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Delegate or Trustee? Preferences of Representation
for School Board Members and Constituents

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements
for the Political Science Department
Dickinson College

Carlisle, Pennsylvania
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Introduction

Public school board members are often our forgotten representatives. In the United States today, local governance in general has been ignored by many citizens. This is evidenced by the simplest, direct form of political participation-- voting. U.S. citizens turn out to vote, and engage in dialogue, far more often for federal elections like that of the president than for local elections. Yet realistically, citizens have significantly less influence or control over their state and federal representatives than the potential for representation that they have with local officials. The smaller the ratio of representative to constituent body, the greater the chance for citizens to have meaningful influence both in their vote choice for candidates as well as direct input once the members are in office. This is not to suggest that citizens should not participate in state and federal politics, but rather, to highlight the significant impact that they can have when staying active locally. School boards serve as the closest representative body that citizens have to the field of education. They not only directly impact students' education, but they also have the authority to make decisions that affect every resident within their geographic discretion.

With that said, it is essential to investigate the representational relationship between school board members and their constituents. Little research has been done that draws a direct connection between representation, a concept within the field of political science, and school boards, an institution more often studied with an education lens. However, I argue that congressional theories of representation like that of the delegate and trustee styles, serve as a great dichotomy to study school board representation. Generally speaking, these terms prompt the examination of the level of authority that constituents are willing to give to their board representatives, and also how involved they wish to be in the substantive decision-making process with the school board. Likewise, the application of these theories allows for the understanding of how school board members view their role, and how much control over decision-making they wish to have in relation to constituent feedback.

As Christopher Carman (2007) found, the level of authority that constituents are willing to give to their congressional representatives varies depending on a multitude of characteristics and identities (e.g. race, level of education, political efficacy). This can also be assumed at the school board level. School boards are often criticized for not responding to the wishes of *parents*, for example, who seem to express the desire to hold more control over their board representatives (Spring 2020). In addition, Miller and Stokes posed the question: “Does the legislator have a single generalized mode of response to his constituency that is rooted in a normative belief about the representative’s role or does the same legislator respond to his constituency differently on different issues? (1963, 46). They found that legislators will choose different representation styles based on the issue topic, and thus may either vote based on their own policy views or based on what they believe the perception of their constituents to be. Again, this question can be made relative to how school board representatives respond to their constituency bases.

This paper is broken into two sections. The first three chapters serve to provide relevant information about school boards and to establish their purpose and significance as representative structures in local communities, with special regard to Pennsylvania school boards. Section two, the remaining four chapters, seeks to address the primary research questions of this work: in what contexts do *school board constituents* prefer the delegate or trustee style of representation, and in what contexts do *school board members* prefer the delegate or trustee style of representation? In order to answer these questions, I will provide thorough definitions of the delegate and trustee styles of representation, and then move into a mixed methods approach on a single case study district in the state of PA.

Chapter 1: What is a School Board?

The History of School Boards in the U.S.

According to Danzberger (1992), local school boards in the United States can be traced back to the early to mid-1800s. As Danzberger recounts, Massachusetts can be credited with creating the first prototype of school board structure. As the population continued to increase in Massachusetts,

local governance structures became overwhelmed with the amount of responsibility that coexisted with managing their towns. So, selectmen who oversaw the local government created committees of townspeople to govern education as a way to alleviate their number of tasks. The separation of public education governance from other local governance structures in Massachusetts became a design that spread throughout the colonies. As more schools were developed to accommodate the quick population surges, the selectmen encouraged the creation of geographic school districts; each would have its own school board to lead the way on education. Local tax dollars were being used to keep schools running, but officially in 1891, Massachusetts passed legislation that granted each district, and thus each school board, to have the authority over their finances and administrative decisions (Danzberger 1992). Tax dollars continued to be the primary source of income for schools. One of the largest changes to Massachusetts' original prototype is how board members are selected; rather than townspeople being appointed by local government officials, many states now require districts to hold elections. This will be further discussed in the *School Board Politics* section.

Local school districts ultimately held full power over education for a little more than a century, with semi-influential structures in place from the state government (Carol et al. 1986). Increasingly since the 1950s, however, the federal government has become more involved in education, taking substantial control over curriculum, testing and performance indicators, and issues of inequity (see No Child Left Behind, IDEA, *Brown v. Board of Education*, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972). The increased federal involvement has caused a debate primarily between education scholars over the degree of power that local education structures actually have over education policy. Although some researchers view the movement toward centralization as a cause of local obsolescence (McGuinn 2006), others believe that local education officials, particularly school boards, still remain significantly impactful in the lives of students and communities (Henig 2009; Bulkey et al. 2010).

Whether or not school boards serve as a key actor in *national* education policy decisions, I argue that the sovereignty of school boards to make day-to-day decisions, and particularly the ability

of school board members to cast votes, warrants the acknowledgement that they are critical representatives for local citizens. The decisions that board members make will impact the lives of taxpayers, students, teachers, faculty, and all residents within their jurisdiction. As I will briefly touch on in the *Constituency Bases* section, the evidence of increased spending by national actors in school board elections demonstrates that there is a recognition of the power of a board members' position and vote. Given that my study focuses primarily on the impact that *Pennsylvania* school boards have on the daily lives of their residents, I will first give a more detailed description of what school boards are and how they are structured in the modern context. This will distinguish how Pennsylvania school boards may differ from school boards in other states. Then, I will provide an overview of the topics and decisions that board members have discretion over to demonstrate their influence over education and local communities.

Modern Structure of a School Board

First, it is important to note that this paper will only focus on school boards that serve *public* schools. Private institutions like independent or religious schools may have similar administrative bodies in place, but the term "school board" in this paper refers to the unit in the public education system. Today, the structure of school boards in regard to size, board member selection procedures, term length and limit, and pay, are relative to state law. For example, school boards across the United States may have between five and 15 board members serving; the number of board members is often influenced by the population of the district (National School Boards Association). In addition, school board members may either be appointed by a government official, like the mayor, or elected by the public (see *School Board Politics* for more information on elections). Again, depending on state regulations, term length may be either two, four, or six years for a board member. Term limits also vary state. Some states do not require term limits, so board members can serve for as long as they desire if they continue to be reappointed or re-elected at the end of each term. There has been a recent movement in Florida to create term limits for school board members, capping them at 8-years-- or two, four-year terms (Sun Sentinel 2020). Some citizens believe that term limits should be set for

board members just as there are limits for other representative positions, while others think that forced turnover after 8 years may not provide enough time for board members to implement an agenda (Sun Sentinel 2020). Finally, in some states, board members are paid a small salary or given a stipend, while in others, board members receive no compensation for their service.

According to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, in Pennsylvania, most school boards are comprised of nine, publicly elected members who serve four-year terms. However, Article III of the 1949 Act 14 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly designates the structure of each school board by assigning their district to a certain Class. Depending on the Class assignment, school boards may have as few as seven school board members and no more than 15 (Pennsylvania General Assembly 1949). Likewise, some board members may serve two-year or six-year terms or be selected by appointment rather than public election. The two key structures that are consistent across Pennsylvania school boards include that there are no term limits and that board members do not receive pay (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). As will be discussed further in *School Board Politics*, all PA school boards that utilize public elections for their selection must be partisan, where candidates must run in association with a political party.

By Pennsylvania law, school districts are considered “political subdivisions” of the state, meaning that the district and its “governing bodies” are considered legislative agents of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). These governing bodies include the local school boards as well as any other boards that reside within the district, like a city council, for example. A distinction between school boards as a legislative body of the state and a state congress, for example, is that “The law does not convey any power or authority upon individual school board members acting on their own merely by virtue of their office as a school director” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). In other words, the power that an individual board member has comes solely from their power to vote on an issue with the rest of the school board, which must occur at a public meeting according to the Sunshine Laws (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). Whereas, representatives of a state congress have authority to provide personal, direct

aid to constituents (e.g. expediting a passport), in addition to casting state congressional votes. Still, the power of a vote is enough to draw a connection between theories of congressional representation to school board representation.

Roles and Powers of a School Board

Just as the make-up of school boards varies by state and district, the responsibilities of school boards are relative as well. Some of the more common, as well as Pennsylvania-specific, school board powers are listed below to demonstrate the major influence they have on local education.

1. Hiring and Firing the Superintendent: The most common power among school boards across the country is the ability to hire and fire the district's superintendent. Some districts title this person as the CEO, like in the Chicago Public School District. A superintendent is the head executive of a school district, who oversees the head staff of all schools, including principals and teachers, and is seen as one of the primary leaders of the district. The superintendent is responsible for ensuring that the district is abiding by all state and federal laws, and likewise is expected to lobby politicians on behalf of the district to gain resources and other necessities for the student body (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). Another major role of a superintendent is configuring all transportation needs for students in the district. This includes the purchasing of buses and hiring of bus drivers, the creation of efficient bus routes, walking and bicycle routes, and snow or road closure routes to assure that students get to school safely. With all of the powers that coincide with the superintendent role, it is essential that a qualified individual is hired. School boards can hire, hold accountable, and fire these executives, which is a major source of power.

2. Adopt and oversee the annual budget: Nationwide, school boards control more than \$600 billion annually and oversee the education of 50 million students (National School Boards Association). A contentious area for almost all school boards is how to prioritize and then allocate their budget. The board works in conjunction with the superintendent to come up with an annual budget, and then inevitably has the power to accept, reject, or amend the superintendent's final

proposal. School districts are funded primarily by local and state tax dollars. On average, only about 10 percent of a school district's budget comes from federal funds (National Center for Education Statistics). Other revenue may come from fees collected by parents, fundraisers, or donors for example, and these sources of funding vary by district. Simply put, the school board is a body that is responsible for significant amounts of funds and how to allocate them; for example, this requires a board to prioritize how money is distributed between extracurricular activities or programs for students, school building renovations, teaching supplies, sports programs, and more. How a board chooses to invest money across these different topics may speak to what they value or do not value in education.

3. Approve Textbooks and Other Curriculum Materials: The materials used to teach are a critical element in a child's education. Textbooks in particular are used throughout the United States as a primary resource for teaching and learning. There are numerous versions of textbooks for every subject, which are constantly being updated and changed each year. The school board is in charge of approving the books that teachers are using in the classroom, which is the fundamental power to determine the quality of a child's education. Take for example, history textbooks. It has been known that different geographic regions of the United States intentionally use different textbooks that have contrasting, misleading, or simply false narratives on topics like the civil war, slavery, and Native American history (Goldstein 2020). Although we want our teachers to be cognizant of the books they recommend, the school board has the ultimate power to accept or reject those proposals, which contributes to developing the educational vision of the district.

4. Make decisions regarding the annual school calendar/schedule: The school board has the power to create the school calendar each year. This means that they get to decide when students will start and end the school year, which days they will be given off, and longer periods of time off-- that is, if they choose to give a typical winter or spring break. The start and stop times of a single school day, as well as the length of school days, is also determined by the board. However, there is a state mandated minimum number of days per year (180 in PA) and hours per day (Kindergarten= 2.5

hours; Grades 1-8= 5 hours; Grades 9-12= 5.5 hours in PA) that students must be in school (National Center for Education Statistics). The impact of extended school days and school years on student performance has been an area of study in the field of education since the 1950s (Patall, Cooper, and Allen 2010). However, the debate on the effectiveness of extended school days took flight after President Obama drew national attention during a speech where he expressed his preference for longer school days, weeks, and years (Obama 2009). Some scholars claim that longer school days, and hence more hours of instruction, create an increase in student achievement (Farbman and Kaplan 2005), while others feel that longer days will create fatigue among students and have an inverse effect (Abeles et al 2016). Thus, school boards can decide on the schedule they feel is most beneficial based on the mixed research, which will impact the education of students and the working schedules of parents.

5. *Setting the tax rates:* School boards vote on the property tax rates, typically prior to the beginning of a new school year as it is a consideration for their annual budget. The decision on tax rates ultimately influences the finances of community members in the district. School boards cannot just set the tax rate at any percentage they desire, however. Each state has a version of an index that designates the maximum percentage that a school board can increase real estate taxes by; the index varies by district depending on their market value. For Pennsylvania, the base index is 2.9% per year, although some districts are allowed to increase by up to 4.1% (“Act 1 Index” Pennsylvania Department of Education). School boards can navigate around this requirement however, by encouraging a voter referendum, which would allow the school board to increase the tax rates at a higher percentage than the maximum index. Regardless, the particular ability to allocate the budget with taxpayer dollars, by increasing or decreasing taxes, is a power that will impact every community member.

In sum, school boards are responsible for making decisions on school issues that impact not just students’ education, but also the entire community given their power over the budget and tax rates. Of course, the five examples noted here are just a few of the ways that board members

contribute to local education governance. Yet, given the significance of these decisions, it is necessary to consider who is in charge of making them. In the next chapter, we will examine how certain election structures and design may influence who makes it into office as a school board member. In addition, I will discuss the current demographics of school board members as well as potential motives for running for a position on the school board.

Chapter 2: School Board Politics

Elections

School board elections are known to have very small turnout, with typically less than 5% of eligible voters casting a vote (Reckhow et al 2017). Usually, the citizens who do turn out to vote are not representative of the district population in regard to race and income level (Reckhow et al 2017). One of the two forms of constituent control, according to Miller and Stokes (1963), is for voters to elect someone into office that inherently reflects their values, especially in regard to policy. Thus, when constituents do not vote, they are losing the first opportunity to have a say in their representation. Although low voter turnout in school board elections may appear to be political apathy among citizens, there are systemic structures in place that prevent citizens from voting (Allen and Plank 2005). The most common is the timing of the election; when school board elections are held on separate dates from other major elections, as is the case for some Pennsylvania districts, it is less likely that citizens will be able to make time to vote or know when the vote is going on. As I later discover (see *Interview Data and Results: Delegate Inhibitors*), the lack of media attention to some school board elections may also be why citizens are unaware of their right to vote or when the election is taking place. In addition to structures that burden citizens from participating, school board election designs may also favor certain candidates. Specifically, I will distinguish between partisan and nonpartisan elections as well as regional and at-large elections, to demonstrate how election-type can influence who is elected to office, and the implications of how that can impact constituency bases. This will be important when considering the qualities and types of representatives that citizens want to hold school board positions.

School Board Election Types: Partisan or Nonpartisan

School board elections, and likewise other local government races, can either be classified as “partisan” or “nonpartisan”. A partisan election, as is used in the state of Pennsylvania for school board elections, can be defined as any election where the candidate’s political party affiliation is marked on the ballot, (Adrian 1959), whereas, nonpartisan elections do not disclose the candidate’s political party alignment (Northup 1987). Partisan elections have dominated the sphere of American elections at the local, state, and federal level since the founding of the United States. One of the reasons political parties were formed was to provide citizens guidance when voting. Essentially, the intent was to congregate similar ideological values under specific titles, so that voters could narrow their vote choices to candidates that better reflect their political beliefs. At the turn of the 19th century, however, progressive reformers felt that there needed to be change in the structure of local government. Political machines had begun corrupting cities through patronage, large scandals, and self-interested means, so the reformers believed that having the involvement of political parties in city administration was undermining local governance (Trounstine 2010).

