THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF TASA HONOR SCHOOL BOARDS IN TEXAS:

A VIEW THROUGH THE LENS OF SCOTT'S THREE PILLARS

OF INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

by

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Dedication

  I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family: To my loving husband Jeremy, who supported me and was proud of me even in times when he thought the end would never get here, to my amazing son Griffin who is the reason I started this journey so he would always know to finish what you start and to work to accomplish your goals no matter what, to my adorable daughter Gracin who was our little blessing in the middle of my path to my Ph.D., and to our precious two babies we sadly lost in the midst of this journey. We will always love you and wish you were here with us. Also, to my parents whose love has always been there for me unconditionally! Finally, I want to thank the good Lord up above for without Him none of this would even be possible!

Abstract

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Quality public schools are linked to the effectiveness of their school boards, and voting for local trustees, elected lay men and women, impacts the overall condition of local communities (Foster, 2014). Experts believe school board adeptness and efficiency can be increased by improving procedures (Sell, 2005). Looking through the lens of institutional theory, the purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Richard Scott's three pillars of institutionalization (regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces) through exploring specific procedures of TASA Honor Boards as compared to demographically similar boards. This study relied on content analysis of school board meeting minutes from five recognized TASA Honor Boards and five non-awarded boards from comparable school districts, as well as specific documentation from Honor Board nomination packets. Past studies involving school boards show effective boards are the result of deliberate and focused efforts (Richardson, 2009). These efforts can be aligned with normative, cultural-cognitive, and regulative forces of institutional theory to help future school boards be recognized for their effectiveness and to impact the school district and student achievement in a positive way.

The research revealed that Honor Boards are immersed in decision-making action items that are more balanced and distributed among the three pillars of institutional theory more so

than in the case of comparable school boards. There is evidence showing specific attention to the normative pillar, such as networking and connections with educational agencies and associations, occurs with more frequency in Honor Boards than with non-awarded boards. These results align with the research that reveals the normative element as promoting collaboration and how legitimate connections with other organizations help demonstrate and support the success of an institution's practices (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). According to Scott (2004), for an institution to be considered legitimate, the organization needs to generate action; when examining specific school board meeting minutes in this study, the evidence suggests that Honor Boards are shown to take more action than other school boards. These non-awarded boards showed a pattern of putting off more decisions until a later date, and a fewer number of action items occurred overall written in the board meeting minutes of the non-awarded boards than in the Honor Board meetings. In summation, Scott (2013) explains that actions are institutionalized, and are surrounded by a common set of normative standards. The standards here are set by the Texas Association of School Administrators and Honor Board criteria set by TASA. The trustees are acting to meet those standards while working through each of the three institutional pillars in a more balanced manner with the Honor Boards than the school boards of the other comparable districts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public school boards of trustees have existed in America for hundreds of years, throughout this time span however, the powers and format of school boards has changed in numerous ways (Nauyokas, 2009). Presently, there are roughly 15,000 public school districts in the United States, which equates to close to 100,000 school board members across the country (Sell, 2005; National School Boards Association, n. d.). School boards may look different from each other depending on the location of the district and the culture of the community, but it is unquestionable that boards have a vast potential to impact school district effectiveness and student achievement (Dawson & Quinn, 2004).

The school board, as the largest group of elected officials in the U.S., represents the public's voice in education, providing governance by citizens and setting the standard for what the local community wants (Terrier, 2010). Even though local school boards have lost some of their policy-making power to federal and state governments over the last few decades, the school board is still significant in local communities and in state educational systems (Sell, 2005). The institution of public education is a $423 billion entity, and the school board, as the group who approves the budget, ensures that taxpayers feel they get the most success from their tax dollars (NSBA, n.d.). If community members feel that their schools are not producing successful students, the voters can select new board members, which is why school boards typically do not go through a formal annual evaluation process (Kowalski, Ellerson, McCord, Petersen, & Young, 2010).

Even though school boards have many responsibilities, one crucial role of the school board is employing and evaluating the school superintendent, as well as working frequently with the superintendent in carrying out the district's mission (Bentley, 2006). How those two entities

work together can be summed up with an emphasis on the team aspect: "The board of education, along with the superintendent as part of that team, is responsible for creating a clear vision as well as structure and accountability, public representation and policy implementation" (Kowalski et al., 2010, p. 4). The importance of this scheme can best be concluded in this way: If a school board fails to hire a superintendent capable of having a strong relationship with the board, or the school board does not carry out their own role and mission effectively many serious issues in the district can arise (Sell, 2005). A harmonious relationship, with the school board focused on development of policy and the superintendent focused on the daily functions of schools, can be productive and successful in making a district more effective (Terrier, 2010).

Public school boards in Texas, along with guidelines from the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), follow suit with the federal model of the role of the school board of trustees. According to the TASB website, governing the school district is the primary role of a school board, and school board members are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of public education on a local scale (Texas Association of School Boards, 2011). The success of public schools is tied directly to the achievement and effectiveness of quality school boards and votes for local school board members impact a community's overall atmosphere, maybe more than any other decision on a ballot (Foster, 2014). So this raises the question, could more efficient methods and procedures of school governance be utilized by these boards of trustees to become more effective (Sell, 2005)?

Statement of the Problem

Schools vary in location, size, culture, grade levels, and instructional practices, but each reflects the institutional patterns of those that are representative of the school district's environment (Cummings, 1999). All public school boards are made up of ordinary lay men and

women who have been elected to the board to govern local education, and most are not professional politicians (Land, 2002; Williams, 2008). These individuals typically obtain a great amount of influence and power on school districts and make important decisions impacting student achievement (Terrier, 2010). That being said, some boards are considered "outstanding" or are more effective and successful than others, despite having the same potential influence, same basic required state trainings, comparable powers, and similar decision options (TASB, 2011). If, all school boards embody the characteristics to impact student achievement in some measure (Rice, 2010; Williams, 2008), why are some boards more successful than others?

This anomaly can best be explained by variations in the operations and procedures of outstanding boards and those procedures of less exemplary boards in terms of behavior, actions, and support for student achievement (Land, 2002). According to many experts, elected school board effectiveness can be increased by changing and improving their procedures (Sell, 2005). This leads to the current examination of some outstanding boards, TASA Honor Boards, to explore their routines and procedures to see if institutionalizing these operations impact some school boards to have more success than others.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the operations and procedures of Texas public school boards that have been recognized and awarded by the Texas Association of School Administrators as Honor Boards or Outstanding school boards within the past 10 years (2005-2015). The study investigated how the operations, procedures, and routines of the Honor Boards, in relation to the elements of Institutional Theory – specifically Scott's three pillars – compared to those of other school boards that are similar demographically but have never been awarded and may not show as much success.

Recommendations in Texas have called for studies that identify individual characteristics particular to school boards, not just the superintendent office, which have a positive board-superintendent relationship (Simpson-Laskoskie, 2003). Using this logic it would seem crucial to explore the characteristics of boards which have been awarded as Honor Boards by TASA, a major state association, that do have this amicable board-superintendent relationship. Historically, a major obstacle in discovering the specific characteristics of effective school boards has been the lack of research on board practices, including how these boards carry out their duties (Sell, 2005). Many researchers have reviewed the impact that a strong relationship between the school board and superintendent can have on student achievement (Domenech, 2005; Simpson-Laskoskie, 2003; Terrier, 2010). There have been some studies that have examined the motivation trustees have to be elected and serve on school boards in the first place (Mountford, 2004). However, there were no studies that examined the impact that the specific institutionalized operations of effective school boards can have (Land, 2002), as the current study attempted to do in relation to TASA Honor Boards in the state of Texas.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the operations and procedures of Honor Boards/ Outstanding school boards?

2. How well do Scott's pillars of institutionalization: Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive, explain the operations and procedures of these boards?

3. How useful is institutional theory in understanding what makes a school board outstanding, in comparison to other non-awarded school boards?

4.   What other realities about outstanding school boards, in comparison to less

exemplary boards, were revealed during this study?

Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory is a theoretical framework that recognizes how structures, rules,

norms, and routines, become established as guidelines for public organizations such as

educational institutions (Scott, 2001). Institutional theory is a lens that has not been used too

frequently in regard to specific educational research in the past, but studies have not yet explored

more recent institutional developments in this area, as the current study attempted to do (Burch,

2007). Public school districts have been described as ideal for analysis using old or new

institutionalism, as education is defined as an authentic example of an institutional organization

(Brint, Hanneman, Murphy, Proctor, Turk-Bicakci, 2009). Institutional theory would propose

that all public school boards can be considered institutions, in fact highly developed institutions

with a network of rules that apply to the organizations (Burch, 2007; Meyer, 1977).

Institutional theory can be broken down into three elements, sometimes referred to as

systems, or pillars of institutionalization specifically by researcher Richard Scott: regulative,

normative, and cultural-cognitive, and these elements provide meaning to the institution or

organization (Scott, 1995, 2001). These three aspects (pillars) can explain in what ways the

procedures, structures, systems, and social behaviors within an institution impact the

functionality of the institution once they have been operationalized (Scott, 2004). Using the

research of Williams (2008), one can see the need for exploring the area of school boards as

institutions with particular structures in place: "Without proper structure, a school board is like

the proverbial ship without a rudder left to enter areas not intended. School boards, through a

system of governance, must have a structure in which to operate" (p. 12). Fleshing out these

three pillars leads to the following basic definitions with regard to the current study. The regulative pillar involves the mandates, education codes, and legislative rulings that a school board must comply with within their policy and decision making process (Scott, 2005). The normative pillar is concerned with the norms and standards of a school district, and the connections with external associations that produce the behavior guidelines for school boards such as teacher certification processes (Scott, 2004). Finally, the cultural-cognitive pillar includes the environment a school board actually operates within. These are the values and beliefs that are supported by a school district's culture based on community influences, common belief systems, or mimetic processes copied from other districts (Scott, 2008).

As an institution there are operations, norms, and procedures incorporated by school boards that are used to keep them functioning, provide legitimacy for the organization, stabilize behavior, and help them to be as effective as possible (Scott, 2005). Ineffective school boards can become constrained with the presence of poor management procedures (Simpson-Laskoskie, 2003), whereas the goal of using institutionalized procedures would be to avoid this impediment. According to the Texas Association of School Boards, truly effective boards that are committed to higher student achievement have institutionalized certain practices to ensure that tasks that promote improvement are performed routinely, consistently, and effectively (TASB, 2011). Applying the framework of institutional theory was valid for this study and can be successfully utilized in future studies when examining school boards, because it is broad enough to be applied to a variety of educational entities, yet it can be summed up into three distinct pillars that influence individual educational organizations (Bright, 2014).

Methodology

This study focused on 10 school boards in the state of Texas, 5 of which have been voted as an Outstanding or Honor school board by TASA between the years 2005-2015. Since TASA began giving this award in 1971, two regions have the distinction of housing the majority of the winning Honor Boards overall for the past 42 years. Looking at the 3-5 annual winning Honor and Outstanding school boards, according to the comprehensive list on the TASA website (as of 2015) 86% of the time there has been at least one representative from regional education service centers 10 and 11 throughout the history of the award. This is compared to only 43% of regions 20, 13, and 4. Consequently, regions 20, 13, and 4 are the regions which are home to the large cities of Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. A second set of 5 comparable school districts was also chosen to add to the study, because they are located in the same regions as the Honor Board districts. This means they receive similar training pieces, with one necessary exception coming from region 6, and they have student demographics and student achievement results that resemble that of the awarded districts.

This study relied on analysis of the content of explicit school board meeting minutes of all 10 boards, media articles contained on those school district websites or in local newspapers, and an analysis of the documentation found in the TASA Honor Board nomination packets of the awarded school boards. Content analysis is a research method in which the analysis of written documents, interviews, media articles, and multiple forms of communication can be used to make valid inferences regarding the research topic (Krippendorff, 1989). Some of the outstanding school boards included in this study have been named as an Honor Board as many as four times over the past 40 years (TASB, n.d.), and a focus on the actual operationalized institutional practices shown in school board documents will be valuable information to educational research.

Significance of the Study

This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature in regard to school board practices, and will contribute to the advancement of educational theory, research, and practice.

Theory

There is only a small amount of research using institutional theory in the educational realm and the field could benefit from this perspective (Burch, 2007). There is virtually no research using this theory in looking at something specifically dealing with the operations of school board trustees, as most relevant studies done in Texas do not look through a theoretical lens in this area of research (Bright, 2014). This study can open up a theoretical discussion using institutionalized procedures and operations and explore how specific routines and structures can be recreated by other districts and school boards to promote the success and effectiveness of boards throughout the state.

Research

As stated before, there is a noticeable gap in the research in the area of school board operations. Most research is concerned with the superintendent's relationship with the board and how to improve that relationship, while some even deals with improving superintendent preparatory programs with regard to this partnership (Campbell & DeArmond, 2011; Richardson, 2009). There are also explicit research suggestions, as that of Richardson (2009), recommending a "study of Texas School Board of the Year finalists and their characteristics which can be used to implement improvements to ensure that all school boards are part of what can be considered an outstanding team" (p. 59). Therefore this study adjusts the scope and focus from the superintendent side of the picture over to the critical area of the school board and the specific characteristics of an effective board.

Practice

The K-12 arena is ruled by locally elected school boards, and in the state of Texas those board members make policies that affect over 4 million students (Terrier, 2010). There is a gap in the literature in the area of effective school boards, and any research that can be added in this area will benefit educational practice (Land, 2002). A new focus on certain institutionalized operations of school boards can also aid in a greater understanding of school boards as a primarily policy-making body, and this may curb any selfish or negative motives potential board members have in serving on local school boards (Mountford, 2004). This study also creates the opportunity for more districts, and board of trustees, to align their processes, focusing on the operationalized routines and procedures that are in place, which will create a greater opportunity for districts to receive these awards and accolades creating a positive light shining on public school boards.

Definition of Terms

As this study is specific to educational research, there are multiple examples of educational jargon and acronyms used throughout the following chapters. Listed below are some brief definitions which may be helpful in comprehending the study.

Texas Education Agency (TEA): The agency provides leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students in the state of Texas. The state commissioner of education is the head of this agency, and some of the administrative duties performed are: overseeing the state accountability system, implementing statewide curriculum and assessment programs, distributing federal funding, and monitoring compliance with federal guidelines (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA): As the state educational association that created the School Board Awards program in 1971, a TASA committee chooses all Honor and Outstanding School Boards each year. According to the TASA website (n.d.), their mission is to promote and help develop school leaders "who create and sustain student-centered schools and develop future-ready students" (para. 1).

Texas Association of School Boards (TASB): Another state educational association that serves and represents local Texas school districts and updates state policies to be implemented by local school boards. TASB's membership includes all 1,030 Texas school districts, and it represents the largest group of publicly elected officials with over 7000 school board trustees in the state (TEA, n.d.; TASB, n.d.).

Texas Education Code: A set of the state statutes (laws) governing public education in Texas that were established by the Texas Legislature. The code applies to all educational institutions supported by state tax funds, and it was set up to direct the goals and framework of public education in Texas (TEA, n.d.).

Honor Board: The Honor Board was an award of achievement created by TASA as part of the School Board Awards Program in 1971 to recognize those school boards that were considered outstanding in Texas. The awards program allows a committee in each of the 20 Regions in the state to submit up to two nominations for state competition, one from districts with less than 1,000 students and one from districts with more than 1,000 students. The nominations are based on ten criteria established by TASA. TASA's School Board Awards Committee then reviews the annual regional winners and selects not more than five boards to be named and recognized as Honor Boards for the year (TASA, n.d.).

Outstanding School Board: After the five Texas Honor Boards are chosen each fall, one of them is chosen as Texas' Outstanding School Board for the year. The School Board Awards Committee interviews each of the Honor Boards as a whole at the TASA/TASB Annual Convention then determines which will become the Outstanding Board to be named at the convention (TASB, n.d.).

Regional Education Service Center (ESC): TEC, Ch 8.002, states that the 20 Regional Education Service Centers (in Texas) responsibilities are: to assist school districts in improving student performance in each region of the system (with professional development, updates on legislation, and making shared services available for example), to enable school districts to operate more efficiently and economically (with training, technical assistance and instruction in financial literacy for example), and to implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the commissioner (with training, updates, and overviews of specific programs and initiatives for example) (TEC, n.d.).

Summary

School boards in Texas contain the same potential influence, same basic required training outline, and are comprised of members with comparable powers and decision options; yet some boards are considered more effective than others (Ballard, 2002). Aside from direct classroom instruction, school leadership is the most significant variable to affect student achievement, and as such school boards, as key players in that leadership, need further exploration (Terrier, 2010). Public school boards serve as one of the voices for educational advancement of a community, but the job also comes with a vast amount of responsibility, difficult choices and decisions, and negative criticism of the board and superintendent (Kowalski et al., 2010). Pressures in all three of Scott's pillars of institutional theory can affect an American public school district, from state

and national governments bringing new regulations, professional agencies and interest groups looking to impact the normative arena, and parents and community members concerned with cultural elements (Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1981; Scott, 2005).

The procedures and manner in which school boards operationalized these institutional elements may be impacting the effectiveness of these boards. In the small body of research regarding successful school boards, a theme is found, that effective school boards remain focused on their efforts to foster success in their districts (Richardson, 2009). This study, not only fills a gap in literature by scrutinizing the operations of outstanding school boards, but it opens up the possibility that the actions and efforts of boards could be aligned with the normative, cultural-cognitive, and regulative forces of institutional theory to help future boards reach the level of an Honor or Outstanding school board.

Reporting

The remaining chapters of the dissertation include a review of relevant literature in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 also provides detail as to the importance of the study, incorporating the need for research regarding school board effectiveness. Chapter 3 includes the methodology report, data collection, and procedures. Chapter 4 consists of the findings, presentation of data, data analysis relating to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

This review of the related literature was designed to establish knowledge about school boards in Texas, specifically their history, makeup, responsibilities, and impact on students. The review examines the process, operations, history, and value of the Texas Association of School Administrators annual Honor Board and Outstanding school Board awards. Finally, the theoretical framework of institutional theory is explained, as well as how the three pillars of this theory (as created by Richard Scott) relate to school board operations and procedures.

History of School Boards in Texas

In America, electing lay persons from the community to serve as the policy-making body for school systems is common, but this is a practice unique to America (Ballard, 2002). It has traditionally been the case that local school districts have made most of the educational decisions, and now some of that power has shifted to the state and federal governments (Sell, 2005). Until the 1960s, the federal government stayed relatively uninvolved and left the governing of elementary and secondary education up to state and local educational departments (Scott & Meyer, 1994). As such, the following descriptions have historically applied to most local school boards: (a) meets the needs of the local community, (b) provides local control of school districts, (c) lays oversight of educational policies, (d) manages cooperatively with a professional superintendent, (e) has a board president as the chief officer, (f) is a democratic process of elections, and (g) reflects the separation of educational and general government decision making (Land, 2002).

There are many citizens in America who see local school boards as outdated and ineffective (Land, 2002). However, according to the National School Boards Association website (n.d.), there are still good reasons local school boards are governed under the current structure:

(a) education of students is the most important item for the school board, while budget issues are secondary (b) school boards represent the public's voice (c) school boards set the standard for achievement based on the community's needs (d) school boards are accountable for the performance of the schools in the district (e) school boards ensure taxpayers get the most for their tax dollars.

Six states in the U.S. (Georgia, Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas) have certain training requirements all school board members must receive to serve on the board, and the minimum training requirements are the same no matter the size or substance of the public school board (Rice, 2010; Simpson-Laskowskie, 2003). Part of the purpose of this required training is to help new board members understand educational policies and the duties of trustees, but also to build a strong superintendent/school board relationship, and in Texas this training is given through twenty Regional Education Service Centers (Ballard, 2002). The qualifications a person must possess to become a governing member of a board of trustees in Texas are:

1. Be a United States citizen,

2. Be 18 years of age or older by the first day of their elected term,

3. Have not been determined by a court to be (a) totally mentally incapacitated, or (b) partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote,

4. Have not been convicted of a felony from which the person hasn't been pardoned, or

5. Have resided continuously in the state for 12 months and in the territory from which the office is elected for 6 months preceding the election (Williams, 2008, p. 25).

