

Teaching School Boards about Leadership and Strategic Policymaking: The Texas Institute Training and Lessons in Reform Governance

Denise D. Quigley, Ph.D.
Jake W. Dembosky

The Texas Institute Evaluation Team
Evaluation & Research Services

December 2008

Evaluation & Research Services
2015 A Pullman Lane
Redondo Beach CA 90278
(310) 951-9592

Texas Institute for School Boards Evaluation Team
Denise D. Quigley, Evaluation Project Director/Principal Investigator
Copyright Evaluation & Research Services © 2008

The research contained herein was commissioned by the Houston Endowment as part of the evaluation of the Texas Institute for School Boards. Opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Texas Institute for School Boards or the aforementioned private foundation.

PREFACE

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 hundreds of reform ideas, including teacher professional development, class-size reduction, raised graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing and innumerable reading and math programs. But few reforms 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 low academic achievement. School boards, particularly in ethnically diverse communities, contribute to low academic achievement by what they fail to do, e.g. do not keep school districts on course, do not as the governing body stay focused on student achievement, etc. (Finn & Kegan, 2004). Policymakers, as a result, are debating the value of school boards and rethinking whether another leadership structure, i.e. school districts governed by the mayor, would be more effective at governing public schools.

One approach to addressing school boards' lack of focus on student achievement is improved professional training of school board members on important aspects of governance. The Center for Reform of School Systems (CRSS), a Texas not-for-profit corporation partially supported by the Houston Endowment, has developed a training program—the Texas Institute for School Boards—and has been providing it to first-time school board members since 2002. The Texas Institute training is 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 (E&R Services) selected six school boards in Texas as case study boards from the 44 urban and suburban boards that had participated in the Texas Institute training. The case study school boards were selected to represent those boards in which the CRSS reform governance model was “working;” i.e., school board members were directing their school districts on a path of reform, or “non-working”; i.e., school board members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence that a reform policy agenda was taking hold. Three school boards were selected as working and three were selected as non-working. This initial determination of working or non-working was primarily based on self-reported survey data from school board members and superintendents that demonstrated (or not) the presence of key elements of CRSS's reform governance model. For this study, researchers at E&R Services conducted interviews with the district superintendents and all eight of the school board members on each of the six boards. The researchers also collected and reviewed relevant policy documents and observed several school board meetings for each of the six boards.

The goal of the in-depth case studies is to understand the influence of the Texas Institute training as well as the critical factors that contribute to school board governance focused on reform and improved student academic achievement. Many factors contribute to “reform governance”. A board should have a set of beliefs that all children can learn and achieve at high levels. A board should have mechanisms built into the system that motivate board members and other adults to

focus on the well being of students and their academic achievement. Boards need to have a curriculum aligned with district goals for academic achievement. A board should monitor student data disaggregated by sub-groups (i.e., ethnic groups, socio-economic groups, English language groups). A board should think strategically and envisioning how to best educate all kids and improve student achievement for all kids. Board should actively develop policy and oversee policy implementation including the setting of reform policies, i.e., policies designed to restructure how a district educates kids and to improve student achievement. A board should diligently monitor the implementation of policies. A board needs to hold efficient and effective meetings that are focused on student achievement. Board members should respect each other and know their governance role and the function of policy. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to assess the influence the Texas Institute training has on creating a reform policy environment based on the key components of CRSS's reform governance model by observing the variation in these factors and identifying common themes of behavior in the selected school boards. The case studies focus on how school boards are able to govern without micromanaging their districts, how well school board members work as a team, and how they enact reform policies to improve student achievement (or not).

This descriptive report is the second in a series. The first report, *Reform Governance: how has it influenced Texas school board members and their school boards* (Quigley, 2007), found that efficient board operations and a focus on board roles, responsibilities, and relationships were most associated with boards enacting reform policy. Moreover, Quigley (2007) found that the Texas Institute training did influence individual participant's policy-making actions and beliefs about children's ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship. However, the training did not significantly influence the functioning of a board as a whole, esp. in terms of codifying reform policy. This second report should be of interest to policymakers at the state level and to 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.

CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
Contents	v
Table of Tables	viii
Executive Summary	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xix
1. Background and Context.....	1
School Boards May Contribute to the Low-Academic-Achievement Problem.....	1
Education Reforms Have Diminished the Power of School Boards.....	1
Training for Board Members May Improve Governance and Student Achievement.....	2
Research Evaluates Working and Non-working Boards and Effects of Texas Institute	3
Organization of the Report.....	4
2. Key Elements of the Reform Governance Model and the Texas Institute Training Program	5
Texas Institute Training Program	5
Reform Governance Model.....	6
Summary	8
3. Evaluation Methodology.....	9
Overview of the Cross-comparative Case-study Approach and Related Evaluation Design Decisions	9
Case Study Sites Selected to Represent Two Distinct Levels of Board Governing	10
Interview Protocols Designed to Capture Key Elements of Reform Governance Model	10
Initial Interviews Conducted to Verify Working and Non-working Designation	11
Data Collected to Gain In-depth Perspective of Entire Board.....	11
Analysis Identified Common Themes and Differences in Working and Non-working Boards	12
Limitations	14
Summary	14
4. Findings: Differences in How Working and Non-Working Boards Govern	16
Working Boards Share Core Beliefs and Commitments	16

Developing a Theory of Action for Change is Critical for Reform Governance.....	17
Building Blocks of Reform Governance Were Present in Working and Non-Working Boards	18
Working Boards Seem to be More Active in Policy Development and Policy Oversight.....	18
Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships are Important for Working Boards	19
Summary	19
5. Findings: The Influence of The Texas Institute Training on Board Governance	22
Interaction with CRSS and the Texas Institute Training	22
Influence of the Texas Institute Training.....	23
Differences in the Influence of the Texas Institute by Working and Non-Working Boards	28
Valuable Aspects of the Texas Institute Training.....	29
Summary	30
6. Findings: Critical Factors in Effective Board Governance.....	34
Factors that Contribute to Successful Board Governance	34
Board Member or Superintendent Turnover Seen as Mechanism to Improve Governance	34
Focus on Governing and not Managing is Seen as Mechanism to Improve Governance	36
Board Unity and Teamwork Seen as Mechanism which Improves Governance.....	37
Barriers to Reform Governance	38
A Culture of Mediocrity and Funding Seen as External Barriers to Good Governance....	39
Personal Agendas and a Lack of Desire to Change Seen as Main Barriers to Governance	40
Areas of Need	41
Boards Biggest Needs are a Clear Theory of Action and Active Policy Development.....	41
Boards Need More Effective Communication with the Community to be Successful.....	42
Summary	43
7. Discussion and Recommendations	49
Discussion of Findings.....	49
Recommendations.....	53
Summary	55

References.....	56
APPENDIX A: Twenty Indicators of Reform Governance.....	58
APPENDIX B: Descriptive Information on Six Case Study Boards.....	59

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Mean Percent of Team of Eight who Mentioned Supportive Evidence for a Given Reform Governance Indicator, by Working and Non-working Boards	21
Table 5.1 Interaction between Team of Eight and CRSS	23
Table 5.2 Influences of the Texas Institute Training, By Indicator and By Working and Non-working Boards	31
Table 5.2 (Continued) Influences of the Texas Institute Training, By Indicator and By Working and Non-working Boards	32
Table 5.3 Valuable Aspects of Texas Institute Training, Overall and By Working & Non-working Boards	33
Table 6.1 Success Factors Mentioned by Whether They are Attributed or Not to Texas Institute Training, Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards	45
Table 6.2 Barriers Mentioned, Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards	46
Table 6.3 Areas of Need Mentioned, By Indicator, Overall and By Working and Not Working Boards	47
Table 6.3 (Continued) Areas of Need Mentioned, By Indicator, Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards	48
Table B.1 Fourteen Indicators of Reform Governance for the Six Participating School Boards, By Working and Non-working Boards	59
Table B.2 Some Characteristics of the Six Participating School Boards, By Working and Non-working Boards	60

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 hundreds of reform ideas, including teacher professional development, class-size reduction, raised graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing and innumerable reading and math programs. But few reforms 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 low academic achievement. School boards, particularly in ethnically diverse communities, contribute to low academic achievement by what they fail to do, e.g. do not keep school districts on course, do not as the governing body stay focused on student achievement, etc. (Finn & Kegan, 2004). Policymakers, as a result, are debating the value of school boards and rethinking whether another leadership structure, i.e. school districts governed by the mayor, would be more effective at governing public schools.

Whatever their role in leading the effort to improve student achievement, school boards typically retain a lot of practical power over the day-to-day functioning of schools. They select superintendents, set expectations for the superintendent and district administrators, 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.

Professional training may also be one of the only viable options that policymakers, superintendents and board members have for equipping *all* board members with the knowledge they need to effectively govern because, since boards are democratically elected, board members may come into the position with varying levels of education, training, and experience. 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.

Board members need training, in general, on the basic and vital aspects of governance and reform. Effective, in-depth, and targeted professional training has the potential not only to standardize, but also to improve the knowledge base and leadership skills of all school board members. This type of in-depth training could be the vehicle for providing valuable guidance to school board members and boards on how to lead a school system – school board together with the school district – to produce substantial and sustained improvements in student learning and academic achievement.

To understand the value of such a professional training, 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 teach board members 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 intensely on board members core beliefs and commitments, roles, responsibilities and relationships. To some extent, they cover several other aspects of reform governance such as theories of action for change; building blocks of reform governance; policy development and policy oversight; and reform policies.

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 was conducted in two phases. The first phase of research, published in *Reform Governance: how has it influenced Texas school board members and their school boards* (Quigley, 2007), found that efficient board operations and a focus on board roles, responsibilities, and relationships were most associated with boards enacting reform policy. Moreover, Quigley (2007) found that the Texas Institute training did influence individual participant’s policy-making actions and beliefs about children’s ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship. However, the training did not significantly influence the functioning of a board as a whole, esp. in terms of codifying reform policy. The goals of the second phase of this exploratory research, described in this report, are to: 1) capture the successes and challenges of board members as they apply the reform governance principles taught at the Texas Institute training; 2) identify – at a relatively crude level – what factors were most and least prevalent for both working and non-working boards; and 3) generate hypotheses about mechanisms that are likely to lead to effective governance by school boards that focuses on reforming and improving student achievement.

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 a comparative case-study approach to qualitatively isolate general factors associated with effective and non-effective reform governance and participation in the Texas Institute training. By choosing this approach, researchers can describe the variation in influence the Texas Institute training has had on boards where the reform governance modeling is working and not working, and to test (in some cases) for the statistical significance of these differences. “Working” is defined as a school board with members that were directing their school district on a path of reform; “non-working” is defined as a school board where the members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence that a reform policy agenda was taking hold.

Researchers selected six case studies – three as working and three as non-working. During selection, researchers ensured that the two types of case study boards had similar numbers of trained board members. The snapshot of these boards was taken after 78 percent (32 of the 41) of school board members and 83 percent (five out of the six) of superintendents had attended the Texas Institute training at various times since 2002.

In the spring of 2008, interviews were conducted with the full board and the superintendent (i.e., the full “team of eight”) in the six case study districts (N=47; one school district only had six board members). We had 100% response rate and the interviews lasted from 45-75 minutes with two researchers, one designated as the principal interviewer and the other as a notes taker. In this report, we use the term “school board” or “board” to refer to the “team of eight” which includes all of the members on the school board and the superintendent.

ANALYSIS

To identify themes, we utilized a staged technique described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elaborated on by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Then using the classic comparative case study design approach, we described and compared two groups and tested (in some cases) whether one group differed from the other. We examined the degree to which common themes and indicators were present for each person interviewed. We examined the patterns overall, at the individual school board level, and at the working vs. non-working board level. As we examined these patterns, it became clear that the pattern of variation at the individual school board level was reflected in the working vs. non-working groupings. Therefore, we only report the overall percentages and the working vs. non-working comparisons.

RESULTS: COMPARING WORKING AND NON-WORKING BOARDS

By comparing in-depth how working and non-working boards govern, we can identify what behaviors and beliefs are found in boards that are directing their school districts on a path of reform. These characteristics provide information that is potentially important to understanding how boards move from exhibiting leadership without evidence that a reform policy agenda is taking hold to successfully directing school districts toward reforms that improve student achievement.

The main difference in working boards and non-working boards are that working boards are more active in policy development and have clear theories of action for change for their districts. We found some key differences in the working and non-working boards that highlight what actions board engage in when they are directing their districts toward reform and improving student achievement. Board members and superintendents in the working and non-working boards had very similar core beliefs and commitments about children’s ability to perform at or above grade level, but the working boards had taken the next step and actually formalized their core beliefs and commitments into policy. They differ the most in that more board members and superintendents on working boards feel that they are active in policy development, they are ensuring that reform policies are codified, and they communicate their goals, plans, and policies to the community. Working boards also differ from non-working boards in that working boards have a clear theory of action for change for their districts to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Working

boards also believe that they treat themselves and their superintendent with respect, and they do not have fixed factions.

We found several similarities in the working and non-working boards. The members of working and non-working boards tended to feel similarly about having efficient board meetings focused on student achievement, about exercising their oversight management responsibilities for the district, about having an aligned curriculum and monitoring student data, and about being diligent in monitoring the implementation of policies. Working and non-working boards were also similar in their ability to maintain a close relationship of trust with the superintendent. They both understand that their role is to govern, not manage, and to provide necessary constituent service.

RESULTS: INFLUENCE OF TX INSTITUTE TRAINING ACCORDING TO BOARDS

According to the majority of superintendents and school board members, the Texas Institute training provided knowledge to board members that is essential to strategically leading a district toward reform. The Texas Institute training and the reform governance model increased boards' knowledge of governance roles, relationships and responsibilities. Specifically, the Texas Institute training influenced both the working and non-working boards by increasing their knowledge of the role of the superintendent, their role as board members, the responsibilities of the team of eight, and how to work as a team.

Besides the Texas Institute training and reform governance model increasing board knowledge of governance roles, relationships and responsibilities, the training provided motivation and focus which then lead to changes in overall board behavior. We found that the Texas Institute training increased board member awareness of the need to have a strategic vision and a set of strategies to improve how the school district educates all children, a.k.a., a theory of action. The Texas Institute also increased board accountability for their vision and long-term strategic plan (primarily by underscoring their responsibilities) and provided motivation and hope that "*change can be done*" (within real live case examples). These changes in turn lead to and motivated board behavior change – increased board unity and teamwork, decreased micromanagement, more focus on achievement, learning, and policy (setting, reviewing, and aligning), improved operating procedures, improved policymaking processes, increased discussions about change to the districts, and the use of a common language related to governance.

We also found some different perceptions in the working and non-working boards. The working boards distinguish themselves in that they also perceived the influence of the Texas Institute training to be primarily on their "*adoption of core beliefs,*" "*focus on long-term strategic vision and theory of action*" and their "*adoption of reform policies.*" Non-working boards perceived the influence of the Texas Institute training to be mostly on their "*knowledge of the role of a board member,*" "*knowledge of how to manage relationships,*" and "*holding their superintendent accountable for 'how' to run the district.*"

In terms of the training itself, the majority of attendees found several aspects of the training beneficial. Attendees valued the case study method, the networking at the Institute training and

with alumni, the modeling of good civil behavior and good board governance, and the guidelines, next steps, and solutions that were discussed pertaining to their board's current issues.

RESULTS: MOST COMMON FACTORS OF SUCCESS, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

According to the superintendents and school board members, several factors helped improve their governance. *The main factor that helped improve board governance was turnover in the team of eight including the hiring of an experienced superintendent.* In the non-working boards, board member turnover, and not a change in the superintendent, was reported as the primary leverage for change because board member turnover eliminated members on the board who had very strong and stubborn personal agendas.

Besides the improvements that come along with a change in members on the team of eight, leadership is key. *Boards mentioned that when a board as a whole focuses on governing, and not micromanaging, they are better able to lead and set a vision.* This is known in the reform governance model as 'not crossing the management line'. This focus on the management line was attributed to the Texas Institute training by half of those who mentioned it.

Board members and superintendents mentioned that teamwork and board unity lead to better governance. As described by the board members and superintendents in both working and non-working boards, these two factors appear to play a key role in implementing a change agenda and staying focused on an improvement plan.

Boards mentioned several barriers in their efforts to improve student achievement – those external to the board and those related to governing. The external barriers mentioned most often were: the lack of community trust either past or current; being in a community that is apathetic or has low expectations for their students and families; tight budgets; inequities in school facilities throughout the district; and the need for bond funds to improve the facilities.

Board members and superintendents mentioned several barriers related to effective board governance. They indicated that personal agendas, not have a strong desire to change, and being reactionary instead of thinking strategically and maintaining a district-wide focus were the largest barriers to improving board governance. Most often boards described that when personal agendas were at work, teamwork and governance for the good of all students was not possible. They discussed how a strong desire to change was paramount in maintaining the motivation and urgency required to tackle difficult problems. They said it was sometimes easier to deny that a problem exists. Boards also mentioned the barrier of spending too much time on mundane, non-strategic issues, i.e., being too reactionary, instead of spending time on district-wide strategic issues. In addition, boards mentioned the need to have change-minded leadership at the district and on school campuses as a challenge.

Non-working boards mentioned two additional challenges. Non-working boards were challenged primarily by shallow dialogue between their board and their superintendent/administration and by faction voting within their board. Faction voting stymies board progress and signals to everyone – public, school district, and board members – the divisive nature of the board. Faction voting is many times also along racial or socio-economic lines, representing the culture diversity of the community within which boards are based. In addition, the superintendent – board

relationship is vital to the governance ability of a board, since the superintendent implements the policies of the board and manages how a district implements board decisions.

Working and non-working boards had similar needs. Both working and non-working boards mentioned the need to develop clear theories of action and actively engaging in policy development. Specifically, this means that they both need to have strategic discussions defining the “how” of changing and improving student learning and performance. They both realize the importance of focusing on policy, reviewing policies, and aligning policies and practice, but admitted they need to perform these tasks in an active, on-going systematic manner. They also both need to set specific goals and benchmarks for their superintendent that are aligned with policies in order to hold the superintendent accountable for change. They need to systematically monitor district functions, rather than having the district report to them in an ad hoc fashion.

