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Determining Whether a Link Exists Between the Academic Performance of Mississippi Public School Districts and School Administrators' Use of Persuasive Communication Techniques and Self-Efficacy in Communication

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The University of Southern Mississippi

DETERMINING WHETHER A LINK EXISTS BETWEEN THE
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' USE OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION
TECHNIQUES AND SELF-EFFICACY IN COMMUNICATION

by

David Alexander Burris

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

DETERMINING WHETHER A LINK EXISTS BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' USE OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES AND SELF-EFFICACY IN COMMUNICATION

by David Alexander Burris

May 2015

This study sought to determine whether a link existed between types of persuasive communication methods and the academic performance of school districts and whether administrators' perceived self-efficacy as communicators was related to the academic performance of school districts. This study could help school officials to analyze their use of persuasive communication methods to determine if they are communicating with the public in a manner that is conducive to achieving the goals related to the academic performance of their district. School officials could also use the results of this study to design or modify an existing public relations plan to communicate in a manner that impacts district performance.

The population of this study consisted of Mississippi school administrators responsible for school communication with the public on a district level. Potential participants received this instrument as a paper and pencil document sent through the mail. There was no statistically significant correlation found between types of persuasive communication used and the academic performance of school districts, but a regression model found that a small amount of variation in academic performance was explained by the types of persuasive communication used. There was no statistically significant

correlation found between the frequency of using persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts, but a regression model revealed that a meaningful amount of variance in academic performance could be explained by the frequency of using persuasive communication. There was also no statistically significant link between school leaders' self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts.

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A Dissertation
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May 2015

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Lynn. She is the unsung hero, the hidden motivation behind my pursuit of this degree. Though her name will not be on the diploma, she has sacrificed just as much time, money, and resources as I have. She was there for me when I was triumphant upon completing a course of study or major assignment, and she was there when I felt like I could not bear another moment of scholarly endeavors. I cannot thank her enough for all her love and support.

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I would also like to thank the administrators of the Hinds County School District. They provided valuable support to this project in the form of a panel review and pilot study. I would like to specifically thank Dr. Delesicia Martin for her encouragement and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the American public has expressed an overall decline in their belief that public schools are adequately serving their communities. This declining support could have negative consequences for schools, since schools with higher levels of public support enjoy benefits that schools with lower levels of support do not. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), several studies have shown a link between the academic performance of a school or district and family and community support of the school or district. Another benefit associated with public support is increased funding through local taxes and bond issues (Marshall, Piper, & Micich, 2002). School districts with low public support are linked to lower academic performance, lower financial support, decreased enrollment (Schrom, 2004), and school closure (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006).

For many years, parents of children in public schools have also indicated declining support for public schools in general but, paradoxically, have expressed increasing levels of confidence in their children's schools to meet their educational needs (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). As late as 2014, this gap between the ratings of local public schools and public schools in general remained (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014). This raised questions about the disconnection between perceptions of local schools and public education in general. This trend seemed to indicate that something was different about parents' experiences with their children's schools when compared to the experiences of parents and members of the public with public education in general.

Some experts have suggested that communication may account for these differences in perceptions of public schools (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen, Saultz, &

Snyder, 2013; Reynolds, 2013). School leaders are, in general, expected to be increasingly better communicators with the parents of the children in their school or district, but these same school leaders might not be improving their communication with the non-parental members of their communities. This could be problematic for education leaders, since there has been evidence that communication between the school district and community is related to the academic performance of that district (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

It made sense, then, to study communication between school officials and members of the school community. Specifically, it needed to be determined whether there was a correlation between school officials' use of persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts. It also needed to be determined whether a correlation existed between school officials' self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district.

Justification for the Study

Public schools and their local communities benefit from strong community support for these schools. The schools benefit from increased support, increased academic performance, and attendance, while the community benefits from having a local school that has served as a center of community activity and a major employer (Bard et al., 2006). Schools, however, have been experiencing a decline in public support that may be unrelated to actual performance. In recent years, NAEP scores have risen and the dropout rate has declined, yet the trend of declining public support of public education has persisted (Smith III, Turner, & Lattanzio, 2012). Research was needed to determine why there is a disconnection between performance and support. Some experts

have suggested that it may be due to ineffective communication from educational leaders (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2013).

Community support is important to schools for many reasons. Community support has been linked to academic performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Marshall (1998) identified the four factors that influence public support of schools as (a) perceived community benefits of public schools, (b) perceived performance of public schools, (c) tax equity in funding public schools, and (d) perceived responsibility of society to provide public schools. If school leaders want to influence these factors related to the support of their schools, then they might use persuasive communication as the means of this influence.

If the previously mentioned decline in community support is due to poor communication from school leaders, this does not necessarily mean that all school districts communicate poorly. It seemed reasonable to assume that some school districts were more effective at communicating with the local school community than others. It also seemed likely that the districts with more effective communication plans and strategies would have higher levels of public support, and by extension, higher levels of academic performance. Furthermore, school officials with higher levels of self-efficacy as communicators may be more persuasive than those with lower levels, and higher levels of self-efficacy in communication could be associated with higher levels of district performance. This study sought to examine whether the academic performance of school districts was correlated with the four types and frequency of persuasive communication techniques found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model used among school leaders in public school districts in Mississippi. The four major types of communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model are one-way direct communication, one-way

indirect communication, two-way asymmetrical communication and two-way symmetrical communication.

Significance of the Study

In recent years, public school districts have been increasingly expected to increase academic performance. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandated that school districts improve the achievement of students as measured by standardized test scores. In addition, in order to meet legal requirements, school officials are required to attempt to communicate the performance level of their local schools or districts to the parents and community members they serve (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013). Communication methods may play a significant role in both improving the academic performance of a school district and broadcasting the results of this performance to the school community.

There is a link between public support and the academic performance of a school or district (Carroll & Carroll, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Communication methods provide a way for school officials to attempt to increase community support for public schools (Kessler, 2011; O'Brien & Lebow, 2013; Reynolds, 2013). The results of this study could be used by school officials to help determine what types of communication are most directly related to academic performance of a school or district.

According to Bandura (1991), self-efficacy is a mechanism that plays a significant role in the social cognitive theory of self-regulation. Self-efficacy has been linked to effective leadership (Bandura, 1991; Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011; McCormick, 2011). Self-efficacy has also been linked to increased job performance levels among school administrators (Daly et al., 2011; Devos, Bouckennooghe, Engels, Hotton, & Aelterman, 2007; McCollum & Kajs, 2009; McCullers

& Bozeman, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2009). If the results of this study had indicated a link between school administrators' self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of a school district, this could help public education officials better understand the need to train and equip school administrators to be confident and determined communicators.

Need for This Study

This study was needed to help determine whether a link existed between any of the four types of persuasive communication methods identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992) and district performance and whether administrators' perceived self-efficacy as communicators was related to district performance. This study could help school officials to analyze their use of persuasive communication methods to determine if they are communicating with the public in a manner that is commensurate with achieving the goals related to the academic performance of their district. School officials could also use the results of this study to design or modify an existing public relations plan to communicate in a manner that impacts district performance.

This study could also shed light on the importance of school leaders being not only effective communicators but persuasive communicators. District leaders could use the results of this study to determine whether it is necessary to implement a professional development plan centered on persuasive communication. Officials in higher education could use the results of this study to help determine if persuasive communication skills need to be included in their educational leadership programs of study.

Contribution to the Literature

There have been few published studies on the perceived self-efficacy of school leaders as persuasive communicators. Many of the studies on self-efficacy focus on

various aspects of leadership, and a few of these studies included communication as one of many measures. None of these studies, however, focused specifically on measuring the effect of school leaders' perceived self-efficacy as communicators on the academic performance of a school district. This study could help increase the body of research in the area of the use of persuasive communication in public schools, and whether school leaders perceive themselves to be capable of effectively delivering this type of communication.

There have been studies about the effect of communication on community support as well as the effect of community support on the academic performance of a school district, but there are almost no studies that sought to determine a direct link between Grunig and Grunig's (1992) types of persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district. In addition, studies on school and community communication have seldom focused specifically on persuasive communication. Persuasive communication techniques such as those found in marketing and public relations can be applied to communicating with both families and the broader communities. This study could help determine if school leaders are making use of such broad communications and whether or not there is a correlation between persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district.

There is a clear gap in the literature in researching persuasive communication strategies that school officials can adopt to increase public support and by extension the academic performance of a school district. There is also a gap in the literature as to what effect school officials who perceive themselves as capable communications leaders have on the academic performance of a school district. This study sought to fill these gaps by analyzing whether a link existed between school leaders' self-efficacy in communication

and the academic performance of a school district, and whether a link existed between persuasive communication techniques and the academic performance of a school district.

Statement of the Problem

If school leaders are going to persuade the public to support their schools and therefore increase the academic performance of a school district, they need to believe in their abilities as communicators, and they need to be effective communicators. They also need to know if the types of communication they use are related to the academic performance of a school district, hence the reason for this study. The goal of this study was to provide school leaders with insight into what types of communication need to be included in a district communication plan. By including district officials' input about their perceived ability to effectively communicate with members of the school community, it was hoped that this would provide insight into the communication training needs of both aspiring and practicing administrators.

For this study, this researcher gathered and studied responses from Mississippi public school district officials in charge of communication regarding the use of Grunig and Grunig's (1992) persuasive communication techniques and the respondents' reported self-efficacy as communicators. Many factors needed to be considered when examining this information. The size of a school district could have an impact on what sorts of communication techniques are practical, while the socioeconomic status of the students in district could have a confounding effect on the academic performance of a district. Also, the distribution of students per school in the district was taken into account as it provided an estimated average size of school community served by each school. This measure of the average size of school communities in a district could affect what types of communication were preferred by members of these communities.

In anticipation of the differences in use of communication techniques related to district size, socioeconomic status, and distribution of students per school, efforts were made to account for these differences when examining the data. This was done to aid in studying the effects of persuasive communication on the academic performance of school districts and the relationship between perceived self-efficacy in communication among administrators and the academic performance of school districts in all the respondents' schools as a whole.

Regarding the analysis of persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district, the independent variable was types of persuasive communication based on the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model used by respondents. The academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of Education was the dependent variable. For the relationship between school leaders' perceived self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of a school district, the reported perceived self-efficacy in communication reported by Mississippi public school district leaders was the independent variable, while the academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of Education was the dependent variable.

Research Questions

This correlational study sought to examine persuasive communication between public schools and community members in two different ways. One examination proposed to treat persuasive communication styles as an independent variable and determine this communication's effect on the academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of

Education as the dependent variable. The other examination sought to treat school leaders' self-efficacy as communicators as an independent variable and the academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of Education as the dependent variable.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the degree to which Mississippi school leaders select type or combination of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model?
2. What are the perspectives of Mississippi school leaders regarding their effectiveness as communicators?
3. Is there a significant link between the selection of any type or combination of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?
4. Is there a significant link between the frequency of use by school leaders of one or more types of persuasive communication techniques identified by in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?
5. Is there a link between school officials' self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district?

Operational Definitions

The following terms have been defined to specify their meaning within the scope of this study.

Academic performance of a school district. This term refers to the average level of proficiency and the average level of academic growth exhibited by students in public school systems. For this study, the academic performance of a school district is measured by the A-F accountability assignments established by the Mississippi Department of Education. These assignments are primarily based on standardized test scores, student growth rates from year to year, and graduation rates.

Community support. This term refers to the extent to which the school community expresses satisfaction with a school's or district's level of performance in meeting that community's needs. It also refers to the extent that school community members are willing to take a specific action suggested or requested by school officials.

Distribution of students per school. This term refers to the average number of students per school in a district. It is used as a measure of the average size of communities served by each school in a district.

District size. This term refers to the overall student population of a school district. Districts will be labeled as large, medium, and small based on the calculated average district population size based on information found on the Mississippi Department of Education website.

Frequency of persuasive communication. This term refers to how often on average public school district officials initiate one of the four types of persuasive communication found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model with the school community.

One-way direct communication. This term refers to messages transmitted from a school district to the community, without the solicitation of feedback, designed to overtly persuade members of the community in some manner (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). For example, paid advertisements would be considered one-way direct communication.

One-way indirect communication. This term refers to messages transmitted from a school district to the community, without solicitation of feedback, designed to covertly persuade members of the community in some manner (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). For example, a school newsletter would be considered one-way indirect communication.

Persuasive communication. This term refers to communication between school officials and members of the school community that originate with the school and are designed to, at least in part, either influence the school community's perceptions of the school or district or influence the public to take particular actions perceived to be beneficial to the school or district. This study identifies all types of persuasive communication as belonging to one of the four types of persuasive communication found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model.

Public schools. This term refers to schools that are primarily funded by state, local, and federal tax funds that serve students ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

School community. This term refers to the adult members residing in a geographic area served by a particular school or school district. The school community includes both parents with students enrolled in public schools and adults who do not have children enrolled in public schools.

School officials. This term refers to employees of a public school district that are in positions of authority. This authority might be on a building level or district level. This term is used interchangeably with the term *school leaders*.

Self-efficacy. This term refers to the extent an individual intrinsically believes that he or she is able to control the outcome of an event or perform a task to a satisfactory level through his or her own actions.

Socioeconomic status. This term refers to the household income per student of the families served by a school district. In this study, the socioeconomic status of students will be measured by the percentage of students in a district who qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Two-way asymmetrical communication. This term refers to communication between a school district and the community, with feedback solicited for the purpose of improving the school district's ability to persuade the community in future communications (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

Two-way symmetrical communication. This term refers to communication between a school district and the community, with feedback solicited for the purpose of facilitating the school district and community to mutually influence each other (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

Types of persuasive communication. This term refers to one of the four types of persuasive communication from the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model. These were identified as press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Press agency and public information methods were identified as one-way methods of communication designed to influence the public to look favorably on an organization through propaganda (press agency) or by specifically releasing favorable

information (public information). Two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical models both allowed for mutual communication and influence, with a key difference. The asymmetrical model focused more on using information gathered from the public to generate messages designed to influence the public, while the symmetrical model uses information from the public to allow mutual influence between an organization and the public that it serves.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were listed to reduce the potential threats to the validity of this study.

1. All respondents would answer honestly and gave appropriate efforts to respond in an accurate manner.
2. Respondents would participate only once in the survey.
3. Participants would complete the instrument anonymously and without fear of any potential negative consequences.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were identified as factors that limited the generalizations of this study.

1. The scope of this study was limited to public school district officials in Mississippi.
2. Participation in this study was voluntary and results may be biased based on the self-selected respondents' views regarding persuasive communication between school officials and the school community and/or these respondents perceived self-efficacy as communicators.

3. The feeder patterns of different school districts may have resulted in students per school ratios that are a little higher or lower for one district than they would be in a district of similar size with a different feeder pattern. For example, a district that had multiple small elementary schools serving one or two grades that feed into a larger middle and high school serving three or four grades would have a smaller student to school ratio than a district of similar size with equal numbers of students throughout elementary, middle and high schools. This could give the inaccurate impression that the first district was serving smaller school communities.