This era marked the slight deterioration of partisan elections in local government; many local municipalities began changing their election status from partisan to nonpartisan in the hopes that the depoliticization of local offices would lessen conflict in urban administration and increase efficiency. The belief held by progressive reformers, that nonpartisan elections would better fuel effective governance in local offices, applied to school districts who were branching off as municipal divisions of local government. The theory was that the removal of partisan labels in school-related elections would rid of inappropriate resource allocation in education and attract more open-minded candidates (Howell 2005). This is still up for debate among scholars. Some argue that there is not much difference between partisan and nonpartisan elections on the strategic selection of candidates, because partisan cues make it is nearly impossible for partisanship of candidates to go unnoticed in any election (Adrian 1959; Boudreau and Mackenzie 2014; Meier and Rutherford 2014; Bonneau and

Cann 2015). Others however find that the two structures lead to systemic advantages or disadvantages to certain candidates.

Zoltan Hajnal and Paul Lewis, for example, find that nonpartisan elections, for mayoral and city council, *do* conceal candidate partisanship, and lead to low voter turnout of racial and ethnic minority groups that tend to support democratic values (2003). They find that partisan cues are not necessarily apparent in these settings, and therefore fewer Democrats turn out to vote, inversely creating Republican victories. Thus, voters who do end up voting in local races tend to elect higher income, white candidates whose views are generally associated with the Republican party. Much of the research supports Hajnal and Lewis's conclusion that nonpartisan ballots negatively impact Democrats, therefore increasing the likelihood of Republican success. More specifically, a study conducted by Susan Welch and Timothy Bledsoe asks the question: "do nonpartisan elections produce council members that are more likely to be Republican than partisan elections?" (1986, 128). The researchers account for city size, the amount of partisan cues, partisan majority or minority percent, cities with at-large or regional elections, and regions in the West versus other areas. They conclude that without accounting for the controls, Republican victory seems clear in nonpartisan elections, however, with the addition of the controls the significance of that trend lowers. Only in particular contexts is the likelihood of Republican success extremely significant, like in larger cities where the costs of running are high (Welch and Bledsoe 1986). A similar study published just two years later likewise supports the theory of Republican success, or inversely Democrat failure, in nonpartisan elections. Davidson and Fraga (1988) find that nonpartisan elections remove the motivation of political parties to supply campaign funds to candidates, and therefore it limits the ability for those of low socioeconomic backgrounds to run for office and implement democratic values. Small amounts of campaign donations from political parties can also mean that members do not have as many ties to the national party, and will not be as bound by their political influence once in office (Williams and Adrian 1959). All of these studies suggest, to some extent, that nonpartisan elections tend to favor Republican candidates. It cannot be assumed that the studies on local

government are entirely transferable to school board elections, given that they are measuring different institutions like mayoral or city council positions. Yet, it is a starting point for understanding the kinds of impacts that nonpartisan or partisan designs can have on school board elections, given that there is limited research on the topic.

This research would support then, that Democrats are favored for school board office in the state of Pennsylvania, because the state requires partisan elections. However, for primary elections, board candidates in PA can opt to cross-file as both a Democrat and Republican in the primary election (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). In 2018, Justin Simmons, a Republican Pennsylvania House representative sponsored a bill that would end cross-filing as an option for school board candidates. Simmons explained his reasoning for the bill in a memo to lawmakers:

Historically, school board candidates have been permitted to cross-file because this position has been thought of as non-partisan. However, school board members once in office make very important decisions related to a school district's budget, and constituents are increasingly viewing this position as a partisan one. Often, voters are confused when a school board candidate receives the nomination of more than one party on the ballot, and eliminating their ability to cross-file could provide some clarity to voters in school board elections (Esack 2019).

The bill passed through the PA House with a 114-77 vote, but the decision from the PA senate on the bill is still in the works (Esack 2019). Michel Faccienetto, a Democrat and former president of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, thinks the bill is unnecessary and that Republicans are more likely “to vote straight-ticket GOP on state and federal elections, but are much less likely to do so on issues involving their local schools” (Esack 2019). In contrast to the literature, which suggests that Republicans would more likely benefit from nonpartisan elections, Republicans are advocating for even clearer partisan election rules in Pennsylvania.

School Board Election Types: At-large, Regional, or Combination

In addition to partisan and nonpartisan election-types, the way in which board members are selected may also determine who is more likely to get into office. Although there are some school districts that have school board members appointed, as opposed to elected by the public, Pennsylvania offers three participatory election structures. First, board members may be elected ‘at-large’. This means that candidates “must be residents of the school district, but may live anywhere in the district and are chosen by all the voters in the district” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). A regional election, however, splits the district into regions that have an equal number of representatives. School board members must reside within their respective region and are only elected by residents from that area, rather than all district residents. All regions must have relatively equal populations. The case study district for this work employs a regional election structure (see *Methods*). Finally, a third structure combines at-large and regional rules. In this election-type, regions still exist, but some board members are elected by their region, whereas, others are elected at large by voters across the district. For example, if there are three regions in the district, six of the nine board members may be elected by residents in their region (two representatives per region), and the remaining three may be elected at-large. The following literature may help explain why this combination is desirable, given that there are advantages and disadvantages to both at-large and regional election plans.

It is often argued that regional elections, also known as ward elections, provide greater possibility for the election of minority candidates, and result in more localized control, whereas at-large elections favor the election of candidates who represent a larger public interest (Pierranzu 2008). In terms of race relations then, minoritized groups that are geographically clustered together, like African Americans and Latino communities in particular, are said to benefit from regional elections and disadvantaged by at-large races (Leal et al 2004). This finding assumes that racial congruence between representatives and their constituents provides inherently positive representation, as opposed to a white representative overseeing a region made up primarily of people of color, for example. More specifically, the literature suggests that localized control is more likely in regional

elections, because the representative will either inherently represent the policy desires of the majority in that region, or the region will be better able to direct their thoughts to the representative, because it is a smaller population the district at-large. Ultimately, I find in the *Interview Data and Results* section that school board representatives in particular often view their constituency at-large, even though they are elected regionally. The research here would suggest that minority populations would be shut out if there is a disregard to regional election structure. This will be further analyzed in the *Discussion* section.

Other scholars make a claim for the importance of representing a *whole* constituency, as would be implied if an at-large election was used. In representation literature, this is referred to as collective representation. Weissburg (1978) and Grimmer (2013) both make arguments that collective representation by congressmen, meaning that the congressman thinks about the opinions of the whole nation as opposed to just their district, is a more accurate form of representation. Weissburg argues that when all congressmen consider the needs of the nation at large, they are statistically more likely to make policy decisions that accurately reflect a majority national opinion. Whereas, congressmen who only consider their region may end up having a false perception of what their region wants, in turn creating a potential for “misrepresentation” (Weissburg 1978, 547). Grimmer in particular highlights how preferencing regional views over collective views can cause a decrease in collective representative (2013). At-large elections are still more likely to place white candidates into office assuming that the white population is not a minority in the district. So, it is important for constituents to consider how the differing election types may influence how a representative views their constituency and likewise which candidates are favored for office.

Who is in Office... and Why?

School Board Demographics

After consideration of how election types may influence who is elected for school board positions, I will present information on the current demographics of school board members across the United States. The following demographics were taken from a survey conducted by the National

School Boards Association in 2018: “Today’s School Boards and Their Priorities Tomorrow”.

Gender and age: Unlike in other political offices, women are not underrepresented as school board representatives; as of 2018, women make up 48% of board members across the United States. For comparison, women held only 20% of the seats in the United States Congress and 25% of state legislature positions in 2017 (DeSilver 2018). As for age, school board members have steadily reflected a more mature population, with the median age of members being 59. Race and ethnicity: Although student populations in the U.S. are becoming more racially diverse, the same is not true for school board members. Around 78% of school board members across the country identified as white on the 2018 NSBA survey, and only 10% identified as African American/Black. Falling at or below 3% each are Hispanic or Latino/a, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Multiracial.

Education and Career: A majority of board members have some form of college education, with only 4% having just a high school diploma or GED. More specifically, a plurality of school board members has either their Masters or Doctorate (46%), 31% have a Bachelor’s degree, and 19% had some college or postsecondary degree. Given that the school board is typically an unpaid position, board members have a wide range of careers that they pursue simultaneously during their time in office. Education (27%) and Business and Finance (11%) were the two primary categories of occupation, and the rest of the respondents fell within an ‘other’ category, because their professions varied too drastically. Some additional board member occupational fields include construction, legal, military, office and administration, math, sales, transportation, and food preparation, for example.

Income Level: Nearly half (49%) of board members have an annual household income of \$100,000 or more, 30% were between \$50,000-\$99,999, and 8% earn between \$25,000-\$49,999. There were no board members that identified making \$25,000 or less. It is important to note, however, that this is a national survey, and so the implications of these incomes may vary. The cost of living in different states and districts may influence how these income levels are to be classified in terms of wealth and class.

Retirement and Children in School: Again, given that school board members may be unpaid for their time-consuming role, it makes it an optimal role for a retired citizen who does not need a full-time income. 40% of school board members indicated that they are retired, while the other 60% are working simultaneously during their term. Parents also seem to be frequent board members. 32% of all participants said that they have a child in school or preschool; this 32% is likely the non-retired survey participants, who are more likely to have school-aged children. Unsurprisingly, 91% of these parents say they serve as a board member in the same district that their child attends, because many times a qualification to run for board is being a resident of the school district. *Political Ideology:* Board members span across the entire political ideology spectrum, splitting almost evenly between Progressive, Leaning Progressive, Leaning Conservative, and Conservative. The progressive side of the spectrum did have a slightly higher percentage of identifying participants with 44% than the conservative end, which had 36% in total. 19% of participants chose not to share their ideological positioning.

Motivations for Office

There are a variety of reasons why individuals may run for a position on the school board. For Pennsylvanians, there are not many legal qualifications that a candidate must have to run for office; “Under the School Code, to be eligible to be elected or appointed to a Pennsylvania school board, one must be a citizen, at least 18 years old, of good moral character, and a resident of the school district for at least one year prior to the date of election or appointment” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). There is no specific definition of “good moral character” determined by PA, however, based on the Pennsylvania Constitution, citizens are deemed ineligible for office if they have committed an “infamous crime” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). The courts have determined “infamous crimes” to include all felonies and some misdemeanors involving dishonesty or “moral turpitude” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). Other eligibility requirements for school board include that the person cannot receive any portion of their income from the school district that they are attempting to run for office in. This would include teachers, administrators, or

other employees in the district, for example. In addition, one may not hold any other elected office in addition to a position on the school board, so for instance, a Mayor could not also be a school board member.

Despite the seemingly simple eligibility requirements as a possible gateway to office, it is still important to delve further into *why* someone would want to run for a position that requires much time and effort, but with little--if any--compensation. One of the first studies conducted on this topic found that board members were motivated to join school boards because they perceived something specifically wrong in the school and thought they could fix it (Goldhammer 1955). Another motive may be to have formal power within the school district and one's community (Mountford 2004), in order to gain the feelings and assets that come along with such prestige (Goodman and Zimmerman 2000). Aside from these negatively associated motives, research has also found that board members were inclined to join because of a sense of civic duty and an interest in education-related issues (McCarty 1959; Garmire 1962; Goodman and Zimmerman 2000). Board members may also have altruistic reasons for running for office (Cistone 1975), such as simply wanting to contribute to helping students and teachers. In contrast, others may run due to a personal vendetta against the district, administration, or other related personnel from the area (McCarty 1959). Some may have little personal motive, but instead were recruited by friends or family (McCarty 1959).

All of the research cited thus far on motives for the school board, excluding Mountford (2004), relied solely on self-reports of the board members. Alby (1979), a student of McCarty's (1959), decided that new methodology was needed to get the most honest and accurate reasons for why board members chose to pursue office. In order to do this, Alby (1979) encouraged the use of personal interviews as opposed to self-reported claims. More specifically, he decided that interviewing a board member about their reasons for office, in addition to interviewing their colleague and their superintendent for two alternative perspectives, was the best approach (Alby 1979). Alby (1979) found five main motives for joining the school board: because they a) wanted to fix a specific issue in the district, b) had a positive concern for education, c) were recruited, e) expressed the desire

to belong to a group, and e) wanted to increase their prestige. Alby's findings do not stray far from research done in the past; the only new motive discovered was the desire to belong to a group. After examining the variety of reasons that a citizen may be interested in a position on the school board, Mountford (2004) believes that about half of board members in the United States run for personal reasons while the other half run for altruistic reasons. The research conducted for this paper reflects these findings to an extent and adds the motive of recruitment specifically by political parties or school administrators to the literature presented here (see *Interview Data and Results*).

Chapter 3: School Boards as a Representative Body

Constituency Bases

Now that we know what school boards are, what powers they have, who their members are, and how they got there, it is necessary to explore who they are serving. Little research has been done on organized constituent bases specific to school boards (Reckhow et al 2017). A study by Delbert Taebel (1977) combines work on “constituent voters” by Eugene Lewis (1973, 170) and “clientele voters” by Ira Lineberry and Robert Sharkansky (1971, 59) to create a dichotomy for observing local government constituencies. Constituent voters are defined by Lewis as citizens that have a real or perceived stake in the government entity at hand (1973, 170). Taebel provides examples of “primary constituent voters” to be that of employees of the government body (1977, 156). In the context of a school board constituency base, these voters would be union members, teachers, administrators, bus drivers, or all other hired positions of the school district. Taebel distinguishes parents of currently enrolled students to be a part of the constituent voter group. In contrast, clientele voters are citizens that have fewer remote connections to the government body, but still may be recipients of its services (Lineberry and Sharkansky 1971, 59). District taxpayers and possibly voting age students would fall under this category.

Taebel's combination of constituent and clientele voters as categories of the represented is limited, given that constituent and clientele voters refer only to members who *vote*. As we know, school board election turnout is limited and many times hindered by structural barriers; thus, it is

important to consider those who do not, or are unable, to vote as constituents as well. In addition to constituent and clientele voters, then, school board constituency bases may also be interpreted through Richard Fenno's theory on Congressional constituencies (Fenno 1978). Fenno, known for his landmark contributions to literature on political representation, argues that Congressional House representatives view their constituency base in four categories: the geographical constituency (the district), the reelection constituency (the supporters), the primary constituency (strongest supporters), and the personal constituency, also known as "the intimates" (1978, 24). Based on the perceptions that the representative has of these bases, they are better able to understand the strategies they need to use to continue gaining, or to maintain, electoral support. This theory may be applied to school board constituencies.

