

Running head: TEACHER AND STUDENT MORALE

TEACHER AND STUDENT MORALE AND SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

by

Kara M. Corlett

A Master's Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science of Education

Curriculum and Instruction: Inclusive Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

State University of New York at Fredonia

Fredonia, New York

May 2015

Running head: TEACHER AND STUDENT MORALE

State University of New York at Fredonia  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

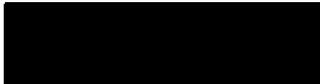
CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled TEACHER AND STUDENT MORALE AND SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE by Kara Corlett, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Education, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.



Dr. Carrie Fitzgerald  
EDU 691 Course Instructor  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

5/11/15  
Date



Department Chair Dr. Robert Dahlgren  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

5/15/2015  
Date



Dean Christine Givner  
College of Education  
At SUNY Fredonia

5/15/2015  
Date

### **Abstract**

School boards have been around since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century in the American Public Education System to help with the local governance of school districts. There has not been a lot of focus in research on how the governance of a school board effects the morale of teachers and students. With the increase in news media in the recent decade, there has been more attention on local governments and elected officials, such as a school board. With this increase, there has been more government scandals exposed, including those involving school board officials and school district administrators. While most of the attention has been the negative effect on the officials themselves, there has not been much attention on how the scandals affect teachers and students. The purpose of this Master's Project was to see if a local school board scandal negatively impacted teacher and student morale at the local high school in the district. The question of the impact was researched with an online survey that was sent to high school teachers and guidance counselors. The results of the survey give new insight into teacher and student morale in public schools, when there is a lot of media focus on education today.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	2
a. History of School Board Governance.....	2
b. School and Communities: The Nature of Their Partnerships.....	5
c. The Role of the Superintendent.....	6
d. Effects on Student Achievement and Success.....	8
e. Professional Development for Board Members.....	9
f. Effects on Teacher Effectiveness and Morale.....	10
g. Using Current Events as a Teaching Moment.....	12
h. Leadership Role of School Board in 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	13
i. Media Influence on the Educational System.....	14
3. Problem Statement.....	15
4. Methodology.....	16
5. Results.....	18
6. Discussion.....	21
a. Significant Findings.....	21
b. Limitations in Research.....	23
c. Implications for Future Research.....	24
7. References.....	26
8. Appendix.....	31

## Introduction

School boards are the median between educational policy and the local community of the school district. In recent years, there has been an increase with the media coverage of school boards and their governance of school districts. Most of the media coverage has been negative; covering scandals and ineffective governing.

In our local community of Western New York, there has been a scandal of a local suburban school for the past four years. During the past summer, the scandal became a huge news story. The school district's superintendent pleaded guilty to filing a false police report that stated that their car was vandalized while parked in the school's parking lot and was put on administrative leave (Vaughters, 2014). Along with the actions of the superintendent, there were also misconduct charges brought against a school board member. The member was giving a hearing and removed from their position on the board, and is now trying to appeal the decision (Plants, 2014).

As an alumnus of this school district I was very upset by the negative attention that the district was receiving. I believe that the school is a great one and does a lot for the students and that the board should be focusing on the students, instead of the legal matters and negative media backlash. I also started to think about the moral of current students and teachers in the school district.

The focus of this Master's Project is going to be to see if there is an influence on the daily morale of teachers and students in a school district based on negative media attention on a school board.

## **Literature Review**

### **History of School Board Governance**

School boards have managed the affairs of local American education since 1642 (Van Alfen & Schmidt, 2007). They are one of the longest-running forms of citizen governance in the United States (Garn & Copeland, 2014). First established during the Colonial era, where school matters were originally addressed in town meetings, Boston established its first school board in 1721 (Provenzo, 2008). School boards were formed to keep the “public” in public education (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). They provide the conduit that delivers the community’s values and into its schools. School boards in their various renditions approve school policies, priorities, and budgets (Garn & Copeland, 2014). Research has shown that their decisions have a long-term impact on their communities and schools (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Citizen oversight of local government is the cornerstone of our American democracy. It is the foundation that has lasted through the turbulent centuries since our nation’s beginning (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

During the nineteenth century, the primary task of local school boards was the hiring and firing of teachers (Provenzo, 2008). School boards were mostly dominated by professionals and businessmen. Almost all the members of the board were men (Provenzo, 2008). While many things have changed throughout the centuries, the main characteristic that has remained the same throughout school boards history is that the members are local community members, often business owners. They usually do not have an educational background.

School board members are elected by citizens of the district and the elections become a focal point of how schools are governed (Garn & Copeland, 2014). Yet, school board elections are among the most understudied elections in American politics (Allen & Plank, 2005). School board elections are unique from one state to another and, often, among counties or districts

within states (Garn & Copeland, 2014). These elections happen frequently; nearly all of the 14,000 districts in the United States elect board members. Voting behavior in school board elections is a prime example of common local elections, which is not widely known (Garn & Copeland, 2014).