Summary

There is evidence that school districts with higher levels of public support are associated with higher levels of academic performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). There is also evidence that communication, particularly persuasive communication, was associated with higher levels of public support (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2013). This study sought to determine if there is a direct correlation between school districts' use of persuasive communication and the academic performance of these districts. Since school district leaders are expected to be communication leaders (Kowalski, 2006), this study also sought to determine if school district administrators' perceived self-efficacy as communicators was associated with the level of academic performance in a school district.

In Chapter II, a study of the literature associated with this study is presented. The chapter will begin with a review of relevant literature associated with school and community support. Next, the historical role of school superintendents as communication leaders will be presented. After that, a theoretical framework concerning

communication between organizations and their constituents will be reviewed. Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of the use of marketing and public relations by public organizations including schools.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In a letter to a rival scientist, Isaac Newton once wrote, “If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants” (“On the shoulders,” 2001, para. 1). Newton may have intended this statement as part of an insult, but the original meaning of the statement refers to the value of past researchers in current studies (“On the shoulders,” 2001). It was in that spirit, that past research both recent and beyond was reviewed to find “giants” upon which to build this study.

A scientist cannot know ahead of time what the results of an experiment that has never been done will be, but he or she can certainly research related topics in order to hazard an educated guess. A researcher should conduct similar research before conducting an original study to ensure that the study contributes to the body of literature. Neither scientists nor researchers can review every broad concept in comprehensive detail. Rather, a careful balance should be struck between a comprehensive review and a focused approach.

To strike such a balance in this particular review, several key topics were thoroughly researched. Using The University of Southern Mississippi’s online library, several terms were entered into search engines in order to search online databases, professional journals, research studies, and books. These terms correspond to the major sections of this literature review. These terms include the following and similar variations: (a) public support for public education; (b) superintendent’s role in school and community communications; (c) constructivism and communication; (d) persuasive communication and academic performance; and (e) public relations in public schools.

These searches led to the majority of the sources used in this literature review, but other sources were also gathered, and in different ways. For example, articles and studies were recommended by professors in related fields. Various internet search engines, such as Google Scholar, were used to find additional sources that were peer-reviewed and scholastic in nature. Occasionally, authors cited other authors or sources that seemed particularly relevant, and I then tracked down these sources in their original form to ascertain their value to this literature review. Sources were gathered in many different ways, but it was the methodical search through the university library resources of the previously mentioned search terms that provided a factor of comprehensiveness to this literature review.

One purpose of this study is to determine whether a statistically significant link exists between type and frequency of persuasive communication used by school districts and the academic performance of school districts. Another purpose of this study is to determine if a statistically significant link exists between school district officials' self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts. The body of literature was analyzed to determine what previous researchers have discovered about certain topics. These topics included: (a) whether a link exists between public support of schools and benefits to public schools; (b) current trends in public support of public schools; (c) historic roles of superintendents as communication leaders; (d) communication theories; and (e) marketing and public relations.

These topics were presented in the order that followed a logical progression. Each section seeks to focus on questions brought up by the prior section, while introducing questions for the next section. The progression of questions was as follows:

1. Do public schools need public support?

2. Are schools getting public support?
3. What factors are associated with public support?
4. Can communication affect these factors, particularly district performance, associated with public support?
5. What roles of communication leadership have superintendents performed in the past?
6. What is communication? What is its purpose? What philosophies of communication are relevant to public support of schools?
7. What types of communication are associated with increasing public support and/or the academic performance of a school district?

This thought process begins with analyzing the overall relevance of public support, and each subsequent section focuses on addressing the previous topic.

Public Support of Public Education

This section begins with an analysis of research related to benefits associated with public schools with high levels of public support. Hereafter, unless otherwise specified, the term “support” will refer to public support and “schools” will refer to public, K-12 schools. Detriments associated with public schools with low levels of support are also reviewed. Next, trends in public support of schools are presented. Finally, an examination of the pertinent literature regarding factors linked to public support of schools is conducted.

The Need for Support

Before examining factors that might influence the public’s support of public education, it made sense to research whether public support is even necessary for public schools. It made sense to research what benefits have been associated with schools and

community support, and what consequences have been associated with schools that do not have strong support from the community.

One important benefit schools have received through community support was that of increased the academic performance of a school district (Carroll & Carroll, 1994; Kinder, Bagin, & Gallagher, 1990). According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), several studies have shown a link between the academic performance of a school district and family and community support of the school. Henderson and Mapp (2002) did make note of the fact that the majority of studies focused specifically on family support, but those studies that focused on or at least included the study of broader community support suggested a significant enough link to the academic performance of a school district to lead the authors to say, “It takes more than engaged parents to produce high student achievement” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24).

This achievement benefit from community support has manifested in multiple ways, but when the community involvement was centered on student learning, Henderson and Mapp (2002) noted a higher rate of the academic performance of a school district was observed when they stated, “Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a stronger association with achievement than more general forms of involvement” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 38). Examples of this type of involvement included community volunteers serving as tutors (Invernizzi, Rosemary, Richards, & Richards, 1997) and community members serving on school leadership councils (Moore, 1998). It has been widely accepted that family support has been important to the academic performance of a school district, but these researchers have clearly indicated a link between the academic performance of a school district and support from community members beyond the family.

To accomplish their program goals or improve their facilities, school districts have often attempted to pass a bond issue through local voting procedures. Marshall et al. (2002) revealed that there was a link between voter support for bond issues and voters' perceptions of certain aspects of schools, such as academic performance. Reynolds (2013) conducted a study in which approximately half the participants were willing to pay higher taxes just to keep their local school open. The link between bond passage and school support has been identified so many times that there are even organizations that have used the passage of school bonds to measure community support for the local school district ("Extracurricular," 2007).

If schools with high community support have enjoyed certain benefits, schools that do not have strong community support could be expected to experience detriments. Research has indicated that these school districts have lower academic performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These schools have also had a lower rate of passing school bonds (Marshall et al., 2002; Reynolds, 2013). These may not have been the only concerns, however.

Schrom (2004) pointed out that low support for public schools has coincided with a rise in private schools, charter schools, and vouchers. This has increased the financial strain on some school districts. As Schrom (2004) put it:

Public schools find themselves in the unfortunate position of needing to increase quality to meet the ongoing accountability movement, while cutting costs and battling political movements aimed at increasing competition for scarce government funds. (p. 3)

If enough students were unenrolled from certain schools, these schools have often been consolidated (Bard et al., 2006). This has been particularly true if they lack the

community support necessary to increase local funding, and this type of consolidation has been linked to devastating effects on both the school and community (Bard et al., 2006). Examples of such effects include an increase in absenteeism and even community disintegration in communities where the local school was closed due to consolidation (Bard et al., 2006).

To summarize, researchers have suggested that both public schools and their local communities benefited from strong community support for these schools. The school district may have benefited from increased academic performance and attendance, while the community seems to have benefited from having a local school that has served as a center of community activity and a major employer (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005).

School districts with weak community support are associated with lower academic performance, lower attendance, and lower rates of local funding. In addition, these schools often face a decline in enrollment which increases these schools' risk of consolidation. Communities that lose their local schools to consolidation may suffer or even disintegrate from the loss of a community hub and local employer. It would seem logical, therefore, that school officials might wish to know whether their schools are being supported by the public.

Trends in Community Support

If a link has been established between community support and benefits to public schools, it made sense to determine whether schools have been recently receiving this support. To answer this question, trends in support for schools needed to be ascertained for individual schools and public schools in general. For example, an article based on a 2011 Gallup poll identified several trends in public support of schools, and both positive and negative trends were observed (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011).

Public schools can be encouraged by recent increases in expressed support from parents of public school students. For example, a recent Gallup poll found that parents were on average rating their children's local schools higher than ever, and that these ratings had risen for several years (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). This trend has stabilized somewhat, but as recently as 2014, parents were continuing to rate their children's schools higher than public schools in general (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014). Chingos, Henderson, and West (2010) also found that parents rated their local schools higher than non-parents, particularly when schools increased their level of performance; furthermore, this increase in ratings was found across racial, social, and economic groups in the local community.

A problematic trend for public schools was a decline in the general public's perception of the performance of public education and administrators; also, the average rating participants give public schools has declined several years in a row (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). This trend has also stabilized, but the ratings are remain low (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011). In addition, the general public has continued to express less and less confidence in public schools as a whole since 1973 (Jones, 2012). In terms of educators, teachers were on average rated positively, but administrators, superintendents, and school boards received increasingly unfavorable ratings, respectively (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011).

Even more troubling was the perceived idea that this decline in overall support seemed unrelated to actual school performance. An example of this can be found in a recent article by Farhi (2012) in which he bemoaned the decline in the public's perception of public school performance despite the fact that, "Educational attainment has never been higher in the United States" (n.p.). Another study found a strong relationship between parent support and actual school performance, but this relationship

became very weak among non-parents (Chingos et al., 2010). In recent years, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have risen and the dropout rate has declined, yet the overall decline in public support of public education has persisted (Smith III et al., 2012).

Factors Related to Public Support of Schools

Recent trends in public support of schools brought up some interesting topics. The literature was examined to study why there was a disconnection between parental support and the overall community's support for local schools. Also, why parents rated their children's schools favorably while rating public education as a whole negatively needed to be explored. To shed light on these questions, the literature was examined to identify factors that seemed to influence school support.

Marshall (1998) published an article in which he expressed his belief that the public's perceptions about certain characteristics of public schools significantly influenced their support of that school. These factors were (a) perceived community benefits of public schools, (b) perceived performance of public schools, (c) tax equity in funding public schools, and (d) perceived responsibility of society to provide public schools (Marshall, 1998). Individuals were likely to support their local schools if they believed that the schools benefited their communities in ways such as providing a quality education, increasing property values, and hiring local citizens (Marshall, 1998). Individuals convinced that the local schools were performing well academically were also more likely to be supportive (Marshall, 1998). People were less likely to be financially supportive of schools if they believed that their local tax system used to fund schools was applied unfairly (Marshall, 1998). Some people were more likely to support local schools because they felt it was their social responsibility (Marshall, 1998). In 2002,

a study was conducted that found a significant link to these perceptions and increased likelihood of voters to support passing a school bond issue (Marshall et al., 2002).

Another factor that has seemed to affect community support for public schools is schools' responses to critical events. Pride (2002) defined critical events as those that are, "contextually dramatic" (p. 161), and used media coverage as an example. Critical events include such things as contentious elections related to the local school district, school crime or violence, and political intervention in school affairs, and Pride (2002) used a tax-referendum, a school shooting, and court-ordered busing of students as examples in his study. A significant link was established between the public's perceptions of how schools handled the communication process during critical events and support for the school (Pride, 2002).

School closings from consolidation have been associated with lower public support of schools, particularly in rural areas (Bard et al., 2006). When a community's school has closed, the population of that community has often declined and members of that community have shown a decrease in their support of public education (Louisiana Department of Education, 2003). As Bard et al. (2005) put it, "community members argue that the loss of the school means the loss of the community" (p. 42). Consolidation has often resulted in very large schools, and these larger schools are also associated with lower public support (Adams & Foster, 2002).

School leaders should be concerned about the evidence that suggested a decline in support for public schools as a whole, regardless of performance, particularly the seemingly contradictory trends of parents having rated their children's individual schools increasingly higher while both parents and non-parents rated overall public education lower. There a disconnection between these groups that should be examined. Some

experts have suggested that it may be due to poor communication from educational leaders (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2013).

The Superintendent as Communications Leader

If poor communication from school leaders had a negative effect on school support, then it was worthwhile to explore who was responsible for this poor communication. As the chief executive of school districts, superintendents have been expected to be responsible for all of the successes and failures of their schools. It seemed likely that this would include being a communications leader. To that end, the relevant literature indicates that the role of superintendent as a communications leader has changed significantly over the years.

In this section, the changing roles and expectations of superintendents as communication leaders are presented from a historical context. Next, the modern role of superintendents as communication leaders is analyzed. Particular focus is given to the expectations of increased frequency and complexity of communication methods modern superintendents are expected to meet. The section concludes with an overview of some of the challenges and barriers to communication modern superintendents need to overcome.

Historical Role of Superintendents as Public Communicators

As early as the 1880's, school superintendents were being cautioned not to ignore the general public (Harris, 1882). Communication in this time period was primarily done by word of mouth, and it was this method that Harris (1882) proscribed. Harris's (1882) warning came as a result of his perception that school superintendents were operating in relative isolation, and that superintendents preferred this isolation and saw no tangible benefit to engaging in public discourse.

This preference of avoiding public communication was prevalent among superintendents through the early 1900's (Jones & Stout, 1960). Jones and Stout (1960) characterized this lack of communication as "relative indifference" (p. 193), and they suggested that when problems arose between superintendents and various segments of the population, superintendents had created these problems, themselves, "perhaps mostly through the school's own fault and indifference" (p. 166). Superintendents in this time period were considered to be good communicators if they were at least be willing to engage in public discourse about their schools (Jones & Stout, 1960).

Miller and Charles (1924) argued that there was a critical need for superintendents to manage communications between schools and the community. This suggestion went beyond previous calls for superintendents to simply engage in the communication process. Superintendents were called upon to cultivate and use public communications to the advantage of their schools:

The educational administrator who clearly sees the avenue to public understanding and support that are open to the school system and who, with sound knowledge of their large possibilities, makes the proper adaptations in his administrative program, will soon discover that the schools are obtaining not only a larger measure of public confidence, but that they are also steadily improving their accomplishments and constantly striving toward higher ideals of service to the children and the community. (Miller & Charles, 1924, pp. 19-20)

Miller and Charles (1924) then proceeded to provide superintendents with guidelines on how to manage school-community communications by suggesting that superintendents convey a cheerful personality when speaking to the public or staff and to use staff members to further the communication process. A common theme throughout

Miller and Charles's (1924) work was that superintendents needed to give conscious thought to what message they wanted to deliver and make deliberate preparations to ensure the effective delivery of their message. This theme of deliberate communication would eventually become an expected role of superintendents to be communications leaders first in their school districts and ultimately beyond (Kowalski, 2006).

In the 1960's, superintendents were beginning to be expected to take the communication process to a new level. An idea that began to gain popularity characterized schools and the communities they served as partners in the education process, and this meant that communication between superintendents and communities needed to be two-way (Jones & Stout, 1960). Superintendents were still expected to manage the outgoing communication identified by Miller and Charles (1924), but they were additionally expected to solicit and receive messages from the community.

Thus, by the 1960's, communication was becoming a major role for superintendents. As one researcher put it, superintendents served in three roles, "first as an organizational manager, second as a democratic statesman (or politician), and third as an applied social scientist" (Kowalski, 2006, p. 15). A good school and community relationship was considered the responsibility of the superintendent (Jones & Stout, 1960) and superintendents were expected to develop the necessary communication skills to effect such a relationship (Kowalski, 2006).

