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# How Exemplary Suburban Superintendents Build Trust With and Between School Board Members

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# How Exemplary Suburban Superintendents Build Trust With and Between School Board Members

A Dissertation by

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On the day I was born, there was no one in any part of my family, past or present, who had graduated from college. I am grateful that my mother and father led both their families and our own in using education to serve humankind and move us all into economic security. My mother was the first one into college. My father was the first one to graduate. Between the two of them they earned two bachelor's and two master's degrees along with multiple professional licenses. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for instilling in me a spirit of curiosity and a love for learning.

I wish to thank my three children, Emma, Ben and Annie, for their love, understanding and patience. All those mornings where you individually came to Starbucks with me so we could study together, while I wrote my dissertation, meant the world to me. That one particular Thanksgiving morning where all four us studied together will always be a highlight in my life. To be surrounded by the love and support of my children while I slowly slogged through this dissertation sustained me. I know this wasn't easy for you, and I want you to know how proud I am to have watched you step up and demonstrate love and acceptance of your distracted father.

I wish to thank my wife Kate, who has been married to me for 25 years. This dissertation was hardest on you. Your patience, good cooking, patient editing, and numerous walks listening to me while I talked about trust in each and every one of my relationships was needed, appreciated, and kept me going. You knew this was my dream, you let me live it out, you listened to my frustrations and you didn't leave me during this dissertation. I think there is a special place in heaven for the spouses and life partners of those who write their dissertations.

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ABSTRACT

How Exemplary Suburban Superintendents Build Trust With and Between School Board Members

by Daniel R.C. Scudero

**Purpose:** The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what leadership strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with school board members using the 5 domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe what leadership strategies suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust between board members.

**Methodology:** This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study analyzed quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to answer the research questions in regard to each element of trust in The Values Institute pyramid of trust.

**Findings:** The major strategies exemplary suburban superintendents used to build trust were to lead, develop, and engage board members in discussions about their district's mission, vision, and values; make hard decisions; keep board members involved and engaged in governance activities; develop norms, protocols, and a governance handbook; keep commitments to board members; demonstrate visibility combined with behaviors and actions that are expected; ensure that board members have a voice; keep the board informed in an open and honest fashion; be transparent, honest, and develop mutual accountability; listen; and get to know board members and treat them positively and respectfully.

**Conclusions:** It was concluded that to build trust superintendents should give the governance team meaningful roles to develop and implement district values, vision, and mission; be highly visible and keep commitments to board members; skillfully facilitate discussions with board members while demonstrating high transparency; understand that trust is complex and must be built individually and collectively; develop highly effective and adaptable communication skills; and practice leadership based on love and acceptance.

**Recommendations:** Additional research should be conducted to understand trust from the board members' perspective; determine trust instrument effectiveness, describe gender influence on trust, determine the effectiveness of consultants trained to build trust, describe trust repair strategies, and explore the lived experiences of those superintendents who demonstrate the leadership practices of love and acceptance.

# PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study superintendent and school board trust with many populations, four doctoral students, in collaboration with faculty members, developed a common interest in exploring the strategies exemplary superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with and between school board members. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of four doctoral students. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was designed with a focus on the five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection using The Values Institute's trust framework by author Weisman (2016) to identify and describe the strategies superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with and between school board members. Each researcher administered a survey to at least 15 superintendents to determine what strategies they perceived as most important in building trust with and between school board members utilizing the five domains; competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. The researcher then interviewed five of the superintendents who participated in the survey to determine what strategies they perceived as the most important in building trust with and between school board members. To ensure thematic consistency and reliability, the team developed the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, interview questions, survey, and study procedures.

Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* was used to refer to the researchers who conducted the thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied superintendent and school board trust strategies with the following populations in California K-12 school districts: Edwin G. Cora, rural superintendents;

Theresa M. Giamarino, regional occupational centers and programs superintendents; Daniel R.C. Scudero, suburban superintendents; and Damon J. Wright, urban superintendents.

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There is an unprecedented crisis of trust in the world (Edelman, 2017). This crisis is of such magnitude that the online *Oxford Dictionary* chose the word "post-truth" (Midgely, 2016, p. 1) as its word for 2016. The word was used to denote the public's decreasing reliance on facts and increasing reliance on emotions and beliefs. According to Midgely (2016) and Rowe and Alexander (2017), "post-truth," or its cousin "fake news," is so widely used now that newspapers, magazines, and television shows no longer explain or define the terms. These terms are a result of an ever-increasing lack of trust in scientific experts or politicians (Midgely, 2016; O'Neill, 2017; Rowe & Alexander, 2017). In 2017, worldwide surveys showed that the average citizen was now found to be as credible as any expert and more reliable than politicians or government officials, thus leading to a global distrust in government, science, and the media (Edelman, 2017).

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer noted that two thirds of countries surveyed are "'distrusters' (under 50 percent trust in the mainstream institutions of business, government, media and NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] to do what is right)" (Edelman, 2017, p. 2). In fact, trust in the media dropped so precipitously that 82% of countries surveyed distrust the media, bringing it down to the same level as government (Edelman, 2017). This decrease in trust for those in authority and an increase in trust with friends and family essentially dispersed authority, making it more horizontal and less vertical (Edelman, 2017).

Public trust has also decreased regarding Internet privacy and safety (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2016). The lack of trust in the Internet like the lack

of trust in government, media, and experts noted above is based on the personal fear that those in charge are untrustworthy (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2016; O'Neill, 2017). This distrust leads to an increased desire to be able to trust somebody who can be observed to be "honest, competent and reliable" (O'Neill, 2017, p. 31). It brings to the forefront each community's need to be able to trust leaders again. This need to be able to trust leaders again can also be observed in education.

In major urban areas, such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, states turned over education control or partial control to the mayors of these cities to transform schools (Education Writers Association, 2003). The Gallup News (Newport, 2017) showed an increase in the public's confidence in public schools from 30% in 2016 to 36% in 2017. Despite that increase, almost two thirds of Americans continue to lack confidence in public schools (Newport, 2017). The traits of honesty, competence, and reliability noted by O'Neil (2017) as necessary for the Internet are also essential for education leaders and are some of the major factors that constitute trust (S. M. R. Covey, Link, & Merrill, 2012; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).

In the book, *Smart Trust*, S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) wrote about the crisis of trust in governments, businesses, and relationships. Leaders are encouraged to adhere to core beliefs and behaviors, which improve trust (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). It is imperative for today's leaders to accept the new horizontal nature of authority and to involve, communicate with, and seek out the input of the various stakeholders involved in their enterprise (Edelman, 2017; Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, Smith, & Dawson, 2013; O'Neill, 2017). The same is true for superintendents and board members working as a governance team. Together the governance team members must solicit the support

and engagement of all stakeholders by developing a high degree of trust. An essential first step in developing trust is to have strong relationships between the superintendent and board members.

## Background

### A Brief History of Trust

The shocking crisis of trust present in the world today causes one to wonder what is trust and how does it apply to our world's leaders. There is widespread agreement that today is an "age of upheaval" (Alexander, 2017, p. 1). People see things as either beneficial to themselves or beneficial to someone else, and this self-centered view is destructive to both building and maintaining trust (S. R. Covey, 2011). There is a distinctly understood need for ethical and responsible leadership that grows and nurtures trust based on integrity and empathy (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). While the crisis of trust seems to be raging today, it is not a new concern for leaders; it is a historical issue of developing and maintaining relationships that contribute to individual and organizational success (S. R. Covey, 2011; Weisman, 2016).

Early discussions and research on trust often begin with Aristotle, which is interesting because Aristotle did not write specifically about trust (Wicks, Berman, & Jones, 1999). Aristotle wrote about ethics and friendship (Mullis, 2010; Wicks et al., 1999). In discussing ethics, Aristotle used the term "epistêmêhere [which] has the meaning of specialist ability, specialist competence or understanding of the subject" (Höffe, 2010, p. 11). The concept of competence is considered to be an essential element of trust **(**Weisman, 2016**)**. When writing about friendship, Aristotle wrote that true friends were good to each other and respected each other's mutual and reciprocated virtue

(Höffe, 2010; Mullis, 2010). In the last century this began to be called benevolence, and in this century it is beginning to be known as concern (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Weisman, 2016). Thus the overall concept of trust can be sifted from Aristotle's writings on benevolence and concern to the discussion today of trust.

More recently researchers began to note connections between trust and leadership. In America, the most prominent and first president was George Washington (McDonald, 1997). Washington was deeply trusted by the First Continental Congress and American citizens based on his military successes and 8 years of experience as the leader of the Continental Army (McDonald, 1997). As previously mentioned by Aristotle, competence was a crucial factor in trust. Competence was also a crucial factor in the trust extended to George Washington. Also playing a significant role was Washington's refusal to assume ever more power, his willing and historic stepping down from power after winning the Revolutionary War, and his reluctance to return to power (McDonald, 1997). In essence, he was seen as a benevolent leader who did not want power, which of course caused almost everyone to trust him explicitly (McDonald, 1997).

The next great leader to bring about national transformation was Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was known for taking his political rivals and turning them into his cabinet advisors (Coutu, 2009). He had the confidence to utilize the leadership skills of his competitors for the greater good of the country, and by the end of the day, those rivals came to respect him because he respected them first (Coutu, 2009). That initial regard that Lincoln extended to his cabinet was a strong foundation for the building of trust (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012).

## Theoretical Foundations

**Great man leadership theory.** Many years after Washington, Thomas Carlyle espoused the great man theory. Essentially Carlisle advocated that great men are gifts from the Almighty and were put on the planet to lift up humanity to a higher level of existence (Spector, 2016). The problem was that the common man was to bow down to these great leaders and submit to them (Spector, 2016). Of course, neither Lincoln nor Washington espoused this view, which was why they were able to engender so much trust from others (Coutu, 2009; McDonald, 1997).

**Contingency leadership theory.** Over time, leadership theories changed. The contingency theory of leadership was first postulated by Fred Fielder in the 1960s and is more widely known as situational leadership (Hill, 1969). It is based on the assumption that leaders are merely human and that different types of leadership are more successful in different situations (Fiedler, 1972a; Hill, 1969). Leaders have natural orientations to a relationship focus or a task focus, but that focus can be adjusted based on the situation that the leaders and followers are facing (Hill, 1969). While it is easy to see that the relationship focus can enhance trust, a task focus can also enhance trust when followers need evidence of competence or ability (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Fiedler, 1972a; Weisman, 2016).

**Transactional leadership theory.** In transactional leadership theory, leaders give rewards or punishments according to followers' behaviors (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). This reward/consequence leadership can provide a useful structure for short-term units or project teams (Bass et al., 2003; Tyssen, Wald, & Spieth, 2014). Transactional leadership can generate trust based on a leader's ability or competence

(Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). However, this type of leadership does not create levels of inspiration or strong relational bonds seen in leaders like Washington or Lincoln (Coutu, 2009; McDonald, 1997; Tyssen et al., 2014). For those higher levels of trust and organizational performance, one must look at other types of leadership, such as transformational leadership.

**Transformational leadership theory.** Transformational leadership theory requires leaders to first examine themselves before addressing the mindset and cultural changes needed by their organization (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010b). Its most significant emphasis is on building relationships of trust to bring about large-scale, breakthrough changes in organizations and nations (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). One can easily discern that both Washington and Lincoln were transformational leaders intent on unleashing the potential of those they served (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). Unlike the great man theory, which is intent on great leaders lifting up humanity, transformational leadership is intent on the leader helping humanity lift up itself (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). So how do leaders transform their organizations?

**Social capital theory.** Many leaders begin the transformation of their organizations, or in the case of Washington and Lincoln, their nations, by first building relationships with their followers. Through these relationships, they build up reservoirs of trust by developing their networks and championing the values they hold in common with their followers (Stickel, Mayer, & Sitkin, 2009). In essence, leaders accrue favors, trust, and respect, which they later use to accomplish actions or tasks (Ament, 2014). It is essentially a model of how one can build trust, nurture it, and then use it as needed.

**Trust theory.** Many leaders including Washington and Lincoln built up trust and used it to build or rebuild a nation. Normal, everyday leaders can do the same, but first, one must understand trust itself (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). At its most basic level there are three steps to trusting someone else (Wilson, 2011). First, there must initially be a determination about what is required to trust another. Second, the individual must decide to trust the other person, thereby becoming vulnerable. Third, the individual must take the active step of trusting the other person (Wilson, 2011). Regarding education, trust theory states that people (community, parents, staff) must come to believe that their interests are being heard and treated fairly and that the school board and superintendent are both reliable and consistent in carrying out their duties and responsibilities (Pittman, 2012).

## Values Institute Theoretical Framework

Many different trust frameworks explain the nature of trust and how leaders can build and use it. In this study, the researcher uses The Values Institute theoretical framework for trust. The Values Institute framework developed the "Pyramid of Trust" (Weisman, 2016, p. 138), which espouses five domains of trust. These domains are "competence, consistency, concern, candor and connection" (Weisman, 2016, p. 139). Competence is a measure of a person's or organization's ability to provide the services or products they say they will provide (Weisman, 2016). Consistency is a measure of how well one's actions mirror one's values and how well one's actions align with what they said they were going to do (Weisman, 2016). Concern is a measure of how a person or organization cares about its stakeholders and whether or not the team actively displays respect and integrity in their interactions with their stakeholders (Weisman, 2016).

Candor is the perception of how honest and open a person is on a day-to-day basis (Weisman, 2016). Connection is a conglomeration of the other four domains of trust and requires deliberate effort to create and sustain a long-term relationship with others (Weisman, 2016).

The pyramid of trust envisions competence and consistency as the foundation on which one can build trusting relationships. Midway up the pyramid are concern and candor, which begin to supersede regular functional interactions and add some "emotionally charged 'glue' to relationships" (Weisman, 2016, p. 139). At the top of the pyramid of trust is connection, where bonds are formed to help individuals move their organizations to higher levels of effectiveness and reach the goal of trust (Weisman, 2016). The pyramid shape was chosen to visualize the difficulty of moving higher up the pyramid to achieve more useful and higher impact versions of trust.

**Trust**

To begin to understand how this crisis of trust can be addressed, it is essential to understand the concept of trust. There are numerous definitions of trust, and while there are similarities, there are also differences of opinion. Tschannen-Moran (2014) believed that "trust is one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (pp. 19-20). Tschannen-Moran acknowledged that trust is a many-faceted and complex construct. A person can trust someone in one aspect of work and not trust them in another. Trust for one particular person in one area can increase or decrease depending on context and experience. Most interestingly Tschannen-Moran contended that because leaders have

higher authority in their organization, they have a higher responsibility for developing and maintaining trusting relationships with their staff.

Weisman (2016) did not define trust but believed that it is a daily journey for individuals to embark on as they move up the pyramid of trust to more productive and more lasting levels of trust. He emphasized the concept of connection, connection being the penultimate synthesis of all the other layers of trust that engenders long-term, deep, and abiding mutual commitments from one to another (Weisman, 2016).

Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) did not believe in one definition of trust. Their research on developing models of trust for artificial intelligence studies aimed at developing a multifaceted and many-layered series of definitions regarding trust. As an overriding generality, they noted that trust must have five components: the expectation of trust, a trustee—the one who is being trusted, actions taken by both the trustee and trustor—the one doing the trusting, predictable results from the trustor's behaviors, and risk (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010). Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) contended, "Without uncertainty and risk there is no trust" (p. 9).

S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) also did not define trust but declared, "Smart trust is judgment" (p. 57). They espoused five behaviors for leaders to develop smart trust: "choose to believe in trust . . . start with self . . . declare their intent . . . do what they say they are going to do . . . lead out in extending trust to others" (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012, p. 83). One can easily hear in Covey's directions on how to develop trust the echoes of Aristotle, Washington, and Lincoln.

**Communication and trust.** In both national and educational terms, communication is critical. Results from the majority of studies on this topic lead to the

firm conclusion that communication is a key to establishing trust with a school board (Cox, 2010; Hoffert, 2015). Exemplary superintendents communicate to the board that their goals are paramount and the superintendent is exploring with stakeholders how to best implement them (Weiss, 2018). Researchers also examined the optimal types of communication to have with board members. While methods like telephone calls, e-mails, texts, lunch meetings were all explored, the most effective method of communication, argued Rohrbach (2016), for any particular board member was the style of communication that board member preferred.

Perhaps most important in the discussion about communication as a trust builder was the concept of "equitable communication" (Crump, 2011, p. 113). Superintendents need to communicate to all board members the same information, at the same time and in a consistent manner, whether the information was considered to be good or bad (Rohrbach, 2016). Researchers agree that honest, open, and consistent communication is a key to establishing trust with a school board (Ament, 2014; McCann, 2012).

**Relationships and trust.** Another key to establishing trust is the relationship between the trustee and the trustor (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). The state of this relationship determines how much trust is extended from one to the other (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). The better the relationship is, the more trust one person will extend to another (White et al., 2016). Gottman, Gottman, and McNulty (2017) pointed out that for couples both the relationship and the resultant trust requires regular and systematic conversation and attention. Similar to trust in couples, trust between superintendents and school boards also requires constant attention, focus, and communication (White et al., 2016).

**Trust between superintendents and school boards.** It is imperative for superintendents to establish relationships or a connection with board members, argued Crump (2011), to become familiar with their strengths and history. Spending time in developing these personal and professional relationships with board members, Crump believed, will smooth the daily governance activities and becomes essential when controversial issues arise. Superintendents must master communication, asserted T. J. Waters and Marzano (2006), to hear, organize, and operationalize the interests of the board. To help students achieve academic success, superintendents must become experts at establishing trusting relationships with their school boards (Ripley, Mitchell, & Richman, 2013). High levels of trust between superintendents and school board members begin with thorough communication about and a clear understanding of each other's roles (Yaffe, 2015).

## Role of the School Board

Before becoming a country, colonial schools were governed locally by the leaders of the town or village, and this structure continued once it became the United States of America (Kowalski, 2013). From this country's inception, the structure of its schools' governance was based on "the cherished principles of liberty and equity" (Kowalski, 2013, p. 13). Thus all control was local (Kowalski, 2013).

As the country grew and the population began to move from rural areas to urban areas, there was a need to start to hire people to work with the teachers and help manage the students. At the same time, politicians began to create laws to balance the need for equity with the need for liberty, thus establishing state departments of education and "relegating authority to local boards of education (Butts & Cremin, 1953)" (Kowalski,

2013. p. 13). Over time, this arrangement of authority and responsibility has resulted in three essential functions or duties that school boards must perform:

> (1) Ensure that state laws, rules and regulations are followed;
>
> (2) establish policy in areas not covered by state laws, rules, and regulations; and
>
> (3) employ a superintendent to serve as chief executive officer. (Kowalski, 2013, p. 14)

Today, the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2018) espouses numerous roles for school board members. Board members are to participate in strategic planning, develop the community's vision, oversee improvements in instruction, review district plans, practice collaboration, demonstrate trust, advocate with legislators, advocate for student achievement, establish a climate of transparent communication, and provide funding for the above collaborative efforts (NSBA, 2018). While essentially just a more thorough explanation of the traditional board roles, the NSBA roles are to help board members become leaders in their communities.

By contrast, the California School Boards Association (CSBA, 2013) simplifies the board roles "to ensure that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of their communities" (CSBA, 2016b, p. 1). The CSBA espouses five essential responsibilities boards must perform to help them fulfill this goal:

- Setting direction
- Establishing an effective and efficient structure
- Providing support
- Ensuring accountability

- Providing community leadership as advocates for children, the school district, and public schools. (CSBA, 2016b, p. 1)

To understand how these three similar but slightly different perspectives on board roles work effectively for local educational governance, one also needs to understand the role of the superintendent.

**Role of the Superintendent**

While public schools were established during colonial times, it was not until the 1820s, commented Kowalski (2013), that some school districts hired clerks to help with daily operations, and it was this position that eventually metamorphosed into the superintendency. The first actual superintendent was not appointed until the late 1830s in Buffalo New York (Kowalski, 2013). Over the last 155 years, confirmed Kowalski, the role of the superintendent has evolved into its current iteration, emphasizing each of five roles over time as they emerged but never relinquishing the importance of any of the previous ones.

The first role of superintendents was that of teacher-scholar (Green, 2013; Kowalski, 2013). The second role of superintendents around the time of the industrial revolution was that of business executive (Green, 2013; Howland, 2013). The third role of superintendents around the time of the depression was that of democratic leader or statesmen (Howland, 2013; Kowalski, 2013). The fourth role of superintendents during the 1950s was that of applied social scientist (Kowalski, 2013). The fifth and final role of superintendents during the 1980s was that of effective communicator (Kowalski, 2013). The ability to build positive relationships with all stakeholder groups and communicate effectively with them, asserted Jimenez (2013), became a necessary skill set sought out

by school boards. Successful fulfillment of these roles helps the superintendent and school board efficiently govern together and builds the school board's trust in the superintendent's executive leadership skills.

**Governance**

Exemplary superintendents begin their jobs researching the community, school board, and district they are about to serve, believed Smith (2013), but this information is not enough to begin their work, so they frequently develop an entry plan. The focus of an entry plan, pointed out Crump (2011), is to give the superintendent time to talk with all stakeholders, relay findings to the board, and work with the board members to develop, refine, or recommit to their overall district goals. During this same time frame, exemplary superintendents work with the board to create a mutual understanding of both the board members' roles and the superintendent's roles (Crump, 2011).

Clearly defined roles help avoid confusion later on as some board members may be tempted to perform managerial actions instead of remaining in their strategic planning roles. Any difficulty in this area can lead to conflict between the superintendent and the board, which usually leads to shortened tenure for the superintendent (Hoffert, 2015). Shortened tenure is problematic because a longer tenure for superintendents results in stronger student achievement results (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). Shortened tenure is not conducive to strong effective relationships in the governance team because those relationships take time to establish (Gore, 2017). Shortened tenure, according to Finnigan and Daly (2017), leads to a state of churn in a district and "churn can potentially have a cascading disruptive impact, from the superintendent's office all the way to the classroom" (p. 25). Therefore, exemplary school boards and superintendents understand

their respective roles and mutually support each other in fulfilling their roles (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Foundational to this productive working relationship is the establishment of trust (Anderson, 2017; Crump, 2011).

### Gap in Research

The literature shows that there is a historical foundation of concern about trust and how trust-enhancing positive relationships are developed and maintained. The more recent research about trust and leadership focuses on business and government. There is limited research on how superintendents establish and maintain trust with their school boards or between their board members. Research conducted by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and the California School Boards Association (CSBA) provides firm direction to the superintendent and board members as to how they should work as a governance team, but both say little about trust. This study is an attempt to fill that gap in what is known about trust with school board members and between members.

## Statement of the Research Problem

The trust Armageddon currently being experienced in the world today is both well-known and deeply felt (Edelman, 2017). Citizens do not trust their government, their businesses, or their leaders (Edelman, 2017). Even academics and the previously revered profession of science have currently lost favor with the public (Leiserowitz et al., 2013) and are often considered "fake news" (Rowe & Alexander, 2017, p. 181). The Internet, that bastion of spontaneous freedom, has also started to be less trusted by the public and has begun to become more regulated (O'Neill, 2017). However, this lack of trust is hardly a new story (O'Neill, 2017). Plato shared that Socrates was so disconcerted by the communication disruption caused by writing that Socrates relied

solely on the spoken word (O'Neill, 2017). Then, as now, trust has been a significant societal issue.

The disastrous decline in trust has even affected the field of education where almost two thirds of Americans do not trust public schools (Newport, 2017). Public schools, organized into school districts for governance, are those bastions of American government and local control where anyone can be elected by their peers to become a school board member (Kowalski, 2013). Public school districts were the first truly democratic form of government instituted by towns in America where the people ruled and made the decisions (Kowalski, 2013). Thus the loss of trust in school districts is a loss of local trust with local leaders. So if trust has remained an issue throughout history, its current decline noted both globally and locally, what is one to do?

The answer to that question is that it comes down to leadership (White et al., 2016). Leaders in government, business, science, and education all struggle with building and maintaining trust (Hoffert, 2015; Leiserowitz et al., 2013; Weisman, 2016). Leaders get fired for losing the community's trust by hiding critical information (Madhani, 2015). They lose trust by releasing confidential intelligence information for political purposes (Barrett, Demirjian, & Rucker, 2018). In education, boards lose trust through infighting and obscuring information the public has the right to know ("Editorial: Not the Public's Business," 2016). One of the main reasons superintendents get fired is for breaking trust with their community, often discovered through unethical behavior (Barnes & Altman, 2017; "McAlester Superintendent Fired Amid Spending Allegations," 2016; Wilhelm, 2017).

This country needs leaders who can recognize this miasma of distrust as an opportunity to help us rebuild trust (S. M. R. Covey, 2010). Specifically, this country needs local leaders, superintendents, and school boards who can restore trust (Kowalski, 2013). There are various types of school districts in the United States, grouped around their proximity to urban centers and their population size within the school district area (Geverdet, 2017). These districts are based on the 2010 Census and are known as urban (or city), suburban, town, and rural school districts (Geverdet, 2017). Thus elected and appointed leaders in these different types of school districts need to seize this moment in time, as advocated by S. M. R. Covey (2010), to take advantage of this unique opportunity to rebuild trust with local communities.

However, these elected and appointed school district leaders are limited in how they build trust with the community based upon the nature of the trust they hold regarding each other (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006; Yaffe, 2015). While the literature on trust has grown since Mayer et al.'s (1995) pivotal study, the research on how superintendents build and maintain trust with their elected school boards lacks in comparison. When one considers how superintendents in the various types of school districts build and maintain trust with their elected school board leaders, the literature is relatively new, and there are still fewer sources. In terms of how superintendents help build and maintain trust between board members, there is almost no literature as of yet. So if citizens are to restore trust in their communities, they must first discover those local leaders who are successfully building trust and document how they do it.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust between school board members.