Boards also mentioned the need for better communication with the public, either in having any community voice (non-working boards) or engaging all stakeholders (working boards).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a democracy, no one can limit who is elected. Board members or school district administration or policymakers themselves can not control what type of people are elected as board members, so professional training is one of the only options that boards, superintendents and policymakers have for equipping all board members with the knowledge they need to govern. This evaluation has found that targeted professional training can address the lack of leadership by school boards and their lack of focus on student achievement by training school board members on important aspects of governance.

We found that both working and non-working board members and superintendents did attribute (partially and fully) entire board behavior changes to the Texas Institute training. The boards attributed to the Texas Institute training their decreased levels of micromanagement, increased board unity and teamwork, improved operating procedures, use of a common language around governance, and more of a focus on achievement and learning. Non-working boards also indicated that the Institute training helped them work as an entire board to put in place the mechanisms and expectations to hold their superintendent accountable for “how” to run the district, while working boards indicated that the Institute training influenced them as a whole board by assisting them in also establishing and adopting core beliefs. These findings, however, contrast with findings from Quigley (2007) which did not find significant evidence that board behavior as a whole had changed, particularly in the area of boards developing, enacting or codifying reform policies (as a result of the Institute training or not). Quigley (2007) found that the Texas Institute had significantly influenced individual board member beliefs and behaviors. The training had intensified board member beliefs about children’s ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship. The training had increased policy making actions centered on reform, such as seeking outside expert advice on reform strategies, deliberating and or voting on reform policies and strategies.

This difference in findings may be partially accounted for by the changes CRSS made to the Texas Institute curriculum based on the recommendations from the 2007 Quigley report. In July 2007, CRSS added more in-depth coverage and discussion of policy development, the theory of action for change, and reform policy to the Texas Institute curriculum. It is also possible that the difference in findings is partially attributed to the difference in methodologies used from one study to the next. The qualitative case study work using interviews may be more sensitive to identifying this type of whole board behavior change.

To summarize, the findings from this report indicate that the Institute training is helping individual board members with a minimum set of basic governance principles and policy making skills and is assisting boards (as a whole) who are equipped with varying governance abilities to focus on student learning, improve their operating procedures, use a common language around governance, work more as a team, and focus on governing not micromanaging the superintendent or district. The Texas Institute training is assisting boards (as a whole) to mature and reach a more sophisticated level of governance. Boards have moved from having personal agendas derail their unity and focusing on day-to-day operations (i.e. micromanaging) to discussing (and in some case adopting) core beliefs and commitments, running more efficient and respectful board meetings, having more discussions and a focus on district-wide issues and student achievement with a more well-rounded and defined understanding of their role and the role of the superintendent. Overall, the training appears to influence how boards as a whole govern – they maintain focus, work as a team, and operate professionally and efficiently in meetings – and not just how individual school board members behave.

These findings imply that the Texas Institute training does provide valuable information to school board members and has improved the knowledge base and leadership skills of entire boards. However, even after the majority of board members on a given board have attended the Texas Institute training, both working and non-working boards still specified a strong need for training in strategic, long-term planning and defining a theory of action for change. Non-working boards also voiced the need for more training in policy development and policymaking. Therefore, the Texas Institute training has been an essential component in improving board governance, but it has not been adequate to assist boards in leading districts successfully toward meaningful reforms focused on sustained student achievement.

Based on these findings, we suggest the following recommendations:

The Texas Institute training should continue their case study approach and focus on training newly elected board members. Board members who have personal agendas and board members who do not focus on all students were the most commonly mentioned challenges that boards have while governing. As a result, training newly elected board members in the basics of good governance is appropriate and can reduce the likelihood that board members will fall into this type of single-minded, constituency driven behavior. The Texas Institute intense case-study method and reform governance model was considered valuable by board members and superintendents from boards with varying governance abilities, i.e., working and non-working boards, because it either introduced these basic concepts or reinforced them. The case-study

approach to learning, the networking during and after training, the modeling of good governance by CRSS staff, and the structure of the training structured were highly valued by participants.

The Texas Institute training should continue to focus on topics related to effective leadership: core beliefs and commitments; theories of action for change; efficient basic operations; policy development and policy oversight; and roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

The Texas Institute training appears to improve the knowledge base of board members and superintendents in boards of varying leadership and governance capacity in terms of their roles and responsibilities; the importance of a board having and acting on a set of core beliefs and commitments; and the need for policy development aimed at district reform. Besides this transfer in knowledge, the Texas Institute training also assisted boards to become more efficient in their operating procedures and be able to focus more on their important work – student achievement. In many cases, the training empowered and motivated individual board members and superintendents to have the courage to try and take the necessary next steps in their districts. These elements – core beliefs and commitments, defined roles and responsibilities, good working relationships including teamwork, and efficient operating procedures – are the basic foundation for good governance. We found that there is a general need for this type of governance knowledge across a varied range of boards, one that the Texas Institute can address.

Any follow up training to the Texas Institute training should be designed by CRSS and offered in several stand-alone training modules, so as to address the specific needs of boards. Given that boards are in all states of healthy functioning and willingness to change and that as CRSS trains more boards the number of boards with higher levels of board functioning will increase, there is and will continue to be a growing need for training that focuses on defining the specifics of a theory of action and of policy development and oversight (as was seen in the working boards in the study). CRSS could develop several stand-alone training modules to address these training needs. The modules should be on:

- Policy development and policy making;
- District reform models and how to clearly define a theory of action for change based on a district's current structure, i.e., site-based management, centralized management, etc.;
- How to conduct a thorough policy review of district policies and guidelines with a focus on the role of school board members and the superintendent in the policy review process;
- Gaining community support and how to engage all stakeholders; and
- Basics of team building with a particular emphasis on how to gain consensus on major issues or core objectives with a focus on policy.

To assist in targeting the specific needs of the boards with the CRSS training modules, CRSS may want to invest in the development and testing of a set of reform governance indicators as a diagnostic tool. Further research would be needed to pilot and test a set of indicators with a larger pool of boards with a range of governance abilities alongside a set of cognitive interviews with a small subset of the boards included in the pilot. These data would enable the creation and design of a psychometrically sound and cognitively valid tool which could assess both the “readiness and willingness of a board to change” and the specific “maturity” level of a board in terms of its reform governance behavior. This type of diagnostic tool could be used to assess the needs of a board, target training and start discussions among board members and superintendents about next steps.

CRSS should focus on boards where it has leverage through the Texas Institute and consider training discrete boards (i.e., full teams of eight) – either one board at a time or in groups of boards. The interviews did not specify how many board members it takes to influence a board to work more successfully as a team, primarily because some non-trained board members may have basic governance skills and knowledge. However, in the absence of a valid tool that can identify an entire board's level of functioning or sophistication in reform governance principles, CRSS will have more opportunity to influence boards where (1) there are several newly elected board members, (2) over four members have been trained, or (3) the superintendent has been trained. In these districts where there is more of a potential to influence an entire board, CRSS should consider training discrete boards (i.e., full teams of eight) – either one board at a time or in groups of boards.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to the school board members and superintendents whom we asked to participate in the interviews. They were generous with their time and participated thoughtfully in the interview process, providing us with invaluable information about their experiences and opinions. Thank you also to the school board service personnel who assisted in setting up the interviews and in locating the documents that we requested and reviewed. A number of other individuals made important contributions to the development of this work. For their valuable input, we would like to thank Catherine Augustine, Lara Hilton, Shelley Wiseman, Kristin Leuschner, Norrell Naoe, and all of our colleagues on the Evaluation & Research Services evaluation team.

TEACHING SCHOOL BOARDS ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC POLICYMAKING: THE TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING AND LESSONS IN REFORM GOVERNANCE

Denise D. Quigley, Jake W. Dembosky

Evaluation & Research Services

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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 hundreds of reform ideas, including teacher professional development, class-size reduction, raised graduation requirements, comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing and innumerable reading and math programs. But few reforms have succeeded in producing substantial and sustained improvement in academic achievement.

School Boards May Contribute to the Low-Academic-Achievement Problem

Increasingly, policymakers have identified traditionally organized, heavily bureaucratized school districts as one source of the low academic achievement. School boards, particularly in ethnically diverse communities, contribute to low academic achievement by what they fail to do, e.g. do not keep school districts on course, do not as the governing body stay focused on student achievement, etc. (Finn & Kegan, 2004). Policymakers, as a result, are debating the value of school boards and rethinking whether another leadership structure, i.e. school districts governed by the mayor, would be more effective at governing public schools.

School boards often do resemble dysfunctional families whose members represent the stubborn and competitive factions that divide communities. 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 micromanaging the school district. Moreover, according to the report, boards did not exercise adequate policy oversight, nor did they have adequate processes for accountability and for communicating with the public about schools and the school system. 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.

Education Reforms Have Diminished the Power of School Boards

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.

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.

Training for Board Members May Improve Governance and 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.

Professional training may also be one of the only viable options that policymakers, superintendents and board members have for equipping *all* board members with the knowledge they need to effectively govern because, since boards are democratically elected, board members may come into the position with varying levels of education, training, and experience. 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.

Board members need training, in general, on the basic and vital aspects of governance and reform. Effective, in-depth, and targeted professional training has the potential not only to standardize, but also to improve the knowledge base and leadership skills of all school board members. This type of in-depth training could be the vehicle for providing valuable guidance to school board members and boards on how to lead a school system – school board together with the school district – to produce substantial and sustained improvements in student learning and academic achievement.

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 program and conceptual model are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Research Evaluates Working and Non-working Boards and Effects of Texas Institute

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, i.e. 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.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases. The first phase of research, published in *Reform Governance: how has it influenced Texas school board members and their school boards* (Quigley, 2007), found that efficient board operations and a focus on board roles, responsibilities, and relationships were most associated with boards enacting reform policy. Moreover, Quigley (2007) found that the Texas Institute training did influence individual participant’s policy-making actions and beliefs about children’s ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship. However, the training did not significantly influence the functioning of a board as a whole, esp. in terms of codifying reform policy. The goals of the second phase of this exploratory research, described in this report, are to: 1) capture the successes and challenges of board members as they apply the reform governance principles taught at the Texas Institute training; 2) identify – at a relatively crude level – what factors were most and least prevalent for both working and non-working boards; and 3) generate hypotheses about mechanisms that are likely to lead to effective governance by school boards that focuses on reforming and improving student achievement.

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.

The research questions addressed in this report are:

- *Existence of reform governance.* How do working boards govern differently than non-working boards? For example, what elements of reform governance are more prominent in the working (vs. non-working) boards?
- *Influence of the Texas Institute training.* What has been the influence of the Texas Institute training on school board governance, according to school board members and superintendents? Does this differ for working and non-working boards?
- *Other factors that have been critical to school boards.* Besides the Texas Institute training, what are the critical factors mentioned by school board members and superintendents that have stimulated good governance and a focus on improving student achievement? What are the challenges? What is still needed?

The uniqueness of educational settings implies that no single study is likely to yield conclusive evidence about the influence of training on governance or student achievement. However, this study is important in that it provides information about the effects of school board training programs and may have larger implications for the role of school boards in improving student achievement.

Organization of the Report

This report is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter has described the goals and context of the evaluation. Chapter 2 describes the key elements of the CRSS reform governance model and Texas Institute training. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the evaluation methodology, including the selection of case study sites and collection of data. Chapter 4 describes how working boards govern differently than non-working boards. Chapter 5 describes how the Texas Institute training has influenced good governance in both working and non-working boards. Chapter 6 describes the other factors, besides the Texas Institute training, that have positively or negatively influenced school boards' reform governance behavior, and it discusses what is still needed to raise the boards' functioning and leadership. Chapter 7 provides some recommendations and discusses next steps.

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

This chapter begins by describing the Texas Institute training in more detail. Then it describes the conceptual model that is the basis for the training. Here the focus is on the underlying theory of reform governance – how an effective school board is intended to function, especially when it is engaged in active governance and reform of its district and schools. The chapter describes the characteristics, or components, of a healthy board that allow it to stay focused on schools and children and implement policy reforms when needed. Finally, the chapter introduces 14 “indicators”—criteria for evaluating whether the core components are present in a board’s operations. For example, if Indicator 9 is present—if “Board members treat each other, the superintendent, staff, and members of the public with respect,” it is more likely that the board is focused on reform governance. Subsequent chapters examine how the reform governance theory has been incorporated into the case study school boards’ actions and decisions.

Texas Institute Training Program

The Texas Institute training provides first-time school board members with a premier 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. CRSS developed this professional training program for newly elected board members based on its conceptual framework on reform governance, which was developed by Don McAdams.

The Texas Institute training targets all newly elected school board members in the largest 44 urban and suburban school districts in Texas. Most school boards consist of seven members; the larger school districts have nine members. The superintendent is a *de facto* member of the board, besides having the responsibility for running the district. Hence, a board is often referred to as the “team of eight”—seven board members plus the superintendent. The Texas Institute training is held generally in early summer, only a few months after new board members are elected in May. Reading materials and information packets are sent to all attendees a week before the training. Newly elected board members and some superintendents from multiple districts in Texas together attend a long weekend of intense training. The board members then return to their districts after the training to be part of school boards that have a wide range of abilities, needs, and willingness to function at a sophisticated, strategic policy level with a varying number of other Texas Institute trained board members.

Since 2002, CRSS has trained 220 newly elected board members and 21 superintendents from the 44 large districts. Of those, 167 school board members are still seated on their boards and 17 of the superintendents are still superintendents. In 24 of the 44 districts, the

Texas Institute training has trained a majority of the board. In time, CRSS intends to train all the school board members in its target districts.

Many entire boards have also worked with McAdams and his CRSS staff directly via invited workshop sessions in which McAdams or his staff travel to the school district and work with all members of the board on a specified set of topics or issues. For example, a board may request a CRSS workshop on team building or on developing a board's set of core beliefs and commitments, or any number of other topics depending on the board's need.

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. The training includes a discussion of the factors that contribute to "reform governance." They include: a set of beliefs held by the board that all children can learn and achieve at high levels; mechanisms built into the system that motivate board members and other adults to focus on the well being of students and their academic achievement; a curriculum aligned with district goals for academic achievement; a board that monitors student data disaggregated by sub-groups (i.e., ethnic groups, socio-economic groups, English language groups); strategic thinking and visioning on how to best educate all kids and improve student achievement for all kids; active policy development and oversight that includes the setting of reform policies, i.e., policies designed to restructure how a district educates kids and improve student achievement; diligent monitoring of the implementation of policies; efficient and effective meetings that are focused on student achievement; and members who respect each other and know their governance role and the function of policy. As stated by McAdams¹:

"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)

McAdams refers to some of the components that are part of the CRSS reform governance framework. The eight components are:

1. Core beliefs and commitments of board members
2. Theories of action for change

¹ McAdams, D. (2006). *What School Boards Can Do: reform governance for Urban Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

3. Building blocks of reform governance (including school board operations and management oversight)
4. Policy development and policy oversight
5. Reform policies
6. Roles, responsibilities and relationships of board members
7. Civic engagement
8. Transition planning

However, 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 its reform agenda and its effective exercise of the powers of governance to advance the agenda.”

To assess whether a board has grasped the reform governance model and is effectively applying it, CRSS and the Broad Foundation developed a set of 20 indicators—criteria for evaluating whether the core components are present in a board’s operations—with a rubric an evaluator can use to help assess whether each indicator is fully present, partly present, or not present (see Appendix A).

The Texas Institute training focuses on the first six of the eight main components of the CRSS reform governance model, with the main emphasis on two of the six – core beliefs and commitments; and roles, responsibilities and relationships – and a solid overview of four other components – theories of action for change; building blocks of reform governance; policy development and policy oversight; and reform policies. These four components and the remaining two – civic engagement and transition planning – are covered in-depth during subsequent trainings and/or work with the school boards via the Texas Institute Alumni Program, which includes breakfast meetings at the annual Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) conference. The applicable indicators are listed below, organized with the corresponding components of the reform governance model.

Core beliefs and commitments

1. Board members view all children achieving at high levels as their primary objective and act accordingly.
2. The board has approved a statement of core beliefs and commitments for high student achievement and efficient and effective operations.

Theories of action for change

3. The board has a clear theory of action that provides an overarching strategy for achieving its goals.
4. The board has adopted a comprehensive and aligned district curriculum and monitors disaggregated student performance data by grade and school.

Building blocks of reform governance (incl. school board operations and management oversight)

5. Board meetings are efficient and effective and focus primarily on student achievement and other district priorities.

6. The board exercises its management oversight responsibilities through audits, workshops, reports, and other methods to assure the integrity and performance of the district's management systems.

Policy development (including reform policies) and policy oversight

7. The board is active in policy development and ensures that its reform priorities are codified in policy.

8. The board is diligent about monitoring the implementation of its policies to determine whether or not they are achieving their intended objectives.

Roles, responsibilities and relationships

9. Board members treat each other, the superintendent, staff, and members of the public with respect.

10. The board is fairly cohesive; not all votes are unanimous, but there are no "fixed factions."

11. The board maintains a close relationship of trust with the superintendent/CEO and strives to facilitate his or her success.

12. The board effectively communicates its goals, plans, and policies to the community to build public understanding and support.

13. Board members understand their role is to govern, not manage, and act in accordance with this understanding.

14. Board members provide necessary constituent service without attempting to solve problems or otherwise cross the line into management.

Summary

CRSS has developed training for first-time newly elected school board members in large, Texas, urban and suburban school districts. The training is intended to teach individuals concepts and skills that will help them as individuals, and their boards as a group, function at a higher level than they might have previously. For example, boards should not be managing the day-to-day challenges of schools and school districts; rather, they should be thinking strategically about how to provide the best education for students, how to reform the schools as needed to promote academic achievement, how to plan for the future, and what policies should be developed and implemented to codify best practices. The Texas Institute training teaches the key components that pertain to a board's ability to govern well and offers a checklist of 14 "indicators" to help board members determine if their own boards are governing well and to give board members some behavioral and attitudinal goals to work towards.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the evaluation approach, data collection strategies, and evaluation methods used by the researchers as well as limitations to the study.

