

Superintendents Building Public Trust and Engagement in Five Public School Communities

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Abstract

To increase capacity for public participation and improve problem-solving practices, some public school districts have launched stakeholder-training programs. This mixed methods study examined the impact of five school district parent training programs (four in Colorado and one in Illinois) designed to increase trust and engagement. Data were collected from 67 trainee surveys, 21 trainee interviews, and five superintendent interviews. Quantitative analysis examined five domains: knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, and action. Using qualitative thematic analysis, we examined stakeholder and superintendent interviews. Stakeholders (parents and community members) reported increased knowledge about school district operations and improved relationships with district leaders. Four main themes emerged from the superintendent interviews: building trust, advocacy, community engagement, and sharing power. Findings converged indicating that trainings increased engagement, knowledge, advocacy, and trust for district administrators. Findings suggested school superintendents can increase stakeholder trust, build capacity for public participation, and narrow the engagement gap in district affairs through stakeholder training programs.

Key Words: public education, public participation, public deliberation, parent engagement, training, organizational change

Stakeholder Engagement in Schools

...our institutions need to develop more effective ways of helping citizens work through the issues and move steadily along the learning curve.

– Daniel Yankelovich, 2010

At public school districts across America, administrators and school board members are routinely faced with issues and decisions ripe for controversy and conflict—decisions related to standardized testing, LGBT rights, bullying, curriculum, and freedom of expression to name a few. Controversial issues like these can highlight differences in stakeholder values, activate parents and special interest groups, and create tension between a school district and its community. When educators include parents and other stakeholders (e.g., profit and non-profit businesspersons, directors of educational foundations, and other citizens with an interest in school district operations) in thoughtful, well-run deliberations, the process can pull people together, generate innovative solutions, strengthen buy-in, and build trust.

To navigate hot-button issues, education leaders typically rely on a combination of administrator expertise, legal counsel, industry experts, and other institutional insiders to inform their decisions. This method of decision-making, often intended to avoid uncomfortable public meetings, can actually stoke the public's ire rather than dampen it. With the law on their side, administrators and boards will regularly choose to sidestep public deliberation, render a decision, and endeavor to move on.

An unfortunate reason for excluding community input is the belief that professional educators, unlike “non-expert” stakeholders, are uniquely qualified and know how to address complex education issues. But while many administrators believe they alone have the knowledge and expertise to determine what is best for students (Gurke, 2008), research shows that other stakeholders can make meaningful contributions to complex problems when given information and other tools (Hartz-Karp, 2007; Heath, Lewis, Schneider, & Majors, 2017; Yankelovich & Friedman, 2010).

There are compelling reasons for district administrators and school boards to cultivate a district culture that actively engages stakeholders in deliberative problem solving. The deliberative process includes citizens collaborating with public administrators to expand public participation and contribute to problem solving (Gudowsky & Bechtold, 2013; Nabatchi, 2010). Increased stakeholder participation in school business has been linked to better solutions to shared problems (Fung, 2004) and increased levels of stakeholder agreement and trust (Langsdorf, 2003). Yet another benefit of increased stakeholder

engagement in schools is improved student achievement (Rice et al., 2000). Bryk and Schneider (2002) reported that student learning improved most in elementary schools with high relational trust. Importantly, building relational trust in public schools requires commitment from school staff and community leaders to collaborate with the broader community, which positively impacts the day-to-day routine work of schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Van Maele, Forsyth, & Van Houttle, 2014). Additionally, research suggests that parents who step into school and community leadership activities serve as role models for children and for other parents to become involved (Cunningham, Kreider, & Ocón, 2012).

The long-term implications for not engaging stakeholders and actively deepening relationships with them are substantial. This is particularly evident when ballot initiatives are put before the public to fund school operations and capital construction. When educators opt to exclude the public from discussions pertaining to controversial issues, stakeholders are quick to mobilize against tax initiatives or withhold other forms of support such as volunteering, serving on committees, or advocating for the district in the public square.

Disengaged stakeholders are prone to grow actively adversarial toward their school districts. The lack of proactive public engagement has been described as problematic by several authors (Auerbach, 2007; Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Putman, 2000). In one study, school leaders reported that promoting parent engagement was an important goal, but little effort was made towards strategic planning for authentic engagement (Auerbach, 2007). Although symbolic efforts were made by some school leaders, no efforts were put forth for a comprehensive approach to public engagement. In the absence of deliberative processes that are well-planned and well-facilitated, stakeholders can become enmeshed in “a web of suspicion, extreme partisanship, competitiveness, and poor communication” (Mathews, 2006, p. 35).

Getting a broad representation of stakeholders to participate in meetings and group discussions about shared problems is often challenging. Many educators and other institutional leaders have not been exemplary performers in advocating for better public participation. However, because citizens do not naturally come together to improve their skills in public participation and deliberation, it is important for today's leaders to intervene and engage their constituents in this work (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011).

Some researchers have turned their attention to the impact of shared educational leadership, which is a leadership style focused on building community engagement by including community members in decision-making and organizational learning (Daly & Finnigan, 2012; James, Mann, & Creasy, 2007; Leech, & Fulton, 2008). With deliberate effort, shared educational leadership

has been successful in reshaping school culture and building trust (Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009).

Engaging the public requires resources and skills. Feldman and Khademian (2007) said the role of a public administrator must be recast as a facilitator of community involvement, and Fischer (2009) advocated for “a new breed of participatory professionals” skilled in convening and facilitating deliberative problem solving and decision-making (p. 71). These skills include relationship building and the ability to deal with conflict in a constructive, open environment (Boyte, 2009). Fitzgerald and Militello (2016) underscore the importance of school leaders learning to “listen to and dialogue with families and communities” (p. 112).

In 2012, the lead author studied a stakeholder training program designed to increase trust and participation of parents and other stakeholders in the affairs of a large Colorado public school district (Poynton, 2012). Findings from that mixed method study suggested that the training increased participant trust and capacity for public participation across five study domains (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, action). In this article, we summarize findings from a study of five school districts (named herein with permission) including the district in the original study and four new school districts (three more from Colorado and one from Illinois) that subsequently launched similar training programs in their communities.