In a research study, Garn and Copeland (2014) studied what motivates citizens to vote in school board elections and how they choose among candidates. They used focus groups and observations to research seven theories on voting methods. The first findings addressed the question, “Why do people like you vote in school board elections?” Two strong themes emerged from the data. The first theme was self-interest, where some participants described a direct self-interest in that they or a family member worked or had worked in some capacity for a school district. They indicated that they need to vote because of the direct impact on their professional lives by electing one candidate or by making sure that another is not elected. Another self-interest theme was related to the economic impact of schools. Some participants, typically on a fixed income, claimed to vote for fiscally conservative candidates because they had concerns about an increase in school tax (Garn & Copeland, 2014). The second theme was civic responsibility. Observational notes confirmed that focus group participants in older generations particularly expressed a deep responsibility to vote in every election. They understood and articulated the heavy cost paid for the right to vote by previous generations (Garn & Copeland, 2014). The findings for how the participants of the study selected school board candidates, was that voters relied heavily on an evaluation of candidate character in determining their vote and that they got that information largely through informal channels, such as friends and neighbors. Many participants also indicated that they directly knew one or more candidates for the school board (Garn & Copeland, 2014).

Citizen oversight of local government is the cornerstone of our American democracy, and has lasted through the turbulent centuries since our nation came into being (Campbell & Greene, 1994). Again, many governmental agencies, including school districts, are staffed by experts but are all government by civilians (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

There has been an increased interest in society to create more diverse school districts and combine city with suburban districts to cut spending costs. School boards and elections have been the center of this issue in creating new school district zones. After a studying of two case studies to analyze how demographic shifts and politics of diversity affect districts where both the city and suburban areas are encompassed within one district, Frankenberg and Diem (2012) found how it will effect school board leadership and policy making in the future. The first finding was that school board instability made it difficult to sustain policies designed to create diverse schools and also new policies in the future (Frankenberg & Diem, 2012). They also found that since both school districts had new superintendents. With new superintendents, school board leadership is critical to the success of governing the school district (Frankenberg & Diem, 2012).

Today, school boards govern a system that has higher and higher expectations for its students, that must address a tremendous diversity of student needs, and that by and large is inadequately funded (Campbell & Greene, 1994). If you think about it, the full complement of the nation's social, economic, and environmental ills appears in a teacher's classroom in one form or another (Campbell & Greene, 1994). Still with all the leadership and influence that school boards have and there are many opinions of what boards ought not to do, no agreement seems to exist about what they ought to do (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

### **School and Communities: The Nature of Their Partnerships**

School boards are supposed to be the intermediate between the local community and the school district. There has been a study by Hands (2008) that researched the role of school-community partnerships in the formation and citizenship of secondary school students. It looked at an alternative to school character or values education programs. Through partnerships between schools and their surrounding geographic communities, to become a means to establish close school-community ties and to create activities that enhance students' exposure to the varied and diverse values beyond the walls of their school (Hands, 2008). Hands (2008) defined community as a geographic location in which interpersonal relationships take place. In relation to the school-community relationship, the community is made up of the school personnel and all the individuals and organizations outside the school with a common interest in education (Hands, 2008). Some of the organizations may include businesses, health care facilities, government and military organizations (Hands, 2008). Partnerships between the school and community are characterized by shared responsibilities among institutions, with an emphasis on coordination, cooperation, and complementarities of schools and families (Hands, 2008). After the study Hands (2008), found that the principal played a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the school's vision for community involvement and enabling teachers in the partnerships. Hands (2008) found that the partnerships helped guide and enhance the moral development of the students. They also assisted the students in developing their interpersonal and vocational skills (Hands, 2008). A major improvement for the students through the partnerships was that the activities enhanced the students' self-esteem over the course of their personal development and encouraged civic involvement (Hands, 2008).

These positive relationships between the school and local community can help teach students to be caring, competent people who are able to contribute to their society. This is a major reason for public education, and is what school boards, superintendent and local communities should focus on.

### **The Role of the Superintendent**

The superintendent (and, in many cases the principal) is responsible for overseeing personnel, academics, finances, and community involvement duties for the school district (Berman, 2005). Therefore, high achievement and district-wide improvement are, ultimately, the superintendent's responsibility (Mason, 2013).

To help superintendents understand their roles as instructional leaders, the Lighthouse Project (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2007) studied high achieving districts. Findings from this project indicated these districts were characterized by:

“(a) leaders who pursued high and equitable achievement goals for all groups of students; (b) the courage to acknowledge poor performance and the will to seek solutions; (c) a superintendent and other leaders at the helm who developed and nurtured widely shared beliefs about learning, including high expectations, and who provided a strong focus on results; (d) schools that emphasized the achievement of every student in every classroom and took responsibility for that performance; (e) staff who not only wanted their students to graduate from high school but also to leave high school fully prepared to be successful in college; and (f) consistently high expectations for all students, regardless of students' prior academic performance” (p. 12).

Superintendents and school boards play a critical role in the well-being of students in the American public school system (Thompson, 2014). How they work together strongly impacts the quality of our children's schools. The school board-superintendent relationship is vital to increasing student achievement in the twenty-first century (Thompson, 2014).

The school board president holds a unique relationship with the superintendent. The relationship is not a matter of individual strength but one of partnership and teamwork (Thompson, 2014). The school board president serves as a liaison between the board and the superintendent. The president informs both the board and the superintendent of the amount of support for issues, develops compromises, and attempts to ensure that there are no surprises in the working relationship (Thompson, 2014). The board members and superintendent are key players in implementation and governance of the educational reform movement.

