

SMALL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN TEXAS:
PRACTICES & CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL
DISTRICTS WITH 500 OR LESS STUDENTS

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Executive Summary

Democratic governance of public school systems is a uniquely American institution, with its' ancestry beginning with the publicly controlled schools of the New England colonies and in the common school movement of the 19th century. Despite this long history of local school boards and this important responsibility of governing public schools very little statistical information has been available on these public bodies.

This report draws on the results of a study to elucidate the characteristics of school boards and the challenges they encounter. A survey of 323 school districts yielded a robust response rate of 40%, which provided an exceptionally precise and trenchant look into the groups of men and women who govern the state of Texas small rural school districts.

Although the United States contains approximately 14, 890 public school systems it is estimated that almost 80% of those school districts have 1,000 or less students in attendance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This study's target population was school districts in the state of Texas with 500 or less students. The state of Texas has 1,040 school districts and of this number 185 are charter or private schools (Texas Education Agency, 2003). For research purposes the charter schools and private schools were removed from the target population because of their separate governance structures. Therefore the research sample of 323 school districts represents 31% of the public school districts in the state of Texas.

Key Findings

1. School Board Elections

- 88.0 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study were elected at-large compared to the 45.6 percent in the NSBA study for small school districts.
- 76.9 percent of the board members in the SSGT study were male and three-fourths of the small school districts board's of education have a minimum of one female board member.
- 72.9 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study identified parent groups as the most active group in school board elections.
- Racial/ethnic groups are moderately to minimally active in school board elections.
- 94.7 percent of board presidents in the SSGT study spent \$1,000 or less of personal wealth being elected to the board of education.
- Service and motivation from school and community groups were the two primary reasons school board presidents ran for election.
- 71.6 of the board presidents reported being members of the Republican Party.

2. School Board Service

- 90.0 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study had lived in their communities for eleven years or more.
- The most pressing issues to school board presidents were: (1) budget/finance, (2) declining enrollment, (3) student achievement and (4) regulations.
- 90.0 percent of board presidents reported a positive relationship with the district superintendent.
- The main sources of conflict between board presidents and board members focused on personal agendas, extracurricular activities, personnel and student discipline.

3. The Superintendent

- The mean length of service for district superintendents in the SSGT study was 4.30 years as compared to the NSBA study of 5.48 years.
- 80.3 percent of the board presidents reported that the district superintendent was hired from outside the school district.
- 99.1 percent of the board presidents believe the district superintendent is qualified for the position.
- 88.0 percent of the board presidents indicated that their school board accepted the policy recommendations of the district superintendent 80-100 percent of the time.
- The major issues in the district superintendent's annual evaluation were: (1) academic accountability, (2) curriculum/pedagogical reform, (3) relationships with community, faculty, board members and administrators.
- Conflict with the district superintendent usually focused on the superintendent's contract.

4. Policy Issues

- 97.0 percent of the board presidents reported that the board of education needed additional training in roles and responsibilities.
- 95.2 percent of the board presidents reported they were prepared to meet the standards of No Child Left Behind legislation.

5. Demographics

- 93.1 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study reported themselves as Caucasian.
- Over 50 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study have college or graduate degrees and professional occupations.
- 94.1 percent of the board presidents reported an annual household income of \$50,000 to \$100,000.
- 97.3 percent of the board presidents have or have had children who attended public school.

Introduction, Methodology, & Literature Review

The United States constitution relegates the governance of education to the states. The states in turn created local school boards comprised of lay individuals with the authority to govern public education (Johnson, 1988). Since their inception school boards have provided forums in which individuals and the public have debated the issues of education. School boards are the only public forum where private and public interests are publicly debated (Lindle, 1998). These boards were founded on the principle that school boards provide credibility to the public as well as stewardship and direction to the local education effort (Resnick, 1999).

Local school boards are comprised of individuals who nearly all have been elected and have been given authority by the state to govern the local schools (Johnson, 1988). This system of school governance originated more than two centuries ago in the Massachusetts system of local governance by selectmen (Carol et al, 1986, Danzberger, 1992, 1994). As the population of that state increased, the governance structure changed. Massachusetts' form of government spread throughout the other colonies and helped to define the current local board format (Danzberger, 1992).

From mid-19th century to early 20th century, the number of school districts and school boards increased. As the number grew so did the variation in their governance structures. Yet they still primarily provided direction to public education (Carol et al, 1986; Johnson, 1988). As the twentieth century closed, the number of larger school districts was growing, while the number of small districts was declining leading to an overall decline in the number of school

districts in the nation (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2000). In 1936 there were 118,892 school districts with an average of 218 students; by 1997 only 15,178 districts averaging 3,005 students existed (Howell, 2005). Currently, approximately 95,000 board members govern local education (Resnick, 1999).

One recent study, *School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, by the National School Board Association surveyed board members on a variety of issues and characteristics in an effort to provide a greater understanding of board members and issues faced by school boards. This particular study disaggregated its data by grouping school districts into three categories: large districts – 25,000 or more students, middle size districts – 5,000 to 24,999 students, and small districts – less than 5,000 students (NSBA, 2002). This research design provided additional insight into the less studied small school districts.

This study, *Small School Governance in Texas*, drew upon the questions and issues from the NSBA study in an effort to understand the issues and functions of school boards in Texas that govern 500 or less students as well as to draw comparisons and contrasts where appropriate to the NSBA study. The project's research revolved around five themes: school board elections, school board service, the superintendent, policy issues, and demographics.

Minimal research has been conducted on small school districts. A review of the literature revealed scarce data in the five themes of the research project as well as governance in small districts in general.

School Board Elections

School boards provide the means by which the stakeholders of each community can have a voice in how the schools are governed and how the children are educated. School board politics are not near as dramatic as congressional or presidential elections. Rather, these elections are low-budgeted operations that are for the most part noncompetitive and rely on friends and family for their funding source (Howell, 2005). A link also appears to exist between socioeconomic level and participation in the school board political process. Those who participate in the process are usually more affluent, more interested in politics, have a greater political efficacy or effectiveness and experience a personal obligation to participate (Verba & Nie, 1972; Nie & Verba, 1975; Verba, et al, 1978).

School Board Service

Individuals usually seek membership on a school board as the result of having children in school (Wait, 1996). Martin (2001) reported the same motivation for individuals seeking the office of board president in New Zealand. These individuals, whether American or New Zealander provide an important service to their communities yet little is available in the literature about the traits and qualities of school board members (Kennedy & Barker, 1987).

Unlike their counterparts in the nineteenth century who governed virtually all aspects of public education, today board members share the political arena with an assortment of local, state, and federal players. Most everything school board members consider is subject to some type of regulation (Howell, 2005).

Howell (2005) identified three trends in public education that have contributed to the decline in school board powers. The first is that states have assumed primary responsibility for the operations of public schools thus abridging or eliminating local board authority. Second, states have empowered parents by initiatives such as vouchers, school choice and charter schools. Finally, The No Child Left Behind Act's accountability standards have increased the federal influence over local schools.

Since the local school board is the local legal agent of the state, it must comply with both state and federal mandates. Yet it must also be responsive and answerable to its local constituents and responsive to the needs of the students. It must react to the changes in K-12 public education by using visionary leadership (American Association of School Administrators & National School Board Association [AASA & NSBA], 1980). Michael Resnick, associate executive director of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), surmised this situation, "As the role of the state expanded in terms of standards, assessments and the implementation criteria it establishes, one might argue that the role or need for school boards has diminished. It is this increased state intervention, however, that makes the creditability brought through community self-governance even more important." (Resnick, 1999).

More specific to the topic of this report is that of the needs of small rural school districts in adapting to the changes to state and federal mandates. As mentioned earlier the number of rural school districts has been declining. Small towns and communities limit privacy, which in turn makes board members more

visible in the communities where they work and live (Kennedy & Barker, 1987; Martin, 2001). Curtis Van Alfen (1992) of Brigham Young University appositively characterized the role of boards in small districts when he opined, "Education in the rural school districts of America have a unique opportunity to strengthen education through empowering various constituencies. Because the rural districts are close to these constituencies both in physical proximity and in value consensus, they have the ideal setting for empowerment. The local school board is the key to this opportunity. The board of education in a rural community must focus its time and attention on forming these linkages. The stumbling block for successful rural school boards are [is] too few linkages."

