

Reform Governance: How has it influenced Texas school board members and their school boards?

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PREFACE

Low academic performance has been widely recognized as a problem for at least two decades, since *A Nation at Risk* sounded a call of alarm in 1983. Since then, policymakers and educators have tried a thousand and one reform ideas, but few have succeeded in producing substantial and sustained improvement in academic achievement. Increasingly, policymakers have identified traditionally organized, heavily bureaucratized school districts as one source of the problem. School boards, particularly those in diverse communities, have been accused of contributing to the school system's ills by not keeping school districts on task and focused on student achievement (Finn & Kegan, 2004).

One approach to addressing the diminishing role of the school board and their lack of focus on student achievement is improved professional training of school board members on important aspects of governance, such as roles and responsibilities, core beliefs, reform strategies, policy development, and building civic capacity. The Texas Institute for School Boards, a key initiative of the Center for Reform of School Systems (CRSS) a Texas not-for-profit corporation partially supported by the Houston Endowment, has developed such a training program based on a conceptual framework of reform governance (See McAdams, 2006). Started in 2002, the Texas Institute training provides first-time school board members with an induction experience that focuses on the theory and practice of urban school district improvement and the policy-level roles and responsibilities of urban school board members.

Researchers at Evaluation & Research Services conducted a survey of the superintendents, school board members, and school board service personnel of the 43 urban and suburban school districts in Texas targeted by CRSS to attend the Texas Institute training. Their goal was to assess the hypothesized links from the Texas Institute school board training based on the Reform Governance model to changes in school board behavior and policymaking that could potentially lead to improvement in district performance and ultimately student achievement. In addition, the researchers examined the survey data to identify two types of school districts: (1) school districts where there was evidence of school board members directing their school district on a path of reform, and (2) school districts where school board members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold. These school districts are to be used as case-study districts in a follow-on study to understand how the reform governance model (defined by CRSS) is working and not working. This descriptive report, the first in a series, should be of interest to policymakers at the state level, educators and school board members, especially in Texas. Community members and parents may also benefit from the information this report provides.

This research was conducted by Evaluation & Research Services with support from the Houston Endowment. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Low academic performance has been widely recognized as a problem for at least two and a half decades, since *A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)* sounded a call of alarm in 1983. Since then, policymakers and educators have tried 1,001 reform ideas, including back-to-basics curricula, teacher professional development, class-size reduction, raised graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing, abolition of social promotion, site-based management, and innumerable reading and math programs. But few have succeeded in producing substantial and sustained improvement in academic achievement.

Increasingly, policymakers have identified traditionally organized, heavily bureaucratized school districts as one source of the problem. School boards, particularly those in diverse communities, have been accused of contributing to the school system's ills by not keeping school districts on task and focused on student achievement (Finn & Kegan, 2004).

Some trends in public education reform in the last two decades have tended to diminish the power of school boards. Site-based management took hold in the late 1980's, and weakened school boards and districts' central office. By the mid-1990s, in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York, mayors assumed control of school districts, appointing boards that were frequently little more than window dressing. Moreover, choice-based reforms threaten to limit governmental power more generally and empower parents. The latest policy trend threatening the autonomy of local school boards is the recent push for standards and accountability, epitomized by the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, a federal statute that requires schools to administer standardized tests every year to students in grades three through eight. Schools that fail to demonstrate adequate yearly progress toward proficiency (as defined by the states) are subject to sanctions ranging from the potential loss of students to the eventual reconstitution of their operations.

Given these trends and the recent state accountability systems, policymakers are debating the value of school boards and rethinking the appropriate design of a structure for governing public schools. Whatever their role, school boards typically retain a lot of practical power over the day-to-day functioning of schools. They select superintendents, set expectations, approve budgets, oversee major management systems and processes, approve and sometimes create the policy framework within which the district operates, approve contracts and usually personnel appointments, and significantly influence district culture. All of these activities help establish the overall vision and strategic direction of the school district. However, boards also have a strategic leadership role in helping schools focus on and support student achievement, which many boards do not perform very well. To strategically lead a school district, boards have the authority to develop a strategic plan, establish performance criteria for the superintendent, and implement structural changes to the district to improve the delivery or content of education. Because of these wide-ranging responsibilities, boards continue to be a major leverage point for effecting overall district transformation. Despite their power, however, a lot of boards do not demonstrate the kind of leadership and perform the role needed to improve student achievement.

One option is to improve how school boards currently govern school districts by providing boards with professional training. Through professional training, school board members could gain a clearer understanding of their purpose as a governing body, e.g. to strategically lead by setting a reform vision, maintaining a district-wide focus not based on constituents or special populations, focusing the activities and the policies of the district on improving student achievement, evaluating the superintendent based on concrete district performance goals, etc. Professional training on this unique leadership role of a school board could increase board focus on the achievement and learning of students and improve board members' ability to keep school districts focused on student learning.

Board members start out with varying abilities and knowledge of their role and how to govern. Training board members can play an important role by helping boards understand what they can do to support student achievement and teaching them how to perform leadership and policymaking activities, over and above the activities related to the day-to-day functioning of the school district.

To understand the value of professional training for school board members, the Houston Endowment has contracted with Evaluation & Research Services to conduct a large-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of a professional board training offered to new school board members in Texas since 2002, called the Texas Institute for School Boards. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the linkages from the training and its reform governance model to changes in school board behavior that could lead to improved district performance and to improved student achievement.

TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING AIMS TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

The Center for Reform of School Systems (CRSS), a Texas not-for-profit corporation partially supported by the Houston Endowment, has developed a professional training program for newly elected school board members, called the Texas Institute for School Boards. The training is based on a conceptual framework of "reform governance" (McAdams, 2006), i.e., governance focused on whatever reforms are appropriate to improve student academic achievement. Started in 2002, the Texas Institute training provides first-time school board members with an induction experience that focuses on the theory and practice of urban school district improvement and the policy-level roles and responsibilities of urban school board members.

The training is intended to empower individual board members and thereby boards as a whole with knowledge on how to function at a sophisticated, strategic policy level and be in the mode of "reform governance" where the aim of their leadership is to reform the school district in ways that will improve how students are educated. The Texas Institute training focuses on the main components of the CRSS reform governance model with emphasis on core beliefs and commitments; and roles, responsibilities and relationships. They also provide a solid overview of theories of action for change; building blocks of reform governance; policy development and policy oversight; and reform policies. Outside of the Texas Institute training, CRSS also provides subsequent trainings that focus on civic engagement and transition planning. These additional topics are generally offered via the

Texas Institute Alumni Program, which includes breakfast meetings at the annual Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) conference.

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION RESEARCH

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the linkages from the training to changes in school board behavior that could lead to improved district performance and to improved student achievement. This information also provides feedback to the Houston Endowment on the effectiveness of the Texas Institute for School Boards training and its underlying conceptual model of “reform governance”.

The evaluation has two phases. The first phase of research, described in this report, explored (1) whether there was evidence of influence on the Texas Institute participant’s beliefs and actions vs. non-participant school board members, (2) whether there is evidence that school boards with Texas Institute trained school board members exhibit effective governance and (3) whether there was evidence that the building blocks of the Texas Institute Reform Governance model influenced intermediate outcomes, such as the codification of reform policies. The second phase of this exploratory research, planned for next year, will explore in-depth via case studies the successes and challenges of school board members and their superintendents who are implementing the knowledge and tools gained at the Texas Institute training.

Because the ultimate goal of the Texas Institute training is to improve student achievement, any measurable effect will be evident after the completion of the qualitative phase of the evaluation. This report seeks to provide formative feedback on *intermediate* goals that might lead to improvement in student achievement. The intermediate goal is to improve the reform governance of urban school boards in Texas. Accordingly, the evaluation questions that underlie this report touch on not only the Texas Institute training’s effect on school board members’ actions and beliefs, but also collectively on school boards’ governance and adherence to the reform governance model. This report is not able to provide a rigorous estimate of the Texas Institute training’s efficacy in achieving its *ultimate goal* – improved student achievement.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

Evaluation & Research Services chose an evaluation approach that involves a comparison group design that examines the behavioral differences of school board members trained (and not trained) at the Texas Institute training. By choosing this approach, the researchers can describe the variation in influence the Texas Institute training has had on trained vs. non-trained board members, and to test for the statistical significance of these differences. The analysis is also a formative evaluation on intermediate outcomes, not a summative evaluation on the effect of the Texas Institute training on student achievement gains.

