incumbent school board member defeats in the State of Washington. Additionally, this research has implications for the identification of indicators of public dissatisfaction leading to those incumbent defeats which may, in turn, lead very rapidly to superintendent turnover and school district policy change.

The earliest major studies focusing on incumbent school board member defeat typically focused on the twin concerns of causality and prediction. However, the current

literature regarding school board elections is suffused with concern about the legitimacy of school board governance as it relates to issues of educational reform and how local school boards can resist the forces of instability represented by single-interest “insurgencies” in an era where such interests seem to predominate. Concerns about the legitimacy, the stability and the purpose of locally elected school boards permeate most of the opinion pieces contained in the educational literature specific to this topic.

Background Issues

Mitchell and Thorsted (1976), in their study “Incumbent School Board Member Defeat Reconsidered: New Evidence for Its Political Meaning,” reviewed those studies relating to incumbent school board member defeats from the perspective of political economy. They examined Iannaccone and Lutz’s hypothesis that the defeat of an incumbent school board member is the “most visible indicator yet identified that a closed school district policy system is in the process of being forced open because it no longer represents the interests of the larger community” (p.32). The authors, through their study, arrived at the conclusion that “All available data also concur in the judgment that political variables are closely associated with the incumbent defeat process” (p. 43). Mitchell and Thorsted suggested, “Additional investigation of the political ideological shifts which are associated with the turnover of a school board through incumbent defeat is needed. Other indicators need to be identified that could provide insight into the ideological shifts relating to incumbent school board member defeat” (p. 46). Their study, through its creation of the *Challenger Index*, quantified certain key indicators of public dissatisfaction in an attempt to predict incumbent school board member defeat and to illustrate the broader political implications of their discoveries. Certainly, this study,

in light of Mitchell and Thorsted's research, has been informed to a significant degree by considerations arising from issues of political economy. However, there is a tendency in research informed by the assumptions of political economy to examine data from very large samples. This approach to researching local school board elections, and in particular those elections resulting in incumbent school board member defeat, has tended to create very broad, general political conclusions. These conclusions often do little to inform those most likely to be interested in the issue of incumbent school board member defeat; such as incumbent school board members, prospective challengers and the superintendents likely to be impacted by those incumbent school board member defeats.

Lutz and Wang (1987), in their study titled "Predicting Public Dissatisfaction: A Study of School Board Member Defeat," offered the operational definition for public dissatisfaction as "the number of challengers in any election" (p. 67). Their study examined Hunt's (1980) post hoc attempt at modeling the predictive validity of his index formula. Hunt had created a prediction model that claimed to have discovered "variables that were consistent in accounting for incumbent defeat across time." Lutz and Wang challenged Hunt's data derived conclusion based on its inability to predict accurately incumbent school board member defeats. They adjusted his formulae by including a variable they developed called "the dissatisfaction factor" and were able, as a result of this adjustment, to support what they described as the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy. They indicated a need for more effective identification of the "discrepant dislikes" which act as the variables (athletic policy, gifted/talented policy, discipline policy etc.), which, when combined, lead to voter dissatisfaction with the policymakers (read: board members) in a school district. They noted that voters appeared

to unite in their dissatisfaction when a constellation of these various dissatisfied groups reached a “dissatisfied enough” stage to create a generalized sense of political urgency for change.

Although this study is informed by many of the assumptions of political economy (responsiveness to constituents is important for re-election success, identification of key issues to support in electoral campaign, identification of key candidate differences, creation of support in the community for one’s position, communication of core beliefs, etc.), it was not limited to that set of assumptions exclusively. Instead, this study seeks to identify a number of issues and surface information through a combination of descriptive and qualitative strategies. This study will examine these various issues and other associated information to determine salient issues.

Current Perspectives on the Locally Elected School Board

Robert Wagner (1992), in his essay written for the Phi Delta Kappan titled “The Case for Local Education Policy Boards,” suggested that the legitimacy of local school boards is questionable due to the extremely poor voter participation in those elections. This view is an echo of Professor Charles H. Judd’s 1934 call for the abolishment of local school boards in his article, “School Boards as an Obstruction to Good Administration” cited by Wagner (1992). Wagner (1992) suggested that there be threshold requirements for election certification. Further, he suggested that local education policy boards be created to replace local school boards, which he believed were far too involved in the administrative minutiae of operating a school system to provide effective policy leadership. Wagner stated that the disjunction between state-sponsored (usually mandated) reform initiatives and local school boards was in large part due to local school

boards failing to understand their core leadership responsibilities as policy makers. Interestingly, the response to Wagner's position paper (he was a member of the Twentieth Century Fund/Danforth Foundation Task Force on School Governance) as expressed by E. Harold Fisher and Thomas A. Shannon (1992) in the same issue of the Phi Delta Kappan is that we already have local education policy boards and they are known as local school boards. They challenged Wagner's suggestion that school board legitimacy is undermined by low voter participation in elections. Fisher and Shannon claimed that most school board members would welcome the strengthening of their policy-making role in their educational leadership activities. Much of the current debate about local school boards, as represented in opinion journals such as the Phi Delta Kappan, is focused on issues of local school board legitimacy and the sort of role local school boards should play in the current "national education reform" era.

This study assumes that locally elected school boards remain central, viable and influential arbiters of educational policy in their communities. Therefore, this study does not explore those issues currently being debated about the role of the school board in our society, no matter how compelling they may seem. Perhaps the resiliency of locally elected school boards in the State of Washington in the face of the current debate about their efficacy and relevance to modern society relates directly to their essentially democratic foundations.

Definition of Incumbent.

The term incumbent refers to an elected or appointed school board member who is in service on a school board at the time of a general election. Appointed incumbent

school board members must participate in the first general election after their appointment, regardless of the length of their predecessors' remaining term.

Research Questions

This study focuses on five research questions:

- 1) What issues identified in previous research were determined to exist during the 1995 school board elections in Washington State in which an incumbent school board member was defeated by a challenger, and what degree of influence did each issue have on the defeat of the incumbent?
- 2) What additional groupings of factors were determined to exist during the same election, which were not among those identified as issues from Section I of the survey instrument?
- 3) What influence, if any, did each of 17 identified campaign factors have on the outcome of the 1995 school board elections in Washington State in which an incumbent school board member was defeated by a challenger, and how long before the election did the incumbent and the challenger begin to campaign?
- 4) What unique conditions or specific demographic factors existed within each community, which were determined to have exerted a significant influence on the defeat of an incumbent school board member during the 1995 school board elections in the State of Washington?
- 5) How did the 1995 election results compare with the data compiled during the previous six school board elections in the State of Washington?

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This review of literature will focus on the research regarding incumbent school board member election defeats and the theoretical explanations derived from that research. This review of literature will elaborate on the main lines of research in this area in order to underpin this study's research model and data extracted from the 1995 school board elections in the State of Washington. This examination will focus on the dominant ideas of the research base in this area of study. An examination of economic theory as it relates to the issue of school board elections will be undertaken. In addition, the research subsets of political theory that explore community dissatisfaction and electoral competition's relationship to candidate responsiveness will be examined. Additionally, this review will look at the political economy theory of school governance that concerns itself with school board elections.

Much of the significant research conducted in the area of school board elections was initiated in the 1970's. Although some research regarding school boards was done in the mid to late 1960's, nearly all of the seminal studies referred to in this dissertation originated over the past three decades. The quantity of research focused on incumbent school board member defeat is sparse but of good quality. This study has been pursued in order to contribute to that standard.

A thorough search of the literature regarding the issue of incumbent school board member defeat was conducted for this study. Throughout this search, the following key descriptors were used to elicit pertinent information regarding the study topic:

- a) school governance

- b) school-community relationship
- c) school board elections
- d) incumbent school board member defeats
- e) board of director elections
- f) dissatisfaction theory
- g) school board public support
- h) superintendent succession theories
- i) board-administration relationship
- j) local control of schools
- k) politics of education
- l) educational leadership
- m) public support of education
- n) school board member turnover
- o) school change
- p) education reform
- q) community dissatisfaction with schools

Study searches using these key descriptors provided the source materials necessary to establish the foundation and context for this study.

The questions that relate to why, how and when incumbent school board members are defeated in school board elections are varied. The proposed answers are equally varied. There are several general approaches to seeking answers to these questions, however, that illuminate the research landscape. All of the various approaches to

answering the questions about incumbent school board defeats share some common assumptions.

Researchers in this area all concur that incumbents are unseated as a result of a gap growing between them and their constituents. The nature of this gap, the causative antecedents to this gap and the relationship between the development of the gap and incumbent school board member defeat are not generally agreed upon. The assumption that a gap is present between an incumbent school board member and his or her constituency when they are defeated is a universal assumption in the research. There is little agreement about how much control over this gap formation an incumbent school board member has, but it is very clear that researchers have posited much of their hypothetical work around the central idea of a disconnection occurring between the incumbent and his or her constituency.

Economic Theory

The economic perspective is best exemplified in the work done by Lutz and Gaberina (1977). They based their research on a set of economic factors such as the direction of the socio-economic community indicators (these indicators were measures of economic growth or decline in a community) and the tax rate supporting public education in a community. Their research “operationalized the investigation of the ‘gap’ that can exist between a school board and its community and the relationship between that gap and incumbent school board member defeat” (p. 282). Lutz and Gaberina concluded that a community’s property tax rate is a predictive variable of incumbent school board member defeat in “declining” communities. These communities, suffering from economic decline, were more likely to show a “gap” between the community’s

expectations or demands and the school board's response to the changed economic condition of the community. This finding, of course, suggests the possibility of responding to economic factors in such a way to prevent incumbent school board member defeat. However, Lutz and Gaberina did not explore the practical implications this research might have for incumbent school board members facing future electoral challenges, nor did they explore whether or not this gap generated challengers for incumbent school board members. Although they made claims, based on their research, regarding economic factors and the relationship of those factors to school board elections, these claims were very broad and general, therefore difficult for board members to turn to practical use in the political arena they inhabit. Lutz moved away from studying economic factors relating to incumbent school board member defeat in his subsequent work. His work in public dissatisfaction theory has contributed significantly to this research area.

