A COMPARISON OF MISSOURI SCHOOL BOARD BEST PRACTICES

BASED ON SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE,
LEVEL OF SUCCESS, AND GEOGRAPHIC REGION

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by
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SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE, LEVEL OF SUCCESS, AND GEOGRAPHIC REGION

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A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

And hereby certify in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

A man travels the world over in search of what he needs, and returns home to find it. ~ George Moore

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful wife Sarah. You are my friend, my motivation, and my love. Without your support and encouragement, this process might not have begun and certainly would not have been completed. I promise, as I did when we were first married, to always support and encourage you the same way; whatever life may bring us.

And

To my amazing children, Thomas and Stephanie. Your energy and excitement for life have given me the strength and endurance to see this process through. May the pages of this dissertation serve as a reminder that good things come to those who work hard and persevere. I know that you will each grow up to be happy and successful, I am so very proud of you. I love you so much!

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And

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to research both imperially validated and conceptualized school board best practices, as well as their utilization within Missouri school districts from differing geographic regions, with differing total school populations and differing level of school success. School success for this study was defined as district level of improvement.

This quantitative study surveyed 99 Missouri school board members using the Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS). The MSBPS contains 24 items separated into four subscales: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. The MSBPS was developed by adapting items from the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (Smoley, 1999) and by developing new items consistent with school board best-practices identified through a review of relevant research.

The findings of the study revealed a significant difference in only one of the MSBPS subscales, Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action. These findings indicate small school districts (less than 500) report different utilization of monitoring progress and taking corrective action than do larger schools (1600 or more students). Additionally the study found a significant difference between school districts that were not in improvement compared to schools that were in the highest level of school improvement on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale.

Implications for practice indicate school boards must continue to be actively involved in the governance of local policies and practices regardless of the size of the school district. In addition to monitoring progress and taking corrective action when school goals are not met, school board must work collaboratively to create a vision,
remain committed to the goals which they set, and continue to use data to make educational decisions.

Recommendations for further research include the need to explore additional school board practices and replicate the study using a larger sample of school districts. Additionally, this study discovered a positive correlation between the total population of a school district and the school districts' level of improvement within Missouri school districts. This relationship was not explored during this study and should be investigated.
CHAPTER ONE
Introduction to the Study

Background

Local school boards in America are older than the country itself (Walser, 2009). The tradition of electing a community member to help govern the education of the community’s children aligns with our democratic system of government. Unlike many elected officials, however, school board members are not paid for their services to the community. However, like politicians, their decisions are often influenced by constituents, school employees, other board members, and their own preferences.

While educational administrators face unique challenges on a daily basis, many of these challenges and concerns are shared by the community. The community has the responsibility of providing education for its children; school board members are the elected representatives of the community (National School Boards Association, 1993). This is a similar process through which public officials are elected. Seven school board members are elected to serve as a local board of education. The only requirement to run for a school board seat is residency in the school district. Therefore, school districts may be governed by individuals with little training, experience, or knowledge of pedagogy or educational policy. Regardless, board members are charged with governing a school district that decides the future of their local and global community. Each school board member brings to their governance a unique set of experiences and values, which guides their decisions and therefore guides the education of all students in the district.

Nearly thirty years ago the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report about the state of education in the United States titled A Nation at Risk
(National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report signaled a shift in priorities and awareness in education. It was the beginning of educational reform and the precursor to many laws and policy which are still in place today. The *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001* (Spring, 2008) began to shaped many policies in K-12 education. The most current educational policy that seeks to influence education is the *Race to the Top Program*. Each educational initiative has placed an increased focus on accountability as well as an increased competition for funding. These initiatives and competition for scarce resources have created difficult choices for national, state, and local school governing bodies.

Competition for scarce resources is prevalent at both the national and state levels. Politicians are continually lobbied by various patrons and interest groups, while being constrained by laws and court decisions. Current issues that signify competing resources include: school choice, charter schools, and the competition for funds with other national and state level programs. However, these difficult choices are not limited to national and state level officials; local school boards are being forced to consider potentially costly initiatives.

Scarcity of resources require difficult choices to be made by local school districts and building administrators. Charged with the daunting task of educating an ever-changing population of students, local school boards must provide education to all students while operating within the laws and guidelines imposed by the state and federal government. How the seven member board of education makes decisions that affect students, educators, and the community is the central theme of this study. What guides
school board members to make the decisions that they do? How do they make difficult decisions between competing needs of the school district?

Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

The success of public schools is a topic that elicits strong emotion in many Americans. The questions of what defines school success and what is needed to achieve school success are at the heart of the debate about school funding. Regardless of the definition placed upon successfulness of a local school, there are many independent variables acting upon school success. In addition to curriculum, effective instruction, and building level leadership, the practices of local school boards have been found to affect the success of school districts’ members (Degardelle, 2008; Hofman, 1995; Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009; Rice et al., 2001).

School boards have evolved throughout the history of America; the structure of current school boards is very similar to executive boards from many business and nonprofit organizations (Land, 2002). This similarity theoretically suggests that effective practices of business and nonprofit leadership may transfer to educational leadership. Unfortunately this theoretical relationship has been experimentally tested in relatively few studies (Cristone, 2008; Johnson, 2010). Given the close relationship between secular board practices and school board practices, this study will be viewed through the lens of The Strategic Board Model (Light, 2001).

Renz (2004) stated that a board needs to answer two questions for themselves: (a) What work needs to be completed to by the board? and (b) How can the board best connect to the community? The Strategic Board Model seeks to facilitate the involvement of the board with community members through a four step planning process. The first
step is called developing a leadership plan which includes establishing a vision for the organization. The second step is developing a delegation plan; this plan identifies “who does what” in an organization. Next, a management plan is developed; this plan prioritizes what needs to be accomplished immediately. Finally, an organization must establish a vigilance plan which includes monitoring and evaluating the goals of the organization and holding the leadership team accountable for meeting those goals. Within the Strategic Board framework, there is a unique partnership between administration and the school board which leads to a much more effective organization (Light, 2001).

Leadership Plan

A Leadership Plan addresses the organization’s vision and values (Light, 2001). Each of these areas are commonly cited as important to the leadership of effective school districts (Black, 2008; Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001). “The Leadership Plan is where the high-impact decisions are made about the chosen destiny for the organization” (Light, 2001, p. 45). The vision of the school district must be established through a working relationship between school board members, district administration, school staff, and community members (Johnson, 2010). The emerging vision will closely align with community values (Johnson, 2010) and must focus on academic achievement for all students (Black, 2008). The vision of a school district should guide its goals.

Delegation Plan

The delegation plan from The Strategic Board Model identifies who does what in an organization. While the level of involvement of the school board in day-to-day decisions is contested and varies (Krist, 2008), research related to effective school boards
highlights the importance of the relationship of the school board with district level leadership, especially the superintendent (Black, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Krist, 2008). Separation of the school board from all day-to-day involvement may even be impossible (Land, 2002). Light (2001) reinforced this concept by stating “no board has the time or knowledge to watch over the shoulder of the professional staff every minute, but the strategic board decides what is important to monitor and then communicates it precisely” (p. xi). It is clear that the leadership of successful school districts must share a common vision for the school.

The district administration and the school board represent the leadership team for the district. For the district to be successful, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board must be strong (Johnson, 2010). The nature of this relationship is one of both employee and team member (National School Boards Association, 1993). Both share the responsibility of leading an effective school district and must share a common vision for the school (Johnson, 2010).

Management Plan

Light’s (2001) model for boards identifies the Management Plan as a plan for what needs to be accomplished immediately. This pillar of the Strategic Board Model emphasizes the goals of the organization. While a review of educational research does not seem to frame effective practices of school boards in terms of timelines for completion, it does discuss the need for school boards to create awareness and urgency (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010). In addition to a sense of urgency, organizations and effective school boards must provide training necessary to meet the needs of its staff (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Johnson, 2010).
After establishing a vision, the goal setting activities of school boards must be a collaborative process that includes input from board members, school personnel, and the community (Johnson, 2010). The goals of the school district must also be student centered, concerned primarily with student achievement and instruction authors (Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The goals of any organization must be clear and measurable (Bush, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2002). It is important for school boards to allocate the necessary resources to sustain goals as well as plan for staffing and school board member succession (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010).

School board members must work collaboratively with district administrations to advocate for the needs of all students in the district (Johnson, 2010). Some school boards have been described as setting policy through a method labeled “rubberstamping.” Rubberstamping is characterized by a board accepting all recommendations on policy from district administration (Mountford, 2008). The Strategic Board Model does not subscribe to the phenomenon of rubberstamping; rather within this model the board clearly defines the role of the executive director (Light, 2001). By advocating for student needs and board policies, the community and school staff will begin to understand the importance of the school board’s vision and begin to buy-in to the school’s vision. The acculturalization of staff members with the vision of the school district happens through staff training (Bruffee, 1998).

A major foundation of the human resource frame is that organizations must provide training adequate for staff members (Bolman & Deal, 2008). School boards demonstrate and promote their vision and goals through strategic professional
development for their staff that is focused on their vision for student learning (Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001). Effective school districts must provide teachers with training on district preferred instruction and curriculum (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

Vigilance Plan

According to Light (2001), the Vigilance Plan of a board considers monitoring, evaluating, and holding the organization accountable. Research on the effectiveness of local school boards also considers activities in these areas essential. Effective school boards use data, monitor progress, and take corrective action (Black, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001; Stringfield, 2008).

The local school board holds a valuable and important office, charged with the great responsibility of ensuring that the youth of the community are educated. The role as school board members requires that they sift through a large amount of information prior to making a policy decision (Black, 2008). Effective school board members often work collaboratively with the district administration and other school board members to collect data needed to make decisions, rather than relying on district staff to provide the information needed to make an informed decision (Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001). Once data have been collected, school boards use it to ensure accountability. Attention to data is part of all school board decisions and be used as part of the evaluation process of school programs and administration (Johnson, 2010). The ability to understand data allows school board members to monitor the progress of the district and district corrective action if the goals of the district are not being met.

School districts are held accountable to federal and state governments. In most states, including Missouri, schools that fail to make adequate progress are subject to
additional requirements and may be penalized financially (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). Given the recent emphasis on school accountability, local school boards must hold district staff accountable to local results as well. The superintendent, as leader of the school, is ultimately responsible for the school’s success (Stringfield, 2008). Data to assess effectiveness of the school should include feedback from all stakeholders: students, parents, staff, and community members (Johnson, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

It has been shown that certain practices undertaken by school boards and school board members have an impact on student achievement (Hoffman, 1995; Rice et al., 2001). Even more practices are theoretically believed to have an impact upon school success (Johnson, 2010). While a great many variables influence student achievement and school success, the research on the effect of school board practices on school success is limited in addition, research exploring the differences of school board practices between school districts of differing geographic regions and total school population does not seem to exist.

The literature in the area of leadership is full of effective practices. Developing a vision, creating clear measurable goals, accountability, making data based decisions, and providing strategic staff training have all been listed as effective leadership practices (Bolman & Deal, 2004; Bush, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2002). These leadership practices are not limited to the secular or nonprofit sector, extending as well to local school board governance (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001). Given the high stakes associated with school performance, local districts must have effective
leadership. Imperially validated research on the relationship of school board practices upon school success is limited.

Purpose of the Study

While the policy making role of the local school board has diminished somewhat with increased federal and state regulation (Mountford, 2008), local boards of education still have some impact upon school success (Hofman, 1995; Rice et al., 2001). School success is a high-stakes game that affects educator’s employment, school accreditation, and most importantly student learning. A large number of studies have considered a multitude of variables that influence school success (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). This study was concerned with studying the influence of school board practices on school success.

The purpose of this study was to research both imperially validated and conceptualized school board best practices, as well as their utilization within school districts of differing geographic regions and total school district population. After identification of these best practices, the study looked for possible relationships between each of the best practices as reported by schools and their school success as measured by the school district’s level of school improvement. This study adds to the relatively small amount of research about school board leadership, highlighting which executive practices are most likely to influence school success.
Research Questions

Within the framework of this study, the following research questions were proposed:

1. To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

2. What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

3. What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

4. What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

Included in this section are the known limitations of this study as well as some basic assumptions common of educational research. It is acknowledged that a large number of variables likely influence school success. Among those variables, certain school board practices are believed and have been shown to have some impact.
Additionally, this section discusses the design controls of this study in an attempt to address the reliability and validity of this inquiry.

**Limitations**

This study was affected by several limitations which must be acknowledged. First, there are an infinite number of variables which might influence school success. These variables include teaching practices, curriculum, district leadership, state leadership, and family demographics (Leithwood et al., 2004). This study did not attempt to isolate or account for extraneous variables which likely influence school success.

Second, the very idea of what defines school success is often contended. The definition of a successful school is likely different depending on the individual being asked. Are ACT scores reflective of successful schools? What about graduation rate and future college enrollment? Perhaps reading ability of all students is a measure of school success. With the infinite number of definitions for school success, this study defined school success consistent with the federal standard. The district level of school improvement was used as the standard for school success.

Third, the nature of the data collection instrument is such that one school representative records his/her perception of what extent the school they represent follows each best practice. This leads to a couple of concerns. Is the individual knowledgeable about what the school board does and does not do? Is the instrument being answered truthfully or has self-reporting bias influenced what the respondent feels the school board in their district should be doing (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987)?
Assumptions

The first assumption of this study addresses a design limitation. The survey of the school board practices was sent to and asked to be completed by the local school members. These individuals should be knowledgeable of the operation of the school board in their district (Walser, 2009).

The second assumption is that the district level of improvement is an accepted definition of school success. As previously discussed, level of improvement is a distinction that reflects several factors commonly associated with school performance (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). In an attempt to quantify school success, the district level of improvement was selected as a measure of the successfulness of schools.

Design Controls

Any academic inquiry must consider the validation of the instrument, which determines the usefulness of the study, advancing its importance within a growing body of educational research (Mertens, 2005). This study compared the school board president’s rating on the Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS) to the district’s school improvement identification (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The MSBPS is designed to measure to what extent a local school board uses four school board practices that have been identified in research as having an impact on school success. For the survey to be reliable, someone with detailed knowledge of the school board practices in the district must respond. The assessment items contained within the MSBPS were developed after an extensive review of research related to effective school board practices and also contain items adapted from the Board
Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) which was developed by Smoley (1999). The pool of items was selected to reflect board practices that have been identified to impact school success. This method of item selection addresses the survey’s content validity (DeVilllis, 2012).

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The study of values and values in decision-making has a long history (Rescher, 2004). However, there are some differences between the philosophical studies of values compared to the study of values within education. This section will serve to provide clarification about terms that are contained within this research project.

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).* In 2001, congress passed the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* a major provision of this law required all schools demonstrate that students are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The law required states to look at three areas: Annual Proficiency Target, attendance and graduation rates, and assessment participation rates (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). AYP for this study focused on the Missouri definition:

Missouri’s AYP targets were established by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education based on a formula from the *NCLB Act* and an analysis of Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data, attendance rate data, and graduation rate data from prior years. When all targets are met, the requirements of AYP are met. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011, p. 1)
In 2008-2009, Missouri began using a growth model to help determine AYP. Within this model, school districts could meet AYP by making growth toward AYP targets. AYP is a component of a school district’s level of improvement.

**Geographic region.** The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education separate school districts into one of nine different regions. These nine regions are titled Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC). In addition to serving as boundaries within the state for professional development, these regions are commonly used to organize state level activities and support. Two of the nine RPDC are primarily urban areas: (a) Kansas City and (b) St. Louis. In contrast, the other seven regions have a variety of rural, urban, and suburban student populations (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010).