Parent and Community Training Program

In 2009, St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) formalized and launched a stakeholder-training program called Leadership St. Vrain (LSV). The purpose of LSV was to build trust and increase public participation through two key strategies: (a) to provide stakeholders a working knowledge of how their district operates; and (b), to build relationships between stakeholders and district administrators. The rationale is that when provided with operational knowledge and when social relations are strengthened, stakeholders will be more willing, available, and effective participants in school district business.

The training program was publicized several ways across the five school districts. In some districts, principals of local schools made announcements at back-to-school-nights; recruitment was also publicized through district Facebook pages, and one district listed the training on a handout advertising several events and volunteer opportunities to parents. Word of mouth was the most effective recruitment method for all districts; consequently, each year the training programs were offered the number of participants increased. Training included eight 2.5-hour sessions, meeting one time per month over the course of the school year. Most of the districts held meetings on Friday mornings, but

one district held meetings in the evenings, while another district experimented with both day and evening meeting times.

The topics covered varied to some degree, but the following topics were covered across all districts: assessment, budget/school finance, curriculum, governance, state and federal laws, technology, and safety and security. Based on interest and feedback from stakeholders, other examples of topics that were presented included gifted and talented education, growth and construction, special education, and student services. The presentations of specific topics were made by appropriate administrative leaders. For example, the district's assistant superintendent of assessment and curriculum presented on assessment. The respective superintendents were present at all sessions and gave a brief superintendent report at the beginning of each meeting. In most districts, a parent liaison facilitated the trainings by introducing the respective speakers and fielding questions after the presentations. In some districts, the meetings were facilitated by the director of communications. To facilitate attendance and diversity, the training program provided childcare, and some districts included live translation from English with the use of headsets.

The Current Study

The decline in public participation has been regarded as a factor contributing to the distrust surrounding public education and misunderstandings surrounding educational policy (McNeil, 2002). To reverse this trend, build stakeholder trust, and increase participation in district business, other school districts have followed the lead of SVVSD and have begun offering similar stakeholder-training programs to their school communities. In the current study, conducted in 2015–16, we explored the effectiveness and experiences of five public school districts implementing training programs to build stakeholder trust and raise capacity for public participation.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were as follows:

1. As a result of their participation in the training, what gains did participants make in terms of operational knowledge about the district, enhanced relationships (trust) with key decision makers, willingness to be involved in education-related activities, and efficacy in deliberative problem solving?
2. What new education-related actions did participants perform after involvement in the training?
3. Were there different impacts to participants based on differences in the respective district training programs?
4. What did the participating superintendents report about the impact of the training programs on their respective districts and communities?

We were interested in examining the combined impact of the domains and exploring the following inquiry: Do stakeholder training programs that provide operational knowledge and relationship-building opportunities increase trust and build stakeholder capacity for public participation in public school district communities?

Method

To answer the research questions, we used a mixed methods approach. This design allowed for a multiperspective examination of the effectiveness of the programs by evaluating outcomes of the training through surveys and striving to understand the experiences of the participants through interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Participants

The participants were school district stakeholders and superintendents of five public school districts (see Table 1). For the quantitative portion of the study, respondents included 59 district stakeholders (15 male, 44 female). Participant response rate was 53% across the five districts (see Table 1 for response rate by district). Most participants were parents of children in the school district; however, non-parent business owners and individuals involved with local nonprofit organizations also participated in the training programs. Other than gender, we did not collect demographic information from the participants. Many participants self-selected for the program by responding to public announcements/invitations, and others were recruited by central office administrators and school principals.

Table 1. Training Programs, Samples, School Districts, and Locations

Program Name	# of Stakeholders	Sample Size	Response Rate (%)	School District	District Location
Engage 27J	32	14	44	Brighton	Brighton, CO
Insider's Academy	12	5	42	Eagle Valley	Eagle, CO
Mesa Explore	30	19	63	Mesa Valley	Grand Junction, CO
Parents as Leaders (PALs)	9	7	77	Peoria	Peoria, IL
Leadership St. Vrain (LSV)	32	14	48	St. Vrain Valley	Longmont, CO
Total	112	59	53		

For the qualitative portion of the study, we completed 26 interviews. Twenty-one interviews were with district stakeholders (5 male, 16 female). Of the interviewees, 90% were parents of children in the school districts ($n = 19$). Five superintendents, one from each school district, were also interviewed (4 male, 1 female).

Instruments

We used the instrument designed for the initial study (Poynton, 2012) which included Likert-like items, yes/no items, and open-ended questions (see Appendix). Five Likert items assessed four (of five) domains (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy) with five response choices (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). Internal consistency of these subscales using Cronbach's alphas ranged from .77 to .80 indicating acceptable to good reliability (knowledge $\alpha = .80$, relationships $\alpha = .77$, willingness $\alpha = .80$, efficacy $\alpha = .79$). There were four open-ended response opportunities, one for each of the domains, to gather additional information.

For the fifth domain, action, we assessed actions taken by participants after getting involved in the training. Respondents were asked, "After being involved with [name of training program], I have done these things," followed with a list of 10 items for yes/no responses. Example actions were "Shared knowledge about school district-related information with my school PTO" and "Submitted a letter to the editor of a local newspaper concerning a school district-related issue."

Procedures

After five school districts agreed to participate and IRB approval was granted, each district provided the researchers a list of participant names and emails. The survey link was subsequently emailed to a listserv of training participants at each school district. The email with the survey link was sent at least twice to each school district's listserv. Qualtrics software hosted the survey. Response rates ranged from 52%–78% by district.

