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A STUDY OF HOW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS  
ACQUIRE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

by  
Susan L. Rice

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
2002

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May 6, 2002

## ABSTRACT

Susan L. Rice  
A STUDY OF HOW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS  
ACQUIRE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF EDUCATIONAL ISSUES  
2001 - 2002  
Dr. Stanley Urban  
Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to determine how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues. A questionnaire was used to examine the socio-economic background of Board of Education members, along with their acquisition of knowledge. The questionnaire was distributed to Elementary and High School Boards of Education in the Southern New Jersey area. The data collected from the questionnaires, research on Boards of Education and conclusions drawn from the summary of the data are presented.

The study of the data indicates Boards of Education consist predominantly of white males, age 40 - 49, who have attended college, and have had a child in the district. Most School Board Members indicated they were satisfied with their Boards of Education, and rely on school board discussions and superintendent recommendations to acquire their knowledge of educational issues. All of the members questioned were unpaid, the majority did not belong to any outside educational agencies, and a large majority did not rely on personal research or discussion with school personnel to gain educational knowledge.

The major finding of this study indicates School Board Members rely heavily on superintendent recommendations to gain educational knowledge.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Susan L. Rice

### A STUDY OF HOW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS ACQUIRE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

2001/02

Dr. Stanley Urban

Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to determine how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues. Data obtained from a questionnaire used in the study indicates that School Board Members rely heavily on their superintendent for educational knowledge.

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It's been said that it takes a village... there are many in my small village to whom I owe my sincere thanks. Without these people I would not be who I am today. My heartfelt gratitude goes to:

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my Mother and Father who guide me from above

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Dr. Stanley Urban - for guidance with a sense of humor

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my many family, friends, and colleagues who encouraged me along the journey

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....   | iii  |
| <b>Chapter One</b>   |      |
| INTRODUCTION.....  | 1    |
| Background.....  | 1    |
| Purpose of the Study.....  | 1    |
| Research Question.....   | 1    |
| Significance of the Study.....   | 2    |
| Definition of Terms.....   | 2    |
| Organization of the Study.....   | 2    |
| <b>Chapter Two</b>   |      |
| REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....  | 4    |
| Introduction.....  | 4    |
| Section One: The Origin of School Boards.....                                    | 4    |
| Section Two: The Qualifications and Expectations of<br>School Board Members..... | 5    |
| Section Three: Acquisition of Knowledge.....                                     | 9    |
| Summary.....   | 12   |
| <b>Chapter Three</b>   |      |
| DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....   | 13   |
| Introduction.....  | 13   |
| Method of Sample Selection.....  | 13   |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Instrumentation.....                                | 13   |
| Collection of Data.....                             | 15   |
| Analysis of the Data.....                           | 15   |
| <b>Chapter Four</b>                                 |      |
| ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA..           | 16   |
| Introduction.....                                   | 16   |
| Results of the Data.....                            | 17   |
| Summary of the Data.....                            | 20   |
| <b>Chapter Five</b>                                 |      |
| SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS.....             | 22   |
| Summary.....  | 22   |
| Findings and Conclusions.....                       | 22   |
| Table 1 and Table 2.....                            | 24   |
| Discussions and Implications for Further Study..... | 25   |
| REFERENCES.....                                     | 27   |
| APPENDIX.....                                       | 29   |

## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTON**

#### **Background**

School Board Members in The United States possess an important responsibility in the education of the students enrolled in their respective districts. School Board Members are democratically elected representatives of the community of each school district, and wield tremendous power over the educational issues concerning students, teachers, and the community. If they are to be effective in their role, School Board Members must possess a deep knowledge of educational issues, and policies.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the sources of information currently used by School Board Members to obtain knowledge of educational issues related to their duties.

#### **Research Question**

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the data obtained is used to answer the following research question:

What are the sources of information used by School Board Members to acquire their knowledge of educational issues?

## **Significance of the Study**

The means by which School Board Members gain knowledge of the issues they deal with each week is crucial. How do the members acquire their knowledge and share their knowledge with each other? These types of questions are important in determining the level of competency that members bring to their responsibilities as School Board Members. It is important for teachers, and other personnel to understand how Board Members obtain their information since it may be helpful to broaden their sources.

## **Definition of Terms**

Several terms used in the present study have special meaning and are defined here:

School Board Member - A person elected to a position on a School Board by a general election process. This person must be a registered voter in the school district.