Overview of the Cross-comparative Case-study Approach and Related Evaluation Design Decisions

An evaluation of the Texas Institute training (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 because there are many uncontrolled variables likely to affect the outcomes in the targeted sites. Therefore, we chose a comparative case-study approach to qualitatively isolate general factors associated with effective and non-effective reform governance and participation in the Texas Institute training. Moreover, this evaluation approach assumes that the concern is to evaluate in-depth the process and conditions for *how* the Texas Institute training has influenced and changed school boards and *what* critical factors facilitate or hinder these changes. By choosing this approach, researchers can describe the variation in influence the Texas Institute training has had on boards where the reform governance modeling is working and not working, and to test (in some cases) for the statistical significance of these differences. “Working” is defined as a school board with members that were directing their school district on a path of reform; “non-working” is defined as a school board where the members were exhibiting leadership, but there was not yet evidence that a reform policy agenda was taking hold.

The analysis provided here is also part of a formative evaluation on intermediate outcomes, not a summative evaluation on the effect of the Texas Institute training on student achievement gains. 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 not yet determined and decision makers seek to make mid-course corrections along the way².

Given that we chose to use a cross-comparative case-study approach and to conduct a formative evaluation, the researchers made several key evaluation design decisions. First, case studies needed to be selected that could represent both working and non-working boards, but also have similar numbers of trained board members. So, from the pool of target districts, the researchers selected six boards to be used as case studies representing two distinct types of boards – half were working boards and half were non-working boards. To capture the influence of the Texas Institute training, the researchers made sure that a minimum of half of the school board members and superintendents in each of the case studies had participated in the Texas Institute training. Next, to gain a full perspective of each given board, the researchers aimed to interview all board members, i.e., the seven school

² 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).

board members and the superintendent (i.e., the full “team of eight”). Additional effort and importance was placed on achieving a 100 percent response rate. In this report, we will be using the term “school board” or “board” to refer to the “team of eight” which includes all of the members on the school board and the superintendent. Lastly, to ensure that what board members and superintendents self-reported matched the characteristics and actions of their boards, researchers observed school board meetings and analyzed secondary documents.

Case Study Sites Selected to Represent Two Distinct Levels of Board Governing

We identified two types of school boards among the 44 targeted by CRSS: 1) boards where there is evidence that school board members and their superintendents are directing their school districts on a path of reform, and 2) boards where there is not yet evidence of a reform policy agenda taking hold despite the fact that school board members and superintendents are exhibiting leadership. Reform policy is defined here as policies which are strategic and focused on fundamentally changing how the school system educates students (as opposed to operating policies, which are intended to maintain or improve the every day functioning of a school district, i.e., maintaining the status quo). This identification process was based on self-reported survey data collected from all 44 school boards on issues of governance (see Quigley 2007 for further details on the self-reported survey data).

We identified boards as working if members reported that the boards incorporated elements of reform governance such as core beliefs and commitments, trust among board members, good relationships with their superintendents, a focus on student achievement, lack of fixed factions, minimal-to-no micro-management, efficient board meetings, and recent, codified reform policies. Of the five identified initially as working, we selected three boards that had a majority of members trained by the Texas Institute training program. Next, we identified “non-working” boards where there was evidence of core beliefs and commitments, decent relationships among board members and the superintendent, a focus on student achievement, but no evidence of reform policies being enacted. Of the eight boards identified as non-working, we selected the three boards where the majority of board members were trained by the Texas Institute training as “non-working” boards. We approached the six school board presidents and then their superintendents about participating in the evaluation study. All six boards agreed and they became the case-study school boards for this research. Descriptive (but not identifying) information on the six case study boards is included in Appendix B. These steps were completed between July 2008 and October 2007.

Interview Protocols Designed to Capture Key Elements of Reform Governance Model

Data collection tools were designed to measure the key mechanisms and processes described in the reform governance model and to capture the details of the 14 indicators of reform governance as well as measure the reasons for change including the influence of the Texas Institute training. We specifically designed questions to elicit information on: board member and superintendent experiences with CRSS and the Texas Institute training; the perceived value and influence of the Institute training; the school board’s vision and ability to maintain a common vision; core beliefs and commitments; strategies to improve or change the district; policies enacted to support reform and improvement; interim changes still needed; other reasons for change; current focus as a board; barriers and challenges to their efforts; successes; policy setting and oversight behavior; main board work; main purpose for policy;

focus on policy; and lessons learned. Similar questions were asked of superintendents and school board members.

Initial Interviews Conducted to Verify Working and Non-working Designation

We used semi-structured interviews to elicit information from board members and superintendent on their experiences. We conducted two sets of interviews. The first set of interviews (using a shortened version of the protocol) was only with the superintendent and the school board president on each of the six boards for a total of 12 initial interviews. These interviews were conducted in November and December of 2007 and were used to confirm or deny our initial judgment as to whether they were working or non-working boards, i.e., verify that our designation of working and non-working was valid. We had a 100 percent response rate from the interviewees.

Data Collected to Gain In-depth Perspective of Entire Board

Interviews. The second set of semi-structured interviews was aimed to capture the perspectives of all board members and the superintendent from each of the case study districts. The interviews were the main data collection exercise in this study. We aimed to interview all of the board members and superintendent from each case study board in a given week to capture their experiences, information, and perspectives at a similar point in time. We designated a given week for each case study board in which to conduct all eight interviews based on their regular board-meeting calendar from March 2008 through May 2008. The weeks that we chose included a board meeting to increase the likelihood that all board members and superintendents would be in town and available.

In the spring of 2008, we conducted interviews (using the full protocol) with all six of the superintendents and all of the board members of the six districts. One board only has six members on their board, resulting in a total of 41 completed school board interviews and six superintendent interviews (Total N=47). We had a 100 percent response rate from the interviewees. Typically, the interviews were conducted by two researchers, with one designated as the principal interviewer and the other as the note taker. Individual interviews lasted 45-75 minutes. It was our impression that answers given were candid and that interview respondents were open about their board's operation, interactions, successes, needs, and frustrations.

In each interview, we began by asking each person whether he or she had attended the Texas Institute training (and when) and what other interaction their boards had had with CRSS or the Texas Institute training. Next, we asked interviewees to describe in their own words the value the Texas Institute training and interaction with CRSS had for them or their boards. After this "grand tour" questioning, we asked questions relating to the main components of the reform governance model and we probed on successes, challenges, reasons for change, and whether the Texas Institute training was an influence. We asked respondents open-ended questions before we asked closed-ended questions so as not to bias respondent answers as well as to be able to explore new leads and generate richer and more detailed narratives (Bernard, 2006; Spradley, 1979). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For the superintendent and school board president interviews, we combined their interview transcripts. Transcripts were managed and coded using ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 1991).

Secondary data. In addition to conducting the interviews, we collected some additional factual information from school board presidents and their school board service personnel about the school boards and their districts via a six-page survey. We also worked with the school board service person to obtain copies of any reform policies mentioned in the initial interviews by the superintendents or school board presidents, and to obtain the meeting agendas, meeting notes, and DVD recordings of three regular board meetings for each school board.

Analysis Identified Common Themes and Differences in Working and Non-working Boards

Strategy. We based our analysis on a comparative case-study design to qualitatively isolate general factors associated with working and non-working reform governance and with participation in the Texas Institute training. To identify themes, we utilized a staged technique described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elaborated on by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Then using the classic comparative case study design approach, we described and compared two groups and tested (in some cases) whether one group differed from the other.

Coding of Interview Transcripts. First, we used text management software (*ATLAS.ti*) to mark contiguous blocks of transcript text that pertained to the *a priori* topic areas incorporated within the interview protocol based on the components of the reform governance model, known as structural coding (MacQueen et al., 1998). These structural codes were further refined through inductive reasoning in accordance with grounded theory approach (grounded theory is an inductive approach in which theory is developed from a specific set of data). That is, the “quotations” or excerpts of the transcripts, tagged in connection with each of the main domains, were then reviewed to identify sub-themes and further refine the coding scheme. We pulled out all text associated with a particular domain and broke the texts into shorter “quotes” that expressed a single general idea and that could be read as independent statements. After printing the quotes on slips of paper, we spread them out on a large table. Three team members studied the quotes and engaged in a discussion about how to best sort them into piles based on their thematic similarities. Eventually, the team members came to a consensus about what thematic categories to include and which quotes were affiliated with each. We then named each thematic category and developed an explicit codebook to describe each (Crabtree and Miller, 1992; MacQueen et al., 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Willms et al., 1990). In the next step, a two-person team matched each quote in a domain with a specific subcategory. In cases where there was disagreement or confusion about how to code a particular quote, we first examined the larger context within which the quote came. If this was still unclear, we asked the original field interviewers if they could shed light on particular instances. If the issue was still not resolved by consensus then the decision was left to the project leader.

Coding Indicators of Reform Governance. Next, two team members pulled out and reviewed all the text associated with the domains that a priori aligned with each of the 14 indicators. For each indicator, the two team members studied the text associated with the domains and decided if a quote supported the full presence, partial presence or non-presence of the indicator (based on the rubric). Team members came to consensus about the extent of the presence of each of the indicators and assigned the quotes accordingly. To further validate

several of the indicators, we reviewed the copies of any reform policies mentioned by the superintendent or school board president in the initial interviews to validate that the policies were truly aimed at fundamentally changing the district. We also watched DVDs of three regular board meetings for each school board and we read the meeting agendas and notes. Watching the board meetings and documenting various characteristics allowed us to validate the efficiency of the board meetings and witness the interactions of board members with each other and the superintendent. These observations were used to assess the validity of the self-reported interview comments about board member relationships and personalities, and about board meeting efficiency and content.

Analysis of Themes. We examined the degree to which these themes and indicators were present for each person interviewed. For example, if one respondent mentioned a theme four times and another mentioned it once, the total number of quotes for the theme would be five, while the number of persons who mentioned the theme would be two. From the person counts, we calculated the overall and school board percentage of people who mentioned a theme, the full presence of an indicator or the partial presence of an indicator and then we calculated the percentages based on working and non-working boards by summing the total number of persons across the given set of boards. We examined the patterns overall, at the individual school board level, and at the working vs. non-working board level. As we examined these patterns, it became clear that the pattern of variation at the individual school board level was reflected in the working vs. non-working groupings. Therefore, we are only reporting the overall percentages and the working vs. non-working comparisons.

Differences between Working and Non-working Boards. We examined the patterns across working and non-working boards. Then, we describe how working boards, for example, govern differently than non-working boards by elaborating on the self-reported evidence that the elements of reform governance exist within a school board, i.e., core beliefs and commitments; roles, responsibilities and relationships; school board operations; theories of action; policy development, and policy oversight; and reform policies (as defined by CRSS's model). This examination highlights which aspects of the reform governance model are more prominent in the working (vs. non-working) boards and in the process served as a validation method of the selection of the six case studies into the two distinct groups.

"T-tests" (in some cases) were calculated to examine the statistical difference between the percentages of people who mentioned a theme in the working boards vs. the non-working boards. The t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other, or do not happen by chance. The p-value is the probability that the difference in the means is due to chance. The null hypothesis is rejected when the p-value is small, i.e. that the difference in means is not due to chance (and is therefore statistically significant or statistically different). In our analysis, student's t-tests were used because they deal with the problems associated with inference based on "small" samples. Moreover, in some cases our samples are too small to reliably conduct the student t-test in which case, the p-value is still reported to indicate whether the means are distinct, but the results are flagged to indicate that small sample size is an issue.

Limitations

This study faces some limitations. First the small sample size challenges our ability to generalize more broadly about the influence of the Texas Institute training for all boards in Texas and to find complex patterns and nuances. However, our intent was not to generate formal models to predict the influence of the Texas Institute training. The confidence in our findings comes from the degree to which the patterns appear among our diverse sample of school boards rather than from a larger and more statistically representative sample. We believe that the combination of a purposeful diverse sampling strategy, a comprehensive conceptual framework to guide our interviews, and a semi-structured format allowed for school board members and superintendents to describe their experiences in their own words and was both an appropriate and cost-effective approach for meeting the goals of the evaluation.

Second, the use of recall data to identify behavioral patterns poses a number of challenges. It is possible that hindsight and social desirability may have affected school board member or superintendent responses and that they may have confused some of the details in remembering past events. Our sense, however, is that the school board members and superintendents (especially those that did not attend the Institute training or were considered in a fixed faction) were very forthcoming and candid with their opinions, experiences and value of the Texas Institute training. The fact that many of them talked freely of the divisiveness, micro-management issues, troubles with the community, etc make clear that they had few problems talking about sensitive issues. We also were able to interview all school board members and superintendents – trained and non-trained by the Institute training. We encouraged school board members and superintendents to tell their stories in their own words and, more often than not, prompted them for more details and a fuller understanding of their experiences rather than asking them to give rationalizations for their behavior or opinions. Further, whenever interviewers saw inconsistencies, they asked for clarification. This often resulted in not only a more in-depth understanding of both the situation, but also more insight into the kinds of rules and schema the board members and superintendents were working from.

Summary

The training provided by CRSS to new school board members is a work in progress. Many school board members and superintendents in Texas's largest school districts have participated in the Texas Institute training, but many school board members have not been trained, and it is too soon to determine if the ultimate goal of the training—improving student achievement—has been achieved. However, we can ask if the training seems to have had any effect on the school board members who have received the training and on the boards on which they sit, and especially if they show evidence of reform governance—leading their districts and schools with an eye towards appropriate reform.

The Evaluation & Research Services evaluation used a comparative case study approach to look at the effects of the training on six school boards where at least some of their members and superintendents have received the training. Three were judged to be “working,” in terms

of successfully implementing policies for reform, and three were “non-working,” in that they were showing leadership but had not yet been successful in implementing reform policies.

We interviewed every board member and superintendent for all six boards. We collected factual information from board presidents via a six-page survey. We examined the transcripts of the interviews and pulled out text related to the 14 indicators. We looked for common themes. And we worked with the data to ensure that our findings could provide reliable guidance to CRSS as it goes forward with the Texas Institute training.

4. FINDINGS: DIFFERENCES IN HOW WORKING AND NON-WORKING BOARDS GOVERN

This chapter reports on and discusses our findings related to the first research question and the components introduced earlier in this report:

Existence of reform governance. How do working boards govern differently than non-working boards? For example, what components of reform governance are more prominent in the working vs. non-working boards? The components of reform governance were described in Chapter 2. They include:

- Core beliefs and commitments
- Theories of action for change
- Building blocks of reform governance (including school board operations and management oversight)
- Policy development (including reform policies) and policy oversight
- Roles, responsibilities, and relationships of board members

It is important to remember that the information in this chapter is based on self-reported information from board members and superintendents, which has been aggregated for each of the six school boards to provide one picture of each board. This snapshot was taken after 78 percent (32 of the 41) of school board members and 83 percent (five out of the six) of superintendents had attended the Texas Institute training at various times since 2002; hence, it captures the influence of the Texas Institute training on school boards' governance and we don't know what governance might have looked like before the training. In the next chapter, we will discuss more specifically the influence of the Texas Institute training on school board governance, according to school board members and superintendents.

Working Boards Share Core Beliefs and Commitments

In general, boards where reform governance is working (vs. non-working) have similar numbers of board members (mean of 33 percent vs. 19 percent, respectively) who feel that their "board members viewed all children as able to achieve at high levels" (indicator 1). This means that board members accept no excuses for poor performance and demonstrate a strong commitment to all children achieving at high levels. The board also views the achievement gap with urgency and actively pursues policies, programs, and other actions to eliminate it. The majority of both the working and the non-working boards had board members that may profess a commitment to high standards for all children but do not follow through consistently with action (i.e., policies, programs). Both types of boards also lack a sense of urgency about poor performance and the achievement gap. Table 4.1 (at the end of this chapter) shows the average percentages of board members by working and non-working boards for each of the indicators grouped by the reform governance components as well as whether the differences in the means of working vs. non-working are different from each other, or do not happen by chance. Specifically, we used the student's t-test to determine if the means are different from each other because they deal with the problems associated with inference based on "small" samples. The p-value is the probability that the difference in the

means is due to chance. The null hypothesis is rejected when the p-value is small, i.e., the difference in means is not due to chance.

The first column in table 4.1 lists the 14 indicators of reform governance. In other words, if a board has those characteristics it is likely that the board governs with an eye towards reform. So, reading the first line of the table going across, the second column tells us that 35 of the 47 interviewees said something in their comments that suggested “Board members view all children as achieving at high levels.” This view on the part of a board is indicator #1, or the first piece of evidence that the board governs with an eye toward reform. The third and fourth columns in the table tell us that 0.83 percent of all the members of the working boards and 0.79 percent of all the members of the non-working boards said something in their comments that indicated their boards view all children are able to achieve at high levels. The last column in the table tells us that the probability is 30% (0.30) that the difference in the response between the working and non-working boards is similar (and occurred by chance); if the p-value or probability is less than 10% (0.10) then the difference between the working and non-working boards did not occur by chance and is considered not similar, i.e. the difference is considered statistically different. The fact that the numerals are not printed in bold indicates that the difference in responses between the working and non-working boards was not statistically significantly different. It would seem, then, that this indicator by itself does not differentiate a working board from a non-working board among our six case study boards.

In addition, the working boards have significantly more board members (71 percent vs. 34 percent) who indicated that their “board had approved core beliefs and commitments” (indicator 2). These means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level. As one board member in a working board described, *“[Establishing and approving core beliefs and commitments] was a battle. When we finally did it, it was very valuable. Because our ability to have discussions on core issues is limited, due to the need to focus to short term things, we had to make time to have more opportunity for the core belief consensus building, vision setting, and identifying upcoming issues. Discussing the core beliefs and hashing them through in terms of what we really believe was a good process. And we go back to the beliefs, especially if questions come up about something we may want to do. We try to connect them to the beliefs. It was valuable to leaders in the community to see us establish the core beliefs because it created unity around what our intentions were. We have a laminated sheet in front of each member at meetings now.”*

Developing a Theory of Action for Change is Critical for Reform Governance

Working and non-working boards had similar numbers of board members (38 percent vs. 28 percent) who indicated that their “board has an aligned curriculum and monitors disaggregated student achievement data” (indicator 4). However, in school boards where reform governance is working (vs. non-working) there are significantly more board members (64 percent vs. 5 percent, respectively) who indicated that their ‘board has established a clear theory of action (theory of action)’ (indicator 3). This means that the working boards (by design) have and can articulate a clear theory of action that is reasonably complete and well aligned with other district reform strategies. The board is also deeply knowledgeable about district reforms. These means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level.