There is much research into improving the relationship between school board presidents and superintendents. In 2002, Muth advanced the notion that transformation of education leadership and practice is the framework that liberates stakeholders to new possibilities, knowledge, and methods of education (Thompson, 2014). Transformation leadership expects that the school board and superintendent team commitment will develop trust, respect, and interdependence upon one another (Thompson, 2014). In 2003, Duffy advances that leadership emphasizes a collaborative relationship rather than an adversarial one, and advances that trust, respect, and results flourish (Thompson, 2014). In 2014, Thompson conducted a study in Texas into the problem that adverse actions and operations by school boards negatively impact the effective working relationship of school board and the superintendent. His findings found that there is a difference in Texas school board and superintendents' perceptions regarding the school board-superintendent working relationship. School boards and superintendents must develop

processes and practices to connect with the community in a meaningful manner (Thompson, 2014). All the previous research has also shown that an overall issue of change is an element that must be continually factored into the updating and revising of the training topics and materials for school boards and superintendents (Thompson, 2014).

Superintendents and school principals often work together to create effective instructional leadership, which is an important characteristic of effective schools (Mason, 2013). With the new demand for higher educational accountability, more school superintendents and principals have begun to move towards a greater focus on improving their instructional leadership (Mason, 2013). As superintendent and principal roles transition from a managerial- focus to a focus on instructional leadership, it is critical that system and school leaders have both the skills and knowledge necessary to direct multi-dimensional action towards a single objective: improving student achievement (Mason, 2013). Both superintendents and principals frequently reference the lack of available of time, largely created by administrative duties and accountability reporting, as a significant challenge that adversely impact their abilities to be effective instructional leaders. Therefore, a challenge for policy-makers is to endeavor to provide more opportunities where teachers, principals, and superintendents can actively engage in professional discussion that examines evidence of student learning and develops strategies for improving teaching (Mason, 2013).

### **Effects on Student Achievement and Success**

American opinion of school boards fluctuates between positive and negative opinion, mostly based on student achievement. There has been much research based on the impact that school boards' governance has on student achievement. A study in 2011, researched the impact the school board had on student success by looking at the Policy Governance model (Sommers,

2011). The Policy Governance model was used to analyze the work of the boards because it matched the definition of high-quality board work. It suggested that quality boards should: understand and represent the owners' expectations for the school district, envision the future and the role of the school district, measure progress toward achieving the educational priorities and determine the extent to which board policy is carried out by the district staff, acquire information for decision making, manage and evaluate the board's work and ensure board member development (Sommers, 2011). In 2009, Carver again researched the effectiveness of the Policy Governance model on student achievement. He looked at if the school board was influenced more by the taxpayers' expectations and how that effected student achievement (Carver, 2009). Both studies found that there is no correlation between student achievement and school board actions and effectiveness. Student performance varied among the schools in ways unrelated to the board's actions or views (Sommers, 2011).

### **Professional Development for Board Members**

American public feels their schools are not performing up to par because of articles which state the American graduation rate is twenty-first out of 27 industrial countries (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). How do we lead the public schools back to excellence? One way to do this is by providing and demanding quality professional development for school board members. This philosophy came about as schools were being held more accountable for school improvement. Board positions are elected positions and a college degree is not a pre-requisite for election; therefore board members needed to be trained so they could effectively lead and understand the operations of a school district (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Professional development also provides board members with the skills and information, and behavior needed to effectively run a school district (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

Roberts and Sampson (2011), conducted a study to examine if board member professional development have an effect on student achievement. Their findings were that professional development is needed and essential for student learning but it was not altogether conclusive. There seemed to be some positive effect between school board member professional development and overall state education ranking. The states that required board professional development received a grade of C or B while those not requiring board professional development receive a grade of C or D. In regards to student achievement there was no effect (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

### **Effects on Teacher Effectiveness and Morale**

Building teacher morale requires more than compliments, plaques, and one-time events. Researchers have looked at how school leadership, especially principals, need to give teachers a voice in their day-to-day responsibilities - a strong support system (Black, 2001). Teacher morale is higher in schools where principals create a positive school culture and climate (Black, 2001).

Where teacher morale is high, students typically show high achievement but when teacher morale sinks, achievement drops and other problems come to the surface (Black, 2001). Many teachers who experience low morale contemplate moving to a new career (Black, 2001). According to Black (2001), many of the complaints from teachers were about weak or rigid curriculum plans, ineffective school policies, and too much paperwork and testing. One of the biggest complaints was that school administrators were running a bureaucratic jungle.

Still while bureaucratic disagreement and scandals make teacher morale low, many teachers stated that they were more motivated by intrinsic rewards such as self-respect, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment than extrinsic rewards such as job security, salaries, and fringe benefits (Black, 2001). Black also found that traditional, rigid

bureaucratically-administered schools result in low teacher commitment and job satisfaction, but progressive and flexible schools that use collaborative problem-solving strategies promote a feeling of affiliation with the school and raise teacher morale (Black, 2001).