Researchers have suggested that even though Texas state law requires school board members and superintendents to receive training in team building each year, specifically what is termed *team of eight training*, there is still room for confusion regarding the role of the school

board and the role of the superintendent (Mountford, 2004; Simpson-Laskoskie, 2003). The greatest potential for school board/superintendent conflict is the misunderstanding of policy-making versus day-to-day administration (Terrier, 2010). Specific language in the training requirements provided in the Texas Administrative Code, revised in 1995, tries to address this issue:

1. The continuing education requirement consists of orientation sessions, an annual team-building session with the local board and the superintendent, and specified hours of continuing education based on identified needs.

2. The entire board, including all board members, shall annually participate with their superintendent in a team-building session facilitated by the ESC (Education Service Center) or any registered provider. The team-building session shall be of a length deemed appropriate by the board, but generally at least three hours. The purpose of the team-building session is to enhance the effectiveness of the board-superintendent team and to assess the continuing education needs of the board-superintendent team. The assessment of needs shall be based on the framework for governance leadership and shall be used to plan continuing education activities for the year for the governance leadership team (TAC, Ch. 61.1).

The current system in Texas, consisting of a commissioner of education, state board of education, and the Texas Education Agency has been in existence since 1949 (Anderson, 1984). Locally, in the more than 1200 Independent Public School Districts in Texas, the superintendent serves as the head of the school district, and the school board of trustees is the educational policy-making body for Texas public school districts and for more than four million students in the state (TEA, n.d.; Terrier, 2010). The Texas Association of School Boards put the roles of the

school board and superintendent into terms that are easy yet essential to understand: Texas statute assigns to the board the task of "overseeing the management of the district" and actually managing the district daily is assigned to the superintendent, who is the chief executive officer of the district (TASB, 2011, p. 5). There is a great deal of literature to back up the need to strengthen the school board/superintendent relationship (Campbell & DeArmond, 2011; Dawson & Quinn, 2004). This is the case in Texas as well, for example, in *Framework for School Board Development* published by the Texas Education Agency (2012), the opening Preamble statement states: "to meet the many challenges in public education, superintendents and school boards must function together as a leadership team" (p. 1). Typically, the literature has put the school administration, or superintendent, in the spotlight in examining relationships between boards and superintendents (Mountford, 2004), but shifting the target of this research opens up the exploration of the procedures that public school boards are utilizing.

There is a gap in the literature that has been established with respect to the exploration of school boards who are able to work together in a productive manner. The Texas Association of School Boards, TASB seeks local board members who go to great lengths to be as effective as possible by governing by the principles of effective board service (TASB, 2011). When board members are elected, most have no training in the educational realm or decision making, so there must be external factors that help boards become successful within the system (Ballard, 2002), and institutionalized procedures may be one of these factors. This concept is clearly stated within the TASB *Board Effectiveness Audit* (2001) which was written to be used by district leadership teams, some excerpts are below in reference to the specific characteristics of effective school boards:

1. They have embraced a vision and a set of clearly defined priorities for the district that structure both the board's decision making and the work of the district staff. Vision and goals ensure both the district and the board have a clear focus for their efforts.

2. They have a clear picture of what their work entails. That is, they understand their job relative to the work of others and know the tools at their disposal for performing the job.

3. They have formalized their work. That is, they have developed and follow clearly defined procedures and schedules for doing their work.

4. They foster, through their own practices, the free flow of information within the community. The free flow of information ensures the community is informed about and involved in the district's work. TASB has found that the more fully the board has formalized and documented certain procedures and the more systematically the board reviews these procedures, the more efficiently the board works. (TASB, 2001, p. 2).

Even though school boards set the tone for the achievement, improvement, and management of school districts (Foster, 2014), the literature and research of the recent past, has failed to examine the successes of some school districts with the board of trustees specifically in mind. There is also a lack of exploration of the characteristics of effective boards and how the effective practices are operationalized (Land, 2002). A carefully structured system of school governance promotes sound governing decisions, builds ownership among board members, and builds a more cohesive relationship between the board and school administration (Williams, 2008). The Texas Education Code is very specific about the duties that both the superintendent and school board are expected to perform, and the responsibilities of school boards are as follows:

The board shall:

1. Seek to establish working relationships with other public entities to make effective use of community resources and to serve the needs of public school students in the community;

2. Adopt a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent and monitor progress toward those goals;

3. Establish performance goals for the district concerning (a) the academic and fiscal performance indicators and (b) any performance indicators adopted by the district;

4. Ensure that the superintendent: (a) is accountable for achieving performance results; (b) recognizes performance accomplishments; and (c) takes action as necessary to meet performance goals;

5. Adopt a policy to establish a district- and campus-level planning and decision-making process as required

6. Publish an annual educational performance report as required

7. Adopt an annual budget for the district

8. Adopt a tax rate each fiscal year

9. Monitor district finances to ensure that the superintendent is properly maintaining the district's financial procedures and records;

10. Ensure that district fiscal accounts are audited annually as required

11. Publish an end-of-year financial report for distribution to the community;

12. Conduct elections as required by law;

13. By rule, adopt a process through which district personnel, students or the parents or guardians of students, and members of the public may obtain a hearing from the district administrators and the board regarding a complaint;

14. Make decisions relating to terminating the employment of district employees employed under a contract to which Chapter 21 applies, including terminating or not renewing an employment contract to which that chapter applies; and

15. Carry out other powers and duties as provided by this code or other law

16. Issue bonds and levy, pledge, assess, and collect an annual ad valorem tax to pay the principal and interest on the bonds

17. Levy, assess, and collect an annual ad valorem tax for maintenance and operation of the district

18. Employ a person to assess or collect the district's taxes

19. Enter into contracts as authorized under this code or other law and delegate contractual authority to the superintendent as appropriate. (TEC Ch11.151)

Additionally, in other parts of the country, studies have shown the procedures of an efficient school board are worth exploring. A study done by the Iowa Association of School Boards showed there are seven conditions for productive change in the governing bodies of high-achieving school systems that were significantly different from those of low-achieving schools, and at the top of that list was an emphasis on building a human organizational system, or institution (Simpson-Laskowskie, 2003). Due to the fact that some districts have seemingly first-rate board members who are working with superintendents as a successful team of eight, it is crucial to explore the practices of these effective boards to positively impact education (Richardson, 2009).

Honor and Outstanding School Boards

The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) created the School Board Awards Program in 1971 to recognize school boards that have demonstrated outstanding dedication and ethical service to the students in the state of Texas (TASA, n.d.). The awards program allows each of the 20 Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) in Texas to submit up to two nominations for the state competition each year. A selection committee reviews all the nomination packets in the region and chooses one nomination from districts in the area with less than 1,000 students and one from districts with more than 1,000 students (G. Taylor, Director of Region 10, personal communication, July 16, 2015). There is an average of five Honor boards awarded each year through this process, although some years may have only three or four. All regional nominees and Honor Boards are recognized at the TASA/TASB Convention, along with the presentation of the Outstanding school board, which takes place each fall (TASA, n.d.).

I will now list some data collected in my brief interview with Dr. Gordon Taylor, Executive Director of Region 10 Education Service Center. Dr. Taylor reviewed the nomination procedures with the researcher, regarding the nomination process for the TASA Honor Board:

> The process of nominating a school board is a daunting task, and there are some years in which it seems like many districts are completing packets and some years where very few districts are submitted to the Regional Service Center. (personal communication, July 16, 2015).

The Director gave several reasons for why superintendents might not be submitting packets highlighting the works and successes of their respective school boards, including (a) superintendent turnover – superintendents must have served in their respective districts for at least two years at the time of the nomination; (b) time frame – there may not have been five full

years since a particular school board has been awarded as an Honor Board, creating a few years in which certain districts cannot submit a nomination; (c) busyness – completing the nomination packet is a rather large endeavor, especially for a smaller district that might not have a communications or public relations staff on hand; (d) preoccupation with daily operations – if the superintendent and school board are just too preoccupied with other tasks or possible issues that may be going on in the district currently; and lastly (e) relationship breakdown – if those two pieces of the school board aren't working well together, no submission will be made (personal communication, July 16, 2015). However, throughout the 20 ESC districts, the state committee and TASA still average at least 40 submitted nomination packets each year to consider as the five boards that will represent the state as the Honor and Outstanding school boards (TASA, n.d.). The criteria which serve as the basis for Regional Education Service Centers, TASA, in selecting Outstanding School Boards encompasses ten functions of a school board, and each district that submits a nomination packet must have documented evidence of their excellence in each of the criterion and sub-criterion areas. There is a list of these criteria with the addition of the pillars of institutional theory available in Table 2.1 (also see Appendix B).

Table 2.1

Selection Criteria for TASA Honor Boards (TASA, 2014)

Criteria for Outstanding & Honor Boards	Examples of documentation or evidence of meeting each criterion
Functions as a policy making body	Policies established/revised in the last 2 years Evaluation time/support for new policies prior to alterations Active support for superintendent/school personnel in carrying out policies Input from staff/patrons into policy-making process
Adherence to adopted board policies	Formal procedure for initiating, adopting, changing policy Frequency of policy review; last date of review/ revision Procedure for updating/ maintaining policy book Availability of board policies to district personnel & the community

THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF TASA HONOR SCHOOL BOARDS

Criteria for Outstanding & Honor Boards	Examples of documentation or evidence of meeting each criterion
Support for educational performance in accordance with state-established standards	Data profiling student performance/ gains; copy of district's current state accountability ratings & Texas Academic Performance Report Support for programs contributing to high performance Recognition received for educational performance Support for efforts to correct deficiencies in student performance
Support for educational improvement projects & school transformation initiatives	Long-range data plans for curriculum design/ revisions to the academic program Technology integration into learning Support for innovative programs initiated by the district Individual board member support for school district/ dedication to duty Support for bond elections, facility planning, strategic planning
Commitment to a code of ethics	Copy of board's code of ethics Ethical practices in dealing with staff collectively and individually Ethical considerations dealing with professional contracts, grievances, and dismissal procedures Commitment of board members to the adopted code of ethics from the National School Boards Association or one developed & adopted by the board itself
Provision of financial support for the school system	Statement showing total taxable base of district/applied tax rate/ average expenditure per child/employee salaries & benefits/efforts to finance schools & educational programs Efficient business management practices
Participation in workshops & other performance improvement programs	Association membership & participation Specific workshops, conventions, training programs board members attended Completion of required school board member training Support of professional development opportunities for superintendent
Placement of the welfare of students above personal/political motives	Support of potentially unpopular actions when they clearly benefit district & students Placing dedication to the school system above special or personal favors and policy exceptions
Public relations efforts, including community awareness	Newsletters, media clippings illustrating district efforts to convey information on policies & procedures to the community Publications aimed at informing the community about actions affecting local public schools Efforts to obtain community input in decision making
Maintenance of harmonious & supportive relationships among board members	Statements from individual board members & news personnel testifying to harmonious working relationship among board members Unified action by board, including effective resolution of differences

In examining the Outstanding and Honor Board History, only 167 school boards (13%) of 1,247 Texas school districts have ever received the Honor Board award (TEA, n.d.). An even smaller number of boards, 39 total districts or 3%, over the last 44 years, can call themselves an Outstanding School Board award winner (TASA, n.d.). TASB (2001) describes these particular boards of trustees as those who represent diverse populations with various needs, but each of the board members is united in their efforts in doing what is best for each child in the care of their district. Unfortunately, within that 87% of non-awarded school boards in the state of Texas, are school boards described as not exhibiting the practices and characteristics shown to be crucial in the effective running of a school district (Land, 2002).

There are a few more criteria that school boards must meet in order to be nominated by their superintendents for Texas State Honor Board each year. Boards are only eligible if they have not received the award in any of the previous five years (TASA, n.d.), which makes some of the boards examined in this study seemingly more effective since they've been an Honor Board three or four different times over the past four decades. Additionally, superintendents who send in a nomination letter and packet for their district's school board to their corresponding regional service center must be a member of TASA and must have served at their respective districts for a minimum of two consecutive years, which may leave some outstanding boards out of the running, regardless of the details of the most recent school year, if they are functioning under the management of a superintendent who happens to be new to the ISD. Listed below are the actual procedures for school board Honor and Outstanding board awards directly from the TASA website:

1. Any Texas superintendent of schools who is a member of TASA and who has been serving in his/her current position for at least the last two years, other than the TASA

president at the time the awards will be made, may nominate his/her board of trustees

by collecting and submitting data supportive of the criteria.

2. Only members of TASA shall serve on the selection committees.

3. No member of a selection committee shall be from a school whose board is being

   considered.

4. No board may repeat as an Outstanding Board or Honor Board more often than once

   every five years (e.g., a board named as the Outstanding Board or as an Honor Board

   in 2012 or later is not eligible to submit a nomination in 2016).

Institutional Theory

Early work in institutional theory began roughly with the work of organizational

researchers, like Philip Selznick, several decades ago examining systems, environments, and the

features of institutions (Scott, 1987). Public schools as institutions were completing basic day-to-

day tasks, but many were seen as inadequate while others were improving student achievement,

and this led to exploration of education as an organization (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981). With

few exceptions, social researchers had been examining schools only from the technical view, or

what happens inside of the classroom (Meyer, 1980). Looking at schools from this sole

perspective made education seem like an unsuccessful organization, so theorists began to move

away from this technical view of education, thinking that the issue may not be how schools were

organized or run, but with the type of frames and models that were being used to examine them

(Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Contemporary institutional theory, usually defined as neo-institutional, captured the

attention of multiple scholars across social sciences to explore various systems, and the

generalizations of the early theory were elaborated and applied by Meyer and Scott, and a

number of collaborators, to the analysis of educational systems (Scott, 2004). Scott and Meyer's

work at Stanford included examining how institutional forces could structure organizations

(Scott, 2005). This collaborative effort created studies that made institutional theory relevant by

analyzing more diverse and distinctive organizations, such as public education (Scott, 2005). In

these early days of neo-institutional arguments, schools could be seen as legitimate if they were

conforming to the norms about the structure of a school system: (a) grade levels, (b) evaluations,

(c) staffing, and (d) other professional and societal expectations. The assumption was those

schools that conformed and fit the mold were viewed as being effective at educating students

(Warshaw, Beaudry, & Olson, 1991).

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) work in this research area began near this same time at

Yale University. Their arguments considered network connections and how the isomorphic

processes of coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures from internal and external agencies

could cause organizations to operate in similar ways but would not necessarily make them

operate more efficiently (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2005). This exploration included

concerns with isomorphism and stressing network connections that considered pressures from

institutional agents, such as state or professional agencies, or influences from similar arenas

causing mimetic forces to be enacted (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2004).

As institutional theory branched out to examine educational organizations, researchers

found that in order for a school to survive, it is most crucial for that entity to conform to

institutional rules, such as defining teacher licensing, general topics of instruction, and

appropriate facilities (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981; Scott, 2004). Meyer and Scott (1984)

examined the institutionalism present in both private and public school organizations, noting that

public districts had become more centralized and thus more decisions were beginning to be made

at the higher rather than lower (local) level as states began to give more funding to districts. This new model of institutional theory examined cultural processes, routines and procedures, legitimacy processes, as well as formal structures, and looked at institutionalism as it was occurring (Meyer& Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In plain and simple terms, schools and school districts are not immune from seeking institutional legitimacy (Rorrer, 2001). Legitimacy can best be defined as a key resource for organizations in how the institution conforms to norms, cultural and cognitive concepts and beliefs, and compliance with legal regulations through practices that help make the organization legitimate and valid (Scott, 2001). Again when looking at public schools, where there are various and frequent pressures applied by politics, parents, government, and local communities, there may be a tendency for a school board to behave boisterously, reacting to demands, and spending a great amount of time in a conflict about library books for example, instead of fostering success or focused expansion (Meyer et al., 1981).

The Three Pillars of Institutional Theory

Scott (2004) posited that organizations with structures that conform to institutional rules, like schools, tend to succeed in environments with elaborated institutional structures. Further, each school district acquires an understanding of the educational process strictly from operating within the same institutional environment and sharing the same educational "culture" (Meyer, 1980). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) asserted that all organizations confront both institutional and technical types of pressure, and educational institutions are typically subject to stronger institutional pressures rather than the technical, classroom instruction, details. Scott (2005) theorized using similar connections to this, affirming that institutions are variously comprised of

cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that together with associated actions, activities, and resources provide both stability and meaning to those organizations.

School organizations go to great lengths to seek and maintain their legitimate status as educational institutions, by modeling themselves after other schools and conforming to regulations that are legally mandated and professionally suggested (Meyer, 1980). Local school board members, district administrators, and campus administrators perform the daily tasks of organizing, budgeting, and managing disruptions within the organization, in order to build and keep up community confidence in the institution of public education (Elmore, 2000). Schools reach this level of confidence, or legitimacy, by connecting to wider cultural values, such as training and learning, and creating procedures to establish patterns set up for educational organizations (Scott, 2013).

Scott's (2005) work is specifically highlighted in this study, as a contributing researcher, who was able to connect and elaborate on the foundations of institutional theory, with arguments that are still relevant today. Scott explains that his framework is not assumed to be the final word on organizations, but rather can be used to make connections among the various mindsets of institutional theory, so that each can be seen to affect the big picture (Scott, 2001, 2005). Scott's use of the three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, as a framework incorporates aspects of both early and neo-institutional theory, because it is a system that can be expanded in a variety of areas (Bright, 2014). Although all institutions are composed of various combinations of elements, they vary among themselves, and over time may differ in which elements are dominant (Scott, 2004).

These elements provide common themes and give meaning to systems that vary over time, and one or two elements may become dominant in a particular institution (Scott, 2005).

Regulative elements stress rule-setting, system monitoring, and activities that are specifically sanctioned (Scott, 2001). Normative elements "introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life" (Scott, 2008, p. 54). And cultural-cognitive elements emphasize the "shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made" (Scott, 2008, p. 57). Each element differs in what area of institutionalism it supports, providing various, "rationale for claiming legitimacy, whether by virtue of being legally sanctioned, morally authorized, or culturally supported" (Scott, 2008, p. 51). The institutional environment brings stability to a field through these regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive structures (Park, 2008).

Regulative

The regulative pillar of institutionalization includes rules, laws, sanctions, or structures that are put in place in order to regulate or constrain behaviors (Scott, 2008). The regulatory processes provide legitimacy to organizations by operating within and conforming to legal requirements and rules (Scott, 2008). Leaders in school districts act with a sense of agency, to redefine routines and conform or negotiate regulatory and symbolic systems (Scott, 1995). Regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect conformity to them, and, when necessary, manipulate sanctions, rewards, or punishments in an attempt to influence future behavior (Scott, 2007). Scott, along with Dacin et al. (2002), summarizes studies in which the regulative pillar, which is expressed through laws and compliance, actually has less impact than the normative and cultural-cognitive activities that can occur after a sanction is handed down (Luoma & Goodstein, 1999).

Normative

Research exploring the study of the power of normative agents, such as professional associations, in shaping organizational procedures and processes continues to be impressive in this area of study (Scott, 2004). The three elements are constantly at work to stabilize systems, but normative agents, like external professional associations, are very powerful in shaping the processes of an organization (Scott, 2005). The primary components of the normative pillar include a system of norms, expectations, values, and roles that seek to influence behavior, or in a sense regulate the relations among individuals (Scott, 2007; Scott, 2013). Normative elements provide guidelines and standards developed through the work of professional groups outside of the institution itself, but these are not as coercive as regulative systems are (Scott, 2005). For example, normative behaviors are evident when educational administrators are trained at the same university, or in the same program.