The Superintendent

The superintendent is a critical factor in having effective school board governance (Land, 2002). However, little information is available in the literature about the traits and qualities of successful school superintendents (Kennedy & Barker, 1987). Kennedy and Barker (1987) did however; identify eight traits that small school boards desired in superintendents: living in the community, high moral standards, understanding the implications of living in a small community, use of technology, grant writing, conservative political view, married male and family living in the area. Because the local board is accountable to its community, it must ensure that the superintendent is also continuously assessing all conditions impacting education (AASA & NSBA, 1980).

When problems arise between the superintendent and the board it is usually associated with communication issues (Grady & Bryant, 1991). Kennedy

and Barker (1987) also identified communication as a key skill boards expected of superintendents. Superintendents on the other hand did not perceive communication as their most pressing issue; lack of finances was first in their minds (Ferre, et al., 1988).

Policy Issues

School boards have perceived their role in matters of pedagogy as one not to impose their views but yield to the professional educators. They operated under a supportive role by approving the school budget, dealing with constituents, receiving reports, campaigning on bond issues, and handling sensitive political issues (Resnick, 1999). However, today boards confront increasing number of state and federal mandates dictating learning goals and restricting flexibility (Lashway, 2002). The growth of mandates has reduced the school board's control on a variety of issues while the state and federal government expands their governance in education issues (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Resnick, 1999; Kirst, 1994; and Todras, 1993).

Major issues that rural school boards confront are: adequate school monies, student achievement, improving the curriculum, securing and retaining teachers, school morale, working with the community and school consolidation (Kennedy & Barker, 1987). The accountability movement has created a consensus on one of these issues. It has made student achievement the ultimate measure of educational value (Lashway, 2002).

This mandate, student achievement, has presented boards with some challenges. Federal and state curriculum mandates have expanded required

instruction while the amount of time available for instruction has remained constant (AASA & NASB, 1980). This mandate has posed other challenges. Curriculum standards are established at the state level and translated into instruction at the local level. This places the school board in an ill-defined mediating role since boards have historically taken a hands-off approach to instructional decisions (Lashway, 2002).

Demographics

The last seventy years has brought about many changes in boards. The number of school districts dropped from 118,892 in 1936 to 15,178 districts in 1997 while during the same period the average student membership in the districts rose from 218 students to 3,005, which significantly impacted the structure and nature of school districts. The 28 cities in 1893 with over 100,000 residents had boards that averaged 21.5 members. A short twenty years later the average board had shrunk to approximately seven members. It has remained steady at that size ever since (Howell, 2005). Even with these substantial changes, two-thirds of the school districts in the United States are still considered rural and approximately one-third of the public school students attend these school districts.

Not only has the organization of school districts and boards changed but also so have the demographics of their students. Between 1975 and 2003 the percentage of high school students who were identified as White declined from 80.5% to 64.1%. The percentage of students who were identified as Hispanic

rose from 5.4% to 13.7% an increase of about 250% in the same time period (NCES, 2005).

The demographics of the board members themselves have also changed. Between 1972 and 1997 the percent of women school board members increase from 12% to 44%(Alvey, et al, 1986; Gaul, et al, 1994; & Weisenburger, et al, 1995; NSBA, 1997). The percentage of Whites on boards declined from 95.2% to 86.9% while minority representation rose from 4.8% to 13.1% (NSBA, 1997). Also of interest was that from 1986 to 1997 the percentage of board members from rural areas declined from 27.6% to 22.2% (NSBA, 1997).

I. School Board Elections

Historically, school board elections have been viewed as non-partisan in the United States. As the political and social milieus of America continue to become more diverse, are the politics of local school boards in small school districts evolving? An examination of board dimensions, election dimensions, demographics of the school board and political ideology can provide insight to this question.

Board Dimensions

Are elections still non-partisan today? How are board members elected? What is the gender composition of school boards? How active are interested constituents? What are the sources of campaign funds? How much are spent on campaigns? What is the ideology of small district board members?

Table 1: How School Board Members Are Elected

Elected at-large	88.0 percent
Elected by ward	3.1 percent
Appointed	5.4 percent
Single member district	2.3percent
Other	1.6 percent

n = 129

Ninety three percent of the board presidents participating in this study, *Small School Governance in Texas: Practices and Challenges of Districts with 500 or Less Students* (SSGT), reported being elected to their position on the local school board. This number mirrors the 96.7% of small school board members who reported that they were elected to their positions in the *School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century* study conducted by the National School Boards Association (Hess, 2002). While the SSGT study focused on Texas school districts with 500 or less students, the NSBA study was nationwide and served a broader range of school sizes. The NSBA study which is referred to throughout this report, disaggregated its results based on three district enrollment groups: 1) large districts – districts with 25,000+ students, 2) medium districts – districts with 5,000 to 24,999 students, and 3) small districts – districts with less than 5,000 students. Clearly both studies confirm that the election process is the accepted norm for obtaining a seat on a school board.

While a strong similarity existed in acquiring a position on a school board through election a difference was evident in how individuals were elected to the school board. In this study 88.0 percent of the Texas respondents reported being elected at large. This is in stark contrast to the 56.7 percent rate for all districts and 45.6 percent rate for small districts elected at-large in the NSBA

study. Although Texas school districts have the option to have single member districts (TEC § 11.052), it appears that the much smaller communities in the Texas study find no need to subdivide their school districts into wards or single member districts. This phenomenon in small school districts was also reported in the NSBA study without clear evidence as to why it exists. Could it possibly be a function of population density?

Table 2: Term of Office

Three years	98.4 percent
Four years	0.8 percent
Five years	0.8 percent
Other	0.0 percent

N = 129

A significant difference existed between the small schools of Texas and the schools in the NSBA study with regard to the length of a board member’s term. Texas school districts with 500 or less students were nearly unanimous in having three-year terms of office with 98.4 percent of the districts reporting using three-year terms even though state law allows districts to have either three or four year terms (TEC §11.059). In contrast, only 30.4% of the schools in the NSBA study reported having terms of three or fewer years. The most frequent term of office reported in the national study, four years, was reported by 63.2 percent of the districts (Hess, 2002). Only one percent of the Texas schools reported a four-year term in the SSGT study.

Table 3: Size of School Board

Three member	3.3 percent
Five member	1.6 percent
Seven member	95.9 percent
Other	1.6 percent

N = 123

Ninety-six percent of the school boards in the SSGT study were comprised of seven members. Texas state law (TEC § 11.051) established seven members as the size of school boards thus explaining why this size of board is so prevalent. The same law, however, “grandfathered” existing school boards of three and five members. The national study indicated that 44.7 percent of all school districts had 7-8 member boards of education. In the SSGT study only 4.9 percent of the boards had five members or less while in the NSBA study 0.9 percent indicated a board structure of less than five members. Also 36.9 percent in the NSBA study indicted a board size of 5-6 members.

Table 4: Representation of Women on Texas School Boards With 500 or Less Students

Number of Women on the School Board	Percentage of Boards
0	21.6 percent
1	24.1 percent
2	30.2 percent
3	16.4 percent
4	4.3 percent
5	2.6 percent
6	0.0 percent
7	0.0 percent

n=117

The SSGT data reported that 21.6 percent of the school boards have no female board members. In addition almost one-half or 46.6 percent indicted that they had two or three female board members on the board of education. Therefore over three fourths of the boards in small Texas school districts with five hundred or less students in attendance have a minimum of one female board member.

The percent of women school board members at the national level increased from approximately 12 percent to 44 percent between 1972 and 1997 (Alvery, et.al., 1986; Gual, et.al.; Weisenburger, et.al., 1995; NSBA, 1997). The small school districts in the NSBA study reported that 36.7 of the school board members were women. The NSBA data indicated that as school districts became smaller that the percentage of female board members decreased with approximately 63 percent of the small school board members being male. The SSGT data indicated that approximately 76.9 percent of the board presidents were male. It is evident from both studies that the majority of board members in small districts are male.