Developing a theory of action is a main emphasis of the reform governance framework because the theory of action is the strategic vision of how a board wants to reform or change the structure of the district to emphasize instruction and learning and improve student achievement. In addition, the use of the vernacular “theory of action” is also part of the common language of reform that is taught at the Texas Institute training. As one board member from a working board describes it, *‘CRSS made us focus on what our theory of action was, and probably did help us focus on XXX (Specifics of theory of action strategies are blinded here for anonymity). We realized that what we were talking about as a board was really a theory of action. So the theory of action and XXX co-evolved. Since the Institute training, the Board is now very interested in setting the direction and vision of the district.’* Moreover, note that 95 percent of the school board members or superintendents from the non-working boards did not have a clear theory of action.

Building Blocks of Reform Governance Were Present in Working and Non-Working Boards

In school boards where reform governance is working and non-working there are similar numbers of board members who mentioned evidence that supports that their ‘board meetings are efficient, effective and focus on student achievement’ (indicator 7) (79 percent vs. 64 percent). The observation and review of three regular board meetings per board (via DVD recordings) validated the findings from the interviews that board meetings were efficient (avg. 2 hours each), non-confrontational, and generally had focused discussions on student achievement. Similar numbers of working and non-working boards indicated that their ‘board exercises its management oversight responsibilities’ (indicator 8) (33 percent vs. 21 percent). This entails having a regular systematic review of district functions through audits, workshops, task forces, and committee structures.

Working Boards Seem to be More Active in Policy Development and Policy Oversight

In general, boards where reform governance is working (vs. non-working) have significantly more board members who feel that their ‘board is active in policy development and ensures that reform policies are codified’ (79 percent vs. 36 percent) (indicator 5). These means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level. As one board member from a working board describes, *“We develop policy and rely on the superintendent to run the district. That is how we operate. If there is something we are interested in, we request reports from the administration. We don’t try to run the district ourselves. Our main role is to develop policy and supervise/evaluate the superintendent, and require him/her to run the district. We don’t deal with personnel issues unless the superintendent brings them to us.”* This was supported also by what the superintendent of the same board described, *“The board rarely gets into operational issues; they leave that to me and my staff. So they mostly focus on policy development. They will ask me about operational issues, but leave that up to me mostly. They don’t see operations as their area. They are very clear on their governance role.”* Based on the review of policy documents from the six boards, two of the three working districts had adopted and codified reform policies.

In school boards where reform governance is working and non-working, however, there are similar numbers of board members – about half – who mentioned evidence that supports that their “board is diligent about monitoring the implementation of policies” (indicator 6). Policy

development and oversight is not an area that is covered in-depth at the Texas Institute training, but is addressed more intensely in follow-up alumni meetings or one-on-one consultations with CRSS.

Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships are Important for Working Boards

In general, boards where reform governance is working (vs. non-working) have significantly more board members who feel that their board members treat each other and the superintendent with respect (42 percent vs. 10 percent) (indicator 9) and that their ‘board effectively communicates its goals, plans, and policies to the community’ (58 percent vs. 4 percent) (indicator 12). These means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level. As one board member in a non-working board describes, *“[Slipping back into old habits of not respecting each other] happens most often when someone has a personal agenda and they are not always conscious of when that agenda rears its head. That person then forgets we must work as a team and they focus on their own district or constituency. It can get heated. We try and address it by head-on self-policing. We rely at times on the superintendent to work out some of those difficult situations. We use him/her to work on that too much, however. The president of the board should do more to address it when one member goes off on his or her own in this way.”*

Additionally, the non-working boards had significantly fewer board members (100 percent vs. 74 percent) who indicated that their ‘board is fairly cohesive with no fixed factions’ (indicator 10). This indicates that there are some fixed factions among the non-working boards, which typically consisted of only one or two board members. In none of these cases did the factions impact the voting majority.

Moreover, both working and non-working boards were similar in terms of the number of board members who mentioned supportive evidence that their ‘board maintains close relationship of trust with the superintendent’ (46 percent vs. 44 percent) (indicator 11), ‘board members understand their role is to govern, not manage (42 percent vs. 29 percent) (indicator 13), and also that ‘board members provide necessary constituent service (25 percent vs. 26 percent) (indicator 14).

Understanding the differences and similarities in the presence of the core components of reform governance among the three working and three non-working boards highlights the distinct and most prominent aspects of how a good board governs. Moreover, it validates that the two groups can be used for making a valid comparison, despite the fact that large percentages of both groups’ board members and superintendents have attended the Texas Institute training, 78 percent and 83 percent respectively.

Summary

By comparing how working and non-working boards govern, researchers can identify what unique behaviors and beliefs are found in boards that are directing their school districts on a path of reform. These characteristics provide information that is potentially important to understanding how boards move from exhibiting leadership without evidence that a reform

policy agenda is taking hold in their to successfully directing school districts toward reforms that improve student achievement.

The main difference in working boards and non-working boards are that working boards are more active in policy development and have clear theories of action for change for their districts. We found some key differences in the working and non-working boards that highlight what actions board engage in when they are directing their districts toward reform and improving student achievement. Board members and superintendents in the working and non-working boards had very similar core beliefs and commitments about children's ability to perform at or above grade level, but the working boards had taken the next step and actually formalized their core beliefs and commitments into policy. They differ the most in that more board members and superintendents on working boards feel that they are active in policy development, they are ensuring that reform policies are codified, and they communicate their goals, plans, and policies to the community. Working boards also differ from non-working boards in that working boards have a clear theory of action for change for their districts to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Working boards also believe that they treat themselves and their superintendent with respect, and they do not have fixed factions.

We also found several similarities in the working and non-working boards. The members of working and non-working boards tended to feel similarly about having efficient board meetings focused on student achievement, about exercising their oversight management responsibilities for the district, about having an aligned curriculum and monitoring student data, and about being diligent in monitoring the implementation of policies. Working and non-working boards were also similar in their ability to maintain a close relationship of trust with the superintendent. They both understand that their role is to govern, not manage, and to provide necessary constituent service.

Table 4.1
Mean Percent of Team of Eight who Mentioned Supportive Evidence for a Given Reform Governance Indicator, by Working and Non-working Boards

	Indicator	N	Mean percent of working	Mean percent of not working	T-Test P-value	
(N=47)						
Core Beliefs and Commitments						
	Board members view all children as achieving at high levels	1	35	0.83	0.79	0.30
	Board has approved core beliefs and commitments	2	41	0.71	0.34	0.10*
Theory of Action for Change						
	Board has clear theory of action	3	43	0.64	0.05	0.10*
	Board has aligned curriculum & monitors data	4	25	0.38	0.26	0.24
Policy Development (incl. Reform Policies) and Oversight						
	Board active in policy development; ensures reform policies are codified	5	36	0.79	0.36	0.02***
	Board is diligent about monitoring implementation of policies	6	36	0.46	0.50	0.46
Building Blocks of Reform Governance						
	Board mtgs are efficient, effective and focus on student achievement	7	34	0.79	0.64	0.28
	Board exercises its management oversight responsibilities	8	19	0.33	0.21	0.35
Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships						
	Board treats each other and superintendent with respect	9	37	0.42	0.10	0.10*
	Board is fairly cohesive; no fixed factions	10	16	1.00	7.4	0.10*
	Board maintains close relationship of trust with superintendent	11	27	0.46	0.44	0.45
	Board effectively communicates goals, plans, policies to community	12	37	0.58	0.04	0.01***
	Board members understand their role to govern, not manage	13	39	0.42	0.29	0.38
	Board members provide necessary constituent service	14	21	0.25	0.26	0.48

Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

The team of eight includes the seven school board members and the superintendent.

5. FINDINGS: THE INFLUENCE OF THE TEXAS INSTITUTE TRAINING ON BOARD GOVERNANCE

This chapter reports on and discusses the influence of the various elements of the CRSS reform governance framework, including the components described in Chapter 2, that are the basis for the Texas Institute curriculum and training. Specifically, we will examine the combined influence of the Texas Institute training and other interactions with CRSS according to school board members and superintendents, and whether the influence is different in working and non-working boards. Members of the teams of eight also mentioned other influences independent of CRSS; these will be discussed in the next chapter.

Interaction with CRSS and the Texas Institute Training

In our six case study boards, overall 79 percent (32 of 41) of school board members and 83 percent (five out of six) of the superintendents have attended the Texas Institute training from 2002 to 2008. Table 5.1 shows the interaction between the teams of eight and CRSS overall and by the working and non-working boards. For the three working boards, 67 percent of the school board members have attended and 67 percent of the superintendents. For the three non-working boards, 92 percent of the school board members have attended and 100 percent of the superintendents. This attendance information was verified with the administrative records of CRSS. As a result, there was a similar “dosage” of the Texas Institute training across the working and non-working boards.

At the board level, two-thirds of both the working and non-working boards had invited CRSS to conduct a training or board workshop for their entire board. In most cases, the board members mentioned having held a workshop with Don McAdams or one of his staff. One board member from a working board described his experience, “*We had Don come out and train us about five years ago. We needed a new superintendent and he helped us work on our efforts on that, and on managing conflict.*” Other workshop topics were mentioned. “*We then brought Don in to help us with team building and consensus building, during a board workshop.*” Another board member mentioned how Don helped their board, “*The training pointed out to us (and also through the alumni events) that we lacked a plan and a vision. We realized we were not operating efficiently because we lacked these things. So through the alumni reunions, where we would all (or most of us) get together, we realized this and it was useful. And we had Don come a few times for workshops; the big one was on our strategic plan (i.e., theory of action). He helped us understand the need for the plan, and the need to work together (to disagree without being disagreeable).*”

In addition, one-third of the working and non-working boards also had initiated a self-study for their entire board including the superintendent on the reform governance framework using McAdams’ book, *What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools* (2006). For these boards, the book study helped solidify next steps. This board member explains how the book study helped clinch the necessary support for their core beliefs and commitments, “*The training provided the foundation, however the book study was the impetus. There were two or three of us who pushed it; there were a few others on the board who could not have cared less. And a few of them were in fact trained. The book study*

provided the venue for the development of the core beliefs to happen.” Lastly, about one-third of the members of the teams of eight for both the working and non-working boards (38 percent vs. 31 percent, respectively) have attended the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) breakfast meetings. As a result, there was also a similar “dosage” of other interaction with CRSS or the reform governance framework across the working and non-working boards.

Table 5.1
Interaction between Team of Eight and CRSS

	N=	Overall Percent	Mean percent of working	Mean percent of non-working	T-Test P-value
Board members attended Texas Institute training (N=41)	32	0.79	0.67	0.92	0.15
Superintendent attended Texas Institute Training (N=6)	5	0.83	0.67	1.00	0.21
TASB breakfast meetings (N=47)	16	0.30	0.38	0.31	0.33
Board invited CRSS to training workshop (N=6)	4	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.50
Board initiated a self study (N=6)	2	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.50

Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

The team of eight includes all seven school board members and the superintendent.

In this analysis, we examine the combined influence of the reform governance framework from any or all of these interactions with CRSS and the Texas Institute training. We did not try during the interviews to attribute specific influence to just the Texas Institute training, but rather to the overarching influence of any interaction a board or board member or superintendent had with CRSS. For ease of reporting, we will be referring to this combined influence as the “influence of the Texas Institute training.”

Influence of the Texas Institute Training

According to school board members and superintendents, the primary influence of the reform governance model via the Texas Institute training and other interactions with CRSS was on “*how united the board acts as a team particularly when resolving conflict*” and on their “*knowledge of how board members view their governance role.*” Over half (53 percent) of the members of the teams of eight mentioned these influences. Table 5.2 lists the set of influences discussed by school board members and superintendents, organized according to the components of the reform governance model. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned influences (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (out of 47) that mentioned the influence, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. Refer to Table 5.2 at the end of this chapter. The difference across working and non-working boards will be discussed in the next sub-section of this chapter.

The most commonly mentioned influences by the board members and superintendents (those mentioned by over 20 percent of all of the members of the teams of eight, i.e., more than 10

of the 47 members) are italicized in the table and are discussed below according to the components of the reform governance framework.

Core beliefs and commitments. We found that the main influences of the Texas Institute training include the “*establishment or adoption of a set of core beliefs and commitments by the team of eight*” (38 percent). A board member from a working board described it this way, “*For example, on the last day of the institute, we decided that we would come up with our core commitments or beliefs. The first thing we did when we came back was to have Don come and help us develop those core beliefs. Through this process, we realized that we did have different beliefs. The training at the institute, and the workshop, enabled us to have a deeper discussion than we would have otherwise.*” Several board members saw the value of the core beliefs and commitments in their ability to unite the mission of the board and the whole district. One board member explained it in this way, “*Creating those belief statements has had a big impact. All staff, down to the cafeteria workers, knows those belief statements. The statements remind us of who we are and what we are about. Those statements are a part of our district plan, and are on the website.*”

Building blocks of reform governance. The Texas Institute training brought “*more board focus on achievement, instruction and learning*” (40 percent) and according to about one-quarter of the board members and superintendents it lead to “*improved operating procedures*” (23 percent). The Texas Institute training, it appears, has assisted boards to become more efficient in their operating procedures and to be able to focus more on their important work – student achievement. One board member described the influence of the Institute training in this way, “*When I started on the board, we were dealing with operational issues and reacting to problems. We were just careening from guardrail to guardrail. Now, we are 80 percent of the way to being on the other end of spectrum. We are not 100 percent there. We are still reactive, partly due to the nature of the school finance system, which has modified our ability to start new programs. We lack money to do some things we want to do, like add academies and expand arts education. But we as a board are striving to be top-level policy and goal setters. In the past, we had begun to have pre-agenda meetings as our first monthly meeting, followed by an agenda meeting where we went over the agenda again. We weren’t getting anything done, especially with regard to academics. We were focusing more on operations. We went away from Don’s model. Now since the Institute, the first meeting of the month is a workshop meeting (our last one was on operating procedures changes), where we have discussion topics. Then there is a regular monthly meeting which has a celebratory/student recognition component and the rest is then focused on contracts and a variety of other topics. This has been a good change. This change was part of the new operating procedures that we established as a result of the Institute. This has allowed us to focus more on academics.*”

Another board member described how the Texas Institute training helped reinforce where the board needs to focus by using case studies. The board member said, “*As we have gone to the [Texas Institute training] breakfasts, they [CRSS] present one or two short cases that deal with a variety of topics. The opportunity to listen to the problem, how it was resolved, and discussion of how it was resolved is very useful. The key lesson: Leave your personal agenda at home, work as a team for what is best for the district, and be open minded. For those who*

have attended, the Institute also has changed conversations. Not all on our board have attended, so I don't know about them. But (for those of us who have attended) we don't have anger, jealousy, or pride messing things up, we now focus on students and what is best for the district."

Roles, responsibilities and relationships. We found that the Institute training had the most influence on "how board members see their role" and the "superintendent's role in governance." For one-third of the board members and superintendents in the case study boards, the Institute training increased their "awareness of the need for new roles and relationships" (32 percent). It also gave one-third a "common language around governance to use with the team of eight" (30 percent). Furthermore, board members credited the Institute for their new knowledge in several key areas:

- *How board members view their governance role* (53 percent),
- *The role of superintendent* (23 percent),
- *How to work as a team of eight* (45 percent),
- *How to manage relationships* (21 percent),

This new-found knowledge was applied and led to changes in the boards in several key ways; for example, "how united the board acts as a team, particularly when resolving conflict" (53 percent), "decreased micro-management behavior by the team of eight" (43 percent), and "holding the superintendent accountable for the 'how' of running the district" (30 percent).

Over half of the people who mentioned a decrease in micromanagement attributed it to a majority of the board having trained at the Institute. One board member explained this idea particularly well: "With enough of us saying 'you are crossing the line' to each other, we could hold each other accountable. That didn't work when it was just a few of us who had been trained to say this to the others on the board. This self-policing decreased our micromanagement."

Another board member explained how having a "common language around governance" was the key to decreasing micromanagement. They explained, "The [Texas Institute] training was the critical link to why we are as high performing as we are. The key is the common language. And it taught us that when we cross the line into management we are doing a huge disservice. We can't get involved in a particular child's case, or into what a school is doing. I can say 'no' to people who come to me with a complaint about something like that. I can say 'talk to the principal.' I must work on strategy for the district rather than get involved in these matters."

One board member explained the influence of the Institute in terms of learning that a board's responsibility is to "hold the superintendent accountable for the 'how'." One board member explained it in these words, "We have moved away from micromanaging in recent years. At times, we had board members who saw themselves as superintendents and got very involved in the details of daily operations. We do not do that now. We try to make our expectations clear to the superintendent, we let him try to meet them, and we monitor his performance. We try to be very specific about our goals and expectations for him. We have gotten specific

about the outcomes that we want. That guides him. We recently gave him four very concrete goals that wanted him to achieve. But we don't tell him how to achieve them. His evaluation is based on these four specific, measurable outcomes. Since the Institute training, we don't dictate how he should meet his goals, but we expect him to tell us how he will do so, then report to us on what has been achieved."

Theory of action for change. Board members and superintendents (in both working and non-working boards) talked about how they gained an "increased awareness for the need of a long-term strategic vision" (for the board and the district) on how to improve board governance. They included as part of the long-term vision a specific set of strategies on how to change the school district aimed at improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap, otherwise known as a theory of action (32 percent). They used words such as "visioning," "long term," "strategic," "district-wide," "global" and "theory of action." The board member's comment on the value of the alumni events (quoted above) also applies to influence of the Institute training and the need for a theory of action for change: "*The training pointed out to us (and also through the alumni events) that we lacked a plan and a vision. We realized we were not operating efficiently because we lacked these things. So through the alumni reunions, where we would all (or most of our board) get together, we realized this. And we had Don come a few times for workshops; the big one was on our strategic plan (theory of action). He helped us understand the need for the plan, and the need to work together (to disagree without being disagreeable)."*

Other boards gained "focus on a long-term strategic vision and theory of action" (32 percent). One board member [of a non working board] explained it this way, "*For me personally, it was a very helpful training. Without Don's group, I am not sure where we would have gotten that kind of training [training on roles and responsibilities]; I don't think TASB [Texas Association of School Boards] provides it. It was a huge help for me. It helped me understand my role and understand what to focus on. It helped me to zero in on a few key issues and try to address them well, such as a focus on policy and long range planning and the theory of action work we talked about earlier. We may have gotten there eventually without the Institute, but it would have taken more time and been a more painful process. And maybe we would never have gotten there. Now there is a common purpose and vision of the board – the Institute gave us that."* About one-quarter attributed more discussion on district change (23 percent) to the Texas Institute training as well as having a common language as a team of eight around reform and change (23 percent).