**School success.** It is difficult to reach a common consensus on the definition of school success. The idea of school success varies between most individuals. This study will consider school success based upon the school district’s level of improvement. District level of improvement is determined by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) which is a complex set of calculations which considers the district’s results from state assessments, the district’s attendance and graduation rate, and the rate of student participation on state assessments. There are four categories of district improvement status: (a) district is not in improvement, (b) level one district improvement, (c) level two district improvement, and (d) level three district improvement. While this distinction does not consider a great number of variables, its validity is supported by its use by the federal government to determine school accreditation and funding (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).
School board member. A school board member is an elected official who has the responsibility “to represent the wishes of the people and to exercise lay control of educational goals and direction” (National School Boards Association, 1996, p. ix).

School board president. A school board president is a school board member who is elected by a majority vote of the school board to serve as president. The school board president conducts the proceedings of the school board meetings. In addition to other responsibilities, the school board president works closely with the superintendent to set the agenda for school board meetings and therefore has a great deal of influence and understanding of school board practices (National School Boards Association, 1996; Walser, 2009).

School improvement. NCLB considers the improvement status of schools in terms of district status and school status. Within this consideration, it is possible for a school district to be in a different level of school improvement or possibly not in improvement at all, whereas a school building within the district could be at another level or not at all. For the purposes of this study, school improvement will be identified as district level improvement (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

Superintendent. The superintendent is the CEO of the school district. They are ultimately responsible and ultimately held accountable for the success of the school (Delagardelle, 2008; Stringfield, 2008). They are the employee of the school district with the most responsibility and biggest paycheck (Stringfield, 2008). Their role includes working most closely with the school board, often helping to create the vision for the school district (Land, 2002). Given the close nature of school board – superintendent
interaction, superintendents should be able to accurately report the current practices of
and to the school board.

*The public school board.* Local school boards are comprised of five to seven
elected members. These members are selected during a public election and serve three
year terms of office. Each school board has an internally elected group of officers which
includes a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. The school board has the
responsibility and authority to guide the educational direction of the school district.
While school board members provide leadership for a school district, the day-to-day
operation of the school district rests upon the administrators and teachers (Smoley, 1999;
Walser, 2009).

*Total student population.* Total student population for this study represents the
total number of reported K-12 students attending each school district during the 2011-
2012 school year. It does not include pre-K or students who are homeschooled. The
population of this study was stratified into three different categories based on total school
district population. The categories are: (a) Small school districts: 0-500 students; (b) Mid-
sized school districts: 501-1600 students; (c) Large school districts: 1601-5,000 students;
and (d) Mega-school districts: 5000+.

*Significance of the Study*

This research project will add to the growing number of studies that looks at value
based decisions. While the research base related to educational leaders is growing, this
project will bring much needed attention to the role of school board members’ values
within the educational decision-making process. Additionally, gaining an improved
understanding of how an organization and individuals within an organization make
decisions can only strengthen the process of organizational governance. Gaining a better understanding of how individuals on a school board make decisions may allow a school district to work more efficiently and make more informed decisions.

Summary

Chapter One provided the conceptual framework for understanding the problem of this study. To review, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between identified best practices of local school boards and school district success as measured by individual school districts’ level of improvement. This study attempts to add to the relatively small amount of research related to the relationship between school board practices and school success. To the knowledge of this researcher, no other quantitative studies have examined this relationship.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature related to local school boards. This review considers the history of public schools and the evolution of the local school board. It also reviews the role of individual school board members and discusses concerns faced by school boards and individual school board members. Finally, Chapter Two details both imperially validated and theoretically identified best practices commonly associated with school success.

Chapter Three of this study provides the research methodology used. This section includes the rationale for the participants, the development of the survey, the reliability and validity of the survey, and a discussion of the method of data collection and analysis. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five concludes the study with a discussion of the results, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The field of educational research is bursting with studies which attempt to solve a multitude of educational problems and concerns. Of the few studies that have examined the impact of the school board, Cristone (2008) identified two fundamental problems. First, much of the research regarding school boards has focused on the role and involvement of the individual school board member, rather than the school board as a group or team. An individual school board member is essentially powerless, in that it takes a majority decision to officially make policy. While it is true that individual board members cannot make policy on their own, they certainly can influence decisions for which they are passionate (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In addition to viewing school boards as a team, Cristone (2008) further suggested the research of school boards is limited primarily to qualitative research.

Much of the research conducted about the impact of school boards upon school success has been primarily in the form of theoretical case studies (Cristone, 2008). This type of research is limited to what we expect should happen in a perfect world, or in the case of qualitative research, the results are insufficient to provide generalizability (Mertens, 2005). Cristone (2008) also recommended research studying the impact of school boards on school success would be more effective if it were not limited to a qualitative design but also included quantitative components.
Even though research related to the impact of school board practices on school success is limited, a small amount of research is available. Any investigation of the impact of school boards on school success must consider several areas. This review of literature will examine the history of school boards in America, internal and external influences on local school boards, and lastly, effective school board practices.

The History of School Boards in America

The American school board has experienced significant changes since the birth of the country. The need for an educated population was foreseen by the founders of the county. In fact, early leaders of America saw a strong educational system as the path to continued civic growth within the new country (Spring, 2008). Effective governance of the country required educated citizens and leaders (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). From the beginning of the country, the history of local school boards mirrors the changes that have occurred in America. Those changes have both created opportunities and problems for education in America.

Education Post-Revolution

Formal local boards of education in America stem from the democratic society that had just been created at the end of the Revolutionary War. The first organized local boards of education were created when the burdens of governing towns became too great to allow both civil governance and educational governance to be decided under the same roof (Land, 2002). Early school board governance was closely aligned with protestant religious beliefs (Bjork, 2008; Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). This belief system sought educated clergy parishioners, who could read, write, and do basic mathematics (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). Additionally, changes in the nature of the American
economy demanded an educated population. “If one’s children’s future depended on their understanding of changing market realities, then an appreciation of competition, hard work, determination, and achievement (not to mention the ability to read, cipher, and communicate) assumed greater value” (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001, p. 10). This system of local school board governance lasted until the 1850’s. Changes initiated by the industrial revolution also required necessary changes within the structure of educational governance.

*Education in the Industrial Revolution*

In addition to the impact upon America and the world, the industrial revolution had a profound impact upon education in America. From the mid 1800’s to the early 1900’s, local groups of elected laypeople governed the education their children received (Land, 2002). The educational system which they managed faced the same challenges of the world; these challenges included rapid population increases of immigrants looking for work in a new country, amidst unprecedented changes in industry and technology (Bjork, 2008; Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001; Spring, 2008). The changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution made the previously straightforward process of educating children far more complex. It is because of this complexity that local school boards first began hiring individuals to manage and oversee the education of their children. These new educators were the first school administrators. The first superintendents were primarily responsible for curriculum and instruction, and local school boards only remained active in the administration of the school’s business (Land, 2002). The complexity of the evolving educational system, however, eventually brought increased federal involvement.
Great economic growth and capitalism brought many immigrants into America. Each new arrival brought their own beliefs and traditions, ultimately their culture. This multicultural influx caused established Americans to begin to fear an erosion of the “American value system.” The local school was seen as a modality of reaffirming the American value system; therefore, the school began to offer many social services aimed at assimilating immigrants into the current American culture (Spring, 2008). Parkerson and Parkerson (2001) summed up the role of the school system during this time of immigration. “The common school emerged as the accepted model of education because it met the emerging social, political, and economic needs of the new republic” (pp. 1-2).

Mid 1900’s

In light of concerns about school effectiveness (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001) and corruption, the school governance system of local school districts was reformed in the mid 1900’s to closely resemble the board of directors common in business models (Land, 2002). At this same time, educational pioneers, such as Horace Mann, argued that a common school system with common goals could help assimilate immigrants into the culture of America, while making them educated members of society (Bjork, 2008). These changes signaled the beginning of state and federal influence on local boards of education. It was also during the mid to late 1900’s that the structure of schools began to look more like they do today. There was a shift toward a more efficient system of school management, which incorporated the ideals of scientific management. This led to role specialization within schools (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). The role of the principal and teacher was more clearly defined, and in an effort to make schools more efficient, schools were often divided into different grade levels (Bjork, 2008). Changes brought on
by the Great Depression aided the evolution of the school board, specifically the role of
the superintendent.

Education during and after the Great Depression

During the turbulent financial times of the 1930’s, the role of superintendents
changed from being a non-political figure to someone who was required to secure scarce
resources for his or her district during desperate financial times. Bjork (2008) described
this period as a time when superintendents were forced to begin to listen to public
concerns about the governance of schools. Prior to this time, school districts had been
managed by principles that drove the industrial revolution, such as efficiency. During the
1950’s, the federal government began to reassert control over the education of the county.
This initiative began with national panic about Sputnik and led to increased federal
control over the educational system through the National Defense Education Act of 1958.
The act provided increased funding for math and science at the federal government’s
expense (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). This period of time saw a transition from
economic panic to panic about national security issues. The end of this era was
highlighted by dissatisfaction with the educational system and even the political system
in America, ushering in the civil rights movement.

The Civil Rights Movement

After the Civil War and increasing though the 1960’s, the issue of segregation
began to impact public schools in America. Racial discrimination was perpetuated in the
country, primarily the South, by Jim Crow laws. These unofficial rules reinforced the
discriminatory idea that blacks were inferior to whites (Paterson & Paterson, 2001). The
policy of segregation between white school and black schools was established by Plessy
v. Ferguson in 1896 (Paterson & Paterson, 2001). The “separate but equal” standard was challenged and overturned in 1954 by Brown vs. Board of Education (Paterson & Paterson, 2011). This supreme court decision was just the beginning of civil rights reform in the public schools and America.

The 1950’s and 1960’s brought sweeping reforms to civil rights legislation. State and federal laws mandated equal rights and access to all public services, including education. These federal and state laws began to shift the power of educational governance away from the local board of education (Bjork, 2008; Land, 2002). Additionally, in the 1970’s, the federal government continued exerting its influence on local school policies by funding separate categorical programs, such as special education (Land, 2002). During the 1960’s, the federal government increased education spending by more than 230% (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). This spending coincided with a push for desegregation across the country enforced by a 1968 policy which only provided funds to districts who had desegregated (Peterson, 2010). Following widespread desegregation reforms, schools were put on notice as being deficient by citizens through reports such as A Nation At-Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

A Nation at Risk Era

The “A Nation at Risk” report signaled the beginning of discontent, and even distrust, in the ability of American schools to prepare its students for a global world (Bjork, 2008). The report identified many shortfalls of public education in America, but it included few recommendations for remediation (Peterson, 2010). During this timeframe, many parents and policy makers began to voice dissatisfaction with the current school
establishment and began organizing major education reform. Schools and the government began to enact policies designed to address needs of marginalized students, who were previously falling through the cracks. The study which led to *A Nation at Risk* was intended to increase local control in educational decisions; instead, the report led to increased federal involvement (Peterson, 2010).

During this era, schools began to be leaders in social movements such as drug abuse and poverty (Bjork, 2008). Bjork also contended this era once again reshaped the role of the superintendent, requiring the leader of the school district also be an excellent communicator with the ability to gather input and support from all stakeholders in the community, even those whose interests remained on the margins. The most recent changes in school board history involved a shift toward more stringent accountability of the local educational system.

*No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Era*

Awareness of school accountability has moved to the forefront in public education in recent years. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* greatly expanded the federal role in education. Regulations from the federal government seem likely to impact local school boards for some time. “Pressure from the federal and state governments for high academic standards and achievement shows no signs of abating” (Land, 2002, p. 232). School districts are now mandated by the federal government to meet standards or face financial sanctions (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). In addition to being 100% proficient by 2014, *NCLB* required districts to show regular progress for all students toward proficiency (Peterson, 2010). Unfortunately, what represents Adequate Yearly Progress differs from state to
state across America. This difference is due to the severe discrepancy between measures of proficiency, proficiency level is determined by each individual state. Under the current system, only a few state assessment systems meet international standards. Missouri’s standard of measurement is considered to be as rigorous as other international measures (Peterson, 2010).

As the list of demands and expectations for school districts continue to grow, school board members must shoulder the load of allocating scarce financial resources. This includes maintaining an effective educational staff, meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, and taking the lead by trying to solve complex social problems (Land, 2002). Continuous evolution of the educational system in the United States also includes the Race to the Top initiative.

Race to the Top Program

In 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). This act was designed to stimulate a stagnant economy by creating jobs in America. In addition to other industries, the educational system received funds to further support educational growth. As part of ARRA’s educational investment, 4.35 billion dollars were set aside for competitive state grants. This state grant program was titled the Race to the Top. The Race to the Top was designed to encourage states to make educational gains in student achievement, improve graduation rates, and increase college and career readiness (United States Department of Education, 2009). According to the Race to the Top Program executive summary (United States Department of Education, 2009), eligible states were responsible for implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas:
• Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
• Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
• Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
• Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (p. 2)

The history of local school boards has echoed the evolution of America, beginning with a vision of free education for citizens set by the founders to humanitarian changes common throughout the civil rights movement. The most recent school reforms affecting local school boards have come from federal reform movements; for example, NCLB and Race to the Top have influenced many local policy shifts for local school boards in America.

Internal and External Influences on Local School Boards

Just as America and the public school system have evolved over the past 200 years, so too have the influences upon the decision making of local school boards. The policy making of local boards of education is influenced both externally and internally (Krist, 2008). The external influences discussed in this review of literature revolve around state and federal policies that dictate local board policy. The internal influences of local board decisions center around the relationships associated with school board members including: superintendent relations, power struggles, and board members’ motives, as well as differing styles of decision-making among board members.
External Influences on Local School Boards

Federal and state policies impact local school boards by tying access to significant funding contingent upon adherence to state and federal policies. In addition to funding, federal policy may be influenced by litigation. For example, if a local school district decided to exclude individuals with disabilities from educational services, the federal government would withhold special education categorical funding, and the parents of those students with disabilities may sue the school district on the basis of discrimination. This type of federal control was necessary for many civil rights related policies that the United States Government could not afford to leave in the hands of local school boards. Even so, federal and state policies have created additional concerns for local school districts.

Increasing State and Federal Control. As previously discussed, increases in federal and state control mirror the evolving history of America. School boards began as local entities, described by Krist (2008) as an archipelago of districts, each guided by local communities. Over time, smaller districts consolidated into larger districts. During this same time, the values and beliefs of Americans began to change. In addition to the civil rights movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s, the presence of federal education policy increased within local school board decisions (Bjork, 2008).

Several reasons are cited for the move away from local school board control toward increased federal and state involvement. Krist (2008) attributed the changes to:

(a) loss of confidence by higher authorities in local decision makers including elected school boards, teachers, and administrators; (b) the increased use of federal and state categorical grants; (c) changes in state funding and control
patterns to enhance equity and place limits on local property tax spending; (d) growing legalization of education; (e) the tendency of NCLB and state accountability to centralize more authority than it decentralizes; and (f) federal and state concern about the role and impact of local unions. (p. 49)

Perhaps no federal policy has as much impact upon the local districts as the NCLB Act of 2001. NCLB significantly limited the power of local school boards to set policy not directly aligned with federal policy (Krist, 2008). Local districts were required to align local goals and objectives with federal requirements. Failure of local school districts to perform to federal standards would result in economic sanctions, which if left uncorrected could lead to school district dissolution.