Between the period of 1980 and 2000, even more communication roles were assigned to superintendents. Kowalski (2006) stated that in addition to previously mentioned roles, superintendents were expected to participate in political dialogue related to education and develop a positive image for their schools that would endure beyond any specific communications. Superintendents were being expected to gather community

support for any change initiatives and to create and implement a shared vision of successful students and schools (Kowalski, 2006). Kowalski (2006) expressed that communication skills provided the foundation of accomplishing these roles, so superintendents were expected to have the necessary skills to be communications leaders.

Modern Role of Superintendents as Communication Leaders

At the time of this writing, superintendents were still expected to be communications leaders by performing many of the historical roles of communication, such as managing the communication process and engaging parents and the community in a shared vision, though some of them were performed in a manner vastly different than in previous eras (Kowalski, 2006). An example of one of these differences was that superintendents were expected to be more accessible than ever before. Specifically, they were expected to be more accessible through a multitude of communication channels (Cox, 2012); more accessible during a crisis (Meek, 1999); and more accessible to increasingly diverse cultures (Kowalski, 2006).

Americans in the 2010's have had a virtual cornucopia of potential forms of communication available to them. These forms of communication included such classic styles as personal conversations and paper-based communications, the established modern communications such as electronic mail and phone calls, and newer forms of communication such as text messaging and various forms of social media. No matter their personal preferences, superintendents may be expected to be available through any and all of these types of communication (Cox, 2012).

The use of social media is an example of a type of communication that has potential benefits along with potential concerns. There have been increasing numbers of legal and discipline problems between school employees, students, and parents that have

resulted from the use of social media ("Eight Ways," 2011). Because of these problems, many superintendents have avoided the use of social media to engage in school and community communications. Cox (2012) argued that this may be a mistake, since community members, particularly non-parents, are more susceptible to communication through social media than communication through traditional means.

In 2011, a book on public relations featured a story in which an unhappy customer posted a song to social media about his experience with an airline (Scott, 2011). Within days, the video had been watched over one million times, during which time the airline was criticized for being silent on the matter. Inappropriate use of social media can be problematic for an organization, however, as this story indicates, avoiding social media altogether can be problematic as well.

In addition to using different methods of public communication, superintendents are expected to communicate with the public during many different circumstances as well. For example, during a crisis, superintendents are expected to both resolve the crisis and manage the communications process as well (Meek, 1999). Failing to communicate effectively in a crisis situation may be detrimental to public support (Pride, 2002). Meek (1999) warned that satisfactory crisis communication could only be accomplished if school leaders had been proactive in establishing lines of communication before crises occurred. These lines of communication should have been created between the superintendent and the school district employees, parents, non-parents, and members of the mass media (Bagin, Gallagher, & Moore, 2008a; Meek, 1999).

If communicating with the public was already challenging, it has become even more so with the increase in diversity found in the population of today's public school districts. Sometimes, these challenges have been represented by logistical obstacles to

communication; other times, the obstacles have been related to the cultures or beliefs of different groups (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Regardless of these barriers, superintendents are expected to be good communicators with all populations in their communities (Kowalski, 2006).

To overcome logistical barriers of communication, superintendents should plan for a variety of issues such as language barriers, physical barriers such as meeting times or locations, and resource barriers such as volunteer time or money (Larocque et al., 2011). Superintendents have needed to decide what steps to take in order to accommodate the communications process with these community members. These steps have included a variety of scheduled meeting times, translators, the use of school buses to transport community members to meetings, and providing childcare and babysitting services, so that “by addressing physical barriers, schools can facilitate parents being able to physically attend school activities” (Larocque et al., 2011, p. 119).

In addition to overcoming physical barriers to communication, superintendents need to also overcome communication barriers that exist between different groups in a culturally diverse community (Kowalski, 2006; Larocque et al., 2011). These barriers have included mistrust or fear between members of different cultural groups and school leaders based on either previous bad experiences with the public education system or general mistrust of people in authority, and this problem is only made worse when superintendents do not adequately understand the diverse cultures that make up the communities they represent (Larocque et al., 2011). Superintendents should first work towards understanding these different cultures well enough to communicate effectively and work on navigating the cultural barriers to engage the community in the educational process (Larocque et al., 2011).

Summary

Through the years, the communication-based roles of superintendents have changed dramatically. Early superintendents went from generally ignoring the public to being available to communicate with certain parts of the community. In the 1920's, superintendents began to be expected to manage the communications process between the schools and the citizens they served by deliberately taking steps to craft and deliver messages on a widespread scale. The 1960's saw superintendents take on the idea of building partnerships between their school districts and the communities they served, and this partnership required superintendents to manage both the delivery of outgoing messages and incoming feedback. The latter half of the twentieth century saw superintendents add such communication roles as engaging in political dialogue, providing a positive image for the school district, leading change initiatives, and creating a shared vision. Superintendents in 2014 were expected to continue these communication duties while adding those of crisis communications, using multiple and various means of communicating, and communicating effectively across cultural lines.

School and Community Communication

The role that communication has played in factors linked to public support of schools needed to be examined. It needed to be determined whether schools with certain communication strategies have been positively linked to good community support. Before these questions can be discussed, the theoretical nature of communication should be analyzed to determine what communication fundamentally is. Its purpose and the methods of communication that are applicable to school and community communication should be explored as well.

This section begins with a brief overview of definitions, elements, processes, and barriers of communication. Next, the purposes of school and community communications are analyzed. Different theories are also examined to determine their effects on how school officials define their purposes for communicating with the public. And finally, examples of both effective and ineffective applications of these theories to the communication process are included at the end of this section.

Communication

The word, “communication,” came from the Latin *communicare*, which meant to share a common message (Bagin, Gallagher, & Moore, 2008b). Communication has been defined as, “a cooperative enterprise requiring the mutual interchange of ideas and information, and out of which understanding develops and action is taken” (Bagin et al., 2008b, p. 74). These definitions referred to any form of communication, which would include messages between school officials and the community.

Communication requires certain elements in order to take place. First, a source message is constructed, and then an encoder chooses a particular form of symbolic representation for this message (Bagin et al., 2008b). A source message can be thought of as the knowledge or concepts intended to be communicated (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). The encoder is the entity that converts the meanings of the source message into a transmittable message by creating a symbolic representation of the source message using symbols such as words, pictures, or expressions (Kuhlmann, 2007).

Next, the transmission must go through a channel or medium before it goes through a decoding process (Kuhlmann, 2007). The channel refers to the method of message delivery such as oral conversation, written messages, or selected images (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). The decoding process can be thought of as the prior

perceptions and conceptualizations of the ultimate receiver, who then reconstructs the transmitted message (Bagin et al., 2008b; Kuhlmann, 2007). If the communication process has been successful, the message reconstructed by the receiver will closely match the message originally created, but sometimes obstacles can prevent the accurate transmission of a message (Howell & West, 2009).

According to one researcher, obstacles to the communication process have arisen and have needed to be overcome (Bortun, 2013). These obstacles have been either physical, such as mode of transmission or semantics, or internal such as feelings towards the communicator, speculation, or misconceptions (Bortun, 2013). Regardless of the types of obstacles, overcoming them is of utmost importance since:

Today we know: a word said to the wrong person, in the wrong moment and in the wrong place or in the wrong manner can destroy a friendship or a love relationship, a political alliance or an international treaty, the peace in a country or the world peace. (Bortun, 2013, p. 22)

Communication between the school and community has hardly been a threat to world peace or international treaties, but Bortun's (2013) lessons of responsible communication should be considered by school leaders. Attention to the communication process has been an important part of the relationships between schools and communities (Bagin, Gallagher, & Moore, 2008c) Furthermore, it has been the responsibility of school leaders to attend to the basic elements of communication and minimize the barriers to communication (Bortun, 2013; O'Brien & Lebow, 2013). To meet this responsibility, school leaders should give careful consideration to the reasons they communicate with the public.

School officials have communicated with the public for a variety of reasons. One reason, perhaps the most basic reason, was to provide relevant information to the school community either to meet state and federal requirements or to simply share information (Howell & West, 2009; Meek, 1999). Another reason schools have communicated with the public has been to influence the public in some manner (Kessler, 2011; O'Brien & Lebow, 2013; Reynolds, 2013). Depending on the nature of the messages, all of these reasons may have been valid, and effective communicators have needed to understand the fundamental nature of each of these reasons.

Legal Requirements of Communication

Even the most reluctant communicators found among school leaders have had to follow the legal requirements of communicating certain information to the general public (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013). No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) mandated that schools publicize their performance level ratings to inform the public of their progress towards the academic performance of a school district as defined by this law. Individual states have often required certain public communications as well. For example, Mississippi passed the Accountability and Transparency Act of 2008 that mandates that public agencies, including school districts, publish reports on state and federal spending and make those reports available to the public ("Transparency," 2008). Mississippi also passed a law requiring state agencies, including school districts, to give notice of all official meetings, open the meetings to the general public, and make the minutes of the meetings available to the public with the exception of executive sessions ("Open Meetings," n.d.).

There have also been legal requirements that oblige schools to limit their communication of certain types of information ("FERPA," n.d.). The Family and

Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA (n.d.) mandated that, with certain exceptions, school districts cannot publicly share information found in students' school records with other parties without parental consent, and school districts are required to inform parents of their rights to inspect and/or challenge any portion of said records. FERPA allowed exceptions to this rule by stating that schools could share directory-type information about students, but only if parents were notified and given reasonable time to request such information not be shared. Another exception FERPA allowed was that school districts can share student records with:

1. School officials with legitimate educational interest;
2. Other schools to which a student is transferring;
3. Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
4. Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
5. Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
6. Accrediting organizations;
7. To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
8. State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific state law. ("FERPA," n. d., para. 5)
9. School officials with legitimate educational interest;

At a minimum, schools have been required to meet state and federal requirements mandating that certain information be communicated to the public, certain information not be communicated to the public without consent, and some information be communicated with specific individuals ("FERPA," n.d.; NCLB, 2002; "Open Meetings," n.d.; "Transparency," 2008). There may be reasons beyond legal requirements that lead school officials to communicate with members of the public, but to analyze these reasons,

the body of research had to be studied to determine the basic theoretical or philosophical reasons why communication takes place.

Selected Theories of Communication

The definitions of basic communication suggested that communication is the transmission and sharing of information or knowledge (Bagin et al., 2008b; "Communication," 2014; Heslep, 1998); therefore, it was important to analyze theories regarding how knowledge was formed and how it was best transmitted. Two major theories were found that seemed particularly relevant to the role of communication in how individuals gain knowledge: objectivism and constructivism. These two theories have been shown to be vastly different in terms of the nature of reality, the way individuals process information to form knowledge, and the role communication plays in the knowledge building process (Vrasidas, 2000). The social cognitive theory of self-regulation was also found to be of import as it provided possible explanations about what could make some individuals better communicators than others.

Objectivism

Objectivism has been defined as “one version of basic realism according to which reality exists independent of humans” (Lakoff, 1987, p. 158). This theory has asserted that there exists a single reality regardless of whether an individual is able to correctly perceive it (Vrasidas, 2000). There were found to be six major assumptions associated with this theory:

1. There is a real world consisting of entities structured according to their properties and relations. Categorization of these entities is based on their properties.
2. The real world is fully and correctly structured so that it can be modeled.

3. Symbols are representations of reality and can only be meaningful to the degree that they correspond to reality.
4. The human mind processes abstract symbols in a computer-like fashion so that it mirrors nature.
5. Human thought is symbol-manipulation and it is independent of the human organism.
6. The meaning of the world exists objectively, independent of the human mind and it is external to the knower. (Vrasidas, 2000, pp. 340-341)

Objectivists have held to the notion that knowledge is something that already exists, and individuals discover it by processing information received from their senses in a scientific manner (Jonassen, 1991; Lakoff, 1987; Vrasidas, 2000). The role of the mind has been to predictably and logically manipulate symbols, data, and concepts into a structure that accurately represents the real world as found in nature (Jonassen, 1991; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010; Lakoff, 1987; Vrasidas, 2000). Knowledge discovered in this manner should be uniform among individuals, regardless of their differences, since knowledge can only be accurate if it mirrors the single reality of nature (Jonassen, 1991; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010; Lakoff, 1987; Vrasidas, 2000). As Vrasidas (2000) stated, “Knowledge and learning are achieved when the abstract symbols that the learner came to know correspond to the one and only real world” (p. 341).

In terms of communication, objectivists focus on transmitting factual information as accurately as possible, since providing the receiver with accurate stimuli along with the appropriate reinforcement system should result in the receiver correctly conceptualizing the reality of the message (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010). Although any actions or beliefs that resulted from objectivist-style communication would be by nature

quantifiable and measurable, objectivists did not engage in communications with any expectations of responses from receivers other than comprehension (Ward, Monaghan, & Villing, 2006). For objectivists, choosing the mode of delivery or symbolic representation of a message has depended solely upon selecting the symbols that most closely correspond to the actual reality of the message as reflected in nature (Lakoff, 1987).

Constructivism

The theory of constructivism stated that reality is not independent of people's perceptions; rather, individuals construct their own knowledge about reality (Andrews, 2012; Cobb, 1994; Piaget, 1954; Vrasidas, 2000). Constructivists hold to the notion that there is not a single accurate reality, but that multiple realities can be created by the perceptions and interactions of individuals or collective groups (Andrews, 2012; Cobb, 1994; Jonassen, 1991; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010). Vrasidas (2000) summarized the work of Cobb (1994), Jonassen, (1991), and Phillips, (1995) to outline the following assumptions associated with constructivism:

1. There is a real world that sets boundaries to what we can experience.
However, reality is local and there are multiple realities.
2. The structure of the world is created in the mind through interaction with the world and is based on interpretation. Symbols are products of culture and they are used to construct reality.
3. The mind creates symbols by perceiving and interpreting the world.
4. Human thought is imaginative and develops out of perception, sensory experiences, and social interaction.

5. Meaning is a result of an interpretive process and it depends on the knowers' experiences and understanding. (p. 345)

Based on constructivism, knowledge is created in the mind of individuals “by the active construction of knowledge supported by various perspectives within meaningful contexts and social interactions” (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010, p. 31). Symbolic representations of concepts are held to be tools constructed by individuals or groups to build a framework with which to construct more complex concepts of knowledge (Burr, 2003; Kundi & Nawaz, 2010; Piaget, 1954; Vrasidas, 2000). Cognitive processing of previously created concepts was believed to make possible the creation of new knowledge as:

In this faculty of repeating and joining together its ideas, the mind has greater power in varying and multiplying the objects of its thoughts...It can, by its own power, put together those ideas it has, and make new complex ones. (Locke, 1947, p. 65)

Constructivists have claimed that individuals who communicate in a manner that takes into consideration the experiences, beliefs, and pre-conceptions of others are more skilled at communication than those who do not (Burlison, 2006; Vygotsky, 1962). Possessing the skills of social perception, message creation, and message reception were considered necessary for effective communication, and individuals who had these skills were said to possess “functional communication competence” (Burlison, 2006, p. 106). Functionally competent communicators have been associated with being more likable and helping others to achieve their goals (Burlison, 1987).