Another normative aspect is how a district's goals are connected to wider cultural values, such as socialization and type of education, and to the extent that an organization conforms their structures and procedures to established "patterns of operation" specified for educational organizations (Scott, 1995, p. 20). If a school fails to maintain its legitimacy through consistent operations, then various external entities, such as professional organizations, educational agencies, parents, or local governments may no longer support the school (Warshaw et al., 1991). There are networks that provide information exchange among professionals within or across organizations, and they further normative changes. Examples of these within education include professional affiliations such as the Texas Association of School Administrators, the National Educators Association, or Texas Association of School Boards. Basically, the normative element states the objectives while also designating appropriate ways to pursue them;

this can be stated in a simplified manner, i.e., specifying how the game is supposed to be played (Scott, 2013).

Cultural-Cognitive

The cultural-cognitive pillar of institutionalization involves the shared beliefs of people, with reference to what is typically taken for granted, including in an academic environment (Bright, 2014). Within this pillar, legitimacy is claimed by cultural support of deep foundations that have been embedded within the institution (Scott, 2008). Using this logic, school districts have their own unique cultures that have been formed around a combination of values and beliefs. This culture emphasizes what a district deems important (i.e. high SAT scores, a successful football program, or producing students who go onto college) (Hanson, 2001). Culture can also include the parents and students of school districts, as a part of the community, as they are among the primary carriers of the cultural belief system (Scott, 1987). Cultural-cognitive aspects are generally more difficult to recognize and identify because they are so entrenched among the actors in the organization and as such are easily overlooked or taken for granted (Scott, 2007). A cultural-cognitive focus can lead to legitimacy for the organization by reaching common definitions, and ways to handle situations according to the established and embedded culture of the institution where the actors might find support (Scott, 2008).

Isomorphism is also a crucial aspect of the cultural-cognitive area. As Scott (2013) explains, institutions do not emerge in a vacuum, but they are constantly borrowing from and loaning to others on some level. In regard to education, the legitimacy or institutionalization of school systems can largely be traced to the compliance with accepted rules and structures, most notably existing in the regulative pillar (Scott, 2008). This is especially evident in public schools, which have more regulation from outside sources and stress the formal part of education, such as

standardized testing, rather than the technical part of specific daily instruction (Davies & Quirke, 2005). Utilizing this framework it is clear why, regardless of size or administrative components, school districts and school boards are run using isomorphic systems (Scott and Meyer, 1994). It also helps explain why most school boards are made up of seven members, regardless of the size of the particular district. Schools boards as organizations then, must not simply manage students but manage the school district itself, and as the environment becomes more complex (i.e. certification issues, highly qualified teacher programs, No Child Left Behind of 2001) many changes take place that boards have to manage within their realm of the institutional framework (Meyer & Scott, 1984). Institutions, like education, are made up of norms and procedures that are complex and are directed toward specific goals and ideas (Cummings, 1999).

A variety of theorists have stressed one of these elements over the others, early sociologists like Selznick favored normative elements, and in the same manner more recent organizational sociologists such as Tolbert and Zucker focused on cultural-cognitive elements (Scott, 2005). The big picture is that individual school organizations conform to institutional rules defining what a school is, but some of these rules are generalized cultural beliefs (definitions of roles such as teachers and elementary or secondary students and categories such as reading and mathematics instruction), some are requirements or norms enforced by occupational associations (standardization, or tenure guidelines) and others are mandated by state or federal legislation (accreditation requirements) (Scott, 2004). The three pillars were designed to create checks and balances within organizations and institutional environments, but if they are not aligned, one pillar can actually be undermining the effects of another (Scott, 2005).

Research indicates that the adoption of new policies and formal structures by school leaders can support instructional improvement as long as there is attention given to the three

institutional elements regarding regulations and routines, organizational norms of the educational environment, and cognitive beliefs about what and how to teach and run campuses (Scott 2007). One analysis of a district showed how regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions were working in a constant state of tension, and that tension between the regulative (new math standards from a state agency) and normative dimensions (district norms of teacher autonomy in instruction) contributed to the negative and limited influence educational leaders were able to have in the school setting (Hopkins & Spillane, 2015).

Table 2.2

Scott's (2001, 2004) Three Pillars of Institutionalization with Educational Examples (Bright, 2014)

Pillar / Element	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
Mechanism	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Basis of Legitimacy	Legally Sanctioned	Morally governed	Culturally accepted or promoted
Basis of Compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Shared understanding
Indicators	Rules/Laws, Codes, Sanctions, Standards	Credentialing, Certification, Accreditation	Common Beliefs Isomorphism
Examples from Texas Education	Texas Education/Admin Code TEA State requirements TASB required training Policies on school funding Federal or state mandates	Networks/ Unions/Professional Associations TASA & TASB NCAA Regional Service Centers Texas teacher certification& qualifications	Campus Culture/ Climate Community / Parent involvement Working relationships Class economics and demographics Extra-curricular/ athletic accolades

Summary

Institutional theory is positioned to help confront important questions socially, including the bases of organizational similarity and differentiation, and the relation between structure and behavior (Scott, 1995, 2001). The value of the early work of Meyer and Scott as prominent theorists of theory is that they presented a new way of looking at how many organizations, including schools, operate both within the organization and externally (Warshaw et al. 1991). Legitimacy in regard to schools in the days of early institutionalism involved conforming to and maintaining the models of education that were relevant at the time (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Utilizing neo-institutional concepts means a school board has to take into account actors as agents, all three elements of institutional theory, and multiple external agencies and interest groups that are attempting to influence local education (Brint, Hanneman, Murphy, Proctor, & Turk-Bicakci, 2009).

Institutions utilize stabilizing properties that are set in motion by regulative, normative, and cognitive elements, and these are the building blocks of institutional structures that guide behavior (Scott, 2013). Written operating and institutionalized procedures can be very beneficial to both new superintendents and school board members, because failing to perform important tasks in a correct way can lead to inefficiency (TASB, 2011). These procedures and policies created by school boards dictate the standards and philosophy by which schools are run and the criteria used to judge whether the schools are being run well. The current system, with a constant flow of new school board members in office, can maintain itself with flexibility, but institutionalized practices must exist to make this occur (Bentley, 2006). In terms of institutionalism, the more conflicted the environment is that the organization is operating in, the less coherent and consistent that organization will be (Meyer & Scott, 1984), which means if the

superintendent and school board as a public organization do not work well together within the structure of the institution, effectiveness will not be evident.

Examining school boards accurately through the lens of institutional theory, framed by all three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, shows how the routines, systems, and behaviors are operationalized within an educational institution (Scott, 2004). One example of the emphasis on the institutional and normative aspects of education deals with hiring teachers who are properly credentialed – applicants who do not have the appropriate professional certification will not be employed regardless of their knowledge and instructional abilities (Meyer, 1980). Depending on the current circumstances of an institution, one of the three pillars might be more prominent than the other two (Bright, 2014), which is why this framework can be successful in explaining some differentiating between school boards who operate within the same general location and with similar training.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the method and design used in the study. The major components of the chapter include the research questions which led to the research design, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the operations and procedures of Texas public school boards that have been recognized by the Texas Association of School Administrators as Outstanding or Honor school boards within the past 10 years (2005-2015), and then to explore how these operations, procedures, and routines, in relation to the elements of institutional theory, compare to those of other school boards that are similar demographically but have not ever been awarded. The first step was to determine which school boards to focus the study on based on the research questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the operations and procedures of Honor Boards/ Outstanding school boards?

2. How well do Scott's pillars of institutionalization: Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive, explain the operations and procedures of these boards?

3. How useful is institutional theory in understanding what makes a school board outstanding, in comparison to other non-awarded school boards?

4. What other realities about outstanding school boards, in comparison to less exemplary boards, were revealed during this study?

The Researcher

Researchers bring their own perceptions of the world, including biases, mindsets, and belief systems, to the research project and therefore use theoretical frameworks as interpretations to help guide their study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As the researcher for this study, I have spent 20 years in education, seven as an administrator, and 13 years in the secondary classroom teaching language arts, social studies, and foreign language. As an administrator, I have been charged with ensuring a high level of learning for all students, providing discipline, and leading all campus assessments, curriculum, and special programs including English as a Second Language. As I move forward in my career, it is my desire to become a superintendent or an assistant superintendent in my current district or in a nearby school district. I am increasingly aware that superintendents and school board of trustees have an opportunity to have a positive impact on the students of the 21st century. In order to gain more insight into how the relationship between those two entities can work at the highest level of success, I have delved into the current research on school boards and noticed there is a significant gap in the research as to the operations and characteristics of a strong school board. This observation led me to my current study in which I was able to draw some conclusions from the actual work of school boards who are consistently showing signs of working at the outstanding level.

As a career educator I am familiar with school boards and the amount of work they do within a particular school district. Through research and personal observation I believe the actions of the boards of trustees can impact a school district in both positive and negative ways. I also believe that the actions a school board takes are a reflection of the values and norms they hold as crucial to the success of the school district and students served there. I had an open mind about the impact of institutional theory as it would be applied in this study to the decisions of the 10 school boards examined. However, I did assume I would see the 5 Honor Boards somehow

outperforming the 5 comparable boards, and that would be evident by examining a year's worth of school board meeting minutes for each district.

Assumptions

Four assumptions guided this inquiry. They formed the foundation for an exploration of school boards through the lens of institutional theory.

1. School boards who have been voted as an Honor Board and/or Outstanding school board by the Texas Association of School Administrators over the past 10 years can be considered effective school boards.

2. These school boards have certain identifiable operating procedures that help them be effective within their school districts and in the state of Texas.

3. Those procedures are evident in school board meeting minutes and nomination packets that are included in the data.

4. School boards play a key independent role in the overall learning and success of the school district, and the institutional operations and procedures incorporated by these school boards have an effect on this success.

Limitations

There are several limitations with this study. First, this study only included data collected from 10 school boards total; therefore, the conclusions drawn from this data may not apply to other school boards throughout the state and nation. While the study explored previously unexamined characteristics of school boards, and there was a great deal of content that was analyzed, there was still only data from 10 school boards. A second limitation is the data sources used. A substantial amount of information came from the Honor Board nomination packets in order to focus on the actual procedures the 5 Honor Board's are using. However, there was no

such information regarding the 5 comparable boards available to the researcher as these boards do not have nomination packets available to the public or possibly even in existence. Another documented disadvantage of this type of analysis is that the validity of documents, in terms of sources, for accuracy, and factual information may be questionable, depending on the motives of the authors. The researcher was able to address this simply by examining for information in the documents that was pertinent to the elements of institutional theory (Neunendorf, 2002).

Data Needs

In an effort to answer the research questions, several sets of data were needed to explore the operations and procedures of outstanding school boards. First, I needed to know what actions these school boards were taking, as a board only has true power when members are working as a collective body, not individually (Ballard, 2002; TASB, 2011). Once I was able to gain insight into the specifics of the work the boards were involved in, as the researcher, I was able to categorize this work into the three specific pillars of institutional theory.

Data Sources

School board meeting minutes: These minutes from both Honor Boards and comparable boards were carefully examined to both account for the pillars of institutional theory within the frequency of action items listed, and to see if there were certain decisions, actions, and connections that were evident in Honor Board meeting minutes that were not present in the minutes of other boards.

Honor board nomination packets: The contents of these nomination packets, six total (as one Honor Board produced a packet both in 2007 and 2013), were examined to code all items listed into the pillars of institutional theory to see if there were any procedures specific to Honor Boards that were distributed in a particular pattern.

Table 3.1

Demographic Detail of the Ten School Boards in the Study

Board	ESC Region	Student Enrollment	Year of Honor/Outstanding Board Award	Total Number of Campuses
Honor Board 1	10	37, 272	1974	47
			1998	
			2007	
			2013	
Board 6	11	34, 950	N/A	39
Honor Board 2	11	7, 730	1989	11
			1994	
			2009	
Board 7	10	8, 100	N/A	10
Honor Board 3	11	5, 943	1988	10
			1998	
			2006	
Board 8	11	5, 822	N/A	11
Honor Board 4	10	54, 930	2014	72
Board 9	6	55, 004	N/A	52
Honor Board 5	11	25, 835	2003	36
			2011	
Board 10	10	24, 750	N/A	30

School District Profiles

The basic descriptions of the 10 school boards are listed below as district and school

leadership profiles. The specific school district names have been kept confidential for the

purposes of this study, but all of these descriptive statistics were taken from the individual school

district websites as well as the Outstanding and Honor Board history section of the current

TASA website.

Honor Boards

    The key assumption to this study was that TASA Honor Boards exhibit certain

characteristics shown through procedures, operations, and routines used in school board

meetings and decision making, more abundantly than other school boards. In fleshing out these

procedures with the five examined Honor Boards the researcher had to begin with a depth of

descriptions for each of these districts and those are listed below.

    Honor board #1. Honor Board #1. is located in the north Texas metroplex and belongs to

the Region 10 Education Service Center. This district serves a diverse population of over 37,000

total students. This school board has the prestige of being named an Honor Board by TASA and

TASB a record four times over the past forty years. One of those occurrences was the honor of

Outstanding School Board of Texas, and their most recent award was bestowed in 2013. The first

Honor Board is again the most awarded of any in the state, and it belongs to the Region 10

Education Service Center. The district has shown strong student performance over the years, and

obtained a Recognized accountability rating and a Met Standard rating from TEA during the

years of the respective awards. This district worked with the same superintendent on the team

with the school board during the entire ten years examined in this study, only its fifth

superintendent historically. There are seven men and women who have been elected by the

members of the community to serve as trustees. One of the board members who is still serving

the district has been in place since 1988, and the average tenure of the entire board during the

awarded years was a vastly experienced 8.5 years.

    Honor board #2. Honor Board #2 is also located in north Texas, but it is a suburban town

which the Region 11 Education Service Center serves. This district and its school board have

been awarded as an Honor Board three times since 1989. In two out of those three award years,

Board #2 had the honor of being named the Outstanding School Board in Texas, most recently in 2009. There are a total of eleven campuses within the school district. Student performance in this district has been relatively high, and the district obtained a Recognized rating from TEA in 2009, the last year of the Outstanding Board award. This school board during the 2009 school year was made up of seven men and women from the community who had served the school district for an average time period of four years. The superintendent who was part of the team of eight for that school board that year has since retired, but there have only been two administrators to hold that top position within the ten years of the study.

Honor board #3. Honor Board #3 also belongs to the Region 11 service center area and is actually a medium sized district serving around 6,000 total students. Honor Board 3 has, like the previously mentioned boards, been acknowledged as an Honor Board or the Outstanding Board in Texas multiple times, three times in fact, with the most recent award coming almost ten years ago in 2006. Located in the area of the Region 11 Education Service Center in a small suburban area, there are ten total campuses belonging to the district. The school board makes decisions for the student population, and in the last year of the Honor Board recognition, the district had an Academically Acceptable rating from TEA with one gold performance area. The school board from this district in 2006 had served together for an average of five and a half years, with a couple of board members having been a trustee for more than ten years. The superintendent, who consequently won the TASB Superintendent of the Year the year before the board was awarded in 2005, has since left the district. However, there has only been one other superintendent to serve the district along with the board since.

Honor board #4. Honor Board #4 is a larger district in Region 10, serving around 55,000 total students. In 2014 this school district received the Honor Board award from TASA, and that

is the sole year their board was awarded. This Honor Board comes from the largest district in our study, and the fifteenth largest district in Texas. The district is located in a large city, within the Region 10 service center's area, and has over 70 total campuses. This board has only had the distinction of being named an Honor Board once, but it has still had a history of high student performance, meeting the TEA accountability standard in 2014. Even though this school board comes from a large district, the majority of trustees on the seven member board are serving for their second or third term of four year terms. However, the district has seen some turnover in the superintendent over the past decade, with one superintendent leaving in 2012, the next one retiring in 2014 after the school board was recognized as an Honor Board, and the current superintendent taking over the district during the following school year.

Honor board #5. Honor Board #5 belongs to Region 11 and has received the award of Honor Board in both 2003 and 2011. This board has been voted an Honor Board twice before, with the most recent award in 2011. The district serves their students on a total of 36 campuses in a medium sized urban area. Although 2011 was a rather unstable year for most school districts in Texas, with large budget cuts, Honor Board #5 still managed to receive an Academically Acceptable rating from TEA with one gold performance area. This school board had served together as trustees for eight years on average in 2011, and one member has been a trustee since 1993. The superintendent who was part of the "Team of Eight" during the awarded year, who also was voted as one of the top five Superintendents in Texas twice during the ten year time span of this study, had held that position for thirteen years and seen two Honor Board awards during his tenure. This superintendent retired in 2012, and the current superintendent took over in this large district.

Comparable School Districts

The identifying characteristics of the comparable school districts and school boards were gathered by the researcher from the current Texas Education Agency website, as well as the respective school district websites, and again none of the next five school boards have ever been awarded as an Honor or Outstanding Board through the TASA School Board Awards program since its inception in 1971.

Board #6. Board #6 was paired with Honor Board #1, because these two school districts serve students in a similar sized town in north Texas. This school board corresponded with Honor Board #1 because of its size and similar demographics. The district is located in Region 11 on the edge of a large urban area, with some campuses located in the city limits of the smaller suburban area the district is named after. The district houses 39 total campuses and serves around 34,000 students. During the years of comparison to the Honor Board, the district had a majority of campuses rated as Exemplary or Recognized by TEA. This school board has submitted several bond packages that have passed over the past 10 years to open 21 new campuses, more than 50% of the total number during that time span. The current board members average a four year service time, with one member serving as a trustee since 2001. This district also has had three different superintendents since 2004.

Board #7. Board #7, paired with Honor Board #2, is from a medium-sized school district that serves roughly 7,300 total students. This school board is located in the Region 10 Education Service Center area, is in a small suburban community, and houses a total of 10 campuses. The student performance of the schools this board oversees usually fair well compared to others in the state. In fact, during the year the corresponding district was voted Honor Board, Board #7 had an accountability rating of Academically Acceptable by the Texas Education Agency,

followed up by a Recognized rating the following year. The district has had three

superintendents during the ten year span of the study.

Board #8. Board #8 was compared with Honor Board #3. It is located about 15 miles

from the paired district. This district is also served by the Region 11 Education Service Center.

This district is in a small suburban area, has eleven total campuses, and serves approximately

5,850 students. During 2006, the year the corresponding district received the award, the district

had a TEA accountability rating of Academically Acceptable.

Board #9. Board #9 was matched up with Honor Board #4 due to a similar size and total

student population. Board # 9 was the only board examined that is outside of the North Texas

area, and the scope of the study had to be maximized a bit in order to analyze another district of

the same size and similar demographics to Honor Board #4. The district belongs to the Region 6

Education Service Center and is located in a large city community. The board makes decisions

for approximately 55,000 students and houses over 50 total campuses. The district met standard

according to TEA accountability ratings during the corresponding 2014 school year.

Board #10. The final school district studied is located in a large town only 20 miles away

from Honor Board #5. This school district experienced a great deal of growth over the past 20

years. The district is home to nearly 25,000 students who attend school at 30 different campuses.

Looking at the 2011 school year, which is the year the comparable district received their Honor

Board award, the district saw a relative amount of success with a Recognized accountability

rating from TEA.

Study Design

The design of this study was a qualitative study of multiple school boards from school

districts in the state of Texas, from Regions 10 and 11, through the use of qualitative content

analysis of documents. This research was designed around the best practices of qualitative

content analysis, and no human source data was used. Validity, authenticity, or credibility were

achieved by using proven qualitative content analysis techniques such as diverse sources of

information, and thick, rich description of the qualitative content and context (Creswell, 2007).