## Research Questions

1. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

## Significance of the Study

The current global crisis of trust directly affects those in the field of education (Edelman, 2017; Kowalski, 2013). Trust between the superintendent and the school board needs constant nurturing and reinforcement as witnessed by the often, cataclysmic,

destruction of trust in numerous school districts ("Editorial: Not the Public's Business," 2016; "McAlester Superintendent Fired," 2016; Wilhelm, 2017). More importantly, the nature of the trust relationship between the superintendent and board and between board members determines the culture and success of the school district (Anderson, 2017; Crump, 2011; McCann, 2012). When one considers how many individuals are affected by the successful nature of this trust relationship, it is easy to see why this study is essential.

In the state of California in the 2016-2017 school year, there were 1,024 public school districts containing 10,477 schools, employing 274,246 teachers and serving 6,228,235 students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016). The average school board in California had five members, which equates to slightly over 5,000 school board members in California (CSBA, 2017). While this study focused exclusively on California suburban superintendents and school boards, its findings applied directly to the 1,024 superintendents and the over 5,000 school board members in the state of California (CDE, 2016; CSBA, 2017). In California, the study also indirectly applied to 10,477 school principals, 274,246 teachers, and affected 6,228,235 students, not including their parents, grandparents, and family members (CDE, 2016; CSBA, 2017). As of the 2010 Census, there were 13,709 school districts in the United States that may also benefit from the generalizability of this study's results (ProximityOne, 2018b).

The number of people who will benefit from this study and who could be affected by this investigation attest to its potential importance. However, it was also useful to examine researchers' views on the need for the study. J. Weiss (2018) noted the need for future research on the practices and behaviors of superintendents that created high levels

of trust in their school districts. Smith (2013) discussed the limited number of superintendents and board members who were surveyed in a similar study and requested additional research be done in the same area of determining how superintendents build trust with their boards. This study provides information relevant to each of these areas needing additional research.

## Definitions

**Competence.** The ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Consistency.** The confidence that a person's pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Concern.** The value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability and support, and motivate and care for each other (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a; S. M. R. Covey & Merrill, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).

**Candor.** Communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Connection.** A shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Oliver & Sloan, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016).

**Trust.** "An individuals' willingness, given their culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable based on the belief that another individual, group or organization is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable and identified with their common values and goals" (Weisman, 2010, p. 1)

**Suburban school districts.** School districts that are inside an urbanized area but are outside of a principal city with the population of the suburban area categorized as one of three sizes: large suburb with a population of more than 250,000 people, midsize suburb with a population from 100,000 to 250,000 people, and small suburb with a population less than 100,000 people (EDGE, 2018).

**Superintendent.** An appointed executive hired to operationalize the policies and decisions of the school board. This executive leader serves as the board's educational expert, charged with overseeing the management of business affairs, interacting with the community in a politically and culturally aware fashion, as well as fulfilling the role of communicator in chief (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Cuban, 1976; Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010; Wright & Harris, 2010).

**School board member.** A locally elected official charged with governing a public school district and ensuring that the district respectfully responds to the priorities, values, and beliefs of the community. This elected official determines policies, makes strategic and fiscal decisions, requires accountability from the superintendent, and interacts with the community in a leadership role. Most importantly, this elected official governs as a member of a group, not as an individual (CSBA, 2016b; Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011; Heiligenthal, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2010).

## Delimitations

This study was delimited to 16 exemplary California suburban superintendents for the survey and five exemplary California suburban superintendents for the face-to-face interview, all of whom have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members. To qualify for the study sample, the exemplary suburban superintendent had to meet four of the five following criteria:

1. Superintendents must have worked 3 or more years in their current district.
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA conference.
4. Superintendent showed evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships.
5. Superintendent was recommended by two retired superintendents who are members of a north/south superintendent's group.

## Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters, references, and appendices organized in the following fashion. Chapter I included the introduction of the abysmal state of trust in the world today as well as the need for leaders to inspire trust by looking back at the history of trust and the five domains of trust found in Weisman's (2016) pyramid of trust. Chapter I also included a discussion of superintendent and board member roles as well as definitions and limitations. Chapter II consists of an extensive review of the research and literature that has been conducted thus far on trust and the building of trust between superintendents and board members that enhances effective governance. Chapter III describes the methodology the researcher utilized to obtain and examine the data used in

this study. Chapter IV presents the data collected through the study, the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data, and the findings and results of the research. Following this, Chapter V contains a discussion of the significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

There truly is an unprecedented crisis of trust in the world today (Edelman, 2017). According to Midgely (2016) and Rowe and Alexander (2017), the words "post-truth," or its cousin "fake news," are so widely used now that no one explains the terms anymore. These terms are a result of an ever-increasing lack of trust in politicians or scientific experts (Midgely, 2016; O'Neill, 2017; Rowe & Alexander, 2017). In 2017, global surveys showed that the average citizen was now found to be as credible as any expert and more reliable than politicians or government officials, thus leading to a global distrust in government, science, and the media (Edelman, 2017).

This decrease in trust for those in authority and increase in trust with friends and family essentially dispersed power, making it more horizontal and less vertical (Edelman, 2017). This distrust leads to an increased desire to be able to trust somebody who can be observed to be "honest, competent and reliable" (O'Neill, 2017, p. 31). It brings to the forefront each community's need to be able to trust leaders again. This need to be able to trust leaders again can also be observed in education.

Shockingly, two thirds of Americans continue to lack confidence in public schools (Newport, 2017). It is imperative for today's educational leaders to accept the new horizontal nature of authority and to involve, communicate with, and seek out the input of the various stakeholders involved in their enterprise (Edelman, 2017; Leiserowitz et al., 2013; O'Neill, 2017). An essential first step in developing trust with stakeholders is to have a strong trust relationship between the superintendent and board and between members of the board.

The reader may wonder why trust is so important in the field of education. Superintendent tenure, or more correctly the length of a superintendent's tenure, is positively correlated with student achievement (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). However, the average superintendent's tenure is approximately three years, shorter than it has ever been and often not long enough to enact successful change that impacts student achievement (Bowers, 2017; Crump, 2011; Hoffert, 2015; T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). The cause of this superintendent churn is often found to be the board's and community's loss of confidence with the superintendent due to conflict between the superintendent and board that often comes from a lack of trust (Bowers, 2017; Hoffert, 2015). Thus overcoming the crisis of trust that is present in the world today, including in public schools, and discovering how exemplary superintendents build trust both with their board members and between their board members is of the utmost importance for our children (Crump, 2011; Pittman, 2012). Since most children in both the United States and California attend school in a suburban school district, this study focused exclusively on how exemplary suburban superintendents build trust with and between board members (Glander, 2016).

Chapter II provides a review of the research literature regarding trust and how exemplary superintendents build trust with and between school board members. The literature review begins with a history of trust and of those theoretical foundations in leadership and trust that apply to this study. The review introduces the theoretical framework used in this study and compares the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection to the research of others on the multifaceted construct of trust. This literature review then investigates the concepts of governance, including the

roles of the superintendent and school board members. The review concludes with an examination of the literature on how superintendents and school boards work effectively together.

## History of Trust

The mind-numbing crisis of trust currently existing in this world today brings up the question of what trust is and how it applies or should apply to world leaders. Large sections of this planet today cry out for ethical and responsible leadership that builds trust founded on integrity and empathy (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). There is widespread agreement across the globe that this is a time of cataclysmic change (Alexander, 2017). Astonishingly, while the crisis of trust roars across the world today, it is not a new issue; it is a historical issue of developing and maintaining relationships that contribute to individual and organizational success founded upon trust (S. R. Covey, 2011).

Much of the research on trust begins with Aristotle, which is interesting because Aristotle did not write specifically about trust (Wicks et al., 1999). Aristotle wrote about ethics and friendship (Mullis, 2010; Wicks et al., 1999). In discussing ethics, Aristotle differentiates between two types of reasoning: "instrumental or technical reasoning and ethical reasoning" (De Nalda, Guillén, & Pechuán, 2016, p. 561). He used the term "epistêmêhere [which] has the meaning of specialist ability, specialist competence or understanding of the subject" (Höffe, 2010, p. 11). Thus, technical reasoning is present when the trustee, the one who is being trusted, is competent in the area of concern and can produce the results the trustor, the one doing the trusting, wants (De Nalda et al., 2016). The concept of competence is considered to be an essential element of trust (Weisman, 2016). Ethical reasoning, on the other hand, focuses on the trustee's

intentions and principles (De Nalda et al., 2016). Researchers now call this integrity, reliability, or consistency, all of which are considered to be an essential element of trust (Mayer et al., 1995; Weisman, 2016; J. Weiss, 2018).

When writing about friendship, Aristotle wrote that true friends were good to each other, respected each other's mutual virtue, and desired good things for each other (Höffe, 2010; Mullis, 2010). In the last century this began to be called benevolence, and this century it is starting to be known as concern (Mayer et al., 1995; Weisman, 2016). Aristotle wrote about the reciprocity of virtue and how friends can remain steadfast in their mutual dedication to virtue, another example of consistency (Mullis, 2010; Weisman, 2016). This mutual belief in each other's goodness requires that the two friends are honest with each other and share their views with each other. This mutual belief in each other's goodness is now called concern, and the honest sharing is known as candor (Weisman, 2016). Finally, present throughout Aristotle's writings on friendship are the common, mutual interests that friends share (Mullis, 2010), a process often called connection. Like competence and consistency, concern, candor, and connection are all essential domains of trust (Weisman, 2016).

In the last two centuries, researchers began to note again connections between trust and leadership much as Aristotle had discussed the asymmetrical friendship between rulers and followers (Mullis, 2010). In the United States, one of the most prominent leaders was the first president, George Washington (McDonald, 1997). Washington was profoundly trusted by the First Continental Congress and American citizens based on his military successes and 8 years of experience as the leader of the Continental Army (McDonald, 1997). As previously mentioned by Aristotle, competence was a crucial

factor in trust. Competence was also a crucial factor in the trust extended to George Washington. But there was more.

When Washington stopped the mutiny at Newburgh, he used the trust his officers had in him to meet with them and appeal to their better nature in order to end their march on Congress (Lipset, 1999). Thomas Jefferson was to later write of Washington's intervention at Newburgh, "The moderation of a single character probably prevented this revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish" (Lipset, 1999, p. 13). This beneficial use of trust to start a nation along with Washington's subsequent withdrawal from public life and return to Mt. Vernon put Washington in a unique category in history (Lipset, 1999). His willing and historic stepping down from power after winning the Revolutionary War and his reluctance to return to power as president caused him to be seen as a benevolent leader and engendered almost everyone to trust him (McDonald, 1997).

Another great American leader who brought about national transformation was Abraham Lincoln. While the country was disintegrating with various southern states seceding from the union immediately before and after Lincoln's inauguration, Lincoln gave his political rivals national power by making them members of his cabinet (Coutu, 2009). He had the confidence to utilize the leadership skills of his competitors for the greater good of the country, and by the end of the day, those rivals came to respect him because he respected them first (Coutu, 2009). Lincoln modeled for the country and posterity the leadership skill of extending trust to others, and sure enough, his cabinet eventually gave him their trust in return (Coutu, 2009; S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). It is interesting to note how those world leaders who were able to build and maintain trust

stand out as beacons of hope to others as they stare back down the halls of history. At this point it would be prudent to examine both leadership and trust and how they can interact beneficially for those involved, and for the purpose of this study, specifically how they can interact beneficially for superintendents and school board members.

## Theoretical Foundations

In this section, the researcher reviews those foundational theories that influence the working relationship between the superintendent and the school board members. This section begins with the great man leadership theory and also covers contingency leadership theory—including situational leadership, transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, situational leadership theory—and finally ends with trust theory. Trust theory is, in essence, the foundation of this study and is interwoven in the purpose and the research questions. Washington and Lincoln were avid practitioners of building trust in subordinates and were both categorized under the great man leadership theory, although it is most likely that they would not have cared for such a distinction (Coutu, 2009; McDonald, 1997).

### Great Man Leadership Theory

Many years after Washington and during the early years of Lincoln, Thomas Carlyle gave a series of six lectures in 1840 that were later to be pieced together to become his book, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Mazzeno, 2016; Spector, 2016). In his book, Carlyle continued the Greek tradition of venerating leaders and heroes by celebrating their great accomplishments (Dziak, 2017). In essence, he maintained the tradition of giving these great men god-like qualities (Dziak, 2017). Thus was born the great man theory of leadership (Mazzeno, 2016; Spector, 2016).

Carlyle believed that human history moved forward in leaps and bounds when these great men held the reins of leadership. He advocated that great men are gifts from the Almighty and were put on the planet to lift up humanity to a higher level of existence (Spector, 2016). Carlyle contended that their greatness was inborn, not nurtured or learned (Dziak, 2017). Of course, he never mentioned great women, which was both an inaccurate recounting of history and troublesome (Mazzeno, 2016).

The problem with the great man theory was that the common man was to bow down to these great leaders and submit to them (Spector, 2016). Mazzeno (2016) disagreed with this hierarchy-of-worth point of view and argued that Carlyle believed that heroes are to use their powers in service to others. It was the combination of selfless leadership and willing obedience that distinguished Carlyle's ideas (Mazzeno, 2016). This theme of obedience to these great men came from Carlisle's Calvinist upbringing (Spector, 2016).

Herbert Spencer contended that great leaders were created in the societies in which they were raised and that nurture, not nature, was the major contributing factor to their outstanding leadership (Dziak, 2017). Gladwell (2018) contended that it is the combination of unique opportunity combined with greater-than-average skills, which are nurtured by society to develop greatness. Of course, neither Lincoln nor Washington espoused the great man view, which was why they were able to engender so much trust from others (Coutu, 2009; McDonald, 1997).

**Contingency Leadership Theory**

Attempts to connect leadership behavior to personality and leadership effectiveness continued throughout the next century, resulting in the proposal in 1964 by

Fred Fiedler (1972b) of the contingency leadership theory. He created a survey that generated a score called the "Least Preferred Coworker or LPC" (Fiedler, 1972b, p. 391). This score indicated whether a leader was relationship oriented, with a high LPC score, or task oriented, with a low LPC score (Fiedler, 1973). These scores were based on leaders answering a set of questions about a coworker in their life that they least liked working with (Fiedler, 1972b). Through a series of studies, Fiedler (1972a, 1972b, 1973) discovered that different types of leaders performed better in different types of situations. Low LPC leaders performed better in favorable and unfavorable situations. High LPC leaders performed better in moderately favorable situations. Fiedler (1972b) defined the favorableness of situations "as the degree to which the leadership situation enables the leader to control or influence his group's behavior" (p. 391).

While over 100 years after the great man theory of leadership, one can still see in Fiedler's initial concept of the rigidity of the set skill levels that leaders have as a continuation of the great man theory (Fiedler, 1972b; Mazzeno, 2016). Initially, there was no thought of change or growth. Indeed, in an article written by Fiedler (1973), he contended that training is only beneficial for some leaders and for others it leads to worse performance. This is reminiscent of the set skills bred into men by God from the great man theory (Dziak, 2017).

Contingent leadership theory has several weaknesses. The first weakness is that the LPC is self-administered by the leaders who utilize it, thus generating concerns about its validity (Fiedler, 1972b; R. D. Waters, 2013). However, it is important to note the LPC has been shown in a myriad of tests to be both reliable and valid as a measure of a person's "motivational hierarchy" (R. D. Waters, 2013, p. 327). Second, contingency

theory has been criticized because it does not explain why specific leadership styles are more effective in certain situations (R. D. Waters, 2013). It does, however, explain the results of repeated tests and studies done by Fiedler and others that show that specific leadership styles perform better under certain conditions (R. D. Waters, 2013). These results led corporations to become aware that the situation leaders face, combined with their particular leadership style, determines their effectiveness (Hill, 1969). This later became known as situational leadership.

Situational leadership is one of the contingency leadership family of theories (Campbell, 2015). It recognizes that different leadership skills are more beneficial in different situations, and it encourages leaders to vary their leadership style to match their talent to the current situation (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970; Campbell, 2015). Situational leadership theory proposes that intelligent leaders will identify, with the help of their subordinates, the leadership skills needed in particular situations to best achieve the organization's goals (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974).

**Transactional Leadership Theory**

Transactional leadership is a recognizable, traditional form of leadership whereby leaders give rewards or punishments according to the actions of followers (Bass, 1985, 1990, 1997). Leaders clarify expectations and objectives, determine and communicate responsibilities, and negotiate rewards for expected behaviors (Bass et al., 2003). It is, in essence, the old-fashioned carrot and the stick approach (Bass, 1985, 1997). This type of leadership dominated research for half of the 20th century (Bass, 1985). Its focus was on improving worker or follower performance often in incremental steps with minimal results (Bass, 1985).

The foundation of transactional leadership is to find those rewards that interest employees and then set goals attached to those rewards to motivate employees to accomplish the goals (Bass, 1985; Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013). Rewards can take the forms of praise, additional resources to accomplish the work, or public recognition (Bass et al., 2003). Rewards traditionally involve "pay increases, bonuses and promotion" (Bass, 1985, p. 34). How the rewards are scheduled to be disseminated, how closely the reward is given in relation to the desired behavior, and the consistency of the rewards from one behavior to another or from one person to another determines the effectiveness of the reward (Bass, 1985). This is the carrot side of transactional leadership.

The stick side of transactional leadership involves punishment for undesirable or organizationally ineffective behaviors (Bass, 1990). Punishments can range from drawing the employee's attention to poor performance, reduction of leader support, to reprimand, suspension without pay, and termination (Bass, 1985). However, these negative rewards are only useful if the employee perceives them as negative and often they do not cause a positive change in employee behavior (Bass, 1990).

This rewards and punishment discussion brings up a point that is necessary for transactional leadership to be effective. An exemplary leader must discover what rewards the employee deems worth obtaining. In fact, exemplary transactional leaders often negotiate with employees regarding which rewards are being offered and strive to deliver those rewards that employees agree are worthwhile (Bass, 1997; Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013). However, the leader's effectiveness is judged by how dependably she or he can deliver those rewards, which often are beyond his or her immediate control (Bass, 1990).

Transactional leadership can also magnify some poor leadership habits. Project leaders who implement punishments inconsistently, or only after numerous infractions, are deemed ineffective leaders by employees (Tyssen et al., 2014). Practices such as the implementation of subpar evaluation methods, poor management techniques, and lack of employee buy-in to the reward/punishment schema can undercut a leader's perceived reliability and believability (Bass, 1985). Some leaders, fearing employee reactions to punishments delivered to employees, step in only when standards are not met or, worse, exercise no authority, thus practicing "management by exception or . . . laissez-faire (management)" (Bass, 1990, p. 22; see also Bass et al., 2003), all of which undercuts the employee's trust in his or her leaders.

Conversely, transactional leadership can generate trust based on a leader's proven ability or competence (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). This trust is based only on the leader's ability to deliver on promises (Bass, 1985). This type of leadership does not create levels of inspiration or strong relational bonds seen in leaders like Washington or Lincoln (Coutu, 2009; McDonald, 1997; Tyssen et al., 2014). For those higher levels of trust and organizational performance, one must look at other types of leadership, such as transformational leadership.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

In his seminal work "Leadership: Good, Better, Best," Bass (1985), covered the benefits of both transactional leadership and transformational leadership. While most readers understood the benefits and shortfalls of transactional leadership, transformational leadership was different. Historic leaders like Washington, Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were easy to comprehend as transformational leaders, but Bass

took it a step further. After surveying senior U.S. Army officers and analyzing the results, he proposed that transformational leadership could be understood if one examined its components and that a normal everyday leader could successfully implement these practices (Bass, 1985).

Bass (1985) contended that transformational leaders exhibited three leadership factors: "These factors were (1) charismatic leadership . . . (2) individualized consideration . . . and (3) intellectual stimulation" (p. 33). He surveyed educational leaders, business leaders, and professional leaders and found similar results. Moreover, his analysis showed that when leaders exhibited the three transformational abilities noted above, subordinates made extra effort far beyond what they did with just transactional practices alone.

Charisma is the most significant component of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1990, 1997). Charismatic leaders inspire those around them to contribute more to the organization's goals than they normally would (Bass, 1985). Their self-confidence, determination, and belief that the goal can be achieved spur subordinates on to greater levels of performance (Bass, 1985). Subordinates were excited by the mission espoused by the charismatic leader, were proud to be a part of the leader's team, and had complete faith in their leader's ability to overcome all obstacles (Bass, 1985). The followers believe that they matter to their charismatic leader.

Individual consideration is one of those leadership factors transformational leaders display that causes followers to believe that they matter and are important to the leader (Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987). The leader pays close attention to the individual needs and skills of employees (Bass, 1990). The leader mentors those who

need it or want it to help the subordinate grow and develop his or her abilities to reach the organizational goals and enhance his or her own, unique leadership skills (Bass, 1990). This developmental orientation of the transformational leader prepares followers for positions of greater responsibility in the future to help the organization successfully reach its goals (Bass, 1985). Often, leaders can encourage followers to greater efforts by intellectually challenging them to find better, more efficient ways to achieve the organization's goals (Bass, 1985).

This intellectual stimulation of subordinates is another key factor of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders help followers look at old problems in new ways and challenge them to find new ways of solving them (Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders help subordinates look at difficult issues as problems that can be addressed in rational and effective ways (Bass, 1990). Intellectual stimulation of subordinates unleashes their imagination and causes them to generate solutions that were not conceived or thought possible (Bass, 1985). This is one of the three factors of transformational leadership that causes followers to want to place trust and confidence in their leaders (Bass et al., 1987).

One has to wonder, how much transformational leadership can an organization tolerate? Can an organization have too many transformational leaders? Do transformational leaders begat other transformational leaders? The answers are both yes and no. In a 1980s study about Exxon managers who were highly rated by their superiors, the managers reported that they were given interesting and difficult assignments by their initial supervisor (Bass, 1990). Bass (1990) argued that leaders usually model their leadership style upon the leadership style of their initial supervisor.

This he believed was the reason for his findings from the Exxon study that if more higher level managers were considered transformational leaders, than more lower level managers and employees will model that transformational behavior and are more likely to become transformational leaders themselves as they rise in the organization (Bass, 1990). Thus the answer to the above questions is yes; transformational leaders begat other transformational leaders.

However, just a few years before this, Bass et al. (1987) were trying to determine the relationship between upper and lower level managers in a government agency in New Zealand. Similar to the Exon study, they discovered "a cascading effect of transformational leadership" (Bass et al., 1987, p. 84). This means that they found that the levels of transformational leadership seen at the upper management level were also seen at lower management levels (Bass et al., 1987). This was attributed by Bass et al. to the selection of lower level managers to match the styles of upper management, the subculture of the units studied, and the specific work demands placed on managers requiring similar skill sets in multiple levels of management. This would also seem to be a yes answer to transformational leaders developing more transformational leaders.

Today's leaders are interested in the practical steps of how ordinary everyday leaders become transformational leaders. They want to learn about what causes change, what are the types of organizational change, what roles mindset and culture play, and how one helps followers move from resistance to engagement (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). Authors and researchers assist with information on how to prepare an organization for upcoming transformation, how to manage the changes when they arrive, and how to use those changes to move the organization closer to achieving its vision

(Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010b). Most of this information regarding setting the organizational vision and empowering stakeholders aligns with Bass's (1985) concept of intellectual stimulation of followers (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010b). The predominance of the research and information on transformational leadership revolves around developing trusting relationships with subordinates (White et al., 2016).

Transformational leadership theory requires leaders to first examine themselves before addressing the mindset and culture changes needed by their organization (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010b). Its most significant emphasis is on building relationships of trust to bring about large-scale, breakthrough changes in organizations and nations (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). One can easily discern that both Washington and Lincoln were transformational leaders intent on unleashing the potential of those they served (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). Unlike the great man theory that is intent on great leaders lifting up humanity, transformational leadership is intent on the leader helping humanity lift up itself (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a). So how do leaders transform their organizations?

**Social Capital Theory**

One way that leaders transform their organizations is by taking time to establish individual relationships and networks of relationships to spur the organization on to greater heights (White et al., 2016). In essence, these leaders generate social capital in the relationships, networks, and professional organizations to which they belong (Coleman, 1988). According to Putnam (2013), "'Social capital' refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 70). These social networks are a significant

concept in social capital and can be formal or informal (Hean, O'Halloran, Hammick, Craddock, & Pitt, 2013). These social networks contain within them the strengths and resources of the group, the resources of the individual members, the norms or rules that guide the group and most importantly trust between members and the group, and between individual members (Hean et al., 2013).

Stickel et al. (2009) argued that Putman's 1993 definition of social capital does indeed consist of three components: "networks, values, and trust" (p. 305). They proposed that without a complex interaction between these three components, members of a group will not invest in the social capital of the group (Stickel et al., 2009). Conversely, when all three components are present, group members are more likely to share resources to address the group's needs (Stickel et al., 2009). Out of all three components, many researchers agree that trust is the essential factor in social capital where mutual trust is earned through time (Finnigan & Daly, 2017; Stickel et al., 2009).

However, not all the seminal authors of social capital agree on how to describe it. Coleman (1998) contended that the power of social capital resides in the noncorporeal structure of relationships themselves and does not reside in the individual participants. Bordieu (1986) argued that the power of social capital resides in the individuals who possess it, making them sought after by those who wish to access their social capital. Lee (2014) insisted that both Coleman and Bordieu were correct and that social capital has two components: structural and symbolic. Coleman's (1988) argument that the power of social capital is formed through the relationships between individuals and groups is what Lee (2014) contended is the structural component of social capital. Bordieu (1986) pointed out that individuals can possess social capital, making them powerful and sought

after by others, which represents the symbolic component of social capital (Lee, 2014). Both Coleman (1988) and Bordieu (1986) posited that the trustworthiness of the social structure being utilized to produce the desired results is the foundation upon which social capital is built and is why it is both desired and useful. Thus social capital like transformational leadership requires trust, which brings up that most cogent of questions: What is trust?

**Trust Theory**

Many leaders, including Washington and Lincoln, built up trust and used it to build or rebuild a nation. Normal, everyday, leaders can do the same, but first, one must understand trust itself (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012). Trust theory has been proposed and refined by numerous individuals and at its most basic level, declared Wilson (2011), there are three steps to trusting someone else. First, there must initially be a determination about what is required to trust another. Second, the individual must decide to trust the other person, thereby becoming vulnerable. Third, the individual must take the active step of trusting the other person (Wilson, 2011).

