

Local Control over Education:
Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida County School Board Members

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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my wife Amanda, the love of my life. A brilliant attorney who took a chance on a rough and tumble soldier, and after 33 years of a blessed marriage, her love for me continues to be unconditional and enduring. She is a woman of faith, courage and conviction, whose unstinting, ethical and professional representation of the unheard continues to inspire members of the Bench and Bar. Life without her would be darkness and despair, rather than the light and joy I've experienced with her at my side. I love her beyond life itself. "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies." Proverbs 31:10.

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ABSTRACT

Historically, local boards of education have been viewed as community stewards who are responsible for providing local children with a quality education that reflects the values and mores of the locality in which they serve (Rice, 2014). However, in recent years, many states have significantly expanded their roles in public education. Quite often, this expansion results in an erosion of local control. For instance, in 2019, the State of Florida, which presently has a mix of elected and appointed school superintendents, considered a state constitutional amendment which would have moved the state to a wholly appointed school superintendent model. In that same year, a Bill was vetted by members of the Tennessee Legislature's Education Administration & Planning Committee, that proposed to require the election (rather than the appointment) of school superintendents in Tennessee. Neither the Florida nor the Tennessee Legislatures consulted with county school board members in their respective states when debating legislation that directly affected local power and authority.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the perceptions of county school board members in Tennessee and Florida concerning the influence state legislators and state Board of Education members have on the role and power of local boards of education. This study is based upon the most recent study conducted in Tennessee by Morgan (2003), which explored the State's shift from elected to appointed school superintendents. In 1992, the Tennessee Legislature adopted the Education Improvement Act (EIA), that moved the state to a wholly appointive school superintendent process. The context of that original study was limited to school districts in Tennessee and focused on the perceptions of school superintendents relative to the superintendent selection process. As an extension to the original study, this researcher expanded the research to include the State of Florida and focused on the perceptions of school board members (as compared to school superintendents), in both states. Further, this researcher

also modified the original study to include the perceptions of school board members beyond the superintendent selection process by exploring the perceived effects of the expanding role of the state in local education policies and practices. Like the Morgan Study, this investigation followed a quantitative design.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Over twenty years ago Lutz (1986) observed the willingness of governors, state legislatures, and state departments of education to substitute their values regarding the manner in which children will be educated for those held by local boards of education and the communities they serve. The National School Boards Association (NSBA) (2018) also aware of this phenomenon, noted that “School boards, elected or appointed by their communities, represent the community’s beliefs and values” and as such, are uniquely qualified to “shoulder the responsibility for preparing children to live productive and satisfying lives.” (NSBA, 2018, para. 5). Nevertheless, Kirst (2008) observed that state legislatures are increasingly willing to enact legislation that dictates how local boards of education conduct themselves. He argued that the rise in state mandates can be attributed to perceptions that local school districts lack certain trustworthiness when it comes to improving the education of children residing in their respective districts.

In recent years, state legislatures have eclipsed local boards of education in terms of taking the lead on developing and implementing education policies and procedures as school districts consumed greater amounts of the state’s fiscal pie (Finch, 2012; Mazzoni, 1994; McDonnell, 2009). Finch (2012) further noted that state elected and appointed officials “have emerged as the main forces shaping education policy” (p. 577) while local boards of education have been relegated to secondary roles at best. Although states regularly exercise both direct and indirect leadership in their attempts to improve local school districts and schools they manage, right down to the classroom level, there exists little consensus amongst affected school districts

on what role the state should play in local school governance (Louis, Thomas, Gordon, & Febey, 2008).

In their multi-state study, Cooper and Fusarelli (2009) observed that, as state legislative bodies increasingly involve themselves in the affairs of local boards of education, there's a tendency to promulgate state mandates designed to "ensure that local school boards are adequately educating students" (p. 2). Such mandates show a willingness on the part of states to intercede in local school board operations, serving to directly impact the manner in which local school boards test their students, discipline, hire, and fire teachers, and determine which schools are viable and thus remain operational (Ramirez, 2010; Rice, 2014). Engel (2000) argued that state policy makers, in their efforts to reform public schools, deprive local communities of the ability to manage their schools, deprive teachers of the ability to control their classrooms, and deprive students of the ability to control their futures. Rice (2014) contended that the willingness of state governments, and, at times, the federal government, to promulgate policy, or make decisions that affect the day-to-day running of public schools without conferring with or seeking input from local boards of education is "impractical" at best (p. 12). Rice likewise suggested that "the institution of local elected school boards is the only means available to promote what is collectively best for the public good" (p. 14). Alarmed by the propensity of states to preempt local authority, Boyle and Burns (2011) offered a vision of public schools that serves to do away with state regulation of education while empowering parents to decide how best to spend their education dollars.

Shelton (2015) asserted that "The United States practices a decentralized system of schooling in which the states historically assign responsibility for school governance to local elected school boards" (p. 33). However, although school boards are managed at the local level,

they are nevertheless considered to be agents of state government. As such, they are legally mandated to set policy that is congruent with state laws, legislation, and regulations that implicitly or impliedly dictate how local school districts operate (Ehrensals & First, 2008). While the state determines the manner in which school districts are funded, managed, operated, structured, staffed, and what curricula and programs will be offered in the schools that comprise the district (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009), Knoester and Parkison (2017) suggested that there is a disconnect between state-level policy makers and the local school districts that are required to implement state policies. Such disconnects, they argued, lead to a misunderstanding on the part of the state of local educational needs, while depriving local school districts of voice in such matters, and ultimately “the cutting out of broad democratic deliberation” (p. 252). They further opined that the manner in which state educational agencies view public schools and evaluate expected outcomes “is not closely analyzed or adequately critiqued” (p. 250). Consequently, states are prone to “reduce outcomes to what is easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage: attendance rates, graduation rates, test scores, and school finances” (p. 250).

Malen (2011) observed that local control of schools is continually being curtailed, as state governments demonstrate increasing and, at times, overly assertive efforts to control public schools. She cautioned:

[T]he balance of power has shifted. School systems are the clear targets and often the reluctant recipients of policies that make them assume substantial responsibility for reform outcomes but grant them little opportunity to influence reform inputs. That arrangement places local actors at a clear disadvantage. They are not powerless, but they are forced to maneuver within the relatively narrow and narrowing parameters set at the federal and state levels of the system (p. 38).

Malen (2005) argued that this shift in the locus and balance of power is noteworthy, considering the perception that “during the 1950s and early 1960s, states were broadly viewed as the weak link in the federal-state-local chain of school governance” (p. 196). According to James (as cited in Cooper and Fusarelli, 2009) state reforms often result in diminishing local control while simultaneously strengthening state control “despite countervailing rhetoric of local control, privatization, choice, and school-based management” (p. 3). Today, states are the primary policymakers in K-12 education and often bypass localities when they pass mandates that determine class size, student and teacher assessment standards, graduation requirements, teacher discipline, and other important policies (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

For more than two centuries, the public has looked to the local school board to provide both a form of educational governance and a forum for democracy and the free exchange of ideas (Land, 2002; Trujillo, 2012). According to Diem, Frankenberg, and Cleary (2015) local school boards remain important to the educational process. They suggested that:

While there is a growing push for more standardization in public education, the history of public schooling has vested authority in the local level of school board governance.

Locally elected school board members have been governing public education for centuries; they exist to carry out states’ constitutional guarantees of public education (p. 713).

The authors further suggest that “school boards have an enormous impact on public education, shaping policies that have consequences for local school districts and communities” (pp. 713,714).

Knoester and Parkison (2017) also argue in favor of local control by way of local boards of education. In their study of the perceptions of federal and state education policymakers, they not only touted the importance of empowering local school boards when it comes to accountability and control, but argued that “local school communities should have much more control over the curriculum and the assessments used to improve education” (p. 247). Examining the standardized tests foisted upon local school districts by the federal and state governments, they observed a system that moves schools “away from a consideration of competencies understood locally and toward a consideration of test-item indicators of competencies understood nationally” (p. 252). Engel (2000) noting that many Americans are unappreciative or unaware of the utility of local school boards, described them as “among the most venerable of U.S. public institutions, embodying many of our most cherished political and cultural tenets” (p. 214). Rice (2014) is likewise effusive in his praise of local boards of education, referring to them as “stewards of the community charged with making decisions on behalf of the community that reflect the values of the community” (p. 3). He further suggested that “state boards of education cannot efficiently carry out any reforms without the support of local school districts” and that for any state reform to truly be successful, “it is vital that the local districts take a lead role in guiding and facilitating the process” (p. 8).

Despite the existence of proponents of local control of schools, the trend for states to expand their control of public schools is unmistakable. Beginning with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, most states passed legislation to reform local school systems that typically diminished local control over education policies (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009). Cooper & Fusarelli (2009) observed that state departments of education have been “transformed from sleepy little offices into large, active bodies with oversight capability and significant control over local

education initiatives” (p. 2). Since NCLB, the federal government has passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires states to identify and turn around struggling schools. Schueler, Goodman, and Deming (2017) suggested that, while the ESSA is designed to induce states to turn around individual struggling schools, district-wide turnarounds are becoming more common. According to Zimmer, Henry, and Ho (2017) the Tennessee Legislature’s Achievement School District (ASD) program, designed to turn struggling schools around, often results in “replaced personnel, altered school operations, and reformed teaching and learning practices” (p. 671). They concluded that there is scant evidence to suggest that, before a school can be effectively turned around, it must be severed from the local school district and turned over to operators external to the district.

Boyle and Burns (2012) observed that proponents of a state-controlled system of schools have openly criticized local school boards, viewing them as “unprepared for the critical task of preparing a work force for a technological society and a global economy” (p. 157). Boyle and Burns further observed that a portion of society view school boards as nothing more than “dysfunctional families” comprised of:

- 1) aspiring politicians for whom this is a rung on the ladder to higher office;
- 2) former employees of the school system with a score to settle; and
- 3) single-minded advocates of one dubious cause or another who yearn to use the public schools to impose their particular hang-up on all the kids in town (p. 157).

Mark Twain was even less generous when it came to the utility of school boards, commenting, “In the first place God made idiots. This was for practice. Then he made School Boards” (as cited in Rasmussen, 1998, p. 144).

In her study of Kentucky public schools Brown-Ferrigno (2009) opined that there exists a defensible rationale for increased state control of public schools. She suggested that, while concerns over increases in state control over local education decision-making do exist, “if left to their own devices, many local school officials will do little to address or remedy inequities within the educational system” (p. 255).

State control over local schools comes in many forms. For instance, in 2019, the Florida Legislature, through its Constitution Revision Commission, sought to amend the Florida Constitution, relative to the selection of school superintendents. Specifically, Article IX, section 5 of the Florida Constitution allows a county to change the office of superintendent of schools from an elective to an appointive position. Dubbed Proposition 33, the amendment was designed to move the state to a wholly appointive school superintendent selection scheme by removing the ability of citizens to choose between an elected or appointed school superintendent. A review of the legislative history of Proposition 33 failed to disclose any language whatsoever to suggest that the Florida Legislature conferred with local school boards, or relied upon any established or commissioned studies, prior to attempting to move the state to a wholly appointive school superintendent selection scheme. According to Solocheck (2019), Proposition 33 proceeded “Despite pushback from the people who would be most affected” (para 1). Further, both the Florida School Boards Association and the Florida Association of School Superintendents opposed the proposition.

In 2017, Tennessee House Bill No. 907 (HB 907) proposed to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 2, relative to move Tennessee from an appointed to an elected school superintendent selection process. The bill’s sponsors were unsuccessful. As was the case in Florida, a review of the legislative history of HB 907 failed to reveal any evidence to suggest

that local boards of education or school superintendents were included in the deliberation process. According to The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE, 2011), the primary duty and responsibility of a local board of education is to set qualifications for school superintendent candidates, and to conduct comprehensive searches to find the right leader for their districts. The Center for Public Education (2016) suggests that school boards are charged with defining an initial vision for the district and seeking a superintendent to match that vision. The actions of both the Florida and Tennessee Legislatures regarding the superintendent selection process failed to give voice to the persons who were the most affected, or potentially the most affected, namely, local school board members. According to some researchers, such actions are merely symptoms of an overarching problem, namely, the propensity of states to usurp local control of schools (Engle, 2000; Rice, 2014).

In addition to the above-noted legislations, both Tennessee and Florida introduced a substantial amount of legislation designed to affect the day-to-day operations of local school boards. During Tennessee's 111th General Assembly, 2018-2019, 111 bills were passed that directly affected local school board operations. During Florida's 2019 regular session of the Florida Legislature, 2018-2019, 47 bills were passed that directly affected local school board operations. There exists no evidence to suggest that either state legislature actively sought input from local school board members when vetting and passing such legislation.

Ohm (2018) observed that there exists a growing frustration amongst some Tennessee local school board members when it comes to their relationship with members of their own state legislative delegation. She reports one school board member as saying, "Our legislators refuse to listen to us in meetings and have gone so far as to insult board members in person. We have experienced some adverse legislation from our delegation and they deny us access to meetings

they have with teachers" (para. 3). Local school board members in Florida are, at times, likewise at odds with state lawmakers when it comes to educational policy. According to the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA, 2019), one of its primary missions is to maintain local control over public schools by ensuring that school boards are strengthened and empowered to "exercise their constitutional right to control, manage, and operate school districts" (para. 1).

Rice (2014) suggested that local school boards are and should remain relevant, especially when one considers that fact that the public electing them presumes that "school boards evaluate the superintendent, the superintendent evaluates administrators, principals evaluate teachers, and teachers evaluate students" (p. 211). He further suggested that local school boards are uniquely suited to govern local public schools because:

1. School boards keep the public in public schools
2. School boards positively impact student achievement
3. School boards serve as trustees over district resources
4. School boards serve as advocates for public schools (p. 93).

Jacobson and Saultz (2012) in their analysis of data generated by Phi Delta Kappa, observed that, while citizens acknowledge that the state and federal government are important players in education policymaking, those polled consistently preferred local to state control of schools, especially when it comes to curriculum development and school performance. Their findings concluded that local citizens consistently selected their local school boards as the group that should have the greatest influence in determining what their children are being taught. Despite the key role local boards of education play in the public education process, school board member voice is, by and large, absent from the discussions leading up to state legislation affecting the power and authority of locally elected and appointed boards of education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members toward state control of public schools. Additionally, the study investigated how Tennessee and Florida county school board members perceived increased state control of public schools has affected their ability to govern.

To achieve this purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

- 1.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over local school performance?
- 2.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state influence over public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?

Based upon the above variables and constructs, the following relevant hypotheses are:

- 1.) School performance:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

- 2.) School board governance

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

Significance of the Study

According to the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2018) there are over 14,000 school boards in the United States populated by approximately 100,000 school board members. Approximately 96% of school board members are locally elected with the remaining 4% appointed by sitting school board members. Despite the decisive role played by local school in the education of the Nation's children, Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) observed that there exists a dearth of qualitative and quantitative research on the efficacy of local boards of education and "comparatively few studies on the practices and effectiveness of elected or appointed boards" (p. 1).

In their multi-state study of public school policy-making, Seashore, Gordon, Meath, and Thomas (2009) observed that the tensions associated with whether the state or localities set educational policy boasts a long, contentious history. They suggest that there are times when the interests of local school boards have prevailed, and times when the state has seen fit to take control of public education. For instance, when studying the state of Oregon, they noted that, while there exists a culture that encourages local, decentralized decision-making, there contemporaneously exists a determined effort by the state to develop uniformity amongst local school districts. Local school board members, however, rather than perceiving themselves as extensions of the state, view themselves as "policymakers at the local level" responsible for both the interpretation and implementation of emerging education policy (p. 162).

Considering the importance of dialogue between state legislatures and local boards of education regarding legislation affecting the manner in which local school districts are governed, state and local officials would benefit from a study which seeks to investigate the benefits of increased interaction between state education policymakers and local education policy implementors (Schultz & McGinn, 2012). As observed by Boyle and Burns (2012) the governance of America's public schools must be a "collective and representative enterprise" that includes both state legislatures and local boards of education (p. 163).

This study extended research by Morgan (2003) on the perceptions of the school superintendents relative to whether school superintendents should be elected or appointed. The study was undertaken ten years after the Tennessee Legislature adopted the Education Improvement Act (EIA), that moved the state to a wholly appointive school superintendent process. Morgan concluded that Tennessee's school superintendents, regardless if they served in districts where school superintendents were traditionally elected, favored an appointive process. However, Morgan's study was limited to the school superintendent selection process, and based solely upon the perceptions of Tennessee school superintendents.

The present study expanded Morgan's efforts by examining the perceptions of local school board members in Tennessee and Florida beyond the superintendent selection process by investigating their perceptions of state influence on local decision making. Examining these perceptions can aid in the political legitimization of the study due to the symbiotic relationship between state legislatures and local school boards. As noted by Rice (2014) "state boards of education cannot efficiently carry out any reforms without the support of local school districts" and strong relationships between the two are crucial for the successful implementation of policies that ultimately inure to the benefit of public schools (p. 8).

Educational reformer Deborah Meier (2003) has suggested that there exists a culture of mistrust when it comes to local school boards, leading state bureaucracies to standardize public education. By identifying local boards of education as stakeholders who are directly affected by the actions of state policymakers, their perceptions may help abate the culture of mistrust existing between state and local education agencies.

Definition of Terms

For clarification, terms specific to this study that may be unfamiliar to the reader are defined.

- Tennessee Senate Bill 391 – “Notwithstanding subsection (a) or any provisions of Chapter 535 of the Public Acts of 1992 to the contrary, any county or municipality operating a school system may reestablish the office of elected school superintendent by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the membership of the county or municipal legislative body.”
- Florida Statute §1001.32 reads – “In accordance with the provisions of s. 4(b) of Art. IX of the State Constitution, district school boards shall operate, control, and supervise all free public schools in their respective districts and may exercise any power except as expressly prohibited by the State Constitution or general law.”
- Appointive method: The appointive method refers to a system providing for the appointment of the school superintendent by the local school board.
- County or Municipal School Board: A local board or authority responsible for the provision and maintenance of schools.
- Elective method: The term “elective method” refers to a system providing for the election of the school superintendent by popular vote of the local electorate.

- Lobbyists: Professional advocates that work to influence political decisions on behalf of individuals and organizations.
- Local Education Agency (LEA): a local board of education.
- School Superintendent or Director of Schools: a person employed by the LEA and tasked with insuring that the laws relating to the schools and rules of the state and the LEA are faithfully executed and implemented.
- School District is an independent special-purpose government run by a school board or LEA.
- Tennessee Legislator: a member of the Tennessee General Assembly serving either in the Senate or the House of Representatives.
- Florida Legislator: a member of the Florida General Assembly serving either in the Senate or the House of Representatives.
- T.C.A. is an abbreviation for Tennessee Code Annotated, the codification of laws enacted by the Tennessee General Assembly.
- FLA. STAT. is an abbreviation for Florida Statutes Anno Annotated, the codification of laws enacted by the Florida General Assembly.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study, set by the researcher for the purposes of narrowing the scope of the study for significance factors, are as follows:

1. This study will focus only on two states: Tennessee and Florida.

2. Only locally elected and appointed school board members will be surveyed in this study.
3. Because Florida has only county school districts (unlike Tennessee which has both county and city school districts), the target population was limited to county school board members in both states.

