Facilities, Policy, and Funding of Rural Schools: A Case Study of School Board Decision Making

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the reality and spirit of all things rural and to all those who live, learn, and dream in these places.

Acknowledgements

Every journey begins with a first step. At the onset, I was fortunate to have a number of mentors, guides, and confidants, Dr. Lionel "Skip" Meno, Dr. James P. Coon, and Dr. John Hamels. While pursuing the master's degree Dr. Bruce Murphy and Dr. Mary Breckenridge, administrative credentials Dr. Andrew Pushchack and the recently departed Dr. Raymond Domborwski,

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Abstract of Dissertation

Facilities, Policy, and Funding of Rural Schools:
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School facilities issues in rural America and the resources to remedy them are made more complex by rural population trends, building deterioration and inadequacies, financial constraints, and education policy. The challenge for rural districts is to generate the revenues required to build or renovate school facilities. The resulting long-term underfunding of school facilities has left a pattern of crumbling school buildings across rural communities. Rural school districts, particularly those with older structures, need to improve energy efficiency of buildings and upgrade building infrastructure to support new technology

This case study was conducted to ascertain and gain an understanding of the decision-making process of a rural school board as it related to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. A review of the literature, to understand why rural schools are often in deteriorating condition, revealed a limited scope of research addressing rural education. Kingdon's (1984) Agenda-Setting Theory provided the conceptual framework for the analysis of the board of education's complex decisions made, both collectively and individually. Applied was Kingdon's The Three Streams Model to understand what factors influenced board members when making financial and policy decisions for school facilities.

This single case study utilized field research methods to collect interview data and documents for archival analysis. Interviews were conducted with the school board

members who made the decisions for the capital building project investigated in this study.

A key finding in this study was how changes in district leadership and the shifting mood of the school board precipitated the initiation of a policy and reinforced the chances for survival. This finding was particularly true in respect of financial feasibility, which did, in fact, result in enabling the policy to become a building project. This case study serves as a foundation for continued analysis. To connect the larger themes of rural school facility issues with decision making, policy development, and the effects of changing social-economic dynamics shaping the rural school agenda locally, statewide, and nationally.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As an elementary student, I attended a two-room schoolhouse. This brick structure, the one-time pride of a small rural community, was showing signs of age and neglect. As a doctoral student, the primary area of interest and study is rural education, with a particular focus on the dynamics of leadership and decision making. Nurturing this interest was seven years of school board service and observations while working in the construction industry and contracting services with the U.S. Department of Labor Job Corps Program. My work and school board experience afforded the opportunity to visit schools around the nation; this included urban, suburban, and rural districts. The condition of these buildings, particularly the disrepair evident in rural school buildings, prompted this study of rural school facilities and school board decision making.

Interactions with school board members in both in my district and others have led to an attempt to understand decisions that affect or explain why school facilities exist as they do. Crotty (1998) stated people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same event. This concept was fundamental to the development of an understanding of how board members develop their sets of beliefs. Because of experiences with this phenomenon, a desire developed to explore the reasoning, perceptions, and influences that school board members experience when making decisions.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that the researcher should be the instrument of research. In this light, values and biases, based on personal and cultural grounding, influence the results of the current research. The relationship existing between the researcher and that which is being studied is interrelated and dependent. This

interrelationship became evident through prior personal experience and time in the field conducting observations and collecting other data. The interrelationship led to the decision to include personal factors in the conduct of this research to the extent perception was relevant to the interpretation of observations.

Overview

The total expenditures for educating children in the United States dramatically increased over the last three decades. The Digest of Educational Statistics cited total expenditures for 48.7 million public elementary and secondary students for the 1977-1978 School Year at $87 billion. For the 2007-2008 School Year for 55.2 million elementary and secondary students the budget was $631 billion (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman, 2009; Snyder & Hoffman, 1995).

Statistics for the most recent 10 years indicates expenses for the 2000-2001 School Year to have been $449 billion to educate 53.4 million students. The total expenditures for 54.7 million students enrolled for the 2010-2011 School Year were $673 billion. Inflation-adjusted expenses for elementary and secondary schools between 2000-2001 and 2010-2011 indicate an estimated increase of 20% (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Estimates for future expenses are that they will continually increase. Recent projections from The United States Department of Education estimating expenditures for the 2018-2019 K-12 Academic Year to be $646 billion (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). The projections made by Hussar and Bailey (2009) contained two caveats, one the effect of policy initiatives, and two retirements of teachers and the hiring of new educators. These caveats may account for the leveling off of projected monies to be spent for education when compared to the scale of increases seen before the 2007-2008 School Year

The educational process is a complex system of interactions among local, state, and federal government entities encompassing compliance with regulations, rules, mandates, and policies, all with the intent of improving student achievement. Funding issues and decisions affect every aspect of education, including providing structures that are safe and adequate to effectively educate children.

School facilities in the United States face challenges of deteriorating conditions, out of date designs, and changing utilization requirements. Every day, there are students attending school in old, outdated, uncomfortable, and often unsafe buildings. The National Educational Association (2011) estimated 14 million children attend deteriorating public schools in America. These elements impact teaching, learning, teacher motivation, and student achievement (Dewees, 1999; Earthman, 2002; Earthman & Lemasters, 1998; Earthman & Lemasters, 2011; Filardo, 2008; Lemasters, 1997; Schneider, 2003).

Existing school buildings have undergone minor renovations since construction and are now in need of major renovations. Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, and Kaplan (2000) report revealed three-quarters of all school facilities are in need of repairs, upgrades, and modernization to bring them into good condition. The report stated one in four schools indicated at least one on-site building was in less than adequate condition. This study showed 50% of all schools identified one of the nine building features as being in less than adequate condition. Additionally, 47% of all schools in the study reported an inadequacy in one of six environmental factors: lighting, heating, ventilation, indoor air quality, noise control or acoustics, and physical security of the building. An updated study of existing school building released by Alexander and Lewis (2014), the first in over a decade,

indicated 53% of school buildings need repairs, renovations, or modernizations measured across 3 metrics: 17 building features, 7 outdoor features, and 8 environmental factors.

The estimated costs to replace, repair, and modernize school facilities continue to escalate. In 1995, the U.S. General Accounting Office estimated $112 billion needed to correct infrastructure deficiencies in facility maintenance, health and safety standards, and accessibility issues in America's schools. In 2000, using data from the report *The Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 1999*, the National Center for Educational Statistics estimated $127 billion needed for the same upgrades (Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, & Kaplan, 2000). One year later, the National Education Association (NEA) (2000) estimated $268.2 billion to modernize the nation's school facilities. In the same report, the NEA estimated total infrastructure costs of $322 billion. Included were costs for new school construction, additions to existing buildings, renovations, retrofitting, deferred maintenance, technology, and significant improvements to grounds. The report issued by Alexander and Lewis (2014) estimated $197 billion for repairs, renovations, and modernizations to existing structures. The researchers noted an estimated expenditure of $4.5 million per individual school building.

Agron (2006) stated that while school buildings age and deteriorate, spending for Maintenance and Operations (M&O) remains inadequate, "reflecting the rather low priority many schools districts place on the condition of facilities where children learn" (p. 1). In an analysis of M&O spending from 1989 through 2008, Agron (2008) found the percentage of total district expenditures in 1989 to be 11.70%, in 1998, 9.40%, and expenditures in 2008 declined to 8.35%. Agron (2008) noted an overall decrease during this 20-year period with the 8.35% expenditure being higher than percentages allocated during the

previous 10 years. Agron attributes the small percentages of total spending to the flagging economy and rapidly rising costs straining school budgets, forcing the redirection of available funds to other areas to include salaries and benefits.

Agron (2008) reported on new school construction, additions, and modernization expenditures for the decade FY ‘98 through FY ‘07. He stated during this 10-year period, school districts allocated a total of $232.1 billion for facilities construction. Expenditures ranged from a low of $16.0 billion for 1999 to a high of $29.1 billion in 2004. In 2008, construction expenditures increased 18% to $25.2 billion from $20.3 billion in 2007, reversing a four-year spending decline (Agron, 2009).

Abramson (2009) noted construction costs began to decline after 1979 and continued declining until 2001. Precipitating this decrease was the end of the post-World War II increase in the birth rate and the consequential trend into smaller cohorts of children entering school. During this 23-year period, schools spent an aggregate of $226 billion on construction projects. He reported 2002 as a benchmark year in which the 23-year trend reversed, resulting in increased spending for school building projects. Abramson stated current expenditures for new construction were at the highest percentage of construction dollars since 1979 (Abramson, 2009).

Between 2000 and 2008, annual school construction expenditures averaged in excess of $20 billion (Abramson, 2010). These expenses covered new school construction, additions, and renovations (Abramson, 2012). Abramson (2012) reported this trend came to an abrupt halt as a result of the 2008 recession and anti-tax sentiment fomenting across the nation as a consequence of the recession. The last year of construction allocations meeting the $20 billion average level of funding was 2008. The ensuing years have seen a

precipitous drop in construction funds: $16.4 billion in 2009, $14.5 billion in 2010, $12.4 billion in 2011, and projected funding for 2012 to be $10.4 billion (Abramson, 2012).

The deterioration of school facilities is not a phenomenon restricted to urban districts. Marshall's (2000) study of rural policies noted school buildings were in need of repairs and upgrades and observed in contrast to urban schools; rural schools had older buildings and fewer resources. Rural schools need upgraded facilities, including new buildings; the acquisition of funding for new construction and renovations is a continuous challenge (Dewees, 1999). The tying of allocations to property values leaves rural districts continuing to be hard pressed for construction dollars.

A study of rural schools by Honeyman (1989) concluded the average age of school buildings in rural districts was nearly 50 years old. Ten years later, Rowand (1999), followed by Lewis et al., 2000, reported on the condition of America's public schools, stating the average age of school facilities in the United States was 40 years. In this report, the age of rural and small town schools averaged 41 years with a functional age of 16 years. Urban schools averaged 42 years with a functional age of 17years and urban fringe/large town (suburban) 37 years with a functional age of 14 years (Lewis et al., 2000). Lewis, et. al (2000) defined "functional age of schools" as the calculated years from initial construction of a school with no major renovation or the years since the most recent renovation of schools completing major projects.

Alexander and Lewis (2014), reported statistics from the 2012-13 School Year indicating the average main instructional building across all schools in America as 44 years. The average functional age was estimated to be 19 years. Built, on average 50 years

ago urban main instruction buildings have a current functional age of 21 years. Rural schools main instructional building is 40 years old with a functional age of 18 years.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (2010), in their *2009 Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, stated it had been over a decade since new data had been collected on the condition of school facilities in the United States. The last time the federal government released a report assessing public school buildings was in a Department of Education report entitled *Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 1999*. The American Society of Civil Engineers (2009) cited the 2000 NEA report as the last comprehensive collection of data for school facilities to include total infrastructure cost estimates. A fact sheet issued by Building Educational Success Together (2011) stated there was no national database of information on public school facilities. In *Policy Statement 452 – Investing in America's Schools, the American Society of Civil Engineers* (2012) once again authors stated the federal government has not assessed the condition of public schools in America since 1999. The most recent report from the American Society of Civil Engineers (2013) reconfirmed there has been no assessment done after 1999 of American schools. The 10-year gap ended with the release of *The Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 2012-2013* (Alexander & Lewis, 2014). This report "provides nationally representative data" (p.1) and references the Lewis et al. (2000) report as generating the last data collection (Alexander & Lewis, 2014).

Rural-Urban Context

The dichotomy that once existed between rural and urban districts has mitigated to a situation of convergence more so than divergence. Rural, as well as urban districts, face similar challenges of providing education for all children, impoverished or not,

minority or not, with high-quality teachers and rigorous curricula in a safe and educationally conducive environment. Rural districts, however, face challenges different from urban districts. Hill (2015), in his study on opportunities for rural education, made the following observations interpreting the distinction of rural schools:

> The imperatives that have made big-city schools such a topic of investment and ferment are as great for schools in rural and remote areas. Rural education has remained on the back burner. The reasons for this relative neglect are many:
>
> - Rural areas are distant from major media markets, making rural education much more difficult for newspapers and TV to cover.
> - There is no dramatic civil rights connection. Though rural students are disproportionately African American in the Southeast, they are mainly white elsewhere. The rapid growth of the Hispanic population in the West is a recent phenomenon and has not yet connected with a civil rights agenda.
> - Domination of federal policy by urban concerns has led to concentration of federal program funds in metropolitan areas.
> - Specific policy on rural areas has been relegated to the states, which in turn have set their own priorities in line with federal policy and funding.
> - A mismatch exists between the education-reform solutions favored by the dominent national philanthropies—for example, school choice and competition—and what is possible in low-density rural areas. (p. 4)

Manifestations of these disparities are evident in funding. Rural districts receive lower levels of Title I funding and absorb the high costs of transporting children long distances. Rural schools contend with state funding formulas that often favor larger and wealthier districts. The dependence on local property tax revenues to finance education creates funding disparities between urban, suburban, and rural districts (Haas, 2000; Reeves, 2003). Disadvantaging rural schools are funding policies and programs which include funding formulas setting a minimum number of students as a prerequisite for qualifying for funding. Programs such as the USDE/New York REAP SRSA Funding (Office of Accountability, 2015) connect funding to growth in the student population (Lawrence, 2001).

Additional issues setting rural schools apart from urban include, but at not limited to the following examples. Rural school districts have limited central offices staffs. As stated by Sperry and Hill (2014), these offices are staffed by the superintendent and a clerk, sometimes doing double duty or more. I completed my preK-12 administrative internship in a small rural district. Currently, the superintendent in this district is also the principal and the coordinator of special education services, triple duty. Limited as well is the ability to apply for and receive grants. There are major foundations directly supporting rural initiatives, the Kellogg, and Walmart Foundations, and there are others that do not, the Wallace Foundation is an example (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Bailey and Zumeta (2015) identified challenges unique to the delivery of special education services in rural schools as being rooted in difficulties recruiting and retaining quality staff, limited financial resources, and burdensome non-instructional demands.

The challenges that are unique need to be recognized, embraced, and resolved. There is limited research addressing the rural context. Circumstances viewed as unique may be so because they are yet to be studied. A case-in-point is school board decision making relative to facilities.

Statement of the Problem

The United States faces severe and growing challenges to sustaining school facilities and meeting the rapidly increasing demands of state and federal standards for learning and achievement goals. The intrinsic problem in this study was to identify a school board's decision prioritization process relative to district facilities in the face of challenges, obstacles, and competing interests. Rural Policy Matters (2007) succinctly stated the plight of rural schools, "Despite their extremely high rates of poverty, these schools and students are largely invisible to policymakers because they are geographically dispersed, often isolated, demographically and culturally diverse, and without political power" (p.1). Rural school facilities need updates and improvements, as well as policy and funding, to sustain these changes in the face of mounting pressures and competition for each educational dollar. Facility challenges, if not successfully met, threaten the viability and future prospects for children in rural schools. Students in rural schools face poor building conditions every school day. Dilapidated and deteriorating buildings make the learning environment unsafe and demotivating to students, thereby impacting achievement and outcomes and contributing to a sense of learned helplessness (Jensen, 2009; Oakes, 2002).

It can be difficult for a rural school board of education to understand the impact of their decisions on their district and students who are already marginalized due to location

and/or socio-economic conditions. An illustrative example of how school board decisions impact student learning is the support of technology in the school. There are boards supporting the use of technology and others that are resistant to change thereby limiting the academic offerings their students receive. Rural Opportunities (2014) suggests the integration of technology as an important resource for poor rural schools. They continued stating small, rural schools are not likely to receive funding for academics or the facilities they need. Compounding comprehension at the state and national levels, are elements of distance, demographics, and competing partisan and nonpartisan interests and issues.

Local school boards are entrusted with the responsibility of representing their communities and making decisions that directly affect the integrity of their district. Local school boards exercise considerable influence and power over the day-to-day operations and management of their schools (Local School Board, 2014). The authority of a local school board is contingent upon the powers that the state legislature and state constitution delegate; school districts establish policies to govern their district.

Purpose of the Study

Rural school boards face difficult decisions concerning the use of funds that have not grown proportionally to meet increasing demands for program development, teacher salaries, inflation, and school facility maintenance. Rural districts face the challenge of prioritizing their finances to enact mandated programs from both state and federal governments, even though funding of these expenditures may not exist or address the district's most pressing needs. Bryant (2010) stated, "federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind have forced rural schools to choose whether to spend money where it may be most needed – for example, to improve deteriorating facilities or attract more qualified

teachers – or spend it complying with government regulations to meet less urgent needs" (p. 54).

It is important to clarify from the beginning what this study is not about. This study does not examine relationships between school facilities and student outcomes. Secondly, this study does not identify or describe optimal learning environments based on existing or new research. Thirdly, the purpose of this study is not to provide design guidance for the renovation or construction of new school buildings. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the decision-making process of a rural school board of education as it relates to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities.

To examine the decision-making dynamics of a rural school boards, a case study utilizing Kingdon's (1984) Agenda-Setting Theory will provide a foundation for analyzing the complex decisions made by a local board of education members, both collectively and individually, when making financial and policy decisions for their school facilities and to understand what factors influence board members and ultimately their decisions. Kingdon (1984) contended it was necessary to take into consideration the agenda-setting process that surrounds and determines the policymaking process. His theory explains why some issues become significant and prominent in the policy agenda and, in time, become policy and why others never become policy.

Statement of Research Questions

In the context of this resaeach, a single case study examined the decision-making process of a purposefully selected rural school board. The research questions are constructed to reflect the governance of the district by the school board through the

application and enforcement of policy. The school board is the district's decision-making body whose powers are derived and delegated through the state constitution.

The following research questions guide this study.

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers in directing resources to facility funding?
2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers in directing resources to facility funding?
3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

Significance of the Study

This study will examine how a rural school board's decisions made within the context of policy and funding affect the condition of school facilities and, ostensibly, the potential viability of their community. The potential significance of this examination is not the redefinition or overhaul of policy and funding formulas, but rather an emergence of insights through an understanding of the dynamics of rural school board decision making. The analysis and recommendations from this study may potentially assist board members, collectively or as individuals, to evaluate their past, current, and future decision-making motivations and resultant outcomes impacting the funding of district facilities. The findings additionally, may be valuable to school boards and administrators as they evaluate their governance relationship and budgetary preparations, specifically facility funding. It

would follow that educators, lawmakers, and policymakers at the state and national levels may benefit from the findings derived from the interpretations in this study, when they address the role school facilities play in providing a safe, equitable, and quality educational environment.

This study provides findings synthesized and analyzed from interviews, observations, and document reviews conducted with a rural school district board of education. From these findings, policymakers can make inferences for the formulation of policy and procedural recommendations to school administrators and elected and appointed officials at the local, state, and national levels to support and fund the construction of quality facilities to enhance the delivery of educational programs and services in rural schools.

The current condition of 53% of rural school buildings needing to spend funds on facilities (Alexander & Lewis, 2014), presents situations for all stakeholders to analyze and formulate suitable alternatives and solutions. Otherwise, the disparity in funding will continue to grow out of balance. These supplemental sources of income may or may not be adequate, and 12 states do not appropriate facility money (Filardo, 2010); it is nonexistent. The findings of this study have applicability to foster an understanding of the development of partnerships between schools and other organizations; to involve interagency cooperation; to coordinate civic and political action; to enhance economic development; and to enable these partnerships to assist in solving funding availability and funding disparity.

Significant to the study of rural education issues is the existence of rural education research. Helge (1986), Sherwood (2001), Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2005), and

Strange, Johnson, Showalter, and Klein (2012) stated there exists no national research program or agenda that adequately examines the condition of rural education in the United States. There exists in the literature a lack of high-quality research to document the condition of rural education (Arnold et. al, 2005; Helge, 1986, Sherwood, 2001). The intent of this study was to contribute to the body of rural education literature, specifically, to understand decision making by rural school boards affecting school facilities.

Conceptual Framework

The United States faces severe and growing challenges to sustaining safe, adequate, and equitable rural school facilities to meet the rapidly increasing demands of state and federal standards for learning and achievement goals. Facility challenges, if not successfully met, will threaten future opportunities and prospects for children and the viability of rural schools. A challenge facing many rural school district facilities is the need to increase their funding base to be able to sustain and improve facilities in the face of mounting pressures and competition for each educational dollar. Policy and legislation, to provide money to fund rural school facilities, should align with decision making to ensure equal access by all claimants for scarce financial resources.

The goal of this study was to improve the understanding of a local school board of education's decision-making process at the district level and the effect of those decisions on rural school funding and policy for the maintenance, renovation, and construction of buildings. Rector (1987) pointed out public managers select policy goals based on competing social interests and philosophies. Thus, accomplishing management in the public sector is through the selection or choice of goals. Rector (1987) contended groups will question and contest these goals and that they will have the constitutional and political

right to participate in shaping them. For the purpose of this dissertation, public managers are school board members elected in their school districts.

Crew (1992) observed that the importance of policy making should not override the responsibility for managing the decision-making process. He also noted that decisions occur not only at one point in time, rather in different settings with diverse participants. He suggested the need for public managers to think of structuring and managing policy, as well as making policy.

Kingdon's Agenda Setting Theory

To understand the complexity of decision making regarding the allocation of funds for rural school facilities at the local district level, applied was Kingdon's Agenda Setting Theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Policymakers have used Kingdon's Agenda-Setting Theory (1984) primarily as a conceptual framework analyzing policymaking and decisions with application at the local, state, national, and multi-national levels. Kingdon's multiple streams analysis often is associated with domestic policy agenda setting. A review of the literature revealed an extensive application of Kingdon's model to educational decision making. For example, here is a list: a contentious battle over multicultural curriculum in Minnesota (Stout & Stevens, 2000); the passing of the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Legislation (Lieberman, 2002); a case study of federal class size reduction (Rohan, 2003); the campaign for universal per-K in Illinois and California (Kelly, 2005); and strategies to address the teacher shortage in sub-Saharan Africa (DeJaeghere, Chapman, & Mulkeen, 2006). Brown (2007) study of Wisconsin's No Social Promotion statues and Virtue's (2007) case study of teacher certification policy in South

Carolina are both additional examples. In each of these writings, a change in the political stream affected windows of opportunity resulting in impacts on the policy process.

Kingdon developed his theory from the garbage can model developed by Cohen, March, and Olson (1972). The garbage can model contradicts the rational approach to decision making. The model contends policies are not the product of rational actions; policy actors rarely evaluate alternatives for action, and they do not compare them systematically.

The focus of Kingdon's Theory (1984) is on the flow and timing of policy action and not on component steps. Rather than being a sequential model, Kingdon envisioned three distinct, but complementary streams moving independently in the policy system: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream. Kingdon stated that these three streams do not occur in ordered or logical sequences; they occurred randomly. Determined by individuals, groups, and organizations loosely connected in the policy system, these streams flow independently of one another. Kingdon's model demonstrates policy making is the seemingly unanticipated result of these three streams (problem, policy, and political) forming a confluence over a particular issue at a given time in a particular context to become a policy.

Kingdon's (1984) problem stream consists of public problems or issues recognized as being of significant interest. Policy players, citizens, groups, and the media all work actively to secure interest or action on problems, perceived or real. The rationale behind this stream is that a situation has to be clearly identified as a problem for it to have an opportunity to transform into policy. A policy proposal has a better chance of rising to agenda status if the problem is perceived as severe or real. Recognition is critical; Kingdon

(1984) stated that a situation must deteriorate to crisis proportions before receiving the necessary attention to achieve agenda status. A situation not defined as a problem, without viable proposals or alternatives, will not convert into a policy issue.

The policy stream is concerned with the formulation of policy proposals, alternatives, and possible solutions to problems (Kingdon, 1984). These potential solutions, debated and revised, require credence and credibility to be adopted for consideration. Kingdon calls those who advocate proposals or the prominence of an idea, policy entrepreneurs (1984). These entrepreneurs can be from inside or outside government. They can be elected, or appointed officials, public administrators, special interest groups, or research groups. For the policy stream to flow forward, Kingdon referred to a softening-up-phase during which trial balloons are released and a multitude of suggestions are made both publically and privately so see if a "proposal is taken seriously" (1984, p. 137). Delineated by Kingdon were considerations necessary for a proposal to be serious and viable: technical feasibility, value acceptability with decision makers, reasonable cost, public acceptance, and appeal to elected decision makers. Issues will rise and fall on the agenda, and this stream can change, flex, or adapt in unison with the problem stream, as both internal and external events dictate.

Kingdon (1984) identified two important aspects of the policy stream; the first is the belief that policymakers can rework initially not accepted proposals and solutions to align with future problems. The second aspect is having a viable alternative readily available for adoption improves the placement of an issue on an agenda and significantly increases the probability of attachment to the decision agenda.

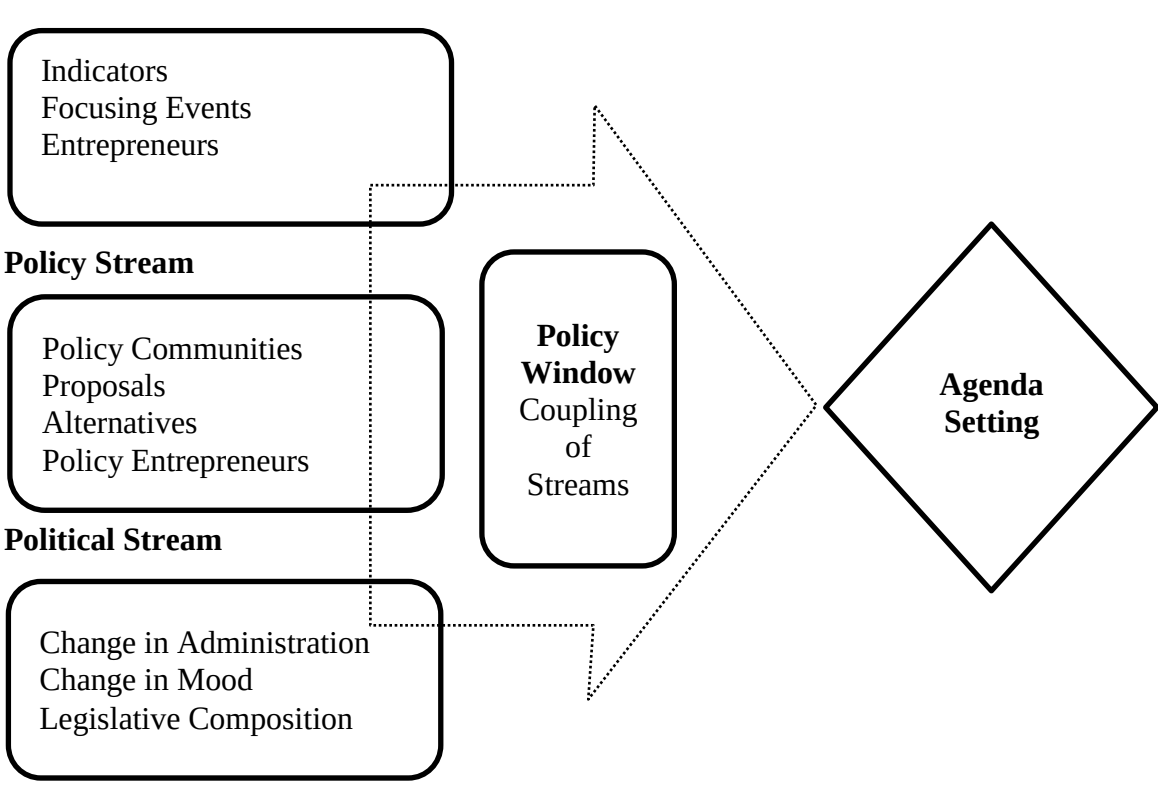
The political stream flows independently from the problem and policy streams and moves along according to election results, changes in administration, swings in public opinion or mood, and the intervention of special interest groups. Developments in these aspects of the political stream have a profound effect on agendas; new agenda items become prominent and others relegate to less important status or perhaps considered at a more opportune time (Kingdon, 1984). The primary participants in agenda formulation are the visible clusters of policy actors; Kingdon identifies these actors as those who receive press coverage and are in the public eye.

The turnover in governance, elected officials, administrators, or key personnel can have a substantial impact on agendas. Kingdon (1984) contended an agenda item is subject to change if aided by a constituency in favor of that item and is vulnerable when a supportive constituency is non-existent or is opposed by an active, organized interest(s). To move an item forward in the political stream, participants achieve consensus through a bargaining process. At an indeterminate point or juncture in the negotiations, a bandwagon or tilting effect occurs when the participants want into the process to protect their interests in the policy resolution and not be excluded from the benefits in the event that a policy is passed.

Kingdon (1984) stated agenda setting comes about when these three streams occasionally converge simultaneously for a short period, opening a policy window. A change in the national mood, a crisis, or a major event usually precipitates the opportunity for policy windows to open. A policy window creates an opening for new ideas or views. Additionally, a policy window provides an opportunity for advocates to consider alternate issues and solutions. The opening of a window can provide an opportunity permitting

some advocates to advance their proposals to a decision-making agenda. Kingdon stated it was not always necessary for all three streams to join simultaneously for a policy to develop. In some cases, a partial coming together of two streams is sufficient to open a window of opportunity for an item to move onto the decision agenda and coalesce into a policy; however, successful agenda setting substantially increases when all three streams--problem, policy, and politics--link to a single proposition.

Figure 1. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model



The current reality of tight funding, coupled with the accountability of achieving academic outcomes, puts ever-escalating pressure on school districts and states to expend their limited financial resources judiciously. Problems and issues compete for the attention of the school board and other school officials; there are board members and staff alike who

will have their ideas and issues to pursue. Only a portion of these problems will achieve agenda status. There are reasons affecting why stakeholders make decisions. These reasons include a lack of time, difficulty initiating interest, competing interests, scarce resources, a lack of information, or the resolve to consider the problem or issue. The strength of this theory is that it interprets the policy process as fluid and non-linear, involving actors and forces. The value of Kingdon's model is it provides an understanding of the changing realities of context – politics, climate, and timing – that factor into agenda setting and policy making. It is within the context of Kingdon's analysis of policymaking that decisions by the school board affecting school facilities were examined in this study.

Summary of Methodology

To bring understanding to the complexity of a rural school board's decision making and the allocation of funds for facilities, selected for this study was a qualitative research design. In certain fields of study, such as education, researchers use the case study methodology to identify and examine processes, issues, and problems (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, Merriam (1998) stated a case study is useful for the evaluation of programs and for informing policy. The case study methodology makes the study personal, with decision makers having an active and participatory voice. A case study focuses on the story of those who are directly responsible for funding policy through observations, interviews, reports, and documentation. As such, this dissertation tells the story of the policy, political, and problem confluences in a rural school district faced with facility issues. Purposefully selected for this study was a rural school district in New York State. The pseudonym, The Otter Creek Central School District, will represent the district in this study. The New York State Department of Education has designated this district as a high-

needs rural district. The district recently completed a construction project renovating the exteriors of existing school buildings in 2005. At the time of this study, a district-wide renovation project to existing interior and exterior facilities was in the final stages of completion.

Yin (2009) defined case study research methodology as "an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Soy (1997) characterized the advantage of the case study methodology is its applicability to real-life, existing human situations. Improved is the interpretation and understanding of results from a case study when relevant to the reader's everyday experiences. In a case study, the interest is in the process and not the outcomes, in the context and not specific variables, in the discovery and not confirmation (Merriam, 1998). Case study design was employed in this research endeavor to gain an in-depth understanding of the school policy, political and problem issues, and the meaning for those involved in the decision-making process for facility funding and policy in a rural school district.

Accomplishing the triangulation of data was use of three sources of evidence: interviews, direct observation, and documentation. It was anticipated that the methodology emerge as the study progressed. The purpose of the case study was descriptive. Illustrative structures applied to the composition of this study were Linear-Analytic and Comparative. Utilized were these two structures because Yin (2003) identified them as both applicable to descriptive case studies.

Limitations

The analysis of this case study is limited to a single, purposefully selected local rural school board of education, their policies, and their decision making as related to facility funding. Findings from this study are not generalizable.

Definition of Key Terms

Acquisition: A purchase.

Alterations: The construction of an existing building that results in a change in educational space or use, reconstruction work done in connection with an addition, and site development work. Considered for a construction project may be an alteration. ("Definitions", 2009)

Assessed Valuation: Is the value assigned to the property for the purpose of tax assessment.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA): Student membership calculation based on a district's average attendance and used to determine a district's state aid allocation.

Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES): In 1948, the New York State legislature created BOCES to provide shared educational programs and services to school districts in the state. There are 37 BOCES, incorporating 697 school districts. BOCES partners with component districts to provide a broad range of services to meet the evolving educational needs of students with cost efficient and collaborative initiatives to close gaps in achievement.

Bond: A written promise guaranteeing to pay a specified sum of money at a particular time and carrying a fixed rate of interest.

Building Features (examples): Roofs, framing and floor foundations; exterior walls, finishes, windows, and doors; interior finishes and trim; plumbing; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; electrical power; electrical lighting; and life safety concerns. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000)

Capital Fund: An independent budgetary fund established to pay for future building projects or large equipment purchases.

Capital Improvement: A valuable addition or enhancement to an existing building, not a structural addition. An improvement is permanent and is intended to increase a structure's value, beauty, or utility, or adapt the building for a new or future purpose. An improvement must do more than replace or restore to original condition. ("Definitions", 2009)

Construction Costs: The costs of construction and/or reconstruction work that is approved and eligible for building aid. To be eligible for assistance, construction costs are to exceed $10,000, and the various elements of the work require prior approval and a building permit. ("Definitions", 2009)

Economies of Scale: The average cost of producing one unit of a service as the quantity of output increases (Spencer, 2009).

EXCEL (Expanding our Children's Education and Learning) Project: A program that provides support funding for school building projects. To be eligible project costs are required to be spent primary on one or more of the following categories, with costs exceeding 75% of the total projected project budget: physical capacity expansion, energy, accessibility, health and safety, and education technology.

Exempt Property: Real property not subject to taxation. Typically, federal, state, or local branches of government, and religious or educational institutions own property.

Fiscal Year (FY): Annual period used for accounting purposes. In New York State for school district accounting purposes, the financial year begins July 1 and ends June 30 of the next year. Named for the calendar year in which it ends (i.e., FY ’14 begins July 1, 2013 and ends June 30, 2014).

Foundation Funding: Method of funding schools through a combination of state and local aid. A formula determines funding and takes into account the ability of a school district to raise tax revenue, as well as the state-determined minimum amount necessary per student to provide an adequate education.

Housing Unit: A house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied (or if vacant, intended for occupancy) as separate living quarters. Separate living quarters are those in which the occupants live and eat separately from any other persons in the building and which have direct access from the outside of the building or through a common hall. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010)

Levy**:** Property tax revenue to provide for local construction purposes. Proceeds from the levy are used to pay the principal and interest on construction bonds.

New Construction: Includes construction of new school buildings (erection) and additions (enlargements) to existing school buildings. (“Definitions”, 2009)

Real Property: Land above and below water; improvements to land such as structures or buildings, railroads and railroad structures, utilities, mobile homes and trailers.

Reconstruction: The replacement and/or remodeling in an existing school building. Reconstruction includes all types of work other than a new building or additions.

Remodeling: The work performed to alter, modernize, renovate, or otherwise change over a building in a different way. ("Definitions", 2009)

Repair: The work of reoccurring nature that is intended to restore to a satisfactory condition that which has decayed, deteriorated, weathered, or become broken, torn, or otherwise inoperable. The recurring maintenance work is intended to promote the upkeep on a property in poor operating condition. Repairs and maintenance are not eligible for building aid. ("Definitions", 2009)

Replacement: The substitution and/or installation of components of a building (i.e., replacement of a roof, windows, walls, boiler, temperature controls, or electrical service). These prolong the life and/or increased the value of the building ("Definitions", 2009)

School Community: The term school community typically refers to the various individuals, groups, businesses, and institutions that are invested in the welfare and vitality of a public school and its community - i.e., the neighborhoods and municipalities served by the school. (School Community, 2014)

Small Rural School District: A school district enrolling fewer than the median for all public schools districts in the United States; median = 535 students (Johnson & Strange, 2009).

Sparsity: A calculation of the square miles in a district divided by the K-12 enrollment (Sipple, McCabe, Ross-Bernstein, & Casto, 2008).

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Today, perhaps more than any previous era in American public education, the demands on students, teachers, administrators, school boards, taxpayers, and all stakeholders have never been so critical. There are demands that hamper the pursuit to provide equitable and adequate educational services for all public school children. Demands include high-stakes testing, school accountability, government mandates, and an expansive global economy straining the resource capacities of local school districts and states across the nation fuel the demands.

One element of this strain, often clearly evident, is the condition of school buildings. The condition of school buildings is not a new problem, but one that has been systemic from the erection of the first schoolhouse in colonial Massachusetts and now exacerbated by current economic and educational pressures. Through the initial review of the literature to understand why rural schools are often in deteriorating condition, the limited research addressing rural education issues soon became evident. The initial stage of this review found limited literature specifically investigating any connection between facilities and school board decision making. A further analysis to establish parameters for this study revealed a lack of research investigating rural school facilities. In comparison, there was seen more research addressing curriculum and common core, student achievement and outcomes, and provisions of NCLB's impact on hiring highly-qualified teachers and retention in rural schools. The limited research on rural topics was not at all

unanticipated, study in rural issues conducted prior to this inquiry found the limitations to be a consistent factor.

This review focused on pertinent literature to gain an understanding of the interrelationship of policies and funding for the construction, renovation, repair, and maintenance of rural school facilities and school board decision making. The review was not limited only to qualitative or quantitative educational research; encompassed also were other sources providing insight into decision making and facilities from a national perspective to the specificity of rural school districts.

The resources to conduct this literature review consisted of internet search engines including ALADIN Catalog, Counsel of Educational Facilities Planners International (CEFPI), and EBSCO, and Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC). I also utilized: Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF), OVID, Pro Quest Research Library, Scholarly Journal Archive (JSTOR), Google and Google Scholar. At the onset, conducted was the initial review of the literature in a ten-year band, 1996-2006. The limitations in the literature specific to the topic of this research extend the band back to 1980. At this juncture, reviewed were references made in the literature dated post-1980 and specific to the study for possible inclusion. As the study progressed, the review of the literature did as well, and the review of pertinent information continued forward from 2006 to the present. Utilized were keywords identifying topics related to education, facilities, funding, policy, rural and rural schools, decision making, and school boards to search for, and identify pertinent literature and empirical scholarship. Additionally, reviewed were reference lists from the

literature and examined were recent books on education and other closely aligned fields to include organizational leadership and behavior.

Definition of Rural

In the context of education, there exist a plethora of definitions defining rural in America. Researchers and politicians developed definitions specifically to facilitate data collection, but often only marginally for data gathering purposes as evidenced by the six definitions in the federal law alone (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007; Miller & Johnson, 2009). Hart, Larsen, and Lishner (2005) stated, "Getting the definition of rural right has proven difficult because rural is a complex concept with no singular set of attributes characterizing rural places" (as cited in Arnold et al., 2007, p. 2).

Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, and Shapley (2007) offered, "The word rural has many meanings. Rural has been defined in reference to population density, levels of economic and industrial development, and census tracts" (Summary, iii). Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, and Shapley (2007) stated a precise definition of rural would have a significant impact on public policies and practices in education. A precise definition establishes resource needs and priorities to achieving goals for state standards of learning and federal guidelines (Arnold et al., 2007). Identified were two policy questions by Arnold et al. (2007) that are contingent upon the definition of rural. One concern is identifying resource needs of rural populations and to then monitoring and evaluating efficient utilization. The implication of identification is of paramount concern, for it decides who does or does not receive resource allocations. The second question examines the determination as to whether rural schools are achieving goals consistent with state and

federal legislation. If rural schools are encountering obstacles to achievement, then administrators need to consider issues of equity.

Whitaker (as cited in Rios, 1988), in his paper, "The Many Faces of Ephraim: In Search of a Functional Typology of Rural Areas," stated "[R]ural was first used by the U.S. Bureau of Census in 1874 when it was defined as indicating the population of a county exclusive of any cities or towns with 8,000 or more inhabitants." The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1983) Urban and Rural Definitions from the "19th century until prior to 1950 defined all territory, persons, and housing units in incorporated places of 2,500 or more inhabitants as urban; all other areas were categorized as rural" (para. 1,2).

In an attempt to improve measures of population, the US Census Bureau's Urban and Rural Definitions (1995) in 1950 defined "urban as territory, persons, and housing units in incorporated and unincorporated places with 2,500 or more persons" (para. 6). This definition remained virtually unchanged for the Censuses of 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990. All territories outside of those designated as urban in the 1950 Census remained categorized as rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995).

For the Census 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), classifications for urban and rural were:

> For Census 2000, the Census Bureau classifies as urban all territory, population, and housing units located within an urbanized area (UA) or an urban cluster (UC). It delineates UA and UC boundaries to encompass densely settled territory, which consists of:
>
> - core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and

- surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile.

In addition, under certain conditions, less densely settled territory may be part of each UA or UC.

> The Census Bureau's classification of "rural" consists of all territory, population, and housing units located outside of UAs and UCs. The rural component contains both place and nonplace territory. Geographic entities, such as census tracts, counties, metropolitan areas, and the territory outside metropolitan areas, often are "split" between urban and rural territory, and the population and housing units they contain often are partly classified as urban and partly classified as rural. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, p.1)

Federal agencies have categorized geographic and political or governmental entities using a number of definition and classification systems to understand issues and challenges of rural schools. These multiple definitions employ different criteria in identifying rural places (Arnold et al., 2007). Providing a synopsis Arnold et al. (2007) delineated six frequently used systems beginning with the most common:

- U.S. Census Bureau Classification defined rural using geographic features, physical and cultural boundaries, political and legal boundaries, and population, and all areas not classified as urban.
- Metropolitan Status Code defined rural relative to a Core-Based Statistical Area (CBSA), which is an urban center of at least 10,000 people and adjacent areas socioeconomically tied to the urban center.

- Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (Beale Codes) defined rural by population and proximity to metropolitan areas.
- Metro-centric Locale Codes (Johnson Codes). Frank H. Johnson developed the Metro-centric Locale Codes for general description sampling and statistical purposes. He based the metrics on metropolitan statistical areas with boundaries adjacent to counties.
- Urban-centric Locale Codes improved the reliability of code assignments for evaluative purposes using school locations by longitude and latitude.
- Core-based Statistical Areas statistically defined geographic areas of one or more adjacent counties or county-equivalents having at least one urban core area with a minimum population of at least 10,000, plus adjacent territory having a high degree of social and economic integration as measured by commuting ties.

In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) working with the U.S. Census Bureau released a new classification system. The new system assigned schools according to physical longitude and latitude, relying on an address in proximity to an urbanized area and less on population size and county lines (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, (2007). This new system is the Urban-Centric Classification System (Appendix A). Provasnik et al. (2007) explained, "This system has four major locale categories – city, suburban, town, and rural – each is subdivided into three subcategories" (p. 2). The NCES classified all schools into one of the 12 categories based on the school's actual address and latitude and longitude coordinates (Provasnik et

al., 2007). This system differentiates towns and rural areas by proximity to large urban centers and not as previously by population size (Provasnik et al., 2007).

Provasnik et al. (2007) stated the new Urban-centric locale categories system makes school data more consistent, accurate, and useful to policymakers, researchers, and educators dealing with issues in rural education. Rural schools mainly benefit from the system's ability to identify and differentiate rural schools and school districts in remote areas from those which might be located adjacently to an urban center. The classification system can collect and disseminate high-quality data from across rural areas to include: fringe, distant, and remote rural areas with a higher degree of consistency and integrity.

Characteristics of Rural New York State

Hopper (2008) delineated the following rural characteristics of New York State. The state consists of 62 counties; the state identifies 43 of these counties as rural. Rural counties are those with populations less than 200,000. Agriculture constitutes the largest single use of the state's land; 37,000 farmers use 25%, or 7.6 million acres, of the land. Other extractive industries use a less but significant portion of land and coastal areas for mining, forestry, and fishing.

The Rural School and Community Trust (2012) reported 18% of New York's schools are classified as rural; these schools enroll 13% of the state's total K-12 student population. The state's 350,000 rural students rank New York eighth in the United States in the number of rural students (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). The report continued and stated New York State spent $10,214 to educate each rural student; this sum is greater than all but three other states in the nation.

Rural Schools

Rural schools have long labored in the shadow of urban and suburban schools. Schools in rural areas have "significant differences in geography, fiscal ability, poverty, local infrastructure, diversity, levels of adult education, and student achievement" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 11). The Alliance (2010) noted rural schools exist in geographically remote regions with 10% of the roughly 7000 rural schools districts enrolling fewer than 200 students, and in poor counties with poverty rates of 21% compared to 18% for urban children. These rural schools do not have the same levels of funding or community and transportation resources as do urban and suburban areas (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Rural communities range from affluent New England towns to the high-needs regions of the Southwest, the Southeast, the Mid-South Delta, and Appalachia (Johnson & Strange, 2007).

Rural communities tend to serve smaller numbers of students than suburban and urban areas (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Provasnik et al. (2007) reported 20% of the nation's children attended rural public schools. This enrollment percentage remained unchanged in the ensuing years. Johnson, Showalter, Klein, and Lester (2014) cited a 20% enrollment figure in "Why Rural Matters 2013-14: The Condition of Rural Education in the 50 States". Nationally, one in five students, almost 10 million children, attended school in a rural district (Johnson & Strange, 2009). Overall, rural school enrollment in communities of 2,500 or fewer people has increased by 15% (1.3 million students) over the past several years (Johnson & Strange, 2007). During the years after the release of the Provasnik Study (2007), both Strange, Johnson, Showalter

and Klein (2012) and Johnson, Showalter, Klein, and Lester (2014) reported total enrollments of more than 9.6 million children remained unchanged at 20%.

In the United States, 33% of all schools are rural with 49.9% of those districts being small rural districts, enrolling fewer than 537 students (Strange et al., 2012). Ten percent of all rural students attend schools numbering fewer than 200 students; this is in contrast to 4% attending town schools, 2% attending city schools, and 1% attending suburban schools (Provasnik et al., 2007).

Strange et al. (2012) reported more than half of all rural schools are in15 states: South Dakota, Montana, Vermont, North Dakota, Maine, Alaska, Nebraska, Wyoming, Arkansas, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Iowa, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and North Carolina. Strange et al. (2012) continued, observing there are 11 states that enroll more than 50% of all rural students: Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Alabama. The 5 states representing the highest percentages of rural school students are: Mississippi (54.7%), Vermont (54.6%), Maine (52.7%), North Carolina (47.2%), and South Dakota (42.5 %).

In 2000, Beeson and Strange studied the significance of rural education in each of the 50 states. The 2000 study was the first in a series of planned studies to examine the status of rural education and was to be conducted at two-year intervals. Beeson and Strange (2000) noted that in "most of the 50 states" (p. 5), the condition of urban school children received the greatest attention. The authors countered and contended that rural students and their communities do matter. They stated one-fourth of the nation's school children attended school in rural areas or small towns numbering less than 25,000 inhabitants (Beeson & Strange, 2000). The authors continued and noted that, with 25% of

all school-age children in rural areas and small towns, the states should make action on behalf of these students an urgent priority.

To assess rural education, Beeson and Strange (2000) used the Rural Importance Gauge and the Rural Urgency Gauge. The Rural Importance Gauge asked the question: "How important is it to the overall educational performance of each state to explicitly address the particular needs of schools serving its rural communities?" (Beeson & Strange, 2000, p. 64). The authors used eight indices to assess the challenges of rural education in each state. The Rural Urgency Gauge asks, "Given conditions in the state's rural schools and communities, how urgent is it in each state that policymakers develop explicit rural education policies?" (Beeson & Strange, 2000, p. 65). The researchers use eleven indicators to rank the need for concern, including those comparing the conditions in the state's rural schools with non-rural schools (Beeson and Strange, 2000).

To determine the importance of rural education and the urgency of the need for policy action, Beeson and Strange (2000) ranked the states. Beeson and Strange (2000) added all the state rankings and then divided by the number of indicators to construct a cumulative ranking for each state. The authors ordered states by average ranking and then divided into quartiles, placing the states in relative positions along a range.

Using the Importance and Urgency Gauges, Beeson and Strange (2000) identified rural education as crucial and urgent in seven states: Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, West Virginia, North Dakota, and South Dakota. These states have rural areas identified as chronically depressed and large areas of out-migration, and the global economy deeply affects the well-being of these areas. Beeson and Strange (2000) identified five states identified as urgent on the Urgency Gauge, but less crucial on the

Importance Gauge: Tennessee, South Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia, and New Mexico. They continued and reported Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Montana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Vermont as critical on the Importance Gauge and less than urgent on the Urgency Gauge.

Beeson and Strange (2000) asserted the categories described a state's relative position along a continuum indicating a measure of the importance of how each state explicitly addressed rural education. The authors explained rankings in the report were useful when used to identify states where rural education is essential to the state. Additionally, they noted the results identified states where the needs of rural communities may be lost in the political process.

Beeson and Strange (2000) concluded rural education policy is urgent and critical in 25 of the states. They took the position that small, rural schools continued to be important. The authors stated issues of poverty and the digital divide existed in rural as well as urban areas. Beeson and Strange's finding suggests an underlying tenet that the mandating or accountability cannot be for schools alone. The challenges facing education in rural places makes it incumbent upon state legislatures to enact policy that is cognizant of those challenges and the state's responsibility to mitigate change.

In the 2012 biennial report, Strange, Johnson, Showalter, and Klein authored and released *Why Rural Matters 2011-12: The Condition of Rural Education in the 50 States*. Beeson and Strange published the first report, which introduced the concept of using indicators and gauges to assess the condition of education in the nation's rural and small town schools in 2000.

The authors stated that since the initial release of the report, the indicators and gauges have been deliberately altered to reflect what the author's termed as the "variability and complexity of rural education" (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012, p. 1). The current gauges are Importance, Student and Family Diversity, Educational Policy, Educational Outcomes, and Longitudinal. While these changes may be desirable in the long run viability of this report, the making of interpretations or apples to apples comparisons of data, acquired over the past 12 years, is difficult when parameters are changed.

Remaining somewhat consistent from 2000 to the current 2012 report was those states whose rankings remained in the top quartile of the Importance Gauge. In decreasing order these states were: Vermont, Maine, South Dakota, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Iowa, and Tennessee (Strange et al., 2012).

Of note in their analysis, the authors stated that despite the shifts in the scope of this report over the years, a number of states appear in the Priority Gauge each year. The authors referred to this phenomenon as the "Southern Hegemony" (p. 19), so named because of the consistency in the states rankings throughout the report. These states are primarily located in the South, Southwest, and Appalachia regions, with the only exception being Alaska. In rank order from highest profile to lowest they are: Tennessee, Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, Alaska, Alabama, Arkansas, New Mexico, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia (Strange et al., 2012).

The authors made several general observations regarding the current state of rural education in the nation. Challenged is every state, they remarked, to provide high-quality

educational experiences to all children regardless of where they attend school. The states most affected are the ones in which critical factors identified in the report converge to offer the most challenging obstacles to a high-quality education. They commented that those states with the greatest challenges need the attention of policymakers but concluded there are rural students living in states where the educational policy agenda is dominated by urban interests (Strange et al., 2012).