School Board / Board of Education - A group of elected persons from the community, who represent the best interests of the community members and their school aged children in reference to school related issues.

## **Organization of the Study**

The following outline is presented as an overview of the organization of the study. The purpose and content of each chapter is briefly presented.

Chapter One contains a statement of Introduction which discusses the responsibility and power elected School Board Members have in relation to educational

issues in their school district, and the concern that the Board Members possess a greater knowledge of such issues. Chapter Two contains a review of the literature which relates to the origin of School Boards and their purpose, a determination of qualifications and expectations of School Board Members, and addresses the question of how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues.

In Chapter Three the method of selecting the sample from the population is described, the instrument and procedures for collecting the data are discussed, and procedures for analyzing the data are explained.

In Chapter Four, the data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed and interpreted. The results and interpretation of the data will be presented in this chapter. Chapter Five will summarize and discuss the data collected. Findings and conclusions from the data will be made. Implications and need for further study will be addressed.

## **Chapter Two**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

To begin to answer the question of how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues one must first examine the origin of School Boards and their purpose, this will be addressed in Section One. Section Two will discuss the importance of how School Board Members are chosen in terms of qualifications along with the general public's expectations of School Board Members. Finally, Section Three will address the issue of how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues.

#### **Section One: The Origin of School Boards**

Boards of Education were originally established to “ ... create a meritocracy in the organization of the schools... ” ( Spring, 1997 ). Meritocracy is a societal concept based on the idea that a person's individual merit will determine his or her occupation or position. The person's political and/or economic associations would not be a factor in that person's ability to attain or remain in a position.

The creation of smaller School Boards arose from the fear that “ local schoolhouses would be lost to the political machines gaining ascendancy in urban politics at the time. ” ( Spring, 1997 ). As School Boards were made smaller, the duties of the administration grew larger. According Spring ( 1997 ), “ School administrators championed ideas such as keeping the schools out of politics and maintaining clear lines

between the functions of the School Board and those of the administration. ”

During the 1920's there was a push for early School Board reform. Joseph M. Cronin's 1927 study, *Control of Urban Schools: Perspectives on the Power of Educational Reformers* gave a voice to the argument that local ward bosses and their influence was a threat. More recent authors reinforce Cronin's view. For example, Urban and Wagoner Jr. ( 1996 ) state, “ Giving more responsibility to a central board meant that the schools would now be guided by the same men who guarded the larger reputation of the city.... they were expected to act in the best interest of the largest number of citizens, not the particular interest of some small neighborhood group... In short, centralized schools were run according to the same principles as any large corporation.” If School Boards were reduced in size and elections made nonpartisan, the ward bosses influence would be destroyed giving schools centralized control.

At the present time, most School Board Members are elected in a general election. Most School Boards will appoint a member to the board if a current member must resign from his or her position. Prior to a person being appointed to the School Board, their appointment is discussed at a general meeting, allowing public comments. The School Board then adjourns to a closed session to take the matter into further consideration. An appointment is usually made by the School Board in an expedient manner.

## **Section Two: The Qualifications and Expectations of School Board Members**

In the early years of School Board organization, if a member of the public was to be chosen as a School Board Member, that person was most likely a member of the 'elite' or one of the 'best' members of the community. 'Elite' or 'best' referring to the individual's monetary worth or his civic standing in the community. According to Spring,

( 1997 ) “ One recent study of the occupations of civic elites found that over 50% were bankers, industrialists, and heads of local businesses, while the remainder included heads of local communities, newspaper people, civic association executives, clergy, university administrators, and professionals [lawyers, doctors and the like] ”. The argument was “ ... that a factory worker would have less ability than a banker to make correct decisions about the public interest regarding schooling. ” ( Spring, 1997 ).

In his classic study, Counts ( 1927 ), stated “ ... the social composition of School Board members ... highlighted their privileged economical backgrounds and the negative consequences of those backgrounds for democratically oriented public schooling. ”. While some may continue to argue that the ‘elite’ control today’s elections of School Board Members, their view would likely be met with much criticism. The role of a School Board Member, as stated earlier in this paper, should rely exclusively on his or her merit.

Society may continue to judge a person’s merit by their individual wealth or political power, yet our School Boards were formed to create meritocracy. Being a member of the ‘elite’ should not and does not ensure an individual a place on their local School Board.