Of the 59 participants who completed the survey, 40 indicated willingness to be interviewed. Interviews were successfully scheduled and completed with 21 individuals from the districts who participated in the program. Telephone interviews were conducted with all but three interviewees, which were held in person (2 stakeholders, 1 superintendent). The interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed by a researcher who did not complete the interview.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

To examine the domains summarized in research question 1, we calculated the percentages of participants who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to the survey items relating to knowledge, relationships, willingness, and efficacy. For research question 2, we counted the number of participants who marked “yes” to each of 10 specific action items they had performed after getting involved in the training. To answer research question 3 examining whether there were differences between school districts, a multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was run. The average score of the four domains were the dependent variables (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy), and the five school districts were the independent variable. First, we examined if the data met the assumptions of MANOVA. We examined Shapiro-Wilk test of normality for the dependent variables (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy). Findings indicated that knowledge and efficacy were not normally distributed (knowledge Shapiro-Wilk = .86, $p < .000$; efficacy Shapiro-Wilk = .97, $p = .004$); the relationship and willingness domains were normally distributed (relationships Shapiro-Wilk = .96, $p = .064$; willingness Shapiro-Wilk = .97, $p = .11$). However, as MANOVA is robust to violations of multivariate normality, we continued to examine whether MANOVA might be appropriate. Box’s test of equality of covariance was non-significant ($F(40, 1344) = .781$, $p = .835$) indicating the assumption of homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices was met. Last, to check whether there was evidence of multicollinearity among the dependent variables, Pearson’s r and variance inflation factors (VIFs) were examined. Pearson’s correlations greater than .90 are usually considered problematic (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), and VIFs above ten, or in some cases five, may be concern for collinearity (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005; O’Brien, 2007). Pearson’s r for the current study ranged from .40 to .76 for the four domains (see Table 2), and VIFs for knowledge, relationship, willingness, and efficacy were 2.48, 3.39, 2.71, and 2.34, respectively. Therefore, the threshold for multicollinearity was not problematic.

Table 2. Pearson’s Correlations for the Domains: Knowledge, Relationships, Willingness, and Efficacy

	Knowledge	Relationships	Willingness	Efficacy
Knowledge	–			
Relationships	.65	–		
Willingness	.40	.76	–	
Efficacy	.68	.60	.57	–

Note. All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Qualitative

We conducted a theoretical thematic analysis examination of stakeholders' interview transcripts for themes that aligned with the five domains (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, action) identified in a previous study (Poynton, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006) described this approach as being appropriate when the researchers have theoretical support for examining a specific set of identified themes. Hsich and Shannon (2005) described this directed approach as appropriate when using previous findings to guide the analysis. Using this method, two researchers independently read the stakeholders' transcripts and identified quotes which appeared to be representative of one or more of the five domains. These quotes were coded by domain into a spreadsheet. Next, we identified all quotes that were categorized into the same theme by both researchers. A final spreadsheet was created that included the quotes both researchers coded as being representative of the predetermined themes. Next, we engaged in the same process for the transcripts of the superintendents' interviews.

Finally, to answer research question 4—"What did the participating superintendents report about the impact of the training programs on their respective district and community?"—we engaged in an inductive analysis examining the superintendent interviews for themes that were not identified prior to this study. In other words, during this exploratory thematic analysis, we examined the transcripts for recurring themes not captured in the five domains of knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, and action.

Findings

Table 3 reports the overall percentage of participants who responded strongly agree or agree to the item inquiring about the four domains. We also examined the number of yes responses to the distinct actions that participants engaged in after getting involved in the training program (see Table 4). The MANOVA indicated there were no significant differences among school districts, $F(16, 156) = 1.02, p = .43$; Wilks' Lambda = .74.

Table 3. Four Domains and Percentages of Participants Who Responded Strongly Agree or Agree by Training Program

Training Programs						
Domain	Total Sample	LSV	Explore	Insiders	Engage	PALs
Knowledge	88	87	68	100	79	86
Relationships	67	80	58	80	64	71
Willingness	63	73	42	80	79	57
Efficacy	88	91	68	100	100	86

Table 4. Cumulative Percentages (and Totals) of Yes Responses for Actions Taken

Training Programs						
Action Items	Total Sample	LSV (<i>n</i> = 14)	Explore (<i>n</i> = 19)	Insiders (<i>n</i> = 5)	Engage (<i>n</i> = 14)	PALs (<i>n</i> = 7)
10	<i>N</i> = 59	49% (69)	43% (82)	40% (20)	67% (94)	68% (48)

Domain Findings

Here we report the noteworthy quantitative and qualitative findings that emerged within the domains of knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, and action (see Table 3) and qualitative findings from participant interviews.

Knowledge

For the five survey items for the knowledge domain, 88% of the participants (*n* = 59) responded agree (2) or strongly agree (1; *M* = 2.00, *SD* = .62). In terms of acquiring knowledge, stakeholders consistently reported learning information about which they were not previously aware. Many participants shared that they did not anticipate how interesting and helpful the new information would be. To illustrate, one parent recalled being routinely surprised by her and her husband’s interest in the presentations, “Every night we’d look at the agenda before the meeting, and my husband and I would look at each other and think, this is going to be boring, and then we’d get there and learn something truly fascinating.”

School finance, the most discussed training topic that emerged in the interviews, was regularly reported as being an eye-opener. One stakeholder said, “I’ll be honest, when I voted for school issues in the past, it was ‘yeah, schools get enough money, they’re just not using the money wisely.’ Then, when you have your eyes opened to the truth, it’s like...oh my!” Stakeholders learned about financial issues and consistently reported surprise regarding the information. A participant observed,

You always hear about the schools really having to stretch their dollars and maximizing on things. You know, I always had the impression of “yeah, whatever, I’m sure they’ve got plenty of money” . . .but some of the financial pieces, and actually kind of seeing the numbers, and for lack of a better term, seeing how the business stays open, seeing how they keep the lights on, was pretty enlightening to me.

Learning about budgeting and financial constraints school districts face was transformative. That is, participants described an increase in knowledge, and the knowledge shifted their perspective regarding the school district’s operations. Prior to the training, many did not understand the funding processes, how different funding sources are regulated, and the misrepresentations the media often portray regarding educational funding. One participant reported,

It kind of enabled you as a parent to look past the media and see a little bit what the district is dealing with, numbers-wise, information-wise. Just kind of made you look at the bigger picture. Budget breakdown was obviously really informative.

Other district policies that stakeholders reported learning about were state and federally mandated assessments, curriculum development, support services, instructional practices, technology, and governance processes. Many interviewees shared that the training dispelled myths or misunderstandings they held regarding school district operations. One participant thoughtfully shared,

The information from [name of training program] gave me the facts straight from the school district. Really from its core, it dispelled some of those misimpressions that I had about the school district—things that I thought that I knew, that I was so convinced of. When I was finished, I was able to say what I know, and say what I don’t know. But those items that I might have misrepresented previously, I now have the facts.