A secondary effect of increased federal and state involvement in local school decisions is the minimizing of local power. Mountford (2008) discussed the impact of increased state and federal accountability systems and suggested that significant increases in state and federal involvement in the policy making of school boards have caused school board members to sometimes feel devalued. Federal and state guidelines often restrict the actions of local school boards, requiring that scarce resources be spent on mandated programs. This loss of local control has led to what Mountford (2008) called the rubber stamping of the superintendent’s recommendation. Rubber stamping is when school boards simply accept the superintendent’s recommendation in order to remain in compliance with policies set at the state and local level. Various political changes have affected functioning of local school boards; “the discretionary decision zone of the superintendents and the boards has been squeezed into a smaller and smaller area” (Krist, 2008, p. 54).
Local school boards vs. state or national school boards. With a significant shift away from local control, why are local school boards needed? Krist (2008) described the rationale for local school governance. He stated local school elections allow for more direct control and specialization of policies that directly relate to the local community rather than to a larger state and national population. Additionally, Krist argued local school board governance leads to increased efficacy, which in turn leads to more participation. Participation by parents and community stakeholders only serves to strengthen the local school district. In addition to increased community support for education, local school boards allow for organizational decentralization.

Local school boards clearly serve the educational interests of the district. While most educational research focuses on educational goals, curriculum, and instructional practices, the local board of education has other functions. History has shown that the governance of schools requires too much involvement for civil government to monitor every step in the process (Land, 2002). Local school boards, therefore, are needed to make decisions about transportation, food services, school budgeting, collective bargaining, student discipline, and employment decisions (National School Boards Association, 1993). National and state boards of education would be very inefficient in completing these tasks. However, local educational control is not without its problems and concerns.

Internal Influences on School Boards

The local board of education is comprised of local citizens, elected by patrons of the school district. Ideally, these representatives decide educational policy for students and function as a team, with the best interests of the district at heart. Aside from external
(federal and state) influences, internal elements often shape the local policy created by these public servants. Local influences may include board member demographics, board member motives, power struggles, decision making style, and superintendent relationships.

*The structure of the school board.* Most school boards have five to seven board members who are elected by a popular vote of the community (Land, 2002; Walser, 2009). As previously mentioned, the school board is structured similarly to the executive board of a corporation. This structure requires school boards to nominate and vote for officers of the board. Officer positions of the school board include: president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer (Walser, 2009). The most influential officer of the board is the school board president. The president’s duties include running the actual board meeting in accordance with the rules of order and planning the agenda of meetings with the superintendent (National School Boards Association, 1993). In addition to understanding the structure of the school board, it is also important to know the demographics common to school boards in America.

*School board demographics.* The majority of school boards in America are located in smaller rural areas of the country and serve districts with populations fewer than 3,000 students (Land, 2002). Land also indicated that the overwhelming majority of school board members are white, middle class, educated citizens. Over 50% of school board members report an annual income above $60,000, which is nearly three to four times the poverty threshold for a family of three or four family members (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). The predominate demographics of
school boards may suggest, that without considerable effort, marginalized voices may not be heard at the planning table.

*Power struggles.* School board demographics may explain some of the basis of conflict among school board members. Conflict is a central component of an organization. It presents itself when individuals within an organization compete for scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The competition within a healthy organization allows various individuals or groups to represent their interests and ideas. Healthy conflict is necessary and will even drive an organization to make better decisions (Larson, 1997). Mountford (2008) described power struggles within school board members as a function of the individual board member’s motives. Difficulties within board member relations often occur when one board member tries to exert his or her ideals on situations without collecting all of the necessary information or allowing an opportunity for others to collaborate in the decision making process. Individual board members must not abandon the collaborative process because “they do not hold formal power as individuals. Their power lies only with the entire group of school board members” (Mountford, 2008, p. 86).

The political aspects of board relations are no less different from other organizations. Power is wielded through the process of bargaining and negotiating (Bolman & Deal, 2008). If conflict and negotiation are a part of school board decisions, then the motivations that individuals cite for running for the board of education are important.

*Motives for service.* Why do individuals run for school board office? Mountford (2008) listed five primary reasons, which include: (a) wanting to solve a specific
problem; (b) being interested in the process of policy-making; (c) desiring prestige; (d) needing to achieve a sense of belonging; and (e) being actively recruited. Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately half of all school board members run for altruistic reasons, whereas the other half run for personal reasons or a mixture of both reasons. Personal reasons for running for the school board include the needs of the board members’ own children, their own need for belonging, and a need for formal power. Board members with altruistic reasons for running are generally concerned for the wellbeing and good of all students. These individuals see it as their civic responsibility to improve the education in their schools for the betterment of all children and therefore society as a whole (Mountford, 2008). School board members who have been recruited by others to serve commonly do it for altruistic reasons.

The stance on board member decisions may be affected by what motivates school board members to run for the board. Mountford (2008) argued individuals who run for school board for personal reasons are often interested in specific details, routinely wanting to conduct their own research on a topic. This approach may lead to power conflicts with district administration and other board members. Conversely, board members who run for altruistic reasons tend to be more collaborative prior to making decisions. These individuals often favor committee based decisions and strive for consensus.

*Styles of board decision making.* Confounding the concern of board member motives for services is the fact that board members’ style of decision-making may differ from one board member to another (Mountford, 2008). Mountford also identified the three types of board decision making to include trustee, delegate, and politico. The
Trustee style of decision making bases decisions on individuals’ own system of values and beliefs and does not consider the desires of constituents. The delegate style of decision making is one in which a decision-maker receives guidance or instructions from a group of people and then make a decision based on the group’s recommendations. The politico style of decision-making uses a trustee or delegate style based on the circumstance surrounding the decision.

Differing styles of decision-making among school board members may make it difficult for a school board to come to consensus on policy decisions. Additionally, the complexity of the process of understanding each individual school board member’s motives for decisions may lead the school administration to have unclear expectations about the vision of the school (Johnson, 2010; Mountford, 2008). It is during these times of disorganization and indecisiveness about a decision that the relationship between a school board and the superintendent are examined most closely.

Superintendent interactions. Traditionally, the view of school board has been to write policy and not directly interfere with the day-to-day interaction of the school (Krist, 2008; Land, 2002). However, the interactions between school boards and the superintendent have begun receiving more attention in the research literature. Krist (2008) listed the four dominant patterns of superintendent-board relations as:

(a) a strong superintendent, trusted by board members, dominates policy making and administration; (b) a strong board that does not trust the superintendent dominates policy making and administration; (c) a mixture where the superintendent and the board both cross over frequently into policy making and administration; (d) the
textbook definition of separation of roles, where each participant knows what is expected and abides by those understandings. (Krist, 2008, pp. 55-56)

Regardless of the pattern of interaction between the superintendent and the school board, the superintendent must be held accountable for the performance of the school. Stringfield (2008) described the relationship of the school board to the superintendent directly, “it [is] important to declare annual, measurable goals for the superintendent and the system, and to hold the superintendent accountable for performance” (p. 287).

This section has shown that school board members are not a group of five to seven like-minded community members whose sole purpose is to promote the academic success of the school district. Both external and internal influences act upon the decisions local school board members make regarding educational policy. External influences that affect local policy include a multitude of state and federal policies. Internal influences include individual school board member interactions, superintendent relations, power struggles, board members’ motives, and differing styles of decision-making.

**Essential Board Leadership Practices**

Do school boards have an impact upon student learning? Hofman (1995) found school boards do actually make a difference in school effectiveness. Similarly, Johnson (2010) identified twelve essential practices affecting leadership of public school districts. In addition to Johnson’s work, others have written about the effective practices among school board members (Delagardelle, 2008; Marzano & Walters, 2009; Rice et al., 2001). Many of the concepts identified as effective school board practices are similar to effective leadership practices outside of education (Lencioni, 2002; Yukl, 2002), with the addition of a student centered focus.
Much of the research on the effect of school boards on student achievement and effective schools discuss the importance of student centered policies (Johnson, 2010). The student centered focus of the board of education must be non-negotiable (Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009). Student achievement and instruction must be at the foundation of school board policies for any effective school (Black, 2008; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The following section details effective school board practices found during a review of relevant research.

Creating a Vision

The vision of an organization provides a clear picture of where an organization is headed and what it wants its future to look like (Northouse, 2004). Yukl (2002) stated, “vision conveys an image of what can be achieved, why it is worthwhile, and how it can be done” (p. 284). The idea of creating a vision to help guide an organization is not reserved to education; many successful organizations are built upon a successful vision.

Johnson (2010) argued effective school boards work closely with district staff and community stakeholders to develop a long-range vision for the school district. Furthermore, the vision for the school district must embody the belief that all students can learn (Delagardelle, 2008; Rice et al., 2001) and that all staff members can positively affect student outcomes (Johnson, 2010). In addition to the vision focusing on the belief that all students can learn, Black (2008) wrote that the most effective school boards focus their efforts and resources upon academic achievement for all students.

Within an organization such as a school district, a vision must be developed as part of a collaborative process and can never be directed from any one person or any elite group of people (Gill, 2010). Even so, the school district’s executive administration and
the school board must have a similar vision for a school district to be effective (Johnson, 2010). It is the job and duty of the superintendent and school board to regularly reevaluate the vision of the school district, ensuring that it truly remains a shared vision among all district and community stakeholders (Johnson, 2010). Once a vision has been established, the board of education, in conjunction with district administration, must develop goals that will guide the district in the attainment of those goals.

Setting Goals and Remaining Committed

As previously discussed, school board members hold very little official power as individuals (Mountford, 2008). Therefore, the school board should be considered holistically as a team. “Team goals need to be very clear so that one can tell if the performance objective has been realized” (Northouse, 2004, p. 212). Teams fail and school boards may prove ineffective if decisions not are guided by the district goals. Close adherence to the goals will reduce the likelihood that individual team members (i.e., school board members) will let personal agendas become the center of their focus (Northouse, 2004). Johnson (2010) observed that goal setting for school boards must be a collaborative process that includes input from board members, school personnel, and the community. Additionally, and similar to the school vision, the goals of the school board must focus on student achievement and instruction. This student centered focus has been described as non-negotiable by several authors (Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009). Student achievement and instruction should be the foundation of school board policies for school districts to be effective. In fact, Murphy and Hallinger (1988) studied effective schools in California, and found that almost two-thirds of the goals from school being studied were designed to impact curriculum and instruction.
It is the school board’s duty to ensure the educators in their district have direction and the resources to meet the board’s goals of student achievement and instruction. Once the goals have been set for the district, it is the job of the professionally trained educators to implement those goals, while being accountable to the school board for their results (Johnson, 2010). The *Lighthouse Inquiry* showed that school board members of effective districts were able to articulate the boards’ goals, as well as describe the efforts that were being undertaken to reach those goals; whereas school board members from ineffective districts were unable to clearly articulate the goals of the school (Rice et al., 2001). An example from the *Lighthouse Inquiry* of an ineffective board practice is when “board members said it wasn’t their job to know about instruction” (Rice, et al, 2001, p. 11).

The importance of setting clear and measurable goals is highlighted by authors in the field of leadership (Bush, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2002). The field of educational leadership is no different. For educational initiatives to sustain beyond the often short tenure of school board members and administrators, much thought must be given to the sustainability of board policies (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010). In addition to sustainability, effective school boards also work closely with school staff to ensure their policies are being followed. This school board involvement sometimes parallels the work of school administrations regarding policy implementation (Johnson, 2010).

If establishing non-negotiable goals that lead to increased student learning is essential, then remaining committed to those goals is also imperative. Johnson stated, “effective school boards demonstrate commitment to the district’s vision and goals by ensuring that district resources support district goals, and that school board members
spend time together learning about district programs, initiatives, and issues” (2010, p. 37). LaMonte and Delagardelle (2009) also discussed the importance of school boards remaining committed to the educational goals which they have set-forth. They affirmed the need to remain consistent to the board goals, citing examples of improved teacher buy-in when the school board members remained committed to their goals.

It is clearly important for local school boards to develop a vision collaboratively with the community. Additionally, setting non-negotiable goals and remaining committed to those goals are equally important for school boards. However, it is virtually useless unless the school board has a plan for monitoring progress and taking action if goals are not being met.

*Using Data*

Like other elected officials in the government, school board members represent the patrons of the school district. As part of their service, school board members are accountable to the voters who elected them to lead the school district. They are charged with ensuring that the school district is successful. Within this pursuit of success, board members must be able to effectively use data to make decisions (Johnson, 2010). “The best boards use data to make informed decisions and develop policies” (Black, 2008, p. 34). It has been suggested that school boards gather data together as a group prior to making a decision (Johnson, 2010). The *Lighthouse Inquiry* suggested the school boards of successful districts were seekers and connoisseurs of data prior to making decisions, whereas the school boards of ineffective districts relied upon district administration and staff to provide the data they (the district employees) believed to be useful in guiding a decision (Rice, et al., 2001). The *Lighthouse Inquiry* also found that moving (effective)
school board members were “very clear about their decision-making process in terms of study, learning, reading, listening, receiving data, questioning, discussing, and then deciding and evaluating” (Rice et al., 2001, p.10). This is in contrast to stuck (ineffective) school board members whose decision-making process rested almost solely upon the recommendation of the superintendent.

In addition to using data to help guide decisions, effective school boards may use data to ensure accountability among district staff. This attention to data should become part of all school board decisions and could be used as part of the evaluation process of school programs and administration (Johnson, 2010). The data used by school board members must be both truthful and complete so the board is allowed the ability to make an informed decision (Black, 2008). Access to data will allow the school board to monitor the progress of the district and allow them to take corrective action if the goals of the district are not being met.

*Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action*

Northouse (2004) described leadership as the process of directing a group of individuals toward accomplishing a goal. But how do school board members, as educational leaders, assess whether or not a goal has been met? Schools must be held accountable for the attainment of the goals set for them. Team leaders, including administration and school board leaders, may foster accountability by requiring results, reviewing those results, and rewarding results (Northouse, 2004). Stringfield (2008) suggested school boards members are inundated with data from many sources about the governance of their school district. He stated that board members must be able to
determine which data are accurate and should be used to form information which is valuable to making a decision.

Who must be held accountable? Stringfield (2008) stated the school board has only one employee, which is the superintendent. The superintendent is the most highly paid individual in the school district and is also the employee with the most responsibility. The superintendent must find a way to meet the goals set by the board, and the board must hold the superintendent accountable. Rice, et al. found superintendents of ineffective schools “made excuses for why students didn’t learn or why their test scores were not as high as they would like” (2001, p. 12). If the highest paid, most influential employee of the school district makes excuses rather than produces results, the district may be doomed to failure. This belief of helplessness will almost certainly be projected to other staff members. Johnson (2010) described the process of evaluating school goals and holding school staff accountable as an ongoing assessment of all aspects of education. Part of this accountability assessment should include feedback from all stakeholders: students, parents, staff, and community members. Delagardelle (2008) also suggested effective school boards hold both themselves and the district staff accountable for meeting the district goals. In addition to ensuring the goals of the school are being met, the board must take the lead on many education initiatives by creating a sense of urgency which will model passion for educational reform.

Creating Awareness and Urgency

It has been said that raising a child takes a village, and that is particularly true for schools. Johnson (2010) found school boards must be an advocate for all children, and therefore gather both community and staff support to meet the needs of all students.
School board members can foster a sense of urgency within the community by identifying and discussing student needs. In regards to building a sense of urgency, “board members also found it important to build the collective will of the staff and the community to improve student learning” (Delagardelle, 2008, p. 212).