Election Dimensions

Are school board elections competitive? What constituent groups are active in school board elections? How much does it cost to win a school board election? What are the sources of campaign funds? What are the future election plans of board members? What issues influenced individuals to seek election? These questions lead to an examination of election issues associated with school boards.

Table 5: Competitiveness of Elections

Very competitive	3.9 percent
Somewhat competitive	13.2 percent
Occasionally competitive	73.6 percent
Not competitive	9.3 percent

N = 129

Respondent's perceptions support the impression that few school board elections are actively contested in small Texas school districts. Nearly three-

quarters of the board presidents reported that elections were only occasionally competitive. The data appears to indicate that most of the electorate is either content with the way school districts are being led, are apathetic about school board elections, or there is a lack of individuals willing to serve on the school board. The NSBA study reported that 46.7% of the school elections were occasionally competitive. This rate was consistent between the large, medium and small districts in that study. The NSBA study reported “very competitive” 8.7 percent and “somewhat competitive” 27.2 percent competitiveness numbers, twice those in the SSGT study (e.g. 3.9 percent and 13.2 percent). Since the SSGT study defined small district as those with 500 or less students, it appears that competitiveness in elections is limited in the smaller districts. The SSGT data confirms the NSBA study that as school districts become smaller the competitiveness of elections becomes less.

Table 6: Constituents Groups Active in School Board Elections

Parent groups	72.9 percent
Other	21.7 percent
Teacher associations	17.8 percent
Business groups	15.5 percent
Religious organizations	8.5 percent
Ethnic/racial groups	4.7 percent
School reform coalitions	3.9 percent

N =129

While the board presidents reported a much less competitive atmosphere for elections in small Texas school districts, 72.9 percent of them identified parent groups as the most likely type of group to be active in elections. “Other”, teacher associations and business groups distantly followed parent groups as active constituent groups. Again this was significantly different from the groups identified in the national study. While only 17.8 percent of the board presidents in this study identified teacher associations as an active constituent group, in the NSBA study, 79.5 percent of the board members of districts with more than 25,000 reported them as an active group as did 67.6 percent of the respondents from districts of 5,000-24,999 students, and 43.9 percent of those from districts with less than 5,000 students in the NSBA study.

It appears that as school district enrollment declines and teacher numbers are reduced that it is less likely that teacher groups will be active in the political process. This decrease in active involvement of teacher groups in school board elections appears to indicate that teachers and other stakeholders have closer and possible multiple role relationships (e.g. relative, employee, neighbor, etc.) with board members due to the small size of the district’s community. Another possible explanation for the significant difference in the involvement of teacher associations in board elections is the fact that Texas is a right to work state. State employees do not have the right to collectively bargain or to strike (Texas Codes Ann. Title 3 §101.003).

The SSGT data supports the NSBA data in that ethnic/racial groups are moderately to minimally active in school board elections. There is also likely to

be more casual conversation between the various community groups negating or making active campaigning more socially awkward.

Table 7: Funds Expended by Respondents on Their Board Campaign

\$0 - \$999	100.0 percent
\$1,000 - \$2,499	0.0 percent
\$2,500 - \$4,999	0.0 percent
\$5,000 - \$7,499	0.0 percent
\$7,500 and above	0.0 percent
N = 129	

How much does it cost to win a school board seat in small school districts in Texas? All of the board presidents responding to the SSGT survey reported spending less than \$1,000 on their campaigns, similarly in the NSBA study, 94.7 percent of the board members of school districts with less than 5,000 reported spending less than \$1,000. In the NSBA study board election campaigns that expended less than \$1,000 declined sharply as the size of the district increased. Only 63.8 percent of the board members of medium districts (5,000-24,999) reported spending less than \$1,000. The rate declined again in the large districts (25,000+) to 37.6 percent. The SSGT data affirmed the national study’s data reflecting that the smaller the school district the more likely the amount spent on campaigns would be less.

Table 8: Sources of Campaign Funds

Source of funds	SSGT Percent of funds	NSBA All Districts
Personal wealth	79.8 percent	67.1 percent
Family and friends	5.4 percent	52.1 percent
Employee organizations	0.0 percent	21.9 percent

Business groups	0.0 percent	27.0 percent
Religious organizations	0.0 percent	7.5 percent
Other	14.7 percent	N/A

N = 129

Once again there was a significant difference in the sources of campaign funds from the small school districts in Texas and what was reported about the districts in the NSBA study. The SSGT study reported that personal wealth accounted for 79.8 percent of the campaign funds in the districts with 500 or less students in Texas. In the NSBA study 67.1 percent of the board members listed personal wealth as a campaign fund source. More significantly, 52.1 percent of the board members in the national study reported receiving campaign funds from family members and friends compared to only 5.4 percent in the Texas study. What was surprising to the researchers was the absence of business groups and religious organizations as sources of campaign funds in the smaller districts in Texas. Again this is likely associated with a smaller business community and the social nature of these small communities where word of mouth can be a powerful source of campaign activity.

Table 9: Future Election Plans

Yes	55.8 percent
No	10.9 percent
Undecided	33.3 percent

N = 129

Board presidents who indicated they had future election plans were more than five to one prepared to seek reelection when compared to the one-third of the board presidents who declared they had no future election plans. This ratio

is significantly greater than the approximately two to one ratio in the large, medium and small districts in the NSBA study. It is evident that the board presidents are content in their civic duty and received personal satisfaction in performing this public service. The one third of the board presidents in the SSGT study who were undecided about their future election plans was similar to the 34.1 percent undecided rate reported in the national study.

Table 10: Issues By Themes that Influenced Board Members to Seek Election

Themes	Number of Responses
<i>Service</i>	108
Community	56
Students	31
School	21
<i>Motivation</i>	72
Family and friends	21

Support of superintendent	19
Board members request	14
Church groups	12
Displeased with the administration	06
Teacher groups	02
<i>Academic</i>	33
Curriculum	18
Testing	15
<i>Non-academic</i>	31
Finances	12
Facilities	12
Personnel	02
Athletics	02
Buses	01
Lack of public interest	01
Consolidation	01
<i>Board</i>	14
Turmoil	07
Policy	03
Politics	02
Appointed to position	02
<i>Other</i>	17
None	
Nonsense	17
	04

What themes motivated individuals to run for the local school board? This question was addressed in the SSGT study but not in the NSBA study. Board presidents were able to submit up to three issues in response to this question. The issues were then clustered around six themes: service, motivation, academic, non-academic, board, and other. Service and motivation were by far the two most referenced themes among the responses provided by the board presidents. Board presidents are primarily motivated to serve their community, the students and the schools. Again the smaller community with its' closer

relationships appears to strongly influence a board candidate's motivation. Encouragement from family and friends as well a support of the superintendent, request from board members and church groups also influenced board presidents to seek election. Other major areas motivating board members to seek election were curriculum and testing mandates, school district finances and facilities, and board turmoil.

Ideology

Are board presidents liberal, conservative or moderate? What, if any, political party affiliation do board presidents have? Answers to these questions can assist in shaping an understanding of local school board election dynamics as well as the political philosophy of board presidents.

Table 11: Political Persuasion of Board Presidents

Political Persuasion	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small 500 or less	NSBA All Districts
Liberal	0.0 percent	12.9 percent	15.9 percent
Conservative	79.3 percent	40.9 percent	35.7 percent
Moderate	20.7 percent	41.4 percent	44.5 percent

n=116

Elected bodies such as school boards, reflect the collective view of their constituents; hence, the importance of understanding the political tendencies of board members. This study suggests that school boards in small Texas school districts are overwhelmingly “conservative”. Approximately 79 percent of the board presidents identified themselves as conservative in the SSGT study as compared to the 40.9 percent in the national study. About 21 percent identified

themselves as “moderate” while not one board member described himself or herself as “liberal”.