Relationships

For the five survey items for the relationships domain, 67% of the participants ($n = 59$) responded strongly agree or agree ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .69$). One of the primary goals of the training was to develop a sustainable culture of relationship building among district officials, parents, and other stakeholders. The trainings were designed to introduce participants to key decision-making individuals and to provide opportunities to build connections with these individuals. Evidence in support of this goal emerged through the relationship participants developed with the superintendents. One participant reflected, “I got connected with the superintendent. I’ve connected with him at the training but after as well.” Participants reported it was important the superintendents

were present at the meetings, and the participants appreciated how available their superintendent was. “The superintendent was always there,” stated one participant, “He’s made a huge effort to reach out to people.” Stakeholders in each school district reported getting to know the superintendent was a key component to the success of the program. When asked to summarize her experience, one participant shared, “the superintendent, I was very impressed. He would pretty much answer any question that was thrown out to him. He was very candid and was present at a lot of the meetings.” One superintendent noted the training’s relationship building opportunities: “...once you get to know people, it makes all the difference in the world.”

Similar to impacts from the knowledge domain, the increase in relationship building was reported to foster trust in district administrators. One stakeholder shared, “As a parent, I felt like they had a very open door, and if I had additional questions, I could go ask them.” A non-parent reported a similar experience, “Having a stronger relationship helps us to align our goals for youth.”

Participants reported feeling empowered by the deepening personal connections made possible by the training. “The relationship with [the superintendent’s name] has gotten better, yeah. I’m more empowered by him after it.” The theme of empowerment emerged within several of the domains, but it was particularly prominent within the relationship domain. Another participant stressed enthusiastically, “It’s given me a sense of knowledge, and knowledge is power. And it’s great to know that I can go and have a conversation with somebody and not feel like I’m a bother.” Discussing empowerment another person said, “I don’t know that I would have been as confident to have that interaction or that relationship with these people had that groundwork not been established for me.”

Stakeholders reported that increased connections with district administrators were important for providing access to the appropriate persons regarding specific issues. When participants had questions, they knew who the decision makers were. Participants had formed relationships with key people in the district and felt comfortable approaching them when they had a question. The importance many participants reported regarding relationships they made during the training was summed up by one:

At the end of the day, if I have a concern, I already have that relationship—to know who I can go to, who I can talk to, who I can get the facts from, or maybe it’s not even something that pertains to me...but as a community member it gives me the opportunity to hear first-hand what happened and what was the cause and resolution.

Willingness

For the five survey items for the willingness domain, 63% of the participants ($n = 59$) responded strongly agree or agree ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .71$). We were interested in learning whether the training program impacted the willingness of participants to engage in school district activities. The interview question that probed willingness was, “Since completing the [name of training program], would you describe yourself as being more open to being involved in school district-related activities, less open to being involved, or about the same?” The overwhelming majority of participants responded to being more open to involvement.

Many of the participants who reported increased involvement described their willingness to engage district administrators and others in detail. One parent said, “Absolutely, I was more likely to pick up the phone and call them when I had a question relevant to their job, and I did. I reached out to them directly.” Another interviewee discussed several avenues of sharing information:

I shared it with other parents that I’m involved with, that I know in the community. I’ve tried to talk with some other people, with neighbors that don’t necessarily have kids in the district that happen to live in the community. I’ve shared things on Facebook, as often as I can, important information, so that the public can see what some of the challenges are and what some of the needs of the district are.

The participants’ willingness to share information extended beyond communicating with other parents and school staff. A participant discussed how it was clear from the onset that part of the goal was for parents to take what they learned back to their schools; however, she emphasized they have made it their job to do more, “Let’s have a dialogue about this. It goes back to what I said at the beginning...it just makes our community a better place, and I’m forever grateful we were a part of that.”

Many participants described their willingness to engage in conversations regarding district business and demonstrated their commitment to advocate for the district. Some participants explicitly talked about this, while others hinted at advocacy. In response to a follow-up question regarding why the information she learned was valuable, a participant elaborated on being an active advocate:

When we hear these questions and discuss it when we go back to our schools, we can be an advocate for the district, not necessarily “yes” or “no” on some issue, but to say “that’s really a good question. I would suggest you contact this person,” or say, “that issue was addressed at [name of training program], and maybe there’s more information to consider than what we know.”

Beyond sharing information, participants discussed other ways they were willing to become involved. After being asked whether she was more open to being involved after participating in the training, one interviewee responded emphatically about having started volunteering. “It wouldn’t have occurred to me to volunteer before my kids were in school, maybe after but not before, not if I hadn’t gone through the class.”

Efficacy

For the five survey items for the efficacy domain, 88% of the participants ($n = 59$) responded strongly agree or agree ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .57$). The efficacy domain examined whether participants increased their understanding of the importance of working with others to find solutions to difficult problems. This included whether participants reported an increased capacity for engaging in productive conversations with people with whom they might not agree. In being more open to engaging others and listening to alternative points of view, many interviewees acknowledged the importance of having dialogue with others, especially when there are differences in opinions. One interviewee stressed, “it’s put me in a position where I have very engaging conversations. Sometimes those conversations are in a positive light, and sometimes they’re in a negative light.” One interviewee remarked, “It was just very eye-opening. Even in a small room, opinions were very diverse.”

In addition to gaining perspectives regarding differences in opinions, participants said they felt comfortable sharing perspectives with others, including district administrators. “It makes me feel like I can speak my mind and not be judged.” We believe it noteworthy to report how participants felt regarding interacting with district administrators. A parent enthusiastically stated, “...and I can go to my home school administrator and say ‘look, this is what’s happening’ and not feel intimidated, and if I have facts and know what I’m talking about, it makes it such a better conversation.”

The same parent said, “People have different opinions, but the bottom line is that people have to work things out.” At the end of the interview she stressed, “You have to be open to all kinds of experiences and perspectives, not just your own.” Several participants specifically espoused the importance of hearing a variety of perspectives as necessary for effectively moving forward. One said, “If it’s not difficult, it’s not worth doing.” Another participant recognized the value of discussing issues with people with different beliefs:

Not everyone agreed in there. If you have everyone nodding their head with you all the time, you’re not always going to get the best dialogue. I think it’s good to have some people who don’t like stuff that’s going on.