This explanation of what constitutes trust is built from Mayer, Davis, and Shoorman's (1995) understanding of trust in their seminal article, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust." They defined trust as

> the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712)

This definition of trust, claimed Mayer et al. (1995), is similar to that of Gambetta (1988) with the added component of vulnerability. The trustor, the one doing the trusting, experiences vulnerability because there is something important to the trustor that could be lost (Mayer et al., 1995). Thus the trustor perceives risk and is willing to take the chance that the trustee, the one who is being trusted, might not perform the action that they he or she needs the trustee to perform. The concept of risk is what makes trust unique and different from other constructs such as collaboration, confidence, or predictability (Mayer et al., 1995).

Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) claimed, "Without uncertainty and risk there is no trust" (p. 9). However, Castelfranchi and Falcone did not believe in one definition of trust. Their research on developing models of trust for artificial intelligence studies was aimed at developing a multifaceted and many-layered series of definitions regarding trust. They examined biological influencers of trust as well as attempted to develop a mathematical basis that explains trust. As an overriding generality, they noted that trust must have five components: the expectation of trust, a trustee, actions taken by both the trustee and trustor, predictable results from the trustee's behaviors, and risk (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010). Similar to Mayer et al. (1995), Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) contended that the trustor has to perceive the risk and actively choose to be vulnerable to the trustee.

Successfully navigating the vulnerability of trusting another has powerful business implications (S. R. Covey, 1999). Through a series of books and articles, S.R. Covey and his son, S. M. R. Covey, encouraged leaders to trust their employees and their business partners, explaining how this will make their business more successful (S. M. R.

Covey, 2007, 2008, 2010; S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; S. R. Covey, 1999, 2011). In their book, *Smart Trust: Creating Prosperity, Energy and Joy in a Low-Trust World*, S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) proposed five steps that leaders can take to create successful business trust: first, "Choose to believe in trust" (p. 85); second, "Start with self" (p. 109); third, "Declare your intent . . . and assume positive intent in others" (p. 142); fourth, "Do what you say you're going to do" (p. 176); and fifth, "Lead out in extending trust to others" (p. 206). It is fascinating how this explains S. M. R. Covey's father's descriptions of how to negotiate with others. S. R. Covey, the father, in his book *The 3rd Alternative,* described how to generate and use trust without explicitly talking about trust just one year prior to his son explaining the steps of how to actively create trust (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; S. R. Covey, 2011). Their themes of listening, extending trust, and moving from "me" to "we" explain their popularity among business circles and also connect them with other researchers on trust.

Coming from an entirely different application regarding trust, John Gottman (2011) went into minute detail about how to build trust in loving relationships, yet his themes are very similar to both Coveys. His idea of turning toward one's partner rather than away from his or her partner is strikingly similar to S. M. R. Covey's steps of extending trust to someone else (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; Gottman, 2011). Gottman and his fellow researchers studied couples for over 20 years, taping discussions during a conflict, having the couple later watch the video and rate how they were feeling at that particular moment using an 18-point Likert scale, and then matching each person's scores to each unique point in time during the discussion (Gottman, 2011). They studied heterosexual and homosexual couples and from their studies were able to predict with

startling accuracy how likely couples were to break apart within the next 5 to 6 years (Gottman, 2011). Later they realized they could use their information to help couples take active steps to increase the level of trust in their relationships using their constructs of "attunement (and) The Sound Relationship House" (Gottman et al., 2017, pp. 440-444; see also Gottman, 2011; see Figure 1). Both constructs involve listening to understand


*Figure 1*. The sound relationship house. From "The Role of Trust and Commitment in Love Relationships," by J. Gottman, J. Gottman, and M. A. McNulty, p. 440, in J. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Foundations for Couples' Therapy: Research for the Real World* (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2017).

one's partner and working together to build a "we" identity instead of just a "me" identity (Gottman et al., 2017). The major themes of Gottman et al.'s steps on reaching this common identity are similar to S. R. Covey's explanation of how to reach his new communal negotiation concept, which he called "The 3rd alternative" (S. R. Covey, 2011, p. 50; see also Gottman et al., 2017). Both S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) and Gottman et al. (2017) espoused knowing and understanding the other person's world in order to achieve a state of synergy, a new way of working together that is better than what existed before individually.

This relational aspect of trust plays a critical role in the work of Weisman (2016). His research on trust theory combined with their business view of trust has some similarities and dissimilarities with both S. R. Covey and S. M. R. Covey. S. R. Covey (2011) and S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) both came up with steps on how to grow or use trust. Weisman (2016) talked more about trust itself and then went on to the business applications of trust, all viewed within the context of connection or relationships. For these reasons and for the purpose of this study, the researcher used the definition of trust developed by Weisman (2010):

> An individuals' willingness, given their culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable based on the belief that another individual, group or organization is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable and identified with their common values and goals. (p. 1)

To summarize leadership and trust research thus far, researchers have examined how trust plays a critical role in business success and relationships (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; Gottman et al., 2017). Researchers have examined how the great man theory

required trust (Dziak, 2017; Mazzeno, 2016). They discovered with contingency leadership how leaders could modify their behaviors to specific situations and foster trust (Campbell, 2015; Fiedler, 1972b). Researchers explained with transactional leadership theory how consistent dispersal of rewards or punishments generated a basic form of trust (Bass, 1985; Landis, Hill, & Harvey, 2014). Researchers revealed how transformational leaders could empower others and create a lasting trust (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010b; Bass, 1985). Using social capital theory, researchers showed how leaders could generate, store, and utilize trust through building relationships and social networks (Lee, 2014; Putnam, 2013). In the discussion of trust theory, researchers came up with various definitions for trust along with different components of trust. What is needed is a framework to draw together all these different leadership theories with information on how to build and maintain trust.

## Values Institute Theoretical Framework

Many different trust frameworks explain the nature of trust and how leaders can build and use it. In this study, the researcher uses The Values Institute theoretical framework for trust. While this framework is focused on business applications of trust, it also applies to educational applications of trust. The Values Institute framework developed the "Pyramid of Trust" (Weisman, 2016, p. 138; see Figure 2), which espouses five domains of trust. These domains are "Competence, Consistency, Concern, Candor and Connection" (Weisman, 2016, p. 139). Competence and concern are considered skill-based domains of trust and are the foundation of the pyramid of trust (Weisman, 2016). Concern and candor are relational domains of trust and deepen the skill-based components of trust upon which they rest (Weisman, 2016). The apex of the trust

pyramid is connection, which is the penultimate expression of trust in which both the business and the customer demonstrate pride in being associated with each other (Weisman, 2016).

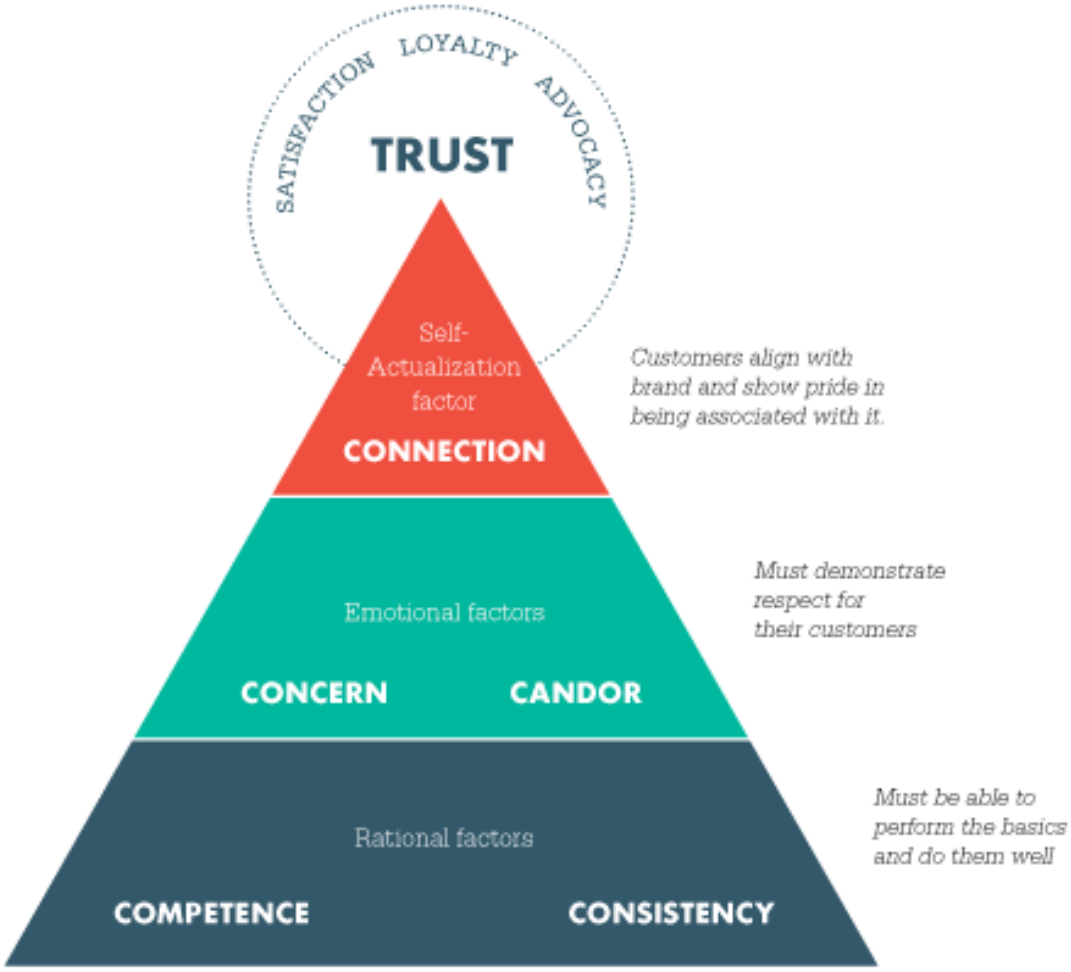


*Figure 2.* The pyramid of trust. From *Choosing Higher Ground: Working and Living in the Values Economy,* by M. Weisman with B. Jusino, p. 138 (Santa Ana, CA: Nortia Press, 2016).

**Competence**

Competence deals with an individual's technical skills and basic interpersonal skills regarding leading in their area of business, education, or nonprofit organization (NPO; Ripley et al., 2013). It encompasses the leader's knowledge of his or her

organization including how it works, why it works, and how it can be made to work more effectively (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). The trust developed through competency can be very specific to only those skills needed by and admired by employees (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). Thus a leader can be trusted to exhibit specific skills in certain situations and not trusted to exhibit other skills in other situations (Colquitt et al., 2007; Schoorman et al., 2007). Competence is a beginning place for trust to be developed (Schoorman et al., 2007). For the purposes of this study, competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

While Weisman calls this construct, competence, most researchers call it by another name, ability (Blanchard, Olmstead, & Lawrence, 2013; Colquitt et al., 2007; De Nalda et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007; White et al., 2016). Mayer et al. (1995), in their seminal work "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," identified ability as "that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain" (p. 717). The domain was specific, because similar to other researchers, Mayer et al. also identified that the trustee, the one who is being trusted, may have strong skills or knowledge in one area but may have little information or experience in another area (Colquitt et al., 2007; Schoorman et al., 2007). Therefore trust can be earned in specific situations and with specific skills on the part of the trustee because "trust is domain specific" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 717). White et al. (2016) noted that ability or competence is not the sole foundational component of trust, but it is essential for anyone who wishes to lead.

Weisman (2016) also noted that competence is not the sole foundation of trust. But he did consider it to be a critical component of trust, noting that competence is a measure of a person's or organization's ability to provide the services or products they say they will provide (Weisman, 2016). Like the majority of an iceberg that is under water, the presence of competence is often not consciously recognized by the consumer or trustor, the one doing the trusting, but its absence is immediately noticeable to those who are trying to determine if they should trust the business or people involved (Weisman, 2016). Weisman claimed that competence is a rational component of trust based on a person's or organization's specific skills and abilities to provide the trustee with what he or she is seeking. However, he insisted that there are two foundational and rational domains of trust that they subsequently placed at the bottom of their pyramid of trust—competence and consistency (see Figure 2; Weisman, 2016).

**Consistency**

Consistency revolves around one's ability to constantly take the same action in the same situation, without fail (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). To followers, it is a measure of a leader's ability to repeatedly achieve the wished for results in the same situation, over and over again (De Nalda et al., 2016). It means keeping one's commitments (Bowers, 2017). Consistency indicates to followers and stakeholders that they can count on the leader to follow through when the leader gives his or her word (White et al., 2016). The leader is always dependable and will follow through with commitments (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels, 2008). Some researchers equate it with moral and ethical behavior on the part of the leader (Butcher, 2015; De Nalda et al., 2016), especially when the leader's actions indicate a moral purpose that matches the vision of

the organization and has the agreement of the employees (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). For the purposes of this study, consistency is the confidence that a person's pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable, and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

While Weisman (2010) called this construct consistency, many researchers call it by another name, reliability (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Thompson & Holt, 2016; J. Weiss, 2018; White et al., 2016). Other researchers call this component of trust integrity (Colquitt et al., 2007; Crump, 2011; De Nalda et al., 2016; Hoffert, 2015; Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007; Smollan, 2013; Thompson & Holt, 2016). Still other researchers call this component of trust both terms, reliability and integrity, giving it the dependable and steadfast elements of both (Chhuon et al., 2008; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Although this component of trust dealing with dependability, stability, repeatedly behaving in the same way, and steadfastness can be interchangeably called integrity, reliability, or consistency, this study uses consistency to denote these attributes.

Many discussions regarding the concept of consistency are centered on the seminal work by Mayer et al. (1995). Mayer et al. contended that integrity (consistency) "involves the trustor's, the one doing the trusting, perception that the trustee, the one who is being trusted, adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable" (p. 719). In essence, the trustor watches the trustee's behavior over time and finds that the trustee's behaviors indicate that he or she follows a set of beliefs or principles that the trustor either agrees with, supports, or wholeheartedly endorses (Stickel et al., 2009). Thus, both predictability and respect, based on the positive intent of the trustee, play a part in the

concept of consistency (Thompson & Holt, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; J. Weiss, 2018).

Weisman (2016) insisted that both consistency and competence are the foundations of trust (see Figure 2). However, De Nalda et al. (2016) maintained that consistency becomes the overriding factor, more important than competence, when trustees are determining whether or not to trust an individual. Tschannen-Moran (2014), in her seminal work *Trust Matters*, argued that although all the elements of trust are important, their level of importance relative to each other will depend on the nature of the interdependence between the trustee and the trustor and the trustee's level of vulnerability. In this study's theoretical framework, the pyramid of trust, Weisman (2016) placed consistency at the bottom of the pyramid with competence as a rational domain of trust. He argued that without these two domains, a leader cannot get to the more powerful emotional or relationship-centered domains of trust (Weisman, 2016).

**Concern**

Concern is one of two domains of trust that is more emotional or relationship centered (see Figure 2; Weisman, 2016). Concern is best demonstrated when leaders listen empathetically to others (Anderson, 2017). Often leaders prefer face-to-face meetings when listening to others because it allows them to put themselves in others' situation and gain a deeper understanding of their perspective (Anderson, 2017). In turn, followers believe the leader demonstrates concern when the followers perceive that the leader's intentions are beneficial to the follower (De Nalda et al., 2016). Building these kinds of relationships takes time to provide opportunities for frequent contact and social interactions to create and maintain trust (Chhuon et al., 2008). For the purposes of this

study, concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members can show their vulnerability and support, and motivate care for each other (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a; S. M. R. Covey & Merrill, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).

While Weisman (2016) called this domain of trust concern, many researchers call it benevolence (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Hendriks, Kienhues, & Bromme, 2016; Mayer et al., 1995; Smollan, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; White et al., 2016). Benevolence contains the same behaviors as concern, including the leader's ability to act independently of his or her own self-centered motives and to act in the best interest of the trustor or the organization (Hendriks et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 1995). Like concern, it has elements of caring and fairness and is most often demonstrated through the leader's ability to listen to those who are being led (Kaucher, 2010).

In the pyramid of trust, concern is one of the emotional or relational domains of trust (see Figure 2; Weisman, 2016). Writing in agreement with White et al.'s (2016) assertions about the importance of relationships, Weisman (2016) argued that building relationships takes time and is, in essence, a journey, a journey that takes work and requires one to cultivate and tend to the relationship. In fact, Weisman "designed the Pyramid of Trust as a steep-sided mountain on purpose to demonstrate that it takes effort to get to the top" (p. 139). The higher one goes up, the more work that is involved and the greater the payoff regarding earned trust with his or her customers, stakeholders, or followers (Weisman, 2016). In an unconnected study, Kaucher (2010) surveyed 168

educators at three universities regarding effective and ethical educators and discovered that the top two resulting factors were listening and honesty—what Weisman (2016) would term concern and candor.

**Candor**

Candor is a measure of how transparent and authentic a leader is in the opinion of others (Weisman, 2016). Candor can often be seen in the communications that leaders give or send to the organization's members. The more clear and transparent those communications are, the more followers perceive that the leader is honest, and the more likely it is that the leader will establish or grow trust in those relationships (Crump, 2011). This concept of candor includes communicating the why or reasons why specific decisions are being made and doing so honestly and transparently (Puckett, 2017). For the purposes of this study, candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

While Weisman (2016) called this domain of trust candor, many researchers call it honesty (Ament, 2014; Mayer et al., 1995; Ripley et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Honesty has the same connotations to open and truthful dialogue as candor (Ament, 2014). Sincere honesty on the part of a leader can cause others to define the leader's character in a favorable light and generate trust in the leader (Krolczyk, 2015). Honesty as an element of trust is most potent when it is modeled consistently as a leader continues to build relationships (Thompson & Holt, 2016). In fact, O'Neill (2017) argued that it is difficult to determine the honesty of communications from strangers, which highlights Weisman's (2016) relational nature of candor. Honesty becomes a

more powerful antecedent of trust the stronger the relationship is between the leader and the follower (White et al., 2016).

It is interesting to note that in their seminal work on organizational trust, Mayer et al. (1995) did not mention candor or honesty as an element of trust. Their three elements of trust were "ability, benevolence and integrity" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 720). Near the end of their article, they ask a question: "To what extent does cooperation that can be attributed to external motivations develop trust?" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 730). By the next year, Cummings and Bromiley (1996a, 1996b) determined that one of those external motivations was honesty (candor) and developed a measurement for honesty (candor) on the Organizational Trust Inventory and the Organizational Trust Inventory–Short Form. Three years later, Tschannen-Moran (1998, 2004, 2014) included honesty (candor) as one of her five elements of trust in her dissertation, which then became the foundation of her seminal book *Trust Matters*. One has to wonder if Mayer et al. (1995) missed any other elements of trust.

**Connection**

It turns out that Mayer et al. (1995) did not miss the concept of connection, but they did not state that it was one of the elements of trust. Like many researchers, Mayer et al. referred to connection as relationship (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; White et al., 2016). Connection is essentially a shared bond with others (Stovall & Baker, 2010). Connection requires time and effort to build and maintain (Oliver & Sloan, 2013). Connection can be damaged during times of distress if it has not been attended to, but it can also be strengthened during times of difficulty if the situation is approached with candor and concern (Oliver & Sloan, 2013). For the purposes of this

study, connection is a shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and interrelatedness (Oliver & Sloan, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016).

In summary of The Values Institute theoretical framework for trust, Weisman (2016) was among the few researchers who argued that connection in and of itself is one of the key domains of trust. He used the metaphor of connection being the visible portion of an iceberg, being on top of, connected with, and affected by the lower parts of the iceberg, which in this metaphor consisted of competence, consistency, concern, and candor (Weisman, 2016). Weisman contended,

> The five elements—Competence, Consistency, Concern, Candor and Connection—should not be separated from one another in the final analysis, because they are individual stages of a single journey toward the ultimate goal: trust. The connections between the elements, and what those reveal about how a company or individual expresses their values, are as important as the elements themselves. (pp. 138-139)

In essence, connection is a conglomeration of the other four domains of trust and requires deliberate effort to create and sustain a long-term relationship with others (Weisman, 2016). When it is actively nurtured over time, connection can be a powerful tool for educational governance (Bowers, 2017; Crump, 2011; Macaluso, 2012; McCann, 2012; Puckett, 2017; Smith, 2013; White et al., 2016).

## Governance

The simplest explanation of "governance" (2017) is "the way that a city, company, etc. is controlled by the people who run it" (Governance defined for English

language learners, para. 1). Sounds simple; however, the history of school governance in the United States is quite complicated. Prior to the American Revolution, colonial schools were governed locally by the village leaders and this continued once it became its own country (Kowalski, 2013). Founded on the concepts of liberty and equality of opportunity, the bedrock of American education has always centered on local control (Kowalski, 2013). However, what constitutes local control has often been contested with political fights about power and who has it to run the schools (Eadie, 2009; Finn, Manno, & Wright, 2017; McGrath, 2015). One of the more interesting political fights occurred in 1894 when the mayor of Detroit walked into a Detroit school board meeting and had four board members arrested for corruption (McGrath, 2015). Jump forward 100 years and multiple big city mayors took over control of the school districts and appointed their own board members (McGrath, 2015). However, it was not just the mayors taking control, numerous states also placed school districts under their control, appointing their own school district leadership (McGrath, 2015). Still, in spite of these political machinations, school governance in most U.S. school districts remains centered upon a locally elected school board and their appointed superintendent (Finn et al., 2017).

Typically today, board members are elected by their local constituencies to govern their local school district (Finn et al., 2017). They hire a superintendent to help them with the day-to-day operations of the school district (Kowalski, 2013). Together, they address complicated high-stakes issues and navigate the interests of special interest groups (Eadie, 2009; McGrath, 2015). They plan budgets, hire personnel, do strategic planning, monitor performance, and relate with the community (CSBA, 2013; Eadie,

2009; Kowalski, 2013). The responsibilities of a governing board can be overwhelming. How does a governance team know what they as a governing group are supposed to do?

Exemplary superintendents work with their board members to create a mutual understanding of both the board members' roles and the superintendent's role (Crump, 2011). Clearly defined roles help avoid confusion later on as some board members may be tempted to do managerial actions instead of remaining in their strategic planning roles. Any difficulty in this area can lead to conflict between the superintendent and the board, which usually leads to shortened tenure for the superintendent (Hoffert, 2015). Shortened tenure is problematic because a longer tenure for superintendents results in stronger student achievement results, which are what everyone wants (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). Shortened tenure is not conducive to strong effective relationships in the governance team because those relationships take time to establish (Gore, 2017). Shortened tenure, according to Finnigan and Daly (2017), leads to a state of churn in a district and "churn can potentially have a cascading disruptive impact, from the superintendent's office all the way to the classroom" (p. 25). Therefore, exemplary school boards and superintendents understand their respective roles and mutually support each other in fulfilling their roles (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011).

**Role of the School Board**

Before becoming a country, colonial schools were governed locally by town or village leaders, and this structure continued once it became the United States of America (Kowalski, 2013). As the country grew and the population began to move from rural areas to urban areas, politicians started to create laws to balance the need for equity with the need for liberty, thus establishing state departments of education and "relegating

authority to local boards of education (Butts & Cremin, 1953)" (Kowalski, 2013, p. 13). Over time, this arrangement of authority and responsibility has resulted in three essential functions or duties that school boards must perform:

> (1) Ensure that state laws, rules and regulations are followed;
>
> (2) establish policy in areas not covered by state laws, rules, and regulations; and
>
> (3) employ a superintendent to serve as chief executive officer. (Kowalski, 2013, p. 14)

Today, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) espouses numerous roles for school board members. Board members are to participate in strategic planning, develop the community's vision, oversee improvements in instruction, review district plans, practice collaboration, demonstrate trust, advocate with legislators, advocate for student achievement, establish a climate of transparent communication, and provide funding for the above collaborative efforts (NSBA, 2018). While essentially just a more thorough explanation of the traditional board roles, the NSBA roles are to help board members become leaders in their communities.

By contrast, the California School Boards Association (CSBA, 2016b) simplifies the board roles "to ensure that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of their communities" (p. 1). The CSBA (2016b) espouses five essential responsibilities boards must perform to help them fulfill this goal:

- Setting direction
- Establishing an effective and efficient structure
- Providing support
- Ensuring accountability

- Providing community leadership as advocates for children, the school district, and public schools. (p. 1)

Notice how the historical roles of the board, those noted by the NSBA (2018), and by the CSBA are all slightly different. Most interesting from CSBA (2016b) is the addition of accountability as a board role, usually in relation to holding superintendents accountable for their actions, but since 2002, also holding the superintendents and administrators accountable for student academic performance.

There are approximately 14,000 school districts or systems across the United States (Kowalski et al., 2010). In California, there are approximately 1,024 school districts (CDE, 2016). The vast majority of these districts are led by locally elected board members who govern based upon local need and politics (CSBA, 2016b; Finn et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2010). Since local politics differ from one town or city to another, or from rural areas to urban areas, there is considerable variability in the issues that board members and superintendents face (Kowalski et al., 2010).

This variability regarding conflicting community perspectives on what board member roles should be along with the sundry laws addressing school governance can cause problems between the board members and the superintendent (CSBA, 2013; G. Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2015). There are numerous researchers who call attention to the disastrous effect board and superintendent role confusion can have upon a district (Ament, 2014; Bowers, 2017; Hoffert, 2015; McCann, 2012; R. K. Meyer, 2008; Puckett, 2017). Role confusion is why major school board organizations like the NSBA and the CSBA, along with researchers, advocate for ongoing board member and superintendent training on their respective roles (CSBA,

2016b; NSBA, 2018; G. Weiss et al., 2015). To understand how these similar but slightly different perspectives on board roles work effectively for local educational governance and who is responsible for seeking training for superintendents and board members, one also needs to understand the role of the superintendent.