This phase of the evaluation research collected self-report survey data on all the school board members and superintendents in the 43 target districts, which include two types of school board members – those trained (and not trained) by the Texas Institute training. Surveys were administered from September to December 2006 via mail and web to all superintendents, school board members, and school board service personnel in the targeted 42 large urban

school districts in Texas (43 target districts minus the one pilot district). The survey was sent to 309 school board members, 42 superintendents, and 42 school board service personnel. Two reminder letters were sent in October and then follow-up phone calls were made in late November and early December. From a total of 309 school board members, 185 responded with a response rate of 60 percent. From a total of 42 superintendents, 29 responded with a response rate of 69 percent. From a total of 42 school board service personnel, 19 responded with a response of 45 percent.

The surveys collected measures not only on interim outcomes but also on the key mechanisms and processes described in the Texas Institute training model – beliefs, roles and responsibilities, operations, theories of action, reform policy. Three of the components of the Reform Governance model were not included, because they are not the focus of the Texas Institute training – policy implementation and oversight, civic capacity, and transition. Similar questions were asked of superintendents and school board members to gain insight from the entire 8 (or 10) member governance team. Some additional factual questions were then asked of the school board service personnel about the school district.

ANALYSIS

Researchers conducted correlational and regression analysis to test the influence of participation, the influence of the building blocks of the reform governance model and the influence of training a percent of school board members on a school board on the codification of reform policies controlling for external factors.

T-tests were calculated to examine the statistical difference between the behaviors and actions of school board members trained and not trained by the Texas Institute training. These analyses were run on the school board member level data (N=185). There are 88 school board members who have attended the Texas Institute training from 2002-2006 and 97 that have not attended.

To analyze the data at the school board level, the school board member level data was aggregated into school board level data by calculating the median (given the small sample sizes) of the school board member and superintendent responses for each school board. Each set of school board data were also analyzed for completeness, i.e. at least half of the trained and untrained school board members on the school board needed to have responded to the school board member survey. If this criterion was met (or exceeded) then the school board data was included in the analyses. Seven school boards had insufficient data to be included in the analyses; the pilot board was also not included. The analysis sample included 35 school boards.

RESULTS: DIFFERENCES IN BOARD MEMBERS TRAINED AND NOT TRAINED AT THE TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING

We found that the two groups of school board members are very similar prior to their attendance at the Texas Institute training. Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) are male: 67 percent vs. 55 percent. However, the two groups are similar in age, education background, race, and employment. The two groups of school board members also have a similar distribution of when they were first elected as board members as well as similar percentages elected at-large vs. single

member districts, or ran against an incumbent. The two groups of school board members also had similar percentages of their election contributions coming from the business community, parent groups, PACs, unions, and their own personal wealth. This similarity prior to attendance establishes the validity of comparing the two groups and allows for making inferences concerning the influence of the Texas Institute training on their beliefs and actions.

By comparing the board members who were trained and not trained at the Texas Institute training, the differences suggests that the Texas Institute training influences the intensity of its participants' core belief about children's ability to perform at or above grade level as well as the importance of defining an appropriate superintendent-school board relationship within the governance structure of a school board including the expectation that the Superintendent is a co-leader of reform. The Texas Institute training appears to also influence specific policymaking behaviors in school board members centered on reform, such as seeking outside expert advice on reform strategies, deliberating, voting on and/or adopting reform policies and strategies. These types of behaviors are key aspects emphasized in the Reform Governance model and the Texas Institute training – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and reform policy – that can possibly strengthen a school board's role in both approving and creating a policy framework within which the district operates.

Furthermore, the Texas Institute trained school board members rated other school board trainings more harshly than the school board members who had not attended the Texas Institute training. And in terms of all of the training that they had received, the Texas Institute trained school board members felt that the training they had received had been useful to their work as a school board member and they valued their training on governance and reform strategy most highly. In terms of future training, the Texas Institute trained school board members also expressed different needs in terms of the types of topics that they would find most useful to them in their work as a school board member. They wanted more training on policy implementation and oversight, governance, and school board operations.

RESULTS: INFLUENCE OF REFORM GOVERNANCE MODEL ON CODIFYING POLICY

The correlational and regression results indicate that two of the three main elements of the reform governance model – roles and responsibilities and school board operations, but not core beliefs – are independently associated with the codification of reform policies by a school board. The functioning of a board – either in terms of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships, or the operation of school board meetings, or evaluating the superintendent regularly – seem to be more influential than the core belief of the school board that all children can perform at or above grade level or of the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap in shaping a reform policy and getting it codified into policy.

Influencing a school board's governance appears to be more complex than increasing the number of trained members. Neither metric – the current penetration rate or overtime coverage measure – was significant in the multiple regression models, even controlling for district size, district performance, the rating of the superintendent and civic support. These regression findings imply that school boards with none, a mix, or a majority of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training (either measured as a current status or as a accumulative coverage measure) have the same likelihood of codifying reform policies and functioning effectively in their school board roles and in their operations. This finding may

be partially explained by the fact that several of the targeted school boards that have none or very few (up to 30 percent) of their school board members trained by the Texas Institute reported having positive core beliefs about children performing at grade level, belief in the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap, efficient board operations, and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships among the team of eight.

Moreover, comparing the two metrics, the overtime coverage measure has a stronger influence than the current status penetration rate, albeit not a significant influence. Both measures also explain a similar amount of variation in the model overall. Given that more information is contained in the overtime coverage measure, it has a higher correlation with presence of a fixed faction, and it has a higher level of sensitivity in the model, it is a preferred metric for measuring influence of the Texas Institute training.

We also found that the bivariate associations indicate that the higher the percent of Texas Institute trained board members (currently or overtime), or the increased presence of core beliefs, or the increased presence of effective roles and responsibilities, significantly lower the presence a fixed faction on a board. These influences, however, on reform policy codification were not significant, i.e. they did not have a significant independent association with reform policy codification in the multiple regression models.

Overall, these findings indicate that the percent of Texas Institute trained board members on a given school board (current or accumulatively overtime) significantly influences the presence of a fixed faction on a board, but does not contribute significantly – directly or indirectly – to more effective operations, core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, or reform policy codification. This suggests that there is not a so-called current or overtime percentage of how many school board members it takes to launch a district onto the path of reform. Instead, more effective school board operations and more effective roles and responsibilities of the school board members (regardless of the numbers of members trained) is what significantly influences the codification of reform policies within a given a district.

In weighing these findings, certain limitations should be considered. First, these findings may not be generalizable beyond urban and suburban Texas school boards. At the same time, little research has addressed this important population. In addition, the measures used in this study were original. Although this was necessary in the context of the current research, to the extent that a different set of measures might better operationalize the constructs of interest, additional research is needed. Additional research is also needed to assess the extent to which socially desirable responding may be a factor.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Texas Institute training appears to promote several important beliefs and actions in *individual* school board members pertaining to good reform governance practices. The importance of efficient board operations and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships appear to be significantly influential in shaping and adopting reform policies by a board. However, the specific percent of trained board members or their accumulative coverage overtime by the Texas Institute training appears not be a direct or indirect mechanism that drives the

codification of reform policy, although it does contribute to improving the functioning of boards by reducing the likelihood of a fixed faction on a board.

This implies that the Texas Institute training does influence its individual participant's policy making actions and beliefs about children's ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship, but it appears not to significantly influence the functioning of a board as a whole in terms of codifying reform policy. This may partially be explained because some of the school board members who have not attended the Texas Institute training hold similar beliefs and also practice good governance (as defined by the components of the CRSS reform governance model). This said, for those school board members who are not following the principles laid out in the reform governance model the Texas Institute training could have a significant influence on their individual beliefs and actions. Additionally, if school board members worked together more closely as a governance team (trained or not trained by the Texas Institute training) to implement efficient and good practices in terms of their board operations, roles, relationships, and responsibilities, there could be a significant increase in the codification of reform policies intended to improve district performance.