Lencioni (2002) also stated a committed team must have clarity and buy-in. He discouraged the idea of team consensus, arguing that team consensus toward a decision is not nearly as important as allowing each team member to freely share their ideas. It is with this shared responsibility and leadership that buy-in is achieved. This process, if successful, both uses and builds trust within a team. To facilitate commitment, a leader must articulate a vision that can be accomplished by the team, relate the team’s goals to member values, and build or maintain confidence within the team (Yukl, 2002). By promoting egalitarianism, or shared leadership, team members have greater buy-in into the decision making process and they are therefore more committed (Bolman & Deal, 2002).

In addition to creating a sense of urgency, effective school leaders establish the climate they want to see in their district. Transformational leadership seeks to empower other members of the organization leading to positive change (Northouse, 2004). By serving as a role model with its policies, the school board sets the climate for the school district. While the needs of each school differ considerably, effective school districts remained focused upon the learning needs of their students. Their policies reflect those student needs, and the climate of the school remains student centered (Johnson, 2010). Murphy and Hallinger (1988) described the practices of effective schools within their study as part of the environment or culture. For school districts to be effective, school
leaders must take the lead, creating a climate focused on the needs of students. Once school board members are committed to their course of action it is their duty to share their vision with community, creating a sense of urgency.

Engaging the Community

As previously mentioned, effective school boards look towards the community in which they live to gain assistance in developing the district’s vision and subsequent goals. However, the community involvement must not stop at the school’s vision; it must extend to community forums that allow the board of education to receive community feedback on educational issues (Johnson, 2010). The Lighthouse Inquiry found effective school board members “could name specific ways the district was involving parents and community and all indicated a desire for more involvement” (Rice et.al, 2001, p. 10). Whereas, the “Inquiry” cited board members from ineffective schools believed a lack of parental participation stemmed from a lack of interest. Hofman (1995) found school boards with increased community involvement and shared decision making had better educational results. Black (2008) stated gaining input from a panel of community members can be very valuable as long as the board of education is willing to take that advice. While it is true the school board must consider input from community members, they must also be able to work productively with district leaders to ensure the success of the district.

Connecting with District Leadership

The school board and district administration represent the leadership team of the school district. School administration includes the superintendent, building administration, and any other district administration. Johnson (2010) noted the
relationship between school administration and the board must be strong. Lencioni (2002) suggested a team must have many things, but each is predicated upon trust in each team member. Without a sense of trust and community, team members may become “bogged down” by being concerned about what other team members think about their ideas rather than generating and voicing ideas that enhance the growth of their organization (school).

The process of building trust within a team and connecting with district leadership requires similar activities. These activities may include retreats and other social events where board members can discuss viewpoints and begin to build trust in one another (Johnson 2010; Lencioni, 2002).

There is perhaps no subject written about as much, regarding school boards, than the relationship of the school board with the superintendent. School board members in effective districts understand that the work of the superintendent and the role of the school board often intermingle. Each has the duty of serving as a role model for their district, serving as an example for staff to follow while achieving the goals of the district (Rice, et al., 2001). Given the nature of the relationship, both employer and team member, this can make for an interesting marriage.

School board and administration teams quickly unify within effective school districts. The team that is formed must have a common vision with shared responsibility for the school district. This vision again must be based on the fundamental belief that all school goals have to be student centered (Black, 2008; Johnson, 2010). Within this school leadership team, the superintendent shoulders the majority of the responsibility for informing the school board about effective instructional practices and curricular issues (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). LaMonte and Delagardelle (2009) discussed effective
board/administration teams within their study and “spent time learning together about approaches to building leadership that were proven effective in other districts. Then the board set clear expectations for the superintendent based on the learning” (p. 29).

“Historically, the prevalent view is that the board should not cross the policy line and delve into the arena of administration. But, these boundaries are unclear” (Krist, 2008, p. 55). More recent research suggests effective school boards are knowledgeable about district initiatives the administration has put in place to meet the goals of the school (Rice et al., 2001). Land (2002) pointed out, “The roles of the school board and superintendent are highly interdependent, making complete separation of policymaking and administration impractical, if not impossible” (p. 252). Murphy and Hallinger (1988) found high performing schools had very positive interactions between district administration and the school board. They also found that within successful districts, the members of the governance team i.e., superintendent, and board members regularly reached consensus on school decisions. This close working relationship between the school board and the superintendent is essential to effective schools (National School Board Association, 1996). Delagardelle (2008) described the relationship between the school board and the superintendent as part of a continuum, whose goal is to provide an effective education for the district’s students. The relationship of the school board and district administration must, therefore, be an area of emphasis when considering the impact of school boards upon the success of a school district.

Providing Staff Development

While the role is not clearly defined, both the school board and district administration must ensure that staff have adequate training to meet the needs of the
students in the district. The human resource frame of organizational analysis suggests that for an organization to be effective there must be a good match between the worker and the organization. One of the foundations of the human resource frame is that organizations should hire the best people they can, provide adequate training for those individuals, and then strive to keep them working for the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Effective school boards provide strategic professional development for their staff that is focused on student learning (Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001). In direct contrast to the idea of student centered professional development, ineffective school districts featured in the Lighthouse Inquiry identified the following school board members’ belief about professional development as “the staff development reported was generated by teacher needs (credits for recertification, specific areas of interest) or mandates rather than student needs” (Rice, et al., 2011, p.47). The “Lighthouse Inquiry” noted board members from effective school districts within their study were able to discuss how district professional development linked to the goals set forth by the boards of education (Rice et al., 2001).

Further support for target professional development comes from Murphy and Hallinger’s (1988) study of effective school districts in California. Within their study, board policies either formally or informally required assessment of new principal and staff applicants. The school staff of these effective schools were hired primarily based on their performance on these assessments of their knowledge of curriculum and instruction. Effective schools identified by Murphy and Hallinger (1988) seemed to adhere to the human resource frame; after a staff member was hired, the new employee received training on district preferred instruction and curriculum philosophies. Based on previous
information included in this review of literature, the theme of student centered activities and planning seems to emerge.

Summary

The history of public schools and local school boards has evolved similarly to America over the past 200 years. With each step of the process, the need for strong leadership has continued. The local school board continues to serve the purpose of uniting the patrons to provide the best education possible for the community.

School board members who are elected for office have the difficult task of continuing to set policy that ensures their district is successful. Board members are not alone in their concern for the students in their districts. Both external and internal influences attempt to act upon their policy making decisions. Whether it is power struggles within the board or federal regulations, school board members are faced with difficult decisions routinely. Patrons look to these elected leaders to ensure a successful school.

Several effective practices of school boards have been identified. It is very clear the school board and other district leaders must always make student–centered decisions. Effective school boards collaboratively create a vision for the district with the members of the community. In addition to setting a clear vision, effective school boards set and measure goals consistent with their vision. Working closely with district staff, effective school boards hold professional educators accountable for meeting the goals of the district, which in turn ensures a successful school district.

The introduction and previous literature review identify a conceptual framework and relevant research that support further inquiry into the impact of effective school
board practices on student achievement and school success. Chapter Three provides a
detailed description of the methodology used during this inquiry. The findings of the
study are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five concludes the study with a discussion
of the results, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Increasingly, over the past 30 years, educational quality and performance have been emphasized at the federal and state levels (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). With the enactment of NCLB in 2001, local school districts across America were notified that if their schools do not succeed, they would face harsh penalties, up to, and including the closing of schools (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The Race to the Top Program (United States, 2009) has increased the competitiveness of education by creating a competitive grant program to be accessed by the states most willing to meet the requirements of the program. Both NCLB and The Race to the Top Program have forced local school governing bodies to make very difficult choices. When faced with difficult choices, schools must have effective leadership at the highest level in order to be successful.

Local school districts have many levels of leadership, but district level leadership is the primary focus of this study. The superintendent and school board members comprise the school district leadership team. It is essential for school success that the leadership team work collaboratively (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). In addition to working well together, several school board practices have been found, or are believed, to have a positive impact upon school success (Hoffman, 1995; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001).
While the focus of some research studies considers the impact of school boards on student achievement, many of those studies look at individual board members’ interactions, and most researchers utilize a qualitative approach. Further research is needed on the impact of school board practices upon school success, and quantitative measures should be utilized to further explore this impact (Cristone, 2008; Smoley, 1999). This study intends to add to the body of research that explores the influence of school board leadership on school district success.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between school board practices and school district success, as measured by the school district’s level of improvement. Due to the nature of the research questions, the method of analysis selected was quantitative. In the current study, survey data were examined to determine to what extent local school boards were using researcher-selected school board practices, comparing the reported utilization of those practices to school districts from differing geographic regions, districts with differing student populations and districts with differing levels of school improvement. After analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher was able to answer specific research questions related to school board practices and school district success.

Chapter Three lists the research questions posed by this study, followed by a description of the design of the study. Next, a description of the population, stratification techniques utilized, and a detailed description of the data collection instruments. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description and rationale for selected data analysis of the study.
Research Questions

Within the framework of this study, the following research questions were proposed:

1. To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices:
   (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

2. What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

3. What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

4. What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

Design for the Study

While it is generally understood there is not one best type of research design, several factors can influence the selection of research designs (Creswell, 2009). A quantitative approach was chosen because of a desire to answer research questions specific to this study. Given that each research question either required descriptive or
correlational data that could be collected through a survey of school board presidents in Missouri, a quantitative approach research design was chosen. Whereas qualitative research is most concerned with exploring the meaning the participants attribute to problems, quantitative research seeks to test relationships among variables (Creswell, 2009). The primary quantitative research method employed was an individual survey, the *Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS)*. “Survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2009, p. 12). The *MSBPS* survey was administered to school board presidents from across Missouri. Secondary data collection included obtaining preexisting data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

**Limitations**

It is important to note that all research designs have limitations or threats (Creswell, 2009). This study was affected by several limitations which must be acknowledged. First, there are an infinite number of variables which might influence school success. These variables include teaching practices, curriculum, district leadership, state leadership, and family demographics (Leithwood et al., 2004). This study did not attempt to isolate or account for extraneous variables which likely influence school district success.

Second, the very idea of what defines school district success could be contended. With the infinite number of definitions for school success, this study defined school success consistent with the federal standard. This study viewed the district’s level of school improvement as the standard for school success.
Third, the nature of the data collection instrument is such that one school representative records his/her perception of what extent the school they represent follows a specific practice. This type of self-report may lead to self-report bias which may suggest the responses of school boards presidents have been influenced by what the respondent feels they should be doing rather than what is actually taking place (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study addresses a design limitation. The survey of the school board practices was sent to and asked to be completed by school board members. These are individuals who should be knowledgeable of the operation of the school board in their district (National School Boards Association, 1993).

The second assumption is that the level of district improvement is an accepted definition of school success. As previously discussed, level of improvement is a federal distinction that reflects several factors commonly associated with school performance (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

Population and Sample

The population for this study was public school districts in Missouri, specifically school board presidents from public school districts in Missouri. The researcher considered choosing a sample of these school districts/board presidents, but rejected this idea due to the desire to include as many participants as possible to support research findings. This population includes 536 school boards and their members (Meador, 2012). The researcher decided to include all 536 school districts in an attempt to bolster the usefulness of the results of the study. The researcher initially contacted the Missouri
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the email addresses of each Missouri school board president. Upon notification that contact information for school board presidents was not available from DESE, the researcher contacted the Missouri School Boards Association (MSBA) to gain the required contact information for each school board president. MSBA was unable to release the required contact information but agreed to allow a link to the survey to be added to its weekly e-newsletter that is emailed to each school board member who is part of MSBA (appendix C). Almost 95% of Missouri school districts are members of MSBA.

Recruitment for the study was initially presented through an electronic newsletter from the Missouri School Board Association (MSBA). The newsletter was sent two separate weeks to all school board members belonging to MSBA. Unfortunately, this method of recruitment did not yield sufficient study participation. The researcher next sent a letter to each Missouri school superintendent’s email address, obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The school superintendent was asked to forward the survey on to each of their school board members. The amount of recruitment letters forwarded by superintendents is unknown. Because superintendents sent the survey to multiple school board members, procedures were undertaken to select only one respondent per district.

Because multiple respondents from one district would skew the data collected, a procedure was adopted to narrow the participants to only one per school district. Participants were narrowed using the hierarchy located in Table 1. This hierarchy was developed with the school board officers being listed by the order in which they are voted upon during school board reorganization. This process is guided by school board policy
(Fair Grove R-10 School District Policy Online, 2012). In the rare event when only board members responded to the MSBPS, the earliest respondent was selected as a participant in the study. The researcher believes this recruitment process allowed for saturation of the data. Ideally, data from every school district in Missouri are most desirable.

Table 1

Selection of School Board Participant Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Order of Selection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Board President</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Vice-President</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Secretary</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Treasurer</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Member who completed</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the survey first</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A response rate of 25% was the goal of the researcher, which is believed to be attainable when certain measures are used to facilitate higher response rates. Given the nature of the e-newsletter format the survey will be included in two separate e-news mailings. Fink (2009) suggested response rates will increase when the survey is easily understandable, when respondents understand how the survey information will be used, and when reminders are sent to participants who have not responded to the survey.

Total School Population

The state of Missouri has a total student population of 919,067 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). These students are enrolled
in 536 school districts of various sizes (Meador, 2012). The population of this study was stratified into four different categories based on total school district population. The categories are: (a) Small school districts: 0-500 students; (b) Mid-sized school districts: 501-1600 students; (c) Large school districts: 1601-5,000 students; (d) Mega school districts: 5001+. This stratification allowed the researcher to compare differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts with differing total student populations. Due to the small number of respondents from Mega-School Districts and the unevenness of sample sizes across variables, the researcher decided to combine respondents from Large Schools with Mega Schools into one category.

**Geographic Region**

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education separate school districts into one of nine different regions. These nine regions are titled Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC). In addition to serving as boundaries within the state for professional development, these regions are commonly used to organize state level activities and support. Two of the nine RPDC are primarily urban areas: (a) Kansas City and (b) St. Louis. In contrast, the other seven regions have a variety of rural, urban, and suburban student populations (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010).

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Accurate and complete data collection procedures are essential for a valid and reliable study (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005). The data collection procedures, a description of the instruments used, and a list of the protections afforded to study participants are included in following sections. The MSBPS, procedures for collection of
preexisting data, and data collection procedures were reviewed by the University of Missouri’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to the collection of data, permission was received from Jossey-Bass publishers to utilize or adapt the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ). Correspondence between the researcher and Jossey-Bass is included in Appendix A.

Data were collected in this study in two ways. First, the MSBPS was developed and administered. Second, school district demographic and historical data were collected though correspondence with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The attainment of historical and demographic data is straightforward; however, the development of the MSBPS requires further explanation. DeVellis’ (2012) practices about developing a survey were used as a guide by the researcher for the creation of the MSBPS.

While creating survey items it is important to consider internal consistency reliability. “Theoretically, a good set of items is chosen randomly from the universe of items relating to the construct of interest” (DeVellis, 2012, p. 77). Obviously, it is impossible to truly identify all of the possible items that could begin to measure a construct; therefore, a researcher must conduct an exhaustive review of literature related to the construct to be measured. DeVellis (2012) cautioned researchers must ensure that items generated be more than part of a category but rather capture the essence of the construct for which they are intended to measure. Some researchers include both positively and negatively worded survey items in their pool. The use of both types of wording may allow thorough measurement of a construct from different perspectives, but
it should be used with caution lest it lead to confusion for the examinee during test administration.

*The Missouri School Board Practices Survey*

To obtain data for this study, school board presidents completed an electronic survey identifying to what extent their school board uses specified selected school board practices. The school board president was selected as the respondent for the survey due to the strong likelihood that he/she would be most familiar with current school board practices. The *Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS)*, included in Appendix B, is designed to measure to what extent a local school board uses four different school board practices that were identified through a review of relevant research as having an impact on school success. Those four areas included: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action.