As opposed to objectivists' somewhat simplistic focus on the necessary skills to accurately transmit factual data, communication following constructivist ideals has been

found to be much more complex (Griffin, 2000). Effective constructivist communicators have had to understand and manipulate the thoughts and behaviors of other people and by extension collective societies (Burlison, 2006). In addition, these communicators have needed to construct messages designed to elicit a desired response or behavior from those receiving these messages (Berger, 2003). Also, effective communicators had to possess the ability to interpret both the expressed content and hidden implications of messages from others (McCornack, 1992). The common theme among these communication skills associated with constructivism was the focus on the receiving a desired response from others (Berger, 2003; Burlison, 2006; Griffin, 2000; McCornack, 1992).

Another example of the complexity of constructivist-style communication was found in the mode of message transmission. For example, objectivists selected what they believed to be the single best uniform delivery system that was the most accurate in depicting the reality of the message (Lakoff, 1987), while constructivists had to choose delivery styles that were both accurate, socially appropriate, and persuasive (Berger, 2003; Burlison, 2006; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982). It was suggested that communicators give thought to the medium of message delivery, such as personal communication versus a newsletter, to accomplish the ideal form of message delivery (O'Brien & Lebow, 2013; Webster & Treviño, 1995).

A branch of constructivism known as social constructivism was also found to be relevant to the communications of organizations. Social constructivists believed that knowledge is built by interaction between groups in a society (Vygotsky, 1962), and that those who have devoted more time to the study and communication of a particular topic have a stronger impact in the formation of this knowledge (McQuail, 2010). This impact was alleged to be the result of framing, which Entman (1993) defined as, "the presence or

absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52). Carragee and Roefs (2004) suggested this idea of reinforcement was valid by pointing out that framing makes use of language that implies some form of valuation to certain concepts within messages.

Framing was found to have a particularly large impact via the mass media (Scheufele, 1999; Tamir & Davidson, 2011; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). Journalists have claimed to strive for objectivity, but Shoemaker and Reese (1991) pointed out that pure objectivity may be impossible, since journalists cannot separate themselves from their own perceptions, feelings, and experiences. Tamir and Davidson (2011) stated that reports from the mass media often used language that framed concepts from their primary sources’ points of view, and if these sources were unbalanced, the language associated with framing in these articles had a persuasive effect on the audience. Social constructivists held that social elites, such as politicians or large activist groups, have exerted the largest influence in framing topics in the mass media (Tamir & Davidson, 2011), but this role of influence should have belonged to the experts in the fields related to these topics (Cohen, 2010).

Application of Objectivism and Constructivism to School-Community Communication

Despite the fact that constructivism and objectivism differed greatly in terms of the nature of reality and the construction of knowledge, both of these theories have been linked to effective school and community communication. Webster and Treviño (1995) argued that there have been times when one-way, direct forms of communication were both appropriate and preferred. Other circumstances have required communication based on “everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their

reality” (Andrews, 2012, section 6). There have been times when school officials wished to be objective in their communication (Meek, 1999), and times when such leaders wanted to persuade others to embrace a particular conclusion (Kessler, 2011; Reynolds, 2013). Effective communicators have demonstrated an ability to know when to use either objectivist-styles or constructivist-styles of communication (Kinder et al., 1990).

Direct transmission of data following objectivist principles has sometimes been detrimental to public support of schools when used to communicate complex issues. For example, one study found that non-parent community members indicated a decline in support of schools whose performance level dropped (Jacobsen et al., 2013). Ironically, test scores used to determine these rankings had risen, but performance levels decreased because a policy raising the standards necessary to reach particular performance levels had been implemented (Jacobsen et al., 2013). Schools had followed the minimal legal requirements of communicating the performance level to the public (NCLB, 2002), but non-parents had not been made aware of the policy change (Jacobsen et al., 2013).

Other studies have supported this link between objective communication and loss of community support. Chingos et al. (2010) examined several small-scale studies and found that non-parents were sensitive to publicly communicated knowledge about performance levels, but were unaware and unsupportive of student growth rates from one year to the next. Howell and West (2009) conducted a study that suggested lower levels of support for teacher pay and school funding in groups given one objective financial fact about these issues compared to groups given no information at all.

Constructivist-style communication can also be used inappropriately. For example, McGarity (2003) warned that selectively omitting significant data in communications and reports in order to persuade members of the public to support a

particular stance is unethical, and the resulting loss of trust from the public when such practices are discovered is unrecoverable and devastating to the relationship. This practice was found to be made even worse by organizations using a pseudo-scientific approach described as, “a strategically manipulated caricature of the scientific process in which perception, not objective truth, is the primary goal” (McGarity, 2003, para. 14). School leaders should also avoid using persuasive communication in this type of deceptive manner (White & Park, 2010).

Another author illustrated how school boards have sometimes used selective reporting on academic issues by focusing on favorable data and either minimizing negative data or omitting it entirely (Reimer, 2008). Instead, these board members have focused on matters that are politically provocative, such as dress code or discipline policies, rather than academics, so they could be seen as taking active roles in school policy without being exposed to the pressures of achieving academic growth (Reimer, 2008). Students, teachers, school officials, and even the community as a whole would have been better served by following Meek’s (1999) advice to, “always have integrity and tell the truth” (p. 96).

Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation

According to Bandura (1991), self-efficacy is a mechanism that plays a significant role in the social cognitive theory of self-regulation. This theory posits that individual behavior is dependent upon a framework of self-influence exercises that include self-monitoring of behaviors, self-judgment of behaviors, and self-reaction. If external outcomes were the sole motivators of human behavior, people would behave “like weathervanes, constantly shifting direction to conform to whatever momentary social influence happened to impinge upon them” (Bandura, 1991, p. 249). Instead, Bandura

(1991) claimed that individuals possess internal cognitive structures that allow them to exert some control over their own motivations and behaviors. Bandura (1991) further stated that, “Self-regulation also encompasses the self-efficacy mechanism, which plays a central role in the exercise of personal agency by its strong impact on thought, affect, motivation, and action” (p. 248).

In the social cognitive theory of self-regulation, self-monitoring refers to an individual’s awareness of his or her actions and performances of various tasks. Bandura (1991) noted that self-monitoring, or observation, is more than a simple routine of recalling tasks, but instead encompasses the effects an individual’s own preexisting beliefs, cognitive structures, and even mood. Bandura (1991) stated that self-observation is important to self-regulation because it provides the necessary information an individual needs in order to set realistic goals and evaluate progress towards these goals.

Self-judgment is the process by which an individual rates his or her performance of a task as positive or negative based on self-created standards (Bandura, 1991). These standards are influenced in three ways. One way these standards are influenced is by the way important people in an individual’s life react to a particular behavior or performance (Bandura, 1991). Another way these standards can be influenced is by the direct instruction or recommendation by an influential person in an individual’s life. Finally, these standards can be influenced by an individual’s observations of others’ performances (Bandura, 1991).

Bandura (1991) went on to comment that “Performance judgments set the occasion for self-reactive influence” (p. 256). Self-reaction is the process by which an individual modifies his or her behavior based on the individual’s self-judgment of whether previous performances met or fell short of personal standards (Bandura 1991).

Meeting personal standards can be an incentive for an individual's behavior, while failing to meet personal standards can result in an individual's self-censure (Bandura, 1991). In other words, "People pursue courses of action that produce positive self-reactions and refrain from behaving in ways that result in self-censure" (Bandura, 1991 p. 256).

Self-efficacy's refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to control the outcomes of his or her performances (Bandura, 1991). These beliefs have a major influence on self-regulation as Bandura (1991) pointed out that:

Peoples beliefs in their efficacy influences the choices they make, their aspirations, how much effort they mobilize in a given endeavor, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties and setbacks, whether their thought patters are self-hindering or self-aiding, the amount of stress they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and their vulnerability to depression. (p. 257).

Self-efficacy has been linked to effective leadership (Bandura, 1997; McCormick, 2010). Bandura (1997) suggested that individuals who believe they are able to control most aspects of their personal life extend that belief into their professional lives making them well-suited for leadership roles. McCormick (2011) pointed out that leaders with higher levels of self-efficacy perform at a higher level than those who do not believe they can perform as well. This idea of people who believe in themselves perform better than those who do not has been confirmed by other researchers as well (Daly et al., 2011; McCollum & Kajs, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010).

Self-efficacy has been specifically linked to increased job performance levels among school administrators (Daly et al., 2011; Devos et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Aspiring principals with higher self-efficacy seem to perform better when they become principals than those who do not (Fisher, 2011). McCullers and Bozeman

(2010) conducted a study that indicated that principals had strong beliefs in their ability to increase student achievement regardless of environmental factors such as socioeconomic status of the students, staff turnover, or past performance.

Recent Studies Concerning School Communication

While recent studies that focus specifically on persuasive communication's effect on the academic performance of a school district have been hard to find, there have been studies on the effect of communication on student achievement. These studies generally focused on communication designed to involve parents in their children's learning process. These studies also focused on communication between schools and parents, not school districts and communities. Furthermore, these studies focused on student achievement scores, not the overall academic performance of an entire school district. Nevertheless, these studies were similar enough in nature to this project that it seemed prudent to examine them.

Epstein (2001) posed the idea that home and school represent the two biggest influences in a child's life, and that these influences were often connected to one another in some way. Epstein (2001) further argued that schools who sought to build relationships with parents would have higher parent involvement and, by extension, higher student achievement scores. It would seem that communication would provide the means for a school to build such relationships.

Research seems to support the idea of school communication in the form of outreach to involve parents being linked to increased student achievement. A study by Galindo and Sheldon (2012) indicated that school outreach to parents was directly and positively linked to reading and math achievement among kindergarteners. Sheldon, Epstein, and Galindo (2011) also found a positive link between school outreach to parents

and student achievement in math. Schulting, Malone and Dodge (2005) also found a link between school outreach and student achievement.

Though few in number, the studies on communication's effect on student achievement have yielded results that seem promising. It seems clear that school and family communication, when done effectively, is positively linked to student achievement. If school and family communication can have an effect on student achievement, it stands to reason that district and community communication may have such a connection as well.

Summary

Schools communicate with the public for many reasons. One mandatory reason has been to meet the legal requirements of state and federal regulations. This has required schools to communicate required data and to specifically not communicate confidential information. Beyond legal requirements, school officials have communicated for the reasons of either informing the community about facts related to their schools or to persuade the community to support a particular stance or take a particular action.

The theories of objectivism and constructivism have played major roles in how schools communicate with the public. Communication following objectivist concepts has been found in messages where school officials were sharing facts about their schools with no expectation of a specific response from the community. Communication following constructivist concepts has involved school officials structuring their messages to the public with the intent to provoke a specific response. Both styles of communication have been believed to be beneficial in certain situations, and both styles of communication have been shown to be detrimental in certain circumstances. As Bagin, Gallagher, and

Moore (2008d) stated, “Each superintendent and board must decide which [communication] approach is better for their needs” (p. 303).

Marketing and Public Relations

Previous research has shown that public support for public schools has declined (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011; Chingos et al., 2010). There is also evidence that this decline in support is linked in part to the public’s perceptions of such criteria as school performance, community benefits of a school, tax-equity in school funding, and social responsibility (Marshall, 1998). It would stand to reason, therefore, that public educators would want to improve the public’s perceptions of schools in order to receive the benefit of increased support. In order to change public perception, public schools have started using marketing and public relations strategies (American Marketing Association [AMA], 2008b).

In this section, marketing and the use of public relations will be linked to the theory of social constructivism. An analysis of the definitions, practices, and examples of marketing and public relations will be conducted. Next, the use of marketing and public relations by organizations will be discussed with a particular emphasis on non-profit and government organizations. This section concludes with current applications and suggested use of public relations strategies by public schools.

Origins and Definitions of Marketing and Public Relations

The concept of marketing originated in the business world, and it became a prominent consideration of businesses by the 1930s (Bagozzi, 1986). Marketing in this sense referred to businesses’ use of advertising, branding, sales techniques, and packaging to generate demand for their products and increase their profits (Keith, 1960). This focus on profits and sales has certainly remained a priority for businesses, and this

form of marketing continues to exist on a lesser scale (Ward, 2011). Current definitions of marketing have shown a shift from focusing exclusively on the profit or sales goals of businesses to meeting both the needs of consumers and organizations (Gaski, 2013). These definitions have implied that marketing is appropriate for any organizations, not just profit-based businesses (Kotler & Levy, 1969).

The terms marketing and public relations are commonly used interchangeably, but researchers have differentiated between them. Marketing has been defined as, “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders” (American Marketing Association, 2008a, n.p.). Gaski (2013) identified a common theme of satisfying customers while meeting organizational goals in multiple definitions of marketing from a variety of sources. This theme of focusing on both customers and the organization was consistent with the concept of mutually beneficial exchange identified by Kotler and Levy (1969).

Public relations (PR) has been defined by the AMA (2008b) as:

that form of communication management that seeks to make use of publicity and other nonpaid forms of promotion and information to influence the feelings, opinions, or beliefs about the company, its products or services, or about the value of the product or service or the activities of the organization to buyers, prospects, or other stakeholders. (n.p.)

Coombs and Holladay (2010) expressed a similar view defining public relations as, “the management of mutually influential relationships within a web of constituency relationships” (p. 4). Rather than focusing only on meeting the needs of organizations, the use of public relations has shifted to focus on fostering relationships between

organizations and their constituents in order to provide a means of mutually beneficial influence between them (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001).

According to Coombs and Holladay (2010), the use of public relations strategies by organizations originated in the early 1900s as a corporate response to pressure from activist organizations. Activists were using publicity to increase public awareness about the negative or unethical actions of corporations, but “corporations had better and more abundant resources to use publicity” (Stoker & Rawlins, 2005, p. 186). Moloney (2005) noted that both activists and corporations appeared to be using public relations to simply share information, but both groups were actually attempting to influence the behavior of others through the strategic use of this information. As was the case with marketing, the early use of public relations by organizations to influence others has expanded to include a two-way influence model where organizations influence their constituents and constituents, in turn, influence these organizations (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

Link to Social Constructivism

From a theoretical standpoint, the use of public relations has links to social constructivism. For example, Miller (2001) stated that “Social problems are social constructs” (p. 274). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) indicated that communication should be, “analysed as an instrument of power and not, as is too often the case in communication theory, as a more or less independent, neutral phenomenon” (p. 95). Weimann (2000) suggested that public relations practitioners make use of three major concepts: agenda-setting, priming, and framing. Agenda setting refers to the deliberate selection and omission of discussion topics designed to strengthen and/or weaken certain concepts (Scheufele, 1999). Priming refers to the influence of exposing individuals to

certain images or terms associated with a certain concept (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). It was also pointed out that:

Abundant evidence for this comes from experiments in which researchers manipulate whether participants are exposed to a word or image related to a construct (a prime) and then measure the extent to which the participants' subsequent interpretations of a stimulus are influenced by the primed construct. (Hong et al., 2000, p. 709)

Framing refers to what researchers have characterized as the deliberate choice of terms or phrases applied to a concept within a message that is designed to influence the type and magnitude of value placed on that concept from those receiving the message (Farhi, 2012; McQuail, 2010). These researchers share the idea that a link between social constructivism and public relations practices exists in terms of origins of social issues, use of communication, and strategies to influence the public on an issue.