This study used qualitative content analysis, which is at times referred to as a narrative analysis

(Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Content analysis is potentially one of the most

important research techniques that can be applied to the area of psychology and with educational

materials (Krippendorff, 2004). There are, according to Krippendorff (1980, 2004), four

distinguishing characteristics of content analysis:

1. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique; there are no subjects who are directly

    observed or situations where observations can be contaminated.

2. Content analysis can handle unstructured matter as data; there are no surveys or

    questionnaires used with structured answer choices, this allows the ideas of the

    original documents to be preserved.

3. Content analysis is context sensitive; there is not a controlled laboratory setting and

    this allows the researcher to process text of documents as data which are significant,

    meaningful, and representational to others.

4. Content analysis can cope with large volumes of data; using electronic databases and

    other previously inaccessible data sources helps the researcher be able to work within

    diverse scholarly disciplines (p. 40-42).

Utilizing content analysis in our current electronic age is a relevant way to track ideas

and inferences that are written specifically in or hidden in text (Kripendorff, 2004). Analysis of

text documents allows the researcher to collect narrative data in order to discover patterns and

themes during the study (Altheide, 1987). Through the process of content analysis, the researcher creates a context where documents are examined, inferences are made from the data, and research questions can then be addressed (Kripendorff, 2004). Content analysis is also used in cases where there are very few or no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon (Krippendorff, 1980), which is certainly true in regard to previous research on the operations and effectiveness of school boards.

Tracking of documents done in the beginning of the research provides connections about how things have occurred, and this leads the researcher to the search for valid documents and records to obtain inferences then from specific content (Garman, 1982). In this case the researcher was led to explicit school board meeting minutes and Honor Board nomination packets of awarded school boards that showed individual procedures and actions of school boards during the past 10 years, and these documents, along with other media articles listed on district's websites or found through a basic search of the names of the 10 school districts regarding these respective school boards, were coded and categorized according to the elements of institutional theory.

As indicated by Marsh and White (2006), using a content analysis methodology can be interpreted based on a researcher's particular objectives and goals. Krippendorff (2004) asserts that these analytical constructs may be developed based on existing theories or practices, previous experience or expertise. This style of methodology requires an extensive amount of time to sift through all of the documents, but with the constant flow of information available now on public and specific websites, the value of content analysis has naturally increased (Mayring, 2000). A content analysis of source material in this case described pertinent aspects of the

institutionalized routines, procedures, and operations of five specific north Texas school district's Board of Trustees.

The analysis of documents, general content analysis, is a technique that can be used in education evaluation which relies heavily upon a variety of written materials for data, insights, and inferences about programs or events (Garman, 1982). The most important factor in the selection of documents for analysis is that the data provide useful evidence for answering the research questions and relate to any theoretical frame or existing literature. Even though there are large numbers of documents and records which public school systems produce and that are available to evaluators as public record, document analysis remains a relatively underutilized approach in educational settings (Garman, 1982).

In previous educational studies involving school board members' perceptions through the use of surveys and interviews, the findings included researchers who questioned the reliability of the results because the responses were purely politically correct answers (Richardson 2009, Terrier, 2010). By using content analysis of the documents involved, the results may have a lower likelihood of showing this same unreliability based on the perceptions of the subjects. In the current study the researcher is able to use this type of analysis to, just as the name suggests, to focus on the content of the different types of data provided in the corresponding documents. Through this methodology the researcher was able to use analytical practices, from the district documents as well as from the elements of institutional theory. Next, the researcher utilized the rules of inference, by identifying patterns of repetitive topics and themes, to move from the analysis of text in the distinct documents to address the answers to the research questions (Marsh & White, 2006).

Data Collection

The researcher began collecting data by creating a database of about 50 comparable

school districts across Texas, many also belonging to the other three largest regions in the state.

This database contained information taken from the Texas Association of School Administrators

website, Texas Education Agency website, and websites of each individual school district. The

information included: Honor or Outstanding school board status, size of school district

(including total students served), regional Education Service Center (ESC) to which the district

belonged, Texas Education Agency accountability ratings (including the rating the year of the

Honor board award), superintendent terms, school board member make up and terms, strategic

planning in the districts, and education foundation membership.

The researcher then narrowed the scope of the study down to include five honored school

boards and districts in the database that belonged to Region 10 or Region 11 (as the school

boards from these two regions have historically been the most awarded), and those in which the

Honor Board nomination packets were available for the study (either available on the website or

sent to the researcher by the administration of the district). Then, five additional districts with

similar demographics were selected whose school boards have never received an honor from the

Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), these were also chosen from Regions 10

and 11 with one necessary exception (see Table 3.1). Narrowing the focus further to only two

regions also helped the researcher study districts that have had training from the same Regional

Education Service Centers, thereby taking out any possibility that different types of state-

required training could have any impact when comparing districts.

Data collection and analysis occurred almost concurrently in this case, as the analysis of

the content was done immediately after the individual documents were deemed appropriate for

the study. Documents relevant to this type of analysis can include minutes of meetings, organizational charts, staff reports, and memoranda (Owen, 2014). Yin (2003) concurs with using this type of documentation as well as these modes of communication: (a) agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events; (b) administrative documents, proposals, and other internal documents; (c) formal studies or evaluations and (d) other articles appearing in the mass media. The following specific types of documents were chosen to analyze throughout this study: (a) School board meeting minutes; (b) guidelines, publications, and regulations from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Association of School Boards; and (c) other literature that allowed the researcher to glean the intricacies of the particular district school boards that were examined.

School board meetings are the setting where official school district actions take place, and a public record of these meetings is available. Yin (2003) concurs with using this type of documentation as well as these modes of communication: (a) agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events; (b) administrative documents, proposals, and other internal documents; (c) formal studies or evaluations and (d) other articles appearing in the mass media. Michel, 1973). Content analysis as a proper research technique and is logical considering board meetings must be open to the public, and the minutes recorded there are at the root of decision making for the school system; additionally, they are official legal documents (Kripendorff, 2004). Any school board meeting across the state of Texas must adhere to a few legal requirements, coming from the Open Meetings Act, as well as guidelines coming directly from the Texas Association of School Boards or the Texas Education Agency. The provisions spelled out in the Open Meeting Acts are very specific, for example, keeping appropriate minutes:

During all meetings, minutes of the meeting must be kept, and certain rules must be

followed when holding an executive session. A governing body must either keep minutes

or make a tape recording of every open meeting. The minutes or tape recording of an

open meeting are open to the public and must be available for inspection or copying

(Open Meeting Acts Handbook, 2014, p. 55).

As of January 2016 the state law of Texas also requires all school districts serving more

than 10,000 students to record all school board meetings both in audio and video: These videos

must also be posted online on the respective districts' websites. This new law will affect more

than 100 districts across the state, including 60% of those involved in this study (Light, 2016).

There were three districts profiled during this study that already use video and post current

school board meetings on the district websites, and this added a data source for the researcher to

use. I reviewed numerous documents and artifacts from each district including district strategic

and improvement plans, program descriptions, policies, local and state student and performance

data, and other information accessible through the district's website. In addition, I investigated

local and statewide media reports and publications to provide additional local and state context

when available.

The documents collected throughout this study included the laws and regulations, the

most up to date or newest version when possible, from the websites of the Texas Education

Agency, the Texas Association of School Boards, and Texas Education and Administrative

Codes. The Honor Board nomination packets, submitted to Regions Ten or Eleven and to TASA

were collected from each school district's website, or if not available the researcher contacted the

communications department of the districts and asked them to provide the documents for the

study. School board minutes, recorded precisely during the corresponding year of each district's

Honor Board award were examined as well as any media articles containing information about the procedures or operations of the school boards from 2005-2015.

Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher began by creating a database of the 56 school districts that have been voted as an Honor or Outstanding school board during the past 10 years. This database included descriptive statistics of these honored school districts, including: (a) size, (b) Texas Education Agency rating, (c) Title I status, and (d) information on the makeup of the trustees and school board membership. In order to examine the stated problem, that effective school boards' institutionalized procedures look different from that of less effective boards, the researcher needed to compare some data in the form of the actual work the school board was doing that was evidenced within the archives of school board meeting minutes. Minutes from these districts, dated during the corresponding time frame, were analyzed and coded according to Scott's three elements of institutional theory. Then an analysis of school board meeting minutes from the 5 other school districts was applied in order to compare the procedures and operations of both sets of districts through the lens of institutional theory. During the data collection phase of the study these three pillars of institutional theory were coded as they were used in the context of school board meeting minutes, for example: (a) discussing new legislation would be considered a regulatory element; (b) networks and teacher certification are normative, and (c) mimicking a program used by another district would be a cultural-cognitive element.

In addition, the researcher analyzed some specific content data from actual school board meeting minutes in order to break down board action items into the three elements of Scott's institutional theory: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. Other documents such as newspaper articles, or school website articles dealing with school board elections and statistics,

were analyzed as well. School board meeting minutes from the 10 boards were pulled from school district websites dating back to include explicitly the year that the district earned the Honor or Outstanding board award. In addition, the researcher collected and analyzed for specific content, newspaper and website articles dealing with the specifics of school board activities and elections to examine these through the lens of institutional theory, and then determined patterns and themes. For the school boards in Regions 10 and 11 who have received the award of Honor or Outstanding school board in Texas another set of documents exists that were included here, and that is the actual TASA Honor Board nomination packet, written by the superintendent of the respective district and submitted originally to the regional Education Service Center in either Region 10 or 11.

Documents were reviewed, coded, and sorted as to how much the elements of institutional theory are being executed by the respective school boards that can be considered outstanding and those which are not deemed as successful or effective. The researcher began coding by charting the specific educational items according to Scott's three pillars (as in Table 2.2), and then went through the monthly school board meeting minutes (and videos when available for observation) and TASA nomination packets color coding each action item listed in the documents. Then these action items were documented by the researcher (as in the raw data listed in Appendix C) for each particular school board into the categories of the three pillars, and then a total count of action items (as well as the percentage of each category according to the items) were reported at the bottom of the data charts for each of the 10 school boards.

The content analysis of the documents allowed the researcher to review literature describing the vision, goals, operations, and activities pertaining to the 10 school boards in the study. By using content analysis, reliability and validity were increased, as content analysis

minimizes interviewer and subject biases (Krippendorff, 1989). Other studies that used other qualitative methods such as interviews have shown that bias in the subjects may come forward in survey and interview responses (Terrier, 2010). By looking at an institution's communication, habits, and routines, which can be done with a thorough content analysis of the work of a school board, inferences, and conclusions can be formed as patterns emerge (Krippendorff, 2004). And although researcher bias may be present during the study since the analysis does include inferences, content analysis can at least keep the tendencies of subject bias from affecting the study (Krippendorff, 2004).

In order to add another level of reliability into this institutional content analysis the researcher also spent time studying the history and demographics of each school district and school board used to make up the study of outstanding school boards. The history of an institution in creating its practices is an important aspect of content analysis research (Krippendorff, 1989). By creating a small database of sorts with the demographics, similarities, and differences of both outstanding school boards and boards who have not been as successful, the researcher adds to the validity of the conclusions that can be drawn through the analysis.

According to Creswell (2007), the first step of this type of data analysis is to organize the data. Once the sample population (10 school boards) had been chosen, I began collecting data by finding and printing school board minutes from the individual school district websites from the months of the respective year(s) the Honor Boards, and corresponding boards, were awarded. If video was available on the websites, it was also watched and analyzed. A folder for each particular district, both awarded and non-awarded, was created to allow for easy and repetitive access and the nomination packets of each of the Honor Boards were added to those specific folders. Once the nomination packets and board meeting minutes were obtained, the data was

organized and analyzed for content within the school board meeting details. This process included reading through months of recorded meeting minutes, as well as watching video of the actual board meetings multiple times, looking for the specific areas defined by Scott as the pillars of institutional theory (Scott, 2004). I looked for major activities, operations, and actions of the school boards that fit into one of the three categories: Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive.

Weber (1990) points out that content analysis is a useful technique to make valid inferences from text, and for discovering and describing the focus of a group or institution. Again this analysis included categorizing the narrative and factual information in these documents into the elements of institutional theory: Regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces. Where the data is concerned, using categories, which are the center of the analysis, utilizing qualitative content analysis allows for combining both qualitative and quantitative forms of data (Mayring, 2000). The specific practices and procedures carried out by each school board body were coded and categorized into one of these three elements, and then the data included in each area was compared later in the analysis among complementary effective and non-effective boards. A process of a priori coding was completed by categorizing according to the theory guiding the study. Weber (1990) described a priori coding as a process of applying pre-determined categories to the data. These categories are based on a particular theory, in this case institutional theory, and were established prior to the analysis.

Initial codes were created during the course of data collection and used to analyze and answer research questions regarding institutionalized procedures of various school boards. Each school board action item presented in the board meeting minutes was color coded according to the priori coding scheme of the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of

institutional theory. The reasoning for this particular brand of coding and categorizing was used by the researcher using the following logic: Qualitative research that uses theory, or new institutionalism, as an analytical framework provides practitioners, researchers, and policy makers with valuable information related to school districts contribution to educational opportunities (Rorrer, 2001). Applying this style of analysis allowed for the researcher to see how often these institutional pillars are actually active in the procedures and activities of outstanding school boards, in relation to the frequency of the elements with the five non awarded boards, adding a quantitative step in the analysis (Mayring, 2000).

Before reading through the TASA Honor Board nomination packets I created a table of how the three pillars of institutional theory could be applied to the ten areas of criteria for the award (See Appendix B). A table can be used to help the reader visualize the data (Creswell, 2007), and beginning with this table helped the researcher see the content categories within the nomination packets more clearly since this type of data contained even more information than did the meeting minutes. As the data were read and examined multiple times, the researcher began early categorization with color coding of key words and events, according to the examples Scott (2004) used of the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive aspects of institutional theory. In this way the process of data collection and data analysis occurred almost simultaneously, with the analysis happening immediately after the data was collected and at times along with collection.

Data Relevant to Research Questions

Research question 1 asks: What are the operations and procedures of outstanding school boards? In order to answer this question, data built from descriptive resources such as school board meeting minutes, school board voting results (to check for unanimous decisions), and

nomination packets sent in by school boards who have been voted outstanding in the state of

Texas (which are available online) needed to be obtained. Additional information was taken,

from the Texas Association of School Boards *Inventory of Effective School Boards, Effective*

School Board Audit, and from the list of criteria used in voting for outstanding School Boards

from the Texas Association of School Administrators and TASB websites, in order to obtain

additional input regarding what these large agencies deem as essential to the success of school

boards.

Documents were reviewed from five specific school district websites, local newspapers,

state agency publications, specific school board minutes, and Honor Board nomination packets

submitted to local educational service centers in Regions 10 and 11, and the Texas Association

of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards for consideration. The school

boards examined in this study, that were awarded as Honor Boards in the years 2005-2015, have

a clear picture of understanding of the formalization in which their work involves, and have

clearly defined procedures for accomplishing that work (TASB, 2011). The practices and

actions of these particular boards can be analyzed and summarized through the content

examination provided in this study. In this case, the researcher sifted through the following

documents to address this research question: (a) Seven to ten recorded school board meeting

minutes for each of the five school boards from the corresponding years of their Honor Board

award, (b) eight newspaper or media articles found on the districts' websites or in state

publications, (c) three separate articles written by members of TASB to precisely show the

characteristics the association deems visible in an effective school board, and (d) the six Honor

Board nomination packets (access was given to two definitive year's submissions from one of

the five districts) submitted to the local service centers and TASA during the years the districts

received the award of Honor or Outstanding School Board in Texas. In order to have a clear picture of the data from each of the individual five Honor Boards, the nomination packets had to be reviewed several times, and highlight patterns of activities that took place at multiple meetings, certain topics that were discussed during the majority of the meetings, and actions that the boards and superintendents themselves drew attention to by mentioning specifically in the packets. Once these patterns were established I began tracking how many times particular actions, topics, or operations were discussed within the nomination packets by keeping a running list, color coded by individual district.

Research question 2 asked: How well do Scott's pillars of institutionalization: Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive, explain the operations and procedures of these boards? Data was needed from school board meeting minutes from the specific school districts I looked at explicitly from Regions 10 and 11, as well as from any other documents, or newspaper articles written about any of these school boards. These documents were all categorized and analyzed by content using the three elements of institutional theory: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. It was useful to look at how much time was spent in each of these areas for an effective and non-effective school board body.

Another set of documents that had to be analyzed by content, and categorized by the three institutional elements, were the actual nomination packets used by superintendents and school boards during the nomination process of electing Honor Boards in each region of Texas, these packets were originally submitted to the respective Regional Education Service Centers and then sent onto TASA (TASB, n.d.). These documents were available on each school district's website, or were submitted to the researcher by the district itself, and provided a clearer and more concise picture of the actual operations and procedures of the school boards who have

been in the running for this honor at least once, in some cases more, over the past decade. The

TASA School Board Awards program uses the following criteria in choosing the Outstanding

school board each year: (a) Functions as a policy-making body, (b) adherence to adopted board

policies, (c) support for educational performance in accordance with state-established standards,

(d) support for educational improvement projects, (e) commitment to a code of ethics, (f)

provision of financial support for the school system, (g) participation in workshops and other

performance improvement programs, (h) placement of the welfare of children served by the

school system above personal or political motives, (i) public relations efforts, including

community awareness, and (j) maintenance of harmonious and supportive relationships among

board members (TASB, n.d.). This criteria list is important to adhere to for school boards hoping

to obtain an award from TASA. Gurecky (2004) states, "Almost as important as identifying your

school board as outstanding is the task of studying TASA's list of criteria and making certain

each one can be met without fail" (p. 50). The specific criteria and examples used in each

individual school board's samples were also categorized within the three elements of

institutionalization, for example: evidence of efforts by a school board to obtain community

input in decision making would be considered networking, a normative feature of institutional

theory (Scott, 2004).

The technique of content analysis was used to categorize some continuously used

procedures of these school boards into the three pillars of institutional theory. Part of what makes

this technique meaningful and relevant is its reliance on coding and categorizing of the specific

type of data the researcher is recording (Scott, 2004). Utilizing content analysis involves a

category system, and by using this system, the aspects, filtered from the literature, are defined

(Krippendorff, 1980). The researcher then categorized the information from school board

minutes, articles, and nomination packets into the categories based on the three elements of institutionalization: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. I followed the breakdown given by the research of Scott to code each individual example of a procedure, operation, or action of the school boards with one of these three elements.

Although this became a lengthy process, working in this way allowed the procedure of formulating the categories derived from the theoretical background and research questions in connection with the text (Mayring, 2000). In this manner, the researcher was able to analyze multiple texts written in different circumstances such as newspaper and media articles and make inferences about the categorical procedures and routines of school boards by examining the explicit school board minutes outlining their activities, actions, operational guidelines, and rulings. It was also important for the researcher to utilize all three of Scott's pillars here as many regulative aspects affecting education in laws and sanctions in the educational realm come in the form of an unfunded mandates, such as parts of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001; and dealing with such mandates require interpretations and processes that actually cross into the normative and cultural-cognitive arena not just the coercive (Scott, 2008).

Research question 3 asks: How useful is institutional theory in understanding what makes a school board "outstanding" in comparison to other non-awarded school boards? To answer this, the differences between the institutionalized practices of some "outstanding" school boards in Texas (operationalized as regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces) and boards who do not share that honor needed to be explored. The documents describing school board demographics and election statistics were also used to see what differences in characteristics each board had as well as what variables may have not been institutionalized.

The categories from content analysis were used to compare the organizational practices of TASA Honor Boards to the practices of the comparable boards who have not been awarded. Again the individual district documentation analyzed here included: (a) School board meeting minutes, (b) articles written about the five awarded districts, and (c) the TASA Honor Board nomination packets sent in to the Regional ESCs and to TASA after that. In regard to this particular research, the categories have already been established, based on institutional theory, and the a priori coding could be applied to the data (Weber, 1990). The researcher then was able to look at institutional facets in the procedures to see if there were any differences among these boards in regard to their operations, policies, and practices. Through the inferences that could be made based on the content, the researcher had the opportunity to determine how well viewing through the lens of this theory was impacting school board operations.