The *MSBPS* survey items were generated in two ways: first, items were adapted from the *BSAQ* (Smoley, 1999). In addition to items generated from the *BSAQ*, the researcher selected items generated from an extensive review of relevant research. These survey items represent what DeVellis described as the “essence of the construct” (2012).

In light of practices to develop appropriate survey items, the researcher relied heavily on existing literature. This review of relevant research yielded eight effective school board practices or categories of effective practices. Given the scope of this research project; the researcher selected four effective practices to include in the *MSBPS*. The *MSBPS* was designed to contain six items from each of the four areas of identified best practices. Each item was either generated from the review of research or adapted
from the *BSAQ* by the researcher. Each item represents a different feature of the larger school board practice theme and together represent what DeVillis (2012) called the essence of the construct.

*Creating a vision.* This area of the survey explores the theme of creating a vision. Research indicated the vision of a school district is developed collaboratively with all relevant community stakeholders not simply the leadership team from the district (Gill, 2010; Johnson, 2010). Additionally, the vision must be student-centered with an emphasis on achievement, student outcomes, and include the beliefs that all students can learn and that all school staff have an impact on that learning (Black, 2008; Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001).

*Setting goals and remaining committed.* This subscale of the *MSBPS* is concerned with the goal-setting activities of a school district. Similar to creating a collaborative vision, research suggested school districts should include multiple stakeholders in the process of setting goals for the school district (Johnson, 2010). While setting student-centered goals it is also important for school districts to consider the sustainability of the goals (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010). Once the goals for the district have been set, school leaders must remain committed to the goals and use them as the basis for school decisions (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009).

*Using data.* Understanding and using data to make educational decisions are the theme of the third subscale of the *MSBPS*. A review of the literature suggested effective school boards are seekers and connoisseurs of data. This is in contrast to ineffective school boards, which expect school employees to provide the majority of data used when
making important decisions. Data collected by others may not be sufficient to make fully informed decisions (Rice, et al., 2001).

*Monitoring progress and taking corrective action.* The final subscale of the *MSBPS* purports to measure the extent a school district monitors progress and takes corrective action. If school districts are to be successful, research indicated school leaders must be held accountable for the successes or failures of a district (Rice, et al., 2001; Stringfield, 2008). The process of evaluating the district’s goals is continuous and must evaluate all aspects of education (Johnson, 2010).

*Scoring system.* The *MSBPS* contains 24 survey items related to school board practices. There are six items for each of the four school board practice areas: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. Each of the 24 items have a possible score of one to six, a score of one represents “Least represents my school board” whereas a score of six represents “most represents my school board.” The items are totaled and divided by six to create a subscale score for each participant for each of the four subscales. This creates and interval measurement for each of the four subscales.

The intent of the *MSBPS* is to measure to what extent school boards in Missouri are using effective school board practices. To what extent a district uses a specific item on the survey was based on a six point Likert-type scale. The length of the survey was considered during the development of the instrument and is intended to be as brief as possible, while being able to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions of this study. Given the diverse occupations and education level of school board
presidents, a brief survey was desired to facilitate higher completion rates among participants.

Archival Data from DESE

Prior to the study, demographic data about each school district were obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The researcher contacted two individuals in the office of data management at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The information collected included: (a) total school population, (b) geographic area, and (c) district level of improvement.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

An instrument is only as good as its psychometric properties. The validity of an instrument describes the ability of an instrument to measure what it purports to measure. Even more important is the reliability of a test. Whereas, the reliability of an instrument allows users the assurance the instrument will measure approximately the same way every time it is used (McIntire & Miller, 2007).

Reliability. In an effort to address reliability of the instrument, the researcher measured the internal consistency of the items within the survey. While the MSBPS is intended to measure school board practices, the subscales contained within are not homogeneous. Because each subscale is a separate component of effective school board practices and therefore heterogeneous categories, it was important to measure the internal consistencies of the items contained within each subscale. Additionally, the internal consistency of the MSBPS is presented with the understanding that each subscale represents a different heterogeneous group. Table two displays the internal reliability for each of the four subscales. The internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach’s
alpha “coefficient alpha that calculates internal consistency for questions that have more than two possible responses” (McIntire & Miller, 2007, p. 186). While there is not a fixed value for satisfactory reliability coefficients, measures which have coefficients at or above .70 have been found useful in educational research (McIntire & Miller, 2007).

Table 2

*Internal Reliability of MSBPS subscales*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Reliability Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a vision</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals and remaining committed</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring progress and taking corrective action</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Validity.* Whereas the internal consistency coefficients help to measure how consistent each item is within a subscale, the validity of an instrument speaks to how well an instrument actually measures the construct that it proposes to measure (McIntire & Miller, 2007). The assessment items were developed after an extensive review of research related to effective school board practices. The pool of items was selected to reflect board practices that have been identified to impact school success. This method of item selection gives evidence of the survey’s content validity (DeVilllis, 2012). In addition to selecting items with direct links to literature, the content validity is further supported by the inclusion of items adapted from the *BSAQ*. The *BASQ* was created by Smoley’s
(1999) extensive interviews of school board members from various size school districts and experts in Delaware.

In addition to conducting an extensive review of literature and utilizing existing assessment items, DeVillis (2012) recommended survey items be reviewed by experts. Seven school board members from a local school district were selected to serve as experts. Therefore, their expertise was limited to school board practices within their own school district. Their task was to take the MSBPS while reviewing survey items for clarity and content. After completion of the survey, the expert panel of school board members wrote questions or concerns about test items and provided them to the researcher. These suggestions were considered, and changes were made to the MSBPS prior to the actual survey of Missouri school board presidents.

Human Subjects Protection

School districts across Missouri were selected as participants in this study. Due to the vast disbursement of school board presidents, prior approval in the form of gatekeeper permission was obtained from the Missouri School Board Association (Appendix C). While it was not clear this permission was necessary, the researcher felt it was important to include the governing body of school board policies within the state to help bolster credibility for the survey and facilitate higher response rates. In addition to gatekeeper consent, each school board member consented to participate prior to completing the anonymous survey.
Data Analysis

The data collected from the Missouri School Board Practices Survey were combined with data collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and then analyzed using the statistical program SPSS version 19.0. Specific statistical methods were applied to each of the research questions. Prior to the data analysis, the raw data had to be formatted or prepared in a specific way to allow for computer analysis.

Preparation of the data involved several important steps. These steps included: (a) obtaining demographic data about Missouri school districts; (b) linking the school data to the school board president’s responses to the MSBPS; (c) identifying and categorizing the independent and dependent variables; and (d) determining the appropriate steps to take when calculating the data analysis on SPSS.

This quantitative study answered the research questions by using preexisting information obtained from Missouri DESE as well as the results of the MSBPS. Preexisting data included total district student population, level of district improvement, and geographic/RPDC region. Data collected were required to answer one or more of the four research questions.

This study used common quantitative data analysis methods including: (a) descriptive statistics and (b) a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc tests. Descriptive statistics are simply a way to summarize the main points of the data collected. Additionally, the study used qualitative methods to analyze data collected from open-ended questions from the MSBPS.
The usage of a qualitative data to enhance a quantitative study is well documented (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The use of qualitative data can help to overcome some limitations of quantitative data. This study chose to use qualitative methods to provide more evidence for the researcher to better understand the utilization of school board practices in Missouri. As part of this understanding the researcher sought to better understand the problems facing school board members as well as understand the influence each reported having upon their school district.

The qualitative methods were used to analyze the final three questions on the MSBPS. The responses to the open-ended questions were coded using priori coding. This is a process in which categories are pre-set by the researcher, usually based on themes found in literature, prior to analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2007). Priori categories included: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. An additional miscellaneous category was used for responses which did not fit easily into one of the four priori categories. The miscellaneous category is recommended by Creswell (2007) to allow for emergent themes. Data contained in the miscellaneous category were examined by the researcher to determine if any additional themes emerged. The data were then coded into categories, counted, and analyzed to determine themes.

Research Question One

Research question one asked “To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” This question was best answered by using descriptive statistics to analyze the data.
Descriptive statistics serve to describe several characteristics common to the population sampled (McIntire & Miller, 2007). For the purposes of this question, measures of central tendency will be used to summarize to what extent school boards in Missouri are using best practices as defined in this review of literature.

*Research Question Two*

Research question two asked “What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” A One-Way ANOVA was performed to determine if there were significant differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts from differing geographic regions. One-Way ANOVA was used because the results of the MSBPS are interval variables whereas the geographic/RPDC region is a categorical variable.

*Research Question Three*

Research question three asked “What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” Similar to research question two, a One-Way ANOVA was used to compare the results of the MSBPS and total district population category which is a categorical variable. This test again analyzes the results of each category compared to what could be explained by chance (Field, 2009). Significant findings were evaluated using Tukey’s post hoc tests because sample sizes were similar (Field, 2009).
Research Question Four

Research question four asked “What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” The data collected and analyzed associated with research question four represent categorical data. The level of school success for this study has been defined as the school district’s level of school improvement. The district’s level of school improvement is itself a category which is determined by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education based on several factors. There are four categories of district improvement status: (a) district is not in improvement, (b) level one district improvement, (c) level two district improvement, and (d) level three district improvement.

These data were compared to the district’s reported utilization for effective school board practices via the MSBPS. This instrument used a six point Likert-type scale which allowed the researcher to discover to what extent a school board utilized each item of the survey. Each survey item is part of four different subscales: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. When comparing the means of these subscales to the categorical variable, district level of improvement, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is performed to determine if there are differences in the levels of utilization of best practices and school success. A value of .05 was used to determine the statistical significance of the results; this is consistent with studies in social sciences (Field, 2009). The results of this analysis allowed the researcher to determine if there a significant relationship between school success (as measured by level of district improvement) and reported
utilization of school board practices. Significant findings were evaluated using Gabriel’s
post hoc tests because sample sizes were different (Field, 2009).

Summary

Chapter Three of this study listed a detailed description of the quantitative
procedures employed. The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between
school board practices and school district success, as measured by the school district’s
level of improvement. The researcher collected survey data from school board presidents
in Missouri, as well as school district data from the Missouri Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education to answer the research questions. After data collection, the
researcher used descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA with post hoc tests to analyze
the data collected. The data analysis was aided by the use of SPSS 19.0.

The remainder of the study will describe the research findings and provide an
analysis of these data. Chapter Four includes a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter Five
describes the research findings from this study, implications, and recommendations for
future research.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States, the governance of local schools has shifted from solely local control to increasingly state and federal control (Bjork, 2008; Land, 2002). This change was spurred by increased federal grants, which tied significant financial increases to school initiatives (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001). Regardless of the move toward more unified school governance, local school boards continue to have a responsibility to educate local students. Local school boards continue to be responsible for schools that perform effectively; more recently, federal grants have shifted funding toward districts and states willing to participate in national reformation initiatives such as the Race to the Top Program (United States Department of Education, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between school board practices and school district success, as measured by the school district’s level of improvement. Due to the nature of the research questions, the method of analysis selected was quantitative. In the current study, survey data were examined to determine to what extent local school boards were using researcher-selected school board practices, comparing those practices to the school district’s level of improvement. After analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher was able to answer specific research questions related to school board practices and school success.
The practices of the governing school body, the school board, have been shown or are believed to have a positive impact on school success (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnston, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009; Rice et al., 2001). A review of relevant research identified eight school board practices of significance: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action, (e) creating awareness and urgency, (f) engaging the community, (g) connecting with district leadership, and (h) providing staff development. For the purposes of this study, the Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS) was developed. The MSBPS assesses school board practices in four of these areas: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action.

Creating a Vision. This subscale of the MSBPS explores the theme of creating a vision. Research suggests the vision of a school district is developed collaboratively with all relevant community stakeholders (Johnson, 2010). Additionally, the vision must be student-centered, placing an emphasis on achievement and student outcomes. Finally the vision of successful school districts includes the over-arching belief that all students can learn, and all school staff have an impact on that learning (Black, 2008; Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Rice et al., 2001).

Setting goals and remaining committed. The second subscale of the MSBPS is concerned with the goal-setting activities of a school district. Some of the themes contained within this subscale overlap the Creating a Vision subscale. The process of setting goals includes multiple stakeholders for successful schools (Johnson, 2010). In addition to setting student-centered goals, it is also important for school districts to
consider the sustainability of goals (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010). Once the goals for the district have been set, school leaders must remain committed to the goals and use them as the basis for school decisions (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009).

*Using data.* Understanding and using data to make educational decisions are the theme of the third subscale of the MSBPS. A review of the literature suggested effective school boards are seekers and connoisseurs of data (Black, 2008; Johnson, 2010, Rice, et al., 2001). School board members may need to develop their own data to make informed decisions rather than rely on data collected for them by school district administration (Rice, et al., 2001).

*Monitoring progress and taking corrective action.* The final subscale of the MSBPS measures the extent a school district monitors progress toward school district goals and takes corrective action if the district’s goals are not being met. If school districts are to be successful, research indicated school leaders must be held accountable for the successes or failures of a district (Rice, et al., 2001; Stringfield, 2008). The process of evaluating the district’s goals is continuous and must evaluate all aspects of education (Johnson, 2010). Progress monitoring and taking corrective action include collecting data from staff and district patrons, while using the collected data to make decisions about retention of district staff, including administration.

As stated previously, the intent of the MSBPS is to measure to what extent school boards in Missouri are using effective school board practices. To what extent a district uses a specific item on the survey was based on a six point Likert-type scale. The length of the survey was considered during the development of the instrument and is intended to be as brief as possible, while being able to collect the data necessary to
answer the research questions of this study. Given the diverse occupations and education level of school board presidents, a brief survey was desired to facilitate higher completion rates among participants.

Data about school district total population, geographic region and level of improvement were collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. These data were combined with the results of the MSBPS to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

2. What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

3. What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

4. What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?
Each of the research questions was answered by quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics, statistical analysis, or a combination or both. The following chapter includes the results of the study participation and reliability statistics for the MSBPS. In addition, the research questions are listed. Finally, the statistical analysis performed to address each research question is described followed by the findings of the analysis.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was public school districts in Missouri, specifically school board members from public school districts in Missouri. The researcher wanted to survey the most knowledgeable school board members from each district. Because of this, the researcher initially intended to only accept responses of the school board president. This technique, however, was abandoned due to low participation rates among only school board presidents.

The MSBPS had 167 total respondents from 99 separate school districts. Several school districts had multiple school board members respond. Because multiple respondents from one district would skew the data collected, a procedure was adopted to narrow the participants to only one per school district. Participants were narrowed using the hierarchy located in Table 1. This hierarchy was developed with the school board officers being listed by the order in which they are voted upon during school board reorganization. This process is guided by school board policy (Fair Grove R-10 School District Policy Online, 2012). In the rare event when only board members responded to the MSBPS, the earliest respondent was selected as a participant in the study.

Of the 99 board member responses used, 24 were school board presidents, whereas 45 were non-officer board members (Table 3). A previous review of literature
cited rationale that school board presidents were likely the most knowledgeable about school board practices (Walser, 2009). While the researcher was concerned about the level of knowledge about school board practices by study participants, it was determined that any school board member’s response on the MSBPS would be accepted in order to obtain more study participants.