Schools are trying to help the problem of low teacher morale with many programs. One program in New Jersey faculty and staff participation in wellness activities that are designed to help teachers feel good from the inside out (Black, 2001). Still while there are many programs and activities, researchers say that these interventions must begin with strong school leadership, which includes the principal, superintendent and school board (Black, 2001).

Another resource that can effect teacher morale that was researched was the role of the school principal and staff meetings with their teachers. One study looked whether there was a direct relationship between the manner in which a principal communicates information classroom teachers and the classroom teachers' perception of the campus' climate (Helmer, Holt & Thompson, 2015). All media types of communication were examined in the study, such as e-mail, face-to-face, staff meetings, phone conversations and written documentation. Along with the type of communication, the manner, demeanor, and presentation style of the principal's communication was studied (Helmer, Holt & Thompson, 2015). The researchers got their results from questions from two electronic surveys. The surveys had a total of 74 questions and were sent out to 124 female elementary school teachers in a North Central Texas school district, with a 32.8% response rate. The findings of the survey indicated that the manner in which a principal communicates to his staff is related to the teachers' perceptions of campus morale (Helmer, Holt & Thompson, 2015). Many of the teachers noted that oral communication was the most effect but writing formal documentation and using in-person discussions were also highly valuable (Helmer, Holt & Thompson). The teachers also noted that while e-mail was an efficient way to

communicate, one of the downsides is that meaning can be misconstrued. Therefore, a principal who relies mainly on electronic communication may inadvertently alienate the teachers (Helmer, Holt & Thompson, 2015).

### **Using Current Events as Teaching Moments**

One of the most important aspects of teaching is to make students active and knowledgeable citizens in local, state, and federal government. A way to help students become good citizens is to help them relate the information that they are learning in the classroom to current events. A great way is to use what is happening in their local community to help them become active members of the community while also learning.

Luckhardt (2014) conducted a study, where she used online discussion boards in her history class to help students understand primary and secondary sources, while also going deeper into the meaning of the documents. Online discussion boards take away the pressure of the instructor observing while the students discuss, therefore the students are able to discuss their feelings more in-depth on the discussion board (Luckhardt, 2014). After that she used the discussion boards to have the students discuss videos or podcasts about current events. While the students discussed their initial reactions to the event, they also were responsible for relating the current event to a historical event from the past that they had learned in class (Luckhardt, 2014). Luckhardt found that each semester she used the online discussion boards, the current event assignment becomes the liveliest lesson of the semester. The subject matter often resonates deeply with millennial students. The online forums help foster lively discussion about topics the students might not know they care about until the instructor introduced the topic, such as prehistoric humans (Luckhardt, 2014).

Using current events in teaching helps emphasize connecting the past to the present, and thinking and writing critically about those ideas (Luckhardt, 2104).

### **Leadership Role of School Board in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

School boards today govern a system that has higher and higher expectations for its students (Campbell & Greene, 1994). The contemporary school board member must command a deep understanding of governance in all its complexities. Many board members must also carry out their responsibilities in an extremely difficult, politically-charged environment. They are expected to confront the community's economic and social problems as they are reflected in the classroom, rise above political pressures, and govern in a highly ethical and professional manner (Campbell & Greene, 1994). The responsible exercise of power within the authority granted by law is the ultimate challenge to any individual board member. The National School Boards Association formed a task force in 1994 to help define the role of the school board. They came up with a definition of governance responsibilities for school boards (Campbell & Greene, 1994). The responsibilities are: the establishment of a long-term vision for the school system; the establishment and maintenance of a basic organizational structure for the school system, including employment of a superintendent, adoption of an annual budget, adoption of governance policies, and creation of a climate that promotes excellence; the establishment of systems and processes to ensure accountability to the community, including fiscal accountability, accountability for programs and student outcomes, staff accountability, and collective bargaining; and advocacy on behalf of children and public education at the community, state and national levels (Campbell & Greene, 1994). For effective boardsmanship, the task force came up with basic characteristics that effective board members have. Some of the characteristics were that effective board members understand, appreciate, and respect the role of the superintendent,

the district staff, and all other members of the community. They realize that demonstrating a respectful attitude enhances the image of the board as a professional body and serves to build staff morale and a climate for excellence system-wide. They also establish an environment of trust within the board and the district. They have established an accountability system that enables them to concentrate on outcomes, not on methods and procedures. Effective board members carry out their responsibilities with a high level of professionalism and understand that their behavior sets a tone for the entire system (Campbell & Greene, 1994). These characteristics should help the boards make clear role definitions and training to understand the complexities of their job and to keep up with critical education issues and new developments (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

### **Media Influence on the Educational System**

In today's society, media is everywhere. People can get information about a certain topic almost instantaneously, via the internet, social media and television. Since education and education policies affect most people's lives, the media attention has increased in the recent decades.