**Role of the Superintendent**

Although public schools were established during colonial times, it was not until the 1820s, commented Kowalski (2013), that some school districts hired clerks to help with daily operations, and it was this position that eventually metamorphosed into the superintendency. The first actual superintendent was not appointed until the late 1830s in Buffalo, New York (Kowalski, 2013). Over the last 155 years, the role of the superintendent has evolved into its current iteration, emphasizing each of five roles over time as they emerged but never relinquishing the importance of any of the previous ones (Kowalski, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2010).

The first role superintendents acquired was that of teacher-scholar (Green, 2013; Kowalski, 2013). This role was the main role for superintendents between 1865 and 1920 (Kowalski et al., 2010). The duties as espoused by then-Superintendent of St. Louis W. T. Harris was to be an educational expert whose most important responsibility was focused on "how to make good teachers out of poor ones" (Cuban, 1976, p. 15). At the time James M. Greenwood, Kansas City superintendent declared that the board managed the business aspects while he supervised the schools (Cuban, 1976). Superintendents were the lead educators, with some giving advice to board members and many others just supervising the principals, teachers, and students in the schools (Cuban, 1976; Kowalski et al., 2010; R. K. Meyer, 2008).

The second role superintendents obtained around the time of the industrial revolution was that of business executive (Green, 2013; Howland, 2013). Numerous school boards believed that if the scientific principles and mass production techniques could so radically change industry, they must be suitable for education also (Kowalski et al., 2010). While Callahan (1962) argued that superintendents were fools for placating board members who wanted efficiency, Tyack (1972) countered that superintendents were politically astute and responded to the situation at the time (Kowalski et al., 2010). Thomas and Moran (1992) contended that superintendents at the time took the opportunity to protect and legitimize their power (Kowalski et al., 2010). Whatever the motivation, this role of business executive led to a more authoritative and task-oriented culture of control in the superintendency (Cuban, 1976; Kowalski et al., 2010).

The third role superintendents acquired around the time of the depression was that of democratic leader or statesmen (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Howland, 2013). The destructive crash of the stock market led to American citizens losing faith in the scientific tenets and centralized control of powerful managers (Kowalski et al., 2010). Local citizenry wanted more input, which led to an increase in the political actions of multiple groups with limited interests (Björk & Gurley, 2005). This increased need for decentralization combined with a decrease in resources led to superintendents taking on the role of statesman to meet the needs of diverse groups of citizens and to encourage citizen groups to help fund the education of their community's children (Kowalski et al., 2010).

The fourth role superintendents received during the 1950s was that of applied social scientist (Howland, 2013; Kowalski, 2013). As the baby boom generation began to

move through schools and the need for more schools arose, there was a need for superintendents who were knowledgeable about and sensitive to significant social problems (Kowalski et al., 2010). Superintendents were needed who could resolve education problems that were occurring in our multicultural and democratic country (Kowalski et al., 2010). As this role developed, preparation programs for superintendents became more extensive and rigorous, but Callahan (1966) warned that this would produce superintendents who are expert technicians but would not understand where they were going with their districts (as cited in Kowalski et al., 2010).

The fifth role that superintendents acquired during the 1980s was that of effective communicator (Kowalski, 2013). The ability to build positive relationships with all stakeholder groups and communicate effectively with them, asserted Jimenez (2013), became a necessary skill set sought out by school boards. The ability to be an effective and strong communicator was one of the primary traits desired by board members (McCann, 2012). The skill to form relationships with others, collaborate with various community groups, and involve and empower numerous stakeholder groups centers on these desired and effective communication skills (Kowalski et al., 2010).

These various historical roles must now all be effectively implemented by current superintendents to be successful (Kowalski et al., 2010). These roles still all apply now, but they are not the only leadership roles superintendents must fulfill. Superintendents must fill the role of achievement gap closer, demonstrating cultural proficiency in guiding their districts in addressing the unique learning needs of their diverse student body (Wright & Harris, 2010). Superintendents must manage the intense and emotional politics of diversity, filling the role of board policy implementer while navigating the

reactions of the community (Diem, Frankenberg, & Cleary, 2015). In rural and smaller suburban school districts, the superintendent must be able to simultaneously wear multiple hats such as manager, planner, listener, communicator, and community participant to fulfill all the roles expected by the board and the community (Copeland, 2013). How many leadership roles are there for superintendents? As many roles as there are school districts in these United States. Exemplary superintendents fulfill these numerous leadership roles simultaneously, emphasizing some roles over others based on their training, experience, and the needs of the school district they serve. This study limits the types of school districts to four and focuses intently on just one: suburban school districts.

## Types of School Districts

Public school districts in the United States provide one of three types of educational services: regular education, special education, or vocational education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), districts in most of the East Coast states follow municipal boundaries and districts in the Midwest and West do not. The U.S. Census Bureau states that there are over 14,000 districts in the country. The U.S. Census Bureau's Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates project (EDGE) generates data, such as school district locale codes, for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is used in educational research like this study (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The U.S. Census Bureau and NCES break down American school districts into four main types: city or urban, suburban, town, and rural (EDGE, 2018). Urban districts are inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with the city categorized as one of

three sizes: large cities are more than 250,000 people; midsize cities are from 100,000 to 250,000 people; and small cities are less than 100,000 people (EDGE, 2018). Suburban school districts are also inside an urbanized area but are outside of a principal city with the population of the suburban area categorized as one of three sizes: large suburb with a population of more than 250,000 people; midsize suburb with a population from 100,000 to 250,000 people; and small suburb with a population less than 100,000 people (EDGE, 2018). Towns are inside an urban cluster and are defined by their distance from an urbanized area (EDGE, 2018). Rural districts are in a census-defined rural territory and are defined by both their distance from urbanized areas and their distance from urban clusters (EDGE, 2018). While these are the four main types of school districts according to the U.S. Census, this study focuses on suburban school districts.

Suburban school districts have undergone many changes in the last couple of decades (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). In the first decade of the new millennium, the level of poverty in the suburbs grew five times faster than it did in the cities, resulting in one third of the nations poor residing in the suburbs by 2008 (Kneebone & Garr, 2010). Suburban school districts now serve more students than in any other type of census-defined school district (Glander, 2016). While the total number of students in suburban school districts increased, "virtually all of this increase (99%) has been due to the enrollment of new Latino, black and Asian students" (Fry, 2009, p. 1). Thus suburban school districts, their superintendents, and school boards have had to learn how to work together while managing this rapid change.

## How Exemplary Suburban Superintendents and School Boards Work Together

It is mostly true that "everyone knows the mantra: school board members make policy, while superintendents manage day-to-day operations" (Yaffe, 2015, p. 46). However, exemplary superintendents understand that establishing and maintaining trust is critical in order to work with the school board in generating student success (CSBA, 2013; White et al., 2016). Many professional organizations discuss clarifying board member and superintendent roles as a way to assist superintendents and school boards to work effectively together (CSBA, 2013; Dawson & Quinn, 2017; NSBA, 2018). Additionally, multiple studies and researchers have found that there are many different ways to generate trust and operate as an exemplary governance team. One of the common themes of these studies is the importance of communication and how superintendents can use communication to grow trust.

### Communication and Trust

Results from the majority of studies on the topic of superintendents, school boards, and trust lead to the firm conclusion that communication is a key to establishing trust with a school board (Cox, 2010; Hoffert, 2015). Multiple researchers from the University of Southern California promote the use of an "Entry Plan" (Green, 2013, p. 67) as an immediate and effective way to communicate a new superintendent's explorative plans on how to implement the board's goals in an effective manner (Howland, 2013; Huang, 2013; Jimenez, 2013; Smith, 2013). Thus communicating to the board that their goals are paramount, the superintendent is exploring how to best implement them, and stakeholder opinions are important and will be considered as to how to implement the board's goals (Jimenez, 2013; Smith, 2013).

Superintendents must master communication, asserted T. J. Waters and Marzano (2006), to hear, organize, and operationalize the interests of the board. The superintendent is the team member responsible for determining board member training needs through open communication and ensuring that board members and the superintendent each understand their roles (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). High levels of trust between superintendents and school board members begin with thorough communication about and a clear understanding of each other's roles (Yaffe, 2015).

Researchers also explored the optimal methods of communication between superintendents and board members. While methods like telephone calls, e-mails, texts, and lunch meetings were all examined, the most effective method of communication for any particular board member was the method of communication that board member preferred (Rohrbach, 2016). Thus, asking board members for their preferred method of communication was found to be a positive strategy to build trust.

Perhaps most important in the discussion about communication as a trust builder was the concept of "equitable communication" (Crump, 2011, p. 113). Superintendents need to communicate to all board members the same information, at the same time and in a consistent manner, whether the information was considered to be good or bad (Rohrbach, 2016). Full and complete transparency of communication, Rohrbach (2016) declared, is desired by board members and is what exemplary superintendents do consistently. Communications with the board are an opportunity for a superintendent to earn trust by demonstrating candor, consistency, and competence. Researchers agree that honest, open, and consistent communication is a key to establishing trust with a school board and helping students succeed academically (Ament, 2014; DuFour & Marzano,

2011; McCann, 2012). This honest, open, and consistent communication allows superintendents to build strong relationships with board members by demonstrating transparency, clarity, interdependence, and respect, which is what each superintendent and school board need to be successful (White et al., 2016).

**Relationships and Trust**

It is imperative for superintendents to establish relationships or a connection with board members, argued Crump (2011), to become familiar with their strengths and history. Spending time in developing these personal and professional relationships with board members will smooth the daily governance activities and becomes essential when controversial issues arise (Crump, 2011). To help students achieve academic success, superintendents must become experts at establishing trusting relationships with their school boards (Ripley et al., 2013). But superintendents must also develop trusting relationships with their central office staff, principals, teachers, classified staff, and all the stakeholder groups that interact with the board and employees (Anderson, 2017; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hatchel, 2012; Oliver & Sloan, 2013). It would be prudent here to look at the research on how personal relationships are forged and maintained.

Gottman's (2011) work on building trust in relationships melds seamlessly with S. R. Covey's (2011) work on synergistic negotiations. However, Gottman (2011) studied couples' relationships for multiple decades and his findings on relationships were much more extensive. The reader can glean from his findings how superintendents can build personal relationships with the myriad people that the superintendent serves.

Knowing the other person's world including their hopes and aspirations is the foundational base for Gottman et al.'s (2017) construct, "The Sound Relationship House" (pp. 440-444; see Figure 1). This means that superintendents must be accessible enough to others that they can take time to ask questions and listen to the hopes of others as well as their personal information and stories that make them who they are (Gottman, 2011; White et al., 2016). The next step is for the superintendent to show vulnerability by demonstrating concern and an open appreciation for the other person (Gottman, 2011; F. Meyer, Le Fevre, & Robinson, 2017; Weisman, 2016). Demonstrating concern requires that the superintendent develop the habit of turning toward others rather than the old-fashioned practice of retreating behind multiple layers of bureaucracy to turn away from others (Anderson, 2017; Gottman, 2011). Superintendents must always maintain a positive perspective regarding the board members, the board's goals, and all the other personnel with whom the superintendent interacts (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Gottman et al., 2017; Smollan, 2013). Managing conflict is a necessary career skill for superintendents, and it begins as things usually do, with listening and asking clarifying questions (Dawson & Quinn, 2017; White et al., 2016).

The top of the sound relationship house is where people create shared meaning through collaboration, discussion, and listening (Gottman et al., 2017). According to Gottman et al. (2017), they also help make the other's life dreams come true, which is fascinating, isn't it? It seems to imply that superintendents are in the business of making parents, students, and the community's life dreams come true. This should not surprise the reader; after all, "trust places confidence in the ability of others to care for something important to the trustor" (Thompson & Holt, 2016, p. 2). What greater trust is there than

placing the welfare of your children into the hands of another? In terms of relationships and trust, it is important for superintendents and board members alike to remember that "the board-superintendent relationship is like a marriage: it won't work if you don't work at it" (Eadie, 2012, p. 39). Foundational to this relationship is the establishment and maintenance of trust (Anderson, 2017; Crump, 2011).

**Trust Between Superintendents and School Boards**

To work on this most important relationship between board members and the superintendent with the result of successfully helping students achieve academic success, superintendents must become experts at establishing trust with their school boards, stakeholders, and communities (Ripley et al., 2013). Superintendents need to be perceived as leaders who are sincere, candid, capable, dependable, compassionate, and caring (Ripley et al., 2013). Superintendents, as educational leaders, must also be perceived as having strong collaboration skills that they use to move the organization forward (Tschannen-Moran, 1998). Only then will the board and the community trust the superintendent and move forward with her or him in creating an exemplary school district.

One of the first skills necessary for the superintendent to establish trust is to be perceived as competent with the right types of education and administrative experiences (Hoffert, 2015). To demonstrate competence, superintendents must also master communication in order to hear, organize, and operationalize the interests of the many stakeholders they interact with, focusing them all on the goals the board and community have set forth and leading all in a common goal-centered direction (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). Exemplary superintendents and school boards need to be consistent

over time, meaning that their goals and policies orient all to move in the same direction (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). All of the district's actions, such as hiring, the use of resources, and monitoring of results need to align with the goals (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). This consistency of purpose also leads to longer superintendent and school board tenure (Hoffert, 2015). The longer the tenure of the district leadership, superintendent, and school board, the greater the students' academic achievement, which is why the board members were elected in the first place (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). However, this is just the beginning of developing trust.

Next, the superintendent must layer in the relational aspects of trust to enhance the district's ability to grow trust (Weisman, 2016). Like successful airline pilots who consistently survive chaotic situations, superintendents must demonstrate candor, always modeling transparency and honesty so that coworkers, in turn, give them mission-critical information in all circumstances (Crump, 2011; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Perego, 2017). Superintendents must also show concern for the health, happiness, and welfare of their employees and board members (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Scherz, 2013). This personal regard for others, whether they agree with the superintendent or not, over time, develops interpersonal trust (Christiansen Swain, 2008). Putting all of these traits together, competence, consistency, candor, and concern help the superintendent develop a connection with the school board (Bowers, 2017; Weisman, 2016).

It is important that superintendents establish a connection or relationships with the board members, becoming familiar with their personal strengths and history, including the names of family members (Crump, 2011). Spending time in establishing these personal and professional connections with board members will smooth the daily

governance activities and becomes essential when controversial issues arise (Bowers, 2017). Exemplary superintendents create nonpoliticized opportunities to personally connect with board members and build trust one personal interaction at a time (Bowers, 2017). In terms of building and maintaining trust between superintendents and school board members, truly "relationships are everything" (White et al., 2016, p. 14).

## How Exemplary School Board Members Work Together

Not only is it important for board members to build relationships with the superintendent, it is essential for them to build relationships with each other (Bowers, 2017). This requires that they know what their role is and how they are supposed to accomplish it (CSBA, 2016b; NSBA, 2018; G. Weiss et al., 2015). There are many organizations, such as the NSBA and the CSBA, that board members can use to learn their roles and how to fill them. Board members can go to these scheduled role and governance trainings at multiple locations, or they can hire governance consultants to come work with the board on their specific issues (CSBA, 2016a). It is important to highlight how many researchers and board organizations point out the importance of this training leading the researcher and hopefully the reader to understand that this is not a skill set one is born with, one has to learn it, preferably with the other governance team members (CSBA, 2016b; Diem et al., 2015; NSBA, 2018; G. Weiss et al., 2015).

Once an understanding of their roles has been achieved, board members need to learn how to work collaboratively with each other and the superintendent on making their governance decisions (Heiligenthal, 2015). As Wright and Harris (2010) pointed out, this is especially true for those board members who serve in diverse school districts, where there are racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic disparities regarding student performance.

When faced with these kinds of challenging issues, exemplary board members serve on committees, listen to the community and other stakeholder groups, and practice those collaborative governance skills they have learned (Hackett, 2015).

## Gap in the Research

The literature shows that there is historical interest in trust and how trust-enhancing positive relationships are developed and maintained. The more recent research about trust and leadership focuses on business and government. There is limited research on how superintendents establish and maintain trust with their school boards or between their board members. Research conducted by NSBA (2018) and CSBA (2016a, 2016b) provides firm direction to the superintendent and board members as to how they should work as a governance team, but both say little about trust. This study attempts to fill that gap in what is known about trust between the superintendent and school board members and between school board members themselves.

## Summary

The world's citizens are living in times of an extreme crisis of trust (Edelman, 2017). While trust disasters occur periodically throughout the world's history, it is currently so bad that it is hard for the U.S. general public to determine who to trust in national or international affairs (DeYoung, 2018). This trust distress extends to education also, with two thirds of Americans not trusting their local school districts (Newport, 2017). An examination of the history of trust uncovered the influential roles of competence and relationships when researchers discussed trust in regard to Aristotle, Washington, and Lincoln (Coutu, 2009; Lipset, 1999; Mullis, 2010).

Examination of these three renowned philosophical and national leaders led to an analysis of leadership and trust. Each of the different leadership theories either required trust, as in the great man leadership theory, or engendered trust, as in the contingency, transactional, and transformational leadership theories (Bass, 1985; Campbell, 2015; Dziak, 2017; Fiedler, 1972b). Social capital and trust theory were focused on establishing and actualizing relationships and connections to utilize trust (Bourdieu, 1986; S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 1995; Putnam, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Weisman (2016) introduced The Values Institute theoretical framework of trust along with his pyramid of trust, which consists of five domains, "Competence, Consistency, Concern, Candor and Connection" (p. 139). Competence and concern are considered skill-based domains of trust and are the foundation of the pyramid of trust (Weisman, 2016). Concern and candor are relational domains of trust and deepen the skill-based domains of trust upon which they rest (Weisman, 2016). The apex of the trust pyramid is connection, and after examining numerous researchers on trust, Weisman was among the few researchers who argued that connection in and of itself is one of the key domains of trust.

The remainder of Chapter II provided a review of the research literature regarding how exemplary superintendents and school boards work together. School boards are typically the smallest and most local form of democratic governance (Finn et al., 2017). As such they are charged with almost legislative oversight of school districts (Kowalski et al., 2010). However, they are usually composed of citizens who have little previous knowledge of running an educational system and superintendents need to plan training to

help them learn their roles and how to govern (CSBA, 2016a, 2016b; NSBA, 2018). Researchers agreed that consistent and transparent communication was a key to successfully running a school district and building trust between the superintendent and the school board members (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006). Consistent and honest communication also fostered strong connection or relationships between the superintendent and board members (Gottman, 2011; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Rohrbach, 2016). Strengthening connection or relationships is a key factor, some researchers would say the key factor, in building bonds of trust between superintendents and board members (Bowers, 2017; Crump, 2011; Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Scherz, 2013; White et al., 2016). The significance of this study is that it uncovers the strategies superintendents use to build and maintain trust with and between board members.

# CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

## Overview

The abysmal status of trust in the world today directly affects those in the field of education (Edelman, 2017; Kowalski, 2013). Trust between the superintendent and the school board needs constant nurturing and reinforcement as witnessed by the destruction of trust in numerous school districts ("Editorial: Not the Public's Business," 2016; "McAlester Superintendent Fired Amid Spending Allegations," 2016; Wilhelm, 2017). More importantly, the nature of the trust relationship between the superintendent and board and between board members determines the culture and success of the school district (Anderson, 2017; Crump, 2011; McCann, 2012). When one considers how many individuals are affected by the nature of this trust relationship, the need for a pragmatic approach to uncovering those strategies and habits that exemplary superintendents use to build trust becomes absolutely clear.

Chapter III outlines the methodology used in this study to identify the strategies that exemplary superintendents use to build trust. Specifically, it focuses on those strategies employed by suburban superintendents. The study examined how these superintendents build trust with their board members and between their board members. This chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions studied as well as the research design that was used to answer the research questions. The section describes the population, target population, and how the research sample was determined. There follows a thorough description of the research instruments used and how the data were collected and organized. The chapter then describes in-depth how the data were analyzed. The limitations of the study are discussed including a description of the

procedures to protect the human research subjects who volunteered to participate in this study. The chapter ends with an overall summary of the methodology that was used in this study.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust between school board members.

## Research Questions

1. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

## Research Design

A mixed-methods study is a powerful way of combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods in one study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The combination of two different investigative techniques improves triangulation. This study combined two different types of triangulation: data triangulation and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation uses multiple sources of data for a study (Patton, 2015). This study provided both quantitative data and qualitative data to answer the research questions. Methodological triangulation employs several methods to examine a single problem (Patton, 2015). This study used two methods to obtain data: surveys to collect the quantitative data and in-person interviews to capture the qualitative data.

### Quantitative Research

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the mixed-methods approach allows researchers to make explicit the implicit theories that guide research studies. This mixed-methods study utilized The Values Institute theoretical framework and the literature review as a guiding conceptual perspective. With the guidance and input of faculty and peer researchers from Brandman University, a new survey, the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey (see Appendix A) was constructed, still based on The Values Institute framework and the literature review but more specific to discovering and describing those strategies suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies to building trust with and between their board members.

### Qualitative Research

The Values Institute framework and the literature review also guided the formation of the interview questions used for the qualitative part of this study. Creswell

and Creswell (2018) contended that in an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, the qualitative portion of the study further expands on and explains the quantitative results gathered previously. The peer researcher group researched and generated two questions for each one of the five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. There were numerous construction and review sessions with peer researchers and faculty advisors. After much discussion, analysis, and revision, the interview questions were approved by the peer researchers and faculty advisors.

**Method Rationale**

This study specifically used an "explanatory sequential mixed methods design" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 221). This is one of the three core mixed-methods approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The explanatory strategy first gathers and examines quantitative data and then gathers and examines qualitative data (Creswell, 2003). The purpose of this strategy is to use qualitative findings to aid in the explanation and interpretation of the quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach helps generate a more complete and thorough understanding of the human phenomena being studied, which in the case of this study is the building of trust between superintendents and board members and between board members (Patton, 2015). The main weakness of the explanatory approach is the amount of time spent in data collection with the two separate data collection phases (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2015).

To successfully fulfill the purpose of this study it was necessary to gather information from superintendents as to the actual practices and strategies they use to build trust. The Superintendent & School Board Trust Surveys were analyzed first to bring a generalized understanding of those strategies that then were uncovered more

completely through qualitative in-person interviews. The powerful combination of both the quantitative surveys and the qualitative interviews were why the researcher chose the mixed-methods approach. The use of multiple approaches to a study can uncover a more complete and in-depth understanding of the complexities involved in human phenomena (Patton, 2015).

## Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "A population is a group of . . . individuals . . . that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). Another way to define a population is to consider it as the group from which the researcher will ultimately take the research sample (Patten, 2012). In this study, the population is suburban superintendents in the United States of America. These superintendents are the CEOs of their school districts. As such superintendents lead the vision of their districts, plan the finances, manage their district's human resources and provide accountability for instructional expertise (Kowlaski et al., 2010). Often the population, as in this study, is very large and studying all its members is prohibitive in terms of time and effort to gather the data (Patten, 2012). Besides if a researcher studied all the members of a population, the researcher would be doing a census, and it is more practical to draw a sample from the population and then generalize the results of the study to the population (Patten, 2012). In the case of this study, there are 13,709 public school districts in the United States (ProximityOne, 2018b). This means that there are 13,709 superintendents in the United States. This is a large population, and it is not feasible to study all the members of this population due to fiscal

and time constraints. Therefore the population was narrowed to identify a target population.

**Target Population**

A target population is often a smaller portion of the population that the researcher will take the sample from and wishes to generalize the results to (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012). A target population for a study is often delimited to address the various constraints that researchers face, such as time, money, and geography (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For example, the population for this study is the 13,709 public school districts in the United States, but the target population is the 1,024 school districts that are within the state of California (CDE, 2016; ProximityOne, 2018b). Additionally, this study is interested in and focuses on suburban superintendents. Within the United States in the 2014-2015 school year, 39.8% of all public elementary and secondary students learned in suburban schools, and in California, 45.9% of all public elementary and secondary students learned in suburban schools (Glander, 2016). For both the United States and California, this is the largest group of students to learn in one type of census-defined school, which also means that suburban school district superintendents serve the most students in both the United States and California (Glander, 2016). After analyzing 2017 Census data and removing county school districts and Regional Occupational Program (ROCP) districts, the target population for this study was determined to be the 317 suburban superintendents of the 317 suburban school districts in the state of California as of the 2015-2016 academic school year (ProximityOne, 2018a).

## Sample

A simple way of thinking of a sample is that it "is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested" (Patten, 2012, p. 45). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) put it a little more directly by calling a sample "the group of subjects from whom the data are collected" (p. 129). This study used a purposeful convenience sample. Purposeful sampling "selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 138). In the case of this study, the researcher purposefully sampled suburban superintendents. A convenience sample "is a nonprobability sample . . . in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience or availability" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). In this study, it was convenient for the researcher to limit the sample pool to suburban superintendents in the state of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost. In this study, suburban superintendents who were considered exemplary on building trust with and between board members were purposefully chosen for the sample based on their expertise.

In order to choose those superintendents who have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members, the thematic team used the following criteria on the target population. Each participant had to meet four of these five criteria:

1. Superintendents must have worked 3 or more years in their current district.
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA conference.
4. Superintendent showed evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships.

5. Superintendent was recommended by two retired superintendents who are members of a north/south superintendent's group.

**Sample Participant Selection Process**

Recommendations were obtained from educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Evidence of positive superintendent relationships with board members and between board members was obtained by examining documents contained on the district website, board minutes, video recordings of board meetings, newspaper articles, and social media. The data collected in the process of vetting potential participants were also reviewed with educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Based on this final review, 16 superintendents were invited to participate in the quantitative survey and were invited to volunteer for the qualitative interview.

After the approval of this study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the sample participants, identified through the process mentioned above, were contacted for participation in the quantitative electronic survey. The process for contacting these sample participants for the quantitative electronic survey was as follows:

1. A superintendent/sponsor who knew the superintendent introduced the researcher by e-mail or in person to the participant.
2. The researcher contacted the participant by phone or e-mail to explain the purpose of the study and to confirm participation in the study.
3. If the individual agreed to participate, the researcher e-mailed to the participant (a) an invitation to participate letter (see Appendix B), (b) the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix C), (c) an informed consent form

(see Appendix D) so the participant was knowledgeable about the nature of the study prior to indicating consent on the electronic survey, and (d) a link to the electronic Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey (see Appendix A).