The NSBA study reported that in small districts 40.9 percent of board members described themselves as conservative, 41.4 percent moderate, and 12.9 percent as liberal. The NSBA study indicates, as school districts become smaller political persuasion shifts to the right and adopts a more conservative posture. The SSGT study of much smaller school districts than the national study, 500 or less students versus 5,000 or less students, supports this trend in that the boards in the much smaller districts possessed a much more conservative political view.

Table 12: Political Party Preference of Board Presidents

Political Party Preference	Percentage of Board Presidents
Democrat	19.8 percent
Republican	71.6 percent
Independent	6.9 percent
Other	1.7 percent

n=116

Since 79.3 percent of the board presidents identified themselves as conservative, it was no surprise that 71.6 percent of them identified most with the Republican Party. This is further supported by the voting pattern in the rural areas of Texas in the last decade or so. The Democratic Party, long the dominant political party in Texas, garnered only 19.8 percent of the board presidents identifying themselves with that party. It is evident that “conservative Republican” would be an accurate description of the ideology of a majority of the board presidents of Texas school districts with 500 or fewer students.

II. School Board Service

There are many dimensions to school board service. Among them are time demands and length of service, residency, committee use and pressing issues. Understanding these dimensions of school board service assists in understanding how small school districts function.

Residency and Commitment

How long have board presidents resided in their communities? How long do they serve as a school board members? How much time is required to perform board duties? Answers to these questions provide insight into the residency and commitment as they relate to board service.

Table 13: Length of Residency in the Community

Less than 2 years	1.6 percent
2 – 5 years	3.2 percent
6 – 10 years	7.2 percent
11 – 15 years	13.6 percent
16 – 20 years	16.0 percent
More than 20 years	60.0 percent
N = 125	

Board presidents tend to be long time community members. Three out of five board presidents had lived in their district for more than twenty years. Nine out of ten had resided in their districts for eleven or more years. The electorate in these small districts appears to be more comfortable in having their schools governed by representatives who had long ties with the community. In fact, the longer the board member's ties with the community, the more appealing it was to the electorate.

Table 14: Length of Service as a School Board Member

Years of service	Current Board
0 to less than 2 years	0.9 percent
2 to 5 years	31.6 percent
6 to 10 years	56.4 percent
11 to 15 years	5.1 percent
16 to 20 years	3.4 percent
More than 20 years	0.9 percent

n=117

Over half of the board presidents reported serving six to ten years on their current board. Since 98.4 percent of the board presidents reported serving three-year terms (Table 2), these board presidents have served on the board for two to four terms. There is a significant decrease in the percentage of board presidents who have eleven or more years of tenure on the board compared to those with two to ten years of service on the board. In the NSBA study, less than one-half of the board members had six or more years of experience on the board compared to two-thirds of the board presidents in the SSGT study. It is evident that the board presidents in the small school districts in Texas are much more likely to provide their districts with an institutional memory than those in the national study. The longevity of school board presidents on small school districts boards of education in Texas gives evidence of their leadership abilities and acceptance by the electorate.

Table 15: Monthly Time Required to Perform Board Duties

Hours Per Month	Percent of Board Presidents
0 – 10 hours	78.4%
11 – 25 hours	21.6%
26 – 50 hours	1.6%

51 – 70 hours	0.0%
More than 70 hours	0.0%
N = 125	

Board members in the national study reported spending substantially more time on board business than the board presidents in the SSGT study. In the SSGT study seventy-eight percent of the board presidents reported spending less than ten hours a month on school business. Forty-four percent of board members of small schools in the NSBA study reported spending zero to ten hours a month on board business. Likewise, 21.6 percent of the board presidents in the SSGT study reported spending 11 to 25 hours of time on board business compared to 39.3 percent in the NSBA study.

The level of time commitment of school board presidents in the small school districts in Texas was in even greater contrast to the board members in the large school districts in the NSBA study who reported spending three to four hours a day during the work week on board business. It is evident that being a board president in a Texas school district with 500 or less students is a part-time commitment.

Committees and Issues

Do school boards in small Texas school districts of 500 or less students frequently use committees? If committees are used, what types of committees are formed? What are the most important issues? The answers to these questions can provide additional insight into the governance of small school districts.

Table 16: Frequency of Committee Use by School Boards

Extensive	3.0 percent
Frequent	6.1 percent
Some	69.7 percent
Never	23.2 percent

n = 99a

Nearly one-fourth of the board presidents reported their boards never use committees. Seven out of ten said they only used committees some of the time. This indicates that the vast majority of school board business is conducted by the board en banc.

Table 17: Types of Committees Used by School Boards

Committees Used	SSGT Study (500 or less students)	NSBA Study (5000 or less students)
Budget	70.8 percent	71.8 percent
Facilities	50.0 percent	66.2 percent
Student Achievement	30.6 percent	50.5 percent
Safety	12.5 percent	44.1 percent
Other	11.1 percent	N/A
Policy	11.1 percent	68.3 percent
Government Issues	9.7 percent	51.3 percent
Personnel	9.7 percent	60.4 percent
Technology	8.3 percent	59.0 percent
Community & Public Relations	6.9 percent	32.2 percent
Drug Testing	6.9 percent	N/A

n=72

The 78.8 percent of board president’s in this study who reported that their board used committees, were given the opportunity to list up to three types of committees used by the board. When boards did use committees the top two reasons were for budget and facilities issues. These reasons were the same top two reasons reported for all districts in the NSBA study. The remainder of the issues being assigned to a committee by small school districts in Texas lagged

significantly behind the boards in the national study. This further reinforces the notion that school business in small Texas school districts is more likely to be conducted by the school board en banc compared to the districts in the national study.

Table 18: Most Pressing Issues in School Districts

Budget/finance	97.6 percent
Declining enrollment	78.4 percent
Student achievement	66.4 percent
Regulations	15.2 percent
Special education	8.0 percent
Class or school size	6.4 percent
Parent/community support	4.8 percent
Consolidation	4.0 percent
Other	4.0 percent
Technology	4.0 percent
Discipline	3.2 percent
Teacher certification/shortage	3.2 percent
Drugs/alcohol	0.8 percent

n=125

What issues do Texas board presidents in districts with 500 or less students view as most pressing? Like his or her counterpart in the NSBA study, nearly every board president selected budget/finance as a pressing issue. This was not surprising given the current Texas legislature's inability to pass a school finance bill in both the 2005 regular and special sessions. At the writing of this report, the Texas Supreme Court is hearing a case, which will decide if Texas is operating an illegal school funding system. A group of 33 school districts is arguing that Texas inadequately funds its schools and has created an illegal statewide property tax (Fort Worth Star Telegram, 2005).

Declining enrollment was also identified as the second most pressing concern by over three-fourths of the board presidents. This is not surprising

since the state funding formulas in Texas are tethered to average daily attendance. With declining enrollment, schools receive less revenue from the state thereby creating increased budgetary pressures. Texas school funding formulas also put pressure on districts to consolidate as their enrollment contracts. Through the years, many smaller districts have consolidated, either out of necessity or because of incentives offered by the state. On the other hand, efforts to force consolidation have been widely opposed by Texans (retrieved from www.window.state.tx.us/tpr/atg/atged/atged03.html). Declining enrollment was not identified as a significant concern in the NSBA study.

Texas has been one of the lead states in the student academic accountability movement that has swept across our nation and the Texas academic accountability system has been the blueprint for portions of the No Child Left Behind Act. Therefore it was no surprise to find student academic accountability near the top of the Texas small school districts board presidents' concern list. Coming in third in the list of pressing issues, student achievement completes the trio of concerns clustered significantly close atop the list of concerns for school board presidents.

Student achievement came in a close second to budgeting/funding in the national study. Student achievement started becoming a major concern of school boards in the 1990s as the accountability movement continued its demands on schools (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). Although student achievement was high on the concerns list in both studies, it was identified at a much higher rate, 97.2 percent, in the national study compared to 66.4 percent in this study. One

possible explanation for its lower identification rate in the SSGT study is the social and political dynamics of very small school districts. Once again the close-knit relationship between the school and the community in these small districts increases the opportunities for early intervention in academic concerns.