Evidently then, based on Fenno's first constituency, any person residing within the school board's geographic control, or district, can be considered a constituent of the board. In many cases, like the site of study for this research, individual board members are elected to represent a region of the district, usually an area that they personally reside. They are expected to advocate for the needs of their particular region of the district in conversations and decisions made by the school board. Of course, as mentioned in the *At-Large versus Regional Elections* section, oftentimes board members may view their geographic constituency at-large, despite the mode in which they were elected. The second constituency base, the reelection constituency, is defined by Fenno as simply those who cast a vote in their favor, as opposed to those who do not (1978, 8). Partisanship plays a major role in this distinction-- it is no secret that Democrats tend not to vote in favor of Republicans and vice versa. Hence, school board elections that are partisan may likewise lead individual board members to be elected or not based on their displayed political affiliation.

The primary constituency are also citizens that vote in favor of the representative but provide even stronger support. This constituency is usually made up of a group of people who support the same side of an issue that the representative does and who give consistent and unwavering support for the candidate during their initial election, the tenure of their term, reelections, and so forth. For

example, the “antiwar people” (Fenno 1978, 19) for one congressman were classified as a primary constituency, because they provided constant campaigning and advocacy for the so-called anti-war representative. In the context of a school board member, charter school promoters may be a part of the primary constituency of a board member that believes in charter schools. This goes in contrast to unions who would rather support a candidate against charters, and who is invested in keeping money in the public school system. These individuals would provide an “at-home-ness” (Fenno 1978, 22) feeling for the representative, making them feel both electorally safe and well-supported in their ideas for office.

An unspoken primary constituency base may also be those that provide financial support to the candidate; “In the primary constituency, the test for inclusion and exclusion goes beyond a vote, to the intensity and the durability of one’s support” (Fenno 1978, 19). These diehard supporters may not only provide a vote, but also the comfortable support of checks towards the candidate’s campaign(s). Candidates may not want to disclose these individuals as a part of their primary base, with the thought that this exposure could get rid of other electoral support from their other constituencies. More and more money is being filtered into school board elections (Henig 2019). More specifically, “national reform donors and competing national interest groups are transforming dozens of local school board elections into major electoral battlegrounds, with millions of dollars in campaign funding and professional campaign consultants” (Reckhow et al 2019, 1). Elite donors, who are providing “outside money” (Reckhow et al 2019), meaning that the donor is out-of-district or out of state, can even be considered constituents. Although outside donors do not entirely fulfill Fenno’s definition of primary constituencies, because of their ineligibility to vote and the potential lackluster of “at-home-ness”, the candidate can feel a sense of obligation to them and bring opinions to the board on behalf of these money-givers. Perhaps, these individuals are better termed “the non-geographic constituency” or “the outside constituency”. This constituency base may be more relevant to very large school districts, where board elections are more competitive.

Finally, the personal constituency, or the intimate friend groups and family that a representative has is likewise an applicable constituency base to school board representatives. One of the primary reasons that school board candidates run for the position is because they were recruited to do so by close family or friends (Alby 1979). Especially in a local context, where the candidate is presumably living near some of their closest friends, as opposed to being a representative working in Washington for most of their week, the intimate constituency may be even more relevant to school board members. The premise of Fenno's work poses the question of which constituency or constituencies, based on the four just mentioned, do congressmen consider when performing either the delegate or trustee model of representation? Although, the question is left up in the air for researchers to examine. This will be a primary question explored in this paper, but in reference to school boards.

Constituency Voices: Board Meetings and Personal Communications

One of the prime opportunities for school district constituents to voice their opinions and interact with their board representatives are at school board meetings. Many school boards will offer monthly general board meetings, where votes are taken, as well as 'committee' meetings that are topic-specific information sessions. Through the Sunshine Act, "school boards must allow citizens a reasonable opportunity to speak to the board about matters the board is deciding" (Pennsylvania School Boards Association) So, constituents are given typically 3-5 minutes each to speak during the portion of the agenda designated for public comment at each meeting, either general or committee meetings. Counterintuitively, the Pennsylvania School Board Association recommends that board members not engage with public comment at meetings. For example, if a constituent speaks on a subject during their allocated time, board members may listen, but tend to not respond or comment on what was said. This makes it challenging for the public to know how their preferences are being considered or interpreted in the decision-making process, but they are at minimum given a designated opportunity to state their feelings towards a certain issue or topic.

Board meetings may also serve as an accountability and transparency measure for board officials by their constituents; “as with other local government units, school boards are legally required to deliberate and make their decisions at meetings that are open to the public and advertised in advance” (Pennsylvania School Boards Association). Realistically, however, if turnout from the public to meetings are low, or nonexistent, from the public, then the opportunity for accountability is lost. Likewise, as will be discussed in the results of this paper, “deliberation” does not tend to occur at meetings when a vote will be cast, between constituents or between board members. Board members enter vote meetings already knowing how they plan to vote, thus making first time public comment at these meetings less influential. In other words, it is best for the public’s thoughts to be heard and considered if they attend meetings prior to the day of a vote, instead of a last-minute plea.

The opportunity for constituents and board members to interact may also extend to in-face communications outside of the meeting setting. Henig (2019) discusses the difference between local leaders and leaders of state and national governments regarding constituent interactions:

Because local leaders are more known and accessible to voters, local decisions are more likely to respond to democratically expressed desires. Especially in smaller districts, but also in some large districts where school board members are elected by ward, it is common for citizens to run into their representatives in the course of their everyday lives.... that accessibility [between local leaders and constituents] can create a bond and a channel of communication that is more intimate and effective than between voters and state or national leaders (29).

Henig (2019) describes the opportunity for democratic processes to be most effective at the local level. School board representatives are people who a constituent may run into every day-- at the grocery store, at a sports event, or at a local coffee shop. With such opportunity for public input, it is an intriguing question to see if board members and constituents utilize this communication, and hence to explore their representational relationship.

Chapter 4: Delegate and Trustee Theories of Representation

With an understanding of school board structure, the members that compose them, and their possible constituency bases, it is clear that school boards are critical representative bodies. This section will provide an overview of the two forms of political representation styles that this paper looks to apply to school boards, in order to gain an understanding of the relationship between school board members and their constituency bases. In addition, I will provide relevant literature on the preferences for these two styles.

Definitions

A delegate style of representation “posits that the representative ought to reflect purposively the preferences of his constituents” (McCrone and Kuklinski 1979, 278). In other words, a representative who assumes a delegate role should make decisions based on the desires of their constituents and act in ways that their constituents are requesting. In order to know the policy preferences of any constituency base, and hence for the delegate theory to accurately function, constituents must provide cues to their representatives as to what it is they desire (McCrone and Kuklinski 1979). In general, these ‘cues’ will likely come from citizens that write letters or contact their representatives in some form, attend meetings, or have interest in the government decision-making process (Miller and Stokes 1963). Thus, in most cases a representative is using their *perception* of what a partial constituency base wants-- those who are active enough to make their beliefs known, and thus become a majority opinion. A delegate style of representation is more easily and accurately implemented surrounding issues that are salient to the public, because citizens who are not typically active in the political process are more likely to vocalize their opinions to their representative(s) on such matters (Miller and Stokes 1963; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979). In these cases, a representative will gain a clearer assessment of their geographic constituents’ feelings on an issue, either regionally or at-large. It can also be argued that delegate representatives have a moral responsibility to make efforts towards understanding what their constituents’ preferences are, by

being accessible, approachable, and providing multiple opportunities for constituents to express their needs.

A trustee style of representation, on the other hand, can be thought of as when a representative is “self-reliant in judgment, [is] less responsive to sanction, and aim[s] at the good of the whole” (Mansbridge 2011, 621). Many times, a trustee relationship is preferred by constituents simply because they feel that the representative is a qualified expert who can make good decisions. Or, if a constituency is so apathetic to the point where they share no expression of opinion, a representative may be automated into a trustee role, because they have no ‘sanctions’ to follow. Other times, a trustee may deliberately go against the desire of the constituency. Fenno describes a trustee relationship as representation that is “based on what he [the representative] thinks is good public policy, regardless of what his constituents want” (1978, 160). Take, for example, a statement by a southern Congressman who was interviewed by Fenno:

Sometimes I vote in ways that are not popular with my constituents and I know they aren't popular... For instance, I voted for the Voting Rights Bill. It was a liberal vote -- not all southerners voted for it. But I did it because it equalized treatment instead of singling out and discriminating against the South.

This example shows three potential criteria of a trustee that goes against the will of their constituents, with the first being an acknowledgement that the community disagrees. Second, a vote is made in the opposition to the perceived majority of the constituency, and third, the decision is made purely on the representative's belief on the matter. When the Congressman stated, ‘not all southerners voted for it’, he suggested that he was not swayed by the expectations of his political party. Trustee representation holds that the representative is not influenced by their party, but because there is little contemporary research on this form of representation, it is undecided if things like special interest groups or electoral advantage constitutes undue influence toward vote choice (Hill et al 2015).

Preferences of Representation Style

With two very different forms of representation, it is important to know which styles are preferred by certain groups. Research has shown that constituents who have obtained a higher education are more likely to allow their representative to act as a trustee, because the constituent has a better understanding of the complexity of governing decisions, and also tends to have more trust in government altogether (McMurry and Parsons 1965; Patterson et al 1975). Likewise, those who have more political efficacy also prefer a trustee relationship; citizens with high political efficacy believe that they have the power to correct or influence political officials if policy begins to move in a direction they do not desire, whereas those with low political efficacy feel the need to control their representative more closely (Carman 2007). Political standing and race also are determining factors of representation preference. It has been found that the delegate style tends to be preferred by political majorities, given that the delegate will coincide with the majority opinion (Carman 2007). Whereas, political minorities prefer a trustee relationship that will not follow the demands of the majority, but rather do what is best for all constituents (Carman 2007). Thus, racial minorities also tend to prefer the trustee relationship, except in cases where their representative is a person of color. Carman finds specifically that when African American constituents have an African American representative, a delegate style may be preferred because there is a belief that the representative will consider the racial minorities needs in addition to majority opinion (Carman 2007). Finally, Carman (2007) found that partisanship differences may result in different representation preferences, although did not think that partisanship was as influential as level of trust.

It can also be hypothesized that issue-type may be a factor in a constituent's desire for a delegate or trustee relationship. Take for example research done on the relationship between congressmen and the President of the United States. Even congressmen rely on, or prefer, a specific, issue-based relationship with the President, who is technically their representative. For instance, on domestic policy issues, congressmen are confident, passionate, and knowledgeable about their

position, and thus have a specific stance that they wish for the President to follow (Wildavsky 1966). On issues concerning foreign policy, however, congressmen tend to defer to the advice of the President, because the President usually has more knowledge and intel on such issues (Wildavsky 1966), making the President a trustee. Thus, it can be argued that constituents who are not knowledgeable about a certain topic may entrust their representative, who is theoretically more knowledgeable on the issue, to make the right decision. This is just one example, but it shows how constituents may desire a particular representation style for each issue the school board addressed.

Little research has been conducted to directly tie a representative's preference to either a delegate or trustee style of representation when approaching a vote. The work by John Kingdon (1981) provides some insight. Kingdon interviewed members of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1969. He used an issue-based approach; he would ask the representative about how they made a decision on a specific, recent vote, while prompting them to discuss the actors that influenced their decision. After analyzing the interview data and combining patterns, Kingdon found the main categories of actors that were influential to congressmen's decisions to be their constituency, fellow congressmen, party leadership, interest groups, administration, staff, and reading. Ultimately, he found that the opinion of fellow congressmen, followed by constituency opinion, were the most influential toward a congressman's vote choice. Although the study does not directly demonstrate preferences for the delegate and trustee representation, it shows that congressmen will listen to their constituents in some situations, as opposed to their own belief, and vice versa. The decision-making process prior to casting a vote is ultimately a demonstration of how a representative prefers to approach their representational relationship. A similar methodology to Kingdon's (1981) was used for school board members in this study, but was altered to more directly elicit preferences for being a delegate or trustee (see *Approaches to Data Analysis*).

Delegate and trustee models of representation "place competing and contradictory commands on the behavior of representatives" (Dovi 2006, 3). They cannot act as simultaneous forms of representation when deciding on a policy choice, which makes the mutual preference of style

between representatives and constituents even more important. These two forms of representation are not traditionally applied in educational research, but they serve as a common dichotomy to understand representation between representatives and their constituency bases in the field of political science. I argue that this dichotomy of representation is an appropriate lens to view school board and constituent relationships, for three main reasons: 1) school board members have a vote toward substantive policy decisions, and thus are capable of either following the perceived view of their constituents, the delegate form, or acting on their own expertise--the trustee form. 2) School board constituency bases are relatively small compared to the regions that congressmen serve, making it even more practical to implement the delegate method appropriately by having a better opportunity to know the preferences of their constituents. Likewise, school board representatives may be more familiar with their constituents given the geographic closeness, and have the potential to build a relationship that elicits the trustee preference of representation. 3) Constituents of school board members become active when issues are salient (Tracy and Durfy 2007), and so it is necessary to test if members of the school board serve as a delegate in these cases, or choose to ignore their regional constituents and act on their own judgements.

Chapter 5: Methodology

Overview

This research uses a mixed methods approach in order to understand the representational preferences among school board members and their constituents. A single school district in Pennsylvania was used for this research (see *Participants and Site* for more information on the case study). An original survey was distributed to district constituents in order to collect demographic characteristics of the participants and to assess four main categories: 1) their knowledge of school board powers 2) their participation in school board politics, 3) their attitudes toward the school board and 4) their preference of a delegate or trustee style of representation based on issue-type. The appropriate statistical tests were run to see if there are statistically significant relationships between

some of the dependent variables on the survey and the demographic features of the participants. There are also open-ended response questions on the survey that served to address the first three categories.

As surveys were used to cover the perspectives of constituents, individual interviews of school board members were held to gain insight on the political officials' representation style(s). Interviews were conducted of six school board members of the same district, who represent the participants of the survey, to gain an understanding of their decision-making processes as well as their preferred representation style. The interviews used a semi-structured format; about 10 questions were asked revolving around the themes of 1) background experience/educational history of the board member, 2) relationships and interactions with constituents, and 3) decision-making practices in relation to delegate and trustee styles of representation (see *Appendix B* for the full list of interview questions).

Participants and Site

As mentioned, this research used a case study of a school district in Pennsylvania. For the sake of confidentiality, pseudonyms were given for the district and any participants referenced in the study, as well as any other potentially identifying information. I will call the district of study “Archwood Area School District” or “AASD”. The Archwood Area School District can be classified as an urban, suburban, and rural school district, as it has a number of schools in its discretion that are located in all of these areas. There are approximately 65,000 residents within the AASD. A little more than half of AASD residents are Caucasian, about 20% are African American, 20% are Hispanic, and the remaining percent includes residents of Asian descent or other race categories. Nearly half of the students in the district are eligible for free or reduced lunch. This diversity in geographic and socioeconomic spread is one of the reasons why this site was chosen for this study. The results gained from this site may be resourceful for multi analysis case studies of school board representation among heterogeneous demographics and constituency bases.