Limitations

As in most quantitative studies, this study will involve the collection of quantitative data through the use of a survey instrument in the form of a questionnaire. This implies that respondents will self-report, a process that does not always result in candid responses. Further, quantitative research methodology requires a large sample size. Boeren (2018) cautioned, “In setting up a survey, the researcher will have to make decisions on not only how to sample but also on how to formulate the specific questions that will be asked, which is extremely important as these questions cannot be changed anymore once data collection has started” (p. 69). By administering the instrument to locally elected and appointed school board members in Tennessee and Florida, the hope is that a more complete and balanced picture of the perceptions of the aforementioned, relative to the extent the expanding role of the state affects local governance of schools, can be obtained.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the extent to which state governments have increased their interventions and scope of control in local education. The problem under investigation was identified as the lack of empirical research regarding the perceptions of local school board members of state activism in education policymaking, often resulting in increased state control of public schools. This chapter therefore explained the purpose and significance of the study as an essential element towards giving voice to local school board members during future state educational policymaking endeavors. The chapter concluded with definitions of terms used in the study. The limitations of the study were provided for greater understanding of the influences the researcher cannot control, and the delimitations were provided to explain the boundaries set for the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 will provide an extensive review of the literature related to this study for the purpose of illuminating the rise in state control over locally elected county school boards and the reasons behind the proposed research questions and study design. Within the review of literature, the arguments for state versus local control of schools are explored. Finally, Chapter 2 will identify gaps in the literature regarding the perceptions of school board members relative to the increase of state influence in local education decision making and policy formulation.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in this quantitative study, and will outline the study's research design to explain the rationale, participants, and sample for the study. The chapter will conclude with a description of the data analysis procedures used to display the data collected.

Chapter 4 will be dedicated to quantitative data analysis and a discussion that connects the results presented to the relevant literature. Specifically, quantitative data obtained through the survey instruments will be analyzed to aid in the legitimization of findings.

Chapter 5 will conclude this study with a discussion and conclusions, and will aim to provide practical recommendations to Tennessee and Florida legislators when considering prospective legislation designed to affect local control of public education. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of the implications for practitioners, and suggestions for future research as gleaned from the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose, research questions, and significance of this study. The literature regarding the willingness on the part of states to intercede in local school board operations must be examined to illuminate the perceptions of city and county school board members in Tennessee and Florida concerning the effect state legislative mandates have on the role and power of local boards of education. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1.) What are the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state control over school performance?
- 2.) How do Tennessee and Florida county school board members perceive that state control of public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?

Based upon the above variables and constructs, the following relevant hypotheses are:

- 1.) School performance:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

- 2.) School board governance

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

According to Usdan (2010) the role of school boards, as well as the relationship between local boards of education and state and federal education agencies, has been under-represented in the literature. This is especially true, he suggested, when it comes to education reform. An often-neglected player in school reform as result of increased state and federal influence, he argued that “School boards can be ignored or bypassed in reform efforts, or they can become a crucial element in leading and sustaining positive change” (p. 9). This chapter begins with an outline of the search process employed to locate bodies of literature germane to this study. This outline is followed by a brief history of school boards, followed by: (a) school board membership and motivations to serve, (b) the role of school boards, (c) school board elections, (d) school board campaign financing, (e) school board training, (f) school board effectiveness, and (g) school board oversight. Within these areas, Chapter 2 will examine the literature regarding the incentives for state control of schools, followed by incentives for local control of schools, and finally, the rise of the state as a leader in educational reform, and the implications that rise may have for local school boards.

The Search Process

A diverse body of databases was accessed during the search process for literature for this study. Google Scholar was accessed to locate peer reviewed articles, theses, books, abstracts and court opinions. Databases maintained by the Tennessee Legislature, the Florida Legislature, the U.S., Tennessee, and Florida Departments of Education, and LexisNexis® (the publisher of the Tennessee and Florida codes of law) were also accessed. The University of Tennessee online education databases were used to retrieve articles and reports from various providers such as Education Source, ERIC, Sage Reference Online and EBSCO host. Databases maintained by the Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of School Superintendents, the

American Association of School Administrators, the Tennessee School Board Association, and the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents were accessed as were the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Education Commission of the States. The University of Tennessee Hodges Library catalog was accessed to obtain various texts and dissertations, and the Library's Interlibrary Loan Services were used to obtain copies of works not maintained by the library or available online.

School Boards in America: A Brief History

The locally elected school board is a unique institution that has been a hallmark of American public education for over two centuries (Kirst, 2008). The origins of a system of school governance consisting of an elected board responsible for governing the local district is most commonly traced back to 18th century Massachusetts, which provided for a representative system of local governance by selectmen (Danzberger, 1992, 1994). However, Littlefield (1904) in his classic account of education in 17th century Massachusetts, reported on the existence of a system whereby citizens selected three men who were part of the landed gentry and who were given the title of either "warden" or "overseer." These gentlemen were tasked with, among other things, ensuring that each school was supplied with "an able and sufficient school master" (p. 82). Further, wardens and overseers were required to mediate disputes between parents and schoolmasters, provide sufficient fuel in the form of coal or wood to warm classrooms, keep schools in good repair, ensure that all students, rich or poor, were offered an education, and provide for a system of corporal punishment "according as the nature and quality of the offense shall require" (p. 85). By the mid-nineteenth century, school boards began to divest themselves of the day-to-day administration of schools, opting rather to transfer such duties and responsibilities to professional superintendents (Maeroff, 2010). For instance, Tennessee enacted

the Public School Act of 1873 which is regarded as the parent act of public education, having provided the basic framework for Tennessee's system of public education (Darnell, 2007). The Act served to create local boards of education throughout the state, consisting of three directors for each board or district who were elected for three-year terms. These directors were charged with having general oversight of schools, managing school funds, and ensuring that school superintendents within their purview visited schools, certified teachers, and issued reports to the state superintendent of schools (Rothrock, 1946).

Finn and Petrilli (2013) theorized that local school boards were not created by the various states, as much as they were inherited from an "earlier era of community-based, locally financed education" (p. 25). They observed that school board configurations "vary as greatly as do our communities. In some states, they coincide with counties; in others, they are coterminous with cities or townships" (p. 25). Boyle and Burns (2012) noted that public schools were historically a creature of local government designed with local control in mind, and as such, funded at the local level. The original intent of public schools then was to "prepare responsible citizens through nonsectarian and nonpartisan moral and civic instruction (p. 154).

Throughout the twentieth century, school boards continued to evolve to the point where, like municipal governments, school board members were locally elected and tasked with hiring a chief executive in the form of a school superintendent. Thus, the specific preferences of local residents became the catalyst for creating large school districts governed by small school boards that were answerable to the people at the polls. In one of the earlier studies of local school boards in America, Eliot (1959) noted that school boards were created to "to hire and support a competent professional as superintendent, defend the schools against public criticism, and persuade the people to open their pocketbooks" (p. 1033). The model that predominates most

school districts in the United States today comes in the form of citizens who provide oversight of school boards that are expected to promulgate policy, as well as rely upon a chief executive in the form of a professional superintendent to manage the day-to-day activities of the district (Land, 2002).

School Boards Today: Who Serves and Why

More children attend elementary and secondary schools in the United States today than at any time in our Nation's history. These children are, by and large, being taught in public schools managed by local boards of education. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

According to the National School Boards Association (NSBA) (2017) more than 90,000 men and women are members of local school boards in the United States, serving on 13,809 locally elected or appointed bodies. Approximately 91% of school boards have between five and nine members, with seven member boards being the most common, and five member boards prevalent in smaller school districts (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011).

The demographic profile of today's local board of education has changed considerably in recent years as our society becomes increasingly more diverse culturally, ethnically and religiously (Kowalski, 2008b). Hess and Meeks (2010) in their national study of local school boards sought to identify the demographics and characteristics of school board members. They noted:

On the whole, school board members are not dramatically different from the nation as a whole. That said, they're somewhat wealthier and more educated, somewhat less likely to be African-American or Latino, and somewhat more likely to have been an educator. They're more likely to have children in school than the typical adult, though most do not have a school-age child, and their political views broadly track those of the adult

population. Finally, they frequently report having been moved to board service by notions of service and civic duty (p. 21).

Rice (2010) suggested that there exists a dearth of comprehensive research to adequately identify the various reasons that motivate citizens to serve on their local school board. He did observe, however, that various state school board associations often collect data in an effort to determine the motivations behind school board membership, and that data illuminates some of the more common motives. He provided the following examples:

Wisconsin School Boards Association (2012 survey):

- Interest in promoting public education and student achievement.
- Interest in educational issues.
- To give back to the community.

Illinois School Boards Association (2009 survey):

- To make improvement in the schools.
- To fulfill my civic duty.
- To help my children get a good education.

Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014 survey):

- To improve the quality of education, standards, and/or achievement.
- To share expertise and experience.
- To serve the community, public service.

Although the motivations behind school board service are as diverse as the people who serve, research suggests that the most common motivators are a desire to ensure that the children in their care receive a good education, as well as a desire to serve their community (Rice, 2010). Gore (2015) opined that locally elected school boards are part of our nation's heritage and are

comprised of citizens whose interests in serving are founded upon a desire to improve their communities, states, and the nation. He suggested that “Our nation’s founders were strategic and thoughtful when they chose to entrust state and local citizens with the governance of our schools” (p. 171). Tallerico (1989) noted that many citizens view school boards as the epitome of local control, and as such, the essence of grassroots democracy.

The Role of School Boards

According to Usdan (2010) there exists a dearth of research and literature focusing on the contemporary duties and challenges of school boards. Howell (2005) went one step further noting, “It is hardly an exaggeration to note that more is known about the operation of medieval guilds than about the institutions that govern contemporary school districts” (p. 15). In their seminal study on school board leadership, Danzberger et al. (1986) opined that school boards were a mystery to most Americans, referring to them as “that dark island of American governance” (p. xv). In one of the first comprehensive studies of school boards commissioned by the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and conducted by White (1962), it was announced that, while county and municipal boards of education are in effect political subdivisions of their respective states, nevertheless they conduct themselves as local agencies. White reported that “Chosen from among the school district citizenry, the board of education represents the community in public school matters and is responsible for the district's educational program” (p. 7). Despite the ensuing years and the advent of state and federal mandates, Kirst (2010) noted that the management of public schools in the United States continues to be left to local school boards. Such boards, he suggested, are empowered to establish local leadership, promulgate policy, and enjoy almost unbridled discretion when it came to the governance authority over the operations of the district. He further suggested that

local school boards are increasingly experiencing a shift from their basic management role to more policy making duties and responsibilities. Lefkowitz and Woempner (2007) also recognized an increase in school board authority and suggested that:

School boards should require all schools to have clearly articulated and widely communicated rules and codes of behavior, including a system of rewards and sanctions, as many schools have already. In addition, schools should be required to monitor the effectiveness of their disciplinary system by keeping accurate and up-to-date records of referrals, suspensions, acts of violence, vandalism, and other disruptive activities. (p. 8)

Historically in the United States, local school boards have been populated with lay individuals, and vested with authority by their respective states to provide for the education of a community's children (Johnson, 1988). Such is the case in Tennessee and Florida. Although education is declared to be a state function as expressed in each state's respective constitutions (Tennessee Constitution, Article XI, Section 12; Florida Constitution, Article IX Section 4), both Tennessee and Florida legislatively vest responsibility for local administration of public education in locally elected boards of education (T.C.A. § 49-1-102(c); FLA. STAT. §1001-32). Consequently, locally elected school boards in both states have a statutory duty for ensuring that the schools for which they are responsible, are operated efficiently so that all children are given an opportunity to learn, and both state legislatures maintain house and senate education committees. In Florida, county school board members are elected at the general election in November for terms of 4 years and are responsible for the education of the children in their care (FLA. STAT. §1001-35). The duties and responsibilities of school board members include the operation, control, and supervision all free public schools within the school district as well as determine the rate of school district taxes. Further, school boards are charged with adopting and

providing for the execution of plans for the establishment, organization, and operation of the schools of the district (FLA. STAT. §1001-32).

In Tennessee, county school board members are elected by the people for a period of four years, and are responsible for the education of the children in their care (T.C.A. §49-2-201). Board members are empowered to set policies relative to the construction of schools, school discipline and attendance, the entering into of contracts, and the establishment and operation of before and after school care programs (T.C.A. §49-2-201). They are also empowered to hire the school superintendent/director of schools who is required to “Act for the board in seeing that the laws relating to the schools and rules of the state and the local board of education are faithfully executed” (T.C.A. §49-2-301). Regardless of the minimum qualifications established by Tennessee and Florida for their respective school superintendents, both states empower their respective local boards of education to mandate additional qualifications when hiring school superintendents (T.C.A. §49-2-301; FLA. STAT. §1001-32).

According to Hatrick (2010) of all the duties and responsibilities with which today’s school board is saddled, the selection of the school superintendent is one of the most important decisions it will encounter. The school superintendent is often regarded as one of the most influential, if not important persons, in today’s local school district, responsible for everything from diligently executing school board mandates to developing curricula and serving as chief leader among leaders (Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2015). As the chief executive of the local board of education, the school superintendent is charged with carrying out the board’s policies, while simultaneously administering the school districts’ day-to-day affairs (Björk & Kowalski, 2005). In their 2010 decennial study of the school superintendency, Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson (2011) reported that school boards exert

significant influence over the superintendents they appoint. They asserted that “Nowhere are the dynamics of superintendent-school board relations put to the test and played out in a more public arena than the board’s acceptance or rejection of a superintendent’s policy recommendations” (p. 67). This influence, they argued, has two important implications, namely “the extent to which superintendents provide policy recommendations and the extent to which school boards approve them” (p. 67).

School Board elections

Of all the federal, state, and local elections that take place in the United States, the most under researched elections are those involving local boards of education (Garn and Copeland, 2014; Allen & Plank, 2005). As Garn and Copeland (2014) put it, local school board elections are “low-turnout, low-information elections” that often escape the notice of a local citizenry that doesn’t “possess enough knowledge to make a thoughtful decision discerning one candidate from another” (p. 10). While Walser (2009) reported that only 10 percent of voters turn out for local school board elections, Garn and Copeland suggested that, despite low voter turnout, most voters in school board elections did possess the presence of mind to identify candidates who possessed good moral character, the ability to effectively govern, as well as make sound decisions. According to Shoher and Hartney (2014), the best outcome citizens can expect from the process of democratically electing board members is to accurately “identify a candidate’s political bent and previous connection to education, and then assume that the candidate will represent a particular agenda” (p. 24).

Traditionally, local voters elect a legislative body in the form of a school board from the local citizenry and subsequently entrust that board with employing (unless the district provides for an elected superintendent) a professional administrator/executive to serve at the board’s

pleasure. According to Feuerstein (2012) there are two conflicting perspectives on how a school system should be governed based upon the historical model. Some citizens perceive school board elections as the only vehicle by which they have a voice in school affairs and ultimately the education of their children. Others, however, take a more cynical approach, viewing such elections as nothing more than legitimatizing the school board and its decisions. Such divergent views, he argues, are demonstrative of just how complex and divisive local control of schools has become.

According to the National School Board Association (2018), approximately 90% of local school board elections in the United States are non-partisan, consisting of candidates who run without party designation. Tennessee and Florida are among such states. However, Maeroff (2010) contends that such statistics are illusory, in that local political parties work diligently to ensure their membership is aware of the political party with which candidates are affiliated and to which they are loyal. He further noted, “Like it or not, members of boards of education almost everywhere operate in a political arena of sorts, even the 90 percent who don’t run with party designation” (p. 129). Table 1 provides the qualifications to serve on either a Tennessee or Florida county school board.

School Board Campaign Financing

In his study of local school board elections campaign financing, Hess (2008) found a landscape where school board members kept campaign spending to a minimum, received only a fraction of their donations from unions or members of the business community, and rarely, if ever, were influenced by national organizations, civil rights, or religious groups. It was only in large, urbanized districts that he observed a possible influence by special interest groups, a fact

Table 1

Local School Board Elections in Tennessee and Florida

Tennessee	Florida
Elections for a seat on the county school board are non-partisan and are generally held in conjunction with county general elections. Members serve 4 year terms and may succeed themselves. There are not term limits. To qualify to run for office, candidates must be citizen of Tennessee and be; • At least 18 years old; • A resident of the school district; • A high school graduate or G.E.D; • A registered voter in the county	Elections for a seat on the county school board are non-partisan. Members serve 4 year terms and may succeed themselves. There are no term limits. To qualify to run for office, candidates must be a citizen of Florida and; • Be registered to vote • A resident of the school district • Maintain residency in that district throughout their term of office.

he attributed to more professionally run campaigns. He further suggested that such districts constitute a noticeably small percentage of school districts across the United States. Nine years later, Rechow, Henig, Jacobsen, and Alter Litt, (2017) painted a totally different picture, which was reflected in their study of the influence of outside money in local school board elections. Although they concentrated on local school districts in four states, namely, Colorado, California, Louisiana, and Connecticut, they suggested that the expenditure of outside money is not unique to these school districts, “nor is the infusion of outside money into local school board elections likely to be a passing fad” (p. 803). They further suggested that larger school districts are not the sole recipients of outside money as various educational organizations increasingly see the wisdom of becoming fiscally involved in small district elections. Nevertheless, they posited that there continues to be a dearth of research into what motivates outside donors, the extent of their involvement in local school board elections, and that “the existing scholarship on school board elections provides little guidance on the factors that might motivate a donor residing thousands of miles away to contribute to a school board election” (p. 787).

School Board Lobbying

Local school districts across the United States frequently use public funds to hire lobbyists whose job it is to influence legislation and appropriations at the state and federal levels. This phenomenon is nothing new as evidenced by the fact that almost 30 years ago, Hoyt and Toma (1993) observed that it is not uncommon for local school boards to allocate resources to hire lobbyists to politically pressure state governments. They argued that, by exerting pressure on the state, local school boards may influence the level of expenditures committed to localities. Ferrare and Reynolds (2016), noted that, as federal and state roles in education policy have expanded in the past 2 decades, K12 organizations are increasingly engaged in lobbying to

develop and promote their educational policy agendas. This practice is often controversial because public funds are spent to lobby for an agenda not subject to direct approval by voters, and outcomes may be contrary to the taxpayer's benefit (Greenlaw and Shapiro, 2018). Tangberg (2010) noted that there exists intense competition for scarce education resources, hence, an increase in lobbying efforts by education agencies.

In Tennessee, local school boards are empowered to hire lobbyists to advocate on their behalf before the Tennessee General Assembly and the executive branch. Prior to doing so, however, the school board must include in its budget for each fiscal year, a line item reflecting lobbying expenditures that includes the total amount to be spent on lobbying expenditures by the board during that fiscal year (T.C.A. §49-2-212). Florida public school district may likewise hire lobbyists to represent the school district's interests before the legislative or executive branch (FLA. STAT. §11.602).

School Board Training

One of the challenges for newly elected or appointed school board members concerns the paucity of mandatory or voluntary training available to them. According to Richard and Kruse (2008) "While superintendents generally either come to the position with several other administrative jobs or experiences in their past, any person can be elected to a board of education, and in most of the United States there is absolutely no training required once elected" (p. 13). This lack of training opportunities, they surmise, can have a detrimental effect upon the school board-school superintendent relationship. However, unlike many school boards across the United States, both Tennessee and Florida require mandatory training for school board members (Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-2-202(a)(6), FLA. STAT. §112.3142). In Tennessee, all local school board members are required to undergo training throughout their service on the board. All

newly-elected members are required to attend a 14 hour orientation during their first year in office. For each year thereafter, members are required to participate in seven hours of training administered by the Tennessee Department of Education, School Board Academy. The training consists of a series of training modules developed by the Tennessee School Boards Association (TSBA), and ultimately approved by the State Board of Education. The training modules shall include:

- Advocating the Board's Vision;
- Board Policy and Operations;
- Board/Superintendent Relations;
- School Law; and
- The Board's Role in School Finance (State Board of Education Rule 0520-1-2-11).