Policy development (including reform policies) and policy oversight. About 30 percent of the board members and superintendents attributed "board focus on policy setting, review and alignment" (32 percent) and "improved policymaking process" (28 percent) to their attendance at the Texas Institute training. One board member explained it this way, "*For my first three years [on the board], we didn't work on policy, unless it was something reactive, meaning if someone raised something to us. Now, at every meeting we are reviewing and tweaking policy. That change happened about two years ago. We realized that we weren't looking at our policies. Our superintendent kept pushing us to do it; he/she even hired a deputy superintendent whose expertise is in policy. But then it finally sunk in when Don would ask us, 'How often do you look at your policies? Do you only do it when people are*

screaming at you in meetings?’ Which was the case for us. So, a small group of us realized that we needed to and we started looking at, reviewing, and tweaking our policies.”

For other boards, the Institute training helped make their current policymaking process more efficient. As another board member explained, *“The Institute encouraged us to look harder at certain policies, and to be more perceptive when looking at them. It helped us to assess policy more critically and thoroughly. We also do this much more efficiently now.”*

A superintendent explained how the Institute training was influential in making sure that the push was on policy, i.e., on strategic policy. She/He explained it as, *“The Institute was influential, but was not the cause ...it [the training at the Institute] highlighted my need [as superintendent] to be visionary with policy, instead of just visionary and allowing policies to happen. It reminded me of something I knew, but was not doing. Basically, the sugar was already in the tea.”*

Another board member explained how the Institute training was influential in getting necessary changes codified into policy. *“The institute made it easier for us [as a board] to keep the pursuit of these changes in the forefront. There were two members who really latched onto those reform ideas, so the Institute was really valuable for them. I am not sure that would have happened without the Institute. One of those particular members was trained by the Institute, the other was not. Even though the one member hadn’t gone [to the Texas Institute training], he/she had gone to the [TASB] breakfast and some of the alumni retreats, so he/she had exposure to what CRSS teaches. We also did a study of Don’s book, which gave everyone on the board exposure to those ideas. Anyway the Institute’s ideas have had a great influence. Some changes probably would have happened anyway. But we as board members may not have been as involved. We are blessed with a great superintendent and administration. The superintendent thinks this way [in the same way that CRSS advocates] anyway. So in the absence of the Institute the changes would have maybe been more management-driven than board-driven. Now they have been driven by both. The benefit of it being board-driven is that changes must be codified into policy to become institutionalized. Then the changes are not dependent on who the superintendent is.”*

It is noteworthy that none of the persons interviewed mentioned anything that related the Texas Institute training or reform governance model with a board being diligent about monitoring implementation of policies (indicator 6).

Other influences. We also found that one-quarter of the board members and superintendents felt that the Texas Institute training was their *“motivation or catalyst for change”* (23 percent). One board member explained how the Institute is a catalyst for change: *“Accountability is the primary motivation to change. Without that system telling people where the kids’ performance is, it would be difficult. If people think we are doing well and have no evidence to the contrary, then they won’t support change. Our academic performance isn’t terrible, but it could be better. We are making progress in some areas, but there is no consistency to it. We have pockets of success. That has brought people to the table, but the discussions of the board at the CRSS training and afterwards have helped board members (and the community) understand that we must make changes to improve*

achievement.” Another board member explains how the case studies at the Texas Institute training are a good motivator, “*The Institute gave us the vision that this could be done. You wonder: can we really turn this board and district around? And then you attend the Institute and see cases of districts that have done that. Seeing those cases was what is helping us move from good to great.*” Another board member explains how the Institute motivates one to keep pushing for excellence and not let up, “[The Institute] *was the catalyst for some things we are doing. Sometimes a board becomes complacent, and you think you are doing a good job when you could do better. So the Institute made me think about ways we could do better, think outside the box. We now ask questions like: Can every student go to college? How much time are students spending in the classroom? Do we need technology classes? We keep pushing the envelope.*”

Differences in the Influence of the Texas Institute by Working and Non-Working Boards

The influence of the Texas Institute training also differed in some key aspects across the working and non-working boards. Table 5.2 lists the set of influences discussed by school board members and superintendents, organized according to the components of the reform governance model. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned influences (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (with a total of 47) that mentioned the influence, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. We report differences that were significant at the $p=0.10$, $p=0.05$, and $p=0.01$ levels. Refer to Table 5.2 at the end of this chapter.

First of all, the working and non-working boards were similar in how they perceive the influence of the Institute in terms of core beliefs and commitments and the building blocks of reform governance, i.e. efficient, effective board meetings, and management oversight responsibilities, with the one exception that more working boards had adopted a set of core beliefs (38 percent vs. 17 percent). However, there were some important distinguishing aspects of the influence of the Texas Institute training in the reform governance components of roles, responsibilities, and relationships, theory of action for change, and policy development (including reform policies) and policy oversight. These are explained below.

Roles, responsibilities and relationships. In general, boards where reform governance is non-working (vs. working) have significantly more board members who feel that the Texas Institute influenced their knowledge of “how to manage relationships” (36 percent vs. 08 percent, respectively) (indicator 9), the “role of a board member” (65 percent vs. 42 percent) (indicator 13), the “role of a superintendent” (36 percent vs. 13 percent) (indicator 13) as well as the ability to “hold the superintendent accountable for the ‘how’” (44 percent vs. 17 percent). The means on the knowledge of the “role of a board member” is significant at the $p=0.05$ level, while the other means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level. In general, these mean percentages for the non-working boards are fairly high and represent a significant portion of the non-working school board members and superintendents. Additionally, more non-working boards (vs. working boards) learned how to maintain or build community support (19 percent vs. 0 percent, respectively).

Theory of action for change. Board members and superintendents in working boards (vs. non-working boards) distinguish themselves from the non-working boards in that they found

the Texas Institute to mainly be an influence on their “*focus on a long-term strategic vision or theory of action (theory of action)*” (50 percent vs. 14 percent respectively) (indicator 3). These means are statistically different at the $p=0.10$ level. In addition, working boards (vs. non-working boards) found the Texas Institute influenced their “*adoption of reform policies*” (17 percent vs. 0 percent) (indicator 5). All of the people who mentioned this influence were in the working boards; however, the overall number of comments is too small to test the statistical difference of the means.

Valuable Aspects of the Texas Institute Training

According to school board members and superintendents, there were several valuable aspects of the training itself. Table 5.3 lists the set of valuable aspects of the training mentioned by school board members and superintendents. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned aspects of the training (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (out of 47) that mentioned the specific aspect, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. In most cases, however, the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but a p-value less than 0.10 does indicate that the distributions across working and non-working are distinct. Refer to Table 5.3 at the end of this chapter.

The aspects of the training that were mentioned as “valuable” most often (those mentioned by over 20 percent of all of the members of the teams of eight, i.e., more than 10 of the 47 members) by the board members and superintendents who attended the Institute training (N=37) were: the case study method of teaching (70 percent), networking (70 percent) (at the Institute training (46 percent) and with alumni after the training (24 percent), modeling of good board behavior and governance (56 percent) (i.e., civil behavior agreeing to disagree) (24 percent), work ethic, approach to homework, intensity, etc. (32 percent), working through guidelines, next steps, and solutions to current issues (51 percent), gaining knowledge of the role of a board member (43 percent), having multiple attendees from the same board at the same Institute, particularly the superintendent (35 percent), the actual content of the governance model (27 percent), having extended discussions about policy (throughout the whole weekend) (24 percent), and, finally, the training being conducted by third party, objective and experienced moderators and staff (22 percent). These were all mentioned equally across working and non-working boards. A board member described it well, he/she said, “*We realized that with the Institute, we could drill down and address the very issues we were facing, like the bond issue, issues around dealing with new members (the board was in a big state of transition at the time), the political structure of communities in the district, and what to do about the reality that there had been a lack of administrative and board leadership (the district had not been following wishes of the community. The main question was how were we to repair that?). The case studies-which we received in advance of the training addressed these issues (above) we were facing. We talked with [other board members from different districts] and exchanged information and ideas. We learned a lot and by the end of the weekend we knew what changes we needed to make next.*”

There were also a handful of other valuable aspects of the training itself that were mentioned by a few people. These were: attended the session with the superintendent (14 percent), the delivery of the information was done in the Socratic method (11 percent), and the question

and answer sessions with real people from the case studies (11 percent). These were all mentioned equally across working and non-working boards.

Summary

According to the majority of superintendents and school board members, the Texas Institute training provided knowledge to board members that is essential to strategically leading a district toward reform. The Texas Institute training and the reform governance model increased boards' knowledge of governance roles, relationships and responsibilities. Specifically, the Texas Institute training influenced both the working and non-working boards by increasing their knowledge of the role of the superintendent, their role as board members, the responsibilities of the team of eight, and how to work as a team.

Besides the Texas Institute training and reform governance model increasing board knowledge of governance roles, relationships and responsibilities, the training provided motivation and focus which then lead to changes in overall board behavior. We found that the Texas Institute training increased board member awareness of the need to have a strategic vision and a set of strategies to improve how the school district educates all children, a.k.a., a theory of action. The Texas Institute also increased board accountability for their vision and long-term strategic plan (primarily by underscoring their responsibilities) and provided motivation and hope that *"change can be done"* (within real live case examples). These changes in turn lead to and motivated board behavior change – increased board unity and teamwork, decreased micromanagement, more focus on achievement, learning, and policy (setting, reviewing, and aligning), improved operating procedures, improved policymaking processes, increased discussions about change to the districts, and the use of a common language related to governance.

We also found some different perceptions in the working and non-working boards. The working boards distinguish themselves in that they also perceived the influence of the Texas Institute training to be primarily on their *"adoption of core beliefs," "focus on long-term strategic vision and theory of action"* and their *"adoption of reform policies."* Non-working boards perceived the influence of the Texas Institute training to be mostly on their *"knowledge of the role of a board member," "knowledge of how to manage relationships,"* and *"holding their superintendent accountable for 'how' to run the district."*

In terms of the training itself, the majority of attendees found several aspects of the training beneficial. Attendees valued the case study method, the networking at the Institute training and with alumni, the modeling of good civil behavior and good board governance, and the guidelines, next steps, and solutions that were discussed pertaining to their board's current issues.

Table 5.2
Influences of the Texas Institute Training, By Indicator and By Working and Non-working Boards

	Indicator	Influences Mentioned	N N=47	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
Core Beliefs and Commitments							
Board members view all children as achieving at high levels	1	Focus on equity among all kids	6	0.13	0.04	0.22	0.13
Board has approved core beliefs and commitments	2	<i>Adopted core beliefs/commitments</i>	13	0.28	0.38	0.17	0.20
	2	Annual review of goals/ commitments	6	0.13	0.21	0.04	0.19
	2	Awareness/Need for core beliefs	3	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.34
Theory of Action for Change							
Board has clear theory of action for change	3	<i>Awareness/Need for Vision/Strategy</i>	15	0.32	0.29	0.35	0.33
	3	<i>Focus on l.t. strategic vision/theory of action for change</i>	15	0.32	0.50	0.14	0.06*
	3	<i>More discussion on district change</i>	11	0.23	0.21	0.26	0.29
	3	<i>Common Language around reform</i>	11	0.23	0.21	0.27	0.38
	3	Focus on theory of action for change	7	0.15	0.25	0.05	0.15
	3	Knowledge of reform strategies	3	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.30
	3	Developed theory of action	3	0.06	0.13	0.00	0.11
Board has aligned curriculum & monitors data	4	Curriculum alignment/changes	6	0.13	0.08	0.18	0.12
Policy Development (incl. Reform Policies) and Oversight							
Brd active in policy developm't; ensures reform policies are codified	5	<i>Focus on policy</i>	15	0.32	0.25	0.40	0.24
	5	<i>Improved policymaking process</i>	13	0.28	0.25	0.32	0.37
	5	More discussions on policy	8	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.46
	5	Adopted reform policies	4	0.09	0.17	0.00	0.03**!
Board is diligent about monitoring implementation of policies	6	—	0	—	—	—	—
Building Blocks of Reform Governance							
Brd mtgs are efficient, effective and focus on student achievement	7	<i>Focus on achievem't and instruction</i>	19	0.40	0.33	0.48	0.23
	7	Meeting efficiency	8	0.17	0.08	0.25	0.19
	7	More educated votes	4	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.46
Board exercises its management oversight responsibilities	8	<i>Improved operating procedures</i>	11	0.23	0.25	0.21	0.45
	8	More informat'n gathering behavior	7	0.15	0.13	0.17	0.36
	8	More district monitoring/ reporting	3	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.24

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; ! denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct across working and non-working boards; *Italics* indicates the most frequently mentioned influence by members of the team of eight

Table 5.2 (Continued)
Influences of the Texas Institute Training, By Indicator and By Working and Non-working Boards

		Influences Mentioned	N	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
Indicator			N=47				
Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships							
Board treats each other and superintendent with respect	9	<i>Need for new roles & relationships</i>	15	0.32	0.38	0.26	0.28
	9	How to manage relationships	10	0.21	0.08	0.36	0.08* [!]
	9	Increased trust respect for each other	8	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.47
	9	Improved board communication	8	0.17	0.21	0.14	0.25
Board is fairly cohesive; no fixed factions	10	<i>Unity/Teamwork/Resolving conflict</i>	25	0.53	0.50	0.57	0.39
Board maintains close relationship of trust with superintendent	11	Increased trust respect for Sup	8	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.43
Brd effectively communicates goals, plans, policies to community	12	How to Communicate with Public	4	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.46
	12	Build Maintain community support	4	0.09	0.00	0.19	0.03** [!]
	12	Communicate goals and vision	3	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.37
Board members understand their role to govern, not manage	13	<i>Knowledge of Role of Board Mbr</i>	25	0.53	0.42	0.65	0.05**
	13	<i>How to Work as Team of 8</i>	21	0.45	0.42	0.49	0.39
	13	<i>Common Language on Governance</i>	14	0.30	0.29	0.31	0.47
	13	<i>Hold Sup accountable for the How</i>	14	0.30	0.17	0.44	0.07*
	13	<i>Knowledge of Role of Sup</i>	11	0.23	0.13	0.36	0.08* [!]
	13	Focus on district-wide perspective	10	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.46
	13	Board accountability for vision	10	0.21	0.29	0.13	0.14
	13	More discussion about role of Board	4	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.46
Board members provide necessary constituent service	14	<i>Decreased micromanagement</i>	20	0.43	0.42	0.43	0.46
Other Influences of the Texas Institute training							
	Other	<i>Motivation/Catalyst for change</i>	11	0.23	0.25	0.22	0.43
	Other	Knowledge of Common pitfalls	9	0.19	0.25	0.14	0.18
	Other	Need right people on Team of 8	7	0.15	0.08	0.22	0.12
	Other	Networking	6	0.13	0.13	0.14	0.46
	Other	More Confidence	6	0.13	0.08	0.17	0.25
	Other	Validation of on right path	4	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.50
	Other	Patience/Change takes time	3	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.24

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; [!] denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct across working and non-working boards; *Italics* indicates the most frequently mentioned influence by members of the team of eight

Table 5.3
Valuable Aspects of Texas Institute Training, Overall and By Working & Non-working Boards

	N	Percent of those Attended (N=37)	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
<i>Case Study method/ hands-on evidence of model</i>	26	0.70	0.50	0.61	0.15
<i>Guidelines/ Next Steps /Solutions</i>	19	0.51	0.38	0.44	0.31
<i>Networking and collaboration at Texas Institute training</i>	17	0.46	0.29	0.45	0.20
<i>Knowledge on role as a board member</i>	16	0.43	0.33	0.35	0.47
<i>Multiple attendees from board at same Institute training</i>	13	0.35	0.33	0.21	0.30
<i>Modeled good board governance (i.e., work ethic, intensity)</i>	12	0.32	0.25	0.26	0.48
<i>Governance model</i>	10	0.27	0.17	0.26	0.27
<i>Extended discussions about policy</i>	9	0.24	0.21	0.17	0.36
<i>Alumni Networking</i>	9	0.24	0.17	0.22	0.34
<i>Modeled/Promoted civil behavior</i>	9	0.24	0.13	0.26	0.23
<i>Third party objective, experienced moderators</i>	8	0.22	0.08	0.26	0.15
Attended with Superintendent	5	0.14	0.08	0.13	0.32
Delivery/Socratic method	4	0.11	0.13	0.04	0.19
Q & A with real people	4	0.11	0.13	0.04	0.19

Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

! denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct across working and non-working boards

Italics indicate the most frequently mentioned by members of the team of eight.

6. FINDINGS: CRITICAL FACTORS IN EFFECTIVE BOARD GOVERNANCE

This chapter reports and discusses mechanisms or critical factors that are likely to lead to effective, successful governance by school boards focused on reform policymaking and improving student achievement. Some of these critical factors are attributed by the school board members and superintendents to the Texas Institute training, and others are not. Specifically, we will examine the self-reported success factors, challenges and what is still needed for success according to school board members and superintendents. We also examine if these critical factors or current needs differ in working or non-working boards.

Factors that Contribute to Successful Board Governance

According to school board members and superintendents, there were several important factors or mechanisms that they attribute to their successes in leading and governing their districts on the path of reform. Some of the factors they attribute to the reform governance model in the Texas Institute training and to other interactions with CRSS; other factors are not attributed to CRSS or the training. Table 6.1 lists the set of success factors described by school board members and superintendents, organized according to those that they attribute to the influence of the Texas Institute training and those that they do not. The success factors that are mentioned both in relation to the Institute training by some board members and not related to the Institute training by others are highlighted in *italics* in the table. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned success factors (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (out of N=47) that mentioned the success factor attributed to the Institute training or not, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. In all cases, however, the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but a p-value less than 0.10 does indicate that the distributions across working and non-working are distinct. Refer to Table 6.1 at the end of this chapter.