Organization of Schools in New York State

With nationhood secured, in 1784, the Regents and Governor of New York State pressed the Legislature to establish a system of common schools (Folts, 1996). The year 1795 saw the expansion of the common schools legislation to one of support for public schools. The state legislature established a fund in 1805 to support commons school using monies obtained from the sale of state lands and other state assets (Folts, 1996; "Rural", 2009). In 1812, the state legislature authorized an act to bring education to all and to empower local authorities to establish common school districts (Folts, 1996). The 1812 Common School Act shaped public education in New York State until the middle of the 19th century (Folts, 1996). The act delineated common schools as a state function under state control, and the school district as the primary administrative unit for public education (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008). The act provided that the state was to raise money from the state derived public funds that were then to be disturbed proportionally to the number of residents of the town. The state was then to divide this money amongst the districts; the town would then be responsible for raising an amount equal to the state allotment ("School District", 2008). The aggregate sum of state and

local monies combined became the annual budgetary cost for all school related expenses (Folts, 1996; “Rural”, 2009).

An amendment to the state constitution in 1814 strengthened the act adopted in 1812 to authorize a statewide system of common school districts by requiring a statewide system (Folts, 1996; “School District”, 2008). Town and city officials were then to lay out districts and voters would elect trustees from within the district to oversee school operation and to operate the school (Folts, 1996; “School District”, 2008). The mid-19th century saw the growth of common school districts numbering in excess of ten thousand across New York (“School District”, 2008). The districts were composed primarily of one- or two-room schoolhouses where the core curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and geography (Folts, 1996; “Rural”, 2009).

A general law in 1853 authorized one or more common districts to combine to form a union free school district (“School District”, 2013). Both the Regents and the Superintendent of Public Instruction oversaw union free districts, and they were permitted to establish ‘academic departments,’ or high schools (Folts, 1996). A Board of Education charged with managing district property, finances, and hiring a superintendent to provide administrative services to several schools governed union free districts (Folts, 1996). At the closing of the 19th century, the Secretary of the Board of Regents, Melvil Dewey, successfully initiated a movement to organize more high schools in rural areas (Folts, 1996; “School District”. 2008).

The beginning of the 20th century saw the landscape of New York State covered with one room schoolhouses constituting over 10,000 school districts (Folts, 1996; “Expanding the Options”, 2009; “School”, 2013). While these small districts provided a

basic education to thousands of students, the state recognized the need for a more comprehensive plan to compensate for the limited tax and student bases in small rural districts ("School", 2013). In response to this need, the government passed the Central Rural Schools Act in 1914, providing state aid incentives that resulted in a statewide reorganization of rural districts (Folts, 1996).

Table 1

Reorganizations Since 1870

Year	Number of Districts	Decrease
1870	11,372	
1890	11,216	- 156
1910	10,565	- 651
1930	9,118	-1,447
1940	6,387	-2,721
1950	3,189	-3,208
1960	1,293	-1,896
1970	760	- 533
1980	739	- 21
1990	720	- 19
2000	704	- 16
2010	697	- 7

New York State Education Management Services, 2013

In 1917, the New York State Legislature abolished common school districts and formed township units ("School District", 2008). This legislation provided no equalization formula and, as a result, school taxes soared. The outcry from the taxpayers led the Legislature to repeal the township system one year later ("School District", 2008; "School", 2013). In the aftermath of World War I, New York State felt the repercussions of post-war inflation and the post-war agricultural depression (Folts, 1996). In response

to this economic downturn, the New York State Legislature, in 1925, authorized additional state aid for school operating expenses, transportation, and construction, paving the way for a system of central rural school districts (Folts, 1996).

Through the efforts of the Rapp-Coudert Commission (1941-47), the state developed and put forth a plan for state-wide consolidation into central school districts in 1947, and the state updated the plan in 1958 (Folts, 1996). Folts (1996) observed that during the 1950s, the state passed statutes facilitating consolidation of common and smaller city districts into central school districts. He further observed the state completed centralization during the 1960s.

The farm organization funded Council on Rural Education observed central schools with limited enrollments were not large enough to provide a broad spectrum of academic and vocational offerings (Folts, 1996). In 1944, the Council recommended the formation of a cooperative association of school districts responsive to the needs of rural communities (Folts, 1996). Adopted was a statewide master plan for reorganization the following year. The state passed the Intermediate District Law of 1948 initiating temporary Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES); the state formed no singular districts under this legislative act ("School District", 2008).

According to Education Law §1950 (BOCES, 2012), the Commissioner of Education initiates the establishment of a BOCES at the request of school boards in one or more supervisory districts. A supervisory district occurs in a geographic area in districts where shared services are feasible by virtue of proximity. A district superintendent administrates the BOCES District; school board representatives from the component districts that form the BOCES District collectively elect a Board of

Education. The board then approves the BOCES budget, and the State Education Department approves the service contracts. Services provided by BOCES consist of instructional and professional development, special education, career/technical programs, and administrative services to member districts (BOCES, 2014). Currently in New York State there are 37 BOCES, which incorporate all but 9 of the state's 697 school districts (BOCES, 2014).

Rural Communities and Their Schools

The general population needs to understand and appreciate rural schools and communities as the unique entities they are. The rural community socio-economic characteristics and standards shape educational issues for local school boards and state legislatures (Debertin & Goetz, 1994). The challenges of rural education are more than issues of economic concern, but also ones of cultural realities and perceptions coupled with the social dynamics of family and community. These same issues remain today as unchanged. Williams (2010) observed that rural places face the challenges of inadequate financing, teacher shortages, and inaccessible and unaffordable services for children and their community.

Models and expectations applied to rural schools have been characterized as being a one-size-fits-all, a conceptual remnant from the industrial age of American education where the interconnectedness of the rural school and rural community were ignored (Howley, 1997; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Vargas (2006) observed that school systems are organizations grounded in bureaucracy and modeled after factories with the intentions of routinization and standardization of education, designed to deflect and resist change.

DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) focused their study on the cultural implications and policy considerations for rural schools and communities. The authors noted that rural educators are faced with a double challenge of generating revenue to operate schools where property values are low, while teaching values and skills useful for primarily metropolitan areas.

The DeYoung and Lawrence (1995) introduced the concept of "cultural contradiction" (p. 4) that briefly offers that pressures from careerism and consumerism cannot exist solely for the purpose of supplying workers and consumers for the national economy. They stated the one system fits all format of the industrial age system of education has to give way to embracing all areas of America where children go to school. De Young and Lawrence (1995) observed "community, place, and family are often strong in rural communities" (p. 9), and rural schools are often the center of their community's activities and identities.

The authors warned not to repeat the mistakes of the past and not imitate urban practices, to include facilities. They stated that there are educators and people connected with education believe that schools need to be human-scaled; buildings and operations should match the natural pace and personal character of human activity.

Seal and Harmon (1995) discussed the problems and opportunities facing rural schools within the context of educational reform. "Changing schools means changing the community. . . .Change is not a new concept in rural Appalachia, but the road to education is bumpy and curved" (Seal & Harmon, 1995, p. 3). The authors attributed declining student enrollments, shrinking tax base, and state incentives to merge or close rural schools as having contributed to school consolidation and education reform initiatives. The authors

stated rural schools could become learning communities through innovation, planning, and the integration of technologies.

Those who lead reform efforts in rural areas need to consider and confront the challenges both in the schools and their communities (Seal & Harmon, 1995). The authors squarely put the need for change into the hands of policymakers, legislators, and local people. Seal and Harmon (1995) stressed the need for collaborative efforts to change attitudes and mindsets that negatively impact education. Wholesale change, such as consolidation, is not the only answer to solving the state's disparity in providing educational services. The authors offered plausible alternatives to consolidation through their vision of rural schools as learning and technologically integrated communities. They envision technology as linking the school and community in a connecting partnership with global information resources.

In contrast, also, to the industrial education model, Webb, Shumway, and Shute (1996) focused on the concept of human development as the central purpose for rural schools, and that leaders should not drive changes in schools based on economic considerations or constructs. The authors conveyed the community becomes an integral part of a systemic change supported by state and federal assistance (Webb, Shumway & Shute, 1996). They proposed schools should exist for students to develop their mental faculties through self-discovery aided by teacher guidance. They refer to this as "thoughtful learning . . . a process of continuous growth in multiple areas" (p. 49). This approach to learning is in contrast to what the authors refer to as the "technocratic approach . . . which relies on ready-made "one best" solutions devised by experts, manipulative methods, and mechanical techniques" (p. 1). Webb et al. (1996) summarized this

methodology of instruction as leading "to the trivialization of learning and, hence, to boredom and frustration" (p. 35).

Looking at the close relationship between the rural school and community, Howley and Eckman (1997) developed guidelines to assist educators, parents, and community members. They designed their recommendations to locate resources, design school options and take the initiative to improve small rural schools in ways that benefit both the community and its students. First, they discussed the advantages of small schools and the relationship between the school and community. Second, they considered the historical implications of the industrial model of education and the social and political forces now driving state policymakers. Their third guideline centered on making the rural community the focus of curricular development. The fourth examined innovative practices in areas such as rural school organization, multi-grade scheduling, and the use of technology. The fifth provided strategies and key points for facilitating change in the district.

Shuman (2000) offered a view of what communities have to consider to remaining viable and capable of supporting local schools in the Global Age. The author proposed communities invest funding in local schools specifically to improve vocational and business programs to create a cycle of mutual benefit of sustainability for the community and its schools. Shuman's (2000) view provided the outlines of both new economics and business philosophy, based upon the conservation of communities.

Shuman (2000) outlined three strategies for activists, business people, politicians, and planners to direct their energies. First, stop destroying the quality of local life to accommodate mobile corporations and instead develop local businesses dedicated to the

quality of enhancing local life. Second, stop attempting to expand economic activity through exports and instead focus on eliminating dependency by creating new import-replacement business that meets the needs of the community. Third, stop lobbying and relying on federal funding and instead demand the legal and political power to create environments in which local business can develop.

In an article from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Gibbs (2005) proposed the use of education as a strategy for rural development. He stated that the improvement in rural schools faced challenges. Chief among these is the balancing of resources and outcomes. He observed the cost of per pupil expenditures in rural areas exceeds the national norm because rural districts cannot take advantage of economies of scale provided by large population bases.

The financial challenges and geographic isolation contribute to educational disadvantages (e.g. limited curriculum offerings). With that said, he offered that communities with good schools can make a difference in attracting former out-migrants back to rural areas for those parents who wish to raise children in a home environment they enjoyed and sought to provide the best possible education for their children. Gibbs (2005) concluded stating the benefit to rural communities appears to be optimal when human capital improvements are a part of the agenda. He stressed the need for a strategic plan targeted to improve the local economy, the social profile, and education.

The Center for Rural Affairs ("Rural Schools", 2010) issued a policy brief that presented a less than optimistic future for rural schools. The article points out that while the small rural schools have come a long way from the days of the one-room schoolhouse, now are being underfunded out of existence. The authors stated that while metro schools

are receiving funding to downsize, forcing rural schools into consolidation. The Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) stated "policy that forces small schools to consolidate through underfunding and incentives is counter-productive" (" Rural Schools," 2010, para 1). The CFRA continued observing that as schools become larger educational outcomes diminish.

The Center for Rural Affairs ("Rural Schools", 2010) saw that schools are vital to the local community: schools are a significant employer, act as centers for social events, increase property values and the tax base, and contribute to the local economy. The article concluded with recommendations for state policymakers:

- Support community-based schools and scale to achieve a quality education.
- Support financing that recognizes cost differentials at the local level to ensure predictability, stability of funding, and adopt a state aid formula based on actual costs and local ability to contribute.
- Craft policies that recognize the importance of schools in rural communities.

Williams (2010) addressed challenges in rural education and put forth the concept of the developing full-service community schools as a solution to the challenges confronting rural education and rural communities. She identified the concept of a community school using and data from The Rural School and Community Trust and definitions from the U.S. Department of Education and the Coalition for Community Schools. These definitions are concurrent in their mutual objectives: partnerships between the school and community resources, integrated focus on academic, health and social services, and community engagement and development. They emphasize the importance of the school and community as a joint entity.

Williams, (2010) made six recommendations for the implementation of the community school framework:

- States and rural districts develop teacher recruitment strategies focusing on the benefits of the community school structure.
- Rural districts develop programs for parent and community participation in the schools.
- New facility planning to include multi-use areas for community needs.
- States reduce the financial risk of new construction projects to community school partnership ventures
- Federal and state legislatures provide incentives for the implementation of community schools as a strategy for improving low-performing schools with high needs.
- Federal and state legislatures increase funding and technical assistance to community schools.

The author concluded that change in rural education required a focus on educational outcomes, the needs of children, their families, and community. She believed that in order for the concept of community schools to be successful, collaboration and consensus building will be required to bring together education, local community culture, and state and federal legislatures committed to eliminating barriers, and to remove obstacles to implement community schools.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) released a report that addressed the challenges and opportunities in rural schools for student success. The report focused on the needs of rural communities and the ineffectiveness of state and national policy to attend to

those needs. The Alliance (2010) cited four reasons why policymakers should be attentive to the condition of education in rural schools:

1. Principles of basic equity to identify where challenges exist for different populations and direct resources to assist in the solution.
2. All children need to be prepared to participate in a technological and expanding economy.
3. The nature of small, close-knit communities can be beneficial to the implementation of changes and a rapid analysis of performance.
4. The current condition of educational funding in America needs the federal government to intervene and enact significant policy changes to provide the commitment and resources to innovation for rural schools to succeed.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) stated the community is central to school success. Schools rely on community-based services, businesses, and other partners to supplement limited resources. Rural schools benefit from communities that guide school improvement and participate in school activities and functions. Retaining community support is a challenge in areas that lack an adequate tax base, stable economy, and the social and community capital to invest in supporting the school district.

Central to the viability of rural schools and their communities is the cultivation of collaborative and meaningful dialogue between the community, school, and policymakers focused on student success and social and economic viability (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; "Rural Schools", 2010; Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Lyons, 2002; Williams, 2010). Strong local community partnerships with the schools play an integral part in community connectivity; there are rural areas, where the rural community revolves around

churches, volunteer fire departments, and schools (Lyson, 2002). An understanding of what is rural, and working with both the opportunities and challenges inherent in this environment, are what give purpose and meaning to education in the rural context (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). When explicitly linked to the nature of the rural school and community, change in state and federal understanding and policymaking along with adequate funding to include facilities impact rural students and their communities' ability to succeed (Williams, 2010).

Changing culture and perceptions is a difficult challenge; alternatives provide real viability for rural communities across the nation extending from the rural community and school to a broader national context. If economic needs are not redressed and economic stability not restored, the plight of rural schools will not change without substantial state and federal assistance.

School Boards

School boards are inherently American institutions. America's school boards are unique in the world; they represent traditional grassroots democracy (McAdams, 2002). Local school governance has been a fundamental part of the educational landscape since colonial times. Local concern and obligation have extended from early 17th century colonial Massachusetts through the common school movement of the early 19th century (Hess, 2002; Land, 2002). From the founding of the republic until the close of the early 19th century, state and federal intervention into educational issues was limited to statutory language in state constitutions. In practice, education was a matter left to local ministers, selectmen, and elected trustees (Land, 2002).

Through the middle years of 19th century, state constitutions, while providing statutory language for the oversight of elementary and secondary schools, exercised little governance (Danzberger, 1994). Danzberger (1994) and Land (2002) both noted it was not until 1837 when Massachusetts was the first state to establish a state board of education and an office of the state superintendent to provide governance for education. The 1870s was the advent of school centralization beginning in cities and progressing into towns and rural areas. This significant shift in educational governance saw the number of school districts continually decrease from over 200,000, each with a separate board, to 84,000 districts nationwide by the middle of the 20th century (Pardini & Lewis, 2003).

The second half of the 20th century saw increased intervention by the federal and state government and the declining of local control by school boards. Land (2002) illustrated this change as being orchestrated by events such as the landmark court case Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), the 1957 Soviet Union launch of Sputnik, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and the release of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983. The state and federal government's ensuing push for high academic standards and achievement were evident in remarks from the National School Boards Association (NSBA). The NSBA identified the improvement of student achievement as the principal objective of school boards (Speer, 1998). The National School Boards Foundation ("Improving School", 2001) acknowledged the primary role of school boards was to improve student achievement.

In the wake of federal mandates ushered in by the reauthorization of the ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), McAdams (2002) observed school boards must function as change agents and as reform leaders for this new paradigm in American

educational reform. McAdams (2002) saw this paradigm organized around four core themes: governance, politics, whole-system change, and theories of change action. The National School Boards Association ("Why School Boards", 2002) and the Education Commission of the States (2012) stated traditional responsibilities must now give way to a new focus, which incorporates setting the vision for the school district, providing three distinct areas of focus: structure in school districts, accountability in school districts, and advocacy for public education in the community.

Subsequent to the passage of the NCLB legislation, the traditional role of the school board was one of the overarching roles and responsibilities, and less with the actual governance of the school district. Freeman (2002) typified these tasks as: establish procedure and policies for the administration of the district, implement the state's education laws and procedures, oversee the operation of the district and its programs, hire the superintendent, and monitor the annual budget and resource deployment. While these tasks may vary by state and locality, in general school boards approve budgets, contracts, and personnel acquisitions, the district tax levy and bond issues, and the provision for educational services and facilities usage, in addition to the prime responsibility of policy-making and approval (Goldhammer, 1964; "Education Commission of the States", 2012; "Leadership", 2010).

In 2000, National School Boards Association (NSBA) took a more expansive look at school board responsibilities in their publication *Key Work of School Boards* (Gemberling, Smith & Villani, 2000), which proposed a comprehensive action plan for eight critical areas: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement. NSBA (Gemberling et al., 2000),

offered this plan with the caveat that it is non-sequential, but rather it should be approached as a systemic guide to being an effective school board. The NSBA plan has become a touchstone for state school board associations and local school boards who replicated the principles in the *Key Work of School Boards* (Gemberling et al., 2000)**.** In the post NCLB era other authors and organizations have developed their own interpretation of board roles and responsibilities (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011; "Education Commission of the States", 2012; Land, 2002; Ziebarth, 2002). States adopting these plans expand upon elements of the NSBA principles, such as school board training and evaluation, which NSBA incorporates into the continuous improvement key action. All guidelines relating to board roles and responsibilities fall within one of the eight precepts established by NSBA. In 2009, NSBA released a new edition of *Key Work for School Boards* (Gemberling, Smith, & Villani, 2009), the eight critical areas did not change, and NSBA reiterated improving student achievement through community engagement and expanding engagement to the state and national theatre.

There are approximately 13,600 public school districts in the United States; a number which represents a change of less than 10% in the number of districts during the last 10 years ("Digest", 2012; "Education Commission of the States", 2012). Within these districts are 52,000,000 children, supervised by 6,000,000 employees, with annual expenditures of $600 billion (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Around 95,000 lay men and women who collectively serve as a school board for their school district govern these systems (Hess & Meeks, 2011). There are states in which school board members are elected; other states have both elected and appointed boards. In city districts, there is a growing trend to

have appointed school board members, and the mayor of the municipality often appoints these members ("Education Commission of the States", 2012).

School board members represent the educational values and beliefs of their community and the school (Why School Boards, 2002; Resnick & Bryant, 2008). These district governing bodies provide forums for community members to be heard, issues to be debated, and the direction and oversight of public education in the community ("Education Commission of the States", 2012; Resnick & Bryant, 2008). The New York State School Boards Association ("What", 2012) stated school boards keep the nation's public schools flexible and responsive to the local communities they serve.

School boards provide direction and oversight of public education in the community ("Education Commission of the States", 2012). School boards are responsible for overall student education, not daily school operations, nor micro-management of the district. The school board's primary function is to formulate policies and establish goals for their district. A good school board does not manage the day-to-day affairs of the schools; it ensures they are run well. The board governs, and the superintendent manages (Hess & Meeks, 2011).

The state constitution prescribes board duties and responsibilities, and the state legislature delineates them. The Constitution of the United States does not stipulate or establish, nor does it reference, education. The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution stipulates, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Essex (2002) explained state constitutions represent the source of law for the state and

require legislative bodies to exercise the function of law such as the establishment of a public education system.

School board authority is derived from the state legislature through statutes that are the source of law affecting public schools (Essex, 2002). Statutory law "gives local school boards the authority to adopt and enforce reasonable rules and regulations for the operation and management of schools" (Essex, 2002, p. 24). An individual school board member has no singular authority or power. His or her power exists only collectively, when members are sitting as a board, and only when in a legally called board meetings do board members have authority and power as granted by their state constitution and legislature.

As the delegated representatives of their state legislature, the school board members govern and conduct the oversight of student education and personnel as the policy-making body at the local level (Beckham & Wills, 2003). The board develops district policy. District policies are the rules and regulations to control the operation of the school to include: staffing, organizational structure, student classification, location, curriculum, extracurricular activities, fiscal management and purchases, day-to-day operations, and annual budget preparation. Additionally, state legislatures authorize boards to levy and collect taxes, invest resources, acquire land, and assume bonded indebtedness. Once the board adopts a policy, the school board must adhere to its policy; failure to do so may result in challenges to board actions (Essex, 2002).

Literature addressing school boards and their members primarily run the gamut from an overview of school board roles and responsibilities to prescriptive guidelines to an indictment of America's public education system. Works by Royer (1996) and Maeroff (2010), although over a decade apart in publishing, typify much of the writing in respect to

school boards. In *School Board Leadership 2000,* Royer (1996) conceptualizes the board's role using John Carver's Policy Governance Model as a blueprint for effective governance. Royer (1996) exemplifies Carver's method as defining the board's role in establishing goals, aligning resources with goals, setting measures to achieve goals, monitoring progress, and communicating with the public. Royer (1996) summarized this model as empowering the staff while the school board retains the controls necessary for accountability. The book provided a rational, rather linear, approach to school board governance; however, to be successful, the training necessary for a board to become effective in this model would require far more time than provided in a typical weekend seminar or workshop. Change of the magnitude suggested by Royer, using the Carver model, must become systemic for successful long-term results. Maeroff (2010) in his work *School Boards in America: A Flawed Exercise in Democracy* attempted to provide an inside view of public school boards and how they govern from his experiences serving as a school board president in New Jersey. While he exposed of the foibles inherent to school boards, he offered no constructive remedies; rather, he saw school boards continuing to exist if only as a premise of the American grassroots conception of democracy.

Hess (2002; Hess & Meeks, 2011) conducted two, two-part extensive and comprehensive research studies profiling school board members nationally. Published in 2011 was the latter study co-authored with Meeks. The studies were conducted using a survey instrument developed with the National School Boards Association. The 2002 study identified 14,890 school districts in the United States, and the 2011 study identified 13, 809 districts. The sample was stratified to ensure equal representation of urban and

non-urban districts. In the 2002 study, 2000 districts were in the sample with 827 responding. The 2011 study received 418 responses from a sample of 518 districts.

In the first study, Hess (2002) observed board members are not generally compensated for their service. The author noted a full two-thirds served without pay while 4% earn $10,000 or more and are, usually, in districts numbering 25,000 or more students. His findings showed "school boards are somewhat less racially diverse than is the nation as a whole, but more ethnically diverse than most state and national elective bodies" (Hess, 2002, p. 4). The observation made by Hess (2002) indicated board composition nationally as being 85.5% Caucasian, 7.8% African American, and 3.8% Hispanic. Large urban districts tended to be more racially/ethnically heterogeneous with representations being 78.9% Caucasian, 13.0% African American, and 7.5% Hispanic.

In general, Hess (2002) reported board membership as being 61.1% male and 38.9% female. Large districts were 55.6 % male while small districts 63.3 % male. The educational attainment and income level of board members was reported as being higher than the average American. Hess noted 25% of Americans hold a 4-year degree, while two-thirds (66%) of all board members held Bachelor's degrees, with nearly 40% holding a graduate degree. He reported board members' annual average income at $50,000 a year compared to the national average of $49,682. He noted somewhat less than half of the respondents in his study indicated backgrounds in business or professional areas as occupations. He observed few of the respondents indicated backgrounds as education professionals.

School boards composed of 5 to 8 members represent 80% of boards, with the remaining 20% composed of nine or more members. Terms of 4 years duration accounted

for 66% of boards and terms of 5 or more years comprised the remaining percentage. The mean length of time board members serviced was 6.7 years; however, there are board members who serve for longer periods (Hess, 2002). Additionally, he stated board members contribute twenty-five hours or more a month, with others spending twenty or more hours a week.

Hess (2002) noted large boards were different from smaller boards. He categorized large boards as serving student populations of 25,000 or more and accounting for approximately 2% of all school boards. He typified large boards as being political bodies with costly campaigns, special interest groups, and more politically motivated candidates in often highly-contested races. Conversely, small boards, he indicated, were apolitical and did not garner much attention, with less costly campaigns and often uncontested elections. The author characterized large-district board members as being middle-aged and being more inclined to have an interest and time to devote to board demands. Hess' data suggest small-district board members were likely to be business people and professionals doing their political career-building civic duty.

In the study, "School Boards Circa 2011: Governance in the Accountability Era," Hess, co-authoring with Meeks, duplicated his earlier study of school boards from 2002. Hess and Meeks reported board composition nationally as having changed somewhat in the new study. Board representation in 2010 indicated 80.7% Caucasian, a decrease of 4.8%; 12.3% African American, an increase of 4.5%, and 3.1% Hispanic a decrease of 0.7%. Large urban districts continued to be more racially/ethnically heterogeneous with representations being 72.2% Caucasian, 21.8% African American, and 6.0% Hispanic. In general Hess and Meeks (2011), reported board membership as being 56.0% male, a

decrease of 5.1%, and 44% female, an increase of 4.1%. Large districts were 55% male, while male board members in small districts remain at approximately 65.8%. In medium to large districts, female board members account for just over half of the representation.

The educational attainment and income level of board members continued to be higher as was reported in 2002 when compared to the general population. The total number of board members holding Bachelor's degrees increased to three-fourths from two-thirds in 2002. In large districts, 50% of board members hold a graduate degree, while in small districts, 36.6% earned advanced degrees. Board members' annual average income was reported at $50,000 a year for 90.4% of all board members and in excess of $100,000 by 48.6% of the 90.4%. Hess, in 2002, noted somewhat less than 50 % of the respondents in his study indicated backgrounds in business or professional areas as occupations. In 2010, Hess and Meeks reported backgrounds as being 27.1% education, 18.1% business or commerce, 14.1% non-profit or government, and 14% medicine or law. The authors indicated 27.4% of all board members are retired, while 72.6% are actively employed.

Hess and Meeks (2011) observed board members do not differ significantly from the constituency they serve. This was the same conclusion Hess drew from his 2002 study. The reports indicated single-digit percentile differences between 2002 and 2010. In some areas, there have been gains, such as the representation of female board members nationally reaching slightly more than 50%. Noted were increases in the representation of African Americans on large urban boards, and decreases, such as the representation of Hispanics nationally and on large urban boards. The authors concluded the profile of school board members had not changed dramatically during the ensuing years between the two studies.

In the literature examined, there existed no distinction between an urban, suburban, or rural school board. Factors inherent in their communities may be the source of challenges not faced by all boards, or the magnitude of those challenges may differ as a function of variables such as size, location, district wealth, or other unique community attributes, (e.g. proximity to a federal reservation, outsourcing, and plant closures). Irrespective of all outside influences the school board is ultimately responsible to the community for district oversight and student achievement.

School Board Decision Making

The body of literature addressing school boards primarily is concentrated on practices and approaches to school governance and not decision making. The literature includes anecdotal pieces, reports, and empirical research. The researchers in this field conducted their work using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For example, to access the relationship between school leadership and student achievement, Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997) examined the relationship between the school board and superintendent in 10 districts in5 states to identify quality governance characteristics affecting achievement. Togneri and Andersen (2003) examined the connection amongst high test scores, poverty, and administration, to include school board governance. They performed their research as a case study analysis of five school districts. The Iowa Association of School Boards undertook a multi-year study of the role of school boards and student achievement. The original study was performed in 1998-2000, with follow–up research conducted in 2001 and 2007 (LaMonte, Delagardelle, &Vander Zyl, 2007). Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a meta-analysis in 2,800 districts to examine the relationship between district leadership and achievement.

Another focus of school board research analogous to school governance has been the training and development board members. These studies are usually conducted in concert with the broader study of district leadership. Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997) stressed the importance of formal training for school boards members to include orientation and continuous training while on the board. In their study of effective districts, Togneri and Anderson (2003) observed two of the five districts studied developed formal training and professional development programs for board members. From Canada, a study by LaRocque and Coleman (1993) spoke of the value or both formal and informal training and learning activities for board members. They emphasized the use of retreats, special meetings, work sessions, school visits, and continuous interaction with the administration and teachers as a means of developing an effective school board.

In contrast to the literature referenced in the proceeding paragraphs, Patterson, Koenigs, Mohn, and Rasmussen (2006) conducted addressed decision making in a small rural school district in the mid-west. While not specific to facilities, the study did address issues of school consolidation, equitable distribution of resources, and leadership. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine leadership allocation. The authors examined leadership, including the school board and superintendent, through three archetype lenses: my way or the highway, use of disinformation to accomplish goals, and success to the successful.

The study revealed the dysfunction that existed in this district between school leadership and the communities they served as a result of the historical adherence of the three archetypes as applied to the governance of the school district. Patterson et al. (2006), in their conclusion, offered the observation that school leaders and community leaders need

to work cooperatively when allocating scarce resources and not allow funding to be the only determining factor of school viability. The issue left unresolved in this study was this: how to get school leadership to realize and identify that they are dysfunctional, and then how to implement change. Given the power and pervasiveness of the three archetypes discussed this can be a tough nut to crack for any district.

Norton (2007) conducted a study in the State of Michigan which addressed low-density suburbanization, which he referred to as sprawl and school board decision making. The author stated the phenomenon of sprawl was a concern across the United States to both schools and communities. The concern is that school districts are abandoning facilities in urban areas and siting schools in exurban or rural areas. Norton maintained that this relocation was increasing the spread of sprawl and contributing to the decline of urban neighborhoods.

Norton (2007) surveyed district superintendents and local government officials. His premise was, "[T]o test a number of assertions commonly made in the literature about factors influencing school board decision making" (Norton, 2007, p. 478). The researcher framed this study around two overarching questions: first, should existing school buildings undergo renovation or new facilities built, and second, to build a new facility in an urban or exurban area. Norton selected a web-based survey instrument to collect data. Additionally, he used data collected from the Michigan State Departments of Treasury and Education and the Center for Educational Performance for his analysis. The researcher distributed surveys to school superintendents and local administrators (city managers and township supervisors).

The findings from Norton's (2007) study can be summed as school boards are influenced by a sense of competition with neighboring districts and demographics, and limited is the cooperation between school boards and local governments because of the institutional arrangements shaping school decision making (Norton, 2007). From these findings and other research cited by the author, he developed a table that delineated five factors influencing school board decision making as to the question of renovation or new construction and site location. The five factors are:

- Demographics
- Constituent Demands
- Policies, Standards, and Other Institutional Factors
- School Board Decision-making Practices and Attitudes
- Site Considerations/Land Availability. (Norton, 2007, p. 481)

The generalizability of findings from this research may or may not be applicable to other areas of the nation. Considerations of demographics, regulatory requirements, cost, local infrastructure, and regional economies are all factors to be weighed. The elements, perhaps generalizable, are the factors influencing decision making that Norton delineated. School boards can apply these five factors to all decision making whether it is in a rural, suburban, or urban district.

What is perplexing about this research is that Norton framed his study as an investigation of school board decision making. He does not collect data from school board members. His data collection was from observations and responses to his survey from school superintendents and local government officials. These third parties, with possible

prejudices and dispositions regarding school board members, may not provide accurate exposes of school board decision making.

Dissertation Review of School Board Decision Making

A review of dissertations, from 1990 to 2012, did yield a number of studies that examined decision making by school boards. Of the nineteen dissertations reviewed, eight written before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and eleven written after the implementation of the act. This research is generalized into five categories: achievement, characteristics, finance, influences, and processes. The studies of decision making prior to the passage of NCLB indicated one examined finance (Ray, 1993), two influences (De Simon, 1990; O'Cull, 2001), and five processes (Klebs, 1994; Latimore, 2000; Pierce & Maybes, 1995; Rock, 1995; Schmidt, 1994). The post-NCLB research indicated three dissertations examined achievement (Buckley, 2006; Foust, 2009; Jordahl, 2007), one characteristics (Kreassig, 2007), two finance (Burckbunchler, 2008; Simmons, 2005), one influences (Vanek, 2004), and four processes (Crum, 2006; Hellman, 2007; Mast, 2012; Zimmerman, 2005).

The three dissertations that examined decision making in a financial context did not look with any specificity at facility issues; the authors examined budgetary practices. The dissertation written prior to NCLB focused on school boards in Texas grappling with how to balance district budgets in a time of economic decline and increasing legislative control (Ray, 1993). One of the dissertations completed after the passage of NCLB was again researched in Texas, and the study examined districts with substandard fiscal ratings with resources insufficient to accomplish district objectives (Simmons, 2005). Research for this study used a framework of budgetary decision-making models and their application to

school financing. The second study did address NCLB as a mitigating factor in district budgeting (Burckbuchler, 2008). The author examined if a correlation existed between student achievement, district budgeting practices, and resource allocation to fund instructional strategies.

An extensive search of the literature produced only three dissertations addressing decision making. One was specific to rural school board decision making. The other two included school facilities in its study of school board decision making.

Latimore (2000) conducted his dissertation on rural schools in Virginia. Latimore conducted a case study analysis of the dynamics of the decision-making process of a five-member board and district superintendent. The author studied four selected issues and the board members' decision processes used to make what they felt was the best decision. Two of the selected issues were internal district decisions relating to employee retirement and student discipline. The other two weighed the merits of regional programs for alternative education and another for advanced upper division mathematics and sciences. The dissertation did provide insights into the dynamics of decision-making models applied to the rural context; however, the four decisions issues studied did not relate to school facilities and therefore not connected to this study.

The Zimmerman (2005) dissertation included facilities as one of his six areas of school board decisions in his case study of an urban district in Virginia. The other five categories were: curriculum, finance, personnel, student concerns, and miscellaneous. Zimmerman defined facilities as school plant and equipment. The purpose of Zimmerman's study was to identify characteristics of school board actions in response to legislative changes imposed from 1971 up to and including the effects of the passage of

NCLB in 2005. Zimmerman (2005) summed the board's actions relative to school plant and equipment as one of reliance on the superintendent's staff, contractors, and private business to identify problems and recommend solutions. The study did not reference specific as to any exchanges or dialog regarding the decisions rendered by the board relating to facilities; ostensibly it would appear the board rubber-stamped facility issues.

In 2012, Mast addressed the issues of school facilities and decision making in the urban content, where she examined the site selection process for a new high school in a small mid-western city. She investigated the decision-making process of not only the school board but of the entire administrative team. She grounded her conceptual framework in collaborative planning models from the urban planning models, adult and continuing education perspectives, "and evidence-based decision making at the school district level" (Mast, 2012, p. 1). She viewed reality and knowledge as being socially constructed. From this perspective, the researcher exposed and examined power relationships and political aspects of the decision process. In concluding, Mast (2012) expressed the importance of decision making lay not in the importance of the decision but the consideration of the political and social dynamics of the design process.

Limited Research on School Board Decision Making

Rand (2002), while authoring a report on local school boards, noted there was a limited number of data-driven studies on the role and effectiveness of local school boards. She observed much of the literature consisted of opinion-based academic and professional writings. The lack of studies examining school board effectiveness and student achievement led her to broaden the scope of her search. The casting of a wider net yielded writings on board governance, current and future role of school boards, professional

guidebooks for school boards-- published by national and state school board associations, and other writings identifying characteristics of school boards.

Hess and Meeks (2011), in *School Boards Circa 2010*, remarked upon their observation, noting only limited empirical research had been conducted on school boards since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. In their research, Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) noted few studies existed examining the practices and effectiveness of school boards. Dervarics and O'Brien do make one critical inaccuracy in their assessment of research literature; they do not equate the quality of research performed using qualitative measures with data generated from quantitative studies.

Repeatedly reflected in the literature was the emphasis directed toward practices and issues of school governance. For the most part, decision making is regarded as functionary role or responsibility of the school board. Decision making is given cursory treatment at best. The books, writings, and research reviewed did not delve into the specifics of decision making by school board members. There was no discussion of motivations, influences, or the understanding of issues and potential ramifications or consequences of the decisions contemplated and made by board members. In contrast, the dissertations reviewed did consider such factors as influences and processes in their studies of school boards providing insights into the complexity of decision making.

Consistent with Rand (2002), Hess and Meeks (2011), and Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) assessments of the limited research on school boards, there exists, relative to rural school boards and decision making, an unusually expansive void. The literature review was unable to locate studies that examined rural school boards; decision making specific to school facilities.

Otter Creek School Board Meetings: The Decision Making Venue

The setting of this case study was the Otter Creek Central School District located in New York State; resultantly all references are pursuant to the laws of the state. The preponderance of regulatory control as to the conduct of a board meeting is the purview of state law. Laws specifically addressing central school districts and their applicability to decision making are referenced in this case study.

The conduct of the school board meeting has both cultural and statutory norms and regulations, and these vary from district to district and state to state. Cultural norms can be akin to local or regional customs. School Board meetings may be one of the last bastions of grassroots democracy in America. The meetings and the resulting minutes are one of only a limited number of windows through which the public can view their representatives. These meetings are unique opportunities to observe and assess the functionality of those elected to carry out their duties.

The school board is a corporate body and exists as a distinct legal entity apart from its members (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009; School Boards, 2012). Contracts, policies, and resolutions of a school board do not depend on the board membership (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009; School Boards, 2012). As stated by Fanniff and Abrams (2009), a school board member has no inherent powers by reason only of holding office (Gen. Constr. Law§ 41: *Coughlan v. Cowan,* Misc.2d 667,1959; *Appeal of Silano,* 33 Ed Dep't Rep. 20, 1993; *Matter of Bruno,* 4 Ed Dep't Rep. 14, 1964), nor do they have the individual authority to direct or supervise employees (*Appeal of Balen,* 40 Ed. Dep't Rep. 479, 2001).

A school board as a public body is governed using the Open Meeting Law (School Boards, 2012). In accordance with and pursuant to this law, school board meetings can

only be convened with a simple majority of the members physically present (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). Fanniff and Abrams (2009) and School Boards (2012) state a call to order to convene a meeting for the purpose of discussing school district business must be open to the public (Pub. Off. Law § 103 et seq. and Ed. Law § 1708 (3)). The law states school business includes binding votes, informal discussions, and any preliminary activity preceding a vote or involving the consideration of an issue that could be a subject of board action (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009; School Boards, 2012). When a school board meeting is duly convened, a quorum must be present if the board is to conduct any business pertaining to resolutions and motions (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). A quorum exists when more than half of the board members are present (Gen. Const. Law § 41.) The composition of the Otter Creek Board is seven members; the adoption of a board's resolutions or motions requires the majority of the board and not simply by a majority of those present.

The passage of a capital project, such as the one Otter Creek Central Schools undertook, is a unique circumstance, as Fannif and Abrams (2009) explained, where a supermajority (3/5 vote) of the board is required for the placing of a proposition before the district voters for an object or purpose (facilities project) for which bonds are issued (Local Fin. Law § 33.00). The OCCS board has seven members; therefore, to achieve a supermajority the vote must minimally receive support of five board members.

There are those who describe school board meetings as a private meeting held in public. School boards cannot exclude public attendance, but do have the authority to adopt rules and regulations for the conduct of behavior on school property (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009; School Boards, 2012). There exists no statute in New York State that allows the public to speak at a board meeting (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). As Fanniff and Abrams

(2009) noted, the consensus of past commissioners of education is that boards should adopt a policy for the public to speak. At no time, however, is the board to engage in or entertain discussions involving confidentiality and privacy issues.

The Otter Creek Board allows public comment during its meetings. The agenda affords two opportunities for the public to speak. These designated opportunities are at the beginning and end of the New Business section of the agenda. Members of the public wishing to speak are asked to state their name and address for the purpose of recording remarks in the formal minutes and to limit their time to two minutes. Asked to contact the Board President or Superintendent to arrange for a possible slot on an upcoming agenda is individuals or groups desiring to speak for more than the allotted two minutes.

There exists in New York State no statutory requirement or recommended format for a board meeting agenda (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). Nevertheless, preceding each OCCS Board Meeting, the board develops and posts the agenda on the school's website on the Monday prior to the meeting. The Board President and Superintendent decide the contents of the agenda in a meeting. The pair reviews pending action items and discusses and prioritizes new business for potential inclusion on the next meeting agenda. Board members can propose items for inclusion on the agenda by contacting either the Board President or Superintendent. The night of the meeting, the board makes agendas available to all interested parties at the entrance to the board meeting room.

The Superintendent's secretary who also serves as the capacity of District Clerk takes formal meeting minutes at the meeting. State law delineates (Pub. Off. Law § 106(1)), the minutes must contain a summary of all motions and proposals and the results of all votes. State statutes do not dictate that the minutes of the meeting necessarily are a

verbatim transcript of the proceedings (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). The only requirement is they meet the minimal requirements of the Open Meeting Law. A board, at their discretion, may dictate additional requirement by the adoption of a board policy specifically addressing meeting minutes.

Fanniff and Abrams (2009) explained access to meeting minutes are to be made available to the public within two weeks of the meeting date, and action taken during executive session by a formal vote is to be available within one week (Pub. Off. Law §106 (3)). If the time between board meetings in is excess of two weeks the minutes are to be designated as "Draft" and approved at the next duly convened meeting (NYS Department of State, Committee on Open Government OML-AO-3799). The NYS Department of State, Committee on Open Government FOIL-AO-8573, Nov. 17, 1994 states minutes not approved by the board must be made available for public inspection (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009). Otter Creek makes meeting minutes available to the general public on the school's public website under the Board of Education tab.

Facilities

The problem of rural school deterioration continues as a result of deferred maintenance. The cause of deterioration is attributable in numerous situations: competing priorities, a lack of funding resources, and district leadership. The lack of funding permeates discussions of renovations and new construction, as well compounding the ability of districts to provide adequate and safe school facilities. Historically, both federal and state constitutions have made no provisions for school facilities. School buildings have been the responsibility of each local district or community.

The inability of districts to fund capital projects is a burden that rural, small town and inner city schools share; few districts are immune to the facilities crisis (Dewees, 1999). Mandates, whether for educational programs or environmental safety, have seldom been accompanied by adequate state or federal funding sources necessary to implement these policy mandates (Frazier, 1993; Crampton, Thompson, & Vesely, 2004). These unfunded mandates have placed financial burdens on local districts confounding school leaders' abilities to fund capital projects to build new or renovate existing school facilities.

Hunter (2006) stated, "In recent years the cost of providing and maintaining adequate school facilities has increased dramatically due to increasing enrollments, aging buildings, and reforms that require more classrooms, such as class size reduction" (p. 2). Hunter (2006) highlighted two constraining characteristics typical of rural schools. First, aging buildings are not able to support rigorous requirements for the sciences or upgrades to accommodate instructional technology. Second, rural districts lack the fiscal capacity for building improvements.

Increased enrollments and a pedagogical shift in inclusionary services for students with special needs as defined in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) generated the need for classroom space that drove school construction and renovation spending (Filardo, Vincent, Sung, & Stein, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) presented data indicating school enrollment nationally increased 10% from 1995-2004. Nationally, the costs to which Hunter referred represented an annual increase of construction dollars. Filardo et al. (2006) provided the following synopsis of spending on school construction. In 1995, spending was $20.8 million on school construction; by 2004 expenditures increased to $37.3 million. Schools spent a total of $600 billion nationally

between FY 1995 and FY 2004. Facilities acquisition and construction expenditures at the state level detailed average per pupil spending (1995-2004) ranging from a high of $12,842 in Alaska to a low of $2,004 in Montana.

Rural districts are hard pressed for construction dollars when allocations are tied to property values (Williams, 2010). The deterioration of school facilities is not a phenomenon isolated to urban districts. Dewees (1999) reported 54% of rural schools need upgraded facilities and the funds for new construction and renovation (Dewees, 1999). Marshall (2000) in a study of rural policies stated disadvantages were serious in school facilities and observed in contrast to urban schools; rural schools had older buildings and fewer resources. A study of rural schools by Honeyman (1989) concluded that the average age of school buildings in rural districts was nearly 50 years old. Ten years later, Rowand (1999), followed by Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, and Kaplan (2000), reported on the condition of America's public schools stating the average age of school facilities in the United States was 40 years, based on the number of years from original date of construction. In this report (Lewis et al., 2000), rural and small town schools averaged 41 years with a functional age of 16 years. Urban schools averaged 42 years with a functional age of 17 years and urban fringe/large town (suburban) 37 years with a functional age of 14 years (Lewis et al., 2000). In a study recently released by Alexander and Lewis (2014) updates building age statistics. The age of the main instructional buildings (years) are rural 40, town 48, suburban 43, and city 50. The functional age of these structures correspondingly is rural 15, town 17, suburban19, and city 22 (Alexander & Lewis, 2014).

Prior to the release of the 2014 survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Alexander & Lewis, 2014) there existed no national inventory or

assessment of K-12 public school buildings in the United States, and not all states maintain an inventory or information on the size, age, condition, and capacity of their school buildings (ASCE, 2013; Filardo, 2008). The National Center for Educational Statistics survey (Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, & Kaplan, 2000), gave the last reporting of the condition of school buildings in America. The GAO (1995) report gave the last comprehensive accounting and noted 23 states collected data on the condition of school facilities. Filardo (2008) stated that inventory estimates are extrapolated from public school enrollment numbers, and capital outlay as reported in the U.S. Census of Governments. As was noted previously, The American Society of Civil Engineers (2013), in their 2012 Report Card for America's Infrastructure reporting on the condition of schools in the United States, stated, "No comprehensive, authoritative data have been collected in 10 years" (p. 131). The release of The Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 2012-2013 (Alexander & Lewis, 2014) closed the 10-year gap. This report "provides nationally representative data" (p.1) and references the Lewis et al. (2000) report as generating the last national collection of data (Alexander & Lewis, 2014).

Hodges (1998) performed an informational analysis of rural school facilities. The purpose was to examine how America's school facilities have gotten to their present state of deterioration and inadequacy. To accomplish this analysis, the author chose to focus on historical content.

In conducting the analysis, Hodges reviewed data for 10,000 schools in over 5,000 school districts nationwide using data from the *GAO 1995 - School Facilities: America's Schools Not Designed or Equipped for 21st Century* to report "the state of rural schools' infrastructure, rural district's economic problems and the need to upgrade school facilities"

(p. 1). The analysis identified four periods in the history of rural school development; pre-industrial age, industrial age to World War II, post-World War II, and the age of technology. The researcher examined each period from a social-economic perspective, and she noted the impact on rural education and the ability of communities to contribute to local school success.

Hodges (1998) noted the needs of rural school districts fell into four categories:

1. Provide maintenance for health, safety, aesthetics and building life.
2. Upgrade facilities for technology.
3. Improve energy efficiency of systems and buildings.
4. Meet American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Hodges (1998) suggested there was a consensus of the inequities in educational funding because of property assessments and value and state financing. The author further opined that the primary reason for the poor condition of facilities was that the maintenance budget was an easy target during budget times when a district had to decide between other competing priorities. These priorities ran the gamut from educational equipment to supplies for students to teacher salaries and benefits. She continued expressing that the delivery of educational services requires 5 elements, "adequate building space, comfortable environment, proper equipment, sufficient electrical power and a 20:1 student-teacher ratio" (p. 11).

Providing historical background to rural education and mainly focusing on how school facilities have deteriorated to their present condition is potentially valuable if solutions are offered. Hodges's analysis contained a discussion of facility changes needed for rural schools to improve student achievement. The analysis was a reiteration of the

GAO Report (1995) with the elements pertaining to rural extrapolated. The author offered no substantive strategies as to how to affect change in policy or funding to improve the flow of dollars for facility maintenance, renovation, or construction, opening the question of the intent of the analysis.

Stewart (1998), in contrast to Hodges, in his descriptive report on rural schools, suggested options do exist for facilities improvement. The author stated that any attempt to debate the definition of what constitutes a rural school can be considered counterproductive to achieving the goals for improving rural facilities. The author offered a number of options in his report accompanied by a brief discussion of each.

Modernization or new construction, Stewart (1998) stated, is the most significant example of facility improvement. He stated schools could fund these projects through the annual operating funds or through bond obligations of 20 or more years. Stewart defines maintenance as the effort to maintain the building as close as practical to its original condition. Additionally, Stewart (1998) stated maintenance was the commonly accepted form of school improvement. The rationale for maintenance work is that it provides a safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning. He argued that a well-maintained environment would promote achievement rather than retard the educational process.

Stewart (1998) termed school reorganization as a means of improving facilities utilization. The author suggested reorganization could result in a long and productive future for some districts. Consolidation and or deconsolidation are usually highly-charged political issues, of which some legislators are hesitant to speak and tend to avoid public dialogue on the subjects (Stewart, 1998). The author offered that not all states are pushing consolidation agendas and asserted it was becoming more common to see districts sharing

services and personnel. The author provided no arguments or supportive evidence, whether pro or con, to the concept of consolidation issues.

Stewart (1998) suggested a number of alternative revenue-generating uses for school buildings that no longer were of service to the district. He indicated well-maintained, non-operating school buildings can be a source or generating additional supplemental income for the district through either sale or rental. Some of these alternative uses included: closure, which can be the most traumatic and requires significant thought and planning; development of a charter, magnet or special use school, or alternative school. Another alternative use was as an educational service center, commonly termed a co-op. Finally, the author suggested non-educational uses including abandonment, deeding out, housing, health care facility, or commercial/industrial use.

Stewart (1998) was optimistic suggesting a bright future for rural schools and their buildings. In his concluding remarks, he stated "rural schools are alive and well" (p. 22). He extolled the virtues of technology as the prima facie or apparent driving force for the success of rural schools. He contended that options for improving facilities were continually being identified, approved, and implemented. Stewart (1998) maintained that capital and instructional improvements to rural schools will ensure future viability.

Stewart (1998) offered potentially viable suggestions and options for rural school facility improvements. However, he failed to look at the financial considerations of funding, to include property taxation, state aid, and other mitigating factors directly related to school facility costs. Rather he chooses to ignore these precepts focusing instead on marketing concepts to draw students away from adjacent communities and school districts, raising questions of ethical conduct.

Understanding that schools are a community within a community, Phelps, Peach, & Reddick (1998) framed their study, "Meeting Facility Needs in Rural Schools," on the research question: What is the relationship between facility conditions and curricular and extracurricular opportunities? This informational analysis evaluated the construction and renovation of rural school facilities in Tennessee from 1993-98. These included the construction projects for 12 new facilities and the major renovation of 46 schools (Phelps, Peach, & Reddick, 1998). The level of building activity for the Tennessee schools in this study was consistent with nationwide data (Phelps et al., 1998). Selected for this analysis were 75 rural schools in Tennessee. Enrollments in these schools ranged from 216 to 840 students.

Sixty-two K-12 principals completed surveys for a return of 83%. The resulting data provided a summary of the condition of school facilities in rural regions and their ability to accommodate curricular and extracurricular programs. The surveys reflected a generally positive "level of compatibility of the curricular and extracurricular offerings with their schools' facilities" (Phelps, Peach, & Reddick, 1998, p. 9). Phelps et al. (1998) interpreted compatibility as meaning school facilities were able to physically accommodate the spatial requirements for teaching and learning without limitations or restrictions to programs or services. The authors identified several other areas of high compatibility. These included a safe school environment and positive climate, technology, meaningful extracurricular activities, satisfaction with curricular offerings and school location (Phelps, Peach, & Reddick, 1998). The authors identified limitations for existing facilities and restricting programs and services as a lack of space and over-crowded classrooms, wiring and other infrastructure problems limiting technology utilization, and inadequate

maintenance. Phelps et al. (1998) found that survey respondents cited the care and upkeep of facilities were critical to the curriculum; adequately maintained buildings motivate students and school personnel and project a positive image to the community.