Based on these findings, we suggest the following recommendations:

The Texas Institute training should focus more on specific strategies that school board members can use to transform their board operations and roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

Given that none of the associations between the building blocks of the reform governance model and the codification of reform policy were moderated by either the percent of Texas Institute trained board members or the overall coverage metric, then increasing the percent of school board members who are trained by the Texas Institute training or the number of school board service years held by trained school board members on a given board may not provide sufficient changes in the functioning of school board governance. It may only reduce the presence of a fixed faction on a board, implying that this should not be the aim of the Texas Institute training. However, significant relationships were found between school board operations and roles, responsibilities and relationships, and the codification of reform policies indicating that these aspects of the reform governance model can promote good governance practices. This implies that the curriculum and training model of the Texas Institute training should be further refined to provide school board members with specific strategies on *how* to transform a school board's operations, *how* to improve roles, responsibilities and relationships, as well as, include more specific information on *how* to reform a district, i.e. reform strategies.

The Texas Institute training should include policy implementation and teamwork in the curriculum.

Individual school board members (rather than a whole school board) appear to be influenced in positive ways by the Texas Institute training in terms of beliefs and policymaking actions centered on reform. However, few of the school boards members are able to translate those changes into actual reform policies established by the whole board. The Texas Institute training seems to fall short in providing the specific strategies for a school board member to actually *implement* their learning and approve or create reform policies as a team of 8. This is evidenced by the fact that reform policy codification was not significantly associated with the percent of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training in a given district. Significantly more Texas Institute trained school board members also wanted additional

training in policy implementation, besides policy oversight, governance, and school board operations. These two facts suggest that the Texas Institute training should include (or add) the policy implementation training component into the Texas Institute training curriculum as well as add specific strategies for individual board members to follow on how to implement policy changes *within a team framework*.

The Texas Institute training should increase the amount of networking and informational support provided to school board members after the Texas Institute training.

The Texas Institute training could strengthen the support structure and networking component they provide to trained members. This support network should build up a set of resources that provide case examples, tools, strategies, pitfalls to avoid, etc which allow school board members who have attended the Texas Institute training to share their experiences, but more importantly interact and learn from each other's successes and mistakes. Providing this type of information and support after school board members have left the Texas Institute training and return home to their school boards should help board members with the specific choices and steps to attempt in *implementing* the new governance concepts and practices. Continued contact and support from other board members at the Texas Institute training should also help school board members initiate and take more action toward creating and approving reform policies.

Further research is needed to understand the specific success factors and barriers that are facilitating or impeding changes in individual board member governance behavior to translate into changes in behavior by the board as whole.

This study indicates that individual school board members do change their governance behavior as a result of being trained in good governance techniques, but that these individual changes are not translating into lasting reform policy changes collectively being made by school boards as a whole. In addition, the findings also suggest that improved board operations and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships do influence the codification of reform policies. Therefore, to be able to improve the functioning of school boards through training individual members it is pertinent to understand how changes in individual's beliefs and behaviors translate into improving board operations and creating effective roles, responsibilities and relationships. Research on the success factors and barriers of how these types of changes occur is part of the case study research that is the second phase of the evaluation. This case study research will be conducted with six boards where there was evidence of (1) school board members directing their school district on a path of reform, and (2) where school board members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to the school board members, superintendents, and school board service personnel whom we asked to participate in the survey. They were generous with their time and participated thoughtfully in the survey process, providing us with invaluable information about their experiences and opinions. A number of other individuals made important contributions to the development of this work. For their valuable input, we would like to thank Marc Elliott, Don McAdams, Norell Naoe, and all my colleagues on the Evaluation & Research Services evaluation team.

REFORM GOVERNANCE: HOW HAS IT INFLUENCED TEXAS SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND THEIR SCHOOL BOARDS

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1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Low academic performance has been widely recognized as a problem for at least two decades, since *A Nation at Risk* sounded a call of alarm in 1983. Since then, policymakers and educators have tried a thousand and one reform ideas, including back-to-basics curricula, teacher professional development, class-size reduction, raised graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing, abolition of social promotion, site-based management, and innumerable reading and math programs. But few have succeeded in producing substantial and sustained improvement in academic achievement.

Increasingly, policymakers have identified traditionally organized, heavily bureaucratized school districts as one source of the problem. School boards, particularly those in diverse communities, have also been accused of contributing to the school system's ills by not keeping school districts on task and focused on student achievement (Finn & Kegan, 2004).

School boards often do resemble dysfunctional families who represent a community's factions. A 1992 report found that school boards failed to establish a climate of change and orchestrate a coherent strategy for reforming America's public schools (Danzberger, et al, 1992). Specifically, the report asserted that boards were not providing far-reaching or politically risk-taking leadership for education reforms and they had become another level of administration, often micro-managing the school district. Moreover, according to the report, boards did not exercise adequate policy oversight, nor did they have adequate accountability processes and process for communicating about schools and the school system with the public. They showed little capacity to develop positive and productive lasting relationships with their superintendents and paid little or no attention to their governance performance and to their needs for on-going development of their capacity to govern.

Some trends in public education reform in the last two decades have tended to diminish the power of school boards. Site-based management took hold in the late 1980's, and weakened school boards and districts' central office. By the mid-1990s, in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York, mayors assumed control of school districts, appointing boards that were frequently little more than window dressing. Moreover, choice-based reforms threaten to limit governmental power more generally and empower parents.

The latest policy trend threatening the autonomy of local school boards is the recent push for standards and accountability, epitomized by the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a

federal statute that requires schools to administer standardized tests every year to students in grades 3 through 8. Schools that fail to demonstrate adequate yearly progress toward proficiency (as defined by the states) are subject to sanctions ranging from the potential loss of students to the eventual reconstitution of their operations.

These trends along with the recent state accountability systems have left school boards caught in the middle. Policymakers, as a result are debating the value of school boards and the appropriate design of the structures that govern public schools. However, school boards remain powerful. They select superintendents, set expectations, approve budgets, oversee major management systems and processes, approve and sometimes create the policy framework within which the district operates, approve contracts and (in most districts) personnel appointments, and significantly influence district culture. School boards are responsible for the overall performance of school districts, and because of their power they continue to be the highest leverage point for overall district transformation.

One approach to addressing the diminishing role of the school board and their lack of focus on student achievement is improved professional training of school board members on governance, such as roles and responsibilities, core beliefs, reform strategies, policy development, and building civic capacity. Center for Reform of School Systems (CRSS), a Texas not-for-profit corporation partially supported by the Houston Endowment, has developed such a training program based on a conceptual framework on reform governance (See McAdams, 2006) called the Texas Institute for School Boards. Started in 2002, the Texas Institute training provides first-time school board members with an induction experience that focuses on the theory and practice of urban school district improvement and the policy-level roles and responsibilities of urban school board members.

In order to gain feedback on the effectiveness of this training program – referred to as the Texas Institute training – and its underlying conceptual model, the Houston Endowment contracted with Evaluation & Research Services to provide an evaluation of the training program. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the linkages from the Texas Institute school board training to changes in school board behavior based on the reform governance model that could lead to improvement in district performance and ultimately student achievement.

The Texas Institute training's ultimate goal is to improve student achievement. Consequently, its influence will be evident, if evident at all, after the completion of this initial phase of the evaluation. Thus, this report is not able to provide a rigorous estimate of the Texas Institute training's efficacy in achieving its *ultimate goal*. Instead, this report seeks to provide formative feedback on *intermediate* goals that might lead to improvement in student achievement. The intermediate goal is to improve the governance and reform leadership of urban school boards in Texas (i.e. codifying reform policies). Accordingly, the evaluation questions that underlie this report touch on not only the Texas Institute training's influence on participants' actions and beliefs, but also collectively on the functioning of the entire school board's governance and the correlations between the various building blocks of the Texas Institute's Reform Governance model:

- *Training Outcomes.* Is there evidence of influences on the Texas Institute participant's beliefs and actions vs. non-participant school board members?
- *Reform Governance Model.* Is there evidence that the building blocks of the Texas Institute Reform Governance model influence intermediate outcomes, such as the codification of reform policies?
- *School Board Governance.* Is there evidence that school boards with Texas Institute trained school board members exhibit effective governance (as defined by CRSS's theory of reform governance) in terms of their core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, operations, theories of action, policy development, and reform policies? More specifically, is there a so-called penetration rate in terms of the percent of school board members on a given board that the Texas Institute training needs to train to ensure a school district will adopt reform policies?

In addition, the researchers will identify two types of school districts among the 43 targeted by CRSS: (1) school districts where there is evidence of school board members directing their school district on a path of reform, and (2) school districts where school board members are exhibiting leadership, but there is not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold. These school districts are to be used as case-study districts in a follow-on study to understand how the reform governance model (as defined by CRSS) is working and not working. Reform policy is defined as policies intended to fundamentally change how the school system operates (as opposed to operating policies, which are intended to maintain or improve the functioning of a school district, i.e., maintaining the status quo).