As stated earlier in this paper, most of today’s School Board Members are elected to their position by general election. By informing the public of their personal views on relevant educational issues, and personal accomplishments, the prospective School Board Member allows the public to make an informed choice. The public’s decision on which candidate they feel will accurately represent the best interests of all of the students enrolled in that district will result in that candidate’s election to their local School Board.

There are no educational or professional qualifications required to be a candidate

for election to a local School Board. The sole requirement of the candidate running for a seat on the School Board is that the candidate be a registered voter residing in the school district. There are however, certain qualities many feel a candidate should possess in order to be considered an asset to the School Board. Those qualities include, but are not limited to the following:

1) The capability to apply the time necessary to make informed decisions.

“ A board member should be willing to invest the many hours necessary to discharge his/her responsibility. ” ( Becoming A School Board Member, 2001 ). Most of the general public is unaware of the endless hours School Board members spend acquiring the information necessary to allow them adequate knowledge of educational issues facing the school district. “Many citizens do not know exactly what a school board does or what its duties and responsibilities are. Some are not aware that most board members do not get paid for their services. Others have no idea the amount of time board members spend on school matters or the number of meetings they attend. ” ( Gallagher et al. 1997 ).

2) The ability to be visionary, able to understand the forces of change.

A School Board Member should be “ ... able to look beyond yesterday’s solutions and yesterday’s kind of education and be willing to provide today’s education to today’s children. ” ( Becoming A School Board Member, 2001 ). J. Bauer, a School Board Member in Orange County, California agrees with this quality stating, “ School Board Members must be visionary leaders, not followers. ” ( Bauer, 1998 ).

The National School Boards Foundation also agrees that School Board Members should be visionary. According to their 2001 Mission Statement “The National School Boards Foundation encourages and prepares local school board members to become

catalysts for educational change and agents for systemic reform in the public schools so that all students will be prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow. ”

3) The ability to judge public opinion.

“ Public opinion is that intangible but powerful force in American life that influences all that is done in public affairs. A school board must know something about the nature of public opinion in order to run a good school system. If it fails to do what the public wants, sharp criticism follows. If it moves too far ahead of public opinion, it invites opposition.” ( Gallagher et al. 1997 ).

School Board Members must always keep in mind that a School Board, “Sets the educational tone for the district by passing policies which reflect the immediate and long term needs of the community; Must be the eyes and ears for all segments of the community; Must set educational policy based upon community input; ” ( Bauer, 1998 ).

According to Sioux Falls B.O.E. ( 2001 ), “ The board member should bear in mind that he/she has a responsibility to all of the children in the district.” In the text, The School and Community Relations ( 6th edition ) ( Gallagher et al. 1997 ) the authors write, “ It is essential to the management of the school that those who are charged with the responsibility for directing it’s affairs understand the role of public attitudes ... and their effect on the education of the children ... Without this knowledge, it is difficult to plan strategies affecting school, community relations.”

4) The ability to collect and share educational information from various sources.

There are numerous ways a School Board Member can obtain educational

knowledge. A School Board Member should have the capacity to “...gather data from many different sources... have the skills to look beyond what is presented to them by a single source or by a special interest group.” ( Bauer, 1998 ).

The more aware our School Board Members are of educational issues which effect the students in their district, the more those members will have the tools which will enable them to make informed decisions. According to Gallagher and his colleagues, “The board of education sets a better tone for the system when it consults with interested citizens and representatives of community groups on problems facing the schools ... Good ideas and suggestions can also be obtained from groups that have interest in recreation, safety, health, library services, correction of physical handicaps in children, citizenship training and the like. Consulting these people makes them partners in the job of education and helps to build many bridges of goodwill and understanding. ” ( Gallagher et al, 1997 ).

As we can see from the qualities that are desirable in our School Board Members, we hold high expectations of those who are elected to a position on their local School Board. Many of the qualities listed require time and effort on the part of the School Board Member, for which that member will most likely not be compensated. Gaining educational knowledge of issues is essential for an effective School Board. “ The quality of the educational program of a school district is influenced strongly by the leadership that the Board of Education and the superintendent provide. Without the communication and support of high expectations by boards and superintendents, high quality education is not likely to be achieved.” ( Johnson et al., 1996 ).