Another intriguing discovery concerning pressing issues was that discipline, teacher certification/shortage and drugs/alcohol were at the bottom of the concern lists by board presidents in the SSGT study. Each of these three issues receives ongoing widespread media attention at both the national and state level. In the national study each of these issues were identified by over 60 percent of the respondents as pressing issues. Yet these same issues finished last in the concerns of board presidents with an identification rate of one to three percent. Why? Perhaps community and student demographics play a role in reduced concern by the board presidents of small school districts or small districts school boards do not talk publicly about these concerns.

Relationships and Conflicts

What is the relationship between board members and the board president? Where does input originate from in the development of board policy? What are the sources of conflict among board members? Answers to questions like these will further reveal the political dynamics of governance in small school districts.

Table 19: Status of Relationships between Board Members and the Board President

Positive	91.2 percent
Somewhat positive	9.6 percent
Somewhat negative	0.8 percent
Negative	0.0 percent

n=125

Nine out of ten board presidents reported a positive relationship with board members. It is worth noting that only one percent of the respondents indicated a “somewhat negative” or “negative” relationship. This indicates that for the most part, the school boards function in a collegial manner as they confront the issues and concerns of governing their school districts.

Table 20: Sources of Input on the Development of Board Policy

Variety of interest groups	54.4 percent
Defers to superintendent	29.6 percent
Two competing factions	8.0 percent
Others	7.2 percent
Dominated by community elites	3.2 percent

n=125

Ninety-two percent of the sources of input in the development of board policy come from a variety of interest groups, competing factions or deferment to the superintendent. McCarty & Ramsey’s (1971) research indicated that school boards, communities, and superintendent types fall into one of four categories. A recent study by Littleton and Vornberg (2004) using McCarty & Ramsey’s research examined the same link between community type and school board governance type in Texas school districts under governance audits by the TEA. These studies depict both a community type and school board governance type. Thus the question is raised, does a type of community and school board governance type give evidence of how school boards take policy input? SSGT data confirms that over 60 percent of the source of policy input for small school boards in Texas originates from a variety of interest groups or competing factions. The other major source of policy input for boards of education emanated

from the superintendent. The district superintendent was the source of policy input almost 30 percent of the time in the SSGT data.

Table 21: Sources of Conflict Among Board Members

Conflict Source	Number of Responses
No conflict	56
Personal agendas	17
Extracurricular activities	16
Personnel	11
Student discipline	10
Finances	08
Superintendent	07
Community politics	07

n=123

Over half of the board presidents reported no conflict among board members. When conflict was reported personal agendas and extracurricular activities were the most frequent identified sources of conflict followed by personnel and student discipline. These data indicate that board members are: 1) able to resolve issues of conflict previous to board meetings or 2) able to democratically resolve issues during discussion at board meetings.

III. The Superintendent

An important function of school boards is selecting and supervising the district's superintendent. The superintendent is the only employee the school board directly supervises. The relationship of the board and superintendent

strongly influences the school districts culture and climate. An examination of the hiring of superintendents, relations and perceptions, policy issues, and evaluation and conflict as these relate to the relationship between the board and the superintendent is in order.

Hiring & Service

Where do boards locate their superintendents? Do they hire from within or outside of the district? Answers to these questions begin the examination of the school board and superintendent relationship.

Table 22: Length of Service of the Superintendent to the School District

Years with the District	Number of Superintendents
Less than 1 year	1.9 percent
1 year	7.1 percent
2 years	8.9 percent
3 years	25.0 percent
4 years	18.8 percent
5 years	19.6 percent
6 years	4.5 percent
7 years	2.7 percent
8 years	1.9 percent
9 years	0.9 percent
10 or more years	8.9 percent

n = 112

Approximately three out of five superintendents have three to five years of service inside the district according to the respondents. There was a sharp drop in the number of superintendents who had six to ten years of service within the district. The mean length of service in the SSGT study, 4.30 years, is more than a year shorter than the mean of 5.48 years of service reported in the NSBA study. In general superintendents have a shorter tenure in the district than the board president (Table 14); therefore, the board president's wealth of information

regarding the district’s institutional memory becomes an invaluable asset for the superintendent.

Table 23: Are Superintendents Promoted from Within Or Hired from Outside the District?

Promoted from within	19.7 percent
Hired from outside	80.3 percent

n = 122

Four out of five of the school board presidents reported that their current superintendent was hired from outside of the district. This rate compares to 66.2 percent in all districts and 71.5 percent in small districts in the NSBA study. Both the SSGT and the NSBA data indicate that over 70 percent of the time superintendents in small districts are hired from outside the district. Perhaps this is due to the small in-district administrative staff applicant pool for the superintendent’s position.

Relationships and perceptions

What is the relationship between the board president and superintendent? How do board presidents perceive the superintendent’s abilities and professional preparation?

Table 24: Relationship between School Board President and the Superintendent

Positive	86.1 percent
Somewhat positive	14.8 percent
Somewhat negative	0.0 percent

Negative n = 122	0.0 percent
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Approximately five of six board presidents have a positive relationship with the superintendent. No board president reported a “negative” or “somewhat negative” relationship with the superintendent. This data indicates that school board presidents in small school districts in Texas are able to resolve conflict and effectively govern the school district without damaging the relationship with the superintendent.

**Table 25: Board Presidents Perception
of the Superintendent’s Abilities and Preparation**

Well qualified	66.4 percent
Qualified	33.6 percent
Somewhat qualified	0.8 percent
Not qualified	0.0 percent
N=122	

Board presidents almost unanimously perceive their superintendent as either “qualified” or “well qualified” in their abilities and preparation for their employment position. In fact, two-thirds of the board presidents believed the superintendents to be “well qualified”. This perception of the superintendent’s abilities and preparation is likely to be a significant factor in the positive perception of the relationship between the board president and superintendent.

Policy Issues

How do board members respond to superintendent policy recommendations? What issues are associated with the superintendent’s evaluation? One of the major responsibilities of the board of education is the formation, adoption, and implementation of policy. In this section of the report

data will indicate who initiates policy and how do board members respond to the superintendent policy recommendations.

Table 26: Sources of Board Policy Initiation

Superintendent	83.9 percent
Superintendent and Board	09.1 percent
Board member	04.8 percent
Other	02.2 percent

n = 122

The Texas Association of School Boards and the Texas Education Agency along with the Texas legislature are the primary sources of policy initiation for Texas public schools. Although board's of education are legally charged with the responsibility of approving policy it is interesting that approximately 84 percent of the board president's reported that policy recommendations were initiated by the district superintendent. In small school districts board members frequently defer to the expertise of the superintendent to write and recommend policy.

Superintendents may use various sources to assist with policy formulation (e.g.—state school board associations, state departments of education, legal counsel, and district staff). Only five percent of the school board members indicated that board presidents initiated policy. Either lack of time or lack of technical expertise in writing policy or both characteristics contributed to the lack of policy initiation by board members.

Nine percent of the respondents indicated that it was a joint effort between the administration and board members on policy initiation. This would seem to indicate that the constraints listed above prevent collective policy initiation or that a collegial atmosphere necessary to initiate policy had not been created. In many

instances the collaboration among board members or board members and superintendent occurred after the introduction of the policy recommendation at school board meetings.

Table 27: Boards Acceptance Rate of Superintendent Policy Recommendations

Range of Acceptance	Board Acceptance Rate
80 to 100 percent	87.7 percent
60 to 79 percent	11.5 percent
40 to 59 percent	1.6 percent
Less than 40 percent	0.0 percent

n = 122

Small school boards have a high acceptance rate for the superintendent's policy recommendations. It is interesting to note that in these data we discover information about micromanagement of the district regarding policy recommendations. In a time when the literature is replete with evidence of the micromanagement of school administrators by school board members (Todras, 1993) it is noteworthy that almost 88.0 percent of the board presidents perceived that their school board members accepted the policy recommendations of the district superintendent 80 to 100 of the time – an indication of a very “hands off” environment. Small school districts value the district superintendent's policy recommendations. None of the respondents reported a range of acceptance less than 40 percent. Although school boards in the SSGT study may discuss and debate the issues involved with a particular policy recommendation they consistently accept the superintendent's policy recommendations.