In addition to Miller (2001), Best (1995) as well as Jamrozik and Nocella (1998) have also supported the idea of socially constructed issues. Specifically, these authors each present the notion that social issues become problems when enough members of a society communicate their belief that these issues are problems (Best, 1995; Jamrozik & Nocella, 1998; Miller, 2001). This notion is commensurate with the social constructivism concept of creating knowledge through communication among members of a society (McQuail, 2010). The communication skills necessary to accomplish the creation of such knowledge are also related to social constructivism.

Communication has been identified as a powerful tool in society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Best (1995) pointed out that identifying a social problem or “claimsmaking” (p. 13) is done through the process of communication, and it is

successful when, “their claims persuade their audiences” (p. 13). According to Farhi (2012), an example of this occurs in education when the media exposes problems in education, politicians pass bills to correct these problems, and members of the public voice their concerns about the problems. Best (1995) pointed out that it does not matter if whether these problems in education actually exist or not, what matters is whether they are commented on.

School officials can negate this process of claimsmaking if they are effective communicators who possess the social constructivist skills of social perception, message creation, and message reception (Berger, 2003; McCornack, 1992). Burleson (2006) summarized these skills by stating:

Successful functional communication requires mastering skills associated with several distinguishable communication processes, including interpreting people and social situations (social perception), producing messages (message production), and receiving and processing messages generated by others (message reception). Skillful communicators do all of these things well. (p. 107)

School officials can apply these skills to the public relations strategies of agenda setting, priming, and framing by understanding the public and designing messages designed to both influence and appeal to the public (Burleson, 2006; Weimann, 2000).

Use of Public Relations and Marketing by Public Agencies

Kotler and Levy (1969) recognized that organizations outside of the business world could make use of marketing and public relations strategies. For example, a local government provides public services through the use of taxes. Kotler and Levy (1969) argued that the local tax rate could be thought of as the price the government charged for its product of public services, thus that local government could benefit just as much from

the use of public relations and marketing as private businesses. Anderson (1966) essentially agreed with governmental use of marketing and public relations by pointing out that “municipal corporations” (p. 12) benefit from communicating the positive aspects of their organizations. A more current example of government agencies use of marketing and public relations was found when Kavaratzis (2004) noted that public organizations have created brands by establishing an image of quality or value associated with their organizations. Marketing and public relations strategies have been used by public organizations for many years, but the ways in which these concepts are used have changed.

In 1992, Grunig and Grunig identified four methods of communication associated with public relations; these were identified as press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Press agency and public information methods were identified as one-way methods of communication designed to make “the organization look good either through propaganda (press agency) or by disseminating only favorable information (public information)” (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 18). Two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical models both allowed for mutual communication and influence, with a key difference. The asymmetrical model focused more on using information gathered from the public to generate messages designed to influence the public, while the symmetrical model uses information from the public “to resolve conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics” (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 18). These models will be discussed further in a later passage in this section. Public organizations have used a combination of each of these models in the past, but the focus on which models should represent what portions of this combination have shown a distinct shift.

Cornelissen and Thorpe (2001) identified a shift in organizations from the use of direct forms of influence found in marketing to the less-direct forms of mutual influence and relationship building found in public relations strategies. A recommendation to use public relations strategies designed to foster relationships between members of the public and an organization as opposed to those strictly designed to manipulate the behaviors of the public was made by Ledingham and Bruning (2000). In addition, Kelly (2005) suggested that public organizations should make use of two-way forms of communication, “not just to assess customer attitudes, but to define them” (p. 81). Cameron et al. (2001) advocated the use of two-way communication when appropriate, but they further stated that organizations should include a range of responses ranging from advocacy to accommodation based on the needs of each situation. These examples serve to illustrate a shift from one-way, direct marketing strategies to two-way models of communication and influence. However, recognizing that good public relations specialists still advocate for their organizations at times, Grunig and Grunig (1992), suggested that most of these professionals practice a “mixed-motive model” (p. 19) that focused on two-way communication based on both advocacy and accommodation.

The use of marketing and public relations strategies by public agencies has had its share of detractors. For example, Heise (1985) warned that the wholesale adoption of marketing and public relations practices by public agencies could negatively impact trust between public agencies and members of the public when he stated:

In the case of the PR model, it appears that the adoption took place without much thought, if any, being given to the consequences, intended or otherwise, of employing this approach in a setting substantially different from its private-sector habitat. (p. 203)

Hickley (2006) found that factors related to trust had an effect on public support of a bond issue, particularly when communication from school officials seemed overtly manipulative. Anderson (1966) urged caution in the overuse of persuasive practices in public organizations, since “governments must adhere to higher ethical and moral standards than their business counterparts because people see government as symbolic of fair play, law and order, and justice in both the abstract and concrete” (p. 13). These concerns seem warranted, but they do not mean that any form of public relations is appropriate for public organizations.

The concerns regarding public agencies use of public relations are hardly prohibitive. Hickley (2006) advocated the use of public relations as an ongoing tool to both share positive aspects of a school district as well as foster relationships. Likewise, Anderson (1966) advocated the use of public relations and marketing to share positive aspects of a “municipal corporation” (p. 12) that citizens might overlook. A study was conducted that implied that the public is generally supportive of public agencies’ use of public relations strategies (White & Park, 2010). Central to these researchers’ support of public relations was that communication needs to take place openly and honestly and focus on building relationships.

Some researchers advocate the use of public relations methods in public organizations and schools specifically as a way to negate a prevalence of negative framing found in the media. Reichart (1996) demonstrated a link between the framing of a news story and the primary sources of information used in the story. A similar link was found when Farhi (2012) outlined examples of negative framing of educational issues in the media, and he advocated an increase in communication between school officials and members of the media to influence the framing of these issues. Other researchers have

found similar results of the media's use of framing and the need for school officials to influence this framing through increased communication with the media (Carr, 2007; Cohen, 2010; Hogan, 2013; Tamir & Davidson, 2011). The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA, 2011) advocated the development of good relationships with the media to allow school districts to both effectively communicate with the public and influence the framing of important issues, and public relations strategies are needed to manage these relationships.

Public Relations Practices in Public Schools

There are many ways that public organizations use public relations strategies to both influence the public and foster relationships with the public. These practices can be categorized by the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model according to the purpose and method of communication. These categories were identified as:

1. Press-agentry described as one-way communications designed to overtly influence the public.
2. Public information described as one-way communications designed to covertly influence the public.
3. Two-way asymmetrical communications designed to collect data from the public in order to tailor messages designed to influence the public.
4. Two-way symmetrical communications designed to send and receive messages to the public in order to both influence the public and be influenced by the public.

Each type of communication has specific requirements and is designed to accomplish specific goals.

Press Agency

The most common forms of one-way communication designed to overtly influence the public are advertising and branding. Advertising is defined as “the action of calling something to the attention of the public especially by paid announcements” (“Advertising,” n.d., definition 1). Branding has been described as, “a way to position and define a company through carefully crafted messages to key audiences” (Fleishman-Hillard, 2009, p. 1). Both of these methods are characterized by messages transmitted to the public with the open intent to persuade them in some manner.

Schools have used many different methods to advertise. Purchasing space in magazines and newspapers was identified as one frequently-used technique (Erickson, 2012; Reynolds, 2013). Other methods were identified such as school signs, word of mouth, and flyers (Erickson, 2012; Holt, 1993; Koetter & Cannon, 1992; Reynolds, 2013). Since advertisements can be viewed as a financial risk, Fisk and Ladd (2000) suggested that smaller school districts have often been limited to a smaller array of advertising choices since, “the smaller the school the more difficulty it has coping with financial risk” (p. 176).

School districts have commonly used branding techniques as a means to influence the public. Kavaratzis (2004) noted that public organizations, which would include schools, have been using environmental features such as landscaping, art displays, and building designs as a form of branding by using these features to construct an attractive image in the minds of their constituents. Willows (2008) pointed out that some school officials have used district employees as representatives of their school’s brand not only by regulating such behaviors as dress and public conduct, but also equipping them with the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with the public. The design,

content, and layout of school districts' websites have also served as a means of developing a brand with the public (Shuls & Maranto, 2013). These methods are classified as press-agentry because they openly seek to influence the public. Next, more covert ways of influencing the public will be analyzed.

Public Information

Public information is similar to press agentry because both methods are one-way communications designed to influence members of the public (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). What differentiates public information methods from press-agentry is that public information methods influence the public in an indirect or covert manner. The use of this covert influence does not necessitate dishonesty or unethical behavior as Heiss (1984) and Hickley (2006) warned against. Instead, this influence should occur through following social constructivist methods such as issue-framing and selection (Reichart, 1996; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013), communication skills (Burlison, 2006), and providing the public with the information needed to positively influence perceptions of schools (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2013). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) stated that pure objectivity in communications could be impossible, since communicators cannot completely separate themselves from their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Even sharing information openly and honestly can be thought of as applying covert influence, since doing so can have a positive effect on public support through building relationships (Grunig, 1993; Hickley, 2006; Kowalski, 2006; Meek, 1999) and establishing trust with the community (Faltys, 2006; Hickley, 2006; Moloney, 2005; Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971). Perhaps Reigel (2014) summed this up best by recommending that school officials know their audience and “communicate with a purpose” (p. 1).

Schools have used many different ways to communicate information to the public. Traditional methods include newsletters, press releases, and flyers (Carr, 2002; Mathison, 1998; Reynolds, 2013). Technological tools that have been commonly used include mass e-mails and website articles (Hopper, 2003; O'Brien & Lebow, 2013; Olmstead, 2013). An emerging trend in using technology to reach a wide audience has been identified as the use of social media (Cox, 2012; Fiore, 2011; Taylor & Kent, 2010). School officials may use any and all of these methods to distribute selected information to the public depending on the complexity of the message and the preferences of community members (Webster & Treviño, 1995).

Both press-agentry and public information methods of communication are characterized by being one-way communication methods. When organizations use these methods, they are creating messages and using delivery methods to get these messages to the public, and once the public receives these messages, the process ends. If organizations wish to continue the communication process beyond message transmission and get feedback or other forms of information from the public, two-way forms of communication should be used. The two forms of two-way communication identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992) are asymmetrical and symmetrical.

Two-way Asymmetrical Communication

This style of communication requires that feedback be collected from members of the public (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). This feedback is primarily used to aid school officials in using the social constructivist skills of social perception and message design to tailor messages to segments of the community in order to maximize the influence of these messages (Burlison, 2006; De Lange & Linders, 2006). Coombs and Holladay (2010) summed it up by saying, “the model assumes that the organization listens in order

to persuade. But it also assumes that the organization does not adapt to what it hears from the stakeholder” (p. 46).

Examples of this type of communication primarily involve research strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Kelly, 2005). School officials commonly conduct this research through surveys and polls of various groups in the community (Van de Moortel, 2003). Lane (2003) noted that some schools used advisory groups to gauge the group’s reaction to messages related to decisions that had already been made. Gathering demographic information about the make-up of the community has allowed school officials insight into how to best communicate with diverse groups (Riegel, 2014). These methods make use of input from the members of the community, districts start to make use of public input to both influence the community and adapt to meet the needs of the community, the communication style is no longer asymmetrical.

Two-way Symmetrical Communication

Two-way symmetrical communication is similar to two-way asymmetrical communication in that both forms seek to influence the public; however, symmetrical communication is different in that it requires organizations, such as schools, to be influenced by the public (Grunig & Grunig 1992). Many researchers have identified this method of communication as being the best way to manage relationships through public relations (Hickley, 2006; Kowalski, 2006; Meek, 1999). Two-way symmetrical communication has also been associated with increased trust and support of schools (Anderson, Evans, Kozak, & Peterson, 1999; Hickley, 2006). Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) described this type of communication as the primary means for carrying out public relations when they stated:

The purpose of public relations... is not to simply influence publics for the good of the institution. Rather, it is—or at least it should be—to help organizations and their publics accommodate each others' interests with a goal of mutual benefit. (p. 194)

School officials make use of this type of communication whenever they engage in dialogues with members of the public, so long as the information coming in from the public is used to help drive the behaviors and decisions of the school (Kowalski, 2006; Lane, 2003). According to many researchers, forming advisory groups of multiple types of stakeholders has been the most common practice to accomplish two-way symmetrical communication (Fairbank, 2006; Kelly & Zieper, 2001; Koetter & Cannon, 1992; Lane, 2003; Weathersby, 2002). There have been many benefits ascribed to using such groups to help make school decisions including:

1. increased collaboration (Conte, 2001; Weathersby, 2002),
2. increased support of schools (Lode, 1999; Surratt, 1987),
3. wider distribution of school communications throughout the community (Chopra, 1988; Fiore, 2011),
4. opportunities “to add or improve a resource that benefits the entire community such as a computer learning center or a playground” (Chung, 2012, p. 135),
and
5. increased the academic performance of a school district (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008).

The challenges of working with such groups include:

1. working with individuals who may have goals or desires that are in opposition to one another and/or contradictory to the vision and goals of the school (Weathersby, 2002).
2. “School districts have various levels of bureaucracy that can create potential obstacles for community development efforts” (Chung, 2012, p. 137).
3. “The external environment...as schools face many external pressures from inspection, new initiatives and other strategies” (Harris & Jones, 2010 p. 179). Examples of this could be state and federal mandates, audits, or accountability models.

The formation of advisory groups comprised of diverse stakeholders is not the only way school officials can collaborate with the public. Public meetings with an open question and answer session can facilitate mutual influence between the school and community (Moore, 2009). These meetings could be held with one group of stakeholders at a time (Hickley, 2006) or with a large-scale meeting of the general public (Reynolds, 2013). According to Van de Moortel (2003) research strategies, such as surveys, can represent two-way symmetrical communication if the results are used to influence the decision-making process. Even the communication strategies associated with releasing public information can become two-way symmetrical communication if a means of soliciting feedback is added, and the feedback is used to influence the behavior and decisions of school personnel (Lane, 2003).

The use by school officials of each type of communication strategy can either be useful or harmful depending on the situation (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). School officials should consider the goal and the circumstances surrounding each message they construct and choose a communication method that will meet their goal in an effective, ethical

manner (White & Park, 2010). Though one-way communication methods can be useful at times (Webster & Treviño, 1995), researchers have indicated that schools should give preference to two-way models of communication in order to more effectively foster relationships and accommodate the needs of the community (Conte, 2001; Hickley, 2006; Koetter & Cannon, 1992; Kowalski, 2006; Lane, 2003; Weathersby, 2002). Two-way symmetrical communication provides the best method for true collaboration, but since school officials are expected to both advocate for the school and accommodate the needs of the community, a mixture of communication models is the most common practice (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

Summary

Marketing and public relations originated in the business world as a means of manipulating the public to either increase a business's profits or improve a business's public image. Over time, the goals of these strategies expanded to include meeting the needs of customers and fostering relationships with them. These broader goals of developing relationships and meeting the needs of the public made the use of marketing and public relations strategies appropriate for public organizations, including schools.