### **Section Three: Acquisition of Knowledge**

The ways in which a School Board Member can acquire knowledge of educational issues are extensive. The most obvious way to acquire such knowledge is to search for written information on the issues that school district is facing. Books, journals, articles, and the Internet are readily accessible, and relatively inexpensive. As stated earlier in this paper, a School Board Member must be willing to devote the time and effort into finding such written information. Once the School Board Member has found such information, he/she should also be willing to share the findings with fellow members of the Board of Education. This seeking out and sharing of information is a necessary quality of an effective School Board Member.

Another interesting and informative way of acquiring information on educational issues would be for School Board Member visitation. “ Members of the board should take a day or so a month to visit schools and chat with principals, and teachers, and other employees. The board should also invite teachers to give presentations on their work at public board meetings. In other words, it should show a real interest in the work being done by the employees.” ( Gallagher et al., 1997 ). While the visitation approach may seem unrealistic for those members of a School Board who have full time jobs, it is not an idea that should be readily dismissed.

By having School Board Members visit a school each month, those members would learn valuable, hands-on knowledge of how that school works, and gain insight on the educational issues the employees feel need to be addressed. The visiting School Board Member could then take the information they had gathered, and report back to his/her fellow Board of Education members. Actually witnessing and talking to the people who work in the schools is a valuable resource.

Another method of gaining educational knowledge a School Board Member should exercise, is to talk to the superintendent of the school district. The superintendent should be a wealth of knowledge. While the opinions given by the superintendent should not be viewed as the only opinions available, they will give the School Board Member a point to begin in their search for knowledge. A superintendent should also be able to assist the School Board Member in finding different materials available which would present various viewpoints concerning educational issues.

Research, along with visitation information and superintendent recommendations, will assist the School Board Members in addressing educational issues large and small. This information will enlighten the Board of Education, allowing for informed decisions. These decisions will ultimately effect each child in the school district.

One major reoccurring theme in most of the research materials used by this author, was the insistence that the children of each school district be represented equally. “ A Board should ... invite and encourage citizens to discuss their views on important questions under consideration and make decisions consistent with the best interests of the school system. It is imperative that a Board take public leadership in building the best educational program possible.” ( Gallagher et al., 1997 ). According to The National School Boards Foundation, “ America’s vision of educational equality is a cornerstone - and a great test - of democracy. Never before has any nation challenged its public schools to educate and care for all of it’s children, regardless of race, culture, economic status, and physical or mental ability.” ( The National School Boards Foundation, 2001 ).

School Board Members need to be continually well informed by many sources, and

adequate time given them to allow for well informed and thoughtout decisions which will ultimately effect the children of their local school district. “ Strong local school board leadership is fundamental to the success of public education. ... Improving the capacity of school boards to lead and govern is a basic requirement for meaningful progress in education reform.” ( The National School Boards Foundation, 2001 ).

### **Summary**

School Boards were originally established to allow the average person a voice in their child’s education. Throughout the years, political and economic influences weighed heavy in School Board Member elections. While today there are no educational or professional requirements for a School Board Member, most candidates are chosen for qualities which are considered to be an asset to the Board of Education.

School Board Members have many resources from which they can gain knowledge of educational issues their school districts face. Assuming the School Board Member is able to devote the time needed to research the issues, that member can be a valuable addition to their local Board of Education. By allowing community members an equal voice on their local School Board, equal representation for every child in the school district is shown.

## **Chapter Three**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter contains a description of the method used to collect data from School Board Members concerning their acquisition of knowledge of educational issues. The sample selection method and population it is drawn is described. The instrument and procedures for collection of data are discussed, and procedures for analyzing the data collected are detailed. The cover letter and instrument are included in the Appendix.

#### **Method of Sample Selection**

The sample selected for this study consisted of a convenience group composed of School Boards where the author had personal contact. Data was collected by means of personal interviews with School Board Members and superintendents. A brief questionnaire was distributed to 20 School Board Members. The questionnaire was designed by this author to gather information which would answer the research question stated in Chapter One. It is the opinion of this author, that the School Boards which composed the sample for the study were representative of Boards of Education in the southern New Jersey area.

#### **Instrumentation**

A 12 item questionnaire, designed to be completed in 5 - 10 minutes of a School

Board Member's time was constructed to answer key questions concerning School Board Members and their acquisition of knowledge of educational issues. The information requested included inquiries relating to the member's socio-economic background, and specific questions concerning the individual member's use of a variety of sources to acquire educational knowledge.