Table 3

*Respondent Breakdown by School Board Role (N=99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-President</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A response rate of 25% of Missouri school districts was the researcher’s goal. School board members from 99 different schools responded to the MSBPS, which represents only 18.47% of the 536 districts who were sent an invitation to participate in the study. Recruitment for the study was initially presented through an electronic newsletter from the Missouri School Board Association (MSBA). The newsletter was sent two separate weeks to all school board members belonging to MSBA. Unfortunately, this method of recruitment did not yield sufficient study participation. The researcher next sent a letter to each Missouri school superintendent’s email address, obtained from
the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The school superintendent was asked to forward the survey on to each of their school board members. The amount of recruitment letters forwarded by superintendents is unknown. The researcher believes this recruitment process allowed for saturation of the data. Ideally, data from every school district in Missouri are most desirable.

Total School Population

The state of Missouri has a total student population of 919,067 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). These students are enrolled in 536 school districts of various sizes (Meador, 2012). The population of this study was stratified into four different categories based on total school district population. The categories are: (a) Small school districts: 0-500 students; (b) Mid-sized school districts: 501-1600 students; (c) Large school districts: 1601-5,000 students; (d) Mega school districts: 5001+. This stratification allowed the researcher to compare differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts with differing total student populations. Table four shows the study participation by districts of differing total student populations. Sample sizes among differing groups were similar between small, mid-sized, and large schools. However, the participation by Mega-School Districts was limited to only eight participants which is a very small sample size, making statistical analysis difficult (Field, 2009).
Table 4

Participation of districts, stratified by total student population (N=99)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Size (Total Population)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Districts (0-500)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Sized Districts (501-1600)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Districts (1601-5000)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mega-Districts (5000+)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geographic Region

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education separates school districts into one of nine different regions. These nine regions are titled Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC). In addition to serving as boundaries within the state for professional development, these regions are commonly used to organize state level activities and support. Two of the nine RPDC are primarily urban areas: (a) St. Louis and (b) Kansas City. In contrast, the other seven regions have a variety of rural, urban, and suburban student populations (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010).

Ninety-nine different school districts are represented within this study. Table 5 shows a breakdown of participation by geographic region. Thirty-two school districts from the southwest region participated in the study, making up almost a third of the participants. The increased participation rate from this region may be due in part to the name recognition associated with the researcher who works within this region. Other than
the increased participation rates from the southwest region, the participation rate from other RPDC regions seem unremarkable, ranging from 4 to 13 participants.

Table 5

*Study Participation Rate by Geographic Region (N=99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart of Missouri</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Collection Instruments*

*The Missouri School Board Practices Survey*

To obtain data for this study, school board presidents completed an electronic survey identifying to what extent their school district utilizes a specific school board practice. The *Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS)*, included in Appendix B, is designed to measure to what extent a local school board uses four different school board practices that were identified through a review of relevant research as having an
impact on school district success. Those four areas included: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action.

The MSBPS contains 24 survey items related to school board practices. There are six items for each of the four school board practice areas. Each of the 24 items has a possible score of one to six. A score of one signifies “Least represents my school board” whereas a score of six expresses “Most represents my school board.” The items are totaled and divided by six to create a subscale score for each participant for each of the four subscales. The MSBPS contains two items. The data obtained from these two items were recoded to remain consistent with the MSBPS scoring protocol.

Internal Reliability

The internal reliability of the MSBPS was determined by analyzing the internal consistency of the four subscales within the survey (Table 6). In addition to the overall internal reliability of the survey, Table 6 also lists the results of a factorial analysis of subscale items that was conducted to determine the effect of removing a specific subscale upon the reliability of the instrument. The internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha “coefficient alpha that calculates internal consistency for questions that have more than two possible responses” (McIntire & Miller, 2007, p. 186). While there is not a fixed value for satisfactory reliability coefficients, measures that have coefficients at or above .70 have been found useful in educational research (McIntire & Miller, 2007).

The internal reliability coefficients of the MSBPS are within acceptable levels at .843. The analysis of deleted subscales yielded similar reliability coefficients within each subscale (.793 and .810), indicating that each subscale is equally valuable to the overall
reliability of the instrument. This measure suggests there are no outlying subscales within
the MSBPS that detract from the ability of the scale to consistently measure its intended
purpose.

Table 6

*Internal Reliability of the MSBPS with Subscale Item Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test/Subscale</th>
<th>Reliability Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Test</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability if Vision subscale is deleted</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability if Setting Goals subscale is deleted</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability if Using Data subscale is deleted</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability if Monitoring Progress is deleted</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the MSBPS is intended to measure school board practices, the subscales
contained within are not homogeneous. Because each subscale is a separate component of
effective school board practices and therefore heterogeneous categories, it was important
to measure the internal consistency between each of the four subscales within the MSBPS
(Table 1). Cronbach’s alpha was also used for the analysis of the four different subscales,
(a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d)
monitoring progress and taking corrective action.

The internal consistency among the differing subscales varies considerably from .55 to .73 (Table 7). This variation and relatively low coefficient suggests the independent subscales of the MSBPS are not necessarily linked together. The most
closely linked subscales are *Creating a Vision* and *Setting Goals and Remaining Committed* with a reliability coefficient of .73. This contrasts to the comparison of the much smaller reliability coefficients between *Setting Goals and Remaining Committed* and *Using Data* (.51) and *Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action* (.51).

In addition to the internal reliability of the total test, the reliability coefficients within each subscale are important to explore. Cronbach’s alpha was again used to assess internal consistency; the results were previously provided in Table 1. This analysis explores the consistency of responses on each of the six items within its own subscale. Reliability coefficients for each subscale of the MSBPS are all above the typically accepted level of .70 (McIntire & Miller, 2007), ranging from .76 to .83 (Table 1).

**Table 7**

*Inter-item Correlation of the MSBPS Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Creating a Vision</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Setting Goals and Remaining Committed</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Using Data</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the Missouri School Board Practices Survey were combined with data collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and then analyzed using the statistical program SPSS version 19.0.
Specific statistical methods were applied to each of the research questions. Prior to the
data analysis, the raw data had to be formatted or prepared in a specific way to allow for
computer analysis.

Preparation of the data involved several important steps. These included: (a)
obtaining demographic data about Missouri school districts; (b) linking the school data to
the school board president’s responses to the MSBPS; (c) identifying and categorizing the
independent and dependent variables; and (d) determining the appropriate steps to take
when calculating the data analysis on SPSS. Once data preparation was complete the
analyses were performed.

This quantitative study answered the research questions by using preexisting
information obtained from Missouri DESE as well as the results of the MSBPS.
Preexisting data included total district student population, level of district improvement,
and geographic/RPDC region. Data collected were required to answer one or more of the
four research questions.

This study’s research questions focused on comparing the utilization of school
board practices among school districts of differing size, geographic region, and school
success. This study used common quantitative data analysis methods including: (a)
descriptive statistics and (b) a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to answer each of
the four research questions. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level of
confidence when using analysis of variance (Field, 2009).

*Research Question One*

Research question one asked “To what extent are school boards in Missouri using
the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining
committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” This question was answered by using descriptive statistics to analyze the data.

Descriptive statistics serve to describe several characteristics common to the population sampled (McIntire & Miller, 2007). For the purposes of this question, measures of central tendency were used to summarize to what extent school boards in Missouri are using the practices surveyed by the MSBPS. Each subscale has a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 36. The mean for each subscale was computed by totaling the items and dividing by 6 (Table 8).

The combined results of the study participants show that the mean scores on the Creating a Vision ($M=5.01$, $SD = .73$) were higher than the other mean subscales. While statistical significance was not evaluated, it is clear that study participants reported their school board practices include Creating a Vision more than the other subscales. It is important to note a score of four represents a positive indication on the Likert scale, indicating a positive preference toward the school district utilizing the practice on each of the four subscales.
Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of MSBPS Scores (Total Possible=6) n = 99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSBPS Subscale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Vision</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Goals and Remaining Committed</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Data</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Scores of 1 = Least represents; 6 = Most represents my school board.

It is certainly important to understand the global picture of school board practices utilized in Missouri. Further exploration of participants’ responses to each of the 24 items on the MSBPS yields the utilization of specific board practices within each subscale. Table 9 provides descriptive statistics about school board practices within the subscale of Setting Goals and Remaining Committed. There is a much higher percentage of respondents who indicated their district utilizes individual items within the Creating a Vision subscale than respondents whose district do not utilize the items.

A good example of this positive utilizations is the item, “The vision of the school includes the belief that all students can learn,” where respondents positively indicated utilizing the practice 99% of the time. In fact, over 70% of respondents report the belief “all students can learn,” most represents their school district. Similarly, 98% of respondents indicated positively toward utilization of, “The vision of the school includes the belief that all staff members affect student outcomes.”

While the subscale shows primarily positive utilizations of school board practices, further exploration of Creating a Vision indicates the utilization of the practice of
including community leaders in the development of the vision occurs less than most other items. Similarly, the practice of committing more than half of the board’s time to long-term planning was underutilized compared to all other items contained in this subscale. 28.2% of respondents report less long-term planning.
Table 9  
*Descriptive Statistics of Creating a Vision (n = 99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating a Vision</th>
<th>Least Represents</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
<th>Most Represents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. At least once a year, this board asks that the superintendent articulate his/her vision for the school district's future and strategies to realize that vision.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The board discusses where the school district should be headed five or more years into the future.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. More than half of this board's time is spent in discussions of issues of importance to the school district's long-range future.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The vision of the school includes the belief that all students can learn.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The vision of the school includes the belief that all staff members affect student outcomes.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The process of creating the vision for the district includes community leaders.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive analyses of the items contained within the *Setting Goals and Remaining Committed* subscale are shown in Table 10. Participants report positive utilization of all of the subscale items but one. More than three-fourths of participants report items contained within this subscale represent their school board practices.

The percentages of positive responses on 5 of the 6 items within this subscale are similar ranging from 73.7% to 88.9% affirmative. Positively utilized board practices include, “Once a decision is made, all board members work together to see that it is accepted and carried out,” for which 88.9% of respondents report utilization. The item, “Within the past year, this board has reviewed the school district's strategies for attaining its long-term goals,” shows the highest amount of “Most represents our school district” at 46.5%.

The primarily positive utilization of items contained within the *Setting Goals and Remaining Committed* subscale contrasts with the responses to the item, “Our board meetings tend to focus more on current concerns than on preparing for the future between,” in which only 36.4% of respondents reported utilizing. The majority of study participants report school board meetings tend to focus less on future planning. It is possible that the reverse wording of this item contributed to more negatively indicated responses. In general school board members report positive utilization of practices within the subscale of *Setting Goals and Remaining Committed*. 
### Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics of Setting Goals and Remaining Committed (n = 99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Goals and Remaining Committed</th>
<th>Least Represents</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
<th>Most Represents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. The board sets clear organizational priorities for the year ahead.</td>
<td>2.0 3.0 7.1 18.2 41.4 28.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. *Our board meetings tend to focus more on current concerns than on preparing for the future.</td>
<td>12.1 23.2 28.3 17.2 19.2 0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Within the past year, this board has reviewed the school district's strategies for attaining its long-term goals.</td>
<td>2.0 4.0 9.1 10.1 28.3 46.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Once a decision is made, all board members work together to see that it is accepted and carried out.</td>
<td>2.0 3.0 6.1 16.2 31.3 41.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This board makes explicit use of the long-range priorities of this school district in dealing with current issues.</td>
<td>3.0 5.1 8.1 23.2 40.4 20.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. *The board will reverse its position based on pressure from the community.</td>
<td>2.0 7.1 17.2 13.1 35.4 25.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * Items Reverse Scored
The subscale of *Using Data* is intended to measure to what extent a school board uses data to make decisions. The items contained within this subscale were developed based upon a review of literature as well as adapted from the BSAQ. There is a much higher percentage of respondents who indicated their district utilizes individual items within the *Using Data* subscale than respondents whose district do not utilize the items.

Participants reported positively utilizing each of the items in this subscale between 73.7% and 94% (Table 1). Ninety-four percent of respondents indicate the item, “The board usually receives a full rationale for the recommendations it is asked to act upon,” positively represents their school district. A similar percentage of participants report utilization of the board practice: “The leadership of this board typically goes out of its way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.” Almost half of respondents report the leadership of the school district makes sure all board members have necessary information as “Most Represents.”

While there were no predominately negative reported items within the Using Data subscale, almost 20% of participants reported on the negative utilization side of two items. Both, “The board often requests that a decision be postponed until further information can be obtained,” and “The board often requests additional information before making a decision” yielded relatively more negative responses. Overall, the practice of using data to make educational decisions appears to be positively represented in Missouri school boards.
Table 11

Descriptive Statistics of Using Data ($n = 99$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using Data</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Least Represents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. This board periodically sets aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts like the one we govern.</td>
<td>2.0 7.1  17.2  28.3  34.3  11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The leadership of this board typically goes out of its way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.</td>
<td>4.0  3.0  3.0  9.1  33.3  47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The board often requests that a decision be postponed until further information can be obtained.</td>
<td>4.0  17.2  4.0  19.2  39.4  16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The board periodically obtains information on the perspectives of staff and community.</td>
<td>2.0  5.1  3.0  18.2  41.4  30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The board often requests additional information before making a decision.</td>
<td>2.0  9.1  10.1  25.3  35.4  18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The board usually receives a full rationale for the recommendations it is asked to act upon.</td>
<td>1.0  3.0  2.0  12.1  44.4  37.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last subscale contained within the MSBPS is *Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action*. It is designed to measure to what extent Missouri school boards monitor school district progress and hold district staff accountable for that progress or lack thereof. Descriptive analysis of the items contained in this subscale is shown in Table 12. Participants report positively utilizing 5 of the 6 items within the subscale (70.6% to 91.9%).

Of the positively utilized practices included within this subscale, “The evaluation of the superintendent is based in part upon the successful attainment of the district’s goals,” received the highest percentage of responses indicating it represents school districts surveyed. Furthermore, over 45% of participants responded attainment of goals is part of the evaluation process of the superintendent “Most represents our school district.” While the percentages of responses to most of the items within this subscale show similar results, one stands out.

The exception to the overwhelmingly positive utilization of items contained within the *Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action* subtest, is an almost neutrally reported item, “At least once every two years, our board has a retreat or special session to examine our performance, how well we are doing as a board.” Responses for this item were 52.5% negative and 47.5% positive. It is also important to note the great discrepancy of responses within this item, 22.2% of respondents strongly disagree, contending their board does not attend retreats to examine performance, opposed to 30.3% who indicate strongly their board does participate in such retreats. Overall, the majority of respondents report to utilizing most of the items contained within the *Monitoring Progress and taking Corrective Action* subscale.
Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics of Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action (n = 99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
<th>Least Represents</th>
<th>Most Represents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. At least once every two years, our board has a retreat or special session to examine our performance, how well we are doing as a board.</td>
<td>22.2 12.1 18.2 9.1 8.1 30.3</td>
<td>4.0 5.1 6.1 28.3 30.3 26.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I have been in board meetings where the discussion focused on identifying or overcoming the school district’s weaknesses.</td>
<td>5.1 5.1 12.1 14.1 31.3 32.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The school board has set specific dates for the evaluation of district goals.</td>
<td>7.1 7.1 15.2 22.2 26.3 22.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Assessment of district goals includes feedback from parents.</td>
<td>5.1 2.0 7.1 18.2 32.3 35.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Assessment of district goals includes feedback from staff members.</td>
<td>1.0 1.0 6.1 8.1 38.4 45.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The evaluation of the superintendent is based in part upon the successful attainment of the district’s goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Two

Research question two asked, “What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” A One-Way ANOVA was performed to determine if there were significant differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts from differing geographic regions (Table 13). The dependent variable was the individual subscales of the MSBPS. The independent variable was the RPDC region. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine the statistical significance. No statistical significance was found in any of the MSBPS subscales by RPDC region; Creating a Vision $F(8, 90) = 1.21, p = .31, \omega^2 = .02, ns.$, Setting Goals and Remaining Committed $F(8, 90) = 1.65, p = .12, \omega^2 = .05, ns.$, Using Data $F(8, 90) = .56, p = .81, \omega^2 = .04, ns.$, Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action $F(8, 90) = 1.43, p = .19, \omega^2 = .03, ns.$ Given that there are no statistically significant differences on the MSBPS among schools from differing RPDC regions, it is important to note the similarities of each region’s responses on the subscales.
Table 13

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the MSBPS among RPDC Regions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>180.77</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.60</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1668.58</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>18.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1867.35</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>317.91</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39.74</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2170.17</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>24.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Committed</td>
<td>2488.08</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>136.71</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.09</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2757.47</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>30.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2894.18</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Progress/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>430.12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.77</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>3380.43</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>37.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Action</td>
<td>3810.55</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 provides a graphic representation demonstrating the similarities of the MSBPS subscale means from schools across RPDC regions. This figure shows the results of means plots for each of the four subscales of the MSBPS: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. The reported utilization of board practices of school districts from differing geographic regions is very similar across the state.