Piazza (2014) studied the media influence on certain educational policies that were being introduced into school systems. More specifically, he researched whether the media description of the policies contained accurate descriptions of the actual components of a new policy. The new policy being studied was Stand for Children, which was an approved new system for teacher supervision and evaluation that was created by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2011, and spurred by President Obama's Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program. The new system combined classroom observations with measures of student performance to rate teachers on a four-point scale from "exemplary" to "unsatisfactory". In the

“Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot question, Stand for Children proposed adding “teeth” to the new system in the form of higher consequences for underperforming teachers. Resembling a “last-in, first-out” model, Massachusetts’ law at the time allowed districts to use a teacher’s length of service at a particular public school as the primary factor in decisions about dismissal or in-district transfer. As originally written, the ballot question aimed to prohibit such practice, replacing seniority with performance evaluations as the primary factor in personnel decisions (Piazza, 2014). Upon its formal announcement, the ballot initiative came under immediate criticism from the state’s two teachers’ unions, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), an affiliate of the National Education Association, and the Massachusetts chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT-MA). The backlash brought media attention to the ballot question (Piazza, 2014).

Piazza (2014) counted the number of media articles that supported or opposed the ballot question, and also interviewed members of the public to gather data. He found that the media largely got it wrong. His case illustrates the pitfalls of relying on broad social discourses, often promulgated through mass media, to understand the particular social and political relationships that animate state-level policy making (Piazza, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

This past two years, I have been actively interested in the spectacle that has been the Hamburg Central School Board. The short story of the corruption with the board is that a board member was brought up on misconduct charges, and also the school superintendent filed a false police report of alleged vandalism to his car by school board member. The saga was in the local news for almost two years. I am an alumnus of the Hamburg Central School system and think very highly of the quality of the teachers and educators at the schools and everything that they have

taught me. When the drama within the school board unfolded in the news two years ago, I was irritated at the bad publicity it was creating for a great school district in the Western New York area. I started to think about instead of worrying about law suits the board should get to work doing what they were meant to do, which is help the students and teachers in the school district and be leaders in the community and school. I began to research articles about effective school boards and their community involvement. Effective board members have a conviction for public education, a commitment to public involvement, the ability to make decisions, belief in the democratic process, and the willingness to devote the time (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

There has been limited research done on school board governance in the past. Most of the articles I found about the topic were limited. Some focused on professional development effectiveness for school board members on student achievement (Roberts & Sampson, 2011) (Marino, 2011). Another focused on the extent that rural school districts engage in building community and discussing state and national reform (Van Alfen & Schmidt, 2007). Another focused on the role of the school board helping partner community and schools (Hands, 2008). I was surprised that there was not more research on how school board corruption affects the teachers and students. With this, I want to focus my thesis on this problem. I think that this research needs to be done because there is not a lot of focus on how school boards really do affect the daily moral of the school district, especially the teachers and students, by the either negative or positive media attention.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Site**

Hamburg High School is in Hamburg, New York, a suburb of Buffalo, New York. The suburb is known for being a quiet upper middle class town, with limited of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. In the 2011-2012 school year 128 students out of 1196 total enrollment (11%), were eligible for free lunch (The New York State Report Card, 2013). Only 1 student had limited English proficiency, and 95% of the students were of white racial origin (The New York State Report Card, 2013).

### **Participants**

For the purpose of this study, I e-mailed 12 former teachers and 1 former guidance counselor of mine that have were working at the high school. I choose the high school of the Hamburg School District because it was were the school board scandal originated. I only e-mailed these 13 participants because they had been teaching at the high school at the time that I attended, and knew about the school board scandal. Some of the participants worked with the teacher that was involved in the beginning of the scandal. Since they were my former teachers I knew that there was a better chance that they would participate in my study. The teachers that I e-mailed all had a Master's Degree and had been teaching for over 10 years at the high school. (The New York State Report Card, 2013). I e-mailed the subjects of my study using their school e-mail addresses. These e-mails are available to the public on the Hamburg High School website. I explained my study and the survey to the teachers in the e-mail. I also attached a copy of the consent form for the study to the e-mail.

### **Study Procedure**

To answer the question of whether a school board scandal can affect teacher and student morale in a high school, I created a ten-question survey with the online program Survey

Monkey™. The survey yielded qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive data was analyzed by the Survey Monkey™ software, and no identifying information was accessible to me. I got the e-mail addresses of my former teachers and guidance counselor by looking them up on the Hamburg High School website. I then e-mailed the teachers with a quick description of the study and an explanation that the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Out of the 13 participants that were invited to participate, 11 completed the survey (an 84.62% response rate).

Also included on the survey were questions that asked teachers to give an example of what administration did to help improve morale, or whether they wanted the administrators to do more. They were also asked to indicate whether they spoke to their students about the scandal, and to give examples of how they did so if applicable.

The link to the survey was included in the e-mail and the consent form. The survey included an introduction page giving a brief description of the study objectives, goals, and procedures. All questions were voluntary, so participants did not have to answer all questions on the survey to be included in the data analysis. At the end of the survey there was an explanation to the teachers that their survey responses would be deleted after May 2015.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Data**

The survey that I created collected both quantitative and qualitative data. To collect the quantitative data I created a number of questions that asked the participants to choose a choice of ranking answers that measured their opinion about the question. The answers that participants were allowed to choose from were based on the Likert Scale. The Likert Scale was developed by Likert, a psychologist. Likert-type or frequency scales use fixed choice response formats and are designed to measure attitudes or opinions (Bowling, 1997; Burns, & Grove, 1997).