The initial six questions of the instrument inquire into the School Board Member's age, race, sex, and educational background. Further questions inquire about the member's personal involvement as a parent in the school district. The final personal question asks if the School Board Member receives a salary for his/her position. The second six questions of the instrument relate directly to the School Board Member's acquisition of knowledge of educational issues.

One question asks if the School Board Member belongs to, or is a member of, any educational associations, organizations, journals, magazines, coalitions, or councils. A follow-up question requests that the member list the items to which they are referring in the previous question. To expand on this answer, another question asks the School Board Member to prioritize the following: School Board discussions, superintendent recommendations, personal research, &/or discussions with school personnel, in order to show the method most utilized to acquire educational knowledge which specifically effects their school district.

Two questions inquire into the School Board Member's feelings in relation to their Board of Education's provision of adequate information on issues, ways to obtain information, adequate time for discussions, and the pursuit of appropriate outside assistance when warranted. Finally the question of Board of Education independence in

decision making is addressed. The questionnaire allows ample space for the member to expand upon any question.

### **Collection of Data**

The data for this study was collected by the use of the above mentioned questionnaire, and interviews. The questionnaires were briefly described and distributed at Board of Education meetings. The School Board Members were requested to review the instrument, contacting the author with any questions they may have had concerning the instrument. The members were asked to complete the instrument prior to the following Board of Education meeting. The Board secretaries graciously volunteered to collect the questionnaires, and contacted this author when all were completed.

A copy of the questionnaire and the cover letter contained with each are included in the Appendix.

### **Analysis of the Data**

A frequency of the number of responses to each item will be presented, an interpretation provided, and conclusions will be formulated.

## **Chapter Four**

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

#### **Introduction**

The analysis of the results of the data collected from the questionnaire distributed will be outlined and briefly summarized in this chapter. The results show both encouraging, and troubling data.

The encouraging data indicates that School Board Members are now more equally divided between male and female. The member's age range appears to place the respondents at a time in their lives where they should have had sufficient life experiences from which to draw conclusions relating to educational issues. The member's educational backgrounds demonstrate that many have earned a college education, and have a genuine interest in educational issues, due to their own children's enrollment in the district.

The troubling data indicates that our School Boards do not show equality for all races, and are also not paid. The slight majority of our School Board Members do not belong to any outside educational agencies, and rely on School Board discussions, and Superintendent recommendations for solutions to educational issues. This reliance is troubling due to the disclosure from most respondents that they have little contact with school personnel, and conducted little personal research on educational issues.

## Results of the Data

The result of the data, taken from the questionnaire will be listed in the order of the item presented in the questionnaire. This will allow the reader a more organized approach, and aid in understanding the results.

Question 1. Respondents included:

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| 8 | male   |
| 7 | female |

Question 2. Age ranges were as follows:

|    |              |
|----|--------------|
| 10 | ages 40 - 49 |
| 3  | ages 50+     |
| 1  | ages 30 - 39 |
| 0  | ages 20 - 29 |

(one non-response)

Question 3. All of the respondents were Caucasian.

Question 4. Educational backgrounds were as follows:

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 9 | College +             |
| 3 | High School + 2 years |
| 2 | High School graduates |
| 1 | College Graduate      |

Question 5. Member's who have now, or previously had a child in the district:

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 14 | yes |
| 1  | no  |

Question 6. Paid School Board Members.

|    |    |
|----|----|
| 15 | no |
|----|----|

Question 7. Member's of any educational associations, organizations, journals, magazines, coalitions, or councils:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 8 | no  |
| 7 | yes |

Question 8. The educational items listed to explain yes answers to question #7 included:

- 4 N.J.E.A. (New Jersey Education Organization)
- 4 N.J.S.B.A. (New Jersey School Board Association)
- 2 N.E.A. (National Education Association)
- 2 Subscriptions to School Leaders Magazine
- 1 M.T.E.A. (Mantua Township Education Association)
- 1 Tri County District Council

Question 9. Prioritization of the following items, indicating how members acquired their knowledge of issues which effect their school district included:

School Board discussions

superintendent recommendations

personal research

discussions with various school personnel

6 respondents chose School Board discussions as their top priority

3 chose this as their 2nd priority

4 chose this as their 3rd priority

2 chose this as their last priority

6 respondents chose the superintendent recommendations as their top priority

3 chose this as their 2nd priority

3 chose this as their 3rd priority

3 chose this as their last priority

1 respondent chose personal research as their top priority

3 chose this as their 2nd priority

2 chose this as their 3rd priority

9 chose this as their last priority

2 chose discussions with school personnel as their top priority

6 chose this as their 2nd priority

6 chose this as their 3rd priority

1 chose this as their last priority

Question 10. Member's feelings on the amount of information &/or adequate ways to obtain information on educational issues:

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 14 | yes |
| 1  | no  |

Question 11. Member's feelings on the amount of time for discussions & appropriate help provided with issues when warranted:

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 14 | yes |
| 1  | no  |

Question 12. Member's feelings of their Board of Education's independence on issues:

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 14 | yes |
| 1  | no  |

### **Summary of the data**

The summary of the data on School Board Member's knowledge of educational issues indicates the following:

1. The slight majority of School Board Member's are male.
2. The average age range of School Board Member's is 40 -49 years, followed by 50+, and 30 -39 year olds.
3. All of the School Board Member's in this study were Caucasian.
4. The majority of School Board Member's have some type of post High School education, most having college experience.
5. The majority of School Board Member's have now, or have had a student in the district.
6. No School Board Members in this study were paid.
7. By a slight majority, most School Board Members do not belong to any outside educational agencies.
8. The majority of the School Board Members which were associated with an outside educational agency were also teachers. Most of these members belonged to more than one outside agency or organization. The majority of School Board Members that were not teachers did not belong to any outside educational agencies.
9. The large majority of School Board Members rely on superintendent recommendations, and school board discussions to acquire knowledge of educational issues which effect their schools. A decidedly small minority of School Board Members rely on personal research and discussions with school personnel to acquire knowledge of

these educational issues.

10, 11, 12. The overwhelming majority of School Board Members feel their Boards of Education provide adequate information, and time to process the information, along with ways to obtain information, and act as an independent when arriving at decisions.

## **Chapter Five**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine how School Board Members acquire their knowledge of educational issues. A 12 item questionnaire was used to examine the socio-economic background of Board of Education Members, along with their acquisition of educational knowledge. The questionnaire was distributed to Elementary and High School Boards of Education in the Southern New Jersey area. The data collected from the questionnaires, research on Boards of Education and conclusions drawn from the summary of the data are presented.

The study of the data indicates Boards of Education consist predominantly of white males, age 40 - 49, who have attended college, and have had a child in the district. Most School Board Members indicated they were satisfied with their Boards of Education, relying on School Board discussions and superintendent recommendations to acquire their knowledge of educational issues. All of the members questioned were unpaid. The majority did not belong to any outside educational agencies, and a large majority did not rely on personal research or discussions with school personnel to gain educational knowledge.

#### **Findings and Conclusions**

The findings of this study indicate that Boards of Education have changed some

since their inception. The School Board Members appear competent, and rely on school board discussions and the superintendent to provide answers to many difficult questions. This raises the question : What, or who is the major influence on School Board Members knowledge of educational issues?

Boards of Education were originally run by the “elite” of the community, people possessing financial or political influence. Many would argue that the same remains today. School Board Members continue to be, although only slightly, predominantly white males. These findings are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2.

The most troubling finding of this study points to the lack of personal knowledge of educational issues sought by School Board Members. The vast majority of members indicated that they did little or no personal research, and had little or no discussions with school personnel, therefore relying on the superintendent for their knowledge. When we examine those answers, we must conclude that School Board Members bring limited personal knowledge to the discussions, relying heavily on the superintendent’s knowledge. The superintendent must be able to present opposing views of educational issues without bias, allowing for ample discussions and outside input from community members.

Few of the respondents indicated subscribing to School Board journals, magazines, or organizations. This finding is disturbing due to the unbiased reporting in such outlets. The use of unbiased presentation of educational issues is necessary to allow School Board Members the most knowledge available, giving them more information with which to base their opinions.