Political Economy: Dissatisfaction Theory Reviewed

As stated earlier, Mitchell and Thorsted (1976), in their study "Incumbent School Board Member Reconsidered: New Evidence for Its Political Meaning," reviewed those studies relating to incumbent school board member defeats from the perspective of political economy. Political economy, as used here, refers to the political variables that are associated with electoral success or failure as presented in the research literature concerned with this topic. However, there is significant disagreement over which political variables are most closely related to electoral success or failure. There is general agreement in the literature that once the identification of political variables can be established, the causal determinants for electoral success or failure will have been

established. A close look at several of the key source studies revealed the lines of the political economy theories regarding incumbent school board member defeats.

Lutz and Iannaccone (1978), as described in their dissatisfaction theory, indicated that in local public education policy the first significant indicator of a dramatic policy change process is incumbent school board defeat. They saw incumbent defeat as being an integral element in local education policy change. The capability to predict that event early enough would permit effective policy change without the disruptive effects of incumbent defeat and subsequent superintendent turnover.

Lutz and Wang (1987) applied the dissatisfaction theory of governance to school board elections. The primary claim of dissatisfaction theory (as applied to school governance) is that the public will take electoral action when there is a lack of correspondence between demands and outputs. Lutz and Wang identified numerous indicators of public dissatisfaction that led to incumbent school board member defeat, superintendent turnover and policy change. Again, the relationship between the defeat of an incumbent school board member and involuntary superintendent turnover was substantiated. Lutz and Wang concluded that the number of challengers in any election, including school board elections, was a “reasonable operational indicator of public dissatisfaction.” Lutz and Wang looked for variables of dissatisfaction that were consistent and stable in a population over time. Their dissatisfaction factor was calculated as follows:

$$\text{DISSAT-xx} = 1 - \frac{\text{Number of Seats Available}}{\text{Incumbents Running} + \text{New Challengers}}$$

In addition to the dissatisfaction factor, Lutz and Wang used the same type of ratio variables for property tax, assessed valuation and average daily attendance in schools.

They used these adjusted ratio variables with incumbent wins (the criterion variable) to calculate Pearson correlation coefficients for a zero-order matrix. According to their analysis, the single consistent and major contributor to variance was the dissatisfaction factor, as they identified it.

Rada and Carlson (1985) claimed that the dissatisfaction theory of school governance could predict changes in school governance. The dissatisfaction theory predicts what will happen when a community's dissatisfaction with its schools is great enough. These researchers claim that a predictable series of events occur once a threshold of community dissatisfaction is reached. These events are:

- 1) inputs from the public demanding different or new policies or procedures reach a high level
- 2) the number of split votes by the school board reaches a high level
- 3) the rate of school board member turnover increases
- 4) involuntary superintendent turnover occurs

These researchers based their theoretical model on data derived from the public record of school governance. In other words, they constructed a methodology for their research that quantified data, especially in the area of "demand inputs," that other researchers have viewed as being essentially qualitative in nature. For instance, Rada and Carlson tracked any statement directed to the school boards they included in their research that expressed a person's belief, concern or wish about a school issue. They took the total number of tallies per fiscal year to represent the rate of demand inputs. They did note that the reliability of data on demand inputs could easily be seen as questionable, especially given the fact that comments from the public are not usually a legally required part of school

board minutes. In addition, they devised a tallying system that recognized the difference between a single person making a comment at a board meeting and a large organized group making a point at a meeting. They created an indexing system that weighted demand inputs according to group size. However, there was no recognition of the possibility that different communities might exhibit markedly different views and behaviors regarding access to board meetings. They assumed an equality of access, based on legal fact, which may not exist in practice. This assumption could very well be an undermining factor in terms of the reliability of their demand-input tallies.

Rada and Carlson (1985) agreed that the defeat of an incumbent school board member has important implications for a school district. They defined incumbent school board member defeat very broadly, as follows:

- 1) board member stands for reelection and receives fewer votes than a challenger,
- 2) member is recalled from office,
- 3) member resigns before the completion of a full term in office, or
- 4) member does not stand for reelection.

I chose to use the narrowest definition, as stated in #1 above, in my study of incumbent school board member defeat. The second definition of board member turnover is an extremely rare phenomenon (no record of this in the 15 year history of data collection for this study) and the final two definitions of board member turnover often involve personal decision-making processes not explored directly in my data collection, at least from the perspective of establishing reasons for incumbent defeat. The researchers in this area of study generally use Rada and Carlson's broader definition of incumbent school board

member turnover. However, this very broad definition makes it difficult to understand specific, direct variables that may contribute to the electoral defeat of an incumbent school board member.

Rada and Carlson (1985) attempted to identify some sources of community dissatisfaction and to show how those different sources might differentiate the focus of community dissatisfaction. They examined sources of community dissatisfaction that focused solely on school board members, sources that focused on the school board and the superintendent collectively and sources that focused on the superintendent exclusively. They found that there was a differentiated impact on increased school board member turnover depending on the focus of community dissatisfaction. In addition, they identified a number of intervening variables that they believed limited the predictive value of the community dissatisfaction theory. Finally, this study was silent on the level of community dissatisfaction needed to affect change in local school board governance.

Dissatisfaction Theory: Board Role Duality and Conflict

Merz (1984) examined the sources for school board member turnover by studying those demands of the role of school board member that seemed to generate conflict and frustration for those members. The fundamental assumption in her research was that much of the conflict in school governance was generated by the representational/expert duality of the role a school board member must play. Her study attempted to identify which part of this role duality, if any, was more responsible for conflict and frustration on the part of board members. Merz found that school boards felt that acquiring expertise was not a problem. What she did find was that school board members identified labor negotiations and dealing with the demands of special interest groups as being the most

significant sources of conflict and frustration in their roles. Both of these significant sources of conflict and frustration for school board members fell under the 'representational half' of their role duality. Merz's study explored the community dissatisfaction theory from the perspective of both school board members and superintendents. An interesting implication of this study was that when school boards were engaged in managing conflict (negotiating and facilitating), they were most likely to be at risk in terms of turnover. This implication was explored in this study.

Dissatisfaction Theory: Key Issues

Merz (1985) continued her research regarding incumbent school board member defeats by examining data collected in a study sponsored by the Washington State School Director's Association and the Washington Association of School Administrators in 1984. This study surveyed superintendents, a practice continued in my study, and school board presidents in districts experiencing incumbent school board member defeats. Merz found that the primary issues that seemed significant in the election leading to incumbent school board member defeats were:

- a) the relationship of a board member to the community and special interest groups,
- b) the board member's controversial style and
- c) the board member's lack of visibility or action.

Merz did not see these as being especially substantive issues, in terms of their direct relationship to school life. Rather, she found little evidence to indicate that the outcomes of these elections were influenced by what she referred to as the substantive issues of controversy over curriculum, declining enrollment or athletics. She claimed that the

differences between a defeated incumbent school board member and the successful challenger resided primarily in campaign intensity rather than in differences between the candidates' personal characteristics. She defined campaign intensity as the expenditure of money, number of campaign activities and endorsements by special interest groups. Whether or not a candidate was perceived as a community leader and had name familiarity constituted Merz's definition of personal characteristic for the purposes of her study. Merz, in this study, discussed the possibility that community dissatisfaction, as expressed in incumbent school board member defeats, was related to regional population and economic factors.

This review of literature, thus far, has concerned itself with a number of studies that have explored the relationship between social, political and economic factors that may or may not contribute to incumbent school board member defeat. I chose to include those studies that directly examined school governance theory, public dissatisfaction theory and responsiveness theory. These theoretical categories are arbitrary, to a large extent, because of the significant amount of 'data overlapping' that occurs in their construction. Essentially, these studies see incumbent school board member defeats as being either indicative of, or caused by economic forces, political changes, new social dynamics or candidate behavior. There is significant disagreement over how much control an incumbent school board member can exert over all of these forces and conditions, especially when considering the scope of some studies. In essence, the differing perspectives represented in the theoretical work I have chosen to examine reflect the ongoing debate about whether human history, as represented by such a small event as a school board election, is the product of broad, inexorable forces or is, in fact, a

collection of many individual acts of human will. The theoretical constructs I have encountered in this review of literature represent that continuum. The polarities of that continuum would have us believe that history is either a steamroller of uncontrollable forces (akin to the forces of nature) or the reality created through the multitudinous, but individually significant, acts of human beings exercising their free will. In all of the studies, however, there is a tendency to recognize the mutually informing nature of these two polar regions toward the center. Some of the researchers I have reviewed claim that although the forces that determine much of the shape of the electoral process are beyond any one person's control, there are responses to those forces that will favor the perceptive over the imperceptive. Others state that much of what can be done in terms of gaining success electorally has little impact on broad, changing social conditions. Seeking specificity that can inform practice, while also recognizing the importance of broader, less controllable forces from this research is a valuable exercise in conceptual integration that in the end can be purposefully applied.

As noted earlier in this review, most theoreticians in this area of study agree that incumbent school board member defeats can be associated to some degree with a disconnect between the incumbent school board member and his or her constituency. The dynamics of the process of disconnection are explored to a large degree by the authors of the responsiveness theory of electoral politics. For the purpose of this review, I have most closely examined the work of those theoreticians that are concerned specifically with school board elections.

Dissatisfaction Theory: Competition and Responsiveness Research

Jennings and Zeigler (1970) define responsiveness to mean “acting on the basis of expressed preferences by constituents. Thus two conditions must be met: 1) there must be expressions and 2) they must be taken into account” (p. 6). Their study examined the extent to which school boards were responsive to their constituencies as defined above. In terms of this examination, they looked at two different dimensions of representation. They examined how board members responded to groups (or spokespersons for groups) and to individuals. According to their findings, responsiveness to constituencies rises in direct proportion to the socio-political complexity of a school district. Of interest here was the discussion of what responsiveness meant in terms of data derived from the study. Jennings and Zeigler (1970) found that responsiveness should be seen as a state in which the representatives pay attention to and are affected by group demands among the represented. In less complex districts, board members relying on individual transactions, or “cues” as the authors define casual social contact between board members and individual members of the public, are not facing the kind of zero-sum pressure and demands which are place on board members in more complex districts. Board members from these less complex districts may act in terms of a “self-defined image” of what they think is best for their district. Ultimately, board members of less complex districts who are able to maintain individual contacts with community members are more likely to survive disagreements and maintain public support than their counterparts from more complex districts, according to Jennings and Zeigler’s study.