The first question that measured quantitative data was the second question in the survey. For the second question of the survey, “Did you know about the school board scandal involving the Hamburg School district superintendent and school board?” My original hypothesis with this question, was that the response from the teachers would be “Somewhat” or “To a Great Extent”, since the scandal originally started out in the high school itself. The greatest response was “Somewhat” (54.55%), while the second most frequently chosen response was “To a Great Extent” (45.45%). These response rates indicate that my original hypothesis was accurate.

The third question on the survey was, “Did your morale to teach in the school district decrease while the scandal was in the news?” The highest response rate was 36.36% for “Somewhat” and the second highest response rate was 27.27% for were “Much”. My original hypothesis was that the majority of the responses would be “Much”, and while that response was not the highest response rate, the results from this survey question indicate that my hypothesis was not far from correct.

“Did administrators do anything to improve morale at the school while the scandal was occurring?” was the fourth question in the survey. The highest response rate for the question was “Occasionally” with a rate of 45.45% and the second highest response rate was “Rarely” with a rate of 27.27%. My original hypothesis was that the highest response rate would be for “Occasionally”, which results indicated to be accurate. The seventh question was, “Did your students know about the school board scandal?” The highest response rate was “Somewhat” with a rate of 72.73%, while second most frequently selected response was “To a Great Extent” with a rate of 27.27%.

The eighth question was, “Did you notice a decrease in student morale while the scandal was in the news?” “Somewhat”. The highest response rate was tied with both responses of “Very Little” and “Somewhat” with a rate of 45.45%.

The ninth question was, “Did you do anything to explain the scandal and its impact to your students?” The most frequently selected response was “Not at All” with a rate of 40.00; Both “Very Little” and “Somewhat” were the selected response for 30.00% of the participants.

### **Qualitative Data**

The fifth and sixth questions were open-ended questions for which teachers were given the opportunity to provide examples and other qualitative data. The fifth question stated: “If administrators did do anything to improve morale, please give a short description of what it was.” The participants stated that at school wide staff meetings the principal started off the meeting with a pep talk. The principals would state “We’ll get through this,” and told the teachers to focus on the continuing to do the good work and focus on the kids. The responses also indicated that the administrators did not give the scandal a lot of attention.

The sixth question asked: “If administrators did not do anything, please give an example of something that you would have liked for them to have done.” The responses from the participants were mixed. Some of the teachers were glad that there was not a lot of attention given to the scandal, but others wished that there would have been a little bit more attention given. One of the responses was that they wished they would have had an open and honest discussion about what was happening with the scandal. Participants also indicated that they liked that the administrators treated them as professionals. One respondent reported that he/she wished

the school district administrators or the school board made a public apology to the students, teachers, parents and community members.

The final question on the survey was a short answer question, asking respondents to give an example of something they did to discuss with students or improve their morale.” The most frequent response was that the teachers did not talk about the scandal with their students, unless the students asked questions about it. Some participants also reported having used the scandal as a teaching and learning opportunity for students. One of the responses stated that while the scandal was unpleasant, “sometimes it is a necessary path to travel to remind and rekindle the awareness of what is truly important and a participative expression of local government.”

### **Discussion**

After conducting this research, I believe that school board governance does impact morale in the schools of which they are in charge. The purpose of this research was to study the effect of school board governance and its view in the media on teacher and student morale in the schools in the district they govern.

The results of the survey indicated that teacher morale decreased when the school board was not serving the school district to the best of its abilities and was consumed by a scandal. Another important result of this survey was that student morale was not affected as much as teacher morale by negative school board governance. These results are important to the improvement of school board governance, teacher morale, and professional development.

### **Significant Findings**

These findings suggest the importance of professional development for school board members, as was also indicated by Roberts and Sampson (2011). The primary focus of the this

professional development should be on teaching the board members that their first focus as a local elected official to the school board, should be on supporting students and teachers and also on improving the schools in their district.. This will assist new board members in recognizing that they should do everything in their power to help students and teachers in the schools. It will also serve to remind reelected school board members of the most important focus for their role on the board. Focused professional development is also likely to improve the governance of school board and its public image in the media and the local community. This type of professional development might be beneficial to the Hamburg School District school board, and may improve the professional demeanors and public image of the school board members.

Improving the school board's ability to govern would also likely increase teacher morale in the school district. The survey results indicate that the teacher morale became low during the scandal. As indicated previously, when teacher morale is high students typically show high achievement, but when teacher morale sinks, student achievement drops and other problems often surface (Black, 2001). To help improve teacher morale, the responses of the participants indicated that there needed to more open discussion about the scandal of the school board. Open communication between teachers, administrators and school board members should be encouraged as a way to. Improve teacher morale. Along with open communication, many of the responses on the survey indicated that teachers were grateful and their morale improved when administrators treated them as professionals. Teachers need to and deserve to be respected on a professional level, both within the school and also the community. In order to improve teacher morale.

Another important finding of the study was that there was little to no effect on student morale, as observed/reported by the teachers, during the school board scandal. One of the

possible reasons for this is that the teachers might not really know if the students' morale decreased because they did not ask them directly. Another reason for this, might be that students do not understand the impact that the school board scandal was having in the local community, as much as teachers did. The students might have only heard limited information about the scandal in school or at home. Another reason that the student morale did not decrease might have been that the students do not have long-term investments in their public school, because they are only there until they graduate. Unlike the teachers, who have chosen to work and have a career in the school district with more long-term investment, the students probably focus on short-term goals, for example passing their core subjects and graduating.