In Florida, local school board members are required complete 4 hours of ethics training each calendar year which addresses, at a minimum, §8, Art. II of the State Constitution (Ethics in Government), the Code of Ethics for Public Officers and Employees, and Florida's public records and public meetings laws (FLA. STAT. §112.3142). Further, school board members are encouraged to undergo training provided by the FSBA including, but limited to, transition to public life, becoming an effective school board member, and the statutory powers of the school board

According to Maeroff (2010) the effectiveness of school boards can be greatly improved if school board members receive adequate and regular training. He argued that, by being required to undergo continuing education, school board members will become greater equipped to govern, develop an increased sensitivity to students' diverse cultural needs, and generally become more professional and responsive to the communities in which they serve.

School Board Effectiveness

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) (2017) reports that regardless of the fact that local boards of education play a pivotal role in a district's educational framework, few studies exist that focus on the attributes shared by the nation's top performing school boards.

They suggest that effective school boards essentially share eight characteristics:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with

their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

Unlike school superintendents, whose tenure is never guaranteed and often short, school board members generally serve for terms of years. Gelber and Thompson (2015) observed that school boards cannot maintain any level of effectiveness if they adjust their direction and vision to a series of short-tenured superintendents. They suggested that school boards have a duty to maintain the district's desired outcomes, mores, values, and vision in the face of changes in executive leadership. They further suggested that "School boards need to take responsibility and ownership for the sustainability of the district's strategic direction, so that it is carried forward when the superintendency changes" (p. 133). The authors also observed that school boards cannot expect to be effective if they do not maintain a disciplined approach to their day-to-day duties and responsibilities. Whether the task at hand is simple, such as crafting the agenda, setting dates and times for public meetings, or deciding on which rules of order should be adopted during the conduct of public meetings, or complex, such as board-constituent relations, or student achievement, school boards are obligated to assume a disciplined approach to the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Saatcioglu (2015) posited that the effectiveness of a school board is often determined by whether there exists a high level of social capital developed by its members. School boards develop social capital by maintaining solid working relationships with one another, and productive relationships with outside stakeholders such as parents, legislators, the media, civic groups, business and local community leaders, the media, philanthropists and school leaders in neighboring districts.

School Board Oversight

Because county school board members in Tennessee and Florida are elected, it stands to reason that they would operate under close public scrutiny. However, Rice (2014) theorized that local school boards often escape scrutiny because citizens rarely concern themselves with the actions of school board members, unless and until a questionable or unpopular decision is made, or a crisis erupts in the classroom. Further, because lawmakers view state and federal educational mandates as the driving forces behind public education, “school boards are being left out of the national conversation concerning public education reform” (p. 2). Rice’s findings are congruent with a report issued by the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) (2012), which noted that:

Elected school boards are often seen as a reflection of America’s commitment to democracy, providing a way for local community members to have a say in how their children’s schools are run. Yet, these locally elected boards also face challenges that can lead to dysfunction. It is difficult for local voters to hold school board members accountable. Voters often do not know their elected school board member’s name or responsibilities, and turnout in local school board elections—particularly those that occur “off-cycle,” separate from elections for state and national offices—is very low (p. 3).

The ICW also found that school board meetings across the United States suffer from low community turnout, and that those citizens most likely to attend are either those with a specific grievance, or those with the greatest vested interest, such as teachers or disgruntled staffers. Consequently, the broader community goes unrepresented, while the most important issues go unaddressed and unresolved. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that a lack of public interest or scrutiny generally means the public is satisfied with its local school board, while heightened

interest often means dissatisfaction with the school board's performance (Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008).

Rhim (2013) observed that scholarly literature rarely, if ever, reference local school boards when discussing various educational improvement efforts such as grants, waivers that provide local school districts with greater flexibility in how they may use federal program fund, or major federal initiatives like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or Race to the Top (RTTT). She has suggested, however, that the practice of minimizing the importance of local school boards may be waning. Noting that the first iteration of RTTT mandated that local school districts be formally evaluated on an annual basis, she suggested that the initial inclusion of local school board evaluations in the guidelines "reflected a growing sense of awareness on the part of the federal government that local school boards had a role to play in improving schools" (p. 5). In her study, Wasler (2009) opined that "School boards have untapped power. They have been overlooked as partners in reform, and yet, when they are involved constructively and appropriately in focusing the attention of the district on student achievement, great things can happen" (p. xix). Hess and Meeks (2010) found that while locally elected and appointed school boards are rarely comprised of professional educators, they do play a pivotal role in improving both student achievement and student learning. They also suggested that "No matter what happens with education policy at the state or federal level, we will always need locally elected or appointed boards to govern and lead our schools in some capacity" (p. 4).

The Case for State Control of Schools

The debate over the utility and viability of local school boards continues to evolve since Miller (2008) acerbically commented "First, Kill All the School Boards" (p. 1) in his call for the nationalization of public schools. He concluded his oft-cited piece by insisting that local school

boards hinder any attempts to improve the performance and effectiveness of the United States' K-12 education system. According to Finn (2003) local boards of education have long outlived their usefulness. He suggested:

The local school board, especially the elected kind, is an anachronism and an outrage....We can no longer pretend it's working well or hide behind the mantra of 'local control of education.' We need to steel ourselves to put this dysfunctional arrangement out of its misery and move on to something that will work for children. (p. 3).

Finn and Petrilli (2013) argued that local school districts are so dysfunctional that they've lost the faith, trust, and confidence of parents. They observed:

In far too many places, well-educated, civic-minded, and reasonably prosperous people find district-level politics daunting and painful. Many have foresworn the public school system itself, moving to smaller districts, enrolling their children in private or charter schools, or busying themselves with other kinds of community service—service that is less onerous and more likely to result in gratitude than in hostility. (p. 31).

They asserted that, due to the dysfunctional nature of school boards, the only people willing to serve on them are “aspiring politicians, union puppets, individuals with some cause or scheme they yearn to inflict on everyone's children, and former employees of the system with scores to settle” (p. 31). Boyle and Burns (2012) quoted an unknown 20th Century author who suggested that local boards of education are “one of those instruments of tortuous propensities which, beaming with unbecoming and reflected wisdom, wanders in a twilight zone between civil squander and political connivance” (Anonymous, 1939). It was the hope of this unknown author that “Undoubtedly, some future public appraisal, beyond the board's discernment, will snuff it out” (Anonymous, 1939).

Maxell (2009) questioned whether local school boards are capable of effective district governance in an era of increased pressure and control by federal and state lawmakers and bureaucrats. He observed that, despite a keen interest among state and federal education policymakers, scholars, and benefactors in the effectiveness of schools and the leadership qualities of school leaders, school boards are routinely ignored or neglected during state and federal K-12 policy discussions. Such neglect, he argued, “has led to a governance system that is too often ineffective, if not dysfunctional” (p. 1). Maeroff (2010) viewed local school boards as a flawed exercise in democracy that places too much power and authority in the hands of local leaders who have more duties and responsibilities than they can manage. “Could it be” he asked, “that school boards might be more valuable and effective if they were charged with fewer duties?” (p. 199). He suggested that, by having the state assume some of the responsibilities of local school boards, or regionalizing some of those duties, school board members would be less “distracted from their most important task, namely concentrating on what occurs in the classroom” (p. 199). He also opined that local school boards often involve themselves in areas best left to administration professionals, and often “get in the habit of micromanaging the schools” a practice that goes unchecked because “no one has the courage and clout to intervene so as to tell board members that they have overstepped their boundaries” (p. 144).

Over twenty years ago, Danzberger (1992) asserted "The evidence is beginning to mount...that school boards are an institution in trouble. Critics find evidence that local boards are increasingly irrelevant in light of major education reforms affecting governance" (p. 68). Danzberger (1994) further claimed that school boards frequently appear dysfunctional because individual board members lack a common definition of the board's role, and are therefore incapable of charting a clear direction for their school systems. According to Kirst (2007) it is

this appearance of inefficiency and dysfunctionality that have led some urban schools to move to a mayoral control of schools. He argues that the rationale behind such a move is the perception that mayors, as noneducators, are adept at navigating both the state and local political infrastructures, the business community, and the general citizenry, thus empowering them to hire the most qualified teachers, and obtaining the highest quality instructional materials. Fusarelli (2011) noted that the wresting of control from elected school boards by mayoral appointees is rooted in the perception that such changes result in greater efficiency, equity, and effectiveness. He further noted that state lawmakers have also sought to expand their control over local school boards and education reform and, as such, are no longer content to merely appropriate funding to local school districts.

According to Glass (2008) local school boards often do a disservice to the very people who elect them by getting bogged down in minutiae, or stirring up unnecessary controversy, rather than attending to the business of effectively educating the district's children. He argued that some school board members seek the assistance of outside groups (during their election and reelection campaigns), who expect an immediate quid pro quo for their support. Other board members sow internal board discord by advocating single-issue, controversial matters such as "school prayer, superintendent dismissal, school closings, budget cuts, or elimination of controversial programs" (p. 302). Such activities, he observed, serve to create a fractured and unstable education environment. The solution, he suggested, is to enact legislation at the state level designed to require local school boards to undergo external evaluations by professionals not associated with the local board. Usdan (2010) observed that many state education and political leaders, as well business leaders, often view local boards of education as nothing more than an "anachronistic, unviable part of the problem — a status quo entity to be ignored or bypassed in

the reform process rather than a crucial element in leading and sustaining positive change” (p. 9). Trujillo (2013) questioned the notion that locally elected school boards can directly and positively impact the democratic processes that were designed to further the education of a district’s children. She suggested that, until an in-depth analysis of a school board’s policy making activities is conducted, the discussion of the viability and efficacy of local control cannot be fully and effectively explored.

The Case for Local Control of Schools

Although the perennial argument over whether state and federal control over public schools is less democratic than local political control of public schools remains unsettled, it is generally agreed that citizens are more empowered to affect local school board policy than state or national education policies (Kirst, 2010). Local citizens are not as removed from locally elected officials as they are from their state and federal politicians, due in part to the fact that local school board members have fewer constituents than state and federal education policy makers. As such, they are “much closer to citizens psychologically as well as geographically” (p. 38). Further, local citizens demonstrate a greater willingness to participate in local school board politics if they perceive that their participation can directly impact school board policy. By keeping schools close to the people most affected by them, thus removing or limiting control from state or federal bureaucrats, citizens maintain control over the fiscal, management, and policy making duties and responsibilities of the school board as well as their children’s education (Kirst, 2010).

Gemberling, Smith, and Villani (2009) suggested that:

Local boards of education are no longer merely overseers of school systems; they are leaders of public education in their states and communities. They are charged with the

responsibility to create the conditions within their school districts that enable students to meet rigorous knowledge and performance standards. (p. 2)

According to Rice (2014) “Local school boards play a key role in preserving our democratic republic by maintaining individual freedoms while simultaneously forging unity” (p. 93). He further asserted that by their very nature, local school boards are uniquely designed to strike a balance between local community values and the needs of the larger common good. Because local school boards provide a voice for the parents and guardians of children, the community at large benefits. “Local representation in school governance” he argued, “may be one of the greatest strengths of a democratic nation” (p. 94). By approaching education policy from the perspective of the local populous, the school board is uniquely situated to make policy decisions that positively impact the education of local students. Rhim (2013) concurred, asserting that “Locally controlled public schools are one of the cornerstones of our nation’s democracy” (p. i).

According to Gelber and Thompson (2015) the local school board exists to ensure all students are educated to the highest level possible. Viewing the school board as both a guardian of the schools located within its district, as well as a trustee acting on behalf of all students current and future, they assert that when school boards govern, they do so on behalf of the entire community. Viewing the school board as a vehicle by which the links between poverty, race, and educational performance can be broken, they suggested that, by exercising a level amount of political will, and making commitments to both high and underachieving students, school boards can ensure that all students succeed. They further suggested that school boards, despite federal and state mandates, possess the power and authority to promulgate policies and procedures that align with the specific needs of local students, as well as the district’s core values, educational objectives, and values.

Delagardelle (2008) asserted that local boards of education are responsible for making decisions resulting in “what students learn, how students are taught, how learning is measured, how teachers are supported with professional development, how funds are focused on district priorities, and how effectively the community is engaged around student learning” (p. 191). In a 2015 study, she perceived a growing and necessary role for school boards to play in the arena of enhanced student achievement by way of efforts to reform instructional processes at the local level. She observed that the policies crafted by local school boards have a direct impact on the manner in which students are taught, how they learn, how learning outcomes are measured, and the extent to which the local community involves itself in the education process. She further observed that the inclusion of local school boards in school reform literature is a recent phenomenon, and school boards have been generally discounted as change agents where student performance is concerned. She suggested that “While by their nature school boards are removed from the day-to-day work of teaching and learning, their policy, personnel, and budgetary decisions control the conditions that support successful teaching and learning throughout the system” (p. 15). Lorentzen and McCaw (2015) observed that a school district’s success is directly proportional to the board’s ability to effectively lead without state interference. They argued that, when a board leads effectively, it is reasonable to challenge the traditional assumption that teachers and administrators are the predominate players in influencing student achievement, while school boards concern themselves with peripheral roles of education such as budgeting, politics, policymaking, and personnel matters.

According to the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) (2018), local school boards are a part of the state’s heritage, and remain relevant and necessary for the following reasons:

- Florida's system of education requires effective legislative participation in order to exercise school boards' constitutional right to control, manage, and operate school districts.
- Children will learn with proper expectations and resources.
- Children must be motivated to become active learners and education should be focused on designated outcomes.
- Children must be prepared to live, learn, work, and communicate in a diverse society.
- Educational systems should develop and must make available programs that enable each child to learn and develop at his/her maximum potential.
- Legislative decisions concerning the education and welfare of young people can best be made with informed input from stakeholders (p. 2).

The Tennessee School Boards Association (TSBA) (2017) likewise touts the importance of the local school board advising its membership:

No greater honor can be bestowed upon a citizen than membership on his local school board. The office calls for the highest personal qualifications and a dedicated interest in the welfare of all children, youth and adults in the community served by the board. The best, most capable, and most farsighted citizens of each community should be drafted to serve on the school board. To be a school board member is to serve the future of your community, state, nation and world. (p. 10)

The TSBA also declared that local school boards are vital because:

- Local school boards keep the public schools in the possession of the public rather than central government, professional educators or private corporations.

- School boards are a check on a propriety interest of the professionals and thus, carry out the American precept of checks and balances.
- School boards afford a means for debating varying points of view in formulating school policy.
- School boards allow representatives of the community to become well-informed and govern the schools in the best interest of the community (p. 13).

The National School Boards Association (2018) cautioned against turning direct oversight and responsibility of schools to state legislators, and in so doing, outlined five reasons why local boards of education are best suited to make decisions in consonance with a community's core values and beliefs:

1. Education is not a line item in your school board's budget—it is the only item.
2. The school board represents the public's voice in public education, providing citizen governance for what the public schools need and what the community wants.
3. Your school board sets the standard for achievement in your district, incorporating the community's view of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.
4. Your school board is accessible to you and accountable for the performance of the schools in your district, and if the schools are not producing, it is your right as a voter to select new board members who will see to it that your students and your schools succeed.
5. Your school board is your community's education watchdog, ensuring that taxpayers get the most for their tax dollars. (para. 3)

Delagardelle (2008), as part of the Iowa School Board Foundation's Lighthouse Inquiry, observed a direct link between policies created by local boards of education, and the manner in

which school district employees performed. She further observed that student attainment and performance levels increased when school board members governed under the premise that all children can learn. Petersen and Fusarelli (2008) perceived the relationship between local boards of education and the communities they serve to be a fundamental one. They suggested that this relationship has evolved into a system whereby school boards are entrusted by the general public to collaboratively work with their district superintendent in an effort to ensure their interests are projected and that their children receive a first-rate education. This system, they observed, makes the case for the continued existence of local school boards since they “play a substantial role in the fabric of democratic decision making at the grassroots level” (p. 121).

The Rising State

As a result of the United States Supreme Court ruling in the case of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), states were advised that the United States Constitution fails to explicitly or implicitly guarantee Americans a constitutional right to education. As such, Americans were informed that access to a free public education was not a federal fundamental, constitutionally protected right (Mead, 2012). Consequently, it was up to each state legislature to enact legislation to provide for the education of its citizenry. Such legislation, argued Mead, has the tendency to create tensions between the state and local boards of education, due to the ability of the state to establish the balance between the state and localities, as well as the power to modify the “balance between state and local control whenever the political will to do so asserts itself” (p. 288). She further argued that states have shown a willingness to modify the balance between state and local control by “divesting local school boards of much of the authority for school operations” (p. 288). Fusarelli (2011) suggested that “States have become powerful actors and willing (some would say too willing) participants in

education reform, particularly legislatures and governors” (p. 97). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (2018), state legislatures across the United States enacted 1,184 bills that served to substantively impact local school board operations during their respective 2017 legislative sessions. The bills ranged from requiring local boards of education to enact ethics policies to enhancing school security. Beckham and Wills (2016) had this to offer:

The policy environment in which local school boards operate is complicated by a number of factors. Legal mandates based on state and federal legislation, judicial decisions, and negotiated union contracts may impose substantial constraints on the local board's policymaking authority. Board members may have conflicting and irreconcilable views on the appropriate means to achieve key objectives. (p. 6)

Although school board members are elected to office by the local citizenry, Bjork and Brown-Ferrigno (2014) noted that the ability of school boards to “act on behalf of the state is conditional. The state has complete control of school-district boundaries, jurisdiction, funding, and defining powers of each local board of education” (p. 445). Koski (2001) opined that states divest local school boards of their ability to manage district operations by passing legislation that requires local school boards to adhere to rigid educational standards as well as accountability measures that guarantee compliance. According to Ford and Ihrke (2017) local school districts today are inundated with state and federal mandates and are continually “threatened with governance reforms that either eliminate the democratically elected board (i.e., mayoral control reforms) or shift publicly funded schools and students to non-district schools (i.e., vouchers, charters schools, and state-administered school districts)” (p. 110).

Smrekar and Crowson (2015) reported that public education has experienced extreme changes in recent years, primarily because local school board governance “is more deeply

penetrated than ever by state and national agendas” (p. 2). Consequently, “the national spotlight on educational improvement brings an importance today to even the most localized, day-by-day decisions of school authorities” (p. 2). This era of change began in the 1980s when local school board decision making began to be preempted by state-level-decision making, especially in the areas of curriculum development, standardized testing, and school performance (Fusarelli & Cooper, 2009). Henig (2013) suggested that the United States is experiencing sweeping changes to traditional local school board governance and that “we are now witnessing the gradual reabsorption of educational decision-making into multilevel, general-purpose government and politics” (p. 179). He further suggested that states, mayors, and even the White House are increasingly making key education decisions that were traditionally left to local boards of education. He cautioned against the emergence of “education governors” who, rather than leave school administration to school boards and educators, are taking “a more proactive stance in engaging with K–12 public education” (p. 180) often by appointing state school chiefs who support their educational agendas.” He also observed that the courts have been party to transferring power from localities to the states “by challenging and diminishing the traditional role of local school boards” (p. 191). The end result, he argued, is that local decision making is being transferred to state legislatures, and to a lesser extent, urban mayors.

Malen (2011) observed an ongoing erosion of local control due to increased federal and state mandates. He warned that,

[T]he balance of power has shifted. School systems are the clear targets and often the reluctant recipients of policies that make them assume substantial responsibility for reform outcomes but grant them little opportunity to influence reform inputs. That arrangement places local actors at a clear disadvantage. They are not powerless, but they

are forced to maneuver within the relatively narrow and narrowing parameters set at the federal and state levels of the system. (p. 38)

In her study of the increased role of the state in education policy, McDermott (2009) observed that “Scholars have considered the ways in which increased state policy activism has affected the long-standing tradition of local control of education (p. 757). She argued that, as a result of the tendency of the state to encroach upon local school board prerogatives, conflicts inevitably arise between the two.