AASD serves approximately 10,000 students. As of 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that of the 13,584 school districts nationwide, about 13% (1,040) of them have

between 5,000 and 9,999 students (“Digest of Education Statistics” 2017). Nearly half of the school districts nationwide (6,142) serve between 1,000 and 10,000 students. There are 6,334 school districts serving fewer than 1,000 students, and only 900 districts serving more than 10,000 students. Thus, AASD can be classified as a fairly large district after considering the median number of students per district across the country; this excludes outliers like New York City Public Schools, which serves over one million students. A large district was desired for this research to see how a school board is able to manage a larger constituency base. AASD was also an appropriate site for study, because it had undergone the retirement of its superintendent within the past year of the research being conducted. This retirement, theoretically, should spark more political participation from the constituent base, in pressing their board members to vote for a desired candidate (refer to *Roles and Powers of a School Board* for information on a Superintendent). Likewise, the AASD had recent elections in May of 2019, which is useful for asking participants about their vote history.

Data Collection

Constituent Survey Data

An original survey was posted to a public Facebook group, which comprised over 16,000 members from the district of study. As a note, a survey filter was used to assure that participants were actually residents of the AASD by asking them to select their area of residency from a multiple choice question. If they selected ‘none of the above’ the survey ended. Minors were also filtered out of the study; the first question of the survey provided age ranges, and if the participant selected ‘under 18’ the survey ended. Given the time frame allotted for this research and the choice of methodology, approval for the participation of minors by the Institutional Review Board was not possible, however, the perspectives of students would be meaningful. Future research should examine how students interact with their school board representatives. Please refer to the Appendix A for specific survey protocol, and the limitations section below, which summarizes some of the limits to the methods.

School Board Interviews

The AASD has nine total school board members. Six of the nine were interviewed; their pseudonyms are shown in the table below, under the region that they serve (recall that AASD board members are elected regionally as opposed to at-large).

REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3
Laurie Harrison	Erin Fitzgerald	Kelly Brooks
Evan Brown	Garrett Walker	Matthew Smith

Generally speaking, Region 1 serves residents of suburban areas, Region 2 serves residents within urban areas, and Region 3 serves suburban and rural areas, all of which are within the district. Interviews were conducted independently, rather than in small groups or as a whole, because the board members may sway each other's responses had they been asked to interview together in the same room. It is likely that social desirability may be at play for representatives who may want to present that they are responsive to, and considerate of, their constituents, despite their true feelings on constituent involvement in the decision-making process. Individual interviews, as well as personal interviewer traits to build rapport, were used to help mitigate this urge and to elicit the most honest response possible. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Approaches to Data Analysis

The system Qualtrics was used to collect the survey responses from AASD participants. After cleaning the data of incomplete responses (e.g. I deleted responses that did not answer any questions past the demographics section), the data was imported to Stata, a software for statistics. All univariate statistics were calculated through Stata to provide accurate population sizes for each demographic question as well as to assure that the proper percentages of each category response were reported. In addition, chi-square tests were run to determine statistically significant (95% confidence interval) bivariate relationships between the categorical variables on the survey. These tests were run for every applicable combination of variables, so that no possible relationships were ruled out. For any

qualitative survey responses reported in this paper, they were simply grouped into themes to provide additional explanation for the relevant quantitative survey results.

For school board participants, all interviews were transcribed and coded. A similar approach to coding was used to that of Kingdon (1981) who inspired the interview questions strategy for this research (see *Delegate and Trustee Theories of Representation* for Kingdon's results). Given that my study looked to explore preferences for delegate and trustee styles of representation, questions were asked about the school board member's decision-making process. All questions during the interview were strategically designed to elicit conversation that would relate to delegate and trustee representation styles. Participants were prompted to explain the decision process in relation to specific vote choices on two different issues. Kingdon (1981) argued that this issue-by-issue approach allows the representative to provide a more concrete and accurate explanation of how they approached a vote, because they have a specific instance to think about. In addition, I also asked participants to explain, in general, their decision process and people that they may consult as a way to see who their primary contacts are on a day to day basis. Thus, school board members' preference for delegate or trustee representation was not based on a direct claim by the participant, as those terms were never mentioned in the interviews, but rather their rhetoric was coded as they spoke on their decision-making process.

Similar to Kingdon (1981), I calculated the number of mentions of the board members' constituency bases, board colleagues, outside actors, or personal opinions in relation to impacting their vote choice or approach to a decision. The comments of these actors were coded to have either 1) no importance on the decision, 2) minor importance, or 3) major importance in influencing the representative, as were the categories used by Kingdon (1981). This allowed me to see which actors are most critical and influential on a daily basis. If a constituency base was coded as being a "1", for example for general decision-making or for a specific vote choice, then the representation style most likely at play was trusteeship. Likewise, if a representative's personal opinion was coded as a "3" and the constituency as a "2", then it was also likely to be a trustee relationship. Importance was placed

on word choice as well; examples of specific language that led me to code as either trustee or delegate are represented through quotations in the *Interview Data and Results* section.

Limitations

Like any case study, results are not necessarily generalizable. Thus, the results found in this research based on the Archwood Area School District may not apply to other districts. These results are most applicable to districts with similar board structures, including partisan and regional election types, a Democratic-dominated school board, and a heterogeneous district that includes urban and suburban areas. The goal, however, is for the results to provide meaningful insight on representation and leadership styles for constituents and board members from other areas, even if results are not fully transferable. The research question itself is founded off of the idea that constituents do not have the same preference of representation style (Carman 2007), and so the board will never be able to please every member. However, board members and constituents may be better able to work together if they are aware of each others' perspectives on an issue. It is possible that the use of online distribution for the survey may limit a particular demographic of possible participants, like those who have access to the internet or wifi. Those who are not as privileged to afford these features may be unintentionally excluded from the survey. Or, simply those who choose not to participate on social media sites like Facebook, potentially older populations, may be underrepresented as well. As the survey data will show, there was a vast underrepresentation of residents of color given the demographics of the district. As for the interviews, because I only spoke with six of the nine total board members, it is possible that I am missing critical perspectives on how the board as a whole operates when making decisions. In addition, Kingdon (1981) argued that asking a representative about their general decision-making process, as opposed to asking about a specific issue, can potentially lead to cliché responses. Although I utilized both of these approaches, and it is possible that clichés were given, the first instinct response of a representative may also be telling as to who they value most often. For example, if the constituency is not mentioned as an actor in their decision-

making process without prompting by the interviewer, then it can suggest that the constituency is not a major influential actor for most issues.

Chapter 6: Data and Results

Survey Data and Results

Participants: Demographics and Party Affiliation

There was a total of 146 respondents to the survey; the sample consisted of 72% female respondents and 28% male. In addition, half of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 49 years old, and around 30% were between 50 and 64. The tail ends of the age spectrum, 18-29 and 65+, made 9% each of the sample. In terms of race, the sample was a majority Caucasian; white participants made up 88% of the sample, while the other 12% were non-white, consisting of Black, Latino, Asian, and Middle Eastern identifying respondents. 60% of participants (N=143) designated that they had an annual family income of \$80,000 or more, and around 9% preferred not to share their income level. A plurality (34%) of respondents identified that their highest level of education was a 4-year degree, 28% designated that they had obtained a graduate or professional degree, and 25% had gone to some college or technical school. The rest of the participants had earned a high school diploma, with fewer than 1% completing less than high school. Finally, participants were fairly dispersed along the political spectrum, but there was certainly a plurality of participants on the Democratic side. 48% of participants (N=142) fell on the Democratic side of the spectrum, 30% identified as Republican, and 14% chose that they aligned with an Independent. Around 8% preferred not to share their party affiliation. For reference, the sample is not entirely representative of Archwood Area School District's composition. Women were overrepresented in the sample, with actual percentages being closer to 50-50. In addition, there was an under representation of African American and Latino residents, who combined make up close to half of the AASD. The rest of the demographics aligned well with the true population of the district.

Participants: Residency, Identity, and Political Involvement

Given that the population of study had to live within the boundaries of the Archwood Area School District, participants of the survey were required to mark which municipality they reside in. Of the four municipalities within the AASD, a majority of participants lived in the more suburban or semi-rural townships. Recall that the AASD presides over urban, suburban, and rural municipalities. 45% of respondents live in Haven Township, a combination of rural and suburban spaces, 28% live in Williamsburg Township, a primarily suburban area, and 25% live in the City of Archwood, an urban area. The remaining 2% of participants reside in South Penn Township, which is a rural township that is furthest from schools within the district, and the smallest municipality that the district oversees. In regard to population distribution in the AASD, there was an overrepresentation of residents from Haven Township, and a slight underrepresentation of South Penn and City residents.

Lastly, participants were asked to select all identifying ties to the AASD, or the education field in general, from a list of identities like being a Parent of an [AASD] student, an Alumni of [AASD] , or a Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) member (refer to figure 1 for identities). An ‘other’ category was offered, which provided a space to type any additional identities that the participant felt were relevant based on the list they were given. The purpose of identifying these traits is to cross-reference educational interest and/or major stakes in the district with constituents’ participation and contact with the school board. 20 respondents opted to skip past the identity question on the survey, so N=123 as opposed to 146. Figure 1 demonstrates the percentage of participants in each of the categories. There were three identity categories not displayed on the graph; less than one percent of respondents were current education administrators. In addition, one participant identified as being a former school board member in the ‘other’ section, and two participants mentioned that they were parents of homeschool students. There were some ‘other’ comments that were excluded, because their typed response did not qualify as a relevant identity (e.g. “property owner” and “someone who pays way too much taxes for this junk”).

Figure 1. Participant Identity

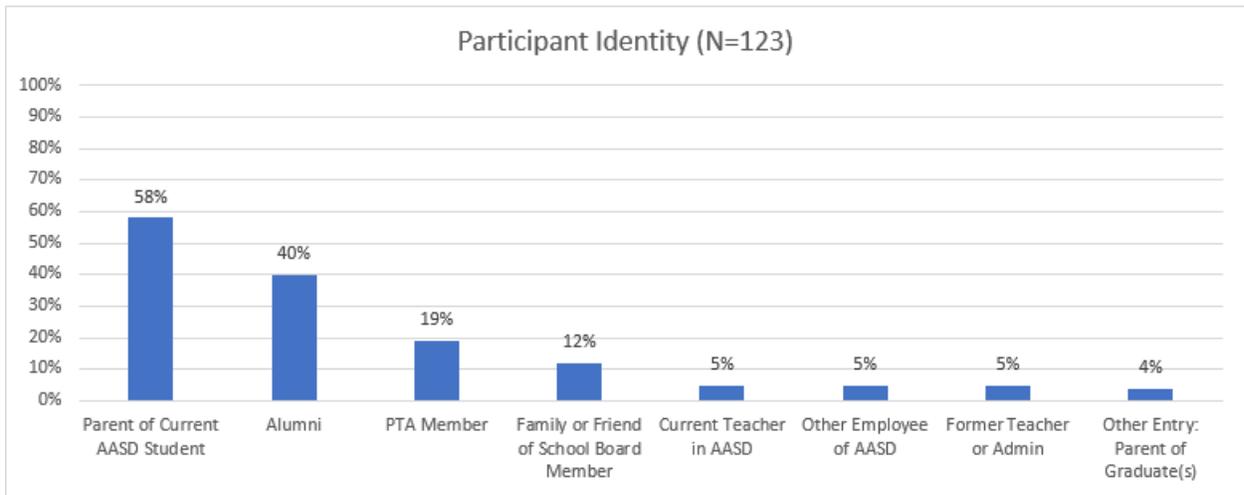


Figure 1. Respondents were able to select more than one identity category, so percentages do not add to 100. 66% of respondents chose only one identity, 15% chose two, 14% chose three, and 3% selected 4 identities. The remaining 1% of respondents for this question had selected 'other'.

Speaking of which, it should be reminded that *all* participants are taxpayers to the district, given the fact that they live within the school district boundaries. So, even for the participants that selected only one or two identities, they are also still stakeholders in the education system, because their tax money is being allocated by the school board.

Given that there were a significant number of parents, alumni, and other stakeholders in the education system that were identified on the survey, it was expected that the sample would be relatively interactive with their local school board. Responses indicate, however, the sample of participants had little direct involvement with the board in terms of voting, attending meetings, and other demonstrations of political participation. 43% of respondents (N= 135) said that they did not vote in the most recent board election; most selected that they either had little interest in voting or did not have time, when asked why they did not vote. The most frequent qualitative response, when given the option to select 'other', was that they didn't know that the election was going on, reinforcing the literature (Reckhow et al 2017) that off-cycle elections inhibit voting, as well as the lack of media attention as discussed in the interview results.

Table 1. Measure of Actual and Potential Constituent Political Action

Political Action	Have Done	Might Do	Would Never Do
Sign a petition related to a school district issue	35%	60%	5%
Contact a school board member	24%	68%	7%
Attend a school board committee meeting	22%	68%	10%
Attend a monthly school board meeting	25%	64%	11%
Speak at a school board meeting	16%	63%	21%
Discuss school issues with my friends and neighbors	66%	30%	4%
Join a strike, boycott, or other protest in regard to the school district	8%	55%	37%
Donate money to a school board candidate	3%	41%	56%
Recruit friends and family to attend school board meetings (N=113)	14%	73%	13%

Table 2. N=114. Notably, the most participation occurred with respondents discussing school issues with friends and neighbors, while the least likely form of participation was donating money to a school board candidate. There was a large amount of potential participation in the ‘might do’ column.

See table two for constituent *actual* political action (‘have done’) and *potential* political action (‘might do’ or ‘would never’ do). These measures will be relevant when exploring constituents’ representation preferences, as political participation in regard to sharing cues is necessary for the delegate style.

Participants on Representation

In order to begin to answer the primary research question of this paper, which seeks to learn the *preferences* for representation of constituents and school board members, it is insightful to simultaneously determine the *current* representational relationship between the AASD constituents

and the school board. By doing so, the inherent feelings that constituents have toward the current relationship with the board will shine through ,and will assist in uncovering their satisfaction level and/or their desired preference for a delegate or trustee style. First, level of trust plays a large role in designating your representative as a trustee, and informally consenting to a trustee relationship as a constituent. So, participants were asked to respond to the statement, *“I feel like I can trust the school board to do what is right...”* , by selecting ‘almost always’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘seldom’, or ‘never’.

Just over half of respondents (N=108) chose the middle response category, saying that they can ‘sometimes’ trust the school board. 29% said that they can ‘almost always’ or ‘often’ trust the school board, while 19% felt they can ‘seldom’ or ‘never’ trust the school board to do what is right. Although the term ‘sometimes’ is ambiguous, it suggests that constituents’ trust in the school board to do what is right may vary depending on the context or issue at hand. All participants who responded to the ‘trust’ question were met with an open-ended opportunity to type why they felt they could [almost always, often, sometimes, seldom, or never] trust the school board to do what is right. Those that selected ‘sometimes’ expressed similar reasons for their choice. The most frequent theme among the responses made mention of the board and/or board members having a ‘personal agenda’, which was not taken positively by constituents. Below are some examples from the survey:

P30: In the good old boys club that is the [AASD], there is always an unseen or unheard agenda that runs through many in administration and the school board. Only with strong input and oversight from the public can the school board be trusted.