Jennings and Zeigler (1970) claimed that, “Inferentially, the force of competition, the threat of defeat, and the desire to remain in office are of little moment for many

school boards in keeping them responsive to their publics” (p. 28). They continued with their examination of how responsiveness shapes the constitution of school boards by further examining the assumption that free, competitive elections invoke responsiveness. They found that competition characteristics had only a remote and barely identifiable tie with responsiveness. Their work indicated that social complexity and mass support were the major determinants of response style on the part of board members. They stressed that electoral processes served as a “mediating or interpreting device in the articulation between complexity-mass support and responsiveness” (p. 31). The assumption that board responsiveness was a product of the competitive nature of the electoral process between the elected and their constituents was challenged. Rather, Jennings and Zeigler painted a much more complex picture of how responsiveness was created and sustained over time.

Much of the focus of Jennings and Zeigler’s (1970) study was on the nature of metropolitan electoral phenomena and how it related to school board responsiveness. In a state such as Washington, where only a small percentage of the state’s school districts could be termed metropolitan, any study of school board responsiveness requires close examination of the differences between rural, suburban and metropolitan electoral practices and subsequent outcomes. An examination of school board responsiveness from a differentiated (rural, suburban and metropolitan) perspective has not, to date, been undertaken in this state. Jennings and Zeigler’s work suggested that this approach to data might yield important information regarding school board responsiveness. However, since researchers in this state have lacked even a thorough baseline of information at the state level regarding incumbent school board member defeat, it seemed prudent to

establish a more general base of information and related knowledge before exploring a more differentiated perspective on school board elections.

Levine and Clawar (1978) studied data available to them from the New York City Public School System. In 1960, the New York City school system was decentralized into 32 school districts with limited authority over elementary and junior high schools. State legislation provided for locally elected school boards for these newly created community school districts. Levine and Clawar examined data using two organizing categories, demographic variables and experience-resource variables, to structure their investigation. Each of the two sets of variables was tested using a Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis. The dependent variable was whether or not the board candidate won or lost. The variable of previous running experience, included in the grouping of variables called experience-resource, was the highest single correlate of winning. These researchers came to the conclusion that the group of variables called experience-resource was much more potent in predicting the outcome of a school board election than demographic variables. According to Levine and Clawar, data collected for this study would be within the aggregate category of experience-resource variables. From a political perspective, variables from the experience and resource domain are much more amenable to change and control, the lifeblood of political activity. Therefore, those variables are likely to present information most likely to militate for political utility. Certainly, my study has been approached, at least partially, with this in mind.

Stelzer (1972) has studied the issue of school board receptivity in great detail. Stelzer defined school board member receptivity as “an attitude set that favors greater communication and participation by the public.” Also examined in this study was

the relationship election competition had in creating or sustaining receptivity between the public and elected school board members. Interestingly, Stelzer found only a very weak relationship between election competition and an explanation of receptivity. Stelzer (1961), however, reserved judgment regarding this finding because of the poor measures of competitive structure of school board elections available for this study. Stelzer was exploring the statement made by James Madison in the Federalist Paper Number 52 that expressed:

As it is essential to liberty that government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an ultimate sympathy with, the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can be effectively secured (p. 327).

Of course, this statement expresses the assumption imbedded in the thinking of many political scientists such as Dahl (1961) who said, "Elected leaders keep the real or imagined preferences of constituents constantly in mind in deciding what policies to adopt or reject" (p. 164). Perhaps this assumption is more often stated than tested, but it remains central to much of the discussion regarding democratic political practice.

Stelzer's 1972 study of receptivity did find that "elective board members who faced competition in their first election were more receptive than those who did not" (p. 86). Stelzer also found that "under conditions of community arousal, receptive boards interpose themselves in policy formulation through opposition to the superintendent" (p. 86). The practical implications of this research should not be lost on superintendents who

wish to be seen as mutually receptive with their school board members in addressing community educational concerns.

Stelzer (1972) devised a receptivity index that permitted the comprehensive study of this issue. The index gauges attitudes related to receptivity by asking the six questions listed below of each school board member interviewed:

1. What have been your most satisfying experiences as a school board member?
2. And what experiences have been most dissatisfying?
3. In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing education in this school district?
4. How do you expect to handle this [as previously stated] problem?
5. There are two main points of view how a school board member should act when he has to make up his mind. One is that he should do what the public wants him to do, even if it isn't his own preference. The second is that he should use his own judgment, regardless of what others want him to do. Which of these views comes closest to your own view? [After respondent answers] Why do you feel this way?
6. How do you feel about the efforts of groups to make their views known to you? (IF NECESSARY) Why do you feel that way? (pp. 86-88)

Stelzer created a coding system for categorizing responses to these questions. From this index, Stelzer derived measures of receptivity. "The distribution of receptivity, the conditions that support it and its importance in policy formulation" (p. 71) were the foci of Stelzer's 1972 research study. The issue of board member receptivity was an issue that was examined in this study of incumbent school board member defeats, as well.

Stelzer continued with another study that examined data regarding school board receptivity to the public in 1974. This study focused on issues raised in Stelzer's previous study regarding school board member receptivity.

Stelzer (1974) hypothesized that:

1. School boards employ a strategy of receptivity when faced with community conflict. Receptivity is defined as openness to public participation and influence.
2. Receptivity is the mechanism by which the board channels community conflict into opposition to the superintendent. The receptive board translates public disaffection into policy opposition.
3. Competitive elections are institutional mechanisms that support school board receptivity (p. 383).

Stelzer developed four measures to use in the study of school board receptivity. First, a receptivity index was created for individual school board members. This index was derived from scoring responses to three described activities:

1. Do you personally reach out for policy support from the public?
2. Do community groups seek your support for policy positions?
3. How much time do you spend on requests or questions from the public (p. 384)?

Second, Stelzer reviewed three measures of community conflict as listed below to create a community conflict index:

1. A dichotomous variable from board members' answers to the question "Is there any tension or conflict among people in the district on questions having to do with school policies?"

2. A measure of the school system's ratio of success in passing financial proposals as reported by the superintendent.
3. An index of arousal based on the responses to seven questions regarding general and specific conflict in the community (pp. 384-385).

These conflict variables were checked for interrelationships and gamma scores were given. Superintendents were asked to give index scores for these measures according to their understanding of their board members and the community they represented. The use of superintendents as index 'mediators' was not utilized in any significant way in Stelzer's study but it did suggest a research approach to be utilized in this study of incumbent school board member defeat.

Third, checking a board member's initial election created a measure of electoral competition. Stelzer assumed that competition has more meaning if the competitor is an incumbent and if his/her ideas are different from the challenger's. Another variable indicating electoral competition was derived from incumbent defeats in the election preceding the interviewing process. The more defeats, the more competitive the election, according to Stelzer. This measure was seen as a very reliable measure because it was based on district election figures and was not subject to 'memory decay' or false perceptions on the parts of board members involved in the elections.

Fourth, Stelzer developed a measure of board opposition to the superintendent that was based on the responses to these questions:

1. Does any person or group on the board often oppose the superintendent?
2. If the response to question #1 was affirmative, the board member was asked if they considered themselves one of these persons (p.385).

Stelzer found that board members were more inclined to express receptivity in the face of community conflict, depending on their perception of the level of that conflict. The greater the perceived level of community conflict, the more receptive board members became. School board members became the informal means for channeling community dissatisfaction with school administration, as represented by the superintendent. This relationship became the institutional formula for connecting community dissent with school leadership. The results of Stelzer's study indicated that receptive boards are attuned to the public. They form an ongoing channel that presents no challenge to the superintendent except in times of public arousal. When a receptive board perceives public discontent, the superintendent will face board opposition as a consequence. In terms of electoral competition, elections were found to facilitate the replacement of representatives who did not manage to stay attuned to voters. The gamma association between incumbent defeats and receptivity was shown to be .5.

Stelzer (1974) found that there was a relationship between candidate ambition and receptivity that formed a logically related cycle of incumbency. Stelzer noted that incumbent board members became less receptive to the public once they had proven themselves on the board and been successfully reelected. Accordingly, peak ambition occurred at four to five years of service. Stelzer was able to show that the relationship between ambition and receptivity was strongest for board members with four to five years of service. Electoral competition and personal ambition combined to support board member receptivity to the public, albeit for a brief period of time.

Rancorous dissent is the product of insufficient institutional channels for redress of grievances, according to Coleman (1957). Institutions without the formal means of

channeling dissent cannot prevent the intensification of conflict. This exemplifies the importance of school board receptivity in assuring that public conflict does not intensify to destructive levels of discord. Stelzer's (1974) study supported Coleman's conclusion that school politics are characterized by cycles of conflict and peace. Coleman claimed that the continuity established under a traditional ruling group does not provide for adequate channeling of dissent, so that over time the dissent turns to mobilized conflict resulting in a dramatic overturning of the traditional ruling group. This sort of mobilized conflict is seen currently in single-interest campaigns against targeted incumbent school board members, as shown in this study. When a school board fails to maintain its receptivity to the public, fails to create an infrastructure for dissent and allows itself to be perceived as isolated, it has sufficiently fed the frustrations of an aggrieved public to face defeat. Involuntary superintendent turnover follows close behind. Stelzer (1974) noted, "under conditions of low involvement, it is fairly easy for a small, narrowly focused group to defeat an incumbent" (p.392). My study explored this idea over the course of fifteen years.

In light of this research on receptivity, Stelzer (1974) was surprised to find that "Only 22 percent of the board members have sought support for their positions. Only 41 percent were approached by groups with requests for support" (p.392). Without the spurs of electoral competition and personal ambition, receptivity does not thrive of its own self-evident charms!