The use of marketing and public relations has been linked to social constructionism, since these methods are used, in part, to influence an organization's constituents. This influence should be used to increase public support by improving the public's perceptions about an organization, improving the language used by the media when framing a story, and improving relationships with constituents by building trust. The desire to influence others is appropriate, as long as communication is conducted in a manner that is truthful and ethical.

There are four models of communication identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992) which include the one-way methods of press-agentry and public information along with the methods of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communication. These models differ in both the style and the type of influence being sought, with press-agentry representing a direct attempt to persuade and two-way symmetrical communication providing a means for both organizations and constituents to influence one another. Public schools should make use of each type of communication as appropriate, but research suggests that school officials should emphasize the use of two-way symmetrical communication as an effective way to increase collaboration and foster relationships with the public.

Tying it All Together

In section one, evidence was presented related to public support of public schools. First, literature was examined that demonstrated a link between public support and certain benefits to schools and communities. Next, trends in public support were analyzed, and two major trends were identified. There has been a trend in increasing support among parents of public school children, and there has been a trend in declining support among non-parents. Finally, data linking certain factors with public support were presented.

In the next section, the history of superintendents as communication leaders was outlined. Superintendents through the years have expanded their role of communication leaders from that of indifference to proactively managing all aspects of school and community communication. This expanded role has led superintendents to consider how much to communicate, how often to communicate, and which methods to use when communicating.

The third section introduced the theories of objectivism and constructivism and related them to the communication process. Objectivism holds that knowledge is an unchangeable absolute and communication should involve simply choosing the most accurate representation of a message and transmitting it. Constructivism states that knowledge is influenced by an individual's prior knowledge and experience. Constructivists believe that communication should involve symbolic representations that are designed to both convey a message and influence the receiver. Both theories were found to be applicable in certain circumstances depending on the nature of the message and the reason for sending it.

The final section analyzed the use of the constructivist concept of persuasive communication. For large organizations, such as school districts, this involves marketing and public relations. Grunig and Grunig's (1992) four models of persuasive communication were outlined. Examples of these models, along with applications for public school districts, followed next.

These sections were selected and sequenced to guide the research process of examining what role persuasive communication can have on public support of public schools. A theoretical framework for the effective use of persuasive communication was presented. Examples, methods, and applications of persuasive communication for use by public schools were also included.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the structure and methods of research that were used to answer the research questions. The first step in this process was to obtain approval to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). A description of the population is included along with the methods used to sample the population. In addition, the details of the study's design and methodology are explained. A description of the survey instrument that was used to conduct the research is included as well as a description of the methods used to compile and statistically analyze the collected information.

Research Questions

This correlational study sought to examine persuasive communication between public schools and community members in two different ways. One examination proposed to treat frequency and use of persuasive communication techniques as an independent variable and determine if there is a statistically significant correlation between this type of communication and the dependent variable of the academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of Education. The other examination sought to treat school leaders' self-efficacy as communicators as an independent variable and the academic performance of a school district as measured by the A-F labeling system established by the Mississippi Department of Education as the dependent variable.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the degree to which Mississippi school leaders select types or combination of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model?
2. What are the perspectives of Mississippi school leaders regarding their effectiveness as communicators?
3. Is there a significant link between the selection of any type or combination of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?
4. Is there a significant link between the frequency of use by school leaders of one or more types of persuasive communication techniques identified by in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?
5. Is there a link between school officials' self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district?

The hypothesis for Research Question 3 was as follows:

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between the use of one more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district while controlling

for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

The hypothesis for Research Question 4 was as follows:

H2: There is a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of using one or more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district while controlling for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

The hypothesis for Research Question 5 was as follows:

H3: There is a statistically significant correlation between educational leaders' reported perceived self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district.

Research Design

This study was designed to conduct descriptive and correlational research. Correlational research refers to experiments that are conducted to determine whether a relationship between two or more occurrences exists. Quantitative data were gathered and statistically analyzed to address the research questions and related hypotheses. Quantitative data refer to data that have particular values or fall within a range of values.

The Instrument

The instrument that was used to answer the research questions consisted of five demographic questions, eleven questions addressing respondents' self-efficacy as communicators, and a chart containing twenty-two types of communication measured by criteria contained in five categories (Appendix B). The demographic questions polled the

position held by the respondents, the size of the district, the achievement rating of the school, the socioeconomic status of the student population, and the number of schools in the district. The self-efficacy items were measured using a 5 point Likert-type scale in order to capture to what degree respondents believed they were able to communicate with others. The chart measured the frequency and type of persuasive communication used by respondents' school districts.

The instrument used in this study featured a combination of two questionnaires. One questionnaire was designed by this researcher to measure type and frequency of persuasive communication used by school leaders. The other questionnaire contained items selected from the Sojourner Self-Efficacy in Communication (SSEC) Scale developed by Peterson, Milstein, Chen, and Nakazawa (2011). These instruments were used to gather quantitative data that were analyzed through SPSS Version 22.

The first five items of the instrument were used to gather demographic information. Item A captured whether the superintendent, assistant superintendent, or another district official was responsible for district-level communications. Item B captured the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. This item was important as it provided a way to account for the effect socioeconomic status may have had on the academic performance of a school district. Item C captured the accountability rating of the school district which represented the measure of the academic performance of a school district for Research Questions 3-5 in this study. Item D captured the number of students in the district, while Item E captured the number of schools in the district. Items D and E provided a way to determine both overall district size and the students to school ratio. These items were important because they provided a way to account for the effect of school size and the effect of individual school community size might have had

on both the academic performance of districts and the preference and effectiveness of different types of communication.

Two other demographic measures were calculated using demographic data gathered via instrument. School district size was important as it provided a way to control the effect school district size may have had on both the academic performance of districts and the available types of communication. The demographic measure of distribution of students per school ratio was calculated by the researcher from information provided in the measurement instrument. This information was important as it provided a way to control for the effect the average school community size may have had on both the academic performance of school districts and the preferred types of persuasive communication used.

Items 1-11 represented selected items of the instrument used to measure the Sojourner Self-Efficacy in Communication (SSEC) Scale developed by Peterson et al. (2011). This instrument was designed for use in measuring the communication skills of sojourners, but the developers also indicated its appropriate use in determining general self-efficacy in communication. Items were selected for use in this study to measure respondents' self-efficacy as communicators. A pilot study was used to determine validity and reliability of these items used to measure the independent variable for Research Question 5 and help answer Research Question 2.

These eleven items were scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale. This portion of the instrument was scored by assigning a point value to the responses that corresponds to the level of agreement a respondent has with that item's statement. A point value of 1 indicated that a respondent strongly disagreed with the corresponding statement. A point value of 2 indicated the respondent disagreed with the statement. A point value of 3

indicated the respondent felt neutral about the statement. A point value of 4 indicated the respondent agreed with the statement. A point value of 5 indicated the respondent strongly agreed with the corresponding statement. The responses for each individual were added together, and a mean and standard deviation were calculated for all responses. These scores were then able to be compared to the corresponding academic performance values of school districts to determine if a correlation existed between school leaders' self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts.

The chart of the instrument addressed the type and frequency of persuasive communication used by participants' school districts in columns A-C. This addressed the independent variable of types and frequency of persuasive communication for research questions 1, 3 and 4. The horizontal rows on the chart addressed the type of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model as follows:

1. Rows 6, 7, 8, and 9 identified methods of one-way direct communication techniques identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992).
2. Rows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 identified methods of one-way indirectly persuasive communication identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992).
3. Rows 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 identified two-way communication that will either be classified as two-way asymmetrical, two-way symmetrical communication, or both based on responses on responses in columns D-E.

The vertical columns on chart one measured the following:

1. Columns A, B, and C will captured the average frequency of each type of persuasive communication used.

2. Column D identified which of the two-way communication techniques were two-way asymmetrical.
3. Column E identified which of the two-way communication techniques were two-way symmetrical.
4. Rows in which both Column D and Column E are marked were considered to be both two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communication techniques.

The frequency of communication portion of the instrument was scored as follows. Columns A, B, and C were treated like items using a 3-point Likert-type scale based on the frequency of communication use. Column A was scored as 1 point. Column B was scored as 2 points. Column C was scored as 3 points, while no response in any column was scored as 0 points. Columns D and E were used to categorize two-way communication as either asymmetrical, symmetrical, or both. A mark in Column D indicated that form of two-way communication was asymmetrical, while a mark in Column E only indicated that form of two-way communication was symmetrical. A mark in both Columns D and E indicated that form of two-way communication was used both asymmetrically and symmetrically.

To determine a score for frequency of each type of communication in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model the following was done:

1. The scores from rows 6, 7, 8, and 9 were added and a mean was calculated to determine the average frequency of a district's use of one-way direct communication.

2. The scores from rows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were added and a mean calculated to determine the average frequency of a district's use of one-way indirect communication.
3. The scores from rows 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 that respondents indicated as two-way asymmetrical communication by also marking column D were added and a mean calculated to determine the average frequency of a district's use of two-way asymmetrical communication.
4. The scores from rows 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 that respondents indicated as two-way symmetrical communication by marking column E were added and a mean was calculated to determine the average frequency of district's use of two-way symmetrical communication.

These scores were then compared to the corresponding academic performance of school district values to determine if a correlation existed between frequency of using types of communication in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model and the academic performance of school districts.

To determine a score for types of communication used, respondents who indicated any frequency of using a particular type of communication in columns A, B, or C were given a score of 1 to indicate that type of communication is used. Likewise, no response in columns A-C was given a score of 0 indicating that particular communication was not used.

The following was done to determine the types of communication used for each of the Grunig and Grunig (1992) categories of communication;

1. The scores from rows 6, 7, 8, and 9 were added to determine the number of types of one-way direct communication used by the district. These scores

were converted into a ratio of types of communication used to types of communication available.

2. The scores from rows 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were added to determine the number of types of one-way indirect communication used by the district. These scores were converted into a ratio of types of communication used to types of communication available.
3. The scores from rows 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 that respondents indicated as two-way asymmetrical communication by marking column D were added to determine the number of types of two-way asymmetrical communication used by the district. These scores were converted into a ratio of types of communication used to types of communication available.
4. The scores from rows 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 that respondents indicated as two-way symmetrical communication by marking column E were added to determine the number of types of two-way symmetrical communication used by the district. These scores were converted into a ratio of types of communication used to types of communication available.

These ratios were then compared to corresponding performance levels to determine if a correlation between the number used of available types of each category of communication identified by Grunig and Grunig (1992) and the academic performance of a school district existed.

Population and Participants

The population of this study consisted of Mississippi school administrators responsible for school communication with the public on a district level. This included the superintendents of the 152 public school districts (MDE, 2014) and/or their designee

in charge of communication with the public. Since the academic performance of a school district was being measured by the Mississippi A-F accountability system, this study could only include district administrators from public schools in Mississippi. Participants within this population were those officials who voluntarily completed the survey instrument.

Potential participants received this instrument as a paper and pencil document sent through the mail. Along with the survey instrument, potential participants also received a cover letter that also served as an informed consent document (Appendix C). The cover letter explained the possible significance of this study, how to participate, and encouraged those receiving it to participate. The informed consent document explained how the data would be used, who would see the data, and how the data would be kept confidential. Since this instrument was sent directly to superintendents, it was not necessary to obtain a permission form from the superintendent for participation.

A panel of experts, consisting of two assistant superintendents reviewed the initial instrument. These experts were asked to examine the items of the instrument in order to help the researcher determine (a) the face validity of the instrument and (b) the content validity of the instrument. The panel was given a protocol to aid in accuracy and uniformity of feedback (Appendix D). The researcher was available during the panel review to assist in the analysis, facilitate discussion, explain what each item was designed to measure, and answer any questions.

Face validity was determined by the panel of expert's feedback regarding the reading level of the instrument and whether any particular topics might be considered sensitive to respondents. Content validity was determined by the panel's feedback concerning the clarity of the items, accuracy of collecting the intended data, and whether

any necessary measure or portion of measure had been omitted. The researcher collected the feedback from the expert panel for use in making any necessary modifications to the instrument.

Both members of the panel review were assistant superintendents. Both participants had been in the field of public education for over 20 years and administrators for many of those years. Both members felt that the survey and related instructional material was practical and clear with a couple of exceptions.

One participant pointed out that although the instructions indicated that the academic performance rating should be the district's rating without using a waiver, he felt that respondents might overlook that instruction or forget about it by the time they got to that item on the instrument. The other reviewer agreed with this assessment, and an acceptable solution was devised. Item C on the survey was modified to include instruction for participants to indicate the academic performance of their school district without a waiver.

The other concern was with item 19 on the chart portion of the survey. This item referred to a school districts' study of data related to the community to improve the effectiveness of communication with the community. As it was written at the time, both reviewers felt that the majority of respondents would answer that question based on the analysis of academic data related to students. This was remedied by modifying this item to specify that participants should respond to this item by considering the analysis of data related to the community used for communication and not the routine study of academic data.

After defending the proposal of this study and receiving permission from the Instructional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher pilot-tested the instrument.

The survey was given to twenty-six administrators from the Hinds County School District serving as building level administrators. Seventeen responses were collected. Each participant in the pilot study had some responsibility for either building level or district level communication with the public. Results from this pilot study were entered into SPSS and analyzed for reliability by determining a Cronbach's Alpha value for the items used to determine administrators' self-efficacy in communication. It was determined that these eleven questions had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .96 reported, indicating internal reliability. At this point, the live study began.

Data Collection

The instrument described in the previous section was distributed to the population of public school superintendents in the state of Mississippi early in the spring semester of 2015 (Appendix B). The participants were selected based on their voluntary completion of the survey and the acceptable completion of the survey. In addition to the survey, participants received a cover letter and informed consent document that describes the nature of the study, the use of the data, the confidentiality and anonymity of responses, contact information, and encouragement to participate (Appendix D). To encourage participation, superintendents also received an email that explained the nature of the study, reemphasized the confidentiality of the survey, and encouraged participation (Appendix E). Survey responses missing key demographic information were discarded along with surveys missing an unacceptable number of responses relating to any of the research questions. Since the instruments were sent to superintendents directly, superintendents were not asked to submit a permission form granting themselves or their designees permission to take the survey.

Data for this research were collected through the use of a pencil and paper survey delivered to each of Mississippi's 152 public school superintendents. It was sent through the mail, and along with the survey, each superintendent received a self-addressed, stamped envelope to be used in returning the survey. The research was designed to collect self-reported data in a manner consistent with descriptive research. The data collected from this survey were statistically analyzed through the use of SPSS.

Several steps were taken to safeguard the data and ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. The survey instrument was designed to be completed without respondents having to openly identify themselves or their school districts. Also, the collected data were kept in a locked filing cabinet whenever it was not being studied. In addition, the return envelopes were labeled with this researchers address in the return address area to prevent respondents from putting identifying information on the return envelopes. Finally, upon completion of the project, the data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for five years, then they will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

As results came in, they were reviewed to check for completeness, accuracy, etc. These data were entered into a spreadsheet for uploading into the SPSS program. Entering results as collected provided an option to run some preliminary statistical checks to get an idea about the validity and reliability of the instrument along with identifying any unforeseen issues.