At the end of the electronic Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey, the researcher asked participants if they were willing to volunteer for a follow-up interview. If more than five volunteered to participate in the follow-up interview, then five were to be randomly selected for the face-to-face interviews. These five participants were contacted for the qualitative face-to-face interview portion of the study in the following manner:

1. The researcher contacted the participant by phone or e-mail to reexplain the purpose of the study.
2. The researcher scheduled a 60-minute interview with each of the five exemplary suburban superintendents. Prior to the interview the researcher e-mailed to the participant (a) an invitation to participate letter (see Appendix B), (b) the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix C), (c) an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to be signed and collected at the interview, (d) an audio release form to be signed and collected at the interview (see Appendix E), and (e) a copy of the interview questions and definitions of the five domains of trust contained in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol (see Appendix F).

## Instrumentation

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to answer the research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that a mixed-methods

approach collects "both quantitative and qualitative data . . . integrating the two forms of data" (p. 4). The most important distinction for this study was Creswell and Creswell's (2018) argument "that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone" (p. 4). Thus, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data will enrich the reader's understanding of the strategies superintendents use to build trust with and between board members. An electronic survey for quantitative data collection and interview questions for qualitative data collection were both created for this study.

**Researcher's Role as an Instrument of the Study**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) pointed out that "qualitative research is interpretive research" (p. 183). Patton (2015) made the same point more directly: "In qualitative inquiry, the person conducting interviews and engaging in field observations is the instrument of the inquiry" (p. 33). This means that during the qualitative interview portion of the study, the interviewer is an instrument of the study and the interviewer's past experiences, values, skills, and background are important and may affect the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

During the data gathering and data analysis phases of this study, it was important for the researcher to honestly and accurately capture the participants' answers and reflect upon the interview processes as they took place. The researcher needed to reflect upon personal background and experiences that could have an impact upon the interpretation of the data. Honest and accurate recording of participants' answers combined with reflection upon the interview process and the researcher's possible impact on the process helped reduce bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The researcher is an

educator who has served under seven superintendents and has participated in numerous school board meetings and presented to multiple school boards. Additionally, the researcher has been an educator for 28 years and a school principal for 19 years. The researcher has witnessed superintendents who established trusting relationships with their school boards and superintendents who did not and were released. The researcher qualified for the role of interviewer by acquiring background knowledge and interviewing skill during university coursework and by successfully completing the National Institutes of Health's training course on "Protecting Human Research Participants" (see Appendix G).

**Quantitative Instrument**

The quantitative survey instrument, the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey, was influenced by a culmination of the literature review conducted by peer researchers, the knowledge of faculty advisors, and was based on The Values Institute theoretical framework regarding trust (Weisman, 2016). The Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey used in this study was a 30-question survey with six questions pertaining to each of the five domains of trust from The Values Institute framework and the research questions of this study (see Appendix D). The respondents to the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey used a 6-point Likert scale—*strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree,* and *strongly agree*—to indicate their level of agreement with the questions. The same key for the Likert scale was present for each of the 30 questions.

The thematic research team originally planned to use The Values Institute Pulse Survey that was developed for use in the business sector. A thorough analysis of the

survey indicated that it was too general and lacked the specificity to uncover the strategies superintendents perceived as most important to building trust with and between school board members. With the guidance and input of faculty and peer researchers from Brandman University, a new survey was constructed, still based on The Values Institute. The new survey using the five domains was focused on education and the work of school superintendents in building trust with and between school board members. The survey is specific to the role of superintendents as the chief executive officer and leader of the governance team, composed of board members.

The survey was constructed on the electronic survey program, SurveyMonkey (http://surveymonkey.com). The survey began with an explanation of the survey purpose and background about the thematic dissertation topic on superintendents and trust. The respondents had to read the background and informed consent and indicate that they voluntarily agreed to participate before the survey began.

**Qualitative Instrument**

The qualitative instrument created for this study, the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol, includes a series of open-ended interview questions. Patton (2015) argued that the "contribution of qualitative methods in uncovering unanticipated consequences come from the openness of inquiry; asking open-ended interview questions . . . and observing with open eyes and an open mind" (p. 11). The interview questions in this study were based on the research literature about trust and specifically on The Values Institute theoretical framework regarding trust. Weisman (2016) developed The Values Institute theoretical framework and contended that there are five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection.

The interview questions were developed in an iterative process involving peer researchers. Each set of questions developed was analyzed by peer researchers and faculty to determine if the questions successfully addressed the trust domains. After numerous iterations and with the assistance of the faculty, the 10 interview questions were chosen, two questions per domain of trust.

The researcher conducted all interviews in person, in the superintendent's natural setting. The qualitative interview began with an overview of the study including an explanation of the Research Participants Bill of Rights, obtaining the participant's signature on the informed consent form, and the audio recording release form. The researcher collected the previously stated documents and proceeded with the interview. The researcher used open-ended questions and discussion prompts identified in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Thematic Interview Protocol to engage the participants in an interactive dialogue. The open-ended questions and discussion prompts were used to elicit adequate depth to each of the questions.

**Field Testing**

The researcher implemented a field test of the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey with a practicing suburban superintendent who qualified for the study and was not included in the sample. After the superintendent completed the survey, the researcher met with the superintendent to solicit feedback about the survey using the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey Feedback Form (see Appendix H). The researcher asked the superintendent various questions about the survey designed to encourage the superintendent to give feedback. The superintendent was also given a paper copy of the survey so the superintendent could indicate those areas where there

were concerns or a lack of clarity. Each of the peer researchers also conducted a field test of the survey. The researcher and the peer researchers participated in an analysis of the feedback from each of the four participating superintendents regarding the survey statements. Based on the feedback from the participants and the peer researchers, the survey instrument was revised and approved by the faculty and the peer researchers.

The researcher and each peer researcher also conducted a field test of the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol. The field-test participant met the sample criteria. Feedback was provided by the field-test participant using the Field Test Participant Feedback Questions (see Appendix I). Feedback was also obtained from an observer trained and experienced in qualitative interviews using the Interview Feedback Reflection Questions (see Appendix J). Finally, the researcher and peer researchers participated in an analysis of the four observers' and the four field-test participants' feedback on the interview questions and the interview protocol. Based on the feedback from participants, observers, and peer researchers, the interview instrument was revised and approved by the faculty and the peer researchers.

## Validity

According to Roberts (2010), "Validity is the degree to which your instrument truly measures what it purports to measure" (p. 151). Patten (2012) agreed with Roberts (2010) and claimed that "a measure is valid to the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure and accurately performs the function(s) it is purported to perform" (p. 61). So for researchers, validity is a determination of whether or not the instruments being utilized actually measure what the researcher wants to measure. Even more

importantly, a valid instrument measures what the researcher is attempting to measure, accurately.

One of the ways that researchers can improve the validity of their instruments is to field test them (Roberts, 2010). In a mixed-methods approach it is essential to field test both the quantitative and qualitative instruments. Creswell and Creswell (2018) encouraged researchers in explanatory sequential mixed-methods studies to pay attention to the quantitative portion of the study in particular, because a lack of attention to validity in the quantitative section will negatively affect the validity of the qualitative sections also. Both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interview questions were field tested in this study.

The field testing of both the survey and the interview questions helped to improve the content validity, "The items measure the content they were intended to measure" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 153). The field testing also enhanced the construct validity; the "items measure hypothetical constructs or concepts" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 153). In the case of this study, those hypothetical constructs are Weisman's (2016) five domains of trust in the pyramid of trust. Regarding construct validity, the field-test superintendents all agreed that the instruments would uncover those strategies that current and future superintendents could use to enhance their practice of building trust with and between superintendents and board members.

Other methods that were utilized in the qualitative interview section of the study to improve validity were the use of multimethod strategies, the design of the interview questions in the participant's language, and the use of mechanical recorded data through the mechanical recording of interviews (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the mechanical

recording of the interviews yielded verbatim accounts from the participants (Patton, 2015). Finally, after the interviews were transcribed, the researcher sent the transcription to the participant for review to ensure accuracy and to enhance validity.

## Reliability

Reliability is "the consistency or repeatability of an instrument" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Roberts (2010) agreed with Creswell and Creswell and expanded the explanation of reliability stating, "Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another" (p. 151). In the case of both the quantitative and the qualitative instruments in this study, reliability means that the results from the field-test participants were consistent.

To enhance the reliability of the quantitative portion of the study, the same survey description and background information, as well as the same survey questions, were used for all participants. To enhance the reliability of the qualitative portion of the study, the same interview script and review questions were used with all five interview participants. These steps ensured that each participant had the same information prior to responding to the survey questions or answering the interview questions and that each participant was asked the same questions or responded to the same survey statements.

Intercoder agreement or interrater reliability occurs when a different, third-party individual also coded the data, and those codes and the coding of specific sections of an interview's transcripts, independently obtained, matched the researcher's codes and coding of the same specific sections (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). As a general rule of thumb, intercoder agreement is said to have been reached or displayed consistency when the researcher and the third-party coder have an agreement level of

80% or higher in their coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used a peer researcher to check the coding and ensure consistency and accuracy of themes with an agreement level of 80% or higher on one interview.

## Data Collection

Data in this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study were collected in two different ways. The quantitative data were obtained through an electronic survey and the qualitative data were obtained through face-to-face interviews. Both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview transcript data were stored in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected computer. The collection of data for this study only began once the researcher received approval from Brandman University's IRB (see Appendix K). The rights of all participants were protected throughout the study as were their information and privacy. Records of information that participants provided for the research study and any personal information provided was not linked in any way. Participants were identified as Superintendent A, Superintendent B, Superintendent C, and so forth, thus making it impossible to identify participants or any district specific information they provided for the study.

### Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data collected in this study were from the electronic survey designed and reviewed by the peer researchers and faculty advisors. The Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey is a 30-question survey using a 6-point Likert scale—*strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree*, and *strongly agree*—to indicate level of agreement with the questions. Each participant was sent the informed consent document along with the link to the survey. The participants were

required to indicate that they gave consent and were voluntarily participating in the study before they were able to respond to the survey.

### Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data collected in this study were transcriptions of face-to-face interviews as well as the electronic coding of those interviews. The interview questions on the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol were designed and reviewed by the peer researchers and faculty advisors. Prior to the interview, each participant received the informed consent document and the audio-recording release form, both of which were signed before the start of the interview. These interviews were conducted with five suburban superintendents who met the sample criteria and volunteered on the survey to participate in an interview. Each interviewer was read the printed interview directions and the same 10 open-ended interview questions. Probes for each question were used if the participant did not address the domain of trust contained within the question. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) reminded researchers that "responses can be probed, followed up, clarified, and elaborated to achieve specific, accurate responses" (p. 205). The interview was transcribed with a confidential online transcription service, and each participant was sent a copy of his or her transcript to ensure its accuracy and completeness.

## Data Analysis

This mixed-methods study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data were collected through an electronic survey and the qualitative data were obtained through face-to-face interviews. The quantitative data were acquired first,

followed by the qualitative interviews and their transcription. Upon the completion of the collection of both kinds of data, the data were analyzed to answer the research questions.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

A total of 16 surveys were sent to those suburban superintendents who met the sample selection criteria. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data obtained. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, "Descriptive statistics are used to transform a set of numbers or observations into indices that describe or characterize the data" (p. 149). When combined with graphic representations and explanations of data, descriptive statistics is the premier method of interpreting the data in quantitative research studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

There are three methods of measuring the central tendency of data in a study: mean, median, and mode (Patton, 2015). Mean is the most common and is used to describe the average of all data points, or in the case of this study, the average Likert score for all participants who completed the survey. Median is the middle most score of a data set with half the scores being greater and half the scores being smaller. The mode is the data point or score that occurs most often (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the mean along with the standard deviation was used in the quantitative analysis of data.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed all of the data from the five interviews of suburban superintendents collected during the face-to-face interviews. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described the process of organizing, reading, and reviewing data before coding them. The researcher organized the data by having a third-party, online transcription

service transcribe the recordings. The transcription was sent to the participant to allow the participant to provide any needed feedback to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the participant's responses to the interview questions. After reviewing all of the data from the interviews, the researcher reflected upon the data and looked for general themes and impressions from the data to develop a complete understanding of the meanings and patterns in the data prior to coding. The data were then formally coded using an electronic coding program, NVivo, to create frequency tables to help identify patterns and themes (Patton, 2015).

These patterns and themes from the qualitative data were reviewed in the light of the statistical findings from the survey. The patterns and themes analysis was also informed by the interrater reliability exercise done with a peer researcher to ensure consistency and accuracy of themes with an agreement level of 80% or higher on one interview. The results of this mixed-methods data analysis guided the researcher in answering the research questions specifically focusing on how the five variables or domains of trust—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—impact the strategies that suburban superintendents use to build trust with and between board members.

## Limitations

Limitations in any study are often out of the researcher's control and may impact the results of the research and affect the generalizability of the study (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). This thematic study of trust was replicated by four different peer researchers who utilized the same quantitative and qualitative instruments and methodology but focused on different types of superintendents—urban, suburban, rural

and ROCP—which supported the validity of this study's findings. There was a variety of limitations that may have affected this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study including the researcher as the instrument, geography, time, and sample size.

**Researcher as the Instrument**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher becomes one of the instruments of the study, which could negatively affect the credibility of the study (Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). The researcher of this study has been in educational leadership positions for over 20 years and has conducted hundreds of interviews for numerous purposes in an educational setting. The researcher facilitated the interviews face-to-face in an environment that was comfortable for the participant. The transcriptions of the interview were sent to the participant to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the transcriptions and to ensure the neutral and transparent representation of the participant's responses.

**Geography**

There are 13,709 public school districts in the United States (ProximityOne, 2018a). Of these, 1,024 school districts are within the state of California, and an analysis of census data shows that 317 of them are considered suburban school districts (CDE, 2016; ProximityOne, 2018a). Due to the geography of the United States, which poses both time and fiscal constraints on the researcher, the sample was narrowed to public suburban school districts within the state of California. These geographical constraints aided the researcher in conducting face-to-face interviews within a reasonable amount of time.

### Time

There were time limitations for this study as no research could be conducted until after the Brandman University IRB granted approval. As a result, data collection had to occur at the beginning of the school year before the holiday season when superintendents were not accessible due to work schedules. Superintendents are among the busiest people in education and society, and, as such, the interviews had to be restricted to no more than 60 minutes in order to respect their schedule. Additionally, the completion of the surveys and the retrieval of the superintendents' interview feedback had to be obtained before the start of their busy holiday season when they were attending numerous community and school events.

### Sample Size

The use of a purposeful convenience sample for this study—16 suburban superintendents for the survey and five suburban superintendents for the interviews, all within the geographical boundaries of California—can limit the generalizability of the results to the total population of superintendents. The sample size for the quantitative portion of this mixed-methods study was limited to at least 15 superintendents for each of the peer researchers. The sample size for the qualitative interviews was limited to five superintendents for each of the peer researchers. These sample sizes were determined and reviewed by the peer researchers and the faculty advisors.

## Summary

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. A mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to develop a more complete and thorough understanding of the complexities involved in human phenomena and the topic being

studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The study analyzed quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to answer the research questions in regard to each domain of trust in The Values Institute pyramid of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. This analysis was done in order to determine the strategies that exemplary suburban superintendents use to build trust with and between their board members.

This chapter restated the purpose statement, research questions, and research design. The chapter then discussed the population, target population, and sample, including the sample criteria. This section reviewed the instruments used in this study as well as the data collection methods and data analysis methods utilized. This methodology chapter ended with the potential limitations of the study.

This study was conducted with suburban superintendents. Another three peer researchers conducted similar studies using the same instruments and methodology with superintendents from different types of school districts as defined by the U.S. Census. Through this thematic approach, studying different target populations and samples, the goal was to identify and describe the strategies exemplary superintendents use to build trust with and between board members. With the coordinated efforts of all four peer researchers, this study may yield generalizable results regarding how superintendents use competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection to implement strategies to build trust with and between board members. Chapter IV presents the data obtained through the study, the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data, and the findings and results of the research. Following this, Chapter V contains a discussion the significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

## Overview

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study identified and described the leadership strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important to build trust with and between school board members. The quantitative section of this study surveyed suburban superintendents as to the most important strategies for building trust and allowed the researcher to give the results some numerical descriptors. The qualitative section of this study utilized interview questions to go into greater depth and expand upon the initial findings of the quantitative survey and described the strategies suburban superintendents perceive as the most important for building trust in greater detail. This chapter begins with the purpose statement, research questions, and a brief review of the methodology and data collection procedures used in this study. This is followed by a review of the population, sample, and a brief description of the demographic data of the exemplary suburban superintendents in the study. Chapter IV concludes with a presentation and analysis of the data collected and a summary of the results.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban

superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust between school board members.

## Research Questions

1. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

## Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research methodology was used to answer the research questions. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, explained Creswell and Creswell (2018), is a powerful research methodology because "the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone" (p. 4). This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to enrich the reader's understanding of the strategies suburban superintendents use to build trust with and between board members.

The quantitative portion of the study obtained electronic survey results from 16 exemplary suburban superintendents. A 17th outlier survey was discarded after consultation with peer researchers and faculty advisors because its responses were greater than three standard deviations from the mean (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The qualitative portion of the study interviewed five exemplary suburban superintendents to add depth to the survey results and more fully describe and expand both the researcher's and the reader's understanding regarding the details of the strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as trust building with and between board members. These five exemplary suburban superintendents who were interviewed volunteered for the interview at the end of the electronic survey. More than five of the exemplary suburban superintendents volunteered, so five were randomly chosen for the interview. Both the electronic survey and the interview questions for qualitative data collection were cocreated with faculty advisors and peer researchers.

## Population

A population is defined as "a group of . . . individuals . . . that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). It is the group from which the researcher will ultimately take the research sample (Patten, 2012). In this study, the population was suburban superintendents in the United States of America. These superintendents were the CEOs of their school districts. As such superintendents lead the vision of their districts, plan the finances, manage their district's human resources and provide accountability for instructional expertise (Kowlaski et al., 2010). Often the population, as in this study, is very large and it is not feasible to study all the members of the population due to fiscal

and time constraints so the population is narrowed to identify a target population. The target population for this study was narrowed to the 317 suburban superintendents of the 317 suburban school districts in the state of California as of the 2015-2016 academic school year (ProximityOne, 2018a).

## Sample

A sample "is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested" (Patten, 2012, p. 45). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) put it a little more directly by calling a sample "the group of subjects from whom the data are collected" (p. 129). This study used a purposeful convenience sample. The researcher purposefully sampled suburban superintendents and limited the sample pool to suburban superintendents in the state of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost. In this study, suburban superintendents who were considered exemplary at building trust with and between board members were chosen for the sample based on their expertise.

In order to choose those superintendents who successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members, the thematic team used the following criteria on the target population. Each participant had to meet four of these five criteria:

1. Superintendents must have worked 3 or more years in their current district.
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA conference.
4. Superintendent showed evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships.
5. Superintendent was recommended by two retired superintendents who are members of a north/south superintendent's group.

Recommendations for sample participants were obtained from educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Evidence of positive superintendent relationships with board members and between board members was obtained by examining documents contained on the district website, board minutes, video recordings of board meetings, newspaper articles, and social media. The data collected in the process of vetting potential participants were also reviewed with educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Based on this final review, 28 exemplary suburban superintendents were invited to participate in the quantitative survey and to volunteer for the qualitative interview. Of the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents who participated in the survey, eight of them volunteered to participate in an interview and five were randomly chosen for participation in the qualitative interview.

## Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data for this study were presented and analyzed by research question. The quantitative portion of the survey addressing each individual research question was presented and analyzed first. The quantitative analysis presented the mean or average of all of the scores on any particular question. The quantitative analysis also presented the standard deviation, or average distance from the mean, for all of the answers for any particular question. The smaller the standard deviation in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey, the more similar the participants' answers were to each other's. The Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey used a 6-point Likert scale with the answers *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *disagree somewhat*, *agree somewhat*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. For the purposes of this study, each possible survey answer was assigned

the following numerical values: 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*disagree somewhat*), 4 (*agree somewhat*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (*strongly agree*).

The qualitative portion of the interviews addressing each individual research question was then presented and analyzed. The qualitative interview question responses were reviewed several times to uncover themes and patterns. The interview responses were then coded using NVivo software. The codes were analyzed for commonalities and put into categories (themes) and patterns (see Figure 3). Since the questions were organized by individual domains of trust—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—the patterns for each section of questions were easily identified as the individual domains of trust. The categories (themes) for each domain of trust were organized according to the responses of the exemplary suburban superintendent participants. As the reader will discover in the presentation and analysis of data, many of

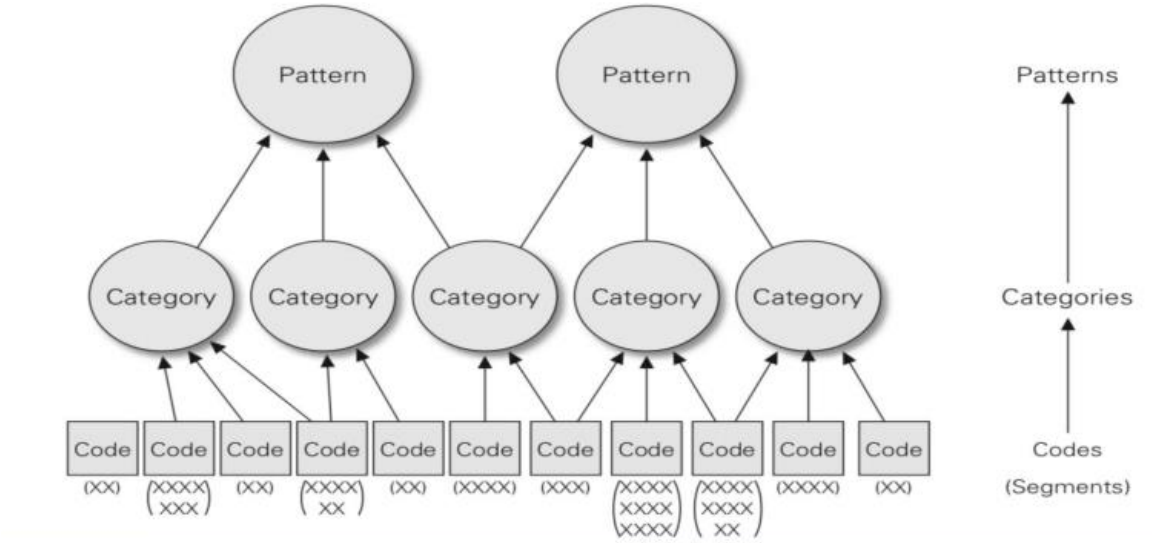


*Figure 3.* Building patterns of meaning. From *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry,* by J. McMillan and S. Schumacher, p. 378 (New York, NY: Pearson, 2010).

these categories (themes) are dispersed across multiple domains of trust. Even more interesting, the responses of the exemplary suburban superintendent interview participants drew connections between the domains of trust.

## Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability or intercoder agreement is a method of demonstrating "good qualitative reliability" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 202). Interrater reliability occurs when the researcher and a third-party coder have an agreement level of 80% or higher in their coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). For the purposes of this study, a peer researcher was selected to check the coding on one interview to ensure consistency and accuracy of themes. The peer researcher achieved an agreement level of higher than 80% in the coding of the interview as compared to the coding results of the researcher. The peer researcher identified data themes and patterns and reached conclusions closely related to those identified by the researcher.

## Research Question 1

*What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?* For the purpose of this study, competence was defined as the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). It is in this context that both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

**Quantitative data presentation and analysis.** In the portion of the survey dealing with competence, the statement with the highest agreement scoring was, "I lead vision setting and manage the strategic actions of the school district." This statement had

a mean of 5.69, indicating that the average response was closer to *strongly agree* (see Table 1). This question also had the smallest standard deviation of the competence questions, 0.48. This indicated that the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents who completed the survey gave mostly similar responses indicating a high level of agreement with the statement that they lead vision setting and strategic actions for their school districts. Thus, leading vision setting activities and strategic planning activities was perceived by suburban superintendents as one of the most important strategies for building trust with school board members. The exemplary suburban superintendents' perceptions about the importance of vision setting and strategic actions were supported by both the California School Boards Association (CSBA, 2013, 2016b) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2018).

The next two statements where exemplary suburban superintendents indicated the highest level of agreement with the statement also had the next smallest standard deviation, indicating that their responses were similar. These two statements were, "I work with the board members to achieve the district's goals" and "I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow," both of which had a mean of 5.50 and a standard deviation of 0.63. The statement, "I promote collaborative decision making with the governance team," had the next highest mean of 5.38 but also the second highest standard deviation of 0.81 in the area of competence. This indicates that while there was still strong agreement with the statement, the exemplary suburban superintendents' answers were slightly less similar. The statement, "I promote the capability of school board members," had a mean of 5.25 but also had the highest standard deviation in this portion of the survey with 0.86, indicating strong agreement but even less similarity in their

Table 1

*Survey Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Competence*

| Competence | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Disagree somewhat | | Agree somewhat | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *M* | *SD* |
| I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to students, staff, and community. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 3 | 18.75% | 7 | 43.75% | 6 | 37.50% | 5.19 | 0.75 |
| I work with the board members to achieve the district's goals. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 1 | 6.25% | 6 | 37.50% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.50 | 0.63 |
| I promote the capability of school board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 6.25% | 1 | 6.25% | 7 | 43.75% | 7 | 43.75% | 5.25 | 0.86 |
| I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 1 | 6.25% | 6 | 37.50% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.50 | 0.63 |
| I promote collaborative decision making with the governance team. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 3 | 18.75% | 4 | 25.00% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.38 | 0.81 |
| I lead vision setting and manage the strategic actions of the school district. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% | 5 | 31.25% | 11 | 68.75% | 5.69 | 0.48 |

answers. Finally the statement, "I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to students, staff, and community," had a mean of 5.19 and a standard deviation of 0.75.