To teach attendees about the theory and practice of deliberative problem solving, a communications professor experienced in public participation facilitation (Martin Carcasson, Ph.D.) presented at the first and last sessions in two of the five district training programs. His presentation was strategically included in the first session to set the stage regarding the importance of understanding the deliberative process. Most interviewees appreciated this training, and one brought up this presentation without being prompted:

We did a lot of work with Martin Carcasson; having that at the very beginning of the year I think is valuable because they were talking about “wicked problems,” and its differing perspectives and opinions are just that. You may never fully agree, but you don’t have to disagree.

When asked about the most beneficial content of the training, another participant disclosed that he appreciated the presentation about the deliberative process, “The one that I found most valuable, that resonated with me the most, would have been with...Dr. Carcasson.” This same individual, when talking about the value of the deliberative process, discussed how several presenters did not slant the discussion with a certain viewpoint. This perspective of the presenters seemed to be a key aspect for developing a culture that was conducive for the deliberative process within the trainee group.

Some participants indicated they experienced a shift regarding their efficacy in the deliberative process, as they did not necessarily feel comfortable working through difficult issues before the training. One representative comment was “There were times when I would not have been prepared to have conversations about...how schools were funded or how those funds were dispersed.”

Action

For the 10 items about specific, education-related actions participants did or did not do after getting involved in the training, the participants ($n = 59$) responded yes to 53% of the items. Overall, the 59 respondents indicated performing 313 actions. See Table 4 for percentages of actions taken by district cohort. The actions stakeholders participated in as a result of the training varied greatly. Some examples included sharing information, volunteering at the classroom level, relaunching a defunct PTO, running for school board, and supporting ballot campaigns.

There is overlap with the action domain and other domains. For instance, in the knowledge domain we discussed how participants reported sharing information with others in the community. One of the actions reported most frequently was disseminating information in various formats. One participant reported sharing through “social media, neighbors, Facebook...all of the above. I passed along information to the PTO president.” Another stakeholder

discussed that she was committed to sharing the information because she believed this was one of the program's main purposes: "Each meeting I took the information and reported back, absolutely. That's the whole idea...I would talk with the principals and ask about what was happening, then I would talk with other parents."

Several participants discussed a progression of increased involvement, and one said "because I served on [name of training program], I'm on the PTO. I did this pattern that I think they want most to see happen. I did [name of training program] first, and then I went on the PTO board for my school." Training spurred another to become more involved over time. She emphasized her growing involvement, saying, "our daughter, last year, was a junior, and she decided to graduate early. So, she's done, and my husband's term is over, but where were we last night? At the school board meeting! Because we see the value, we're taxpayers."

Several interviewees talked about engaging in activities at the community level. "We were told to take it back to the schools, but we're no longer in the schools, so we're going to take it a step farther. We're going to take it to the community." Others reported increasing involvement after the training program. One participant stated,

Immediately after [the training program] ended, I got involved with the bond measure. I was deeply involved in the structuring and planning for that. My involvement with [the training program] gave me a better understanding of how these dynamics worked.

Superintendent Voices

For the superintendents of schools, we investigated themes that emerged from their interviews. These were trust building, advocate building, power sharing, and community building. The following section describes each of these themes.

Trust Building

From the perspective of the superintendents, one of the consistent benefits of the stakeholder-training program was increased public trust surrounding the school district. This theme emerged when asking several questions, including the main purpose for hosting the program. A superintendent answered,

Building a trustful relationship with the community. Because whatever the challenges that public education is facing, whatever they may be, and there's certainly a myriad of them, but they're only going to be solved if communities work together. There's no silver bullet, there's no magic fairy dust, it's not one charismatic person or two. It's the community

coming together to say we've got a problem, to work together and see how we're going to fix it, how are we going to work together to make things better. That's it – that kind of relationship.

We asked superintendents what they would like other superintendents and administrators to know about the benefits of establishing a stakeholder-training program. One superintendent succinctly said, "It develops the relationship and trust you need to make informed decisions." The potency of the increase in trust is observed when a few of the superintendents specifically addressed stakeholders who moved from having high levels of skepticism to becoming champions. A superintendent enthusiastically described one community member in particular who became highly involved and was previously an antagonist:

One of the gentlemen...he wasn't always happy with us. He was on the outside looking in, and he was regularly questioning things. We brought him into [the training program], we were able to tell him our story, and we couldn't have a better champion—because he [now] understands the challenges that we have, he has access to myself and other staff members in terms of questions for himself and for others. But really and truly, he was the one throwing rocks on a regular basis.

The critical aspect is the stakeholder shifted from not understanding the circumstances to becoming informed of the facts and parameters the school district faced. The training program allowed individuals to build relationships and to see that administrators really do care about students, teachers, and providing the best education possible. The importance of having a deepened relationship with the public is demonstrated in the following statement,

When you don't know someone, it's really easy to be critical and throw rocks. But if you know someone, it's a human business in terms of dealing with people, and we've gotten so far away from that, and it's easy to demonize people you don't know.

The superintendents conveyed that the only sincere path to building trust is through engaging with the public proactively. That is, public engagement must build trust so it exists before a crisis hits. Their position was that public engagement must be a continuing process. Describing past engagement practices, one of the superintendents shared this analogy:

What I observed before was this "circle the wagons and protect yourself," because there was this view that the community was hostile, and they probably were, because the school deserved it, and when I say schools I mean administration. And what they didn't realize was that by circling the wagons and avoiding the conflict, avoiding the tough conversations, it just intensifies, because the more you hide, the worse the trust gets.

Importantly, trust was a theme consistently heard in the stakeholder interviews. One parent thoughtfully summarized,

Before I went through the program, we would have left the district for lack of faith, lack of trust in the district. But after engaging in that process, it wasn't a matter of lack of trust, or lack of faith, or lack of effort from the district leadership.

The theme of trust was also observed across the domains examined in the stakeholders' interviews. For instance, the increase in information learned (i.e., knowledge) often shifted the stakeholder's understanding of operations and provided more awareness regarding constraints the districts worked within, as described above. Even participants who began the program with a high level of trust reported a positive impact regarding their knowledge and confidence in school district operations. A participant stressed, "These kinds of programs can do a lot to build trust and develop a core group of individuals within the district to work with." Several participants described a renewed trust in district staff in this way: "Increased level of trust, yes. The overall morale of our community was down, but now there's much more respect for the superintendent."