According to Brown, Hess, Lautzenheiser, and Owen (2011), when it comes to finding new ways to implement federal or state education legislation, change or raise educational standards, address teacher accountability, or tackle school improvement, it is to state education agencies, or SEAs to whom the public should look and not the local school board. They opined that “States often bump up against obstinate local leadership or unions when confronted with persistently low-performing schools” (p. 3). The solution, they suggested, is to provide SEAs with the authority to assert control over failing schools and districts “since the threat of state takeover is a powerful lever to incite change at the local level” (p. 3). They further argued that it is the state, and not the local board of education, that is ultimately responsible for overseeing elementary and secondary education, as well as administering federal and state education laws, rules, and regulations. Consequently, they encourage SEAs to be the agents of change in educational governance by exploiting existing rules, cultivating their relationships with other school officials, enlisting the assistance of various foundations and civic leaders, and revising “stifling interpretations of federal law” (p. 34). Years earlier, Usdan, McCloud, Podmostko, and Cuban (2001) asserted that state education agencies are “every state’s principal human and organizational resource for shaping the policies (and laws, administrative orders, and other

dictates) that governors, legislatures, and boards produce into deliverable high-quality educational services for the state's students and schools" (p. 8).

Cooper and Nisonoff (2009) observed that increases in state power and authority over local school districts most commonly comes in the form of school choice, finance, and policymaking. They argued that, the more the state involves itself in local school funding, the more it can increase its influence over standard testing and curriculum development. Such intrusive mandates, they observed, "all but destroys local control and responsiveness" (p.49). The end result of increased state regulations, they concluded, is "a state system more 'tightly coupled' to local districts and classrooms—and the concomitant loss of local actions and autonomy" (p. 54).

Kirst (2008) observed that, in an effort to ensure that local boards of education are fulfilling their charge to educate the nation's children, federal and state lawmakers are increasingly instituting education reforms designed to hold school boards accountable. This is accomplished through greater centralized control, increases in federal and state education policy staff, and various technological tools and data bases designed to increase oversight and control over local education policymaking. Kirst further observed that the discretionary power of school boards has decreased significantly as they are "squeezed from the top by increasing regulation from the legislative, administrative, and judicial arms of the federal and state governments" (p. 47). He further argued that school boards are often "squeezed from the bottom" (p. 47) by various special interest groups, labor unions, and government think tanks. He attributed the shift from local to nonlocal control to several interrelated factors, such as a loss of confidence in local decision-making abilities by state and federal education policy makers, increased federal and state funding containing restrictive spending covenants, and increasing legalization of public

education. According to Johnson (2012) the era of local boards of education enjoying complete governance authority over the management of schools has ended, as state mandates continue to reduce their role as policy maker. Such mandates, he argued, have led to confusion amongst school boards, as they grapple with where to best concentrate their energies. As Mountford (2008) observed, “This confusion leads to board member micromanagement and can become a catalyst for controversy that severely weakens trust and collaboration between the superintendent and his or her board” (p. 86). Such controversies, she argued, aggravated by increasing state accountability, result in dysfunctional school board-school superintendents relationships as school boards find their power and authority usurped by the state, and, not infrequently, by the federal government.

Increased state influence over local school board affairs has also manifested itself in the area of school district finance. In the most recent report issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2018), elementary and secondary public schools in the United States received \$664 billion in revenues. Of this total, eight percent of revenues were from federal sources, 47 percent from state sources, and 45 percent were from local sources. Of all of the taxes Americans pay into state and local government coffers, it is the school board that receives and controls the most money, eclipsing all other public expenditures such as public health, safety, corrections, infrastructure, and pension benefits. Who controls this money is quite another matter. Maeroff (2010) observed that, due to increased federal and state influence over classroom performance, coupled with teachers empowered through collective bargaining agreements, many of the duties and responsibilities school boards traditionally presumed were their domain are being exercised by others, and that “New governance models threaten to make school boards in some locales as obsolete as yesterday’s Pontiac” (p. 32). He also noted that

there exists an “array of officials seeking to influence the public schools — the U.S. Secretary of Education, state education departments, state boards of education, chief state school officers, members of the legislature, and even governors’ education advisers in some states” (p. 34), a scenario that leaves the local school board with a significant decrease in its power and influence over the manner in which local children are educated and how their education dollars are spent.

Usdan (2010) studied the rise of state federal control of schools, noting that most education, political, and business leaders viewed the local school board as little more than an arcane entity that exemplified all that was wrong with America’s schools. He theorized, however, that, when it comes to facilitating effective collaborations between teachers, school administrators, central office staff, parents, and the local school board, it is the school board, in the capacity of a district’s policymaking body, which is uniquely situated to do so. He argued that the role of the local school board as a collaborative body is routinely ignored, despite its pivotal role in coordinating various district resources, without which a school system would fail. He asserted that local school boards “are the linchpin of the local governance structure” (p. 8), because of the amount of influence they wield. He further asserted that “Often, they’re the only entities that provide continuous institutional leadership through times of constant change and administrative churn” (p. 9).

Grissom and Herrington (2012) observed that, while states traditionally delegated the responsibility to provide for the education of children to local schoolboards, there appears to be a trend to transfer power back to the states. They argued that states are developing “new strategies” for gaining influence over local boards of education (p. 13). Such “expansions into local decision making” they argued, are more often than not viewed by local decisions makers as “illegitimate” attempts to usurp local authority (p. 11). Further, they noted that the proliferation of various

federal laws has a trickle-down effect to the states, ultimately leading to a diminution in local authority due to “the federal reach in education and concomitant growth in the state infrastructures required to implement each federal initiative” (p. 8). Rice (2013) reached a similar conclusion, positing that the escalation and expansion of state involvement in local school districts can be “directly tied to the expanded federal role in education” (p. 8).

Brady (2009) explored the struggle between local school boards’ demand for greater control and autonomy and state demands that their educational policy goals be accomplished through state-level administrative, centralized control mechanisms. He surmised that, while states strive to achieve, or at least enhance, equity in public education, they often do so at the cost of diminished local school board influence over that manner in which schools are funded, children are tested, or curriculums are developed. Brady also noted that, due to the original intent of local school boards - that of imparting local values to the children in their care – they were not historically designed to respond to state education policy mandates. However, due to the vast resources that governors, state legislatures, and state boards of education have at their disposal, local school boards have great difficulty maintaining independence from that state. He suggested that the struggle between the state and localities over who should control our schools can be settled if the states “create greater student equity through fiscal and governance reforms that allow for the dominance of state educational policies coexisting with the sanctity of local control” (p. 188). Rafa and Woods (2018) surmised that although state education leaders are expected to, at a minimum, play a supporting role in local school district performance, it is the state that possesses the fiscal resources necessary to achieve educational equity on a statewide basis. Further, stakeholders look to the state when schools and LEAs are underperforming or struggling to improve.

The power and willingness of the state to substitute its leadership for local leadership manifested itself in Clayton County, Georgia, when, in 2008, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) determined that Clayton's board was so dysfunctional that it demanded Clayton to show cause as to why it should not lose its accreditation. When the Clayton Board of Education was incapable of rising to the challenge, it lost its accreditation. (Maeroff, 2010). Although Clayton ultimately regained its accreditation, the Georgia General Assembly, in response to Clayton's failings, enacted Senate Bill 84 (SB 84), which instituted mandatory sweeping revisions to the structure and function of all of Georgia's local boards of education. Major revisions included the following:

- A revision of provisions relating to the eligibility for election as a local board of education member;
- Limitations of the size of local boards of education;
- Changes relating to per diem and expenses for local board members;
- Providing for the fundamental role of local boards of education and local school superintendents;
- Prohibiting certain conflicts of interest of board members;
- Provided for a code of ethics for local board of education members;
- Provided the for removal of board members under certain circumstances; and
- A revision of provisions relating to training of local board of education members.

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The ESSA is designed to improve basic education programs operated by state and local education agencies, and in so doing, "provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair,

equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps” (EESA, 2015, p. 13). According to the National School Boards Association (NSBA) (2018) the ESSA provides states and local school districts greater flexibility in key areas such as testing and accountability, while simultaneously reducing federal power and authority. However, according to Zeehandelaar et al. (2015) the passage of the ESSA has not affected the current trend in most states toward greater state control. Rather, state education leaders and policy makers continue to be dubious about the ability of LEAs to effectively lead.

According to Maxwell (2009) despite the fact that local school boards are under constant pressure to increase literacy, high school graduation rates, ensure equity amongst schools, minimize achievement gaps, and prepare students for careers or higher education, federal and state lawmakers question whether they are up to the task. Further, school boards must constantly wrestle with myriad and complex federal and state mandates, such as the review, approval, or rejection of charter schools, as well as operate under the threat of sanctions for failing to comply with such mandates. Metz and Socol (2017) suggested that state education leaders are empowered to remedy the myriad of inequities that exists in local school districts by making decisions and taking actions that serve to incentivize local leaders to act accordingly. This can be accomplished by providing local leaders with transparent expectations for improvement and motivating them to meet those expectations. Because state leaders are the custodians of various student data bases, they are “uniquely positioned to provide district and school leaders — and the public — with transparent information” (p. 6) that serves to illuminate the inequities that exist in a given district. They further recommended that state leaders should assist local leaders in setting district-level goals, and in so doing,

establish clear timelines for meeting those goals while ensuring the end results are aligned with the state's goals for the district.

According to McDonnell (as cited in Maxwell, 2009), there has been a tendency at the state level to issue educational reforms designed to increase state authority over local school boards. However, none of the policymakers “seemed to think about the implications for the school boards that must govern and deal with a much, much more complex system. There are some real capacity issues, and no one has paid enough attention to that” (p. 3). Knoester and Parkinson (2017) also noted the disparity in how state policy makers see things in their attempts to control local school districts, as compared to how those that actually work and live there, see things. They advocated for local control and accountability for schools, noting that attempts by states to “bring a simplistic and linear map to an intrinsically complex ecology” (p. 247), results in schools becoming dehumanized, and school personnel becoming more stressed and distracted. The solution, they suggested, is that local boards of education should be given greater control over student assessments and curriculum development without the threat of reduced funding. They further argued that states have the tendency to measure local education achievements or outcomes to “what is easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage: attendance rates, graduation rates, test scores, and school finances” (p. 250), hence the widespread use of standardized test scores. By placing such a premium on test scores, states are viewing education through a corporate government lens, where test scores are the bottom line, and are considered the best vehicle by which to measure teacher, principal and school finances, as well as the promotion of students. Further, test scores are likewise considered by many states to be the most effective way to “keep score in the competition between schools—public, parochial, and private” (p. 251).

The Power of the State:

When it comes to the influence of the state over K12 education in Tennessee and Florida, both states exercise a separation of powers between the department of education, which is empowered to influence school performance, and the legislature, which is empowered to influence local school governance.

State Boards of Education. In Florida, the state board of education is empowered to promulgate and enforce system-wide school performance goals and policies as well as prescribe minimum standards and definitions that will ensure a high quality of education, (FLA. STAT, §1001.01). Further, although the local district school board is responsible for school and student performance, the board of education retains the power and authority to ensure that individual academic programs are achieving state-mandated student learning and program objectives while promoting accountability for student achievement and improvement, (FLA. STAT, §1001.11). Unlike local school boards that meet weekly, however, the Florida State Board of Education meets on average 6 times per year.

In Tennessee, the state board of education is empowered to set policies for the completion of elementary, middle, junior high and senior high schools, evaluate individual student progress and achievement, evaluate individual teachers, and measure the educational achievement of individual schools. Further, the state board of education is empowered to develop and maintain current a master plan for the development of public education, kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12), and provide to the executive branch, the general assembly, local boards of education, and directors of schools, recommendations related to school performance and the use of public funds for education (T.C.A. §49-1-302). Unlike local school boards that meet weekly, however, the Tennessee State Board of Education, like

its Florida counterpart, meets on average 6 times per year. Both the Florida and Tennessee Departments of Education promulgate state-wide policies on standardized testing, bullying/cyberbullying, weapons on school property, substance abuse, and school safety/security.

The Legislature. In Florida, the policy of the Legislature is to achieve, within existing resources, a seamless academic educational system that fosters an integrated continuum of kindergarten through 12th grade for Florida's students. Thus, the Legislature is empowered to ensure that local school districts promote enhanced academic success and efficient educational delivery systems, by aligning responsibility with accountability. The Legislature is further empowered to establish education policy, enact education laws, and appropriate and allocate education resources. provides for local operational flexibility while promoting accountability for student achievement and improvement (FLA. STAT, §1000.03).

In Tennessee, the system of public education is governed in accordance with laws enacted by the General Assembly (also referred to as the "Legislature"). It is the intent of the General Assembly that every local school board moves expeditiously and promptly toward the goals they establish in terms of local school governance, and maximum class sizes. The general assembly likewise determined that teaching practices in educational institutions that receive public funding for kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) education, shall embrace and implement proven best practices models related to K-12 education reform. Further, the General Assembly is empowered to adopt all laws, policies, standards, and guidelines that are necessary for the proper operation of public education in kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) (T.C.A. §49-1-102).

Conclusion

When it comes to the mechanics of school governance and whether the state or the local school board should be in charge, Ford and Ihrke (2017) noted that “absent in the debate over the effectiveness of democratic board governance generally, and democratic school board governance specifically, is the perceptions of actual school board members” (p. 109). Rice, (2013) opined that “It is impracticable for state and federal governments to continue to make decisions regarding public schools without the input of local school boards” (p. 12). He suggested that, absent the support and cooperation of local boards of education, state boards of education would be incapable of efficiently carrying out their desired reforms. He further suggested that state and federal government agencies should collaboratively work with local boards of education to achieve common goals for the common good. Ten years earlier, Conley, (2003) suggested that, if state and federal governments continue to enact education policies without soliciting input from local school boards, their respective mandates will, in all probability, be followed to the letter of the law, while falling short of the spirit of the law. He predicted a rising state that will be evidenced by “the increasing reach of the state in the province of local school districts” (p. 62). Such intrusions, he argued, will translate into complete state control over education funding, uniform school district performance goals, and uniform student performance measures. Hess and Meeks (2010) suggested that, before championing state or mayoral control of schools, reformers are well advised to acquire “a better understanding of the gritty reality of district governance and the thinking of board members” (p.34). They further suggested that “For state and federal policymakers counting on districts to translate into practice new policies governing accountability, standards, or school restructuring, an appreciation for the strengths and limitations of local boards would seem imperative” (p. 34).

While there has been substantial research examining the increased propensity of states to directly insinuate themselves into the day-to-day operations of local boards of education, there exists a dearth of research on school board members' perceptions of this phenomenon. Although local boards of education have historically been the vehicle by which schools addressed the educational needs of the local populous, the literature suggests they are increasingly falling into disfavor. While school boards are increasingly being directed to assume new duties and responsibilities, or in some cases losing them, the body of research addressing how local boards of education are responding is small at best (Sykes, O'Day, & Ford, 2009).

In this chapter, the researcher familiarized the reader with the concept of increased state influence over local school board operations by beginning with a brief history of school boards, followed by: (a) school board membership and motivations to serve, (b) the role of school boards, (c) school board elections, (d) school board campaign financing, (e) school board training, (f) school board effectiveness, and (g) school board oversight. Within these areas, Chapter 2 examined the literature regarding the incentives for state control of schools, followed by incentives for local control of schools, and finally, the rise of the state as leader in educational reform. This study will attempt to interpret the perceptions of school board members in Tennessee and Florida of the increased role of the state in local school board operations through the lens of the mutually dependent relationship between state and local actors.

Chapter 3 will provide a description and rationale for the methodology to be used in this study by examining school board members' perceptions of the rising state and its influence on local decision-making.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed that, although several studies examined how state officials affect local schools in terms of decision making, standardized student testing, and policy formation, there is a paucity of quantitative research that examines how locally elected school officials perceive these impacts. Further, as the Tennessee and Florida legislatures continue to enact legislation that affects the manner in which local schools are controlled, no study in either state has focused on what local school board members think about this type of legislation. How local school board members perceive these state actions can affect policy implementation and also shape the nature of future legislation. A systematic analysis of these perceptions can help demystify the complex relationship between state legislatures and local school boards. As noted by Rice (2014) “state boards of education cannot efficiently carry out any reforms without the support of local school districts” (p. 8) and strong relationships between the two are crucial for the successful implementation of policies that ultimately inure to the benefit of public schools.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the perceptions of county school board members in Tennessee and Florida concerning the effect state legislative mandates have on the role and power of local boards of education. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

- 1.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state control over school performance?

2.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state control of public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?

Based upon the above variables and constructs, the following relevant hypotheses are:

1.) School performance:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

2.) School board governance

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to investigate these two questions. Included in this chapter is a visual representation of the research design and the rationale for why the design was chosen. An explanation is provided for why a quantitative method was selected and served to achieve the purpose of the study, sample selection, data collection, and instrumentation. Trustworthiness of the findings is explained, and the chapter will conclude with a summary of the methodology used for this study.

Rationale for Quantitative Research Approach

This study used a quantitative research approach. Yilmaz (2013) defines a quantitative approach as one that seeks to explain phenomena by collecting relevant numerical data that are analyzed with statistics. Quantitative research can be considered “confirmatory because researchers test or attempt to confirm their hypotheses” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 30). One of the advantages of using quantitative methods is the ability to collect and analyze a large amount of data and information in a relatively brief time. Quantitative research begins with a problem statement and involves the formation of a hypothesis, a literature review, and a quantitative data analysis. According to Creswell (2003), quantitative research enables the researcher to “employ strategies of inquiry such as experimental and surveys, and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data” (p. 18). Collected data can be analyzed with statistical software such as Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The results from these analyses may suggest new avenues for inquiry or the need for additional theoretical development. Finally, quantitative methods are appropriate for analyzing responses to survey questions. Survey research is a form of nonexperimental investigation in which questionnaires are relied upon to obtain needed information from a target population (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In determining the proper research design, this researcher reviewed multiple studies that focused on the perceptions of educational professionals from a nonexperimental quantitative posture.

Non-experimental Approach

A nonexperimental quantitative method with a survey to empirical inquiries when the researcher lacks control over the independent variable, does not seek to manipulate the independent variable, and seeks to study naturally occurring phenomena (Johnson &

Christensen, 2004). Although an argument can be made that nonexperimental research isn't as effective, thus leading to assertions that such evidence is less conclusive due to its more exploratory or tentative nature, still, it is almost impossible to manipulate educational variables and/or create real-life settings in a laboratory (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Of the types of non-experimental designs available to researchers, this study consists of correlational research that compares two or more pre-existing groups of participants, the nonrandom assignment of participants to groups, and does not manipulate the independent variable (Price, Chiang, & Jhangiani, 2015). In other words, the researcher measures the two variables of interest without controls for extraneous variables and then assesses this bivariate relationship.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), when conducting nonexperimental research, the researcher generally follows a prescribed formula as follows:

1. The researcher defines the research problem and frames the research hypothesis to be tested;
2. The researcher selects and defines the variables to be used in the study;
3. The researcher collects the data;
4. The researcher analyzes the data;
5. The researcher interprets the data (p. 327).

The researcher will use a survey to collect for data on the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida elected county school board members on the impact and influence of state legislation on local school board decision-making. The mechanics of the survey are more fully described below, however, one of the benefits of relying upon a survey is the preservation of anonymity. According to Bordens and Abbot (2005) a survey is better suited when the researcher is attempting to reach large numbers of participants as well ensure consistency in the type of

information collected. Further, unlike artificial situations like experiments, survey research permits the researcher to generalize findings to real-world settings. Surveys also enable the researcher to gather large amounts of data for a reasonable cost (Muijs, 2004).