The evaluation of the Texas Institute training is important as it provides information about the effects of school board training programs, which may have larger implications for the role of the school board and improving student achievement.

The uniqueness of educational settings implies that no single study is likely to yield conclusive evidence about the influence of school board training on governance and policy setting, nor improvement in student achievement. The strength of this study is in examining the differences between various school board behaviors and improvement in governance outcomes, particularly a school board enacting a set of reform policies.

The evaluation approach involves (1) a comparison group design that examines the behavioral differences of school board members trained (and not trained) at the Texas Institute training, (2) correlational analysis and regression analysis to test the building blocks of the reform governance model, (3) regression analysis to understand the influence of training a percent of school board members on a school board on the codification of reform policies, and (4) identification of school districts that according to McAdams's reform governance model are on the path to reform or are exhibiting leadership but not yet solidified a reform agenda. These two groups of school districts will be studied in more depth to understand the conditions and factors that promote reform governance. We collected survey data from school board members, superintendents, and school board service personnel from the 43 urban and suburban school districts in Texas targeted by CRSS. Overall, the evaluation assesses the effects of the Texas Institute training experience on the participants and collectively on the school boards targeted by CRSS. The findings carry broader significance by expanding the information available about school board training and the role of governance in reforming school districts.

Organization of the Report

This report is divided into seven Chapters. The first chapter has described the goals and context of the evaluation. Chapter 2 provides a description of the key elements of the CRSS Reform Governance model and training employed at the Texas Institute training. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the data collection and evaluation methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 assesses the Texas Institute training's success in influencing participants' beliefs and actions. Chapter 5 describes the correlational and regression analyses of the influence of the Reform Governance model on intermediate outcomes and tests whether the percentage of trained school board members on a single school board influences the codification of reform policies. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings from the evaluation and provides recommendations.

2. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE REFORM GOVERNANCE MODEL AND THE TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING PROGRAM

This chapter describes and analyzes the conceptual model that is the basis for the Texas Institute curriculum and training program (See McAdams, 2006). Here the focus is on the underlying theory – how an effective school board is intended to function. Subsequent chapters examine how this theory has been incorporated into school board members’ actions and school board decisions.

Reform Governance Model

The Texas Institute training focuses on the theory and practice of urban school district improvement and the policy-level roles and responsibilities of urban school board members. As stated by McAdams:

“Reform governance is a comprehensive theory of governance for urban school boards committed to effective and efficient district operations, high achievement for all children, and the elimination of the achievement gap. It is built on the belief that to achieve this outcome, urban districts must be redesigned.

To act, boards must be clear about their core beliefs and commitments. They must have a clear theory of action for change that drives redesign of their district through the enactment and oversight of aligned reform policies. Policy development and approval and all their work must rest on clear and shared understandings of roles and responsibilities and board conventions about how work is done. And broad public support must be earned and continuity assured. These are the elements of the Reform Governance Framework.” (Pg. 13)

Table I summarizes the Reform Governance Framework by delineating school board levers, the major mediating factors that are influenced by school boards, and the ultimate outcomes that school boards and school district policies aim to promote. The school board levers are the seven fundamental building blocks in McAdams’s reform governance model. The mediating factors are the links between the levers and the ultimate outcomes and as such represent interim outcome measures.

As McAdams (2006) states, “ a conceptual framework, of course, is not reality. In the lives of board members, everything is happening at the same time. Nothing comes first and nothing comes last. ... Nevertheless, theory guides the understanding of reality and makes possible the management of change....What matters is the board’s understanding and ownership of the reform agenda and its effective exercise of the powers of governance to advance the agenda.”

Table 2.1
How the Texas Institute for School Boards Links to Ultimate Outcomes

School Board levers	Mediating factors	Ultimate outcomes
I. ○ Core beliefs ○ Commitment to core beliefs II. ○ Relationship with superintendent ○ Relationship to key stakeholders ○ Roles and responsibilities in governing III. ○ School board operations IV. ○ Theory of action for change ○ Reform policies V. ○ Policy development ○ Policy oversight VI. ○ Civic engagement V II. ○ Transition planning	○ Reform policy implementation ○ Superintendent ○ Civic support	○ Achievement of all students ○ Equity

Texas Institute Training Program

The Texas Institute training targets all newly elected school board members in the largest 43 urban and suburban school districts in Texas. These districts serve 1.7 million or, 39 percent, of the state’s 4.3 million students. Since 2002, the Texas Institute training has trained 120 board members and 9 superintendents from these 43 districts. In 11 of these districts, the Texas Institute training has trained a majority of the board and, across the 43 districts the Texas Institute training has currently trained 39 percent of the currently seated 309 board members. In time, CRSS intends to train all the school board members in the target districts.

The Texas Institute training, which is for newly elected school board members, focuses on four main building blocks of the Reform Governance Model: I Core beliefs, II Roles, responsibilities and relationships, III School board operations, and IV Theories of Action and Reform policies. Policy development and oversight, Civic engagement and Transition planning are addressed in subsequent trainings and work with the school districts via the Texas Institute Alumni Program, which has served most of these 120 board members a second or third time, as well as, introduced superintendents to reform leadership. As a result, this report will focus only on the influence and influence of the four school board levers taught at the Texas Institute training. Reform policy implementation is the primary intermediate outcome of interest, while the effectiveness of the superintendent and the level of civic support are important contextual factors that influence the mediating effects of governance.

3. DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION METHODS

This chapter describes the data collection strategies and evaluation methods. The analysis provided here is part of a formative evaluation on intermediate outcomes, not a summative evaluation. Formative evaluations are typically conducted during the earlier stages of a program and provide useful feedback on program design, redesign, and scale-up. Summative evaluations, by contrast, are designed to inform “thumbs up, thumbs down” decisions about whether programs deserve funding (or continued funding) (Scriven, 1991). Formative evaluations are especially appropriate when ultimate outcomes are distal and decision makers seek to make mid-course corrections along the way¹.

Design Overview

This evaluation, along with much social science research and evaluation work, is limited in the extent to which it can attribute connections between observed processes and conditions to observed effects since there are many uncontrolled variables likely to affect the outcomes in the targeted sites. Our evaluation design, however, examines the correlational links between key components of the reform governance model and intermediate outcomes in addition to regression analysis to test the overall influence of the key components of reform governance controlling for external factors to provide a solution to this problem.

This study collected self-report data on all the school board members and superintendents in the 43 target districts, which include two types of school board members – those trained (and not trained) by the Texas Institute training. This design assumes that the concern is to evaluate how *all* Texas Institute trained school board members in the 43 target districts – from the most to the least advantaged school districts – changed as a result of the Texas Institute training.

Moreover, this data allows us to describe the differences in school board member actions and beliefs from the same school boards in Texas according to whether they received governance training at the Texas Institute training, and to test for the statistical significance of these differences, as well as, to test the overall influence of having multiple trained school board members on one school board. We will also test the independent association of the individual components of the reform governance model and their influence on reform policy codification.

Data Collection

Data collection was designed to measure not only interim outcomes but also the key mechanisms and processes described in the Texas Institute training model – beliefs, roles and responsibilities, operations, theories of action, reform policy. Three of the components of the Reform Governance model were not included, because they are not the focus of the Texas

¹ As Stake summarizes, “When the cook tastes the soup, it is formative evaluation; when the consumer tastes the soup, it is summative evaluation” (Stake, 2000).

Institute training – policy implementation and oversight, civic capacity, and transition. Similar questions were asked of superintendents and school board members to gain insight from the entire 8 (or 10) member governance team. Some additional factual questions were then asked of the school board service personnel about the school district.

A pilot test was conducted in July with one school board in Texas that had been selected as part of a nationwide program to receive additional training on Governance. Given that they were going to receive additional training prior to our survey, they would not have been included in this study because of the contamination of the intervention. Several edits were made to the final survey and data collection process based on the pilot.

Surveys were administered from September to December 2006 via mail and web to all superintendents, school board members, and school board service personnel in the targeted 42 large urban school districts in Texas (43 target districts minus the pilot district). The survey was sent to 309 school board members, 42 superintendents, and 42 school board service personnel. Prior to sending out the first mailing of the survey, an advance notification letter was mailed by the Houston Endowment and a list serve announcement was sent out to all Texas Institute attendees (2001-2006) by CRSS. The first survey mailing on September 15th also included a letter on how to access the survey by web. Two reminder letters followed up this mailing in October and then follow-up phone calls were made in late November and early December. From a total of 309 school board members, 185 responded with a response rate of 60%. From a total of 42 superintendents, 29 responded with a response rate of 69%. From a total of 42 school board service personnel, 19 responded with a response of 45%. For a copy of the final surveys please contact the author at Evaluation & Research Services.