Advocate Building

The theme of advocacy building was found in each of the five superintendent interviews. Although related to trust building, advocacy is a step further in the continuum of stakeholder engagement. As a result of the training program, superintendents consistently reported an increase in explicit supporters for their district. One superintendent stated thoughtfully that the training program was, "an opportunity for us to tell our story. We were trying to deputize folks to go out and share our story. Arm them with information. They could be deputized, unpaid PIOs [public information officers]." This goal was emphasized by another superintendent who indicated that his motivation to begin the program was to "build over a period of years, a large and informed cadre of public education advocates who were very knowledgeable and were well acquainted with the approach to improving schools in our district."

Notably, advocacy building was a goal that extended beyond developing supporters for their specific school district. Their interest included creating informed supporters of public education in general. When asked about what inspired them to begin the training program, one superintendent said,

To create a group of ambassadors that would be able to communicate effectively and accurately with other parents, business leaders, with elected officials, with the media, because one of the things we found out was that a lot of information that was out there was not just accurate, not only about our school district but public schools in general.

Superintendents do not view the training program as a one-year engagement process. Instead, it is a long-term process which, over time, will provide exponential benefits. In this regard, the impact of advocacy becomes heightened over time, as stated in the following comment:

We're averaging 20 to 25 [attendees] a year, so over time it's building an informed and activated community school group for our public schools, which we think is critical to having the district supported from the community and impacting tax questions that there might be a ballot for and defending the district from attacks from various philosophies that could undermine or redirect public education in a different way.

The superintendents reported that stakeholders participated in advocacy roles ranging from quelling rumors to advocacy at the state level. Some of the school districts have had community groups emerge from the training programs. One of the most prominent organizations is Grassroots St. Vrain (GSV), which is a volunteer-based nonprofit that promotes informed decision-making relating to state and local school funding. A few parents who completed the LSV training program founded GSV. Several years later, graduates of the training continued to be primary leaders driving GSV. The superintendent summarized the new roles these stakeholders have assumed in governance and advocacy after completing the program:

Some of the parents have become board members, some have moved from the role of parent advocate to the governing body. I think we have...1, 2, 3, 4 out of 7 board members of LSV. Others have gone on to Grassroots St. Vrain and partner with us down at the Capitol.

Power Sharing

The superintendents described how the training programs helped to create a shift in how their leadership team engages with the public. Instead of defending decisions, they are vested in a collaborative process with the public. "Most people engage in communications when there's a crisis, and then they go into damage control mode, and then it's too late." Similarly, another superintendent conveyed, "It's a bad way to do business when the only time you're interacting with the public is when there's a crisis, and I see that sometimes around the state." This comment is suggestive of the outdated approach many district leaders subscribe to, which is to stay close and protect the internal operations rather than venturing out to engage with the public.

When asked about the purpose of the program, one superintendent said, We also wanted to make sure that our parents had a vehicle to share in the leadership in this district and to give us their feedback, and it

was sincere. It wasn't just "we want to hear from you" and nothing ever comes from it, we really wanted to hear from them as to how we could become a better school system.

This theme of power sharing reflects a change in school district leadership practices, a fundamental shift in philosophy as to how district leaders involve the public. One of the superintendents described the shift with this perspective:

I would say it's very much changed the way we conduct business. The very fact that we've initiated this program, we're reaching out to parents, giving them an opportunity to know us better, and to me that's fundamentally different from what we've done in the past.

The superintendents acknowledged a deliberative process is an effective and necessary part of decision-making processes. This suggests these administrators approach issues with a perspective that they can obtain valuable insights about issues important to the public. Critically, this means district leaders must acknowledge that they may not have all the answers. This attitude is observed when a superintendent responded to a question about the impact the training program has had on his staff. He stressed,

It takes a leadership team that's willing to let go. You have to be willing to let go of any perceived control or power and have that truly be a shared piece...power, influence, vision-making, all truly has to be shared, and legitimately shared with parents in the community.

The superintendent emphasized "perceived control" in his comment, which indicates a shift in perspective from the status quo version of school district leadership. An integral part of this theme of power sharing is that efforts must be authentic. The superintendents shared that without real intent to take the public's point of view into consideration, their efforts would backfire. In other words, administrators must be prepared and sincere to take into consideration the public's views when making decisions. One superintendent said, "For me, it's the empowerment, the sharing of information, and the collaboration around decision-making."

Community Building

The final theme that emerged from the superintendent interviews was a strong sense of community building through district outreach and engagement. A superintendent shared that their approach regarding how they ran the training sessions was key to cultivating a sense of community. "We also had it facilitated by community members with staff present to answer questions so that it wasn't just district employees talking to them the whole time. We had a community member lead the discussion...that's been a good move." One

superintendent specifically emphasized their district seeks to reach stakeholders other than parents. He emphasized,

Our program is broader than a parent training program; it's a community training program heavily attended by parents. But we've had teachers, we've had retirees, we've had community leaders and...citizens show up. What I would hope other school leaders would see in this is an opportunity to authentically engage and build relationships with the community.

Within community building, the importance of creating multiple avenues of communication with the broader community was emphasized. When discussing the primary goal of the training program, this superintendent consistently emphasized the issue of community engagement:

The most important goal is engagement and having the hope over time that hundreds of community members that are very much more aware of the school in their community other than when they see a school bus go by. They understand what's happening inside the schools, the challenges that schools are facing. The victories, the wonderful things that are happening in the schools, the increased level of engagement beyond just the staff we have in the schools and parents with kids.

As evidenced by the above quote, community engagement consistently involves communication between school district leaders and community stakeholders. This was explained as:

To communicate effective information, and that's two-way communication, and then it evolves into multiple communications. It starts at our communication with the parents, then it evolves into all kinds of communication...You're trying to give people high quality, real time information, then you're involving them in decisions and they're informed and so they can now really make informed decisions.

An important component of community building facilitated by the training is active listening among participants, administrators, and other presenters. Awareness of this emerged in the participant interviews. When asked about being heard, one participant emphasized, "It was definitely a two-way communication, delivering information to us, but they were willing to listen and interact with us on a dialogue level, which I think was beneficial to both sides."

Dispelling rumors was another positive aspect of community building. When asked about this issue, one superintendent reported, "Yes, if we're having a meeting at the same time that something's occurred in the community and the group wanted to talk about it, then we'd talk about it right then." Ultimately, the theme of community building overlaps with the other three themes of trust building, advocacy building, and power sharing.