Institutional theorists like Scott, see institutional theory as being the most productive lens to analyze organizations within modern society (Scott, 2013). The elements of this theory also open up exploration of specific practices, such as the Texas Association of Administrators choosing the Outstanding school board each year, having a normative influence for example on the procedures of these awarded school boards by making the criteria for Honor Boards public information. This section of analysis brought in the content from documents regarding the non-awarded school boards, limited to articles written about the corresponding districts and explicit school board meeting minutes since none of these boards had a nomination packet associated with winning an award.

The elements of institutionalization: regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive may not be aligned in certain circumstances, and one at times may be undermining the effects of the other (Scott, 2004). Therefore, by applying the theory in this setting, virtually all school boards would

be immersed in some element(s) of institutional theory at one time or another, but a balance of the three elements would be taking place in the operations of an Honor or Outstanding board. Rorrer (2001) examined the influence of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements on different school districts and described actual strategies district leaders used to negotiate among the three pillars in order to maintain institutional legitimacy for the districts. Simply put, the amount and percentage of time school boards spend in school board meetings actually discussing policy related decisions and taking action on items in each monthly meeting gives a measurement of how involved the boards are with regard to the institution of the school district (Land, 2002).

Therefore, an inference may be centered around a balance of these elements or pillars in the case of Honor Boards and an imbalance of the pillars in other less effective districts that may spend too much time on other things, such as political happenings in the area that could be bogging down the school boards. Working within the elements of institutional theory increases reputation, prominence, and acceptability (Scott, 2004). As the researcher attempted to address this aspect, which would not be possible without using this institutional lens, the importance of reputation also was prominent with outstanding boards, and that is why there is typically a great deal of documentation on each school district website of the Honor Boards publicizing their school board's award.

Research question 4 asks: What other realities about outstanding school boards, in comparison to less exemplary boards, were revealed during this study? The researcher used the content analysis findings from all the school board documents to determine what other trends or themes and patterns emerged from the exploration of these records. The most crucial part of the data analyzed here was from the examination of the school boards that have never received an

Honor Board award. Through the entire analysis done of the contents of these various

documents, the researcher was able to make assumptions and conclusions about the most

noticeable data that appeared. All of these inferences went into the research notes and were

accessed to address this reflective question during and after analysis. For example, the researcher

can see in this instance how Oliver (1991) and the research which hypothesized that actors are

the ones who are holding the norms in an institution were of specific value, and this could be

impacting certain school boards or even the superintendents as actors who are part of the

nomination process.

Research Criteria

Trustworthiness is a way to ensure findings are credible (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation

was achieved by analyzing multiple nomination packets from the five Honor Boards districts, by

examining two distinct nomination packets from different years from the same district, and also

by conducting an interview with the Region 10 Executive Director about the nomination and

award process itself. The purpose of triangulation in document analysis is to verify the

authenticity of the document itself or the information within it, or cross referencing with other

documents (Garman, 1982). This was done in this study by analyzing the minutes of more than

fifty school board meetings and cross referencing that information with the explicit contents of

the TASA Honor Board nomination packets.

Further, validity and reliability were established through the use of multiple sources of

evidence listed above, because this can provide various examples of the same phenomenon (Yin,

2003). The TASA Honor Board nomination packets sent in by the districts are written to make

these particular school districts look successful, but the focus on institutional aspects explicitly

keeps the accuracy of the information intact in this case. A complete list of the various

documents reviewed by the researcher during the data analysis phase using content analysis,

including the board meeting minutes, was created as well (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Data Analysis Table

Questions	Data Needs	Data Sources	Data Collection	Data Analysis
What are the operations and procedures of honor/ outstanding school boards?	School board meetings Review Document Analysis Nomination packets used for Honor Boards	TEA district data TASB guidelines & publications TASA criteria for selecting honor boards Interview -Region 10 director School Board meeting minutes Nomination packets Media articles District websites	Coding of school board action items (in board minutes and nomination packets) according to pillars of Institutional Theory Interview notes	Content Analysis with coding according to pillars of Institutional Theory Look for patterns & write down inferences
How well do Scott's pillars of Institutional Theory, regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, explain the operations and procedures of these boards?	School board meetings Review Document Analysis Nomination packets used for Honor Boards	TEA district data TASB guidelines & publications TASA criteria for selecting honor boards School Board meeting minutes Nomination packets Media articles District websites	Coding of school board action items (in board minutes and nomination packets) according to pillars of Institutional Theory Interview notes	Content Analysis with coding according to pillars of Institutional Theory Look for patterns & write down inferences
How useful is Institutional Theory in understanding what makes a school board outstanding, as compared to other non-awarded school boards?	School board meetings Review Document Analysis Nomination packets used for Honor Boards	TEA district data, TASB guidelines and publications TASA criteria for selecting honor boards School Board meeting minutes Nomination packets Media articles District websites	Coding of school board action items (in board minutes and nomination packets) according to pillars of Institutional Theory Interview notes	Content Analysis with coding according to pillars of Institutional Theory Look for patterns & write down inferences

| What other realities about outstanding school boards, in comparison to less exemplary boards, were revealed during this study? | School board meetings Review Document Analysis Nomination packets used for Honor Boards | TEA district data TASB guidelines and publications TASA criteria for selecting honor boards School Board meeting minutes Nomination packets Media articles District websites | Coding of school board action items (in board minutes and nomination packets) according to pillars of Institutional Theory Interview notes | Content Analysis with coding according to pillars of Institutional Theory Look for patterns & write down inferences |

Summary

The researcher reviewed state data and educational literature of a large number of school districts to narrow down this study to include the selection of ten specific school boards. To ensure confidentiality, all district and school names were changed and all research materials were kept secure throughout the study. To gain the data needed for this study, school board documents including minutes, agendas, articles, and TASA honor board nomination packets were all reviewed. All research documents analyzed were available to the public, or willingly surrendered for investigation in this study. The district websites provided the school board minutes and agendas from the corresponding years, and the TEA, TASA, and TASB websites provided information on the mandatory training and practices of all Texas school boards. I employed a content analysis methodology in order to gather and categorize data from districts who have received the prestigious Honor Board award for school boards as well as from districts who have never been awarded, but have similar characteristics to those that have been. Data for this study were collected through content analysis, and the data collected included some quantitative data in the form of district demographics as well as qualitative data in the form of rich, thick description of district school boards and their actions and procedures.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter is organized into four parts. Data analysis and results are presented as they answered each of the four research questions, including trends from the content analysis for institutional categories for each individual school board broken down and reported in the first four sections. School board meeting minutes from a compilation of regular and specially called meetings during the specific years the Honor boards were awarded were examined and analyzed to answer these questions, along with school board meeting minutes from the comparable school districts from the corresponding years. Then the final section in the chapter with regard to the last research question presents an overall summary of the findings of the study, as common themes then began to come forth from the data as I identified patterns that could be seen in the content of multiple board meetings among the different school districts.

Each categorical section consists of three parts. Each major school board activity evidenced in the meeting minutes is listed under the appropriate pillar of institutional theory: Regulative, Normative, or Cultural-Cognitive, based on the breakdown of these facets from Scott's (2004) theoretical research. Finally, similarities among these categories, or any subcategories therein based on the trends and inferences, are reported based on the details of the analysis of the particular districts.

A comprehensive description of the procedures of TASA Honor Boards was required to address *Research question 1*: What are the operations and procedures of outstanding school boards? The majority of the data came from the analysis of the six TASA Honor Board nomination packets, and the researcher also analyzed the monthly school board meeting minutes to corroborate the action items presented in the nomination packets. In the case of three of the five Honor Boards there were also videos of the school board meetings available online from the

corresponding years of the respective boards' awards. Again, with the overarching assumption that Honor Boards can be considered outstanding or effective boards, topics discussed within the nomination packets and action items cited in the school board meeting minutes point to specific procedures that these boards use to function. The operating procedures, which emerged from the data, can be put into the following subcategories, as these topics were seen in greater frequency inside the school board meeting minutes of the Honor Boards more so than in those of the comparable boards.

Networks/Partnerships. All five Honor Boards spent time in joint meetings, regularly called meetings or specially called ones with their respective city management, mayor, city council, and Chamber of Commerce. These ties with the community, along with those of local businesses, hospitals, and large corporations were explicitly referenced in the nomination packets as evidence of partnerships that are built purposefully to show support of the decisions that the school boards were making throughout the year examined. These five districts have also built partnerships with area colleges, nearby community college programs, with universities, or with both types of post high school educational and certification programs. The value of these postsecondary partnerships are aligned specifically in both the school board meeting minutes and the Honor Board nomination packets to overall student success and achievement, through dual credit programs, internship opportunities, and Career and Technology Education support. All five of the Honor Boards also have an Education Foundation, which is referenced multiple times in the board meeting minutes, and this is evidence of a network connection with the external community that the comparable boards do not all show.

The associations mentioned as influential networks in all five nomination packets and board meeting minutes were: (a) Regional Education Service Centers, (b) the Texas Association

of School Boards, (c) the Texas Association of School Administrators, and (d) the North Texas Association of School Boards. These networking entities appear less frequently in the board minutes of the five comparable boards, which can be evidence that these associations assist boards on a path to success. Another argument could be that these external agencies have a stake in these awards, and the effect of such networking is that certain school boards become more familiar with the criteria used for Outstanding Board processes. Using the logic of either argument, in this case leads to a path of an award at minimum, which still propels Honor Boards ahead of non-awarded boards in a general sense.

Voting Tendencies. This area surfaced when analyzing the meeting details listed in the Honor Board meeting minutes. The researcher examined how many action items had unanimous approvals and how many votes were not unanimous or not supported by all members of the board. Part of the discussion about voting also came from referencing operating procedures: three of these Honor Boards listed discussion in closed/executive session before taking a vote as a specific part of Board Operating Procedures. The superintendent for Honor Board #1 made it a point in the nomination packet, and cross referenced by the researcher in board meeting minutes, to explain that in both years of receiving this award that only one vote all year was not unanimous, but that the board member who voted against the rest of the team explained their reasoning in a closed session before a vote was cast, and that all seven board members got completely "behind the decision of the board to present a united show of support" once the vote had been taken during open session. This practice shows a deliberate recognition and focus on procedures by Honor Boards, as well as a commitment to work through differences which are bound to come up before the public discourse and voting part of board meetings.

Budget/Finances. This topic was mentioned throughout all the board meeting minutes for each district, seeing as approving the school district's budget is one of the actions a school board must take every year according to TASB policy. The specific of each community's tax base also was recorded multiple times if the subject discussed in the board meetings were: bond elections, tax ratification elections, or updating facilities. All five honor boards also made it a point to include on their websites as well as in the nomination packets that each received a Superior rating from the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST), the financial auditing program, every year these ratings have been available. There was only one such reference, to the FIRST rating, within the board minutes of the comparable boards.

Along with the specifics listed in the budget discussion, there was reference to bond packages, voting, and facilities maintenance throughout the data on all five honor board districts. On average, examining just these five districts, bonds had been passed approximately every four years. In three of the five districts a bond in fact had just been passed within two years of the Honor Board recognition. Facilities was included under this same subcategory because specific facility needs, gains, or updates/renovations were mentioned 100% of the time that bonds were discussed by the board in each district. Some of these included stadiums, science labs, new buildings, and even new campuses.

Training. There is specific training that is required of school board members in Texas every year, based on the Texas Education Code (TEC 11.159). The framework for training created by the State Board of Education must be posted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website and given by the president of each board of trustees to all current board members and the superintendent. No matter the size or location of the district, this training is required and the entities that provide the training are listed as well (TEA, n.d.). In regard to the institutional side, theorists (e.g. Scott, 2013) stress the need for entities to embed processes with routines such as training and refresher courses. Adherence to this process

is evident in the case of Honor Boards here in Texas. Some specific training listed explicitly in the five Honor Boards' meeting minutes involves Baldridge continuous improvement processes for three of the five awarded boards. In a previous study involving this topic, the administrator explained that the effectiveness of any continuous improvement process is directly related to the degree to which it is institutionalized (Rorrer, 2001).

The topic of training was listed frequently within the operating procedures of the five Honor Boards involved in this study. Members of all five Honor boards described training that had been attended by trustees over the year(s) evident in both their meeting minutes and nomination packets within the following detailed subcategories of entities who conducted the trainings: (a) TASB, (b) Team of Eight, (c) NSBA and TASB conferences and conventions, and (d) Regional Education Service Centers. Further, as one of the specific criteria examined for Honor Board awards, all five districts described in detail the amount of training hours their board members obtained that were over and above what is required under TASB policy. Some examples of required training for boards of trustees, taken from the Texas Education Agency (n.d.) include: (a) team building sessions (b) legislative updates (c) open meetings training (d) public information training (e) orientation to the Texas Education Code (f) continuing education training based on the *Framework for school board development* needs assessment.

It is evident in state policy and regulations that the required training that school board members, both new and experienced, is spelled out explicitly and that it is also a basic annual training. The fact that Honor Boards are making a purposeful effort to attend trainings that are voluntary emphasizes a commitment to the success of their school districts. The fact that participation in these trainings becomes a matter of public record, both through the details of board meeting minutes and from potential local media articles, demonstrates that this practice is crucial to a board's success.

Honor Boards are able to demonstrate how they have institutionalized their procedures and operations through any one of the 10 criteria to be nominated as a TASA Honor Board. As part of Criteria 8: Putting the welfare of the district's children above personal motives, Honor Board #2 presented an example of a trustee resigning once their child was about to marry a teacher in the district. His action showed there was no question of nepotism involved and allowed the teacher to remain in the district. This was not just a random event that was brought up for the purpose of the nomination packet, but can be found in the minutes of a February board meeting listed in the data collection section. Honor Board #3 references a similar experience in which the child of a trustee had alcohol in their vehicle on the high school campus, and the student was treated with the same zero tolerance policy as other students. The trustee "did not ask for special favors," illustrating that she placed the welfare of the district coming before any personal motives.

School board meeting minutes and the TASA Honor Board nomination packets from all 5 Honor Board districts were scrutinized completely to address *research question 2*: How well do Scott's pillars of institutional theory: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, explain the operations and procedures of these boards? The extension of the data analyzed from the first question to answer research question number 2 including the distribution of topics and action items from these boards into the three pillars of institutional theory. Table 4.2 shows some specific actions and practices, unique to only the Honor Boards in this study, which were used by the superintendent to highlight the efficiency of their school boards as part of the TASA Honor Board nomination packets. The researcher was able to put these explicit examples into the categories of Scott's pillars, and this allowed the differences in these action items to be compared to the other five non-awarded boards to answer research question 3 as well.

Table 4.1

Action items in Honor Board Nomination Packets coded into pillars of institutionalization

Honor Board	Regulative Pillar	Normative Pillar	Cultural-Cognitive Pillar
Honor Board #1	District Policy: Revise the policy and procedures handbook every 3 years.	Associations trustees belong to: TASB Board of Directors, North Texas Area Association of School Boards, Joint Tax Office Board, NSBA Hispanic Caucus, TASB Risk Management Board, Council for Urban Boards of Education, UIL Medical Advisory Board	District initiative: K-12 initiative to grow college readiness into the culture and focus students all way down to Kindergarten on the reality of post-secondary education
Honor Board #2	Board Operating Guidelines were specifically created and are updated every July, these outline issues the trustees might face when carrying out policies. New policy was written and created that specifically states the Board will focus on the efficiency & effectiveness of Board meetings.	Participated in Baldrige continuous improvement training, went to a Team of Eight training conducted by a continuous improvement consultant, and as a part of this process the board has elected to go through a TASB Board Audit twice to gain information from an external source regarding the efficiency of the board's systems and practices.	District Community Services program: Adult education for GED certificate or ESL classes, after-school child care, and a variety of recreational activities for both students and adults
Honor Board #3	District's largest bond proposal ever was approved by voters	District Accolades: TASB Superintendent of the Year, Region 11 Teacher of the Year, Wal-Mart Teacher of the Year. Partnership with Texas Christian University to provide an intensive professional development "school" for college students before student teaching	Professional development academy occurs every August, topics are based on parent surveys & input and staff member surveys and input

| Honor Board #4 | Tax Ratification Election which led to a 3-3.5% salary increase for all district employees | Led initiative for Region 10 service center, Community and Student Engagement Accountability System: this process created subcommittees in areas of accountability that were outside of test scores. Education Foundation partners which include $6 million in corporate sponsorships | School Options: eSchool program, high school courses are taken online and students work through curriculum independently, since 2001- 30,000 students have been served through the program |
| Honor Board #5 | Finalizing the Board Operating Procedures for the district created to outline and explain guidelines for the trustees to follow | Changed local appraisal tool and moved over to PDAS, state adopted appraisal system for consistency. PLCs (professional learning communities) are the expected "norm" in this district | Ninth grade programs: student may attend afternoon sessions at the non-traditional high school/ Freshmen survival program full day in August committed to only 9th graders on campus for a day |

School board meeting minutes from all 10 school districts were analyzed equally to address *research question 3*: How useful is institutional theory in understanding what makes a school board outstanding, as compared to other non-awarded school boards? To present the data in this section, a brief summary of action items discussed in board meetings for each Honor Board and their specific comparable district are given, and then the patterns and themes that emerged in regard to the three pillars of institutional theory are lined out.

Honor Board #1. During each board meeting the executive session was held at the beginning of the meeting. The board president controlled the conversation of the meeting the majority of the time. After the board returned to the regular meeting time, the outline and order of the meeting took place in the same order each time. At each meeting two Apple Corps teachers were recognized from various campuses in the district and the teachers gave a brief speech, and then student recognitions were provided (athletics, choir, band, UIL, etc). The

meeting then continued with consent agenda, old business, new business, and two chances for audience input. During the Honor Board nominated school years of 2007 and 2013, there was only one vote the whole year each time that was not unanimous. One instance was regarding replacing the scoreboard in the football stadium and exact words of the trustee were, "I think I made my point clear in the closed session but I don't disagree with the decision just the timing." The other year (2007) in the description contained in the nomination packet there was also only one non-unanimous vote and it was about dress code/uniforms and this time the board member's comment was, "I agree with the dress code decision; I just feel it's my duty to speak for the parent concern as well". Both times as soon as the vote was over both dissenting board members supported the board's decision completely and were able to present a united front on behalf of the school board to the public.

There were several large nationally recognized programs the district was involved in and were mentioned explicitly in the board minutes as well as the nomination packets: (a) Baldridge continuous improvement, (b) AVID for a diverse population of students, and (c) Strategic Planning to look to future goals as well. The board cancelled a Board election in 2013, because the two open seats (in which two trustees were up for reelection in) were running unopposed and the inference would be that the large community was very comfortable with those members continuing to serve that school district.

Board #6. The board minutes were available online for this district, as well as on video just as Honor Board #1 were. The board president was not the main speaker, and there were commonly close to 10 individuals who spoke an equal amount of time and presented information during the meetings. The operationalized procedure in this district appeared as such: Choose a subject on the agenda each time and designate an assistant superintendent, of which there are

five, or a Director (i.e. of curriculum) to speak on that particular item so each has a chance to speak at the board meetings.

Honor Board #2. The researcher had access to monthly school board minutes for the 2009 school year, as well as the Honor Board nomination packet for the analysis of this board. This school board has made an effort to make appearances at school functions, and this can be seen as trustees make a point to attend many events, to show support for the district, while still managing to leave day to day school decisions to school administration. The board has gone through multiple Baldridge continuous improvement trainings. Strategic planning was on several agenda, as well as long range goals for the betterment of the district, even though the district has shown much success in relation to student performance. There did not appear to be many personal or political agendas from the trustees, but evidence of working together among the board through additional trainings and workshops attended as a corporate body. There even happened to be the resignation of a board member during this awarded year to avoid nepotism as well, which is a good example of putting the needs of the district above other motives.