Evaluation & Conflict

Conflict is inherent in organizational governance as boards of education and superintendents authoritatively allocate resources and values (Kirk & Wirst, 2001). What issues are associated with the superintendent's evaluation? What are the sources of conflict between superintendents and school boards?

Table 28: Issues Associated with Evaluation of the Superintendent by the Board

Issues	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important
District performance on standardized measurements	85 percent	14 percent	2 percent	0 percent
Success of pedagogical or curriculum reforms	56 percent	40 percent	4 percent	0 percent
Relationship with community leaders	59 percent	37 percent	3 percent	1 percent
Relationship with school board	90 percent	10 percent	0 percent	0 percent
Morale of teachers/administrators	90 percent	9 percent	1 percent	0 percent
Parent satisfaction	70 percent	29 percent	1 percent	0 percent
Efforts to upgrade technology	32 percent	63 percent	3 percent	2 percent
Facility management	37 percent	56 percent	6 percent	1 percent
Safety	47 percent	49 percent	3 percent	1 percent
Efforts to address racial/ethnic concerns	15 percent	38 percent	46 percent	1 percent

n = 124

Historically boards of education in school districts have fluctuated between a formal and informal process for the evaluation of the superintendent (Kowalski, 2006). The SSGT data indicates that the standards and assessment movement has brought new accountability to the evaluation process. With state legislatures increasingly mandating standardized curriculum and assessment it has elevated the issues of accountability to the superintendents' evaluation. Blended with this accountability for academic achievement as measured by an assortment of test scores is the pressure for pedagogical and curriculum reform to support increased student achievement.

Relationships with community leaders, school board members, faculty, district administrators and parents are important to school board presidents. Fifty percent or more of the board presidents responded that these relationships are “very important” evaluation issues for the superintendents. The increase in violence in schools, which is usually perceived as a suburban or urban school issue, is also evident in small schools. School board presidents rated this issue as “very important” to “somewhat important” 96 percent of the time when evaluating the superintendent. Although facility management and the upgrading of technology were listed as evaluation issues by board presidents these issues were of lesser importance when compared to the other areas of superintendent evaluations.

It is possible that school board ethnic composition and/or its relationship with the minority/ethnic community has fostered unity within the community since racial/ethnic concerns was ranked as “not very important” by 46 percent and “somewhat important” by 38 percent of the school board presidents when evaluating the superintendent. It is also possible that racial issues are non-discussables in small rural communities.

Table 29: Sources of Conflict between the Superintendent and Board Members

Issues	Number of times identified
No conflict	57
Superintendent’s contract	21
Daily decisions/recommendations	19
Finances	09
Hiring practices	08
Personnel issues	06

School discipline	06
Executive session	06
Extracurricular activities	06
Other issues	28
n= 106	

It is interesting to note that in a time of increased tension between political groups that the majority of respondents indicated no major conflict existed between the school board and the district superintendent. When conflict existed between the superintendent and the school board it was usually associated with the superintendent's contract. Whether this conflict existed at the initial employment stage when the provisions of the superintendent contract were being negotiated or later at the renewal of the superintendent's contract were not clear. In addition no evidence was given as to the specific provisions of the contract that caused conflict and specifically if the issue was the salary of the district's superintendent.

The conflict between board members and the superintendent concerning daily decisions or board agenda recommendations, 19.0 percent, is an expected occurrence when governing a public school system. Much of this conflict is inherent in the democratic control of the school system as represented by the school board and the general public as compared to the professional control of the district as represented by the superintendent, administrative staff and faculty (Kowalski, 2006). This power and control interplay is evident in the day-to-day operations of a school system and in the agenda of school board meetings.

The issues of school finance causing conflict, 9.0 percent, would seem to be focused on the expenditures of the school district. Except for the conflict in

setting a local tax rate, which the school boards in Texas have that power, most revenue sources are beyond the local board of education's control. Consequently when most school districts budgets are 80 to 85 percent personnel costs, 7 to 10 percent fixed costs, the conflicts centers upon how to spend the remaining 5 to 13 percent of district funds. This conflict should be considered normal as multiple perspectives and personal agendas are intermixed in the financial expenditure decision making process.

The next cluster of issues that cause conflict between school board members and the superintendent (i.e.-hiring practices, personnel issues and student school discipline) involved the personal judgment of the superintendent, specifically judgment associated with management decisions by the administration. Frequently the public wants school board members' influence on decisions in operational areas. However, it should be noted that the number of respondents who indicated that these issues were sources of conflict with the district superintendent were minimal when compared to the total number of responses. In addition some minor issues were reported such as vehicles, policies, communication and micromanagement but these should be considered as outliers and as isolated incidents within the respective school districts that reported these as issues of conflict.

IV. Policy Issues

In Texas like most states new board members have training requirements mandated by either state statute or state education agency regulations. One of

the primary goals of this training is in regard to board member roles and responsibilities.

The passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation three years ago signaled a level of federal intervention in state public education unparalleled in the history of the republic (Kowalski, 2006). The initial reaction from educators across the country was one of dismay as to how to implement the provisions of NCLB. Therefore, what policy areas are board members trained in and what areas do they need additional training? Has the federal No Child Left Behind legislation caused policy implementation problems or hiring difficulties?

Table 30: Perception of Board Presidents on the Need of Training on Policy Issues

Policy Issue	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
Board members roles and responsibilities	80 percent	17 percent	4 percent	1 percent
Board and superintendent relations	46 percent	46 percent	7 percent	2 percent
Leadership skills	42 percent	51 percent	7 percent	2 percent
Legal issues	28 percent	66 percent	7 percent	2 percent
Board member accountability	72 percent	22 percent	7 percent	1 percent
Board member communications	26 percent	58 percent	17 percent	0 percent
Budget and resource allocations	38 percent	49 percent	15 percent	0 percent
Community collaboration/partnerships	13 percent	34 percent	48 percent	7 percent

n = 122

Ninety-seven percent of the board presidents responded that board members needed additional training in the area of roles and responsibilities. The relationship between board members and district superintendents is vital to the success of the district. In the SSGT data 94 percent of the board presidents responded that there was a “very useful” to “useful” need for continued training to improve board and superintendent relations.

Although school board members are perceived by the public as leaders within the community and school district, 93 percent of the board presidents responded that it would be “very useful” or “useful” for additional training in leadership skills. It is surprising that additional training in legal issues received only 28 percent as “very useful” and 66 percent as “useful”. Perhaps this indicates that when it comes to legal issues that: (1) school board members have cursory knowledge of school law, (2) board members defer to the experience of the school superintendent or (3) they seek advice from legal counsel.

In an age of high stakes testing and state-wide standards it is not surprising that board members ranked accountability as 72 percent second only to board members roles and responsibilities. Board members are feeling the pressure of state accountability systems and are taking this role seriously.

Communication among board members is crucial to the successful operation of the school board. The SSGT data reported 84 percent of the school board presidents listed communication as an additional training need in the “very useful” or “useful” category. Unfortunately the NSBA study data indicates that board members in smaller school districts are less likely to receive training in communication than their counterparts in the larger school districts.

Budget and resource allocation is one of the major duties of the board of education and the SSGT data indicated that board members need additional training in this area with 87 percent of the respondents reporting a need in the “very useful” category. In most of these school districts with five hundred or less students the business community is likewise very small. This lack of a large

business community may be the reason that this training area has the largest percentage score of 47 percent in the “somewhat useful” category. When combined with the “not useful” data over 50 percent of the board presidents responded that this training area was not a need in their district.