Adkison (1978) studied the issues of electoral competition and electoral conflict, and how those political factors affected board responsiveness. Adkison's work aligned with Stelzer's work in terms of its focus on how electoral politics related to school board

responsiveness to the public. Where Stelzer defined receptivity as being a set of personal attitudes about public involvement in education, Adkison defined school board responsiveness as a political reflex closely tied to political and economic forces not subject to individual attitudes or attributes. Adkison noted that the sampled voters in her study were predominantly middle-income citizens with a direct interest in schools. This identification of who voted in school board elections is an important feature of this study since it identified the group for whom school board member responsiveness would be most pertinent. Additionally, it should be noted that Adkison's study was based on 14.5% of the registered voters participating in the school board election she studied. This was not an atypical election. The school board election previous to the one under review had a 13.2% voter turnout. These facts illustrate how narrowly defined the voter base for school board elections has been in the research. When researchers consider receptivity and responsiveness to the public, the definition of what constitutes that public is important to consider. Research in this area does not engage this question often or in much depth. Adkison, however, does examine these data and relates it to her hypothesis about the school board election she reviewed. She asked whether or not intense electoral conflict and competition had the predicted effect of changing voter turnout. She described the voters who were studied as being "individuals linked by activity in formal, school-related bodies such as the PTA, civic organizations which include education among their interests, and professionals employed in education" (p. 12). When responsiveness was examined, it was viewed in terms of the characteristics of those who voted. The characteristics of those who voted in the past (during the 70's, for instance, when Adkison was doing her research) may not be true for those who voted in 1995; but

the importance of knowing these characteristics could aid the focusing of school board member responsiveness where it would garner the greatest support. If community support for schools is an essential attribute of successful school systems, this focus becomes more than just savvy political maneuvering.

However, defining what responsiveness is in terms of school board member behavior is a challenging task. Adkison (1978) found two dominant definitions of responsiveness in her research. The system's critics held a definition of responsiveness as acting in accordance with the expressed wishes of community groups. This definition was contradictory in practice because it presumed agreement about educational issues across community groups, which was shown to be a very fragile presumption in a complex community such as the one Adkison studied. To a great degree, what this definition really seems to be saying is responsiveness is acting in accordance with the expressed wishes of 'our' group, whomever 'we' are. The second definition of responsiveness that emerged from Adkison's study focused on the public relations task of improving the quality of communication to the public regarding the school board's reasoning for the decisions they made. Again, it is possible that both definitions might make sense in the political arena if they served to activate supportive voting behavior from the majority of those who vote. As has been shown, the group studied by Adkison was narrowly composed.

Adkison (1978) found that her study supported "the theory linking the complexity of a school district with electoral competition and with a decision making style marked by open conflict on the board and between the board and the superintendent" (p. 19).

Adkison closes by concluding:

Finally, it appears that the relationships the theory identifies may not necessarily represent democratic influence on policy formation. While the board's decision style may appear more responsive, the board still cannot respond easily to the expressed demands of their constituents. Even within the small educational social system, grievances are varied, and their solutions are often in mutual conflict. When faced with constant criticism from one part or another of the community, the new board over time may retreat from its expressed posture of responsiveness and close ranks with the administration (p. 20).

Political Economy Theory of School Governance

Rada (1987) viewed electoral conflict as doing several things to school board elections. According to his economic theory of school governance equation, electoral conflict produces costs that are greater than the benefits of holding office for some potential candidates, thus discouraging participation, while for other candidates that same conflict may "provide an issue that makes the power of school board membership appealing" (p. 16). Adkison (1978) noted that some incumbents chose to retire rather than face a challenge. Rada identified this as a case where an incumbent was a "prestige" candidate. According to Rada's theory, "If an election is expected to be contested, potential prestige candidates hesitate to declare their candidacy. The possible conflict during a campaign and the possibility of losing the election are unbearable costs for most prestige candidates" (p. 18). On the other hand, the interests of power candidates are centered on conflict. Power candidates generally have narrow interests; they want to influence a particular district policy, and are often single-interest candidates in their initial campaign. If they are successful in creating policy advocacy positions between

candidates, the perception of overt conflict is increased, thus reducing the likelihood of prestige candidates electing to participate in elections. Given data gathered in this study, incumbents who are in office for prestige reasons as defined by Rada (1987) have much to be concerned about.

Rada (1987) claimed that responsiveness to the community on the part of the school board was the result of “prestige board members’ attempt to reduce conflict that can lead to community dissatisfaction with the school board” (p. 20). This claim might help explain the phenomenon cited in research on superintendent turnover that shows incumbent school board members moving toward the position of a victorious, insurgent challenger. According to Rada, this behavior would come from “prestige” members of the school board as they sought to diminish conflict on the board. When this happens, a rapidly formed coalition of board members may begin opposing the superintendent, which in turn leads quickly to involuntary superintendent turnover. Incumbent school board member defeat is an especially acute forewarning of superintendent turnover.

Rada (1987) claimed that responsiveness to the public was based on what he posited as the “Majority Principle.” According to Rada (1987) incumbent school board members would behave in the following way:

They always choose the policy decision favored by the majority. To do otherwise would invite defeat, since challengers could align with incumbents on all policy issues except issue *x*, on which the incumbent ignored the majority. Since voters are indifferent on all issues except *x*, the election would come down to issue *x*, and the challengers, since they support the majority opinion, would gain the most

votes and win the election. Thus, in order to win reelection, incumbents must support the majority on every issue (p. 23).

Rada (1987) stated that the benefits of school board membership were slight. The corollary to this axiom would be that the cost of election must be low. Furthermore, the cost of holding office must remain low. Candidates, according to Rada, would not incur costs beyond benefits. These theoretical claims warranted looking at the types of “costs” and “benefits” involved in school board elections. The issues examined in this study could be identified as “costs” that negatively affected the political “balance” sheet of incumbents. Certainly, Rada’s theory provided a perspective on this study’s data that suggested some of the underlying reasons for incumbent school board member defeat.

Rada (1988) developed his theoretical concepts further in his paper on public choice theory. He chose to define rationality in economic terms. Thus, people acting on their self-interest would make rational decisions based on a cost-benefit determination, rationally made. In the case of school board members, cost was defined as time spent campaigning and serving, disruption of family life and possible electoral defeat. Benefits could be defined as money, power, and prestige in the community and possible electoral victory. Rada theorized that rational candidates would rank order their preferences against the alternatives and they would then choose the alternative that provided them the greatest “utility.” Rada claimed that the key element in his theoretical structure was the “self-interest axiom.” He then described the costs to candidates of such things as uncertainty and the cost of becoming informed. Rada stated, “We assume that candidates in our theory act solely to obtain the prestige and the power that holding office affords. Based on these assumptions rests the fundamental hypothesis of our theory: Candidates

for school board membership campaign and conduct themselves in office in a manner that they expect will maximize their personal benefits” (p. 229).

Rada (1988) went to some lengths to create a ‘calculus’ of the benefits and costs of school board membership. He noted that the benefits of school board membership were usually slight, especially when compared with other elective offices. Further, he noted that the degree of power granted a school board member was low as measured against other elected positions. Rada noted that prestige and civic duty were perceived as benefits to school board members. According to Rada’s ‘calculus,’ potential candidates for a school board election compare the costs and the benefits running for office. If the difference between benefit and cost is positive, the potential candidate will actively campaign for office. If the difference between benefit and cost is zero or negative, the potential candidate will remain an observer of the election. Rada discussed the different motivating factors at work for prestige and power candidates. Rada noted that “As conflict increases, power candidates appear and prestige candidates disappear” (p.230). These two types of candidates conduct very different campaigns. Power candidates are willing to create conflict through particular policy advocacy in order to mobilize support while prestige candidates avoid conflict. Prestige candidates are likely to restrict their campaigns “to name recognition and reputation promotion strategies,” according to Rada (1988, p. 230). He noted that many potential prestige candidates hesitate to declare their candidacy because of the unbearable costs associated with conflict and possible electoral defeat. This conclusion would also provide an explanation for the choice of many incumbent school members to ‘retire’ from their positions rather than face a challenger in

a school board election. This is a phenomenon that is little explored in the body of research regarding school board elections.

Rada (1988) stated a number of hypotheses in his public choice theory. These fourteen hypotheses were organized in terms of several major categories such as 1) Campaigning: Power and Prestige, 2) School Board Dependency on the Superintendent, 3) Effects of Campaigning, 4) The Majority Principle and 5) The Effect of Voter Distribution. These five categories were derived from the theory's basic assumption that the primary motivation for action in school governance is self-interest. Rada suggested that superintendents and school board members would find this hypothetical framework helpful in predicting what would happen when community dissatisfaction increased or when voter distribution changed because of demographic shifts in the community. Rada was emphatic that the study of school governance demanded a concerted effort to inform, build and test an axiomatic theory. This study is dedicated to that ongoing work.

School Governance: Tenets Regarding Responsiveness Reconsidered

Zeigler (1975) spoke to the representative concept by specifically referring to the notion of responsiveness as being central to all political science. Furthermore, Zeigler continued by saying there has been a comparative obsession among students of educational administration in looking at the governance structure of locally elected school boards through the lens of this tenet of political science. In his paper, Zeigler made the case that the standard model of a responsive decision-making body may be inappropriate when applied to locally elected school boards. He claimed that political scientists too often failed to recognize that a distinction should be made between organizations whose decisions are supposed to benefit the public at large and

organizations that provide services to a specialized population. His claim is based on the premise that schools do not serve the general public in a way that is clear to the overwhelming majority of the community. Rather, they provide services to a very specialized population: parents and their children. Many demographic studies would bear out this claim, especially in the decades since Zeigler's paper. Many communities find themselves supporting a school system that directly serves a minority of the larger community's population. Zeigler claimed that the notion of being responsive in a political science sense of the word was seen by educational decision-makers as being an unprofessional model for governance. Zeigler felt that school board members frequently rejected the notion that they were to respond to the demands of their constituents in favor of relying on the relationship they had with the district's professional employees, especially the superintendent. Of course, many of the authors cited in this review of literature would claim that this dependency on the professional employees of a district represented the precursor state of affairs leading to a loss of responsiveness and eventual electoral defeat or early retirement from a school board position. Zeigler stated that incumbent school board member defeat is largely a function of a community undergoing significant political realignment. He called into question the relationship between responsiveness, as political scientists and educational researchers, and effective school governance define it. However, much of the research done subsequent to Zeigler's paper continued to examine the significance of school board member responsiveness to the community. Zeigler criticized researchers for using the same research assumptions and methodologies used for the examination of civil governance (i.e. city councils) when researching a school board's responsiveness to its community. Zeigler made the claim

that “Responsiveness may be a luxury which, even in its limited form, we can no longer afford” (p.12).

