



Personal characteristics and perceived role responsibility of school boards in Montana
by Gar Lenroot Amundson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Adult and Higher Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:

The problem of this study was: (a) to determine selected personal characteristics of typical school board members serving Montana schools in 1980-81 ; (b) to determine if the personal characteristics of typical school board members varied according to school district classification; (c) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; (d) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' preferred organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; and (e) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual and preferred organizational behavior.

The major findings of the study were that: (a) the typical school board member has a median age of 43.5 years, is a married man, and is the father of one child attending the district's public schools; (b) he has some college training and is involved in agriculture with an annual family income of \$29,200; (c) school board members' actual role responsibilities are dependent on their preferred role responsibilities; and (d) conflict exists between school board members' actual role responsibilities and the School Laws of Montana.

The major recommendations of the study were: (a) that the State Board of Education address the conflict between mandated school board responsibilities and actual school board responsibilities and urge the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to formulate a strategy which would lead to the reduction or elimination of such conflict; (b) that the Montana School Boards Association and the Office of Public Instruction develop resource materials and provide in-service workshops for board members concerning their mandated role responsibilities; and (c) that units of the Montana University System offer in-service workshops for school board members and administrators during which ideas are explored and materials developed which would familiarize board members with their mandated role responsibilities.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEIVED ROLE
RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHOOL BOARDS
IN MONTANA

by

GAR LENROOT AMUNDSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

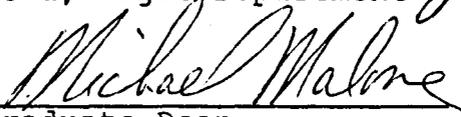
in

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of my graduate committee: Dr. John Kohl (chairman), Dr. Eric Strohmeier, Dr. Gloria Gregg, Professor William Johnstone, and Dr. Leroy Casagrande. Also thanks to Dr. Robert Warrington, my graduate representative.

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ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was: (a) to determine selected personal characteristics of typical school board members serving Montana schools in 1980-81; (b) to determine if the personal characteristics of typical school board members varied according to school district classification; (c) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; (d) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' preferred organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; and (e) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual and preferred organizational behavior.

The major findings of the study were that: (a) the typical school board member has a median age of 43.5 years, is a married man, and is the father of one child attending the district's public schools; (b) he has some college training and is involved in agriculture with an annual family income of \$29,200; (c) school board members' actual role responsibilities are dependent on their preferred role responsibilities; and (d) conflict exists between school board members' actual role responsibilities and the School Laws of Montana.

The major recommendations of the study were: (a) that the State Board of Education address the conflict between mandated school board responsibilities and actual school board responsibilities and urge the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to formulate a strategy which would lead to the reduction or elimination of such conflict; (b) that the Montana School Boards Association and the Office of Public Instruction develop resource materials and provide in-service workshops for board members concerning their mandated role responsibilities; and (c) that units of the Montana University System offer in-service workshops for school board members and administrators during which ideas are explored and materials developed which would familiarize board members with their mandated role responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The legal provisions pertaining to education are found in federal and state constitutions, statutes, and education codes. The control of education at present is under the jurisdiction of the state governments due to the Tenth Amendment contained within the Constitution of the United States. The Tenth Amendment gives all powers not mentioned as federal powers to the states. Therefore, the power of each state to provide and maintain public schools is inherent in the state responsibilities established by this amendment. Even though the states have the full legal responsibility for public education, they have delegated a significant amount of responsibility to the local school districts. Although the relationship between the local citizens and local schools has been very close, there has been a legal structure provided for the establishment of the local school authority within the state of Montana. This legal responsibility has been placed with the local school board (School Laws of Montana, 1979, pp. 162-164).

The election process of Montana school district board members has undergone changes since the school law

of 1865. The 1865 law referred to only one class of school district and each district had a board composed of three elected school directors. As population centers grew, schools were assigned to three classes. Today seven trustees are elected for Class I districts, five trustees for Class II districts, and three trustees for Class III districts. The length of term of a school district trustee is three years (Anderson, 1972, p. 80; School Laws of Montana, 1979, pp. 155-156).

When elementary school districts have territory located in a high school district, school law 75-5903 states:

. . . each high school district, except a high school district operating a county high school, may have additional trustee positions when the trustees of a majority of the elementary districts with territory located in the high school district, but without representation on the high school district trustees . . . request the establishment of such additional trustee positions.