Population and Sample

This study is a modification one of the leading studies of legislation affecting local school board operations conducted in Tennessee, Morgan (2003), which was under the direction of Jason Walton, Ph.D. Permission to use this instrument from its creator, John Morgan, Chancellor (Retired), Tennessee Board of Regents, was received via e-mail (see Appendix A). The original study was commissioned by members of the House and Senate who requested the Comptroller of the Treasury's Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to investigate the issue of elected versus appointed superintendents. Of the superintendents who responded to the survey, 94 (74%) favored an appointed school superintendent, 19 (15%) supported an elected superintendent, and 14 (11%) did not answer the question. The study also explored the effects of The Tennessee Education Improvement Act (EIA) of 1992 (which was a comprehensive piece of legislation that affected many facets of Tennessee public education), on the school superintendency. The context of the original study was limited to a population consisting of 138 Tennessee superintendents which was conducted by the OEA. Of the 138 superintendents surveyed, 127 responded (92 percent). The primary purpose of the Morgan Study was to determine the perceptions of Tennessee school superintendents in terms of whether they experienced undue pressure to make personnel decisions that were consistent with school board member preferences. As an extension to the original study, the current study consists of a survey of elected county school board members in Tennessee and Florida to examine whether locally elected school board members perceived an increase in state control over school performance as

well as whether they think state involvement in public schools affected their ability to govern their school districts.

The population of the sample for this study was limited to locally elected county school board members in Tennessee (n= 470), and Florida (n=350), for a total population of (n=820). Appointed and municipal/city school board members were not included in the study due to the fact that Florida only has county school districts. According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), the generalizability of a study can be brought into question if the sample size is considered to be inadequate. Conversely, a numerically adequate sample is far more likely to yield valid, generalizable, and reliable results especially when relying upon a quantitative survey design (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001). Holton and Burnett (1997) suggested that “One of the real advantages of quantitative methods is their ability to use smaller groups of people to make inferences about larger groups that would be prohibitively expensive to study” (p. 71). Hutchinson (2004) suggested that determining sample size in quantitative studies is crucial if the researcher hopes to have a population size sufficient to conduct the various statistical analyses necessary to generalize results from survey participants to broader populations. By contacting all locally elected county school board members in Tennessee and Florida, the prospects are enhanced for obtaining a sufficiently large response rate that represents the perceptions of each target population. The ability to generalize survey results from responses received, to a larger population, increases the ability of the researcher to identify statistically significant differences about the phenomenon being investigated (Hutchinson, 2004).

Hutchinson (2004) asserted that the most time-consuming and important aspect of any survey study is the construction of the survey instrument. During the construction phase the researcher decides upon what questions to ask, and how to ask them. By failing to take the time

to understand potential survey participants, or by hastily constructing the survey instrument, the researcher runs the risk of ending up with a study that is of limited validity or reliability.

Procedures

Once approved by the University of Tennessee, Institutional Review Board (IRB), the data in this study will be acquired through a web-based QuestionPro® survey platform. This software, adopted by the University of Tennessee, is designed to assist researchers in analyzing survey questions in real-time while offering personalized survey design recommendations to boost response rates and thus obtain better quality data. In the Morgan Study, respondents were directed to respond to the survey via U.S. Mail, facsimile transmission, or email. Respondents in this study will be recruited via email only, and by primarily relying upon the email databases maintained and made available by the Tennessee and Florida School Board Associations, as well as the official websites maintained by school districts in Tennessee and Florida. Data relating to (a) perceived increased state control of public schools and (b) perceived impact of state legislation on local school board operations will be obtained through a web-based survey, the link to which will be provided to respondents. According to Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece (2003), web-based surveys are cost-effective and provide for rapid distribution of the survey. Additionally, web-based surveys provide the ability to transfer survey responses directly into a database, thereby eliminating transcription errors and preventing survey alterations by respondents.

The survey will be made available to the 470 elected county school board members in Tennessee and the 350 elected county school board members in Florida. Items presented were considered based on literature related to the topic of increased state influence over local educational policymaking. The survey provided to the participants will describe the researcher's

current position and status, the purpose of the study, the number of survey items, a plea for their participation, the assurance of anonymity regarding responses, and contact information.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument created for this study modifies Morgan's survey and is cross-sectional in design. According to Neuman (2006), if the researcher seeks a pool of opinions and practices from at least two groups at a given point in time, a cross-sectional survey would be appropriate. Whereas Morgan's research was limited to one pool of respondents, namely Tennessee school superintendents, this modification and expansion of that research, surveys educational professionals in two pools, i.e. Tennessee and Florida, at a given point in time. In the original study, Morgan found that the majority of school superintends preferred state legislation that directly affected the position of elected school superintendent. This study will explore the perceptions of elected Tennessee and Florida school board members of state legislation that directly affects their respective positions. Careful attention to detail and understanding of the process involved in developing a questionnaire are of immense value to the researcher. According to Esposito (2004), the systematic development of the questionnaire for data collection is crucial when the researcher seeks to reduce measurement errors, questionnaire content, questionnaire design and format.

Development of the Instrument and Validation

Prior to the development and distribution of the survey instrument used in this study, a pilot survey was created. According to Hassan, Schattner, and Mazza (2006), a pilot survey can be defined as a "small study to test research protocols, data collection instruments, sample recruitment strategies, and other research techniques in preparation for a larger study" (p. 1). The pilot survey, consisting of a 60-item questionnaire, was submitted to 20 sitting school board

members. The members agreed to serve as a panel of experts for the purpose of examining the questionnaire for redundancy, clarity, and relevancy. As a result of responses and feedback from the panel of experts, the wording and order of several questions was adjusted, and eight questions eliminated, resulting in a 52-question survey. Because none of the aforementioned experts were included in the study, the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board advised that it did not require a copy of the pilot instrument for its review. A sampling of the recommendations from the panel of experts is reflected in Table 2.

School Board Discussions with Parents

During the pilot test of this survey, the panel of experts suggested that the four most common issues (and thus, a proper are of inquiry), parents discuss with school boards are:

- bullying/Cyberbullying
- school safety/security
- internet safety
- substance abuse

Table 3 reflects the concerns raised by parents with respondents during the year preceding the survey. Although parents expressed concern over all of the above-listed issues, the two areas that garnered the most attention were bullying/cyberbullying, and school safety/security.

The panel of experts likewise suggested that Respondents should be asked what concerns, if any, parents have expressed to potential respondents as regards to state-mandated student testing.

Table 4 presents reflects the level of concern expressed by parents relative to state-mandated, standardized student testing. The Pearson's Chi-square test was conducted to compare the level of concern by state. There were no significant difference in the levels of concern expressed by parents in Florida and Tennessee.

Table 2

Sampling of Suggestions Issued by Panel of Experts

Tennessee	Florida
Provide participants with gender-preference option, e.g. binary, transgender, etc.; Clarify question on teacher competency; Consider exploring school board-parent relationships; Omit questions regarding school resource officers.	More clearly define differences between state legislature and state department of education; Explore effectiveness of training mandated by the State Board of Education; Explore relationship between State Board of Education and district administrative staff.

Table 3

Parental Concerns expressed to Respondents

	State				Total by State
	FL N	%	TN N	%	
Bullying/Cyberbullying	7	22	15	35	22
School Safety/Security	11	33	15	35	26
Internet safety	1	3	0	0	1
Substance abuse	0	0	3	7	3
All of the above	6	18	7	16	13
Other	8	24	3	7	11
Overall Total	33	100	43	100	76

Table 4

Level of Concern expressed by parents over state-mandated standardized testing

	State		TN N	Total by State	
	FL N	%		%	
None	9	24	16	31	25
Some	15	40	23	44	37
A good deal	8	20	8	15	17
A great deal	5	16	5	10	8
Total	37	100	52	100	89

Prior to gathering contact information from Tennessee and Florida school districts, permission to conduct this study was obtained from (UTIRB) (see Appendix B). Surveys were distributed via the QuestionPro email survey platform. For those school boards that do not publish email addresses for school board members, the survey was sent via U.S. mail to the offices of the respective school boards. Names and addresses were obtained from The Tennessee Department of Education online data source and The Florida Department of Education online data source. The mailing included a cover letter requesting participation (see Appendix C), and the Survey Instrument (see Appendix D).

Data Collection Procedures

Both research questions were addressed through a quantitative approach. Table 5 provides a summary of how the research questions were addressed by the quantitative data collection tool.

Data Analysis

In order to maintain integrity of this study as well as ensure the integrity of the Morgan (2003) study (with modifications), the Pearson's Chi-square test was the preferred statistical measure utilized. Since the study involved only two groups (elected county school board members in Tennessee and Florida), I determined that Pearson's Chi-square test should be used because I wanted to compare two sample means. Further, the observations in each sample were collected randomly and independently. In other words, the observations in one sample have no relationship with the observations in the second sample. As such, by utilizing a Pearson's Chi-square test on all targeted variables, I have the ability to compare the means of two independent groups, namely Tennessee and Florida county school board members, in order to determine

Table 5

Research Questions in Relation to Data Collection Tool

Research question	State Control Survey Items
1. Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over local school performance?	Questions 17, 22, 27, 38, 39
2. Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state influence over public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?	Questions 6, 26, 11, 18, 20, 21

whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are significantly different.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics will be used to describe and illustrate the quantitative results from the survey. According to Argenti and Finlay (1999) descriptive statistics are most often relied upon by researchers to summarize a collection of data in a clear, understandable, and summarizing way, as well as provide the researcher with the distribution frequency of the data. A visual representation of this quantitative methods study appears on page 74.

Likert Scale

Most of the survey questions presented to respondents will be measured by Likert Scale. According to McLeod (2008), of the various kinds of rating scales that have been developed to measure perceptions or attitudes, the most widely relied upon by researchers is the Likert Scale. Because a Likert Scale can be designed to measure the strength or intensity of a subject's experience in linear fashion, i.e. on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, perceptions and attitudes can be measured. Survey respondents may be offered a choice of five to nine pre-coded responses with the neutral point being neither agree nor disagree. For example, respondents would be offered choices such as: strongly agree / agree / don't know / disagree / strongly disagree with each of the five (or seven) responses assigned a numerical value which would be used to measure the perception or attitude under investigation. Some questions, however, were framed in such a manner that a nominal scale was utilized.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the researcher pursuing IRB approval through the University of Tennessee, the following considerations were foremost:

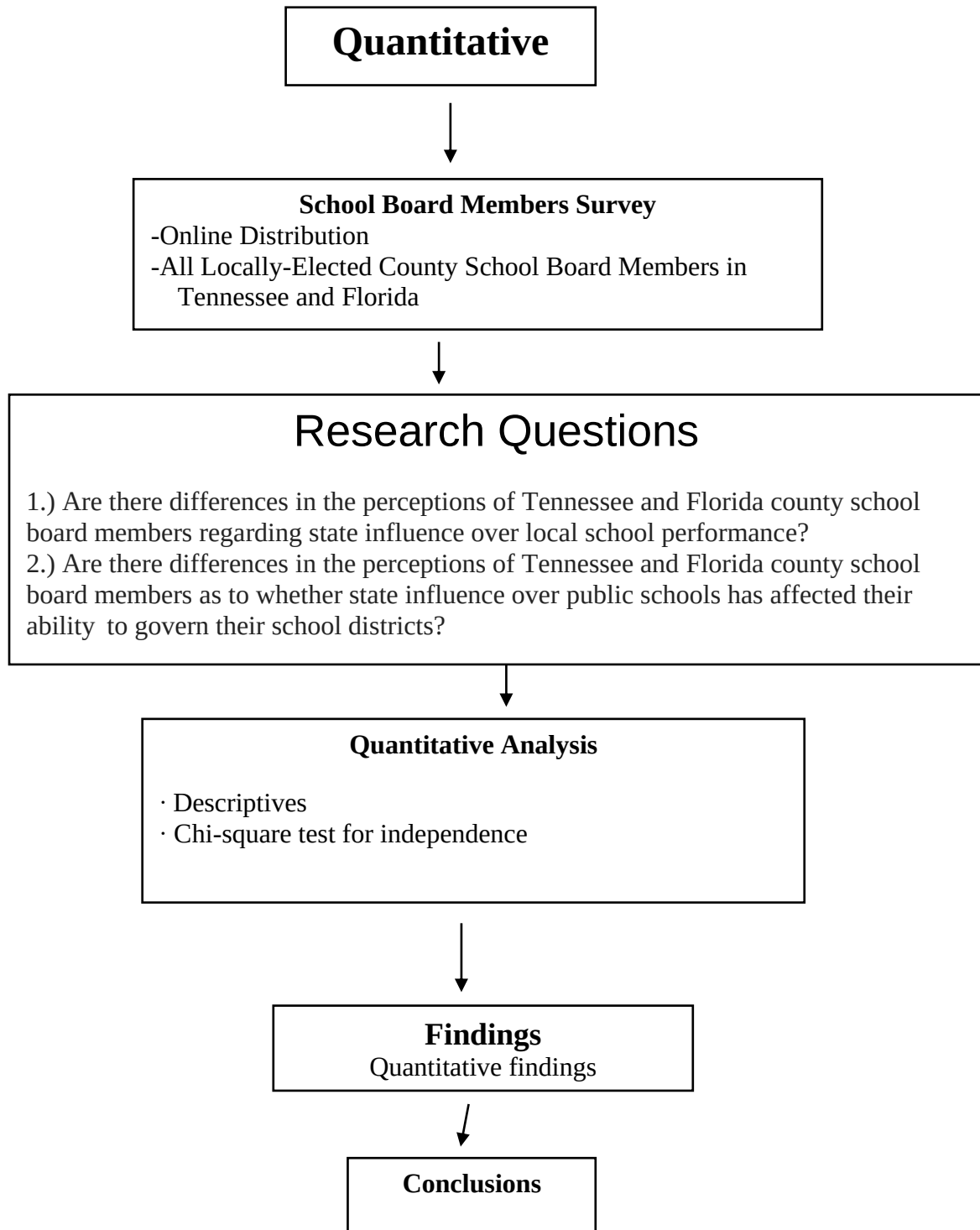


Figure 1: Visual representation of quantitative methods study.

Freedom from Harm

- The researcher was sensitive to participants' personal information, such as the name of their school district, and other identifying information. Such information was not collected in the study.

Freedom from Exploitation

- Participants were protected from adverse situations. The researcher kept the names of all districts confidential and did not report population sizes or other data which would have exposed participants.

The Right to Full Disclosure

- Participants were informed of the researcher's affiliation with the field, the nature of the study, and were given the option to not participate.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 described and supported the methodology and research design that was used for this quantitative study. All aspects of the research process were identified and explained, including sample size and selection, quantitative instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Validity and reliability of this quantitative study was also discussed. Limitations associated with the proposed research design were addressed in addition to limitations specific to quantitative research. Ethical safeguards and threats to liability were accounted for and addressed. Chapter 4 will present a detailed data analysis of the study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose, research questions, and significance of this study. The purpose of this study was to examine differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida district school board members (also referred to herein as “respondents”), regarding state influence over local school performance and governance. Chapter 2 revealed that, although extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between elected local school board members and school administrators, there is a dearth of research on the relationship between local school boards members and state departments of education. Chapter 3 described the quantitative method design that was used to examine perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over public schools, and explained how a quantitative method was relied upon for data analysis and integration.

This chapter presents findings related to two main research questions:

- 1.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over local school performance?
- 2.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state influence over public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?

Based upon the above research questions, variables and constructs, the following relevant hypotheses that correlate with the research questions are:

- 1.) School performance:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

2.) School board governance

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

The survey designed for this study was sent to all locally elected county school board members in Tennessee (n= 470), and Florida (n=350), for a total population of (n=820). A 10% (n=89) overall response rate was achieved, apportioned as follows: Tennessee (n=47), and Florida (n=35). This study extended research by Morgan (2003) on the perceptions of the school superintendents relative to whether school superintendents should be elected or appointed. Morgan's study was limited to the school superintendent selection process, and based solely upon the perceptions of Tennessee school superintendents. The survey instrument used in Morgan's (2003) study was adopted and significantly modified (see Chapter 3 for an instrument description and noted modifications). Rather than distribute the survey to school superintendents, all locally elected county school board members in Tennessee and Florida comprised the target population. This chapter will describe the analysis of the data, and the findings which resulted from the analyses.

I begin the chapter with descriptive results that outline respondent demographics, including race, gender, education levels, years of school board experience, type of school district

(suburban, rural & urban), and the amount of time spent each week on school board business. I continue with an analysis of communication levels between local school boards and state legislators and state board of education members, and the use of lobbyists by local school boards. Finally, I explore those survey questions that directly address the research questions relating to local school board performance and governance.

Descriptive Results

Once a 10% response rate was achieved from both Tennessee and Florida, data were downloaded from the Questionpro platform into SPSS for initial data cleaning and analysis. First, data were scanned to make sure no duplicate records existed in the file, and were filtered for only complete survey responses with the exception of optional, demographic questions. After the data cleaning concluded, descriptive analysis was conducted on the remaining ($n=83$) survey responses. For all statistical hypotheses tests, a 95% confidence level (i.e. $p \leq 0.05$) is used to determine statistically significant differences. The primary statistical test used to analyze the data was Pearson Chi-square test of independence. According to McHugh (2015), the Pearson Chi-square test of independence designed to evaluate the difference between the means of two independent or unrelated groups. In this case, the two unrelated, independent groups are elected county school board members in Tennessee and Florida. By using the Pearson Chi-square test of independence, the researcher can evaluate whether the means for two independent groups are significantly different from each other. The Pearson Chi-square test of independence is most commonly labeled a non-parametric of distribution-free device that divides cases into two mutually exclusive groups or categories. According to McHugh (2015), Pearson's Chi-square test provides considerable information about how each of the groups performed in the study. This richness of detail allows the researcher to understand the results and thus to derive more

detailed information from this statistic than from many others. McHugh likewise asserts that this test “does not require equality of variances among the study groups or homoscedasticity in the data.” (p. 142). The author does note, however, that the test is not without its limitations. For instance, the chi-square test does not provide the researcher with much information about the strength of a relationship, or its substantive significance in the population. Further, the test is sensitive to small expected frequencies in one or more of the cells in the table.

The questionnaire was comprised of four sections:

- The first section explored the local school board-state legislative delegation relationship;
- The second section explored the local school board-state board of education relationship;
- The third section explored the participants’ background, education, years of teaching experience, length of time as school board member, and school district size.
- The fourth section consisted of optional questions relative to race/ethnicity, gender preference and age.

Profile Features of School Board Respondents

According to Salkind (2013), demographic information is most commonly collected when it can provide the researcher with the data necessary to determine whether survey respondents constitute a representative sample of the population targeted as well as for generalization purposes. He suggests that survey respondents be assured that demographic information will be held in the strictest confidence, only collected if necessary (the relevance of such data to the research depends upon populations studied and research questions asked), and that such data be collected at the end of the survey to minimize perceptions of bias. Prior to examining the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida school board members as to state influence

relative to school performance and school board autonomy, I sought to present responses to optional demographic questions.

Demographics of Respondents

Descriptive statistics were computed for the final sample of responses in this study. Of the sample of elected school board members in Tennessee ($n=47$), the majority of those who responded to the optional demographic questions regarding ethnic origin and gender, identified themselves as Caucasian (76%), followed by African American (2%). There were no other ethnic groups reported, and 25% of respondents elected not to answer the question. Regarding gender preference, respondents identified themselves as male (61%), and female (29%). There was no other gender identifying information reported, and 25% of respondents elected not to answer the question. Of the sample of elected school board members in Florida ($n=35$), those who responded to optional demographic questions regarding ethnic origin and gender, the majority identified themselves as Caucasian (91%), followed by Hispanic (2%). There were no other ethnic groups reported, and 25% of respondents elected not to answer the question. Regarding gender preference, respondents identified themselves as female (68%), and male (26%). There was no other gender identifying information reported, and 25% of respondents elected not to answer the question.