Once the responses came in, they were subjected to statistical tests. To test for a significant link between the academic performance of a school district and persuasive communication, two regression models were run and analyzed. A Pearson's coefficient was calculated to compare the academic performance of a school district and school

leaders' self-efficacy as communicators. These models indicated whether a relationship existed between types and frequency of persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district in general while controlling for the variables of district size, students per school, and average socioeconomic status of students in a district. A Pearson's coefficient was also used to test for a correlation between respondents' perceived self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district. In addition to determining whether correlations existed between the independent and dependent variables, the regression models also helped to determine which methods of persuasive speech, if any, appeared to have had the biggest impact on the academic performance of a school district. The findings were used to respond to the research questions and related hypotheses.

Summary

This chapter outlined the plans and proposed procedures for carrying out this study. Research questions were identified and hypotheses were created related to these research questions. The survey instrument was discussed in terms of how it would be used to collect data, and how the data would be scored to address the research questions. A description of safeguards to ensure the confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of respondents was outlined. Finally, procedures for strengthening the validity of the instrument were explained, and proposed methods of distributing and collecting the instrument were included as well. In the next section, the results of the study will be reported.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study sought to analyze whether a relationship existed between school districts' use of persuasive communication and school districts' academic performance. This study also sought to analyze whether a correlation existed between school district leaders' ratings of their self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts. The basis for what constituted persuasive communication was found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model of communication. The basis for determining school leaders' self-efficacy was found using a modified form of the Sojourner Self-Efficacy in Communication (SSEC) Scale developed by Peterson et al. (2011). A survey based on these components was given through a paper and pencil medium designed to be mailed back to the researcher. A total of 152 surveys were mailed out, but two were returned as undeliverable. There were 35 participants who voluntarily mailed their forms back, but 4 of these surveys were incomplete or filled out incorrectly and could not be used. This meant that there was a 23.3% return rate for this survey. The 31 responses that were useful included 23 superintendents, 4 assistant superintendents, and 4 other district officials in charge of district level communication. Of these participants, 30 answered every item, while one participant omitted one answer relating to two-way communication. The results of the statistical analyses of these responses are presented in this chapter.

Descriptive Data

The participants in this study consisted of 31 public school district officials in Mississippi (N=31). School district superintendents represented 74.2% of the participants with 23 responses. There were 4 assistant superintendents in charge of

district-level communication that represented 12.9% of total respondents, while 4 other district officials in charge of district-level communication comprised 12.9% of respondents as well (Table 1). Of the responses, one was from an ‘A’ rated district representing 3.2% of the sample. There were 4 or 12.9% of the responses from ‘B’ rated districts. There were 11 or 35.5% of the responses from ‘C’ rated districts. There were 13 or 41.9% of the responses from ‘D’ rated districts, while 2 or 6.5% of responses came from ‘F’ rated districts (Table 2).

Table 1

List of Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents

Position	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Superintendent	23	74.2	74.2
Assistant Superintendent	4	12.9	87.1
Other Official	4	12.9	100.0
Total	31	100.0	

Table 2

List of Frequencies and Percentages of MDE ratings of Responding Districts

MDE Rating	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	1	3.2	3.2
B	4	12.9	16.1
C	11	35.5	51.6
D	13	41.9	93.5
F	2	6.5	100.0
Total	31	100.0	

There were five research questions that drove this study. These questions were designed to measure if there were any correlations between school districts' use of persuasive communication techniques and the academic performance of these districts. These questions also sought to determine if there was a significant link between school district officials' perceptions of their self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of their school districts. Next, the results of the statistical analyses of each of the research questions are presented.

Research Question One

What is the degree to which Mississippi school leaders select types or combinations of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model?

This question was addressed via the communication chart portion of the study. This chart addressed both which types of persuasive communication were used by respondents and how often these types of communication were used. Individual forms of persuasive communication were categorized as belonging to one of the four Grunig and Grunig (1992) model's types of persuasive communication. These types of communication were one-way direct communication, one-way indirect communication, two-way asymmetrical communication and two-way symmetrical communication.

The score representing types of persuasive communication used was calculated by adding together the types of each category of communication used by a district and dividing this number by the number of available forms of this category of communication. The resulting ratio was then converted into a percentage of available types of communication used for each category. On average, responding school districts used approximately 41.9% of available forms of one-way direct communication, since

the ratio had a mean of 0.42 and a standard deviation of 0.28. The ratio for one-way indirect communication had a mean of 0.62 and a standard deviation of 0.22, which indicated responding districts were using 62% of available forms of one-way indirect communication on average. Two-way asymmetrical communication had a mean ratio of 0.25 with a standard deviation of 0.25 indicating that school districts were using 25% of the available forms of this type of communication on average. Finally, with a mean of 0.68 and a standard deviation of 0.27, the ratio of types of two-way symmetrical used indicated that responding school districts were using 68% of available forms of this type of communication on average (Table 3).

Frequency of communication was measured using a 3 point Likert-type scale (Once a Year, Once a Month, Once a Week) for the types of persuasive communication used in each category. A score of zero was assigned to types of communication that were not used at all. These scores were added together then divided by the number of available forms of communication for each category. This created a score ranging from zero, which indicated no form of that type of communication was used with any frequency, to three, which would indicate that all forms of that type of communication were used at least once per week. One-way direct communication had a mean of 0.77 and a standard deviation of 0.66, while one-way indirect communication had a mean of 1.48 and a standard deviation of 0.66. Two-way asymmetrical communication had a mean of 0.42 and a standard deviation of 0.41, while two-way symmetrical communication had a mean of 1.12 and a standard deviation of 0.59 (Table 3). This would indicate that one-way indirect communication was used with the most frequency while two-way asymmetrical communication was used the least frequently. The standard deviation for each of these variables was very high indicating a high degree of variability

of the frequency of using persuasive communication techniques among respondents in a somewhat small sample.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Type and Frequency of Persuasive Communication

Communication Category		Mean	Standard. Deviation
Type	One-way Direct	0.419	.277
	One-way Indirect	0.618	.219
	Two-way Asymmetrical	0.253	.253
	Two-way Symmetrical	0.676	.271
Frequency	One-way Direct	0.766	.664
	One-way Indirect	1.481	.657
	One-way Asymmetrical	0.421	.410
	One-way Symmetrical	1.123	.595

Likert Scale: 0 = Not Used; 1 = Once a Year; 2 = Once a Month; 3 = Once a Week. N = 31

Research Question Two

What are the perspectives of Mississippi school leaders regarding their effectiveness as communicators?

This question was addressed using a five point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree) on eleven items asking respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a statement about their effectiveness as communicators. Participants indicated that they agreed on average with statements that indicated they believed they were good communicators. The total points for these responses were added together and divided by the total number of questions in order to

calculate an average score for each participant. The average score was 4.29 with a standard deviation of 0.39 (Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Respondents' Self-Efficacy as Communicators

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-efficacy	31	3.55	4.91	4.290	0.387

Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

Research Question Three

Is there a significant link between the selection of any type or combination of types of persuasive communication techniques identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?

There was one hypothesis associated with this research question:

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between the use of one more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district while controlling for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

To answer this question, a regression model was developed through SPSS to determine whether a correlation existed between types of persuasive communication used and the academic performance of school districts. A regression model found that the demographic data collected through the survey of the socioeconomic status of students in

a district, district size, and average size of schools within a district were statistically significant predictors of the academic performance of a school district ($R^2=.374$, $F(3,27)=5.385$, $p=.005$). When types of persuasive communication were added to the model, there was not a significant increase in the R^2 to indicate a correlation between types of persuasive communication used and the academic performance of a district, and communication types accounted for 6.9% of the variability of the model ($R^2=.443$, $F(4,23)=.712$, $p=.592$). Therefore, my hypothesis was rejected.

Further analysis did not determine that a significant link between any of the four major types of persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts existed (Table 5). Thus, my hypothesis was rejected for any of the four major types of persuasive communication.

Table 5

Standardized Coefficients and Significance Values of Types of Persuasive Communication

Communication Category	Beta	Significance
One-way Direct	-.152	.471
One-way Indirect	.194	.334
Two-way Asymmetrical	.282	.229
Two-way Symmetrical	.037	.869

Table 5 indicates that two-way asymmetrical communication, though not statistically significant, was the strongest predictor of academic performance of a school district in this model. One-way direct communication was, surprisingly, negatively

correlated to the academic performance of school districts, though this was likewise not significant.

Research Question Four

Is there a significant link between the frequency of use by school leaders of one or more types of persuasive communication techniques identified by in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district?

There was one hypothesis associated with this research question:

H2: There is a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of using one or more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district while controlling for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

To answer this question a regression model was developed through SPSS to determine whether a correlation existed between the frequency of using persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district. A regression model found that the demographic data collected through the survey of the socioeconomic status of students in a district, district size, and average size of schools within a district were statistically significant predictors of the academic performance of a school district ($R^2=.374$, $F(3,27)=5.385$, $p=.005$). When frequency of persuasive communication values were added, it was determined that there was a not a significant correlation between the frequency of persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts, thus my hypothesis was rejected. Persuasive communication did account for

12.9% of the variability of the model ($R^2=.504$, $F(4,23)=1.499$, $p=.235$). Further analysis determined that there were no significant correlations between any category of persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district (Table 6). Thus my hypothesis was rejected for any of the four major types of persuasive communication.

Table 6

Standardized Coefficients and Significance of Frequencies of Persuasive Communication

Communication Type	Beta	Significance
One-way Direct	-.293	.134
One-way Indirect	.041	.182
Two-way Asymmetrical	.398	.065
Two-way Symmetrical	.400	.106

Table Five indicates that there was a negative correlation between frequency of one-way direct communication and the academic performance of a school district. Though not statistically significant, the frequency of using two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical types of persuasive communication were the strongest predictors of the academic performance of school districts in this model.

Research Question Five

Is there a link between school officials' self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district?

There was one hypothesis associated with this research question:

H3: There is a statistically significant correlation between educational leaders' reported perceived self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district.

This question was addressed by conducting a Pearson's correlation study through SPSS. First, the responses from this study were entered into SPSS and analyzed for reliability by determining a Cronbach's Alpha value for the items used to determine administrators' self-efficacy in communication. It was determined that these eleven questions had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .867, indicating internal reliability.

A significant correlation was sought between the values for respondents' self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts. Results indicated that there was no significant correlation between school leaders' perceptions of their self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of a school district, $r(31) = .181, p = .330$. A significant correlation between the perceptions of school leaders about their self-efficacy as communicators was not found; thus, my hypothesis was rejected.

Summary

A statistically significant correlation between the academic performance of school districts and the variables used in this study of types of persuasive communication, frequencies of persuasive communication, and school leaders' perceptions of their self-efficacy as communicators was not found. A regression model found that, though not statistically significant, a meaningful amount of variance between the academic performances of school districts could be explained by the frequency of using persuasive communication. One-way direct forms of communication were found to have a negative correlation, though not statistically significant, to the academic performance of a school

district. These and other findings and the conclusions associated with them will be explored further in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine whether a relationship existed between persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district. Correlations between types and frequencies of persuasive communications and academic performance of school districts were searched for along with a correlation between school leaders' perceptions of their self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of school districts. Steps were taken to account for the potentially confounding variables of the socioeconomic status of students in responding districts, the size of districts, and the population per school distribution of students in responding districts. This chapter presents a summary of the results of this study, a discussion of the results for this study, limitations of the study, recommendations for current and future practice, and recommendations for future studies.

Summary of the Findings

After analyzing the data from the thirty-one responding officials from thirty-one school districts, the researcher derived several findings. Respondents reported using 41.9% of available forms of one-way direct communication, 62% of available forms of one-way indirect communication, 25% of available forms of two-way asymmetrical communication, and 68% of available forms of two-way symmetrical communication. Respondents also reported using one-way indirect communication with the most frequency followed by two-way symmetrical, one-way direct, and two-way asymmetrical respectively (Table 3). Respondents also indicated that they believed themselves to be good communicators on average (Table 4).

There was no statistically significant correlation found between types of persuasive communication used and the academic performance of school districts, though a regression model found that a small amount of variation in academic performance could be explained by the types of persuasive communication used. There was no statistically significant correlation found between the frequency of using persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts, but a regression model revealed that a meaningful amount of variance in academic performance could be explained by the frequency of using persuasive communication. In both models, two-way communication was the strongest predictor, though not statistically significant, of student achievement. Surprisingly, one-way direct communication, though not statistically significant, was negatively correlated with academic performance. There was no statistically significant link between school leaders perceived self-efficacy as communicators and the academic performance of a school district.

Discussion

Although there were no statistically significant correlations found in this study, there were enough interesting findings to warrant further consideration and discussion. In this section, findings of interest related to the descriptive statistics and the findings related to each of the proposed hypotheses are discussed. The discussion includes findings of interest and possible explanations for these findings.

Reported Use of Types and Frequency of Persuasive Communication

There were a couple of interesting findings regarding the types of persuasive communication respondents reported using. For one thing, respondents used the smallest percentage of available types of two-way asymmetrical communication, the type of communication representing the strongest predictor of academic performance. In

addition, respondents used the largest percentage of available types of two-way symmetrical communication. Each type of available two-way communication could be used either asymmetrically or symmetrically depending on the intent of the communicator; therefore, it would seem that respondents strongly prefer using two-way symmetrical communication over asymmetrical communication.

This preference for two-way symmetrical communication was also seen in respondents' reported frequency of using each type of persuasive communication. Once again, two-way asymmetrical communication represented the strongest predictor of academic performance, yet two-way asymmetrical communication was used with the least frequency. Two-way symmetrical communication was reported as being used with a frequency nearly three times more than two way asymmetrical (Table 3).

Respondents' Reported Self-Efficacy as Communicators

Respondents indicated that they believed that they were good communicators. Using a 5-point scale, the respondent with the lowest self-efficacy as a communicator had an average rating of 3.55 indicating that this individual was more in agreement with the statements about being an effective communicator than not. The respondent with the highest self-efficacy as a communicator had a mean of 4.91 indicating this individual strongly agreed with nearly every statement on the survey concerning his/her effectiveness as a communicator. The mean for the entire group was 4.29 suggesting that respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements more often than not.

Discussion of Hypotheses

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between the use of one more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical)

and the academic performance of a school district while controlling for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

It has already been mentioned that a statistically significant correlation between types of persuasive communication and the academic performance of school districts was not found in this study, so this hypothesis was not supported. However, the regression model did indicate that 6.9% of the variance between the academic performance of responding school districts could be explained by the types of persuasive communication used by these districts. This made it seem worthwhile to examine the correlations between each of the four major types of persuasive communication found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model.