Board Member or Superintendent Turnover Seen as Mechanism to Improve Governance

We found that the most commonly mentioned factors attributed by board members and superintendents to their success as a governing body focused on reform (those mentioned by over 20 percent of all of the members of the teams of eight, i.e., more than 10 of the 47 members) are the election of new board members, i.e., board turnover, and hiring a new superintendent. “*The election of new board members*” was mentioned as a success factor primarily by non-working board members or superintendents rather than working boards (42 percent vs. 7 percent). Most of the boards indicated that there was only so much they could do as a result of the Institute training and sometimes they just needed different people elected. This is captured well in the words of one superintendent, “*Moving from good to great includes having the right people on the bus.*” Another board member said it this way, “*There is a strong buy-in here by our board members, but tigers don’t lose their stripes necessarily. If someone joined the board for the wrong reason, the training won’t fix that person; it takes a new election to fix that. Their underlying beliefs won’t change and these must be in the right place for the entire board to be successful and reform-oriented.*”

A board member explained that they had not planned on waiting for turnover to improve their governance, but it was not possible any other way: *“It took time to implement what we had learned at the Institute. Waiting for new people to get elected was not the initial plan, but that is what happened. We tried to work through the system, but we eventually realized that we really did need new board members. We recognized this in simple things. Evaluative processes, for example. People get into some positions, both on the board and in positions in the district, and they are more concerned with the appearance of what they are doing than with their actual performance. We had people on the board who had no business serving on any board anywhere. They lacked any education themselves other than high school, but they were running a multi-million dollar district. And administrators know how to manipulate these people. And personal agendas were at the fore, and they were hindering the progress of the district. It became apparent that we were being courted by the administration to vote against or for certain things depending on the whim of the moment. Once this changed, and we had a majority of stronger leaders, we began to move forward and could start to implement changes.”*

Another board member attributes their ability to improve their governance to board turnover (and to the Texas Institute training) in this way, *“Our starting point as a board when we began to move in a new and positive direction came when we were able to get new people to run for the board. I and other board members who had been trained [at the Texas Institute] teamed up to do this. We had some people on the board who had been on the board for 18-20 years, who could not see the forest for the trees. [Turnover] was the only way to change our board in substantial ways.”* As was pointed out by most school board members and superintendents, board turnover and the effect of the Texas Institute training is hard to separate. One board member said it with these words, *“These changes [in our board behavior, unity, and respect] and the training go hand in hand. You need people on the board with the right mindset. And you need to get them trained [at the Texas Institute]. So the training enhanced the ability to bring the board together.”*

In addition, one-third of the teams of eight mentioned *“hiring a new superintendent”* as a critical factor for their success in bringing about improvements in the district (30 percent 14/47). Of these, six board members or superintendents attributed the hiring of the new superintendent to the Texas Institute training, while eight did not attribute this to the Texas Institute training. The majority of those that did not attribute the hiring of the superintendent to the Institute training were in non-working boards. One board member from a non-working board explained the influence of hiring a new superintendent in this way, *“What was especially transformational was that we brought in a strong superintendent. Prior, we had a community fed up with the district doing the same old thing, the same old way. We were getting worse financially and academically. The Board realized that must change. We hired a strong staff, and board members were getting trained at the Institute and elsewhere. The Board gained a better understanding of its roles and responsibilities. With [the new superintendent] there was the expectation that things will improve. District administrators started holding people accountable for their work, and monitoring what was happening. There was a new message: “this is important work we are doing, you will be held accountable.” This was larger than an NCLB and TAKS focus. Our community wanted these changes to happen regardless of NCLB.”*

Focus on Governing and not Managing is Seen as Mechanism to Improve Governance

Besides the change in personnel on the team of eight, the most mentioned success factor was a focus on “*staying above the management line*” in governing as a board (68 percent), i.e., not becoming too involved in the day-to-day management of the district and instead focusing on the strategic vision and long-term planning necessary. Half of those who mentioned this (34 percent) attributed it to the Texas Institute training, and half did not (34 percent). The majority of those that mentioned this as a success factor were in non-working boards. One board member explained how the Institute training helped in this way, “*Our board already operated as a team before the institute. Not all districts do. We built a real team of 8 before the institute. We had some micromanagement, but by and large not much. But the [reform governance] model really is good at getting members to focus on their roles and responsibilities, especially for new board members. It is also always good to be able to remind each other about the [management] line—we do that because of CRSS.*”

Another board explained how board turnover interplayed with an increased focus on governing, “*Within a year or two those who had not attended [the Texas Institute] left the board, for various reasons. The three of us [who had been trained at the Texas Institute] started talking about things in terms of the entire district, and started setting policy, which changed the tone of the conversation during meetings. We started trusting our superintendent more to do the daily work of running the district. And when new members joined and attended the Texas Institute training, they learned the same things. Our success is then from both turnover and the [Texas Institute] training because if there is a board of seven and only three have been trained [by the Texas Institute], it must be three very strong people to convince the other four of their way of thinking. It is much easier if the majority is trained – at least four or five of the seven are trained [at the Texas Institute]. Folks from all walks of life join the board, and the [Texas] Institute brings all of them together and educates them all – no one really understands what being on a school board really involves when they first get elected.*”

A board member explained the dynamic of holding each other accountable for not managing and being able to work as a team as their mechanism for success using these words, “*Once we got to critical mass, where a majority of us were trained [by the Texas Institute], then it became obvious that we were more able to function as a team and to focus on our governance role; it made a real difference. By majority, I mean that we reached a tipping point of having four of us on the board who were trained [by the Institute]. Because with enough of us saying, “you are crossing the line” to each other, we could hold each other accountable. That [to say this to the others on the board] didn’t work when it was just a few of us who had been trained [at the Texas Institute].*”

A board member from a non-working district discusses these same success factors in these words, “*First, if there had been no change in [who is on] the board, we would still be looking for a new superintendent. Second, the board does less micro-management because of the Institute training and that we have a majority of people trained [by the Texas Institute]. We as a board are more in agreement now on what the board’s role should be; we focus more on governance and policy. There is more unity and teamwork among the board members,*

though much of that is due to the new superintendent and his team. The new superintendent brought in a new team under him, a new CFO and new CAO. With all of these pieces coming together it has been a rebirth. [Before] everyone was pursuing his or her own agendas. Now we are acting instead of reacting.”

A superintendent explained the importance of having a board that knows their role and does not interfere with managing the district, *“For us to be successful and effective at improving student achievement, the board had to recognize their importance and their role and put that at the fore. And CRSS gave us the foundation to do it. I had to work with the administrative staff to help them understand that the board’s role was to govern, not manage. Before, the board was like a separate, foreign entity [to the staff]. I wanted to make the board central, to make it part of the system, integral as a visioning body for improving the district and how we educate kids. But the board members had to want that, and they did - they came to realize that it was their role to lead, govern, strategize, but not to manage.”*

Board Unity and Teamwork Seen as Mechanism which Improves Governance

Another common success factor mentioned by 32 percent of those interviewed was board unity or teamwork. “Board unity/teamwork” was attributed by all who mentioned it to the Texas Institute training. These board members and superintendents were evenly distributed across the working and non-working boards. A working board described the interplay between board unity, CRSS and their success in this way, *“Teamwork is essential for the team of eight to be successful. Our board has been extremely successful at working together to achieve consensus, even when we may disagree on some tactical issues. This was not necessarily due to the Institute. Since I joined the board, we have been collegial and worked together. And everyone has a different background, so we bring different perspectives. And we all value that, take pride in that. We have healthy debate amongst the superintendent and ourselves and are able to reach decisions that the entire team usually supports. I think the Institute played some role in influencing this but it is hard to pinpoint. I believe that the most successful districts have a high level of continuity in their leadership - with regard to both board and superintendent turnover – and this can contribute to a board’s ability to work as a team.”*

A board member from a working board explained the importance of board unity in times of trouble in this way, *“We had hit rock bottom as a system. Through this the board stayed resolute, and kept the ship from sinking. It was our finest hour as a board, really. We had unity, and were all going in the same direction. We made a decision to stay the course and not get mired down into things that can happen when you have upheaval. It took everyone working together when we hired [our new superintendent]. We all had to work hard to make sure everyone understood that it was about having an excellent system. We as a board had to keep things professional, and not get personal.”*

A board member from a working board highlighted the importance of teamwork with these words, *“Our successes started when we could work as a team. We had a common language (which we got from the Institute). That enabled us to work through issues quicker. We didn’t always have to explain everything to each other; we could use Don’s model and language.*

This contributed a lot to our team building, which helped us develop more trust with each other.”

Finally, one board member reminds us of the basics, *“Through our trials as a board, I learned that the board must work as a team of eight. We do that now. And there is no single board member with more clout than another. It comes down to, if you want a good board, you must accept criticism and work together as a unit.”*

A handful of success factors were mentioned by a few people each that were attributed to the Texas Institute training: a good relationship between superintendent and the board (11 percent), superintendent attended the Institute training (8 percent), trust and respect among board members (6 percent), gaining/maintaining a high level of trust with the community (6 percent), consensus that the board role is to set a vision and a strategy (6 percent) and not having personal agendas on the board (6 percent). Interestingly, the majority of those that mentioned these success factors were in working boards.

A few people mentioned two additional success factors; some attributed them to the Texas Institute training and others did not. They were: *“urgency/motivation for change”* (13 percent) and *“curriculum alignment”* (11 percent). Most of those that mentioned these success factors were in non-working boards. *“Curriculum alignment”* was attributed to the state’s push for it, not to the Institute training. *“Urgency/motivation for change”* was most often motivated by past bad experiences. A board member explained it like this, *“Once we replaced a few members that were definitely micromanaging, the others (the non-trained board members) start to understand what those of us who attended the Institute are saying. Many members – not just those of us that had attended the Institute - then said “we don’t want to go back to that again,” and agreed that we would govern and not micromanage. This was not inspired by the training, but was really just part of moving forward from bad past experiences. We realized that micromanaging was not the thing to do.”*

Other success factors were mentioned by a few people and not attributed to the Texas Institute training; they came primarily from board members and superintendents in non-working boards: general leadership of board members (13 percent), pressure from the community (9 percent), and having more focused and directed board discussions (9 percent).

Barriers to Reform Governance

According to school board members and superintendents, there were several important barriers that they attribute to why they as a board have not been successful in leading and governing their districts. Table 6.2 lists the set of barriers described by school board members and superintendents, organized according to past history, current environmental factors, current district factors and current board issues. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned barriers (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (out of N=47) that mentioned the barrier, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. In all cases, however, the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but a p-value less than 0.10 does indicate that the distributions across working and non-working are distinct. Refer to Table 6.2 at the end of this chapter.

The main barriers that were mentioned from boards' past history were: past history of a lack of community trust (19 percent), multiple superintendents in a short time, i.e., high superintendent turnover (17 percent), and past financial crises or issues (11 percent). Non-working boards primarily mentioned these barriers.

A Culture of Mediocrity and Funding Seen as External Barriers to Good Governance

The main barriers that were mentioned from a board's current environment were: having a culture of mediocrity (34 percent), funding issues (primarily from state changes in tax support and the capped tax rate) (26 percent), current community distrust of the board (23 percent), state micromanagement (15 percent), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements (13 percent), and the news media being negative (6 percent). The working boards more often mentioned funding, NCLB requirements, and state micromanagement as barriers, while the majority of board members and superintendents who mentioned community distrust and negative news media as a barrier were in non-working boards. The barrier that was mentioned fairly evenly by both working and non-working boards was having a culture of mediocrity (25 percent vs. 43 percent, respectively).

Having a culture of mediocrity can be described in this way, as one board member said, *"There is a cultural problem here. It goes beyond the district, to the community. It is a mentality here, especially among minorities, that when we talk about career paths, they tune out. How do you stress the importance of an education to kids whose parents don't understand that importance? There is a lack of support and understanding of the importance of this from parents. The parents are willing to accept less than excellence from their children; they just want them to have better than they (as parents) had."* Others used words like *"apathetic"* or *"backward"* to describe the community and the student body.

One board member talked about it using these words, *"Our biggest barrier is traditions, from the community, staff, etc. saying, 'We have done it this way a long time, why change?' We all get comfortable doing things the same old way and just not wanting to be better or believing that we can. We need to re-evaluate how we do things. We have become more open to doing that than in the past."*

The issues with funding as a barrier are explained in this way, *"The main barriers lie within the financial constraints of the board. By this I mean that currently the review of the budget is the key focus and mechanism for change. Without funding, we can not improve or change."*

Many of the board members brought up the challenge of the capped tax rate. One board member said it in these words, *"Our biggest challenge now is the cap on the tax rate that does not account for inflation. We would like to give teachers a COLA raise each year, but we cannot."*

The main barriers that were mentioned connected to the school district were: inequity in school facilities (15 percent), teacher and principal buy-in to reforms and changes (13 percent), change is slow and is hard (13 percent), teacher union issues (11 percent), inadequate teaching quality (9 percent), and hiring and maintaining good principals (9 percent). The working boards more often mentioned hiring and maintaining good principals

and the fact that change is hard as barriers, while both working and non-working boards mentioned the other barriers. The non-working boards mentioned teacher union issues more often. A few board members in both the working and the non-working boards also mentioned barriers of high student mobility and low teacher morale.

One working board member described the challenge of implementing change in this way, *“School districts and other large organizations have ‘institutional viscosity.’ If you pour heavy oil out, it takes a while for it to ooze out of the can. You can only move an organization in a certain direction at a certain pace; it is a slow process. If you push things too fast you risk chaos. Finding the right pace is an art form. We as a board must understand that. And that pace will differ from one district to another. When I ran for the board, I saw turning around a large organization like this district to be a big endeavor that takes a long time. It is like turning a ship around.”* He/she went on to say this about teacher buy-in and change, *“The entire collection of information we have all gained over the last 8 years – including the institute – has led us to push a more collaborative approach amongst our teachers, at all grade levels. Teaching in our district is no longer an isolated kingdom within a classroom. Now they collaborate and see teaching as a group effort. Teachers have historically felt possessive about what they teach in the classroom-and we have been trying to change that. Our big shift finally came when we had consistent teacher buy-in to the process and changes. We have largely done it, but we still could make more progress on this.”*

Personal Agendas and a Lack of Desire to Change Seen as Main Barriers to Governance

The most often mentioned barriers that were related to board governance were: personal agendas on the board (60 percent), and the lack of desire to change, knowing that there is a problem (30 percent). Personal agendas appear to stymie progress and hinder a board’s focus, even when it is just one member. One board member on a non-working board best describes this, *“We had tried to focus on achievement. We tried very hard, but it always went back to personal agendas, due to a particular negative member. He/she is the only African American on the board and has the African American community’s support. We tried hard to focus on what was best for the students and the district, but everything was racial to him/her.”*

Another board member describes how having personal agendas undermines working as a team. The board member said, *“It is when someone has a personal agenda and they are not always conscious of when that agenda rears its head. That person then forgets we must work as a team and they focus on their own district or constituency.”* Another board member describe it this way, *“I’m not sure if the board members see themselves as advocates for the school system. They have a ‘glass half empty’ pessimistic view. Each is pessimistic about different things, and they have their own axes to grind, and much energy is spent on that. That is distracting and keeps us from what our main focus should be – educating students.”*

Other barriers that were mentioned were: denial that there is a problem or that changes are needed (17 percent), too much time being spent on mundane, non-strategic issues, i.e., being too reactionary (17 percent), lack of time and the large workload to implement change (13 percent), shallow dialogue between the board and the superintendent/ administration (13 percent) and faction voting (13 percent). The working boards more often mentioned the lack of desire to change to known problems and the lack of time to implement change, while the

non-working boards more often mentioned the shallow dialogue between the board and the superintendent/ administration and faction voting. *“Personal agendas on the board”*, *“too much time spent on mundane, non-strategic issues”*, and *“denial that there is a problem”* were mentioned by both non-working and working boards. A few board members in both the working and the non-working boards also mentioned barriers of unprofessional behavior by the board members and a lack of follow through by the board. A few board members in the non-working boards also mentioned the non-inclusion of the community voice in the board processes as a barrier.

Areas of Need

According to school board members and superintendents, there were several important areas where they felt they still needed assistance or change to govern more effectively and improve student achievement. Table 6.3 lists the set of areas of need described by school board members and superintendents, organized according to the components of the reform framework and their 14 indicators and a set of other areas of need organized by external environment, district and current board issues. The table shows the total counts of the mentioned areas of need (by person), the overall percent of the teams of eight (out of N=47) that mentioned the area of need, and the mean percent by working and non-working boards as well as the p-value for the statistical t-test. In all cases, however, the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but a p-value less than 0.10 does indicate that the distributions across working and non-working are distinct. Refer to Table 6.3 at the end of this chapter.

Boards Biggest Needs are a Clear Theory of Action and Active Policy Development

The most often mentioned areas of need are (1) a clear theory of action and (2) active policy development and oversight. In terms of a clear theory of action, boards indicated that they still needed to develop the actual theory of action including defining the how (19 percent), as well as to have strategic discussions (13 percent), urgency for change (11 percent), and a systematic regular review of student achievement data (11 percent). Many of the boards have approved district improvement plans and have goals, but lack a definitive understanding of “how” the change will really happen and what is the right directive to give to the superintendent. One board member describes the dilemma with these words, *“Other than codifying our district improvement plan into local policy, it is a daily question of ‘How will we implement this, and how will we monitor it and ensure that we are staying on track? And if we need to make adjustments, how do we make sure they are the right ones?’ Our operating procedures gave us the mechanism by which we review the [district improvement] plan, and see if achievement is where we want it to be. But if not, we still have to determine ‘how’ to change the plan. We still need to really think through the mechanisms of ‘how’ the plan really will work and what our theory of change is to fall back on when we don’t see improvements.”* There is an uncertainty that stalls the process, when the governing body – the school board – does not clearly have a vision. One board member explains, *“We know the direction we must go in, and we understand there are challenges, but I am not sure we all know ‘how’ to get there. We have discussed this issue in-depth, and we’ve gotten various reports and data. The people who wrote these reports go into different areas of the schools and make recommendations for improvement – but it seems piecemeal. We as a board need to put together a systematic plan and vision for change... we will get nowhere until we do*

this. We need the time to have some high level strategic meetings. But it is sometimes easier to focus on the leaves and not the tree.”