School Board Tenure. The average tenure for Tennessee School Board members was five years ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 3.8$), while Florida School Board members reported an average tenure of nine years ($M = 8.6$, $SD = 7.1$). The average age for Tennessee School Board members was fifty eight years old ($M = 58.4$, $SD = 11.6$), while Florida School Board members reported an average age of 61 years old ($M = 60.5$, $SD = 11.1$). Respondents were asked whether they serve in urban, suburban, or rural school districts. The majority of school board members in both states

reported that they served in suburban districts, followed by rural districts and urban districts respectively.

Regarding the number of years respondents have been a member of their respective school boards, Florida school board members reported longer tenures than Tennessee school board members. Specifically, the average experience as a school board member in Florida was 8.6 years, while Tennessee school board members reported an average of 5.2 years. Respondents were also asked to disclose the amount of time spent on a weekly basis conducting school board-related business. While the majority of school board members in Tennessee and Florida (n=45) spend at least 20 hours per week conducting school board business, only 17% of Florida school board members report devoting less than 20 hours a week devoted to school board business as compared to 56% of Tennessee school board members. Further, 14% of Florida school board members reported spending more than 40 hours per week on school board business, as compared to .01% for Tennessee school board members.

Regarding the educational level of respondents, the majority of both Tennessee and Florida school board members either earned bachelor's degrees (n=24) or master's degrees (n=38), while 2% reported holding a high school diploma, while 8% held doctoral degrees. Regarding teaching experience, 71% of Florida respondents had some teaching experience as compared to 61% of Tennessee respondents.

Descriptive statistics in Table 6 present participant responses to optional demographic questions of gender and race, and nonelective questions, i.e., school district type, time spent on school board business, education levels, and whether respondents had any teaching experience.

Table 6

Descriptive Data for Tennessee and Florida Elected School Board Members

Data	Tennessee	Florida
N	24	14
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	29%	68%
Male	61%	26%
N	50	33
<u>Race</u>		
African American	2%	0%
Hispanic	0%	2%
Caucasian	76%	32%
N	52	34
<u>Type of School District</u>		
Suburban	38%	59%
Urban	19%	18%
Rural	43%	23%
N	51	35
<u>Hours per week spent on school board business</u>		
Fewer than 20 hours	55%	18%
20-39 hours	43%	68%
40 hours or more	2%	14%
N	52	35
<u>Education level</u>		
High School Diploma	13%	3%
Some college	40%	8%
Associate's degree	25%	0%
Bachelor's degree	8%	31%
Master's degree	10%	48%
Doctorate	4%	9%
N	52	35
<u>Teaching experience</u>		
Yes	62%	71%
No	38%	29%

Interaction between State and Local Officials

As noted in the literature, communications between county school board members and their State Legislative Delegations (elected officials), and State Boards of Education (appointed officials), are often strained, if there is any communication at all. Often, state legislators pass legislation that affects local school boards, and state boards of education promulgate policy without conferring with, or seeking input from, the people most affected by such enactments. This section will explore the level of communication between county school boards and their respective state legislators and state boards of education.

State Legislators: School board members in Florida and Tennessee demonstrated high levels of interaction between state and local officials. When asked whether, in the year preceding the survey, respondents met with their respective state legislators, 84% of Florida school board members answered in the affirmative, while 78% of Tennessee school board members did likewise. By running a Pearson Chi-Square test, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between Tennessee and Florida. $\chi^2 (2, N = 88) = .594, p > .05$.

State Boards of Education. When asked whether, in the year preceding the survey, respondents met with their respective state boards of education, 46% of Florida school board members answered in the affirmative, while 39% of Tennessee school board members did likewise. By running a Pearson Chi-Square test, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference between Tennessee and Florida. $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .518, p > .05$.

When contrasting the level of communication between local school board members and members of their respective state boards of education, with that of state legislator-school board communications, respondents reported that they spend more time interacting with their legislators than with state board of education members. This is not a surprising phenomenon, due

to the fact that, state boards of education in both states rarely meet more than six times per year, while legislatures in Florida and Tennessee are mandated, by law, to meet for 60 consecutive days each year, (Art III, 3(2)(d), Fla. Const., Tenn. Const. Art. II, § 8). Table 7 provides a complete breakdown of state-local interaction.

State Legislators and State Board of Education- Local School Board Communications

As noted in Chapter 2, Knoester and Parkison (2017) suggested that there is a communication disconnect between policy makers in the form of state boards of education policy makers, and the local school districts that are required to implement such policies. Such disconnects, they argued, lead to a misunderstanding on the part of the state when it came to local educational needs. As such, by depriving local school districts of a voice in such matters, “the cutting out of broad democratic deliberation” (p. 252) occurred. They further opined that the manner in which state educational agencies view public schools and evaluate expected outcomes “is not closely analyzed or adequately critiqued” (p. 250). As such, survey respondents were asked how frequently, if at all, their state legislators and state boards of education apprised them of proposed legislation that affected local boards of education. and local school boards, relative to the passage of education policy. A Pearson Chi-Square test revealed no statistically significant difference between Tennessee and Florida. $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .910, p > .05$. Specially, 54% of Florida school board members and 50% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were rarely or never apprised of proposed education policy that affects local school board operations. On the other hand, 27% of Florida school board members and 25% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were “sometimes” apprised of proposed policies, only 19% of Florida respondents and 25% of Tennessee respondents reported being regularly apprised of proposed policies.

Table 7

Interaction Between State and Local Officials

		State				Total
		FL		TN		
		N	%	N	%	
State Legislator-School Board Interaction						
Did your school board meet with your	Yes	31	84	41	79	72
state legislators in the last year?	No	6	16	11	21	17
Overall total		37	100	52	100	89
State Board of Education School Board Interaction						
Did your school board meet with your	Yes	17	46	20	38	37
state board of education in the last year?	No	20	54	32	62	52
Overall total		37	100	52	100	89

State Boards of Education Communication. The responses by Florida and Tennessee school board regarding their communications with state boards of education, prior to the enacting of education policies, reflect a dearth of synergy much like that reported above. A Pearson Chi-Square test revealed no statistically significant difference between Tennessee and Florida. $\chi^2 (2, N = 89) = .114, p > .05$. Specifically, 68% of Florida school board members and 60% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were rarely or never apprised of proposed education policy that affects local school board operations. While 12% of Florida school board members and 25% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were “sometimes” apprised of proposed policies, only 20% of Florida respondents and 15% of Tennessee respondents reported being regularly apprised of proposed policies. Table 8 more fully outlines communications between respondents and state legislatures and state boards of education.

Direct Interaction Between Local School Boards and State Legislatures.

Previously, data were presented that reflected the frequency in which state legislators and state school board members communicate with local school boards relative to the passage of education policies by the state. The following data reflects the frequency with which local school boards have face-to-face contact with state legislatures while testifying before a state legislative education committee meeting. Although there existed no statistically significant difference between Florida and Tennessee when it came to the frequency with which state legislators and state school board members communicate with local school boards, the same cannot be said about the appearance of local school board members before state legislative education committees. Here is another area where Florida and Tennessee statistically and significantly differ. I make this assertion based upon the result of a Pearson’s Chi square test I conducted to compare the frequency in which Florida and Tennessee school boards appear before state

Table 8

Communication Between State and Local Officials

		State				Total
		FL		TN		
		N	%	N	%	
State Legislator-Local School Board Communications						
How frequently, if at all do members of your state legislative delegation apprise you of proposed education policy legislation that could directly impact your school board's operations?	Never	8	22	13	25	21
	Rarely	12	32	13	25	25
	Sometimes	10	27	14	27	24
	Often	6	16	9	17	15
	Very often	1	3	3	6	4
	Overall Total	37	100	52	100	89
State School Board-Local School Board Communications						
How frequently, if at all, do members of the state department of education apprise you of proposed policies that could directly impact your school board's operations?	Never	13		23		36
	Rarely	12		8		20
	Sometimes	4		13		16
	Often	5		6		11
	Very often	3		2		5
	Overall Total	37		52		88

Table 9

Appearance before State Education Committees

		State		Total	
		FL		TN	
		N	%	N	%
In the last two years, how frequently, if at all, has a member of your school board testified before a state legislative education committee?	Never	19	51	45	87
	1-2 times	13	35	6	11
	3-5 times	3	9	0	0
	5 or more times	2	5	0	0
	Almost always when possible	0	0	1	2
	Overall Total	37	100	52	100

legislative education committees. The test revealed that there was a significant statistically significant difference between Florida and Tennessee $\chi^2 (3, N = 89) = .016, p < .05$. These results suggest that Florida school board members more frequently appear before state education committees than their Tennessee counterparts. Table 9 reflects the frequency in which local school board members in Florida and Tennessee appear before state education committees.

Third-party Communications. In the above section, I outlined the level of indirect and direct communication between local school board and their state legislatures and boards of education. Here, I am reporting the extent to which local school boards rely upon professional advocates in the form of lobbyists, that are hired to influence political and policy decisions and otherwise communicate on their behalf. As noted in Chapter 2, local school districts across the United States frequently use public funds to hire lobbyists, whose job it is to influence legislation and appropriations at the state and federal levels. Both Florida and Tennessee county school boards are empowered to do so.

As previously reported, responses of Florida and Tennessee school boards have been fairly consistent between the two groups. This consistency does not continue when it comes to the hiring of lobbyists. Here is where Florida and Tennessee statistically and significantly differ. I make this assertion based upon the result of a chi-square test for independence I conducted to compare the extent to which Florida and Tennessee school boards retain the services of a professional lobbyist. The Pearson Chi-Square test revealed that there was a significant difference in the scores for Tennessee and Florida. $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .001, p < .05$.

These above results suggest that Florida school boards employ lobbyists to a greater extent than Tennessee. When asked whether their school districts retain a professional lobbyist, 89% of Florida boards of education answered in the affirmative, as compared to 25% of Tennessee

school boards. Despite the fact that Florida's local school boards more heavily relied upon lobbyists than Tennessee, respondents in both states designate one of their members to advocate on the boards behalf. Specifically, 80% of Florida school board and 61% of Tennessee school boards designate one their member to advocate on their behalf, regardless if a professional lobby is on the payroll. Table 10 provides a complete breakdown of the extent to which Florida and Tennessee retain professional lobbyists.

State Influence Over School Performance

I began this section by exploring respondents' demographics, including race, gender, education levels, years of school board experience, type of school district (suburban, rural and urban), and the amount of time spent each week on school board business. I continued with an analysis of communication levels between local school boards and state legislators and state board of education members, and the use of lobbyists by local school boards. What follows is an examination of those survey questions that correlate with the research questions. I will first explore those research questions relative to the perceptions of state influence over local school performance. The null and alternative hypotheses are listed below:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

The survey questions that assist us in determining whether the null hypothesis should be rejected (due to a definite, consequential relationship between the two states), are reflected in Table 11.

Table 10

Hiring of Professional Lobbyist

		State				
		FL	%	TN	%	Total
Does your school district hire a professional lobbyist to advocate	Yes	33	89	13	25	46
	No	4	11	39	75	43
	Total	37	100	100		89

In their analysis of data generated by Phi Delta Kappa, Jacobson and Saultz (2012) observed that, while citizens acknowledge that the state is an important player in education policymaking, those polled consistently preferred local to state control of schools, especially when it came to curriculum development and school performance. Their findings concluded that local citizens consistently selected their local school boards as the group that should have the greatest influence in determining what their children are being taught. In my study, survey participants were asked several questions designed to elicit their perceptions of what influence, if any, the state has over local school performance.

State Involvement in Local Educational Policies. The first question (Survey Item #17), asked participants to share their perceptions of the level of the state's involvement in educational policies that affect their district. The responses were framed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale as follows: (1) Far too little; (2) Too little; (3); About right; (4) Too much, (5) Far too much. The results of Pearson's Chi-Square test revealed no significant difference between the perceptions of Florida and Tennessee school board members regarding the level of the state's involvement in education policies that affect their school districts. $X^2 (1, N = 89) = .178, p > .05$. Both Florida and Tennessee found the state's involvement excessive. Specifically, 48% of Florida school board members and 52% of Tennessee school board members found the state's involvement to be either "too much," or "far too much." Based upon the aforementioned, we decline to reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 12 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

State Influence Over Student Achievement. The second question (Survey Item #22), asked participants to rate the level of influence they perceived the state exerted over student achievement in their district. The responses were framed in the form of a 5-point Likert

Table 11

Research Questions in Relation to Data Collection Tool-School Performance

Research question	School Performance Survey Questions
1. Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over local school performance?	Questions 17, 22, 27, 38, 39

scale as follows: (1) None; (2) Little; (3); Some; (4) Substantial, (5) Not Sure. The results of Pearson's Chi-Square test revealed no significant difference between the perceptions of Florida and Tennessee school board members regarding the level of influence exerted by state boards of education over local school district student achievement, $X^2 (1, N = 89) = 0.25, p > .05$.

Specifically, Florida school board members rated the level of influence between some and substantial ($M=3.24$), while Tennessee school board members rated the influence between little and some ($M=2.87$). Further, 30% of Florida school board members viewed the state board of education's influence as substantial, while 11% of Tennessee school board members found this to be the case. Based upon the aforementioned, we decline to reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 13 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

State Measurement of Student Competency. The third question (Survey Item #27), asked participants to rate the level of influence they perceived the state exerted over the manner in which teacher competency was measured or assessed in their district. The responses were framed in the form of a 4-point Likert scale as follows: (1) None; (2) Little; (3); Some; (4) Substantial. The results of Pearson's Chi-Square test did not reveal a significant difference in perceptions between Florida and Tennessee school board members, $X^2 (1, N = 89) = .961, p > .05$.

Specifically, both Florida and Tennessee school board members rated the level of influence between some and substantial, while Tennessee school board members rated the influence between little and some. Further, while 30% of Florida school board members viewed the state board of education's influence as substantial, only 11% of Tennessee school board members found this to be the case. Based upon the aforementioned, we decline to reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 14 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

Table 12

Perception of state level of involvement in education policies

		FL		State TN		Total	
		N	%	N	%		
What do you think about your state's level of involvement in education policies that affect schools in your district?	Far too little	5	13	3	6	8	
	Too little	3	8	7	13	10	
	About right	4	11	15	29	19	
	Too much	16	44	16	31	32	
	Far too much	9	24	11	21	20	
Overall total		37	100	52	100	89	

Table 13

State Board of Education Influence over Student Achievement

		State				Total
		FL		TN		
		N	%	N	%	
Please rate the level of influence you think the state boards of education exerts over student achievement in your district?	None	4	11	4	8	8
	Little	5	13	11	21	16
	Some	9	24	25	48	34
	Substantial	16	43	12	23	28
	Not sure	3	9	0	0	34
Overall total		37		52	89	

Table 14

State Board of Education Influence Over Measuring Teacher Competency

		State				Total
		FL	TN			
		N	%	N	%	
What impact or level of influence Does the state board of education exert with respect to how teacher competency is measured or assessed in your school district?	None	2	5	4	8	6
	Little	5	13	6	11	11
	Some	12	33	18	35	30
	Substantial	18	49	24	46	42
	Overall total	37	100	52	100	89

Communication of State Performance Goals. The fourth question (Survey Item #38), asked participants whether state education policymakers clearly articulate school performance goals to them? The responses were framed in a simple 2-point Likert scale as follows: (1) Yes; (2) No. The results of a Pearson's Chi-Square test did not reveal a significant difference in perceptions between Florida and Tennessee school board members, $X^2 (1, N = 89) = .825, p > .05$. Further, Florida school board members were almost equally divided in their responses, with 49% answering "yes," and 51% answering "no." Tennessee school board members were likewise almost evenly split, with 46% answering "yes," and 54% answering "no." Based upon the aforementioned, we decline to reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 15 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

State Influence over Student Achievement Visioning. The fifth question (Survey Item #39), asked participants whether they thought existing state education policies allowed their board to establish a vision for measuring student achievement. The responses were framed in a simple 2-point Likert scale as follows: (1) Yes; (2) No. The results of a Pearson's Chi-Square test did not reveal a significant difference in perceptions between Florida and Tennessee school board members, $X^2 (1, N = 88) = .937, p > .05$. As in question #38, respondents were equally split in their responses. Specifically, Florida school board members were almost equally divided in their responses, with 47% answering "yes," and 53% answering "no." Tennessee school board members were likewise almost evenly split, with 48% answering "yes," and 52% answering "no." Based upon the aforementioned, we decline to reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 16 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

Table 15

Communication by State to Local School Boards regarding Performance Goals

		State		Total	
		FL	TN		
		N	%	N	%
				N	
Do state education policymakers articulate school performance goals to your board?	Yes	17	49	24	47
	No	18	51	28	53
	Overall total	37	100	52	100

Table 16

Communication by State to Local School Boards regarding Vision for Student Achievement

		State				Total
		FL		TN		
		N	%	N	%	
Do you think existing state education policies allow your board to establish a vision for student achievement?	Yes	17	47	25	48	42
	No	19	53	27	52	46
	Overall total	36	100	52	100	88

State Influence over Local Governance

In the above section, I explored research question #1, which was related to perceptions of local school board members regarding state influence over local school performance. In this section, I will explore research question #2, which is related to the perceptions of local school board members regarding the influence of the state over local school governance.

The null and alternative hypotheses are listed below:

H₀: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H₁: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

The survey questions that assist us in determining whether there is no meaningful relationship between Florida and Tennessee, and thus, whether the null hypothesis is to be rejected, are reflected in Table 17.

State Influence Over Local School Governance. The survey in this study proposed six questions directly related to the influence of the state legislature and the state board of education over local school board governance. The rationale for asking six questions directly related to this issue (as compared to five related to school performance), is based on the fact that in both Florida (FLA. STAT. §768.28), and Tennessee (T.C.A. §29-20-102), school boards are political subdivisions of the state. Further, both Florida (FLA. STAT. §1001.01) and Tennessee (T.C.A. §40-2-201), hold their respective state boards of education responsible for the implementation of law or policies established by the state legislature. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, the bulk of the literature that explores the state-local school board relationship, and the tensions between the

Table 17

Research Questions in Relation to Data Collection Tool-School Governance

Research question	School Governance Survey Questions
2. Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state influence over public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?	Questions 6, 26, 11, 18, 20, 21

state and local school boards, is concentrated in the area of governance and the influence of the state on local autonomy. The questions below are not in the same order as they appear in Table 17.