*Figure 1. Means Plots of MSBPS subscales across schools from differing RPDC Regions.*
Research Question Three

Research question three asked, “What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” Similar to research question two, a one-way independent ANOVA was used to compare the results of the MSBPS and total district population category, which is a categorical variable. This test again analyzes the results of each category compared to what could be explained by chance (Field, 2009).

A one-way independent ANOVA was performed to determine if there were significant differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts with differing student populations (Table 14). The dependent variable was the individual subscales of the MSBPS. The independent variable was the total population categories: (a) Small school districts: 0-500 students (N=34); (b) Mid-sized school districts: 501-1600 students (N=32); (c) Large school districts: 1601-5,000 students (N=25); (d) Mega School districts: 5001+ (N=8). Due to the small number of respondents from Mega-Schools and the unevenness of sample sizes across variables, the researcher decided to combine respondents from Large School districts with Mega School districts into one category. Combining the variables allowed the researcher to compare sample sized that were more similar, allowing for a more equal analysis of variables and samples of sufficient size to conduct an One-Way ANOVA (Field, 2009). The new student population categories are: (a) Small school districts: 0-500 students (N=34); (b) Mid-sized school districts: 501-1600 students (N=32); (c) Large school districts plus Mega
school districts: 1601 + students (N=33). The researcher acknowledges the limitation of referring to school districts with a total student population of 1600 and school districts with a population of 5000+ as similar on the basis of student populations. A value of .05 was used to determine the statistical significance.

Table 14 lists the results of the ANOVA for the MSBPS between districts of differing size. The analysis indicates a significant result of the ANOVA when comparing school districts results on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale $F(2, 96) = 3.40, p = .04, \eta^2 = .05$; All other subscales are not significant ($p < .05$)

- Creating a Vision $F(2, 96) = .16, p = .85, \eta^2 = -.02, ns.$
- Setting Goals and Remaining Committed $F(2, 96) = .20, p = .82, \eta^2 = -.02, ns.$
- Using Data $F(2, 96) = .08, p = .92, \eta^2 = -.02, ns.$

Because the ANOVA yielded a significant finding among school districts on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale post hoc tests were necessary. Tukey’s post hoc tests were used because sample sizes were similar (Field, 2009). Tukey’s post hoc tests revealed significant differences between Small school districts and Large plus Mega school districts on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale ($p < .05$); all other groups were not statistically significant.
Table 14

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the MSBPS among Districts of Differing Size*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1861.01</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>19.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1867.35</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Goals/Remaining Committed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2477.99</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2488.08</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2889.12</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2894.18</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Progress/Taking Action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>251.88</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>125.94</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>3558.67</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>37.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3810.55</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p* < .05
The results of the Tukey’s post hoc tests indicated significantly lower responses from small school districts \((M=4.16, SD=1.11)\) on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale of the MSBPS compared to the responses of larger school districts \((M=4.80, SD=1.00)\). Table 15 shows the mean responses from districts of differing size on the Monitoring subtest. The responses from mid-sized school districts \((M=4.49, SD=.91)\) were not significantly different than either districts of differing sizes. It is important to note the relatively large standard deviation discovered in both smaller and larger schools. Standard deviations of 1.00 and 1.11 seem large compared to a total possible item score of 6.

Table 15

**Means Table of Monitoring subscale for Districts of Differing Size.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of District</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Districts</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Sized Districts</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large + Mega Districts</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Score of 1 = Least represents; 6 = Most represents my school board.*

**Research Question Four**

Research question four asked, “What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” The level of
school success for this study has been defined as the school district’s level of school improvement. There are four categories of district improvement status: (a) district is not in improvement, (b) level one district improvement, (c) level two district improvement, and (d) level three district improvement.

The number of possible participants based on level of district improvement proved problematic for equal sample sizes from each group. Of the 536 possible districts, the percentage of districts available from differing categories within the sample is very small (Table 16). For example only 10.8% of all Missouri school districts are in Level 1 and 2 improvements separately.

Table 16

*State Total Disaggregation of School Districts by Level of Improvement (N=536)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Improvement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in Improvement</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Improvement</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Improvement</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Level 1&amp;2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Improvement</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of school districts who participated (N=99) from differing levels of improvement was similar to the state percentages (Table 17). For example, the number of possible participating schools who are in level one improvement is 58, representing 10.8% of the total population. This percentage is similar to the number of school districts
in level one improvement who participated in the study; this trend is consistent throughout the participants as shown in Table 16 and 17. Due to the limited number of participants from school districts in Level one and Level two improvement, the researcher decided to combine these two groups. Combining the variables allowed the researcher to compare sample sized that were more similar, allowing for a more equal analysis of variables (Field, 2009). This new group represents school districts that are in beginning to mid-range improvement within the state.

Table 17

*Disaggregation of Participating School Districts by Level of Improvement (N=99)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Improvement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in Improvement</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Improvement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Improvement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Level 1&amp;2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Improvement</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A one-way independent ANOVA was performed to determine if there were differences in the levels of utilization of board practices and school district success (Table 18). An alpha level of .05 was again used to determine the statistical significance of the results; this is consistent with studies in social sciences (Field, 2009). Similar to research question three, the results of the ANOVA comparing school board practices and school success indicate a significant finding when comparing the results of the
Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action  $F(2, 96) = 3.35, p = .04, \omega^2 = .05$ to level of improvement. All other subscales are not significant ($p < .05$) Creating a Vision $F(2, 96) = .11, p = .90, \omega^2 = -.02, \text{ns.}$ Setting Goals and Remaining Committed $F(2, 96) = .40, p = .67, \omega^2 = -.02, \text{ns.}$, Using Data $F(2, 96) = .22, p = .82, \omega^2 = -.02, \text{ns.}$ Because the ANOVA yielded a significant finding among schools on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale post hoc tests were necessary. Gabriel’s post hoc tests were used because sample sizes were different (Field, 2009). Gabriel’s post hoc tests revealed significant differences between school districts who were not in improvement and districts who were in Level 3 improvement ($p < .05$); all other groups were not statistically significant.
Table 18

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the MSBPS between Districts of Differing Levels of Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Vision</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1863.26</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>19.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1867.35</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Goals/Remaining Committed</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2467.48</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2488.08</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Data</td>
<td>12.89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2881.30</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2894.18</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Progress/Taking Action</td>
<td>248.48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>124.24</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>3562.07</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>37.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3810.55</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * p < .05
The results of the Gabriel’s post hoc tests indicated significantly lower responses from districts not in improvement ($M=4.05, SD=1.12$) on the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale of the MSBPS compared to the responses of districts in level 3 improvement ($M=4.70, SD=0.95$). Table 19 shows the mean responses from districts of differing levels of improvement on the Monitoring subtest. The responses from the combined level 1 and 2 improvement category ($M=4.49, SD=.91$) were not significantly different than districts of other levels of improvement. Similar to the results found among school districts of differing sizes, the standard deviations of each of the responses of districts from differing levels of improvement is relatively large. Each standard deviation ranged from .95 to 1.12 on a 6 point scale.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of District</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in Improvement</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Levels 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Improvement</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Score of 1 = Least represents; 6 = Most represents my school board.

Open Ended Questions Responses

The final three questions on the MSBPS were designed to allow school board members the opportunity to share information about their leadership experiences on the board of education. The responses to each of the open-ended questions were coded using priori coding. This is a process in which categories are pre-set by the researcher, usually
based on themes found in literature, prior to analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2007). Each of the four categories contained within the MSBPS were established as priori categories: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. Additionally, a miscellaneous category was left open for responses which did not fit easily into one of the four priori categories. This process is recommended by Creswell (2007) to allow for emergent themes. Data contained in the miscellaneous category were examined by the researcher to determine if any additional themes emerged. The following is an analysis of each open-ended question. The data were coded and counted as a starting point for analyses (Creswell, 2007).

Describe the influence you have had on your school district. The responses to this item of the MSBPS (Table 20) seem to focus primarily on Using Data (N=20) and Creating a Vision (N=13). The responses coded into the miscellaneous category (N=19) seem to focus on personal accomplishments while on the school board. When addressing influence on the school district, one board member wrote, “I try to ensure every decision is in the best interest of our students and the school district as a whole.” Another board member stated his/her influence was, “Standing strong on a decision.” Yet another board member discussed his role related to using data, saying, “My role has been to make sure all voices are heard before decisions are made.” Each piece of data continues to suggest that Missouri school board members report following several school board best practices.
**Table 20**

*Coded responses to “Describe the influence you have had on your school district.”*  

*(N=57)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Coded responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a vision</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals and remaining committed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring progress and taking corrective action</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*What are your biggest challenges as a school board member?* Table 21 provides descriptive data about the item “What are your biggest challenges as a school board member?” Many responses seem to focus overwhelmingly on finance *(N=22)*. An example of a board member’s response to his/her biggest concern is, “Trying to spread a small amount of money a long way.” Other responses of significance include a board member whose biggest challenge is, “Lack of vision as to how we optimize the education opportunity for students at both ends and the middle of current capabilities and future aspirations.” Another board member stated that a challenge in his/her school district is, “Obtaining accurate information that is not filtered or given a ‘spin’ by administrators. Administrators are experts at spinning data.” A large amount of responses on this item
centered on finance, while data were analyzed which suggest some school board members wish to collect and analyze their own raw data prior to making a decision.

Table 21

*Coded responses to “What are your biggest challenges as a school board member?” (N=63)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Coded responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a vision</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals and remaining committed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring progress and taking corrective action</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(22 items related to Financial Challenges)

*What is your most important role as a school board member?* Data collected from the MSBPS item, “What is your most important role as a school board member?” (Table 22) suggest that board members are concerned with *Creating a Vision* for the district (N=15), *Using Data* (N=13), and Miscellaneous (N=26). Responses coded into the category of miscellaneous focus on the board members sense of responsibility to the patrons of the district. An example of this type of response is when a board member stated, “representing the patrons and advocating for students; hire the best superintendent, keep the budget in check and keep policies up to date. But keeping my nose out of
business that it is NOT my responsibility to decide.” An example of *Creating a Vision* for the district is represented by a board member who stated, “I believe my most important role as a school board member is to advocate for the children in our district, accepting nothing less than striving for the best educational outcomes on their behalf.” Another board member reflected on his/her most important role as a board member, saying, “Hiring, evaluating, and helping our superintendent.” These data suggest that Missouri school boards are utilizing school board best practices.

Table 22

*Coded responses to “What is your most important role as a school board member?”*

*(N=61)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Coded responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a vision</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals and remaining committed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring progress and taking corrective action</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Summary*

In chapter Four, data collected comparing local school board practices based on districts of differing geographic regions, school district size, and level of school improvement were examined. Data collected from the Missouri School Board Practices
were used to answer each of the four research questions. Data from the first 24 questions of the MSBPS were analyzed using quantitative analyses, whereas data collected from the final three open-ended questions were analyzed by qualitative methods. Chapter Five describes the research findings from this study, implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

School reform has been spurred by federal initiatives such as NCLB and the Race to the Top Program over the past decade (United States Department of Education, 2009). In addition to federal and state oversight, local school boards have control over many policies that guide education in Missouri. Several school board practices have been identified as having a positive influence on school district success (Delagardelle, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009; Rice et al., 2001). This study seeks to explore the utilization of school board practices among differing variables in Missouri.

The governance of local school districts falls primarily under the control of seven locally elected school members. These seven individuals are responsible for setting local policy, maintaining local facilities, entering into contracts, and hiring and dismissing school district staff. These individuals have a great deal of responsibility for the education of the children of the community in which they live. Most school board members do not have experience as educational leaders and therefore take direction from district leaders such as the superintendent (National School Boards Association, 1993). Practices such as setting a school district’s goals and vision have been shown, along with other practices, to have a positive effect on school achievement (Johnson, 2010). This study compares the utilization of Missouri school board practices among school districts.
from differing geographic regions and with differing school populations and differing levels of district improvement.

In Chapter Four the results of the data analysis were presented. Within this chapter, the conclusions from the research study are presented. These conclusions include information gained from the analysis of the study’s research questions. Finally, the study’s implications for practice and recommendations for future research are presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the utilization of school board practices in Missouri among school districts of differing geographic regions, total school population, and levels of school district improvement. Due to the nature of the research questions, the method of analysis selected was primarily quantitative. In the current study, survey data were examined to determine to what extent local school boards were using researcher-selected school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action. The study then compared the reported utilization of those practices to school districts of varying: (a) geographic region, (b) total student population, and (c) level of improvement. The data were then analyzed using quantitative methods. Participants’ responses to three open-ended questions were analyzed using qualitative methods, adding the researcher’s understanding of utilization of school board practices.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?
2. What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

3. What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

4. What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?

The previous research questions were developed after an extensive review of literature. This review of literature found few studies that explored the comparison of school board practices among differing school districts. The review of literature listed many school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action, (e) creating awareness and urgency, (f) engaging the community, (g) connecting with district leadership, and (h) providing staff development. Additionally, the review of research yielded no commonly recognized measure of school board practices beyond the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) which was developed by Smoley (1999).

The Missouri School Board Practices Survey (MSBPS) was developed to measure to what extent school boards in Missouri are using specific school board practices.
Participant responses on the MSBPS were scored on a six point Likert-type scale. Study participation was open to school board members from 536 school districts in Missouri. The survey was administered electronically. The data collected from the MSBPS were compared to school district data collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: (a) Geographic/RPDC Region, (b) Total School District Population, and (c) District Level of Improvement. The following sections of this chapter list the conclusions and discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

This study was designed to compare difference in utilizations of four school board practices among school districts from differing geographic regions, differing total school populations, and differing levels of district improvement. Data were collected and analyzed to answer each of the research questions. The analysis included a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of findings. Quantitative analysis was chosen as the primary method of analysis because the ability of that type of research to lead to findings which are more likely generalizable (Mertins, 2005).

Research Question One

The first research question asked, “To what extent are school boards in Missouri using the following best practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action”? Data collected suggest Missouri school boards report a high utilization of each of the four school board practices. School boards report efforts to create a vision as the highest of the
school board practices measured. Data from analysis of individual school practice items suggest a vast majority of school districts hold the common belief, “all students can learn” and “all school staff positively impact student learning.” Additionally, data suggest commonly utilized school board practices are not limited to creating a vision.