Table 31: No Child Left Behind Implementation Issues

Issue	Yes	No
Is the district prepared to implement the NCLB policies?	95.2 percent	4.8 percent
Is the district having problems hiring faculty/staff to meet NCLB requirements?	24.3 percent	75.7 percent

n=122

At the time of the writing of this report numerous states and local school districts are struggling with the accountability standards under NCLB. The board presidents in Texas indicated by a vast majority, 95.2 percent, that their school district was prepared to meet the standards of NCLB. Perhaps this phenomenon can be explained because Texas academic standards and accountability systems were the “blueprint” for many of the standards in NCLB.

Although these board presidents indicated that implementation of NCLB standards was not a problem one fourth reported that they were having difficulty meeting the NCLB standards of “highly qualified teacher” and “paraprofessional” for classroom aides. Many states have had to address the issue of veteran teachers who entered the profession prior to certification testing requirements. Texas like many other states is using the High Objective Uniform Standard of Evaluation (HOUSE) standards for veteran teachers to become compliant with NCLB’s “highly qualified standards”. Also many states initiated associate degree

or professional training programs to bring current and future classroom aides into compliance with NCLB. The issue of district/staff meeting NCLB standards may be for these districts a more difficult task since small rural school districts have unique challenges attracting teachers and support classroom personnel to their communities. When this factor is combined with the national teacher shortage, teacher compensation and support personnel pay the NCLB requirements only compound the personnel recruitment problems for small school districts.

V. District Demography

Does the demography of small school districts have an impact on school boards? Does the percentage of bond indebtedness reveal the level of community support for the improvement of district facilities? Since funding in Texas is tied to student enrollment and attendance are enrollment fluctuations a concern for the board of education?

Table 32: Current Bonded Indebtedness of Small School Districts in Texas

Percentage of Bonded Indebtedness	Percentage of Districts
0-25 percent	94.8 percent
26-50 percent	2.1 percent
51-75 percent	1.1 percent
76-100 percent	2.1 percent

N=97

Texas has several bond referendum advantages that may address the fact that 94.8 percent of the board presidents surveyed indicated a bonded indebtedness of 0 to 25 percent. These features are: (1) only a simple majority of

50 percent plus one is required to pass bond referendums as compared to many states that require a supermajority of 60% or better for approval, (2) the bond's issued by local districts are guaranteed by the state school land fund which gives the local bonds a better rating and thus a lower interest rate on the bonds for local taxpayers, (3) as funds become available local school districts who pass a bond referendum are allowed to apply for state educational facilities allotment funds which can in many cases pay up to 50 percent of the bonds passed by a local school district, (4) unlike many states that have statutory limits on the amount of indebtedness that local school districts can incur, in Texas those limits do not apply, (5) many states have statutory requirements on the length of pay back on general revenue bonds issued by local districts. In Texas no such statutory requirement exists pertaining to length of the bonds, thus many of these small school districts have bonds that must be paid over thirty plus years (Texas Association of School Boards, 2001). All of these fiduciary features pertaining to bond issues in the Texas increase the ability of local school districts to pass bond issues for facility improvements.

Table 33: School District Student Enrollment

Student Enrollment	Percentage of Small School Districts
Less than 100	8.9 percent
101-200	30.1 percent
201-300	26.0 percent
301-400	19.5 percent
401-500	17.9 percent

n=123

Although the United States contains approximately 14, 860 public school systems it is estimated that almost 80% of those school districts have 1,000 or less students in attendance (Digest of Education Statistics, 2003). Specifically, in Texas there are 502 school districts including private and charter schools but of this number only 323 are public school districts that have less than 500 or fewer students in enrollment. This target population of 323 school districts represents 31% of the school districts but only 2.8% of the student population (Texas Education Agency, 2003).

Of the 764 school districts that responded to the NSBA survey, 384 of the respondents were from school districts with less than 5,000 students in enrollment. In contrast the largest response rate in this study was the school districts with 101-200 students with 30.1 percent. This was closely followed by districts with 201-300 students with a 26.0 percent response rate and 301-400 students with a response rate of 19.5 percent. Although the NSBA national study identified small school districts as 5,000 students or less in Texas because of population demographics small school districts are those identified by this study as those school districts with 500 or less students in average daily attendance.

VI. Board President Demography

The leadership position of the school board president has a direct influence on the governance structure and functionality of the board. What are the general characteristics of age, gender, and race regarding board presidents?

How do board president demographics impact school board governance? These and other such research questions are described in this section of the report.

Age, Gender & Race

Table 34: Age of School Board Presidents

Age of Board Presidents	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small District (500 or less)
Less than 20 years	0.0 percent	N/A
20 to 29 years	0.0 percent	0.3 percent
30 to 39 years	3.4 percent	7.3 percent
40 to 49 years	60.5 percent	48.9 percent
50 to 59 years	31.9 percent	30.4 percent
60 or more years	4.2 percent	13.2 percent

n=119

The National School Board Association research listed the ages for all school board members while the SSGT project identified the age of only the school board president. It is interesting to note that in the NSBA study and this research project that the ages of 40-49 and 50-59 were the predominant age patterns in both studies. The data from both studies indicates that the majority of school board members and school board presidents are between the ages of 40-59. The NSBA study indicates that in general the board members in small districts were older than the board presidents in the SSGT study.

Table 35: Gender of Board Presidents

Gender	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small 500 or less	NSBA Medium 5,000-24,999	NSBA Large 25,000+
Male	82.4 percent	63.3 percent	60.1 percent	55.6 percent
Female.	17.6 percent	36.7 percent	39.9 percent	44.4 percent

n=116

The National School Board Association study identified in small school districts with less than 5,000 students that 63.3 percent of the board members were male and 36.7 percent of the board members were female. In the NSBA survey the small districts had the highest percentage of male board members as compared to 60.1 percent in medium size districts and 55.6 percent in large districts.

In comparison to this research study, which identified only the gender of the board presidents it would seem from both the NSBA, study and this research project that the majority of school board members in the United States are male. In particular this study noted that school board presidents in the small school districts were identified as male over 82 percent of the time. In the NSBA study data indicated that as school districts increase in size that the percentage of male board members decreases. The SSGT study confirmed the NSBA study that the highest percentage of male board members is in the small school districts.

Table 36: Race/Ethnicity of Board Presidents

Race/Ethnicity	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small Districts (5000 or less)	NSBA All Districts
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Caucasian	93.1 percent	89.2 percent	85.5 percent
African American	0.0 percent	5.3 percent	7.8 percent
Hispanic	6.9 percent	3.1 percent	3.8 percent
Asian	0.0 percent	N/A	N/A
American Indian/Native Alaskan	0.0 percent	N/A	N/A
Pacific Islander	0.0 percent	N/A	N/A
Other	N/A	2.3 percent	2.3 percent

n=116

The National School Board Association project identified board members in small school districts as 89.2 percent Caucasian compared to SSGT's finding that 93.1 percent of the small school Texas board presidents were Caucasian. The NSBA report listed 5.3 percent of the board members as African-American as compared to zero percent reported in the SSGT study. Hispanic board members represented 3.1 percent of the board in the NSBA study while in this report 6.9 percent of the board presidents reported being Hispanic. American Indian/native Alaskan and Pacific Islander in this survey of board presidents in school districts with 500 or less students in attendance reported zero percent but in the NSBA study this group represented 2.3 percent of board members.

The racial profile of board presidents in small school districts in Texas does not reflect the racial/ethnic profile of the state's student population. 93.1 percent of the board presidents identified themselves as Caucasian while only 38.7 percent of the students in Texas schools are identified as Caucasian. There were no African-American board presidents in the SSGT study yet 14.3 percent of the Texas students are African-American. 6.9 percent of the board presidents identified themselves as Hispanic while 43.8 percent of the state's student body is Hispanic (TEA, 2004).

The NSBA study reported similarly large discrepancies between the ethnic compositions of the small school districts as well as the all district categories in that study. Caucasian board members were reported as 89.2 percent in small districts and 85.5 percent in all districts yet the student population in the United States identified as Caucasian is 64.1 percent. African American board members were listed in the NSBA study as 5.3 percent in small districts and 7.8 percent in all districts but the United States population of African American students is reported as 15.1 percent. Also Hispanic board members were reported in the NSBA study as 3.1 percent in the small districts and 3.8 percent in all districts yet the United States student population for Hispanic students is 15.2 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

It is evident from the NSBA study and this research project that Caucasian board members represent over 80 percent of the board members and board presidents in the districts that responded to both surveys. All minority board members and board president ethnicities combined represent less than 15 percent of board member populations.