State Legislative Influence Over Local School Board Decision-Making. The first question in this section (Survey Item #6), asked participants to rate the level of influence they perceived the state legislature exerted over their day-to-day decision-making. The responses were framed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale as follows: (1) Not at all influential; (2) Slightly influential; (3); Somewhat influential; (4) Very influential, and (5) Extremely influential. The results of a Pearson's Chi square test performed on this question revealed that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$), in the scores for Florida and Tennessee school board members regarding their perception of the level of influence exerted by state over local school district decision-making, $\chi^2 (2, N = 88) = .027, p < .05$. Florida school board members perceived the state's influence to be "very influential", while Tennessee school board members perceived the state's influence to be between "slightly influential" to "somewhat influential." Based on this data, we reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 18 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

State Board of Education Influence Over Local School Board Decision-Making. The second question in this section (Survey Item #26), asked participants to rate the level of influence they perceived the state board of education (as compared to the state legislature, above), exerted over their day-to-day decision-making and operations. The responses were framed in the form of a 4-point Likert scale as follows: (1) None; (2) Little; (3); Some; (4) Substantial. The results of an Pearson's Chi square test performed on this question revealed that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$), in the scores for Florida and Tennessee school board members regarding

Table 18

Influence of State Legislatures on Local School Board Decision-making

		State				Total
		FL N	%	TN N	%	
How influential is state-level educational decision-making upon your board's decision making?	Not at all influential	2	5	9	17	11
	Slightly influential	3	8	11	21	14
	Somewhat influential	5	13	10	18	15
	Very influential	19	52	19	36	38
	Extremely influential	8	22	3	8	11
	Overall total	37	100	52	100	89

their perception of the level of influence exerted by state boards of education over local school district decision-making, $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .047, p > .05$. Specifically, 16% of Florida school board members rated the level of influence as substantial as compared to 6% of Tennessee school board members. Further, 24% Florida school board members reported that the state board of education wielded no influence as compared to 44% Tennessee school board members. Finally, 59% of Florida school board members reported that the state board of education had “little” or “some” influence as compared to 50% of Tennessee school board members. Based upon these responses, we reject the null hypothesis. Table 19 provides a more thorough breakdown of the responses to the question.

The School Superintendent. As reported in Chapter 2, since 1992, school superintendents in Tennessee are wholly appointed, whereas Florida continues to have a mix of appointed and elected school superintendents. Both the Tennessee and Florida School Board Associations list the selection of the school superintendent as the most important function of a local school board, and the essence of local governance. The Morgan Study, upon which this study is based, focused on the perceptions of school superintendents relative to the superintendent selection process. This study expands the Morgan study by examining the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding the superintendent selection process, as well as the influence, if any, of state involvement in the governing of public schools and school performance. Prior to exploring the perceptions of Florida and Tennessee school board members regarding the state’s interaction with, and influence over, the school superintendent, the method of selecting the school board follows.

Method of Selecting School Superintendent. The third question in this study (Survey Item#18), although not directly related to the perceptions of school board members in regards to the

Table 19

Influence of State Boards of Education on Local School Board Decision-making

		State				Total N
		FL N	%	TN N	%	
What level of influence, if any, educational decision-making does the state board of education exert over day-to-day decision-making?	None	9	24	23	44	32
	Little	13	36	21	40	34
	Some	9	24	5	10	14
	Substantial	6	16	3	6	9
	Overall total	37	100	52	100	89

influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts, does set the stage for subsequent questions that deal directly with this issue. The question posed utilized a 2 point nominal scale that asked respondents to choose whether the school superintendent should be (1) Elected, or (2) Appointed. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Morgan Study upon which my survey is partially based, was influential in convincing the Tennessee Legislature to move towards a wholly appointed superintendent process. Likewise discussed was the fact that both the Florida Legislature has considered a constitutional amendment (FL Cont. Amend. 5), and the Tennessee Legislatures continue to consider bills (e.g. Senate Bill 1606), that would either change the school superintendent's position to a wholly appointed one (Florida), or a wholly elected one, (Tennessee),

When asked whether school superintendents should be elected or appointed, 24% of Florida school board members preferred an elected superintendent as compared to 27% of Tennessee school board members. Conversely, 76% of Florida school board members opted for an appointed superintendent, as compared to 37% of Tennessee school board members. Mean scores indicated that school board members in both states tended to prefer an appointed school superintendent, as does the result of Pearson's Chi Square test , $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .783, p > .05$. The data reported in Table 20 provides a complete breakdown of the preferences of all respondents regarding the superintendent selection process.

State Legislative Interaction with School Superintendent. The fourth question in this section (Survey Question #11), asked participants whether their state legislators conduct face-to-face meetings with their school superintendent. Using a simple 3-point nominal scale, respondents were asked to respond as follows: (1) Yes, (2) No, (3) Not Sure. Despite the fact that both

Table 20

Selection of School Superintendent

		State				Total
		FL N	%	TN N	%	
Do you believe the school superintendent should be:	An elected position	9	24	14	27	23
	An appointed position	28	76	38	73	66
Overall total		37	100	52	100	89

Tennessee and Florida School board members reported that state legislators have little influence when it comes to the appointment of the school superintendent, nevertheless, both states reported that their respective state legislators directly interact with school superintendents. Specifically, 62% of Florida school board members noted that their state legislators hold face-to-face meetings with the school superintendent, while 49% of Tennessee school board members reported likewise. It is important to note that 16% of Florida respondents and 18% percent of Tennessee respondents were unsure whether their state legislators were meeting with their superintendents. However, mean scores indicated that the majority of school board members in both states observed this phenomenon. A Pearson's Chi square test was conducted that revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $X^2 (1, N = 89) = .221, p > .05$. . As such, we reject the null hypothesis. Table 21 provides a complete breakdown of state interaction with school superintendents.

Influence of State Boards of Education Over School Superintendent. The fifth question of this section (Survey Question #20) asks respondents to rate the level of influence the state board of education has over the school superintendent by using a 4-point Likert scale as follows: (1) None, (2) Little, (3) Some, and (4) Substantial. Although both Tennessee and Florida school board members reported that state legislators wield minimal influence when it comes to the selection of the school superintendent, they nevertheless report that their respective state boards of education do exert some influence over both elected and appointed school superintendents. While 31% of Florida school board members perceive that the state board of education has “some” influence over the school superintendent, 44% perceive such influence to be substantial. Further, while 36% of Tennessee school board members perceive that the state board of education has “some” influence over the school superintendent, only 10% perceive such

Table 21

State Legislator-School Superintendent Interaction

		State				Total
		FL		TN		
		N	%	N	%	
Do state legislators hold face-to-face meetings with your school superintendent?	Yes	23	63	25	49	48
	No	8	21	17	33	25
	Not sure	6	16	9	18	15
Overall Total		37	100	51	100	88

Table 22

State Board of Education Influence Over School Superintendent

		State				Total	M	SD
		FL		TN				
		N	%	N	%			
Please rate the level of influence the state boards of education exerts over your school superintendent?	None	2	6	12	23	14	2.7	1.0
	Little	5	14	15	29	20		
	Some	13	36	20	38	33		
	Substantial	16	44	5	10	21		
Overall total		36	100	52	100	88		

influence to be substantial. The results of an Pearson's Chi square test performed on such perceptions revealed that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$), in the scores for Florida and Tennessee, $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .002, p < .05$. As such, we reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 22 provides a complete breakdown of the perceptions of local school boards regarding the level of influence state boards of education have over school superintendents.

Perceptions of State Boards of Education Influence Over School Superintendent. The sixth question of this section (Survey Question #21) asks respondents to describe their perceptions of the nature of state boards of educations' influence over the school superintendent, using a 5-point Likert scale as follows: (1) Very Negative, (2) Negative, (3) Positive, (4) Very Positive, and (5) Not Sure. The results Pearson's Chi square test performed on such perceptions revealed that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$), in the scores for Florida and Tennessee, $\chi^2 (1, N = 89) = .042, p < .05$. Generally, Florida school board members were more inclined to perceive the influence of state boards of education over school superintendents to be negative when compared to Tennessee school board members. Tennessee school board members, however, were less knowledgeable of such influences. Specifically, while 55% of Florida school board members viewed state school board influence over the school superintendents in a negative light, 22% viewed this influence in a positive light, with the remaining 13% unsure of the effects of such influence. On the other hand, only 27% of Tennessee school board members viewed such influences to be a negative thing, while 33% viewed such influences in a positive light, with the remaining 40% unsure of the effects of such influence. As such, we reject the null hypothesis as to this question. Table 23 provides a complete breakdown of perceptions of the level of influence state boards of education have over school superintendents.

Table 23

Perceptions of State Board of Education Influence Over School Superintendent

		FL		State TN		Total
			%		%	
Regarding the level of influence the state boards of education exerts over you school superintendent, how would you describe this influence	Very negative	3	8	2	4	5
	Negative	17	46	12	23	29
	Positive	7	19	17	33	24
	Very positive	1	3	0	0	1
	Not sure	9	24	21	40	30
Overall total		37	100	52	100	89

Summary

Although Tennessee and Florida school board members did not always perceive their relationships with their state legislators and state school board members in precisely the same light, there were more common/consistent reactions than statistically significant differences. There did not appear to be any correlation between Tennessee and Florida state/local relations and the amount of interaction between county school boards and their state school board counterparts and state legislators. Further, although county school boards are political subdivisions of the state, nevertheless, both Tennessee and Florida respondents consistently found state involvement in educational policies, to range from “some” to “substantial.” These findings, with some exceptions are consistent with the literature.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented findings from this study based upon a quantitative analysis of the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida local school board members as regards to state influence over local school performance and school governance. A 53 question, anonymous survey was sent to all Tennessee and Florida elected county school board members. Quantitative findings were presented in the form of descriptive statistics. The Pearson’s Chi square test was used to compare the means of two independent groups (Tennessee and Florida), in to determine whether there existed statistical evidence that the associated population means were significantly different. Chapter 5 will present discussion, implications, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida district school board members regarding state influence over local school performance and governance. This was accomplished through a quantitative study, based upon a survey instrument that was designed to address the research questions that guided this study:

- 1.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members regarding state influence over local school performance?
- 2.) Are there differences in the perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members as to whether state influence over public schools has affected their ability to govern their school districts?

Based upon the above research questions, the following relevant hypotheses are:

- 1.) School performance:

H0: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

H1: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over local school performance.

- 2.) School board governance

H0: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will not differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

H1: Perceptions of Tennessee and Florida county school board members will differ regarding the influence their respective states have over their ability to govern their school districts.

This chapter will discuss findings through the lens of Tennessee and Florida local education stakeholders in terms of their relationships with state school board members and legislators and the implications of those relationships in matters of local school performance and governance. Also, based upon findings and literature associated with this study, a framework for improving state-local relationships is proposed. Finally, recommendations for future study will be made based on the methods and findings from this study.

Discussion

Quantitative Approach

According to Creswell (2017), quantitative research is best suited for those studies where the researcher is desirous of testing objective theories by assessing and measuring the relationship among variables. He also noted that the personal experiences, training, and education of the researcher can impact the research approach chosen. As a former school board attorney, I deemed the quantitative approach to be best suited for my research. Creswell further asserted that the last step in a quantitative study is to interpret the data collected in consideration of the research questions or hypotheses articulated at the beginning of the study. As such, the researcher is in a position to determine whether the research questions or hypotheses can be supported or must be refuted. As in most quantitative studies, this study involved the collection of quantitative data through the use of a survey instrument in the form of a questionnaire. This required respondents to self-report. Because such a process does not always result in candid responses, the survey instrument afforded respondents anonymity. Further, I employed a large

sample size that surveyed all Florida and Tennessee local school board members. Because Boeren (2018) cautioned, “In setting up a survey, the researcher will have to make decisions on not only how to sample, but also on how to formulate the specific questions that will be asked, which is extremely important as these questions cannot be changed anymore once data collection has started” (p. 69), I administered a pilot survey (with the consent of the UT IRB), to sitting school board members that were not included in the study. As a result of the feedback received, I administered the instrument to locally elected and appointed school board members in Tennessee and Florida, in an effort to obtain a more complete and balanced picture of their perceptions of the extent state legislators and state school board members influence the performance and governance of local school districts.

The overarching theme that emerged from the data collected pertains to how local school board members in Tennessee and Florida build and maintain relationships with state school board members and state legislators. Specifically, the data revealed how local school boards create, sustain, and manage such relationships, as well as communicate and interact with state-level actors. Lastly, the data revealed the effect such relationships have upon the ability of local school boards to self-govern as well as manage school performance.

The Role of Local School Boards

According to Usdan (2010) there exists a dearth of research and literature focusing on the contemporary duties and challenges of school boards. Howell (2005) went one step further noting, “It is hardly an exaggeration to note that more is known about the operation of medieval guilds than about the institutions that govern contemporary school districts” (p. 15). In Chapter 2 of this study, I outlined the structure, function, duties of, and challenges faced by local school boards in Tennessee and Florida. In Chapter 4 of this study, I explored the relationship between

local school boards and the two stakeholders to which they are considered subordinate, namely, state boards of education and state legislators. In this chapter I attempt, as suggested by Butin (2009) to “explore the larger academic context of how the research fits into and informs the ongoing discussions in the literature and, in turn, impacts our understanding of the bigger picture of that specific issue” (p. 115).

Local School Board-State Legislator Interaction

Prior to collecting the data that drives this study, I had certain preconceived notions about the relationship between local school boards and state legislators. As a result of the assertions of Smrekar and Crowson (2015) that local school board governance “is more deeply penetrated than ever by state and national agendas” (p. 2), I suspected that interactions between local school boards and state legislators would be minimal at best. This, it turns out, was an erroneous assumption. In fact, the data revealed that school board members in Florida and Tennessee reported high levels of interaction between state and local officials. When asked whether, in the year preceding the survey, respondents met with their respective state legislators, 84% of Florida school board members answered in the affirmative, while 78% of Tennessee school board members did likewise. Conversely, when asked whether, in the year preceding the survey, respondents met with their respective state boards of education, 46% of Florida school board members answered in the affirmative, while 39% of Tennessee school board members did likewise. This data reveals that respondents spend more time interacting with their state legislators than with state board of education members. This revelation did not come as a surprise, due to the fact that state boards of education in both states rarely meet more than six times per year, while legislatures in Florida and Tennessee are mandated, by law, to meet for 60 consecutive days each year. The fact that both state legislative bodies maintain house and senate

education committees, local school board members are provided with greater opportunities to confer with their state legislators. However, as noted below, high levels of communication and interaction do not necessarily translate into a collegial atmosphere between state and local stakeholders.

State-local Communications

Based upon the levels of local-state interaction noted above, one would presume that with interaction comes communication. The data revealed that state legislator-local school board interaction did not necessarily translate into state-local communication. Specifically, 54% of Florida school board members and 50% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were rarely or never apprised of proposed education policy that affects local school board operations. However, although the data revealed that Florida school board members appeared before state legislative education committees with greater frequency than their Tennessee counterparts, such appearances did not result in any direct benefit to Florida local school board members in terms of increased policy awareness. Considering the number of education bills passed by the Tennessee and Florida legislature affecting local school board operations, this bit of data was surprising, if not troubling. One can infer that, if local school board members lack effective channels of communication with their state legislators, then state legislators, and those who influence them, end up defining which education issues and policies become priorities and not the local school districts that are directly affected by, and duty bound, to implement those issues or policies.

State Legislator-Local School Superintendent Communication

Legislators in both states seemed more than willing to directly communicate with school superintendents employed by local school districts. Notably, 62% of Florida school board

members reported that their state legislators hold face-to-face meetings with the school superintendent, while 49% of Tennessee school board members reported likewise. Such interactions can prove beneficial to the school system, provided the school superintendent doesn't have an agenda that is contrary to the school board.

Lapses in Communication at the Local Level

Although this study was primarily focused on state-local communication, the data revealed a lapse in communication between local school boards and their school superintendents. Specifically, in some cases, legislators in Florida and Tennessee communicate directly with local school superintendents without the knowledge of the school boards those superintendents serve. Further, 16% of Florida respondents and 18% percent of Tennessee respondents were unsure whether their state legislators were meeting or communicating with their superintendents. Because there still exists elected school superintendents in Florida, an argument can be made that, as separately elected officials, elected school superintendents need not seek permission from, or confer with, their respective school boards prior to having direct contact with members of the Florida Legislature. However, I do not feel the same argument can be made by appointed Florida superintendents and appointed Tennessee school superintendents who are accountable to, and who serve at the pleasure of, the local school board. Legislators can affect and/or impact, positively or negatively, the legislature's relationship with the school board, as well as influence school board policy and governance. As such, it's not unreasonable to make an argument that an appointed school superintendent who is interacting with legislators without the advise or consent of the school board, can cause a rift between school boards and the very superintendents they hired to make decisions concerning the operation of the school system , and who are contractually obligated to carry out school board polices. Based on this phenomenon, one can

hypothesize that should such a rift occur, it can translate into a working relationship between school boards and superintendents that is tenuous at best, as well as result in students becoming inured to a less than cohesive school environment.

Third party Communication

As noted in Chapter 4, both Florida and Tennessee employ lobbyists whose job it is to influence legislation and appropriations at the state and federal levels. This phenomenon came as no surprise considering that almost 30 years ago, Hoyt and Toma (1993) observed that it is not uncommon for local school boards to allocate resources to hire lobbyists to politically pressure state governments. They argued that, by exerting pressure on the state, local school boards may influence the level of expenditures committed to localities. What did come as a surprise was the fact that, in my study, Florida school boards reported employing lobbyists to a significantly greater degree than Tennessee school boards. Specifically, when asked whether their respective school districts employed a professional lobbyist, 89% of Florida boards of education answered in the affirmative, as compared to 25% of Tennessee school boards. However, despite Florida's greater reliance upon professional lobbyists, the data did not reveal a correlation between the extent to which lobbyists were retained, and an increased level of communication between school boards and the state legislators being lobbied.

State Involvement in Local Educational Policies

As noted above, 84% of Florida school board members and 78% of Tennessee school board members reported that they interacted with their state legislators in the preceding year. They also reported that state legislators regularly meet with their respective school superintendents. Despite this interaction, 48% of Florida school board members and 52% of Tennessee school board members found the state's involvement in educational policies that

affect local school districts to be either “too much,” or “far too much.” Further, 67% of Florida local school board members and 71% of Tennessee local school board members reported that the state exerts significant influence over student achievement. Regarding the state’s influence over the manner in which teacher competency is measured by local school districts, 81% of Florida local school board members and 80% of Tennessee school board members found such influence to be considerable. Once again, we see a lack of a correlation between the frequency in which local school board members meet with state stakeholders, and their satisfaction with the actions of those stakeholders. Exacerbating this phenomenon is the fact that 49% of Florida local school board members and 46% of Tennessee local school board members reported that state education policymakers fail to articulate school performance goals to them.

State Legislative Influence over Local School Board Decision-Making

As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, both Tennessee and Florida legislatively vest responsibility for local administration of public education in locally elected boards of education (T.C.A. § 49-1-102(c); FLA. STAT. §1001-32). Consequently, locally elected school boards in both states have a statutory duty for ensuring that the schools for which they are responsible, are operated efficiently so that all children are given an opportunity to learn, and both state legislatures maintain house and senate education committees. In Florida, county school board members are elected at the general election in November for terms of 4 years and are responsible for the education of the children in their care (FLA. STAT. §1001-35). In Tennessee, county school board members are likewise at the general election in November for terms of 4 years and are responsible for the education of the children in their care (T.C.A. §49-2-201).

Despite the duties and responsibilities statutorily granted to local boards of education in Florida and Tennessee, local school board members found that state-level decision-making

influences local decision-making. This seems to imply that, despite the fact that Florida and Tennessee school boards are separately elected bodies politic, they nevertheless remain political subdivisions of their respective states, and with that subservient posture comes significant state influence over local decision-making. For instance, respondents in Florida and Tennessee reported that bullying/cyberbullying, and school safety/security are major parental concerns that parents presume will be addressed by the local school board. However, as reported in Chapter 2 of this study, such policies are promulgated at the state level. Although some respondents in Florida and Tennessee reported that state involvement in local educational policy-making was “far too little,” 48% of Florida school board members and 52% of Tennessee school board members found state involvement to be either “too much,” or “far too much.”

State Influence over Local Governance

According to Boyle and Burns (2012) the governance of America’s public schools must be a “collective and representative enterprise” that includes both state legislatures and local boards of education (p. 163). Maxell (2009), on the other hand, questioned whether local school boards are capable of effective district governance in an era of increased pressure and control by federal and state lawmakers and bureaucrats. The data in this study suggests that Florida and Tennessee school board members question whether their respective states find them capable of self-governance. Specifically, 72% of Florida school board members and 42% of Tennessee school board members perceived the state’s influence over local school governance to range from “very influential” to “extremely influential.” On the other hand, local school board members in both states found their respective state boards of education to be less intrusive in local governance. Specifically, 59% of Florida school board members and 85% of Tennessee

school board members rated the influence of state boards of education over local governance to be between “little” or “none.”