Discussion

The main goal of our study was to examine whether district-facilitated training programs that provide knowledge about district operations and relationship building opportunities with school administrators increase stakeholder trust, build capacity for public participation, and narrow the engagement gap in district affairs. At the end of the year-long training program, data were collected through online surveys, interviews with stakeholders, and interviews with superintendents of schools. The findings across districts suggest consistency of the impact of the trainings on their respective participants. The multivariate analysis of variance examined whether there were differences among five school districts and five domains (knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, action). While we had no reason to believe that differences among the school district training programs would result in differential outcomes, it is reassuring to find no interaction effects among the domains and the districts.

Support for the five domains emerged from the stakeholder interviews, which suggest the stakeholder training programs increased capacity for public participation related to the areas of knowledge, relationships, willingness, efficacy, and action. For instance, the majority of participants interviewed stated they were more willing to be involved with district- and other education-related issues after the training. This trend was evident when stakeholders provided examples of new actions they had taken after the training. This included sharing information learned in the training with other stakeholders and acquaintances, volunteering at school, joining the PTO, writing letters to the editor about education-related issues, and running for school board. The stakeholder interviews also revealed that many participants shared their newly gained knowledge with other stakeholders in their social circles. The most consistently reported knowledge gain was related to education funding, such as state contributions and legislative constraints regarding the use of funds. In addition, personal relationships among participants and administrators were strengthened. These findings align with Cooper and Christie's (2005) belief that establishing relationships between parents and educators is essential to district operations. They observed, "Establishing true partnerships with parents entails educators acknowledging and validating parents' views and ultimately sharing power" (p. 2271).

Four main themes emerged from our interviews with superintendents: trust building, advocate building, power sharing, and community engagement. From these, one dominant finding emerged—a fundamental shift in their school district's recognition of the need for and the capacity for public participation after the training program. One of the key components of the success

reported by participants was that the superintendents made sensitive school district issues transparent. They were open to explaining district challenges in detail. This authentic approach to information sharing helped build trust in the district and in its leaders.

These qualitative findings address previous concerns about a lack of trust and need to build public participation in school districts. For instance, Friedman (2010) emphasized the important role that leaders have in cultivating deliberative problem-solving skills among stakeholders. Auerbach (2007) stated, “If administrators are to engage [the public] in meaningful ways, data are needed on the beliefs and practices of leaders with expertise and commitment in this area. Specifically, how do they shape a vision of parent engagement and construct their role in furthering it?” (p. 700). Our findings suggest a training program is an effective way to build relationships between stakeholders and administrators. Further, the superintendents demonstrated expertise in, and commitment to, increasing stakeholder engagement through stakeholder training.

The impetus for this study is rooted in Yankelovich and Friedman’s (2010) call for community-based action research to engage citizens in issues relevant to their world, and Fishkin (2009) who stressed that institutions have a duty to convene the public. Given the prominence of conflict and controversy linked to public education—from state funding cuts to headline stories on school safety—school districts are in an optimal position to explore how citizens and administrators might systematically increase their capacities for continuous, meaningful engagement and participatory decision-making.

Regrettably, there are teachers and administrators who must also take responsibility for alienating the public. Some have insisted that because they are the education professionals, they alone have the expertise for what’s best for students (Gurke, 2008). In some cases, rather than being trained to work with stakeholders, administrators reported being trained to counter the public’s influence on education (Mathews, 2006) or to keep outside influences from “messing with their plans” (Boo, 1992, p. 24). After taking steps to participate in school district affairs, some stakeholders report feeling ignored and unappreciated (Gurke, 2008).

Based on the positive responses from the participants in our study who were exposed to training on the deliberative process, we believe other school districts would benefit by including this information in their training curriculum. Understanding the theory and practice of public deliberation helps stakeholders strengthen their confidence in participatory problem solving and decision-making. This component of the training empowers stakeholders with critical relationship and engagement skills and narrows the engagement gap with problem solving and decision-making activities.

Implications for Practice

It cannot be assumed that administrators have the necessary skill sets for initiating a formal, open, and sustainable public engagement process (Johnson & Gastil, 2015). Building a sustainable culture of public participation in education is dependent upon having district leaders who are trained in the theory and practice of public participation tools to effectively implement stakeholder training and to facilitate deliberative forums. We recommend at least one member of the executive leadership team receive formal training in public participation. In this way, the leadership team will have access to state-of-the-art planning and facilitation skills and have access to a growing community of professional practitioners who can assist as independent facilitators when needed.

District administrators should receive public participation training through a reputable organization, such as the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2 USA) or the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) at Colorado State University. There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to engaging in deliberative processes. The more quality instruction administrators have, the more likely they will implement empowering stakeholder training, build highly participatory district cultures, and continue to narrow the engagement gap with the public.

Engaging stakeholders in deliberative processes addressing shared problems is challenging, particularly when there are strong opposing ideas and political beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2016). To increase the capacity of stakeholders to engage in meaningful and productive deliberations, training modules that teach the theory and practice of quality public participation should be included. In this way stakeholders would become familiar with the benefits of information sharing, active listening, deliberative problem solving, and decision-making. As with district staff, stakeholders should have this material presented by an expert practitioner who can teach the skills that support quality public participation. These skills include “relationship building, tolerance for ambiguity, ability to deal with conflict constructively, and the capacity to work in open environments with no predetermined outcomes” (Boyte, 2009, p. 26).

Other venues of implementation and research for stakeholder training programs could be community college systems, state colleges, and universities. Education leaders are uniquely positioned to help stakeholders become more effective participants in education-related issues. In today’s increasingly politicized environment, the role of education officials requires their active participation to reduce the engagement gap, keeping the mission of education clearly at the forefront. As problems grow in complexity and impact,

stakeholder trainings can advance the community's capacity for engagement, change, and resilience in uncertain times.