Board #7. The researcher examined the 2009 school year monthly board meeting minutes for this district. Many of the meetings from this school board were joint meetings with city and town officials, with discussion on issues such as air quality and chemicals harming the community. This resulted to the majority of action items falling into the cultural-cognitive pillar. The discussions centered around the issues and how to keep any negative media stories from getting out in the community as well, but these conversations did not transform into action items in this area.

Honor Board #3. The researcher went back ten years to analyze this particular board for the corresponding year of the Honor Board award, board meeting minutes were used as well as

the nomination packet. This board had a superintendent who had been named Superintendent of the Year for Texas the year before the board was named an Honor Board in 2006. The superintendent was also a part some major networks, such as Women's leadership groups as well as multiple civic groups. The board meetings included the following discussions: Recognition for teachers and students, successful Career and Technical Education programs, bonds which have passed and the district had begun building a new high school building at this time.

Board #8. Examining school board meeting minutes, there were multiple examples of tabled decisions, on average three a meeting from this particular board. The tabled decision that fell directly into the regulative pillar, for two months in a row, was a discussion regarding Board Standard Operating Procedures. This was tabled until the next month, and then tabled a second time, too. The pattern this seems to reflect is an avoidance of dealing with the baseline procedures of the board as a governing body. The minutes reflected that there were opposing opinions that were voiced in open session, not just closed sessions. Many votes weren't unanimous, there were many abstentions from voting on certain issues, and there were multiple occurrences of different individual members openly debating each other during the open session of the board meetings. Members presented contradictory evidence to make their points.

Honor Board #4. This analysis involved school board meeting minutes from 2014, as well as the TASA nomination packet, which correlates with those minutes. This board represents the largest district involved in this study, and houses many campuses; therefore, the board must look at finances and tax rate carefully. Most of the board members are in their second or third terms of service so they understand how meetings should work and go by standard operating procedures. Trustees stated their opinions in the packet about choosing the right superintendent in their search from two years previous in 2012, and how important it was for the district's future

(academically and financially) to choose the right person for the job to "complete the team of 8" not just head up the district. Accountability ratings and student performance have always been high but there was still a commitment to closing any achievement gaps in the district and setting goals to improve even more as a district. There was also a great deal of evidence of strong community partnerships with some large businesses and universities in the area.

Board #9. Trying to locate a district which mirrored Honor Board #4 required the researcher to move outside the north Texas region in order to keep the fidelity of the board comparisons in line. Board #9 had the same type of set up as the corresponding Honor Board (even located outside of Houston the way the other district is just outside of Dallas), is housed in an affluent area, has had the same Superintendent for many years (and he was voted Superintendent of the Year during 2007), yet they've never been recognized as an Honor Board. The school board meetings of Board #9 are available on video, as all large districts in Texas have to be as of 2016 by law. There is some hinting in examining the board minutes about the possibility some trustees ran for a spot on the board for personal reasons. According to the data, this board appeared to make many local decisions in the cultural-cognitive arena, not a large number of normative decisions or regulative decisions brought on by laws either, and a small amount of reference to coordinating efforts with the Regional Education Service Center.

Honor Board #5. The analysis of the last Honor Board in this study included school board meeting minutes, and the TASA nomination packet. This board is another one that utilizes continuous improvement strategies, using strong partnerships naturally with the universities in the area, also working with surrounding towns and districts (such as a land deal with a nearby town) to help their own district in long range planning and goals. This board also had to be very frugal and deliberate in making decisions during 2011, which was the exact year of the biggest

budget cuts for education from the federal and Texas state government. There was also evidence throughout the specific minutes of board meetings that the board did their best to stay in touch with the school district attorney, Human Resources director, and Superintendent to make sure the rules were followed as far as Reduction in Force (RIF) as well as being proactive about being able to recall and reassign as many of those employees as much as possible. One normative example was the board's decision, outlined in the nomination packet, to move from a locally adopted appraisal system to the state designed PDAS appraisal system. Their superintendent was also named Top 5 superintendents in Texas in 2003 and 2009 (two years before board was named Honor Board in 2011, and the same year as it was an Honor Board in 2003).

Board #10. The board minutes reference the AVID program for PreAP and Advanced Placement students, and they maintained a consistent discussion to growing and building new campuses. The trustees on this board during 2011 hadn't been on the board long, and there wasn't a lengthy amount of tenure within the trustees from the year of analysis. There was not much evidence of interaction with Region 10, or surrounding districts, or colleges even that are nearby and would be easily accessible. There were also several tabled decisions, and one failed motion, which was notable, because it was a specific motion to change the makeup of the board from five at large members and two in district to all seven members at large. This decision failed by a 2 to 5 vote. There was also a newspaper article documented by the researcher which talked about the school board president resigning from the trustees, due to legal issues and a DWI arrest; this was just in 2010 a year before the corresponding minutes used from this board for this study.

The theoretical framework of institutional theory again is not one that has been popular in addressing educational research, however in the current study I think the frame fits very nicely

with the data included. There is no way to analyze the amount of data found within years of school board meetings, without being able to categorize the content. In this case, the categories, and a priori coding was only able to be utilized using the specifics of Scott's three pillars of institutionalization. In wanting to explore the exact procedures and operations a school board employs, the pillars were useful in both the coding and descriptions of what type of action items the researcher was examining through multiple months of listing of actions and decisions listed within the board meeting minutes. In answering the research question specifically regarding the usefulness of the institutional lens, I think it is best summed up by Sell (2005) in this way:

> When a board does not correctly interpret its responsibility in fulfilling all of the roles, one of three things can happen. The first is that a board becomes a "rubber stamp," approving policy decisions and wishes of the superintendent or the city without argument or evaluation. A less lethargic but arguably even more ineffective board is a board of "firefighters." These boards rush from problem to problem, fixing schools for the moment, but failing to address the cause of the problem or find a long-term cure for it. Finally, boards are often charged with practicing micromanagement. When members fail to delegate tasks or insist upon constantly infringing on the autonomy of a school, few strides are made toward progress in the district (p. 74).

This study shows how focusing on institutionalized areas: regulative (which all boards are going to have to deal with as these are legal sanctions from the state), normative (which can vary among school boards according to partnerships with community, businesses, and state associations), and cultural-cognitive (which will differentiate among all school boards since these factors will be embedded within the culture of the specific school district) and making sure not to just become a rubber stamp board, or a firefighter board, or a board that is micromanaging

the district by not ignoring any one pillar can help school boards operate more efficiently or at least help them reach the same level of success as previous TASA Honor Boards.

The answers to *research question # 4* regarding what other realities came forth regarding the practices of school boards throughout this study were specific to institutional theory. The first reality is the fact that the normative pillar was shown to be in effect at school board meetings in more than double the action items of the five Honor Boards than in that of the comparable boards. The average action item percentage of the normative piece of Honor Board meeting minutes was almost 25%, whereas in the five comparable boards the average was only about 10 % of the items. Another area regarding the normative pillar is that through these action items specifically coded in this field, most of them dealt with networking and partnerships and having a strong collaborative relationship with area universities, state associations, and the community businesses such as those involved in education foundations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The final step within data analysis, according to Creswell (1998), is to interpret the data. For this study, interpretation of the data included not only what key content was included within the school board minutes, but also what key content was left out of each policy as recommended by the best practice recommendations from TASB. Interpretation of the data also included what, if any, significance of the three pillars of institutional theory as laid out by Scott in his research. First the research questions will be addressed and then the conclusions will be summarized.

Research Question #1: What are the Operations and Procedures of Honor Boards?

Successful school boards are made up of individuals without personal agendas and with a desire that all children have the opportunities that come with effective school districts. Effective boards know they are stewards of the public's interest, and they are responsive when the public reaches out to them with questions or issues (Foster, 2014). Organizations that are acknowledged as reputable and legitimate are seen as successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and this is in part what the Honor and Outstanding school board awards provide. This perspective about what contributes to a successful board is evident in the TASA nomination packets, put there to boast about how well these boards are operating, but also found in the corresponding board meeting minutes. This would seem to prove that these boards understand that their true role and power only happens as a body, and during actual school board meetings, whether they were regular monthly meetings, specially called meetings or board workshops.

There are actual training programs, in fact found on the TASB website, which point out that an effective school board must have expectations and operating procedures that are clearly defined to be successful (TASB, 2011). The superintendent and school board as the "Team of

Eight," must be clear on their respective roles and these must be defined and adhered to by both entities. This expectation is best summed up with a quote from Honor Board # 5:

> I like to compare our board to a group of musical instruments; we have seven unique perspectives, all working toward the unified goal of achieving the absolute best four our district (the symphony). Our discussions are open and honest but we maintain true harmony, because we are all united in the pursuit of educational excellence for our district.

Research Question #2: How Well do Scott's Pillars of institutionalization: Regulative, Normative, and Cultural-Cognitive, Explain the Operations and Procedures of these Boards?

The majority of the specifics of the criteria areas for choosing Honor Boards each year involve a combination of the three pillars of institutionalization (see Appendix B). Research backs up this assumption that outstanding boards have a more consistent blending of the three elements of institutional theory (Scott, 1995). In most stable systems there should not be evidence of only a single element at work but varying combinations of all three pillars, and the more these three are aligned the stronger the institution (Scott, 2013). Most of the institutional procedures and practices involve in part at least, the regulative pillar most often (Scott, 2008). This phenomenon actually favors the school board practices of Honor Boards more than non-awarded boards. The evidence suggests the awarded boards had the majority of their action items in the regulative field, and the Honor Boards had more than twice as many decisions were made in the normative pillar as the non-awarded boards did.

On the surface it seems that if the regulative pillar is taken care of school boards would be effective, but regulatory elements can be more superficial in nature, and although usually involve more visible features, such as laws and court cases, these are less crucial than normative

and cultural-cognitive forces (Scott, 2008). Further, since regulative areas involve compliance from governmental forces and operating within the rule systems, in this case both state and federal legislatures, the specifics of this pillar played out in a similar manner at most school board meetings, once again affirming the importance of the normative pillar with regard to education.

The research and data support a merging of cultural-cognitive, normative, or regulative elements. However, the normative facet may be the most crucial in helping institutions find or maintain effectiveness. Research has shown in education that school districts were more innovative and cohesive when they felt supported by state educational agencies, training institutions, and state level professional associations (like TASA, TASB, and TEA) as these are the departments that set and enforce standards (Scott, 2013). In fact more than one board which has yet to be awarded follows a pattern, that though there is some degree of balanced distribution of the three pillars of institutionalism, the explicit breakdown of that is still a different pattern than that of the Honor Boards. The evidence shows that the majority of the decisions and actions that non-awarded boards are making are in the cultural-cognitive realm and that Honor Boards have in fact produced double the quantity of decisions within the normative pillar than their comparable counterparts.

Research Question #3: How Useful is institutional theory in Understanding what makes a School Board Outstanding, in Comparison to Other Non-awarded School Boards?

Most school boards may believe they are running the board as outlined by TASB, and want to operate at a highly institutionalized level, since again the only real authority a board has is as a body not individuals. But the explicit evidence of how that is actually being played out in the board room is a different story according to the data. The Honor Boards appear to be

immersed in decision making that is more balanced among the three areas of institutional theory, and are taking more action in general than the other school boards studied.

Certain boards are perceived as more effective by external actors, and it seems logical that obtaining a reputation of effectiveness can be based on earning this publicized award. In analyzing the Honor Board nomination packets, one from Honor Board #1 contained a quote which thoroughly sums up this anomaly: "This board has served as a model for other districts. Recently Board members from a neighboring district attended a Board Meeting and met with our Board members to study their working relationships and efficient methods for conducting district business." This practice would actually fall into the cultural-cognitive pillar, by conducting the principal of isomorphism and copying the procedures utilized by an effective school board, and there are some normative elements in play as well as there is an attempt to build a partnership with a nearby school district.

Another area that was brought to the forefront during this study was related to the idea of school boards taking action. Specific to the ideals regarding action, many institutional theorists maintain that "to be institutional, the structure must generate action" (Scott, 2004). This could be one reason why many school boards are not reaching "outstanding" levels, if the majority of board meetings are getting bogged down by personal and political agendas, and are never getting through activities or taking enough action to get through all three pillars of institutional theory. There wasn't much evidence within the explicit school board minutes of the non-awarded boards pointing to trustees trying to compromise and make agreements either, so the element of conflict may have also been affecting the amount of action items being taken care of during policy making meetings.

Research Question #4: What Other Realities about Outstanding School

Boards, in Comparison to less Exemplary Boards, were revealed during this Study?

A simple inquiry can be posed within this last research question: why haven't these comparable districts been awarded? The non-awarded boards, no matter how good their intentions may be, do not seem to be operating as efficiently as those who have gained specific recognition. During the analysis of all of the documentation of the 10 school boards, several topics and subcategories emerged. One such subcategory was that of continuous improvement, which was evident in more than one nomination packet. In the packets of Honor Board #1 and #2, each school board referred to continuous improvement as part of the practices that kept the board on track during the years they were awarded. Part of this process included continuous evaluation, score cards, and other assessments of numerous programs within the district including: (a) special programs, (b) technology, (c) curriculum, (d) student performance, and (e) completion rate. Embedded in the nomination packet of Honor Board #2 for example is the process of going through a board audit, twice, as set out by TASB, and using these score cards and work from the continuous improvement consultant to address the efficiency and effectiveness of key systems in the district. This particular procedure falls into the normative pillar, again the element which seems to be highlighted the most in this study, as it involves networking not only with an external agency and consultant to conduct the continuous improvement training, but a specific partnership with the Texas Association of School Boards throughout the audit process.

Normative and regulative aspects are coercive and have some actors impacting organizations externally, but the cultural-cognitive area relates to the internal conditioned thinking of the institution itself and therefore can be taken for granted (Scott, 2013). The trustees,

as actors, must continuously be committed to the cause of the school board as well to show their successfulness, as the data shows the effective boards have been doing. To use another example from Scott (2013), actions are institutionalized so that related actors orient their actions to a common set of normative standards and values. The guidelines here may be set by TASA criteria, but the trustees of an Honor Board acting to meet those standards.

In addition to the roles that individual school board members are playing, the superintendent also cannot be ignored as an actor in institutional theory. There are multiple Honor Boards who happen to be from districts who are previous winners of the TASB Superintendent of the Year awards, and in fact two out of the five examples of Honor Boards from the current study housed Superintendents who won Superintendent of the Year within a five year time span of when the district's school board was awarded as well (TASA, n. d.; TASB, n.d.). This outcome at first can appear to lessen the importance of the school board itself, but using the arguments of the framework of institutional theory once again the normative element is stressed. The normative pillar not only emphasizes the priority of network ties and commitments, but spotlights professional or collegial networks and informal ties as well (Scott, 2013).

Conclusions

The themes that have emerged in the area of institutionalization in this study with regard to the first three research questions were: school boards need to purposefully work in all three pillars when making decisions and taking action, try not to put off actions or get bogged down in the issues and problems that come up in the cultural pillar, and the normative pillar has specific value with regard to building strong ties with community colleges, businesses, and state associations. One fact in examining school board meeting minutes for their exact content is that the outline of each meeting, no matter where it is taking place or who is running the meeting, is

virtually the same. All meetings have an invocation, the pledge of allegiance, an executive or closed meeting time sometime during the process, voting procedures, and an opportunity for audience or public comment, and yet the outcomes of many of these districts' meetings have been varied enough for some boards to obtain recognition as a board that others should perhaps be modeling their practices after (TASB, n.d.). There are also definitive references in the minutes; hence the actual practices and activities of Honor Boards, to Board Operating Procedures and even evaluations and updates of the trainings in which these Honor Boards have chosen to participate, individually and as a body, that go above and beyond what the state of Texas requires. All five of the Honor Boards also have an Education Foundation, which is referenced multiple times in the board meeting minutes which helps foster both the normative and cultural-cognitive realm by: (a) Strengthening the networking with businesses in the community and the school board, (b) showing support for teachers by recognizing grant acceptances and rewards at school board meetings, and (c) adding to the documentation to include in future nomination packets since the foundations are a separate entity from the school district.

Utilizing the explicit content found in the nomination packets of the Honor Boards is warranted to further explore the effects of the final conclusions of this study, as this content was used by Region 10 and 11, as well as TASA, to catapult these five boards (and four out of the five of them multiple times) to the top of hundreds of school boards in the state. These nomination packets were listed in the earlier limitations section due to the fact that the five non-awarded school boards in this study do not have these pieces of data available, and this is why information listed in these packets was not used to make relevant inferences unless the researcher had corroborated the specific action points in the school board meeting minutes. It would benefit

all eligible superintendents and school boards to create these packets to send in to their Regional Education Service Center in the future however, as these become positive public relations points for school districts. Without these potential positive highlights, there may only be articles written that cast a negative light on local school boards, such as the one discussing the board trustee who had a pending Driving While Intoxicated charge looming over him.

From this study, three main conclusions can be drawn: One, school boards who are defined as TASA Honor Boards show a more distributive pattern among the three pillars of institutionalization overall: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. Just a commitment to the institutional aspect of the school board makes a difference in looking at the trustees as part of these Honor Boards, as the secretary noted within the nomination packet of Honor Board #2, "If you have good policies in place, problems seem to take care of themselves. Our Board has learned the fine line between governance and management and it's a time-consuming responsibility." There is also a large amount of evidence found in the data of this study that leads to the inference that the normative aspect of networking is extremely important in regard to becoming an Honor Board. The Honor Boards also do not neglect the normative aspects of institutional theory as much as some less effective boards might be on a normal basis. As the editor of a local paper states about one Honor Board in this study, "Each Board member gives their time to ensure that the Board is run as efficiently and effectively as possible." The normative pillar, most easily seen in the area of networking, can best be described as collaborating with other entities such as: (a) City governments, (b) other school districts, (c) educational associations, and (d) institutes of higher education. Effective boards seem to be purposefully attending to these types of connections to foster success for their school districts.

There are also examples of time spent during specially called school board meetings with other school districts discussing the interview procedures for Honor Boards that takes place at the TASA/ TASB convention in the fall of each year. This shows that these awarded boards are making a conscious effort to associate with other school boards and district personnel that may have further experience in this area, and are attempting to use that knowledge to present their board as one with an effective institutional outlook. Here is an accurate description of that conscious effort:

> Preparation? Your board is outstanding. It has achieved this status level because the documentation submitted was good supportive evidence of its exemplary leadership. The only preparation needed is to remind the members to simply be themselves during the TASA interviews. Encourage them to reveal their individual personalities during the interviews. Remind them to let their enthusiasm for students and public education show! (Gurecky, 2004, pg. 52)

Within the normative element is the case for collaboration and how legitimate connections with other organizations help promote and support the success of an institution's practices (Dacin et al., 2002). In the area of education in fact, there are numerous external agents and agencies that impact both the regulative and normative arenas of the institution.

Secondly, the part of Scott's research in institutional theory which claims effective organizations are focused on action, seems to be true in this study as well. The comparable boards, which have correlated demographics as the Honor Boards, have a tendency to be bogged down in local issues that get played out in the cultural pillar. In some cases, decisions get put off until another time when resolutions can be made. There is also content that shows some of these decisions do not ever take place from the governing body, therefore, causing more stagnation of

the school board. Community members, businesses, and statewide associations take positive notice of a school board that not only progresses enough at each meeting to take action on important pressing issues, but also addresses activities that are relevant to the overall success of the district. As the mayor of one of the towns which is an Honor Board presents it, "Our community is proud of our board members individually, but much more for their actions as a team." Honor Boards must recognize the need for updating policies and procedures as part of their function as taking action as an operational board as well, as one trustee from Honor Board #4 states, "Adhering to adopted policies is certainly a task we take seriously. Updating and maintaining our policy manual is an important piece of our work."