Zeigler (1975) reviewed the body of school governance research and concluded that, “If the uncritical borrowing of concepts has led to problems, so has the uncritical borrowing of methodologies. However, the fault lies not so much in inadequate statistical manipulation, as in an inadequate data base” (p.16). The author went on to state that the best studies to date were those that gathered data over an extended period of time. Zeigler noted that studies should be both longitudinal and comparative.

The research base discussed in this review of literature has informed my study. My study has examined those issues considered germane to the study of school board elections. Additionally, my study has used longitudinal information gathering over the course of fifteen years to inform its conclusions. Of course, concepts regarding the conduct of such research have changed over time to reflect shifts in current methodological development. However, the information gathering methods for this study remained largely unchanged over a fifteen-year period of time. Like all longitudinal research, the quality of the questions asked at the beginning prefigures the ultimate usefulness of data captured over time. The body of information gathered is the most comprehensive baseline of information available to researchers interested in studying the defeat of incumbent school board members in the State of Washington. It will be up to those researchers who follow to determine the quality of the questions asked in this study. Their use of these baseline data and their acceptance or repudiation of the issues and attributes of those incumbent school board election defeats chronicled in this study will

determine the quality of the response to Zeigler's (1975) call for careful longitudinal research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Instrument Development

The questionnaire developed to identify educational and community issues and the degree of their influence on incumbent school board member election defeat during the 1995 general election was designed to ensure that all relevant election issues were identified. The 40-item School Board Election Issues Inventory (Sharratt, Swift and Moody, 1993) provided the core items for the questionnaire. In addition, a literature review on factors leading to incumbent school board member defeat (Abel, 1981; Adkison, 1978; Carpenter, 1980; Clawar and Levine, 1979; Moen, 1976; Snow & Gubbins, 1980) established the core “campaign factors affecting incumbent defeat” found in Section III of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was field tested with a group of 20 randomly selected defeated incumbent school board members to ensure that respondents were clear about the terminologies used and the directions given for completion of the instrument. All 20 questionnaires were returned and the responses were examined for content validity and clarity and found to present no problems of completion or interpretation. To maximize internal validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was developed specifically for use on a homogeneous population, namely defeated incumbent school board members. No work has been done by the developers of the survey to determine the reliability of the School Board Election Issues Inventory, which should be recognized as a potential weakness of this study.

The instrument was comprised of 40 items and was organized around four major sections. Section I contained 15 research-supported questions regarding the issues that may have been present in the community and their degree of influence on the incumbent school board member election defeat. The degree of influence was coded on a Likert scale, (1) no influence, (5) extensive influence on the election outcome.

Section II requested respondents to identify and list any conditions or factors that contributed to the incumbent school board member defeat that were not listed in Section I. This provided internal instrument reliability and offered opportunities for respondents to identify community-specific issues that only related to their unique situations.

Section III addressed the campaign factors affecting the election outcome and was comprised of questions 22-39. Selection of these items was drawn from a review of relevant literature and use of the core questionnaire, "School Board Election Issues Inventory" (Sharratt, Swift & Moody, 1993). Respondents completed this section from both the challenger and the successful candidate's point of view to indicate which campaign factors contributed to their success or defeat. A final question addressed the issue of how long before the election the challenger and successful candidate began to actively campaign.

Section IV sought information on conditions or demographic factors that may have contributed to the incumbent defeat. This was an open-ended response question.

Subjects

Superintendents from school districts where one or more incumbent school board member was defeated during the November 1995 general election were asked to respond to the School Board Election Issues Inventory. The 69 incumbent school board members

who lost their bid for reelection came from 62 school districts. Several school districts experienced more than one incumbent member defeat. The superintendents from those districts with more than one incumbent defeat were requested to complete a separate survey form for each of the defeated incumbent school board members.

Each superintendent within the total population was sent a questionnaire, together with a letter explaining the purpose of the study and a return envelope. Respondents were asked to complete the 40-item School Board Election Issues Inventory and to provide demographic information related to their school district size, location and the superintendent's length of experience. To encourage frank and accurate responses, superintendents were assured that no instrument tracking methods would be used to determine which responses were received from which districts.

Sixty-nine letters and survey instruments were mailed (see Appendixes A and B), representing the number of school board races in which the incumbent was defeated. After 30 days, a letter of thanks (with a reminder to complete and return the survey instrument if they hadn't already done so) was sent to all recipients. Forty-one surveys were returned, representing a return rate of 59%.

Analysis Method

Analysis involved collection, classification, tabulation, depiction, description and interpretation of data obtained by the survey. The study was descriptive in nature, and therefore the survey data were analyzed using descriptive procedures only. These procedures included frequencies distributions, percentages, and rank ordering of the data, along with means.

Chapter 4

Results of the Study

This chapter is devoted to a presentation of data collected in the study. Included in this chapter are (1) descriptions of the issues affecting the outcome of school board elections in the state of Washington in 1995 and the influence of these issues on the incumbent school board member election defeat, (2) groupings of factors that may have contributed to the incumbent school board member defeat which were not listed in Section I, (3) campaign factors affecting the election outcome, (4) conditions or demographic factors that may have contributed to the incumbent defeat, and (5) a comparison of the 1995 election results with data compiled during the previous six school board elections in Washington State.

During the 1995 general election in the State of Washington, 274 (30%) of the 906 incumbent school board members eligible for reelection chose not to run again for office. Six hundred thirty-two (70%) incumbent school board members filed for reelection. Although the majority of all incumbent candidates running were unopposed (454, or 73%), 178 (27%) of the incumbent candidates were challenged by one or more contender. Sixty-nine (39%) of the 178 challenged incumbent seats were lost to the challenger. These 69 defeats occurred in 62 separate districts.

Table 1

Sources of School Board Candidates for the 1995 General Election, Washington State

Candidate Type	Number of Candidates	Percent of Candidates
Unopposed incumbent	454	50%
Contested incumbent	178	20%
Incumbent did not run	274	30%

Note. $n = 906$

Post-election survey results provided by district superintendents identified the primary issues affecting the defeat of incumbent board members. Superintendents reported specific conditions in their districts and communities at the time of the election and rated the influence of these issues on the incumbent's defeat. Superintendents were asked to identify which of 15 issues were present during the 1995 school board elections and to rate each item as to the degree it was perceived to be an influence on the defeat of the incumbent. Ratings of degree were recorded on a Likert scale, with 1 indicating no influence and 5 indicating very strong influence on the defeat of the incumbent. The fifteen issues are listed in Table 2 with the number of times superintendents identified each issue as having an effect on the outcome of the 1995 school board elections and the mean of superintendent responses on the Likert scale rating is also supplied.

Table 2

Superintendent's Responses: Factors Affecting Reelection of Incumbent School Board Members, Washington State General Election, 1995

Issues Affecting Election	Yes	Degree of Influence	No Affect on Election
Incumbent board member/ Superintendent conflict	3 (7%)	3.67	(38)
Incumbent conflict with organized interest group	16 (39%)	3.88	(25)
Curriculum issues/priorities	10 (24%)	3.20	(31)
Financial/fiscal management issues	6 (15%)	3.33	(35)
Levy/bond issues	6 (15%)	3.50	(35)
Incumbent board member/ community relations	23 (56%)	3.30	(18)
Athletic issues	4 (10%)	4.00	(37)
New construction/modernization issues	8 (20%)	3.00	(33)
Academic standards/test scores	3 (7%)	3.67	(38)
Special education program issues	0 (0%)	1.00	(41)
Incompatibility with other board members	8 (20%)	2.88	(33)
Controversial style of incumbent board member	13 (32%)	3.62	(28)
Incumbent board member's lack of visibility/action	19 (46%)	3.58	(22)
School district change efforts	13 (32%)	3.31	(28)
Other issues	12 (29%)	3.58	(29)

Note. $n = 41$ The Degree of Influence values represent the mean score on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 meaning no influence and 5 meaning extensive influence. Respondents answering "no" did not rate for degree of influence.

Superintendents also listed in rank order the five most influential issues from the list of 15 provided in the table above. A ranking of the top issues affecting school board election outcomes and their degree of influence on the incumbent school board member election defeat, as rated by superintendents on a Likert scale (with 1 indicating no influence and 5 indicating extensive influence on the defeat of the incumbent) are presented in Table 3. As there was no discernable fifth-ranked item from the responses provided by superintendents, only the top four ranked items are listed in this table.

Table 3

Superintendents' Responses: Rank Order of the Four Most Influential Issues Influencing Defeat of Incumbent School Board Members, Washington State General Election, 1995

Most Influential Issues	Mean Score
Incumbent conflict with organized interest group	3.88
Incumbent board member's lack of visibility/action	3.58
Other issues	3.58
Incumbent board member/community relations	3.30

Note. $n = 41$

The issues reported by superintendents in response to the third most frequently selected influences (Other Issues) on the outcome of the board elections were: incumbent had no children in school (listed twice), age of incumbent (listed twice), incumbent viewed as a rubber stamp for approval for site-based decision making, lack of aggressive campaigning on the part of the incumbent, influences of new boundary changes, reaction to board member's involvement in a recent teachers' strike, conflict with teachers'

association in grievance issue, and the return to the community of a popular previous board member who ran as the challenger.

Superintendents also identified the motivation of the successful candidates.