Notably, the skills of information sharing, building relationships, and proactively seeking public input has an important role in school district leadership even if a formal training program is not launched. Administrators who strive to build a culture of active listening with a cross section of community members are better equipped to navigate complex issues related to district operations, policy, and governance. This requires creating avenues for citizens to communicate with district leaders. When district administrators are accessible and avenues for communicating are made available, districts benefit in many ways. For instance, the presence of trust and inclusive leadership styles of school leaders predicted lower levels of threat by teachers and administrators (Daly, 2009). Other researchers have reported findings supporting the benefits of school leaders engaging in authentic leadership (Bird, Wang, Watson, & Murray, 2009), distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2007), and relationship building (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). A meta-analysis that examined characteristics of effective schools found a significant relationship between district leadership and students' academic achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). One prominent finding reported in the meta-analysis was that effective superintendents involved many levels of stakeholders when establishing goals for their district. Therefore, the benefits of engaging with the public should be considered regardless of implementation of a stakeholder training program.

The value of training future education leaders in public engagement has been demonstrated (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005); however, Levine (2005) reported that one-third of school administrators indicated their preparation programs did not adequately prepare them to communicate with parents and stakeholders. Auerbach (2007) described that school leaders reported missed opportunities in their preparation programs for training in community relations. Thus, we recommend that public participation skills be taught in university courses preparing educational leaders and administrators. Building a culture of public participation and the deliberative process are skills that take time and practice to develop (Turner, 2014); therefore, training in public engagement should be introduced in graduate curriculums. To improve preparation programs, universities should collaborate and develop partnerships between graduate school programs and school districts for field-based internships focusing on teaching public engagement skills. Intensive, experience-based internships have been emphasized as a cornerstone of quality preparation programs (Orr, 2006; Orr & Barber, 2006). We view this as essential for preparing future school leaders.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study has limitations to consider. First, the five school districts differed in the number of years of experience with stakeholder-training programs. One district was in their second year of the program, while another district had been engaged with the stakeholder training for eight years. The differential years of experience between programs are likely to have had an impact on the district's staff and the level of community engagement. However, we examined the interviews across all five school districts rather than exploring specific trends in each school district.

Second, one of the challenges of the training programs is finding an ideal time for the meetings, which limits who may attend. Morning training sessions exclude individuals who do not have flex time at work, and evening training sessions exclude families who have extracurricular commitments. Districts have to consider their communities. Some might explore the potential for podcasts of sessions to create more opportunities for participation.

Third, neither survey respondents nor interviewees were necessarily a representative sample of training participants. Whether or not the volunteer respondents were those with more positive experiences, we can only speculate. As the districts continue training, a regular sampling of current and past trainees may provide better representation as well as address use of the gained skills in dynamic educational contexts.

A suggestion for future research is to conduct action research in which the stakeholders help shape the development of the program for future cohorts. This would require seeking responses from stakeholders and presenters during the training to learn how to increase the value of the training program. Using an action research model, administrators would have an opportunity to learn the stakeholders' perspectives regarding improving the training program with the goal of increasing engagement and shared power.

Conclusion

In summary, five school districts conducted formal training programs to provide stakeholders with knowledge of district operations and the opportunity to build personal relationships with district administrators and other key influencers. Collectively, robust quantitative and supporting qualitative evidence was found supporting these goals. The overarching purpose of the stakeholder training was to reduce the engagement gap by increasing stakeholder trust and building capacity for public participation in school district issues. Each of the five training programs were effective in increasing knowledge, relationships, willingness to participate, efficacy, and actions taken related to their school district or education-related issues in general. Stakeholder trainings that include

operational knowledge and relationship building opportunities increase trust, build capacity for public participation, and narrow the engagement gap in district affairs.

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Appendix. Participant Survey

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the introductory statement at the top of each section then read the concluding statements that follow and click on the level of agreement that best reflects your experience. At the end of each section you will have an opportunity to provide written comments.

Note: For sections I-IV the answer choices for the first five items were: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree

I. [Name of training here] has significantly improved my knowledge of:

1. The school district's organizational structure.
2. The school district's instructional programs.
3. The school district's overall policies and practices.
4. The school board's role in the district.
5. The State of Colorado's role in school funding.

In the box below, please share additional comments related to the topics mentioned in this section.

II. Because of relationship-building opportunities available to me in [name of training here]:

6. I am more likely to contact a friend or acquaintance about an education-related issue.
7. Friends and acquaintances are more likely to contact me about an education-related issue.
8. I am more likely to contact the superintendent about an education-related issue.
9. I am more likely to contact a member of the Board of Education about an education-related issue.
10. I am more likely to contact a state legislator about an education-related issue.

In the box below, please share additional comments related to the topics mentioned in this section.

III. Because of my participation with [name of training here]:

11. I am more likely to participate in informal conversations with others about education-related issues.
12. I am more likely to participate at Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or other school committee meetings.
13. I am more likely to participate at Board of Education meetings.
14. I am more likely to participate at legislative hearings in my community or at the state capitol.
15. I am more likely to seek a leadership position on a school- or district-related committee.

In the box below, please share additional comments related to the topics mentioned in this section.

IV. To some degree, it is from my experience with [name of training here]:

16. I know that finding solutions to school district-related challenges frequently requires making very difficult choices.
17. I have a greater understanding of parents and other stakeholders whose perspectives on education-related issues are different from mine.
18. I believe that if parents or other stakeholders with different perspectives are involved in solving school district-related challenges, we'll get better resolutions.
19. Even though another parent or stakeholder might have a completely different position from mine about an education-related issue, I believe we could reach a consensus.
20. I understand that finding solutions to controversial problems frequently means having uncomfortable conversations with people that I disagree with.

In the box below, please share additional comments related to the topic mentioned in this section.

Note: For section V, the answer choices were yes or no.

Please answer yes or no to the following questions:

V. After getting involved with [name of training here], I have done these things:

21. Shared knowledge about school district-related information with my school PTO.
22. Written about a school district-related issue on Facebook, Twitter, a blog, or another social media site.
23. Submitted a letter to the editor of a local newspaper concerning a school district-related issue.
24. Was involved in an education-related state legislative initiative.
25. Communicated with the superintendent or member of the Board of Education about an education-related issue.
26. Volunteered my time at a school or district event.
27. Made a financial contribution to a school or district-related initiative.
28. Asked another parent or community member to participate in a school or district-related initiative.
29. Asked another parent or community member to make a financial contribution to a school or district-related initiative.
30. Supported the campaign of a candidate based in part on education-related issues.

In the box below, please share additional comments related to the topics mentioned in this section.