Measures

All measures are original, but were derived from McAdams's Reform Governance model. The measures were self-report, and are scored so that a high score reflects higher levels of the construct measured. The metric used to analyze the survey data is the "Problem" vs. "Not a problem" score. A "Not a problem" score (or conversely a problem score) is a dichotomous measure derived from an item with multiple response categories, and is defined as 1=not a problem or 0= a problem. For example, with a 5-point response scale of poor to excellent, the responses *poor* and *fair* are considered a problem (coded = 0) and the responses of *good*, *very good* and *excellent* are considered not a problem (coded = 1). The "Not a problem" scores (percentages) are then analyzed.

School Board Core Beliefs Measure. School Board core beliefs are measured by 2-items – (1) belief about children's ability to learn: "Do you believe that all children can perform at or above grade level (absent severe learning disabilities and special needs)?" and (2) belief about eliminating the achievement gap: "Do you believe that it is possible to eliminate the achievement gap in your school district?" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). The response categories for the first item are: *Yes, completely*; *Yes, somewhat*; *No, not at all*. Answers were assessed for this three point Likert-type scale with *Yes, completely* scored as a 1 for not a problem and *Yes, somewhat* and *No, not at all* as zero, indicating a problem. The response categories for the second item are: *Yes, very possible*; *Yes possible*; *Yes somewhat possible*; *No, not yet possible*; and *No, never possible*. Answers were assessed for this five point Likert-type scale

with *Yes, very possible* and *Yes, possible* scored as a 1 for not a problem and *Yes, somewhat possible*, *No, not yet possible*, and *No, not at all possible* as zero, indicating a problem. The mean of the two not a problem scores are then calculated. The beliefs composite measure has a range of 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.67.

Roles and Responsibilities Measure. The measure of roles and responsibilities is a sum of ten items: (1) "Has your school board relied on the superintendent to supply a reform vision (i.e. a vision for drastically improving student achievement)?" (2) "Has your school board relied on the superintendent to supply an action plan that sets clear strategic direction for improving student achievement", (3) "Does your school board set policy and allow the superintendent and his or her team to manage and implement this policy in the district?", (4) "How often does your school board try to influence the superintendent's decisions regarding personnel, facilities, and other managerial functions?", (5) "How often do you as a school board member refer constituent complaints back to the superintendent or an appropriate school district staff member?", (6) "Do the members of your board trust and respect the superintendent?", (7) "Do the members of your board trust and respect each other?", (8) "When conducting board business, what is the level of professionalism among school board members?", (9) "In general, how would you rate your working relationship with the school board?", and (10) "How often does the school board (i.e. all members as a whole) discreetly and constructively handle concerns with the superintendent?" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$). The response categories for the first two items are: *Yes, completely*; *Yes, somewhat*; *No, it is being developed only by the school board*; *No, it is actively being developed jointly*; and *No, it is not being developed/We do not have or need one*. These items are scored as *No, it is actively being developed jointly* is 1 for not a problem. The response categories for all of the rest of the items, but (9) are a six-point Likert-type scale from *Never* to *Always* with *Almost always* and *Always* scored as 1 for not a problem. For item (9) the response scale is a five-point Likert-type scale from *poor* to *excellent* with *poor* and *fair* scored as 0 as a problem. The mean of the ten roles and responsibility not a problem scores are calculated. The roles and responsibilities composite measure has a range of 0.1 to 0.7 with a mean of 0.46.

School Board Operations Measure. The measure of school board operations is a sum of five items: (1) "How often does the discussion during a school board meeting veer far from the written agenda?" with 6 response options from *Never* to *Always*, (2) "Is there an evaluation process in place to evaluate the Superintendent performance?" with a *Yes/No* response scale, (3) "On average over the last 12 months, how many school board meetings are held per month?" with the options of 1 to 10 or more, (4) In general, how long are your school board meetings?" with the response options of *less than one hour* and *1 hour up to 10 or more hours*, and (5) "In the last 12 months, how often has a school board meeting run late into the evening (i.e. past 11 pm)?" with the 6 response options from *Never* to *Always* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.66$). Items (1) and (5) with the *Never* to *Always* scale are scored with *Never* and *Almost never* as 1 for not a problem. Items (3) and (4) with the count scales are scored with *1*, *2*, and *3* as a 1 for not a problem (No one indicated that a meeting lasted *less than an hour*). Item 2 with the *Yes/No* scale was scored with *Yes* as 1 for not a problem. The mean of the five not a problem scores are calculated. The School Board Operations composite measure has a range of 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.46.

Interim Outcome Measures. The two interim outcome measures are: whether a reform vision or whether a theory of action have been codified into policy. A reform vision is *defined* as a vision for drastically improving student achievement. Reform policy is *defined* as policies intended to fundamentally change how the school system operates (as opposed to operating policies, which are intended to maintain or improve the functioning of a school district, i.e., maintaining the status quo). Theory of action is *defined* as a set of strategies to improve achievement for all students. The reform vision interim outcome measure is derived from the item: “Has this reform vision been codified into policy?”. The theory of action interim outcome measure is derived from the item: “Has this action plan (or theory of action for change) been codified into policy?” The response categories for both of these items are: *Yes; In progress of being developed; or No*. These items were scored with *Yes* as 1 for not a problem. The reform vision policy measure and the theory of action policy measure have a range of 0 to 1 with a mean of 0.16 and 0.11, respectively. Out of the 43 school districts, 7 school districts reported having a reform policy codified and 6 reported having a theory of action policy (or policies) codified.

Penetration Rate Measure. The penetration rate measure is derived from both the survey data and administrative data from CRSS. Attendance of each school board member was verified and then the school district percentage was calculated. The penetration rate measure ranged from 0 to 100 with a mean of 0.39. Several districts do not have any school board members trained by the Texas Institute training (as of Jan 2007 given that the Texas Institute training has only been offered to newly elected school board members since 2002 with the first Institute being held in 2002. One school district has 100% of their school board members that have been trained at the Texas Institute training.

Analysis Strategy

T-tests were calculated to examine the statistical difference between the behaviors and actions of school board members trained and not trained by the Texas Institute training. These analyses were run on the school board member level data (N=185). There are 88 school board members who have attended the Texas Institute training and 97 that have not attended.

To analyze the data at the school board or district level, the school board member level data was aggregated into school district level data by calculating the median (given the small sample sizes) of the school board member and superintendent responses for each school district. Each set of school district data were also analyzed for completeness, i.e. at least half of the trained and untrained school board members on the school board need to have responded to the school board member survey. If this criterion was met (or exceeded) then the school district data was included in the analyses. Seven school districts had insufficient data to be included in the analyses. The pilot district was also not included. The analysis sample included 35 school districts.

Correlations were calculated to examine the bivariate association between reform vision policy codification and school board core beliefs or school board roles and responsibilities or school board operations as well as the percent of Texas Institute trained board members (i.e. penetration rate) or whether there is a fixed faction on the school board. A fixed faction was

defined as ‘when certain members of the school board vote together as a block on almost all issues.’

Furthermore, the independent variables of interest were regressed on the dependent variable (reform vision policy codification). The independent variables were entered into the model in blocks. First, we modeled the effect of school board core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and operations, while also adjusting for number of schools in the school district, the percent of schools meeting their adequate yearly progress. Model 2 included controls for the school board members rating of the superintendent and civic support (measured by the proxy of a bond having passed between 2001 and 2006 with no bonds failing after a bond had passed). District size and student achievement were included in the models because the literature finds many differences in school district functioning according to size and achievement. The rating of the superintendent and civic support were included in the model because they are potential mediating factors according to the reform governance model. Model 3 added the percent of Texas Institute trained board members in a given district. Models 4 and 5, respectively, added the interaction term of roles and responsibilities with the percent of Texas Institute trained board members and school board operations with the percent of Texas Institute trained board members to examine the moderating effect of the percent of Texas Institute trained board members on a given board. Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, logit regression models were also estimated. Estimates from the OLS and logit models were similar so only the results from the OLS models are reported given their ease of interpretation.