With so many options now available to School Board Members one wonders why they are not being utilized. Is the superintendent offering these options? If the options are

Table 1

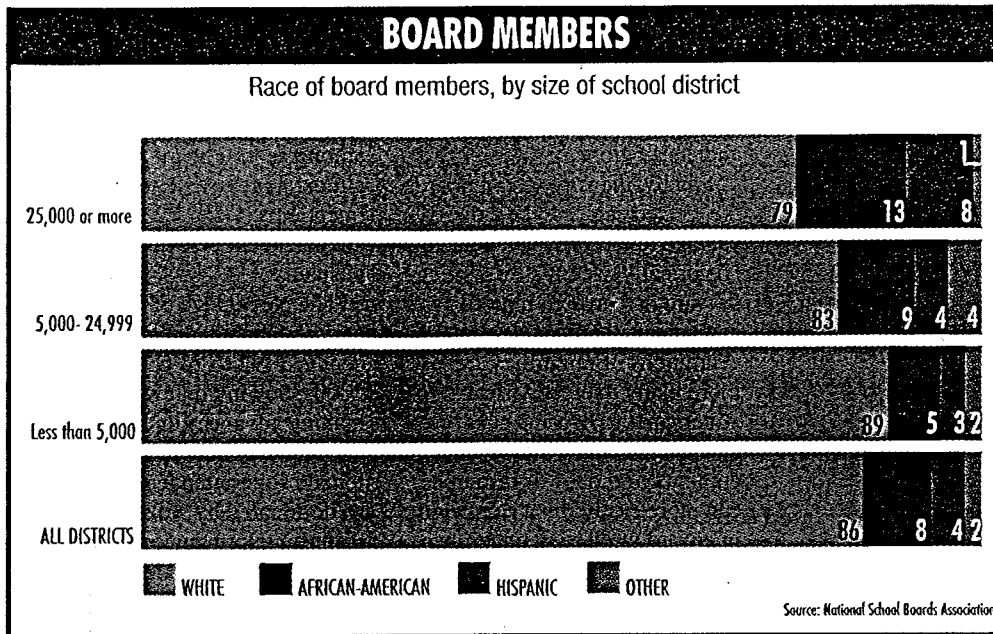
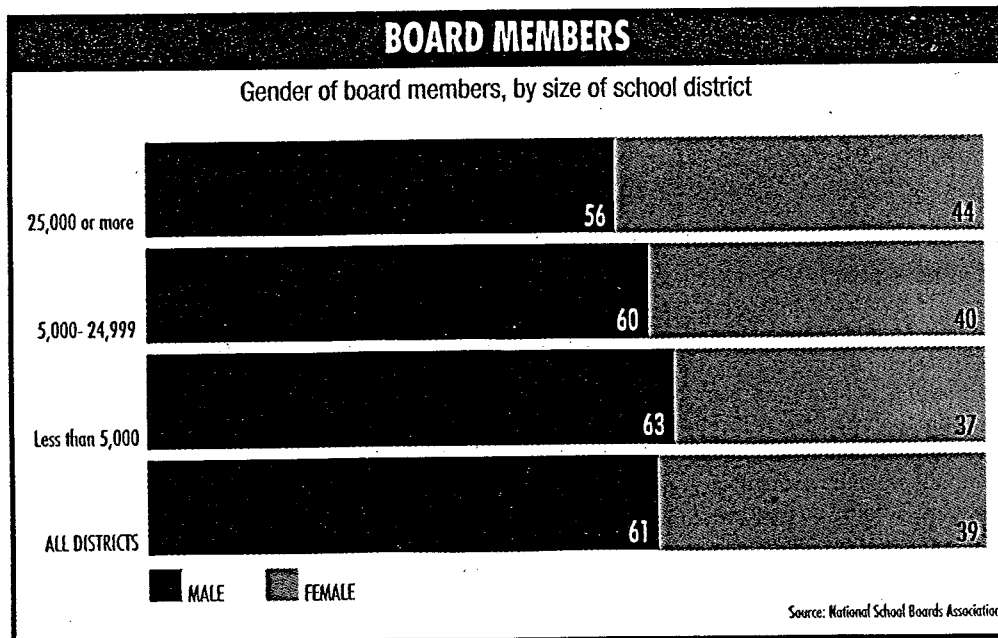


Table 2



offered, why weren't they mentioned?

The superintendent appears to be the major influence for the outcome of educational issues presented to the Board of Education. With this influence, comes a sobering thought; a narrow-minded superintendent could bring a school district to ruin by using the position to fulfill his/her own personal agenda.

School Board Members must be independent thinkers, able to present their views and define these views with determination and conviction. They must be able to withstand a superintendent's perceived superiority, and provide research in order to share their views with others. School Board Members must not allow the personal views of one, to influence an entire school district. If this occurs, the School Board Members have failed the children of the district.