The researchers recognized rural schools as being more than buildings; they were also tools that facilitate the delivery of quality educational programming, centers of community life, and a strong link between schools and their communities (Phelps, Peach, & Reddick, 1998). The analysis concluded that the care and upkeep of buildings were critical to curriculum and facility utilization (Phelps et al., 1998).

This study examined a cross section of Tennessee rural schools and communities; however, what might be true in portions of Tennessee cannot be generalized to the state of rural communities and their schools on a national scale. This work was a comparative information analysis and not empirical research. The authors presented only data in tabular formats with no corollary interpretations. Additionally, the authors made an unwarranted value judgment when they unjustly criticized rural communities as not accurately valuing their youth and typified rural facilities as being unsafe, unclean, and incompatible with academic expectations. The authors place an unfounded emphasis upon what they term as a resettling of rural America. In so doing, there was a tendency for the authors to wax and wane nostalgic about rural life while denying the sentiment.

Dewees and Earthman (2000, Chapter 1) authored "Trends and Issues Affecting School Facilities in Rural America: Challenges and Opportunities for Action." The chapter provided an overview of population and enrollment trends impacting rural school facilities. The chapter utilized data from the 1995 GAO report presenting issues at the federal, state, and local levels. The authors stated there was an increase in overall school enrollment

beginning in 1984 as a result of the echo effect of the post-World War II increase in the birthrate; however, rural schools have experienced a decline. Dewees and Earthman (1998) noted regional variations in population with growth rates highest in the southern and western sections of the country in communities with less than 2,500 inhabitants.

In their chapter Dewees and Earthman (2000) attributed the condition of the nation's schools to underinvestment in facilities. The researchers used data from the 1995 GAO report to estimate funding required to repair, renovate, and modernize all school facilities, the associated cost was $112 billion. As challenges to funding, Dewees and Earthman (2000) cited the declining political influence of rural areas after World War II. They noted the shift from the number of legislators in rural areas to greater numbers in urban and suburban electoral districts with a corresponding result of less support for maintaining small and rural schools. The authors also observed the reluctance of rural administrators to pursue funding for fear of consolidation or school closures (Dewees & Earthman, 2000). Citing poverty statistics from the Bureau of the Census, the authors found higher poverty levels in rural areas correlated to a declined rate of upgrading existing structures or the building of new facilities. Lastly, the authors conveyed the combined effects of lower enrollment, inadequate tax bases, and regulatory debt limits as reasons rural schools cannot generate sufficient revenues to address facility issues.

Dewees and Earthman (2000) offered a number of recommendations and strategies for funding rural schools. They categorized two broad areas where school administrators and school board members could affect funding; one was alternative financing of facilities for learning, and the other was to pursue political and communication tracts. Specific funding strategies suggested by Dewees and Earthman (2000) included:

1. State capital funding in which the capital costs would be distributed across the entire state and not borne locally.
2. State building authorities used to circumvent legal debt limitations for school design and construction work.
3. Interest-free or tax-credit bonds such as the federally funded Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZABs), which can be used only for modernization and not new construction.
4. Convert vacant buildings to school use, thereby providing cost saving and preservation of existing buildings.
5. Sharing buildings with community or government organizations in existing or new spaces to reduce capital and operational costs.
6. Communicating at the state house and Capitol Hill by school board members and school administrators to make their issues and concerns known to politicians and decision makers.
7. Communication at home on a continuous cycle to keep all community stakeholders informed about both the accomplishments and needs of the school district.

The authors concluded with the following generalizations. Rural schools, as well as urban and suburban, face similar challenges, although to varying degrees of insufficient funding, lack of political support for funding, and conflicting demands placed on educational programs (Dewees & Earthman, 2000). Citing Earthman's (1998) study of school building conditions, the authors concluded school facilities affect learning and teaching. The authors emphasized the need for school facilities to be flexible in order to

accommodate and support educational reforms and the ever increasing demands for space and power for technological innovations. The final generalization summed the strengths of rural schools as being small class sizes and the close relationships between students and teachers; the authors stressed that these two strengths be preserved as part of any funding solution.

This report drew upon the 1995 GAO Report for all its statistical support and inferences, offering no new data regarding school facility conditions. The strategies and recommendations offered, while not necessarily new, were fundamentally sound as solutions or alternatives to facility funding, and thus bear repeating. The paper in total, while contributing little that was not already known, is important because it keeps the plight of rural school facilities and funding problems in the light of day for review and consideration and possible action.

The federal government, as noted, has no constitutional or statutory responsibilities for public education or school buildings (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). There is, however, one federal program, with limited funds, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture, which develops essential community facilities for use in rural areas to include school facilities. The program is the Rural Community Facilities Program; this program distributes funds using three financial mechanisms: the Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program, the Community Facilities Direct Grant Program, and the Community Facilities Grant Program. These financial assistance programs are available to communities, counties, special-purpose districts, non-profit corporations, tribal governments for use in rural areas and communities with populations of up to 20,000 (Filardo & O'Connell, 2010).

Summary

The last quarter of the 20th century saw efforts to rethink, restructure, and standardize education for children in the nation's public schools. One important aspect largely overlooked in this process of educational assessment was school facilities. Studies cited have limited generalizability, a factor of research methodology. Consistencies in the research, however, suggest a strong connection between student achievement and the condition of the educational facility in which they attempt to deliver quality programs to students. The need for facilities studies is urgent. The impact on learning is becoming more acute each day as buildings continue to deteriorate negatively affecting the learning and teaching environment. Collaboration between local, state and the federal government is necessary to secure the funds needed to renovate existing structures and to build new facilities to replace those which have outlived their effectiveness or are beyond repair.

Policy

Fundamental to the governance of a school district is the development and approval of policy, as stipulated in a state's constitution, by a school board. Policy makers have not applied consistent definitions of rural to their decisions on policy issues. Precisely not defined is the term rural, providing the U.S. Department of Education with flexibility in applying it (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007). Arnold et al. (2007) delineated three considerations to be applied to definitions of rural to education policies. One is a unit of analysis. They contended, "The way rural is defined and specified (by school or district) is likely to yield different portrayals of rural students, which can affect education policy and practices" (Arnold et al., 2007, p. 8). A second issue identified geographical and political differences among regions. What is considered rural in one part

of the country may not be considered rural in another. A third issue is demographic changes in rural communities. Arnold et al. (2007) observed there are communities losing population while others are gaining. Additionally, they noted the increase in diversity of school district populations.

Policymakers must take into consideration cultural awareness of what is uniquely rural when formulating policy for school facilities. Cultural awareness of what is rural is the premise of the article by Harmon, Howley, Smith, and Dickens (1998). The authors stated, "[S]chool improvement in rural areas cannot succeed without particular attention to rural context" (p. 2). The authors continue, pointing out the need to preserve and sustain schools in communities experiencing high poverty. The authors maintained that improvement in rural schools could not take place without considering the impact of the community on student achievement and personal development. To achieve improvement, the community and school must align their priorities for stability and sustainability if students are going to be able to compete in a global marketplace.

Harmon, Howley, Smith, and Dickens (1998) observed rural-specific issues are lost in the national agenda of educational reform, therefore creating negative repercussions at the local level. The authors discussed what they considered a flawed policy regarding the desirability to create school size by closing small schools, which often leads to the undesirable consolidation of both schools and districts. To address this concern the authors developed a school improvement tool; The Rural Community School's Facility Checklist. The intent was to measure and qualify the characteristics of a good rural community school. To accomplish this objective, the authors considered the relationships between learning, community, and facilities. Harmon et al. (1998) define a good rural school as one

which sustains and is sustainable by local people and their interests. The authors laid out four qualifying characteristics of a good rural school: These schools put their communities at the center of all plans and activities. The design of curriculum is to respect local identity and circumstances. The school makes it convenient for and welcomes local functions and celebrations. The school cares about and is interested in all who live in the community. Predicated were these characteristics on the experiences of the authors as employees of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory who stated, "Our premise is that school improvements in rural places cannot succeed without particular attention to the rural context" (p.1).

The authors discussed the need for the preservation of the rural community school. The relationship between the school and community is essential for the sustainability of both entities according to the authors. The authors spoke of an opportunity for education planners and policymakers to affect the condition of the nation's schools but offered no substantive strategies to enact improvements other than the importance of the bond between community and school. The strengthening of the school improvement tool could be first, by conducting research with the instrument and then generating a data set to support the statements made in the article with examples of how to achieve implementation for school improvement.

Poverty is a persistent companion typifying the economic environment of 535 rural counties, their rural communities and schools. Often viewed as an urban problem, Carter (1999) conducted research studying education and development in poor rural communities stating, "[I]t is not clear from the data how poor rural schools compare with poor urban schools" (p. 2). The article investigated challenges of children living in the poorest rural counties in the nation. The population studied included 535 rural persistent poverty

counties in the United States. The primary objective of this study was to provide background information about Rural Persistent Poverty (RPP) counties (Carter, 1999). Additionally, the author "outline[d] areas and types of multidisciplinary research needed to develop tools, programs and community capacity that can improve the quality of life, including education in poor rural communities" (p. 2). Carter (1999) stated teaching and learning occur within the social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic constraints of a particular location. These factors are interconnected, the author identified issues of academic structure, departmentalized funding, lack of a shared definition of rural, and biases of urban perceptions all confounding an approach to rural solutions.

Carter (1999) maintained that the successful revitalization of rural communities is connected to three research areas: "capacity building, policy, and education and interdisciplinary approaches" (p. 3). Carter (1999) additionally stated that "governmental policies are needed to help facilitate change in one place can sometimes create barriers elsewhere" (p. 5). She continued to say the current policies related to infrastructure development do not adequately address biases against poor rural communities

The author identified three approaches to addressing policy bias:

1. Explore reasons for the unequal educational opportunities and development, examining issues of race and tribal membership.
2. Compare governmental spending on rural programs with previous years and compare with urban/suburban expenditures.
3. Look at how the inequities of politics affect learning and the opportunities to learn.

The article emphasized the link between Rural Persistent Poverty (RPP) and educational opportunities implying a quality education requires the collaboration of partners from diverse fields of expertise. The goal is the creation of a sense of efficacy, empowerment, self-determination, and optimism in the rural community. The article was specific in intent and covered RPP briefly, succinctly, and effectively. The need to develop policy independently from policy models created for urban schools was the singularly important contribution the article made to the body of literature examining rural education.

Not all states make adjustments for differences in local costs or student needs. As a result, there are communities across the nation experiencing difficulty funding school construction and renovation. To investigate the relationship between facilities and achievement, Lee and McIntire (2000) conducted a quantitative analysis of key schooling conditions and opportunities that affect student performance in rural and non-rural settings in a number of states. Thirty-five states comprised the sample. The data collected consisted of national and state mathematics assessments from 1992 and 1996. The authors conducted estimates and averages of the data from the achievement scores. They analyzed gaps and computed the standard error. They tested significant gaps at the .05 level and conducted effect size measures to examine particularly significant gaps. Correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to measure the identified achievement gaps between rural and non-rural students.

The researchers identified six schooling condition variables that potentially impact rural student achievement: instructional resources, professional training, algebra offerings, progressive instruction, safe/orderly climate, and collective support. Rural schools lack the facilities, physical, plants, course materials, and educational materials that are predictably

found in more affluent districts (Lee & McIntire, 2000). Lee and McIntire's (2000) results varied from state to state; Iowa and Maine performed at the top while Arkansas and Mississippi performed below the national average. Fourteen of the 35 states had significant achievement gaps between rural and non-rural students. In seven states, rural students outperformed non-rural students, non-rural students in seven other states scored higher than rural students. Multiple regression analysis indicated that 84% of the total variation was attributable to all six schooling condition variables.

Lee and McIntire (2000) noted that the achievement related to mathematics scores closely related to variations in schooling conditions, citing rural schools in Connecticut and Virginia. They observed opposing patterns to the generalized view of rural versus non-rural achievement gaps. In Connecticut, where schooling conditions are relatively favorable, rural students performed significantly higher than non-rural students. In Virginia, non-rural students scored significantly higher than rural student whose schooling conditions were relatively worse in comparison.

Lee and McIntire (2000) indicated substantial differences do exist between states in rural student achievement and schooling conditions. The authors correlated academic gains to improvements in schooling conditions on the state level. Lee and McIntire (2000) concluded any state policy agenda for improving student achievement in rural schools should assess local needs and consider comprehensive school reform plans.

The Lee and McIntire study presented detail appropriate for an overview of the relationship between the condition of school facilities and the variations in student achievement from state to state. The need for policymakers to look beyond generalizations was the most salient point in their review. Lee and McIntire stressed the importance of

looking at and assessing the unique schooling characteristics of the district and not relying only on mandates to address issues of student achievement.

Limitations identified in the study included the fact that rural and non-rural areas in states have different social and cultural characteristics despite conventional classifications. Census Bureau classifications do not consider types of employment as the criteria in the areas of social and cultural characteristics. There was no consistency in the degrees of isolation; it varies from community to community and from state to state. Bases on measures of schooling conditions were teacher and principal self-reports on selected questionnaire responses introducing issues of bias. Despite these limitations, statistical analysis generated by this type of report should assist state educational policymakers to address the achievement gaps in student outcomes and make informed policy decisions to enact comprehensive school reforms.

Lee (2001) continued the investigation of the relationship between conditions in rural schools and achievement which he began with McIntire in 2000. Lee (2001) found mathematics scores varied significantly from state to state. Consistent with findings from the 2000 study with McIntire, Lee observed similar results with rural student levels of achievement above the national average in some states and below in others and generally higher level of scores were attained by rural as opposed to non-rural. In this study, Lee reviewed research focused on achievement and school conditions. Lee (2001) examined

1. Interstate variations and trends in rural student achievement.
2. Achievement as affected by the condition of rural schools.
3. Variances interstate rural school conditions.
4. Determining what works well in rural schools.

Lee (2001) investigated the conditions in rural schools affecting achievement observing that rural schools have characteristic disadvantages, as well as advantages when compared to their urban counterparts. He observed that rural schools have limited population bases and are located in geographic and cultural isolation, lacking facilities, course materials, and educational programs that are in urban or more affluent schools. Lee (2001) described advantages that small schools have affecting achievement as lower student-teacher ratios, individualized instruction, cooperative learning programs, committed staff, and strong community ties.

Lawrence (2001) performed an informational analysis which identified state policies and ways they can affect rural schools and communities attempting to maintain and renovate or build school facilities. State policies exist governing funding and funding formulas, size, and location of school facilities, and the degree of interaction between schools and communities (Lawrence, 2001). She contended that limited information is available on the condition of school facilities. Existing studies are now becoming dated (GAO, 1995, 1996), and more recent data based on small sample sizes (Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, & Kaplan, 2000) do not differentiate between rural, suburban, or urban schools (Lawrence, 2001).

Lawrence (2001) made the following observations: State and federal funding sources vary in the amount of assistance offered to local districts. Arizona and Hawaii are the only two states that provide 100% of funding for school facilities projects. Eleven states were identified as offering no direct funding. The remaining states used monies distributed by applying a number of methods: flat grants, per pupil allocations, sliding scale grants or loans based on wealth, basic needs formulas, and multiple-source funding. In 37

states, the district is responsible for raising money for facilities using property taxes, bonds, lotteries, and in some instances federal leases.

Lawrence (2001) remarked in those states offering no or limited funding, poor rural districts are severely limited in their abilities to raise monies. Also, when attempting to secure state funds when available, small districts do not have the human capital to spare for these projects, unlike their suburban or urban counterparts. Lawrence (2001) highlighted two limited sources of potential federal funding available to rural districts. One source is the Department of Agriculture's Office of Community Development and the Rural Economic Area Partnership. The other is the Department of Education with funds available through Emergency Repair and Renovation Grants and the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB).

Few states fund school maintenance, and Lawrence (2001) observed maintenance is one of the largest discretionary items in a school budget. Deferred often as a discretionary budget item, is maintenance in favor of another item deemed more pressing or urgent. Consequently, school buildings deteriorate, and districts face the decision to renovate or construct new facilities. The average age of the school building is 42 years; Lawrence (2001) stated this can be ambiguous. Buildings constructed prior to World War II were built to last at least 75 years. Lawrence suggested cost effectiveness realization can be through renovating well-constructed older schools than building new. She stated the better criteria for facilities decisions would be the quality of construction, maintenance, and renovation.

Lawrence (2001) delineated a number of state policies negatively affecting school facilities in rural areas: policies which set percentages of growth or decline in student

population, policies setting a minimum number of students as a prerequisite for funding, policies that require minimal acreage for school facilities, strict interpretations of building codes, and state-mandated facilities designs. State policies do not require participation by the community in planning school facilities, nor are dictates issued regarding the use of school facilities by the community. Lawrence (2001) suggested it is advisable for school districts to encourage community participation in the planning process particularly in rural areas to ensure stakeholder buy-in and continued support. The author continued, suggesting that people involved in school facilities projects become familiar with all local and state policies that may impact their projects to build schools that serve the entire community.

The article was general in its coverage, but it did provide a few state specific policy references and impacts; none of which was particularly favorable to rural school districts. The author gave an adequate overview of school facility policy and the impact of policy on facilities renovation and construction across the nation. In this article, the eleven states providing no direct funding were unnamed. Lawrence's stance in the article was the negative impact of state policy. To have cited examples of positive policy interfaces would have provided balance and enhanced the readers' overall understanding of funding policy and facilities. Of particular value in the article were the suggestions for community involvement in the planning and design process and the need for inclusion of community activities use of facilities.

McColl and Malhoit's (2004) policy brief was written to assist state policymakers, educators, and community members in identifying critical school facility issues and developing state policies to meet the needs of all learners. The authors contended state

governments can impact the quality of education directly by funding facilities that provide students with building that are conducive to and support learning. McColl and Malhoit (2004) stressed the need for rural friendly facilities policies, offering that facilities play an integral function in education. Their reasoning premise for this is one-third of the nation's students are attending rural or small schools. They continued their observation and offered rural schools are in poor condition and getting worse, rural communities cannot afford the schools they need, and states ignore or do not address the facility needs of rural schools.

McColl and Malhoit (2004) indicated funding for facilities was becoming the providence of state control. Court challenges were cited as catalysts precipitating this directional change. Meeting fiscal challenges to providing equitable and adequate education has resulted in litigation. These court findings are charging states to provide students with equal and sufficient resources. Essential components of fair and adequate facilities that McColl and Malhoit (2004) identified include: basing school facility needs on accurate assessments, establishing a process to evaluate state facility programs, adopting state funding mechanisms that do not penalize rural schools, and creating state standards for school facilities to ensure safety and health Additionally, they identified the need to provide for flexibility regarding school size and location, encourage local participation, define the role of the state, and ethical standards. In their appendix, the authors include, as examples, two policy plans: Guiding Principles for Effective and Fair State Facility Plans, and State School Facilities Policy Checklist. Both designed to assist in the development of facilities policy.

McColl and Malhoit (2004) concluded states can correct funding deficiencies; it is the state's constitutional responsibility. The authors put forth a succinct plan to educate

those responsible for the formulation of educational policy, particularly at the state level. The points made to facilitate change were well defined. One point emphatically made was as states continue to raise expectations, and as the federal government legislates accountability, it becomes essential for state and federal policy to address school facility needs to be correspondingly effective.

The article provided a roadmap to begin the process of formulating state policy to address adequately facilities needs of rural schools. This roadmap was difficult to interpret and apply as a formula for developing policy. It did recognize the most formidable challenge facing rural schools is the lack of political power to affect change from their more politically prominent urban and suburban communities. Advocates to assist interested parties in what it takes to be successful would be most useful to navigate this process. Recognizing the political power vacuum in which rural schools exist is critical but so too is providing the information to make a change.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) (Beaumont, 2003) and the Building Education Success Together (BEST) (Collaborative, 2005, 2006) co-authored a series of papers sponsored by the 21st Century School Fund to provide policy recommendations and guidelines to appointed and elected officials and administrators at the local, school district, and state levels. The intent of the initiative was to improve facilities funding and educational programs to students and teachers. The BEST Collaborative (2005) and partners identified state policy reform as one mechanism "for affecting the planning, design, construction, maintenance and funding practices and processes at the state and local school district levels" (p. 2). The partners stressed cautious development of state-level standards and controls to ensure creativity, public engagement,

and local priority considerations in facility planning and design. The NTHP and BEST recommended four general and overarching policies with no distinction as to whether the school was rural, suburban, or urban:

1. Long-term Funding Sources Policy:

   The state ensures long-term, adequate sources of funding to support the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of public school facilities.

2. Scope and Form of Funding Relationship between State and Local School District Policy:

   The state defines the scope and means of the funding arrangement between the state and the local school district being cognizant of the needs, requirements, fiscal ability, and fiscal capacity of the local school district.

3. Funding Allocation for School Building Improvements and/or New Construction Policy:

   The state establishes process and procedure for the distribution of funding directed for existing school buildings and/or new construction based on need and is equitable and fair throughout the state and within school districts.

4. Alternative Financing Methods Policy:

   The state prospects alternative design, construction, and funding methods and offer support and technical assistance to school districts for the purpose of implementing these options.

The NTHP (Beaumont, 2003) and BEST (2005, 2006) maintained that the implementation of these policies would result in high-quality, high-performing, well-

designed, and well-maintained school facilities having direct and indirect impact on the teaching and learning process. The assumptions stated as resultants of the proposed policy implementation are consistent with the content of the series of papers. These policies, while well-intended and desirable, are general and overarching, lacking the specificity required to enact legislation. The authors do not address financial and political aspects of policy formulation (e.g. property wealth, taxation, aid ratios and legislative priorities). Additionally, the variance in state constitutions and their existing education laws do not lend themselves to easy fixes. A consistent and important theme prevalent throughout the series of papers was the need for alternative funding for educational facilities. The historical content and relative context presented to understand funding policies are the strengths of these papers.

New York State Rural School Legislation

Overshadowed the last 25 years is legislation to address the particular needs of rural schools by lawmakers' concerns for schools in urban and suburban areas. Particularly for the urban districts collectively referred to as the Big Five: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers. The make-up of the 2008 Legislature was overwhelming urban/suburban with 212 representatives and rural legislatures numbering 31 (Hopper, 2008). Three years later, this gap in representation remained virtually unchanged with only 15% of the legislature representing rural areas ("Meeting", 2011).

Hopper (2008) delineated legislation specific for rural public education identifying four pieces of legislation. Two legislative actions addressed the realities of rural: the Sparsity Correction Aid (1988-91) and Small Size Correction Aid (1988-93).

Incorporated into the state's overall School Aid Budget, both of these aid programs were no longer stand-alone pieces of legislation. Funding to support the Rural Education Research Program (Chapter 766, Laws of 1990) was through incorporation into state budgets in 1990-2001, 2006, and 2007. The last attempt at school finance reform in New York State was the passage of a comprehensive State Budget and Reform Act of 2007, which made no specific provisions for rural school funding (Hopper, 2008).

In 2008, the New York State Legislature established the New York State Center for Rural Schools (Chapter 616, Laws of 2008). While not providing funding for rural schools, the Center is tasked to build connections between schools and the rural communities they serve utilizing the resources of Cornell University and a range of organizations to assist and inform rural communities and policy makers ("Connections", 2013).

Summary

Policies affect decisions regarding the building and renovations of school facilities (Lawrence, 2001). Of primary importance is the knowledge necessary to make those decisions responsibly. All district decision makers and stakeholders need to have a working knowledge of policies pertaining to their locality, the impact of their decisions, and exploration of options for mitigating problems or creating viable solutions.

There are still significant discrepancies in the funding of rural schools when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts (Patterson, 2010; Reeves, 2003; Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012; Weldon, 2011). The reliance on local property taxes and willingness to pay for educational costs has created "differences in the quality and funding of school facilities between rural schools in poor areas and those in

wealthier communities" (McColl &Malhoit, 2004, p. 5). Inadequate school facilities put students at a disadvantage for learning opportunities and at risk for safety and health considerations. The problems regarding school facilities conditions and the effect of inadequate facilities on the learning environment have been well-documented. Needed is the knowledge to mount challenges successfully to existing funding formula, or lack of funding in some states, to provide equitable and adequate facilities to all children irrespective of the location where they attend school. States have within their constitutional powers the ability to legislate policy and allocate funding to rectify the condition of school facilities. Children in rural areas should not be victims of their geography.

The challenge for school financial policy reform is to address the problem of states with low capacity but high needs. Stating this concern as a question: Are state and federal policymakers, who have emphasized the needs of urban schools, able to effectively plan educational reforms which are fair, equitable, and adequate for rural schools? Rural communities and professional educators cannot be satisfied with the legislation that fails to reflect the needs and realities of educating students in rural schools.

Marshall (2000) in his examination of rural policy challenged state policymakers to determine whether a consensus could be developed on the structure and components of rural policy answering the needs of the following questions:

> Why is a separate rural policy needed? What is unique about rural places? What are the differences between different categories of rural and urban places? How can national policy accommodate dynamics and diverse conditions as well as policies at the regional, state, and local levels? Why is it in the national interest to have a national rural policy? What should be the main elements of rural policy? (p. 43)

These questions remain today as germane as when Marshal asked them in 2000 and need repetition until policy makers develop fair and equitable legislation to achieve rural parity.

Policy makers and those responsible for allocating funds have yet to reach consensus and develop a comprehensive definition of rural and why it is necessary to study rural issues as a distinct area of education. If 20% of the nation's children are receiving education in a rural school, this percentage should rival those students in urban systems and therefore garner parity in educational funding.

Funding

No single data source or information on the role of the federal government in funding or oversight of the nation's public school facilities exists (Filardo & O'Connell, 2010). Researchers glean this information from multiple sources to include, but not limited to, the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Census of Governments reports and other education, fiscal, and construction research and data sources.

The year 1965 was a significant benchmark year in educational funding. It marked the passage of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This legislation was the first partnership encompassing federal, state, and local governments to address the pressing national agenda for providing funding to the neediest students and schools in America. The use of federal monies was to supplement state and local funds, but only to fund special programs mandated at the federal level, such as special education and Title I and not for facilities (Debertin & Goetz, 1994). This continues to the present day with federal contributions to the states for capital expenses being less than 1% (Filardo, Cheng, Allen, Bar, & Ulsoy, 2010).

The federal government's constitutional hands-off declaration has resulted in variations across the states as to how they fund their educational programs (Johnson & Ingle, 2009). All states fund education with a combination of state and local tax dollars, with the exception of Hawaii, which funds all public schools with state tax revenues (Hughes 1998; Lawrence, 2001). Funding for public schools in the United States is derived primarily from state and local sources, with approximately half coming from local property taxes (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; Kenyon, 2007). Griffith and Fonda (2007) noted there are states making no funding contributions specifically for school facility maintenance or construction.

Debertin and Goetz (1994) found the distribution of state revenues varied widely with some states contributing 75% or more, others contributing less than half, and some mid-western and southern states contributing nothing relying heavily only on local tax dollars. The distribution of revenues reported in 1994 has not changed substantially over the last 15 years. Filardo et al. (2010) reported that 11 states paid no capital outlay to support school facilities. They identified these states as Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Having examined the critical funding levels that affect rural schools, Honeyman and Stewart (1985) conducted a study of the condition of facilities in rural and small schools in Kansas. Their investigation questioned: What is the current replacement cost index (RCI)? What is the cost of deferred maintenance (RCI_2)? Their sample included all 305 school districts in Kansas. The researchers obtained descriptive information on each

building to include the Original Cost (OC), Current Replacement Cost (CRC), and the Deferred Cost of Maintenance (DC).

The researchers identified a number of variables as appropriate for this study. The dependent variable selected for the analysis was RCI_2. The Pearson correlation coefficient indicated a positive and significant relationship to RCI_2 at the 0.05 level or greater for capital outlay, debt service, the level of understanding debt, and interest transferred to the capital fund. The condition of facilities, to include deferred maintenance, was significantly related to these methods commonly used to generate capital fund balances for school facilities ($r = .206$, $p <= 0.05$) (Honeyman & Stewart, 1985). The only variable entered into a multiple regression analysis CRI_2 was the level of outstanding debt. The result was that the level of outstanding debt was the best predictor of RCI_1 ($r = .634$, $p <= 0.05$). The researchers performed a final analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient comparing debt outstanding with other variables, which indicated a significant and positive correlation with debt service ($r = .890$, $p <= 0.05$), capital outlay ($r = .450$, $p <= 0.05$), general operating fund budget ($r = .315$, $p <= 0.05$), and taxable income. The strength of taxable income factor (0.3697), and its significance ($p = 0.009$) is important because support for the district generates through bonded elections that are factored on property value and wealth.

The authors observed local property wealth and the level of taxable income should be the primary determinants when addressing a school's ability to renovate or replace district buildings. The wealth of a school district does affect its ability to maintain its facilities (Honeyman & Stewart, 1985). The authors identify the factors whose correlation affects the ability of the school district to renovate or construct new facilities. Shown in this study is the disparity that exists between a wealthy district's ability to generate

revenues as being in sharp contrast to a poor district's inability to generate revenues given the structure of school funding in Kansas. The results suggest a direct relationship between taxable income of the community and the difficulties a community will have in passing a funding package in a bonded election.

Honeyman and Steward (1985) concluded needed are legislative changes to assist poor districts in repairing and replacing old facilities. The authors advocated for the development of new plans to support capital improvement programs in order to equalize the disparity in funding between wealthy and poor districts.

Hunter and Howley (1990) investigated possible solutions to the inadequate or non-existing funds for capital outlay projects. State and federal funding sources were available for operational expenses, such as teacher's salaries, transportation, and aid for instructional services for students identified as having special needs. Conversely, the schools had appropriated limited funding for capital projects. The authors found that 22 states did not provide facilities funding. Income levels and property levies were the mainstays for generating revenue for capital projects. Rural districts are not all poor, but there are situated in rural areas of the county with exceedingly low revenue rolls (Hunter & Howley, 1990).

State-mandated reforms have had a made a significant impact on the maintenance, renovation, or construction of school facilities. Wealthy districts can raise additional funds locally, but impoverished districts devote a disproportionate level of their budgets to operational expenses in an effort to implement state mandates (Hunter & Howley, 1990). The authors commented that wealth neutrality influences the availability of operational resources; local property tax revenues influence the quality of school facilities.

The authors addressed joint issues of adequacy and equity. The authors suggested that the achievement of adequacy may be difficult; the conditions of evaluation are, usually, under the regulation of state statute. The issue of equity is a comparative goal to adequacy, and the attainment of equity may be debatable amongst those who dispense and those who receive monies (Hunter & Howley, 1990).

Resolving issues concerning the loss of local control and the need to develop strong collaborative partnerships between local and state stakeholders are areas the authors discuss as being crucial if school facilities are to receive the necessary funding allocations in the pursuit of equity. Hunter & Howley (1990) pointed out the increase in litigation is a signal that the courts establish a link between capital outlay and the legal premise of adequacy and equity. If state policy is not introduced to correct funding formulas, poor districts will seek court decisions to neutralize their lack of property wealth to improve their districts.

The authors stressed the need for funding formula equalization to put both wealthy districts and poor districts in the position to offer educational programs that are adequate and equitable. The discussion of redress by the court system is misleading. Districts that are cash strapped and revenue poor cannot afford court battles. If associations or district coalitions can pool resources, they might be able to pursue redress in the courts. The battle is with state legislators, and while legislators recognize rural areas are resource poor and lack political clout, social and political advocacy may be more affordable routes to drive the need for change in state funding.

Howell and Miller (1997) authored a report on sources of funding for schools. While not specific to rural schools or facilities, it spoke to the general funding of public K-12 education from which revenues for facilities are derived. Howell and Miller (1997)

reiterated state constitutions require the provision for public schools. The authors acknowledged that variances exist in state education finance systems; the focus of their report was on commonalities, taxes, distribution, and assessment criteria for finance systems. In the 1995-96 report, Howell and Miller (1997) stated the average per pupil revenue was $6,853, with $6,103 being the average per pupil expenditure. The difference between revenues and expenditures was monies used for construction and debt retirement. For the period 1995-96, the national average for revenues from local taxes was 45%, from state governments 47.9%, and from the federal government 7.1% (Howell & Miller, 1997).

The Northeast and Islands Regional Education Laboratory at Brown University School ("School Facilities", 1997) reported facility funding has been traditionally a local responsibility; states have generally used two mechanisms to increase incentives for local voters to approve bond issues and to decrease funding disparities between districts. The first mechanism, debt service, is a process in which state offers grant money to help defer costs of paying interest on the bond. The purpose of this mechanism is to motivate local voters to pass a bond and use state funding monies. The second mechanism, a grant, is generally contingent upon local voters passing a referendum. The use of the grant is for state funding to cover construction costs.

The authors observed three details from the study ("School Facilities", 1997): both mechanisms, whether debt service or direct funding, are, usually, distributed in varying amounts, depending on the local ability to pay and other state priorities. State aid for school facilities has been a small percentage of local budgets. Aid for school facilities from the state is often times distributed on a sliding scale, determined to a degree by the district need. There are those who argue that this form of aid (sliding scale) is insufficient to

compensate for the inequalities in the distribution of property wealth ("School Facilities", 1997).

The "School Facilities" (1997) report cited instances in Arizona and Ohio where state funds were utilized to equalize disparities in the ability to finance capital expenditures between property-rich and property-poor districts. The experience or backlash in these states was that the efforts to achieve equity were met with protests from property-rich communities who were resentful that their tax dollars were being used for school facilities in other communities.

Hughes (1998) conducted a study examining school facility funding variations for all 50 states. The author presented an overview of how, nationally, states access local property value, demonstrating the large number of states that use accessed property evaluation. The author included in this study an in-depth analysis of Arkansas. The report presented a brief literature review of the challenges rural school districts encounter in facilities funding. The author presented an overview of the financing of school facilities, school district wealth, and the ensuing ability to pay. The study provided a synopsis of the capital outlays and debt service provided by each state. Hughes (1998) reported fifteen states have no state funding. The remaining states utilize equalization rates, state formulas or flat grants, debt service, leases, and building authorities. Only Hawaii offers full state funding for school facilities.

Hughes' (1998) analysis of Arkansas focused on a state highly rural in composition. In her report, Hughes (1998) found that Arkansas is one of the 15 states that did not provide substantial school funding for the 1997-98 School Year. The state only provides $10 million for general facilities funding. This level of funding is provided for 312 school

districts serving 400,000 students (Hughes, 1998). Rural Arkansas school districts generally have low student population numbers; consequently limited is revenue for renovation or construction project funding. Rural districts are likely to have both lower assessed property values or mill rates and resident ability to support local taxes. Subsequently, facilities funding based on local property wealth and local ability to pay results in inequities of what the district can provide. In Arkansas, where the aid formula is based on a per pupil expenditure the state's smallest district would only receive $531, 000, despite having 78% of its students receiving free or reduced lunches. Poor districts across the nation have little or no available funding for school facilities when the only available source of revenue is tied directly to their local property tax base (Hughes, 1998).

Hughes (1998) performed the analysis of data for the State of Arkansas using Bivariate Correlations to access facilities funding, school size, and borrowing power. The researcher showed the relationship between school facilities funding and school district size as being strong ($r = .94$). This measured indicated school districts enrolling greater numbers of students received increased funding as a factor of size. The relationship between the borrowing power for school facilities and per pupil expenditure was not significant ($r = .14$). The study also showed that borrowing power was inversely related to receiving free or reduced lunches. Hughes (1998) stated that when funding for facilities is calculated based on local property wealth and the local ability to pay, inequities will be the result. Hughes continued, observing the funding mechanism resulted in rural districts as having three distinct disadvantages: lower enrollment, lower property values, and lower ability to support property taxes. Hughes (1998) suggested solutions to funding equities:

(a) the state recognize local wealth and ability and equalize funds, and (b) the use of federal funds.

The Hughes report (1998) concluded both factors of size and local wealth worked against small school districts when the state did not equalize facilities funding. The author offered that state and or federal aid policies would have to assess individual districts size and local wealth to develop equitable funding formulas. Hughes (1998) found the use of property taxes to fund school facilities as regressive and perpetuating the existing inequities and inadequacies in rural funding.

Hughes (1998) introduced a concept some researchers advocate suggesting local income should be a measure of fiscal capacity to pay, rather than assessed property valuation. Hughes did not elaborate as to who these researchers were or the practical application of this concept into policy and practice. The pursuit of this concept and integration in this report potentially may have increased and supported her position in the analysis of school facility funding in Arkansas.

Dewees (1999) examined rural school buildings to gain an understanding of the requirements to upgrade facilities for the purpose of improving learning and teaching. It was stated by Dewees (1999) 54% of schools; buildings do not meet the standards of adequate learning facilities. The researcher identified funding for facilities as a critical issue. Dewees (1999) performed an information analysis using the U.S. GAO Studies 1995a, 1995b and 1996--which was a nationwide assessment of public elementary and secondary schools in rural and small towns. The GAO studies presented facts on the condition of buildings, particularly in rural areas and small towns for discussions on the

issue of rural education. The author utilized the GAO studies to support rural issues and challenges to improve facilities for teaching and learning.

Dewees (1999) reported funding as tying directly to enrollment, property value assessment, and citizens not willing or unable to pay for improvements. The author discussed new approaches to funding, placing an emphasis on the congressionally-authorized Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZABs). QZAB legislation makes funds available for school renovation projects.

All challenges in rural and small community schools in both growth and no-growth areas must be addressed to provide and maintain an appropriate infrastructure for new modes of instruction, learning approaches, and technology tools to improve learning and teaching (Dewees, 1999). To stop the deterioration of rural and small town schools, the author suggested collaborative intervention strategies amongst local, state and federal governments.

Dewees (1999) presented a critical evaluation of the nation's deplorable school conditions, identifying funding as the primary concern. While this may appear as being obvious, the author explained the reality of funding challenges in a rural environment as linked to enrollment, property value, and the ability of citizens to pay for improvements. The report was not an empirical study; however, it did expose rural issues and the challenges to improving facilities for teaching and learning. The study effectively stated the case for the expansion of a greater understanding of rural school facilities through the use of the GAO reports.

Mired in political debate is funding for school facilities. Because rural schools are small, in widely-dispersed and sparsely-populated areas, they are discounted in the

discussions (Pritchard, 2003). Pritchard (2003) continued, stating each state constitution requires the legislature to establish public schools and guarantee all children an education. In contrast to this, the author observed funding for school facilities has remained a local responsibility. There are states in which property-rich districts receive preferential advantages from funding formulas. In contrast, rural districts are regarded as a millstone around the necks of wealthier areas of the state (Pritchard, 2003). As a result, the quality of facilities varies significantly, and inequalities exist because of the differences in local ability to raise revenue. Schools, Pritchard (2003) observed across the nation, particularly rural schools, with revenue limitations struggle to renovate and construct schools.

Pritchard (2003) investigated equalizing school funding in an article about the characteristics of rural schools. He observed districts had built and maintained school facilities using funds often raised through taxes, bonds, or both. He noted depressed economics, lower property values, and insufficient tax bases were common in rural areas. The author pointed out rural poverty as being more prevalent than commonly thought. Of the 250 poorest counties in the nation, 244 were rural. Additionally, Pritchard (2003) observed there are rural communities having higher concentrations of minority students than urban schools. These factors, he contended, have converged to prevent new construction, as well as regular maintenance needed for older structures.

Pritchard (2003) noted rural schools are in need of repair after decades of deferred maintenance. The author referenced the survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Lewis, Snow, Farris, Smerdon, Cronen, & Kaplan, 2000), which stated that 78% of rural schools reported the need to spend money on repairs, renovation, or modernization to achieve good overall condition of their facilities. Of this 78%, only 36%

of these same schools reported plans to perform essential maintenance on their existing school facilities (Lewis et al., 2000). A report issued in 2014 (Alexander & Lewis, 2014) indicated an improvement in the percentage of rural schools requiring work. The current percentage is 53%, a 25% drop in the number from the previous report. The report indicated 52% (roughly one-half) of the 53% needing repairs, renovation, or modernization have long range plans to complete such work in the next 2 years.

Pritchard (2003) reported political action targeting rural school funding is not addressed as a result of rural schools being small, in sparsely populated regions, and widely dispersed geographic areas. He commented there were state funding formulas that view rural schools as an economic liability, resultantly favoring property-rich schools. He continued and noted there are eleven states that require local communities to bear the entire brunt of facility costs. The inequity in school funding resulted in legal challenges in 45 states, to include high-profile cases in Arkansas, Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Wyoming (Pritchard, 2003). Pritchard (2003) noted that success in court has sometimes proven to be a double-edged sword. Winning has resulted in changes to funding formulas; it has also led to consolidation that eliminated community school districts that fought for equity. The author named Arkansas and West Virginia as two states with legislatures choosing to consolidate rural schools significantly. He identified West Virginia as having consolidated over 25% of the state's rural school districts. These policy changes to funding include requiring minimum student populations and acreage requirements forcing small rural community schools into consolidation (Pritchard, 2003).

Pritchard (2003) stated rural schools often are small and community-centered, with improved academic outcomes, increased graduation rates, fewer discipline problems, and fiscally competent in contrast to urban counterparts. In support of rural schools, the author made a number of conclusions and recommendations for funding rural schools. First, states need to realign funding formulas away from solely relying on local funding to support facilities. Next, states should recognize the unique characteristic of rural schools, noting rural schools do not have the economic capability to build, maintain, or sustain facilities requisite for high standards and federal mandates. Finally, Pritchard stated policymakers need to consider the purpose and place rural schools hold in their respective communities when developing funding formulas for facilities that impact the opportunity for equal education for all students.

Pritchard (2003) stressed the need for reform in school funding policy, and he emphasized a close and mutually beneficial link between the rural school district and the community. He urged policymakers to be cognizant of the qualities and circumstances that make a rural school unique. The article, however, comes up substantially short in the fact that the author offers no action plan to affect change. Stressing the link between school and community is important, but without a strategic plan to influence policy makers and state legislatures this article becomes another in a series of restatements of the plight of rural schools offering no tangible remedies.

Johnson and Ingle (2009) reported that 41 states use foundation aid programs to fund public education, but not all states fund capital projects. They stated these formulas were designed, so property-poor districts receive more aid than wealthy districts. Although 41 states have foundation formulae, the composition of the foundation varies

widely from state to state. The authors observed six states use a guaranteed tax base, and two states use flat grants. Johnson and Ingle (2009) pointed to Hawaii as being unique in that it has one statewide school district. Funding is derived from local, state, and federal sources in varying percentages. Resultantly, school finding systems appear considerably different from state to state.

Johnson and Ingle (2009) set forth three advantages of the property tax: (a) stable tax (not as variable as state income or sales taxes), (b) visible tax (direct correlation of educational services to costs), and (c) related to community involvement and achievement. Conversely, the authors offered two disadvantages to property tax. One is that property taxes are not an accurate measure of wealth, which is to say that taxes and measures of wealth are not related to income. Two, the property tax can result in disparities in funding levels with property wealthy districts realizing more money for schools even if they tax at a lower rate than property-poor districts.

Johnson and Ingle (2009) stated the use of state aid may mitigate such spending inequalities and the tax burden on the poor and elderly. The authors offered a state school funding program may alleviate the wide disparities between property wealthy and property-poor districts ability to generate revenue by reducing the reliance on local property theorizing a fair and equitable disbursement from the state to aid districts. Johnson and Ingle (2009) cautioned that the adoption of state aid as an alternative to the local property tax may not be an advantage. They identified the following as disadvantages: loss of control over the amount of revenue received; vulnerability to reductions in state aid and policy changes; less community involvement in schools with

reliance becoming contingent upon the state; potentially lower levels of student achievement resulting from the detachment of local funding; and the loss of local control.

Johnson and Ingle (2009) advised further study before replacing local property taxes with state aid programs. They suggested a review of possible policy options to mitigate the impact of property taxes. One possible option is property tax circuit breakers that provide tax relief to low-income and the elderly whose taxes exceed a certain percentage of income. A second option was property tax deferral programs that allow eligible homeowners the option of delaying the payment of property taxes until their home is sold, or the estate is settled. Additionally, a third option would be to use tax effort incentives providing an incentive to districts that support their local district beyond their ability to pay. The concept for this policy, the authors share, is that if paying local taxes strengthens the connection between the local community and its schools, then the property tax policy should also support the connection.

Looking at the nation as a whole, Filardo, Cheng, Allen, Bar, and Ulsoy (2010) reported 37 states did not have a facilities plan, 17 states had no facilities standards, and only 11 states had an office dedicated to facilities. Only two states, Kentucky and Ohio, and the District of Columbia had all three: a plan, standards, and a facilities entity (Filardo et al., 2010). At the federal level, there are only 2 financing programs specifically dedicated to rural K-12 public schools in existence: Rural and Community Facilities Program Direct Loans and Rural Community Facilities Program Loan Guarantees, with a combined allocation of $1.1 billion dollars funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

The U.S. Department of Education (2009) released a summation of ARRA detailing the legislation's designed intent to stimulate the economy, create jobs, support states and school districts, and advance reforms and improvements for pre-K-12 students and for post-secondary education. The bill designated $25 billion for upgrades to existing public school buildings. Directed to the nation's 100 largest school districts was the sum of $10 billion, with $15 billion allocated to the states. The states were to have the flexibility to fund additional high-need districts, including rural schools. Federally, ARRA funds were allocated through fiscal year 2011 and distributed primarily through Title 1, Parts A and B; IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), Part B and C; Child Care Block Grant; and Head Start. State distribution of monies was through State Educational Technology Grants and State Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

In September 2011, the White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2011) released a briefing entitled, *Fact Sheet: Repairing and Modernizing America's Schools*. Later in the same month, President Obama submitted to the House of Representatives the American Jobs Act, legislation designed to stimulate infrastructure development, spur economic growth, generate jobs, and prevent layoffs of teachers and public safety workers. The American Jobs Act never became law; one month later in October, political opposition blocked the bill in the Senate.

Funding for Rural New York State Schools

In 1795, the New York Legislature passed a law authorizing the establishment and funding of a system of common schools ("School District", 2008). The first state aid authorization allotted 20,000 pounds per annum for five years to support schools (Folts, 1996). Local tax revenues supplemented this state aid, providing the then existing 1,500

neighborhood schools with funding (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008). The Legislature, in 1800, ended the program and declared proceeds from a statewide lottery would be used to provide funding for common schools ("School District", 2008). In 1822, the lottery was suspended having been declared illegal (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008).

"School Districts" (2008) recorded the following events from the early 1800s. To assist in the support of common schools, the Legislature established a fund in 1805; the state raised monies for this fund through the sale of state lands and other assets. In 1812, the Legislature authorized a statewide system of common schools. The state distributed interest earned from the common school fund as aid statewide to schools. This authorization established the funding of public education as a shared state and local responsibility (Folts, 1996; "School Districts", 2008).

New York State's economy in the early years of the 19th century was by and large agrarian. An agrarian economy dictated school sessions being convened around the cycles of planting and harvesting. Folts (1996) chronicled the following history of early state aid in New York State. Consistent with the principles of an agrarian economy, the distribution of state aid to common was to schools in session at least three months of the year (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008). Aid disbursement was calculated using the school population of students between 5–15 years of age. Town or county property taxes were used to match state school aid for the total operating budget.

In 1814, the state determined if the cost of instruction exceeded revenues from both property tax receipts and state aid, then a tuition charge, commonly referred to as a rate or rate bill was accessed for each student and paid by the parents ("School District",

2008; “Rural”, 2009). Rate bills created an inequality of opportunity for poor children; they were unable to attend schools for lack of ability to pay the tuition charge (“School District”, 2008; “Rural”, 2009).

This situation continued until 1849 when yielding to pressure from a concerned citizenry, a state statute provided for tuition-free common schools (Folts, 1995; “School District”, 2008; “Rural”, 2009). The statute of 1849 gave, for the first time, school districts the authority to levy property taxes for both school construction and instruction (Folts, 1995; “School District”, 2008; “Rural”, 2009). The New York Court of Appeals declared the 1849 law to be illegal.

In 1851, the Legislature repealed the law, nullifying the authority. The local tax levy provision to raise funds for school construction did, however, remain valid (Folts, 1996). Rate bills in union-free districts were not abolished until 1864. The guarantee for a free public primary and secondary education was not realized for the next five decades, until the New York State Constitution was amended in 1894 to read, “The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a system of free common schools, wherein all the children of this State may be educated” (Folts, 1996; “School District”, 2008).

Between 1870 and 1900 total state aid was increased approximately 50%, while local contributions derived from taxes increased by 240% (Folts, 1996). Post-1900, the state’s aid to school districts was from disbursements from the state’s general fund. The state established a system of quotas, which set fixed amounts of money irrespective of the size or wealth of a district (“School District”, 2008). The quota system, by 1929, had expanded to encompass 40 different classifications of quotas to include teachers, city

superintendents, high schools, village superintendents, and vocational/agriculture teachers (Folts, 1996). After the application of quota monies, average daily attendance (ADA) and school-age population were calculated to complete the state aid allocation (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008). In 1902, the state abandoned ADA, and for the first time in New York State a sliding scale depending on assessed valuation became a part of the aid formula ("School District", 2008). ADA was reintroduced in 1925 and remains to this day (Folts, 1996).

The equalization formula introduced in 1902 was inadequate, and school tax increases soared. The state Legislature in 1917 abolished the thousands of common school districts and formed township units (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008; "School", 2013). The forming of the township system coupled with the post-World War I agricultural depression caused a crisis in school finance. State taxpayers protested, and the state scrapped the township system the following year ("School District", 2008; "School", 2013).

The state aid system of quotas was unable to cope with the rapid fluctuations of inflation and deflation, and poor districts bore the brunt of this fiscal crisis (Folts, 1996). In the 1920s, the state launched a number of studies investigating school finance. Among these, the Friedsam Commission concluded state aid be increased and provide for the equalization of aid to poor districts ("School Districts", 2008). The Cole-Rice Law of 1925 initiated minimum statewide standards of equalization to all schools ("School District", 2008). The law provided financial incentives for the formation of central rural school districts that the Central Rural Schools Act authorized in 1914. The Cole-Rice Law allocated 50% transportation aid and 25% building aid. These increases in aid

provided vehicles of growth for centralization during the depression of the 1930s ("School Districts", 2008).

New York State preserved the Cole-Rice Law until 1962 when the Diefendorf Commission recommended the enactment a new state aid formula ("School Districts" 2008). The resulting legislation authorized an even distribution of aid to be generated from between the state and local revenues, and providing more aid for less wealthy districts (Folts, 1996). The Diefendorf Commission directed that the aid be given in four categories: operations, buildings, transportation, and size correction ("School District", 2008). The effects of the Diefendorf equalization provisions were diminished to a degree by changes in aid for disadvantaged and disabled students and the inclusion of hold-harmless provisions for schools encountering enrollment declines and increases in poverty (Folts, 1996).

The New York State school finance system came under scrutiny of the Fleischmann Commission of 1969-72, which recommended a complete state takeover for the financing of public schools (Folts, 1996; "School District", 2008). The state legislature tinkered with modifications to the existing state aid formulas until 1978, when the court's found that the state system did not provide equal protection under the law to all students ("Board of Regents", 2008). In 1982, the Court of Appeals reversed the decision, deferring to the Legislature's constitutional responsibility to finance public education (Folts, 1996).