A request for additional trustee positions shall be made to the county superintendent by a resolution of the trustees of each elementary district. When a resolution has been received from a majority of the elementary districts without representation on the high school district trustees, the county superintendent shall determine the number of additional trustee positions for the affected

high school district . . . the number of additional trustee positions shall not exceed four in a first or second class high school district or two in a third class high school district that is not eligible for an additional trustee position at large (School Laws of Montana, 1971, pp. 113-114).

Qualifications to be elected to a school board are very few. Under Montana law a member of a school board must have the following qualifications:

- (1) has registered to vote with the county registrar in the manner provided by the general state election laws except in regard to the closure of elector registration as provided in section 75-6413;
- (2) shall be of a minimum age for voting provided by the constitution of the state of Montana;
- (3) has met the residency requirement for voting as provided by the constitution of the state of Montana; and
- (4) is a citizen of the United States

(School Laws of Montana, 1971, p. 189, 75-6410).

Due to the minimum number of requirements established by the state, the investigator identified certain personal characteristics of men and women who were willing to devote themselves to such a time-consuming and important position. The investigator also determined trustee

characteristics according to school class size.

In addition, the investigator using 2 x 2 tables and percentages for comparison determined for Montana public school board members as a whole if role conflict existed between the following:

1. Role of the school board as determined by the School Laws of Montana and the role of the school board as determined by operating practice
2. Role of the school board as determined by the School Laws of Montana and the role of the school board as determined by preferences
3. Role of the school board as determined by operating practice and role of the school board as determined by preferences

Need for the Study

The importance of identifying board member characteristics was noted by Goldhammer when he stated:

It is of particular significance that the evidence shows that board members, although feeling that they represent the community, generally represent rather narrow segments of the community. (The School Board, 1964, p. 15)

Previous state studies have shown the typical Montana school board member as being a white male who was 45 to 50 years of age. Also, he had several years of

college and was self-employed as either a professional, manager, executive, proprietor, or a farmer. These findings indicated that many groups such as laborers and women have had little or no representation on the school board.

Goldhammer felt that ". . . to the extent that the community as a whole is represented in decision-making structures, there is the possibility of directing educational decisions toward solutions which will beneficially serve the vast majority of the people rather than a select group." (p. 25)

Since Montana school boards are dominated by a few select groups, the findings of the previous studies of Montana school board members demonstrate a need for the Office of Public Instruction and the Montana School Boards Association to actively encourage and assist members of other community groups to seek a school board position.

Regarding roles, Goldhammer noted:

. . . that a significant problem exists with respect to the definition of the roles of the school board members and the superintendent in relation to policy making and administration of the public schools. The issue of policy making as the proper function of the board and policy execution (or administration) as the proper function of the superintendent has

plagued both school boards and the profession of educational administration for a considerable period of time . . . The evidence clearly indicated that cooperative relationships between the school board and administrator must be established in order to achieve a satisfactory level of performance within the organization and to make organizational policies clearly discernible to all individuals . . . The diffusion of responsibility or actual conflict in responsibility inevitably results in low levels of performance and high levels of insecurity, tension, and organizational ineffectiveness. (pp. 52-53)

Within the state of Montana, no research had been conducted to determine if role conflict existed between the following:

1. Role of the school board as determined by the School Laws of Montana and the role of the school board as determined by operating practice
2. Role of the school board as determined by the School Laws of Montana and the role of the school board as determined by preferences
3. Role of the school board as determined by operating practice and role of the school board as determined by preferences

If role conflict was found to exist between roles, it would be important to work towards the reduction or elimination of such conflict in order to raise the level of performance of the organization. The greater the

level of performance, the greater the public support as demonstrated by verbal, physical, and financial backing.

If role conflict was found involving the School Laws of Montana, the information would be valuable to the boards in helping them to correct actions or policies which leave them open to legal action.

The existence of role conflict would demonstrate to board members, the Office of Public Instruction, and the Montana School Boards Association the need for in-service training. The purpose of such in-service training for school board members should be the explaining of their legal role and responsibilities.

In addition, the existence of role conflict may demonstrate the need for a review of the School Laws of Montana. If it is determined that this approach would best solve the problem, it would be the responsibility of board members, the Office of Public Instruction, and the Montana School Boards Association to express their concern to the Montana Legislature for consideration and action.

Within the state of Montana, only three studies on Montana school board members have been conducted - one at Montana State University and two at the University of Mon-

tana. The most recent in-state study was conducted in 1966; and, as with the two previous studies, was limited to the demographic characteristics of board members.