Part of the process and action which these Honor Boards are consistently carrying out is that of reaching resolution when there is conflict behind closed doors so that when decisions are made and votes are taken the board is in definite unity. There was not one of the five Honor Boards examined that had a decision that was not reached as a unanimous vote more than just one time within a year of board meetings. In the rare times that a vote was not unanimous, the conflicting, assenting opinions were discussed in closed/executive sessions and there was a clear pattern of compromise and support for final judgments after the vote in each case. As one Honor Board president affirms, "My fellow board members have instilled a true sense of appreciation for meaningful dialog without discord. There have been many decisions that have shown multifaceted opinions among our trustees. Ultimately, whether a unanimous vote or otherwise, we proceed as a unified board on behalf of our school children."

Finally, an additional facet of institutional theory explores the impact that the individual actors play in the part of the institution. In the case of the non-awarded school boards in this study, there are multiple examples of actors who were at conflict with one another in the middle

of a public board meeting, or actors who may have specific personal or political agendas as a motive for serving on the board instead of placing the needs of all students in the entire school district ahead of their own personal gains. For a perfect description of the actors in Honor Boards understanding their role completely and having commitment to the task of working together as one body instead of individuals, the superintendent who works alongside of Honor Board #4 says, "As we have coalesced into a Team of Eight, we realized that we needed to spend some time together to become aware of our groups' strengths, weaknesses and to create a unified approach to boardsmanship. Everyone has held to the tenants of the commitment to teamwork." This type of logic aligns once again with institutional theory in so much as, there are many arguments given in modern research that support the idea that being a cooperative and virtuous actor within this framework is advantageous (Meyer, 2010). Institutional theorists' arguments emphasize factors, such as norms, that make actors unlikely to recognize or to even act in their own self-interest (Scott, 1987), and this is another explanation of how an effective school board with strong institutionalized operations can eliminate any selfish or negative motives a board member may have in serving on the local school boards (Mountford, 2004).

Implications

This study attempts to look into two areas that have rarely been connected and that is school board governance and the framework of institutional theory. Further, there is a large imbalance in the field of research, which is extremely heavy on the side of the school board/superintendent relationship, but almost non-existent in the area of school board effectiveness (Land, 2002). The biggest implication for future research the current study creates is focusing on school boards as an organization, and a follow up study could easily bring in some specific interviews with trustees and officers from Honor Board districts to gain even more

insight into the purposeful application of procedures and routines within the functions of the school board. Studies including the analysis and examination of the characteristics of effective school boards are recommended by many researchers (Land, 2002). The utilization of institutional theory can even be valuable in examining the purposes and procedures of higher education organizations, which adds another level to the current body of research (Cummings, 1999). At the post-secondary level, in light of budget cuts this decade, obviously brought on by a regulative force, or in the wake of online learning advancements and popularity, future research could investigate institutional changes in that arena as well as examine any changes in the norms and culture on campuses compared to ten years ago.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a great deal of current research surrounding the idea of Deinstitutionalization, and on this front studies are beginning to examine how structures, procedures, and routines break down over time, mostly when the rules, norms, and beliefs of the actors are not being actively monitored (Scott, 2013). This opens up a realm of educational research which can focus specifically on the school district and school boards who may seem to be going through a process of deinstitutionalization. Institutional theory and the concept of deinstitutionalization as contributors to the examination of organizations may be ahead of us, as this framework has a lengthy past yet still a promising future (Scott, 2005). Deinstitutionalization is a reality for the future of education, as structures have limited funding to public schools and institutions of higher education in recent years, lobbyists and petitioners have been pushing for a voucher system instead of public education, and restructuring what compliance with regulations, policies, and normative standards really are (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002). Many studies have pointed out the perceived problem in U.S. public schools, from regulations such as No Child Left Behind of

2001 or the culture of vouchers and opting out of state assessments, but looking through the institutional lens at specific districts and school boards dealing with these issues, as a part of possible reduced legitimacy as described by Scott (2013) would be a novel avenue to take in the educational field.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the operations and procedures of Texas public school boards that have been recognized by the Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards (TASA/TASB) as Outstanding or Honor school boards within the past 10 years (2005-2015). Institutions exist to create change by shaping the nature of change itself, which is why there is still so much potential in the role of institutional theory (Dacin et al., 2002). There is a large gap in the literature in regard to the efficiency of school boards, and the traits and practices which may make boards more effective (Land, 2002).This study investigated how operations, procedures, and routines, in relation to the elements of institutional theory, compare to those of other school boards who are similar demographically but do not show as much success or as many accolades. After examining this small selection of school boards, five Honor Boards, and five comparable districts, there are boards that are making it common practice to attend to certain areas as the decision making body in their school districts. It would also seem that since four out of five Honor Boards have been awarded multiple times that these practices are purposeful and have become part of the routinely used and embedded procedures at board meetings each month. According to the Texas Association of School Boards website, on the Board Recognition page, one can see how important and relevant this powerful state association feels the Honor Board process really is to school systems in Texas:

You don't do it for the recognition, though it sure can be nice when it happens. TASB and other associations have programs to recognize boards and individual trustees who set an example for their peers. Take a moment to notice the boards who have earned these honors, and think about what your board can do to get there.

There may be many school boards in Texas who are looking to begin working more effectively, and this study points to the possibility that balancing the decisions they make among each of the three areas of institutional theory: regulative (policy making, updating), Normative (networking with business, higher educational institutions, other districts, and state and regional associations), and Cultural-Cognitive (community and district educational needs, values, and expectations). This is summed up inside of TASB's own *Board Effectiveness Audit*: In each section, the audit covers certain basic practices that, if performed well and in a committed fashion, provide a solid foundation from which the board performs the rest of its work. It asks whether the board has institutionalized certain specific practices; that is, whether the board of trustees has built them into the basic routine of its work (TASB, 2013), and the reward could be an even greater number of Texas school boards operating at the level of the most outstanding boards across the state.

Appendix A: Categories in Database for the ten school boards in this study:

Honor Board ISD ('05-'15)	Region	last year of award	past awards	Avg. tenure of members	# Sups-past 10 yrs.	Supt. Details	TEA rating year of award	Size	Total # of students	Total # of campuses	Bonds	Strategic Planning
Honor Board #1	10	2013	4	6 yrs.	1	New sup. in 04-retired 15	Met standard	6 A	37,272	47	00, '07, '15	Revised in '11
Board #6	11	None	N/A	4 yrs.	2	New sup. in '04, new sup. in '12	Recognized	6 A	33,950	39	2008 2014	Revised in '14
Honor Board #2	11	2009	3	3 yrs.	2	Sup. for 11 years (nom Sup. of the Year-09) retires, New since '11	Recognized	6 A	7,530	11	99, fail 13, 15	Revised in '13
Board #7	10	None	N/A	4 yrs.	2	Sup. '03='10, left, new Sup. resigned '15	Acceptable	6 A	8,100	10	2011	Yes in '15
Honor Board #3	11	2006	3	5.5 yrs.	2	Sup. of the Year-'05 left after '06, New Sup. Reg. 11 Sup of the Year-'15	Acceptable w/1 Gold Performance	5 A	5,906	10	2004	Yes in '14
Board #8	11	None	N/A	7 yrs.	2	Sup. resign '08 , New since then	Acceptable	5 A	5,822	11	fail 2008 2013	None found
Honor Board #4	10	2014	0	4.5 yrs. (but 4 yr. term)	3	Sup. Leaves in '12-new Sup. retires '14/new since then	Met standard	6 A	54,930	72	2008 2016	Revised in '13
Board #9	6	None	N/A		1	Same since 03/Sup. Of the Year 2007	Met standard	6 A	55,004	52	2008	Revised in '14
Honor Board #5	11	2011	2	8 yrs.	2	Sup. 13 yrs. (top 5 Sup. of the Year x2) retire '12-new since then	Acceptable w/1 Gold Performance	6 A	25,825	36	2007 2013	goals only
Board #10	10	None	N/A	4 yrs. (4 new)	3	Sup.-04-09, New 09-14, new since '14	Recognized	6 A	24,750	30	2011	Yes-'09

Appendix B: Documentation for Criteria for Honor Boards (with Institutional Pillars listed)

Criteria for Outstanding & Honor Boards:	Examples of Documentation or Evidence of meeting each criterion (Element of Institutional Theory in parentheses):
1) Functions as a policy making body	• Policies established/revised in the last 2 years (Regulative-policy) • Evaluation time/support for new policies prior to alterations (Regulative-policy) • Active support for superintendent/school personnel in carrying out policies (Normative-networks) • Input from staff/patrons into policy-making process (Normative-networks)
2) Adherence to adopted board policies	• Formal procedure for initiating, adopting, changing policy (Regulative-policy) • Frequency of policy review; last date of review/ revision (Regulative-policy) • Procedure for updating/ maintaining policy book (Regulative-policy) • Availability of board policies to district personnel & the community (Normative-networks)
3) Support for educational performance in accordance with state-established standards	• Data profiling student performance/ gains; copy of district's current state accountability ratings & Texas Academic Performance Report (Regulative- state standards) • Support for programs contributing to high performance (Normative-programs/ networks) • Recognition received for educational performance (Cultural-cognitive-culture/ climate) • Support for efforts to correct deficiencies in student performance trends (Regulative-state standards)
4) Support for educational improvement projects & school transformation initiatives	• Long-range data plans for curriculum design/ revisions to the academic program (Normative-curriculum programs) • Technology integration into learning (Normative-curriculum programs) • Support for innovative programs initiated by the district (Normative-programs) • Individual board member support for school district/ dedication to duty (Cultural-cognitive-working relationships) • Support for bond elections, facility planning, strategic planning (Regulative- Bonds/ Normative- social obligation to planning)

5) Commitment to a code of ethics	• Copy of board's code of ethics (Regulative-codes) • Ethical practices in dealing with staff collectively and individually (Regulative-codes/ Cultural-cognitive-working relationships) • Ethical considerations dealing with professional contracts, grievances, and dismissal procedures (Regulative-legal contracts) • Commitment of board members to the adopted code of ethics from the National School Boards Association or one developed & adopted by the board itself (Regulative-codes/Normative- networks)
6) Provision of financial support for the school system	• Statement showing total taxable base of district/applied tax rate/ average expenditure per child/employee salaries & benefits/efforts to finance schools & educational programs (Regulative-finance/ tax codes) • Efficient business management practices (Normative- networks)
7) Participation in workshops & other performance improvement programs	• Association membership & participation (Normative-networks, unions) • Specific workshops, conventions, training programs board members attended (Normative- networks/professional training) • Completion of required school board member training (Regulative-required training) • Support of professional development opportunities for superintendent (Normative- networks/professional training)
8) Placement of the welfare of students above personal/political motives	• Support of potentially unpopular actions when they clearly benefit district & students (Normative-social obligation /Cultural-cognitive-climate/culture/community) • Placing dedication to the school system above special or personal favors and policy exceptions (Normative-social obligation /Cultural-cognitive-climate/culture/community)
9) Public relations efforts, including community awareness	• Newsletters, media clippings illustrating district efforts to convey information on policies & procedures to the community (Normative-networks/ Cultural-cognitive-community) • Publications aimed at informing the community about actions affecting local public schools (Normative-networks/ Cultural-cognitive-community) • Efforts to obtain community input in decision making (Normative-networks/ Cultural-cognitive-community)
10) Maintenance of harmonious & supportive relationships among board members	• Statements from individual board members & news personnel testifying to harmonious working relationship among board members (Cultural-Cognitive- working relationships) • Unified action by board, including effective resolution of differences (Cultural-Cognitive-working relationships/climate)

Appendix C: Raw Data for all ten boards in the study:

Honor Board #1, 2007 and 2013:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Exec. Session-personnel Consent Agenda: approved TEA Waivers: UIL competition-No school/ 15% rule based on EOC Superintendent Contract: Renewal Resolution was signed- vouchers	First Asset Mngt.- investment report Board asked to create a resolution opposing vouchers as a district & share w/state legislators	Apple corps teacher awards Student recognition: athletes Change date of March mtg. Sup. Request purchase of stadium scoreboards Independent finance audit Counselor's week upcoming Presentation: character education program
March	Exec. Session- resignations Consent Agenda: approved Tax refund –bond Property sale	Including Mayor in College/career week	Apple corps teacher awards Student recognition: fine arts CTE course changes Audience portion: grandparent public info. College/Career week-CTE posters
April	Exec. Session-personnel Consent agenda: minutes Budget amendment-new buses Policy update: TASB 96 Bond amendment Board election cancelled-candidates unopposed Contract statuses	Bilingual program- summer Revise vision to include Baldridge items (continuous improvement) Leadership development program- Region 10	Apple corps teacher awards Student recognition: UIL, band Information systems report Renovations update- middle school Library updates
May	Exec. Session-personnel Consent agenda Budget assumptions approval Tax bonds – 2000 bond Approve contracts- term & probationary	Partner w/ city for tower repair Dual Credit-contract w/community college Interlocal agreement (purchasing co-op)	Apple corps teacher awards Student recognition- Valedictorians/ Salutatorians New elementary principals Intervention for STAAR retest in fall not summer SPC path/nurse- recognition

August	Exec. Session-personnel Consent Agenda: resignation/replacement Budget amendments Public hearing: Tax Rate Supplemental contracts	County JJAEP memo Work Session info	Apple corps teacher awards Facility updates-lighting, parking, scoreboards-summer
September	Exec. Session Consent Agenda Waiver – class size Ad Valorem tax rate Public hearing-financial report	TEA accountability overview/ campus distinctions Superior rating-FIRST Choosing TASB delegates American Heart Association-workplace	Apple corps teacher awards Teacher recognition-Tech innovation Summer school report Personnel report on Job Fair Electricity provider info.
October	Exec. Session-personnel Consent Agenda Investment Policy Review Financial Report	Education Foundation-Endowment District Site Based Committee Texas taxpayer & student fairness coalition TASA/TASB convention info.	Apple corps teacher awards Student recognition: NHS, Student Council, lifesaving award Red Ribbon Week info. Committees: attendance, school health advisory
Total	36 (39%)	20 (22%)	36 (39%)

Honor Board #2, 2009:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Consent Agenda/Items Policy update 84 Budget amendments Adoption-budget 09-10 Ad Valorem tax approved Revisions to policy EIF-new grad requirements Policy update GKD-school facilities update Comprehensive Annual Financial Report approved Personnel items unanimously approved-NO closed session	County appraisal district audit RGA committee for training Delegate for TASA/TASB Extension of contract w/ local bank CRSS training for board	Local media in attendance Student recognitions: choir, football, dance School board recognition – January Report-elementary campus Update on stadium renovations (& ad signs) Information on CRSS training for the board Change to 09-10 calendar President request board audit & new ag facility Board annual planning calendar February-CTE educ. Month
February	Consent agenda/items Tax report-Jan. Continuing Education Credit hours-roll calls Board evaluation of board meeting process for improvement Resolution: nominate Sup. Of the Year info TEA waiver Budget development/adoption process approved Order for Trustee election Closed session-personnel/resignation of board member (nepotism for future daughter in law-teacher)	Contract w/sports marketing company Celebrate Texas Public Schools week activities RGA training update Board is nominating Sup. For Sup. Of the Year-Texas	Student Recognitions - FFA Middle school report Stadium renovation/Scoreboard update Strategic Goals: leading indicator process District education improvement committee Special programs work system review Information for sale of property

April	Consent Agenda/ Items Approve new elective & chemistry courses Closed session-personnel Approve purchase of new livestock equipment	Destination Imagination team-global finals Contract-welding company	Student recognition Elementary school report Update stadium renovations Librarians report TAKS reading results-March Summer School plans-Virtual Campus
June	Election of new officers Consent Agenda/Items Board Operating Guidelines Revisions committee appointed Policy update 85 Review of 2002 variable rate bonds/ convert to fixed rate period Policy revisions-DEC Bids rejected for sale of property-bids didn't meet guidelines Closed session-personnel	Special Olympics Endorsement of TASB region director TASB recommendations	Student recognition-special programs students/softball 9th grade center report TAKS results: math & exit level Mentor/volunteer reports Systems review: athletics & child nutrition July budget work session set 09-10 meeting dates set New math/science curriculum specialist
August	Consent Agenda/Items Tax report Proposed budget 09-10 Public hearing on budget and tax rate	AYP progress-all campuses met TEA Recognized rating School Board- Region 11 school board of year Proclamation from city: summer meals program Sup appointed for economic development association board	Campus recognitions Summer school review Student handbooks/ code of conduct report Additional of 4H as an extracurricular activity
October	Consent Agenda/Items PDAS appraisers approved Resolution: nominating	Board named TASA Outstanding School Board-TX at convention	Student recognitions-Natl. merit scholars Open Forum: showing presidential speech to

	members to serve on county appraisal board Approve 09-10 District & Campus Improvement Plans Policy revisions-EIC	Region 11 rep. onto State board of Education Region 11 award for Texas state board of education heroes for children Hospital donation	students Elementary school report Safety & transportation department report Textbook selection comm. Report on contractual personnel moved to Nov.
Total	41 (38%)	25 (23%)	41 (38%)

THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OF TASA HONOR SCHOOL BOARDS

Honor Board #3, 2006:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Consent Agenda Financial Reports Approval of construction contracts Approval of technology/phones contract Budget amendments Policy update 77	Contract w/engineers for new campus bldg. Contract w/ Network experts for technology-phones and for technology-security Agreement w/ La Porte ISD participant-Medicaid	Presentation from AD candidate for future athletic plans Technology infrastructure/ package information Security/ access control Review on portable buildings Elementary character/ caring program Plan for demographic services Textbook selection Calendar adjustments
February	Closed mtg.-personnel Team of 8 training Open Government Act training Consent agenda Budget amendments Senate Bill 11 adoption Call for 2006 Trustee election	Architecture company for new high school Office furniture company-deal for new high school	Media retrieval system Updates on construction fund budget Proposals for new vans New district travel guidelines Change in March mtg date Parent request-reinstating honors class-intermediate
April	Closed mtg.-personnel Consent Agenda Budget amendments-construction contracts Cancel trustee election-all candidates unopposed Accept resignations of staff/ approve contracts-probationary/term	NSBA walk of excellence INOVA process/ plan Mineral lease agreement-Cantey & Hanger law firm	Transportation Routes Demographic study info. Building program update – photos of new high school progress Student transfer info.
May	Closed mtg.-personnel Consent Agenda Nomination of new trustee officers	TASB convention delegates Staff development for summer-*Capturing*	Name of new high school Photos of new high school Student population update Change of July mtg. date

	Accept resignations/ new appointments Construction contracts approved Courtyard w/ 04 bond $ Ad valorem tax collection	*Kids Hearts* Education Foundation donation Special Olympics participation Vending contract w/Coca-Cola Wal-Mart teacher of the Year Board recognized Sup. As Texas Superintendent of the Year for 2005 & the Board was asked to participate in the NSBA convention	
July	Closed mtg.-personnel Consent Agenda/ Items Board budget work session special board mtg Accept resignations/ new appointments	UEA rep –suggests raise for teachers in district Sup. Recognized school board selected as Region 11 school board- go onto TASA for consideration now	Transportation audit info. Training info on safety Photos new high school Renovation updates
August	Closed mtg.-personnel Approve public mtg date for proposed tax rate Consent Agenda/Items Budget amendments Approve construction contracts Policy changes approved: EIA, EI, EIF Amended Board Resolution contract	Service agreement- Trillion partners	Building updates info. Proposals from prospective vendors for vendor list New courses at high school Change in Nov. mtg date

October	Closed mtg.-personnel Consent Agenda/Items Approve mineral lease Accept resignation Construction/ Architect contracts (04 bond $) Budget amendments Policy update 78 adopted	Lease w/Energy Co. Health center w/JPS Agile mind program Training session: prep for TASA Honor Board interview for Outstanding School Board Superior rating-FIRST	Curriculum presentation-math program Open house on school-based health center/ family fitness night Meet the coaches night – booster club Facilities assessment info
Total	43 (44%)	24 (25%)	30 (31%)