The subsequent years since 1982 have seen a number of modifications to the state's funding mechanisms. The old ADA calculations were revised to become RWADA (resident weighted average daily attendance), which provides general aid to school

districts (School District", 2008). Additional modifications have included: aid to students with compensatory needs (1974), excess costs for students with handicapping conditions (1976, 1980), supplemental aid to districts having low personal income (1980), and for students with limited English proficiency (1982) ("School District", 2008).

In general, facilities funding in New York State has gone through a series of modifications with no definitive state policy adopted. In 1997, put on the ballot was a school facilities bond act proposal; it failed (BEST, 2005). In FY 2000 and FY 2001, the New York State Legislature appropriated $195 million for Rebuilding Schools to Uphold Education (RESCUE) (BEST, 2005). The BEST Collaborative (2005) made the following observations of the RESCUE legislation. The state allocates money through the Building Aid Account. The Building Aid account covers debt service costs for districts or direct costs if they have not borrowed funds. Distributed slowly then are monies through the Building Aid office with more money going to less needy school districts than to needy ones. The distribution of funds is on a formula derived from property taxes, which favored the wealthiest districts irrespective of size. This formula had been modified over the years; the BEST Collaborative (2005) offered the ratio is not an accurate reflection of the need.

In 2004, the Governor of New York proposed to increase state aid to $14.6 billion coupled with a reform package (BEST, 2006). The BEST (2006) report provided information from which the following brief synopsis of events post-2004 is derived. The funding increase derivation was primarily from lottery revenue. The state legislature did not pass the proposed package. The legislature then added $506 million dollars to the General Fund, resulting in a net increase of $750 million from the previous year. The

legislature failed to pass the General Fund proposal as well. The legislature at that time was awaiting the release of a report by the New York Court of Appeals concerning the financing of New York City schools. When the report was issued, the Court of Appeals ruled it was the constitutional obligation of the state to provide students with a sound basic education. The court upheld the state's position, and New York City Schools were awarded 1.93 billion (Education Law Center, 2006).

The last comprehensive attempt at school finance reform in New York State was the passage of The State Budget and Reform Act of 2007 (Education Law Center, 2014). Rebell (2011) made following observations of the 2007 Act. The intent of this legislation was to provide New York City and high-need school districts throughout the state an increase of $5.5 billion in basic state aid foundation funding. The phase-in was to be accomplished over a four-year period. Rebell (2011) pointed out that the end of the period of four years, the increased funding had not been forthcoming, and any gains made in the prior four years would be nullified. Compounding the lack of funding, which had been prescribed in the 2007 legislation, aid to schools was further reduced by the state enacted Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) introduced in the 2010-2011 fiscal year. The GAP legislation reduces the state's overall budget by cutting aid to schools. This cut is divided proportionally among all schools throughout the state and is reflected as a reduction in school district state aid. The currently prevailing state aid funding remains as it did at the close of the 2012-2013 Academic Year leaving districts behind levels from 2006-07 (Education Law Center, 2014).

Equity and Adequacy

Rural districts with sparse populations are vulnerable to population shifts and diminishing real property value. These factors affect the local tax base and the subsequent tax rate, often causing a reluctance of taxpayers to pass school bonds and budgets. As a result of funding, the quality of schools varies significantly. Inequities are often the result of differences in local fiscal capacity, state funding formulas, and legislative priorities.

Despite studies demonstrating the importance of quality facilities, a number of barriers impact the efforts to build and maintain schools. Typically, the local school board, other local officials, or the citizens directly set the property tax rate. This system of local control has led to dramatic differences between wealthy and poor communities where school funding is, usually, dependent on the relative property wealth of the surrounding community (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). Pointing out the differences were Biddle and Berliner (2002) in funding mechanism and contributions existing among states, school districts, and schools within the same district. Dayton (1998) recognized children attend under-funded rural schools, live in poverty, and experience high educational needs. This article looks at funding inequities and inadequacies and the legal, political, and fiscal ramifications affecting rural funding. The author cited the court case of Serrano v. Priest (Cal. 1971) as a watershed decision affecting school funding. This California case challenged the constitutionality of the public school funding systems.

After the Serrano v. Priest case, the filing of additional lawsuits in federal and state supreme courts has been to address rural school funding. Dayton (1998) observed litigation between inner-city and suburban schools has dominated the equity discussions with rural schools receiving less attention. The reason for this lack of attention Dayton

(1998) noted is attributable to geographic isolation and the marginal representation of rural schools in the political process.

Dayton (1998) revealed a long history of funding inequities, observing that there are courts reluctant to intervene in school funding controversies or do not directly deal with the concerns of rural schools. The author observed that votes and wealth are the mainstays of political power, and rural areas are deficient in these power essentials. Hampering rural schools seeking redress of funding inequities through the legislative process is their comparatively weak political status giving them a limited voice in funding debates (Dayton, 1998).

Odden (2003) investigated the issues of equity and adequacy in his 2003 study of school finance. The author stated that education policy for the last twenty years had focused on standards-based reform with the goal of educating students to higher achievement levels. The goal of educating students is outcomes-orientated and requires elements of equity and excellence (Odden, 2003). The shift from standards to outcomes represents a fundamental change in school finance policy requiring focus upon fiscal disparities caused by the unequal distribution of the local property tax base (Odden, 2003).

In the course of the study Odden (2003), noted a shift from fiscal equity to fiscal adequacy. The author stated for standards-based education reform the benchmark for school finance is whether it provides adequate revenues per pupil for districts and schools to deploy educational strategies that are successful in educating students to higher achievement levels.

Odden (2003) observed that states select one of the four methodologies to identify both the adequate funding levels and sufficient adjustments for variance in student and

school needs to determine total expenditures per pupil. Briefly, the four methodologies the author addressed were:

1. The successful district approach. This approach is based on the identification of successful districts achieving standard proficiency, and setting the adequacy level at the weighted average expenditures of those districts.
2. The cost function approach. Utilizing regression analysis with expenditure per pupil as the dependent variable and student and district characteristics, as well as desired performance levels as independent variables, with the results producing an adequate expenditure per pupil for the average district.
3. The professional judgment approach. Using educational experts to identify effective educational strategies for all K-12 students, and then develop supporting delivery components, assign a price for each component, and then from the aggregate to determine a total expenditure per pupil.
4. An evidence-based approach. The approach identifies research or evidence-based educational strategies, assigns costs, and then totals to determine spending levels for districts and the state.

To date, across the nation, researchers favor no single methodology of calculating adequate spending. Projections indicate there will be a substantial requirement for an increase in educational funding, and the conduct each methodology will be from the perspective of the state to determine the adequate expenditure level for each district (Odden, 2003).

According to Odden (2003) the adequacy approach to school funding will produce equity gains as the level of resources increases. The author concluded the shift from equity

to adequacy requires a definitive connection between funding provided to schools and the results achieved by students. The article failed to address the issue of where the money comes from. If property taxes are not adequate, and state finance formulas undergo no overhauling and amending, the methodologies Odden presents, conversely, may become of increasing importance to maximize the utilization of decreasing budget dollars.

Toutkoushian and Michael (2007) observed that during the past 30 years, educational policymakers and researchers have been concerned with designing funding formulas that distribute revenues equitably to public schools. The authors described funding formulas as the prescribed total revenues needed by the school district to provide basic educational services and the shares of revenue generated locally through local property taxes. The state is then responsible for supplemental funding for the difference between local revenue and total revenues. In reality, the authors observed that states make adjustments in aid programs for both traditional high-risk, physically and developmentally disabled students, and for particular groups of students such as those in ESL (English as a Second Language) programs. Toutkoushian and Michael (2007) stated that adjustments to funding formulas were sometimes made in response to legal challenges. Claimants asserted levels of funding were dependent on the wealth of the community and not cognizant of a community's ability to generate revenues.

Filardo, Cheng, Allen, Bar, and Ulsoy (2010) reported, while there have been challenges to address issues of adequacy and equity in state funding of public education with respect to operating budgets, which constitute funds used for regularly reoccurring costs, (e.g. teacher salaries, administrators, instructional supplies, and utilities). They noted there have been fewer challenges in regards to adequate and equitable capital

outlay, (e.g. building systems, new construction, renovations, and the acquisition of buildings and land). They observed the existence of wide variances in state spending for school district educational facilities. Filardo et al. (2010) reported 12 states contribute nothing to local districts for capital expenses. The states without capital spending provisions are: Indiana, Lousiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Filardo et al., continued stating 14 contribute less than 20%, 12 states contribute 20% to 50%, 10 states paid out over 50%, and three states and the District of Columbia contribute 100%.

District funding systems supported by a high level of dependence on property taxes have contributed to states having inequitable education programs (Lambert, 2011). Lambert referenced the 1971 case of Serrano v. Priest in California as a case which pioneered judicial decisions in the efforts to achieve equity in school district funding. The court ruling established the principle of equal funding to achieve equal learning (Lambert, 2011).

In the continuing effort to establish equity, researchers raised issues of adequacy. Lambert (2011) described adequacy as the funding amount required to secure a quality education for all students. The author continued saying, "There is no universal definition of adequacy" (Lambert, 2011, p. 2). He offered the following as possible measures of adequacy: state laws for accountability, standard scores of proficiency, or an analysis of the funding amounts needed to provide an adequate education using the metrics of the state education system and students' educational needs as parameters.

Summary

The funding and quality of school facilities differ dramatically, and inequities are often the result of limited local fiscal capacity. Districts with diminished property value in rural and urban districts tend to be the most adversely affected. The inequities are the result of states abdicating their responsibilities to provide equity and adequacy in school funding. There are states that do not make adjustments for the differences in the local ability to contribute to student needs. Additionally, there are 12 states making no provisions for preventative or routine facilities maintenance. Consequently, this challenges communities struggling to provide baseline services for school building needs and can only contemplate upgrades or new construction as a result of limited state funding.

Despite the research connecting quality facilities and increased student achievement, barriers continue to exist, preventing efforts to build and maintain schools. State funding systems that limit financial support and "provide incentives to build schools cheaply and defer maintenance" (Hunter, 2006, p. 1) are disingenuous and not conducive to creating quality learning environments. Rural districts face the challenges of sparse populations, remoteness, and political isolation when attempting to influence state policies for educational funding, especially for school facilities. As a result, impacted negatively are thousands of students each day nationwide as they attend school in facilities that are dated and deteriorating.

Placed before state courts have been lawsuits to grieve, seek resolution, and eradicate inequities in school funding. Issues of equity and adequacy have and will continue to exist, whether at the district, state, or federal levels if funding formulas do not accept and reflect the unique characteristics of rural schools.

Research Literature

The gap in the literature is wide and deep when seeking qualitative or quantitative empirical research directed at rural school facilities. Research conducted to identify appropriate material for this literature review revealed a disproportionate number of studies and articles with classifications such as anecdotal, information analysis, or reports and assessments. These works run the gamut from substantive and valuable to increasing one's understanding of rural facility issues while additionally offering valid recommendations and practices for readers to a plethora of op-ed pieces.

Helge (1986), to chronicle research specific to rural priorities, conducted the first national effort to develop an all-encompassing empirical agenda. Helge (1986) observed the diverse and unique complexities of rural schools needs and the necessity to develop an agenda for research to improve rural education. The author stated that a significant impediment to rural education research was a lack of a clear and definitive definition of rural. Continuing the observation, Helge (1986) noted that federal departments, educators, and professional organizations not having a singular definition for rural was a root cause for insufficient data resources.

Helge (1986) identified two objectives of the study. The first objective was to access rural educators, in both general and special education, to establish research priorities. The second objective was to determine if location, position, and institution were factored in research priorities. To investigate the objectives, Helge (1986) identified two key research variables: population density and geography. Interfacing with these 2 variables was the inclusion of 19 variables the author collectively referred to as other community and district variables. The author postulated that the interaction between these

variables would individualize and distinguish one given community or grouping from another.

The National Rural and Small Schools Consortium developed the survey Helge (1986) used. Helge mailed 1,500 surveys to rural educators, administrators, and researchers selected to be representative of the nation. Returned questionnaires numbered 461 for a return rate of 30.73%; 273 were general educators, and 188 were special educators. The researcher received responses from state education agencies, educational service units, and research and development centers. Colleges, universities, and public schools employed respondents.

The researcher constructed the survey with two response columns. The survey results in the first column identified nine clusters. The author calculated the means for each cluster, and he ranked the clusters by their means from highest to lowest. Column two results identified the top three questions in each cluster from column one and were ranked by means with the most important first followed by the second and third most important to the field.

Helge (1986) derived a series of implications from the data:

1. Federal Government: support research to determine what constitutes equity, routinely and efficiently collect data, promote partnerships with all stakeholders (universities, public schools, and state education agencies).
2. State Agencies: all states should have a designated entity dedicated to improving rural education.

3. Institutions of Higher Learning: research and results school should be linked to rural schools, results from research should be incorporated into education and training programs.
4. Rural Schools and Students: develop effective partnerships between public schools, and universities, state agencies, and the private sector.
5. Data Dissemination: schools and researchers should continually be encouraged to share relevant information and data.

In the methodology of the study, given was no criterion for an acceptable return rate. A response rate of 30.73% raises concerns of non-response bias and actual response rate as a guide to the representativeness of the sample. Babbie (1998) considered "[a] response rate of 50% to be adequate . . . 60 % is good and 70% very good" (p. 262). Babbie theorized that a high response rate decreases the likelihood of significant response bias, and a low response rate may indicate characteristics of non-respondents are different from those who did respond. Babbie (1998) stated, "Survey research is generally weak on validity and strong on reliability" (p. 274).

The analysis performed in the study was one of calculating sample means and then ranking those means on a high to low scale. There was no evidence given of a more sophisticated analytical procedure for the survey. Helge (1986) claimed the analysis of variance as a strong indicator that researchers and people working in rural education were in agreement in prioritizing the importance of rural research issues. The strength of this study is that it was the first to identify a national database for establishing rural research priorities. The low response rate may be the result of extemporary factors but does render the validity of the results suspect.

There is a shortage of dedicated rural education research. In 2001, Sherwood recognized a lack of research dedicated to rural schools as being a significant factor in educational policy making. The author continued his critique of the character of current studies as being misunderstood, underfunded, and not encouraging. Sherwood (2001) further stated rural education has not been a priority of the national education agenda, and that, when studied, the results have failed to identify adequately, and address needs specific to rural communities. The author contended the problems associated with research were further exasperated by the inability of researchers to shed their urban biases, often causing a fixation on the negative and not fairly identifying or considering assets.

Sherwood (2001) looked at the Department of Education and the Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI) and noted the lack of funding for rural research. The author questioned the current adequacy of the funds to meet the research needs of rural schools and communities. The monies for rural education research are limited when compared to the magnitude of the importance of rural research (Sherwood, 2001).

Sherwood (2001) outlined six challenges to conducting rural research:

1. The lack of definition between urban and rural.
2. The lack of academic appeal, or the overshadowing of the high profile urban research.
3. The lack of networking by professionals in rural education.
4. The scarcity of professionals committing careers to the study of rural education.
5. The lack of consensus regarding the role of rural education and where it fits the national education scheme.

6. Rural lacks the urgency attached to urban by policy makers.

In his critique, Sherwood (2001) emphasized the need for a better definition of rural, citing that rural has forms and demographic meanings not falling into the U.S. Bureau of the Census guidelines. Deliberation on rural research is entangled "in demographics, politics, and diminishing returns" (Sherwood, 2001, p. 161). To attract research goals, funding is necessary. Sherwood discussed the OERI Field-Initiated Studies (FIS) Program identifying policy which discourages grants to targeted groups, preferring to reward those studies regarded as having national significance. Sherwood (2001) pointed out that there are no national programs focusing specifically on issues of rural education.

Sherwood (2001) observed that without strong advocacy from within the Department of Education and Congress rural education will continue to remain on the fringe of policy and funding decisions. In concluding Sherwood, contritely remarked that the intent to serve rural communities and their schools without monitored funding does little good.

Sherwood (2001) pointed the finger directly at Washington, D. C. and its policymakers for not adopting a more aggressive stance on the promotion of rural education research. The author urged reform and a designation of rural as an area of study worthy to stand on its own with appropriate federal assistance to carry out meaningful research. While Sherwood called for reform in the structure of organizations charged with rural education research; however, he offered no strategies other than the call for advocacy. The article was very explicit about the lack of rural research, the need for funds to conduct meaningful research, and where those funds should be coming from.

Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2005) conducted a search of the ERIC and PsycINFO databases for research studies of K-12 rural education research penned between 1991 and 2003. The researchers observed school leaders are seeking research-based information to improve student outcomes in rural areas. The purpose of the research was to identify topics in rural education research literature, evaluate the quality of this research, and outline the future agenda for research on rural education (Arnold et al., 2005). The study was composed of two questions:

The researchers employed a comparative research design model and the quality of research criteria developed by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) in Aurora, Colorado, to review and evaluate the problem (Arnold et al., 2005). The authors divided report into three sections. Arnold et al. first identified topics in rural education and examined relative frequency; second, they addressed the quality of rural education research; third, they presented a summary of rural education literature. The researcher's initial database for the comparison consisted of 716 abstracts; 218 were eliminated for not meeting research criteria of being a journal published and with a topic addressing K-12 rural education. They coded the remaining 498 according to the primary focus and then merged them into similar groupings by topic (Arnold et al. 2005).

From their abstracts review, Arnold et al. (2005), observed two methods in which research was conducted: first, studies were conducted specially for rural education issues, and second, studies were conducted in a rural context. Studies specific to rural education were coded as "Rural Specific" (66%, n=330), and studies in the rural context were coded as "Rural Context Only" (34%, n=168).

Arnold et al. (2005) observed there were 10 topics referenced repeatedly. They then examined each topic further for subtopics with four or more associated abstracts. The 10 topics were: Programs and strategies for students with special needs, Instruction, School safety and discipline, Student life and work planning, Factors influencing academic achievement, Student's attitudes and behaviors, Education Leadership, Staff recruitment and retention, Teacher preparation and professional development, and Teacher's beliefs and practices (Arnold et al., 2005). The authors organized 210 of the 498 abstracts (42%) into 5 clusters: Student Growth and Development, Teaching and Learning, Organization of Schooling, Schools and Communities, and Education Policy.

The authors ascertained the quality of rural education research using a comparative method defined by the authors (Arnold et al., 2005) as being of the broadest sense of contrasting and comparing circumstances and groups. This comparative examined studies using single group pretest-posttest, causal-comparative, quasi-experimental, and experimental methods. The researchers found no experimental studies using randomized designs using treatment or control groups; they identified 222 studies using quasi-experimental and causal-comparative designs as the strongest studies. They assigned these 222 studies a 0 to 4 point rating on 8 dimensions of the Quality of Research criteria developed my McREL. Then, they assigned numbers to rankings, from 0 to 26, with 22 to 26 points being the highest quality range. The authors' criteria evaluated (a) construct validity of the intervention, (b) fidelity of implementing the intervention, (c) construct validity of the outcome measures, (d) internal validity of the participant assignment, (e) contamination threats to internal validity, (f) sampling threats to external validity, (g)

external validity-testing within subgroups, and (h) statistical validity as evidenced by effect size estimation and completeness of reporting (Arnold et al., 2005, p. 9).

The authors conceded, "Of the 222 articles reviewed, less than half (n=106) met the requirement of using a comparative research design…." (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005, p. 10). Stated as a result of this analysis Arnold, et.al (2005) determined database records were not a true representation of what is summarized in search engines and abstracts. The authors reported the 116 studies deemed as non-comparative were in fact observations and not comparisons.

Arnold et al. (2005) stated the results of this review reveal only a limited quantity of research can be considered accurate and acceptable to advise policy and practice on rural education issues. They identified no topic of sufficient interest; the authors observed policymakers and practitioners are unable to make a decision with a high degree of confidence for any given intervention (Arnold et al., 2005).

The rural education research agenda crafted by McREL includes nine priority topics:

1. Opportunity to learn:
1. School size and student achievement
2. Teacher quality
3. Administrator quality
4. School district capacity
5. School finance
6. Local control and alternate organizational structures
7. School choice

8. Community and parent aspirations and expectations. (Arnold et al., 2005 p.16)

The study concluded with Arnold et al. (2005) recognizing that the creation of reliable and valid rural research will require dedicated efforts by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. The authors identified three areas as crucial points for rural research to be successful: research is conducted in a variety of areas, important differences existing between rural areas and urban or suburban areas need to be recognized, and the relationship between rural schools and their communities.

The authors evaluated no qualitative studies; they identified the preponderance of rural research as descriptive, and this study did not evaluate descriptive rural research (Arnold et al., 2005). They offered that qualitative research has a set of rigorous research methodology. It appears that this omission of qualitative research in and of itself contributes to the gap in the literature and lack of understanding issues in rural education.

Of particular interest to me is the lack of literature addressing facility concerns. Arnold et al. (2005) recorded the following distributions. The Schools and Communities Cluster recorded only 15 of 44 studies investigating School and Community Issues. The Education Policy Cluster (n=30) yielded nine in School Finance and 11 in Consolidation. The Organization of Schooling (n=18) recorded seven studies addressing Shared Decision making. The sum of 42 studies from these clusters did not yield any focused on facilities. Topics such as grade configuration, evaluation of services for Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) students, enrollment status, and school closings, while all are marginally related, none addressed rural facility issues.

Summary

The review of the literature for this case study revealed a need for continued research in all areas affecting rural schools. A consistent definition of rural, or rather the lack thereof, is a theme played out in the literature. This lack of a definition is linked to the quantity, and more importantly the quality, of rural research (Arnold et al., 2005; Helge, 1986; Sherwood, 2001).

At this time, there appears to be a continuing gap in rural research, particularly in the area of policy studies and specifically facilities. This gap has been precipitated by the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001(ESEA) – or No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which mandated all states to develop standards-based reform models for education. NCLB legislated achievement and accountability goals for the nation's schools. This alignment of goals focused research to be conducted in the areas of academic standards, highly qualified teachers, English language proficiency, learning environment (safe and drug-free schools and not facilities), graduation rates, and career readiness during the last ten year period. As the spotlight dimmed on NCLB, the issues once associated with this legislation have now been supplanted by concerns of measures of student success, the common core curriculum, and teacher accountability.

The U.S. Department of Education (2012) requested each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to submit a waiver to request flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). To be granted a waiver, the requesting state must develop "rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction

(U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 1). In 2013, 44 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education submitted requests for waivers; 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico were approved (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). One year later, as of December 2014, five states had not applied for the waiver (Vermont, Nebraska, North Dakota, Montana, and California), and under review were two states (Iowa, Wyoming), and the Bureau of Indian Education. The remaining 43 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have been approved for the flexibility waiver (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Review of Literature Summary

The literature reviewed and presented in this chapter focused on developing an understanding of rural as a unique concept, separate and apart from studies of urban and suburban schools. The literature reviewed introduced rural schools and rural communities as not the idyllic stereotype framed by geography and nostalgia, but as entities beset today by critical issues of wide disparities in school funding resultantly affecting equity and adequacy of providing school facilities for the safe delivery of educational services**.**

The challenges rural schools face to provide cost-effective, quality instruction to meet rising standards and expectations for student achievement are the responsibility of the local school boards. Compounding their decisions is the current state of affairs in which rural communities are experiencing economic decline, and resultantly are losing people, jobs, and local and state revenues, creating a special set of challenges. Consequently, rural districts are experiencing declines in school enrollments, course offerings (curricula), staffing, transportation, and infrastructure support.

Facility funding is nonexistent without policy. As revealed in the literature review, rural school facilities cannot be built or maintained without consistent revenue dollars and funding formulas that are equitable in the distribution of monies for school buildings. With the exception of a handful of states, which are predominantly rural, states, as evidenced in the literature, will be compelled either legislatively or through the courts to move from an urban-centric perspective and adopt systematic change in funding. Changes in funding will require value-added reform strategies supported by state funding policy to address equity, adequacy, and environmental conditions rural schools. When all is said and done at the state level, it is the local school board that will make the mortar and brick decisions.

This literature review contained seven sections. The first section introduced the concept of rural and rural schools and their communities. Section two provided an overview of school boards, and section three broadly discussed perspectives of school board decision making. The fourth section examined school facilities in the United States. In the fifth section, reviewed are policies at both the state and federal levels. Summarized in section six are facility funding, and also issues of equity and adequacy. The seventh and final section revealed the general lack of information regarding rural school board decision making and the specificity to decisions and facilities.

Given the significant impact school facilities have on education and communities in rural areas I felt compelled to examine why school buildings exist in the condition they do. Through a literature review I gained the perspective to shape and frame the research questions guiding this case study:

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?

2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?
3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

These questions guided the investigation of the decision-making process of a rural school board as it relates to policy and funding for the construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Introduction

Across the United States, existing school buildings are deteriorating faster than districts can replace, upgrade, or renovate. Attempts to adequately maintain these existing structures are a challenge rural districts face. These deteriorating facilities also face the challenges of out-of-date designs, building utilization, over-crowding, and rapidly declining enrollments (Filardo, 2008). Financial resources available to rural school districts for capital funding, maintaining, remodeling, or construction of school buildings vary across the 50 states. These are factors, over which school boards and school district administrators have limited, or no control determine funding. These factors include state and federal funding formulas and policy, and contentious partisan politics. Imazeki and Rechovsky (2003) observed and noted, "[T]he heavy reliance on the property tax by school districts" (p. 138). In states, with an over-reliance on the property tax compounds the problem of funding facilities in rural schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported local governments provided 44% of all revenue generation from the local property tax (Cornman, Keaton, & Glander, 2013). This translates to low-income or high-poverty districts having to tax property at higher rates to fund basic services, in counterpoint to wealthier districts taxing at a lesser rate and yet still raise more revenue.

It is difficult for policymakers and lawmakers at the state and federal levels to understand, whether by distance or dissociation, the impact of their decisions on individual districts and students experiencing marginalization due to location and/or socio-economic

conditions. It is at the local level where the school board members make school facility decisions (BEST, 2005). This case study examined the decision-making process of board of education members as they deliberated the current and future condition of facilities in a single rural school district purposefully selected in New York State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the decision-making process of a rural school board of education as related to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. This qualitative study will focus on the decision-making process of a rural school board. More specifically, utilizing case study methodology, the dissertation will seek to understand how the board members develop an understanding of facilities issues.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the complexity of decision making regarding the allocation of funds for rural school facilities at the local district level, applied was Kingdon's Agenda Setting Theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Kingdon's theory represents decision - making as a combination of three separate, but concurrent streams. One stream consists of problems, another of policies, and the third politics. Each stream has characteristics that exist parallel to the other two. Derived is a decision from the confluence or coincidence of merging streams.

Kingdon's theory focuses on the flow and timing of streams and the concurrent actions of policy players. It is this emphasis on situations and people which aligns this framework with the purpose of the study. The streams conceptualization Kingdon uses in this theory generates detailed insights defining decision making as the connection between

streams and participants. Through the application of Kingdon's theory, investigated were to what extent relationships develop and why they are formed between elements found in the three streams and the actions of policy players. The result was to determine the impact or interrelations on the decision-making process relating to school facility policy and resource allocation for the single school district.

Qualitative Approach

To understand the complexity of decision making and the allocation of funds for rural school facilities, selected was a qualitative methodology. I conducted this study to gain insights and perspectives into the decision-making process of those individuals responsible for crafting policy and distributing monies for facilities in one rural New York State school system. Maxwell (2005) contended qualitative methods are effective when a researcher seeks to understand the process by which events and actions occur. Maxwell stated the strengths of qualitative research allows the researcher to identify process rather than outcomes as it focuses on situations and people, placing the importance, not on numbers, but instead on words (Maxwell, 2005).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as an activity locating the observer (researcher) in the world. They stated qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world in which the researcher studies situations in naturally-occurring settings. The authors concluded that qualitative inquiry "attempts to make sense of or to interpret; phenomena in terms of the meanings individuals or groups bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3).

Creswell (2007) characterized qualitative research as a process of collecting data in a natural setting with the researcher being mindful of people and places in the study and

then analyzing data to draw conclusions to establish the existence of patterns and themes. Creswell (2007) summarized qualitative study as the "research of problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups aligned to a social or human problem" (p. 37).

The qualitative method, with its emphasis on people, natural settings, and the researcher as a key instrument (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2005) aligns with the conceptual framework of Kingdon's Agenda-Setting Theory. Kingdon focuses on the flow and timing of policy actions and policy players.

This chapter will outline the (a) research questions; (b) methodology; (c) research procedures; (d) data analysis procedures; (e) validity and reliability; (f) risks, benefits, and ethical considerations; (g) summary.

Research Questions

Statement of Research Questions

In the context of this research, a single case study examined the decision-making process of a purposefully selected rural school board. The research questions are constructed to reflect the governance of the district by the school board through the application and enforcement of policy. The school board is the district's decision-making body whose powers are derived and delegated through the state constitution.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?
2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?

3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

Methodology

Utilized was case study methodology for this research project. The research occurred in a bounded context; a single case, one rural school board was the unit of analysis in this study. Consistent with Creswell's requirements for a bounded system or case, the investigation occurred "over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

Merriam (1998) offered a case study as an "interest in the process rather than outcomes, in the context rather than a specific variable, in the discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). Specifically influenced by this synopsis of Merriam's concept of a case study, I selected this methodology on the following premises. Case studies are richly descriptive, allowing the reader to immerse into the perspective(s) of the participants in the study and to relate directly to everyday experience, both facilitating an understanding of complex situations. Additionally, the case study methodology makes the findings personal with decision makers having an active and participatory voice. Finally, a case study focuses on the story of those responsible for making the decisions impacting school buildings through conducting interviews, observations, and the interpretation of pertinent documents.

Merriam (1998) stated researchers use case study design "to gain and in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved" (p. 19). Merriam (1998) viewed case study research as a bounded system characterized by intense description and analysis. Merriam's (1998) elements of design for a case study are typified by collecting qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents. The analyzing and reporting of qualitative data includes analytic techniques, data management, levels of analysis, issues of validity, reliability, ethics, and writing reports and case studies.

Yin (2003) and Soy (1997) both characterized the advantages of case study research as being an empirical methodology that investigates a recent phenomenon within its current real-life context, when the relationship is not readily discernable between the occurrence and the setting. Yin (2003) further characterized the strengths of the case study as a research strategy as an "all-encompassing method covering the logic of design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis and interpretation" (p. 14).

Yin (2003) extended Merriam's concept, stating that design and data collection does not follow a prescribed plan. Yin offered a precept indicating the relevant information to a case study is not predictable; the researcher must continually ask why events or facts appear as they do and then discern the relevance to the study. Yin stressed the researcher must possess skills of adaptability and flexibility while being mindful of the original scope of the study but ready to react to unanticipated events. Yin (2003) emphasized rigor and not rigidity in the design for a case study and delineated the use of the following components in a research design:

1. questions are likely to be characterized as "how" and "why",

2. propositions, if any, which direct attention to something is examined in the study,
3. units (s) of analysis, where selection is related to a study's primary research questions,
4. logic of linking data to the propositions, where information is related to a proposition,
5. criteria for interpreting the findings, the contrasting to rival propositions. (Yin 2003, p. 21)

Maxwell (2005) stated research methods depend on the specific content and issues being studied; a qualitative study should include anything seen, heard, or communicated during the course of the study. Maxwell continued to state qualitative data are not the results of a particular method, but rather the researcher should include any and all data-gathering strategies which are practicable. Maxwell (2005) advocated the use of four main components to conduct a qualitative study:

1. the research relationship established with the people in the study,
2. site and participant selection: what settings or individuals are selected to interview, observe, and what other sources of data will be collected,
3. collection: how the information gathered will be used,
4. data analysis: how the information is processed and the sense made of it, (Maxwell, 2005, p. 82).

Creswell (2007), in his approach to conducting research created options for researcher through the use of the case study methodology. Creswell succinctly identified a case study as the research of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system.

Creswell (2007) defined a bounded system as a case or cases explored over a period through detailed data collection utilizing interviews, observations, and documents. Creswell's design suggested a methodology to delineate: the overall approach and rationale; the site or population selection; the data-gathering methods; the analysis procedures; validation; biographies of participants; and consideration of ethical and political dynamics.

Data Collection

Data collection techniques make it possible to develop evidence appropriate to explanations, either confirming or contradicting expectations and allowing the finding of patterns from observations (Babbie, 1998). The following research will employ multiple sources and techniques to gather data for this study. Consistent with Yin's (2003) perspective on data collection, a well-grounded case study cannot be associated specifically with one form of data collection; this study will include interviews, observations, document analysis, and archival investigations for evaluation and analysis.

Yin (2003) offered three overriding principles of data collection. These are the use of multiple sources of evidence which converge on the same set of facts and findings, a case study database, and a chain of evidence. Yin concluded that following these three parameters will contribute significantly to the quality of the case study.

To strengthen and confirm emerging findings from data, and to enhance reliability, as well as validity, used was triangulation to produce a further understanding of data. Triangulation employs multiple and different sources and methods to corroborate evidence (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) termed this corroborative mode as "converging lines of inquiry" (p. 100), and stated an important advantage of using

multiple sources is the findings and conclusions derived from a case study are potentially more convincing and accurate if based on multiple sources of information.

Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: methods, sources, analyst (investigator), and theory/perspective. For the purposes of this study, used were only two types: triangulation by methods and triangulation by source. Triangulation by methods checks the consistency of findings different data collection methods generate (Patton, 1999). There are three elements of triangulation by methods: it is common to have qualitative and quantitative data in a study, findings are merged from each technique to achieve a holistic and better understanding of the phenomenon, and findings that are contradictory or divergent will often lead to further study (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). Triangulation by source is composed of three elements: time (i.e. different points in time), space (i.e. in public vs. private setting), and people (i.e. comparing sets of individuals or groups with divergent points of view) (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999).

Interviews. Interviews are important and essential sources of obtaining case study information (Yin, 2003). In a qualitative study, interviewing is comprised of open-ended questions. This format allows the respondent to frame responses as they see the world through her/his perspective (Merriam, 1998). The interaction between the interviewer and the respondent characterizes the qualitative interview (Babbie, 1998). The research will have a general plan of inquiry. The questions will have a specific intent, but will not have to be asked in a set format or a locked order. Babbie (1998) stated that a qualitative interview "is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (p. 290).

Kvale (1996) delineated strategy with seven steps to conduct an interview process: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. Kvale described a qualitative interview as a conversation where the interviewer directs the conversation and pursues responses to specific topics the participant raised. My goal was to emulate these steps during the administration of the interviewing phase of this study.

Observations. Consistent with Merriam (1998), my role as an observer was that of the "participant as observer" (p. 101). In this context, the role of the observer as a participant is secondary to the prime activity as information collector. The collection of field notes is an essential element of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). She asserted that field notes of observations, usually, include the following:

1. descriptions of the setting, the people, the topics, and the activities,
2. direct quotations or substance of what is said,
3. observational comments are made throughout the running narrative and identified as the researcher's.

Document and artifact analysis. Merriam (1998) stated one of the prime strengths of using documentary material is the fact that it already exists. The researcher does not alter the contents of previously documented sources, unlike the possibility to modify interviews and observations (i.e. The Hawthorne Effect). Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003) offered that when compared to other collected data, document, and artifact collection is minimally invasive and provides detail and evidence to confirm or contradict other sources. Yin (2003) suggested the researcher exercise discretionary measures when analyzing documents and artifacts, explaining these sources of data were not designed for

the purpose of research; they are composed of variant types of communications whose original intent is other than research.

Research Procedures

I conducted this study using methodology and design elements from Creswell, Merriam, Maxwell, and Yin. The guidelines in these four designs have overlapping and inclusive elements; for this reason precluded were none from viability as may be situationally warranted during this study. The conduction of this study was in four phases: research site and participant selection, negotiating entry, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Site and Participant Selection

I conducted the study in New York State. The unit of analysis for this study was a rural school district. Given the complexity and diversity of rural districts in New York State, I selected a district and individuals in this study using purposeful sampling. Merriam (1998) described purposeful sampling as a research strategy used to discover, understand, and gain insight from the participants. Patton (2000) stated that purposeful sampling is a non-random method that selects information-rich cases, which he describes as cases that can yield copious information about issues central to the research.

I selected the district using three elements or criteria. First, applied was National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) urban-centric locale code system, released in 2006 (Provasnik et al., 2007), to select the district to be studied. The particular district was classified as Rural Distant using the NCES code system. Second, used was New York State Department of Education's Needs to Resource Capacity (N/RC) Categories. The N/RC is the measure of a district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources ("Proposal on State Aid", 2012). The third criterion for selection was that a

district had to have made facility investments, to include elements (whether singular or in combination) for maintenance, renovation, or construction, currently or having been completed within the previous three academic years. A total of four districts within the geographic area met the criteria for possible selection for this study.

The Rural and Community Trust (Strange, Johnson, Showalter & Klein, 2012) compiled a report that found that despite New York State's suburban and urban demographic complexion, the state has one of the largest rural student populations, ranking 8th nationally. New York State enrolls approximately 3,000,000 students annually; nearly 349,000 are rural students. New York's instructional expenditures per the rural pupil are $10,214, exceeded only by Alaska's $10,300. New York's percent of state education funds to rural schools is 29th, expending 22.9% of the state's educational funds. State funding contribution per local contribution in New York is $1.28; this ranks New York 24th and 3 cents below the national average of $1.31 (Strange et al., 2012).

Strange et al. (2012) reported the Student and Family Diversity conditions in rural areas ranked 38th. This is above the national median, and which the report categorized as fair. The authors reported rural student diversity in New York State as moderately low when compared to other states; the diversity rates of New York are 10.3%, and the national median is 25.8%. The report cited 0.8% as ELL (English Language Learners)—ranking the state 34th in the nation—and 15.2% as IEP (Individualized Education Program) enrollments for rural schools, ranking the state 12th respectively in the nation.

I selected the Otter Creek Central School District for this study. The Otter Creek District is located in a predominately agricultural region of New York State and classified as a High Need Rural School. Otter Creek is located in a categorically rural county in the

state. There are fewer than 50 communities in the county, 3 with populations greater than 10,000, and the majority of communities having fewer than 2,000 inhabitants (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

Pragmatically, I selected Otter Creek over three other districts in the county also meeting the same criteria for the following reasons. The first was the relative proximity of the district to my home in another community. Secondly, I was an active preK-12 substitute teacher in the school district from September 2010 through June 2015. This allowed the first-hand observation of the construction and renovation project. Third, members of the Otter Creek board were known to me through County and BOCES Board activities. These relationships paved the way for negotiating entry for the conduct of this research study.

Otter Creek Central School District

To gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges the Otter Creek School Board faced in the undertaking of the EXCEL Capital Project, I will present a brief historical perspective of the Otter Creek District, as well as a brief synopsis of the socio-economic profile of the district.

A brief history of Otter Creek. The first inhabitants of the lands that would become Otter Creek were the indigenous peoples of the Americas. This land was part of the Iroquois Confederacy, and home to the Seneca Nation (Shill, 1963). The first Europeans were French explorers seeking trade routes and waterways in the wilderness (Shill, 1963). The ceding of French territories to the English at the conclusion of the French and Indian Wars did not significantly affect the then remote area. The birth of the United States prompted the movement past the bounds of the original colonies, and it was

not until the opening of the 19th century that the Holland Land Company surveyed the lands surrounding Otter Creek, and founders named the counties and towns (townships) (Shill, 1963). The first settler in the Town of New Lyme arrived in 1804; by 1812, the town, also sometimes referred to as the Hamlet of New Lyme, was home to 32 families (Shill, 1963). North of the hamlet, on the banks of what was known as Otter Creek, a community of 24 log and frame structures had grown (Edward, 2007).

According to Shill (1963), in the early 1830's the inhabitants of this creekside community, Otter Creek, learned the Hamlet of New Lyme was to receive a post office. In 1834, they took this opportunity to submit their community for the post office, selecting the name of Blackford Crossing (Shill, 1963). In 1857, because of confusion with another village named Blackford in the state, the village and post office were renamed Otter Creek. Leaders incorporated the village in 1894 within the Town of New Lyme (Edward, 2007; Shill, 1963).

Otter Creek became a flourishing community, surrounded by bountiful farmlands and prosperous businesses complete with churches, fire departments, and hotels (Edward, 2007). A fire destroyed the village in the early 1900's, and citizens rebuilt it in the configuration in which the village remains to this day (Edward, 2007).

District profile. Data from the U.S. Census Community Survey (2011) estimated the population of the Otter Creek Central School District to be 4,868. The district is in relative proximity to state parks, seasonal recreation activities, colleges, and major transportation systems (highway and rail). The nature of the area, from being once a thriving, self-sustaining agrarian community, can now be described as a bedroom community (Edward, 2007). Today, several small and medium sized businesses still

exist, to include farming, within the district. Characterized as the largest these employers are government, light -manufacturing, and public education. Table 2 illustrates the five largest employers in the school district.

Table 2

District Employers

Employer	Type
Otter Creek Central School District	Education
Light Fabrication	Manufacturing
State of New York	Government
Town of New Lyme	Government
Village of Otter Creek	Government

Source: OCCS District Officials

It is not uncommon for the residents living in the district to travel to towns and cities within a 50-mile radius in pursuit of their livelihoods. There are, within a 50-mile radius of Otter Creek, 20 campuses offering the opportunity to pursue higher education or career and technical training. The district supports a wide variety of wage-earners. The U.S. Census Bureau: 2007-2011 American Community Survey estimated 1,787 individuals aged 16, and above comprise this workforce. Table 3 represents occupation classifications in five generalized areas, and the corresponding percentage of district residents employed irrespective of the location of their employment.

Table 3

Occupation by Percent of District Population

Occupational Classification	Percentage
Management, business, science and arts	27.5%
Service	15.9%
Sales and Office	20.7%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	11.4%
Production, transportation, and material handling	24.5%

U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey

Otter Creek Schools. In the 130 years before the district centralization in 1939, a number of school buildings provided education to children of the area. The first school in this newly-settled wilderness was a small log building erected 1808-1809 next to the home of the settlements' first family (Sivart, 1994; Shill, 1963). The school had only six or seven students, and after one year, the residents abandoned it for a location more convenient to the settlers (Sivart, 1994; Shill, 1963). In 1810, the townspeople built a new, more substantial log cabin school not far from the first school house, and it became School District No. 3 (Sivart, 1994; Shill, 1963). This building boasted a front door, paned windows, and a Dutch fireplace with a hole in the roof to allow the smoke to escape (Shill, 1963). The townspeople replaced the log cabin school with a structure of stone and rough-hewn timbers in 1828. The building served the community, eventually

falling into disrepair, and then abandoned (Edward, 2007). Shill (1963) remarked that soon after the 1800 log school house was erected, citizens established a number of early school districts in the Township of New Lyme. The district built a log schoolhouse in 1811, followed by another in 1814. The 1814 structure burned a few years after being built; teachers then held school in the backroom of a local tavern. The district constructed its first wooden framed schoolhouse in 1817, and it served as a school until 1829 (Shill, 1963).

The following is a recounting from Edward (2007) and the Otter Creek Centennial (Sivart, 1994) of the first school site in the creekside community that would become the Village of Otter Creek. The district built its first school in 1819 on the north side of Main Street. They designated the school as School District No. 6 and constructed it of rough board with a wooden chimney; the school burned to the ground on opening day. The district erected another school built of logs immediately upon the ashes of the burnt schoolhouse. In 1824, the district built a larger school, but it too burned down shortly after opening its doors. The town replaced this schoolhouse with yet another on the same parcel of land and opened its doors for the summer of 1825 classes. They used the building until 1887.

After the Civil War years, some of the more prosperous school districts began to replace their wooden schoolhouses with more substantial structures of brick (Edward, 2007). School District No. 9 erected a one-story building with bell dome as opposed to the more traditional bell tower. The citizens of School District 10 constructed a two-story building also with a bell dome. This building survives today as a private residence.

The years prior to 1838 saw the establishment of new districts and changing boundaries to existing districts (Sivart, 1994). The rapidly increasing population growth in the area drove these changes (Shill, 1963). This growth was precipitated by flourishing agricultural ventures and the rapid expansion of railway networks linking these once remote communities to major markets (Edward, 2007). Virtually no changes to the school district boundaries occurred during the ensuing 100 years (Sivart, 1994; Shill, 1963).

The following is a retelling from the combined works of Shill (1963) and Sivart (1994). As the village population increased, it became evident a larger structure was necessary to accommodate the increasing number of school age children. In 1887, the district erected a brick structure on the west side of the village. This building underwent a series of modifications. In 1899, the school added a north wing, and in 1907 they built a south wing. In 1924, a major renovation added a gymnasium and art room with a separate boiler room to heat the new spaces. The town utilized the building until early 1940, when after its days as a school building the citizens converted the structure to community use as a fire hall and community center.

The Village of Otter Creek continued to grow and prosper, becoming the largest community in the northern sector of the Town of New Lyme. The other communities in the immediate area remained small, some even abandoned, leaving Otter Creek the hub of local commerce (Edward, 2007). The Otter Creek School District progressed from a one teacher, one room school house with a handful of students to a substantial brick school with primary and secondary students numbering 372 and a faculty of 19 teachers

(Shill, 1963). As was typical of for rural and small communities throughout New York State during the 1930's, centralization was becoming imminent.

The State Department of Education sponsored a district vote for the purpose of centralization in August of 1938 (Sivart, 1994). The Department of Education advanced the concept of centralization on the theory that small districts could not provide the educational programs and opportunities that a larger district could. "The Guide to the Reorganization" (2013) observed there were two major elements of centralization. First was to provide increased student opportunities in academic and curricular areas. The second was to create the potential for school districts to operate with increased efficiencies and cost-effectiveness

The vote to centralize was not without contention, as Teel (1980) recalled in a school commemorative 50 years later. Briefly summarized, the commemorative retold the contentious issues: New Lyme had no sidewalks and was not going to centralize unless their children were bussed; Otter Creek residents were not going to allow their children to walk if New Lyme students did not. Additionally, those who had attended schools in that district and did not want to become part of the greater Otter Creek district challenged loyalties to a community in the southern sector of the Town of New Lyme (Teel, 1980). Both the residents of the village and the town at the time resolved the issues over transportation and loyalties (Teel, 1980).

The vote passed 157 to 152, a narrow margin of less than 1%. Fifteen districts centralized to become Central School District No. 1, commonly known as the Otter Creek Union School. The school district was, and remains to this day, composed of one village, Otter Creek in the Town of New Lyme, and parts of two contiguous smaller

communities: the Hamlet of New Lyme in the Town of New Lyme and the community of West Lyme, which is located in an adjoining township of the same name and areas of Columbia Township to the north (Sivart, 1994). The town held a school board election soon after the centralization vote. With a new school board in place and the selection of an administration completed, it was time to plan the building of a new central school.

Otter Creek broke ground for the new school the following year. The building site selected was on the south side of the village on the east side of Main Street. The district secured funding for the new school from the Public Works Act, with a grant of $202,272, and a bond issued in the amount of $250,000 (Sivart, 1994). The Works Progress Administration--renamed in 1939 as the Work Projects Administration (WPA)—financed the project, and it was one of the first WPA projects built in the county (Teel, 1980). The architects designed and constructed the building with design elements combining English and Early American architectural themes (Edward, 2007). The review of the original construction drawings indicated the building construction was of brick and cast stone. Further observation detailed the 50,000 square foot building originally featured 45 classrooms, gymnasium, and support facilities housed in a one and two-story structure, which featured a gable roof with a clock tower.

The school opened on February 1, 1940, with 640 students in attendance arriving in 6 buses (Shill, 1963). The formal dedication of the new school took place in May 1940 (Sivart, 1994). The students walked past two prominently displayed dedication plaques in the main vestibule. One bears the names of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and John D. Carmody, Public Works Administrator. The second plaque includes the members of the school board, administrators, attorney, architect, and general contractor.

Today, over 70 years later district children walk through the same main entry doorway as did their predecessors in 1940. Students can still hear family names on the dedication plaque on morning announcements, during morning attendance, and in classrooms throughout the school, and see the names in event programs and athletic rosters.

Edward (2007) observed that it was evident the Otter Creek Central School District community members take great pride in their school. The building itself and its architecture are community landmarks, and the building is a focal point for community events. The school newspaper is nationally ranked, the school offers credit-bearing community college courses to seniors, and each student in grades 7-12 receives a personal laptop computer to use for the school year. Student participation in school activities, special education graduation rates, and post-graduation successes for all district children is consistently a great source of pride to community residents. The quality of the faculty and staff and their rapport with students are factors district residents identify as distinguishing characteristics of their school.

Driving up the serpentine entryway, one is struck by the estate-like appearance of the school. Immediately one's eyes focus on two huge ancient sycamore trees dominating the landscape with their unique dabbled bark and huge shading circumference of their branches. It is more reminiscent of a park and not at all like the more modern school campuses one typically encounters. The groundskeepers maintain the lawns and a plethora of sugar maples and ornamental plantings of trees and shrubs with impeccable care.

In the autumn, the air is resplendent with aromas of the harvest season. The smell conjures memories of a bygone day among the 'locals.' The winter is long and brings abundant wind-driven snows and temperatures that can be harsh, often below zero. It is not unusual during heavy snows to hear the roar of snowmobiles. At Otter Creek, high school students often ride their snowmobiles to school to be on time for class. They ride in advance of village, town, county, or state trucks plowing their roads.

Spring comes quickly, and soon the snows melt, and all becomes verdant once again. Students celebrate spring at OCCS in a truly rural way: they have Tractor Day. On this day students, male and female alike, drive their tractors to school and park in a specially designated area. Everything from new, super-cab air conditioned diesels to the old, one-cylinder small gas tractors, they all arrive in an array of colors, condition, and manufacturer logos.

Renovations and new construction prior to the EXCEL Capital Project. A review of district documentation and records revealed the progression of school construction as the student population increased; undertaken were additions and renovations to improve and update the original facility. The first addition to the original 1939 structure occurred in 1952. This work consisted of a new cafeteria, kitchen, music room, and physical education room. The district added new elementary wing in 1955, allowing the accommodation of three rooms for each grade level and included the building of a new gymnasium with locker room facilities. In 1966, the district built a new and larger cafeteria, swimming pool, industrial arts room, and storage facility. Additionally, as part of the 1967 project, the district constructed a new elementary wing with classrooms and a library. The final phase of the 1966 project was the conversion of

the old, original gymnasium into an auditorium with a sloped floor, a stage, and plush seating.

The additions undertaken in 1990-1991 included adding fifth and sixth-grade classrooms, a home and careers room, and a multi-purpose room. Renovations in 1990 to the original 1939 structure included adding a dropped ceiling on the second floor with new lighting. The district also added a weight room, new lockers in the pool area, a physical education addition, handicapped accessible bathrooms, and new display case lights in the main entry corridor.

The last expansion to the building footprint was the 2003 Capital Project. The new construction added three major academic additions. These areas included 22 new classrooms, a distance learning center, and state-of-the-art science laboratories to the campus. The district also made alterations to instructional areas and building exteriors to facilitate accessibility and to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Additionally, the 2003 project added a new bus garage and a press box at the stadium. In 2005, the most recent project completed prior to the current EXCEL Capital Project replaced windows throughout the campus and addressed masonry restoration to the original 1939 building.