Finally, two types of school districts were identified among the 35 targeted by CRSS: (1) school districts where there is evidence of school board members directing their school district on a path of reform, and (2) school districts where school board members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold. The first type was labeled “Working” and the second type “Mostly Working”.

To identify districts in which the reform governance model is working and mostly working several steps were taken. First, all 35 school districts were classified as working or mostly working in each of the 4 main areas of the Reform Governance model: Core Beliefs, Operations, Roles and responsibilities, and Reform policy codification. For this process, the not a problem (1) vs. a problem (0) dichotomous measure for each of these areas was used. This 0-1 metric indicated whether each district had a problem (or not) in each of these four reform governance areas.

Once this grid of school districts by reform governance areas was created the following two selection rules were applied. First, a school board needed to exhibit that the reform governance model was working or mostly working in the district. This was operationalized as follows: if a district had a 1 (indicating not a problem) for at least 2 of the 3 reform governance elements: core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and operations, then the reform governance model could be considered either working or mostly working for that district. Second, to be a district that was working (vs. mostly working), a district needed to have codified a reform vision. This was operationalized as follows: if the district had a 1 for the reform policy codification measure, indicating that the board members and the

superintendent indicated that the district has codified a reform vision, then a reform vision was considered to be in place. This was validated by a secondary document review of the school district’s policy books.

Overlapping these two groups identifies school districts that are working – have a reform vision codified and have 3 out of the 3 key elements of the reform governance model in place – and those that are mostly working – have only 2 out of 3 key elements of the reform model in place, but do not have a reform vision codified into policy.

Table 3.1
Descriptive Information of Variables Analyzed

Variables	Mean	SD	Observed Range	N coded as 1
N = 35				
Reform Vision Policy Codification	0.16	0.37	0 - 1	6 districts
Theory of Action Policy Codification	0.11	0.32	0 - 1	5 districts
Core Beliefs	0.67	0.34	0 - 1	NA
Roles and Responsibilities	0.42	0.15	0.1 - 0.7	NA
School Board Operations	0.46	0.32	0 - 1	NA
Percent of Texas Institute Trained Board Members	0.39	0.29	0 - 1	NA
Avg. Number of Schools in the District	64 schools	60	26 - 306	NA
Avg. Percent of Schools Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress	0.89	0.17	0.05 - 1.0	NA
Rating of Superintendent	8.3	1.4	0-10	NA
Bond Passed During 2001-2006	0.64	0.49	0 - 1	17 districts
Presence of a Fixed Faction	0.15	0.35	0 - 1	4 districts

4. RESULTS: DIFFERENCES IN BOARD MEMBERS TRAINED AND NOT TRAINED AT THE TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING

This chapter reports and discusses the differences found in the backgrounds, beliefs and actions of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training and those school board members who have not attended the Texas Institute training from the 43 suburban and urban target districts in Texas. This approach is based on a classic comparison group evaluation, which compares two groups and tests whether the one group who received an intervention has different attitudes and behaviors than the group that did not receive the intervention.

T-tests and chi-square tests (as appropriate) were calculated to examine the statistical difference between various background characteristics, beliefs and actions of school board members trained and not trained by the Texas Institute training. These analyses were conducted on school board member level data (N=185) with 97 school board members who were not trained and 88 school board members who were trained at the Texas Institute training. See Table 4.1 for the comparison of background characteristics for the two groups of school board members.

Differences in Background Characteristics

The backgrounds of the trained school board members differ from school board members who have not attended the Texas Institute training in several ways. Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) are male: 67% vs. 55%. However, the two groups are similar in age, education background, race, and employment. The two groups of school board members also have a similar distribution of when they were first elected as board members as well as similar percentages elected at-large vs. single member districts, or ran against an incumbent. The two groups of school board members also had similar percentages of their election contributions coming from the business community, parent groups, PACs, unions, and their own personal wealth. However, school board members who have not attended the Texas Institute training had a significantly larger percentage of their election contributions coming from their families: 50% vs. 39%. There were also some differences in the types of campaign issues across the two groups. Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) ran with the following campaign issues: curriculum and instruction (53% vs. 37%), school facility and planning (45% vs. 32%), and specific school programs (15% vs. 7%). However, similar percentages of school board members of both groups ran their campaigns on the issues of student achievement, budget and finance, teacher or principal quality, equity issues, governance, a recognized local reform effort, and bond issues.

Table 4.1
Descriptive Information of Board Members Trained & Not Trained at the Texas
Institute training

	Attended TISB	Have Not Attended TISB
Variables	%	%
N = 185	N=88	N=97
Male	67% **	55% **
Year first elected School Board Member:		
2006/07	8%	12%
2005/06	11%	15%
2004/05	20%	14%
2003/04	10%	8%
2002/03	9%	2%
2001/02	4%	3%
Prior to 2000/01	24%	35%
Ran against an incumbent	31 %	24%
Elected At-large	55%	57%
Source of election contributions:		
Family	39% ***	50% ***
Business community	36%	29%
Parent groups	25%	20%
Political Action Committees	22%	17%
Union	11%	12%
Personal wealth	45%	39%
Campaign Issues:		
Student Achievement	73%	70%
Budget and Finance issues	41%	39%
Curriculum and instruction	53% ***	37% ***
Teacher or Principal quality	30%	29%
Equity issues	39%	29%
School facility and planning	45% **	32% **
Specific school programs	15% **	7% **
Governance	34%	31%
Recognized local reform effort	10%	9%
Bond issues	1%	3%
	Mean	Mean
Age	55 years	54 years

NOTE: * p< 0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Understanding the differences and similarities in the backgrounds characteristics of the two types of school board members establishes the similarity of the two groups and allows for

making a valid comparison concerning their beliefs and actions after roughly half of them have attended the Texas Institute training. In general, we found that the school board members trained at the Texas Institute training are similar to those who did not attend in key areas such as in what year they first started as school board members, race, age, educational background, and current employment (or state of retirement). They do differ however in terms of some of their campaign issues, percent male, and percent of election contributions that came from their families. The difference in percent male and percent of election contributions that came from family do not raise any concerns. The differences found in campaign issues do indicate that the school board members that attend the Texas Institute training may have had a proclivity for supporting topics or problems related to curriculum and instruction, school facility and planning, and/or specific school programs. However given that similar percentages of both groups of school board members had campaign topics related to various aspects of the Reform Governance model such as governance, student achievement, recognized local reform efforts, and bond issues, the differences found do not raise any concerns for using a comparison group methodology.

Differences in Beliefs and Actions

Comparing the beliefs and actions of the school board members, we found that the school board members trained at the Texas Institute training and the school board members not trained by the Texas Institute training statistically differ in some key beliefs and actions (at the $p=0.001$ level). Specifically, Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) view their role as a school board member as well as their relationship with the superintendent differently, and hold a stronger belief that all children can perform at or above grade level (absent severe learning disabilities and special needs). (See box below for details).

Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training):

Core Beliefs:

- Have the primary expectation that the superintendent would be a co-leader of reform: 45% vs. 30%
- Believed completely (rather than somewhat or not at all) that all children can perform at or above grade level: 87% vs. 74%

View the Most Difficult Problem(s) Faced by Superintendent:

- Defining an appropriate role with the school board: 8% vs. 1%

View the Most Difficult Problem(s) as a School Board Member:

- Superintendent relationship: 8% vs. 2%

In addition, the Texas Institute training motivated school board members to seek out expert input from outside the school district on reform strategies and attended additional training beside the Texas Institute training. Texas trained school board members also engaged more

in the policy development process around policies related to reform and reform strategies. (See box below for details).

Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training):

Took Actions that Support Reform:

- Sought expert input outside of the school district on reform strategies: 66% vs. 43%
- Deliberated on policies related to a reform vision or reform strategy: 56% vs. 42%
- Voted on and adopted reform policies to support a reform vision or reform: 44% vs. 37% strategy

Attended Other School Board Trainings:

- Attended the NASB training: 75% vs. 56%
- Attended the TASB training: 98% vs. 92%
- Attended the regional trainings: 93% vs. 83%

Furthermore, the Texas Institute trained school board members rated other school board trainings more harshly than the school board members who had not attended the Texas Institute training. And in terms of all of the training that they had received, the Texas Institute trained school board members felt that different training topics had been most useful to their work as a school board member; they valued training on governance and reform strategy more highly. (See box below for details).

Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training):

Rated Other School Board Trainings They Attended:

- Gave the NASB training a *lower* rating on a 0-10 point scale: 5 vs. 6
- Gave the TASB training a *lower* rating on a 0-10 point scale: 6.6 vs. 7.5
- Gave the regional trainings a *lower* rating on a 0-10 point scale: 5.6 vs. 6.3

Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) found the following topics most useful:

Training topics that have been most useful:

- Governance: 65% vs. 51%
- Reform strategies: 51% vs. 28%

Finally, in terms of future training, the Texas Institute trained school board members also expressed different needs in the types of topics that they would find most useful to them in

their work as a school board member. They wanted more training on policy implementation and oversight, governance, and school board operations. (See box below for details).

Significantly *more* Texas Institute trained school board members (as compared to those not trained by the Texas Institute training) wanted training on the following topics:

Training topics most useful to work as School Board Member:

- Policy implementation and oversight: 55% vs. 34%
- Governance: 43% vs. 26%
- School board operations: 31% vs. 18%

Summary

Overall, we found that the two groups of school board members are very similar prior to their attendance at the Texas Institute training. Moreover, the findings suggest that the Texas Institute training influences the intensity of its participants' core belief about children's ability to perform at or above grade level as well as the importance of defining an appropriate superintendent-school board relationship within the governance structure of a school board including the expectation that the Superintendent is a co-leader of reform. The Texas Institute training appears to also influence specific policymaking behaviors in school board members centered on reform, such as seeking outside expert advice on reform strategies, deliberating, voting on and/or adopting reform policies and strategies. These behaviors are key aspects emphasized in the Reform Governance model and the Texas Institute training – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and reform policy – that can possibly strengthen a school board's role in both approving and creating a policy framework within which the district operates.

5. RESULTS: THE INFLUENCE OF THE REFORM GOVERNANCE MODEL ON CODIFYING POLICY

This chapter reports and discusses the influence of the various elements of the conceptual model, which is the basis for the Texas Institute curriculum and training program, as well as the influence of the percentage of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training on a school board codifying reform policies (interim outcome) with the intention of improving student achievement in subsequent years.

Intercorrelations Between Key Study Variables

The bivariate correlations of a school board codifying a reform policy and their extent of exhibiting key elements of the reform governance model – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and school board operations – are small in magnitude, as reported in the first row of Table 5.1, and not significant, indicating very weak associations between the outcome variable and the reform governance building blocks. Core beliefs, roles and responsibilities and school board operation however are positively associated with reform policy codification (as hypothesized). The bivariate association between codifying a reform policy and codifying at theory of action is of medium magnitude and significant, indicating a strong association between these two school board actions. A school board's operations and roles and responsibilities are also of medium magnitude and significant, indicating a strong association between these two building blocks of the reform governance model.

The bivariate correlations of the percent of Texas Institute trained board members and the key elements of the reform governance model – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and school board operations – are small in magnitude, as reported in the last column in Table 5.1, indicating weak associations between the percent of school board members trained in a given school board and the reform governance building blocks. The percent of Texas Institute trained board members on a board and the key elements of the reform governance model are positively associated (as hypothesized). However, none of the correlation coefficients were significant at the $p=0.01$ level.

The bivariate correlations of the presence of a fixed faction and the percent of Texas Institute trained school board members and the key elements of the reform governance model – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and school board operations – are small to medium in magnitude, as reported in the last row in Table 5.1, indicating some weak associations and some significant associations between the presence of a fixed faction and the reform governance building blocks. The presence of a fixed faction and the key elements of the reform governance model and the percent of Texas Institute trained members are negatively associated (as hypothesized). The presence of a fixed faction and the percent of Texas Institute trained board members, and core beliefs, and roles, responsibilities, and relationships were significant at the $p=0.01$ level.

Table 5.1
Intercorrelations Between Key Study Variables

	2	3	4	5	6
1. Reform Policy Codification	.03	.13	.28	.62***	.19
2. Core beliefs		.07	.04	.01	.22
3. Roles and Responsibilities			.52***	.18	.05
4. School Board Operations				.23	.10
5. Theory of Action Codified					.04
6. Percent of Texas Institute Trained Board Members					–
7. Presence of a fixed faction	-.32***	-.39***	-.11	-.18	-0.23***

NOTE: ****Italics* indicates significance at the 0.001 level.

Multivariate Regressions

The multivariate regression analyses, when controlling for the number of schools in the school district and the percent of schools meeting their adequate yearly progress, indicate that school boards core beliefs was not independently related to the codification of reform policy (Table 5.2), although roles and responsibilities and school Board operations do remain significantly related to the outcome variable. In addition, there are no size or performance effects.

Additional mediating variables are entered into the equation in Model 2. The rating of the superintendent and whether bonds passed (as a proxy for civic support) were not associated with reform policy codification. The percent of Texas Institute trained board members variable was entered into the equation in Model 3. The percent of Texas Institute trained board members was also not associated with reform policy codification, suggesting that there is not a so called penetration rate of how may school board members it takes to launch a district onto the path of reform.

Interaction terms were entered into the equation in Model 4 and 5 for cases in which roles and responsibilities or school board operations were significant in models 2. None of the interaction terms were statistically significant in these models (results not presented).

The dependent variable Theory of Action codification was used in this same series of models Model 6 through 10. None of the independent variables were statistically significant in these models (results not presented).

Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, logit regression models were also estimated (results not presented). Estimates from the OLS and logit models are similar with the same significance, so only the results from the OLS models are reported given their ease of interpretation.

Table 5.2 Multivariable Regression Analyses of the Reform Governance Building Blocks and Percent of Texas Institute Trained Board Members on Reform Policy Codification

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Reform Policy Codification						
Number of Schools	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percent Meeting AYP	0.59	0.69	1.42	0.88	1.46	0.94
Rating of Superintendent			0.09	0.08	0.09	0.09
Bond Passed 01-06			0.18	0.21	0.18	0.22
Core Beliefs	0.13	0.20	-0.13	0.21	-0.13	0.21
Roles & Responsibilities	1.05***	0.48***	1.37***	0.59***	1.32***	0.63***
School Board Operations	0.83***	0.22***	0.62***	0.30***	0.57***	0.35***
Percent of Texas Institute Trained Board Members					0.08	0.26
N (R ²)	35 (0.47)		35 (0.52)		35 (0.52)	

NOTE: * p< 0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Summary

The results indicate that two of the three main elements of the reform governance model – roles and responsibilities and school board operations, but not core beliefs – are independently associated with the codification of reform policies by a school board. Overall, the functioning of a board – either in terms of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships, or the operation of school board meetings, or evaluating the superintendent regularly – seem to be more influential than the core belief of the school board that all children can perform at or above grade level or of the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap in shaping a reform policy and getting it codified into policy.

We also investigated the relationship between the percent of Texas Institute trained school board members on a given board and the codification of policy as well as the elements of the reform governance model in the bivariate correlations. The percent of Texas Institute trained school board members bivariate associations were not significant, nor was it in our multiple regression models, even controlling for district size, district performance, the rating of the superintendent and civic support. These findings indicate that school boards with none, a mix, or a majority of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training have the same likelihood of codifying reform policies and functioning effectively in their school board roles and in their operations. Several of the targeted school boards that have from 0-30% of their school board members trained by the Texas Institute training also have positive core beliefs about children performing at grade level and the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap, have efficient board operations, and have effective roles, responsibilities and relationships among the team of eight.

We also found that the bivariate associations indicate that the *higher* the percent of Texas Institute trained board members, or the *increased* presence of core beliefs, or the *increased* presence of effective roles and responsibilities, the significantly *lower* the presence a fixed

faction on a board. However, these influences were not significant enough to have a significant independent association in the multiple regression models and influence reform policy codification. These findings indicate that the percent of Texas Institute trained board members on a given school board significantly influences the presence of a fixed faction on a board, but does not contribute significantly to more effective operations, core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, or reform policy codification. Instead, more effective school board operations and roles and responsibilities of the school board members do significantly influence the codification of reform policies within a given a district.

6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation is designed to study the linkages from the Texas Institute school board training to changes in school board behavior based on the reform governance model (as defined by CRSS) that could lead to improvement in district performance and ultimately student achievement.