Thirty-nine responses were collected (see Appendixes C, D and E). These responses have been grouped into six categories: (1) Special Issue Candidates, (2) Candidates with Knowledge and Experience, (3) Public Service Candidates, (4) Personnel Issue Candidates, (5) Need for Power Candidates, and (6) Strong Power Base Candidates. The frequency of items reported in each of these six groups is shown below, in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Responses in Successful Candidate Motivation Groupings by Rank Order

Group Type	Number of responses
Public Service	10 (26%)
Special Issue	7 (18%)
Knowledge and Experience	5 (13%)
Need for Power	5 (13%)
Personnel Issues	4 (10%)
Strong Power Base	4 (10%)

Note. $n = 39$

Public Service, including such items as a desire to improve the district or to serve as a strong child advocate, was the most frequently reported response, with 10 of the 39 (25%) motivational influences grouped into this sector. The second most frequently reported motivational group was Special Issues, including the expansion of a gifted program, the defeat of site-based decision-making and the drive to improve district

communication. The two motivational groups of Need for Power and Knowledge and Experience both ranked as the next most frequently cited. Need for Power consisted of responses such as the desire to impress others with the status of an elected position and a personal interest to enter the political arena. Knowledge and Experience contained responses such as having children in the school system, having experience as a teacher, and having served as a board member in the past. The groups Personnel Issues and Strong Power Base contained the least frequently reported reasons for entering a school board campaign. Personnel Issues consisted of those who were angry with the superintendent and those who felt a sitting board member was not reflecting broad community values. Those motivated by a Strong Power Base represented small interest groups or teachers' unions.

Superintendents also reported factors in the campaigns of individual candidates, which contributed to the outcome of the elections. The 19 reported factors have been categorized into five groupings: (1) Over-confidence of Incumbent, (2) Campaign Techniques, (3) Sociological Influences, (4) Stance on Issues and (5) Negative Personal Qualities (see Appendix B). The frequency of responses in each of these groups is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequency of Campaign Issues Influencing Election Results, Washington State General Election, 1995

Group Type	Number of responses
Campaign Techniques	6 (15%)
Sociological Influences	6 (15%)
Stance on Issues	5 (13%)
Negative Personal Qualities	5 (13%)
Overconfidence of Incumbent	2 (5%)

Note. $n = 39$

The groups of responses most frequently identified, as influencing campaign results were Campaign Techniques and Sociological Influences. The category of Campaign Techniques included campaign characteristics such as large cash contributions, active campaigning and the active search for endorsements. The category of Sociological Influences included such issues as a lack of registered Native American voters, an emphasis on increasing the cultural diversity of the board and the age of the candidate. Two groups tied as the next most frequently cited influences on the effectiveness of campaigns. Stance on Issues included campaigns centered on specific educational issues such as change efforts in the district and release time for teachers. Negative Personal Qualities centered on negative behavior of candidates, such as disputes with coaches or concerns with board member behavior at board meetings. Finally, the least influential category of campaigning methods was Overconfidence of Incumbent. Cited were

examples of incumbents who did not believe they needed to campaign and incumbents who were so self-assured that they began campaigning too late to have a positive effect.

An additional area researched to clarify influences on board member turnover was the campaigning process used by both the successful and defeated candidate.

Superintendents in districts where an incumbent board member was opposed during the general election identified which of 18 campaign influences or the successful challenger used techniques. The results of this data collection are provided in Table 6.



Table 6

Campaign Influences and Techniques Used by Successful Challengers
Washington State General Elections, 1995

Campaign Factors Affecting Election	Successful Challenger	
	Yes	No
Had endorsements from organized interest groups	45%	55%
Was recognized as community leader	46%	54%
Used professional advertising	33%	67%
Spent over \$1,000 on election effort	19%	81%
Had organized campaign committee	41%	59%
Name was familiar to the community	85%	15%
Participated in public forums/debated	55%	45%
Had identifiable platform/known position on issues	51%	49%
Has/had children enrolled in the school district	85%	15%
Was viewed as more liberal than community	21%	79%
Was viewed as more conservative than community	26%	74%
Was viewed as a strong supporter of superintendent's policies	61%	39%
Was personally involved in campaign	71%	29%
Had organized "door-belling" effort	34%	66%
Used yard signs/posters to promote candidacy	53%	47%
Used leaflet/pamphlet to promote candidacy	45%	55%
Publicly criticized/negatively characterized opponent	21%	79%

Note: number of respondents ranged from 36 to 41 for each item listed above due to no response (indicating lack of knowledge specific to the item or a response error)

The Other Factors (this data not shown on Table 6) included six items reported by the superintendents completing the survey. These factors were the race of the candidate (Native American), complacency on the part of the incumbent, a new emphasis on diversity in the leadership of the district, a highly coordinated phone calling campaign, a phone tree campaign alerting positive voters and concern about the age of the incumbent.

The amount of time the incumbent and challenging candidate dedicated to their campaigns were also reported through the survey. These results are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

Number of Months Before the Election Candidates Began Actively Campaigning, Washington State General Election, 1995

<u>Length of Time</u>	<u>Successful Candidate</u>
1 month prior to election	11 (34%)
2-3 months prior to election	16 (50%)
4-6 months prior to election	2 (6%)
7-12 months prior to election	0 (0%)
Over 1 year prior to election	2 (6%)
Candidate did not campaign	8 (25%)

Note. $n = 39$

Finally, superintendents reported conditions and factors, which contributed to the turnover in board membership. This open response portion of the survey generated a variety of responses (see Appendix E), which have been grouped into five general categories. The five categories are Endorsements, Issues, Positive Reputation, Ethnicity or Gender and Previous Experience. The frequency of response for each category is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Categories of Open-Ended Responses Concerning Conditions Influencing Turnover in Board Membership, Washington State General Elections, 1995, by Rank Order

Category	Number of Responses
Issues	6 (30%)
Positive Reputation	6 (30%)
Endorsements	3 (15%)
Previous Experience	3 (15%)
Ethnicity or Gender	2 (10%)

Note. $n = 20$

The category Endorsements in Table 8 included candidates who received backing from religious groups or organizations such as Citizens for Responsible Education. The category Issues comprised boundary changes and the school calendar. The category Positive Reputation included a candidate's length of time living in the community, the candidate's previous community service, and the candidate's professional reputation. The category Ethnicity or Gender contained the desire to have more women on a school board, and the inability of a candidate to relate to a Native American community. The category Previous Experience dealt with a candidate's past history as a school board member, and candidates who had been employed as teachers before retiring.

Data provided by Sharratt, Swift and Moody (1993) reporting the results of the previous six school board elections in Washington State have been updated using 1995 data acquired through the School Board Election Issues Inventory. These data, now encompassing the last seven elections, are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

**School Board Election Results,
Washington State General Elections, 1983 through 1995**

Election Criteria	Year						
	1983	1985	1987	1989	1991	1993	1995
Total number and percent of school board positions open for election in Washington State	923 (62%)	783 (52%)	946 (63%)	764 (51%)	891 (60%)	759 (51%)	906 (61%)
Total number and percent of school board positions where incumbents ran unopposed	431 (47%)	390 (50%)	490 (52%)	406 (53%)	494 (55%)	387 (51%)	454 (50%)
Total number and percent of school board positions where incumbents did not file for reelection	252 (27%)	204 (26%)	219 (23%)	179 (23%)	209 (22%)	180 (24%)	274 (30%)
Total number and percent of school board positions where incumbents were challenged by one or more candidates	258 (28%)	173 (22%)	214 (23%)	163 (21%)	173 (19%)	179 (24%)	178 (20%)
Total number and percent of challenged incumbent school board members who were defeated in their bid for reelection	86 (33%)	67 (39%)	87 (40%)	65 (40%)	103 (61%)	57 (32%)	69 (39%)
Total number of districts where incumbent defeats occurred	68 (23%)	57 (19%)	70 (24%)	50 (17%)	79 (27%)	52 (18%)	62 (21%)

As Table 9 indicates, the percentage of seats open every two years during the past seven general elections has fluctuated between 51% and 62%, with the higher rates of open seats occurring during every year preceding a national Presidential election. During

the 13 years of data presented, the percent of times incumbent board members ran unopposed has remained generally the same, within a very narrow range of 47 to 55%. A review of data also indicated that when incumbent school board members decided to run for reelection they were challenged 19 to 28% of the time, with the highest rate of challenge occurring in 1983 and the lowest rate of challenge occurring in some of the most recent elections, 1991 and 1995. Finally, the likelihood of a challenged incumbent being defeated steadily increased from 33% in 1983 to 61% in 1991, and then dropped to 32% in 1993, followed by a rise to 39% in 1995.

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion

This chapter is organized into five sections: a summary and discussion of data collected in the study, concluding statements regarding the five research questions, a discussion of the implications of the results, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

Summary and Discussion of Data

During the 1995 general election in Washington State, 30% of the seated school board members did not run for reelection. Of the 632 incumbents who did run for reelection, 169 (19%) were challenged for their position, and 69 (39%) of those challenged lost their seats. The 69 school board members who lost their seats ran for election in 62 school districts. School district superintendents from districts where one or more incumbent school board member was challenged during the 1995 November general election were asked to complete the School Board Election Issues. Data were collected to record the superintendents' assessments of which issues influenced the elections, what motivated the candidates, what campaign techniques were used, the degree of the effectiveness of each campaign technique, and which conditions or demographic factors contributed to the incumbent defeat.

Conclusions

Research Question 1.

What issues identified in previous research were determined to exist during the 1995 school board elections in Washington State in which an incumbent school board

member was defeated by a challenger, and what degree of influence did each issue have on the defeat of the incumbent? As reported by district superintendents in those elections where incumbent board members were challenged and defeated, four issues were found to be the most influential in contributing to the defeat. These were, in rank order: (1) a lack of action or visibility on the part of the incumbent school board member, (2) negative relations between the incumbent school board member and the community, (3) conflict between the incumbent school board member and organized interest groups, and (4) the board member's stance on issues such as boundary changes or district focus which created a negative image of the incumbent candidate.

Research Question 2.

What additional groupings of factors were determined to exist during the same election, which were not among those identified as issues from Section I of the survey instrument? Superintendents cited 24 issues influencing election results that were not listed in Section I of the survey instrument. These responses were grouped into five categories as shown in Appendix D. The two categories with the highest number of responses were Campaign Influences and Sociological Influences. The category Campaign Influences encompassed three areas: the amount of money invested in the campaign, the degree of active campaigning by a candidate, and the strength of endorsements. The Sociological Influences category included social issues deemed influential such as a candidate's race, a candidate's familiarity with the community and a candidate's age. The remaining three categories, Stance on Issues, Negative Personal Qualities and Overconfidence of Incumbent comprised half of the influential issues cited by superintendents.