In Appendix B is a summation of completed construction projects prior to the 2011 EXCEL Capital Building Project. This summation was derived from the current board-approved Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan. The New York State Department of Education, which requires a Board of Education to review and update its plan annually, mandates the Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan (Appendix C). The intent of the five-year plan is to collect, coordinate, analyze, and prioritize district infrastructure, and building

program needs through an in-depth facilities assessment. At the conclusion of each year, the board prioritizes and assesses for critical need all incomplete tasks and new situations. The board then incorporates the assessments in the district's annual comprehensive maintenance plan, which is predicated on Board of Education Policy-Non-Instructional/Business Operations 5630 (Appendix D).

In February 2011, Otter Creek approved a $16,000,000 renovation project to upgrade existing facilities. The scope of this project included alterations to the principal's suite, guidance suite, high school/middle school library, music facilities, and cafeteria. Included also were upgrades to the heating and cooling systems, electrical wiring, increased technology accessibility, and outdoor lighting. The plan also included renovations to the swimming pool and building restrooms. Project requirements also included window and roof replacement, installation of energy management equipment, installation of security cameras, and repairs to the original 1939 clock tower and gable roof.

Negotiating Entry

At the beginning of the first phase, I contacted the Otter Creek CSD School Board President. I knew this individual through previous school board service at the regional and state levels. I explained the purpose and scope of the study and then answered questions from the Board President generated during my explanation.

After receiving favorable feedback from the Board President, I contacted the Superintendent of Schools for the district. The Superintendent was apprised of the scope and purpose of the study, and the Superintendent echoed the Board President's interest in participating in this case study. With the School Board President and Superintendent of

Schools in concurrence, I sent a formal letter of request soliciting approval to the Board President and copied to the Superintendent (Appendix E).

During ensuing conversations with the Board President and Superintendent, the decision made was to request the approval of the entire board. This was done at a regularly-scheduled board meeting during the agenda item reserved for input from the public. At the board meeting, I distributed a copy of the solicitation letter to each member of the board (Appendix F). I then proceeded to explain the purpose and scope of the research.

I reviewed the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol with the school board. Explained to the board were issues confidentiality and the protection of identifiable information through the use pseudonyms for the district and all board members to protect the anonymity of all participants. Additionally, assurances were given that data collection would not begin until the IRB review was complete, and the Office of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs granted approval for the Graduate School of Education and Human Development (Appendix G). The board was informed that they would receive a copy of the letter of approval for their review.

At the conclusion of the presentation, I addressed and answered all questions from the board. I reiterated my assurances of confidentiality to the board. After a short discussion in open session, the board gave their support and unanimous consent to participate in this study.

Data Collection

I primarily collected data for this research study through face-to-face interviews with members of the school board. In concert with the interviews, I collected data from

observations and field notes, and document and artifact analysis with the intent to provide a thick and rich description of the perceptions, relationships, and decision-making process of the school board members as they addressed the challenging issues of school facilities confronting their district.

Interviews. I contacted each board member, five of the seven agreed to be interviewed. Collected from these five individuals was key contact information for the purpose of scheduling interviews. Interview sessions consisted of a period of 45 minutes to 1hour with individual board members. The conducting of interviews was in areas of convenience and comfort for the board members, and always being mindful of confidentiality.

A field note journal was kept for each interview. Additionally, I recorded interviews using audio equipment for transcription to a word processing platform at a later date. At the onset of the interview, all participants signed releases, consistent with The George Washington University policy regarding the human subject participation in qualitative research studies (Appendix G). All questions utilized during the interviews appear in the appendices of this study (Appendix H).

The primary sources of data came from the focused interviews conducted with school board members. Interviews provided information on the board's vision for district facilities, how board members approach resource allocation, decision making for facilities in response to pressures to improve student performance, and the factors enabling or constraining efforts to fund facility requirements.

Conducted were semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions framed around the four research questions for each interview. The design of these questions was to

elicit extended responses from the board members. The intention was to create questions board members could answer without leading them toward a specific response. Merriam (1998) offered neither the exact wording or order of questions should be prescribed in advance of the interview. She suggested the exchange and flow between the researcher and participant dictate the order of questions.

The questions for board members focused both on their individual and collective perceptions of their role(s) as custodians of the district's facilities. I also gathered perspectives from these individuals through inferences found in their responses to questions, rather than overt, political, or self-preserving rhetoric. Board members walk a tightrope of both political and social consciousness, and consequences; they serve at the pleasure of the local electorate. As a result, during each interview, I relied on both their political and personal candor in their response to questions.

Anticipated was the elaboration on questions asked during the course of the interviews for the purpose of clarification of the respondents. To capture the content and context, I recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim. Analytic memos were used to organize data and identify emergent themes (Appendix I).

Upon completion of the interviews, transcription of each conversation was within 24 to 72 hours after the interview concluded. Transcripts of the interviews were returned to the participants to review for member checking and comment as a measure of compliance consistent with the member checking requirements for data analysis. Using Creswell's (2007) precepts for data analysis for qualitative research the interview transcripts were analyzed. The next application of data collection was the use of Maxwell's (2005) outline of research procedures for the identification of general themes and ideas. Employed was

open coding to organize the data into meaningful units of information for analysis. The coded data underwent classification and categorization to interpret and develop a contextual description of what the data indicated (Maxwell, 2005). At the conclusion of the study, I compiled an overall description consistent with Maxwell's (2005) design.

Observations. Observation activities afforded insight into the group dynamics of the board and provided a broader context to assist in gaining knowledge and understanding of this rural school district. The collection of data was through on-site observations of school board meetings. There are three general categories of board meetings that members of the general public can attend: annual organizational/re-organizational, regular (to include work sessions), and special or emergency meetings. Boards may hold meetings on district property or off, providing that state requirements are followed for convening of such meetings (Fanniff & Abrams, 2009).

Observations provided an opportunity to observe board members collectively and observe their interactions amongst each other, the district administration, and the public. As stated by Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2007) observations provide an opportunity to record information as it occurs. The keeping of field was for the purpose of providing both descriptive and reflective recordings of each board meeting. Descriptive notes recorded the physical setting, to include date and time, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, and behaviors. Reflective notes focused on recording my feelings, reactions, hunches, interpretations, speculations, and insights as to the proceedings.

Document and artifact analysis. The analysis included a review of information beginning July 2005 and concluding January 2014. The review pertained only to the school board's actions regarding the district's facilities, and policy and funding issues

relating to facilities. Document analysis encompassed the systematic examination of school-related documents such as written policies, meeting minutes, agendas, budgets, and other written reports. I reviewed local and regional newspaper articles and analyzed them for relevance to this research. Additionally, examined were local and regional public access radio and television broadcasts for pertinent content.

The review also examined project data related to the construction, renovation, or maintenance of the current project and previous building projects as a part of the document collection process. Additionally, analyzed were blueprints, drawing revisions, change orders, and environmental impact studies for impact on project costs and schedules.

Data Analysis Procedures

Merriam (1998) strongly suggested that the preliminary data analyses begin concurrently with the onset of data collection. She cautioned that without ongoing data analysis, data can be unfocused, repetitive, and overwhelming in the volume needing to be analyzed and processed. Continuously studied were all interview transcripts, observations, and documentation to identify unique patterns within the data.

Accomplishing the organization and management of interview data was through using coding. Coding is the assigning and labeling of text according to the content (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) identified two steps of coding: first the identification of information in the data and second the interpretive constructs related to analysis.

The first step in the initial phase of coding was to identify units of information and develop categories. I accomplished this using open coding. Creswell (2007) described open coding as taking data from its major categories of information and segmenting the data into categories of codes. The next phase was to utilize in vivo coding. In vivo coding

"uses the exact words of the interviewee to form the names for codes and categories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 239). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) stated researchers can use in vivo codes in the derivation of categories to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions to assist in the organization of data sets. Maxwell (2005) acknowledged the importance of in vivo codes as providing an understanding of the phenomena and events people experience thereby providing perspectives that inform their actions. He continued offering people's ideas, meanings, and values are important to the studied situation and activities, enabling the researcher to grasp real concepts and not rely on theoretical abstractions thereby avoiding potentially incomplete or mistaken interpretations.

The second step in coding was analysis. Merriam (1998) described three levels of data analysis:

> The first level organizes data topically or chronologically and is typically presented in a descriptive narrative. The second level uses concepts to describe phenomena and interpret data. The third level of analysis is the making of inferences, developing models and generating theory. (Merriam, 1998, p. 187)

Merriam (1998) emphasized analytical thinking to be contextual, allowing the researcher to draw inferences about future activity and not be bound by linear thinking. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) also offered a three-phase strategy for data interpretation. First, the researcher retrieves coded data. Second, the researcher splits, splices, and links the coded items, creating trails or paths through the data. The third phase is the transformation of coded data into meaningful data. In the development of meaningful data, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested the researcher seek and identify themes, patterns, to include contrasts, inconsistencies, and contradictions. Coffey & Atkinson (1996) offered the

meaningful interpretation of data leads toward generalizing the finding and conceptual and theoretical coherence in the data.

Developed specific to this case study were observational procedures or protocols. I conducted observations at Board of Education meetings, other board-convened public meetings, meetings attended by board members where they represented the board, and the review of any media broadcasts. Researchers conduct observations as a systematic surveillance which ideally will generate a "rich and thick description*"* (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) as a means to convey what is seen in the data into coherent, comprehensive, and detailed commentary. To deepen the description, I noted information to capture respondent's expressions and emotions. Also, I noted their relationships with others and the feel of the environment in which their stories were told. The descriptions reflected observed behaviors whether or not significant at the time.

The focus of this analysis was the critical examination of documents rather than simple description. It involved the interpretation of documentation in light of interviews and observations. The document review provided a holistic perspective of historic and current district information. The descriptions generated from the document review built analytical explanations to help construct a further understanding of school board decision making.

Coding

Accomplishing the organization and management of data was through the use of a three step process Creswell (2007 and Merriam (1994) to develop codes. The first step in the initial phase of coding was to identify units of information and develop categories using open coding (Creswell, (2007). The second phase was the utilization of in vivo coding.

Following Merriam's (1998) precepts coding assigned and labeled text according to the content. The third step of coding was analysis using Merriam's (1994) three level process: organizing data, using concepts to interpret data, and classifying data. Coding provided an interpretation of data at a given time and also to rate the importance of various influences. As result of the coding process, and using Kingdon's three streams model for scaffolding, identified were the following circumstances and conditions as having been influential in the decision-making process of the Otter Creek CSD School Board during the inception and through to the completion of the EXCEL Capital Building Project:

Problem Stream:

- Problem identification: Attaining consensus in light of reasonable and competing issues
- Constraints: Impediments to solving the problem of deteriorating facilities
- Focusing event: Realization and accompaniment
- Pre-existing solution: State Building Aid and EXCEL Program Aid

Policy Stream

- Policy entrepreneurs: Key actors

Political Stream

- Mood: Board besieged
- A change in administration: Hiring a new superintendent
- Retrospective: The politics of hindsight
- A change in mood: Board mortality

Policy Window

- Policy window and the new administration: Realignment of priorities
- Policy window and a change in mood: Change in perception
- Policy window and the joining of streams: Opportunity to move forward

Data Analysis Summary

Analyzed were the interviews for organization and preliminary relationships at the time of initial transcription. I employed open and in vivo coding after an initial transcript reading to organize data into broad themes. Initially, developed were categories from the transcripts of the interviews. A connective strategy was employed, narrative analysis, to discern relationships between statements in the interviews and collected documentation. Detailed write-ups categorized interview questions and responses and examination of data for within-group similarities and differences.

After the completion of the individual interviews, employed was a comparative analysis. Made were comparisons to predefined categories, in search of themes common and different to all interviews or by classifying the data according to data sources. Examined were all data sources for similar and dissimilar associations. As patterns emerged in one data type, I corroborated them using evidence from observation, and document and artifact analysis to verify the strength of the finding. When conflicts were identified, a deeper analysis of the differences was conducted to identify the cause or source of conflict.

The storing of transcriptions from all interviews was on a primary and backup USB flash drive, as well as a rewriteable CD-ROM. Secured were all hard copies of all interviews, summaries, field notes, and audiotapes, when not in use, at all times.

Additionally, at the conclusion of the dissertation, the keeping of all associated data and materials will be in a secure location for a period of five years.

Validity and Reliability

To answer validity threats to this study four strategies were applied: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation (prolonged engagement), and rich, thick description. Yin (2003) asserted construct validity is realized when multiple sources of data are analyzed, and the data collection procedures are in concert with the operational measures for the concepts being investigated. As Maxwell (2005) prescribed, I used triangulation to reduce the risk that conclusions reflect the biases of a specific group of participants. Triangulation allows for a broader understanding of the experiences being studied through the analysis of interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin 2003). Triangulation strengthens the reliability and internal validity through using multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Accomplishing triangulation was through using methods consistent with precepts established by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999).

Merriam (1998) asserted that member checks are an important method of verifying and validating information transcribed by the researcher; they are both a check and critique of the data. Consistent with Creswell (2007) and Merriam (1998), conducted were member checks with the participants to verify their responses accuracy with the transcriptions.

Both Creswell (2007) and Merriam (1998) advocated the use of long-term observation (prolonged engagement) at the site to build trust, learn the culture, and gather data to increase the validity of the findings. A rich, thick description in which the researcher describes in detail the participants and setting allows the reader to determine

how closely their situation matches the research situation to determine if the findings can be transferable (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Potential Bias

The eradication of researcher bias in qualitative studies is difficult to accomplish, the researcher is the primary tool for data collection, and the processing of data is through the researcher's conceptual understanding, theoretical position, and biases (Merriam, 1998). Maxwell (2005) observed that separating research from the researcher's life cuts off a source of insights, perspectives, and validity checks. I concede the potential for researcher bias prior to the onset of data collection and subsequent analysis. The intent is to limit bias through purposeful sampling, data triangulation, and the acknowledgement bias may exist.

It is from my experiences, perceptions, and observations, that I question why it is with federal, state, and local policies in place there are students attending school every day in substandard and deteriorating school facilities. I have served on a local school board, a county executive school board, and a regional school board (BOCES). I have experienced the complexities and frustrations of securing funding for school facilities firsthand. The current literature focused on education is replete with references to divides and gaps existing in education: the achievement gap, digital divide, and those involving race, ethnicity, and the distribution of wealth. These are serious detractors and impediments to the provision of quality educational programs for students and demand attention and redress. Learning can be neither effective nor affective in our public schools if our schools are not safe, secure, ergonomically friendly, and technology-ready environments.

Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of a qualitative study, there are possibilities of benefits and risks to the participants. Ideally, the benefits to the participants of this study will overshadow or outweigh any potential for risk. The benefits might include an increased understanding and appreciation of the importance of a board member's responsibility and obligation to educate students in safe environments conducive to learning.

The main or primary risk the participants take is the disclosing of their personal stories and feelings. Participants hope to be represented well and fairly to their peers and constituency. Participants, however, may feel that their responses and answers are being judged or are perceived as being wrong, disingenuous, or perhaps even worse. The larger view is that their story may contribute to an increased understanding of the complexities of providing equitable and adequate educational facilities. The more intimate view is that the participants may learn more about their perceptions, feelings, and motivations regarding the execution of their elected or appointed positions.

Respondents may or may not be as forthcoming because of the political considerations of the findings. Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality are ethical considerations that I addressed with all participants. Expended was every effort to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of persons and places by the use of a pseudonym. As elected or appointed representatives of the local school district, participants were made aware that they are subject to all provisions of the federal Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) and provisions of state sunshine laws. No ethical considerations were expected nor did any emerge from this study.

Summary

As in all forms or qualitative research, the findings of this study were limited to those purposefully selected to be interviewed for this investigation, their district, and community. Generalizability of this study will follow the philosophy of Merriam (1998), who offers that reader or user generalizability is dependent upon what the reader determines is applicable or not applicable to their particular perception or situation. Stake (1995) refers to this as naturalistic generalizations; generalizations reached through recognizing similarities in objects and issues and the natural covariations of events relative to one's experiences.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the decision-making process of a rural school board as it relates to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. The principle goal of this study was to improve the understanding of the decision-making process by the local board of education and the effect of those decisions on rural school funding and policy for the maintenance, renovation of existing facilities, and construction of buildings. The analysis and recommendations from this study may potentially assist board members, both collectively and as individuals, to evaluate their past, current, and future decision making motivations and resultant outcomes impacting the cost effectiveness regarding the provision of opportunities for optimal student outcomes. Additionally, the findings may be valuable to school boards and administrators as they evaluate their governance relationship and budgetary preparations, specifically facilities funding. Educators, lawmakers, and policymakers at the state and federal levels might benefit from the findings and recommendations derived from the interpretations in this study when addressing the role school facilities have in providing a safe, equitable, and quality educational environment.

The conceptual framework guiding this analysis was Kingdon's Agenda-Setting Theory of multiple streams processes: Policies, Problems, and Politics, including policy actors and the windows of opportunity. The multiple streams model suggests policy adoption is essentially an event which relies on the convergence of two or more of the three streams (problems, policies, and politics) and the opening of a window of

opportunity through which policy actors attempt to push through their ideas, concepts, or programs.

To perform an in-depth study, focused on one case, a less-generalizing qualitative approach was selected as the appropriate methodology for this research in contrast to quantitative methods, which researchers employ when looking for representative generalizations. When a study's purpose is to investigate and identify the participants' or subjects' traits and attributes, qualitative methods are applicable. Utilized was this methodology to make possible the development of a larger understanding of the participants to gain the broadest perspectives to enable making informed conclusions and rational recommendations for this research study.

Research Procedures

The focus of this research study was the decision-making processes of the Otter Creek Central School Board of Education for the 2011 EXCEL Capital Building Project. This single case study relied on field research methods to collect interview data, documents for archival analysis, and observations. Interviews conducted were with school board members who were on the board at the time of the decisions for the EXCEL Capital Building Project. Interviews used a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of researcher-developed open-ended questions (Appendix H). The intent of the structuring of the questions was to probe and discover relevant and consistent themes among board members. The board members agreed to have their interview recorded with confidentiality protected through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews averaged 70 minutes with a minimum of 45 and maximum of 95 minutes. Used to validate the

accuracy of the interview transcriptions was member checking, consistent with the precepts of Creswell (2007) and Merriam (1998).

Interview data was interpreted using Merriam's (1998) two-level schemes: level one identifies information regarding the data and level two identifies the interpretative constructs to the data. The total scope of data evaluated and analyzed consisted of interview transcripts and notes, observations of board meetings, and archival documents, to include meeting minutes, district policy, newspaper articles, and architectural or construction documents. In line with the postulates of Creswell (2007), Maxwell (2005), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2003), triangulation was employed to strengthen reliability and internal validity of the multiple sources of data analyzed.

Contextual Perspectives

The complexity of examining decision making in any situation is replete with both competing and conflicting issues and challenges; these variant concerns are analogous to Kingdon's Three Stream Model. Kingdon's (1984) model of public policy decision making, simply stated, is the timely conjoining of three streams— the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream. This theory states the coming together of the streams creates the impetus to move a topic or issue from the under discussion stage to the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1984).

Data Collection

Data collected for this research study was primarily through face-to-face interviews with members of the selected school board. This study included multiple sources and techniques to gather data. In concert with the interviews, data was collected from observations and field notes, document and artifact analysis to provide a "rich and thick

description*"* (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) of the perceptions, relationships, and decision-making process of the school board members as they addressed the challenging issues of school facilities confronting their district (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

The data specific to the district collected and analyzed for this study included tables, spreadsheets, reports, and graphs all compiled with the exceptional cooperation from the Offices of the Superintendent and Business Executive. The district's architect and engineering firm, who also acted as the project management contractor, provided site maps, schematics, blueprints, construction schedules, and revisions and change orders for review.

Interviews

The primary sources of data for this study came from interviews with Otter Creek CSD school board members. To arrange interviews, the board members were contacted via email. Each board member received a Solicitation Letter (Appendix F), Consent (Appendix G), Demographic Survey (Appendix J), and Interview Questions (Appendix H). The interview questionnaire consisted of 13 open-ended queries framed around the four research questions for each interview session. Six of the questions had subset questions asking the board member to differentiate between their role and the collective board's action. Design of these questions was to elicit extended responses from the board members. Scheduling of the interview sessions was with five individual board members. Conducting interviews were in areas selected by the board member for their convenience and comfort, always being mindful of confidentiality.

As prescribed by Merriam (1998), kept was a field note journal for each interview. Additionally, the recording of interviews for transcription was to a word processing

platform. Returned to the participants were the interview transcripts for the purpose of review and comment as a measure of compliance consistent with the member checking requirements for data analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Research Questions

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers in directing resources to facility funding?
2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers in directing resources to facility funding?
3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

Key Actors

Interviews with the board members were conducted during the months of October and November 2013. Interviewed were five of the seven School Board members who were on the board during the inception, passing of the EXCEL Capital Project resolution through approval by the New York State Education Department granted in May 2011. Upon request, those interviewed selected a setting in which they felt most comfortable and at ease for the interview session. Two members of the board declined to interview (Appendix K). One of the previous members of the board, Mr. F, a retired gentleman, was experiencing health related concerns and was unable to interview. The other member of the board Mr. G, a current member, who had voted with the board in a

unanimous decision allowing the conduct this study, declined to participate, as was his option. The first interview occurred on a mid-morning in late October with Ms. A. The interview was held in a small conference room located in the original 1939 section of the building, which for nearly five decades was the principal's office. Ms. A was enthusiastic and affable throughout the interview, providing complete answers with details and insights as well as personal reflections. It became clear early in the interview Ms. A was fervent about student outcomes and areas of urgent student needs. She was candid and matter-of-fact about her role as a board officer during the inception, planning, and initial construction phases of the Capital Project. She deferred to speaking of her role as being a member of the board; she spoke of the board as a collective entity. The words we, us, or the board were most often used; I was used very sparingly and only in reference to specific actions.

The next interview was held with Mr. B on the afternoon of the same day as Ms. A's. Mr. B was genuinely interested in the topic of this dissertation; he delivered each of his responses with reflection and candor. It was readily apparent throughout the interview Mr. B was an ardent advocate for the children of the district. He freely discussed his frustration with the state for its lack of support and its continued practice of burdening districts with unfunded mandates.

As a board officer during the inception, planning, and initiation of construction, he too deferred to speaking of his role as being a member of the board and the board being a collective entity. The words: we, us or the board were most often used; I was used only in reference to specific actions.

After reviewing the initial transcription of the interview with Mr. B, it was determined there was a need to probe deeper to understand the decision process of the board and to gain a broader historical perspective on board activities after the completion of the 2005 building project leading to the EXCEL Project. Mr. B is known and well-regarded by his fellow board members for his insights and historical knowledge in all matters related to the school. Conducted was a second follow-up interview with Mr. B on November 8th in the afternoon at his home. The framing of the questions were around Mr. B's responses to the original set of questions asked during the first interview session. His responses were insightful and valuable during the data analysis phase of this study.

Mr. C, on the evening of November 8th, sent online responses to the interview questions. Mr. C is a doer, always looking for ways to improve processes. Mr. C is also retired; however, he works part time. Conducting of the interview with Mr. C was at this part-time job. The interview with Mr. C was a continually running exchange through the first week of December. During these face-to-face encounters, Mr. C would elaborate on his initial online responses consistent with the interview protocol used with the other board members.

Mr. C is a pragmatic person and views all issues with a skeptical eye; he firmly shared his view that the board is the caretaker of the district and should be the voice of reason and realism when the board adopts policies. Mr. C has held elected positions in the local community outside of the School Board. He is a community-orientated person and sees the school and the children as an extension of the community. Mr. C expressed his position that the well-being of the school and the community are inseparable and that both are essential to the well-being of all. Mr. C is the consummate team player;

throughout the interviews he spoke of actions taken by the board as a collective and consensus prevailed.

The convening of the fourth interview, with Ms. D, was in the morning on a Tuesday during the second week of November. Ms. D is retired but works part-time during the day. For convenience, she chose a small local coffeehouse for the interview.

Ms. D spoke easily throughout the interview. Her style of response was story-like, filled with examples and details and replete with personal anecdotes as she responded to each question. She is a long-time district resident and her concerns for the communities within the district were clearly evident. The declining business base and loss of employment opportunities were of great concern to her, especially while on the board. She cited the declining population, faltering socio-economic health of the district, and a shrinking tax base as all contributing to the district's future viability. Ms. D's narrative was remarkably similar to her predecessors. As a board officer during the inception, planning, and initiation of construction, she, too, deferred to speaking of her role as being a member of the board, and the board being a collective entity. She interchangeably used the words we or us, or the phrase The Board and I; I was only used in referencing specific actions.

The last interview with a board member was conducted on a mid-week day during the second week of December. The interview with Mr. E took place at the village library in Otter Creek. Mr. E is retired; he remains active not only with board service but has also held elected positions in Otter Creek and the greater political divisions in the area. Mr. E is the longest continually serving member of the OCCS Board; he has logged over three decades with the district. The EXCEL Project is Mr. E's fourth building project

with the district. He candidly shared his vast knowledge of past projects, successes, missed opportunities, and community perceptions across a wide variety of issues.

Mr. E sees the community and schools as inextricably linked. However, their continued existence is becoming less and less a matter of local control and more an issue of state intervention through mandates and legislation. In this struggle with the state to provide a quality education for the children of OCCSD, Mr. E, like his fellow board members, spoke in terms of the board when discussing actionable issues before the board for decision.

Profile of Board Members

The interviews and surveys that the board members completed characterized them as a relatively homogenous grouping. At the time of the inception of the project, all the interviewed board members were in their late 50s or early 60s, and all were retired. The level of educational achieved indicated two bachelor's and three master's degrees. Three board members had retired from the education field, two from teaching, and one from higher education administration. One of the bachelor degree recipients was a telecommunications engineer, and the other had a career in the legal services profession.

All five of the board members had a long history of residency in the district. Only one, however, was a life-long resident. Of the others, one had lived in Otter Creek for over 20 years, two for more than 30 and one for over 40 years. Prior to coming to Otter Creek, two members moved from suburban areas, one from a rural community, and one from a city. Only one board member completed grades K-12 in Otter Creek Schools; one member entered upper elementary school upon moving into the district and graduated, and three members did not attend school in the district. Three board members had

children attend OCSSD, but only one while serving on the board. This same board member is the only one with grandchildren enrolled in the district.

Board service spanned a period of seven to over thirty years. The board appointed one board member to fill a two-year vacancy and then was elected to one five-year term. He did not seek reelection. Three members served two consecutive terms and did not seek reelection. One member also served two consecutive terms and lost a bid for a third term. The fifth board member has served over thirty years and recently won reelection to another five-year term. Political affiliations differed as one would expect; asked were the interviewees to self-identify their political inclinations (Appendix J). Indications were: two strong Democrats, one strong Republican, and two consider themselves to be Independent voters. Two board members hold membership in special interests groups or organizations, and three members do not. As for civic or community organizations, three members belong to one or two groups, one belongs to five or more groups, and one pursues artistic endeavors.

When asked: Why did you run for the school board? Two themes were clearly evident. First, each board member responded that educational opportunity for children was their paramount concern. The second was a concern for the community. Members viewed board service as a way to give back, a way to aid in the relief of a burdensome tax structure, and a means to bring fair and equitable representation of the community to the board. Excerpts from the interviews with each board member provided insight into the regard they held for the students of the district and the community. The following passages portend to the responses, viewpoints, and experiences shared during exchanges with the board members.

Ms. A: Lifelong educator - importance of education for all is heartfelt. I had volunteered for school groups - Compact for Learning, announced at high school baseball games and volunteer community soccer coach.

Mr. B: I was concerned about education, and giving to the community what my background and experience might offer.

Mr. C: Concerned about education in the schools and giving back to the community.

Ms. D: I was also very concerned about school taxes. My niece was entering kindergarten, and my nephew was in the fourth grade so I was very interested in the educational opportunities that they would have available to them.

Mr. E: Board of Education was a 'Good Old Boys Club' and wanted to reform the Boards' attitude and response to the community's needs; particularly relating to the students.

Interviews with the Superintendent of Schools and Business Executive

During the interviews with board members, it became increasingly evident that two other individuals played roles as both key actors and policy entrepreneurs. It became clear the Superintendent and Business Executive played key entrepreneurial roles in the board's decision-making process. Thought prudent, interviews to these individuals were extended in an effort to further corroborate the agenda setting process, and to provide additional information and insights reflecting the board's decision making and the progression of the Capital Project. The OCCS Superintendent of Schools and the Business Executive agreed, and were both interviewed in early December 2013. After concluding the interviews with board members and completing transcriptions, a concise

list of questions for the Superintendent and Business Executive were developed (Appendix L). The questions were predicated on the questions asked board members (Appendix H). Conducting these interviews was to achieve consistency, clarification of procedures, and insight into board interactions not readily discernable from the interviews with board members or document analysis.

Interviews were scheduled for the December 11 and 12, 2013. Emphasized to the Superintendent and Business Executive at the onset of the arrangement of interviews, the total flexibility of the schedule. This was a particularly busy time of year for these individuals. It was time for annual budget preparation for the next academic year. Also, the EXCEL Project was rapidly winding down, and the added task of reconciliations and final reports due to the State Education Department increased an already onerous burden. Gratefulness for their participation was extended to both for their willingness to carve out time in their day to oblige the request to interview.

The district has employed the Business Executive for the past 18 years. Mr. B said, "Ms. I can walk on water, she is superb." He continued, "Ms. I will go up and through accounting and district finances, she does a great job. She makes it very simple so anyone can understand it." The first attempt to interview the Business Executive was on the morning of December 11. More pressing matters bumped this time to the afternoon and then to the next day. The next day yielded the same outcome; at that point the Business Executive offered to provide written responses to the questions. The next day the Business Executive provided answers in precise and concise language in an equally precise and concise handwritten script.

On the second day of attempting to interview the Business Executive, the Superintendent was able to find time for in an interview. His experiences have been decidedly small town and rural. This is the Superintendent's first district in this position. He is in his fourth decade as an educator having been a teacher, counselor, and building administrator. He is a widely-known and respected educator in this part of New York State.

When one enters Otter Creek CSD and first meets Mr. H, if he or she does not already know he is the Superintendent, he or she figures it out within a moment's time. He is the quintessential rural superintendent; he always impeccably attired, approachable, personable, affable, but never is there a doubt or question about who is in charge. The sighting of the interview was the Superintendent's office on the first floor in the original 1939 section of the campus.

This is Mr. H's first building project as a Superintendent. Previously as a building administrator, he had gone through a number of new construction and renovation projects of varying scopes of work and budgets. Mr. H spoke enthusiastically, with animated gestures when discussing the building project. This led to the interview being concluded with a general discussion of the decision-making process of the board and how having an experienced board at the beginning of the project differed from the less experienced board he worked with presently.

Observations

Observations for this study were conducted in two venues: one while attending meetings (school board meetings and public meetings hosted by the board), and the second was walking through the buildings (Appendix K). Attended were board meetings from

September 2010 through completion of major construction in December 2013 into January 2015. Concurrent with this timeframe, I was a substitute teacher in the district, averaging 60 days during the academic year. This afforded the opportunity to be a participant observer. Field notes were an important method of obtaining information. In the notes were scribed descriptions of the setting, people, topics, and activities observed during building walk-throughs.

Documents and Artifacts

Document analysis encompassed the systematic examination of school documentation. Included in the examination were policies, agendas, meeting minutes, budgets, and other written documents. Reviewed and analyzed for their content were local and regional newspaper articles. During the analysis of local and regional public access radio and television broadcasts, found was no pertinent content. As a result, there are no references to these sources in the research.

The review examined project data related to the construction, renovation, or maintenance of the current project and previous building projects as a part of the document collection process. Analyzed for the effect on project cost and subsequent board action were construction schedules, blueprints, drawing revisions, change orders, and environmental impact studies.

Data Analysis

Essential to the analysis of data is an appreciation of the conceptual framework guiding this study and insight into the dynamics of how the board formed their agendas. To begin the analysis phase, it is important to understand agenda setting. Kingdon (1984) stated problems, politics, and visible participants or actors create agendas. An inspection

of the conduct of the retreat and the monthly board meetings is illustrative of how the board developed recommendations and a final course of action on facilities issues and concerns. The review of these three elements leads to the analysis of three streams and the policy window using the coding results listed in Chapter 3.

Agenda Setting

An agenda evolves from subjects or issues thought of as important enough to warrant actionable consideration. Kingdon portrayed agenda setting as a "three-step process; problem recognition, generation of policy proposals, and political events" (p. 17). A significant event(s) can trigger the first step. The second step, Kingdon (1984) described as "a process of gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among the specialist in a given policy area, and the generation of policy proposals by such specialists" (p. 18). The third step, political events, precipitation is by "change in public mood or opinion, election results and the resultant changes in leadership all may have considerable effect" (p.19).

The initial analysis consisted of examining how the Otter Creek School Board developed the agenda. This analysis illustrated the progression of an issue to the discussion agenda to the decision agenda. This analysis will enable the reader to better ascribe meaning and context to the data presented.

The Retreat

The defining event for agenda development for the Otter Creek CSD is the annual Board Retreat. This gathering is after the July Reorganizational Meeting, during the first week in July after the Independence Day holiday. Typically, the board selects a date in late July or early August for the meeting. The meeting is not held on school property

providing the board with and environment more conducive to their deliberations and the fostering of new ideas and the generation of solutions to existing concerns.

Attending the retreat was the School Board and the Superintendent. The meeting was sometimes self-facilitated, and sometimes the BOCES Superintendent would act as the facilitator/moderator. Other attendees would be at the discretion of the board. They might include the Business Executive, principals, department heads, architects, or board solicitor.

Mr. C shared that this was a time for bringing a particular issue, or all issues forward. He said, "Items not addressed the previous year are reviewed and either brought back into a discussion or dropped entirely depending on the topic." He continued, saying reaffirmed was the agreed-upon mission statement for the district, and agreement was made upon a set of goals, established during the Board Retreat.

Mr. B's interpretation of the annual retreat and its purpose was to "to get the new person on board; look at budget, enrollment, and the contracts; review the year's upcoming contracts; review of the Superintendent's performance." He also stated, "We were looking at where and how much we were going to have to raise in taxes, [and] what the tax increase would be because the Otter Creek District sits in the village and three towns; that is a juggling issue."

Mr. E summed the purpose of the meeting as such:

> We have them a minimum of once a year. To reflect back, set goals, and reset things. If you wait too long or go every other year, you lose track of what the new board has to come into and what the new board has to address. The newly elected board members need to know their roles as board members.

Ms. A offered her perspective using an analogy reflective of her years as a high school boy's baseball announcer:

> Think of the analogy to sports. Somebody can pitch, and somebody can catch, and somebody has to catch those balls that the other players hit and deal with them effectively. So the more diversity (on the Board), the better. We can't all be pitchers; we can't all be outfielders, but we would have that retreat early on. That would be with our administrative staff, and we would talk about the issues that were current at the time. We would really work hard to say; okay what portion of our resources can we address for the building, what do we want to do in terms of academics, and how can we support that? Yeah, we would look at the big questions and just say who would lead that, who would research that, and that gave us our overall agenda for the year

Consistent with the first-step process in agenda setting, the agenda evolves from subjects or issues thought of as important enough to warrant actionable consideration. During the retreat, the board members engaged in broad-ranging discussions of goals and objectives, and of past and future considerations. Ms. A described this process as, "A very open, fluid situation."

Within the agenda setting process, two entities exist, the discussion agenda and the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1984). The OCCSD Board began the discussion agenda using input provided either directly at the retreat or in report(s) from building administrators, Business Executive, Special Education Coordinator, Head of Maintenance, IT Technician, and Cafeteria Manager, and others as appropriate. In the process of prioritizing items to move from discussion to action, the board used a process that Mr. E,

who used budgets as an example, best summed: "We come up with a wish list to a degree of what we would like to get done. Then we come down to prioritize we use three concentric circles, what must be done, what should be done, and what would be nice too." Where these three circles converge as in a Venn diagram, the board, according to Mr. E, moves the item from discussion to the action agenda.

Concluded from board members' comments, the retreat was a time to orientate the newly elected board members, review the previous year and set a general plan for the new academic year. The second phase of the agenda setting process—generating policy proposals—was not a priority of the retreat. There was no evidence of a long-range planning process identifying primary or alternate solutions to any item raised to the action agenda. The board relegated this process to an evolutionary one to be developed through the monthly agenda for the board meetings.

The Monthly Agenda

All board members concurred on the process used to set the monthly agenda. The Board President and the Superintendent construct the agenda primarily at a meeting. This was essentially a four-step process. First, prior to this meeting the Superintendent would convene with his staff approximately one week before and create a tentative agenda. Second, the Board President would sit down with the Superintendent in the week preceding the board meeting and set the meeting agenda.

The Superintendent would bring items to the board needing resolution from current school events and his perspective. Mr. E echoed the board sentiment on this when he offered, "The Superintendent came up with the needs of the school since it is his job to be in on it on a daily basis." The Board President, for his or her part, would share

member concerns and things heard in the community and bring them forward for inclusion on the agenda. There was agreement that it was the Board President who tended to set the agenda with the administrator. This board exhibited a strong commitment to their role as policy makers and the Superintendent as policy manager.

The third step—to choose an option to become policy—and the fourth step—implementation of the decision—would unfold as the problem, policy, and political streams pursuant to examining school facilities.

Problem Stream

First the noticing and recognizing a problem an actionable issue is necessary to promulgate a change in the agenda. Kingdon (1984) asserted a problem is a condition that people believe in addressing and implementing change. Problem recognition is not sufficient in and of itself to place an item on the agenda; however, once a situation or condition is defined as a problem, the chances of rising to the agenda are increased when a tipping point occurs (Kingdon, 1984). The tipping point is realized when a critical mass of people (i.e. interested parties) coalesce on an issue intent for resolution. In this study, the critical mass necessary was the Board of Education.

Problem Identification: Attaining Consensus in Light of Reasonable and Competing Issues

Kingdon (1984) spoke of the prompting of indicators as being not necessarily resulting from political pressure; he suggested decision makers sometimes realize or recognize a problem exists. The Otter Creek Board faced with myriad problems as the 2010-2011 School Year opened. All the board members interviewed attended the annual July 2010 retreat. Their response to a question inquiring about which major issues they

were most occupied with identified five major areas: funding, enrollment, mandates, facilities, and academics. A review of the interviews and the previous year's board minutes did not indicate facilities as issues of importance prior to 2010. Each of these five areas had sub-categories identified through the interviews.

The identified funding sub-categories included: state finances, taxes, annual budget, salaries, and benefits, loss of community businesses, fixed incomes, and poverty. Enrollment sub-categories included consolidation/merger, declining student population, loss of the general population, and the aging population. Mandates, both state and federal included expanded graduation requirements and the inclusion of special needs students. Facilities concerns identified to the board through the Five-Year Facilities Plan highlighted building age, maintenance, technology infrastructure, and health and safety concerns. Academic impacts were attributable to enrollment declines affecting class size, class offerings, loss of programs, and distance learning and technology issues fueling the debate over core curriculum offerings and enrichment programs for students.

For consideration is all major issues, as well as sub-categories, identified could come under the general or singular heading of funding. It was evident from individual board member responses that they perceived each to be a separate and independent issue. Regarding facilities issues, at this retreat, Ms. D shared this observation,

> We as a board talked about the needs that we saw, and what a new building project would do … agenda … nobody really sat down and made a prioritized list. I mean everyone just put their input into it, yeah I agree with that, - yeah that's a good idea, that's how it set.

The board members attending the retreat were all aware that the district's current Five-Year Facility Plan identified eleven areas needing work. Some of the recommended actions were minor, whereas, others required major reconstruction. The 11 areas indicated for construction or reconstructions were: pool reconstruction, major HVAC and mechanical/electrical upgrades, 1939 roof and tower reconstruction, kitchen/cafeteria alterations, high school office, expanded band room, relocated health suite, fitness center relocation, relocation of guidance office, exterior cast stone stairs, and general buildings and grounds.

The statement by Ms. D mirrored Kingdon's (1984) assessment of the existence of a status quo situation. Kingdon (1984) said the viewing of an issue as a steady state was less problematic for decision makers if they see no changes. There was a consensus among the board members that problems existed in the school's facilities; they did not, however, perceive, nor have, a sense of urgency. At the close of the retreat in July of 2010, the facilities issues had not moved off the discussion agenda.

Constraints: Impediments to Solving the Condition of Deteriorating School Facilities

As a school board in a small rural district, beset was the Otter Creek Board with the realities of needs and challenges that encompassed a diverse set of encumbrances for the district to encounter. The continually-declining enrollment, shrinking tax base, reduced state funding, unfunded mandates, outdated technology, and increasing salaries and benefits were some of the issues challenging the Otter Creek Board. Illuminated were constraining factors in the following six categories: Taxes, Enrollment, Contractual Obligations, Mandated Services, Facilities, and Supplemental Funding.

Taxes. Taxes are never far from the top of the discussion agenda in a small town. Mr. B succinctly stated, "Education is an extremely expensive thing." Mr. C shared his views on taxes on one of our walking interviews. To paraphrase Mr. C, money makes the world go around; some might say money is what spins the world out of control. There are only two certainties in life: Death and Taxes. I offered, "The ordering may perhaps have been more accurately conveyed as Taxes and Death or Taxed to Death." Mr. C countered, "Death is a one-time event, but taxes…taxes are a lifetime. Particularly in rural areas, small towns like this, they are a burden; people can only afford so much." Citizens view taxes in New York State, at any level, as either progressive or regressive. The viewpoint often aligns with one's political or depth of pocket perspective and is, therefore, not germane to this study.

In any of the board's deliberations the matter of taxes, and their implication for the Otter Creek District were always front and center. Excerpts from the interviews with three members are illustrative of the pervasive feeling of the entire board. As one reads these passages, it is easy to sense the frustration and undertones of desperation in their words.

> Ms. A: Without a strong tax base, we are continually challenged to provide services for our students that will carry them into this particular century. When we have a tax base that is generally retired and has little industrial base, we have people that are renting, and we have state lands that cannot be taxed or state properties that cannot be taxed. We are really stretched to generate enough funds to address technology; to address enrichment activities, extra-curricular activities, even hire to offer the salaries that attract the best candidates to teach.

Ms. D: Living in Otter Creek for years, I think in rural schools and farming communities (poor district), things were not neglected but things were let go because no one wanted to go to the taxpayers and say we are going to raise your taxes 30% because we have to put a new roof on or we have do this. No one wanted to do that. But I think what happens in a lot of poor rural districts; there are just not the funds available. The money that is collected through taxes is primarily used to just run the school, not really make improvements, just keep it up not modernize it. I would have to say that is true of Otter Creek and most rural districts.

Mr. E: When I became involved in politics around 60-65%, somewhere in that range, possible 70% of the population was on fixed income. So you had to be aware of that deploying resources; getting resources is one thing and the deploying of them properly, you have to keep the people informed because (if) they are not happy….budgets go down.

In New York State, school districts raise the local share of their budget money from assessed property within the district boundaries. Used then is a state formula for the distribution of state monies to the districts. This formula is not a matching funds proposition; there is no equalization rate. The money from the state formula is predicated on the amount raised in local taxes.

New York State has significantly reduced aid to education. This reduction in funding has further exacerbated the position of small rural districts. A state law, Chapter 97 of 2011 (Part A-Property Tax Cap), has limited the amount that can be raised by local property taxes. The cap sits at 2%. While this may appear as tax relief, to the district

taxpayer, especially a poor one, it is devastating. Jeopardizing the district's ability to provide educational opportunities is the increasing costs and reduced revenues. Otter Creek is experiencing declines in their enrollments, fund balances, and reserves, while seeing increases in spending for payrolls and benefits, all of which the state does not cap or regulate.

In the interview with Mr. E, he stated, "51% of the school district, we are talking about a scale; it as almost 49%, 50%, 51% is not taxable." The Otter Creek CSD is in a unique, but not enviable, taxation position. A review of district tax documentation revealed the situation unique to Otter Creek is that approximately 52% of the property in the district is non-taxable. The State of New York owns 50% of the district's property.

Three separate state entities, all with different purposes, control this property, and it is divided into unequal parcels of land. The remaining 2% is comprised of all village and town properties to include schools, parks, water treatment and sanitation facilities, and churches and burial grounds. The limited property tax base coupled with the declining population and fixed incomes saddle the Otter Creek School taxpayer with a significant local tax burden.

The taxpayers in the Otter Creek School District have historically been very supportive of the budgets put forth by the school board. The level of support shown by the community, with a greater than 60% "Yes" vote per year is indicative of the confidence in the school board and the administrators.

Table 4

Ten-Year Budget Vote Results

Year	Yes	No	Passed/Failed
2005	290	140	Passed
2006	303	216	Passed
2007	216	166	Passed
2008	303	201	Passed
2009	241	160	Passed
2010	718	249	Passed
2011	443	254	Passed
2012	456	397	Passed
2013	189	66	Passed
2014	187	50	Passed
10 Year Average	334	189	
Approval %	64%	36%	100%

Source: OCCS District Officials

The only budget, in recent history, which did not pass was the 2004 Budget. The vote failed, 241 No to 197 Yes, a margin of 44 ballots. The district adopted a contingency budget that year with a budget cap established using the state formula. During the most recent ten-year period, the voters approved the 2005 Capital Project and the 2011 EXCEL Capital Building Project, once again showing the confidence held in district leadership.

Enrollment. The challenges in enrollment were reflected in the academic offerings in the district. There was a shared concern among board members about the ability of the district to offer foreign languages, advanced math and sciences, and

Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Class sizes have diminished from 20 to 15 students to 10 and fewer. The cost-effectiveness threshold is crossed when enrollment falls to less than six students prompting the district to eliminate the class. The issue of supplementing instruction in core curricular areas using distance learning centers located in school building has been a statewide and continuing point of contention between NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) and school districts. Resultantly, distance learning is only evident in elective course offerings and not in core curricular areas.

Contractual obligations. A concern for all board members was the continually widening gap in salary and benefits costs, the diminishing local tax base, and declining state aid. The contractual and non-contractual obligations result in leaving only 30-35% of the budget to fund academic programs, technology, operations and maintenance, and all other expenses. This percentage is continuing to shrink each year for the Otter Creek District.

The state, beginning the 1990's, began a concerted effort to push an inclusionary model for special needs students relieving the BOCES Districts of this responsibility. The in-house delivery of services now needs rooms for programs such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. All but the most profoundly physically and mentally disabled students are educated in their home district, with the primary funding source to be derived from the district's annual budget. Mr. B stated, "In Otter Creek education is an extremely expensive, spending $20,000 per student. The cost of educating a special education student can be five times or more of that." He conveyed that the board was very conscious of this, and the board and administration worked

extremely hard on the assessment of students with special needs to provide both fair and equitable services.

Mr. E gave an illustrative of the example of the impact of the inclusionary model in the district. He shared that in August of one recent school year, a family moved into the district with four children, two of whom were special needs students each with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The budget was already voted on and approved the preceding May. The cost to the district to provide services for these two children was $250,000. To compensate for this expense, the budget for the next year included staff cuts and a tax hike to cover the losses.

The inclusionary model that the state imposes is one example of scores of unfunded mandates New York State imposes on school districts. A comprehensive list of these mandates is included in Appendix M (NYSED, 2010). The state imposes mandates through legislation or statutory regulations. Seed money is sometimes available to initiate programs, but, as Mr. E stated, "They always roll it back at you, and you have no choice. These programs are expensive, and the costs are not easily predictive causing a great deal of speculation when constructing the annual district budget."

Facilities. On the issue of facilities, Mr. C, and Ms. D offered their perspectives on constraints. Mr. C made the observation that the state offered free money for building aid, with the district paying a percentage based on the district wealth. Otter Creek was eligible for 98% standard state building aid. This left an obligation of 2% for the district to repay through local taxes; EXCEL money covered this percentage. Mr. C continued when he shared his observation that when a building project is passed, neither the community nor the district has any idea of maintenance and upkeep costs. The only

estimated expenses are derived from square footage maintenance cost calculations from professional associations, state agencies, and federal agencies.

The use of building aid and EXCEL monies is only for construction costs, not for academic programs. The district must return any excess money to the state. Mr. C reiterated, "Yes as I stated before— they have no understanding of the long-range impact on the local budget and taxes." He concluded, "They (the buildings) will fall into disrepair and neglect, who knows if free money will be available."

After interviewing the board members and reviewing the transcripts, noted was the existence of consensus regarding facility maintenance and renovations. This unanimity was the using of money collected through taxes as primarily to run the school and not make improvements or to modernize, just keep it up at a baseline of functionality and safety.

Supplemental funding. The board members during interviews shared a number of innovative measures implemented to augment and supplement the struggle with funding. They spoke of the countless hours the present and former Superintendent, Business Executive, and Elementary Principal spent to maximize revenues through rental income and grants.

The former Superintendent arranged to have regional summer school taught at Otter Creek. Summer School at Otter Creek generated income and saved transportation costs and tuition if Otter Creek students attended summer school out of the district. Furthermore, he initiated renting classroom space out for BOCES programs in Otter Creek facilities. One of the grants the district's Business Executive secured supplemented the cost of operating the school's cafeteria. Unused academic facilities

were rented as office space to the joint finance offices for the village and town. Additionally, the district currently administers the shared fuel depot with village and town. The Business Executive handles the books, eliminating the need to outsource this function saving the district those fees.

In conclusion, the board was always acutely aware of the constraints and challenges faced in meeting district needs. As Kingdon (1984) observed, policy makers anticipate expenses and revenues and adjust as necessary. They initiate cutbacks and other measures as attempts for fiscally responsible management. Kingdon continued offering that during tough times people tend to the conservative and make do, avoiding big changes. This was the modus operandi in Otter Creek.

Focusing Event: Realization and Accompaniment

Kingdon (1984) said a focusing event is "not often self-evident" (p. 99). He continued saying often needed is a crisis or disaster as the accelerator to formulate the development of an actionable response. He also linked the importance of what he referred to as an accompaniment, "something to reinforce the pre-existing perception of the problem" (Kingdon, 1983, p. 103).

Not unlike an incident shared by Mr. E from the late 1990s, when a lintel (load-bearing building component) fell from the 1939 section of the building (fortunately no one was injured). It then, at that time, took a near-catastrophic event to prompt immediate repairs to the building and to become a contributing factor eventually in the inception of the 2003 building project. The conditions of deteriorating and outdated school facilities were known and had existed for years in the Otter Creek School District. The district's Five-Year Facility Plan was in place and served as a constant reminder of

facility needs. Entities both within and outside of the school district recognized the prevailing conditions as problematic for some time prior to the school board action.

The problems associated with the current building project finally came to the action phase, not precipitated by a single event, but rather the cumulative failing of building systems. The recognition of safety factors and the need for adequate educational spaces were at a critical juncture. As stated by Mr. B,

> Always the first priority was safety that was, that is, the overriding emphasis of the Otter Creek Board. Students, then the taxpayers; what can we do for our kids with the resources we have, what can the taxpayers come up with.

The accompaniment that brought the board to realize the inability of the district to repair or replace the existing failing or outdated infrastructure had escalated to the point of total renovation and reconstruction was the new Superintendent. The district immediately hired the Superintendent prior to the start of the academic 2010-2011 year. The new Superintendent began a campaign of information saturation from his office, and his staff directed this information to the board regarding the then current state of the district's facilities. The board, resultantly, came to a consensus that it was time to reprioritize the facilities problem and develop a scope of action.

Pre-existing Solution: State Building Aid and EXCEL Program Aid

Kingdon (1984) asserted for the multiple streams to be effective a pre-existing solution must be available. He continued stating, "A ready to go solution with an available alternative had the greatest potential for placement on the decision agenda" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 151). The pre-existing solution available to the Otter Creek District was the existence of state building aid and EXCEL aid. The OCCSD was designated as a

high needs district and was, therefore, eligible for 98% building aid. The maximum allocated District EXCEL aid was $536,971, and the district would use to supplement the 2% not covered by state building aid ("EXCEL Cover Sheet", 2014).