School board members report frequently setting goals and remaining committed, while primarily focusing on current issues more than future planning. Both quantitative and qualitative data show school board members are concerned about the education of students in their districts. School board members report gathering data on their own while using that data to make sound educational decisions. Data showed that some school districts held separate meetings to discuss the needs and weaknesses of the district, whereas other districts did not. The following research questions compare the utilization of school board practices on differing variables.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question asked, “What differences exist among districts from differing geographic regions in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action Missouri?” A One-way ANOVA was performed to determine if there were differences in the utilization of school board practices among districts from differing RPDC regions. The results indicated no significant differences between school districts from differing geographic. While this finding is not statistically significant, it is important to note it does show similar utilization of school board practices among varying districts. Given a review of relevant research, this similarity was not previously identified.
Research Question Three

Research question three asked, “What differences exist among districts with differing total student populations in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” A One-Way ANOVA was performed to determine if there were significant differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts with differing student populations. The results of this analysis indicate small school districts reported utilization of practices related to Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action significantly less than school districts with student populations exceeding 1600 students.

Research Question Four

Research question four asked, “What differences exist among districts with differing levels of school improvement in Missouri in the utilization of the following school board practices: (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action?” A One-way ANOVA was performed to determine if there were significant differences in utilization of school board practices between school districts with differing district levels of improvement. The results of this analysis indicate school districts who are not in improvement reported utilization of practices related to Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action significantly less than school districts who are in Level 3 improvement.

Summary of Open-ended Question Findings

Qualitative data collected through open-ended questions provided similar findings to quantitative data collected. School board members report influencing decisions
reached by the school board through the use of data. Board members cited examples of
data gathering from many sources, including district patrons and staff members. The
impact of financial concerns emerged as a topic of greatest concern for many school
board members. District finances and utilization of data were at the center of qualitative
data gathered during the study. Interestingly, data collected from the open-ended item
about your most important role as a school board member yielded a large amount of
responses which did not fit into any priori code. This seems to indicate board members
view of their role do not align well with any of the MSBPS subscales.

Discussion

The data collected and analyzed yielded statistically significant findings of school
board practices among school districts of differing student population and level of district
improvement but not related to geographic region. Significant findings were limited to
the Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subtest of the MSBPS. Data
collected represent nearly one in five school districts in Missouri. Overall, reported
utilization of school board practices seems consistent with best practices in school board
research. A representative sample of school districts in Missouri found very similar
school board practices across all studied items.

The Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action subscale measures the
extent a school district monitors progress and takes corrective action. Research shows if
school districts are to be successful, school leaders must be held accountable for the
successes or failures of their district (Rice, et al., 2001; Stringfield, 2008). Additionally,
the process of evaluating the district’s goals is comprehensive and ongoing (Johnson,
2010). The findings of this study indicate that small schools report lesser utilization of
practices related to *Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action* than do larger schools. Additionally, differences exist in between schools who are not in improvement and schools who are in level 3 improvement. Interestingly, schools who are not in any level of improvement have reported utilization of practices within this subscale less than school districts that are in level 3 improvement.

Additionally, qualitative data collected through open-ended questions suggest similar widespread utilization of board practices. In addition to (a) creating a vision, (b) setting goals and remaining committed, (c) using data, and (d) monitoring progress and taking corrective action, school board members are greatly concerned with financial issues. Not all of the qualitative data collected from school board members could be characterized as positive toward school district administration. Some school board members issued comments skeptical of school district administration’s ethics when reporting data.

While no other significant results were identified, a review of relevant research also did not uncover any studies examining either differences or similarities in school board practices based on geographic regions. The *Lighthouse Inquiry* did find school board members from effective school districts utilized many of the practices explored within this study, whereas school board members from failing schools did not (Rice et al., 2001). The data obtained in this study seem to suggest school board practices may not be the most influential variable to consider when exploring differences in school success. This is not meant to say that school board leadership is not valuable, but rather there are a multitude of variables which might influence school success.
Among the four school board practices researched during this study, *Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action* seems to be the practice which has the greatest variance among schools of differing student population and level of school improvement. It is not unreasonable to believe school board practices from schools with populations of 250 students might vary considerably from school districts of 5,000 students. Similarly, data show utilization of school board practices among school districts not in improvement is different than school districts in level 3 improvement. Similar to data collected about school districts of differing size, there seems to be some variance in reported practices using data among schools of differing levels of improvement. This is unfortunate because monitoring progress and taking corrective action has been well documented as having a positive influence on school district success (Johnson, 2010; Rice, et al., 2001; Stringfield, 2008). Although the findings of the study are limited, solace may be gained from the understanding school districts in Missouri report consistent utilization of research based school board practices, regardless of geographic regions, school population or level of school success.

**Limitations**

This study may have been affected by several limitations which must be acknowledged. First, there are an infinite number of variables which might influence school success. Some of these variables include teaching practices, curriculum, district leadership, state leadership, and family demographics (Leithwood et al., 2004). This study did not attempt to isolate or account for extraneous variables which likely influence school success which may limit the scope of the findings.
Second, the very idea of what defines school district success could be argued. While *level of school district improvement* was used as a unit of measure for this study, some might argue ACT scores or reading ability of graduates might be more reflective of successful schools. Additional measures of school success might have included graduation rate or college enrollment rates. With the infinite number of definitions for school success, this study defined school success consistent with the federal standard. The use of district level of improvement and its strong correlation to school district size may be an indication the relationship between the two could be as important as school board practices.

Third, the nature of the data collection instrument is such that one school representative records his/her perception of what extent the school they represent utilizes each practice on the MSBPS. This leads to a couple of concerns. The MSBPS was administered to only one school board member from each school district. The process of selecting one participant, when more than one member responded to the survey was consistent but did not necessarily guarantee the most knowledgeable member was responding on behalf of the school district. Something else to consider, is whether the instrument being answered truthfully or has self-reporting bias influenced what the respondent feels the school board in their district should be doing (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987)?

Next, by combining school districts in level 1 and 2 improvement as well as Large and Mega schools, the researcher created new categories. These new categories were created to facilitate appropriate data analysis (Field, 2009). However, by creating these
new categories, the researcher may have influenced the comparison of data collected and therefore the results.

Finally, less than 20% of Missouri school districts chose to participate in the study. A small number of participants make statistical relevance difficult to achieve (Field, 2009). Given the breakdown of school districts with differing levels of improvement, it is unreasonable to expect equal sample sizes to participate in the study. Inequality in sample sizes among independent variables may have contributed to limited significance.

**Implications for Practice**

Data collected suggest Missouri school board members report utilization of many practices which have been shown to improve school district success. While differences were shown to exist in the area of Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action, many other school board practices were not significantly different. The school board practices examined in this study include creating a vision, setting goals and remaining committed, using data, and monitoring progress and taking corrective action.

The idea of creating a vision to help guide an organization is not reserved to education; many successful organizations are built upon a solid vision (Northouse, 2004). Effective school boards work closely with district staff and community stakeholders to develop a long-range vision for the school district (Johnson, 2010). Perhaps more importantly, school districts must continue to encourage the belief “all students can learn” to permeate all levels of their school district. Additionally, all school-district staff must understand they impact student learning. Working collaboratively with community
members and parents to set the district’s vision is the first step to effective school board leadership. Once the district’s vision has been established, district goals can be generated.

The process of creating district goals is collaborative in nature, including input from board members, school personnel, and the community (Johnson, 2010). The focus of all district goals must remain on students and student learning (Johnson, 2010; Marzano & Walters, 2009). School board members need to understand the school district’s goals and be willing to actively participate in the goal setting process. Additionally, school board members must be unwavering in their commitment to educational goals which they have set (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009).

An important factor when setting goals and remaining committed is using data and understanding how that data relate to district goals. Increased federal accountability requires school districts to use data to make educational decisions (United States Department of Education, 2009). Data from this study support the findings of the *Lighthouse Inquiry*; school boards of successful districts are seekers and connoisseurs of data prior to making decisions (Rice, et al., 2001). Board members must occasionally seek out their own data, ensuring it is free from prior filtering by district staff or administration. Through the use of data, school board members can help ensure accountability among district staff (Black, 2008; Johnson, 2010).

Board members must be able to gather data, while retaining the ability to filter out unproductive information, and make a decision (Stringfield, 2008). As found through qualitative data, board members may be skeptical of data provided to them by school district staff. This is particularly concerning because effective school districts use data to hold district administration accountable. School boards cannot accept excuses for failure
to meet district goals (Rice, et al., 2001). The process of monitoring progress toward district goals is ongoing, including feedback from multiple district stakeholders (Johnson, 2010).

Recommendations for Future Research

The need for effective school districts and increased accountability in education is likely to continue. Differences in utilization of school board practices in the area of Monitoring Progress and Taking Corrective Action need to be explored. An expansion of this study exploring additional items related to monitoring progress and taking corrective action could be conducted. Further study could explore differences between both school districts of differing sizes as well as districts of differing levels of improvement.

Second, similar explorations of school board practices might be undertaken. Specific recruitment efforts to attract more school board participation among school boards of differing success may lead to a better understanding of the influence of school board practices. Further study of school board practice could include an analysis of the combined efforts of school district administrations paired with school board member leadership. Additional studies might consider the utilizations of additional school board practices identified in literature but not considered as part of this study. It is possible that the additional school board practices of: (a) creating awareness and urgency, (b) engaging the community, (c) connecting with district leadership, and (d) providing staff development may differ among school districts significantly.

Lastly, studies have explored school board effectiveness through qualitative methods, and this study attempted to quantify the utilization of school board practices. This study contained only a small portion of qualitative inquiry, certainly not in a method
designed to corroborate quantitative data. While the qualitative data gained yielded some interesting insight to school board practices in Missouri, further research on school board effectiveness might employ a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2007). This type of methodology may help researchers more fully understand the relationship between school board practices and what is being reported by board members on quantitative measures. Research along these lines could also seek to bolster a more effective way to measure the influence of school boards on school success.
References


The future of school board governance: Relevancy and revelation (pp.273-1292).
Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Education.


APPENDIX A

Permission to use or adapt the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

Re: permission to adapt a survey from Smoley/Effective School Boards
Goldweber, Paulette - Hoboken [pgoldweb@wiley.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 1:16 PM
To: Sims, Brian T. (MU-Student)

Dear Brian:

Thank you for your request. This email represents official permission for you to use the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire to collect data for your research. You must purchase one copy of the instrument, which you can do through www.wiley.com. You may then copy the instrument for your research—however, you may not distribute any copies in any other way. All photocopies must keep the copyright notices that are on our publication.

Thank you for your interest in the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Paulette Goldweber
Associate Manager, Permissions
Global Rights
John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Ph: 201-748-0765
Fx: 201-748-6988
pgoldweb@wiley.com
Dear Board Member:

Thank you for considering participation in the study “The influence of school board leadership on Missouri school, district success.” This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of school board practices on school success. This information will be useful to understand the most effective school board practices.

Before you make a final decision about participation, please read the following about how your input will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected:

• Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any point without penalty.
• You need not answer all of the questions.
• Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
• Your participation will take approximately five (5) minutes. During this time you will answer a short online survey which includes rating scales and multiple choice options.
• The data collected will be held in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office and disposed of 6 months after the conclusion of the study.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights, and may be contacted at 573.882.9585. The project is being supervised by Dr. Robert Watson, Professor, CLSE, Missouri State University (417.836.5177).

If at this point you are still interested in participating and assisting with this important research project please fill out the consent form below. Keep the top of this letter for future reference. You can contact me at 417.759.2555 ex. 214 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Brian Sims,
University of Missouri-Columbia

I, ________________________________________, agree to participate in the study of "The influence of school board leadership on Missouri school, district success," conducted by Brian Sims. I understand that:

• My answers will be used for educational research.
• My participation is voluntary.
• I may stop participation at any time without penalty.
• I need not answer all of the questions.
• My answers and identity will be kept confidential.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed:_________________________________________ Date:___________________

Introduction Questions

a. I agree to participate in the give my consent to participate in the study.
   Yes. ☐ No ☐

b. Identify which school for which you are a board member.
   ________________________________ or Multiple choice options for on-line version.

c. Which title best describes your role on the school board.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Vice-President</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
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Creating a Vision

1. At least once a year, this board asks that the superintendent articulate his/her vision for the school district's future and strategies to realize that vision.

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2. The board discusses where the school district should be headed five or more years into the future.

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3. More than half of this board's time is spent in discussions of issues of importance to the school district's long-range future.

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4. The vision of the school includes the belief that all students can learn.

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5. The vision of the school includes the belief that all staff members affect student outcomes.

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6. The process of creating the vision for the district includes community leaders.

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Setting Goals and remaining committed

7. The board sets clear organizational priorities for the year ahead.

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8. Our board meetings tend to focus more on current concerns than on preparing for the future.

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9. Within the past year, this board has reviewed the school district’s strategies for attaining its long-term goals.

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10. Once a decision is made, all board members work together to see that it is accepted and carried out.

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11. This board makes explicit use of the long-range priorities of this school district in dealing with current issues.

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12. The board will reverse its position based on pressure from the community.

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Using data

13. This board periodically sets aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts like the one we govern.

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14. The leadership of this board typically goes out of its way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.

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15. The board often requests that a decision be postponed until further information can be obtained.

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16. The board periodically obtains information on the perspectives of staff and community.

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17. The board often requests additional information before making a decision.

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18. The board usually receives a full rationale for the recommendations it is asked to act upon.

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Monitoring progress and taking corrective action

19. At least once every two years, our board has a retreat or special session to examine our performance, how well we are doing as a board.

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20. I have been in board meetings where the discussion focused on identifying or overcoming the school district's weaknesses.

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21. The school board has set specific dates for the evaluation of district goals.

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22. Assessment of district goals includes feedback from parents.

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23. Assessment of district goals includes feedback from staff members.

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24. The evaluation of the superintendent is based in part upon the successful attainment of the district's goals.

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25. Describe the influence you have had on your school district.

26. What is your most important role as a board member?

27. What are your biggest challenges as a board member?
Appendix C

Permission to survey MSBA school board members.

Follow-up - simab@fgsmail.org - Fair Grove R-10 School District Mail  
https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?shar=Jf1#inbox/139684e12a26c23

Follow-up

Brian Sims
to ghah

Mr. Ghah, Thank you for taking the time to visit with me and help me troubleshoot how to get my survey out to this email as a follow-up of our conversation on the phone earlier today. I expect that my dissertation committee will be happy to know I have your tentative approval to add the survey to one of your electronic mailings. I have attached (Appendix C) so that you may have a better understanding of my research. Please let me know if you still believe very similar ones so that I can inform my committee at the time of proposal. Thank you.
Brian Sims

Ghah, Brent Ghah@msbaht.org
to me

Brent,

Yes, we can distribute a link to this survey to our members.

Brent

From: Brian Sims [mailto:simab@fgsmail.org]  
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2012 11:22 AM  
To: Ghah, Brent

Subject: Follow-up
VITA

Brian T. Sims graduated from Willard High School in 1994. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education from Missouri State University in 1999. While working as a special education teacher in Willard, Missouri he earned his Master of Science in Education, Special Education from Missouri State University in 2003. In 2004, he left the classroom to pursue a leadership role in special education. He has served as a process coordinator for special education and is now the director of Student Services for Fair Grove R-10 schools in Fair Grove, MO. In 2012, he earned a Doctorate in Education from the University of Missouri. He continues to be an educational leader at his K-12 school while also advancing teacher learning through his role as per course faculty for the Department of Counseling, Leadership, and Special Education at Missouri State University in Springfield, MO.