It is understandable that the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents had a high degree of agreement with the six statements focused on the domain of competence and also had a high level of similarity in their responses to all six questions. It is interesting to note that all 16 exemplary suburban superintendents indicated that in the domain of competence, the most important trust-building aspects of their jobs were to lead the vision and strategic actions of the district and work with board members to achieve the district's vision and goals. Ripley et al. (2013) found that a superintendent's ability to lead multiple stakeholder groups, including the board of education in establishing and subsequently supporting district goals, builds trust with all stakeholders, including board members.

**Qualitative data presentation and analysis.** The category that had the most coded responses for the trust domain of competence was reliable and dependable leadership (see Table 2). The willingness and ability to make hard decisions and lead got the most coded responses. Superintendents C and D both noted that they had to close a school. Superintendent C recounted actions he had taken to generate board trust: "I had gone out, and I had met with people, and I'd spent hours doing community listening sessions." Superintendent D summarized the experience:

> When they see that you have a plan to lead them through that difficult time they appreciate that as well, and it demonstrates, I think that competence, they have

trust and faith in you that they feel very comfortable with you as superintendent, helping to get them through that difficult time.

Table 2

*Interview Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Competence*

| Pattern | Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Competence | Reliable & dependable leadership | Total for all credibility codes | **24** |
| | | Willing & able to make a hard decision & lead | 10 |
| | | Ability to run community meetings | 4 |
| | | Willing to do research | 3 |
| | | Ability to hire the right people | 3 |
| | | Superintendent's experience | 2 |
| | | Ability to oversee budgets | 1 |
| | | Keep cool, don't overreact | 1 |
| | Governance | Total for all governance codes | **20** |
| | | Keep board members involved & engaged | 6 |
| | | Strategic planning | 3 |
| | | Shared governance experiences | 3 |
| | | Know each other's roles | 2 |
| | | Board retreats | 2 |
| | | Request board volunteers for projects | 2 |
| | | Norms/protocols/governance handbook | 1 |
| | | Slow down when board feels rushed | 1 |
| | Communication | Total for all communication codes | **6** |
| | | Keep board informed | 3 |
| | | Transparency | 2 |
| | | Communication | 1 |
| | Relationships | Total for all relationship codes | **1** |
| | | Work to maintain the relationship | 1 |

Superintendent A simply stated, it's "just the ability to make a decision and lead."

In the category of governance, keeping board members involved and engaged had the most coded responses. Superintendent A noted, "Keeping them involved, keeping them engaged helps them to have more buy-in, when things come before them." Superintendent D observed, "If we're working on the LCAP or a meeting with DELAC

or other committees, usually they have an open invite to come participate with those different committees."

Most interesting to the researcher were the exemplary suburban superintendents' responses in the strategy code of norms/protocols/governance handbook. While the superintendents only coded this response once under competence, they referred back to this idea 18 times in four of the five domains of trust. Superintendent E stated, "At these retreats you can say, 'How do we talk to each other when parents call me? What do I do with that?' So you're norming one another." Developing norms, protocols, and governance handbooks is supported by both CSBA (2016b) and NSBA (2018) as a major functional skill for a school board to operate effectively as a local governance organization.

The category of communication came up in all five domains of trust. In the domain of competence, suburban superintendents in this study, as well as researchers in other studies, noted the importance of communicating with and keeping the board informed (Crump, 2011; Jimenez, 2013; Rohrbach, 2016; J. Weiss, 2018). When it came to issues before the board, Superintendent D pointed out, "You want to make sure that they've got all the information on both sides." When those issues were controversial or emotionally laden, Superintendent E simply stated, "It's keeping them informed. Be calm. You'll get through it. We'll be okay."

**Strategy summary.** The data for Research Question 1 addressed the trust domain of competence. An analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed what exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies for building trust with and between school board members through competence. The most

important strategies were leading vision setting and managing strategic actions, being willing and able to make hard decisions and lead, keeping board members involved and engaged, and keeping the board informed.

**Research Question 2**

*What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?* For the purposes of this study, consistency was defined as the confidence that a person's pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable, and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed in this context.

**Quantitative data presentation and analysis.** In the portion of the survey dealing with consistency, the statement with the highest agreement scoring was, "I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities." This statement had a mean of 5.88 and a standard deviation of 0.34 (see Table 3). This indicates that the responses were mostly *strongly agree* and that the 16 exemplary superintendents were remarkably similar in the responses they gave. Thus consistently behaving in the manner expected was perceived by exemplary suburban superintendents as one of the most important strategies for building trust with school board members. In fact, believing that another will behave in the manner expected is one of the defining conditions for trust (Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 1995).

Next in importance were, "I keep my commitments to board members" and "I make commitments to board members I can keep." These two statements had means of 5.81 and 5.75 respectively. Their standard deviations were 0.40 and 0.45 respectively,

Table 3

*Survey Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Consistency*

| Consistency | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Disagree somewhat | | Agree somewhat | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *M* | *SD* |
| I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 2 | 12.50% | 14 | 87.50% | 5.88 | 0.34 |
| I create an environment where board members have opportunity to accomplish their goals and responsibilities. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 6 | 37.50% | 8 | 50.00% | 5.38 | 0.72 |
| I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 5 | 31.25% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.44 | 0.73 |
| I make commitments to board members I can keep. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 4 | 25.00% | 12 | 75.00% | 5.75 | 0.45 |
| I keep my commitments to board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 3 | 18.75% | 13 | 81.25% | 5.81 | 0.40 |
| I hold myself and board members accountable for actions. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 18.75% | 8 | 50.00% | 5 | 31.25% | 5.13 | 0.72 |

showing that most of the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents responded similarly with strong agreement that making and keeping commitments to school board members were important strategies to build trust with them. White et al. (2016) argued that keeping commitments was one of 10 strategies for building trust.

The statement, "I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team," had a mean of 5.44 and a standard deviation of 0.73, indicating that the exemplary suburban superintendents' responses were closer to *agree* than *strongly agree* and were less similar to each other in their responses based on the larger standard deviation. In fact, this response had the most variance of responses in the section of the survey addressing consistency. "I create an environment where board members have opportunity to accomplish their goals and responsibilities" had a mean of 5.38 and a standard deviation of 0.72. "I hold myself and board members accountable for actions" had a mean of 5.13 and a standard deviation of 0.72. The means of these last two statements were closer to *agree* than *strongly agree* and also showed a larger variance in the suburban superintendents' responses in terms of the standard deviation.

**Qualitative data presentation and analysis.** The category that had the most coded responses for the trust domain of consistency was communication (see Table 4). Keeping the board informed got the most coded responses. When telling a story about a district crisis, Superintendent B remarked, "I called each individual board member. It took me 2 days. . . . Seven calls telling the same story, answering the questions. That's crisis. When that happens, you talk to them." When talking about emotionally charged issues, Superintendent D shared,

Making sure when the board's going to have to make extremely difficult decisions that are highly charged emotionally, and you know there's going to be people calling and e-mailing, and coming to board meetings, and everything else, that more than ever you want to make sure the board has the information that they need to make decisions.

Table 4

*Interview Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Consistency*

| Pattern | Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Consistency | Communication | Total for all communication codes | **31** |
| | | Keep board informed | 10 |
| | | Be responsive | 7 |
| | | Emergency communications—clear, concise & timely | 3 |
| | | Give board members and staff talking points | 3 |
| | | Phone calls | 2 |
| | | Texts | 1 |
| | | Listen | 1 |
| | | Honesty & transparency | 1 |
| | | Honest & hard courageous conversations | 1 |
| | | Designate a district spokesperson | 1 |
| | | Be available | 1 |
| | Governance | Total for all governance codes | **21** |
| | | Norms/protocols/governance handbook | 5 |
| | | Preplan emergency procedures | 5 |
| | | Know each other's roles | 4 |
| | | Shared governance experiences | 3 |
| | | Have a team mentality | 1 |
| | | Get legal support when needed | 1 |
| | | Get information quickly to the community | 1 |
| | | Follow norms & protocols | 1 |
| | Reliable & dependable leadership | Total for all credibility codes | **20** |
| | | Reliable & dependable | 8 |
| | | Willing & able to make a hard decision & lead | 4 |
| | | Mean what you say and say what you mean | 2 |
| | | Be present (meetings, district functions & community functions) | 2 |
| | | Help board regroup when needed | 2 |
| | | Keep board focused on mission | 1 |
| | | Be calm, cool & collected | 1 |
| | None | Have/hire a consultant/mentor | 1 |

In terms of the code be responsive, Superintendent E declared, "Just keep the communication channel open and flowing at all times. Be responsive." Later Superintendent E added, "At our board retreat we talked about that too . . . we don't want all the little trivial things, so we just kind of talked about what are the items that you [board members] want to know." Thus talking with board members and discovering what the board wants to know so they can be kept informed is a strategy for building trust (Anderson, 2017).

In the category of governance, norms/protocols/governance handbook was noted as an important strategy to build trust with and between school board members. Superintendent A recalled the importance of

> making sure that the board understands in a crisis situation that typically the superintendent is a spokesperson for the board, and maybe the board president, that in the protocols and the handbook, you designate who that is and what that looks like.

Superintendent E related,

> I think it's our norms that we set in that board retreat at the beginning of the year. Our agreements. How do we want to talk to one another? How do we want to make decisions? How do you want us to talk to you, [superintendent]? We're real clear on how we want to do that, and we put it in writing, like norms, and then just keep bringing it up as we go through the course of the year.

Also in the category of governance, planning ahead for emergency situations was seen as a consistency strategy for developing trust. Superintendent A remarked on the importance of "just being clear with them on what to say, who's saying it, and making

sure that you're just all together on that." Superintendent E stated succinctly, "Planning ahead of time helps you be consistent in that moment of crisis."

In the category of reliable and dependable leadership, Superintendent D said it best:

> I think from a relationship standpoint with the board, and that trust piece, it becomes easier to trust someone when you know what to expect from them . . . when you [school board] know that they [superintendent] have that consistent behavior, and that they are reliable, and they are dependable.

Superintendent C went further and noted that consistency builds between board members and with the community also: "I've got a board that is very visible out there in the community at schools, and that shows to the community that they're dependable and reliable." Taken together, these two statements indicate that visibility combined with actions that are expected lead to trust because of the superintendent's or school board member's consistency (Anderson, 2017; Mayer et al., 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Strategy summary.** Research Question 2 addressed the trust domain of consistency. An analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed what exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies for building trust with and between school board members through consistency. Strategies that demonstrated consistency were behaving in a manner consistent with the superintendent's roles and responsibilities, keeping commitments to board members, talking with board members and discovering what the board wants to know so they can be kept informed, developing norms, protocols, and a governance handbook, and

visibility combined with actions that are expected produce a sense of reliability, dependability, and consistency.

**Research Question 3**

*What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?* For the purposes of this study, concern was defined as the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability and support and motivate and care for each other (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010a; S. M. R. Covey & Merrill, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016). Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using this frame of reference.

**Quantitative data presentation and analysis.** In the portion of the survey dealing with concern, there were two statements with the highest agreement: "I treat each board member positively and with respect" and "I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member." Both of these statements had a mean of 5.88 and a standard deviation of 0.34 (see Table 5). This indicates that the responses were mostly *strongly agree* and that the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents were remarkably similar in the responses they gave. Thus treating and demonstrating respect for each board member is perceived by exemplary suburban superintendents as one of the most important strategies for building trust with school board members. Ripley et al. (2013) agreed that generating mutual respect is important in building trust between a superintendent and the school board.

Table 5

*Survey Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Concern*

| Concern | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Disagree somewhat | | Agree somewhat | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *M* | *SD* |
| I take time to meet personally with each board member to understand their concerns. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 3 | 18.75% | 11 | 68.75% | 5.56 | 0.73 |
| I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 18.75% | 5 | 31.25% | 6 | 37.50% | 2 | 12.50% | 4.44 | 0.96 |
| I am a good listener. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 6 | 37.50% | 8 | 50.00% | 5.38 | 0.72 |
| I treat each board member positively and with respect. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 2 | 12.50% | 14 | 87.50% | 5.88 | 0.34 |
| I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 6 | 37.50% | 10 | 62.50% | 5.63 | 0.50 |
| I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 2 | 12.50% | 14 | 87.50% | 5.88 | 0.34 |

The statement, "I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members," had a mean of 5.63 and a standard deviation of 0.50. The statement, "I take time to meet personally with each board member to understand their concerns," had a mean of 5.56 and a standard deviation of 0.73. The means for both of these statements were closer to *strongly agree* than *agree*. The statement, "I am a good listener," had a mean of 5.38 and a standard deviation of 0.72.

Interestingly, the statement, "I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance," was the first statement to have a mean that did not indicate *strongly agree* or *agree*. With a mean of 4.44, the exemplary suburban superintendents averaged a response of *agree somewhat*. This response had the highest standard deviation yet, 0.96, indicating greater variance in their answers, which were thus far fairly similar. It would appear that the exemplary suburban superintendents did not find an appropriate work-life balance to be an important strategy for building trust with school board members.

**Qualitative data presentation and analysis.** The category that had the most coded responses for the trust domain of concern was, to the researcher's surprise, governance (see Table 6). While norms/protocols/governance was again a highly coded response, making sure each board member has a voice received the most responses in the governance category. Superintendent D summarized this point, saying a superintendent's job is

> making sure each board member feels like they have a voice. It's just like anything else as leaders where you might be facilitating a meeting. Sometimes the most important thing or idea may come out of the person who is not saying anything. As a leader, as a member of that governance team, as a superintendent

sometimes you might need to say, “Hey [school board member], what are your thoughts on this?”

Table 6

*Interview Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Concern*

| Pattern | Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Concern | Governance | Total for all governance codes | **42** |
| | | Make sure each board member has a voice | 5 |
| | | Norms/protocols/governance handbook | 4 |
| | | Publicly give board members credit | 4 |
| | | Behind the scene, superintendent indirectly intervenes with board member conflict | 4 |
| | | Board president addresses board issues | 3 |
| | | Have board members participate in committees/situations | 3 |
| | | Governance retreats | 3 |
| | | Ask clarifying questions | 2 |
| | | Board self-evaluations | 2 |
| | | Create checkpoints to prevent failure | 2 |
| | | CSBA conference | 2 |
| | | Front-load issues | 2 |
| | | Help board regroup after failures | 2 |
| | | Create collaborative environment | 1 |
| | | CSBA masters in governance | 1 |
| | | Hold board study sessions | 1 |
| | | New board training | 1 |
| | Relationships | Total for all relationship codes | **22** |
| | | Take an interest in board member’s lives | 12 |
| | | One-on-one meetings | 4 |
| | | Personal touches | 4 |
| | | Let the board know who you are | 1 |
| | | Treat board members the same | 1 |
| | Communication | Total for all communication codes | **14** |
| | | Honest, open & courageous conversations | 7 |
| | | Listen | 4 |
| | | Transparency | 1 |
| | | Equally inform all board members | 1 |
| | | Respond quickly to all board requests for information | 1 |
| | Reliable & dependable leadership | Total for all credibility codes | **6** |
| | | Apologize & own your mistakes | 2 |
| | | Forgive others—don’t hold grudges | 2 |
| | | Model nondefensiveness | 2 |

Superintendent E agreed, “It comes back to watching how people communicate, and not letting others dominate.” Ensuring that each school board member has a voice and is heard is perceived by exemplary suburban superintendents as an important strategy to developing trust with school board members. This solicitation of others’ perspectives is a sign of openness and builds trust (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

It was interesting to note that publicly giving board members credit was an important strategy to developing trust with board members. Superintendent A shared, “I always express their value to the larger community. Whenever there’s large community meetings, back to school, open house, or wherever I speak and there’s board members present, I always give them so much credit for leading our district with vision and insight.” Superintendent E remarked, “We all brag about, or all point out, wonderful things that each of them [school board members] have done, so we’re sort of celebrating one another all the time.”

In the category of relationships, taking an interest in board members’ lives was considered an important strategy for developing trust. Superintendent D shared,

> I think if you spend the time to genuinely get to know them, and care about them, that goes a long way in building that trust, and building that relationship, not just as people, but again working together as a team that really makes you stronger at how you work together, and come from that place of trust and belief in someone else, because you know they’re not saying or doing something just because they have to, but that they really care about how you feel as a person or what you might be dealing with.

Superintendent C said, “I am attentive to what is going on outside of just work. And I actually do care, you know, I’m not just saying that for that reason.” Superintendent E succinctly put it, you have to “demonstrate some empathy.” In all 12 responses about taking an interest in board members’ lives, exemplary suburban superintendents declared that the interactions have to be authentic; they can’t be forced or fake. Authenticity enhances relationship building and “relational trust” (Ripley et al., 2013, p. 45).

In the category of communication, having honest, open, and courageous conversations was noted as an important strategy in building trust. In regard to difficult situations that arise in board meetings, Superintendent A said, “That’s where that honest, open communication comes in too”; and Superintendent B said, “Again, I was honest and I held him accountable.” In regard to violations of board norms, Superintendent C said, “I’m going to have a conversation with them. . . . There’s enough trust there, where they know I’m coming to them out of the best intentions.” Superintendent D responded, “I think that gets back to having that honest conversation with the board. Usually that honest conversation is going to get you back on track as a governance team, but you can’t ignore it. You have to address it.” Superintendent E noted, “It comes back to watching how people communicate, and not letting others dominate.” Each and every one of the five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed believed that holding honest, open, and courageous conversations with board members was a trust builder, especially when the board members knew that the superintendent’s intentions were good, honorable, and governance team centered. Mayer et al. (1995) and Tschannen-Moran (2014) termed this open and honorable ability to hold courageous conversations as benevolence.

**Strategy summary.** Research Question 3 addressed the trust domain of concern. An analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed what exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies for building trust with and between school board members through concern. The most important strategies were treating each board member positively and with respect; demonstrating respect and concern for each board member; making sure each board member has a voice; giving board members credit; developing norms, protocols, and a governance handbook; taking an interest in board members' lives; and having honest, open and courageous conversations.

**Research Question 4**

*What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?* For the purpose of this study, candor was defined as communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). It is with this understanding that both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

**Quantitative data presentation and analysis.** In the portion of the survey dealing with candor, the statement with the highest agreement average was, "I engage board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district." This statement had a mean of 5.75 and a standard deviation of 0.45 (see Table 7). This indicates that the responses were mostly *strongly agree* and that the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents were very similar in their responses. Similar to leading vision setting in the portion of the survey regarding competence, discussions with board

Table 7

*Survey Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Candor*

| Candor | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Disagree somewhat | | Agree somewhat | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *M* | *SD* |
| I engage in open communication with all board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 6.25% | 5 | 31.25% | 10 | 62.50% | 5.56 | 0.63 |
| I share openly with board members when things are going wrong. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 6.25% | 3 | 18.75% | 12 | 75.00% | 5.69 | 0.60 |
| I engage board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 4 | 25.00% | 12 | 75.00% | 5.75 | 0.45 |
| I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 5 | 31.25% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.44 | 0.73 |
| I am open, authentic, and straightforward with all board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 8 | 50.00% | 8 | 50.00% | 5.50 | 0.52 |
| I take on issues head on, even the “undiscussables.” | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 12.50% | 6 | 37.50% | 8 | 50.00% | 5.38 | 0.72 |

members about the vision and direction of the district was perceived by exemplary suburban superintendents as one of the most important strategies for building trust with school board members (CSBA, 2016b; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; NSBA, 2018).

The statement, "I share openly with board members when things are going wrong," had a mean of 5.69 and a standard deviation of 0.60. The statement, "I engage in open communication with all board members," had a mean of 5.56 and a standard deviation of 0.53. "I am open, authentic, and straightforward with all board members" had a mean of 5.50 and a standard deviation of 0.52. These statements indicated an average agreement level closer to *strongly agree* with the standard deviation indicating similarity in the responses given by the respondents.

The statement, "I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion," had a mean of 5.44 and a standard deviation of 0.73. "I take on issues head on, even the 'undiscussables'" had a mean of 5.38 and a standard deviation of 0.72. Both of these statements indicated an agreement level closer to *agree* than *strongly agree* and both showed a greater variance than the previous statements about candor. It was intriguing that all of the statements on candor or the concepts behind the statements showed up again and again in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interviews in almost each domain of trust. This level of similarity among the interview respondents was not indicated in the standard deviations of these statements.

**Qualitative data presentation and analysis.** The category that had the most coded responses for the trust domain of candor was communication (see Table 8). Communication contained four times the coded responses than the next category, relationships. It is important to note that in the category of communication, instead of

keeping all the strategies in the coded response of "keep board informed," which would have had a total of 17 coded responses, the researcher broke them up into seven different codes or strategies to bring some depth to what the interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents were sharing. These codes or strategies were "let the board know before media or public in stores," "over communicate," "quickly respond to board requests for information," "share good news and bad news," "share the same info with all board members," "phone calls," and "text." Each of these were viable strategies for building

Table 8

*Interview Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Candor*

| Pattern | Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Candor | Communication | Total for all communication codes | **46** |
| | | Transparency—open & honest | 7 |
| | | Always be accessible to board members | 6 |
| | | Know board members preferred method of communication | 5 |
| | | Let board know before media or public in stores | 5 |
| | | Open, honest, & courageous conversations | 5 |
| | | Weekly updates | 4 |
| | | Over communicate | 2 |
| | | Phone calls | 2 |
| | | Quickly respond to board request for information | 2 |
| | | Share good news & bad news | 2 |
| | | Share the same information with all board members | 2 |
| | | Text | 2 |
| | Relationships | Total for all relationship codes | **11** |
| | | Ask for feedback | 6 |
| | | Mutual accountability | 3 |
| | | Be willing to work on the relationship | 2 |
| | | One-on-one meetings | 2 |
| | Governance | Total for all governance codes | **5** |
| | | Superintendent evaluation | 5 |
| | Reliable & dependable leadership | Total for all credibility codes | **2** |
| | | Be present, be engaged | 1 |
| | | Don't be defensive | 1 |

trust with board members. Three of the five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents noted the importance of getting information to board members quickly before they heard the news in the media, or more importantly, before they were caught unprepared by hearing the news from the public while board members were shopping in local stores. Superintendent C said, "I want them to hear from us before they hear from somebody in the public." Superintendent E explained, "They don't like it when parents call and say, 'Hey, what the heck's going on over at whatever school?' and they don't know. That, I think it erodes trust. . . . Like dude, a basic thing for you to do as superintendent is keep me in the know. That's a big one." Similarly, in McCann's (2012) and Puckett's (2017) studies regarding relationships and trust between superintendents and school board members, both discovered the importance of communication and keeping board members informed as key ingredients in building trust.

The strategy of transparency—being open and honest—had seven coded responses. Superintendent B recalled building trust "just by being honest and being transparent." Superintendent D noted,

> It also goes to the transparency piece, you want your board members to feel informed. You do not want them to feel like you're withholding information. If they feel individually or collectively that you're not being open and honest it's tough to maintain trust.

These transparency responses were closely connected to the strategy of "always be accessible to board members." In regard to accessibility, Superintendent A simply

stated, “You pretty much are by default, and so even on vacation . . . they know I’m accessible.” Superintendent E gave great advice about accessibility and candor:

> Keep them close to you and reach out to them often, and set up these periodic events that I talked about. The retreats, the dinners, some of the board study sessions where they can come together and they can talk, talk, talk. That’s a big part of it.

The category relationships had two strategies worthy of mention in regard to candor. First a good trust-building strategy is to “ask for feedback.” Four of the five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents brought this up and it was also a finding for DuFour and Marzano (2011). Superintendent C shared, “The other piece, individually in those one-on-ones, I’m always having an opportunity to hear areas where they have concerns.” Superintendent B took the concept of asking for feedback to another level of playing to the strengths of her board members: “I actually have a couple I might call when I’m struggling with something . . . because all of them have a certain strength.” Second, developing “mutual accountability” with board members is a trust builder. Superintendent B when discussing the professional relationship nature of working with school board members said, “I have to say I think it’s not just the positive or telling them everything that’s going on and being transparent, but I think it’s holding them accountable . . . that’s what makes any relationship strong.” Gottman et al. (2017) strongly agreed with this point in their study on relationship trust, when they advocated for consistent and periodic open discussions about both situations that were going well and those that were not.

**Strategy summary.** Research Question 4 addressed the trust domain of candor. An analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed what exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies for building trust with and between school board members through candor. The most important strategies in the domain of candor were engaging board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district, being transparent, always being accessible to board members, knowing board members' preferred method of communication, letting the board know before the media or public let the board know, asking for feedback, and developing mutual accountability.

**Research Question 5**

*What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?* For the purpose of this study, connection was defined as a shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and interrelatedness (Oliver & Sloan, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016). It is in this context that both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

**Quantitative data presentation and analysis.** In the portion of the survey dealing with connection, the following were the statements with the highest agreement average: "I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district" and "I give voice to the district vision and shared values of the district." These statements had means of 5.81 and 5.69 respectively (see Table 9). These statements had standard deviations of 0.40 and 0.48 respectively. This indicates that the responses were mostly *strongly agree* and that the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents were very

Table 9

*Survey Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Connection*

| Connection | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Disagree somewhat | | Agree somewhat | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *M* | *SD* |
| I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 6.25% | 0 | 0.00% | 10 | 62.50% | 5 | 31.25% | 5.19 | 0.75 |
| I am truthful, and frank in all interpersonal communications with board members. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 2 | 12.50% | 5 | 31.25% | 9 | 56.25% | 5.44 | 0.73 |
| I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% | 3 | 18.75% | 13 | 81.25% | 5.81 | 0.40 |
| I give voice to the district vision and shared values of the district. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% | 5 | 31.25% | 11 | 68.75% | 5.69 | 0.48 |
| I engaged board members in recognition and celebrations of school district successes. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 1 | 6.25% | 4 | 25.00% | 11 | 68.75% | 5.63 | 0.62 |
| I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues. | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.00% | 1 | 6.25% | 7 | 43.75% | 8 | 50.00% | 5.44 | 0.63 |

similar in their responses. Similar to leading vision setting in the portion of the survey regarding competence and discussing vision in the portion discussing candor, behavior aligned to district values and beliefs and giving voice to the district vision and shared values were perceived by exemplary suburban superintendents as two of the most important strategies for building trust with school board members. Both Crump (2011) and Puckett (2017) noted that identifying and living the organization's vision, values, and beliefs created strong relationships between superintendents and school board members. Weisman (2016) argued that not only did identifying and living the organization's vision, values, and beliefs build strong relationships, these actions built trust.