The Problem

This study:

1. Determined selected personal characteristics of typical school board members serving Montana schools in 1980-81
2. Determined if the personal characteristics of typical school board members varied according to school district classification
3. Determined if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana
4. Determined if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' preferred organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana
5. Determined if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual and preferred organizational behavior

Questions to be Answered by the Study

The questions considered in this study were:

1. What are the personal characteristics of typical school board members serving Montana schools in 1980-81?

2. Do certain personal characteristics of school board members differ according to school district classification?
3. Do role conflicts exist between Montana school board members' actual organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana?
4. Do role conflicts exist between Montana school board members' preferred organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana?
5. Do role conflicts exist between Montana school board members' actual and preferred organizational behavior?

General Procedures

The first step taken was an extensive review of related research. After reviewing the national studies concerned with the personal characteristics and role conflicts of school board members, the investigator reviewed all previous studies done within the state concerning Montana school board members.

The next step was the construction of the survey instrument. Items developed for the survey instrument were actual responsibilities of the school board and superintendent as defined by the School Laws of Montana. Content validity was ensured by the survey items being developed directly from the School Laws of Montana. After the item

development, a pilot study was conducted with a group of elected county high school board members to determine the test-retest reliability of the instrument.

The final questionnaire was administered to all public school board members in the state of Montana who served on a board which governed a 1-12 academic program. This information was made available by the Montana county superintendents.

Each mailing contained the survey instrument and a letter explaining the purpose of the survey. The enclosed letter not only explained the survey, but also personalized the survey in an attempt to achieve a higher return. The questionnaire, cover letter, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope were sent to each trustee.

The data returned was tabulated and a general description of 1980-81 Montana school board members was compiled. Also, the investigator identified mandated, actual, and preferred role responsibilities of Montana school board members.

Limitations

The study was limited to the 1980-81 school year.

The study considered only those role responsibilities of school board members and superintendents which are mandated by Montana School Law. Also, the study considered only selected personal characteristics of board members.

The study was limited to school board members serving on boards which governed a 1-12 academic program and not classified as county high school districts. County high school boards included: Glendive, Miles City, Ekalaka, Broadus, Jordan, Townsend, Dillon, Deer Lodge, and Big Timber.

Definitions

Actual board member roles: means the responsibilities and duties of the trustees as demonstrated by their operating practices.

Board member (trustee): means a member of the governing board of a school district. (School Laws of Montana, 1979, 20-1-101, p. 133)

Class I, II, and III districts: each school district shall have the classification of:

- (1) first class, if it has a population of six thousand five hundred or more
- (2) second class, if it has a population of one thousand or more but less than six thousand five hundred; or
- (3) third class, if it has a population of less than one thousand (School Laws of Montana, 1979, 20-6-2-1, p. 205)

Mandated board member roles: means the responsibilities and duties assigned to trustees by 20-3-324 (School Laws of Montana, 1979, p. 162)

Preferred board member roles: means the responsibilities and duties trustees would choose to accept and perform.

Summary

Goldhammer (1964) felt that " . . . to the extent that the community as a whole is represented in decision-making structures, there is the possibility of directing educational decisions toward solutions which will beneficially serve the vast majority of the people rather than a select group." (p. 25)

In addition, Goldhammer noted " . . . that a significant problem exists with respect to the definition of the roles of the school board members and the superintendent in

relation to policy making and administration of the public schools." (p. 52)

Therefore, the problem of this study was (1) to determine selected personal characteristics of school board members serving Montana schools in 1980-81; (2) to determine if the selected personal characteristics of school board members varied according to school district classification; (3) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; (4) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' preferred organizational behavior and the School Laws of Montana; and (5) to determine if role conflicts existed between Montana school board members' actual and preferred organizational behavior.

It was hoped that this study would (a) create an awareness on the part of Montana school boards as to the extent of community representation; and (b) identify problems or role conflicts that existed between school board members' actual, preferred, and mandated role responsibilities.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since 1916 an increasing number of studies have been conducted on the national and state levels concerning the composition of school boards. Within the state of Montana only three studies have been completed. The first was conducted in 1932, followed by one in 1952 and another in 1966. The following literature has been divided according to national studies, state studies, and Montana studies.

Studies on a National Scale

George S. Counts made the first national study of school boards in 1926. In his review of literature he mentioned only three prior studies. The first study was conducted in 1916 by Scott Nearing, who reported that the majority of school board members were employed within the business and professional communities. In 1919 a study was conducted by the New York teachers' union in sixty-seven major cities of the United States. They found that seventeen cities had members of organized labor on the local boards. George Struble in 1922 studied the school boards in one hundred and sixty-nine cities and found that fifty-four of the seven hundred and sixty-one board members were

members of organized labor.