Research Question 3.

What influence, if any, did each of 17 identified campaign factors have on the outcome of the 1995 school board elections in Washington State in which an incumbent school board member was defeated by a challenger, and how long before the election did the incumbent and the challenger begin to campaign? According to superintendents, the five most influential (as shown in Table 6) campaign factors were 1) successful challengers had a name that was familiar to the community, 2) successful challengers currently had or had in the past had children enrolled in the school district, 3) successful challengers were personally involved in their election campaign, 4) successful challengers were viewed as strong supporters of the superintendent's policies, and 5) successful challengers had participated in public forums or debates. Superintendents also reported the number of months the successful candidates and the challengers campaigned. Almost identical results were reported for both of these categories, with 68% of the candidates campaigning one to three months, and a remarkable 21% of the candidates reported to have not campaigned at all. Only two districts reported candidates who campaigned for more than one year. These districts were characterized in 1995 as having school boards in distress, with highly politicized, contentious interest groups vying for control of the change process. It could be assumed that the many issues surrounding these two board challenges led to the longer campaigns.

Research Question 4.

What unique conditions or specific demographic factors existed within each community, which were determined to have exerted a significant influence on the defeat of an incumbent school board member during the 1995 school board elections in the State

of Washington? Superintendents listed the unique conditions and/or specific demographic factors identified to have exerted significant influences on the defeat of an incumbent through their open-ended responses in Section IV of the survey instrument. Of the 23 items reported, 15 (65%) were classified as character issues and eight (35%) were classified as program issues. Superintendents offered responses about the endorsements, pertinent educational issues, positive public reputations, ethnicity and previous experiences of the successful challengers to incumbents. In terms of endorsement, it was noted that a successful challenger received strong support from the religious community in the district. Another response noted that the successful challenger had strong support from a State Senator. Some of the pertinent educational issues mentioned as contributing to the defeat of an incumbent were anger over boundary changes for schools in a district, opposition to a four-period, daily schedule proposal, and a proposed calendar calling for early release every Wednesday for site-based council and curriculum planning. Superintendents noted that a positive reputation based on having children in school, being very popular in the community, being known in the community, being perceived as interested in services for at-risk kids, and having been a long-time community member were all influences supporting successful challengers to school board incumbents. Several superintendents mentioned that gender was an influence in the defeat of an incumbent. One district's focus on increasing the number of females on the board was cited as an example of gender being influential in an election outcome. Superintendents stated that previous experience as demonstrated by someone being a former board member was of assistance to the successful challenger in the school board election.

Research Question 5.

How did the 1995 election results compare with the data compiled during the previous six school board elections in the State of Washington? As Table 9 indicated, the percentage of seats open every two years during the past seven general elections has fluctuated between 51% and 62%, with the higher rates of open seats occurring during every year preceding a national Presidential election. During the 13 years of data presented, the percent of times incumbent board members ran unopposed has remained generally the same, within a very narrow range of 47 to 55%. A review of data also indicated that when incumbent school board members decided to run for reelection they were challenged 19 to 28% of the time, with the highest rate of challenge occurring in 1983 and the lowest rate of challenge occurring in some of the most recent elections, 1991 and 1995. Finally, the likelihood of a challenged incumbent being defeated steadily increased from 33% in 1983 to 61% in 1991, and then dropped to 32% in 1993, followed by a rise to 39% in 1995.

Additional Data.

Additionally, data were gathered concerning the motivation of challengers and incumbents to run for school board election. The motivation to run for election for both incumbent and challenging school board candidates revealed much about the makeup of Washington State school boards and provided insight into potential sources of conflict in the governance of our state's public school systems. Superintendents responding to the School Board Election Issues Survey from those districts where incumbent candidates ran for reelection in 1995

provided responses that grouped into five categories. The most frequently reported source of motivation (10 of the 39 responses, 26%) was categorized as Public Service, acknowledging that these candidates were perceived as having run for a board position due to their desire to serve their communities. Their desire to serve the common good and build consensus identified this category of candidates as conflict avoiding. Candidates grouped into the category of Knowledge and Experience (5 of 39, 13%) were perceived to have run for election because of successful past experiences as teachers or parents, or due to their professional knowledge of public education. Board members categorized as motivated by Knowledge and Experience were identified as conflict neutral. In contrast to those candidates motivated by Public Service were those candidates who ran for office to promote or protect a Special Issue. The motivation reported by superintendents for seven of the 39 school board candidates (18%) was grouped into this category. The remaining three categories, Special Issues, Need for Power, and Personnel Issues contained 16 of the 35 (46%) reported sources of motivation. Grouped together these last four categories, consisting of 20 of the 35 (57%) reported sources of motivation, were classified as conflict inducing. They illuminated the high number (57%) of issue or need specific candidates elected during the 1995 school board elections. With almost three of every five school board candidates elected in 1995 perceived by superintendents as desiring a seat on a school board specifically to address controversial issues or causes, the potential for continued issue-based conflict surrounding the work of school boards in the state of Washington appeared to be great.

Discussion of the Implications of the Results

Voters are most interested in electing school board members who have demonstrated success in both the tasks and the relationships essential to successful community leadership. Voters elect school leaders who are seen as generalists devoted to resolving conflicts rather than specialists who create or perpetuate conflict. Voters do not want board members who appear disconnected, inactive, or in conflict with special interest groups. Finally, incumbent board members who are seen as the representatives of minority or unpopular positions or views frequently lose their bids for reelection. The findings also suggest that the perceived influence of the incumbent upon board and district decisions and the relationship of the incumbent to the community have the greatest impact upon election outcome.

Successful candidates used similar campaign techniques in the 1995 election. Efforts to promote a candidate as caring and connected to the community and schools tended to result in successful campaigns, while efforts perceived as active campaigning, such as lawn signs and professional advertising, had negative results. It can be assumed that voters in the state of Washington want to elect candidates who appear to be genuinely interested in public service and who are considered well known and trusted members of the community rather than those who appear to be trying too hard to promote themselves or who are out of alignment with the values of the community. While heartening to imagine that most school board members in the state of Washington are in place due to their representation of central community values, prospective board members can learn

from these findings.

In almost all cases, the amount of time spent campaigning by the successful candidate and the challenger was identical. This would suggest that the time a candidate spends campaigning is a response to the amount of time the opposing candidate spends campaigning. The most frequently reported length of a campaign was zero to three months, perhaps reflecting the large number of candidates who run for office in response to immediate issues facing a district rather than those who run with the goal to provide long term, stable leadership to a school district. The campaign technique section of the study, which revealed that voters prefer not to elect candidates who appear to campaign too long, too professionally, or too earnestly supports these findings. In the two cases where challenging candidates campaigned for over one year, each was successful in defeating the incumbent board member and each was running in highly contentious races for seats on boards in disarray.

During 1995, as has been the case in the past five general elections, the major reasons reported for incumbent defeat were a community's perception that the incumbent did not take an active role in helping direct the actions of the school district and the sense that the incumbent did not work to build strong and effective board and community relationships. These two themes, positive impact and successful relationships, appear to be the key to successful reelection. Sitting board members who wish to retain their seats when challenged in an election should focus their energies in these two areas. As long as a board member is seen as working actively to help direct the actions of a school district without

alienating community members and shows an ability to communicate positively with his/her constituents, this study suggests that the chances for reelection are high.

Discussion of the Limitations of the Study

Four areas have been identified as limitations of this study. The first is the small number of specific, open-ended responses by superintendents to some of the survey items. In some cases, respondents completed all parts of the survey requiring the ranking or rating of items, but did not elaborate when given the opportunity for free response.

The second area includes limitations of the instrument itself. Section I is constructed to ask superintendents to rank order a list of 15 possible campaign influences and then to rate each influence on a Likert Scale. When completing this section, superintendents recorded different responses to the same question, depending on the method of questioning. An analysis of the significance of this difference in responses by superintendents to the same question asked in different ways can be assumed to indicate that some items may not be rated as one of the top five in a list of most influential issues affecting the outcome of board elections but when they were present they had a much stronger impact than other more frequently cited influences. An example of this instrument weakness might be "stance on athletic controversy." While not appearing on any superintendent's top five list of influential issues in the 1995 school board elections, it received the highest overall rating of influence on election results, leading to the possible interpretation that superintendents rated its influence from previous experiences rather than from the current election.

The third limitation to the data collection was that only superintendents were asked to provide responses to the influences on the outcome of the 1995 school board elections. All data analysis must take into account that the findings of the study came from this highly knowledgeable, yet highly involved group of school individuals, whose personal effectiveness within a school district was immediately influenced by the outcome of the elections they were asked to evaluate.

The final limitation to this study is the inability of the researcher to rule out non-school related issues, which might have become controlling influences on the outcomes of school board elections in 1995. Several years earlier, for example, the 1991 board elections across the United States were influenced by the widespread Republican landslide, which impacted all elected positions, not just those of school board seats. No controls were available to rule out such external influences on the outcome of school board elections, nor were such possible influences measured through this instrument.

Although political pressures and special interest groups appear to continue to influence the membership of school boards in the state of Washington, data from this study showed that the determinants to successfully challenging an incumbent school board member, as discussed above, were stable over time and district. While not inviolable, these determinants were robust and persistent. Incumbent school board members will be challenged as long as school boards are seen as instruments to influence social change. This model of school leadership may not promise the sort of leadership stability many professional educators wish for in their work, but it is a model of significant durability over time.

Suggestions for Further Research

Throughout this study, it has become clear that there is the need for further research into the influences on the outcomes of school board elections across the United States. Although much has been written on the topic of school governance, there is remarkably little empirical information concerning the process communities go through to select those who set policy for our nation's public schools. Six areas for further research are listed below. Each would help increase the knowledge base of our nation's school leadership.