The incentive to combine state building aid and EXCEL money to fund a construction project was the potential financial windfall a district could receive for the actualization of a building project. As both a small and a poor district, Otter Creek was in an advantageous position. The district was able to borrow $5 million at 0% interest. Next, the district borrowed $9 million at .007% interest, which the state reimbursed at a 2% interest rate. The district was able to realize a twofold gain: first, enhancement of the district's facilities, and second, a gain $1 million in accrued interest.

When asked if the availability of EXCEL funding was instrumental in pushing the board to make a decision, Ms. A responded, "Absolutely I don't know where else we would get money to do what we have done. Thank goodness for that funding really." When asked the same question Mr. B replied, with a historical anecdote as well:

> I'm not going to get the details right; Albany got themselves into a legal hassle because they gave more money downstate to New York City than they did to the rest of us. (They) got sued and then they had to compensate by giving the districts upstate the EXCEL money that paid for the majority of the work that was done back in 2003-2002 on the (OCCSD) buildings. Albany also had agreed to pick up interest cost, so it worked for Otter Creek that they didn't have to pay for the $16 million that just went into the interest on that $16million. I know people say well you are spending our tax money, but the tax money is being generated by Long Island and New York City not by us here. So you say, if you are not going

to spend the money, you are cutting your nose off to spite your face, and that is not hard to get across.

The only alternative solution the board saw to the constant deterioration of district facilities was the continual raising of local taxes to pay for the repairs and renovation of the deteriorating facility conditions. The needed repairs and updates to the existing building systems would take an extended period to be completed and be limited in scope. The resulting time span would allow for the further deterioration of the facility. The put-off or delayed repairs only fueled the never-ending cycle of tax and spending that provides only temporary short term solutions to longstanding or escalating facilities deterioration. The board framed this alternative solution as unacceptable. The alternative solution was essentially a non-solution; this factor was a prime motivator for the board in achieving consensus on the need for the EXCEL Building Project.

The combination of state building aid at 98% and EXCEL money at 2% resulted in a building project at no cost to the district or taxpayers. What was initially estimated to be $8.8 million repair program as outlined in the district's Five-Year Facility Plan, would become the current $16 million EXCEL Capital Building Project. The availability of funding now made it possible for the district to address their most costly problem: the heating system in the 1939 wing. Collectively described by the maintenance staff as an opening to hell was the still operational old steam boiler system. There was a concern about its safety. Additionally, computer labs, infrastructure upgrades, and a high school library were all in need of repairs. The ability to address these was possible within the expanded scope of the project's $16 million budget.

The focusing event or tipping point was cemented with the fund of monies available from the state building aid fund and the EXCEL Program coupled with a $1 million interest earned incentive. Achieved was the essential compilation of events and circumstances in the agenda-setting process. The reaching of the problem to the decision agenda was now possible because a pre-existing solution was attaching successfully to the facilities issue.

Policy Stream

The policy stream refers to the generation of policy proposals with the intent to solve problems. These proposals are constructed in advance to be ready to implement when need dictates (Kingdon, 1984). Presented were proposals from single or wide-ranging issues and presented from sources both from within an organization or from the outside. The generation and forth coming of proposals may emanate from formal and informal coalitions or groups, or from separate entities who share a common interest.

At Otter Creek, defined was the problem: deteriorating facilities. Identified was the pre-existing solution: 100% financing for a building project. From the policy stream, the resolution (policy) for a building project had next to be generated for presentation to and approval by the district voters

Policy Entrepreneurs: Key Actors

Central to the development of proposals and the generation of policy are policy entrepreneurs. Kingdon (1984) identifies entrepreneurs as those willing to put forth sustained effort and/or resources over time into the policy making process. This is done "in return for anticipated future gain" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 188), all without any guarantee of success. Motivated by concerns and reasons specific to their interests are all

entrepreneurs, to include those in this study. The motivational factors in this case study included personal or career interests, or simply doing one's job. Motivation of others was by what they perceived as the right thing.

Key Actors

Inside the school. Participants with formal positions in an organization are bound by rules of accountability which do not bind people outside the organization (Kingdon, 1984). The entrepreneurs within the district, who were in a position to influence board decision making, included the Superintendent, Business Executive, Administrative Council (principals), faculty, and staff.

Administration. This section will examine actions of the district administration during policy generation through the voices of the school board members. The Otter Creek administration is comprised of the Superintendent, Business Executive, and two principals (elementary pre-K-5 and high/middle school 6-12). When board members were asked who the most significant persons were influencing the board when making facility decisions; the consistent answer was the administrators. Ms. A responded,

> I think a lot of it came from the administration, who could look around and go ooh we have work to do. Let's get to it and not postpone it. We have EXCEL funds that we can address, and if we can package it to the public in a meaningful way they will certainly support our drive to fund it in a fiscally responsible manner as possible. Let's use the money that's out there before we (the buildings) fall down.

When asked about administrative members influencing the board Mr. C simply stated, "Yes, input was heard from the building administrators, Business Executive, Head of Maintenance, IT Technician, and Cafeteria Manager."

Ms. D shared that the retired Superintendent was excellent when it came to researching and presenting the concept of what was to become the EXCEL Project. She said, "I was never on the Building and Grounds Committee. I never served on that, but once we conveyed to the Superintendent the board was on agreeable with it, we presented it to the architects and the financial people and that was how everything was rolled out."

She continued saying,

> When the state put out that money for building, hey why not, it's crazy not to and the retired Superintendent and Business Executive did an awful lot of work on the financial picture of the building project, and we found that the building project helped us financially. Going out for bonds and stuff for it, we would take that money and invest it, and we would make interest money on it and so if it was required to pay it back…those building projects helped us financially plus it definitely improved the facility.

When Ms. D said, "… so if it was required to pay it back," she was referring to building projects undertaken at the being of the 2000's when a former governor and state legislators reneged on a similar funding program called RESCUE. This forced districts to pay the interest on borrowed building project money. Accomplishing the raising of money could only be through the local tax levy. Resultantly, healthy skepticism tempered the actions of board members when considering the new project.

Mr. E saw the Superintendent and administrative staff as the keepers of the flame. He shared that he felt it was the board's responsibility to be a visionary force to get the project going and to get it done within the allotted funding, and to ensure the administration protected the district's long-term investment. He said,

> Let's address this properly and get it done fully, and let's make sure we have enough funds to maintain it afterward. I'm trying to convey to them (administration) that's what keeps us from going right back to square one again.

The interviews with the board members conveyed a strong sense of shared ownership of the EXCEL Project. The board perceived their role as having been the guiding force, providing the vision, direction, and support. The administrative staff was tasked with performing the research and financial sourcing while providing the day to day operational support for the project. It was evident that while the final decision was the board's, the administrative staff provided substantial structure, and logistical support. The Superintendent and Business Executive had almost daily contact with board members and, as a result, were the most influential of the all the policy entrepreneurs. The ability to research and frame the indicators and then provide definitions for solutions to the board paved the way to move the building project from the discussion agenda to the decision agenda and ultimately to a board resolution.

The Business Executive was the sole continuing actor with full knowledge of the proposed EXCEL Project. This individual bridged the gap during the transition between the retiring Superintendent, and the incoming (current) Superintendent hired at the beginning of the 2010-2011 Academic Year. She had been intimately involved in all aspects of the project from inception through completion. Ms. I's knowledge and

persona at board meetings and public events indicated she was the go-to person for the board and Superintendent for all money and fiduciary matters related to the project.

Students. Students were not an entrepreneurial force or group per se with an active voice, but rather a de facto entity whose well-being permeated all decisions made by this board. Interpreted from the interviews, when board members spoke of the school, students were an inclusionary dimension of the school. The only board member to reference students specifically as influential was Ms. A,

> My bottom line was always how it would benefit the students, not just a segment of the students but all of the students. The ones who are challenged to learn, the ones who are excellent at learning, the ones in the middle that may have diverse skills that would be discovered in extra-curricular areas, and that came from my public school background. Yeah, it's got to be good for all of us. Is the building safe, is it accessible, do we have the tools that can reach all of our students.

Faculty and staff. When asked about influences regarding facilities from faculty and/or staff, Ms. A responded,

> I think that came more out of the people who work in the building and could see lights that were getting dim or crumbling things here and there or knew about tiles that had an asbestos backing or insulation that was questionable and roof leaks that were coming in. I'm sure they were brought to our administrator, and we started looking along with our business official for funding to address that area.

Mr. C cited undue influence by some faculty members whom he perceived to be pushing programs and services not related to education or benefiting students. He spoke of extra pay for mentoring, guiding, or supervising pet projects. Mr. C found

recommendations for more technology disturbing. He felt the schools did not utilize or underutilized existing technology in the buildings. He observed Distance Learning Labs, a Mac Lab, and a large and small PC (personal computer) lab in both the elementary and secondary schools as sitting empty the majority of the school day. He remarked, "Thousands of dollars and the room sits empty. This is in addition to each 7-12 grade student having a personal, school-supplied laptop." Additionally, he shared from his observations each classroom is outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment (Smart Boards), which are not used. He noted the unused equipment has no resale or exchange value.

Mr. C felt the lack of use was attributable to one of the two factors: either instructors are not being trained in the use of the equipment or the instructors refusal to use the equipment for instruction and enrichment. In particular to the distance learning technology, Mr. C offered that the non-use was due to a long-running conflict between the New York State Teachers Union and administrators in some districts and school boards statewide. He continued by saying this diverts time and energy from what needs to be done; board members are running with it and not looking at implications or dollars. He stated the directing of funds could be to more urgent district needs (e.g. unfunded state mandates, shifts in special needs population, or the maintenance of a full Fund Balance Account).

Outside the school. Participants without formal positions in the school could constitute interest groups, researchers, academics, consultants, media, political parties, and the general public (Kingdon, 1984). Characterization of these actors can be as hardliners and soft liners regarding their stance on issues. They can open levels of

discussion both inside and outside of the school, and have the ability to motivate the media and influence public opinion

Participants outside of the board of education do not have to power to make or approve district policy. They do, however, have the ability to be persuasive through a variety of methods. They can exert influence through the giving or withdrawal of their support or vote. They can make presentations and offer alternatives to modify decisions of school board members.

Interest groups. Seen as interest groups, can be policy entrepreneurs and other initiators promoting or influencing the agenda. Within the Otter Creek community, when asked if there were interest groups that pushed or led with the intent of influencing board decision making, the consensus among board members was that none existed. There were no overt or organized tax groups, special interest groups, or locally elected officials attempting to affect the board agenda. Observed was no indication of political party influence, connected with board members self-identified party affiliations, and no evidence of the overt influence of partisan politics.

Parents. Argued could be parents as representing an interest group. They are integral to the school; however, in Kingdon's (1984) definition, they are participants without formal power to make or approve district policy. Parents can wield influence through the power of the ballot box, at board meetings, or other public settings. Consistent with Kingdon's statement on formal power, they (parents) cannot make or approve district policy that is the legal responsibility of the school board.

The board members did not identify parents as a group but rather as individuals who would approach them. Board members usually encountered parents in a community

setting but sometimes at school and often in connection with an event: typically athletic or musical in nature. When asked about Parent Teacher Association (PTA) participation Ms. D replied, "No I really do not recall them being involved."

Mr. C shared that specific parents or those with parental responsibilities would approach board members or the Superintendent with concerns for their child or children, but not every child. These concerns more often than not were in regards to athletics or some perceived disadvantage their child was experiencing in school as a result of inadequate facilities. No pool, poor acoustics in the auditorium, and lighting for the football field were examples of some of the concerns voiced.

School community. The community did play a significant role in a school district. The community did become the most successful agent to influence agenda setting and thus become an important actor in affecting board member decision making. The community can sometimes be the only actor to challenge the school board over an agenda item. This was accomplished at Otter Creek either through the ballot box or to a lesser degree, with visible activism at board meetings or other events in the public venue. Although not a part of this study, but illustrating the influence or will of the community, concurrent to conducting this research the board was listening to talk of a possible consolidation or merger gaining traction in the district's community.

All the interviewed board members indicated they were contacted by individuals and not by groups or representatives of a group or coalition. Mr. B said that while serving on the Building Committee, he encountered significant input from the community. This input, while important in terms of the perceptions of needs for improvement to building, was expressed as individual concerns. These concerns were,

usually, moderated by their personal connection to the issue (e.g. athletic facilities, band or choir room, and sometimes more altruistic in regard HVAC concerns).

For example, Mr. B shared one such concern: "There has always been an issue from several people in the community about the clock tower on the original building. It had been poorly maintained back in the 80's, and several people in town wanted it restored." Mr. B shared that in the past it had been cost prohibitive to make repairs, with expenses estimated to be in the vicinity of $100,000. An additional factor was that being a WPA Project it had historical significance, and state approval was required for any restoration or removal.

When asked about the level of community influence or input, Ms. D responded, "There really wasn't anything like that. There was just a general flow through the community; someone might approach you at a local eatery and say I thought about this." She continued saying,

> Yeah, there was no community group that came to the board and said, 'Hey I think you should do this or that' nothing like that. We had individual people come and ask a question. We had public meetings and went through the project and the financing soup to nuts with the public because it is their right to know the project gets aided 100%.

Painted as a positive influence affecting decision making by the board members was community input. As a counter-point, Mr. C shared the community did not see or did not wish to contemplate the long-range effects of the pool renovation. The amount spent on the pool renovation was a significant sum of the total $16 million dollar project. When asked if the board discussed alternatives to the pool renovation; Mr. C succinctly

replied, "No. They should have filled it in and converted the space to a more practical use."

When asked to elaborate, he continued and said:

> I do not feel we need to spend as much as we do on new facilities. The spending of project funds above and beyond the original scope of the project will perpetuate the debt load of the district. Any surplus monies should not be used; state appropriations can be returned to state and local monies used to defer indebtedness. Spending money, just to spend, because it is available is not exercising fiduciary restraint, which is the responsibility of the board when spending district taxpayer's money. I don't think people understand the high cost of pool maintenance. They will never sell enough memberships to offset operational expenses… they have no understanding of the long-range impact on the local budget and taxes.

Special interest groups. Kingdon spoke of visible and hidden entrepreneurs or actors affecting the decision-making process. Interviews with the Otter Creek Board revealed their perception of visible principle actors as those previously delineated. Chief among these was the Superintendent, Business Executive, and individual community members. Observed was the board perceived no other group or organization as having had an overt impact on their decisions.

Architects as entrepreneurs. A group, however, within their employment was, in fact, making profound incursions into the individual and collective thinking of board members relative to the EXCEL Project. This group was a local architectural firm the district retained for developing the state mandated Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan. The architectural firm provided a specific and specialized service to the district. This group

was essentially a hidden participant. Kingdon (1984) identified hidden participants as being specialists or consultants often engaged in planning, evaluation, or budget activities. The architectural firm met all these criterions.

The retired Superintendent brought the firm to the board for approval while serving as the district's Superintendent. The district initially retained the firm in 2001 to comply with the state statute enacted that year for the state-wide evaluation of all school facilities. The district, using the first facilities plan, employed the firm as their project architect for the 2003 building project. The project in 2005 was of a much more limited scope, and the district retained the architectural firm as both project architect and construction managers.

Completed under the tenure of the now retired superintendent were the 2003 and 2005 projects. Ms. D offered this statement:

> The retired Superintendent (Mr. J) was really good at taking care of those things. Once we conveyed, the board was on board with it. We presented it to the architects and the financial people, and that was how everything was rolled out.

The board exhibited a heavy reliance on the Superintendent. The board's trust in the Superintendent was almost without question. The fact that board members knew the principles of the architectural firm prior to being initially retained in 2001 contributed to the board's feeling of reassurance as they unanimously approved the 2003 and 2005 building projects.

The architectural firm's involvement in the current EXCEL Project was met with only limited skepticism. The current Superintendent, Mr. H shared his observations

about the relationship between the board and the architectural firm during his interview about the state of the project:

> …even more confusing is that every five years you have to do a building survey, well, quite frankly, superintendents building, superintendents in schools are not qualified to do that in depth study. So then you hire an architect to do that for you. Why wouldn't he (architect) find concerns that you might want to do with that easy money you got from the state? So now you have an architect also doing a study of what you need that then creates a list of things which you send to your board to have them approve. This Five-Year-Plan, which, says we need a roof on our building, or we need our heating system updated, or we need new windows because they leak. A little bit of a conflict of interest. You don't have to hire this architect by any means, but you will have to hire somebody. So then we have a 5-year building survey is what generates; do we need a capital project? And that truly is what generated this project.

As for the board, their confidence in the firm remained steadfast. Their personal connections buoyed their confidence. The following remark from one of the board members summed the connection, "One of those architects was one of my former students."

The hiring for architectural, engineering, or construction management is at the sole discretion of a school board in New York State; the only requirement is they hold current state credentialing for the purpose of entering into a contract for these services. School boards are not required to put the Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan out to bid.

From the Board Minutes of March 2011:

RESOLVED, that the Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, appoint Architecture & Engineering, P.C. as architects for the EXCEL Capital Project.

Discussion: Upon the successful passing of the appointment of Architecture & Engineering, P.C., the Superintendent will enter into contract negotiations.

7 Yes

Motion carried

At the April 2012 Board Meeting the following resolution was made:

Resolution: Enhanced Construction Contract Administration Services (Construction Management) $280,000 with Architecture and Engineering, PC.

Discussion: This ECCA contract will include 3 on-site personnel, with one acting as primary on-site construction manager.

7 Yes

Motion Carried

In both of these meetings, the discussion was a brief explanation of the services requiring board approval. There were no questions and no exchanges between board members or the Superintendent. The board took votes; the board made unanimous decisions on both resolutions, and it heard no comments or questions from the public. The board gave the firm the virtual ability to write its ticket.

Political Stream

Kingdon (1984) defined the political stream in a national context when he said, "It is composed of such factors as swings in the national mood, election results, changes in

administration, changes in ideological or partisan distributions in Congress, and interest group pressure campaigns" (p. 170). Developments in the political sphere can become powerful and effectual enablers for agenda setters. Within the scope of the political stream, participants build consensus through bargaining and not persuasion as in the policy stream; promoters of specific policies garner support for alternatives through coalition building and the granting of concessions in exchange for support (Kingdon, 1984).

In the 2010-2011 Academic Year, the political climate in the Otter Creek School District was favorable for action to address facility issues. A district had hired a new Superintendent, who was in the first year of a multi-year contract. The board retained its core membership with Ms. A, Mr. B, Mr. C, Ms. D, Mr. E, and Mr. F. The construct of the Problem Stream had identified a significant problem: deteriorating infrastructure and needed upgrades, and the board identified a pre-existing solution to fund the renovations: State Building Aid and EXCEL Aid. The elements of the Policy Stream coalesced and culminated in the board approved resolution/policy: EXCEL Capital Building Project.

Throughout the flow of the Problem and Policy Streams was the independent and meandering Political Stream. The existence of conflicting interests and limited resources can with a certain degree of predictability politicize the decision-making process. District leaders, the board and administration, were making decisions based on the best information available to them at the time, as well as engaging political action strategies to steer their course of action.

Mood: 2010 Board Besieged

As was previously stated, at the onset of the 2010-2011 Academic Year, the board was wrestling with a plethora of issues. Fiscal solvency in an era of demands for increased achievement in the face of decreased revenues and rising costs forced the board to decide whether to cut staff, instructional programs, or facilities. Mr. B characterized the board's concerns at that time as being "the everyday ones that keep the system running. They were the enrollment, state finances, state mandates, and teacher contracts." Mr. C was concerned with long-range technology issues. These were the topics on the board discussion agenda at the 2010 reorganizational meeting. The content of the following four topical areas will contain the voice of each of the board members expressing their concerns.

Enrollment. A declining enrollment and the possibility of merging or consolidating with another district loomed large for the board. Talk of mergers in the region had been circulating with increased frequency since the late 1990s. Otter Creek had recently conducted a merger vote with a neighboring district to the east that was defeated by a solid majority of Otter Creek voters. The pressures of declining enrollment and subsequent loss of programs, coupled with a shrinking tax base and cuts in state aid to districts, renewed merger talks at Otter Creek. Mergers or consolidations were again gaining traction with the board as state intervention in these decisions was becoming a serious concern. The board members were collectively thinking and asking, "Was it better to be preemptive and control the district's course before state-mandated requirements were imposed?" The state legislature's continual eroding of local authority was leaving small rural and poor districts less and less in control of their destinies.

The merger issue was very much at the forefront of the board's deliberations. Ms. A said, "When I served on the board for ten years, our major issues tended to be seeking opportunities to consolidate or centralize with neighboring districts." On the subjects of enrollment and funds, Ms. D offered,

> The last two years I was on the board the declining enrollment was the big hot topic. I mean the hot topic. What are we going to do? Plus increasing taxes you can't do that forever because the public can't bear that burden.

Mr. B summed up the board's thoughts on the subject when he said:

> We are looking at the finances, and we are looking at the enrollment and the state funding. We are seeing that our bottom line both in what we are offering to the students and what we are doing to the taxpayer meant we had to do something about joining another school district.

Mandates. State unfunded mandates were another exemplification of the state's incursion into local control. Mr. B and Mr. C both noted the strain this placed on the district's resources, forcing the board to pick and choose between alternatives where neither was an optimal choice. A case in point had been the withholding of funding for and the ultimate deterioration of the swimming pool. This decision had impacted the curriculum, services to children with physical and developmental disabilities, athletics, and community recreation. Mr. C had said, "Hard choices for hard times."

Contracts. The district was in an essentially winless position in respect to its unionized contracts. Hampered by state statutes, laws, state politics, and the aspirations of those either in or seeking elected office to the state legislature in sum sorely limited the

negotiating position of the board. The ever-escalating costs of salaries and benefits were again forcing the district to make hard choices. Mr. B shared the following observation and the attempts to remediate this issue:

> There had been previous boards that had kinda given the store away with regard to health insurance and paying out pensions. We are looking at our bottom line, and thinking we have got to do something about that…buyouts were offered to get that level down, to get the budget more in line.

While the state does nothing to abate the rising costs of salaries and benefits, they do nothing to fund these increases putting the onerous tasks of deciding what to eliminate and what to keep on the school boards. The board viewed the loss of programs as detrimental to the education of the district's children, a consequence the state chooses to ignore. Mr. E said,

> We are offering less and less elective programs to the students. So the concern is: are we preparing them properly for postsecondary education, are they getting a good basic quality education? We are getting nervous about being able to prepare them for post-high school education.

Mr. E expressed the overall point of consternation for the board,

> You keep reducing or holding taxes or try reduce taxes, and the way to do that is dropping programs or letting staff go. It's becoming more difficult; programs are being diluted or eliminated which students need to become well-rounded. Athletic programs, after-school programs, and concern about music and after school programs with musical applications such as the bands and the plays and

the musicals; seriously better be considered in the future if we cannot address the tax situation.

Technology. A major issue occupying the board was the cost of updating technology. The scope for technology updates was extensive, even for a small district. There are four computer labs in the district, a distance learning facility, two fully-computerized libraries, Smart-Boards in every instructional area, and at least two personal computers in each classroom. Additionally, each teacher has a laptop computer assigned to then, each student in grades 7-12 is issued a laptop for personal use for the school year, and there are two mobile laptop carts that circulate in the elementary school.

The cost of software and equipment maintenance was continually escalating. Hardware was essentially obsolete within three years, and there was virtually no exchange or resale value; replacement is the sole and expensive alternative. Limited costs were eligible for reimbursement from BOCES funds. The funding, however, came from the same pool of money as all state aid is limited.

Mr. C expressed grave concerns about the costs of technology and maintenance. Information Technology (IT) support and maintenance required the district to retain an in-house tech and assistant. This, Mr. C offered, BOCES provides these services as less costly and more efficient. He shared his observations of IT use, or lack of use, in the school. He stated, "The lack of use can be attributed to either instructors not being trained in the use of this equipment or refusal to use as a tool for classroom instruction and enrichment." He continued, "The fact that this equipment is not being used is attributable to a long-running conflict between the New York State Teachers Association (union) and administrators in some districts and school boards statewide." Mr. C saw the annual

expenditure of tens of thousands of dollars on technology that was not utilized (i.e. distance learning lab(s) and computer labs, as the irresponsible action(s) by specific teaching staff supported by a union agenda and state mandates).

Mr. C's issues with technology led him to expand about political implications. He was concerned with an overarching political agenda emanating from the both the state and teacher's union and its effect on the board. He summarized these actions as:

> Pushing programs and services not really related to education or the kids (unfunded mandates), extra pay for mentoring or guiding or supervising pet projects (union initiated). Activities such as these divert board time and energy from what needs to be done. All smoke and mirrors and current board members are running with it and not looking at implications or dollars.

When asked to elaborate on "implications" Mr. C responded, "Long range ramifications - No money to sustain new initiatives or pet projects."

A Change in Administration: Hiring of the New Superintendent

The beginning of the 2010-2011 Academic Year saw the Otter Creek District complete its selection process and hire a new Superintendent of Schools. This event would precipitate a change in the board's political outlook, as both individuals and as collective board members. The previous Superintendent proposed a solution of combining state aid and EXCEL aid to fund the building project, but it had not formally reached the discussion agenda. There was, at that time, no overtly compelling impetus to raise the existing facilities problem into a focusing event. Therefore, the project had remained a non-actionable issue. Linked insufficiently was the magnitude of the scope of facilities work and the availability of aid from the state to accomplish the task.

The interviews with board members revealed subtle, but consistent suggestion that the hiring of a new Superintendent was the catalyst for change. Mr. B's words are a telling summation of the board's sentiment:

> Otter Creek is blessed with the present Superintendent; Mr. H, he is remarkable and then there is a financial agent, Ms. I, who can walk on water; she is superb, and prior to Mr. H., Mr. J (retired Superintendent) was his equal. They would spend hours upon hours looking up every possible way to maximize what revenues we had to cover bases.

The hiring of the new district leader was not so much 'an out with the old and in with the new', but rather a change in administrative approach. The new Superintendent's approach was subtle but sustained. Achieving this was primarily through the continual seeding of information from both his office and the Business Executive's into the boards' pre-meeting packets. This continual flow of information fostered a change in the board's outlook, as both individuals and as collective board members. The new Superintendent and Business Executive succeeded in their attempt to couple the facilities problem to a preferred pre-existing solution capitalizing on a receptive board mood.

A New Administration: New Strategy

Evident in the research were two political strategies affecting the board's decision making as they progressed through the agenda-setting process. The first strategy focused on the board members. The second strategy related to the perception of the issues by the board.

For the board to take action, it was necessary to influence the members to move the facilities problem from the informal discussion agenda to actionable issues on the

discussion agenda, and then finally to the decision-making agenda. In this instance, it was simply the newly-hired Superintendent repackaging the facilities issues for the board, aided by the Business Executive. These individuals collaboratively were able to assist the board in defining the problem and applying a pre-existing solution. They were able to shape the policy agenda to fulfill the board's requirements for the project to have technical feasibility, value acceptability, and cost efficiencies.

A building project is complex; there may be competing interests and priorities among the decision makers. The outcome, the votes of the community causing acceptance of the resolution, is uncertain. To this end, the Superintendent and Business Executive worked to focus the board's perception of the project. As policy advocates, it was evident they grasped the connection between the board's perceptions of how the problem of facilities was framed or defined and the resulting necessity of an acceptable solution.

Their characterization of the project to the board went directly to the heart of the board member's personal values and beliefs. The Superintendent and Business Executive understood the importance of the board knowing what was at stake. The project had to meet board's criteria of value acceptability. It was important for the board to understand the significance of the project to the district. The board sought assurance that the project would advance opportunities for students and community.

Their efforts were primarily directed at influencing the board, whether intentional or not; the spillover effect of influencing the board had a perceptual effect on the public. The board members were keenly attuned to the mood of the district community, and

feedback from the community resultantly has the potentiality to influence their decision-making process.

The Politics of Hindsight

As the interview sessions drew to a close, asked were two questions of each board member.

1. In respect to facilities, how would you evaluate your strategies: successful, moderately successful, neutral, or ineffective?
2. How would deploy resources differently, and what prevents you from doing so?

To the first question, the board members reflected on their perception(s) of the EXCEL Building Project success. Their responses ranged from very successful to moderately successful. To their evaluation, each had his or her own qualifying or moderating comment. While none were the same, they collectively represented a commonality of purpose showing concern for the school and community. Ms. A linked her successful rating to placing the district in a good position of survivability should a merger or consolidation be considered. Mr. B emphasized the board's team effort and utilization of member strengths having given the project a successful evaluation. Skepticism about the future maintenance costs was Mr. C's comment with his moderately successful project evaluation. Ms. D was most pleased that the board kept taxes in check with her rating of the project as moderately successful. Lastly, Mr. E rated the project as successful reflecting on the current project bringing the facility to a point that was desired 20 years ago. Their responses to the first question follow.

Ms. A:

It's looking better all the time; it really is. I look at the classrooms, and they look professional. They don't look like something that the teachers put together themselves. I think the students are taking great pride in this facility, and I think our strategy of making it safe, accessible, and inviting helped in this recent centralization effort where the study team identified this building as being the better place to put our high school students and middle school students. We are not waiting; we are preparing all the time for a decade or more down the road. You have to look to the future, yeah; you have to have classrooms that have the equipment they need. You have to have space for people to get together in small and large groups. You have to have enough ports to take care of the computers and other technology we don't even know about. So, I am thinking we are pretty successful to cover those issues

Mr. B:

I think it was incredible. My background, high school librarian, Ms. A's background, high school English teacher, Mr. F, a retired banker, Ms. D, an executive with a communications company, Mr. C, an administrator in the SUNY system, and then Mr. E, in public service. When it came to finance, you looked at Ms. D and you looked at Mr. F. When it came to the curriculum, Ms. A and I kind of dominated, but we all worked collegially; decisions were made collegially.

Mr. C:

Moderately, as an individual, (the) community is happy with a new building. The continued spending of project funds above and beyond the original scope of the project will perpetuate the debt load of the district. Any surplus monies should not be used; state appropriations can be returned to state and local monies used to defer indebtedness. Spending money, just to spend, because it is available is not exercising fiduciary restraint, which is the responsibility of the board when spending district taxpayer's money.

The amount spent on the pool renovation was a significant sum of the total $16 million project. I don't think people understand the high cost of pool maintenance. They will never sell enough memberships to offset operational expenses. They should have filled it in and converted the space to a more practical use.

Ms. D:

I would say we were moderately successful. With current board (2010-2011), the fact that we were able to get two successful building projects through speaks pretty well. You know our group, and we were pretty successful with keeping the taxes in check. We spent a lot of time on budgets. Mr. F and I were probably the primary drivers of that. We were moderately successful.

Mr. E:

I would say very effective. I believe we are addressing the lower priority needs that will eat you up in the long run, cause you didn't do them and then if you have

to do major ones; you have no choices. So, this has given us the opportunity to be where we wanted to be 20 years ago.

Answers to the second question about resource deployment reflected a general sense of satisfaction with the project. The deployment/redeployment or prioritizing of resources was not an immediate or central issue of the EXCEL Project. The project did not present an immediate budgetary impact because of the 100% financing received, taxes were not raised, and no programmatic or staffing changes were necessary. This resulted in the board members as being more reflective and concerned about overarching issues facing the district; those of staffing and student achievement as their comments indicated.

Ms. A:

I would have not done anything differently. I have been pleased with what has been done.

Mr. B:

Hard question; the contractual issues are there earlier, contracts guaranteed full health coverage for some of the retirees before a certain date. I am not sure of the date. So, that's an obligation the state keeps upping the pension. They finally put a new tier in, but Albany keeps coming up with these unfunded mandates. There should be a defibrillator in the building, but the batteries are $200-300 apiece and Albany goes…that yours. They mandated, just recently, a bullying committee; okay school districts, you pick it up. Our legislators are good about saying to Mommy and Daddy, okay we'll pass a law for you, but they won't come up with the money. We begged them to come up with something on the merger issue or

creating a uniform district. Well, one of them said, "Otter Creek is not a rich district. Medium income is extremely low, elementary school students; 60-70% are on free or reduced lunches, and 52-53% of the district is non-taxable and Albany won't come through to help us."

Mr. C:

We need to address the impact of NYS teachers association on local boards which I doubt will never happen……

Ms. D:

I would try and put more—this is going to sound like I am nuts—but you have to have good teachers to get good results from kids. But, I would try and do something to raise those scores, and I don't know what the answer is.

Mr. E:

Academically we need to have a plan of action, a five-year plan.

A Change in Mood: Board Mortality

The critical element, according to Kingdon (1984), is to know the conditions necessary for an idea to survive. The previous administration had lain much of the initial groundwork for the conception of a new building project. The now-retired Superintendent investigated alternate ways of addressing the facilities problem but was unsuccessful in attempts to capture the board's attention.

The board was already predisposed favorably to a new building project, and the new Superintendent recognized the existence of an opportunity to influence the agenda and assist the board in the development of a policy resolution to address the facilities issue. The importance of the new building project, to which a pre-existing solution

existed, began to gain traction and focus for the board. The hiring of Mr. H as the new Superintendent had a profound effect on the board's mood. At board meetings, observed was a reenergized board with a renewed sense of purpose and determination, ready to confront the difficult issues Otter Creek was facing.

The board 2010-2011. Comprising the 2010-2011 school board membership was six retired professionals with deep roots and long-running ties to the Otter Creek School District and community. The seventh member was a current member of the workforce. Collectively the six retired individuals represented a generational perspective; they were among the first of the post-World War II generation. Their custodial responsibilities as board members, as representatives of their community peers, and most importantly the children of the district, they were receptive to influence from these entities. Influencing the board was the political and social turmoil of the 1960's, the Vietnam Conflict, and the two previous generations: The "Greatest Generation" of World War II and their Depression-era grandparents. Additionally, their sense of place influenced them: rural Otter Creek. Individually and as a board, they shared an unwavering commitment to the district. Echoing this sentiment Ms. D said,

> At that time, I think our Board was excellent. Everybody had a sense of ownership of it because we wanted to share the common goal of improving our school. I would say I felt ownership already, and I know Mr. B did, Mr. F. We all were on the same track.

At the onset of the 2010-2011 School Year, two of the six retired members made it clear they would not seek reelection; one would lose their seat in the May 2011 Annual District Vote. Two others had decided not to seek reelection when their terms of office

came to a conclusion at the end of the 2013 School Year. One member would run for re-election when their term expired and win.

A sense of purpose. There was an underlying sense of purpose and urgency born from the board's custodial sense of responsibility, although it was not readily apparent and completely unseen in the board's demeanor or public persona. The uncertainty of state funding, the continuing deterioration of the facility, and ability of the future board's to prioritize needs of the students and overall district community were fueling the push to pass the EXCEL Project Resolution by the 2010-2011 board.

There was a feeling of unease permeating the board regarding a potential change in district mood, particularly in regards to parental perceptions of priorities. The decreasing enrollment was putting a strain on the ability of the district to field sports teams and offer extracurricular events in the areas of arts and music. In the past, the board had heard rallying cries from district residents centering on these same issues, and they were oft-times focused on the football program.

During the onset of the 2010-2011 School Year, the board began to hear the cries anew. Reoccurring themes of concerns parents expressed were decidedly personal. First and foremost, they centered on how their respective child or children were affected and seldom moving beyond to include collective concern for every child in the district. Becoming a disturbing trend to the board was the shortsightedness of parental concerns.

The 2010-2011 board had six members, all of whom were retired from the workforce and did not have children in Otter Creek schools or family members working in the school. Some in the district perceived this as the board being out of touch with what was going on in the school system. During meetings, the board member's non-

verbal reactions clearly communicated their dismay with the topics of discussion and their perception of the shortsighted perspective of those expressing their views.

The public speaks. The 2010-2011 minutes of the Board Meetings provided an insight to the board's concern. The board conducted 19 Regular Meetings during the academic year in which the public was given the opportunity to speak. The public made a total of 38 comments. Of this total, 2 individuals who had aspirations to be elected to the School Board made 15. An influential staff employee made six comments. All three of these people were parents of school-age children, and their comments represented 55% of the total comments made. Fifty percent of the comments made represented a direct connection with the speaker's child or children. Concerns about sports led with 37% of all comments, followed by merger/consilidation (13%), shared services (11%), arts and music (8%), BOCES (8%), miscellaneous (8%), my elementary child (5%), budget (5%), and facilities (5%).

Mr. C stated, "Parents approach board members and the Superintendent with concerns for their children and not all children— particularly athletics— when we do not even have enough kids to fill a roster safely." Ms. D shared her experiences with this observation, "While not organized as an 'official group', parents interested in sports programs would approach the board with personal agendas. Football received the most concern from parents, followed by equal team opportunity for girls." Mr. E's experiences mirrored those of both Mr. C and Ms. D. In a follow-up telephone call with Mr. E to clarify special interest groups, he recollected, "Individuals, via public session at the board meetings— these individuals represented loosely configured groups with concerns about

athletics—could be termed a special-interest but no group representation came forth—more personally themed about their child's opportunities."

In the interview with the Superintendent, the Superintendent made the following observations. When he made this observation, he was not aware of the previous board members' comments cited above. He said.

> …the board that hired me, only one person is left on the board within four years, it is a different board. The first board that I had, I seldom heard from them. All of them were retired people in the community that actually had no children in the school district at the time. My second board, two years after I got here, there was only one person that was retired and had no children in the district. The other six all had children in the district and worked.
>
> That group, on a daily basis I got a phone call from some member of the board that they had a concern via their kid, their kid's friend, a couple of them have wives that work here. So they get inside information that my old board would never have knowledge. There are two different communities here, and each board of education is unique to that environment.

Determined by the board members' expressed thoughts they were aware of their mortality as a board. They genuinely were concerned that if they did not address their current facilities problems and use the availability of a 100% funding, this opportunity would not be available in the future. They felt the imperative to act before the upcoming elections took its toll on their membership. They feared a facilities project would never come to fruition. They feared a worst-case scenario where district taxpayers would be

forced to bear a burdensome portion of the construction costs if one were to come in the future, and they knew one surely would because of the condition of the buildings.

The concerns of the 2010-2011 board were borne out in the behaviors subsequent boards exhibited, as evident in the Superintendent's statement and my observations. As the events of the 2010-2011 School Year unfolded, it became widely known that a new issue was gathering momentum. The school merger/consolidation discussion would soon alter the focus and attention of future boards.

Policy Window

Kingdon (1984) described a policy window as an opportunity for action on initiatives. It is when issues on the governmental or discussion agenda are moved into a position for enactment; they are now on the decision agenda. These windows infrequently occur, and when they do, they are open for only a short period. Kingdon observed the agenda was more affected by both the problem and political streams. Kingdon indicated strongly that a window opens most often, as a result, in a change in the political stream. Kingdon said, "The political event even results in the heightened preoccupation with the problem" (p. 183). The changes, he discerned, were often precipitated by changes in administration or shifts in mood. The change of administration in this case study had a powerful effect on the board's mood, and, therefore, the agenda. The new administration made a facilities project conceivable and feasible, resulting in the EXCEL Project resolution.

A policy window is an opportunity for policy change, and the availability of an open policy window can be a short-lived event (Kingdon, 1984). However, in this case study, that was not the situation. The open window had been a long-standing

opportunity; state building aid of 98% and EXCEL aid of 2% had been available to the Otter Creek District for a number of years. The problem had been previously identified by the Five-Year Facility Plan, and a pre-existing solution was available to the board.

What did occur was the board rearranging the priorities (problems) and, resultantly, the rearrangement of previously-identified constraints. A change in the political stream triggered this rearrangement; a new superintendent caused a shift in the mood of the board. A political change made it the right time for a policy change; the three streams had converged.

Policy Window and the New Administration: Realignment of Priorities

Administrative changes often bring realignments and new priorities in the policy agenda. Kingdon (1984) stated a change in administration is a powerful event. Kingdon (1984) held that a change in administration was an integral component of the rise of an issue to agenda status. Illustrative of this he stated:

> Administrations change, bringing with them marked changes in policy agendas… Agendas are changed because some of the major participants change… . One of the most powerful turnover effects is a change of administration… . The administration is at the very top of the list of actors in the policy-making area. (Kingdon, 1984, p. 160, 161)

The board knew of the solution combining state aid and EXCEL aid to fund a building project, and it's having been a proposal during the tenure of the previous Superintendent. At that time, the project was in an informal discussion state and was to remain there. The project had yet to reach the discussion agenda; therefore, it remained a non-actionable item. There was no compelling event at that time to raise the existing

facilities condition into a focusing event. Insufficiently was the linking of the magnitude of the scope of the needed facilities work to the availability of aid from the state. The board did not have to assume a wait and see posture. The Superintendent made his priorities and policy agenda known in the first agenda packet sent to the board. Mr. H successfully linked the deteriorating condition of the school's buildings with the availability of 100% state financing through a persistent campaign of information saturation.

Policy Window and a Change in Mood: Change in Perception

A change in political actors Kingdon (1984) offered as an opportunity for the opening of a policy window. Board membership had not changed significantly in the years prior to the 2010-2011 School Year. What had changed was the board's perception of the future of the district in the hands of new board members. They were unsure of the priorities to which new boards would gravitate. To this end, they were motivated to initiate and see the adoption of a resolution for an EXCEL Building project. The board was compelled to ensure that the district facilities were safe, efficient, and able to accommodate learning for the next generation.

It was important for this board to leave as their legacy a sound school building for current and future students as well as the district community. Ms. A reflected this importance when she said, "We are continually challenged to provide services for our students that will carry them into this particular century." Mr. B offered, "It's a fabulous building, it is in good shape, and the OCCS Board is very mindful of keeping it in good, good shape." Ms. D, "We wanted to share a common goal of improving our school." Ms. A, Mr. B, and Ms. D's comments are indicative of the board's sentiment of creating

a lasting legacy to the district, especially given the escalating rhetoric surrounding school mergers and consolidation.

Policy Window and the Joining of Steams: Opportunity to Move Forward

The opening of a policy window is an opportunity for advocates, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders to move forward their solution(s) to a problem. The opening of this window can be for a variety of circumstances or reasons to include, but not limited to a change in administration or political mood. When a window does open it does not stay open for long, participants, particularly entrepreneurs, must act quickly and decisively to make use of the opportunity (Kingdon, 1984).

Prior to 2010-2011, the declining enrollment and looming tax increases to supplement the resultant losses in state aid precluded the opening of a window of opportunity to move the project to the discussion agenda for the board. For a proposal to gain traction and move to the decision agenda, two or more of the streams must converge (Kingdon, 1984). At Otter Creek, all three streams did, in fact, converge. The board recognized a problem and presented a solution in concurrence with an existing state policy. The political landscape was going through changes amicable to the proposal and acceptance of a building resolution. The Problem Stream recognized and defined the problem of deteriorating facilities and applied an existing solution. The Policy Stream tied state policy with the availability monies through building aid (98%) and EXCEL Aid (2%). Changes in the Political Stream were evident in Otter Creek with the change in administration, the hiring of a new Superintendent and the changing mood of the school board.

The convergence of all three streams at Otter Creek significantly increased the chances of the EXCEL Building Project firmly attaching to the decision agenda. The advocates (policy entrepreneurs) for a new building project were able to seize opportunities as they unfolded in the political sphere and to link the proposed project to a pre-existing monetary solution offered by the state. Entrepreneurs were able to take advantage of this solution and apply it to the pressing problem of facility deterioration and influence the receptive political predisposition of the Board of Education. The receptive political climate that existed contributed to a sense purpose and satisfaction that the board was solving a compelling and impending problem to benefit both the students and the community by alleviating pressing immediate and future facility concerns. All of which resulted in the board unanimously approving the EXCEL Building Project Resolution (Policy), which the district voters ultimately passed in February 2011 with completion during the 2013-2014 School Year.

Findings

This study posed four research questions. The derived findings to the questions from data collected during this study were analyzed through the application of Kingdon's Multiple Steams Model.

Research Questions

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?
2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?

3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

Research Question 1

What factors enable one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?

The initial answer to this question is substantiated in the state-granted school board's statutory authority. The primary function of the school board is to provide direction and oversight, to formulate policies, and to establish goals for the district (ECS, 2012; NSBA 2001; School Boards, 2012).

The laws of New York State convey to district decision makers the ability to direct resources to facility funding. School board policies dictate local interpretation and application of state law. At the district level, in Otter Creek, school board policy establishes statutory requirements. Policies are statements that establish the standards or direction of the district; they are legally binding, serving as the local law of the school district (School Board, 2012). Additionally, the school board approves policies specific to the district, and the administration operationalizes them.

In this case study, found were factors enabling the board to direct resources specifically to the EXCEL Building Project in the political stream. The compelling forces that prompted the EXCEL building project moving onto the decision agenda were a change in administrative leadership and a change in board mood.

A finding of this study was the magnitude of the effect district leadership had on the directing of funding for facilities. This was evident from the interviews examined in the context of the policy stream. The administration was the most influential of the policy entrepreneurs. All five board members concurred that the administration was a coalescing agent. Their remarks included phrases such as those from Ms. A, "I think a lot of it came from the administration…"; Mr. B, " The former Superintendent and the present one were always sending us (information)…"; Mr. C, "Yes, input was heard from the building administrators…" ; Ms. D, " …we conveyed to the Superintendent the board was on board with it, … that was how everything was rolled out." ; and Mr. E saw the administration as the force that protected the district's long-term interests.

The current Superintendent used strategic planning principles to advance the idea of a building project. Whereas, before the board and now-retired Superintendent were aware of facilities problems, but they facility issues had failed to gain sufficient traction with the retired Superintendent and the board to move the discussion forward.

Three elements influenced or affected the Superintendent's push for the building project: timing, economics, and education benefits. The timing element was centered on the board's ability to achieve consensus and pass a facilities resolution, and then present it for a district-wide vote prior to the end of the 2010-2011 Academic Year. The economic factor was the availability of the 100% funding from the state. The third element, education benefits, was the close alignment with timing and economics. These three elements were inextricably linked due to the uncertainty of state funding levels, the availability of funds, and the unpredictability of state legislative actions. The opportunity to provide a safe and well-equipped learning environment for the foreseeable future was

dependent upon the EXCEL resolution. Additionally, the Superintendent was concerned about placing the district in the most advantageous position should a district merger or consolidation become a future consideration or mandate.

The examination of the interviews with the board members revealed a number of interconnected consistent categorical themes. These themes emanated from the individual feelings of the board members and were manifested in the public venue as consensus on all issues related to the EXCEL Building Project. These themes were: the district; its children and community, custodial responsibilities, and the legacy the board would leave the district. As Ms. D shared, "Everybody had a sense of ownership of it because we wanted to share the common goal of improving our school."

These themes, coupled with the Superintendent's strategic preparation, culminated in generating a change in the mood of the board. The addressing and updating of the district's facilities for the future of the children the board perceived as their final collective custodial duty.

The board examined the fiscal impact and implications of the project. They projected the composition of near future boards. This led them to decide the most advantageous opportunity to realize and complete a project of the scope and magnitude of the EXCEL Project was with the board membership existing during 2010-2011 Academic Year.

The changes in administration and changes in the mood of the board opened a window of opportunity that allowed for the initiation and adoption of a building project. These changes in all three streams—problems, policy, and political—facilitated their convergence, allowing for the development of a cohesive policy resolution. Pre-existing

solutions to the facilities problems had been available since the time the district completed the 2005 project; changes in the political stream created a climate in which the solution was revived and reconstructed to match the problem with the solution in a palatable form. The confluence elevated the facilities issue to the discussion agenda and then finally to the decision agenda of the board.

I found that significant to enabling the board and then allowing them to direct their efforts to the EXCEL Project was the alternative solution: the continual raising of local taxes to pay for the repairs and renovations of deteriorating facility conditions. This alternative was not acceptable to the board. The alternative solution was a non-solution; this factor was the prime motivator for the EXCEL Building Project. Board consensus prompted the accession of the facility problem first to the discussion agenda and then to the decision agenda and finally to the EXCEL Build Project Resolution

Research Question 2

What factors constrain one school district's decision makers to direct resources to facility funding?

Found was the Otter Creek Board recognized competing issues, which constrained their ability to decide and prioritize the distribution of limited budget dollars: funding, enrollment, mandates, facilities, and academics. All five board members identified funding as a major constraint. The board identified funding sub-categories: state finances, taxes, annual budget, salaries, and benefits, loss of community business, and poverty.

Identified as significant finding was the constraint generated by the district's property tax structure. Comprising the district budget are two primary revenue sources:

local taxes and the state distribution predicated on the local taxes. Taxable property comprises less than one-half of the land within the Otter Creek School District. Only 48% of district property is taxable; of that, 50% is state owned, and the remaining 2% is tax exempt property. The constraining fact or limiting element is the state makes no adjustment or allowance for this disparity, essentially penalizing the district.

The issue of taxation is further complicated by the loss of revenue concurrent with a decreasing population, an aging population, and a shrinking commercial/business presence. Otter Creek's ability to provide educational opportunities was further constrained internally by declining fund balances and reserves and the increases in payrolls and benefits. Heard in the following statements are the board's connections to the community and their concerns for the ability of residents to afford increases in taxes.

> Ms. A: "When we have a tax base that is generally retired and has little industrial base, we have people who are renting, and we have state lands that cannot be taxed or state properties that cannot be taxed."
>
> Mr. B: "We did make a mistake; the taxpayers won't admit it, but we held taxes increases down which came back to bite us because reserve funds are depleted.
>
> Mr. C: "…taxes are a lifetime. Particularly in rural areas, small towns like this, they are a burden; people can only afford so much."
>
> Ms. D: "Living in Otter Creek for years, I think in rural schools and farming communities (poor districts), things were not neglected but things were let go because no one wanted to go to the taxpayers and say we are going to raise your taxes 30% because we have to put on new roof, or we have to do this."

Mr. E: "When I become involved in politics around 60-65%, somewhere in that range, possible 70% of the population was on fixed income."

The Superintendent provided the board with high quality and accurate information focused on the building project. In issues of the financial impact on the local tax levy, communications from the Business Executive gave the board the confidence and ability to make well-informed decisions. The board's community concerns were centered on the building projects impact on the tax levy. These concerns were muted when the board assured and reassured the public the project was 100% state-financed. The scope of the potential project was defined in the district's Five-Year Plan, which made facility needs clear to members of the community helping to diffuse concerns. The state budget, once passed, and not affecting building aid for the 2010-2011 School Year became a moot issue. The availability of funding was locked; this cleared the way for the board to proceed to craft the EXCEL resolution. State and federal mandates, while affecting the overall district budget did not impede the building project.

The assurance of state building aid and EXCEL aid for 2010-2011 substantially mitigated the outside influences the board would have had to deal with if the monies were to have come from funds generated by increases in the tax levy. The transparency of the Five-Year Plan enabled district residents to grasp and gain a better understanding of the needs of an aging campus infrastructure.

In the course of conducting the interviews, heard were factors important to board members contributing to constraints of directing monies to facility concerns during the interviews. The declining enrollment forced the reduction in class offerings, mainly Advanced Placement (AP) courses and electives. Mr. C spoke of the ongoing feud

between the teacher's union and districts over the delivery of online content which remained a contentious issue. Ms. A, Ms. D, and Mr. B all echoed their concerns about the ever-widening gap in salaries and benefits and the diminishing tax base and reductions in state aid dollars. Board members estimated 65-70% of the annual budget went to salaries and benefits for the faculty and staff represented by their respective unions.