Boards also mentioned that to be more active in policy development and oversight they still needed to focus more on policy (13 percent), review their policies (15 percent), align their policies with practice (11 percent), set benchmarks for the superintendent that are aligned with the given policies to be monitored (26 percent), and have systematic monitoring of district functions (21 percent). Non-working (vs. working) boards mentioned the majority of these needs, except that the need to still develop a theory of action and define the “how” was present in both working and non-working boards. One board member from a non-working board explained their policy development need, *“We do not have goals or benchmarks that we will hold the superintendent to that are codified in policy. The board majority will say to him, ‘superintendent, you must do this or that,’ so maybe they plan to hold him accountable based on those things. I don’t know. We don’t discuss this as a board. But in his contract it says that he can get a raise whenever the board deems that it is okay to give him a raise. But we don’t have guidelines to how that is to be done. In this vacuum of accountability, it is hard to make real solid change.”*

Another board member describes the need to be more focused on codifying policies, by saying, *“We as a district haven’t done as good a job making policy as we should. We have plans we want to follow, but we have not formally turned them into policy. For example, we wanted to increase the number of students taking AP classes, and we have mentioned that goal in our district improvement plan, and it is one of the evaluation criteria for the superintendent, but it is not necessarily formalized in policy. We seem to forget that piece of the puzzle – the policy making part.”* A superintendent in another district echoes this same need, *“Policies are addressed as the need arises. When I was [superintendent] at [XYZ] district, we had an in house attorney, and we had regular policy review times, where we took certain sections of our policy manual and reviewed them and brought recommended changes to the board. That is a very good practice, but also very time consuming. This board is not in that mode, or ready to dive into that mode now. One thing that is missing here, which we are working on, is a set of guidelines. Issues were coming up and I was learning that we had no guideline for it. We have a book that listed guidelines, with several crossed out in pencil and with sticky notes. So I have engaged the interim superintendent who was here before I got here, and is now retired, to work with my staff to re-write the guidelines. Our policies are in better shape than our guidelines. With this I hope to be reviewing and aligning the current guidelines, practices, and procedures to the policies we already have. This is a huge need. There are many systems missing here in [ABC] ISD, and we are trying to put those into place. Hopefully one of those will be to regular review of policy. We spend much time now putting out fires instead of the long range planning and policy development we need to be doing.”*

Boards Need More Effective Communication with the Community to be Successful

Besides these two main areas of need within the reform governance framework, boards also mentioned that they needed more effective communication with the community (30 percent) and more board unity and trust (17 percent), which fall in the reform governance framework building block of “roles, responsibilities, and relationships.” Communication with the

community had three aspects of need: better board-public communication (14 percent), the inclusion of the community voice in board processes (11 percent), and the engagement of all stakeholders (6 percent). Board members and superintendents, referred to the need to communicate better with the public about “*bonds,*” “*finances,*” and “*transparency,*” to “*communicate the vision of the district without getting into personnel issues,*” “*the tax rates,*” and “*why boards make the decisions they do.*” Non-working boards mentioned that they needed to ‘*include the community voice,*’ while working board mentioned that they needed to ‘*engage all stakeholders*’.

In terms of areas of need outside of the reform governance framework, boards mentioned that they need more changed-minded district and school leadership (19 percent), campus buy-in to change efforts (17 percent), the passing of bonds and upgrading of facilities (15 percent), and the basic improvement of their curriculum in terms of core courses to be able to push for excellence (15 percent). The need to pass bonds and upgrade facilities was primarily mentioned by non-working boards. The importance of leadership was reflected in these words, “*We often lack the skills in our staff people to facilitate some of these ‘out of the box’ discussions. From last year to this year, I’ve seen people making progress in developing those skills. But this all slows the process down. So a lack of skilled, change-minded staff to lead us through the change process is something we still need.*”

Summary

According to the superintendents and school board members, several factors helped improve their governance. *The main factor that helped improve board governance was turnover in the team of eight including the hiring of an experienced superintendent.* In the non-working boards, board member turnover, and not a change in the superintendent, was reported as the primary leverage for change because board member turnover eliminated members on the board who had very strong and stubborn personal agendas.

Besides the improvements that come along with a change in members on the team of eight, leadership is key. *Boards mentioned that when a board as a whole focuses on governing, and not micromanaging, they are better able to lead and set a vision.* This is known in the reform governance model as ‘not crossing the management line’. This focus on the management line was attributed to the Texas Institute training by half of those who mentioned it.

Board members and superintendents mentioned that teamwork and board unity lead to better governance. As described by the board members and superintendents in both working and non-working boards, these two factors appear to play a key role in implementing a change agenda and staying focused on an improvement plan.

Boards mentioned several barriers in their efforts to improve student achievement – those external to the board and those related to governing. The external barriers mentioned most often were: the lack of community trust either past or current; being in a community that is apathetic or has low expectations for their students and families; tight budgets; inequities in school facilities throughout the district; and the need for bond funds to improve the facilities.

Board members and superintendents mentioned several barriers related to effective board governance. They indicated that personal agendas, not have a strong desire to change, and being reactionary instead of thinking strategically and maintaining a district-wide focus were the largest barriers to improving board governance. Most often boards described that when personal agendas were at work, teamwork and governance for the good of all students was not possible. They discussed how a strong desire to change was paramount in maintaining the motivation and urgency required to tackle difficult problems. They said it was sometimes easier to deny that a problem exists. Boards also mentioned the barrier of spending too much time on mundane, non-strategic issues, i.e., being too reactionary, instead of spending time on district-wide strategic issues. In addition, boards mentioned the need to have change-minded leadership at the district and on school campuses as a challenge.

Non-working boards mentioned two additional challenges. Non-working boards were challenged primarily by shallow dialogue between their board and their superintendent/administration and by faction voting within their board. Faction voting stymies board progress and signals to everyone – public, school district, and board members – the divisive nature of the board. Faction voting is many times also along racial or socio-economic lines, representing the culture diversity of the community within which boards are based. In addition, the superintendent – board relationship is vital to the governance ability of a board, since the superintendent implements the policies of the board and manages how a district implements board decisions.

Working and non-working boards had similar needs. Both working and non-working boards mentioned the need to develop clear theories of action and actively engaging in policy development. Specifically, this means that they both need to have strategic discussions defining the “how” of changing and improving student learning and performance. They both realize the importance of focusing on policy, reviewing policies, and aligning policies and practice, but admitted they need to perform these tasks in an active, on-going systematic manner. They also both need to set specific goals and benchmarks for their superintendent that are aligned with policies in order to hold the superintendent accountable for change. They need to systematically monitor district functions, rather than having the district report to them in an ad hoc fashion.

Boards also mentioned the need for better communication with the public, either in having any community voice (non-working boards) or engaging all stakeholders (working boards).

Table 6.1
Success Factors Mentioned by Whether They are Attributed or Not to Texas Institute Training,
Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards

Attributed by School Board Member or Superintendent to Texas Institute Training						
Indicator	N	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value	
		N=47				
<i>Focus on governance role, not managing</i>	14	16	0.34	0.16	0.18	0.28
Board unity/Teamwork	-	15	0.32	0.17	0.14	0.27
<i>Hire and keep an experienced Superintendent</i>	-	6	0.13	0.08	0.09	0.28
Good relationship between superintendent and board	11	5	0.11	0.16	0.08	0.36
Superintendent attended the Institute training	-	4	0.08	0.20	0.00	0.08 [!]
Trust and respect among board members	9	3	0.06	0.15	0.00	0.10 [!]
Gaining/maintaining high level of trust with community	13	3	0.06	0.06	0.09	0.24
Consensus that board role is to set vision and strategy	14	3	0.06	0.15	0.00	0.10 [!]
No personal agendas on the board	15	3	0.06	0.15	0.00	0.10 [!]
<i>Urgency/motivation for change</i>	-	2	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.36
<i>Curriculum alignment</i>	-	2	0.04	0.01	0.08	0.09 [!]
Not Attributed to Texas Institute Training						
Indicator	N	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value	
		N=47				
<i>Focus on governance role, not managing</i>	14	16	0.34	0.08	0.50	0.09 [!]
New Board Members/Turnover	-	10	0.21	0.07	0.42	0.10 [!]
<i>Hire a new Superintendent</i>	-	8	0.17	0.06	0.34	0.07 [!]
Leadership of board members	-	6	0.13	0.04	0.25	0.09 [!]
Pressure from Community	-	4	0.09	0.03	0.17	0.13
<i>Past bad experience/ urgency/motivation for change</i>	-	4	0.09	0.03	0.17	0.09 [!]
More focused/ directed discussions	-	4	0.09	0.07	0.13	0.29
<i>Curriculum alignment push from state</i>	-	3	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.34

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

[!] denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct

Italics indicates the success factor was mentioned both in relation to the Institute training and not related to the Institute training

Table 6.2
Barriers Mentioned, Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards

	N	Overall percent N=47	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
Past History					
Past community distrust	9	0.19	0.04	0.34	0.04 [!]
Short superintendent tenure/High superintendent turnover	8	0.17	0.13	0.21	0.32
Past Financial troubles	5	0.11	0.04	0.17	0.04 [!]
Current Environmental Factors					
Culture of mediocrity	16	0.34	0.25	0.43	0.37
Funding/Finances/Capped tax rate	12	0.26	0.38	0.13	0.09 [!]
Community distrust/unsupportive	11	0.23	0.13	0.34	0.09 [!]
State micromanagement	7	0.15	0.29	0.00	0.17
NCLB requirements/process	6	0.13	0.21	0.04	0.25
News media is negative	3	0.06	0.00	0.13	0.00 [!]
Current District Factors					
Inequity in school facilities	7	0.15	0.17	0.14	0.42
Teacher/principal buy-in	6	0.13	0.17	0.09	0.14
Change is slow/hard work	6	0.13	0.21	0.05	0.03 [!]
Teacher union issues	5	0.11	0.04	0.17	0.27
Low/Inadequate teaching quality	4	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.50
Hiring/maintaining good principals	4	0.09	0.13	0.04	0.09 [!]
Low teacher morale	3	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.24
High student mobility	3	0.06	0.04	0.10	0.32
Current Board Issues					
Personal agendas on board	28	0.60	0.43	0.56	0.19
Lack of desire to change known problems	14	0.30	0.42	0.17	0.16
Denial about problems or need for change	8	0.17	0.21	0.14	0.29
Too much time on mundane rather than strategic issues	8	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.50
Time/Workload to implement change	6	0.13	0.21	0.04	0.02 [!]
Shallow Board-Admin/Sup dialogue	6	0.13	0.08	0.17	0.10 [!]
Faction/Non-majority voting patterns	6	0.13	0.04	0.21	0.08 [!]
Lack of follow through by Board	4	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.50
Unprofessional behavior by board members	3	0.06	0.04	0.08	0.26
Non-inclusion of community voice	3	0.06	0.00	0.13	0.10 [!]

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

[!] denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct

Table 6.3
Areas of Need Mentioned, By Indicator, Overall and By Working and Not Working Boards

	Indicator	Areas of Need Mentioned	N N=47	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
Core Beliefs and Commitments							
Board members view all children as achieving at high levels	1	Equity/educate equally	5	0.11	0.04	0.18	0.06 [!]
Board has approved core beliefs	2	—	0	—	—	—	—
Theory of Action for Change							
Board has clear Theory of Action (theory of action)	3	Develop theory/ define the “how”	9	0.19	0.17	0.22	0.34
	3	Need strategic discussions	6	0.13	0.08	0.17	0.20
	3	Urgency for change	5	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.36
Board has aligned curriculum & monitors data	4	Systematic, regular review of data	5	0.11	0.08	0.13	0.34
Policy Development (including Reform Policies) and Oversight							
Brd active in policy developm't; ensures reform policies are codified	5	Review of policy	7	0.15	0.00	0.30	0.01 [!]
	5	Focus on policy	6	0.13	0.04	0.21	0.02 [!]
	5	Align policies and practice	5	0.11	0.04	0.18	0.06 [!]
Board is diligent about monitoring implementation of policies	6	Set BMs for sup aligned w/ policy	12	0.26	0.17	0.35	0.21
Building Blocks of Reform Governance							
Brd mtgs are efficient, effective and focus on student achievement	7	—	0	—	—	—	—
Board exercises its management oversight responsibilities	8	Systematic monitoring of district	10	0.21	0.13	0.31	0.16

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; [!] denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct across working and non-working boards

Table 6.3 (Continued)
Areas of Need Mentioned, By Indicator, Overall and By Working and Non-working Boards

	Indicator	Areas of Need Mentioned	N N=47	Overall percent	Mean percent of Working	Mean percent of Non-working	T-Test P-value
Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships							
Board treats each other and superintendent with respect	9	More board unity/trust	8	0.17	0.13	0.21	0.18
	9	Consistent professional brd behavior	5	0.11	0.08	0.13	0.19
Board is fairly cohesive; no fixed factions	10	—	0	—	—	—	—
Board maintains close relationship of trust with superintendent	11	—	0	—	—	—	—
Brd effectively communicates goals, plans, policies to community	12	Better board-public communication	6	0.13	0.08	0.18	0.12
	12	Include community voice	5	0.11	0.00	0.22	0.02 [!]
	12	Engage all stakeholders	3	0.06	0.13	0.00	0.10 [!]
Board members understand their role to govern, not manage	13	—	0	—	—	—	—
Board members provide necessary constituent service	14	Decrease micro-management	5	0.11	0.04	0.17	0.18
Other Areas of Need							
Environment							
	Other	Funding	4	0.09	0.13	0.04	0.19
District							
	Other	Campus buy-in (teachers, principals)	8	0.17	0.21	0.14	0.25
	Other	Improve curriculum in core courses	7	0.15	0.08	0.21	0.19
	Other	Parental involvement	5	0.11	0.04	0.17	0.14
	Other	Incentivize high-quality teaching	5	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.36
Board							
	Other	Need change-minded leadership	9	0.19	0.21	0.17	0.39 [!]
	Other	Pass bond/upgrade facilities	7	0.15	0.04	0.26	0.10 [!]

KEY: Bold indicates statistical significance; * p< 0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01; [!] denotes the sample size is too small to conduct a reliable t-test, but that the distributions are distinct across working and non-working boards

7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to evaluate the influence of the Texas Institute training provided to newly elected school board members on the behavior of individual school board members and on their school boards as a whole. The training is based on the reform governance model as defined by CRSS with the goal of improving school board leadership and policymaking and ultimately improving student academic achievement.

This report provides feedback on *intermediate* goals that might lead to improvements in student achievement. The intermediate goal is to improve the governance and leadership of urban and suburban school boards in Texas. School boards should govern at a strategic level and not become involved in day-to-day management issues. They should develop and set policy, especially reform policy. Policies set by a school board determine how a school district instructs children; they are the board's "legacy" to the district and to the families and children it serves. Accordingly, the evaluation questions that underlie this report focus on 1) the entire school board's governance based on the components of the Texas Institute training's reform governance model (in both working and non-working boards) and 2) the main influences to their success, their challenges, and current areas of need, as perceived by board members and superintendents. This chapter first summarizes conclusions and then provides a set of recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

The detailed descriptions of the three working and three non-working boards are illuminating in that they highlight the complexity and variety of school boards and provide additional insight into the growing literature on the factors that influence board governance. These data were obtained in a total of 47 interviews with all members and superintendents of six school boards, and from our reviews of secondary documents and DVDs. We summarize and discuss our results below.

Because boards cannot control what type of people are elected as board members (i.e., board member turnover) and because personal agendas are the barrier mentioned most often by board members, it is appropriate for the Texas Institute to focus on training newly elected board members.

School board members, especially those on non-working boards, indicated that board member turnover contributed to success in governing. However, school board member turnover is not within the control of a board since board members are elected by the public; therefore, having people on the board who are unwilling to change is on one hand a large barrier, and on the other hand provides a large opportunity for improvement when new board members come onto the board. This confirms the importance of "having the right people on the bus," which was echoed in the comments and experiences of board members and superintendents. This success factor is also mirrored in the fact that the most common barrier mentioned by boards is board members with personal agendas. Personal agendas take away a board's ability to focus, work as a team, and think globally (or district-wide). A board member (or members) who has (have) a personal agenda erodes unity and the single-minded focus on teaching all children. This implies that some boards, especially non-working boards with more fragile and less mature

leadership, are only able to eliminate the destructiveness of personal agendas through board turnover. When turnover occurs, however, it is important to reach new board members early and train them about good governance. This opportunity – to start new board members off on the right foot – is being fulfilled by the Texas Institute. Our findings confirm the importance of the CRSS strategy of reaching out to train newly elected board members.

The manner in which the Texas Institute training is able to influence boards (through knowledge, motivation, and improved board behavior) is aligned with the factors that boards attribute to success.

Board members and superintendents attribute their current successes in leadership and governance as a board to three main factors: (1) school board turnover (discussed above), (2) a focusing on governing (not managing) and (3) board unity and teamwork. Half of these board members and superintendents attribute their focus on governing or their board's teamwork to the Texas Institute training, the other half does not. Looking at the data in another way, the Texas Institute training appears to influence both working and non-working boards in *both* knowledge acquisition and behavior change in both of these areas. The Institute training provides members from working and non-working boards with information on how to work as a governance and policymaking team and the appropriate role of a board member in relation to the superintendent, the community, and its other board members. Non-working board members also specifically learned how to manage relationships and clarified the role of a superintendent in relation to the board. Board members and superintendents attributed – fully or at least partially – decreased micromanagement, working as a team, a more unified focus on learning and a district-wide perspective of their boards as a whole to the Texas Institute training.

The training appears to influence how boards as a whole govern – they maintain focus, work as a team, and operate professionally and efficiently in meetings – and not just how individual school board members behave.