A continuation of the study just completed should take place after each succeeding general election in the state of Washington. This would provide the longitudinal data set urged by Zeigler which, when added to data available from the past seven Washington State general elections, could lead to a higher level of confidence in the findings of the overall study. In addition, soliciting responses from a broader base of perspectives on the influences impacting the outcome of school board elections, perhaps with data provided by incumbents, challengers, continuing board members not up for reelection, presidents of teacher representative groups and other knowledgeable groups would provide a needed balance to data collected in this study. More accurate tracking of the amount of money spent on individual campaigns, followed by an analysis of the impact different levels of spending has on campaign outcomes, would be informative. A study that collected and analyzed data from polling place exit interviews would help determine which of the possible data sources listed above was most accurate in identifying the influences on school board elections and could lead to a more carefully targeted collection of data in the future. A study which looked for the correlation

between school boards with a high rate of turnover and other conditions within the district such as the length of tenure of the superintendent, the success of levy and bond elections, the number of new home starts, the performance of the district's varsity sports teams, and a variety of other possible controlling variables would likely produce informative data. An investigation of the influences on the length of campaigns for school board positions, including factors such as district size, local economic changes, superintendent turnover and number of candidates vying for open seats would produce useful data.

An evaluation of school boards' perceived responsiveness to the public would fill a hole in the current literature. At present, there are insufficient data showing whether boards are seen as generally responding to individuals and their issues concerning district policy or if they are seen as being more ready to respond to organized groups representing many individuals with a common interest. Such research would help direct more effective governance of our nation's public school systems.

Finally, an area for further study would be to track the reasons for incumbent retirement in order to determine if Rada's theoretical claims are valid. There is very little information in the research literature about incumbent school board member retirement and the relationship it has to the rise of insurgent challengers.

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Appendix A

February 28, 1996

(Addressed to:)

Dear (mail merge:),

We are writing this letter to seek your participation in a very important, ongoing research project. We know there are many demands on your time, so we appreciate your willingness to contribute to this study. This research project is unique because of its longevity (now covering 7 general elections in a row) and its specific focus on school board elections. The information from this survey **is used** to help both superintendents and school directors in their leadership efforts and to assist them in planning meaningful school board training (although certainly not training regarding election campaigns themselves, which is prohibited by law). Since 1983 we have collected information regarding incumbent school board member election defeats. During the November 1995 general election, 41% of the challenged incumbents lost. This is an increase of 6% from the 1993 election.

This year we will continue to collect data from all school board races in which an incumbent was challenged, no matter what the outcome. If your district did not have any school board races in which an incumbent was challenged, please return the enclosed questionnaire indicating "no challenged races."

The information being requested concerns the level of influence that selected issues may have had on incumbent re-election outcomes. In addition, information is requested regarding the campaign "processes" used by both candidates. This instrument is being sent to the superintendents in each of the districts which had an incumbent challenged. Of these districts, 69 of the 169 challenged incumbents (41%) were defeated. The 69 defeated incumbents came from 62 school districts. In other words, several districts had multiple defeats. Please use the best information you have readily on hand to complete the survey. If there is a significant issue that affected the election that is not covered, please note it on the survey.

Your contribution in this effort is greatly appreciated. Please return the survey by March 15, so an early analysis of the data can be undertaken. Enclosed is a self-addressed, stamped return envelope for your use.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please call me at (509) 664-0362, fax at (509) 662-9027 or send e-mail to gsharrat@esd171.wednet.edu.

Sincerely,

Gene Sharratt
Superintendent
North Central ESD

David Engle
Superintendent Intern
Bellevue Public Schools

GS/de (Enclosure)

Appendix B

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION ISSUES INVENTORY

Section I

During the November 1995 general election, there were 169 contested races in which an incumbent school board member was involved. There were 62 districts in which an incumbent school board member(s) was defeated in his/her bid for reelection. To date, relatively little information is available that could assist educational leaders in understanding some of the issues surrounding this turnover. In the past twelve years districts that had an incumbent defeated were surveyed. This year all districts that had an incumbent challenged in the election are being asked to complete the following survey to determine the "issues" that may have contributed to the election outcome. This will be a valuable first step in filling this research void.

The intent of this survey is to collect information regarding possible "issues" that may have been present and the degree of their influence on the outcome of the November 1995 school board election. Please read through the issues statements below. Check the appropriate response regarding whether the issue was present during the time of the election and the degree of influence it may have had on the election outcome.

<u>Issues Affecting Election</u>	Please check if issue was present		Influences Circle appropriate number				
	YES	NO	Extensive=5 None=1				
1. Incumbent board member/superintendent conflict	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
2. Incumbent conflict with organized interest group	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
3. Curriculum issues/priorities	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
4. Financial/fiscal management issues	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
5. Levy/bond issues	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
6. Incumbent board member/community relations	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
7. Athletic issues	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
8. New construction/modernization issues	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
9. Academic standards/test scores	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
10. Special education program issues	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
11. Incompatibility with other board members	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
12. Controversial style of incumbent board member	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
13. Incumbent board member's lack of visibility/action	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
14. School district change efforts	()	()	5	4	3	2	1
15. Other issues (explain)	()	()	5	4	3	2	1

Using the issue statements listed above, please rank order the five issues that you feel had the most influence on the outcome of challenged board elections within your district. 1st would be the issue having the greatest influence, 2nd the next greatest influence, and so on to 5th.

16. 1ST _____
17. 2ND _____
18. 3RD _____
19. 4TH _____
20. 5TH _____

21. What words or phrases would best describe the motivation of the successful candidate to serve on the board:

Section II

Please list any conditions/factors that may have contributed to the outcome of the election.

Section III

An additional factor that could further clarify board member turnover is related to the campaigning "process" used by both the successful and defeated candidate. Listed below are some statements about the campaigning process. Please read through statements and circle the appropriate response regarding whether the condition existed for the candidates.

<u>Campaign Factors Affecting Election</u>	Challenger		Successful Candidate		Was the Successful Candidate an Incumbent?	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
22. Had endorsements from organized interest groups	()	()	()	()	()	()
23. Was recognized as community leader	()	()	()	()	()	()
24. Used professional advertising	()	()	()	()	()	()
25. Spent over \$1,000 on election effort	()	()	()	()	()	()
26. Had organized campaign committee	()	()	()	()	()	()
27. Name was familiar to the community	()	()	()	()	()	()
28. Participated in public forums/debated	()	()	()	()	()	()
29. Had identifiable "platform"/known position on issues	()	()	()	()	()	()
30. Has/had children enrolled in the school district	()	()	()	()	()	()
31. Was viewed as more liberal than community	()	()	()	()	()	()
32. Was viewed as more conservative than community	()	()	()	()	()	()
33. Was viewed as a strong supporter of supt.'s policies	()	()	()	()	()	()
34. Was personally involved in campaign	()	()	()	()	()	()
35. Had organized "door-belling" effort	()	()	()	()	()	()
36. Used yard signs/posters to promote candidacy	()	()	()	()	()	()
37. Used leaflet/pamphlet to promote candidacy	()	()	()	()	()	()
38. Publicly criticized/negatively characterized opponent	()	()	()	()	()	()
39. Other factor(s) _____	()	()	()	()	()	()

40. Began active campaign for position:		SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE	CHALLENGER
a.	1 month prior to election	()	()
b.	2-3 months prior to election	()	()
c.	4-6 months prior to election	()	()
d.	7-12 months prior to election	()	()
e.	Over 1 year prior to election	()	()

Section IV

Please list any conditions or demographic factors that may have contributed to the turnover in board membership. In addition, please feel free to make comments regarding this study.

Appendix C

Motivation of Successful Candidates Elected to Serve on Washington State School Boards, as Reported by District Superintendents, 1995

Special Issue (7)

- Against site-based
- Anger at past board action
- Desire to expand gifted program
- Want change
- Increase parents' role in shared decision making
- Improve communication
- Introduce fresh ideas

Knowledge and Experience (5)

- Past teacher
- Parent of young children
- Interest in education
- Has four kids, incumbent zero
- Good experience previous term

Public Service (10)

- Child advocate
- Positive community leader
- Desire to improve district
- Serve in honest manner
- Child oriented
- Truth speaking
- Service to children
- Dedicated 'doer'
- Want positive involvement
- Support quality school

Personnel Issues (4)

- Angry with superintendent
- Dissatisfied with discipline decision
- Get rid of incumbent
- Felt incumbent didn't reflect community values

Need for Power (5)

- Do superintendent's job
- Impress friends with status
- Provide inside information
- Enter political arena
- Desire to impact district

Strong Power Base (4)

- Representative of small group
- Encouraged by political base
- Represent opposition to district
- Encouragement from teachers

Appendix D

Conditions Contributing to the Outcome of School Board Elections in Washington State, as Reported by District Superintendents, 1995

Overconfidence of Incumbent (2)

- Incumbent didn't campaign
- Incumbent too self-assured

Campaign Techniques (6)

- Large cash contributions
- Money spent by challenger
- Active campaigning
- Phone call campaign
- Endorsement of education association
- Endorsement of school foundation

Sociological Influences (6)

- Native American issues (2)
- Home-grown candidate
- Incumbent bought out of district business
- Emphasis on increasing diversity on board
- Age of challenger
- Anti-big business representation

Stance on Issues (5)

- Change efforts
- East-west boundary
- Article in voter guide
- Release time
- Emphasis on discipline

Negative Personal Qualities (5)

- Dispute with coaches
- Conflict between incumbent and board chair
- Newspaper interview
- Grievance about principal
- Incumbent outbursts

Appendix E

Open-ended Responses Concerning Conditions Influencing Turnover in Board Membership in Washington State, as Reported by District Superintendents, 1995

Endorsements (4)

- Strong backing from religious group(s)
- “Citizens for Responsible Education” endorsement
- Strong support from State Senator
- Father-in-law retired executive from Boeing with high visibility

Issues (8)

- Made promises that sounded good
- Anger over recent boundary changes
- Proposed calendar calling for early release every Wednesday for site-based council and curriculum planning
- Anti-four period day
- Contentious disciplinary action where board chose to go further than superintendent recommended
- Candidate seen as more conservative (2)
- Disgust over disarray of the board

Positive Reputation (6)

- Had children in school (2)
- Very popular
- Known in the community
- Known as interested in children and promoter of services to at-risk kids
- Respected leader in community
- Long-time community member

Ethnicity or Gender (2)

- Increase number of females on board
- Woman with child in school

Previous Experience (3)

- Former board member
- Incumbent was appointed six months before the election
- Challenger had been board member previously