State and federal mandates to include inclusionary services for special needs districts were non-funded compulsory programs that required a significant commitment from the district to fund. Mr. B and Mr. E both commented on the expense of the mandates and the fact they had no choice but to comply. Mr. B added, "…but Albany keeps coming up with these unfunded mandates. There should be a defibrillator in the building, but the batteries are $200-300 apiece and Albany goes…that's yours. They mandated, just recently, a bullying committee; ok school districts you pick it up." Mr. E observed, "…their (school's) continued existence is becoming less and less a matter of local control and more an issue of state intervention through mandates and legislation."

Research Question 3

How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

The process of directing resources to facilities in New York State is predictable and predicated on state law and regulations. The district budget is the mechanism that directs funding to facilities. The exception to this is a building project approved by the State Education Department and the voters of the school district. In compliance, Otter Creek's administration created an annual budget for presentation to the board. The budget

incorporated state and federal mandates with accompanying recommendations and State Education Department requirements. The deriving or budget monies were from of two primary sources: funds raised through the local tax levy and state funds determined by the state's distribution formula. Federal funds amounted to less than 10% of the total budget and were derived from title programs. Lacking the support of a building project to fund construction, renovation, and maintenance, the only source available to Otter Creek was to direct resources for from the annual school budget. The board, as was discussed in Research Question 2, was faced with constraints in the deployment of resources even in light of the existence of the district's 5 Year Facilities Plan, state building aid of 98%, and EXCEL aid of 2% prior to 2010.

The board held the Otter Creek CSD annual Board Retreat for the purpose of defining an agenda for the current academic year (2010-2011). The board held this meeting after they held the July Reorganizational Meeting during the first week in July after the Independence Day holiday. There was no evidence of a long-range planning process identifying primary or alternate solutions to facilities issues. Relegated to an evolutionary one, was the development of this process through the monthly agenda for the board meetings.

The Board President and the Superintendent constructed the agenda for the monthly meeting. This meeting reflected items and issues brought forth from school-wide concerns of the Superintendent and concerns of the Board President and members. As a result of these meetings, the Superintendent began his infusion of facilities information into the board packets advancing the concept of a building project.

To enable the board to focus on facility needs, the current Superintendent, hired in the spring of 2010, took a direct strategic approach to overcoming constraints by informing and educating the board. Concluded from the interviews, the facilities project gained traction among board members as a result of the Superintendent's action. This gaining of traction could be attributed to political will; a will bolstered by the availability of 100% state financing and 0% increase in the local tax levy, and the availability of professional expertise existing in the Five-Year Plan provided by the architect and engineering firm retained by the district. In the deployment of resources for a building project, these two elements, funding and expertise, were of significant importance to the decision making of the board.

The analysis of data from the interviews led to the conclusion board members conducted self-examinations to identify and clarify community beliefs, values, expectations, strengths, and priorities. Postulated, was dialogue between board members and the administration occurred at an indeterminate point in time to develop an understanding, a vision addressing the issues for district facilities. The conclusions of self-examinations and the exchange of dialogue between board members were drawn from inferences and interpretations of innuendoes perceived during interviews with board members.

Exhibited throughout the course of the interviews, observations, and document review was no definitive evidence of board engagement in public discussion addressing the rationale for the EXCEL Project. The discussion and analysis of data and information, resource targeting, financial planning, and management associated with a building project was not evident in public sessions. Postulated were three scenarios: One, discussions took

place in Executive Session, contrary to the state's open meeting law. Two, the unflinching faith of the board members in the information provided by the Superintendent and Business Executive negated the need for discussion. Three, the board's dedication to the district and community's future was their prime motivator for moving the EXCEL Project forward purposely in 2010-2011.

Research Question 4

What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

Partisan politics was never a factor or issue in actions or deliberations of the Otter Creek School Board. However, behavior identified in the problem stream specific to board action, or rather inaction, prior to agenda status of the project foretold of actions to follow in the political stream. The status quo existing before the hiring of the new Superintendent was interpreted as less problematic to the board if no changes were seen. As Ms. D said, "We as a board talked about the needs that we saw, and what a new building project would do … agenda…nobody really sat down and made a prioritized list."

The lack of discussion regarding issues on the agenda was evident during the conduct of board meetings. The board meetings were conducted as well rehearsed and orchestrated theater. There was little or no discussion or interaction; the meetings were more perfunctory than thoughtful.

This lack of discussion may, in part, be attributable to the arrangement of the seating in the Board Room. There are three tables arranged in an open "U" formation. The Board President sits at the front table flanked by one board member to the left and

the Superintendent and first vice-president to the right. Seated on the right wing of the "U" are two board members and the Middle/High School Principal. Seated to the left are board members, the pre-K/Elementary Principal, the Business Executive, and the Clerk of the Board. In front of the board is arranged public seating in multiple rows. The "U" seating formation neither facilitates nor lends itself to interpersonal exchanges or discussion.

There was no process or shared dialogue between board members. There was no interaction during the course of a board meeting to see the development of a shared vision or an understanding of the main issues to be addressed when considering a building project. When talking to board members and inquiring about the lack of discussion and the efficient dispatching of items related to facilities issues during a board meeting, the consistent response was that the Superintendent placed necessary information in their meeting packets. Board members shared that if questions arose during their review of the board packets they would contact the Superintendent directly for clarification or additional information as needed in advance of the board meeting.

A board meeting is a private meeting held in a public venue; this is not a reason to forgo active discussion and debate for fear of public perception. Forsaking the value of legitimacy, transparency, and the open practice of grassroots democracy should not be for fear of embarrassment or reproach. It is opined that without an exchange of thoughts or ideas, whether confirming of dissenting, when the board sits collectively renders the quality or value of any decision as questionable. This observation led to a reflection on the phenomenon of groupthink. Groupthink is defined as the mode of thinking that group members engage in when the desire for agreement dominates the group and overrides the

need to evaluate alternative problem solutions realistically (Certo, 1997). An alternative, but plausible, contributing factor to this phenomenon is pressure in the form of political retribution. While not supported by evidence in the research, remains plausible.

The only conclusion was this means of information distribution and clarification was somehow sufficient to bring all board members to the same level of understanding and clarity that resulted in the previous of discussion at the meeting. How this level of consensus was accomplished without discussion may be a subject for future research on board decision making.

Macro-economic barriers beyond control of the district, preventing the board from deploying monies for facilities, were the state contribution to the annual budget and the cost of implementing and supporting state and federal mandates. As was previously discussed, the state made no allowances for the disproportionate nontaxable state holding within the district boundaries. The board was acutely aware that the primary source of district funding was derived from the local tax levy. There was a consensus among the five board members that taxes and the impact on the community were major parts of deliberations before the board. The 100% financing for the project, coupled with the ability to earn interest during the construction phase, were key factors in the adoption of the EXCEL resolution.

Specific to economic factors and the facility concerns at Otter Creek, two board members offered their perspectives on the district. Ms. D offered the consensus view prior to 2010, "… money collected through taxes was primarily used to run the school and not make improvements or to modernize, just keep it up." Mr. C spoke out while interviewing about the long-term consequences associated with maintaining the existing

facilities and new renovations. Mr. C shared his perspective that neither the district nor the community had an understanding of the cost associated with maintaining the buildings or technology without "free money" from the state. Mr. C's statement was to be profound and correct. While initially, maintenance costs associated with the work done in a building project are low, the inevitable need for updates and repairs become future budgetary issues.

Conclusion

This chapter integrated the findings from interviews, observations, and document reviews to describe the process that led to the adoption of the EXCEL Building Project resolution by the Otter Creed School Board. Applied to Kingdon's framework for analysis were the interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings provided an account of decision making which generated the EXCEL policy, thereby informing and answering the four research questions. Chapter 5 will conclude this study providing a summary of the findings, implications and recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Findings

Introduction

Chapter 5 summarizes this study in four sections. First, summarized are the problem and research questions which guided this study, the methodology, procedures for data collection, and data analysis. The second restates the control for researcher bias, limitations, and generalizability. Third, discussed is the summary of findings and the relationship to previously reviewed literature. The fourth proposes implications for practice and recommendations and suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes with brief remarks.

Research Problem, Questions, and Methodology

Synopsis of the Research Problem

The intrinsic problem for this study was to analyze school board decision making, in a rural school district, relative to understanding the motivations, challenges, obstacles, and competing interests confronting board members as they prioritized the needs of their district school buildings. Rural school facilities need updates and improvements as well as policy and funding to sustain their buildings in the face of increased academic requirements and competition for economic resources. It can be difficult for a rural school board to understand the impact of their decisions on their district and students who are already marginalized due to geographic location and/or socio-economic conditions. Compounded by elements of distance and demographics and myriad competing partisan and non-partisan interests and issues is the comprehension of rural needs at the state and national levels.

Review of Research Questions

In the context of this research, a single case study examined the decision-making process of a purposefully selected rural school board. The research questions were constructed to reflect the governance of the district by the school board through the application and enforcement of policy. The school board is the district's decision-making body whose powers are derived and delegated through the state constitution.

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What factors enable one school district's decision makers efforts to direct resources to facility funding?
2. What factors constrain one school district's decision makers efforts to direct resources to facility funding?
3. How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance?
4. What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance?

The purpose of the case study was to investigate the decision-making process of a rural school board of education as it relates to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. Examined, in the study, were the difficult decisions concerning the use of funds that had not grown proportionally to meet the increasing demands of school facilities maintenance.

Methodological Summation

Case study methodology was utilized for this research project. The research occurred in a bounded context; a single case, one rural school board was the unit of analysis in this study. Consistent with Creswell's requirements for a bounded system or case, the investigation occurred "over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

The selection of case study methodology was for the gaining of an in-depth understanding of the problems, policies, and political issues involved in the decision-making process of a rural school board for district facilities. Utilized to gather data were multiple sources. This study included interviews, observations, archival investigations, and document analysis. To strengthen and confirm emerging findings from data, triangulation of the data was conducted to enhance reliability, as well as validity.

The interviews were constructed with open-ended, semi-structured questions (Appendix H). Conducted were in-person interviews with five board members from the 2010-2011 School Year. Additionally, held were two informational interviews with the Superintendent and the Business Executive. The individual interviews, after transcription were returned to the participants for the purpose of member checking. The interviewees made no substantive returned changes, indicating the transcripts were an accurate representation of the interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through on-site observation of school board meetings. The keeping of field notes was for the provision of recording descriptive and reflective information from the meetings. Artifact analysis encompassed the examination of all

related documents and media for pertinent content. The document collection process review also examined project data related to the construction, renovation, or maintenance of the current project and previous building projects.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed for organization and preliminary relationships at the time of initial transcription. Used was open and in vivo coding after the initial transcript reading to organize data into broad themes. Initially developed were categories from the transcripts of the interviews. Employed was a connective strategy, narrative analysis, to discern relationships between statements in the interviews and collected documentation. Detailed write-ups categorized interview questions, and responses, and examination of data for within-group similarities and differences. As patterns emerged in one data type, evidence from observation, and document and artifact analysis were compared to verify the finding. Conflicts or anomalies were resolved through a deeper analysis to identify the cause or source of conflict or discrepancy.

Bias, Limitations, and Generalizability

Prior to data collection and subsequent analysis, I conceded the potential for researcher bias in Chapter 3. The intent was to limit my bias through purposeful sampling, data triangulation, and the acknowledgement bias may exist. During the research and analysis of this study, as participant observer, I remained cognizant of the potentiality for the consideration bias resulting from a loss of objectivity due to the element of familiarity.

Multiple sources of data provided sufficient evidence to support the findings of this study. There was adequate redundant information in the data sources to support the

key factors and events that led to the adaptation of the EXCEL Project resolution. Obtained was satisfactory detail through extensive multiple source analysis to achieve triangulation, thereby rendering aforementioned limitations as having a negligible impact on the conduct and results of this study.

The findings in this study are neither generalizable to all facility policy in rural schools nor are they to the decision-making process. Noted during the research were two additional factors impacting generalizability. First, New York State has a history of annual budget uncertainty. Budgets are often contentious, delayed frequently for extended periods of time further complicating district finances. The state's budget calendar does not align with the local district budget submission for the annual statewide vote in May. The disparity in alignment forces school boards and district leaders to craft a budget with incomplete information. Secondly, New York State school districts must develop a contingency budget if the district voters defeat the local budget in the May vote. This coupled with the state legislature imposed 2% cap on budgets further complicates the uncertainty of the budget process.

Summary of Problem, Policy, and Political Streams Analysis

The Agenda Setting Theory/Multiple Streams Model, as conceived by Kingdon (1984), provides the conceptual framework for this case study. The goal of this research was to further the understanding of the decision-making policy processes that resulted in the EXCEL capital building project. Research focused on the story of the Otter Creek school board members, those individuals directly responsible for district decisions; the interest was in the process.

Kingdon's model aligns with Maxwell's (2005) characterization of a conceptual framework. Maxwell (2005) stated, "[P]rior research findings, will guide or inform your research, and what literature, preliminary studies, and personal experiences will you draw on for understanding the people or issues you are studying" (p. 4). Kingdon's work provides the mechanism to analyze the board members' complex decisions, both collectively and individually. The agenda setting process as Kingdon described is the "list of subjects to which officials are paying some serious attention at any given time" (1984, p. 205). The determination of alternative specifications from the agenda list influences the rise of an issue for potential resolution (Kingdon, 1984).

Kingdon's model is not a strategy or prescriptive formula for policy development or adoption; it is not about final decisions. It is an attempt to "understand why participants deal with certain issues and neglect others" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 205). The focus of the model is not on component steps but timing and the ebb and flow of policy action (Kingdon, 1984). Rather than being a sequential or linear model, Kingdon envisioned three distinct but complementary streams flowing independently of each other in the policy system: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream.

These three streams do not occur in ordered or logical sequences; they occur randomly (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon views policy making as the seemingly unanticipated result of these three streams forming a confluence over a particular issue. At any given time, the coming together of the streams can create a policy opportunity.

The three streams flow independently but are dependent upon the intervention of a policy entrepreneur(s) to provide the catalyst for the merging of streams to occur. The survival of an issue is dependent upon these participants who can either advance or derail

potential policy prospects. Kingdon (1984) asserts these entrepreneurs can be visible actors or hidden actors. In this study, the visible entrepreneurs (actors) were the Superintendent and Business Executive, and the primary hidden actor was the district retained architectural firm. The entrepreneurs did create a policy recommendation by coupling a solution—available state building aid—with a problem—deteriorating and inadequate structures. The result was advancing the facilities issue onto the board's agenda.

Problem Stream

Kingdon's problem stream consists of situations or issues recognized as having significant interest. Accomplishing the identification of problems and making known is through three venues. The first is the use of indicators to assess conditions; the second is focusing events that draw attention to an issue, and third is feedback gathered through formal or informal channels (Kingdon, 1984). Policy players, citizens, groups, and the media can work actively to secure interest or action on problems (Kingdon, 1984).

Supporting this stream is the rationale that a situation has to be identified clearly as a problem for it to have an opportunity of transforming into policy. Kingdon (1984) stated that problems perceived as urgent or pressing, "have a better chance of rising on the agenda" (p. 207). Kingdon (1984) observed that a situation must deteriorate to pressing or crisis proportions before receiving the necessary attention to achieve agenda status. A situation defined as a problem, but without viable proposals or alternatives, will not survive the transition to becoming a policy issue (Kingdon, 1984).

Kingdon (1984) shared that only a limited number of problems achieve agenda status. Competing for the attention of the Otter Creek board was a plethora of situations

and issues. Constraints found affecting the agenda-setting process at Otter Creek were various: the initiation of interest, a lack of time, competing interests (state and federal mandates), scarce resources, a lack of information, and the resolve to consider situations or issues. Kingdon (1984) spoke of constraints as having an adverse impact on a matter becoming a priority or even consideration as an agenda issue. Kingdon's postulate was apparent and confirmed during interviews with board members.

There was no evidence of long-range planning to identify primary or alternate solutions to facilities issues. The process was an evolutionary one developed through the monthly agenda for board meetings. Development of the monthly agenda was the task of the Board President and the Superintendent. These meeting reflected items and issues of concern to the Superintendent and the interests of the Board President and members. Affecting agenda construction was the interpretive providence of the Board President and Superintendent when determining the relative lesser or greater value of constraints meriting inclusion on the agenda.

The facilities problem at Otter Creek was evident; the district buildings were in need of upgrades and new academic spaces. The status quo that existed in board deliberations prior to July 2010 was interpreted as the board seeing the facilities issue as being less problematic the longer the problem existed. Seen not as a drastic or catastrophic change a problem could be a condition for consideration as livable or tolerable. Kingdon noted, there is a difference between a condition and a problem. Kingdon (1984) stated,

> We put up with all kinds of conditions every day, and conditions do not rise to prominent places on the policy agendas. Conditions come to be defined as

problems and have a better chance of rising on the agenda, when we come to believe that we should do something to change them. (Kingdon, 1984, p. 207)

As was revealed in the interviews with board members, prior to July 2010, the district administration did not present the condition of district facilities as a critical problem. Known to the board were the facilities issues as documented in the Five-Year Facilities Plan. However, the raising of the issue to the discussion agenda was a nonevent. There was no single focusing event, as Kingdon deemed necessary, to move the facilities issue onto the discussion agenda of the board.

The research revealed a focusing event consistent with Kingdon's need for problem recognition to advance an idea. The event raising the facilities issue to that of facilities problem was the hiring of the new Superintendent in July 2010. Recognizing the importance of building conditions, the Superintendent, with the assistance of the Business Executive, defined the facilities issue as a problem to the board. Presented to the board was a preexisting solution, readily available for application to the problem as an immediate and viable resolution for district facilities. Kingdon stated, "The recognition and definition of problems affect outcomes significantly" (1984, p. 207)

Kingdon (1984) considered budgets to be a particular concern within the problem stream. Besieging Otter Creek were a number of factors related to the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the district and community that affected the budget development. The manifestation of financial inadequacy was evident in the shrinking tax base, reduced state funding, outdated technology, increasing salaries, and benefits, decreasing enrollment, and an aging and diminishing local population. A finding identified in this research was

the constraints on the budget generated by the district's property tax structure and the state making no adjustment or allowance for the disparity.

All board members acknowledged, in their interviews, that they were aware of the constraints and challenges they faced when building the district's annual budget. Readily apparent in their deliberations and considerations did the board members see the problems they addressed and the ramifications of decisions in light of budget constraints. Kingdon (1984) offered, "[B]udgets act as constraints, holding some items low on (or even off) the agenda because the item would cost more than the decision makers are willing to contemplate" (p. 111). It was clear when viewed them through the lens of the problem stream the Otter Creek board was consistent with Kingdon's assessment.

Policy Stream

Typically found in the flow of the policy stream are the formulation of policy proposals, alternatives, and possible solutions to problems. Policymakers consider, debate, and revise for adoption, as a proposal, these potential solutions. To advanced, a proposal must have credence and credibility. Kingdon (1984) delineated the criteria necessary for a proposal to be considered serious and viable. The criteria are "technical feasibility, value acceptability" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 138), along with consideratios of reasonable cost, public acceptance, and appeal to decision makers.

Complications with policy alternatives did not exist in this study. The only alternative was to have had the board take no action on the facilities problem. Required were solution and policy proposal. Kingdon (1984) asserted that for policy proposition to survive a solution must be in existence prior to problem identification, and potential problems investigated and modified before the problem-solution coupling. A pre-existing

solution was available: building aid and EXCEL monies from the state. The phrase, shovel-ready, borrowed from the construction management field would apply to the board's concept of developing a policy proposal.

For the policy stream to flow forward, advocates are essential to advancing proposals or to bring ideas to prominence (Kingdon, 1984). These advocates, Kingdon calls policy entrepreneurs or actors. A consequential finding was the degree of affect the policy entrepreneurs, and their activities had on board decisions. The prime objective of these policy entrepreneurs in this study—the Superintendent and Business Executive—was to cause the board to adopt a resolution that would bring a long-term solution to the district's facility issues.

In describing the activities of policy entrepreneurs, Kingdon (1984) refers to a softening-up phase during which the release of trial balloons occurs. Softening-up, Kingdon (1984) referred to as "educating the general public" (p.135), and more specifically targeting a "more specialized public, peculiar to a particular interest" (p. 135). The Otter Creek board is the specialized public in this study. Trial balloons are suggestions made both publicly and privately to see if a proposal is seriously under consideration (Kingdon, 1984). The Superintendent floated trial balloons to access the boards interest.

Kingdon (1984) described the softening-up process as slow and deliberate. Consistent with Kingdon was the actions of the Otter Creek Superintendent. The Superintendent recognized the building project discussion had to become the board's intellectual property. Accomplishing this was the introduction of the potential project in incremental steps. The initial scope of the project was $8 million dollars, the criteria developed in the Five-Year Facilities Plan. As the acceptance of the initial proposal gained

board support, introduced was a second and expanded scope of $12 million submitted to the board. The district administrators submitted a third and final all-encompassing project of $16 million, and the board approved. Gaining board consensus was through gradual but persistent information sharing. The continued strategy of information saturation played out successfully again when the school board put forward the board-approved resolution for voter consideration.

Kingdon (1984) identified two important aspects of the policy stream. The first is the belief that proposals and solutions not initially accepted can be reworked or combined, and then refloated in search of problems to which they can align in the future. The second aspect is having a viable alternative readily available for adoption. Ready availability improves the placement of an issue on an agenda and significantly increases the probability of attachment to the decision agenda.

Circumstances in Otter Creek aligned with Kingdon's two important caveats of the policy stream. First, the idea of a building project to correct the failing district infrastructure lay dormant. The condition of district facilities was well-documented in the Five-Year Facilities Plan and known but failed to gain sufficient traction with the previous Superintendent or the board to achieve agenda status. Interviewees in the study acknowledged this situation; the board members knew the problems existed with the school's facilities. They did not, however, perceive, nor have, a sense of urgency. Not until the hiring of the present Superintendent did the board members resurrect the facilities problem and attach it to a preexisting solution to begin moving the conceptualization of a building project forward. Second, not having a viable alternative solution readily available was the catalyst necessary to provide the impetus for the board to move forward with the

project. Not having an alternative reinforced the board's acceptance of the preexisting solution. The board's criteria aligned with Kingdon's (1984) pronouncements of "technical feasibility, value acceptability" (p. 138). To include also, political will, reasonable cost, public acceptance, and appeal to decision makers to advance a proposal for the discussion to the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1984). These are the criteria Kingdon thought necessary for survival of a proposal.

Kingdon (1984) spoke of consensus as a construct in the policy stream. Kingdon (1984) saw two factors comprising the achievement of consensus: "persuasion and diffusion" (p. 146). Suggested was that if an idea passed the survival criteria of technical feasibility, values acceptance, and political will diffusion would occur among the stakeholders and continue to flow in the policy stream.

The process of consensus building and achievement was difficult, if not impossible, to see. There was no interaction during the course of a board meeting to see the development of a shared vision. When interviewing board members and inquiring about the lack of discussion, the consistent response was: the Superintendent did the placing of the necessary information in their meeting packets. A consistent reply from all board members was that if questions arose during the review of the board packets, they made direct contact with the Superintendent.

Political Stream

The political stream flows independently of the problem and policy streams. The political stream moves along according to election results, changes in administration, swings in public opinion or mood, and the intervention of special interest groups (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) stated these changes can have a substantial impact on agendas,

"problem identification, or the development of policy proposals . . ." (p. 207). Kingdon (1984) observed an agenda issue is subject to change if aided by a constituency in favor of that item. Changes in the agenda allow for the introduction and placing of policy alternatives on the table for consideration (Kingdon, 1984). New agenda items become prominent, and others are relegated to less important status or perhaps undergo consideration at a more opportune time (Kingdon, 1984).

Composing the political stream are three components: a change in mood, organized political forces, and changes in administration (Kingdon, 1984). In this study there exist findings, consistent with Kingdon's three components. The findings were how changes in the mood of the school board and changes in district leadership precipitated the initiation of a change in the preexisting status quo of the district's political mindset.

Changes occurring in the political stream during the summer and fall of 2010 created a favorable environment allowing the opportunity to initiate a policy solution for the Otter Creek District's inadequate and deteriorating school buildings. The two primary proponents of agenda formulation were the policy entrepreneurs, the new Superintendent, and the Business Executive. The examination of the interview transcripts indicated an open reception and favorability for a comprehensive building project among the board members. Kingdon (1984) noted that activities of the policy entrepreneurs were essential to the movement of a policy proposal forward. The Superintendent initiated a strategic change and began a campaign of information saturation directed at the condition of the facilities and the existence of a preexisting solution. Through the combined efforts of the Superintendent and Business Executive, they were able to gain the attention of the board.

These tactics enabled the board members to construct a feasibility link between the facilities problem and a pre-existing and available solution.

In the political stream, a symbol can be an important component of an issue or policy proposal to gain agenda status. Once an issue has reached agenda status, those affected make attempts to direct outcomes perceived to be in their best interest (Kingdon, 1984). In the course of the interviews, found was a concern evident among the board members. They were looking toward the end of their board service and custodial duties. Interviews with board members revealed their heightened collective consciousness of how they envisioned the future composition of the school board. The envisioned composition of future board membership precipitated their change in mood. The change in mood, as indicated by Kingdon (1984), was a critical factor enabling the policy entrepreneurs to capitalize on the prospect of potential political changes to move the EXCEL Project forward.

There was an underlying predisposition to create a district legacy, a continuing symbol, to leave both to the school and community. Pragmatic concerns about the district's future viability also fueled this desire. Talks of mergers and consolidations continued to gain impetus in the state legislature. The availability of a state of the art facility could greatly enhance Otter Creek's becoming a regional school in the event of either consolidation or merger. The effect of which was the potential of being a stabilizing agent in the struggling local economy.

Political will is an important element in sustaining a policy proposal through the political stream (Kingdon, 1984). A key to sustaining efforts is the achieving of consensus. In the policy stream, Kingdon (1984) showed consensus to be a process of

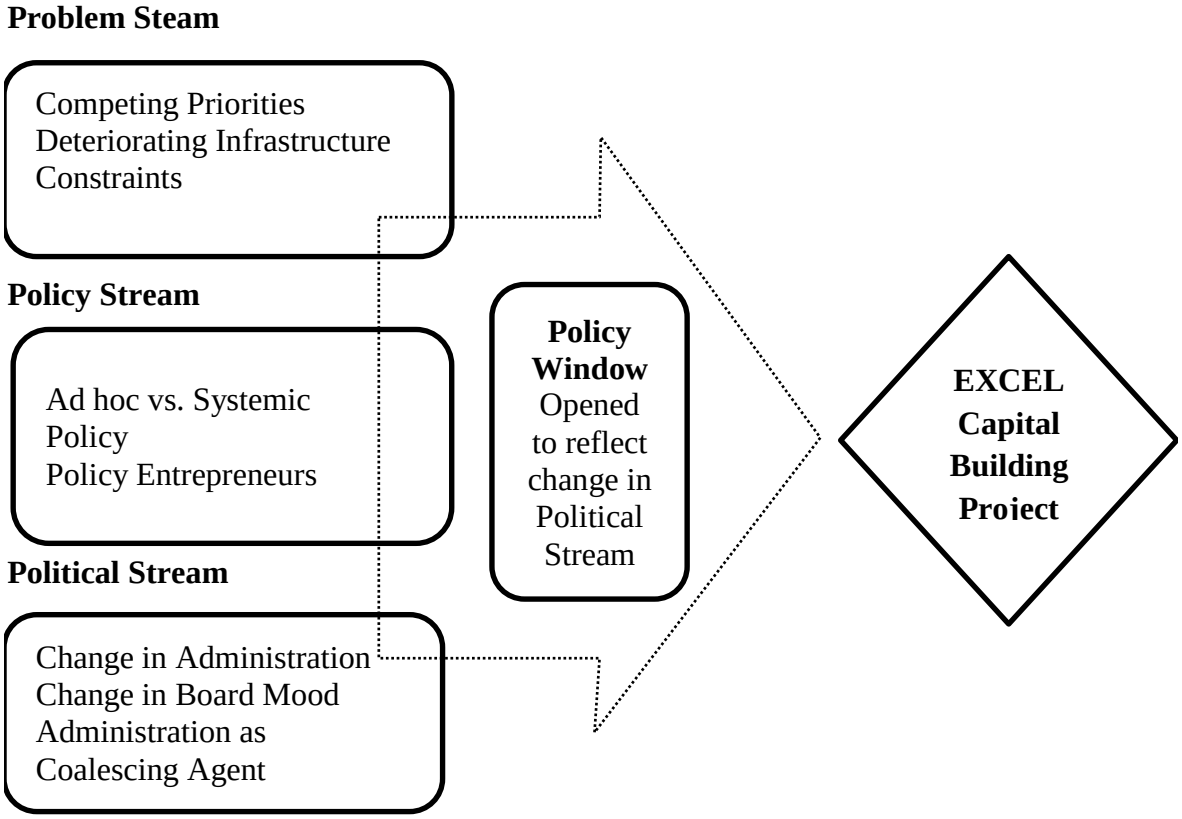
"persuasion and diffusion" (p. 146). In the political stream, characterizing this process, among the participants is a bargaining activity essential to the movement of an item forward in the stream (Kingdon, 1984). At a point or juncture in the negotiations, a bandwagon or tilting effect occurs, sometimes called a tipping point. Reaching the tipping point occurs when the participants want to be a part of the process to protect their interest in the policy resolution and not to be excluded from the benefits in the event the resolution passes (Kingdon, 1984). As revealed in the policy stream, this course of action was not readily apparent at the board meetings but only indicated in the interviews with board members.

Policy Window

Kingdon (1984) stated agenda setting occurs when the three streams converge simultaneously for a short period, opening a policy window. The opportunity for a policy window to open, Kingdon (1984) observed, is usually precipitated by a change in mood, a crisis, or major event. An open policy window creates the opportunity for advances in new ideas or views. Additionally, Kingdon (1984) observed a policy window provides an opportunity for alternate issues and solutions to undergo consideration and permits some advocates to advance their proposals to a decision-making agenda. Kingdon (1984) declared it was not always necessary for all three streams to join simultaneously for a policy to develop. In some cases, a partial coming together of two streams is sufficient to open a window of opportunity. The open window was the factor allowing an item to move on to the decision agenda and coalesce into a policy. However, successful agenda setting substantially increases when all three streams—problem, policy, and politics—link to a single proposition (Kingdon, 1984).

Examined were all three streams to identify themes and changes that resulted in conditions favorable to convergence. The analysis interpreted the policy window to have been open during the 2010-2011 Academic Year. The policy window in this study, contrary to typical windows, remained open for a protracted period because of provisions in state legislation. The convergence of the problem, policy, and political streams is attributable to changes primarily in the political stream, precisely to the changes in administration and board mood allowing the coupling of the problem to the solution.

Figure 2. Application of findings to the Multiple Streams Model conceptual framework.



Kingdon (1984) attributed success in the policy window to the action of policy entrepreneurs. Kingdon (1984) delineated to two possible scenarios illustrating entrepreneurial action. First, policy entrepreneurs have solutions waiting for problems

and the right climate to advance their platform, or, second, policy entrepreneurs have problems and are waiting for solutions and the opportunity to resolve them. In this study, the Superintendent and Business Executive successfully framed and linked the facilities problem to a preexisting solution. The linkage was fundamental to enabling the conceptualization of the project. The defining of the project allowed progression to the discussion agenda, then to the action agenda, and finally culminated in the passing of the building project resolution via the state afforded open policy window.

Concluding Remarks

This study examined decision making using Kingdon's model as the analytical framework for the assessment of interviews, observations, and documents. The framework consists of three streams: Policies, Problems, and Politics, including the actions of policy entrepreneurs (actors) and a window of opportunity. Kingdon's multiple streams model suggests policy adoption is primarily a process relying on the convergence of two or more of the three streams. The convergence opens a window of opportunity through which policy entrepreneurs attempt to push through their ideas, concepts or programs (Kingdon, 1984).

Analysis using the construct of the three streams model illustrated the elemental flows in each of the streams in this study. In the problem stream, observed were influences from both internal, the district and external sources, the state. Prompting changes, flexing, and adaptations in the policy stream the policy entrepreneurs were the catalyst causing issues to rise and fall on the agenda. The political stream illuminated substantive changes in the mood of the board and changes in the complexion of the

administration. The district hired a new Superintendent, and board members were looking to the district's future.

The strength of Kingdon's model is that it interprets the policy process as fluid and non-linear, portraying the actions of the actors and forces in the messy process of policy making. The value of Kingdon's model is it provides an understanding of the changing realities of power, politics, climate, and timing that factor into agenda setting and decision making.

Summary of Findings

The first research question: What factors enable one school district's decision makers efforts to direct resources to facility funding? The data collected represented the elements that moved the facilities project forward. Legislative authority, state law, and statute provided the authority for the board to direct funding. District policy, approved by the school board interpreted state law and stature to direct the local authority to distribute district funds through the annual budget.

Found in the political stream were factors enabling the board to direct their energies to a building project. A compelling factor was the change in administration, which resulted in a change in the board mood. Board members concurred the administration was a coalescing agent. The board's reliance on the Superintendent and his staff was consistent with findings by Zimmerman. Zimmerman's (2005) study of decision making revealed actions relative to facilities as one where the Superintendent, staff, and contractors identified problems and recommend solutions to board members (Zimmerman, 2005).

Three elements influenced or affected the Superintendent's push for the building project: timing, economics, and education benefits. The current Superintendent used strategic planning principles to advance the idea of a building project with the board members through information saturation. The Superintendent's use and expansion of strategic planning were consistent with action recommendations made by Hayden (1993) and Leopold, Frank, Harmon, and Howley (1996).

Consistent with statements found in the literature review (Leopold, Frank, Harmon, &Howley, 1996; McColl & Malhoit, 1996), the 2010-2011 Otter Creek Board examined the fiscal impact and assessed the implications of the building project. The Otter Creek Board projected the near future composition of the school board (political stream), then proceeded forward with the EXCEL Project resolution. Seen in the problem stream and significantly motivating the board was the unacceptable alternative solution to the EXCEL Project: raising the tax levy to fund continual maintenance and renovations.

The examination of the interviews with the board members revealed a number of interconnected and consistent themes. These themes emanated from individual feelings the board members held about their district, its children, and community, custodial responsibilities, and the legacy they would leave the district when they left school board service.

These themes coupled with the Superintendent's strategic planning generated a change in the mood of the board. The 2010-2011 board's final collective custodial duty was to ensure the district's facilities needs were addressed. The board members' pride and concern for the district and its facilities were consistent with observations shared by

Leopold, Frank, Harmon, and Howley (1996). The pride and concern, coupled with the collective change in administration and change in the mood of the board, coalesced into an opportunity for taking advantage of an open policy window to enable the initiation of the EXCEL Building Project.

Regarding the second research question: What factors constrain one school district's decision makers efforts to direct resources to facility funding? This question was directed to the identification of constraints imposed upon decision makers when attempting to direct resources to facilities.

The data analyzed in the problem stream echoed findings consistent with those in the literature review. Carter (1999) spoke of a significant overarching constraint related to infrastructure development for rural schools through her examination of Rural Persistent Poverty (RPP). Carter voiced that a bias against poor rural communities existed and that this bias centered on urban perceptions, reflected in governmental and state policies. DeYoung and Lawrence (1995), Gibbs (2005), "Rural Schools" (2010), and Williams (2010) cited inadequate finances as being the cause affecting all district decisions. Seal and Harmon (1995) focused their research on dwindling tax bases and declining student enrollments. Dewees (1999) and Crampton, Thompson, and Vesely (2004) investigated the deleterious effects unfunded mandates had on the efforts to fund capital projects.

It was evident when viewed through the lens of the problem stream that these conditions prevailed in the Otter Creek District. Plaguing the school system was a number of factors related to the socio-economic circumstances of the district and community. The manifestation of financial inadequacy was evident in the shrinking tax base, reduced state funding, outdated technology, increasing salaries, and benefits, decreasing enrollment, and

an aging and diminishing local population. Otter Creek's fiscally-limited capacity and resultant challenges were reflective and complimentary to Leopold et al.'s (1996) findings in respect to board member involvement and attachment to their district.

All board members reiterated, in the context of their interviews, that they were intensely and agonizingly aware of the constraints and challenges they faced when building the district's annual budget to allocate monies each year. They outlined internal steps the district had taken in an attempt to ameliorate the lack of funding in an attempt to support school-wide programs. The steps, while helpful, could not supplant the ever-widening gap in funding. In their attempts to augment and create additional district revenues, the board's actions were consistent with Leopold et al. (1996) and Rural New York Initiative's (2006) recommendations. The enormity of the challenge to prioritize district needs had often relegated facility issues to a necessitated Band-Aid accord.

The third research question: How do one school district's decision makers deploy resources to support school construction, renovation, and maintenance? The answer to this question is the application of state and district policy. Predicated on New York State law and regulations interpreted in complying district policy, the Otter Creek District directs funding for facilities.

There was no long-range planning process identifying solutions to facilities issues. The Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan provided a narrative of issues but not solutions. Solutions in Otter Creek were an evolutionary process dealt with through the monthly agenda and to a lesser degree at the annual board retreat.

As was previously advanced, the board generated traction to enable the EXCEL Project through the Superintendent's strategic planning process through information

saturation for board members. The Business Executive supplied the cost and benefits analysis and all financial impact information in support of the Superintendent to ensure the board made an informed decision for the EXCEL Project.

Analysis of the policy and political streams revealed that to enable the Otter Creek Board in their decision-making process the requirements for the project had to exhibit the values of technical feasibility, value acceptability, and cost efficiencies. Given the magnitude of the scope of the needed facilities work, and significant to enabling the board's decision, was the availability of 100% state financing with the caveat of no impact on the local tax levy. This board action was consistent with recommendations from Leopold et al. (1996) who observed that before embarking on large-scale projects, a high level of consensus and understanding of use versus cost must be achieved.

The fourth and final research question: What political or economic barriers prevent one school district's decision makers from deploying resources to school construction, renovation, and maintenance? The summation of this question can be macroeconomic barriers and internal board dynamics. Beyond the control of the district, and preventing the board from deploying monies for facilities, were the diminishing state contribution to the annual budget and the cost of implementing and supporting state and federal mandates. The gap between district allocations for salaries and benefits and those to support all other educational requisites, including mandates, was continually widening with no help or intervention in sight from the state.

As has been acknowledged, state and federal mandates had no impact on the EXCEL building project. However, had the building project resolution not passed,

mandates would have continued to have a major and continuing impact on the annual district budget allocation of monies preventing their direction to fund facility needs adequately.

The behavior of board members identified in the problem stream, specific to board action, or rather inaction, prior to agenda status of the project foretold of actions to follow in the political stream. The board did not perceive facilities issues as urgent; the multiplicity of competing issues and their prioritization as outlined in the problem stream were questionable until the hiring of the current Superintendent.

The board's initial reservations focused on the impact a building project would have on the local tax levy. Significant to constraining the board was the district's property tax structure. Less than half (48%) of the district is taxable; 52 percent is not taxable. The state owns 50% of the property within the district; another 2% is exempt and, therefore, non-taxable. The losses in revenue from a decreasing population, an aging population, and the shrinking commercial/business presence further confounded the district's ability to deploy resources. Paralleling the situation in Otter Creek, Lawrence (2001) made the observation that the loss of population and business in small rural districts creates an erosion of the local tax base, which can result in a reluctance of taxpayers to support budgets, bonds, and projects.

Contributing, additionally, to the constraints faced by the board was the elimination of academic programs which resulted from declining enrollment and the contentious issues with the state teacher's union and the use of distance learning to deliver an enriched curriculum and academically challenging educational content.

Conclusions

The changes that occurred in the political stream during the summer and fall of 2010 created a favorable environment that allowed the opportunity to initiate a policy solution for the Otter Creek District's inadequate and deteriorating school buildings. This case study illustrated the constraints and obstacles necessary to overcome for the achievement of a successful construction project. Chief among these findings was competing issues and priorities found in the problem stream. A constraint intrinsic to this board was their limited experience and knowledge of actual construction, building practices, and technology systems and infrastructure. This necessitated the need for outside consultant services, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, raised the issue of a conflict of interests.

Existing facilities issues floated since the completion of both the 2003 and 2005 building projects. The board was aware of the district's Five-Year Facilities Plan cataloging those areas requiring attention or enhancement. An examination of the political stream indicated a favorability for a comprehensive building project as was evidenced by the efforts of the primary policy entrepreneurs: the Superintendent and Business Executive. In 2010, through strategic planning, the administration was able to gain the attention of the board and construct a link between the facilities problem and a pre-existing and available solution.

As was portrayed in the policy stream, policy entrepreneurs, chiefly the Superintendent and Business Executive, were able to ascertain the extent of the facilities problem and bring their plan to the board as an easily interpretable and coherent policy proposal. This raised the collective consciences of the board. Enabling the entrepreneurs

to capitalize on the potentiality of the political changes the board members had envisioned for the future composition of the school board. This envisioned composition of future board membership precipitated a change in mood that enabled the then 2010-2011 board to move the EXCEL Building Project forward through the existing open policy window.

Interpretations

I interpreted the status quo that existed in board deliberations prior to July 2010 as the board seeing the facilities issue as being less problematic the longer the problem existed. If no changes were seen, the relegation of the problem was to the status of being a condition that the district could tolerate or live with. The facilities issue existed and was known as evidenced by the Five-Year Facilities Plan. The issue, however, was not elevated to the discussion agenda. It was my conclusion that had it not been for the advocacy of the policy entrepreneurs, the Superintendent and Business Executive; the facilities problem would have continued to languish for an indeterminate period.

Learned through attendance at school board meetings during the past 20 years, is that local politics and decision making play an interrelated role in rural districts, particularly small ones like Otter Creek. While investigating the first research question, a finding, made while observing board meetings, and confirmed by observational notes, meeting minutes, and media coverage, revealed political underpinnings that influenced the board's decision making. Intertwining inextricably in a small district are the social, professional, and most profoundly personally the relational ties amongst board members, parents, and voters. All the interviewees were keenly aware of their position as a board member and their status in the community. In light of this, the conclusion drawn was that

board members yielded positional power to one another. Organizational norms to include public unity and deference to seniority and experience were clearly evident in meeting proceedings.

In the context of this study, it can reasonably concluded that the personal positional power of board members and reverent authority vested in the 2010-2011 Board by the community greatly influenced the board's adoption of the EXCEL Building Project resolution and the eventual acceptance of the project by the voting public. Examples of the yielding of personal positional power were evident during decisions on budgetary issues. Members deferred to the expertise of Ms. D and Mr. F. For matters centering on educational and pedagogical issues, the board gave deference to Ms. A and Mr. B. On matters of district and community historical congruence and continuity, Mr. E was the authority, given his 30 plus years of board experience. Mr. C, through his work in higher education administration, had the greatest understanding of physical plant issues.

Policy entrepreneurs—the Superintendent and Business Executive—profoundly influenced the board. An observational finding and subsequent conclusion made while investigating the first research question and seen throughout the study was the magnitude of the effect the Superintendent had on district leadership and the board's decisions. If not for the Superintendent's understanding of facilities issues and the viability of state aid and EXCEL aid, the EXCEL Building project, as the 2010-2011 board undertook, may not have come to fruition.

Discerned during the compilation of data for the second research question, were the constraints the board imposed itself, whether knowingly or not. Debate and discussion were virtually non-existent at board meetings. When queried about this lack of discourse,

board members replied it was because they were well-prepared and versed in the topics to be presented at the meeting having had any concerns belayed through contact with the Superintendent prior to the meeting. Dissenting or minority opinions, if they existed, were not publicly voiced. The lack of discourse may have been to either minimize conflict or avoid public rancor. Alternate explanations of this observed behavior may involve issues of board member's self-censorship of their opinions or the portrayal of an illusion of unanimity confirming a decision. Another possible explanation for the high degree of group cohesion may the yielding of positional power; in this case perhaps to the Superintendent. Exhibited was the achieving group consensus in lieu of discussion as seen in the plurality of board voting patterns. Did this behavior impact the board's legitimacy, authority, or positional power? This determination was not within the scope of this research but posits an interesting question had the resolution been unsuccessful.

The data from the interviews reviewed for the third research question lead me to conclude board members conducted self-examinations to identify and clarify their perspectives of community beliefs, values, expectations, strengths, and priorities. Deduced was that dialogue between board members and the administration was occurring at an indeterminate point in time to develop an understanding, a vision of the facilities issues to be addressed.

The Superintendent, Business Executive, and by invitation, the architect retained by the district delivered presentations to the board. Information provided to the board addressed issues to include: the rationale for the EXCEL Project, data and information analysis, resource targeting, or financial planning and management. Through the course of the interviews, observations, and document review, not see was definitive evidence of the

board engaging in public discussion. I propose the existence of three scenarios: One, discussions took place in Executive Session. Two, the unflinching faith of the board members in the information provided by the Superintendent and Business Executive negated the need for discussion. Three, the board's dedication to the district and community's future was their prime motivator for moving the EXCEL Project forward purposely in 2010-2011.

Specific to research question four was the conducting of board meetings as well rehearsed and orchestrated theater. There was little or no discussion or interaction; the meetings were more perfunctory than thoughtful. There was no process or dialogue between board members evident to see the development of a shared vision or an understanding of the main issues to be addressed when considering a building project. Concluded was that this means of information distribution and clarification were somehow sufficient to bring all members to the same level of understanding and clarity that resulted in the foregoing of discussion at the meeting.

It is my position that the value of legitimacy, transparency, and the open practice of grassroots democracy cannot be forsaken for fear of embarrassment or reproach. Accomplishing this level of consensus without discussion led to reflection on this behavior and the interpretation of this phenomenon as an example of groupthink. Another possible explanation for this behavior, although not supported by evidence, was the potentiality of unseen political influence or pressure.

Recommendations

The constraints found affecting the decision-making process at Otter Creek were various: the initiation of interest, a lack of time, competing interests (state and federal

mandates), scarce resources, a lack of information, and the resolve to consider situations or issues. Derived from two primary resources, the findings from this study and my experiences as a school board member, are recommendations developed from this study. The reommendations made are specifically for the Otter Creek School Board. The intent is to encourage development as a board member and foster collaboration between all stakeholders in the school and community. These recommendations will require a proactive board, pursuing an agenda of school board development as well as the priming, by the board; of the administrative staff to ensure their equal involvement and support of this endeavor.

The title of this research project is; Facilities, Policy, and Funding of Rural Schools: A Case Study of School Board Decision Making. Predicated on that format are the following recommendations. The first set of recommendations for the Otter Creek School Board will focus on facilities, followed in turn by funding and policy and concluding with decision making.

Facilities

I discovered three elements relating to this school board and their perspective on facilities issues. The first, interpreted the status quo that existed in board deliberations prior to July 2010 as the board seeing the facilities issue as being less problematic the longer the problem existed. There was no evidence of long-range planning to identify primary or alternate solutions to continuing facilities issues.

The second finding was the existence of competing issues and priorities plaguing the school board. These factors were identified as related to the socio-economic circumstances of the community. Otter Creek's fiscally-limited capacity and resultant

challenges were reflective in the decreasing enrollment and an aging and diminishing population resulting in a shrinking tax base. Losses in revenue were compounded by a dwindling commercial/business presence further confounding the district's ability to generate and deploy resources for facilities.

The third finding was a constraint identified as intrinsic to this board. That constraint was their limited experience and knowledge of actual construction, building practices, technology systems, and general infrastructure upkeep. This situation was evidenced by Mr. C's concerns for the inclusion of the high-cost swimming pool renovation and the technology upgrade pieces of the EXCEL project.

Recommendations. Findings One: Recommended to focus and drive decisions and plans for facilities is the development of a long-range strategic planning model. Strategic plans developed to incorporate the district's vision of student achievement with district facilities provide consistency in providing for instructional needs. The alignment of a strategic facilities plan congruent with operational plans for budgets improve data-driven and research-based decisions to adequately fund facilities.

Finding Two: Specific to the development of comprehensive strategic plans that reflect the constraints endemic to Otter Creek; suggested is the development of board policies in three areas. These policy plans would include a Comprehensive Maintenance Plan: place all systems on a prescribed maintenance schedule, Facility Coordination Plan: evaluate space utilization and technological support, and a Capital Improvement Plan: develop scenarios in advance of building needs. Policy specific to these areas would enhance the existing district (state mandated) Five-Year Facility Plan and District Board

of Education Policy 5630 (Appendix D) providing the board annual status and actionable plans for facilities decision making.

Finding Three: Suggested is the board should consider future expenses necessary to maintain and upgrade existing facilities. The board needs to examine the long-term maintenance costs thoroughly before final inclusion in a project. Accomplishing this can by the soliciting of outside services and seeking professional evaluations from at least two, preferably three outside consults.

Policy

A finding significant to this study was the magnitude of the affect and the degree of effect of two policy entrepreneurs. The actions of the Superintendent and Business Executive profoundly influenced the decisions making of the Otter Creek board. Interpreted from the interviews and document review was a lack of a sense of urgency regarding facilities issues by the board. It was not until the hiring of the present Superintendent that the board resurrected the facilities problem and attached it to a preexisting solution to begin moving the conceptualization of a building project forward.

I observed that the Superintendent gained consensus through understanding the need for the board to have ownership of the project and linking factors of feasibility, value acceptability, and cost efficiencies initiated by a persistent process of information sharing with the board. The change in district leadership and the changing mood of the board precipitated the decision-making process of the school board selecting a policy thread resulting in the selected policy solution, the EXCEL Building Project being approved by the district voters.

Recommendations. Pursuant to the finding and observations in this study the board should realistically evaluate and weigh pedagogical requirements and community demands with defined best practices and existing district policy. As has been advanced in the proceeding recommendation is the development and approval of three facilities policies by the board and operationalized by the Superintendent and administrative staff. These evaluations will assist the board to then judiciously balance fiduciary actualities specific to tackling facility concerns.

I will broadly state a recommendation for the Otter Creek board in the terms of the political/policy dynamics of decision making: the school board as advocate. I learned through my school board experience advocacy goes beyond merely supporting or opposing issues. Advanced is this recommendation resulting from the analysis of minutes taken at board meetings. It was evident that only a minority of the board members attended functions outside of the district. Representing the district's children to state policymakers is critical to change. Recommended to the board is the adoption of an advocacy policy for the purpose to exert influence over policy and politics locally and at the state level. As advocates the projection of a meaningful voice, a physical presence is requisite to the improvement of state programs affecting their students and constituencies. Otter Creek cannot allow itself rendered ineffectual or depoliticized by physical isolation from Albany. The costs of time and travel are significant and oft times prohibitive, however, these can provide opportunities to form coalitions with other districts to advance issues through shared services, i.e. transportation to events.

Connecting the Otter Creek Board with state policymakers at every opportunity is an important consideration. Recommended to the board is that they visit legislators,

attend legislative session and hearings, and invite legislators to their district for first-hand exposure to concerns. Recommends also is that they attend programs and meetings sponsored by the County School Boards Association and the New York State School Boards Association. Recommend is attendance at developmental programs available from these organizations to become skilled board members and highly-competent boards. Lastly, Otter Creek cannot allow memberships to lapse in rural specific programs such as the one affiliated with Cornel University. These organizations can be invaluable to promoting local issues at the state level.

Funding

A finding in this study identified a constraint unique to Otter Creek. The finding identified was the constraint upon on the board's ability to generate the district's budget as a result of the property tax structure existing in the district and the state making no adjustment or allowance for the disparity. A significant factor is the district's property tax structure. Less than half (48%) of the district is taxable; 52 percent is not taxable. The state owns 50% of the property within the district; exempt is another 2% and, therefore, non-taxable.