The Texas Institute training's ultimate goal is to improve student achievement. However, this report seeks to provide formative feedback on *intermediate* goals that might lead to improvement in student achievement. The intermediate goal is to improve the governance and reform leadership of urban and suburban school boards in Texas through codifying reform policies because the policies set by a school board are their legacy to the district and the families and children they serve. Accordingly, the evaluation questions that underlie this report touch on not only the Texas Institute training's influence on participants' actions and beliefs, but also collectively on the functioning of the entire school board's governance and the correlations between the various building blocks of the Texas Institute's Reform Governance model.

This chapter first provides a summary of the conclusions and then provides a set of recommendations.

Summary of Findings

The Texas Institute training appears to influence individual school board member's policymaking actions and their beliefs about children's ability to perform.

In our analyses, we found that the Texas Institute training influences the intensity of its participants' core belief about children's ability to perform at or above grade level, but not their belief about the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap (as compared to school board members who did not attend the Texas Institute training). The Texas Institute training also appeared to influence a school board member's belief about the importance of defining an appropriate superintendent-school board relationship within the governance structure of a school board as well as school board members' specific policymaking behaviors centered on reform, such as seeking outside expert advice on reform strategies, deliberating, voting on and/or adopting reform policies and strategies. These beliefs and behaviors are key aspects emphasized in the Reform Governance model and at the Texas Institute training – core beliefs, roles and responsibilities, and reform policy – that McAdams ascertains will strengthen a school board's role in both approving and creating a policy framework within which a district operates. Based on these results, the Texas Institute training appears to be shaping school board members' beliefs and actions in key ways related to governance and policymaking.

Two key building blocks of the reform governance model independently influence the codification of reform policies.

We found that two of the three main elements of the reform governance model taught at the Texas Institute training – roles and responsibilities and school board operations, but not core

beliefs – are independently associated with the codification of reform policies by a school board. These associations were significant, even when controlling for district size, district performance, the rating of the superintendent or of civic support. Overall, the functioning of a board – either in terms of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships, or the operation of the school board via meetings or evaluating the superintendent regularly – seems to be more influential in shaping a reform policy and getting it codified into policy than the core beliefs of the school board that all children can perform at or above grade level or that eliminating the achievement gap is possible. In sum, more efficient school board operations and effective roles and responsibilities of the school board members appear to significantly influence the codification of reform policies within a given district.

The percent of trained school board members' influences the presence of a fixed faction on a board, but does not influence the codification of reform strategies into policy.

We investigated the bivariate relationships between the percent of Texas Institute trained school board members on a given board and the codification of policy as well as the elements of the reform governance model. The bivariate associations with the percent of Texas Institute trained school board members were not significant, nor was it in our multiple regression models, even controlling for district size, district performance, the rating of the superintendent and civic support. These findings appear to indicate that school boards with none, a mix, or a majority of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training have the same likelihood of codifying reform policies and functioning effectively in their school board roles and in their operations. This is also evidenced by the fact that several of the 35 targeted school boards that had from 0 to 30% of their school board members trained by the Texas Institute training had positive core beliefs about children and the possibility of eliminating the achievement gap, efficient board operations, and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships among their team of eight.

However we did find that the *higher* the percent of Texas Institute trained board members (or the *increased* presence of core beliefs or the *increased* presence of effective roles and responsibilities), the significantly *lower* the presence a fixed faction on a board. But these influences were not strong enough to have a significant independent association in the multiple regression models and provide evidence of their influence on reform policy codification. Nor were the interaction terms with the percent of Texas Institute trained board members and operations or roles and responsibilities significant in the models. These findings indicate that the percent of Texas Institute trained board members on a given school board significantly influences the presence of a fixed faction on a board, but does not contribute significantly – directly or indirectly – to reform policy codification.

In sum, the Texas Institute training appears to promote several important and specific beliefs and actions in *individual* school board members pertaining to good reform governance practices. Moreover, the importance of efficient board operations and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships appear to be significantly influential in shaping and adopting reform policies by a board. However, the specific percent of trained board members by the Texas Institute training appears to not be a direct or indirect mechanism that drives the codification of reform policy, although it does contribute to improving the functioning of boards by reducing the likelihood of a fixed faction on a board.

This implies that the Texas Institute training does influence its individual participant's policy making actions and beliefs about children's ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship, but it appears not to significantly effect the functioning of a board as a whole in terms of codifying reform policy because some of the school board members who have not attended the Texas Institute training hold similar beliefs and also practice good governance (as defined by the components of the CRSS reform governance model). This said, for those school board members who are not following the principles laid out in the reform governance model the Texas Institute training could have a significant influence on their individual beliefs and actions from the Texas Institute training. Additionally, if school board members worked together (trained or not trained by the Texas Institute training) to implement efficient and good practice in terms of operations, roles, relationships, and responsibilities, there could be a significant increase in codification of reform policies to improve district performance.

In weighing these findings, certain limitations should be considered. First, these findings may not be generalizable beyond urban and suburban Texas school boards. At the same time, little research has addressed this important population. In addition, the measures used in this study were original. Although this was necessary in the context of the current research, to the extent that a different set of measures might better operationalize the constructs of interest, additional research is needed. Additional research is also needed to assess the extent to which socially desirable responding may be a factor.

Recommendations

Based on these findings we suggest the following recommendations:

The Texas Institute training should focus more on specific strategies of how school board members can transform their school board operations and roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

Given that none of the associations between the building blocks of the reform governance model and the codification of reform policy were moderated by the percent of Texas Institute trained board members, then increasing the percent of school board members who are trained by the Texas Institute training on a given board may not provide sufficient changes in the functioning of school board governance. It may only reduce the presence of a fixed faction on a board, implying that this should not be the aim of the Texas Institute training. However, significant relationships were found between school board operations and roles, responsibilities and relationships, and the codification of reform policies indicating that the reform governance model can promote good governance practices. By understanding the underlying associations between these components, the curriculum and training model of the Texas Institute training should be further refined to enhance its influence on school board governance and to create changes in a district's policy structure by focusing primarily on providing school board members with specific strategies on *how* to transform a school board's operations, *how* to improve roles, responsibilities and relationships, as well as, include more specific information on *how* to reform a district, i.e. reform strategies.

The Texas Institute training should include policy implementation and teamwork training into the Texas Institute curriculum.

Individual school board members (rather than a whole school board) appear to be influenced in positive ways by the Texas Institute training in terms of beliefs and policymaking actions centered on reform. However, few of the school boards members are able to translate those changes into actual reform policies established by the whole board. The Texas Institute training seems to fall short in providing the specific strategies for a school board member to actually *implement* their learning and approve or create reform policies as a team of 8. This is evidenced by the fact that reform policy codification was not significantly associated with the percent of school board members trained by the Texas Institute training in a given district. Significantly more Texas Institute trained school board members also wanted additional training in policy implementation, besides policy oversight, governance, and school board operations. These two facts suggest that the Texas Institute training should include (or add) the policy implementation training component into the Texas Institute training curriculum as well as add specific strategies for individual board members to follow on how to implement policy changes *within a team framework*.

The Texas Institute training should increase the amount of networking and informational support provided to school board members after the Texas Institute training.

The Texas Institute training could strengthen the support structure and networking component they provide to trained members. This support network should build up a set of resources that provide case examples, tools, strategies, pitfalls to avoid, etc which allow school board members who have attended the Texas Institute training to share their experiences, but more importantly interact and learn from each other's successes and mistakes. Providing this type of information and support after school board members have left the Texas Institute training and return home to their school boards should help board members with the specific choices and steps to attempt in *implementing* the new governance concepts and practices. Continued contact and support from other board members at the Texas Institute training should also help school board members initiate and take more action toward creating and approving reform policies.

Further research is needed to understand the specific success factors (and barriers) that allow (or hinder) changes in individual board member governance behavior to translate into changes in behavior by the board as whole.

This study indicates that individual school board members do change their governance behavior as a result of being trained in good governance techniques, but that these individual changes are not translating into lasting reform policy changes collectively being made by school boards as a whole. In addition, the findings also suggest that improved board operations and effective roles, responsibilities and relationships do influence the codification of reform policies. Therefore, to be able to improve the functioning of school boards through training individual members it is pertinent to understand how changes in individual's beliefs and behaviors translate into improving board operations and creating effective roles, responsibilities and relationships. Research on the success factors and barriers of how these types of changes occur is necessary and will be part of the follow-on case studies research to understand how the reform governance model (defined by CRSS) is working and not working. This case study research will be conducted in the six selected districts (See Chapter

6) where there was evidence of (1) school board members directing their school district on a path of reform, and (2) where school board members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold.

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