### **Limitations in Research**

The first limitation in my research was that I wasn't able to send out my survey to all the schools and grade level teachers in the school district. Since I had a limited time frame to get approval for the study, I choose only to send out the survey to the high school in school district. While I think that the high school teachers were impacted greatly by the scandal, because it started in the school, there could have been more helpful feedback from other teachers, both at the middle and elementary school levels.

Another limitation was that students were not surveyed directly. By not surveying the students, I was not able to get self-reported feedback on their morale. While the teachers do tend to know a good deal about their students, and are often in tune to even subtle changes in their levels of morale, it would have been more beneficial to directly survey the students to get their personal feedback on the school board scandal. It would have also been interesting to see how much they knew about the scandal and also what they would have liked to have seen the school board members, administrators, and teachers do to address the scandal. The students could have

also commented on what the school administrators and teachers did effectively and ineffectively when addressing the situation during the scandal.

After analyzing the survey results, I believe that I should have differentiated the questions to the teachers more. Asking individual questions about the school principals, superintendents, and school board members would likely have yielded more information about how those individual's responses to the scandal impacted morale

### **Implications for Future Research**

Additional research into school board governance and its effect on teachers and students is an important issue that should continue to be studied. This research provided a small snapshot of the impact of local, state, and federal governance on teachers and students.

Future research could investigate student perspectives of their local school boards and how they impact morale and achievement, which. May also help improve education and professional development of teachers, principals, superintendent, and school board members.

In terms of teacher morale, future research could focus more on the actions of school principals, district administrators, and school board members that increase teacher morale. Since many of the responses of the study did indicate that the oral communication and staff meetings did help improve their morale, it would interesting to see what other forms of communication affect teacher morale. There should also be more research into teacher involvement in school board governance, and whether that would be beneficial to students/schools in the future.

Future research might also investigation the community perspective of school board governance, in order to get viewpoints of individuals that are not working for or affiliated with the school district. As such, further research could include local community members of the

school district involved in the scandal, and also community members from other school districts that have some knowledge of the scandal.

In conclusion, the findings of the research indicate that school board governance does affect teacher morale. It was found that there was negative impact on teacher morale when the school board was involved in a public scandal and not governing to the best of its abilities. Along with school board governance, school principals and administrators also heavily impact teacher morale.

### References

- Afshari, M., Bakar, K. A., Luan, W. S., Samah, B. A., & Fooi, F. S. (2008). School leadership and information communication technology. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 7*(4), 1-10.
- Allen, A., & Plank, D. N. (2005). School board election structure and democratic representation. *Educational Policy, 19*(3), 510-527.
- Alsbury, T. L. (2002). Superintendent and school board member turnover: Political versus apolitical turnover as a critical variable in the application of the dissatisfaction theory. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 39*(5), 667-698.
- Becker, A. B. (2014). Employment discrimination, local school boards, and LGBT civil rights: Reviewing 25 years of public opinion data. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 26*(3), 342-354.
- Berman, S. (2005). Restoring progressive values. *School Administrator, 62*(10), 16.
- Bird, J., Dunaway, D., Hancock, D., & Wang, C. (2013). The superintendent's leadership role in school improvement: Relationships between authenticity and best practices. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 12*(1), 37-59.
- Bowling, A. (1997). *Research Methods in Health*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Campbell, D. W., & Greene, D. (1994). Defining the leadership role of school boards in the 21st century. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(5), 391+. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA14887335&v=2.1&u=sunyfredonia&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=0e61646708bf1cd466160f17797c6b85>

- Carver, J. (2009). Is student achievement the test of school board governance? *Board Leadership, 104*, 1-8.
- Carver, J. (2012). School board's role, too often ignored, must be central to renewal. *Board Leadership, 119*, 1-8.
- Duncombe, W. & Hou, Y. (2014). The savings behavior of special purpose governments: A panel study of New York school districts. *Public Budgeting & Finance, 34*(3), 1-23.  
doi:10.1111/pbaf.12045
- Frankenberg, E., & Diem, S. (2013). School board leadership and policymaking in changing political environments. *Urban review: Issues and ideas in public education, 45*(2), 117-142.
- Garn, G. & Copeland G. (2014). School board elections: Theories meet reality. *Journal of School Leadership, 24*(1), 4-31.
- Grissom, J. A. (2010). The determinants of conflict on governing boards in public organizations: The case of California school boards. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory, 20*(3), 601-627. doi:10.1093/jopart/mup043
- Grissom, J. A. (2014). Is discord detrimental? Using institutional variation to identify the impact of public governing board conflict on outcomes. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory, 24*(2), 289-315.
- Hands, C. (2008). Circles of influence: The role of school-community partnerships in the character formation and citizenship of secondary school students. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 54*(1), 50-64.