We found that both working and non-working board members and superintendents did attribute (partially and fully) entire board behavior changes to the Texas Institute training. The boards attributed to the Texas Institute training their decreased levels of micromanagement, increased board unity and teamwork, improved operating procedures, use of a common language around governance, and more of a focus on achievement and learning. Non-working boards also indicated that the Institute training helped them work as an entire board to put in place the mechanisms and expectations to hold their superintendent accountable for “how” to run the district, while working boards indicated that the Institute training influenced them as a whole board by assisting them in also establishing and adopting core beliefs. These findings, however, contrast with findings from Quigley (2007) which did not find significant evidence that board behavior as a whole had changed, particularly in the area of boards developing, enacting or codifying reform policies (as a result of the Institute training or not). Quigley (2007) found that the Texas Institute had significantly influenced individual board member beliefs and behaviors. The training had intensified board member beliefs about children's ability to perform and about the importance of the superintendent-board relationship. The training had increased policy making actions centered on reform, such as seeking outside expert advice on reform strategies, deliberating and or voting on reform policies and strategies.

This difference in findings may be partially accounted for by the changes CRSS made to the Texas Institute curriculum based on the recommendations from the 2007 Quigley report. In July 2007, CRSS added more in-depth coverage and discussion of policy development, the theory of action for change, and reform policy to the Texas Institute curriculum. It is also possible that the difference in findings is partially attributed to the difference in methodologies used from one study to the next. The qualitative case study work using interviews may be more sensitive to identifying this type of whole board behavior change.

The findings from this report indicate that the Institute training is helping individual board members with a minimum set of basic governance principles and policy making skills and is assisting boards (as a whole) who are equipped with varying governance abilities to focus on student learning, improve their operating procedures, use a common language around governance, work more as a team, and focus on governing not micromanaging the superintendent or district. The Texas Institute training is assisting boards (as a whole) to mature and reach a more sophisticated level of governance. Boards have moved from having personal agendas derail their unity and focusing on day-to-day operations (i.e. micromanaging) to discussing (and in some case adopting) core beliefs and commitments, running more efficient and respectful board meetings, having more discussions and a focus on district-wide issues and student achievement with a more well-rounded and defined understanding of their role and the role of the superintendent. Overall, the training appears to influence how boards as a whole govern – they maintain focus, work as a team, and operate professionally and efficiently in meetings – and not just how individual school board members behave.

The Texas Institute training has been an essential component in improving board governance, but it has not been adequate to assist boards in leading districts successfully toward meaningful reforms focused on sustained student achievement. Even after the majority of board members on a given board have attended the Texas Institute training, both working and non-working boards still specified a strong need for training in strategic, long-term planning and defining a theory of action for change. Non-working boards also voiced the need for more training in policy development and policymaking.

As discussed above, the Texas Institute training appears to improve the knowledge base of board members and superintendents in terms of their roles and responsibilities in boards of varying leadership and governance capacity, i.e., across both working and non-working boards. In the school board member interviews, we heard school board members from both working and non-working boards indicate that the Institute training either ‘reemphasized’ their understanding of the role of a board member or ‘more fully explained’ to them what the main role is, i.e., to govern, not manage, focus on all children’s learning, and to set policy. Working boards indicated that the Institute training influenced their adoption of these core beliefs and commitments. In addition, members of non-working boards indicated that the Institute training also provided them with knowledge on how to manage relationships and the role of a superintendent.

The Institute training does this knowledge transfer with a set of case examples that illustrate the importance of the board’s role and responsibilities to the successful governance of a board and what happens in real cases when these roles and responsibilities fall apart. This indicates, on one hand, that there is a general need for this type of governance knowledge across a varied

range of boards. On the other hand, it indicates that as the Texas Institute training reaches more and more board members (and superintendents) in the target districts, the training will fill in these gaps in knowledge concerning good, appropriate governance and establish a consistent knowledge base and purpose for school board work across teams of eight. Besides a transfer in knowledge, the Texas Institute training also assisted boards to become more efficient in their operating procedures and be able to focus more on their important work – student achievement. In many cases, the training empowered and motivated individual board members and superintendents to have the courage to try and take the necessary next steps in their districts.

These elements – core beliefs and commitments, defined roles and responsibilities, good working relationships, and efficient operating procedures – are the basic foundation for good governance. But the influence of the Texas Institute training was not reported as sufficient to move boards further into the mode of reform governance where their focus and (more importantly) actions are on policy making, strategizing and developing methods of reforming education and pushing school districts to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. This need was confirmed by both working and non-working school board members and superintendents, who mentioned the need to work on “*setting clear theories of action*” and “*active policy development.*” They admitted to needing to spend time engaging in strategic discussions defining the “how” of changing and improving student learning and performance. They also realized the importance of focusing on policy, reviewing policies, and aligning policies and practice, but still needed to embark on these tasks in an active, on-going systematic manner. They also mentioned the need to set specific goals and benchmarks for the superintendent that aligned with policies to be able to better hold the superintendent accountable for change.

For boards who are working on some of the foundational aspects of governance (that we discussed above) such as establishing good relationships, defining and establishing good operating procedures, reporting mechanisms for overseeing district functions, etc, it may be too much or too early to also take on strategic policy focused work, but at some point and at some level these aspects of reform governance will need to be encouraged.

Given that the most often mentioned areas of need are still: (1) a clear theory of action and (2) active policy development and oversight, the Institute training is not providing boards with all of what they feel they need to establish good board governance and more importantly what they need to achieve larger gains in improving student achievement. Many of the boards have approved district improvement plans and have goals, but admitted to lack a definitive understanding of ‘how’ the change will really happen and what is the right directive to give to the superintendent.

Importantly, the Texas Institute has not yet been able to influence boards much in the policy making, policy developing, policy oversight, strategic thinking, theory developing, and reform policy arena, which is a main focus and interim outcome of the Reform Governance model and a hypothesized key link to improving student achievement. This said, the Institute has been able to “mature” many of the individuals and boards to a more sophisticated level of governance where the next step is to work more and focus more on policy, theories of action for change, and reform issues. Working boards particularly are at this stage and indicated that

they indeed do have a need as a board for discussing and defining clear theories of action and engaging in more active policy development and oversight. These are areas in which the Texas Institute will need to focus if it intends to move boards into the mode of reform governance and have more of an effect on restructuring school districts in a manner that improves student achievement.

In weighing these findings, certain limitations should be considered. First, these findings are qualitative and provide insight into the common types of changes and what are perceived as the important influences and needs for successful governance. Second, and by design in cross comparative case study work, the sample sizes are small (N=47) in terms of attribution and inference; but they are robust for gaining insights into the experiences and nuances of those interviewed and comparing those experiences across the two types of case studies. At the same time, little research has addressed these important aspects of governance or conducted in-depth research into this particular population.

Recommendations

Based on these findings we make the following recommendations:

The Texas Institute training should continue their case study approach and focus on training newly elected board members. Board members who have personal agendas and board members who do not focus on all students were the most commonly mentioned challenges that boards have while governing. As a result, training newly elected board members in the basics of good governance is appropriate and can reduce the likelihood that board members will fall into this type of single-minded, constituency driven behavior. The Texas Institute intense case-study method and reform governance model was considered valuable by board members and superintendents from boards with varying governance abilities, i.e., working and non-working boards, because it either introduced these basic concepts or reinforced them. The case-study approach to learning, the networking during and after training, the modeling of good governance by CRSS staff, and the structure of the training structured were highly valued by participants.

The Texas Institute training should continue to focus on topics related to effective leadership: core beliefs and commitments; theories of action for change; efficient basic operations; policy development and policy oversight; and roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

The Texas Institute training appears to improve the knowledge base of board members and superintendents in boards of varying leadership and governance capacity in terms of their roles and responsibilities; the importance of a board having and acting on a set of core beliefs and commitments; and the need for policy development aimed at district reform. Besides this transfer in knowledge, the Texas Institute training also assisted boards to become more efficient in their operating procedures and be able to focus more on their important work – student achievement. In many cases, the training empowered and motivated individual board members and superintendents to have the courage to try and take the necessary next steps in their districts. These elements – core beliefs and commitments, defined roles and responsibilities, good working relationships including teamwork, and efficient operating procedures – are the basic foundation for good governance. We

found that there is a general need for this type of governance knowledge across a varied range of boards, one that the Texas Institute can address.

Any follow up training to the Texas Institute training should be designed by CRSS and offered in several stand-alone training modules, so as to address the specific needs of boards. Given that boards are in all states of healthy functioning and willingness to change and that as CRSS trains more boards the number of boards with higher levels of board functioning will increase, there is and will continue to be a growing need for training that focuses on defining the specifics of a theory of action and of policy development and oversight (as was seen in the working boards in the study). CRSS could develop several stand-alone training modules to address these training needs. The modules should be on:

- Policy development and policy making;
- District reform models and how to clearly define a theory of action for change based on a district's current structure, i.e., site-based management, centralized management, etc.;
- How to conduct a thorough policy review of district policies and guidelines with a focus on the role of school board members and the superintendent in the policy review process;
- Gaining community support and how to engage all stakeholders; and
- Basics of team building with a particular emphasis on how to gain consensus on major issues or core objectives with a focus on policy.

CRSS should focus on boards where it has leverage through the Texas Institute and consider training discrete boards (i.e., full teams of eight) – either one board at a time or in groups of boards. The interviews did not specify how many board members it takes to influence a board to work more successfully as a team, primarily because some non-trained board members may have basic governance skills and knowledge. Therefore, in the absence of a valid tool that can identify an entire board's level of functioning or sophistication in reform governance principles, CRSS has more opportunity to influence boards (1) where there are several newly elected board members, (2) where over four members have been trained, or (3) where the superintendent has been trained. In these districts where there is more of a potential to influence an entire board, CRSS should consider training discrete boards (i.e., full teams of eight) – either one board at a time or in groups of boards.

CRSS may want to invest in the development and testing of its reform governance indicators as a diagnostic tool. Further research would be needed to pilot and test the indicators with a larger pool of boards with a range of governance abilities alongside a set of cognitive interviews with a small subset of the boards included in the pilot. These data would enable the creation and design of a psychometrically sound and cognitively valid tool which could assess both the “readiness and willingness of a board to change” and the specific “maturity” level of a board in terms of its reform governance behavior. This type of diagnostic tool could be used to help assess the needs of the board, target training and start discussions among board members and superintendents about next steps.

Some additional research using these same data is also warranted. This report has identified much of the “what,” i.e., what is the influence of the Institute training, what are the success factors, what are the barriers and what are the needs, according to superintendents and school board members in working and non-working districts. These rich experiences of all board

members and superintendents in working and non-working boards can still provide additional insight into how these main influences are linked to each other and if these multiple influences co-occur. Investigating these aspects of the data would provide a fuller understanding of what drives changes in individual vs. entire board governance behavior.

Summary

Our findings can be summarized as follows:

- Because boards cannot control what type of people are elected as board members (i.e., board member turnover) and having personal agendas is the most commonly mentioned barrier that boards identified, it is appropriate for the Texas Institute training to focus on training newly elected board members.
- The manner in which the Texas Institute training is able to influence boards (both through knowledge, motivation, and improved board behavior) is aligned with the factors that boards attribute to success.
- The training appears to influence how boards as a whole govern – they maintain focus, work as a team, and operate professionally and efficiently in meetings – and not just how individual school board members behave.
- The main components that are taught at the Texas Institute training create the necessary (but not sufficient) foundation for good governance. There is still a need for training, according to both members and superintendents of the working and non-working boards, in strategic, long-term planning and defining a theory of action for change. In addition, non-working boards need more training in policy development and policymaking.

These findings lead to the following recommendations:

- CRSS should keep on doing what it is doing with the Texas Institute training, i.e., train newly elected board members and focus this training on the components that affect leadership: core beliefs and commitments; theories of action for change; efficient basic operations; policy development including reform policies and policy oversight; and roles, responsibilities and relationships including teamwork.
- Any follow up training to the Texas Institute should be designed by CRSS and offered in modules, so as to address the specific needs of boards.
- CRSS should focus on boards where they have leverage.
- CRSS may want to invest in the development and testing of its reform governance indicators as a diagnostic tool. Some additional research using these same data is also warranted.

REFERENCES

- Bernard, H. R. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Conley, D. T. (2003). *Who Governs Our Schools? Changing Roles and Responsibilities*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.
- Crabtree, B. F. and Miller, W. L. (1992). A template approach to text analysis: Developing and using codebooks. In B. F. Crabtree and W. L. Miller (eds.) *Doing qualitative research* (pp. 93-109). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Danzberger, J. P. (1992). *Facing the Challenge: The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on School Governance*. New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press.
- Danzberger, J. P. & Kirst, M. (1992). *Governing Public Schools: New Times, New Requirements*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Finn, C.E. & Keegan, L.G. (2005). *Lost at Sea*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution.
- Hess, F. M. (1998). *Spinning Wheels: the politics of Urban School Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Howell, W. G. (Eds.) (2005). *Besieged: School Boards and the Future of Education Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Lashway, L. (2002). *Using School Board Policy to Improve Student Achievement*. Eugene OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. No ed472183. Digest No. 163.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985). Processing naturalistically obtained data. In *Naturalistic Inquiry* (pp.344-356). Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- McAdams, D. (2006). *What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- McQueen, K, McLellan, E., Kay, K. and Milstein, B. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative analysis. *Cultural Anthropology Methods*, 10, 31-36.
- Miles, M.B., and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Muhr, T. (1991). Atlas/ti-A prototype for the support of text interpretation. *Qualitative Sociology*, 14(4), 349-371.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Quigley, D. (2007). *Reform Governance: How Has It Influenced Texas School Board Members and their School Boards?* Los Angeles, CA: Evaluation & Research Services.

Ryan, G. and Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.

Scriven, W. T. Cook, and D. Campbell. (2002). *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stake, R. (2000). "Program evaluation, particularly responsive evaluation," in D. L. Stufflebeam, G. F. Madaus, and T. Kellaghan, eds., *Evaluation Models: Viewpoints on Education and Human Services Evaluation*. Boston: Kluwer.

Willms, D. G., Best, J. A., Taylor, D. W., Raymond, G. J., Wilson, D. M. C., Lindsay, E. A., et al. (1990). A systematic approach for using qualitative methods in primary prevention research. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 4 (4), 391-409.

APPENDIX A: TWENTY INDICATORS OF REFORM GOVERNANCE

The following twenty indicators were developed by the Center for Reform of School Systems and The Broad Foundation to assess the extent of the presence of reform governance in a school board according to the CRSS reform governance Framework. The six-bolded indicators are not used in this study.

1. Board members view all children achieving at high levels as their primary objective and act accordingly.
2. The board has approved a statement of core beliefs and commitments for high student achievement and efficient and effective operations.
3. The board has a clear theory of action that provides an overarching strategy for achieving its goals.
4. The board has adopted a comprehensive and aligned district curriculum and monitors disaggregated student performance data by grade and school.
5. The board is active in policy development and ensures that its reform priorities are codified in policy.
6. The board is diligent about monitoring the implementation of its policies to determine whether or not they are achieving their intended objectives.
- 7. The board makes decisions based on relevant research and data.**
8. Board meetings are efficient and effective and focus primarily on student achievement and other district priorities.
9. Board members treat each other, the superintendent, staff, and members of the public with respect.
10. The board is fairly cohesive; not all votes are unanimous, but there are no “fixed factions.”
11. The board maintains a close relationship of trust with the superintendent/CEO and strives to facilitate his or her success.
- 12. The board ensures opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform board deliberations and decisions.**
13. The board effectively communicates its goals, plans, and policies to the community to build public understanding and support.
14. Board members understand their role is to govern, not manage, and act in accordance with this understanding.
15. Board members provide necessary constituent service without attempting to solve problems or otherwise cross the line into management.
16. The board exercises its management oversight responsibilities through audits, workshops, reports, and other methods to assure the integrity and performance of the district’s management systems.
- 17. The board adopts a fiscally responsible budget based on the district’s vision and goals and regularly monitors the fiscal health of the district.**
- 18. The board strives to provide adequate resources and allocate them equitably to meet the needs of all children in the district.**
- 19. The board annually evaluates the superintendent based on the goals and performance of the district.**
- 20. The board periodically evaluates its own effectiveness.**

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION ON SIX CASE STUDY BOARDS

This appendix provides some descriptive (but not identifying) information on the six case study boards. The information provided here confirms the choices for classifying the six boards as either a working or non-working board.

Table B.1
Fourteen Indicators of Reform Governance for the Six Participating School Boards, By Working and Non-working Boards

		Working Boards			Non-Working Boards		
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Core Beliefs and Commitments							
Board members view all children as achieving at high levels	Indicator 1	A	A	B	A	B	B
Board has approved core beliefs	Indicator 2	A	A	A	B	A	B
Theory of Action for Change							
Board has clear theory of action for change	Indicator 3	A	A	B	B	B	B
Board has aligned curriculum & monitors data	Indicator 4	A	A	A	B	A	B
Policy Development (including Reform Policy) and Oversight							
Board active in policy development & ensures reform policies are codified	Indicator 5	B	B	A	C	C	C
Board is diligent about monitoring implementation of policies	Indicator 6	A	A	B	A	B	B
Building Blocks of Reform Governance							
Board meetings are efficient, effective and focus on student achievement	Indicator 7	B	B	A	A	B	B
Board exercises its management oversight responsibilities	Indicator 8	A	A	B	B	A	B
Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships							
Board members treat each other and superintendent with respect	Indicator 9	A	A	B	B	C	B
Board is fairly cohesive; no fixed factions	Indicator 10	A	A	A	B	B	A
Board maintains close relationship of trust with superintendent	Indicator 11	A	A	A	A	B	A
Board effectively communicates goals, plans, and policies to community	Indicator 12	A	A	A	B	B	B
Board members understand their role to govern, not manage	Indicator 13	A	A	A	B	A	B
Board members provide necessary constituent service	Indicator 14	B	B	A	B	A	B

KEY: A= Fully present; B=Partially present; C=Not at all present (based on percent of school board that reported supportive evidence) Shaded boxes represent the full presence of an indicator and that the board is working in this area.

Table B.2
Some Characteristics of the Six Participating School Boards, By Working and Non-working Boards

	Working Boards			Non-working Boards		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Desired District Reform Model						
Managed Instruction	X					X
Managed Performance/Empowerment		X	X	X	X	
Number of Board Meetings per Month	1	2	1	1	4	2
Board Meeting Length (in hrs)	2	1.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.5
Percent Schools Meeting AYP	93%	97%	89%	75%	65%	59%
Ethnicity:						
Percent Hispanic	39%	43%	54%	36%	51%	77%
Percent White	47%	44%	34%	30%	42%	16%
Percent Economically Disadvantaged	57%	37%	54%	62%	54%	68%