Upon completion of his study, Counts profiled what he considered to be the typical school board in the United States.

The typical city board of education in the United States is composed of six members. These members are elected at large for a term of three years. One of the six members is a woman, who follows the occupation of housewife. Of the five men, one is a merchant; one, a lawyer; one, a physician; one, a banker, manufacturer, or business executive; and one, a salesman, clerk, or laborer. Three of the members have children attending the public schools of the city. From the standpoint of formal education, they constitute, in comparison with the city population as a whole, a highly selected group. But one of the members is a product of the elementary school only; two have attended the secondary school; and three have enjoyed college or university privileges. In age, they exhibit a range of twenty-six years, or a range from thirty-seven to sixty-three years. The remaining four members are distributed between these two extremes at the ages of forty-two, forty-six, fifty, and fifty-four years. In length of service on the board, they likewise show considerable diversity. At the one extreme is a novice who is serving his first year, while at the other is a veteran who has already given fifteen years of service to the board. The others show tenures of office of two, three, five, and eight years, respectively. On the average, these members devote approximately fifty-one hours a year to board duties. For this service they receive no financial compensation. (Counts, 1926, p. 59)

In 1945 the National Education Association surveyed

the economic and social backgrounds of fifteen thousand three hundred and ninety-one members of boards of education. The first part of the survey was concerned with the ratio of men and women on school boards. The average for all school districts was a nine to one ratio favoring males. The trend that appeared in the study showed that the larger the community, the more women served on the board of education. Cities with a population exceeding thirty thousand had a ratio of one woman to eight men and in cities over one hundred thousand the ratio was one to five. In the rural areas male dominance approached a twenty to one ratio.

One board member in three responding to the survey was a college graduate and seven out of ten had graduated from high school. It was also noted that the larger the city, the higher the educational level of board members. In rural and small city systems about twenty percent of the board members had finished college and forty percent had not completed high school. Sixty-six percent of board members in cities with a population over one hundred thousand were college graduates and ten percent had not finished high school.

Table 1

School Board Members Compared with the Average Citizen

	College Graduate	High School Graduate	Non High School Graduate
1945 Board Member	30%	42%	18%
1940 Total Population	5%	20%	75%

Fifteen thousand one hundred and twenty-nine board members responded to the job classification category of the survey and were placed in eleven occupational groups. Three of the eleven groupings accounted for sixty-five percent of the city school board members and seventy-three percent of the non-city board members. The three groupings were proprietors and executives, farmers, and professionals. Housewives made up the fourth group and accounted for seven percent of both city and non-city boards.

Table 2
Major Occupational Groupings

Occupation	City	Noncity	Both
Proprietors and executives	35%	21%	28%
Farmers	10%	42%	27%
Professionals	20%	10%	15%

The median income of city board members was found to be four thousand six hundred dollars and for non-city boards was three thousand two hundred dollars. Also, the median age of school board members was forty-eight point five years. In 1926 Counts found the median age to be forty-eight point three years and in 1922 Struble recorded the median age to be forty-eight point four years. The National Education Association found the lowest median age to be forty-six point nine years for members of the New England town districts. County and large city boards had the highest medians, which ranged from fifty-two point one to fifty-two point two years respectively. Seventy percent of the school board members responding to this study were between forty and sixty years of age. Also, sixty percent of the board members had children or grandchildren attend-

ing public schools.

In 1951 Robert H. Brown conducted a study of school board members located in cities having a population between five thousand and three hundred thousand. The study was based on five hundred and sixty-three questionnaires returned by board members from every state. It was found that proprietors, managers, and professionals made up sixty-nine point three percent of the boards of education.

Brown also found that fifty-two point nine percent of the members surveyed had children in the public schools. The Counts study found that fifty-three percent of the board members had children in the public schools. The percentage of women on school boards was found to be thirteen point six, a one percent loss since the Counts study of 1926. It was also reported that no change had occurred in the proportional representation of school boards between men and women during the last twenty-five years. Four percent of the board members had only a grammar school education.