None of the four major types had a significant relationship with academic performance. Of the four types, two-way asymmetrical communication had the biggest impact (Table 4). This would seem to indicate that school district officials who used data from the community to help improve their persuasive influence over the community may enjoy a small benefit in terms of the academic performance of these districts.

Another surprising result from this regression model was the negative correlation between one-way direct communication and the academic performance of school districts. This might indicate one of several possibilities. This could mean that school districts that use communication methods designed to openly and directly persuade members of the community are actually losing community support from using these methods and experiencing a small decline in academic performance as a result. It could also indicate that these types of communication happen to be widespread among lower-performing districts, or it could indicate that lower-performing districts have a difficult

time getting feedback from the community and resort to more one-way direct communication methods. Since it was not statistically significant, it should be mentioned that chance alone could explain this correlation. More study is needed on this type of communication.

H2: There is a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of using one or more types of persuasive communication identified in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model (one-way direct, one-way indirect, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) and the academic performance of a school district while controlling for the variables of district size, socio-economic status of students, and the average size of school communities within the district.

As was mentioned previously, there were no statistically significant correlations found between the frequency of using any of the four categories of persuasive communication and the academic performance of a school district, but the regression model indicated that the frequency of using one or more types of persuasive communication could account for 12.9% of the variance between the academic performance levels of the responding school districts. This is a meaningful amount of variance, so studying the coefficients and significance of each form of communication seemed worthwhile.

In this model, the frequencies of using both forms of two-way communication were the strongest predictors of academic performance in responding districts (Table Five). This could indicate that responding school districts who gather and use feedback in what Grunig and Grunig (1992) referred to as a, “mixed-motive model” (p. 19) could have experienced an increase in community support and a resulting increase in the

academic performance of these districts. Further study could help shed shine some light on these types of communication.

The finding that one-way direct communication was once again negatively correlated, though not significantly, with academic performance was unexpected. This could indicate that frequent use of one-way directly persuasive communication undermines the very community support and related academic performance that it is designed to generate. It could also indicate that it is hard to get community members to send feedback in lower-performing districts.

It is worth noting that two-way asymmetrical communication was a strong predictor of academic performance in terms of both types of persuasive communication used and frequency of using one or more types of persuasive communication. This would seem to indicate that school district leaders who are willing to embrace the idea that feedback from the community can be used, at least in part, to improve the persuasiveness of future communications are able to better persuade the community to support their districts. This support may then translate into improved academic performance of these districts.

Another interesting result from both models was the negative correlation between academic performance and the types of one-way direct communication used and frequency of using one-way directly persuasive communication. This type of communication was not a particularly strong or statistically significant predictor of academic performance in either model. The negative correlation, however, might be enough to have school district officials reconsider how many types of this communication that they use and how often they use this type of communication.

H3: There is a statistically significant correlation between educational leaders' reported perceived self-efficacy in communication and the academic performance of a school district.

This hypothesis was also not supported. This might indicate that self-efficacy in communication has no effect on community support and the related academic performance, but it could also indicate that responding district officials felt that they were effective communicators whether they actually were or not. The latter argument seems more likely, since using a five-point scale saw an average score of 4.29 with a standard deviation as small as 0.39. An external rating of the communication skill of district officials might be linked significantly with the academic performance of school districts. Further study could help discover if such a link exists.

Links to the Literature

These findings related to type and frequency of persuasive communication seem to run counter to those offered in the literature. Though this study found one-way direct communication to be negatively correlated, though not significantly, to the academic performance of a school district, experts have indicated that one-way direct communication could be a useful tool in building public support for an organization (Hickley, 2006; White & Park, 2010). Experts did indicate that two-way communication was preferable to one-way communication (Cornelissen & Thorpe, 2001; Kelly, 2005; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Contrary to the results of this study, experts seemed to indicate that two-way symmetrical communication was a more powerful form of communication than that of two-way asymmetrical communication (Cameron et al., 2001; Hickley, 2006; Kowalski, 2006; Meek, 1999).

The findings related to respondents' self-efficacy as communicators seems to run counter to the prevailing content found in the literature. High self-efficacy scores in this study were found to be non-significant in terms of their relationship to the academic performance of school districts, while experts have indicated that those with high self-efficacy in an area are linked to higher performance in that area (Daly et al., 2011; Devos et al., 2007; McCollum & Kajs, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010). Perhaps the respondents in this study believed that they were better communicators than they were. This could be true, since many administrators often believe in their abilities to achieve positive results despite any obstacles they face (McCullers & Bozeman, 2010).

Limitations

The following limitations were present in this study:

1. The sample size was small.
2. There was an extremely high degree of variability of types used and frequency of using persuasive communication techniques among respondents.
3. The study was limited to Mississippi public school officials who were willing to participate in the study.
4. Participation in this study was voluntary and results may be biased based on the self-selected respondents' views regarding persuasive communication between school officials and the school community and/or these respondents perceived self-efficacy as communicators.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Despite the fact that there were no statistically significant correlations discovered in this study, there were findings that were interesting enough that district officials in charge of communication might find them compelling. School district officials could use

the findings found in this study to modify how and why they communicate with the community. School district officials could also use the results from this study to design or improve a current communication plan.

School officials could first examine what the purpose is of each type of communication they use. These officials should be willing to embrace the idea that there is a persuasive element to every type of communication, whether direct or indirect. If they accept this idea, then communication can become a stronger and more effective tool that these leaders can use to improve the level of community support and related academic performance of their districts.

School district leaders could benefit from increasing their use of communication that is persuasive in nature. This could be particularly true of using two-way persuasive communication techniques designed to collect and use meaningful feedback. Two-way persuasive communication that is asymmetrical in design seems particularly useful as it was one of the strongest predictors, though not statistically significant, of academic performance in terms of both types and frequency of using persuasive communication.

To accomplish these tasks of improving their districts use of persuasive communication, school leaders might consider deliberately planning for these communications. These plans should include under what circumstances each type of persuasive communication would be effective and appropriate. When using two-way communication, these plans should specify how feedback should be collected and to what purpose it will be used. Finally, these plans should include a method for evaluating the success of using persuasive communication and a process to improve the use of these types of communication.

Recommendations for Future Studies

There are many possible ways to build upon this study. The following list provides some of the ways to expand or improve on the findings of this study:

1. The study could be expanded to include district leaders from across the United States.
2. The study could be expanded to include administrators on the building level.
3. The study could be modified to analyze the effect of persuasive communication on school funding.
4. Instead of self-reporting, school leaders could be rated externally as communicators and these ratings compared to the academic performance of school districts.

Closing Remarks

There is little doubt that there is a link between the academic performance of students in a school district and family and community support (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Many experts believe that communication plays a significant role in this support (Howell & West, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2013; Reynolds, 2013). What is less clear is to what extent persuasive communication as found in the Grunig and Grunig (1992) model affects the academic support of school districts. Though the findings of this study did not yield any statistically significant correlations, the findings seemed to be compelling enough for school leaders to consider.

It is the hope of this researcher that school leaders, at the least, will consider the types and frequencies of persuasive communication they have used in the past and deliberately plan for the effective use of these types of communication. It is also hoped that school leaders will honestly and accurately reflect on their skills in communication.

If school leaders will do these things, then this researcher believes that school and community communication will improve and school districts will benefit from increased public support and academic achievement.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14121601

PROJECT TITLE: Determining Whether a Link Exists between the Academic Performance of Mississippi Public School Districts and School Administrators' use of Persuasive Communication Techniques and Self-Efficacy in Communication

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): David Burnis

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 12/18/2014 to 12/17/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Demographics

DIRECTIONS: Select the category that best describes either your position or your school district's status.

A. Position in the school district:

Superintendent.

Asst. Superintendent in charge of district-level communication

Other district official whose duties include being responsible for district-level communications.

B. Enter the percentage of students eating free or reduced lunch in the district:

_____.

C. Enter the MDE assigned rating for your school district. A B C D F

NOTE: Please indicate the assigned rating for the current year **WITHOUT** a waiver. This will allow student growth to be considered in the study. Remember, these surveys are anonymous and cannot be used to identify your district.

D. Enter the number of students in your district to the nearest hundred_____.

E. Enter the total number of schools in your district_____.

Communication Skill

Directions: For each item, select the choice that most accurately reflects your ability as a communicator.

1. I can introduce new or different ways of solving a problem in an interaction.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

2. I can infer or guess at the meaning of messages in an interaction.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

3. I can inspire others to gain new insight when I communicate with them.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

4. I can stand up in a group of people and give my opinion.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

5. I can effectively assert my opinion when I communicate.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

6. I can recognize subtle shades of meaning in an interaction.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

7. I can predict what another person will say in an interaction.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

8. I can communicate my agreement or disagreement in an argument.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

9. I can find common ground with others when I communicate.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

10. I can build consensus when I communicate.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

11. I can effectively communicate in a persuasive manner.

1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neutral 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree

Directions for the filling out the following chart

Chart One

Directions: For items 1-17 about one-way communication, please select the average frequency this particular type of communication is used on a district level on columns A-C. If a type of communication is not used on the district level, please leave that row blank.

For items 18-22 about two-way communication, please select the average frequency this particular type of communication is used on a district level on columns A-C. If a type of communication is not used on the district level, please leave that row blank.

For columns D-E, please indicate how the feedback from each type of communication is primarily used. If feedback for a particular type of communication is used primarily to improve school leaders' understanding of the community in order to more effectively persuade them in future communications, select column D. If feedback is used to provide a means for members of the community to influence actions taken by the school district, select column E.

NOTE: Some messages sent to the community may contain multiple types of communication. For example, a newsletter containing primarily one-way communication, may contain a two-way poll soliciting feedback from the community. This would count as two forms of communication when filling out this chart. The respondent would count this message as both a newsletter and a poll when determining frequency and use of feedback.

Type of Communication	How often used			Feedback Use	
	A. Once a year	B. Once a month	C. Once a week	D. To improve persuasiveness	E. For mutual influence
1. Newsletter, school-distributed.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXX
2. Newsletter, mailed				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
3. Newsletter, e-mailed				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
4. Article on school websites				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
5. Announcement on school television channel				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
6. Advertisement, local newspaper				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
7. Advertisement, large circulation paper (Clarion Ledger, Sun Herald, or Hattiesburg American)				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
8. Advertisement, radio				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXX
9. Advertisement, television				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
10. Website				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
11. School TV channel				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
12. Press releases				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
13. Social Media post.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
14. District logos used when sharing positive information about the school district.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
15. School logos used when sharing positive information about the school.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
16. Use of district logo on buildings and facilities.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
17. Use of school logo on buildings and facilities.				XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXX
Two-way Communication					
18. Polls					
19. Data analysis					
20. Public meetings					
21. Committees made up of school employees					
22. Committee discussions with members of the public					

APPENDIX C

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION WITH SURVEY

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Superintendent,

I am conducting research through the University of Southern Mississippi on the effect of persuasive communication and the perceived ability of school district leaders to communicate on the academic performance of a school district. The perceptions of school district leaders regarding their effectiveness as communicators is being studied to determine if these perceptions may have an effect on a district's academic performance. Persuasive communication, such as advertising, press-releases, marketing, and public relations, is specifically being studied because this type of communication is designed to have the biggest impact on the school district and community relationship. Both the relationship between the school district and community and the academic performance of a school district should be valued by superintendents. For this reason, I would like to ask for your assistance by filling out the enclosed survey.

If you prefer, your designee responsible for district communications may fill out the survey. For example, if your district makes use of a communications/public relations specialist, he or she might have more time, interest, and information for use in this study. If your district employs such an individual, but you still prefer to complete the survey yourself, that would be wonderful as well.

The survey consists of 5 demographic items, 11 multiple choice items, and a selected-response chart containing 22 items. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and no information will be used to identify you or your school district. Your responses will be completely anonymous, and the data collected will only be viewed by me and my research advisors for the study. Upon completion of the study, all data will be stored in a locking file cabinet for five years and then destroyed. Confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants is of utmost importance to this study.

In appreciation of your participation, I will be happy to send you a copy of the findings of this study. You may find the results useful when designing communications to the public. You may send me an email at David.Burris@eagles.usm.edu to request a copy of the findings.

If you have any questions, you may call me at 601-896-2727 or email me at David.Burris@eagles.usm.edu. This project has been approved by the Instructional Review Board. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Thank you,

David Burris
420 Vista Court
Richland MS 39218

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR PANEL REVIEW OF INSTRUMENT

Panel Review Document

Directions: Indicate your perceptions of each item as described below.

For each item listed, answer the question with a “Y” for yes and a “N” for no.

The comments section may be used for suggesting specific edits to the survey.

Clearly Stated would indicate an item is easy to understand and unlikely to be misinterpreted.

Encompassing would indicate that any valid response for that item could be accurately indicated on the instrument.

Accurate would indicate that the item correctly captures the intended measurement.

Part I: Demographics

Item #	Clearly Stated?	Encompassing?	Accurate?
Directions			
Item A			
Item B			
Item C			
Item D			
Item E			
Item F			

Comments:

Part II: Self-efficacy

Item #	Clearly Stated?	Encompassing?	Accurate?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			

Comments:

Part III: One-way Persuasive Communication

Item #	Clearly Stated?	Encompassing?	Accurate?
Directions			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			

Comments:

Part IV: Two-way Persuasive Communication

Item #	Clearly Stated?	Encompassing?	Accurate?
Directions			
18			
19			
20			
21			

Comments:

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE EMAIL SENT TO SUPERINTENDENTS

Participation Letter

Dear Superintendent,

I am conducting research through the University of Southern Mississippi on the effect of persuasive communication and the perceived ability of school district leaders to communicate on the academic performance of a school district. The perceptions of school district leaders regarding their effectiveness as communicators is being studied to determine if these perceptions may have an effect on a district's academic performance. Persuasive communication, such as advertising, press-releases, marketing, and public relations, is specifically being studied because this type of communication is designed to have the biggest impact on the school district and community relationship. Both the relationship between the school district and community and the academic performance of a school district should be valued by superintendents. For this reason, I would like to ask for your assistance by filling out the enclosed survey.

If you prefer, your designee responsible for district communications may fill out the survey. For example, if your district makes use of a communications/public relations specialist, he or she might have more time, interest, and information for use in this study. If your district employs such an individual, but you still prefer to complete the survey yourself, that would be wonderful as well.

The survey consists of 5 demographic items, 11 multiple choice items, and a selected-response chart containing 22 items. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and no information will be used to identify you or your school district. Your responses will be completely anonymous, and the data collected will only be viewed by the individuals involved in conducting the study. Upon completion of the study, all data will be stored in a locking file cabinet for five years and then destroyed. Confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants is of utmost importance to this study.

In appreciation of your participation, I will be happy to send you a copy of the findings of this study. You may find the results useful when designing communications to the public. You may send me an email at David.Burris@eagles.usm.edu to request a copy of the findings.

If you have any questions, you may call me at 601-896-2727 or email me at David.Burris@eagles.usm.edu. This project has been approved by the Instructional Review Board. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Thank you,

David Burris
420 Vista Court
Richland MS 39218

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