P35: The school board is made up of people with their own personal opinions. They will not always do what is best for the school and community.

P109: I feel that school board members each have their own personal agenda, which is often not shared by the public in whole.

All of these expressed that the board occasionally acts on their own interests, not necessarily as a well-intentioned trustee, and thus there is a seeming desire for a delegate relationship, at least on some occasions. A preference for the delegate style of representation was often made through the

explicit reference to the need for, or the current lack of, consideration of public opinion when making decisions.

P13: Some things they have decided on are great and make valid points, other things they really should get more public opinion on before voting. Hear more opinions and sides. I think it's not only important for parents to get involved and give opinions but I think students and teachers should be heard more.

P104: Some in past on the board i feel were influenced by friends or teaching staff to go one way or the other. Contracts with outrageous salary hikes were passed without regard to community opinion. Many things passed or given the ok when community wanted it held.

Public opinion should involve the consultation with *all* constituents, not just certain subgroups of constituents (e.g. close friends, teachers, parents). The AASD constituents are insinuating the desire for total community involvement in the decision-making process, which suggests a delegate approach to representation. Among those who selected that they can 'never' or 'seldom' (19% total) trust the school board, recurring thoughts included that the board does not budget properly (e.g. wasting money and raising taxes as a result) and similarly to the 'sometimes' responses, that the board is 'out for themselves'.

P22: My statement is mostly pertaining to the fact theses grown adults can't balance a budget and stick to it and raise taxes every single year

P27: they spend too much money on needless issues, too many lawsuits could have been settled but they drug it out and it cost the tax payers

P100: This board is full of self-motivating agendas. They rarely take recommendations from the administration...we're then left with the incompetent, unqualified board members making decisions on items they know nothing about.

In contrast, themes for constituents that selected 'almost always' or 'often' (29% total) reasoned that the board tends to know what they are doing, that members are qualified for their role, and that the board makes good decisions on behalf of the district:

P3: Most of them seem to understand the job

P11: I believe if the school board has the qualified personnel they should all together go over the situations and figure out the way to address/ fix most problems.

P50: I believe in the school board and trust their judgment. I don't agree with everything they do but most of their decisions are appropriate.

P105: I personally know who was elected and trust them

Thus, these constituents feel comfortable with the board acting on their own accord, or as trustees.

Given the variance of opinion between the more-trusting and less-trusting constituents, chi-square tests were used to determine if there is a relationship between demographic or identity variables and the extent of trust with the board.

It was found that there is a statistically significant relationship ($p=.013$) between gender and trust toward the school board; women are more likely to trust the school board than men.

Additionally, political affiliation has a relationship to level of trust. Republicans were the least trusting of the board, while Democrats and Independents were more trusting. Notably, those who indicated that they were a strong partisan, either Democrat or Republican, had responses spread throughout the spectrum of trust more so than leaning partisans. This may be because partisans are likely to follow politics more closely, and so they may feel a greater confidence in selecting the choice that best fits their belief. Lastly, although it was not found to be statistically significant ($p=.106$), there does seem to be a pattern of trust in regard to area of residency. Participants from the City of Archwood seem less likely to trust the school board, with 72% of residents selecting sometimes, whereas participants from the suburbs, either Haven or Williamsburg, selected 'almost always' or 'often' at higher rates. This would imply that residents of the city will more often prefer a delegate style, whereas residents of Haven or Williamsburg may be more accepting of the trustee method. The two respondents from rural South Penn were combined into the data for Haven Township to prevent a misleading p-value, due to small sample size from that area of residency. The South Penn residents were placed with Haven Township, because Haven has rural sections in the township, the townships are geographically close to one another, and they are a part of the same school district region, and thus have the same board representatives.

Table 2. Level of Trust by Partisanship

Level of Trust	Strong Democrat	Leaning Democrat	Independent	Leaning Republican	Strong Republican	Prefer Not to Share
Almost Always	4%	5%	0%	0%	10%	0%
Often	17%	27%	50%	33%	15%	0%
Sometimes	76%	50%	31%	34%	45%	67%
Seldom	3%	18%	6%	20%	25%	0%
Never	0%	0%	13%	13%	5%	33%

Table 2: All columns add to 100% of respondents per category. (N=108); p= .017

In addition to the question on trust, participants were given a series of issue topics that the school board may need to make a decision on. Specifically, participants were asked:

When making decisions, do you think the school board should do what the members of the community they serve (the “people”) think is best, or should the school board do what they think is best when deciding the following issues?

A selection of ‘the people’ would indicate a preference for a delegate style, whereas, choosing ‘the school board’ would show a desire for a trustee relationship for that issue type. A third option was provided, that ‘the people’s and the school board’s view on this issue are largely the same’. In terms of delegate or trustee, this selection would fall closer to the desire for a trustee relationship. By choosing ‘equal on this issue’, the participant likely believes that the board agrees with, at the very least, their own perspective. This is because it is unlikely that respondents who select this answer actually know how ‘the people’ feel, in regard to the geographic constituency, and so they base their perception of ‘the people’s’ view on their own personal values or opinions on the topic (to accurately know the entire public’s and the board’s views requires political participation; refer to table 1 for participant involvement). So, if it is assumed that the board has the same opinion as the public, then they ought to go ahead and act as a trustee. Just as Miller and Stokes theorized, electing, or simply having, a representative that inherently shares your values is a way for constituents to gain control,

and creates a well-serviced trustee relationship (1963). At the very least, a selection of equal on this issue alludes that the participant is content with how the school board has handled issues in this area.

A majority of the respondents (N=103) felt that the school board should do what they think is best when deciding on 'graduation requirements' (66%) and 'curriculum' (63%). Likewise, a plurality (N=104; 46%) agreed that 'administrative budget allocations' should be decided based on what the school board thinks is best. Examples of administrative decisions included cutting teacher positions or salaries. This suggests that a plurality of respondents place trust in the board to know what is best in regard to those tasks. For 'tax rates', 'safety', and 'community expenditures' (e.g. New sports stadiums, parking lot locations), most participants believed that the people and the school board have the same view. Finally, 46% of respondents noted that the people and the school board have the same views when deciding on 'extracurricular budget allocations' (e.g. Giving money to the band program versus to athletics). In no cases was there a majority or plurality that felt that the board should do what 'the people' feel is best.

Given these results, again I ran chi-square tests to see if there was a certain group of participants that would prefer the delegate style on any of the issue-types. There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and six of the seven categories of decision-making. Men are more likely than women to select that the board should do what 'the people think is best' in regard to the curriculum decisions ($p=.001$), graduation requirements ($p=.038$), administrative budget allocations ($p=.000$), community expenditures ($p=.025$), extracurricular expenditures ($p=.000$), and safety ($p=.001$). Given that men were also found to be less trusting of the school board than women, the greater desire for a delegate relationship on six of the issues is unsurprising. Notably, women chose the 'equal on this issue' option more frequently than men. This may again suggest that women prefer trustee relationships, and also they may feel more confident in measuring the public's and the school board's feelings on an issue. There was not a significant gender difference for the tax rate decision topic.

In regard to partisanship, there was no relationship for issues concerning safety, curriculum, or extracurricular activities. However, Republicans were more likely to select ‘the people’ for graduation requirements ($p=.018$) and administrative allocations ($p=.032$). This finding differs from the general sample, who tended to give permission for a trustee relationship in these categories. In addition, Republicans were more likely to express the desire for a delegate relationship when determining tax rates than were Democrats or Independents ($p=.009$). In support with this finding, Republicans expressed at a higher rate that they seldom or never trust the school board, and qualitative comments within those categories frowned upon the board’s undue cost to taxpayers. These findings complement the related congressional literature that states that Republicans more often prefer small government, and thus want less control among their representatives and more involvement from the public (Carman 2007).

Lastly, for area of residency, there was one statistically significant finding. Residents from Haven Township showed more desire for the board to do what ‘the people’ think is best in regard to administrative budget allocations than residents of The City of Archwood or Williamsburg Township ($p=.041$). In contrast, although none of these three trends were statistically significant, for graduation requirements ($p=.053$), curriculum decisions ($p=.108$), and safety ($p=.234$), residents of The City of Archwood selected the delegate option more than the rural-suburban and suburban townships. Interestingly, this would indicate that residents of the City will more often prefer a delegate style for issues directly impacting a student’s education and well-being. Further research should be done with a larger sample size from City residents to verify this relationship. There were no other identifiable patterns based on area of residency for the remaining issues of community expenditures or tax rates.

Survey Results Summary

Overall, it appears that most of the AASD residents of the sample were a bit skeptical of the school board and how they make decisions. Only 29% felt confident that the school board, and thus its individual members, will do what is right in most cases, implicating that they would approve a trustee relationship. Thus, with a majority feeling somewhat concerned that the board does not always

make good decisions, one would expect for there to be a strong desire for a delegate relationship, and inevitably stronger participation. As we saw from the overall issue-type data, this was not the case. Only when subpopulations were broken down, like that of gender, partisanship, and residency, was there a preference for the delegate style on certain issues. Men and Republicans held the strongest relationship to delegate preference, while residents of the City of Archwood demonstrated a leaning towards the delegate style as well on some issues. These findings support that preferences of constituent representation style not only rely on identity, as Carman (2007) found, but also on the issue-type.

Interview Data and Results

Overview and Participant Information

With an awareness of the Archwood Area School District's constituents' feelings towards representation, I will demonstrate the representation preferences of AASD school board officials by exploring their decision-making processes. Individual interviews were conducted of six of the nine board representatives. On average, interviews lasted 40 minutes and all but one were conducted in person; one interview was held over the phone due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. There were three female and three male board members that were interviewed, all of whom identified as White. Table three on the following page provides intel on their background and experience in office.

Considerations for Decision-Making

General-Decision-Making Overview

First, it is important to preface this section on decision-making with the fact that there are some circumstances in which the school board members cannot legally act as a delegate, and thus the supposed 'option' for representation style is nonexistent. For example, in the cases of charter school proposals, the state of Pennsylvania requires that proposals be accepted if the application meets all of the requirements (e.g. includes a full curriculum description). Budgetary constraints or the simple dislike for charter schools is not an acceptable notion for denying the application. Two of the board members interviewed expressed their frustration with having to accept charter proposals, given their personal stance on charter schools. Ironically, members of the public in AASD, and likely in other

districts, are not aware of these restrictions and turnout to meetings at high rates to express their support or opposition to a charter proposal.

Table 3. School Board Member Characteristics

Name and Position	Region	Registered Party	Occupation Type	Years Served	Stated Motive(s) for Office
Laurie Harrison (VP)	1: Williamsburg	Democrat	Non-Education	9	Parent of Student; Curriculum
Evan Brown	1: Williamsburg	Cross-File	Higher Education	4	Parent of Student; Family encouragement
Erin Fitzgerald	2: The City	Democrat	Education	6	Recruit by Administration; Community Service
Garrett Walker	2: The City	Cross-File	Non-Education	2	Recruit by Political Party; Skeptic of Board
Kelly Brooks	3: Haven/South Penn	Cross-File	Education	2	Community Service
Matthew Smith (P)	3: Haven/South Penn	Cross-File	Retired; Admin. and general Education	3	Desire for Community Involvement during retirement

Other issues include that of hiring personnel; the community cannot be involved in that process for privacy reasons, and board members should act on their own judgements based on reviewing the applicants' qualifications.

With that said, after compiling data from participant responses, it was found that board members do not tend to view themselves as delegates, rather, they make individually informed decisions with some collaboration between their colleagues and the administration. When asked about the board's general decision-making process prior to casting a vote, only one of the board members, Erin Fitzgerald, mentioned the solicitation of feedback from the community as a step without prompting. Rather, board members frequently referred to the necessity of transparency, and insinuated that the board should be transparent about *their* decisions with the public in regard to

individual votes as well as reasoning for the majority decision. Thus, the board acts as an informative, rather than collaborative, representative structure for the district, supporting the notion that a trustee relationship occurs most frequently. Of course, there are nuances to this, which will be discussed in the ‘*Exceptions to Trusteeship*’ section. When the community does take the time to participate, mainly on salient issues, there are still a variety of opinions that board members need to navigate through in their considerations, given the heterogeneity of the district. All of these topics will be discussed further in the following sections.

Collaboration with Board Colleagues

Despite the active Sunshine Laws, which prohibit board members from deliberating in private on issues that do not qualify for an executive session, all board members admittedly walk the line and casually discuss opinions with their colleagues. Although there is caution in this process, many found it helpful to seek out the thoughts of a particular board member, based on the issue in question. For instance, Garrett Walker, the most novice member of the board and the furthest delineated from a background in education, relies heavily on his colleagues. He noted that when it came to academic-related topics, that he would seek out Kelly, the board member with a background in teaching and a current librarian. Likewise, Walker noted that for “higher up” topics, Matthew Smith, the board President with years of experience in teaching, being a principal, being a superintendent, and other education roles, seemed to be the person to go to. Smith and Laurie Harrison, the vice-president and the most veteran board member, reiterated the idea that novice board members, as well as those lacking experience in education, seemed to be the most collaborative with their colleagues. Smith tries to support the board by making strategic placements on committees based on the board member’s background.

Although this collaboration seems harmless, it does provide the opportunity for board members to be overly influenced by one another, keeping in mind that they are elected as regional representatives. Harrison mentioned her approach to collaborating with the board:

I'll ask somebody's opinion that I might know usually thinks different than I do. And I'll say, 'what do you think about that?' only because to me it gives me a different perspective. But, trying not to overstep those bounds of trying to coerce them to vote your way.

It is reasonable to want an outside perspective before finalizing a hard decision. In fact, I would argue that most people admire representatives who are actively trying to be open-minded as opposed to ignorant. More importantly, Harrison's statement references the idea of coercion, which is critical to the concept of representation. If all board members are simply going to vote the same way, based on the opinions of their colleagues, then the element of individual thought is lost. The purpose of having an odd number of board members, and more than one board member, is to allow for diversity of opinion. Likewise, representatives are able to be responsive to their regional constituents given that they are each granted a vote. So, if there is too much unwarranted dialogue behind closed doors, then the purpose of public deliberation is lost.

Input from the Administration

In addition to speaking to one another, board members also seemed to rely on the school administration for certain aspects of the decision-making process. The administration seems to serve two functions: the first being that they act as a source of information for the board, and the second being an influential actor in vote choice. All of the board members referenced the administration as being a critical component to making decisions. The administration is the source from which relevant data and insight can be obtained when approaching an issue. For instance, when having to make a decision to redistribute district boundaries, the board was presented with information by the administration on how many students would be impacted by the change and thus forced to move to different schools, or student enrollment numbers for example. Evidently, this collaborative nature should be encouraged given that it is the only way for board members to gain access to critical information relative to a choice that they will eventually vote on.