The United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare studied the composition of school boards in 1962. It found that members of school boards had more for-

mal education than the average citizen, based on 1959 Bureau of the Census statistics. The largest contrast appeared in the area of college graduates. Forty-eight point three percent of board members had completed college, whereas only seven point nine percent of the total adult population had completed four years of college. Those completing high school but not college accounted for forty-four percent of school board membership, while thirty-five percent of the total adult population had attained only a high school education. Only seven point seven percent of school board members were not high school graduates as compared to fifty-five point three percent of the total adult population. Board members who were college graduates accounted for forty-three percent of the board in the smallest systems and up to seventy-two percent in the largest. When the United States was divided into regions, it was found that the Northeast had the highest percentage of college graduates with fifty-five percent, and the South had the lowest with thirty-six point seven percent. The South also had the highest percentage of those who had not completed high school, fifteen point nine percent, and the North Central and West regions had the lowest, four percent.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution of Board Members Having
Specified Amounts of Formal Education,
By District Enrollment and Region

Enrollment Size & Region	Total		Formal Education		
	Number	Percent	Grad. from College	Grad. from H.S. but not College	School- ing ended before H.S. Grad.
Total Board Members in School Systems Reporting	24,041	100.0	48.3	44.0	7.7
District Enrollment Size Group					
1. 1,200-2,999	12,072	100.0	43.1	48.5	8.5
2. 3,000-5,999	6,684	100.0	50.3	41.4	8.4
3. 6,000-11,999	3,205	100.0	53.0	41.3	5.7
4. 12,000- 24,999	1,300	100.0	60.1	34.9	5.0
5. 25,000 +	780	100.0	72.6	24.2	3.2
Region					
Northeast	6,125	100.0	55.0	38.7	6.2
North Central	6,625	100.0	51.5	44.4	4.0
South	6,313	100.0	36.7	47.4	15.9
West	4,978	100.0	50.2	45.8	4.0

Counts noted that membership of women on city school boards increased seven percent between 1920 and 1926. The steady increase of female board membership did not continue into the 1940's as had been expected. In 1945 the National Education Association found that female board membership had dropped to ten percent. The downward trend continued into 1962, when it was found that nine point seven percent of board members serving four thousand and eight schools were women. Of the four thousand and eight boards surveyed, fifty-six point four percent did not have women members, thirty point eight percent had one, and twelve point eight percent had two or more. Districts with a student enrollment of under three thousand accounted for sixty-two point three percent of the boards that had no female membership.

Table 4

Percentage Distribution of Boards, by
Number of Women Members, District
Enrollment, and Region

Enrollment Size & Region	Total		Number of Women Members		
	Number	Percent	None	One	Two or More
Total School Systems Reporting	4,008	100.0	56.4	30.8	12.8
District Enrollment Size Group					
1. 1,200-2,999	2,071	100.0	62.3	27.5	10.2
2. 3,000-5,999	1,099	100.0	54.1	32.8	13.1
3. 6,000-11,999	518	100.0	51.1	33.8	15.1
4. 12,000-24,999	212	100.0	41.5	39.2	19.2
5. 25,000 +	106	100.0	20.4	43.5	36.1
Region					
Northeast	880	100.0	34.9	39.8	25.3
North Central	1,147	100.0	54.5	33.6	11.9
South	1,061	100.0	76.4	17.9	5.7
West	920	100.0	56.3	33.7	10.0

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare study obtained occupational information from twenty-three thousand nine hundred and eighty-one board members and found that sixty-one point nine percent of those responding were business owners, officials, managers, or associated with professional and technical services. Regardless of school size, it was found that thirty-three point one to thirty-four point five percent of the board members were business owners, officials, and managers. The percentage of farmers, skilled craftsmen, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers varied inversely with school system size. Also, the percentage of housewives on school boards increased as the school system size increased. Regional breakdowns showed that in the Northwest twenty-eight point six percent of board members were business owners, officials, or managers as compared to thirty-four point seven percent in the North Central region, thirty-seven point seven percent in the South, and thirty-seven point three percent in the West. Of the three thousand nine hundred and sixty-seven school systems responding, one hundred and seventeen reported a single occupational category for all their members.

Table 5
Occupational Classification

	Business owners, officials, and managers	Profes- sional and tech- nical services	Farmers	Sales & clerical
District				
Enrollment				
Size Group				
1. 1,200-2,999	33.1	25.1	15.1	7.1
2. 3,000-5,999	34.6	28.0	11.9	6.8
3. 6,000-11,999	37.1	28.4	9.2	7.6
4. 12,000-24,999	36.9	34.2	4.6	6.4
5. 25,000 +	38.8	36.4	2.1	3.4
Region				
Northeast	28.6	35.2	3.7	8.7
North Central	34.7	30.5	8.9	7.3
South	37.7	16.3	24.6	6.2
West	37.3	27.7	12.4	5.2