The statement, "I engaged board members in recognition and celebrations of school district successes," had a mean of 5.63 and a standard deviation of 0.62, indicating an agreement level closer to *strongly agree*. "I am truthful, and frank in all interpersonal communications with board members" and "I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues" both had means of 5.44 and standard deviations of 0.73 and 0.63 respectively. "I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all board members" had a mean of 5.19 and a standard deviation of 0.75. The last three statements indicated an agreement level closer to *agree* and also indicated more variance in the responses of the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents than the other connection related questions.

**Qualitative data presentation and analysis.** The trust domain of connection had two categories that both had 34 coded responses: relationships and governance (see Table 10). The relationship category had a subcategory of "get to know your board members," which had 27 coded responses. These responses came from all five of the exemplary suburban superintendents who were interviewed and were reported in Table 10 as

Table 10

*Interview Summary of the Perceived Importance of the Trust Domain—Connection*

| Pattern | Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Connection | Relationships | Total for all relationship codes | **34** |
| | | Get to know your board members—total | **27** |
| | | Spend time with board members | 7 |
| | | Respond to board as individuals | 6 |
| | | Have a team mindset | 5 |
| | | One-on-one meetings | 5 |
| | | Call board members | 2 |
| | | Provide guidance & support when asked | 1 |
| | | To show you care, ask questions about board members & their families | 1 |
| | | Build a strong working relationship | 4 |
| | | Hard decisions done together build trust | 1 |
| | Governance | Total for all governance codes | **34** |
| | | Norms/protocols/governance handbook | 8 |
| | | Shared vision, mission, common beliefs | 8 |
| | | Annual governance retreat | 4 |
| | | Hold each other accountable | 4 |
| | | Superintendent evaluation process | 3 |
| | | Involve the community | 2 |
| | | Annual CSBA conference | 1 |
| | | Board sets goals, admin. strategies, community action steps | 1 |
| | | CSBA masters in governance training | 1 |
| | | New board member training | 1 |
| | | Governance team self-evaluation | 1 |
| | Communication | Total for all communication codes | **20** |
| | | Listen | 5 |
| | | Be transparent—don't hide anything | 4 |
| | | Contact board members according to their preference | 4 |
| | | Keep the board informed | 3 |
| | | Be responsive | 2 |
| | | Have honest & courageous conversations | 1 |
| | | Hear from superintendent before hearing things at grocery store | 1 |
| | Reliable & dependable leadership | Total for all credibility codes | **9** |
| | | See the value of others | 2 |
| | | Be open & honest | 1 |
| | | Be patient | 1 |
| | | Don't get attached to your ideas | 1 |
| | | Keep confidences | 1 |
| | | Make sound decisions & stick by them | 1 |
| | | Run your decisions by board members | 1 |
| | | Research & read | 1 |

individual codes to show the variety of strategies that exemplary suburban superintendents use to build trust with board members. These codes or strategies were "spend time with board members," "respond to board as individuals," "have a team mindset," "one-on-one meetings" whether those were breakfast, lunch or just coffee, "call board members," "provide guidance & support when asked," and "to show you care, ask questions about board members and their families."

Superintendent B shared, "I spent a lot of time with each individual one and as much time as needed." Superintendent C said, "I think a huge piece is just giving them the time they need." Superintendent E summed up the relational aspect of the trust domain of connection: "You really need to work hard to get to know them as people, and they need to know you. To know and to be known is critical. That's just being real, being authentic." All of the exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed stated in one way or another that getting to know the board members in an authentic and real manner was one of the most important strategies for building trust with board members. These strategies highlight the link between building relationships and building trust (Crump, 2011; Puckett, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

The category of governance also had 34 coded responses. Establishing and acting on governance team "vision, mission, common beliefs" and "norms/protocols /governance handbook" each received eight coded responses. It should not be surprising that the actual governance work of the school board governance team builds connections and trust between the superintendent and the school board members and between school board members. In their seminal work, *An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust,* Mayer et al. (1995) advocated that "working together often involves interdependence,

and people must therefore depend on others in various ways to accomplish their personal and organizational goals" (p. 710). Superintendent D noted, "The district values, the board values, it is clearly a statement of what they believe in, individually and collectively as representatives of the community." Superintendent E drew attention to the central role of the district's vision and common beliefs: "It's huge. It's big, and it's the kind of thing that you need to talk about a lot when you're in a closed session, and open session, and in private conversations, sort of weaving that into your conversations with the board to know why you're here, and what we're about." Superintendent B underlined the link between board protocols and values: "I guess it is through the protocols, because we have a unity of purpose. We've agreed on what their rules are. So, this does establish your values."

In terms of the category of communication, three of the five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed drew attention to the importance of listening. According to Superintendent B, listening also has components of respect and acceptance embedded in it, "I've taken them for who they are and I listen to them. I don't dismiss them." Also noted as important by three of the five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed was the importance of transparency and contacting board members according to their preferred method of communication. In terms of transparency, "It is a high level of transparency," according to Superintendent B, and it is about "frank, open, honest, transparent conversations with one another," according to Superintendent E. In terms of contacting board members by their preferred method, Superintendent E encouraged addressing communication preferences right at the beginning: "When I started we talked about their preferred means of communication around most things." Communication

preferences vary by board, for Superintendents A, B, and D it was e-mail. For Superintendent C, it became phone calls. For Superintendent E, it became texts. Each of the five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed mentioned the importance of not just communicating in one fashion but finding the communication preference for each school board member. Differentiating communication styles by board preference in order to equally inform all board members was also noted by Rohrbach (2016) as an effective method for superintendents to interact with their school board members.

**Strategy summary.** Research Question 5 addressed the trust domain of connection. An analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data discovered what exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important strategies for building trust with and between school board members through connection. These trust-building strategies were behavior aligned to district values and beliefs: giving voice to the district vision and shared values; getting to know your board members; developing vision, mission, common beliefs; developing norms, protocols, and a governance handbook; and listening, transparency, and communicating with board members in their preferred method of communication.

## Summary

Chapter IV presented and analyzed the data obtained through this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study. Quantitative data obtained through the survey of 16 exemplary suburban superintendents were presented for each individual research question. The Likert survey response data were analyzed in terms of mean, central tendency, and standard deviation, the average variance of the responses of the participants. Qualitative data obtained from five exemplary suburban superintendents

who volunteered for a face-to-face interview were also presented for each individual research question. Interrater reliability was obtained to ensure the validity and reliability of the coded interview responses. The qualitative interview data were reported in terms of the frequency of the coded responses.

The strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important to build trust with and between school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

*Summary of Strategies Perceived as Most Important for Building Trust With and Between School Board Members*

| Trust Domain | Strategy |
|---|---|
| Competence, candor, connection | Lead, develop, and engage board members in discussions about the mission, vision, and values for the district. Align the superintendent's and board's behaviors and voice to the district mission, vision, and values. |
| Competence | Be willing and able to make hard decisions and lead. |
| Competence | Keep board members involved and engaged. |
| Competence, consistency, concern, candor, connection | Keep the board informed. Know and communicate with board members in their preferred method of communication and always be accessible to board members. |
| Consistency | Keep commitments to board members. |
| Competence, consistency, concern, connection | Develop norms, protocols, and a governance handbook. |
| Consistency | Visibility combined with behaviors and actions that are expected produce a sense of reliability, dependability, and consistency. |
| Concern | Make sure each board member has a voice. |
| Concern, connection | Take an interest in board members lives and get to know them, treating them positively and respectfully. |
| Concern, candor, connection | Be transparent. Have honest, open and courageous conversations. Develop mutual accountability. Ask for feedback. |
| Consistency, concern, connection | Listen |

Many of these strategies show up in the responses to multiple domains of trust. Additionally the categories of communication, governance and reliable and dependable leadership came up in all five domains of trust. The category of relationships came up in four of the five domains of trust but did not surface for the trust domain of consistency. When talking about getting to know their board members and respecting their board members, the intensity of the respect discussed by all five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed, was larger than showed up in the coding.

Chapter V reports the findings in greater detail, weaving them together to determine major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. These conclusions lead the reader to implications for action and recommendations for further research. Chapter V ends with concluding remarks and reflections.

# CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Overview

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study identified and described the leadership strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important to build trust with and between school board members. The quantitative section of this study surveyed exemplary suburban superintendents as to the most important strategies for building trust and allowed the researcher to numerically describe the results. The qualitative section of this study utilized interview questions to go into greater depth and expand upon the initial findings of the quantitative survey and describe these trust-building strategies in greater detail. Chapter V begins with the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample. The chapter then continues with major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. Chapter V ends with implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe what strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust between school board members.

## Research Questions

1. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

## Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods research methodology was used to answer the research questions. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, explained Creswell and Creswell (2018), is a powerful research methodology because "the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone" (p. 4). This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to enrich the reader's understanding of the strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceived as the most important to build trust with and between board members.

The quantitative portion of the study obtained electronic survey results from 16 exemplary suburban superintendents. A 17th outlier survey was discarded after consultation with peer researchers and faculty advisors because its responses were greater

than three standard deviations from the mean (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The qualitative portion of the study interviewed five exemplary suburban superintendents to add depth to the survey results and more fully describe and expand the researcher's and reader's understanding regarding the details of the strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as trust building with and between board members. Eight superintendents volunteered for the interview at the end of the electronic survey. Five of the eight were randomly chosen for the interview. Both the electronic survey and the interview questions for qualitative data collection were cocreated with faculty advisors and peer researchers. A peer researcher performed an interrater reliability check during the coding process.

## Population

A population is defined as "a group of . . . individuals . . . that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). It is the group from which the researcher will ultimately take the research sample (Patten, 2012). In this study, the population was suburban superintendents in the United States. These superintendents are the CEOs of their school districts. As such, superintendents lead the vision of their districts, plan the finances, manage their district's human resources, and provide accountability for instructional expertise (Kowlaski et al., 2010). Often the population, as in this study, is very large and it is not feasible to study all the members of the population due to fiscal and time constraints, so the population is narrowed to identify a target population. The target population for this study was narrowed to the 317 suburban superintendents of the 317

suburban school districts in the state of California as of the 2015-2016 academic school year (ProximityOne, 2018a).

## Sample

A sample "is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested" (Patten, 2012, p. 45). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) put it a little more directly by calling a sample "the group of subjects from whom the data are collected" (p. 129). This study used a purposeful convenience sample. The researcher purposefully sampled suburban superintendents and limited the sample pool to suburban superintendents in the state of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost. In this study, suburban superintendents who were considered exemplary on building trust with and between board members were chosen for the sample based on their expertise.

In order to choose those exemplary superintendents who successfully build trust with and between board members, the thematic team used the following criteria on the target population. Each participant had to meet four of these five criteria:

1. Superintendents must have worked 3 or more years in their current district.
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA conference.
4. Superintendent showed evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships.
5. Superintendent was recommended by two retired superintendents who are members of a north/south superintendent's group.

Recommendations for sample participants were obtained from educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Evidence of

positive superintendent relationships with board members and between board members were obtained by examining documents contained on the district website, board minutes, video recordings of board meetings, newspaper articles, and social media. The data collected in the process of vetting potential participants were also reviewed with educational experts and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Based on this final review, 28 exemplary suburban superintendents were invited to participate in the quantitative survey and were invited to volunteer for the qualitative interview. Of the 16 exemplary suburban superintendents who participated in the survey, eight of them volunteered to participate in an interview, and five were randomly chosen for participation in the qualitative interview.

## Major Findings

The findings from this study fall into three mutually supporting categories. First, what governance activities build trust. Second, actions that superintendents and board members can take to build trust. Third, the skills that superintendents and board members need to successfully build trust.

### Finding 1: Lead Strategic Discussions

Superintendents need to lead, develop, and engage board members in discussions about the mission, vision, and values for the district. Superintendents must align their own and the school board's behaviors and voice to the district mission, vision, and values. This finding was found in Research Questions 1, 4, and 5, the trust domains of competence, candor, and connection. All 16 of the surveyed exemplary suburban superintendents indicated strong agreement, with a mean of 5.69 out of 6.00 and a standard deviation of 0.48, that leading discussions and actions around the mission,

vision, and values of the district was their most important trust-building strategy in the trust domain of competence. All five of the exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed discussed this strategy repeatedly.

T. J. Waters and Marzano (2006) in their meta-analysis, *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement,* also pointed out that in the 27 studies they analyzed, effective superintendents and school board members are "aligned with and supportive of the non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. They ensure these goals remain the primary focus of the district's efforts and that no other initiatives detract attention or resources from accomplishing these goals" (pp. 3-4). Goals are the steps that governance teams take to achieve their mission, vision, and values. In essence, T. J. Waters and Marzano are arguing that governance teams need to align their actions and their resources to maintain their focus on making their mission, vision, and values real. Aligning all goals and governance team actions toward the furtherance of the school board's vision, mission, and values builds trust between governance team members and is supported by both the California School Boards Association and the National School Boards Association (CSBA, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006; Weiss et al., 2015; NSBA, 2018).

**Finding 2: Make Hard Decisions**

Superintendents need to be able and willing to make hard decisions, stick to them, and lead. While not covered directly in the survey, four of the five exemplary superintendents interviewed shared this strategy as important for building trust. In the domain of competence, this strategy had the highest frequency of all responses given by

the interviewed superintendents. One of the hard decisions exemplary superintendents make, according to DuFour and Marzano (2011) is to "limit initiatives" (p. 34). This means that not every interest group or stakeholder group will have its issues addressed to their satisfaction. The need for the executive member of the governance team to make hard decisions and lead has become increasingly important over the last century (Cuban, 1976; Jimenez, 2013; Kowalski, 2013). It is so important now, according to Kowalski et al. (2010), that "society has come to expect that licensed practitioners (superintendents) will not err in making critical decisions" (p. 7).

**Finding 3: Governance Activities Build Trust**

Keeping board members involved and engaged in governance activities builds trust between the superintendent and board members and between board members. This strategy had the second highest frequency of responses from the five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents. The 16 surveyed exemplary suburban superintendents indicated agreement that involving and engaging board members both promoted their capability and promoted their growth with means of 5.25 and 5.50 respectively. There are numerous researchers and organizations that advocate for effective board member involvement in district business through a clear understanding of board members' and superintendents' roles (CSBA, 2016b; Gore, 2017; McCann, 2012; NSBA, 2018; Puckett, 2017). In his article, "Lighthouse Research: Board Spending Time On the 'Right Stuff,'" Heiligenthal (2015) expanded on the importance of board member involvement when he advocated the importance of professional development for board members because it made them more knowledgeable about those aspects of school business on which they would later be making decisions. Interestingly, Blumsack and

McCabe (2013) had a similar finding from the board members' perspective when they studied highly effective board members, "Effective board members participate in professional development and commit the time and energy necessary to be informed and effective leaders" (p. 25). In essence, professional development increases board members' ability to govern effectively and the experiences of effective governance build trust between the superintendent and the board members.

**Finding 4: Develop Norms and Protocols**

Superintendents need to guide board members in developing norms, protocols, and a governance handbook. This finding was found in four of the five research questions, in the domains of competence, consistency, concern, and connections. Norms, protocols, and a governance handbook were mentioned by all five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents as an important strategy for building trust with and between board members. Yaffe (2015) argued that for superintendents and school board members, "The first order of business is defining the ground rules for their relationship" (p. 46). Harvey and Drolet (2005) contended that "norms are the glue of an organization keeping us moving forward together" (p. 57). Developing norms, protocols, and governance handbooks are highly productive governance team behaviors encouraged by both CSBA (2016b) and NSBA (2018) as an important strategy for school boards to operate effectively as a local governance organization.

**Finding 5: Keep Commitments**

Superintendents need to keep commitments to board members. Both Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Krolczyk (2015) noted that people will follow the person before they follow the plan. The 16 exemplary suburban superintendents surveyed indicated strong

agreement with little variance that they only make commitments to board members that they can keep and that they keep their commitments to board members. Means of survey responses were 5.75 and 5.81 out of 6.00 respectively with standard deviations of only 0.45 and 0.40 respectively. When talking about keeping commitments, Superintendent A was to the point, "Do what you say you're going to do." White et al. (2016) contended that leaders must be "someone your people can count on to follow through when your word is given" (p. 15). S. M. R. Covey et al. (2012) summed it up best in their book, *Smart Trust: Creating Prosperity, Energy and Joy in a Low-Trust World*, when they described their fourth smart trust action, "Do what you say you are going to do" (p. 176).

**Finding 6: Visibility Leads to Reliability**

Superintendent visibility combined with behaviors and actions that are expected produce a sense of reliability, dependability, and consistency, thus building trust with board members. The 16 exemplary suburban superintendents surveyed indicated both strong agreement, 5.88 out of 6.00, that behaving in a manner consistent with their roles and responsibilities was an important trust-building strategy. There was very little variance in their responses, with a standard deviation of 0.34. The importance of predictable, expected, and visible behaviors and actions on the part of school leaders was also found to be a trust builder by Handford and Leithwood (2013), Weiss (2018), and Krolczyk (2015).

**Finding 7: Board Member Voice**

Superintendents need to make sure board members have a voice. T. J. Waters and Marzano's (2006) findings that effective superintendents involve all stakeholders including board members in collaborative goal setting, supports this study's finding that

exemplary superintendents ensure board members have a voice. Superintendents ensure board members have a voice when each board member has an opportunity to share his or her views on issues, and when board members are silent, their views are solicited by the superintendent. The 16 exemplary superintendents who responded to the survey indicated mostly *strongly agree*, with a mean of 5.64 out of 6.00 and a standard deviation of 0.50, that they are patient with the questions and issues of interest with board members. When the five interviewed exemplary superintendents answered questions about concern, their most frequent response was to make sure each board member has a voice. In describing how superintendents ensure that board members have a voice, Bowers (2017) noted, "Superintendents implemented protocols to ensure that everyone had a turn to say something on board agenda topics, which increased trust" (p. 117).

**Finding 8: Keep Board Informed**

Superintendents need to keep the board informed in an open and honest fashion. The 16 exemplary suburban superintendents responded to the first three questions in the survey regarding the trust domain of candor with predominantly *strongly agree*, means of 5.56, 5.69, and 5.75 out of 6.00, indicating the importance of consistent and transparent communication with board members. The five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents described the importance of communication in all five of the trust domains. The five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents described the importance of always being accessible to board members as a strategy for demonstrating openness, which was effective in building trust. All five of the interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents described the importance of knowing their school board members' communication preferences, communicating with them according to the those

preferences, giving them information according to their communication needs, and at the same time ensuring that they all received the same information so they were equally informed to make governance decisions.

In essence, exemplary superintendents differentiate their communication activities based on school board member need, ensuring that, by the end, each school board member has the same information, whether that information is considered good, bad, or ugly. For example, some school board members can look at a budget document and immediately see the implications and results of budget decisions. Other board members need to have in-depth explanations of the same budget document in order for them to understand the implications and results of budget decisions. The length of communication or type of communication needs to be different in order for all board members to end up with the same understanding so they can make informed governance decisions. In regard to communication and building trust, Crump (2011) argued, "Under the theme of communication, equity in sharing all information, being consistent in what is shared and how, having a listening ear, and open-ended questioning and discussions underlie the strategies of forming bonds" (p. 127). Crump, along with most researchers regarding communication in the superintendency, understood the importance of giving the same information to all board members, but missed the communication differentiation that exemplary superintendents practice prior to achieving an equal understanding of the information communicated (Anderson, 2017; Cox, 2010; Jimenez, 2013; Puckett, 2017; Rohrbach, 2016). Components of this finding were found in all five research questions and all five trust domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection.

**Finding 9: Transparency, Honesty, and Accountability**

Superintendents need to be transparent, have honest, open, and courageous conversations, and develop mutual accountability. All five of the interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents discussed the importance of transparency. They talked about how living a transparent form of leadership enables others to trust them (Anderson, 2017; S. M. R. Covey, 2012; Yaffe, 2015). It leads to honest, open, and courageous conversations that help maintain the governance teams' relationships and keep the team focused on its duties when its members make mistakes. Asking for feedback also allows the school board members to point out to their single employee, the superintendent, when she or he needs to make adjustments and develops mutual accountability among the governance team. This ninth finding was found in Research Questions 3, 4, and 5 and in the trust domains of concern, candor, and connection.

**Finding 10: Listening**

Listening is a critical trust-building strategy between superintendents and board members. The 16 exemplary suburban superintendents surveyed indicated the importance of listening on Question 2 in the trust domain of concern indicating agreement, with a mean of 5.38 out of 6.00, regarding the statement, "I am a good listener." They also indicated agreement on Question 6 in the trust domain of connection, with a mean of 5.44 out of 6.00, with the statement, "I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues." Listening is also considered to be a strong leadership skill (Anderson, 2017). More interestingly, in the survey listening can be found as a component of Competence Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6; Consistency Questions 2 and 6; Concern Questions 1, 4, 5, and 6; Candor Questions 1, 3, and 4; and Connection Questions 1 and 2. The 16

exemplary suburban superintendents surveyed indicated responses on these questions ranging from *agree* to *strongly agree* with means ranging from 5.13 to 5.88 out of 6.00. Listening was described by four of the five exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed as an important trust-building strategy. But all five of the interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents mentioned it indirectly when discussing leading vision, mission, and values discussions, communication differentiation, and when talking about getting to know their board members. In fact, listening is an important component of Major Findings 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11.

**Finding 11: Relationships, Respect, and Rapport**

It is critical for superintendents to take an interest in board members' lives, getting to know them and treating them positively and respectfully. The 16 exemplary suburban superintendents surveyed indicated strong agreement that they take time to meet with each board member, with a mean of 5.56, that they treat each board member positively and with respect, with a mean of 5.88, and that they demonstrate respect and concern for each board member, with a mean of 5.88. All five of the exemplary suburban superintendents interviewed shared that they both spent time with their school board members to get to know them and that they respected their school board members. What was not coded in the interviews was these superintendents' depth of knowledge about their board members, both strengths and weaknesses, and the depth of respect they had for their board members, whether they agreed or not with their behaviors or positions. Additionally, the five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents used lots of personal relationship language when describing the professional relationships with their board members. Superintendent C explained, "I think a huge piece is just giving them

the time they need. I have five board members, and often I'll compare them to having like five different children. They don't all have the same needs." Superintendent B shared, "Some of your best relationships are when you're able to say to somebody, 'you hurt my feelings or do did this and it bothered me.' Holding them accountable. That's what makes any relationship strong." Superintendent D explained it this way, "I think developing relationships and rapport with board members in many ways is like developing relationships with anyone else, whether that's in the workplace or outside of the workplace." This level of high regard and high respect builds strong relationships. (Crump, 2011; Gottman, 2011; Gottman et al., 2017; Puckett, 2017; Smith, 2013). The relationships of the five interviewed exemplary suburban superintendents with their board members were professional, but the board members were afforded similar respect and attention that were given in more personal relationships.

## Unexpected Findings

The five exemplary suburban superintendents who were interviewed all talked extensively about their relationships with their school board members. They shared strategies they used to build trust within these relationships and how they constantly worked on these relationships. Much of the literature indicated that relationships would be present in every domain of trust between superintendents and school board members (Crump, 2011; Eadie, 2012; Green, 2013; Huang, 2013; McCann, 2012; Mora, 2005; Puckett, 2017; Smith, 2013; Thompson, 2014; Thompson & Holt, 2016; Yaffe, 2015). The researcher thus expected that the category or theme of relationships would be addressed in all five domains of trust and was surprised that relationships did not show up as a category or theme for the trust domain of consistency. It is possible that the codes of

"have a team mentality" and "help board regroup when needed" could also have been placed under the relationship theme. During the interviews, superintendents would share strategies related to upcoming trust domains or add additional strategies to previously discussed trust domains. It is possible that the superintendents interviewed suggested other relationship and trust-building strategies for the trust domain of consistency in questions related to other trust domains.

## Conclusions

### Conclusion 1: Meaningful Strategic Roles

It is concluded that exemplary superintendents who give their governance team meaningful roles and focus them on developing and implementing the district values, vision, and mission, develop trust with board members and between board members. Superintendent A reflected that it was important to "keep them [board members] informed and involved. . . . They have a better understanding of what they do at the board table if they're more engaged, and they have more background information." Regarding focus, Superintendent D explained, "One of my jobs . . . is to keep us all grounded and focused on our mission . . . to keep us all going in the same direction." In their book, *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement*, DuFour and Marzano (2011) agreed,

> Effective superintendents keep the message simple and consistent. They demonstrate congruency between their own actions and professed priorities. They ensure the local board of education is aligned with and supportive of the district's goals and priorities and they demand that leaders throughout the district speak with one voice. (pp. 42-43)

**Conclusion 2: Visibility and Keeping Commitments**

It is concluded that superintendents who are highly visible and keep their commitments to board members will establish high levels of trust. Superintendent A said it best, "Do what you say you're going to do . . . every single day . . . being at all events, representing . . . the board on the district's behalf." Demonstrating behaviors that are dependable and steadfast helps leaders build trust with their stakeholders and become the type of person that others can follow (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Krolczyk, 2015; White et al., 2016).