However, again the theme was seen of board members' potential over-reliance on opinion, but this time to administration opinions, as opposed to colleague input. Board member Evan Brown notes:

I think the board's role is pretty much-- administration will bring us some sort of recommendation and we pretty much just have to OK it, and as long as it is a reasonable recommendation usually the board is pretty consenting to it.

I use the term 'potential' over-reliance, because it is all relative to how a constituency believes the board should operate. On the one hand, the board is responsible for hiring administrators that they feel will do a good job in managing the day-to-day functions, and so there should be some element of trust in the administration's recommendations. Conversely, if the school board is not using their power to override the administration in some circumstances, then there is no accountability--and if the purpose of the board is not to hold the administration accountable, then why have a school board that will simply mimic what the administration desires?

Five of the six board members seemed to attempt to minimize, or underestimate, their power by suggesting that they do not run the district, as that is the role of the administration, but rather they oversee it. This led to the participants' common conviction that the school board should not micromanage or overstep the administration's authority. Three board members noted a few situations where constituents were displeased with choices made by the administration, yet the board refused to overstep them. Kelly Brooks and Matthew Smith both recapped the same example where many parents were displeased of a building principal's decision to change seating arrangements in the cafeteria, because it supposedly revoked the ability for students to be social. After the issue was brought to the board, most agreed that they disliked the principal's arrangement, but that it was not their place to overturn the authority of the principal. Despite clear cues and acknowledgement of frustration from constituents, particularly parents from that school, the board chose to turn a blind eye. Similar events were referenced in addition to this example, where "micromanaging", as termed by the participants, could have occurred, but did not.

The idea of micromanagement again ties to the question of representation. Should board members feel obliged to correct administrative decisions, if members of the constituency are clearly upset? Again, the response to this question relies on what the public expects of their representatives, which may vary district by district. There were two survey participants with contrasting views on the issue; Participant 100, who was quoted on page 38, seemed frustrated that the board did not often take recommendations from the administration, because the participant felt the board is unqualified to make some decisions. Whereas, Participant 52 noted: “[The AASD board members] are more than likely influenced by the Administration to do what benefits the Administration than what is best for the taxpayers and the students. A common sense approach normally doesn’t factor into their decision making.”, demonstrating that the board should not fall to the administration’s desire, but rather do what is best for the community. Regardless, the underestimation of power that was alluded to by many of the interviewed school board members should be refuted, as this paper rests on the argument that Pennsylvania school boards have significant authority in the school system. Although the administration usually sets the agenda for what the board will decide on, the board members are still the ones with the ability to amend, deny, and vote on major substantive decisions. Their votes hold the authority of the entire district.

The School Board as an Information Source

With an awareness that the AASD board relies more so on themselves and the administration when approaching day-to-day decisions, it is important to explore the circumstances where constituent opinion falls into their considerations. As mentioned, the data supports the notion that the school board acts primarily as an information source, as opposed to being collaborative with constituents. For reference, the *Delegate Inhibitors* section will explain that the board is not entirely responsible for the lack of collaboration; delegate representation is a two-way street. In their dialogue, phrases were coded that suggested that decisions were made and then explained to the community after-the-fact. For example, every board member reiterated a theme of ‘educating’ or ‘updating’ their constituents on what is going on. Garrett Walker noted that if he does reach out to constituents, it is to

try and explain a decision. Walker had run for office given the skepticism he had with the school board at the time; he was unsure if their spending decisions were wise, and if they were being transparent with the public. Now, he is on the other side and acknowledged that as a regular citizen, one simply does not know all of the nuances that go into the school board decision-making process. Thus, he, along with Evan Brown, make it a priority to explain board decisions to constituents.

The belief that the majority of the constituency base lacks knowledge on most issues, and the complexity of the decision-process, was expressed by all six board members. Thus, it makes sense why the board feels the urge to educate, as opposed to working jointly with, the public. Smith and Brown tried to cushion the topic of constituent ignorance by expressing that average citizens do not have the time to do their own research, and that people are focused on their jobs and their family. The most novice board members, Walker and Brooks, were more forward, and stated that some people simply misinterpret information, or are simply too close-minded to think fully about a topic. Regardless, the lack of belief in constituent knowledge in turn leads to a trustee style relationship between the board and AASD residents, with board members deciding what is best on their own accord.

In addition, oftentimes when board members explained the purpose of general board meetings and committee meetings, they referred to them as a way for constituents to get information and stay updated. A contrary or supplemental view would show that meetings are also a platform for exchanging dialogue with, and listening to, constituents. Of course, the lack of turnout from AASD constituents may be why the board members seemingly viewed meetings as a basis for information-giving. Matthew Smith reflected on this phenomenon:

I'll tell you what turnout is--is small. But, both of those meetings [committee and general] are streamed. So people can go online and watch in their home, okay. Um, and uh, I think that sort of limits the um, the attendance. But yet it's another way for the district to be able to reach out into the community, and to publicize, and to be transparent, okay, on what's going on. So, nah, attendance is--isn't there. But, there's another mechanism for people to know what's going on.

Smith mentioned an interesting point; AASD board meetings are recorded and posted online, and so community members are able to view the meetings on their own time. This does seem like a mechanism to increase transparency, but it may also create apathy among the public to contribute their voices. People can watch from home to be informed, but are potentially discouraged from being active contributors at meetings where they are provided a space to speak. With regard to district employees, Kelly Brooks described how the board tries to keep them up to date:

The board feels strongly that the school district needs to do more to market ourselves to our community, which involves getting that information out there. And then even smaller things-- the district started sending out a newsletter to employees after every board meeting so that employees know what was going on without having to comb through the minutes and, you know, that's cumbersome.

Of course, it cannot be expected that employees or constituents can make every meeting, and this appears to be a practical way to keep people informed. Yet, it is also perpetuating microcosmic information and involvement, if staff are only reading about what is going on as opposed to regularly speaking up about how decisions are impacting them.

Navigating Constituencies

Since a general understanding of board member decision-making has been established, it is essential to consider how the board typically approaches or thinks about the multiple constituency bases that exist within the district. First, I will discuss how five of the six AASD school board members view their “geographic constituency”, as Fenno (1978) terms; they usually consider their constituents at-large as opposed to regionally. Board member Erin Fitzgerald demonstrated elements of both a regionally-elected representative as well as an at-large representative. The larger implications of the potential disregard to election structure will be further analyzed in the *Discussion* section. Next, I will elaborate on the idea of the student constituency in contrast with the taxpayers. Ultimately, I find that board members are in a place of making difficult financial decisions; in theory, more money invested in school-related resources will benefit students, but will simultaneously harm economically burdened taxpayers. Lastly, the AASD board members feel a particular divide between

constituents who prioritize athletics over education-related spending or vice versa. Topics related to athletics are viewed as the most salient issues in the district, and in turn has the most participation from the public. The athletic-education divide is the most prevalent in the district, and there appears to be a gender-based trend, with men encouraging athletics spending, while women prefer limiting the funds and dispersing it across the budget.

Regional versus At-Large

The most notable decision-making theme in regard to the public was that board members believed they should make a decision based on what they feel is best for the *entire* district as opposed to their regional constituents. Despite being elected regionally, all of the board members suggested that they consider the collective district to determine their stance on an issue in almost every case, as opposed to the needs or desires of constituents in their specific region. For example, the following perspective shared by Laurie Harrison represents similar responses of many of the board members, in recognizing that they are supposed to serve a certain region, but ultimately make a decision with the entire district in mind:

It really should be that you're making a decision based on what you feel is best for the district, um, as a whole. Uh, you are a representative of each--you know, whether it's Archwood, Williamsburg, Haven, that type of thing. But, when you're here it is based on the district as a whole.

Other comments that indicated that board members were more inclined to consider the collective district when making a decision included phrases like, getting a “sense of what the *district* was thinking” or “the vibe of the district”, or instances where the term “community” was used in relation to the entire district, and clearly not in regard to a regional community. In addition, the lack of discussion on regional constituents also implicates that the board members view the whole district as their main constituency.

Although Erin Fitzgerald reiterated the at-large theme, she was also the only board member to continuously refer to the feelings of her regional constituents (region 2, The City of Archwood) throughout the interview.

And sometimes [a decision on an issue] might go against what you want, but you think it's the best thing for the community as a whole. And sometimes you say 'hey, no my people actually feel this strongly about this', and I have to say 'let's try to find a different way of going about it'. Um, there are times that like maybe people from Haven or Williamsburg feel very different than people in the City.

Fitzgerald brings up the point of difference of opinion based on region; this heterogeneity of opinion supports the perspective that it is necessary for a representative to know and think about their own region. If some board members are acting on behalf of their region, whereas others are not, some voices may be lost along the way, while others are favored. Positively, voices who may typically be underrepresented are brought to the forefront.

For example, Fitzgerald showed the most initiative of all of the board members to reach out and communicate with residents living in the city that she represents. She expressed that she will walk around at a local Farmer's Market in the city and go up to people to get their opinion on a salient issue that the board is facing, and then will keep tally marks of how many constituents feel a certain way. Sometimes she uses the casualness of coffee shops in the city to break the ice and speak with people in the area. She even finds herself having conversations, that were initiated by constituents, in the alleyways of the city about school board matters. Fitzgerald recalled how happy people from the city were when she interacted with them, especially during the time of her campaign, and that they had previously felt like no one cared about them.

It is possible that the surplus of public outing spaces in the city provides Fitzgerald with a better opportunity to interact with her regional constituents than the board members who reside in rural or suburban areas with populations that are further spread. Although Garrett Walker, who is also a representative of the City, made no mention of interacting with his regional constituents, he also expressed more strongly than the other five board members the idea that citizens are ignorant to most

board topics. Thus, it makes sense that he would not utilize the spaces provided in the City, because he does not often frequent the opinions of constituents. Yet, in comparison to representatives who are responsible for districts or regions much larger than a school district, like a congressman, board members have the ultimate opportunity to connect with their region and make that style of representation most effective. It is important to remember that representation is always a two-way street. Although the board members primarily refer to and think about their at-large constituency when making decisions, district residents hold some responsibility. If constituents are unaware of who their representatives are, due to lack of participation, for example, then they inadvertently encourage the board members to lump the district into one constituency base. Likewise, if there is no threat of re-election, as is the case for board elections that have low voter turnout and minimal incumbent challengers, then a board member has no accountability threats from their region.

Students versus Taxpayers

Another primary difficulty in making decisions as a school board member is the contrasting needs of district students and taxpayers. All six board members recognized that, logically, residents do not necessarily want their taxes to go up. Yet, with tax funds being the primary source of income for the district, the more money residents are taxed, the more funds there will be to support the students. Those who are financially well-off, and can remain economically comfortable with a tax increase, may not mind higher rates. However, residents who are struggling with money may provide more pushback. Thus, school board members often consider the cost benefit of how their budgetary decisions will impact students and taxpayers. In other words, they may ask themselves, is the investment that we are making to provide students with “X” worth the cost to taxpayers? In order to answer this question, one would hope that educational research is being used to support or refute the benefit the investment will have on students. Fitzgerald and Harrison brought up the dilemma between investing in students and supporting taxpayers the most explicitly.

Although both women noted that students should be a priority of the district, they also referred to people who they know and see every day who cannot afford tax increases. Harrison

mentioned taxpayers, like her parents, who are on a fixed income and will take hits to their medical insurance if taxes increase. Fitzgerald recognized that many of her constituents from the city are older residents who really cannot afford an \$80 tax increase, for example. They both reiterated, however, that they are talking about the many people who genuinely cannot afford the increase, as opposed to people who simply do not want to pay taxes. Or, in Fitzgerald's case, she was *not* referring to constituents who are able to afford cruises and luxury vacation homes in this category of elderly taxpayers. So, with a clear recollection that budget decisions ultimately have the power to put people on the street, but also influence how each student's education will turn out, board members must approach each choice with caution. This is where the frustration comes in over the fight between athletics and education spending in the AASD.

Athletics versus Education

The AASD is notorious for the debate over athletics and education. More specifically, the view is expressed by some parents and community members that the district values sports over the quality of education and vice versa. This perception of what the district values is based on how the board decides to allocate their money, in regard to how much they spend toward education-related items (e.g. after school tutoring programs, technology) versus sports-related materials (e.g. uniforms, equipment, stadiums). But, female survey participants in particular expressed their dislike for how the board has managed funding between athletics and education in the past when describing their level of trust with the school board:

P111: They don't make the best decisions all the time. They spending so much money remodeling a football field how about improving our high school and middle school. Alot of people do not want their child going to Archwood High School including myself will be puting my kids in private school

P56: The products of Archwood's schools, their graduates, speak volumes about how poorly the system works. The board needs to spend taxpayer money on education, not football.

Female survey participants likewise referred to the AASD, and the board, as “the good old boys club” or “buddies out for sports and their buddies”. Ironically, the total board includes five men and four women in total, but in a system of majority rule, that divide may just be enough for male board members’ voices to dominate. As will be discussed further in the ‘*Exceptions to Trusteeship*’ section, female board members were less inclined than their male colleagues to support major spending on athletics, particularly the remodel of a football stadium. Two of the three female board members that I interviewed expressed a sadness that the community will only turn out for issues involving athletics.

In contrast, sports, and especially football, are traditionally viewed as a keystone to the district. The district holds many annual sporting events and has rivalries against other schools where much of the community comes together for competition and expressions of school pride. The board does recognize the importance of this for much of the community; there is often an attachment that graduates of the AASD hold to such tradition. In fact, as mentioned in the survey data section, 40% of the sample were alumni of the district. The AASD has a reputation for keeping its graduates local. Although one cannot be certain that graduates stay in the area after getting their diploma *solely* because of Archwood tradition, when turnout for a rivalry high school football game reaches 13,000, it is evident that a lot of the community cares deeply about sports. The board recognizes that they cannot make all constituents happy, and so they attempt to decide what they feel is best in regard to all of these constituencies.

Summary of General-Decision Making

In sum, the AASD school board generally relies on the administration and their colleagues to make decisions. This supports the idea that most of the time, the board utilizes a trustee style of representation. Although, the board does acknowledge the existence of their constituency bases when approaching issues. This includes their constituency at-large, their students and taxpayers, and their athletic supporting community and their education advocates. This is not to suggest that they are influenced in their decision-making by these groups, but rather these are the people that they have in mind when they are determining what they feel is the most appropriate decision to make. Now that it

has been established that a trustee relationship is most frequently used, it is important to investigate why a delegate relationship is not.

Reasons for Trustee Representation Delegate Inhibitors

Although there were some instances when the board members expressed the desire to collaborate and follow constituents' opinions, participants indirectly referenced four inhibitors that often prevent the delegate relationship from occurring. These include the lack of constituent participation and contact with board members, the heterogeneity of the district and communities, the unreasonable requests made by constituents, and the lack of media attention on school board matters. First, as we have learned from previous literature, representatives need constant cues and participation from their constituents for a delegate relationship to operate. Both the survey data and the accounts from AASD school board members demonstrate that constituents from this district are primarily inactive on most issues. All six board members agreed that they only hear from a limited number of constituents and that turnout to board meetings is poor.