Level of Education

The level of education and the professional background of school board presidents is an indication of the type of individual who seeks school board election. What are the educational levels and work experience of school board presidents in small Texas school districts?

Table 37: Level of Education of Board Presidents

Level of Education	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small Districts (5000 or less)	NSBA All Districts
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High school graduate or equivalent	5.9 percent	9.1 percent	6.2 percent
Some college	28.6 percent	37.0 percent	26.2 percent
Four-year college degree	58.8 percent	24.9 percent	28.7 percent
Graduate degree	5.9 percent	28.5 percent	38.3 percent

n=119

It is evident from the NSBA data and this research report that over 50 percent of the board members and board presidents in small school districts have college degrees. However, board members in the larger districts in the NSBA study are more likely to have graduate degrees.

Table 38: Professional Background of Board Presidents

Professional Background	Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small Districts (5000 or less)	NSBA All Districts
Business/professional	65.5 percent	48.2 percent	44.6 percent
Education	7.6 percent	13.2 percent	13.0 percent
Homemaker/retired	2.5 percent	22.5 percent	26.2 percent
Non-profit/government	4.2 percent	9.3 percent	10.6 percent
Agriculture	16.8 percent	N/A	N/A
Other	3.4 percent	6.7 percent	5.6 percent

n=119

The National School Board Association project reported in small school districts with less than 5,000 in attendance that 48.2 percent of the board members had a business or professional background as compared to approximately 65.5 percent of board presidents in small school districts with 500 or less students in attendance. The NSBA study reported that all board members in the small school district classification who responded listed homemaker/retired 22.5 percent of the time as compared to this target population of board

presidents who listed this professional background as 2.5 percent. The NSBA report listed the professional background of board members as education 13.2 percent as compared to this research report in which board presidents listed education 7.6 percent of the time. The professional background of non-profit/government was reported by the NSBA data as 9.7 percent of board members while this reported noted that non-profit/government professional background was reported as 4.2 percent. In the NSBA study the professional background of other for small school districts was listed as 6.7 percent of the board members. This NSBA report did not include a category of agricultural but 16.8 percent or one in six of the board presidents the SSGT study reported this occupation. This finding was not unexpected because of the large amount of land in rural areas of Texas dedicated to farming and ranching. It is evident from the NSBA data and this research report that in both target populations of small school districts that business/professional occupation represented almost 50 percent of the board members and board presidents.

Income

Do small school board presidents have an annual household income that exceeds the national average? Although board members receive little compensation for their service do they enjoy a comfortable household income? What occupations do board members perform? Is board service viewed as a civic obligation for men and women in small communities? These research questions are addressed in this section of the report

Table 39: Annual Household Income of Board Presidents

Annual Household Income	SSGT Percentage of Board Presidents	NSBA Small Districts (5000 or less)	NSBA All Districts
Less than \$25,000	0.0 percent	2.7 percent	2.0 percent
\$25,000 - \$49,999	3.4 percent	19.2 percent	14.8 percent
\$50,000 - \$74,999	35.6 percent	27.6 percent	24.1 percent
\$75,000 - \$99,999	44.1 percent	18.4 percent	22.2 percent
\$100,000 - \$149,999	14.4 percent	19.8 percent	21.3 percent
More than \$150,000	2.5 percent	12.2 percent	15.6 percent

n=118

It is evident from the NSBA data and this research project that the annual household income range of \$50,000 to \$74,999 was the income range with the largest percentage for small school boards 27.6 percent, and school board members of all school districts, 24.1 percent. In contrast the largest percentage for this study was the income range of \$75,000 to \$99,000 with 44.1 percent reported. Also the data from the NSBA study and this research project indicated that the annual household income range of \$50,000 to \$150,000 accounted for 65.8 percent of small school board members. In the NSBA study, 67.6 percent of school board members in all school districts and in this research population 94 percent of the school board presidents reported an annual income between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

Board President's Children

Do school board members and school board presidents have children?
 Are school board president children of current school age? What percentages of
 school board president children attend public schools?

Table 40: Board Presidents Who Have Children

Response	Percentage of Board Presidents
Yes	99.1 percent
No	0.9 percent

n=114

The National School Board Association reported noted that 96 percent of the school board members have children as compared to the board presidents in this report, which listed 99.1 percent. It is evident from both research reports that nearly all of those who participated in these two studies have children.

Table 41: Age of Board President's Children

Age of Children	Percentage of Board Presidents
0-5 years old	18.3 percent
6-18 years old	72.5 percent
Over 18 years old	68.3 percent

n=120

The National School Board Association report did not delineate the specific age ranges of the school board members' children. However the NSBA report did state that almost half or 48.9 percent of the school board members had children currently in school. If we assume that the age range of 5-18 is the normal K-12 age for school attendance then the SSGT data would suggest that 68 percent of the school board presidents in small school districts with 500 or less students in enrollment have children who are school age. The NSBA report and the SSGT project data indicate that the majority of school board members

and school board presidents have school age children. In addition this data indicates that a majority of school board presidents also have children over the age of 18 which 90.9 percent of the board presidents reported this age range for their children.

Table 42: Number of Board Presidents' Children Who Have or Who Are Attending Public Schools

Number of Children	Percentage of Board Presidents
0	2.7 percent
1	13.5 percent
2	53.1 percent
3	24.3 percent
4	3.6 percent
5	1.8 percent
6	0.0 percent
7	1.1 percent

n=111

Nearly every school board president in small school districts in Texas has or has had a child in public schools. The National School Board Association study reported that 77.3 percent of the board members had children who attended public school. The NSBA report stated that 13.3 percent of the board members had children who never attended public school and that 9.4 percent of the board members children attended a mixture of private and public education. This report notes that only 2.7 percent of the board presidents did not have children who attended public school. Thus 97.3 percent of the board presidents in small school districts with 500 or less students in enrollment had children who attended public school. Also the data from this research report indicates that the number of children for school board presidents was clustered in the one to three

children group, which represented 90.9 percent. Less than seven percent of the school board presidents reported 4 children or more who attended public school.

VII. Conclusions

It is evident from the NSBA and SSGT data that all school boards are not the same. The most prominent supposition from the findings of both studies is that there are elemental differences between large, medium and small school district boards.

Although school board elections are nonpartisan, parent groups were the most active constituents in small rural school districts while teacher associations were the most identified group in larger school districts. The most pressing issue for school boards regardless of the school district size was budget and financial concerns. The vast majority of small rural school districts hired the superintendent from outside the school district and the mean tenure for district superintendents was 4.30 years. Over 95 percent of the small school districts perceived themselves as prepared to meet the policy demands of NCLB. Finally the small rural school board presidents in the SSGT study were predominately male, Caucasian and middle class.

This report is not intended to articulate opinions on school board elections, school board service, the district superintendent, policy issues or the demography of the school districts and school board presidents. Rather than rendering impressive pronouncements about school boards, the intention of this report is to stimulate discussion about educational governance with regard to the

varying size, needs, and resources of school districts and the consideration of the communities in which they operate.

VIII. Addendum

School Board Survey Analysis Addendum

The below identified questions had the indicated number of respondents and the indicated number of responses. This indicates that some of the respondents responded more than once to some questions. As viewable, the number of respondents that over responded was typically 2. With a sample size of 129, a confidence level of 90% and a 40% response rate, a distribution margin of error of 7% exists.

Question #	# of Respondents	# of Responses
10	125	127
12	125	127
14	99	101
17	125	127
18	125	128
21	122	123
22	122	123
23	122	123
25	122	123
28	122	124
29	122	124
30	122	124
31	122	124
32	122	124
33	122	124
34	122	124
35	122	124
38	122	124
39	123	126
41	123	126

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