### **Discussions and Implications for Further Study**

While there were more positives than negatives found in this study, the negatives weigh heavily on the education of the children in the school districts. School Board Members must seek ways to change these negative areas. One negative area was the informational options given to members. The following are some options available to School Board Members which can supply the members with unlimited, unbiased information.

Log on to:

NSBA.org

NSBF.org

your local school district website

any learning/teaching website

Subscribe to:

American School Board Journal Magazine  
[this author was able to subscribe for free while writing this paper]  
School Board Leaders Magazine  
Educator Magazine  
Teacher Magazine  
any educational magazine

Read monthly newsletters from schools in the district along with outlying districts.

Look for controversy. Be prepared when it occurs in the school district.

All of these items can be shared at Board of Education meetings, allowing opposing views to be presented and discussed. Clearly the findings of this small study indicate that School Board Members need to have more outside influences offered to make informed decisions on educational issues.

Further study on School Board Member awareness and use of outside educational agencies would be beneficial. Further study on superintendent willingness to present differing educational opinions would also benefit School Board Members.

One finding is certain, School Board Members have a great deal of educational issues to determine, and limited personal research to aid them in their decisions. School Board Members must be informed and able to present opposing views without personal bias or prejudice, allowing for equality in the education of all of the children in the district.

Boards of Education were originally founded to give an equal voice to all of the children in the district. School Board Members must arm themselves with as much information as possible to allow each voice to be heard. With the combined efforts of the School Board Members, superintendent, and school personnel, each child will receive an equal opportunity to reach their full potential.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix

Hello, my name is Susan Rice. I am a Kindergarten teacher and also a Graduate student from Rowan University. I am currently in the process of writing my Master's Thesis, the topic of which is how School Board members acquire their knowledge of educational issues. I have prepared a brief questionnaire of 12 questions, which I feel will aid me in my research.

I would greatly appreciate your taking the time to complete the questionnaire. I have made arrangements to collect the completed questionnaires prior to your next School Board meeting. If you have any questions concerning the questionnaire, please feel free to call me at Sewell School, 468-0626 ext. 3509.

I thank you for your participation in this endeavor. Once I have received all of the completed questionnaires, I will interpret your answers and form a conclusion using those answers to guide me. I would enjoy being invited to return to your Board of Education to share my results, once my Thesis has been accepted by my professor.

Again I thank you for your participation in this questionnaire, and your dedication to the students in your school district. Your time, energy, and willingness to work for the student's welfare, are greatly appreciated.

## Questionnaire to Measure School Board Member's Acquisition of Knowledge

Please mark the correct answer by completely filling in the 0 next to the answer you have chosen.

### Questions:

The first six questions of the questionnaire will consist of personal questions, these are used in order to gain a picture of the socio/economic make-up of your school board.

1. ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age range : ☐ 25 - 29 ☐ 30 - 39 ☐ 40 - 49  
☐ 50 +
3. Race : ☐ Caucasian ☐ African American  
☐ Hispanic ☐ Native American  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Your Educational background :
- ☐ High School graduate
- ☐ Post High School graduate (trade school, 2 year degree)
- ☐ College Graduate (4 year degree)
- ☐ College graduate +
5. Do you have now, or have you previously had, children in the district?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Are you a paid member of this School Board?

☐ Yes

☐ No

The following six questions relate directly to your acquisition of knowledge of School Board issues, and your school board relations.

7. Do you belong to, or are you a member of any educational associations, organizations, journals, magazines, coalitions, or councils?

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. If you answered yes to #7, please list below the names of the items:

9. Please prioritize the following items using #1 as the most used, and #4 as the least used, indicating how you acquire your knowledge of issues which effect your school district.

☐ school board discussions

☐ superintendent recommendations

☐ personal research

☐ discussions with school personnel, including teachers, administrators, para professionals, custodial workers, and/or transportation officials

10. Do you feel your Board of Education provides adequate information on issues &/or ways you as a school board member can obtain information on those issues?

☐ Yes

☐ No

11. Do you feel your Board of Education allows an adequate amount of time for discussions of ideas and issues &/or seeks appropriate outside assistance when decisions warrant?

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. Do you feel your Board of Education acts as an independent, listening to the superintendent, school employees, and community members, processing all recommendations and ultimately arriving at well informed decisions?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please feel free to elaborate on any of the previous questions, using the space below. Please refer to the question number when writing.