AASD board members did express a desire to increase participation, and reconciled by holding board meetings at a variety of locations. They did this to accommodate larger crowds and make travel less of a barrier for community members. The administration building where board meetings are usually held is in Haven Township, which is centrally located between Williamsburg Township and South Penn, and closest to the City of Archwood. Erin Fitzgerald accounts her frustrations with low public turnout to meetings below:

[We] Hardly ever [have high turnout]. And it's really sad. Um, one of my little peeves is that sometimes we really try and get the community more involved, so we'll have meetings at different schools. And unless there is like a big contentious thing, you might get a couple people showing up. You purposefully advertise 'we're going to this school so that we can talk about things' and you have four people there. It's like--you'd think that people would want to--if it's easier for them to get to their home school, why aren't they showing up? And that's something that bothers me. Because that is, I think, the easiest way for the board to get people involved is to make it easier for them to get to the meetings. By, you know, going to their home school. And when they don't show up, it's like 'okay, well you're showing us that

you really don't care...but you sure care when it's tax time' [laughter] or it has to do with sports.

Fitzgerald alludes to the fact that the constituency does not care about issues that are not related to taxes or sports, as we recall from the previous section. If the board feels the constituency does not have a strong opinion on most issues, then that is a green light to trusteeship. If there is no participation among the constituency, then the delegate style is automatically halted.

Secondly, the heterogeneity of the district as a whole makes it difficult for the board to follow a majority consensus on issues in which the public does engage. When there is a surplus of opinions, or when the district appears to be split evenly on an issue, there is not a strong enough majority cue for the board to follow. This is typical of heterogeneous districts. Yet, heterogeneity may not exist as much if representatives used regional representation more often, especially at the local level, where populations are small in comparison to congressional districts. For instance, the athletic versus education divide may not be as heterogeneous if viewed at a regional level. Haven Township residents may have a majority who prefer education-spending, while residents of the City mainly value the tradition of sports in their community, for example. So, if board members acted regionally, board members responsible for Haven Township and the City may cast votes accordingly when a decision between athletics and education arises.

Thirdly, board members noted that many times constituents have unreasonable, or near-impossible, requests or expectations that cannot whole-heartedly be implemented. Evan Brown jokingly gave the example of constituents asking the board to hire 100 teachers for the following school year or to drop class sizes from 30 to 15. Of course, Brown acknowledged that these would be wonderful things to do, but that the board has to be practical, and could never achieve this in the time frame that constituents desire. Matthew Smith recalled how some constituents are in favor of some of the building projects the board is working on, but that they want it done at a price that is impossible. Smith stated that "people have no idea of the cost of construction nowadays", and thus that leads them to have impractical expectations of what the board can achieve. Again, these

unreasonable expectations conglomerate the theme of constituent ignorance. If the public does not know enough about the complexities of school board decision-making, and cannot offer reasonable suggestions, then board members will tend to ignore them.

Finally, an interesting burden to the delegate style that is not often discussed is the lack of media attention to school board politics. Evan Brown stated,

I like when the press comes out. I think they need to be involved; I think the press needs to report on that. And the press doesn't always come to our meetings and I get a little disheartened with that, because I think the press does need to be there, and they need to hold the district accountable, they need to hold the board accountable. You know, I'm a board director I'd say 'please, you know, come, ask me questions, come to our meeting and--and investigate. Not investigate like in a bad term like there's something going wrong, but, but, ask the questions about this and that. And, and they do, but they don't come to every meeting

The more the board is able to fly under the radar, the more likely it is that constituents will be unaware of what is happening in the district. Without knowledge or awareness, constituents will not be able to formulate opinions, and thus are unable to participate in a delegate system. Brown seems genuinely disappointed with the little press the board receives, and so it does not suggest that board members desire to hide behind closed doors. Kelly Brooks also reiterated that lack of media attention during election season is so small, that it is really up to individual representatives to distribute information about themselves to the public, and one can only do so much, and talk to so many people.

It is reasonable then to argue that regardless of whether a representative *prefers* a delegate style of representation, certain features may inhibit the relationship from existing. Whether it be the lack of public participation in local school board politics, the constraints of a heterogeneous district, the unreasonable expectations that constituents hold, or the minimal media attention, a delegate style is made much more difficult to achieve. Understanding these factors that constrain delegate representation is necessary to know how to reform structural representation barriers and is also important for constituents and board members to know how to adjust their behaviors to get a desired representational relationship.

Desires for Trusteeship: Overview

In addition to the barriers that prevent delegate representation just discussed, board members showed clear preferences of acting as trustees at their own will. The accounts of board member interviews can be combined to understand two main reasons why they felt comfortable making decisions on behalf of the district, based on what they felt was best. First, some board members felt like they are given *permission* by some constituents to be a trustee. Second, almost all board members felt that they had superior points of view on board issues, and thus chose to make decisions based on their own accord, rather than acting on behalf of constituent opinion.

Constituent Acceptance of a Trustee Relationship

Two of the board members believed that they were granted the authority by constituents to be a trustee. Garrett Walker was the most confident in his permission:

I've reached out to some constituents here and there that I know and said 'your thoughts?' and for the most part they always push it back on 'I trust what you do', you know 'I supported you'. I personally, the ones that I speak to, don't get a whole lot of ideas thrown my way. It's more of a, 'we voted for you, we support you, we may not like some things but we trust your opinion and what they do'. So I think it's both confidence no matter what we do.

In Walker's case, it is noteworthy that the people who trust him are also the people who voted for him. As we know, voter turnout in board elections is small. All board members said that they relied on the votes of their close friends and family during election season to get them the victory. So, Walker may have a biased perception of *who* is granting him permission to be a trustee. Friends and family are not necessarily representative of the whole region and district that Walker serves. Yet, without pushback or accountability for preferred representation style, Walker can continue to perform as a trustee. Laurie Harrison likewise alluded to the acceptance of trusteeship by constituents, but in her case, she felt that constituents had respect for her transparency, and hence did not care how she acts on a decision so long as she publicly explains her choice. Again, the theme of transparency occurs among the board members. Their value towards transparency is seemingly their explanation

for trusteeship. In addition to Walker and Harrison's reasons for trusteeship, it should be reiterated that trustee representation is the automatic style assuming that constituents do not provide pushback. Whether constituents give verbal, or symbolic (e.g. voting), permission to candidates to act as a trustee, representatives will ultimately rely on their personal beliefs when casting votes.

Trusteeship: A Superior Point of View

Finally, all board members, when recapping their decision-making process either in general, or for a specific issue, alluded to their point of view being supreme to that of constituents. In situations where the community had contrasting views than the board members, they still chose to act as a trustee, because they seemed to believe that their decision-making logic was more appropriate. A primary example was given when participants were asked how they decided upon redistricting the elementary school boundaries in the district. For reference, it was explained that there were students who, due to past redistricting, were not attending the elementary school that was geographically closest to them. All of the board members agreed that it was best for students to attend their 'home' school, and thus supported the redistricting. Yet, a few constituents came forward and expressed their concerns with the plan. According to Harrison,

We did have a couple parents who were not happy about it. I think their kids would be going to [an elementary school in the City of Archwood-- Grantville], um, so I'm not sure if it's-- you know to me my kids were supposed to go to Williamsburg elementary and my husband taught at Grantville. My kids actually went to Grantville. To me, Grantville has the better opportunity, because they are a Title 1 school so if some kid needs extra help, that's the place to be. And um, so I know that the parents were upset that they were going to go there, but I guess look at it as if-- you're an involved parent, you have great teachers, you're kids aren't going to have any issues, and they are going to learn just as well at Grantville as they would at Williamsburg or Chesterbrook or Haven elementary.

Some parents were concerned that their students would be placed in Grantville, an elementary school in the city, which is given a poorer reputation among people in the AASD. Unfortunately, it can be speculated that the high population of students of color at Grantville could have been a turnoff to

dissenters of this redistricting plan, whose children would have been placed there. The quote suggests that Harrison chose to use her personal opinion on the district schools and disregard the complaints, because she viewed her point of view as superior.

Likewise, every board member reasoned, and agreed with administration, that it is ultimately best for children to be in their home school. Fitzgerald, Walker, and Smith mentioned that some students were being bussed over an hour to get to their current schools, sometimes driving through two municipalities, rather than going to the school that was six blocks down the road from their home. They recounted that this was not cost effective, nor was it conducive to learning; children ought to be tired with the extra travel time. Fitzgerald was empathetic to students who have been at their elementary school for two or three years, and may not want to be displaced, but again, less travel time took her priority. Although Evan Brown questioned the administration on why the district lines were drawn as such to begin with, ultimately discovering that it was an attempt for more racially diverse schools, he too voted in favor of the redistricting plan. It was a unanimous vote to put students back in their home schools. Admittedly, Kelly Brooks stated that if the issue had affected more children (approximately 115 students were moved), and the public had been more aggressive in their dislike for the redistricting proposal, the board may have considered nixing the plan.

Exceptions to Trusteeship: The Case of Pierce Stadium

Given all of the data in support of the finding that board members usually act as trustees, it is important to explore in what instances board members will instead utilize delegate representation. The findings here will provide insight into what potential factors, contexts, and events need to occur for board members to want to act as a delegate, and in turn provide representation that reflects the expressed beliefs of the majority of constituents. As mentioned previously, because AASD board members tend to view their constituency collectively, as opposed to regionally, the exceptions to trusteeship will demonstrate how board members sided with the perceived majority opinion of district constituents as a *whole*. Of issues discussed in the interviews, there was only one instance where some AASD board members purposefully acted as delegates: the vote which denied the budget

proposition for the rebuilding of Pierce stadium, the district's historic football stadium. Simply put, the final estimated total of the project caused "sticker shock", and mended the heterogeneous divides between most of the athletics supporters, education supporters, and taxpayers, making it easier for the board to receive consistent cues from the public. The stadium was viewed by all of these parties as being too much money; the taxpayer identity took priority.

Pierce Stadium has existed as AASD's football stadium for over 100 years. The administration, along with the school board, agreed that the stadium would need to be rebuilt, due to the wear and tear of a century's worth of use. Small renovations were discounted as an option, because the stadium was in too poor of condition. So, knowing that this would be a topic of interest to AASD residents, the school board created multiple committees to seek input from the public on design plans. Turnout to these meetings were unlike any other; all six school board members noted that community members came out in huge numbers, including coaches, students, employees, parents, and taxpayers. After a very collaborative process, which resulted in an estimated cost of 15 million for the new stadium, many constituents felt comfortable with the plan. Those who were initially opposed to spending that much money on a stadium, primarily the education advocates, were satisfied that the stadium would not just be for football as it had been in the past. The board had worked to ensure that the field would be open for the community to use, similar to a park where kids can go to play, or for people to exercise and run the track and stadium steps. Likewise, the plan would allow other AASD sports teams to play on the new field, and professional or out of district teams could rent out the space to bring in additional profit to the district.

After much compromise, which will be a key feature for the delegate style to operate in heterogeneous districts, there was still a minority of people who were not satisfied. The minority opinion on the stadium issue ended up coming from the strongest education advocates: Evan Brown recognized them as the people who say "well, education should be first, uh, who cares if they don't have a football team". These individuals felt so strongly about investing in academics, that they believed the district could cut the football program altogether, making a new stadium an inessential

expense. A turn of events occurred when the final cost estimate came in from the construction crew-- the original 15 million estimate had now jumped to 20.3 million dollars, with the increased cost of steel as a contributor. Those who were in favor of the board's expected approval of the stadium construction were now against it due to the increased cost, and those who were never in favor of the plan became even more aggravated. This is where delegate representation begins.

Although the price for the stadium was increased, board members like Kelly Brooks, still felt that the plan should be approved. In fact, she was the only board member to use her vote as a trustee-- despite public views, Brooks felt the plan should not be dismissed:

I think Pierce Stadium is an example of where public opinion really pushed board members, um, to go in a certain direction like, that I felt we shouldn't, you know, being elected to a school board is not-- once it gets to the school board level it is not an easy decision. You know, if it was an easy call, it would've been dealt with before it got to us. So, you know, we do have to make the hard decisions, and a lot of people are not going to be happy with whatever the decisions are.

On the one hand, Brooks felt that the longer the board waited to approve, the more the cost was going to increase. She described how it was a difficult decision, and that it is the board's responsibility to make the hard decisions, even if people are displeased. In addition, Brooks believed that delaying the approval of the stadium would result in less public input than the first proposal had:

... some board members were very scared by [the negative feedback from the public on the increased cost]. And administration felt the pressure, um, and decided to nix the plan, and I felt that that was unfortunate, because, in doing the revised plan all of those stakeholders that had been involved in that process were cut out, and it got just put on, you know, administration with some board representation, and, and our contractors. The architect and the engineers involved in the redesign of the stadium. And, I felt like that was unfortunate.

Ironically, Brooks felt she had to act as a trustee in order to preserve the collaboration that had already occurred with the public. Whereas, she believed other board members had been influenced by the public to vote 'no'.

Matthew Smith was another board member who displayed a desire to act as a trustee, but he ultimately chose to delay the plan. He continuously reiterated that although the 20.3 million cost seemed to be too much, it would earn its worth over the years:

That stadium has given this community and this district how many years? You know, and, you know when--when you have to build new uh, proportion that over 90 years what the cost is going to be. But see, the sticker shock is what sticks out in everybody's mind. More than anything.

Smith recognized that, aside from minimal maintenance like cutting and fertilizing the grass, the stadium would be set, ready to go, and cost-free for at least another 100 years. Unlike Brooks, Smith believed that the cost would be able to be lowered if the board waited, with certain adjustments to material choice. So, he chose to follow the initial instincts of the community and vote no for the 20.3 million plan, with the intention to follow through on a quality stadium later on that will meet the same expectations of the initial community compromise.

Unlike Smith, Evan Brown and Garrett Walker did not believe the cost was worth the investment, and fell on the side of the perceived constituent majority. Walker summed up his thoughts on the issue, which also reflect the views of Brown:

You know we all want to be as fiscally responsible as possible, so, that's where the--the 'no' vote for the original concept was, because as much as almost everything was put into that is desperately needed, you know again, that's where we did take a lot of constituent concerns and our own into account, so we need to go back to the drawing table and make some corrections to it.

Evan Brown likewise mentioned that he was incredibly vocal about the fact that he was “not prepared for the overrun” of cost, and that the plan simply had to be nixed. Finally, Harrison and Fitzgerald both agreed that the stadium needed to be rebuilt, but likewise agreed with the community that it was too costly. They listened to all of the unhappy constituents who knew their taxes would be increased dramatically had the 20.3 million project been approved. Similar to Smith, Harrison in particular acknowledged that the investment would leave the stadium operating for “150 years”, but she felt that the board needed to consider the concerns of residents in current time who felt it was just too much.

Harrison noted, “So as much as [the new stadium] is a great thing to have and I love the tradition of it, it--even the people who can afford it were still saying this is too much”. Both women considered the majority community’s perspective, including those who could and could not afford tax increases, when choosing to act as a delegate and vote no for the plan.