Based upon the above, it appears that elected state legislators are more likely to involve themselves in local school board governance than appointed state school board members.

Communication of State Performance Goals

Metz and Socol (2017) suggested that state education leaders are empowered to remedy the myriad of inequities that exists in local school districts by making decisions and taking actions that serve to incentivize local leaders to act accordingly. This, they suggest, can be accomplished by providing local leaders with transparent expectations for improvement and motivating them to meet those expectations. Although state education leaders in Florida and Tennessee are empowered to provide local school board members with guidance, the data in this study suggests that state education leaders aren’t necessarily exercising such powers. When asked whether state education policymakers clearly articulate school performance goals to them, 51% of Florida school board members and 54% of Tennessee school board members answered “no.”

As noted in Chapter 2, Beckham and Wills (2016) asserted that local school boards operate in a complicated environment. As a result of federal and state legal mandates and court decisions, the policymaking abilities of local school boards can become constrained. Based on that logic, it would stand to reason that state education policymakers would ensure that local boards of education are provided with clearly articulated performance goals.

State Influence over Student Achievement

As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, Florida’s state board of education is empowered to promulgate and enforce system-wide school performance and achievement goals and policies,

as well as prescribe minimum standards and definitions that will ensure a high quality of education. Tennessee's state board of education is empowered to set policies for the completion of elementary, middle, junior high, and senior high schools, evaluate individual student progress and achievement, evaluate individual teachers, and measure the educational achievement of individual schools. Despite the fact that state boards of education in Florida and Tennessee are empowered to influence student achievement levels at the local level, when respondents to this study were asked to rate the level of influence exerted by state boards of education over local school district student achievement, only 30% of Florida school board members and 11% of Tennessee school board members found the state's influence to be "substantial," while approximately 25% of both Florida and Tennessee respondents rated the state's influence between "none" and "little." These results imply that local school boards in both states have a significant amount of autonomy when it comes to student achievement levels. However, when asked whether they thought existing state education policies allowed their school board to establish a vision for measuring student achievement, 53% of Florida school board members and 52% of Tennessee school board members answered "no."

Limitations

As in most quantitative studies, this study involved the collection of quantitative data through the use of a survey instrument in the form of a questionnaire. This required respondents to self-report, a process that does not always result in candid responses. Further, quantitative research methodology requires a large sample size, hence the selection of a population that included all Florida and Tennessee elected school board members. Boeren (2018) cautioned, "In setting up a survey, the researcher will have to make decisions on not only how to sample but also on how to formulate the specific questions that will be asked, which is extremely important

as these questions cannot be changed anymore once data collection has started” (p. 69). By administering the survey instrument to locally elected school board members in Tennessee and Florida, the goal was to have a more complete and balanced picture of the perceptions of the aforementioned, relative to state influence over local affairs.

It is important to note that this study was originally designed to examine the perceptions of school board members in Tennessee and Mississippi. The initial survey was launched in 2019. Once it became apparent that Mississippi school board members had no interest in participating in the survey (only 1.9% of 410 members surveyed responded), a decision was made to substitute Florida for Mississippi. Once permission for the change was approved by the IRB, the survey was distributed to all Florida county school board members. Unfortunately, the survey was distributed to Florida school board members at the same time Covid-19 made its appearance. This resulted in a reduction in the number of survey responses. According to de Koning et al, (2021), this phenomenon is not unique to my study. They noted that researchers in all field are experience significantly reduced survey responses rated, and what they described as “survey fatigue” as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 2). Leeper (2019) observed that, as a result of Covid-19, researchers are facing an ever-increasing rate of nonresponse where survey research is concerned. Further, according to a recent federal government report (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,2021) the 2020 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) was greatly affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, resulting in lower response rates than anticipated. Nevertheless, I believe that the results reported in this study are representative of the population surveyed.

Implications and Future Research

Implications for Practice

This study suggests that local school boards in Florida and Tennessee demonstrate high levels of awareness when it comes to state influence over their ability to govern their districts and school performance/student achievement. This can be attributed to the fact that, while not ideal, locally elected school board members in Florida and Tennessee have high levels of interaction with their state counterparts, either through direct contact, or attendance at legislative committee hearings or state school board meetings. Nevertheless, the data did not express a positive corollary between the level of interaction and favorable perceptions of respondents when it came to state involvement in local affairs.

As noted in the literature, both Tennessee and Florida legislatures regularly introduce a substantial amount of legislation designed to affect the day-to-day operations of local school boards. There exists no evidence to suggest that either state legislature actively solicits input from local school board members when developing, vetting, and passing such legislation. As noted earlier, 54% of Florida school board members and 50% of Tennessee school board members reported that they were rarely or never apprised by state lawmakers of proposed education policy that affects local school board operations, despite appearances before their respective state legislative education committees. If this trend continues, one can argue that the education of students for which state and local politicians are responsible, will ultimately suffer.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides an analysis of how locally elected school board members perceive levels of state involvement in local affairs. As noted above, such perceptions are not always favorable. Future research can explore methodologies state actors can employ to enhance their

relationships with the local school boards upon which they rely to carryout state educational policy. Usdan (2010) recognized that local school boards are regularly overlooked by education reformers who fail to recognize their strategic importance to the education of our children. He suggested that “lay and professional leaders must reassess their roles and responsibilities and make more explicit efforts to ensure that school boards can play a more active role in school improvement” (p. 9). Although local school boards are political subdivisions of the state, nevertheless, education leaders at the state level are empowered welcome local leaders to the policy formulation table. The data revealed a certain discontent, if you will, on behalf of local school board members who reported that they had little say in the formation of educational policies they were later required to implement. Still, on balance, one area that merits greater research is whether school boards, through education and fostering better relationships at the state level, can create a more a positive perspective by legislators on the essential challenges, accomplishments, and day-to-day work of school boards.

Another area that merits exploration concerns the perceptions of school board members according to gender identity, race, and national origin. In this study, demographic questions regarding ethnic origin, race, and gender identity were optional, with 25% of respondents electing not to respond to such questions. This is unfortunate, especially in today’s political climate. It would be interesting to know whether certain groups felt more detached from state actors than others. Further, having compared 2 states, it would be interesting to expand the search in the future to include perceptions between geographical regions within each state.

As explored in Chapter 2 of this study, school boards in Florida and Tennessee, because they are separately elected bodies politic, can only take official action by a majority vote during a properly noticed public meeting, and then only after an agenda has been published and made

available to the general public. The individual board member has no authority other than the right to cast a vote at such a meeting. The purpose of a school board meeting is to transact the legal business (promulgated at the state level), of the school district through discussion and voting among the members. Generally, those school boards considered to be effective, engage in an ongoing two-way conversation between boards members and parents through the use of public forums, surveys, citizens committees, and other engagement tools to determine the community's aspirations for its schools and students. Effective school boards know the difference between governance and policy-setting (which is their job) and management, including the carrying out of school board policy, (which is the administration's job). Although this study was not designed to rate the effectiveness of school boards, but rather, explore the relationship between local school boards and their state counterparts, nevertheless, it would be interesting to learn whether there exists a corollary between enhanced communications among local and state education stakeholders, and school district performance.

Concluding Thoughts

Although there existed some disparities in the perceptions of Florida and Tennessee local school board members as to the extent to which the state influences local school board decision-making, governance, and student performance, by and large there were few statistically significant differences between the two groups. This is noteworthy when you consider the fact that Florida has a mix of elected and appointed school superintendents, while Tennessee's superintendents are wholly appointed. Needless to say, there will continue to be conflicts between state and local leaders when it comes to the education of our children. Local school board members are closest to the people, and the law requires them to regularly hold public meetings to which their constituents may, and often attend. State legislators, on the other hand,

are one step removed from the people, and as such, have the luxury of passing legislation with little or no input from local school boards who have no choice to enact them, and who bear the brunt of citizen discontent when unpopular mandates are implemented or enforced. Ohm (2018), in her investigation of the local school board-state legislature relationship, quoted one school board member as saying, "Our legislators refuse to listen to us in meetings and have gone so far as to insult board members in person. We have experienced some adverse legislation from our delegation, and they deny us access to meetings they have with teachers" (para. 3). Clearly, there is a communication gap between state and local education stakeholders that must be bridged. The question remains, however, who will take the first step?

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Appendix A

Morgan Study permission

From: John <morg4006@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 24, 2016 7:54:14 AM
To: Jarret, Joseph Gregory
Cc: Monica Greppin-Watts
Subject:
TBR Information Request

Dear Mr. Jarret,

In connection with your letter to me dated May 21, 2016, I would be happy for you to utilize the survey instrument, or any portion thereof, in your research. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you need further information or authorization.

Regards,

John Morgan
Chancellor (Retired)
Tennessee Board of Regents

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

Appendix B

Jarret IRB Outcome Letter



May 01, 2020

Joseph Gregory Jarret,

UTK - College of Arts & Sciences - Political Science

**Re: UTK IRB-19-05273-
XM**

Study Title: Local Control over Education: Perceptions of Tennessee and Mississippi County School Board Members

Dear Joseph Gregory Jarret:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for **revision** of your previously approved project, referenced above. The IRB determined that your revision application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b), and that your study remains eligible for **exempt** status. The following revisions to your project were approved as complying with proper consideration of the rights and welfare of human subjects:

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697 865-974-7400 fax irb.utk.edu

BIG ORANGE. BIG IDEAS.

Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System

Recruit participants from Florida instead of Mississippi
Application version 1.2
Jarret Informed Consent Anonymous Survey Amended - Version 2.0
Jarret Recruitment email Amended - Version 2.0
Jarret Survey - Version 1.1

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, webbased advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any alterations (revisions) in the research project must be submitted to and approved by the UTK Institutional Review Board prior to implementation of these revisions. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Sincerely,



Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.
Chair

Appendix C

Jarret Survey Letter

**Joseph G. Jarret, Lecturer
University of Tennessee
Attorney At Law
Federal & State Mediator**

Hendry County Board of Education
Attn: Chairperson
300 W. Cowboy Way
LaBelle, FL 33935

Re: School Board Survey

Dear School Board Member:

My name is Joe Jarret, and I am a former school board attorney (Knox County, TN), and a doctoral student currently serving the University of Tennessee as a lecturer. As part of my dissertation research, I am conducting a survey of Florida and Tennessee school board members. You are invited to participate in an ***anonymous, confidential survey***, the purpose which is to examine the opinions and perceptions of elected local school board members in Tennessee and Florida regarding the relationship between local boards of education and their respective state legislature and state board of education. In addition, the study examines what Tennessee and Florida county school board members think about their state government's impact on their ability to govern their school districts.

The information gathered in this survey will be kept confidential, will be stored securely through the University of Tennessee's secure data collection system, and will be made available only to persons conducting the study. Further, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study, and any findings published as a result of this survey will not contain information that will personally identify you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. It is very important that I learn your opinions. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Joe Jarret, at (865) 566-5393 or by email, jjarret@utk.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Joseph G. Jarret

Joseph G. Jarret

Attachments

P.O. Box 608
Powell, TN 37849
jjarret@utk.edu
(865) 974-2166

Appendix D

Jarret Survey

Dear School Board Member: I am a former Polk County attorney and working on my PhD in Education Leadership. I would like to invite you to participate in an anonymous survey, the purpose of which is to examine the opinions and perceptions of elected local school board members in Florida regarding the relationship between local boards of education and their respective state legislature and state board of education. In addition, the study examines what county school board members think about their state government's impact on their ability to govern their school districts. The information gathered in this survey will be kept confidential, will be stored securely through the University of Tennessee's secure data collection system, and will be made available only to persons conducting the study. Further, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study, and any findings published as a result of this survey will not contain information that will personally identify you.

Participants are asked to complete questions about local school board-state relations, a task that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Joe Jarret, at (865) 566-5393 or by email, jjarret@utk.edu. Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the Next button below.

Do you wish to continue?

1. Yes
2. No

THIS SET OF QUESTIONS EXPLORE THE SCHOOL BOARD-STATE LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION RELATIONSHIP

How would you rate your school board's working relationship with your state legislative delegation?

1. Poor
2. Below average
3. Average
4. Good
5. Excellent

During the last state legislative session, how frequently, if at all, did you personally confer with the state legislator from your district on matters that affect the schools in your county or district?

1. Never

2. 1-2 times
- 3.
4. 3-5 times
- 5.
6. 5 or more times

How influential is state-level educational decision-making upon your board's decision-making?

1. Not at all influential
2. Slightly influential
3. Somewhat influential
4. Very influential
5. Extremely influential

In the last two years, how frequently, if at all, has a member of your school board testified before a state legislative education committee?

1. Never
2. 1-2 times
3. 3-5 times
4. 5 or more times
5. Almost always when possible

During the last two years or so, how many, if any, state legislative education committee meetings might you have attended?

1. None
2. 1-2
3. 3-5
4. 5 or more

What level of influence, if any, might state legislators have when it comes to the selection of the district school superintendent by your board?

1. Not at all influential
2. Slightly influential
3. Somewhat influential
4. Very influential
5. Extremely influential

During the last year, did your school board meet with members of the state legislative delegation?

1. Yes
2. No

Do members of your state legislative delegation hold face-to-face meetings with your school superintendent?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

Does your school district employ a professional lobbyist to advocate on behalf of the district when it comes to state legislative decision-making?

1. Yes
2. No

Is there a member of your school board who is designated to advocate on behalf of the district when it comes to state legislative decision-making?

1. Yes
2. No

How frequently, if at all, have you testified before a state legislative education committee meeting?

1. Never
2. 1-2 times
3. 3-5 times
4. 5 or more times
5. Almost always when possible

How frequently, if at all, do members of your state legislative delegation apprise you of proposed legislation that could directly impact your school board's operations?

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very often

How frequently, if at all, do members of your state legislative delegation solicit input from your board prior to enacting legislation that could directly impact your school board's operations?

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very often

What do you think about your state's level of involvement in education policies that affect schools in your district?
Do you think it is:

1. Far too little
2. Too little
3. About right
4. Too much
5. Far too much

Do you believe the school superintendent should be:

1. An elected position
2. An appointed position

THIS SET OF QUESTIONS EXPLORE THE SCHOOL BOARD-STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
RELATIONSHIP

Please rate the level of influence the state board of education exerts over your school superintendent.

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial

Regarding the level of influence the state board of education exerts over your school superintendent, how would you describe this influence?

1. Very negative
2. Negative
3. Positive
4. Very positive
5. Not sure

Please rate the level of influence that you think the state board of education exerts over student achievement in your school district:

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial
5. Not sure

Please rate the level of influence that you think the state board of education exerts over day-to-day school board operations:

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial
5. Not sure

Please rate the level of influence that you think the state board of education exerts over student achievement in your school district.

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial

How influential, if at all, are members of the state board of education when it comes to selecting the district school superintendent by your board?

1. Not at all influential
2. Slightly influential
3. Somewhat influential
4. Very influential
5. Extremely influential _____

What level of influence, if any, does the state board of education exert over day-to-day school board operations?

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial

What impact or level of influence does the state board of education exert with respect to how teacher competency is measured or assessed in your school district?

1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Substantial

How beneficial, if at all, would you rate training conducted by the state board of education on behalf of your board?

1. Not at all beneficial
2. Minimally beneficial
3. Beneficial
4. Very Beneficial

Does your state board of education offer preparation programs for teachers?

1. Yes
2. No

If you answered yes to the previous question, how would you rate the effectiveness of such programs?

1. Not effective at all
2. Slightly effective
3. Somewhat effective
4. Very effective
5. Extremely effective
6. Not sure

How frequently, if at all, do members of the state department of education apprise you of proposed policies that could directly impact local school board operations?

1. Never

2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very often

Have you met with members of the state department of education in the last year?

1. Yes
2. No

If the answer to the previous question is yes, how many times did you meet ?

1. 1-3
2. 3-5
3. 5 or more

During the last year, how much, if any, concern was expressed by parents at school board meetings about state education policies?

1. None
2. Some
3. A good deal
4. A great deal

During the last year, how often, if at all, were you contacted by parents who voiced concern over state-mandated standardized testing?

1. Never
2. 1-3 times
3. 4-6 times
4. 6 or more times

If you were contacted by parents who voiced concern over state-mandated standardized testing, what other concerns did they express?

1. Bullying/Cyberbullying
2. School Safety/Security
3. Internet safety
4. Substance abuse
5. Motor vehicle accidents
6. All of the above
7. Other

Have parents in your district suggested to your board that the state school board should consult more frequently with your school board before enacting policies that affect local schools?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

Do state education policymakers clearly articulate school performance goals to your board?

1. Yes
2. No
- 3.

Do you think existing state education policies allow your board to establish a vision for measuring student achievement?

1. Yes
2. No

During the last year, how often, if at all, did your board discuss these topics?

	Not At All	Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently
School absences	☐	☐	☐	☐
School Safety	☐	☐	☐	☐
Academic Rigor	☐	☐	☐	☐
School board autonomy	☐	☐	☐	☐

THIS NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS ARE RELATED TO YOUR BACKGROUND, EXPERIENCE, AND REGION

How many years have you been a school board member?

--

How many hours per week do you spend on school board business?

1. Fewer than 20 hours
2. 20-39 hours
3. 40 hours or more

Do you have any teaching experience?

1. Yes
2. No

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

What is your education level?

1. High school diploma
2. Some college
3. Associate's degree
4. Bachelor's degree
5. Master's degree
6. Doctorate

How would you describe your school district?

1. Suburban
2. Urban
3. Rural

Which best identifies your school board:

1. County
2. District
3. City/Town/Municipality
4. Special District

THE LAST THREE QUESTIONS ARE OPTIONAL AS THEY ASK YOU TO IDENTIFY YOUR GENDER IDENTITY, RACE, AND AGE

Ethnic origin: Please specify your ethnicity.

1. White
2. Hispanic or Latino
3. Black or African American
4. Native American or American Indian
5. Asian/Pacific Islander
6. Not listed
7. Prefer not to answer
8. Other

To which gender identity do you most identify?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Transgender female
4. Transgender male
5. Gender variant/nonconforming
6. Not listed
7. Prefer not to answer
8. Other

What is your age?

Comments/Suggestions:

VITA

Joe Jarret is an attorney and a federal and state mediator who has been practicing law and alternative dispute resolution for over 29 years. He has practiced law before the Tennessee Supreme Court, and lower state and federal courts and before the Florida Governor's Cabinet. He has served four different government entities as chief legal counsel the most recent being the Knox County, Tennessee, Board of Education. He is married to his wife of 33 years, Amanda.

Joe is a full-time lecturer for the University of Tennessee, Political Science Department and the Graduate School of Public Policy and Administration and frequently lectures on behalf of the College of Law. He teaches the education law component of the Leadership Academy on behalf of the Center for Educational Leadership, College of Education, Health & Human Sciences

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, he is a former active-duty United States Army Armored Cavalry Officer and former United States Air Force Special Agent with service overseas.

Joe is an award-winning writer who has published more than 90 articles in various professional journals. He is a recipient of the Gordon Johnston Award for Excellence in the Practice of Local Government Law.

He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Troy University, West Germany campus in 1981, his Masters in Public Administration degree from Central Michigan University in 1983, his Juris Doctor degree from Stetson University College of Law in 1989, and his Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education with a concentration in Leadership Studies at the University of

Tennessee in 2021. Upon finishing his doctoral coursework, Joe plans to continue to teach for the University of Tennessee.