Honor Board #4, 2014:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Closed session-Superintendent's evaluation Consent Agenda Budget amendments Revised student code of conduct Policy update 97 Policy update 98 Policy update-GKD – school facilities	Education foundation-school board recognition month Cell site agreement w/Verizon Interlocal agreement w/City-tennis courts Head Start update	AP biology- fossil discovery Public comment: instructional calendar Draft 14-15 calendar Need surveys of staff-calendar review Community & student engagement accountability system
March	Closed session Consent Agenda-budget amendments pulled from agenda for further discussion Surplus property Notice of termination of probationary contract employee Policy update-EI-academic achievement	Head Start program info	Fine Arts instruction report Elementary school renovation updates Inspection-fire sprinklers Math/ Tech Aps textbook recommendations
May	Closed session-personnel Election of new officers/Signatories Approval of school attorney, medical officer, auditors, demographer Consent Agenda Superintendent contract extension Approval of flex & employee benefits Subcommittee on Board Operating Procedures Policy update 99	Donation-Southwest airlines UT-Dallas- Summer scholars program Contract for copier co. Contract for Insurance provider	Academy Program update Dates/ times set up for meetings Administrative appointment eSchool course work Flex Plan / Benefits package presentation Diploma requests Revisions to instructional calendar Strategic Plan Upcoming work session details

	Policy CH-purchasing Policy DGBA- employee grievances Policy DIA- discrimination Policy GKA- Conduct		
August	Closed session-rescind notice of proposed termination of term contract employee Consent Agenda Purchasing/ bond funds: building materials, theater, security/ alarms, kitchen equipment Administrative appointment	Baylor Medical partner Education foundation- scholarships County governmental purchasing forum Cooperative purchases of Chromebooks IStation Licenses Attendance credits- TEA Head Start Program TASB board of directors endorsement	Innovative summer program-Summer Kindergarten prep Academy Program sponsor Goals of District based improvement committee Construction report Information on recommendation to rescind notice to terminate
October	Closed session- Superintendent evaluation/resignation Consent Agenda – personnel Budget recommendations/ revenue Board Advisory Committee report Approval-Board Operating Protocol Policy update 100	TASB celebration of leadership award School Board awarded as TASA Honor Board Educational purchasing Co-Op north Texas Interlocal agreement TX General Land Office Head Start program info Superior rating-FIRST Visioning Document	Technology presentation- instructional focus Student recognition- National merit scholars Review of 2008 bond program consultants Proposed district initiatives Student Travel information New elementary school location/ information
December	Special Called Mtg. Closed session- Superintendent search	Superintendent search consultant company	Finalize Superintendent profile/ online application info Focus Group input
Total	39 (39%)	25 (25%)	35 (35%)

Honor Board #5, 2011:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Public hearing for AEIS report NCLB report Consent Agenda Closed session-attorney Budget amendments	Interlocal agreement-City Realignment agreement with City	Student Recognitions-football District parent surveys Response to Intervention report Local teacher evaluation system discussion Attendance report Course catalog/schedule
April	82nd legislature info.-budget cuts 14-21 million Consent Agenda Closed session-personnel 2007 bond science labs-add in elementary/ Citizens Bond Oversight Committee Report	Early resignation incentive program Consider joining TRS active care health plan	District has been in "hiring chill" for 2 years, plus reduced admin positions Utility management report Money savings outlined – Fridays closed in June/July Health insurance reviews SPED director –changes in department needs
May	Budget cuts report from 82nd legislature: senate & house proposals Consent Agenda Closed session-personnel Board policy overview of layoffs/ RIFs/ reassignments New administrative appointments	Report on job growth in Texas, anticipating growth in the ISD area Accountability report-new TAKS/TEA accountability AYP report from NSBA	Demographic report-estimated growth - possible portable buildings HR update-recall procedures Internal job postings

August	Instruction Materials Allotment-technology allotment Consent Agenda Approval of change to TRS active care plan, flex accounts, dental plans Approval of max price for science labs from 2004 bond $ Closed Session-teacher on admin leave w/ pay	Region 11 Outstanding school board presentation National Association of Music merchants foundation award Educational data collaborative Needs assistance from TEA in SPED data Approval of TASB delegate TRS active care plan	Construction reports-science labs, football field, track Summer school report Extended School Year (ESL) Fine Arts report Enrollment update
September	District capacity to sell bonds Consent Agenda Budget amendment Approval of appraisal roll, collection rate, tax rate Closed meeting-attorney	Interlocal agreement-w/County for JJAEP 4H status – extracurricular Meeting w/ area Superintendent-TASA Honor Board interview strategies	Safety & drainage assessment Supplemental instructional materials Board member calendar updates Superintendent calendar changes
October	Public hearing on FIRST rating & class sizes Policy update-EIA, EIAB-class rank School finance lawsuit attorneys Approval of NSBA/AASA deregulation of NCLB Closed session Level 2 grievance-admin response upheld by board Review of Board Operating Procedures	TX association for Health- adaptive PE teacher of the year TBEC coalition- 2 elementary schools on honor roll Superior rating-FIRST Appraisal district nomination for board of directors NSBA/AASA deregulation of NCLB	Update on assessment-STAAR tests Update on NCLB/ AYP with STAAR Plan to hire staff in Kindergarten & 1st grade to cut down ratios

November	Public hearing- tax base exemption Texas tax code- resolution School finance lawsuit Consent Agenda Approval of propane fuel proposal/ Resale of property Policy revision: EIA, FFH Policy deletion-EIAB Closed session- personnel - Dismissal of grievance	TSCA –middle school & high school counselor of the year	Update on enrollment of high school –students w/various needs Energy report School calendar update Investment update
Total	44 (45%)	24 (24%)	30 (31%)

Board #6, 2013:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	AEIS Hearing/public input Exec. Session @ 7:10 Budget Review Consent Agenda Policy update 95 Suspend portions of local policy EIA Vote on architect selection- one opposed (carried 6-1)	Education Foundation-UEA donation Approval of investment group Community ambassador cohort	Student awards-character School board appreciation Audience: info from mybigcampus.com/Ed. Foundation appreciation of board Escrow agreement Instructional calendar Enrollment update Digital curriculum Community ambassador cohort Upcoming events-calendar Architect selection for classroom addition
March	Exec Session @ 7:03-attorney/ personnel Legislative action report Budget amendments Consent Agenda 2013-2014 budget Exec. Session-attorney	Architectural firm approval Community ambassador cohort-future discussion Continuous improvement update	Student Recognition-bus safety, character, athletics Audience: compensation Continuous improvement update Facilities needs assessment Compensation plan update CTE/Technology update Upcoming events-calendar
May	Exec. Session @ 6:50-attorney, property, personnel Legislative update-House bill 5 Consent Agenda Approval of staff contracts (non-renewal/termination) Policy Update-TASB 96 Approval of max price for roofing package		Student recognition-character/ state achievements Teacher laptops Summer construction/ renovation update Upcoming events-calendar

June/July	Exec. Session @ 7:05-attorney/personnel Consent Agenda Vote on contract for after school care- decided no vote/ Table action-2 opposed that & 1 abstained (4-2-1) Local Policy EIC- committee to study the policy	ASBO (association) meritorious budget award	Teacher recognitions- certifications Finance awards PTA donation to elementary Student code of conduct Attendance/retention plan Discovery team report District property improvements-concrete batch plant
August	Exec. Session @ 9:23- Level 3 student grievance Exec. Session @ 5:53- attorney/ personnel Consent Agenda Policy Update-TASB 97 2013-2014 budget Exec. Session-attorney	Education Foundation- school supplies drive TASSP- middle school principal of year	Teacher/admin recognitions-awards from local cohorts & TASSP Audience: transportation Graduation date change Professional development for new employees District security report Upcoming events-calendar
September	Exec Session @ 6:44 Consent Agenda Approval of after school care contract (tabled previous meeting- motion carried now 6-0) Approval of employment recommendations, health plan District Improvement Plan Exec. Session @ 8:17- level 3 student grievance, resolution- upheld previous decisions (5-0)	UEA principal of year TASB candidate endorsement	Teacher recognitions- Summer heart at work/ hall of fame Audience: crossing guard/ honor UEA principal of year/county commissioner candidate district STAAR information Upcoming events-calendar

October	Exec. Session @5:56-attorney/personnel Public hearing-required improvement Consent Agenda Approval to use 2008 bond savings-video management system	Education Foundation grants Strategic Planning	Teacher recognitions-parent communication ELL program, SPED staff, enrollment update Employee retention data Upcoming events-calendar Strategic Planning
Total	39 (40%)	13 (13%)	45 (46%)

Board #7, 2009:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Consent Agenda Election results Policy update Superintendent evaluation	TASB media honor roll Historical Society City council partner-air quality, article in Dallas Morning News/US News Could the board write a resolution to help? Schlechty Training Partner w/ County hospital	Wow presentation-students School board recognition-January Public comment: city councilmen-air quality in city Discussion on Item 1 from consent agenda-medical classes partner w/hospital or not? Attendance averages are higher than surrounding districts Bible class added to curriculum Community involvement discussion-not on agenda Sup. Wants Focus Groups Graduate Profile Need more long range planning (no strategic plan) Time for citizens to talk about: waste management, cement plant, air quality (5 min time limit each person) Could the board write a resolution to help?
March	Consent Agenda Budget amendment Lease of property Closed session @ 7:07 Secondary allotment upcoming Budget workshop to Goal workshop	Foundation check to ISD Authorization to cancel a contract w/real estate company Trustee rep. for education foundation	Feedback from focus groups/decision to continue the focus group meetings Construction reports: athletic facility, light poles, ag science bldg. Change in district goals-more measurable

			Change of upcoming Budget workshop to Goal workshop Upcoming events will be emailed to board members
May	Canvass the results of Trustees election/ Oaths of new trustees/ Election of officers Consent Agenda Budget amendments pulled from agenda for clarification Policy update 85 Tax Rate publication Closed session @ 10:07-personnel	TCEQ presentation Interlocal agreement between ISD & city TASB advocacy resolutions	Wow presentation-elementary musical Recognition of PTA presidents Public comment: presenting concerns on air quality Curriculum implementation at high school/ video Construction report: ag science, light poles Scholarship information Servant Leader recognition Stipend increase discussion Senior awards night info Upcoming events calendar
August	Public meeting: Budget & Proposed tax rate Consent Agenda Budget amendments pulled from agenda for clarification Vote of advertising contracts (passed: 5 in favor/2 abstentions) Policy change-FEA local Legislative mandated pay raises-federal stimulus $ Superintendent contract Closed session @ 8:10	Advertising contracts for stadium Date for Joint meeting with city council TASB delegate chosen Dallas business journal chose ISD as 1/25 best places to work Sup. Report on TASB, TASA, TEA-update Schlechty school board conference	Change in attendance policy explained Student recognition meeting date: fall & spring Student council update Construction reports-Ag science, renovations Ring of honor induction date

September	Consent Agenda Title IX info for softball/ baseball $ spending Highly qualified report	Joint workshop w/ City Council upcoming date Upcoming: TASA/TASB convention, TASB winter governance, NSBA conf.	Wow presentation-elementary- skyping Health advisory council info Board wants a joint meeting w/ student council in spring Community problem solver presentation-project cash-board will come back to this once costs are available Baseball field fence expansion concerns-money approved/work wasn't done Discussion on softball bleachers Focus group update Growth management Committee update TELPAS report
October	Potential city ordinances discussed to address public safety Police chief discussed HB55, no cell phones in school zones-increase patrols	Joint meeting with City Council & 8 city staff, police & fire chief Update on City's improvement programs Discussion: land development projects, parks & rec facilities, maintenance of joint facilities	Library report Speed zone warning lights program-18 flashing signs at 6 campuses/ solar powered-city will pay for ½ upgrades if necessary later Concern over elementary students crossings certain places in town Update on Fall Festival
Total	32 (31%)	25 (25%)	45 (44%)

Board #8, 2006:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Resolution: honoring state representative (moved to beginning of meeting) Consent Agenda Board election date Budget amendment Policy update 77 (motion made to approve, then withdrawn, action was tabled then) Added contract days to high school APs, from 202 to 212 annually (passed, 6-1) Public Information Act –Action tabled Closed session-Postponed, level 3 grievance	TEA exception for bilingual honoring state representative Accelerated Reader TASA/TASB joint school conference	Student recognition: elementary students Board member certificates for school board month Curriculum report-testing calendar, math alignment Public meeting upcoming with state representative Personnel audit update Transportation/ library travel stipend info Accelerated Reader info technology update Technology office relocating Discussion-audio taping of meetings: some members had info. supporting taping, some had info. against taping, attorney stated recordings would fall under Public Information Act –Action tabled Discussion on rezoning attendance, turned over to school admin.
March	Consent Agenda-2 items removed to be discussed Board election sites Financial & Cash Flow statements Policy update 77-3rd reading Approval of CIS Social Worker	Interagency agreement w/ESC regions 9,11,14 Communities in Schools	Student recognition- Art Public comment: Student council class schedule/ Jr. high computer elective Curriculum report-staff training Information on Technology coordinator Calendar update-bad weather day

	Gas lease w/energy co. –action was tabled Personnel audit finding; recommend new hires including temp sec for filing certifications & contracts Director of Student Services created (5-2 vote) Administrative realignments Closed session @ 10:50 –contracts		Discussion on a demographic study costs Computer Lit. & Health offered in 8th grade Administrative realignments
May	Consent Agenda I & S tax rate not reduced Policy update- DEC Closed session- Superintendent appraisal & athletic coordinators	Contract w/ demography co. Media Honor Roll	New teacher assignments New uniforms: dance/cheer (moved up on agenda/no action) Curriculum report-TAKS scores Student handbook- attendance details Discussion on local electricity provider
August	Public Hearing-budget/ proposed tax rate Consent Agenda Budget amendments 2006 tax roll 2007 M & O and I & S tax rates set Approval to County JJAEP memo & understanding Settlement agreements w/ dept. of labor (abstaining vote) Policy update-FFA (3rd reading) NCLB report	TASA/TASB convention updates Review of TEA standards Settlement agreements w/ dept. of labor (abstaining vote) Approval to County JJAEP memo	Appraisal calendar- curriculum report Recommendations for new staff District/ campus gains- TAKS Exit Level TAKS report Salary increases for staff/ admin-5% Lunch & breakfast prices Homecoming parade details

	Closed session		
October	Consent Agenda-HR moved to later for discussion & textbook committee section removed (no documentation) Policy update 78-tabled action after 2nd reading complete already Motion on review of Standard Operating Procedures was Tabled Contract for deregulated electricity costs	INOVA program-data (Region 11) Energy savings program proposal (request from 1 member all savings go to libraries/ another member said did not agree that was appropriate) Lease –oil & gas in negotiation Contract for deregulated electricity costs	Public forum: athletic & academic program concerns Textbook committee question: No documentation to support the agenda item? CTE committee details Athletic facilities report-consideration of bond election Report on Accelerated math & Reading was Tabled Enrollment/Rezoning info. Local sick leave bank change
December	Legislative update from Sup. Financial Audit approved Financial & Cash Flow report-Action was tabled Resolution-Board members to take & pass Exit Level TAKS (6-1 vote) Board Operating Procedures discussion was tabled Prioritized list of items for CTE (6-1 vote) Library report-Action was tabled Closed session	Agreement w/city for joint election-polling	Food service program info School bus conduct Request-dept. reports limited to priority items, another member stated receiving the reports should continue Board members to take & pass Exit Level TAKS CTE computer requests Curriculum report-vocational programs Library committee report
Total	44 (42%)	16 (15%)	45 (43%)

Board #9, 2014:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Consent Agenda/Items Policy Update 98 Comp. Annual financial report Principal appointment Extension of Superintendent contract	Contract for plumbing, electric, & HVAC Contract w/architecture company & engineering group Innovation Grant Program	School board recognition from administrators Application for 2014-2016 Educator Excellence Innovation Grant Program Principal appointment Human Resources report
March	Consent Agenda/Items Resignation of Trustee-moving out of district boundaries	Employee Group Health Plan- Aetna	Student recognition-UIL, athletics Recognition of volunteer at elementary library Resignation of Trustee-moving out of district boundaries Take daughters/sons to work date assigned Masonry replacement info at elementary school
May	Consent Agenda/Items Bond referendum projects Personnel appointments Yearly financial report Policy update 99	Contract w/communications co.	Student recognition: Star program Employee recognition: child nutrition department/ transportation department GPA exemptions-2 credits repeat courses after 2 years Campus mascot information Possible security upgrades Personnel appointments
August	Consent Agenda/Items Official budget approval Tax rate adopted	Interlocal agreement for purchasing system	PDAS appraiser list Human Resource info. Summer School report Equipment/supply list for playgrounds

October	Consent Agenda/Items -Public hearing-FIRST rating Policy update 100 Bid for security upgrades	Elementary campus- Blue Ribbon exemplary school-US dept. of Ed (presented by mayor) Lions Club 2014 accountability ratings / AP, SAT, ACT results	Recognition for mentor- Lions Club Instructional materials committee named TELPAS report graduation plan rates Bid for security upgrades Financial information year to date
Total	17 (35%)	7 (14%)	25 (51%)

Board #10, 2011:

Monthly Meeting	Regulative Items	Normative Items	Cultural-Cognitive Items
January	Executive session-personnel Legislative update Consent Agenda Competitive Sealed Proposal project approved for stadium parking & improvements Approval of legal counsel for redistricting Consider extension of Superintendent contract-Tabled until Feb. Policy update-RIF	Schlechty conference Contract for construction manager	District recognitions: gold performances, Biggest Loser competition HVAC for high school
March	Executive session-RIF personnel Consent Agenda Approval for purchase of 39 acres Closed session-Extension of Sup. Contract to 2013	Report: TX Caucus of black school board members summit '11 HVAC contractor (1 abstained vote)	Student recognitions: athletics, spelling bee, art Open Forum: eHigh school: students, staff & certification Alternative school-Center: opposing the closure of center/ separate location Presentation-Early Childhood Center-video
May	Executive session-personnel/attorney Consent Agenda Policy updates-CE, DMC Canvassing of trustee election/ results Failed motion: move to a 7 member single district board instead of5 single member/ 2 at		Recognitions: PTA, student advisory council, athletics Open Forum: Reduction in Force, 4 speakers Citizen's redistricting committee criteria

	large (2-5) Approval of Sup. recommendation to nonrenewal of term contract New member oaths		
August	Executive session-personnel/Sup. Eval. Consent Agenda Tax Rate adoption Board Goals & Sup. Performance objectives-Tabled item Approval of personnel Senate Bill 100-Tabled item	Region 10 teacher of the year (elementary)	Teacher recognitions: various campus outstanding teachers Construction reports Human resources report Energy report
October	Executive session-purchase of real estate property Public hearing: Tax code exemptions Consent Agenda Approval of personnel District & Campus Improvement Plans	2011 TASA/TASB conference community Car dealership	Recognitions-community Car dealership, Teachers of the year Open Forum: underrepresentation of minorities hired by ISD Supplemental science materials Transportation report
Total	30 (60%)	7 (14%)	13 (26%)

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Kendra Nelson was born in Austin, Texas. She graduated from Lockhart High School in 1991, and then began her postsecondary educational career at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Government in 1995, and immediately began her career in education as a classroom teacher. Throughout 14 years in the secondary classroom, Mrs. Nelson taught foreign language, social studies, and language arts. She received her Master of Education degree in Educational Administration from Tarleton State University in 2005. Her administrative career includes three years as a middle school Assistant Principal, and she is now in her fourth year as a high school Assistant Principal in Mineral Wells Independent School District. Kendra completed her Superintendent certificate program at the University of Texas at Arlington, where she earned a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in 2016.

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