So, based on this case, there are four main elements that lead to delegate representation. These include 1) community involvement, which is most typical of salient issues, and turnout to committee meetings in particular, 2) a naturally homogeneous district opinion, or a satisfied compromise within a heterogeneous district, 3) strong constituent pressure, and 4) a reasonable majority opinion. I find that if these conditions are met, then school board members are more willing and able to act as delegates. First, the most obvious condition is community involvement. This has been reiterated throughout the paper, but it was highlighted in the Pierce Stadium example even more clearly. Most importantly in regard to community participation is that there needs to be turnout at meetings, and especially committee meetings where the smaller details are discussed and sought through. The six board members insinuated that attendance at committee meetings provides the opportunity for constituents’ opinions to be heard and expressed; it is simply not enough to show up, or speak at, the general board meeting the night in which a vote is occurring. For Pierce stadium collaboration, the board had seen the highest turnout and vocalization ever to the committee meetings. Such participation leads to the possibility for compromise, the second factor toward delegate representation.

Specifically in heterogeneous districts, creating compromise between constituents with different opinions is essential towards making delegate representation possible, and attractive to, school board representatives. AASD board members found a way to get the typically divided residents, those favoring athletics and those in support of education spending, to agree to an initial proposal for the stadium. In theory, had the estimation not increased by about 5 million, the board would have been able to approve the plan and create an instance of delegate representation. They had a strong majority in favor of the design, and could have proceeded with support of the demanding

constituency. If the design had not gotten the acceptance from the two different groups of constituents, board members more willing to invest in education like Harrison and Fitzgerald for example, may not have felt comfortable going through with such a costly plan.

Third, the degree of pressure constituents give to the board is essential for gaining delegate representation. It can be argued that even with a lot of community involvement and collaboration, the board may not feel obligated to follow the majority. AASD constituents were so strong in their convictions, particularly once the estimation had gone up to 20.3 million, that board members were influenced to follow their lead. As Brooks mentioned, it is possible that board members were “scared” of such strong and consistent feedback to deny the more expensive stadium proposal. This was such a salient issue, that board members may have perceived a threat of reelection had they not followed the public’s opinion.

Lastly, delegate representation is more likely to be accepted by board members if it is on an issue where the public can provide accurate input. For example, votes that are relative to specific education programs may be difficult for the public to understand, and thus make it challenging for them to develop a reasonable and followable opinion. But, like in the case of Pierce Stadium, constituents know when too much money, is just too much money. Simple and demanding requests are more likely to be considered by a school board member; recall that all of the board members expressed that constituents are ignorant to the decision-making process, like how Brown gave the example of constituents demanding for 100 teachers. Yet, it is nearly inarguable to suggest that constituents do not have the knowledge about how increased taxes will impact their lifestyle. Telling a board member to deny a vote, without making direct requests, is easier to implement than a complicated or impractical suggestion. These four conditions are in contrast to most of the conditions that enforce and encourage a trustee relationship that were previously discussed in this section under *Delegate Inhibitors*.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the representational preferences and relationship between school board constituents and their board representatives. More specifically, I asked the questions: in what contexts do a) school board constituents and b) school board members prefer either the delegate or trustee style of representation? The term ‘contexts’ was used as a general placeholder that could encapsulate the influence of demographics, identity, and issue-type on representation preference. Likewise, by studying both the constituents and board members from the same district, it provided insight on how congruent their preferences are, with the understanding that with more congruence comes a more satisfied democratic process. Ultimately it was found that the survey sample of AASD residents was relatively untrusting of the school board, yet they still preferred the trustee relationship on most issues. This unexpected result is likely because of the overrepresentation of women in the sample. It was found that women are more trusting of the school board than men, and that men tend to prefer the delegate style more than women on every issue except for determining the tax rates. Had there been more men in the sample, which would make the sample more representative of the AASD, it might have demonstrated that around half the district is trusting whereas the other half is untrusting given that the population by gender is close to a 50-50 split. Regardless, the implication here is that those who prefer the delegate style, as was often the case of Republicans as well, must also be committed to sending cues to their representatives through active participation, in addition to the four conditions listed in the *Exceptions to Trusteeship* section.

The overall lack of trust, yet the sample’s preference for the trustee style, may also be explained through the possibility that the issues listed on the survey (tax rates, curriculum, safety, extra-curricular budget allocations, administrative budget allocations, and community expenditures) were too general for constituents to make a genuine determination on who they feel should be responsible (the people or the school board). Or, these issue-types simply might not have been issues that a majority of the public felt they needed to give their input on. The views of school board

constituency bases may vary district by district, as we saw with the number of special interests and debates that existed within the context of the AASD. Thus, more specific descriptions of an issue may need to be presented to constituents for them to make their strongest determination of representation preference. For this to occur, school districts may consider distributing their own surveys to district residents, or creating a thoughtful feedback and communications plan, to gather a clearer understanding of how the public feels on specific issues that will be voted upon. This may provide more opportunity for geographically distant constituents, or constituents with little time due to work schedules or other responsibilities, to consistently express their views without needing to attend committee meetings for every issue they are interested in.

However, this type of proactive effort by a school district to collaborate with constituents did not seem to be desired by the interviewed AASD board members. Recall that the six board members saw themselves as an information source for constituents, and suggested a comfortability in their primary representation style as trustees. They showed some desire to interact more with constituents, but seemingly found it the fault of constituents for not turning out in large numbers to meetings for issues other than athletics. One of the main findings is that school board members viewed their constituency base as a whole rather than regionally when making decisions, with the exception of Erin Fitzgerald. Hence, it can be argued that school board members are doing a disservice to their regional constituents by not reaching out; the feedback plan suggestion mentioned previously may be thought of as a duty either for individual board members or for the district to conduct, so that the difference of opinions by region are gathered. The disregard for regional constituent views diminishes the purpose of a regional-election type; representatives are making decisions based on their own accord and a potentially flawed perception of the at-large opinion. Again, representation requires both the representative and the constituents to participate and interact, but if the board is not often considering their regional constituents when making decisions, then they might as well have been elected with an at-large election structure.

In a heterogenous district, regional distribution is likely to also be a distribution of race and partisanship (e.g. urban neighborhoods tend to have more racial minorities and democratic affiliates; suburban and rural areas tend to have higher populations of Caucasian residents and republicans). Although there was not a large enough sample size of people of color to determine if they had different preferences of school board representation than Caucasians, it was found that Republicans prefer the delegate style more than democrats or independents in almost all cases. Given that the AASD board is made up of three Democrats, and the remaining six opted to cross-file with parties, Republicans in the district may feel that their partisan values are not being implemented in the school system. This would explain their desire for “the people” to be heard and listened to. If the board composition had more Republican representatives, Republican constituents may have felt more trusting towards the board. The opposite analysis applies to Democrats; their comfortability with the board’s decision-making may be because of the strong Democrat presence of the board members. Partisanship influences how constituents view the board and the authority they are willing to give them in making decisions, however the AASD board members who were interviewed did not discuss partisanship as a consideration for decision-making, although they were not prompted to do so. Future interview research should look to investigate how board members incorporate partisanship values when making decisions.

The key relationship found between constituents and board members is that trusteeship will be used whether or not constituents desire it, unless four specific conditions of delegate representation are met: 1) community involvement and turnout to committee meetings in particular, 2) a naturally homogeneous district opinion, or a satisfied compromise within a heterogeneous district, 3) strong constituent pressure, and 4) a reasonable majority opinion. At the very least, then, it ought to be considered what qualities the public desires to have in their candidate, so that they can elect a “good” trustee, with the assumption that school issues will remain non-salient to most people and these conditions will not be met very frequently. It is important to consider the qualifications that are wanted for board members. Are individuals with a background in education the best fit for office? Or,

is it best to have individuals with an outside perspective? Of course, candidates are likely to be limited in board elections in Pennsylvania, given that it is an unpaid position. Would retirees who have more time to dedicate to the role, without the constraints of a full or part time job, be best for the school board? Or, should an amendment be made to Pennsylvania state law to require some pay to board members, in order to open up the availability to lower-income citizens? Little work has been done that provides a comprehensive understanding of school board structures and factors that make it the most effective representative body while also providing a quality education for students. The implications of this work show that this balance will vary district by district, depending on the needs of the constituency bases, the attitudes of the board representatives, and the level of communication between the two.

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Appendix A: Survey Protocol

PA School District Survey March-April 2020

Responses to the following survey questions will be used as data for a research project conducted by Sarah Lutz. You may opt out of the survey at any point, and you are not required to answer every question. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me (Sarah Lutz) at lutzsa@dickinson.edu. You are also welcome to contact my two research advisers, Dr. Elizabeth Lewis of the Educational Studies Department (lewiseli@dickinson.edu) or Dr. Sarah Niebler of the Political Science Department (nieblers@dickinson.edu) at Dickinson College (Carlisle, PA) with any questions or concerns.

Do you agree to the terms above? By clicking yes, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey, and that the information you provide in the survey may be used for this research project. Any responses that you provide will be kept anonymous.

Yes

No

**PA School District Survey
March-April 2020**

Are you between...? (mandatory)

- 1 Under 18 years old (ends survey)
- 2 18-29 years old
- 3 30-49 years old
- 4 50-64 years old
- 5 65 or over

**Select your area of residency
(mandatory)**

- 1 [Haven Township]
- 2 [Williamsburg Township]
- 3 [South Penn Township]
- 4 [The City of Archwood]
- 5 None of the above (ends survey)

Are you? (optional)

- 1 Male
- 2 Female
- 3 Other

Are you? (optional)

- 1 White
- 2 Black
- 3 Latino
- 4 Other _____

**Regardless of how you have voted in
the past, which of the following best
describes your party affiliation?**

(optional)

- 1 Strong Republican
- 2 Leaning Republican
- 3 Independent
- 4 Leaning Democrat
- 5 Strong Democrat

- 6 Prefer not to share

**What is your highest level of education?
(optional)**

- 1 Less than high school
- 2 High school graduate
- 3 Some college or technical school
- 4 4-year college graduate
- 5 Graduate or professional degree

**Which of the following categories best
describes your family income? (optional)**

- 1 Under \$20,000
- 2 \$20,000 - \$39,999
- 3 \$40,000 - \$59,999
- 4 \$60,000 - \$79,999
- 5 \$80,000 - \$99,999
- 6 \$100,000 or more
- 7 Prefer not to share

Select all that apply: (optional)

- 1 Parent of [AASD] student
- 2 Current teacher in the [AASD]
- 3 Other employee of the [AASD]
- 4 Family or friend of a current school board member
- 5 Alumni of [AASD]
- 6 Former school teacher or administrator
- 7 Current education administrator
- 8 Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) member
- 9 None of the above
- 10 Other _____

**PA School District Survey
March-April 2020**

Please select the number of school board meetings you have attended within the past 12 months (optional):

None 1 2-3 4-5 6 or more

We know that not everyone has the time to vote. Were you able to vote in the May 2019 school board election? (optional)

1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't Know

-If no, why did you not cast a vote? (optional)

- 1 Didn't have time
- 2 Little interest
- 3 Other _____

Have you ever contacted an [AASD] school board member or made a policy request (for example, like asking for clarification on a school policy, addressing school safety concerns, discussing the district tax rates, etc.) (optional)

Select all that apply:

- 1 Through email 2 By phone call 3 At a board meeting 4 In person, but not at a meeting
- 5 Never

Please describe the three main responsibilities you believe a school board has. (optional)

Open-ended response

**PA School District Survey
March-April 2020**

What would you do if you wanted to influence those in power on a school issue that was important to you? (optional)

- Sign a petition related to a school district issue
- Contact a school board member
- Attend school board committee meetings
- Attend a monthly school board meeting
- Speak at a school board meeting
- Discuss school issues with my friends and neighbors
- Join a strike, boycott, or other protest in regard to the school district
- Donate money to a school board candidate
- Recruit friends and family to attend school board meetings

1 Have done 2 Might do 3 Would Never do (participants' options for each political action above)

What qualities do you feel an effective school board member should have? In your opinion, please rank the following qualities in order of most necessary (being #1) to least necessary (being #10). (optional)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| A higher education degree | A decisive leader |
| A background in economics | Good moral character |
| Honesty | Vision for the district |
| Communicates well with others | Belief that public education is important |
| Listens to public opinion | Teaching experience |

**PA School District Survey
March-April 2020**

When making decisions, do you think the school board should do what the members of the community they serve (the “people”) think is best, or should the school board do what they think is best when deciding the following issues? (optional) (please place an x in the appropriate box under each issue to indicate who you believe the school board should listen to when making a decision)

	Tax Rates	Extracurricular Budget Allocations (ex. Giving money to the band program versus to athletics)	Administrative Budget Allocations (ex. cutting teacher positions or salaries)	School Safety Procedures	Curriculum	Graduation Requirements	Community Expenditures (ex. New sports stadiums, parking lot locations, re-districting)
Do what the <u>people</u> think is best							
Do what the <u>School Board</u> thinks is best							
The people’s and the School Board’s views <u>are largely the same on this issue</u>							

I feel like I can trust the school board to do what is right... (optional)

1 Almost always 2 Often 3 Sometimes 4 Seldom 5 Never

-If you you selected (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5): **Please elaborate on why you feel you can** (almost always, often, sometimes, seldom, never) **trust the school board (optional)**

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The following questions will be asked to school board members of the [Archwood Area School District] in a semi-structured format:

- 1) What is your current or previous experience either in education or other professions?
 - a) How many years have you served on a school board, either for this district or others?

- 2) Why did you decide to run for a position on the school board?
 - a) Who were your biggest supporters during your campaign?
 - b) Were there any specific issues in the district going on when you ran?
 - c) Did someone in the school district or community recruit you?

- 3) How would you describe the Board's general decision-making process prior to casting a vote?
 - a) Do you consult the other board members before making a decision, or are most votes individualized?
 - b) Is there anyone else you may consult?

- 4) Please describe to me the steps that the school board took to address redistricting the elementary school boundaries as of February 2020?
 - a) How about the [Pierce] Stadium renovations/ approval process?
 - i) Leaving the stadium open to the public vs. closed
 - ii) Design elements and cost

- 5) What issues do district members usually speak up on?

- 6) Are there any issues you feel you need to ultimately follow the preferences of your constituents?
 - a) How does the Board know what their preferences are?
 - b) What issues do you rely more on your own expertise or your colleagues? Why?

- 7) What is a typical board meeting like?
 - a) How is turnout from the general public, employees, etc.

- 8) How often do people from the district contact you with questions or concerns? Would you say you hear from your constituents frequently? The same constituents?
 - a) email communications

- b) in person meetings
 - c) committee meetings
 - d) general board meetings
- 9) Do you think constituents have a good understanding of the complexity of certain decisions (eg. budget constraints, state law/mandated requirements)?
- 10) What advice do you have for school board members who want to be more effective in their role?
- a) Is there anything that you wished I had asked you?