- Helmer, B. C., Holt, C., & Thompson, R. (2015). The principals' communication: Shaping campus morale and student learning. *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, 32(2), 17-28.
- Hollingworth, L. (2012). Why leadership matters: empowering teachers to implement formative assessment. *Journal of Educational Administration*. 50(3), 365-379.
- Iowa Association of School Boards. (2007). *Leadership for student learning: The school board's role in creating school districts where all students succeed*. Des Moines, IA: Author
- Johnson, N. (2012). School boards: Governance and intransigence. *Board Leadership*, 123, 6-8.
- Luckhardt, C. (2014). Teaching historical literacy and making world history relevant in the online discussion board. *History Teacher*, 47(2), 187-196.
- Mason, V. (2013). Challenges to instructional practices: *Superintendent and principals' experiences* (Unpublished master thesis). University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.
- Marino, J. (2011). A study of school boards and their implementation of continuous improvement practices. *Journal For Quality & Participation*, 34(2), 27-30.
- McGuigan, L. & Hoy, W. K. (2006). Principal leadership: Creating a culture of academic optimism to improve achievement for all students. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 5(3), 203-229. doi:10.1080/15700760600805816
- Meier, K. J. & Rutherford, A. (2014). Partisanship, structure, and representation: The puzzle of African American education politics. *American Political Science Review*, 108(2), 265-280. doi:10.1017/S0003055414000148

- Piazza, P. (2014). The media got it wrong! A critical discourse analysis of changes to the educational policy making arena. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(36), 1-27.
- Piotrowski, C. (2011). The Bay County School Board shooting incident: Implications from the research literature. *Organization Development Journal*, 29(1), 91-95.
- Roberts, K. L. & Sampson, P. M. (2011). School board member professional development and effects on student achievement. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 25(7), 701-713. doi:10.1108/09513541111172108
- Sommers, R. D. (2011). Board impact on student success. *Board Leadership*, 113, 1-3.
- Thompson, R. (2014). The superintendent and school board relationship: Functioning as a group. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, 7(1), 69-77.
- The New York State Report Card. (2013, July 31). Retrieved from <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2011-12/RC-2012-141601060007.pdf>
- Van Alfen, C. & Schmidt, S. M. (2007). Leadership and rural school boards: Utah data. *Rural Educator*, 29(1), 12-15.
- Williams, S. M. & Hatch, M. L. (2012). Influences of school superintendents' servant leadership practices to length of tenure. *Journal of Organizational Learning & Leadership*, 10(2), 36-58.
- Whitaker, T. (2012). What great principals do differently: Eighteen things that matter most: Second edition. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Whitt, K. K., Scheurich, J. J., & Skrla, L. (2015). Understanding superintendents' self-efficacy influences on instructional leadership and student achievement. *Journal of School Leadership, 25*(1), 102-132.

## Appendix

### Example of Survey Monkey Consent Form

#### Informational Paragraph on This Study for Teachers:

Kara Corlett is a Graduate Student completing her Master's Degree within the College of Education in the Curriculum and Instruction program at SUNY Fredonia. Dr. Carrie Fitzgerald is her faculty sponsor for the project. Kara is conducting a study to determine the impact of a school board scandal on teacher and student morale. Any data collected from this study will be used to add to the literature base on school board governance in the United States. The results of this study will be analyzed and presented in a written Master's project that will be handed in at the completion of the study to Dr. Carrie Fitzgerald.

If you choose to participate, you will complete a survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. The survey is available electronically via Survey Monkey. No names and email addresses are required to participate; the researchers will not be able to identify if you choose to participate or if you don't participate. Participation in the study is independent of your teaching assignments and evaluations. If you want to participate in the study being conducted by Kara Corlett click on the following hyperlink (you will be taken to the introduction page of the survey):

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GQR5TFP>

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kara Corlett. Her e-mail is

[kara.corlett@fredonia.edu](mailto:kara.corlett@fredonia.edu). Her cell phone number is 716-548-0049.

**Survey Questions**

1. What grade level do you teach at Hamburg High School? (Please select all that apply)
  - a. 9<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - b. 10<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - c. 11<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - d. 12<sup>th</sup> Grade
  
2. Did you know about the school board scandal involving Hamburg School District superintendent and school board?
  - a. Not at All
  - b. Very Little
  - c. Somewhat
  - d. To a Great Extent
  
3. Did your morale to teach in the school district decrease while the scandal was in the news?
  - a. Never
  - b. Little
  - c. Somewhat
  - d. Much
  - e. A Great Deal
  
4. Did administrators do anything to improve morale at the school while the scandal was occurring?
  - a. Never

- b. Rarely
  - c. Very Rarely
  - d. Occasionally
  - e. Frequently
  - f. Very Frequently
5. If administrators did do anything to improve morale, please give a short description of what it was.
6. If administrators did not do anything, please give an example of something that you would have liked for them to have done.
7. Did your students know about the school board scandal?
- a. Not at All
  - b. Very Little
  - c. Somewhat
  - d. To a Great Extent
8. Did you notice a decrease in student morale while the scandal was in the news?
- a. Not at All
  - b. Very Little
  - c. Somewhat
  - d. To a Great Extent
9. Did you do anything to explain the scandal and its impact to your students?
- a. Not at All
  - b. Very Little

- c. Somewhat
- d. To a Great Extent

10. Please give an example of something you did to discuss with students or improve their morale.