A review of the districts in New York State did not reveal any school districts of analogous physical size or population with Otter Creek's property tax structure. There were districts with similar limiting elements, identified were none as comparable to the extent evident in Otter Creek. The restricted capabilities to levy taxes hampered the board's decision-making abilities to fund facilities projects.

Recommendations. I propose three recommendations specific to Otter Creek and the boards restricted ability to responsibly generate additional revenue:

1. Explore the integration of Local Education Agency (LEA) and local government.

   School districts (rural) and local governments (village, township, county) share a number of commonalities. Both involve questions of the democratic or political process, varying degrees of influence, status, and differing interests. School Board members and publicly-elected local governmental officials are responsive to constituent demands, and professionally-trained administrators are responsible for maintaining day-to-day operations and oversight. Constituents and their elected representatives interact more intimately on the local stage, especially in rural and small communities where ease of accessibility is a factor of low population density. In small towns and rural communities everyone either knows everyone else or knows about everyone. Residents and representatives have personal familiarity with one another, unlike state and national politics. This intimacy of community structure affects actor behavior and how these actors strategically use resources to influence one another and outcomes.

2. Explore the integration of Local Education Agency (LEA) and local services.

   Considering the realities of funding allocations it would be prudent for the school board to aggressively pursue partnerships and collaborative ventures with local businesses and services. The investigation and implementation of fiscal management strategies such as the rental of excess or unused district facilities can produce needed income. Potential clients are medical and

rehabilitation facilities, senior citizen services, office space, retail space, community center, library, or banks.

3. Explore Grants, Corporate Giving, and Sponsorships.

   Otter Creek does actively pursue grants and other forms of supplemental funding. Performing this onerous task is the Business Executive who has successfully secured grants for the district. Grant writing involves hours of dedicated effort sometimes with less than fruitful results. Recommended is that the board investigate the services of a professional grant writer on a commission basis or a percentage of contract worth thereby not encumbering district funds or the time of district staff.

Offered are grant writing services through BOCES in New York State on tiered menu for costs and depth of service. Grants administered by the New York State Education Department http://www.p12.nysed.gov/funding/currentapps.html and Grants Action News, New York State Assembly (http://assembly.state.ny.us/gan/20090201/) are sites I recommend for information on grants. These websites provide information, including descriptions, eligibility, and funding opportunities for NYS grants, as well as information on federal and private funding.

Decision Making

Decision making is first and foremost the duty, legislated responsibility, and purpose of the school board. The board exists to represent the people of the district and conscientiously make decisions for the provision of a sound public education. School board members should have an understanding of the dynamics and practical aspects of decision making.

Generated for board consideration are issues emanating from a number of sources in Otter Creek. An individual board member or collective members may bring forth an issue for consideration. The generation of issues can be from outside the board (e.g. students, parents, community constituents, media, and other interested parties). The superintendent and his or her administrative staff may also bring issues for the consideration of the board.

Thus far rural communities, like their urban counterparts, have school boards with essentially the same duties and responsibilities. What sets them apart? What is unique to rural school boards and decision making? There are distinctions, important ones discerning the rural board from the urban board and the ramifications of decision making. Service on urban boards is often the first stop for a candidate with higher politically ambitious. Washington, DC is an example of this. Candidates interested in public service first sought election to the school board and in time found themselves in the mayor's office. Board members in rural areas often to double duty, they serve with volunteer fire departments and on EMT squads, civic organizations and local government, holding office or appointments. Occupations in rural areas revolve around agriculture, and extractive industries that do not lend themselves to the availability of time for school board service. Factors of proximity often preclude small business owners from seeking the board for fear decisions may adversely impact business.

The pool of potential candidates is small in rural areas, especially those with experiences or skills related to board service are limited. In an urban setting, the availability of candidates is larger, and they have backgrounds in business, industry, advocacy, community relations, and higher education enriching the pool of candidates.

These individuals often time have experiences enabling their ability to step in and become quickly acclimated to board service.

The above factors in concert with geographic and political isolation all become contributing elements distinguishing the complexities and challenges faced by rural boards in counterpoint to urban boards. Pursuant to the differences particularly in the skills sets brought by urban school board members in contrast to their rural peers are elements of communication skills and skills aligning with the importance of educating board members. In particular rural members should develop a broader perspective of those skills needed to be successful in the exercising of decision making challenges in their district.

Recommendations. Relative to the proceeding statements about decision making at Otter Creek, areas exist which I noted as especially acute to the board's relationship to the decision-making process. These two concerns are school board communication and development of board members. During the review of interview transcripts, observation of board meetings, and confirmed by observational notes, meeting minutes, and media coverage no interaction between board members occurred during the conduct of a board meeting to see the development of a shared vision. The lack of discussion and debate observed at board meeting led to reflection on the groupthink phenomenon. An interpretation of the behavior of the board, not supported by the research, is the potential for pressure, political or otherwise, to be exerted by stronger members of the board.

The second of the two concerns was board development. Election to the Otter Creek board is a transitional journey from the orientation of a new school board member to the learning of how to make positive contributions to the work of the board, and how

to contribute most effectively to lasting change. Reasonably concluded was not all board members availed themselves equally of opportunities to advance their knowledge or to improve their skills relational to board tasks. One board member did attend almost all local and state-sponsored development opportunities. Two other members of the board did regularly attend county wide and BOCES functions. The remaining five board members exhibited minimal attendance at events sponsored to advance their knowledge and skills as board members.

Communications. Foundational to any decision making discourse is effective communication and dissemination of information among all participants. Otter Creek board members should always insist on full disclosure of information and be open to input from multiple resources and viewpoints. Accurate and timely communication is essential for board members to interact and discuss with knowledge and clarity the issues presented for consideration. Boards should clearly understand the definition and delineation of what is for discussion at an open board meeting. Particularly, when the expenditure of public funds, such as for a building project, is an issue the board is considering. Accomplishing this by means of either by board policy or less formal memorandums of best practices.

The socio-economic status of Otter Creek and the ever-changing state's support for education makes it incumbent upon the school board to facilitate both intra-district and inter-district communication. The end game is to foster increased cooperation and collaboration between the school board, administration, teachers and staff, support contractors, and the community to carefully and pragmatically evaluate all student needs. Effective communications, coupled with a realistic balance of demands, would perhaps

increase student opportunities within a balanced budgetary framework that the community can support in Otter Creek. To accomplish communication excellence requires a continual collegial and professional working relationship among board members and with the superintendent and district administrative staff.

Education: An overarching recommendation. As a member of a local, county, regional school boards, and an affiliate of the National School Boards Association, I can state without reservation there is much that needs to be done to educate school board members in the intricacies of decision making. The Otter Creek board can become its own most persuasive advocate. The support for the development of school board members needs to be an ongoing systematic and evolutionary program of education. The program must exceed the traditional training of the past. The enormity of the consequences of school facility conditions on student outcomes and achievement, coupled with the potential effect on the community, make it incumbent upon board members to actively work with their association (New York State School Boards Association) and the Country School Board Association to develop comprehensive programs for all board development.

The curriculum would ideally focus on intense and relatable topics with content-rich modules to enhance the knowledge base and performance of board members. Education offerings related to facilities could include fundamental knowledge of the construction and the development and understanding of predictive models of design elements and cost efficiencies. A familiarity with building systems, instructional technology, conceptual utilization of space for present and future applications, and the

use of demographic data should be minimally inclusive elements of programs for all educational stakeholders and policy makers.

Otter Creek is not a unique entity among rural districts in New York State. Mitigation of the effects of geographic and political isolation is necessary to advance the development of efficiencies of all rural boards. While in-person attendance may the preferred means of educational attainment, cost and time constraints force the exploration of other opportunities for collaborative learning. Equipped with the internet, Skype, and video conferencing Otter Creek is able is participate in web-based activities. Hosted can be workshops, discussion forums, focus groups and yet to be developed educational exchanges on these communication platforms. Otter Creek can take the lead in this development starting with issues now important to the board such as consolidation or merger of districts.

Summary

All the board members interviewed were keenly aware of their position on the board and their status in the community. The relational ties that exist amongst the board members, parents, and voters in Otter Creek are inextricably intertwining socially, professionally, and, most profoundly, personally in the daily goings on in district. The interviews, observations, and document analysis led to the conclusion board decision making warrants the continual development of knowledge and skills in the pursuit of being a highly-effective board. Contained in Appendix N are illustrative of the qualities of a good school board member as exemplified by three state school board associations. The need for improvement and growth, I believe is in the board's control. All that is required is the resolve and commitment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Consistent with Rand (2002), Hess and Meeks (2011), and Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) assessments of the limited research on school boards, there exists, relative to rural school boards and decision making, a particularly expansive void. Self-imposed boundaries would only limit continued studies examining decision making by rural school boards specific to school facilities. What I propose now for the potentiality of future study is a limited spectrum of a much broader array of challenges awaiting scholarly investigation. Included are studies conducted in the past whose replication could enrich the literature related to rural school boards in three selected areas.

Decision-Making Process and Policy

As was concluded from the review of literature in Chapter 2, there is a void in research focusing on facilities decision making by school boards pursuant to the initiation of a building project. Research in areas investigating school board decision making and facilities could entail replications of this case study or the expansion into multiple-comparative case studies of facilities policy making in rural schools.

Specific to rural school boards, research correlating decision making and policy to advance the achievement of coalescence of board members into high-functioning, high-achieving school boards could provide value-laden information to state school boards association as they craft curriculum for board development programs. Related to decision-making development are board member longevity and stability. Research investigating the number of years to achieve optimal proficiency as a board member would be an illuminating study as would be the exploration of term limits for board members.

The phenomenon of groupthink was defined by Janis (1972) as being "a psychological drive for consensus at any cost that suppresses disagreement and prevents the appraisal of alternatives in cohesive decision making" (p. 9). Reviewed were two studies investigating school boards and the groupthink phenomenon: Grant (1993) and Ford (2013). Grant (1993) explored groupthink in the context of school board decision making. The findings from this study suggest the theory of groupthink in decisions constructed by some boards. The Ford (2013) study examined school board governance and student achievement. Ford offered a possible consequence of groupthink would be a lack of situational awareness resulting in the adoption of policy contrary to the best interests of the school district. While neither of these studies addressed facilities issues, extrapolating the concept to such a study is feasible.

Funding Frameworks

Current challenges facing the Otter Creek board and other rural boards include changes in population composition, new state standards (common core), and reduced state funding. Brimley and Garfield (2005), building upon their work from 2002, inferred that the increasing financial burden placed on local districts and the increased state and federal demands have challenged the locus of control once preeminent at the local level. A study focusing on political considerations of decision making caused by these fiscal and budgetary realities, and the resulting effect upon school board making, could aid in understanding and improving district facilities.

Facilities and Policy

One possible aspect of researching policy connected to facilities is the effectiveness of school board members in policy development and the potentiality of

conflict or consensus with school administrators. Using John Carver's (2000) Policy Government Model is one theory to study this relationship. The Policy Governance Model gives superintendents wide-ranging powers and authority, but it comes with extensive responsibility and potential consequences. This is in counterpoint to what Carver called "the ironic combination of micromanagement and rubber stamping" (p. 1). Carver clarified this as being the action of school boards infringing on administrative duties and school boards abdicating their legitimate policymaking role to the superintendent.

Conclusion

This case study targeted a small rural school district in New York State. The research can serve as a foundation for continued studies in decision making and comparative policy analysis that would link to an understanding of challenges and the potentiality of solutions for rural schools. The effects of changing social-economic conditions and political forces that shape rural school agenda locally, statewide, and nationally need to become a priority at all levels of governance.

I conducted this research to ascertain an understanding of school board members' decision-making processes leading to the adoption of a policy resolution and funding to solve the problem of deteriorating facilities in a small rural school district. School Board members represent the educational values and beliefs of their community. The community's effect on the school board members in this study became an integral component of the decision-making process of the Otter Creek Board. It can be argued either way as to whether this was a positive influence or a negative influence. Perception

and reality are sometimes difficult to distinguish in the context of decision making, and the decision results can be equally interpretive dependent upon the respondent.

To navigate the complexities of decision-making analysis, Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model framed this research. Afforded by the model was the ability to systematically study and describe the process of decision making and policy development in the Otter Creek Central School District. Kingdon's model provided the context to answer the research questions that guided this study.

The research presented a systematic record of the policy process at Otter Creek beginning with facilities being a non-issue for the board to becoming a $16 million capital project. Based on interviews with board members and document analysis it became evident as to the how and why a particular problem joined with a pre-existing solution in the political climate that existed in 2010-2011. The analysis described the events in the problem, policy, and political streams as they related to the creation of a policy resolution to address the district's deteriorating buildings. The coupling of streams engineered by the efforts of the administration resulted in the utilization of a policy window and the passing of the EXCEL resolution with no discernible opposition.

Through the initial review of the literature, to understand why rural schools are often in deteriorating condition, what became readily evident was the limited scope of research addressing rural education. A further review to establish parameters for this study revealed a lack of research investigating facilities issues specific to rural schools.

Without an understanding of what is rural, and working with both the opportunities and challenges inherent in this complex environment, improvement cannot succeed. Changing culture and perceptions is difficult; school boards need tenable

alternatives to provide true viability of rural schools and their communities. If economic stability is not restored, the plight of rural schools will not change without substantial state and federal assistance. To confront the challenges that beset rural education will require substantial political will and courage in rural board rooms, in state houses across the nation and on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

This study evolved two key finding. First were the constraints imposed upon decision making abilities of the board to fund facilities projects caused by the district's restricted ability to levy taxes. The second, was how changes in district leadership and the changing mood of the board precipitated the decision-making process of the school board selecting a policy thread and reinforcing the chances of survival, particularly in respect to financial feasibility resulting in the selected policy solution, the EXCEL Building Project. It is from the findings generated by the interviews, observations, and document analysis that promulgated implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Retrospective

I have worked and lived in small towns and rural places the majority of my life. A proclivity to rural, a bias; perhaps, but I view it as an outlook and, therefore, interpretive and not a lock on perspective. As stated, I have been a member of my local district's school board having served as president, vice-president, and clerk of the board. Also, as a member of the county school board and regional board (BOCES). The BOCES district includes rural, small town, small city districts. I was actively involved with the New York State School Boards Association and the National School Boards Association as an affiliate.

Board membership included everything from kindergarten teas, firing and hiring superintendents, building projects to presentations to legislators. All these experiences were enriching, but more importantly a catalyst for the undertaking of this study and the pursuit of interests in all things rural, particularly education. Much that is rural, including education, languishes in the backwaters of political and economic reform. Occasionally, a subject during election stumping, but all too often when the campaign leaves town so does the rhetoric. The pursuit of this degree is the pursuit to be a change agent.

This study was a learning experience to develop and demonstrate the acquiring of analytical, evaluative, and communication skills. This learning experience has resulted in a change, an expansion of thinking and understanding about the conduct of research. The lessons learned during this research included: The selection of a dissertation topic and soliciting a broad spectrum of faculty for input should commence on day one. Inquire about the research interests of all faculty members including those off and on the main campus. The first written version is usually not the best or the last. There are both advantages and disadvantages to being a participant observer. Lastly, perseverance is exceedingly important, as Master Yoda admonishes in The Empire Strikes Back, "Do. Or do not. There is no try."

Specific to this study are alternatives to the single case study method used. The initial change would be to conduct this research as a multiple case study. A study conducted in multiple school districts would allow research and analysis within each setting and across settings. Comparing and contrasting the conclusion from one study with the results from other cases results in a strengthening and reliability of the results. The use of multiple researchers could be an enhancement not only for logistical concerns

but also in the coding process offering differing perspectives and outlooks in the analysis of data. The return of transcripts to the interviewees was only for the purpose of member checking. To strengthen validity, a strategy to implement could be a second review by board members of emergent codes.

Additional, suggestions for the research could include the stratification of districts in a study. Rural districts that are small, and districts having undergone consolidations or mergers or county-wide districts in rural areas could expand the study of the decision-making process of school board members. Another would be the expansion of the unit of analysis, the school board, to potentially include district administrators, faculty, and staff, PTA or PTO, community members, as well as local legislators.

Closing Remarks

Facility funding is nonexistent without policy. To propose policy will require vision: the vision to see the big picture and then to develop and integrate meaningful systemic change. This will require leaders to make informed decisions and to advocate for and be champions of rural issues. Also required will be perseverance and political courage. A key requisite will be the education of all stakeholders: Training to develop functionality required for repetitive tasks; Educating fosters higher order cognition: creativity, problem-solving, invention, and informed decision making. Changes in policy may seem utopic or altruistic; however, even a small, seemingly insignificant change in policy may cultivate significant benefits for children in rural schools.

When first as a candidate, and then a school board member, guiding and tempering my decisions were a proverb and a witticism:

"It takes a village to raise a child."

African Proverb

"God made the Idiot for practice, and then, He made the School Board."

Mark Twain, American Humorist

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Appendices

Appendix A

NCES's Urban-centric Classification System

NCES's Urban-centric locale code categories, released 2006	
Locale	Definition
City	
Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principle city with a population of 250,000 or more.
Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principle city with a population of less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principle city with a population less than 100,000.
Suburb	
Large	Territory outside a principle city and inside and urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more.
Midsize	Territory outside a principle city and inside and urbanized area with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
Small	Territory outside a principle city and inside and urbanized area with a population less than 100,000
Town	
Large	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.
Midsize	Territory inside an urban cluster that is no more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.
Small	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.
Rural	
Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.
Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.
Office of Management and Budget (2006). Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas; Notice. Federal Register (65) No. 249.	

Appendix B

Additions and Renovations

OCCSC Facility Additions and Renovations 1952-2005

Year	Additions	Renovations
1952 9,000 Sq. Ft. One-Story Structure	• Cafeteria • Kitchen • Music Room • Physical Education Room	
1955 30,000 Sq. Ft. One-Story Structure	• 18 Primary Classrooms • Gymnasium and Locker Rooms	
1966 40,000 Sq. Ft. One-Story Structure	• Cafeteria • Swimming Pool • Industrial Arts Room • Storage Room • Elementary Wing and Library	Original Gymnasium • Converted to an Auditorium with a Sloped Floor, Plush Seats, and New Stage
1990 11,700 Sq. Ft. One-Story Structure	• Fifth and Sixth Grade Classroom • Home and Career Rooms • Multi-purpose Room • Physical Education Room	1939 Building: • Drop Ceilings and New Lights • Weight Room • New Lockers in Pool and Physical Education Areas • ADA Compliant **B**athrooms • New Display Case Lights
2003 27,500 Sq. Ft. One-Story Structure 19,600 Sq. Ft. Two-Story Structure 14,200 Sq. Ft. Bus Garage	• Classrooms • Gymnasium with Locker Rooms • Lobby and Concession Area • Bus Garage • Press Box	• Re-Roofing All Buildings Except 1939 Gable Roof • Elementary Entrance Canopy and Interior Alterations
2005		• Windows: All Buildings • Masonry Restoration: 1939 Building.

Appendix C

Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan

Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan

Format

This Section describes the format for the Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan as follows:

- **Cover Page**
- **Table Of Contents**
- **Executive Summary**
- **Building Inventory**
- **District-Wide Analysis And Prioritization**
- **District-Wide Estimated Expenses For Each Plan Year**

♦ Cover Page

The Cover Page is to identify the School District or the Board of Cooperative Educational Services, the Plan title and the date prepared or revised. (See Appendix A)

♦ Table of Contents

The Table of Contents is to include the following items:

- Executive Summary
- Building Inventory

  Each facility owned, operated or leased by the District or Board listed.
- District-wide analysis and prioritization
- District-wide estimated expenses for each plan year

  Each facility owned, operated or leased by the District or Board listed.
  Prioritized Estimated Expenses Summary Form

- **Executive Summary**

This Section shall include a list of all of the District or Board's facilities and provide a brief narrative on the general condition and the goals for each facility. This Section shall also include lists of the people who prepared the Plan and of the resources used.

- **Building Inventory**

The Building Inventory Section shall include an expanded narrative description of each existing facility, describing the building's features and the condition of the building and the major systems. Potential upgrades, renovations, and additions should be discussed along with the rationale for such action. If contemplated, building abandonment, demolition, and/or replacement shall also be discussed.

Per Commissioner's regulation 155.1(4)(ii), the *districtwide* building inventory shall include a Building Inventory Form for each facility the District or Board owns, operates or leases. The building inventory shall include:

(a) Current condition of the facility

(b) Current or proposed new construction

(c) Current or proposed additions to school facilities

(d) Current or proposed alterations or reconstruction of school facilities

(e) Major system replacement, repairs, and maintenance; and

(f) Energy consumption

Appendix A includes a sample form that may be used as is or as an example for all information required. A building floor plan may be included with each building inventory form. This would be beneficial to demonstrate any potential construction phases.

- **District-wide Analysis and Prioritization**

Once the individual facility information has been gathered through such avenues as the building condition survey and other sources listed on page 1, it can be coordinated and analyzed on a district-wide basis. Individual building priorities are to be integrated and prioritized on a district-wide schedule. The highest priority in the five-year plan must be the elimination of all health and safety issues identified on the Building Condition Surveys across all district buildings.

♦ **Estimated Expenses**

The Estimated Expenses Section shall provide estimated expenses for each facility. Items to be addressed are:

- New Construction
- Additions
- Alterations / Reconstructions
- Major System Replacement / Repairs
- Major Repairs

Once the expenses for the individual building needs are established, they can be transferred to the five-year facilities plan for inclusion in the appropriate year's priority work within the plan.

The Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) recommends a budget should include a yearly expenditure of 2% to 3% of a building's replacement value for maintenance. Over a 5-year period this equals 10% to 15% and this figure should provide adequate budgeting to keep pace with life-cycle costs, maintenance and operations. This is not required to be demonstrated in the 5-year plan but should be considered when developing the plan.

Appendix D

Board of Education Policy 5630

Facilities: Inspection, Operation, and Maintenance

SUBJECT: FACILITIES: INSPECTION, OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Operation and Maintenance

The Superintendent is charged with the responsibility for administering plant operations in the most efficient and economical manner possible, while placing high priority on health and safety of students and conservation of natural resources.

The Board, through the Superintendent and his/her staff, has the responsibility of protecting the District investment in plant and facilities through a systematic maintenance program.

It is expected that the program shall include periodic preventive maintenance activities, long-range maintenance schedules and emergency repair procedures. It is further expected that all maintenance work will be carried out in a manner that will cause the least interference with the educational program.

Construction and Remodeling of School Facilities

All capital projects and maintenance must assure compliance with the requirements of the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code, the Manual of Planning Standards and the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. All new buildings must be formally submitted no matter the size or cost. The New York State Education Department Office of Facilities Planning has provided an Instruction Guide at website: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/facplan/ProjMgmt.htm

Plans and specifications for the erection, enlargement, repair or remodeling of facilities of the School District shall be submitted to the Commissioner when the contemplated construction costs of such work are ten thousand dollars ($10,000) or more, and for all projects affecting the health and safety of students.

Plans and specifications submitted to the Commissioner shall bear the signature and seal of an architect or engineer licensed to practice in the State of New York. The architect or engineer who sealed the plans and specifications shall also certify that the plans and specifications conform to the standards set forth in the State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code (19 NYCRR Parts 1220 through 1226) and the State Energy Conservation Construction Code (19 NYCRR Part 1240).

For remodeling or construction projects costing five thousand dollars ($5,000) or more, the District shall assure compliance with the requirements of the State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code (19 NYCRR Parts 1220 through 1226) and Commissioner's Regulations Part 155, and shall retain the services of an architect or engineer licensed to practice in New York State.

For remodeling or construction projects costing less than five thousand dollars ($5,000), the District shall assure compliance with the requirements of the State Uniform

Fire Prevention and Building Code (19 NYCRR Parts 1220 through 1226) and Commissioner's Regulations Part 155.

The administration of the School System shall cooperate with appropriate officials conducting health, fire, asbestos, bus, and boiler inspections. The administration shall keep the Board of Education informed of the results of such inspections in a timely fashion.

In accordance with law, local building inspectors may not enter District premises at any time they wish. Only the Fire Safety Inspector conducting the Annual Fire Safety Inspection may enter District premises for inspections.

In addition, per the requirements of the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA), the District will at least once each school year inform all employees and building occupants (or their legal guardians) about all asbestos inspections, response actions, post-response action activities, as well as triennial re-inspection activities and surveillance activities that are either planned or in progress. Written notice will be provided in the District newsletter and will be filed in the District asbestos management plan.

Comprehensive Public School Building Safety Program (Rescue)

To ensure that all school facilities are properly maintained and preserved and provide suitable educational settings, the Board of Education requires that all occupied school facilities which are owned, operated or leased by the District comply with the provisions of the Comprehensive Public School Safety Program and the Uniform Code of Public School Building Inspections, Safety Rating and Monitoring as prescribed in Commissioner's Regulations. For this reason, the School District shall develop a Comprehensive Public School Building Safety Program in accordance with Commissioner's Regulations.

The program shall be reevaluated and made current at least annually, and shall include the following:

a) A five (5) year capital facilities plan which will include an appraisal of the following: the educational philosophy of the District, with resulting administrative organization and program requirements; present and projected student enrollments; space use and State-rated student capacity of existing facilities; the allocation of instructional space to meet the current and future education program and service needs, and to serve students with disabilities in settings with nondisabled peers; priority of need of maintenance, repair or modernization of existing facilities, including consideration of the obsolescence and retirement of certain facilities; and the provision of additional facilities.

b) A District-wide building inventory, which will include information pertaining to each building including, but not limited to:

Non-Instructional/
Business Operations

1. Type of building, age of building, size of building;

2. Rated capacity, current enrollment;

3. List of energy sources and major systems (lighting, plumbing, electrical, heating); and

4. Summary of triennial Asbestos Inspection reports.

c) Annual Visual Inspections:

1. An annual visual inspection of each occupied building and assignment of a safety rating score. The inspection committee must include a state certified code enforcement official, the District's Facility Director or designee, and a member of the District's Health and Safety Committee.

2. The Commissioner shall require a re-inspection of school buildings where a report of inspection identified violations that, if uncorrected, would cause the department to deny an annual Certificate of Occupancy to such school building, and shall require additional re-inspections until it is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that said violations have been corrected.

d) A building condition survey shall be conducted for all occupied school buildings once every five (5) years by a team that includes at least one (1) licensed architect or engineer.

e) A District-wide monitoring system which includes:

1. Establishing a Health and Safety Committee;

2. Development of detailed plans and a review process of all inspections;

3. Procedures for a response in writing to all inquiries about building health and safety concerns, a copy of which will be sent to the District's Health and Safety Committee for oversight, and a copy kept on permanent file.

f) Procedures to ensure the safety of the building occupants while a construction/renovation project is taking place. These procedures will include:

1. Notification to parents, staff and the community at least two (2) months in advance of a construction project of ten thousand dollars ($10,000) or more to be conducted in a school building while the building is occupied; provided, however, that in the case of emergency construction projects, such notice shall be provided as far in advance of the

2. A plan to ensure that all contractors comply with all health and safety

issues and regulations and wear photo identification badges;

3. An opportunity for the District's Health and Safety Committee to conduct a walk-through inspection of newly renovated or constructed areas to confirm that the area is ready to be reopened for use; and

4. An emergency plan which will address potential concerns with the capital project including, but not limited to, evacuation procedures, fire drills, and structural failures.

School Facility Report Cards

The School District shall prepare an annual School Facility Report Card for each occupied school building, including a description of the activities of the District's Health and Safety Committee.

The School Facility Report Card for each building shall be reviewed annually by the Board of Education. The Board shall report in a public meeting on the status of each item set forth in Commissioner's Regulations for each facility located in the District.

Asbestos Inspection:
40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 763, Subpart E
Education Law Article 9-A
Fire Inspection:
Education Law Section 807-a
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Section 155.4
Health and Safety Committee:
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Section 155.6(c) (17)
Health Inspection:
Education Law Section 906
Plans and Specifications:
Education Law Sections 408, 408-a and 409
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Sections 155.1 and 155.2
19 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Sections 1220-1240
Structural Safety Inspections:
Education Law Sections 409-d, 409-e, 3602 and 3641(4)
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Sections 155.1, 155.3, 155.4(b)(1) and 155.6

5630
Adopted: 7/1/08
Revised: 2/11/10

Appendix E

Solicitation Letter to the Board of Education President

Dear School Board President,

I am currently a doctoral student at The George Washington University, in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development. I am completing my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Marguerita DeSander. I would like to invite your board to participate in this study; therefore, I am seeking approval from the board to conduct a qualitative research study.

The purpose of this case study will be to investigate the decision-making process of a rural school board as relates to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. To examine the decision-making dynamics of rural school boards John Kingdon's Agenda-Setting Theory will provide a foundation for analyzing the complex decisions made by board members, both collectively and individually, when making financial and policy decisions for their school facilities and to understand what factors influence board members and ultimately their decisions.

Data collection methods for this study will include interviews with each member of the school board, observations of school board meetings, and the collection of descriptive data related to the construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities. I anticipate initial interviews will be conducted in a 45-60 minute session at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The interview transcript will be returned to you for verification or correction before analysis is undertaken.

To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all board members, no names or identifiers will be used within the text of the research study. All participants will be protected under the confidentiality clause of the Office of Human Research at The George Washington University, as well as the tenets of federal regulations 45CFR 46 (protection of human subjects).

I would greatly appreciate the board's approval to participate in this study. Your participation will provide valuable insight into decision making and school facilities, leading to a detailed and in depth description of the perceptions of the importance of creating an optimal learning environment for rural school children.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I look forward to meeting with the board in either open or executive session to further discuss this project.

Sincerely,

Russell J. Valvo

Appendix F

Solicitation Letter of School Board

Rural Schools: Facilities, Policy, and Funding
A Case Study of School Board Decision Making

Dear Board Member,

My name is Russell J. Valvo. I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration and Policy Studies at The George Washington University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my degree, and I am would like to invite you and recent board members to participate.

My field of study is rural education, and this study is specific to school facilities and board decision making. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me individually to complete a brief survey and interview about board decision making and school buildings. The meeting will take place at a mutually agree upon time and place, and should last about 60 minutes. The session will be audio taped so that I may accurately record your responses. The tapes will be reviewed and transcribed; you will receive a copy of the transcription for your review and comment. After the transcription and review are completed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participation is voluntary and confidential. Participation is anonymous, no identifying information will be collected, which means no one will know what your answers are. Taking part in the study is your decision. I do not perceive more than minimal risks for your involvement in this study, that is to say, no more risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life. Your participation in this study will not affect your position on the school board or your employment status or community standing. If, at any time, you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you do not have to answer the question or any question you do not wish to.

Study information will be kept in a secure location and password protected. The results of the study will be published in my doctoral dissertation, presented at professional meetings or conferences, or published in professional journals. Your identity and the identity of the district will never be revealed.

Although you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, it is hoped the greater educational and legislative community will benefit and thereby provide enhanced delivery of educational services to all students.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me at 703-474-9195 (Cell Phone) or e-mail rvalvo@gwu.edu. If you have study related questions or concerns, you may contact my dissertation chairperson Mr. Marguerita DeSander at 757-269-2201 or desander@gmail.gwu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research: Institutional Review Board at www.gwwumc.edu/research/human or 202-994-2715.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be contacting you within the next week to discuss your participation.

Sincerely,

Russell J. Valvo
28 Liberty Street
Fredonia, New York 14063
703-474-9195 (Cell Phone)
rvalvo@gwu.edu

Appendix G

Consent

Information about the Research Study

Rural Schools:
Facilities, Policy, and Funding
A Case Study of School Board Decision Making

IRB #061311

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Marguerita DeSander, Ph.D. of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, George Washington University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary.

The purpose of this case study is to investigate the decision-making processes of a rural school board of education as it relates to policy and funding for construction, renovation, and maintenance of school facilities.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey, participate in a one-on-one audio taped interview with the researcher, and review the transcripts of your interview for accuracy. The total amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is approximately three hours. You may decline to answer any of the questions, and you may stop your participation in this study at any time.

There is no physical risk associated with this study. There is, however, the possible loss of confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The records for this study will be kept private. The following steps will be taken to minimize this risk: pseudonyms will be used for all persons and places, alphanumeric coding linked to a key will be stored in a separate secure location, data will be stored on password protected flash drives and rewritable CD-ROMs, and audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription and member checking is complete.

You will not benefit directly from your participation in the study. The benefits to education that might result from this study are: gaining insights and understandings into the dynamics of school board decision making, assist board members both collectively and individually to evaluate their past, current, and future decision making motivations and resultant outcomes, and all stakeholders may benefit when making decisions addressing the role of school facilities in providing safe, equitable, and quality educational environments.

If the results of this research study are reported in journals or meetings the people who participated and the place of this study will not be named or identified. GWU will not

release any information about your research involvement without your written permission.

The Office of Human Research of George Washington University, (202)994-2715, can provide further information about your rights as a research participant. Further information regarding this study may be obtained by contacting Dr. Marguerita DeSander, Principal Investigator, at 757-269-2201.

Your willingness to participate in this research study is implied if you proceed with completing the survey/interview.

*Please keep this document in case you want to read it again.

Appendix H

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
What major issues are you and other board members most occupied by? a. Why do you think these particular issues are the ones receiving attention – how did they become hot topics? b. What major issues are you and other board members most occupied by in regard to school facilities?
What is your general perception(s) of rural school facility needs and challenges?
How does the board construct an agenda?
How are the priorities for the board determined each year? a. How do you prioritize district expenditures?
Did an individual or group approach the school board in public session regarding facilities and/or resource allocation? a. How was this information communicated to the board? b. Did these encounters influence the board in reaching a decision? c. Did this communication play a role in your decision? d. What was the role of the person or group in relation to the school or board?
Was the issue of facilities and/or resource allocation brought to you personally by an individual or group? a. Was that individual or group a member of the school or community? b. How and when was this information communicated to you?
Is there a particular interest group or organization you are a member of or represent through interest identification?
Describe the forces or factors that influenced the school board on reaching its decision? a. How do you think these forces influenced the board's decision? b. Were constituent groups influential in your decision making?
Describe the steps the school board used to reach a decision on school facilities? a. In terms of hours or days how long did it take for you to make a decision on facility funding issues? b. As a board member, describe the role you played in helping the school board make a decision. c. How did the board utilize its time in reaching a decision on facilities issues?
In respect to facilities how would you evaluate your strategies; successful, moderately successful, neutral or ineffective? Please, explain your response.
How would you deploy resources differently, and what prevents you from doing so?
What factors enable or constrain your efforts to direct resources to school facilities?
Is there anything else that you think I might be interested in?

Appendix I

Emergent Themes

Policy Development	The board is elected by the community to set priorities, establish policies, and evaluate the outcomes of the district. The first duty of the school board is to make policy for the responsible operation of the school district. The board approves policies for the district's operational and allocation budget and for curricular frameworks, educational goals and objectives, standards for achievement; to include indicators and assessments.
Socio-economic Considerations	The dynamics of interaction between free and reduced lunch percentages, levy percentages, and property taxes. The board mitigates the effects of the district's ability to allocate revenue and expenditures.
Educational Opportunities for Children	The board's commitment to providing an organizational structure for increasing student opportunities and improving outcomes in a constantly fluid environment of poverty, limited resources, enrollment shifts, demographic variances, and a diminishing property tax base.

Concern for Community	The board's commitment to the community to provide an academically enriching environment in an economically challenged but close-knit community.
Custodial Duties to District	Protect the interests and provide opportunities for all students
Equitable Representation of the Community	The board is accountable to the community for monitoring the conditions affecting the district as a whole and not allow special interests to influence unduly school governance.
Board Legacy	The board member's collective commitment to vote for what they determined to be in the best interest of the school district and community without pandering to special interest groups, political or self-serving considerations.

Appendix J

Demographic Survey

What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-70
- 75 years or older

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or equivalent
- Trade/vocational/technical school (2 year)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctoral degree

Which of the following categories best describes your primary area(s) of employment? Check all that apply.

- Homemaker
- Retired
- Student
- Unemployed
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing or Hunting
- Arts, Entertainment or Recreation
- Journalism, Broadcasting or Media
- Education – College, University or Adult
- Education – Primary/Secondary (preK-12)
- Education – Other
- Construction
- Finance and Insurance
- Government and Public Administration
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Hotel and Food Service
- Information – Services and Data
- Information – Other
- Processing
- Legal Services
- Manufacturing – Computer and Electronics
- Manufacturing – Other
- Military, Law Enforcement or Corrections
- Unable to work

If retired, what was your former area(s) of primary employment?
Check all that apply.

- o Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing or Hunting
- o Arts, Entertainment or Recreation
- o Journalism, Broadcasting or Media
- o Education – College, University or Adult
- o Education – Primary/Secondary (preK-12)
- o Education – Other
- o Construction
- o Finance and Insurance
- o Government and Public Administration
- o Health Care and Social Assistance
- o Hotel and Food Service
- o Information – Services and Data
- o Information – Other
- o Processing
- o Legal Services
- o Manufacturing – Computer and Electronics
- o Manufacturing – Other
- o Military, Law Enforcement or Corrections

What is your current relationship status?

- o Single, never married
- o Married or domestic partner
- o Widowed
- o Divorced
- o Separated

How long have you been living in the school district?

- o Less than 9 years
- o 10-19 years
- o 20-29 years
- o 30-39 years
- o More than 40years
- o All my life

If you moved into the district, how would you characterize your former place of residence?
Check all that apply.

- o Rural
- o Suburban
- o Urban

Did you attend the district schools?

- K-5
- 6-8
- 9-12
- All of the above
- None of the above

Did your spouse or domestic partner attend district schools?

- K-5
- 6-8
- 9-12
- All of the above

  None of the above

Did/do your children attend district schools?

- Yes
- No

Did/do your grandchildren attend district schools?

- Yes
- No

Generally speaking to you consider yourself to be a (n):

- Strong Democrat
- Not so strong Democrat
- Independent leaning Democrat
- Independent
- Independent leaning Republican
- Not so strong Republican
- Strong Republican
- Other
- No party affiliation

Are you affiliated with a local, state, or national special interest group(s)/organization(s)?

- Yes
- No
- Name of group(s)/organization(s): _____

How many civic/service or community organizations do you belong to?

- None
- One or two
- Three or four
- Five of more

Why did you run for election to the school board? What factors were instrumental in your decision?

- _____

  _____

- _____

  _____

- _____

  _____

- _____

  _____

Appendix K

Audit Trail

Audit Trail

July 8, 2013	Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval
August 9, 2013	Received letter of approval for study from the Senior Associate Dean dated August 7, 2013
August 10, 2013	Documentation Collection Began
August 21, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
August 28, 2013	Informal email to School Board members updating them on permission to begin interviewing phase of research
August 28, 2013	Mr. G declined to participate in the interview
August 28, 2013	Letter to the Superintendent of Otter Creek Schools for permission to access district resources for research
August 29, 2013	Mr. F declined to participate in interview
September 4, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
September 9, 2013	Project walk-through: High School office suite and High School general electrical improvements
September 10, 2013	Emailed School Board members with formal invitation to participate in interviews; included were Interview Questions and Survey
September 16, 2013	Project walk-through: Swimming Pool and Fitness Center
September 25, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
September 27, 2013	Mr. C responded with tentative interview date of October 2, 2013
October 2, 2013	Project walk-through: Elementary School and Fire Protection
October 10, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting

October 11, 2013	Project walk-through: Cafeteria Area and High School HVAC
October 15, 2013	Project walk-through: Upper Elementary Wing and Career Development Rooms
October 16, 2013	Ms. A scheduled interview for October 22, 2013 for 9:30 am
October 21, 2013	Project walk-through: Exterior Masonry Steps and Clock Tower
October 22, 2013	Ms. A 9:30 am OCC Conference Room
October 22, 2013	Mr. B called researcher for availability, a time was arranged for same day interview at 3:00 pm
October 22, 2013	Mr. B 3:00 pm Board Member's Home
October 23, 2013	Project walk-through: Swimming Pool
October 30, 2013	Project walk-through: Elementary School-Smart Board Installations
November 2, 2013	Mr. B 3:00 pm Follow-up Interview Board Member's Home
November 4, 2013	Project walk-through: Band Room, Psychologist's, and Guidance Office Suites
November 6, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting Mr. E and Researcher scheduled interview for November 20, 2013 at 4:00 pm
November 8, 2013	Project walk-through: School-Wide HVAC and Technology Backbone Wiring
November 8, 2013	Ms. D scheduled interview for November 12, 2013 10:00 am
November 8, 2013	Mr. C 8:20 pm received online response to Interview Questions and completed Demographic Survey

November 10-18	Mr. C conducted follow-up in-person interviews at Mr. C's place of employment
November 12, 2013	Ms. D 10:00 am Local Coffee Shoppe
November 20, 2013	Mr. E 4:00 pm Otter Creek Public Library
November 20, 2013	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
November 21, 2013	Mr. E 4:30 pm Follow-up Telephone Call
December 9, 2013	Project walk-through: MAC Lab and Computer Labs
December 11, 2013	Ms. I, Business Executive 2:30 pm Business Executive's Office
December 12, 2013	Mr. H, Superintendent 9:00 am Superintendent's Office
December 19, 2013	Project walk-through: Maintenance Suite, Loading Dock and Central Heating Plant
January 10, 2013	General Project walk-through (Last walk-though)
January 15, 2014	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
February 5, 2014	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
March 5, 2014	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
April 9, 2014	Attended School Board Regular Meeting
May 19, 2015	Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD) Office of Student Services

Appendix L

Superintendent/Business Executive Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS Superintendent/Business Executive
All questions relate to School Board decision making, specific to school facilities. School facilities include buildings and grounds: new construction, renovations, and maintenance.
What is your general perception(s) of rural school facility needs and challenges?
How does the board construct their annual agenda using your input?
How are fiscal priorities for the board determined each year? b. How do you prioritize district expenditures?
Describe the forces or factors that you think influenced the school board on reaching facilities related decision, i.e. Public Input (community input), Tax Cap, State Mandates (funded or unfunded), State Funding (EXCEL or other programs)? a. How do you think these forces influenced the board's decision?
Do individual board members consult with you on facilities issues? a. If YES; is it to seek clarification or to expand their understanding of an issue or another reason?
Do you think board members receive adequate training to make fiscal decisions specific to facility issues? a. If NO; what resources could be utilized to provide this training?
Is there anything else that you think I might be interested in?

Appendix M

Unfunded Mandates

New York State Law, Federal Law of Regulations

Mandate	State Law, Federal Law or Regulation
Administration	
Shared Decision Making Team	Regulation
Comprehensive Attendance Program	Regulation
Joint Intervention Teams and Distinguished Educators	State
Medicaid Informed Consent Requirements	Federal
Annual Census	State
3020a Process	State
Master's Degree Required for Teacher Certification	Regulation
Required Oaths	State
Prohibition of Advertising	Regulation
Bidding and Purchasing Requirements (Multiple bids)	State
Lack of flexibility in using textbook, library materials, and software aid	State
Record Retention Requirements	State
Personal Privacy Protection	State
Business	
IRS Retirement Plan 403(b) Regulation Changes, Compliance and Plan Document	Federal
Audit Committee	State
Charter School Payments from District State Aid[1]	State
Claims Auditor	State
Corrective Action Plans to Address Comptroller's Office or Education Department Audits	State
Annual External Audits	State
Audited Financial Statement	State
GASB 34 - Additional Audit Costs and Fixed Asset Inventory Report	Federal
GASB 45 – increased independent auditing costs and actuarial costs	Federal
Internal Auditor	State
School District Property Tax Report Cards	State
Segregation of Duties - Increased Staffing	State
Six-Day Budget Notice to Residents	State
Six-Hour Financial Operations Training for BOE	State
Prohibition on BOCES providing services to municipalities, colleges, and third party contracts	State
Wicks Law Constraints	State

Facilities

Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan	State
Administration of State Environmental Quality Review Act	State
Annual Asbestos Management Plan Review (If Applicable)	Federal
Annual Visual Inspections	State
Asbestos Inspection & Management Plan	Federal
Building Condition Survey (every 5 years)	State
Electronically Operated Gym Partitions Safety Interlock and Door Edge Detectors	State
Environmentally Sensitive Products ("Green Cleaning")	State
Fire Extinguisher Testing and Monitoring	State
Fire Safety Inspection	State
Hazardous Waste Removal	State
Integrated Pest Management	State
Limits on Combustible Materials in Corridors, including Artwork	State
Pesticide Notification Requirements	State
Radon Awareness & Testing	Federal
School Facility Report Card	Regulation
Special Education Space Requirements Plan	State
Triennial AHERA Inspection (Asbestos)	Federal

Health/Safety

AIDS Education	Regulation
Physical Examinations, Eye, and Hearing Tests	State
Review of Student Immunization Records	State
Scoliosis Screening	State
Wellness Policy and Committee	Federal
Automatic External Defibrillators	State
Bicycle Safety	State
Blood-borne Pathogens Training	Federal
Right-to-Know Law & Hazard Communication	State
Training of Coaches in First Aid, CPR & AED	State
Building Level School Safety Plan	State
District-Wide School Safety Plan	State
Pandemic Flu Preparedness Plan	Federal
Violent & Disruptive Incidents (VADIR)	Federal/State
Megan's Law Notifications	State

Body Mass Index (BMI)	State
N-95 Respirators during time of H1N1 pandemic	State Dept. of Labor
Swimming Pool Testing	State
Eye Safety Devices	State
Destruction of Hypodermic Needles and Syringes	State

School-Wide Instruction

180 Days of Instruction	State
Teacher certification areas and grade ranges	Regulation
Requirements for technology education, home and career skills, and library and information skills	Regulation
Academic Intervention Services (AIS)	Regulation
Alternative Instruction of Suspended Students	State
Behavioral Intervention Plan for Students with Disabilities	Federal
Coaching Certification	Regulation
Code of Conduct Annual Review Committee	State
Early Grade Size District Plan	Regulation
Grades 3 - 8 Testing Scoring, Analyzing, and Mailings	Federal
Health Education	State
Home Instruction	State
Home Schooling - Individual Home Instruction Plan	State
Homeless Student Instruction	Federal
Instruction of Incarcerated Youth	State
Conservation Day (Formerly Arbor Day)	State
Curriculum Requirements. For Example, Conservation Day, the Irish Potato Famine, Humane Treatment of Animals, Patriotism and Citizenship, Care of the Flag, Flag Day Observance, Fire Prevention	State
Preschool Committee for Special Education Administration	Federal
Regents Examination Administration	Regulation
Revised Math Curriculum	Regulation
Seat Time Requirements	Regulation
Special Education Transition Plans	Federal
Student Calculators	Regulation
Supplemental Educational Services	Federal
School Choice	Federal
Contracts for Excellence	State
Joint Intervention Teams and Distinguished Educators	State
Staffing Ratios and Class Sizes	State
Cap of 65 for the total caseload of students for teachers providing speech and language services	Regulation

30-day requirement for a summer program	Regulation
Minimum required daily speech-language services requirement for a student with autism	Regulation
Maximum number of students in a co-teaching class	Regulation
Maximum caseload for students assigned to a resource room teacher	Regulation
School districts must provide transportation up to 50 miles to and from a nonpublic school if a student with a disability has been identified by the CSE as receiving services or programs similar to special education programs recommended by the CSE	Regulation
Maximum caseload and minimum level of service requirements for consultant teacher services	Regulation
Independent hearing officers for special education disputes are not selected jointly by parents and districts	State
Behavioral Intervention Plan for Students with Disabilities	Federal
Recommend Declassification Services	State
42 Day Timeline for Evaluation Information and Parental Consent for student evaluation	State
Costs for Students Attending State Schools for the Blind and Deaf	State
Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT) to include a psychologist, parent, and physician	State
Multiple notification requirements such as 5 Day Notice for Excusal of an MDT Member	State
Requirement for Psychologist and Parent Member on the Committee for Special Education	State
Individual evaluation requires: physical examination, individual psychological evaluation, social history and functional behavioral assessment (FBA) required components of a student's initial individual evaluation.	State/Regulation
Policy for placement in a school that uses psychotropic drugs	State/Regulation
Agreement that reevaluation is unnecessary must be in writing	State/Regulation
Children of Viet Nam Vets Must File a Form	State/Regulation
Notify Social Services of Children at Risk	State/Regulation
Parental Consent for 12 Month Program or Services	State/Regulation
Requirement to fund special education services by providers in charter schools	State/Regulation
Provide Copy of State Handbook to Parents	State/Regulation
July/August programs required to provide at least 30 days of service	State/Regulation

Technology	
Unique Student Identifiers	Federal/State
District Data Manager	Regulation
Instructional Computer Technology Plans	State
Statewide Data Collection - Data Warehousing	Regulation
Disaster Recovery Plan	State
Human Resources	
BEDS Reporting	State
Corporal Punishment Report	Regulation
Fingerprinting of Potential Employees	State
Leave for Disaster Relief Workers with American Red Cross	State
Leave for Prostate & Breast Cancer Screening	State
Leave for Blood Donation	State
Professional Development Hours Tracking	Regulation
Professional Development Plan	Regulation
Teacher Mentoring Program	Regulation
Annual Professional Performance Review	Regulation
Nonpublic Schools	
Nonpublic School Hardware Loan	State
District of Location Required to Provided Dual Enrollment	Federal/State
Services to Nonpublic Students (Special Ed., Career Ed. and Gifted and Talented)	
Nonpublic School Health Services	State
Nonpublic School Library Access and Materials Loan	State
Nonpublic School Software Loan	State
Nonpublic School Special Education Services	Federal/State
Nonpublic School Textbook Loan	State
Nonpublic School Transportation	State
Transportation	
Annual Defensive Driving Review	Federal
Annual Physical Exams	Regulation
Bi-annual Bus Drive Physical Performance Test	Regulation
Bi-annual Bus Driver Written Driver's Test	Federal
Bus Driver Safety Training	State
Drug Testing for Drivers	Federal
Exterior Reflective Material on Buses	Federal
Seatbelts on Buses	State

No Standee Rule	State
Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Vehicle Inspection	Federal

Appendix N

Qualities of a Good School Board Member

Qualities of a Good School Board Member		
Oregon School Boards Association (2009)	Iowa School Boards Association (2013)	New York State School Boards Association (2014)
• Hold a conviction that public education is important • Committed to public involvement • Ability to make decisions • Believe in the democratic process • Willing to devote time and energy to the position • Accept the will of the majority • Courage to stand up for convictions • Respect for district employees • Communicate well with others	• They focus their efforts on serving all children. Their first focus is on ensuring success for all children, no matter what other issues arise. • They understand the board's roles and responsibilities. They are committed to ensuring that a long-term vision is established for the school system and to being accountable to their community. • They work well as members of the team. They understand that the board, rather than individuals on the board, establishes the policies and makes the decisions that provide direction for the school district. • They act with professionalism and integrity. They understand that the way board members act as individuals and as a body impacts the climate of the school district. • They commit the time and energy required to be effective. They are willing to commit their time to public service.	• Effective Communicator: Can describe wants and describe what others want; a good listener • Consensus Builder: Capable of working toward decisions all can support and willing to compromise to achieve goals • Community Participant: Can identify community communicators and reaches out to the community • Decision Maker: Is comfortable making decisions and can support group decision making • Information Processor: Can organize priorities and schedules to handle large amounts of verbal and written information • Leader: Willing to take risks, be supportive of board colleagues, district staff, and community • Team Player: Promotes the board's vision and goals