**Conclusion 3: Transparent Discussion Facilitation**

It is concluded that superintendents who skillfully facilitate discussions with board members while demonstrating high transparency will earn board member trust. According to the exemplary superintendents interviewed and surveyed, these strong, transparent, group facilitation skills require the ability to listen closely so the superintendent can guide the group toward new solutions that incorporate the major interests of its members, thus creating strong solutions that align with the district's values, vision, and mission (S. R. Covey, 2011).

**Conclusion 4: Trust Is Complex**

It is concluded that superintendents who fail to understand that building trust is complex and is built both individually and collectively will have a short tenure. Exemplary superintendents understand that trust is a complex metaconstruct or "multifaceted construct" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 257) consisting of many components that must be interwoven together to build the tapestry of trust between superintendents and their school boards. As Superintendent E pointed out, when

discussing trust and relationships with board members, “This relationship with them doesn't take care of itself. It’s not like crock-pot cooking. You have got to watch it.” Superintendent D explained, “How you behave, how you act, the decisions you make . . . like establishing relationships, building trust is your body of work over time.” Exemplary superintendents have learned about the complex nature of trust and take time to build this tapestry of trust.

**Conclusion 5: Adaptable Communication**

It is concluded that superintendents who adapt and accommodate communication to the individual needs of their board members, will build trust with board members. According to Weisman (2016), the trust pyramid consists of five domains: competence and consistency on the bottom, concern and candor in the middle, and connection at the pinnacle of the trust pyramid. If these five domains constitute the building blocks of the trust pyramid, then communication is the mortar that holds all five domains together into the metaconstruct of trust. One cannot talk about trust without also talking about communication. Communication is the language of trust.

**Conclusion 6: Love and Acceptance**

It is concluded that exemplary superintendents who consistently practice leadership based on love and acceptance while holding board members accountable for high achievement will be trusted and revered. Ricciardi (2015) suggested that people who feel loved are significantly more likely to see the boss (superintendent) as a good leader. Crowley (2011) remarked, “People will meet and often exceed the highest expectations and demands when they know their leader values and cares about them” (p. 111). So how does one define love as practiced in an educational environment?

Love practiced by leaders in an educational environment is characterized by acceptance and a high level of respect for others taking into account their strengths and weaknesses, and choosing to focus on their strengths. At its core is a desire to create an open, inclusive, and enduring community where people are loved for who they are (King, 1958). Mónica and Irene (2019) agreed, "Love, therefore, both takes risks and provides safety and a sense of belonging. It motivates us to dream beyond our current limits and . . . requires kindness to oneself and others" (p. 4). It involves treating colleagues with "compassion, humanity and understanding—as if they were a part of the family" (Rollings, 2008, p. 53).

All five of the exemplary superintendents interviewed shared both that they spent time with their school board members to get to know them and that they respected their school board members. Superintendent B explained, "They all have different needs, different levels. I take them for who they are and I listen to them. I don't dismiss them." Superintendent F expounded on the importance of "knowing them [board members] as people, when stuff comes up in their lives, deaths, grandkids, marriage, moving, and whatever. . . . Just knowing people, and listening about their lives, . . . These folks, they're just good honest people." What were not coded in the interviews were these superintendents' depth of knowledge about their board members, both strengths and weaknesses, and the depth of the respect they had for their board members whether they agreed or not with their behaviors or positions. Although they were unaware of it, the exemplary superintendents interviewed practiced both love and acceptance with their board members. This practice, as uncovered in Major Findings 8 and 11 is an important strategy that builds trust with school board members.

## Implications for Action

Building trust is a skill that takes a long time to develop. Although this study was focused on the strategies exemplary suburban superintendents perceive as important in building trust with and between board members, only some of the implications mentioned below address the current relationship between superintendents and board members. Other implications are focused on developing the trust-building skills of new administrators so that those who eventually become superintendents have a greater opportunity to become exemplary superintendents.

### Implication 1: Modify Masters in Governance

It is recommended that the California School Board Association (CSBA) modify its current Masters in Governance program. Currently CSBA offers two types of governance services. One is the Masters in Governance Training, which is helpful according to the exemplary superintendents who were interviewed. The second is the service of CSBA governance experts who will work with individual boards to help them develop stronger governance skills. These two services need to be combined into one complete package in order to train governance teams on how to determine and implement their values, vision, and mission. The Masters in Governance course should treat this as a training activity. Superintendents and school board members should learn how to govern in the training sessions, go back and practice it in their district with periodic observation by governance experts, and then return to the Masters in Governance course to report and share with other superintendents and boards. This combined service should offer on-site coaching and mentoring as well as allowing governance teams to both share with and learn from other governance teams.

**Implication 2: Hire Consultants Trained to Build Trust**

It is recommended that superintendents hire organizational development consultants or executive coaches who are trained to guide superintendents and school board members on how to build trust based on governance team trust research. These external consultants trained on how to build trust need to rate the progress of these administrative team members in their growing ability to build trust. These ratings should be based on the feedback of superintendents, board members, teachers, and community members and on direct observation of the governance team in action.

**Implication 3: Train a Cadre of Consultants**

It is recommended that a consortium of professional organizations develop a register of professional coaches who have the training and experience to work with school superintendents and school boards. Currently, practicing superintendents hire retired superintendents to coach them on fine-tuning their leadership skills. However, in order to reach exemplary superintendent status, current superintendents need specific coaching on building trust with and between board members. National and state organizations like the CSBA and the NSBA need to develop a cadre of consultants who can be hired by school boards to provide them mentoring and coaching on building trust based on governance team trust research.

**Implication 4: Educational Trust Instrument**

It is recommended that the thematic trust peer researchers design and build a trust instrument for measuring the level of trust in governance teams. Trust-building organizational development consultants can use this trust instrument to rate the current state of trust in governance teams and advise them accordingly. While this trust

instrument could be similar to Cummings and Bromiley's (1996a) Organizational Trust Inventory, it should be focused on the unique needs of educational governance teams. This educational trust inventory needs to be able to measure the current status of trust in a governance team as well as be able to measure growth over time. Similar to the Transformational Leadership Skill Inventory (TLSi), developed by Larick and White in 2012, this trust instrument should gather feedback from multiple stakeholder groups.

**Implication 5: Active Listening**

It is recommended that administrators and specifically aspiring superintendents be trained in active listening and group facilitation skills. A class on basic active listening in addition to a class on group facilitation skills, based on the findings in this study will help administrators build trust and should be a requirement to obtain a clear administrative credential by the California Department of Education and other state departments of education. Listening, transparency, and the courage to have honest and open courageous conversations are skills that need to be learned. Classes or trainings that emphasize listening as a skill to hear and understand the point of view or current situations with others need to be developed for administrators. A group facilitation class will offer both knowledge and practice on how to facilitate groups to uncover these views and incorporate multiple different perspectives to build a group identity and trust. Both active listening and group facilitation courses will help superintendents to develop the courage to have those honest, open conversations that lead to group and governance team health. These basic skills in listening, transparency, and group facilitation will enable administrators to enhance and extend the tenure of their superintendency.

**Implication 6: Building Trust Training**

It is recommended that training on understanding trust and the development of skills regarding how to build and maintain trust, must begin at the earliest levels of educational leadership training. Since trust is such a complex metaconstruct consisting of many components that must be interwoven together, this training must be conducted by those who understand and know how to build trust. National and state organizations like the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) need to include sessions on building trust in all leadership training academies beginning with aspiring principal training and continuing through aspiring and new superintendent training. These trainings must enumerate the specific strategies, such as those discovered in this study, that these aspiring or current superintendents can use to build trust. As a part of these programs, these participants should be required to be periodically rated by their superiors, their peers, and those they lead as to how well they are progressing in their development of trust-building skills and behaviors. These results should then be discussed with feedback by those leading the training sessions in order to improve administrators' ability to implement trust-building strategies.

**Implication 7: Communication Feedback Survey**

It is recommended that new administrators receive training and guidance to improve their communication skills in order to build trust. An annual 360-degree communication feedback survey with district leaders, teachers, site staff, and parent leaders for the first 3 years of their administrative career would provide feedback as to what specific communication skills needed attention. Strong communication skills need

to be built up over time so that when an administrator becomes a superintendent, he or she is already a highly effective communicator. Superintendents and assistant superintendents need to train and provide practical opportunities for aspiring administrators to actively practice using all current forms of communication with their peers, subordinates, and superiors. Superintendents and assistant superintendents should instill in aspiring superintendents the skill set to explore and quickly understand future communication pathways for their use with future governance teams in order to build trust.

**Implication 8: Love and Acceptance**

It is recommended that superintendents develop their ability to lead based on love and acceptance of their school board members while at the same time holding board members accountable for high student achievement if they wish to become exemplary superintendents. The five interviewed exemplary superintendents used lots of personal relationship language when describing the professional relationships with their board members. Although all five of them described their knowledge of others, good and bad, acceptance of others with their strengths and weaknesses and an authentic respect for others, not one of them called it love and acceptance. This should not surprise us. Since Martin Luther King, Jr., not many inspirational leaders talk about love and acceptance. It makes people uncomfortable. One way to demystify and bring some acceptance back to these trust-building strategies is to have aspiring superintendents take one or more courses in advanced leadership relationship strategies, during their master's and doctoral coursework. Additionally, state and national administrative organizations like ACSA and

AASA should insert the themes of high respect, acceptance, and love into all of their administrator training programs.

In his book, *The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples*, Gottman (2011) argued for relationship health by encouraging those in relationships to practice awareness, tolerance, understanding, nondefensive listening, and empathy. Sounds familiar doesn't it? While Gottman (2011; Gottman et al., 2017) was sharing these strategies for couples, they are generalizable to all relationships. Most professional educators can understand the conceptual connections between the relationships in a family and relationships in a professional family. The five exemplary superintendents involved in this study described strategies that built trust in their professional families, which included their governance teams.

## Recommendations for Further Research

These recommendations for further research are based on the results and conclusions of this study. School district governance teams are the smallest and most local form of democratic governance (Finn et al., 2017). As such, the development of trust in these governance teams is of the highest priority. Especially when trust has been found to increase superintendent tenure (Hoffert, 2015) and "superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student achievement" (T. J. Waters & Marzano, 2006. p. 4). Thus the development of trust leads to higher levels of student achievement, which is the reason that the governance team exists in the first place. These recommendations for further research are intended to continue the important work of understanding, building and nurturing trust in regard to educational governance.

**Recommendation 1: Board Perceptions of Trust**

It is recommended that a replication study be conducted with an emphasis on what school board members perceive as the most important strategies for building trust with their superintendents. While there are slightly over 1,000 school superintendents in California (CDE, 2016), there are over 5,000 school board members in California (CSBA, 2017). That is five times more school board members than superintendents. Understanding the strategies those publicly elected school board members perceive as important for building trust will help superintendents better understand how to build trust with them.

**Recommendation 2: Trust Instrument Effectiveness**

It is recommended that a validation study be conducted to describe the effectiveness of an instrument for measuring trust in educational governance teams using a Cronbach Alpha analysis. This study would determine the reliability and validity of this trust-measuring instrument. Similar to the Transformational Leadership Skill Inventory (TSLi), which gathers feedback from multiple stakeholder groups in regard to leadership skills, the trust measuring instrument chosen for this study should gather feedback from governance team members in regard to trust.

**Recommendation 3: Gender Influence on Trust**

It is recommended that a comparative analysis be conducted to determine gender strategies and styles regarding trust building. This study should compare trust built and maintained by male superintendents with board members as compared to trust built and maintained by female superintendents with board members. Further differentiation could be achieved by analyzing trust-building strategies used by male superintendents with both

male and female board members as well as trust-building strategies used by female superintendents with both male and female board members. Any gender-related trust-building strengths should be noted along with recommendations on how superintendents of the other gender can develop those strengths to a greater degree.

**Recommendation 4: Consultants Trained to Build Trust**

It is recommended that an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study be conducted to discover how much of an influence organizational development consultants trained to build trust have on governance teams over time. This would require the use of an initial trust inventory when a trust professional coach begins working with a governance team and an exit trust inventory when the trust professional coach concludes his or her coaching time with the governance team. Comparisons of these results with control governance teams, which received no coaching, would be able to quantitatively describe the impact of trust coaching. Qualitative interviews of those governance teams that showed the greatest growth in trust would uncover those strategies used successfully by professional trust coaches to build trust.

**Recommendation 5: Trust Repair Strategies**

It is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted to determine which strategies superintendents use to rebuild trust when trust is broken between the superintendent and the school board and when trust is broken between school board members. There are a fair number of researchers and authors who claim that when trust is broken, professional and personal relationships are doomed to fail (S. M. R. Covey 2010; Gottman, 2011; Gottman et al., 2017; Hoffert, 2015). White et al. (2016) declared, "It can take years to build trust and it can be blown in moments" (p. 24). But what if trust

can be rebuilt? It would be prudent to discover which strategies superintendents successfully use to rebuild trust with board members and between board members.

**Recommendation 6: Leadership Practices Based on Love and Acceptance**

It is recommended that a phenomenological study be conducted to explore the lived experience of superintendents who have demonstrated love and acceptance as important elements of leadership. This phenomenological study should examine the connections between building trust and these leadership practices. These leadership practices that are based on love and acceptance are topics that are not generally discussed in the mainstream field of education. This current study highlighted the trust-building effect of these practices as exhibited by the exemplary superintendents interviewed. Additional study on this topic is warranted.

## Concluding Remarks and Reflections

During the time of this study, there truly has been a crisis of trust in our world (Edelman, 2017). This crisis of trust has played out in daily news stories, workplace interactions, and personal conversations. At the time that these concluding remarks were written, the U.S. Government had undergone the longest partial shutdown in history, because of this crisis of trust. It has been fascinating to note how distrust from one area of life can contaminate other areas of life.

Conversely, it has been refreshing to note, during this study, that trust from one area of life can positively affect other areas of life. In essence, trust leads to more trust and distrust leads to more distrust (S. M. R. Covey et al., 2012; S. M. R. Covey & Merrill, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). In the area of building and maintaining trust, one person can make a huge difference, especially if that person has the

authority and leadership to implement trust-growing strategies in his or her area of expertise.

As I researched the concept of trust and conducted this study, I saw the importance of trust everywhere—not just between the superintendents and school board members I was studying. I also saw it between teachers and students, principals and teachers, between friends, between couples, and between members of my family. I found trust to be an incredibly complex metaconstruct that involved both risk and reward (Mayer et al., 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). I was struck by how hungry people are for trust in their workplace and personal lives. The presence of trust brings meaning and significance to those who are giving it and, more importantly, to those who are receiving or benefiting from it.

I am humbled by the transparency and courageous sharing done by the exemplary suburban superintendents who participated in this study. I was not prepared for the depth of the public-servant-oriented discussions with the five exemplary suburban superintendents who were interviewed. Their knowledge about their board members, and their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their board members, combined with their acceptance of their board members as people, their bosses, and keepers of the public trust was, quite frankly, inspiring.

I listened to these exemplary practitioners of building trust and I deeply reflected upon their shared wisdom regarding the strategies they use to build trust. This study and the important trust-building strategies shared by these exemplary suburban superintendents are, I believe, generalizable not just to superintendents across the United States but also to district administrators, principals, and teacher leaders. To those

aspiring superintendents who are just embarking on their journey to the superintendency, I would say that it is never to soon to learn about trust. To those current educational warriors who are fatigued by the political and educational battles they have lived through as a superintendent, I would say it is never to late to learn about trust. Because in the end, at this lowest level of local governance, this level of democracy closest to the people—it is all about trust.

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# APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

# Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey

**Welcome to the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey**

Successful relationships are dependent on trust. Trust influences a culture which fosters continuous improvement and outcomes. In the field of public education, a trusting relationship between the school board and superintendent enhances the effectiveness of the governance team.

The superintendent and board relationship is a visible signal to staff and community as to the health of the district. How superintendents build trust with and between school board members is a first step in accomplishing the goals of the district.

This survey is part of a thematic dissertation study exploring how superintendents develop trust with and between school board members. This survey solicits your perceptions of the actions and strategies used to develop that trusting relationship.

All responses to this survey are confidential and anonymous. Please read the statement below giving your consent to participate before opening the survey.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

* 1. Clicking on the "agree" button indicates that you have received and read the following documents: the Informed Consent Form and the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button. The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate

- ☐ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and "Bill of Rights." I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.
- ☐ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey

## Consistency

**Consistency is the confidence that a person's pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).**

**6-point scale**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strongly Disagree** | **Disagree** | **Disagree Somewhat** | **Agree Somewhat** | **Agree** | **Strongly Agree** |

2. I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

3. I create an environment where board members have opportunity to accomplish their goals and responsibilities.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

4. I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

5. I make commitments to board members I can keep.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

6. I keep my commitments to board members.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

7. I hold myself and board members accountable for actions.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

**Competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).**

**6-point scale**

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Disagree Somewhat | Agree Somewhat | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

8. I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to students, staff and community.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

9. I work with the board members to achieve the district's goals.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

10. I promote the capability of school board members.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

11. I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

12. I promote collaborative decision making with the governance team.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

13. I lead vision setting and manage the strategic actions of the school district.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

**Candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Giley, 2012; Tschannen-Mora, 2014; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Weisman & Jusino, 2016).**

**6-point scale**

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Disagree Somewhat | Agree Somewhat | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

14. I engage in open communication with all board members.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

15. I share openly with board members when things are going wrong.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

16. I engage board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

17. I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

18. I am open, authentic, and straightforward with all board members.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

19. I take on issues head on, even the "undiscussables."

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

**Concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability, support, motivate and care for each other (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Covey, Merrill, & Covey, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 1988; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).**

**6-point scale**

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Disagree Somewhat | Agree Somewhat | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

20. I take time to meet personally with each board member to understand their concerns.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

21. I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

22. I am a good listener.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

23. I treat each board member positively and with respect.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

24. I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

25. I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Disagree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree Somewhat
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

**Connection is a shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & baker, 2010; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).**

**6-point scale**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strongly Disagree** | **Disagree** | **Disagree Somewhat** | **Agree Somewhat** | **Agree** | **Strongly Agree** |

26. I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all board members.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

27. I am truthful, and frank in all interpersonal communications with board members.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

28. I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

29. I give voice to the district vision and shared values of the district.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

30. I engaged board members in recognition and celebrations of school district successes.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

31. I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Agree Somewhat
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

32. Thank you for completing this survey! If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview, which will provide your knowledge and experience to the body of research on how superintendents build trust with and between school board members, please enter your contact information into the fields below. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and would occur at your office or a location that is convenient for you. This step is entirely optional and voluntary.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | |
| Email Address | |
| Phone Number | |

APPENDIX **B**

## Invitation to Participate Letter

## Letter of Invitation

Study: How Suburban Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members

September _____, 2018

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a mixed methods research study about How Suburban Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). The main investigator of this study is Daniel R.C. Scudero, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study, because you are a superintendent within a suburban school district, who met four of five criteria because of your known expertise in building trust with and between board members.

Approximately fifteen suburban superintendents from California will participate in this study through an electronic survey. Five participants will participate through an interview. Participation in the survey should take 15-20 minutes. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time. Both are entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies suburban superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies suburban superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an email link to the electronic Survey Monkey survey. Participants will complete the survey and submit their responses. Five participants will be selected to be interviewed by the researcher. If chosen for the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a superintendent within a suburban school district, who builds trust with and between school board members. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

**RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS:** There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose online surveys will also be made accessible.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the strategies superintendents use to build trust with

and between school board members. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

**ANONYMITY:** Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me at (707) 738-6129 or by email at dscudero@mail.brandman.edu. You can also contact Dr. Keith Larick by email at larick@brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

Daniel R.C. Scudero

Daniel R.C. Scudero
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University

APPENDIX **C**

## Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights

## BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB Adopted September 2018

APPENDIX **D**

**Informed Consent Form**

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

**RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:** How Suburban Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Daniel R.C. Scudero, Doctoral Candidate

**TITLE OF CONSENT FORM:** Consent to Participate in Research

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies suburban superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model.

**PROCEDURES:** In participating in this research study, I agree to partake in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview or survey. The interview will take place in person at my school site or by phone, and will last about one hour. During the interview or survey, I will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share my experiences as a superintendent, who has experience building trust with and between school board members.

I understand that:

1. The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at my school site or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience. Surveys will also be utilized depending upon participants scheduling availability.

2. I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to determine whether the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model (connection, concern, candor, competence, and consistency) have any effect on the Superintendent's ability to build trust with and between school board members. The

findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

3. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Daniel R.C. Scudero, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Scudero may be contacted by phone at (707) 738-6129 or email at dscudero@mail.brandman.edu. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Keith Larick at larick@brandman.edu.

4. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

5. The study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

6. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Signature of Participant or Responsible Party** | **Date** |
| **Signature of Witness (if appropriate)** | **Date** |
| **Signature of Principal Investigator** | **Date** |

APPENDIX **E**

**Audio Release Form**

**RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:** How Suburban Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members

**BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY**
**16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD**
**IRVINE, CA 92618**

I authorize Daniel R.C. Scudero, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview, without any linkage to my identity, may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

_____ _____

**Signature of Participant or Responsible Party** **Date**

APPENDIX **F**

## Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol

## Script and Interview Questions

**Interviewer:** Daniel R.C. Scudero

**Interview time planned:** Approximately one hour

**Interview place:** Participant's office or other convenient agreed upon location

**Recording:** Digital voice recorder

**Written:** Field and observational notes

Make personal introductions.

**Opening Statement:** [Interviewer states:] I greatly appreciate your valuable time to participate in this interview. To review, The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman's Trust Model. The questions are written to elicit this information.

**Interview Agenda:** [Interviewer states:] I anticipate this interview will take about an hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via letter, and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for the purpose of this study. We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, Brandman University's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form. Next, I will begin the audio recorder and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue on with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy prior to the data being analyzed. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?

**Definitions:**

**Competence**

Competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (Covey, 2009;

Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Candor**
Candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Giley, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; O'Toole & Bennis, 2009; Weisman & Jusino, 2016).
**Concern**
Concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability, support, motivate and care for each other (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Covey & Merrill, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 1988; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).
**Connection**
Connection is a shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).
**Consistency**
Consistency is the confidence that a person's pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Interview Questions:**

1. Connection is about creating positive relationships & rapport with others. How have you developed positive relationships and rapport with board members?

   **Prompt**: How do you see the establishment of positive relationships and rapport as contributing to trust with school board members?

2. In what ways have you developed shared values with board members?

   **Prompt**: How do you see the establishment of shared values as contributing to trust with board members?

3. Research shows that leaders develop trust when they care for their employees' well-being. Tell me about some of the ways that you show you care for your board members and their wellbeing.

   **Prompt:** How do you share yourself with your employees?

4. What are some of the ways you create a collaborative work environment for your board members?

   **Prompt:** Can you provide some examples of how you make teams feel safe to dialogue in a collaborative environment?

   **Prompt:** How do you manage failures among *board members*?

5. The literature for trust indicates that leaders who communicate openly and honestly tend to build trust with their employees. Please share with me some ways that have worked for you as the leader of your site to communicate openly and honestly with board members.

   **Probe**: Can you describe a time when you perceive your communication with board members may have contributed to developing trust?

6. Two characteristics for a transparent leader are accessibility and being open to feedback. Please share some examples of how you demonstrate accessibility and openness to feedback.

   **Probe:** How would you describe your feedback strategies for board members? Can you give me some examples?

7. The literature for trust indicates that leaders who demonstrate competence by fulfilling their role as expected establish credibility and develop trust with their board members. Can you describe a time in which you feel your competence as a leader may have contributed to developing trust?

   **Probe:** Please share with me some examples in which you feel you established your credibility within your role as the superintendent

8. Competent leaders value the expertise of others and invite participation of team members to solve problems through shared decision-making. Please share with me some ways that have worked for you as the superintendent to invite participation in decision-making with the school board?

   **Probe:** Can you describe a time when you perceive school board participation in decision-making may have contributed to developing trust?

9. What are some of the ways that you model leadership that is reliable and dependable?

   **Prompt:** How do you establish expectations that help you to lead the board in a way that is dependable?

10. Can you provide an example of a crisis situation when your leadership was dependable and steadfast and developed trust with and between board members?

    **Prompt:** How do you ensure that your message to board members is consistent and true during a time of crisis?

**"Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings."**

Possible Probes for any of the items:

1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by ……..”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about…. “
6. “Can you give me an example of …..”
7. “How did you feel about that?”

APPENDIX **G**

**National Institutes of Health—Protecting Human Research Participants**

**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Daniel Scudero** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/16/2017.

Certification Number: 2395659.

APPENDIX **H**

**Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey Feedback Form**

Survey Critique by Participants

As a doctoral student and researcher at Brandman University your assistance is so appreciated in designing this survey instrument. Your participation is crucial to the development of a valid and reliable instrument. Below are some questions that I appreciate your answering after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the survey items.
You have been provided with a paper copy of the survey, just to jog your memory if you need it. Thanks so much.

1. How many minutes did it take you to complete the survey, from the moment you opened it on the computer until the time you completed it?_____

2. Did the portion up front that asked you to read the consent information and click the agree box before the survey opened concern you at all? ____
   If so, would you briefly state your concern _____
   _____

3. Was the Introduction sufficiently clear (and not too long) to inform you what the research was about? _____ If not, what would you recommend that would make it better? _____
   _____

4. Were the directions to, and you understood what to do? _____
   If not, would you briefly state the problem _____
   _____

5. Were the brief descriptions of the rating scale choices prior to your completing the items clear, and did they provide sufficient differences among them for you to make a selection? _____ If not, briefly describe the problem_____
   _____

6. As you progressed through the survey in which you gave a rating of # through #, if there were any items that caused you say something like, *"What does this mean?"* Which item(s) were they? Please use the paper copy and mark those that troubled you? Or if not, please check here:____

Thanks so much for your help

APPENDIX I

## Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation**. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I'm pretty new at this)?

APPENDIX J

**Interview Feedback Reflection Questions**

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer' after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX **K**

## Brandman University's Institutional Review Board Approval

Oct. 5, 2018

Dear Daniel R.C. Scudero,
Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.
If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.
Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.
Thank you,
**Doug DeVore, Ed.D.**
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu