THE LOCAL POLITICS OF EDUCATION GOVERNANCE:
POWER AND INFLUENCE AMONG SCHOOL BOARDS, SUPERINTENDENTS,
AND TEACHERS’ UNIONS

by

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DEDICATION

To my family, by birth and by choice.
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There are a number of people who have been simply indispensable to my transition from high school math teacher to doctoral candidate (and before that, my transition from astrophysics graduate student to high school math teacher). They have been my advisors and mentors, my motivators and cheerleaders, my friends and my psychiatrists. They deserve more recognition and accolades than I could possibly give them, but I’d like to start by acknowledging them here.

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ABSTRACT

School districts have two general courses of action to maintain fiscal solvency and raise student achievement in the face of drastic funding cuts. They can reduce spending on teachers, a strategy opposed by many teachers’ unions because it threatens teacher job security. They can also cut expenditures in other areas such as instructional programs and materials, transportation, or non-teaching personnel, but they risk losing support from parents and community members who want to maintain high-quality options for students. There is a growing body of research showing that boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions (alone and as they interact with one another) are highly influential in the decisions school districts make when they allocate resources. However, there is currently no clear understanding of what in practice defines a “powerful” school board, superintendent, or teachers’ union, nor is it widely understood how each uses political power to influence district decision-making.

Using a theory-driven comparative instrumental case study of two large, urban, politically-active school districts, I examined how school boards and their members, superintendents and central office administrators, and teachers’ union leaders strategically used power to affect the outcomes of decision-making and protect their interests. To frame and analyze case study data, I combined political systems, organizational, and power theories, and then used the resulting framework to describe the power resources available to each group and the strategies each used to leverage their resources. I also investigated contextual determinants of resource availability, strategy choice, and strategy success.
This dissertation presents four major findings about the two case study districts. First, the more vocal, visible union that used high-conflict interest group strategies was likely desperate, not powerful. That union was forced to act outside of the district’s formal decision-making processes. As a result it had fewer resources, and its power strategies were less successful, than the union that had been invited to act from within.

Second, while board members were theoretically the strongest district actors because of their legitimate authority over local education governance, in both case study districts the board was not, in practice, powerful in comparison to other actors. In one district, the board was weaker than the superintendent because it ceded its authority to administrators. In the other, the board diminished their own autonomy when board members were overly responsive to community and union demands. This is related to the third finding: The relative power of the superintendent was contingent on the amount of authority ceded to him by the board and permitted to him by the public. Both superintendents were very powerful when they had the ability to, and chose to, use their sizeable knowledge resources and access to decision-making.

Finally, certain environmental conditions significantly decreased resource value and strategy effectiveness in these districts. I define these conditions as community constraint (devaluation of existing resources), systemic exclusion (limited access to the resource exchange marketplace), external uncertainty (depletion or elimination of local resources by outside forces), and internal conflict (when resources are frozen by disagreement before they can be used).
CHAPTER 1
Politics In School Districts: School Boards, Superintendents, and Teachers’ Unions

Public education in California is facing a funding crisis of dire proportions. In the last four years, the state slashed $22 billion from its K-12 education budget. Since 2008, the state has reduced per-pupil spending by 23% and local funding has not been able to fully fill the resulting revenue gap (California Department of Education, 2012; EdSource, 2011; Oliff & Leachman, 2011). In 2011, California Superintendent for Public Instruction Tom Torlakson declared a “state of financial emergency” and noted that “roughly 30 percent of pupils in California now attend school in a district facing serious financial jeopardy” (California Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b). Not only are its public schools underfunded, but California’s students are in academic distress as well. The state’s eighth graders rank 49th in the country on standardized tests in mathematics and reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a). Seventy-one percent of California students who entered ninth grade in 2008 graduated high school in four years; only 7 states had worse freshman graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011b).

To stay solvent and increase achievement as revenue decreases and operating costs rise, district leaders must decide whether to cut spending on teachers, staff, instructional programs, or facilities. Tensions arise between district leaders and teachers’ unions because some cost-saving measures protect the jobs and salaries of teachers, while others maintain instructional programs for students. At any level of democratic government – and school districts are no exception – political action is a natural
consequence when interests diverge and resources are scarce. When political action turns into acrimonious and highly-visible conflict, decision-making becomes a power struggle between publically-elected school board members, appointed administrators, and professional employees. In some districts, the unfortunate result of this power struggle is that the personal and professional goals of adults supersede the best interests of students.

**Context: Political Power, Fiscal Solvency, and Student Achievement**

Public school districts are subject to demands from state and federal governments, students and parents, taxpayers and community members, and their own employees. Paramount among these demands is fiscal solvency and student achievement. By law, California school districts are not allowed to deficit-spend. They must balance their budgets within the constraints of government categorical funding requirements, and they must do so for three years at a time (California AB 1200, 1991). Districts are also mandated to meet the benchmarks for student achievement set by the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965, 2001) and the California *Public Schools Accountability Act* (1999).

To remain solvent, district leaders have a variety of options, some of which they know might endanger student achievement. One avenue for cost-cutting is spending less on teachers. Given the high cost of labor in California, where teachers have the highest average salaries in the nation, spending less on teachers can mean substantial savings for a school district (EdSource, 2011). However, reducing teacher-related expenditures also risks student outcomes because it creates larger classes, shorter instructional calendars, and less-satisfied teachers. Many district leaders have accepted these risks and negotiated
with their local teachers’ union to change compensation, school calendars, and working conditions.¹ In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, 83 percent of school districts in California did not adjust teacher salaries for cost-of-living increases, 50 percent implemented furlough days, 32 percent raised class sizes, and 17 percent reduced spending on teacher health and welfare benefits. Six percent eliminated automatic yearly raises for teachers. An additional 35 percent issued pink slips to their teachers, which does not require bargaining between a district and its union (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2012).

California districts also made substantial expenditure cuts in areas that are not directly related to teacher employment. In the 2011-12 school year, 63 percent of districts spent less on instructional materials compared to the year before. Seventy-seven percent cut funding to arts and music programs, and 72 percent reduced expenditures on gifted and talented education (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2012). Many districts opted to eliminate summer school or freeze the purchase of new textbooks (C. Carlson, 2012; Frey & Gonzales, 2011). Over half of California’s districts laid off non-teaching staff or did not fill existing vacancies in non-teaching positions (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2012).

These actions involve trade-offs: reduce the quantity of teachers or the amount spent on their salaries, or cut expenditures in other areas such as instructional materials, operations, or non-teaching personnel. Conflicting interests and scarce resources politicize decision-making, and now, more than ever, school district leaders are making

¹ Districts in 31 states and the District of Columbia are required by law to negotiate with teachers’ unions, fourteen states neither require nor prohibit bargaining, and five explicitly prohibit it. State law dictates the scope of collective bargaining, but typically-bargained provisions include wages, benefits, pensions, leave, work days and hours, transfers and assignments, dismissals, evaluations, class size, grievance procedures, and right to strike (Koski & Tang, 2011; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2009). In this work, I use “union” to mean employee associations in districts that either require or allow collective bargaining.
choices based on both rational, information-based processes as well as political action strategies among school board members, superintendents, employee unions, and external interest groups (Wirt & Kirst, 2005).

Traditionally, local teachers’ unions act politically to protect teacher job security. Sometimes unions organize their members to lobby, rally, or provide support for union-endorsed school board candidates; at other times, union leaders use negotiating tactics to limit the union’s concessions during collective bargaining. When unions act politically, board members, superintendents, the media, and the public accuse them of demanding a disproportionate amount of district resources without increasing the quality of teaching, of having an undue influence on school board elections and district decision-making, and of negotiating restrictive, protectionist contracts that prevent the board and superintendent from enacting desperately needed reforms (see, for example, Brimelow, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Goldstein, 2010; Hoxby, 1996; Lieberman, 2000; Moe, 2011).²

District leaders use political action as well, often by imposing layoffs or making decisions about curriculum and instruction without asking for teachers’ professional input. In response, unions indict district leaders for seeking quick-fix solutions that serve

² By focusing on teachers’ unions, I do not imply that they are the only influential organized interest. Community and business organizations can be quite powerful locally, but they differ from unions because they are not simultaneously district employees and external actors. I expand on this distinction in later chapters. Other internal actors, such as the PTA and the unions for classified staff and administrators, rarely receive the same degree of criticism as teachers’ unions do. Teachers’ unions have significantly more members (and therefore more money) than other employee unions, and the majority of district expenditures are on teachers. In most states the administrators’ union is not legally recognized as a bargaining unit. Finally, the PTA is a non-profit organization and therefore not allowed to participate in board member campaigns.
board members’ and superintendents’ personal and political interests; they charge district leaders with being overly responsive to community demands while ignoring the value and expertise of teachers (Bascia, 2005; Boyd, Plank, & Sykes, 2000; Duffett, Farkas, Rotherham, & Silva, 2008; Johnson & Kardos, 2000; Kerchner & Koppich, 2000).

Conflict is not new to decision-making in public education (Alsbury, 2008; Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Bjork, 2008; Burlingame, 1988; Cistone, 2008; Hess, 1999; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Lowi, 1972; Moe, 2005; Spillane, 1998; Wirt & Kirst, 1972, 2005). However, financial crisis exacerbated the already political nature of local education governance. Boards, superintendents, and unions face heavy criticism for using political power to put their own self-interest above the public good. Each does wield a significant amount of power to affect decision-making: boards have direct authority, administrators have professional discretion, and teachers’ unions have collective bargaining and electoral politics. Despite the criticism and attention, however, there is currently no clear understanding of what in practice defines a “powerful” school board, superintendent, or teachers’ union, and how each uses political power to influence district decision-making.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

While there is a growing body of research that shows that interactions among boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions affect how school districts allocate their resources, the empirical work on the subject is piecemeal. Researchers who examine the politics of district decision-making tend to focus on external interest groups rather than the internal processes. Other scholars explore in detail one actor, one type of strategy, or
one outcome of decision-making, but as yet have not captured a school district as a collection of individuals and groups with diverse strategies and goals. Some researchers take a holistic, descriptive approach to school districts, acknowledging the sociopolitical nature of local education governance, but do not use a guiding theoretical framework.

The purpose of this study is to use a theory-driven approach to understand how school boards and their members, superintendents and central office administrators, and teachers’ unions act and interact politically as they make decisions in an environment of political and financial constraint. Specifically, I ask:

1. What power resources are available to school board members, superintendents and district administrators, and teachers’ union leaders?
2. When actors use power strategies to leverage their resources, what types of strategies do they use, where are those strategies located, what is the goal of each strategy, and which dimensions of power do those strategies represent?
3. How do environmental factors affect the resources to which actors have access, the strategies that actors choose, and whether or not actors successfully leverage their resources so that outcomes of decision-making reflect their interests?

To answer these questions, I conducted a theory-driven comparative case study of two large, urban, politically-active school districts. In each district, I observed school board, committee, and teachers’ association meetings, interviewed school board members, superintendents and executive management teams, and teachers’ union leaders, and reviewed documents. To frame and analyze these data, I combined political systems, organizational, and power theories, then used the resulting theoretical framework to
describe the power strategies that each group utilized to leverage its resources and gain influence in relation to one another. I also investigated contextual determinants of strategy choice and success.

Decision-Making, Power, and Influence in School Districts

In this section, I briefly introduce my theoretical framework and review the empirical literature on how interactions among boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions affect district decision-making. In the following section, I describe the significance of my study and how it addresses gaps in this extant research. I conclude with an overview of this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework: Political Systems, Organizational, and Power Theories

Political systems theory is one way to model how a governance system like a school district makes decisions (Easton, 1953, 1957, 1965; Kingdon, 1995; D. A. Stone, 2002; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). In a school district, the board and superintendent comprise the legitimate political system. The board passes, amends, and repeals policy, and the superintendent implements policy and oversees operations (Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1992; Kowalski, 2006). Actors without the direct authority to make decisions are external to the legitimate system. These external actors – students, parents, employees, and community members – place demands on the board and superintendent. They can act as individuals, or organize into interest groups. The district then converts input demands into system outputs (Kingdon, 1995). These outcomes feed back to the external actors, who, in reaction, modify their inputs (Easton, 1965; Kingdon, 1995). This is macropolitics.
Not all school district politics are macro. Policy outcomes are influenced as much by actors inside a political system as those outside of it (Walker, 1983). Actors use rational processes to achieve specific organizational goals within a well-defined governance structure, but they also use bargaining and negotiation to ensure that their interests, and the interests of those they represent, are secure (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blase & Blase, 2002; Estler, 1988; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Malen, 1994b; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Willower, 1991). Actors interpret and prioritize. They weigh some demands more heavily than others, integrate their own values, experiences, and goals, and use their power and position to affect the outputs of the political system (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). The translation of demands into decision-making outcomes is both a product of pressure from external interest groups and the internal politics of the district itself. These are micropolitical processes.

The degree to which the outcomes of decision-making actually reflect the interests of a particular individual or group depends on the way that power is distributed within the political system (Blase, 2005; Blase & Blase, 1997; Hanson, 1981; Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993; Malen, 1994a; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). Each actor has a number of power resources – material, knowledge, positional, social – which they can leverage to influence one another. They may choose to do so through direct authority (one actor makes a decision for another) (Dahl, 1957), constraint (limiting access to or the scope of the political process) (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962), or manipulation (persuading another to act contrary to his or her own interests) (Lukes, 1981).
A number of factors shape actors’ access to power resources and strategies, and determine whether those strategies are successful in affecting the outcomes of decision-making. Some of these factors are context-independent, and do not vary from district to district. Other factors are environmental. A district’s institutional context, which includes demographics, wealth, and external policy mandates and laws, constrains certain decisions while encouraging others. The organizational structure, typified by a district’s internal rules and norms, gives boards, superintendents, and external interests more or less sway. The structure of the community also affects how power is distributed; boards and superintendents respond to external demands differently in communities that are dominated by a few interest groups versus communities where power is contested. District leaders are also more or less responsive to certain demands depending on public opinion. Personal traits play an important role in decision-making as well (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Burlingame, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Easton, 1957; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Lawrence & Lorsh, 1967; Malen, 2006; March & Olsen, 1989; March & Simon, 1958; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001; Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 2008).

**Review of Literature: Boards, Superintendents, and Teachers’ Unions in Practice**

The extant research on how board members, superintendents, and teachers’ unions use power to affect the outcomes of decision-making has taken a number of different approaches.

The literature on the work of board members and superintendents is largely descriptive, and focuses on the processes of decision-making rather than the outcomes. Several national surveys examined the responsibilities of board members and
superintendents, the interactions among them, and the degree to which unions and other external actors participate in district governance (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Hess, 2002; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). A number of studies investigated board member-administrator relationships (for comprehensive reviews, see Ehrensal & Frist, 2008; Land, 2002), inter-district politics (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; Mountford, 2004; Opfer, 2005), the effects of superintendent traits on board decisions (Bjork, 2008; Petersen & Short, 2001; Peterson & Williams, 2005), and the relationships among interest groups, community preferences, and school board member behavior (Alsbury, 2003; Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Greene, 1992; Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008). Broadly, these studies show that school districts are inherently political. As board members and superintendents interact among themselves and with the external community, they are partially motivated by the desire to ensure that the distribution of power allows them adequate control over the decisions that are most important to them.

Like the literature on boards and superintendents, empirical research that examines the impact of teachers’ unions is narrow in scope. Researchers have used econometric methods to rigorously investigate the effects of unionization and union strength, but have examined only one outcome of district decision-making: the provisions of negotiated contracts such as teacher compensation and class size (Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Eberts, 1984; Hess & Kelly, 2006; Hoxby, 1996; Moe, 2009; P. Riley, Fusano, Munk, & Peterson, 2002; Strunk, 2011, 2012; Strunk & Grissom, 2010). More recent literature studied the relationship between bargaining outcomes and union strength (Moe,
2006a, 2009; P. Riley, et al., 2002; Strunk, 2011; Strunk & Grissom, 2010; Strunk & McEachin, 2011; Strunk & Zeehandelaar, 2011)]. Studies on the strategies that unions use to leverage their resources to protect their interests, and why some strategies are more successful than others, are largely absent from the empirical literature (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Bjork, 2008; Blase & Bjork, 2010; Burlingame, 1988; Cistone, 2008; Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003; Johnson, 1988; Kirst, 2008; Koski & Tang, 2011). Only one strategy of political influence – electoral politics – has received much attention (Grissom, 2010; Hess & Leal, 2005; Moe, 2005, 2006b; Strunk & Grissom, 2010).

A review of this literature reveals some expected results and other confusing or contradictory findings. School board candidates who are endorsed by a local teachers’ union win more often than those who are not (Moe, 2005, 2006b), but endorsements are not necessarily associated with a union-friendly contract (Strunk & Grissom, 2010) and endorsed board members tend to be less sympathetic toward union interests the longer they stay in office (Moe, 2005). Districts with strong unions, where strength is either measured by the researcher or reported by board members, are more likely to have contracts that restrict administrator actions (Moe, 2009; Strunk & Grissom, 2010), but may not pay their teachers more (Strunk, 2011, 2012) or consistently offer other “union-friendly” contract provisions (Strunk & Zeehandelaar, 2011).

Aggregating the board-superintendent and district-union literature yields several general conclusions about political behavior in school districts. Findings agree that power is contested among school boards, superintendents, teachers’ unions, and that each works to redistribute power in their favor. These actors compete for a variety of available
resources, including financial capital, information, access to the decision-making process, and the support of internal allies, powerful interest groups, and broad-based constituent support. Empirical findings also agree that actors are motivated by a number of sometimes competing factors, among them student achievement, financial solvency, personal job security, and organizational legitimacy.

Despite these consistencies, however, the literature also reveals discrepancies between perceptions of union strength (by both board members and researchers) and decision-making outcomes. The extant literature does not provide sufficient evidence to resolve these discrepancies. Only one process – electoral politics – and one outcome – collective bargaining – have been examined in any detail, leaving a multitude of other strategies and outcomes unstudied. Researchers studied the relationship between superintendents and school boards using predominantly leadership and sociological perspectives, not a political one. The literature on boards and superintendents remains largely disconnected from the work on unions. Studies on the effects of environmental factors on access to resources, actor behavior, and the outcomes of decision-making do not yet give a clear picture of how these factors influence the distribution of power among district actors.

**Significance of the Study**

This study aims to address the gaps in the literature by offering both a holistic and theory-driven approach to understanding the political interactions among school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions. Thus far, education researchers have used micropolitical theory to study policy implementation at the school level (e.g. Achinstein,
2002; Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991, 2005; Flessa, 2009; Hoyle, 1982; Malen & Cochran, 2008); I expand this to examine the behavior of actors internal to the school district political system. Likewise, education researchers have used macropolitical theory to study the impact of interest groups at a national and state level (for a review, see Masters & Delaney, 2005), but not in-depth at the district level. I combine these two models, integrate them with power theory, and apply the resulting lens to school districts to describe how power resources are distributed among district-level actors, to illustrate the strategies available to each to leverage those resources, and to posit what might account for the differences in resource availability, strategy use, and strategy success.

In addition to its contribution to political theory, this work extends the empirical research on how boards, superintendents, and unions influence district decision-making. It also sheds light on the inconsistencies between union strength, either real or perceived, and decision-making outcomes. The conclusions about power in school districts drawn from this research may ultimately provide policymakers and practitioners tools to increase collaboration and leverage conflict for productive organizational change.

**Overview of Dissertation**

This dissertation proceeds as follows: In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework in detail, first modeling the external and internal politics of a school district, then explaining how actors use power to influence the outcomes of district decision-making, and finally offering factors that potentially affect resource availability and actor behavior. I also review the empirical literature on how school board members,
superintendents, and teachers’ unions use a variety of power strategies as they interact, and how those strategies affect the balance of power and, in turn, influence board policies, negotiations, and administrator actions. In Chapter 3, I outline the design of my case study, explain my data collection and analysis methods in detail, and address criteria for rigor. I present descriptive data, and answer Research Questions 1 and 2, in Chapter 4. The explanatory third research question is answered in Chapter 5. With Chapter 6, I discuss broad findings and themes, present implications for policy, practice, and research, and conclude.
CHAPTER 2
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

School districts are internally sociopolitical institutions (Spillane, 1998; Willower, 1991; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). Their leaders are constantly interacting as they react to the demands of students, parents, local communities, state and federal governments, and employees. These demands are varied and complex: students and parents want specific programs, options, and outcomes; communities want efficient districts that use taxpayer money to increase the economic and social benefits for all residents; state and federal governments require student achievement, accountability, and solvency; employees want job security, fair working conditions, support, and empowerment.

Sometimes, demands coincide. For example, fiscal solvency is a priority for everyone, whether it is a requirement (for district leaders), a condition for job security (for employees), or a sign of a successful organization (to voters). But how to maintain solvency, whether limited funds should be spent on salaries, facilities, instructional materials, or elsewhere, is contested. Parents might demand spending on instruction because it is of immediate benefit to their children. Property owners would like to see investment in facilities and high-profile programs, which would raise the value of their homes. Teachers may advocate for allocating funds to the classroom in the form of higher salaries or smaller class sizes. When there is conflict, decision-makers must strategically prioritize and decide to whom they will be the most responsive. Board members are accountable to the voters that elect them; superintendents and administrators are held responsible for student achievement by the public and the government; teachers’ union leaders are chosen by their membership to ensure fair and favorable working conditions.
When the demands of their constituents diverge, leaders try to tip the scales so that the final decision on how to maintain solvency, or raise test scores, or empower teachers, is favorable to the particular group that they represent.

Decision-making in school districts is ultimately then about interests and how to protect them. School board members, superintendents, and teachers’ unions use power strategies to leverage their resources and gain influence so that the outcomes of decision-making protect their organizational interests. In this section, I introduce a theoretical lens for understanding how and why these interactions occur, and review the empirical literature on the way that school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions interact to make decisions. First, I use political systems and organizational theories to frame school districts as political institutions, and I describe how leaders translate demands into board policies, contracts, and administrative actions. Next, I integrate power theory to classify how power is defined, used, and distributed among district actors. I discuss five environmental factors – institutional context, organizational structure, community structure, public opinion, and personal traits – that shape how district leaders actually choose to use power, and whether or not those choices are successful. Finally, I review the empirical literature that has examined how board members, superintendents, and teachers’ unions have used power and whether they have been able to successfully protect the interests of their organizations.

Districts as Political Institutions: Systems, Organizational, and Power Theory

When any government, school districts included, makes decisions, it is deciding how to distribute (or redistribute) limited, contested resources (Lasswell, 1936; Lenski,
These decisions are based on the demands of the public, the expertise and experience of the policymakers, the context in which the decision is being made, and the personal characteristics of the individuals in control. One way of describing how school districts create policy is through a combination of political system and organizational theory (Figure 2.1). The former models how government interacts with the public, and the latter frames the way that decision-makers act within the system itself.

Figure 2.1. Sociopolitical decision-making in school districts.
Political Systems and Organizational Theories

Figure 2.1 illustrates how the school district functions as a political system.\(^3\) Political systems theory, also called the input-output model (Easton, 1953, 1957, 1965; Kingdon, 1995; D. A. Stone, 2002; Wirt & Kirst, 2005), models the interactions between the district and the public. In this model, external actors (in the rectangles) place demands on and offer supports to the legitimate political system. Demands and supports are indicated by the solid black arrows. For school districts, this legitimate system is made up of the board, which serves as the district’s legislature and has the authority to pass, amend, and repeal policy (Danzberger, et al., 1992), and the superintendent, who is the district’s chief executive, charged with implementing policy and overseeing operations (Kowalski, 2006).\(^4,5\) Teachers’ unions, for example, place demands on the district for job-related securities such as salary, defined work rules, and fair hiring and firing practices. They may also petition for professional autonomy, respect, and access to decision-making. In return, unions offer both positive and negative supports: cooperative working relationships, electoral support, antagonism, militancy, or threats to strike. The district then converts these inputs into policy outputs (Kingdon, 1995) with more or less

\(^3\) Throughout this work I use the term “school district” as shorthand for the legitimate political system (i.e. only actors that have the legal authority to make binding policy decisions) of local education policy. I also use “district leaders” to stand for school board members, the superintendent, and the executive cabinet.

\(^4\) Easton (1957) originally defined support as a behavior: voting for a candidate, defending the decision of policymaker, or acting on (or being ready to) act on behalf of a person, government, or ideology. Here, I define support as both a power resource and the strategy or behavior used to leverage that resource to influence policy.

\(^5\) Unlike the chief executive of state or federal political systems, superintendents are not required to give their approval before a policy is adopted, nor does the superintendent hold veto power. Also unlike most political systems, the superintendent and central office administrators serve as ‘staff’ for the school board, keeping the board informed and researching, designing, and often writing policies for board approval (Kowalski, 2006).
responsiveness (Eulau & Karps, 1977); the resulting policies feed back to the external actors, who in turn modify their inputs (Easton, 1965; Kingdon, 1995).

Systems theory is a powerful heuristic for understanding the way in which macropolitical systems like school districts make decisions in response to external demands. However, policy outcomes are influenced as much from inside of government as outside of it (Walker, 1983). District actors choose to accept, combine, reduce, or sometimes ignore the inputs of external groups (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). Systems theory is limited because it focuses only on inputs and outputs – the solid lines in Figure 2.1 – and treats the political system as a discrete unit. Organizational theory addresses these limitations. It acknowledges that the political system is not a single unit but is made up of internal elements: the board and its members, the superintendent and administrative cabinet, and the teachers’ union. Just as in traditional systems theory, the district translates inputs into policy outputs, but in the integrated model the translation process is both a product of pressure from external interest groups and the internal politics, or micropolitics, of the district itself (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Burns, 1961; C. Campbell, 1971; Giddens, 1984; Perrow, 1973; Pfeffer, 1994; Scott, 1992; Wahlke, 1971). The internal politics, or “withinputs,” (C. Campbell, 1971)⁶ are represented by the dashed lines in Figure 2.1. Under organizational theory, organizations are social and political systems (Barnard, 1938; Selznick, 1948) in which individuals use processes of conflict, collaboration, or accommodation to make decisions and ensure that

⁶ Although there are other definitions of “withinputs,” in this review, I will use Campbell’s (1971) definition and separate the concept into intra-organizational behavior (“micropolitics”) and structure (one of the aspects of “organizational context”).

The actual outputs of district decision-making take one of three forms: board policies, negotiations, and administrative actions (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Resnick, 1999), illustrated in Figure 2.1 by the circle labeled “outcomes.” First, board members debate and adopt policies during school board meetings. These “board action items” or “board policies” must be voted on by the school board before they are implemented. Such policies include budgets, layoffs, facilities, district strategic plans, externally-developed instructional programs, personnel assignments, and implementation plans for state and federal policy mandates. Board policies are often developed in collaboration with (or wholly by) the superintendent and other members of a district’s administrative staff. Board policies may also result from the nonbinding recommendations of board member-administrator-teacher committees or advisory councils with parents and other community members (Castilla, 1994; Glass, et al., 2000; McCurdy & Hymes, 1992; Petersen & Short, 2001; Poole, 1999). Because these action items are the purview of the board, it is at the discretion of the board members how much input to allow administrators and others, and how much weight to give that input.

Second, there are a number of decisions that the district can only make after negotiations with the employee unions. School boards or their designee, commonly a central office administrator, negotiate with union leaders on the terms and conditions of teacher employment. Once an agreement is reached, the rank-and-file union members
must approve the contract, and then the school board votes to adopt it. The scope of bargaining is defined at the state level, but typical provisions include wages, pensions, benefits, leave, hours and calendar, adjunct duties, transfers and assignments, dismissals, layoffs, furlough days, evaluations, class size, grievance procedures, and right to strike (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2011). These policies are codified in a contract, or collective bargaining agreement (CBA) (Koski & Tang, 2011). In California, the entire CBA is open for negotiation at least once every three years, and in many districts certain provisions are reopened yearly. The board and union can also modify portions of the CBA by entering into a memorandum of understanding (MOU); just like the contract itself, MOUs must be approved by both the union and the board.

Finally, there are a number of operational decisions that are delegated to the superintendent and administrative staff. Some administrative actions may require the superintendent to inform the board, and some do not (Sharp & Walter, 2004).

Systems and organizational theory thus frame the mechanisms for the way that inputs and withinputs are translated by a school district into outputs. The following section discusses power theory, which describes the process of translation, and how actors influence that process so that the outputs are favorable to them.

**Power Theory**

Political action (both micro and macro) involves actors using power to control policy outcomes (Blase, 2005; Blase & Blase, 1997; Hanson, 1981; Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993; Malen, 1994a; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). To influence the outcomes in Figure 2.1, external and internal actors use political power strategies to leverage their
resources so that the legitimate political system will be motivated to respond to their demands. The general concept of political power is that “A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests” (Lukes, 1974, 2005, pg. 27). In this section, I define political power and offer a system for classifying the ways in which individuals and groups use political power to sway the outcomes of decision-making. I will refer to these definitions throughout this work.

Definitions of power. For this study, I use “power” to generally mean domination of one individual or group over another. So defined, political power has three possible definitions, also called dimensions or faces (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Etzioni, 1968; Gamson, 1968; Lehman, 1969; Lukes, 1981). The first dimension is direct authority: one actor makes a decision for another, or compels another to make a decision, using authority, coercion, persuasion, or force (Dahl, 1957). It is overt, intentional, and observable, exercised during decision-making when interests conflict. Success is measurable; if an actor uses power successfully then decisions or policies protect their interests.

Power can also be defined as constraint. In this second face of power, actors limit the scope of decision-making by setting the agenda of a political system and the rules for participating in that system (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). Actors use behind-the-scenes authority or persuasion to pre-determine which issues require decisions (and which do not), and who can access the decision-making arena. Unlike the first definition, where power is the ability to decide, here power is the ability to prevent a decision from being made at all. Power is still observable, intentional, and active, exercised when interests
conflict. But it is exercised covertly, and deemed successful when the decision-making process effectively excludes opposing interests.

Both of these dimensions assume that power stems from observable conflict. But there is a third definition of power: manipulation (Lukes, 1981). One actor can persuade another to act contrary to his own interests, or shape the interests of the opposition so that they are no longer in conflict. Power is therefore the ability to change the perceptions and preferences of the opposition so that they comply with the dominant actor. In the first two dimensions of power, conflict is observable. It exists when there is a contradiction between the interests of actors. In the first dimension, the interests of the dominated party are stated, included, and then defeated. In the second, the interests of the dominated party are stated, then excluded. But in the third, conflict is latent. The true interests of the dominated are excluded because the dominated do not express them, are not aware of them, or believe it is in their best interest to comply with the dominant.

Using power – resources and strategies. Regardless of whether actors use direct authority, constraint, or manipulation, according to power theory the “use” of power has two requirements. First, an actor must have resources that are valuable to another. Second, an actor must have the ability and desire to strategically leverage those resources in order to direct, constrain, or manipulate another.

Power resources are the assets that actors use to influence others. For this work, I combine concepts from different classification systems and characterize resources as belonging to one of four categories: material, social, positional, and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986; Etzioni, 1968; Fowler, 2009; French & Raven, 1959; M. Mann, 1993;
Material resources include money, assets, time, and patronage (for the superintendent, patronage is represented by control over hiring; for the union, it is control over its membership). Social resources are allies, followers, and the potential to mobilize, motivate, or control them, as well as personality factors such as popularity, status, visibility, and perceived trustworthiness. Positional resources include the rules and norms that give actors access to decision-making, direct control over others, or the opportunity to access material resources, the political system, or the media. Finally, knowledge resources include information and its control (both specialized and of how the system works), intelligence, and communication skills (Bourdieu, 1986; Etzioni, 1968; Fowler, 2009; French & Raven, 1959; M. Mann, 1993; Pfeffer & Cialdini, 2003; Wrong, 1968).

Power strategies are the actions that actors take when they leverage their resources. An actor isn’t powerful solely because he or she has a stockpile of resources; actors must also have the “skill and will” to use their resources to influence policy (Baldwin, 1979; Etzioni, 1968; Kipnis, 1976; Wrong, 1968). A large membership, high status, or financial assets from member dues are only potential power resources for a union until they are used through a mobilization campaign, an endorsement of a candidate, or a strike. The threat of action, both explicit and tacit, is a strategy as well (Bourdieu, 1991; Lehman, 1969; Lukes, 1974, 2005) – a promise to strike or the fear of repercussions from a superintendent with control over hiring decisions can be just as influential as an actual strike or firing.
For this study I combined concepts drawn from political and organizational theories to designate three features of each power strategy: description, location, and goal. First, strategies can simply be described by the action itself. Examples of strategy descriptions include donating money to a school board candidate, controlling the agenda of a board meeting, or interfering in union elections. Second, strategies can be organized by their location. They are either macropolitical – used by an external actor to influence the internal processes of the political system – or micropolitical – used by actors internal to the system itself. Donating money to a candidate is a macropolitical strategy while controlling a board meeting agenda is a micropolitical one. The location of a particular strategy affects an actor’s access to resources, and the dimension in which they use them. Actors in the macropolitical system – districts as institutions, and unions as external interest groups – are more likely to use direct authority or constraint because they have legitimate, institutionalized, and relatively stable access to diverse resources (Lehman, 1969). They can also more easily use threats because others know that they have the power resources to back them up (Lehman, 1969; Wrong, 1968). Micropolitical actors are more likely to use persuasion because their resources are more narrow and normative; individuals rely more often on status, trustworthiness, or information, but often do not have the power to force or constrain action on their own (Lehman, 1969).

Third, I classify strategies by their goal. Each action has an intended outcome as it relates to the opposition. The goal of one actor may be to dominate, exclude, manipulate, persuade, placate, marginalize, or undermine another. Donating money to a candidate is an attempt to persuade; the goal of controlling an agenda is to manipulate or exclude.
Inclusion and collaboration are also possible goals. Some actors may feel that they cannot achieve their own objectives without the help of another (Brunner, 1998). Later in this chapter, I describe the specific strategies used in education politics.

**Alternative perspectives of power.** In this work, I took a behavioralist perspective and defined power as the deliberate use of a resource and strategy by one actor in order to dominate another. I observed the actions and reactions of actors as they attempted to influence one another within their particular environments, and compared their actions to the range of other possible choices. I acknowledged three other views on the use power – the structural, sociological, and radical/interpretive perspectives – by integrating concepts from those fields into the power resources and environmental factors to which actors are responding.\(^7\)

The structural conception of power posits that an individual’s position within an organization’s hierarchy and social networks dictates the resources to which he has access, the actions he is permitted to take, and whether or not others will respond to those actions (Brass, 1984; Kanter, 1979; McCall, 1979; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977; Weber, 1978). Power comes from legitimacy, and the more legitimate authority an individual has the more likely others are to obey their commands. In this work, I conceptualized structural power not as a guarantee that an individual can dominate another, but rather as a resource that an individual might use in order to influence the actions of another. I accounted for structural power with the concept of positional power resources.

\(^7\) I discuss environmental factors in more detail later in this section.
The sociological perspective of power upholds that an individual’s power does not come solely from his position in an organization’s hierarchy but also from interactions among individuals (Foucault, 1980). While legitimate authority is an important resource, it does not automatically secure obedience. Rather, actors are more likely to respond to the use of authority or influence by others when compliance to certain behaviors is standard practice (Giddens, 1971; May & Finch, 2009). Likewise, actors are more likely to successfully use power when they belong to informal social networks within an organization (Krackhardt, 1990) and when they know how to successfully navigate an organization’s networks and practices (Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer, 1994). I represented normalized behaviors with the environmental factor of organizational structure: certain structures render actors’ influence strategies more likely to work, because an organization’s norms might encourage compliance to certain actors and actions. I included systemic knowledge as part of knowledge resources, and networks and allies as one component of social resources.

Finally, the radical/interpretive view of power diverges from the behavioralist perspective because the former maintains that influence does not necessarily come from deliberate action. With the radical view, Lukes (2005) integrates Bourdieu’s (1991) concept that power can be the result of deliberate action or the unintentional consequence of an actor embodying aspects of the hegemonic culture. Even if they do not mean to influence or dominate others, actors may have certain personal characteristics such as gender, race, experience, or style of speaking that represent the dominant culture of an organization or society. Others unconsciously defer to actors who have these
characteristics. The interpretive perspective takes a similar but broader approach: an actor can unintentionally influence others because they have the traits of the dominant culture or because they are charismatic, congenial, and trustworthy (Clegg 1994, Giddens 1971; Weber 1978).

As with structural and sociological power, being able to wield radical or interpretive power because an actor has certain personal characteristics does not guarantee that he will successfully dominate others, but it does make others more likely to respond to his use of power strategies. To reconcile the behaviorist view, which treats power as observable actions and reactions, and the radical/interpretive view, which also includes power as the reaction to the unintended influence of personal characteristics, I introduced “personal traits” as an environmental factor. These traits encompass the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) held by individuals because they have certain characteristics to which others naturally succumb. Certain personal traits make a (deliberate) action more likely to work; for example, an administrator with many years of experience in a community may be more likely than a new administrator to influence a board member, even if both administrators employ the same deliberate power strategy. This assumes, however, that experience is valued by the organization, an assumption that does not hold true in all situations – this is why I classify personal traits as a contextual factor rather than a resource. I discuss personal traits in more detail later in this section.

**The Theoretical Balance of Power: Strategies and Determinants**

Power is not an inherent property of an individual or group. Instead, it is relational (Foucault, 1980; Lehman, 1969). Actors are only powerful when they are *more* powerful
than the person or group whose interests are counter to their own (Bourdieu, 1986; Bryson & Crosby, 1992). In this section, I detail the macro- and micropolitical power strategies used by actors in education governance systems. Next, I introduce five important environmental factors that shape the way power is distributed among district actors: institutional context, community structure, organizational structure, public opinion, and personal traits. I describe how these factors influence the choice of power strategy, and whether or not that strategy will be successful. In the following section, I explore the empirical literature on the prevalence of such strategies as used by school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions, and whether they have proven successful.

Macropolitics: Influence Strategies of External Actors

External actors can individually pressure the legitimate political system to respond to their demands, or they can organize themselves into interest groups. Interest group theory, a subset of political systems theory, posits that organized collective action is the most effective way that external actors – students, parents, employees, voters, taxpayers, businesses, religious organizations, corporations, foundations, and advocates – influence the legitimate political system (Olson, 1965; Truman, 1971). Interest groups

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8 As explained in Chapter 1, the focus on teachers’ unions is not meant to suggest that no other interest groups are active in local education politics. The PTA, other parent and community organizations, and other employee unions may also use the strategies outlined here, but they highlighted here since only unions are both interest group and internal actor, and the teachers is the most influential union among them.

9 An interest group is broadly defined as any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, separate from the government, that attempts to influence public policy (Thomas & Hrebenar, 1992; Wilson, 1990). Groups that are involved in community affairs but do not seek to influence government action, and political parties that can both endorse and nominate candidates, are not included as interest groups.

10 Other influence mechanisms include direct, representative, and deliberative democracy, issue networks, advocacy coalitions, and urban regimes (Berry, 1989; Feuerstein, 2002; Heclo, 1978; Held, 2006; Lutz &
in education can play a role in board election campaigns, ballot initiatives, research production, legislation and lobbying, and decisions about curriculum (Opfer, et al., 2008). They can also influence the behavior of individual citizens by encouraging them to vote, participate in school board meetings, sign up for district advisory committees, support new education initiatives with additional taxes, join advocacy groups, petition, protest, engage in negative media campaigns, or leave the district.

Over the last several decades, the activity of interest groups in education has increased dramatically at all levels of government (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Salisbury, 1992; Spring, 1998). External groups now employ a variety of macropolitical strategies to ensure that school districts are responsive to their demands. The three general types of macropolitical strategies are policymaking, issue/image, and electoral (Wilson, 1990). In the policymaking area, interest groups such as unions try to sway legislators to adopt new policies and change or eliminate existing ones (Gerber, 1999; Hrebenar, 1997; Opfer, et al., 2008). The most common activity is direct lobbying. Typical strategies include contacting board members and superintendents, formally testifying before boards or committees, presenting board members with research or polling data, helping draft board action items, serving on advisory boards, or using personal relationships to make informal contact with policymakers (Balla & Wright, 2001; Hrebenar, 1997; Kimbrough, 1964; Kollman, 1998; Poole, 1999). Interest groups can also use indirect policymaking strategies, such as undertaking media campaigns or interviews, publishing reports, mobilizing other teachers, starting a grassroots campaign in the community, organizing

Iannaccone, 2008; Mawhinney, 2001; Opfer, Young, & Fusarelli, 2008; Sabatier, 1988; Shipps, 2008; C. N. Stone, 2006; Zeigler, Jennings, & Peak, 1974).
letter-writing or online campaigns, protesting, and striking (or threatening to do any of those activities) (Hrebenar, 1997; Kollman, 1998; Opfer, et al., 2008; Poole, 1999).

Rather than focusing on a specific policy, interest groups can instead lobby an issue or image (Brown & Waltzer, 2002; Dwyre, 2002; Poole, 1999). Through issue lobbying – bringing attention to a new issue or offering a potential solution to an existing problem – unions can effectively set the agenda of a board, board candidate, superintendent, and even the public (Kingdon, 1995; Masters & Delaney, 2005; Richardson, 1993). Agenda control may actually be the most influential possible use of political power (Schattschneider, 1960). For example, teachers’ unions can present expert information to the board on the importance of smaller classes without actually lobbying for any class size policy in particular, or mobilize parents to support smaller class sizes and encourage them to appeal to the board. Unions can also strategically define or redefine terms (like “fair” evaluation or “high-quality” teacher); this in turn will affect how boards, superintendents, and the public frame an issue (Coburn, 2006; Leech, Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, & Kimball, 2002) and ultimately can influence how districts design policy to address that issue. Finally, unions can enhance their own image by entering into partnerships with other well-liked community organizations, generating grass-roots support, and appealing to the public or the press (Brown & Waltzer, 2002; Poole, 1999).  

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11 Democratic theory uses the terms “interest group politics” and “macropolitics” interchangeably. Macropolitics are political actions done by external interest groups. However, this definition ignores the fact that internal actors can use macropolitical strategies too. For example, superintendents can align themselves with community organizations to improve their image just as union leaders can. In this work, I defined “interest group politics” as the actions of external groups, regardless of the location of that action. Similarly, “macropolitical strategies” refers to the location of the strategy, not the location of the person
The third area of interest group political activity is electoral politics: interest groups work to elect a favorable candidate or attempt to sway candidates and incumbents to support the group’s position (G. S. Becker, 1983; Grossman & Helpman, 2001; Moe, 2006b). Teachers’ unions have a number of resources from which to draw when engaging in this type of politics. They have material assets in the form of membership dues and contributions (Loomis & Cigler, 2002). Members are a significant social resource when they mobilize on behalf of a school board candidate and recruit other volunteers. Some unions have clout in their name and reputation, powerful because voters are likely to follow the cues of established groups that they find trustworthy or whose values they believe align with their own, especially on technical or unfamiliar issues (Downs, 1957; Gilens & Murakawa, 2002; Masters & Delaney, 1986).

Unions leverage these resources by providing endorsements (Potters, Sloof, & Van Winden, 1997), donating to candidates (Denzau & Munger, 1986; Grossman & Helpman, 2001), campaigning through phone, mail, digital, or door-to-door campaigns (Brown & Waltzer, 2002; Cibulka, 2001; Kollman, 1998), recruiting, training, and advising candidates (Cigler & Loomis, 2002; Samuels, 2011), and encouraging their members to vote.

**Micropolitics: Influence Strategies of Internal Actors**

Boards, superintendents, and unions can also affect the way the legitimate political system translates demands into outcomes by acting micropolitically, from inside the system itself (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1982; Iannaccone, 1975; Malen & Cochran, 2008; using the strategy. So actors internal to the legitimate political system can use macropolitical strategies, as can interest groups. I address this limitation of political theory further in Chapter 6.
Examples of micropolitical strategies are determining meeting agendas (Ball, 1987; Fager, 1993; Grogan & Blackmon, 2001; Malen, 1994b; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; D. Mann, 1974; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001), controlling the composition of decision-making or advisory committees (Achinstein, 2002; Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1993; Goldring, 1993; Hanson, 1981; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; C. H. Weiss & Cambone, 1994), deliberately exchanging autonomy in one policy area for conformity in another (Blase, 1988; Willower, 1991), and creating or downplaying a crisis (D. Mann, 1974; White, 2007). Although the specific strategies that actors use to leverage power resources have been studied at the school level during policy implementation (see, for example, Blase & Bjork, 2010; Malen, 1994b; Malen & Cochran, 2008 for reviews of the empirical literature), there have been no studies of internal actors’ use of power strategies at the level of a school district during policy design.

**Determinants of the Balance of Power**

The above discussion frames the power resources available to district actors and discusses what strategies they might use to leverage those resources. In Figure 2.1, these strategies and resources are represented by the dashed black (micro) and solid black (macro) arrows. However, the resources actors actually access and the strategies actors use to leverage those resources are not simply a matter of choice. Rather, resource accessibility and distribution, and strategy selection and success, are guided by the context – both external and internal – in which district actors operate.
The external contextual factors – institutional context, community structure, and public opinion – and the internal contextual factors – organizational structure and personal traits – are shown in Figure 2.1. These factors shape the actual distribution of available resources, the type, location, and goal of the strategies that actors use to leverage their resources, and whether or not those strategies can successfully influence decision-making so that actors can protect their interests. In this section, I describe how environmental factors might affect the balance of power in a school district.

**Institutional context.** The entire sociopolitical institution of education is embedded in a context that promotes, constrains, and excludes some policy decisions (Bennett & Hansel, 2008; Burlingame, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Easton, 1957; Lawrence & Lorsh, 1967; March & Olsen, 1989; Richardson, 1993; Scott, 2008). Some of these considerations are practical: state and federal mandates give districts total discretion over certain decisions, while in other cases districts are responsible for interpreting and implementing a prescribed policy. In still other instances, such as educating students with disabilities, districts are given no leeway at all and must follow state and federal law. Districts are also limited by how much money they have in reserve and how much revenue they receive from external sources.

A district’s environmental and demographic variables such as population age, socioeconomic status, education level, race and ethnicity, language, religion, diversity, political affiliation (Bjork, 2005; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001) also affect resource availability and strategy use. Changes in these variables, such as an aging population, increasing diversity, or decreasing wealth level will impact policy as well (Berkman &
Plutzer, 2005). The size, location, and urbanicity of a district also matter (Burlingame, 1988); large urban districts tend to have more active interest groups, unions included (Hess & Leal, 2005; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Moe, 2005, 2009), and are faced with solving more complex challenges using more restricted budgets than their smaller, suburban or rural counterparts (Grissom, 2010).

Demographics are important because they are related to constituent values. Some of the largest decisions that boards and superintendents make are value-laden and therefore particularly important to voters (Eliot, 1959; D. A. Stone, 2002). Curriculum and instruction, for example, have been subjects of conflict for as long as school boards have existed because their discussion often involves religious or cultural values (Banks, 1993; Goodson, 1993; Loveless, 2002; Opfer, 2005). Finance is another historically contentious issue. Parents, employees, and property owners may have different views on how fiscally conservative a district should be, how it should prioritize spending the monies it does not save, and whether raising local taxes or passing bond measures are desirable ways to raise capital (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, & Zhang, 2002; Eliot, 1959). An individual’s opinion on value-laden issues is to a certain degree related to his or her general political ideology and party affiliation. Conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, have traditionally held different views on how districts should educate children, raise money through taxes and bonds, spend or save resources, and govern themselves (Cibulka, 1999; Eliot, 1959; Keedy & Bjork, 2002; Kimbrough, 1964; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; Shor, 1992; C H Weiss, 1995). Demographics also affect the public’s characterization of unions – heavily Democrat, liberal communities
tend to be more union-friendly (Fried, 2008) – and a union will have difficulty using interest group strategies successfully if the voters are predisposed against them.

**Organizational structure.** While the entire political system is embedded in a larger institutional environment, it also has its own internal organizational structure – the rules, regulations, norms, traditions, and cultures of a district (Malen, 2006; March & Simon, 1958; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). These rules and traditions limit some actions while permitting or encouraging others, and determine the way that resources are distributed among internal actors (Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). The result is that some actors have a comparative advantage in resources, and are more able to leverage them successfully.

For example, districts have formal rules that define what board members and superintendents can do. There may be codified ways in which unions are involved in decision-making, such as provisions in the collective bargaining agreement that require union participation on certain district committees. Districts also establish de facto norms for decision-making around activities like superintendent autonomy, consultation with union leaders, or deference to the board president. Administrators and unions may have semiformal arrangements for mediating conflict before decisions even reach the board (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). Districts also have ‘authorized’ core values and preferences that are reinforced by decision-makers within the system (Kimbrough, 1964; Wirt & Kirst, 1972). These traditions are diverse – for example, some districts are historically financially conservative. They keep large amounts of money in reserve, and when they do spend money it is carefully invested in physical assets. Others are less conservative,
preferring to maintain minimal reserves while spending more on programs and salaries. District decision-makers maintain these traditions because it is simply the way things are done. To be successful, power strategies must fit with these existing traditions.

**Community structure.** Community structure refers to the existing relationship between the political system and the public. Because board members are elected by the public, superintendents are chosen by the board, and interest groups are strong only when they have the backing of the community, the distribution of resources is linked to the existing community structure. Like organizational structure, community structure also limits some power strategies while encouraging others. The more resources an actor has, and the more permissive a community is in allowing actors to leverage those resources, the more influential that actor will be. Further, depending on the influence of outside groups, administrators and board members may take on the role of protectors of their organization, fending off what they see as intrusions of external pressure campaigns (Willower, 1991).

Democratic theory presents four basic community structures: pluralist, factional, dominated, and inert. If interest groups rather than individuals hold power, the system is either pluralist or factional. *Pluralism* is a competitive model in which multiple, diverse interest groups negotiate with one another (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Dahl, 2005; Held, 2006; Kimbrough, 1964; Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1993; Wilson, 1990). The government then responds to the results of these negotiations and creates policy that reflects the common good (Bentley, 1908, 2005; Truman, 1971). In a pluralist school district, a variety of interest groups – employee unions, parent and parent/teacher
associations (PTAs), community and religious groups, business organizations, state school board associations (SBAs), and local political organizations – debate and compete amongst themselves, decide what is in the best interest of the public that they represent, and present policymakers with those demands. The distribution of power is not fixed; rather, it is constantly changing based on the interactions among groups as they choose to become more or less involved on issues that are important to them.

Pluralism assumes that power, especially in the form of access to government, is equally available to all groups should they choose to seek it (Bachrach, 1967; Barry, 1973; Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Kimber, 1981; Wilson, 1990). One alternative to pluralism is factionalism, in which power is fixed within a few dominant groups. The majority of the elected officials of the political system represent the faction with the most influence at any given time. Neocorporatism is a special type of factionalism in which some groups are fundamentally advantaged over others because they are closely associated with or invited by the legitimate political system (Dahl, 1966; Lindblom, 1977; Lipset, 1962; Salisbury, 1992; Walker, 1966). The factions with power vary from district to district. In some, employee unions are particularly influential because they have greater access to the legitimate political system than other groups do – they not only negotiate many policies directly with the district, but boards and superintendents can also invite them to consult on non-negotiated issues (and unions may even negotiate contract provisions requiring that they be consulted on such policies). In others, the PTA, business, religious, or community organizations may be dominant factions. Invitation is particularly important in the case of the PTA, because it cannot legally engage in certain
interest group activities like participating in political campaigns, while employee unions and other organized interest groups can.

Both pluralism and factionalism assume that power is distributed among interest groups; in a pluralist model, power is contested and fluid, while in a factional model it is fixed. There are two additional models which can describe a school district: dominated and inert. In a dominated system, power is held by a few powerful individuals, usually members of the economic elite. Decision-making is dominated by elite values (Kimbrough, 1964). In an inert model, power is latent and uncontested. Decisions reflect the status quo, and no radical experimentation is accepted (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

Community structure is therefore an important environmental factor for two reasons. First, external groups may successfully pressure internal actors to make decisions that protect group interests. Second, if district leaders have ties to certain factions, they are more likely to be responsive to those factions’ demands even if the pressure to respond is not overt.

Public opinion. Another important factor that affects the balance of power in a district is the public’s opinion of district leaders (Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Hess, 1999; Johnson, 1984; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971). If voters believe that the values of their leaders are aligned with their own, they will trust leaders’ decisions without conflict (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). If district leaders are concerned that their position is at risk because the public does not see them as representative of their values, the leaders are more inclined to be responsive to public demands. The public can also call for
decentralization of power to the schools if they are dissatisfied with a superintendent’s leadership (Eliot, 1959; C H Weiss, 1995).

**Personal traits.** Finally, there are attributes of the individuals involved in power interactions that make their strategies likely to affect the behavior of other actors. Some traits are influential because they are characteristics of the members of the culture that is dominant in society overall or in the social context of a defined geographical area (Bourdieu, 1991; Hallett, 2003). These traits can include gender, education, family background, political ideology, religion and values, perceived alliances with favored groups, and motivation for seeking office (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). If the dominant culture, for example, is white, male, educated, affluent, Republican, and anti-union, then the actions of an individual who has these traits are more likely to influence decision-making then the actions of an individual who does not.

An actor can also be more powerful if he has traits that the organization considers persuasive (Hallett, 2003). Organizations have unique social contexts, within which certain personal or behavioral traits are influential – for example, actors in one district may be more likely to respond to a logical argument, while actors in another may be more persuaded by an emotional appeal because over many years such responses have become standard practice. In the former district, therefore, an actor who has the personal trait of rational thinking is more likely to successfully influence decision-making than an actor who is perceived to be passionate, while in the latter district the opposite would be true.
Personal characteristics also affect others indirectly because having certain traits may make an actor seem more trustworthy, which in turn makes others more likely to be influenced by them. Honesty, intelligence, open-mindedness, and personal history are traits which increase perceived trustworthiness (Currall, 1992; Petersen & Short, 2001; Sasso, 2002). Like culturally- and organizationally-defined traits, these traits that increase trust are often tied to an actor’s personal or group identity; such traits are not easily defined but ultimately affect the behavior of other actors in power interactions (Bourdieu, 1991; Tanis & Postmes, 2005).

The Observed Balance of Power: Boards, Superintendents, and Unions

To this point, I have provided a theoretical model for school districts as political institutions; I used political systems and organizational theories to describe how a district translates external and internal demands into board policies, negotiated contracts, and administrative actions. I then integrated concepts from power theory to frame the way that actors use power resources and strategies to influence the translation process. Finally, I identified five factors that can influence the choice and success of those strategies.

In the following review, I present the empirical literature on how district actors actually use power to influence decisions as they negotiate among themselves to protect their interests and the interests of those they represent. First, I review the role of school boards and superintendents in the district decision-making process: I describe the research on the effects of environmental factors on the actions and resources of board members and superintendents, examine the literature on the strategies used by boards and superintendents to ensure a favorable balance of power for themselves, and present
findings on the success of those strategies. Next, I describe teachers’ unions and the effects that they have on district decision-making in their three traditional roles: as negotiators, as invited participants, and as interest groups.

While there is substantial research on board members, administrators, and teachers’ unions as individual entities, unfortunately, the literature on the political interactions among them is limited. The work on superintendents and boards tends to focus on the processes of interaction but does not examine how those interactions affect policy outcomes (Willower, 1991). There are no aggregate data on the decisions of local school boards, intra-board dynamics have received only minimal attention, and the literature on the board-superintendent relationship is based around themes of effective leadership and management, not policy design (Crowson, 1987; Grissom, 2010; Kirst, 1994; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). Much of the descriptive work uses single-district case studies or anecdote and is not generalizable (Morton, 1999). In contrast, most of the studies on the effects of unions on district decisions have concentrated on the outcomes of decision-making, especially those related to collective bargaining. The ways in which unions leverage their power resources during the decision-making process have only recently received attention.

In this review, I include only studies that provide significant evidence for trustworthiness. For qualitative research, trustworthiness requires that the researchers used data triangulation, reasonable sampling logic, and stringently applied requirements for generalization, especially if the authors have drawn causal conclusions. All of the qualitative studies included here meet these stringent criteria for trustworthiness (Tierney
& Clemens, 2011), as applied by both myself and other scholars who have also reviewed
the work.

The quantitative work reviewed here must also meet high standards for validity
and reliability, although the criteria for validity varied with the specific methodology of
the research. The descriptive work of Glass et al. (2000), Glass and Franceschini (2007),
Kowalski et al. (2011) and Hess and Meeks (2011) are excellent models of rigor: they
specifically address construct validity and give evidence that their samples are random
and representative of the national population of board members and superintendents. Moe
(2009) and Strunk and Grissom (2010) are standards for explanatory work, as they fully
justify their empirical models and provide support for both internal and external validity.

Both qualitative and quantitative work must speak to bias and how it was avoided.
Finally, even if empirical research provides sufficient evidence for validity and
trustworthiness, the conclusions drawn from the research might still have significant
limitations, which I address at the conclusion of the following review.

School Boards and Superintendents in Practice

In theory, the school board drives district policy. It may take community demands
and superintendent recommendations into account when making policy decisions, but it is
not bound to them. The board then delegates the implementation of policies to the
superintendent and administrators. However, the literature has shown that, in practice, the
distribution of power among boards, superintendents, and the public is highly contested
(Mountford, 2008). Historically, there has been a constant disequilibrium between lay
control and professional expertise, and the boundary between governance and
administration has been blurred for decades (Tallerico, 1989). Some board members are more responsive to the demands of their constituents, whereas others prioritize the recommendations of the superintendent. Similarly, some superintendents defer to the board’s policy mandates while others actively direct them (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985; Cistone, 2008; Greene, 1992; Lutz & Gresson, 1980; Tucker & Zeigler, 1980). Below, I discuss the research on how organizational and community structure, public opinion, personal traits, and institutional context have affected the amount of power reserved for the board or designated to the superintendent. I also review the findings on the effects of these factors on the degree of influence that external interests and internal actors have over district decision-making.

**Effects of organizational structure.** In an over-simplified division of responsibilities, board members are legislators while superintendents are executives. As the actual roles of the board and superintendent vary from district to district, the amount of influence each has over district policies and other decisions varies as well. Within an organization, political behavior is determined by what actors think is appropriate, what is expected of them, and what they are allowed to do (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Board members and administrators work within their existing spheres of influence to shape the actions of others, and each works to expand their own sphere of influence as well; in order to understand how each participates in district decision-making, therefore, it is necessary to understand the practical sphere of influence of each.

Researchers have observed that board members have multiple roles as district leaders: as democratically-elected representatives, they stand for voter demands and
protect community resources; as local subordinates to the state, they implement state and federal policy mandates; as a centralized governance system, they manage the district, address student needs, hire the superintendent, and negotiate with unions (Bjork, 2005; Briffault, 2005; Cuban, 1988; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Eliot, 1959; Howell, 2005; Kirst, 2008; Sykes, O'Day, & Ford, 2009; Wirt & Kirst, 2005; Zeigler, et al., 1974). Board members must contend with competing demands of democracy and economic efficiency (Boyd & Crowson, 1981), and mediate among multiple and often conflicting demands from students, parents, teachers, and citizens (Ehrensal & Frist, 2008; Lutz, 1975; Sykes, et al., 2009; Wirt & Kirst, 2005; Zeigler, et al., 1974). Modern boards create local policies and resolutions, implement state and federal mandates, approve and oversee budgets, negotiate with labor unions, make personnel decisions (including the hiring and firing of superintendents), contract services and suppliers, and set district goals (Hochschild, 2005).

The superintendent and administrative cabinet’s role is to implement and manage the boards’ decisions, inform members on district operations and status, write district policy based on board priorities, and handle operations such as budget and finance, human resources, facilities and maintenance, transportation, food services, special education compliance, and curricular decisions (Cuban, 1988; Kowalski, 2006; Lashway, 2002; Merz, 1986). The superintendent is also a district’s instructional leader, often its chief politician, and more recently its applied social scientist (Bjork, 2008; Bjork & Lindle, 2001; Boyd, 1974; Callahan, 1962; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; B. S. Cooper & Boyd, 1987; Cronin, 1973; Cuban, 1976; Howlett, 1993; Kowalski, 2005; Petersen &
Barnett, 2005; Spring, 1994; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The position requires maintaining relationships with the school board, district employees, and organized groups like unions, parent organizations, and community groups. Even the most successful superintendents do not have enough individual power to accomplish their goals, so these connections are crucial (Grogan & Blackmon, 2001; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; C. N. Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001).

As districts have become more complex, the boundary between the work of the board and the superintendent has blurred (Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Land, 2002). The shifting boundaries have altered the sphere of influence of administrators and board members, expanding it in some cases and contracting it in others, and changed the balance of power within the district. One striking example is in policy-making. Once the exclusive purview of the school board, superintendents frequently manage a district’s policy agenda on behalf of the board members, and central office administrators rather than board members draft policy (Ehrensal & Frist, 2008; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001). Board members now report that they spend the majority of their time on administration and responding to citizens and less than ten percent of it on policy (Hochschild, 2005). In addition, the superintendent or a central office staff member, usually the assistant superintendent for human resources, often serves as the school board’s designee during contract negotiations (Sharp, 1989; Strunk & Zeehandelaar, unreleased data).

**Effects of community structure.** Community structure also affects the observed responsiveness of a board to its constituents, and the amount of power delegated to the superintendent (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Burlingame, 1988;
Communities that have historically been dominated by powerful individuals or groups have school boards that are more susceptible to community demands, but there is not much debate among board members. They also have superintendents who implement the policies designed by the board, rather than establishing policy themselves. Neocorporate or factional communities, with power concentrated within a few external interests, have factional boards where individual board members consistently respond to a particular interest and superintendents who act as political strategists. If a community is pluralist, rather than factional, power among interests is fluid. School board members are active but not rigidly bound to a particular interest, and power is equally distributed among board members. The superintendent is the professional advisor, using research and experience to make recommendations which are debated by the board. Inert communities in which power is latent or dictated by the status quo have board members that follow the lead of the superintendent and hold views that are aligned with the value of the community (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Bjork & Keedy, 2001; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971).

**Effects of public opinion.** Public opinion is another environmental factor that shapes the behavior of district actors during decision-making. If the public does not believe a school district is properly translating their values and demands into policy outputs, there is conflict between district leaders and constituents (Greene, 1992). Dissatisfaction theory posits that school board elections are more competitive when a large amount of conflict exists; voters try to oust incumbent board members and replace them with candidates with whom they share values and ideologies (Iannaccone & Lutz,
1970). By the theory of electoral accountability, when elected officials are concerned about being reelected they are more responsive to their constituents (Prewitt, 1970), especially on issues like curriculum and facilities where they have the potential to gain, or alienate, a significant number of voters (Hess, 1999). If a district has competitive elections, the demands of the public could therefore supersede the recommendations of the superintendent when a board makes decisions. Taken together, this suggests that districts with competitive elections or high frequencies of incumbent defeat are more likely to have boards that are more responsive to the public and less so to the superintendent (Adkison, 1982; Greene, 1992).

**Effects of personal traits.** Research indicates that personal traits play an important role in the interactions that determine the balance of power in a district. Board members run for a variety of reasons, ranging from the desire to improve student achievement to a commitment to American public education to an aspiration for increased professional prestige (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Mountford, 2004); those who felt civic duty to the general community behave differently than those who wanted to improve conditions for a particular constituency or fix a specific problem. Those who were recruited by community groups, unions, or sitting board members are initially less independent than those who were not (Zeigler, et al., 1974). Many board members are members of local business, parent, religious, or community organizations, or have been in the past (Zeigler, et al., 1974). Whether or not their children attend school in the district, or if they have a personal relationship with teachers or administrators also influences board member behavior (Hess & Meeks, 2011).
Similarly, because liberals and conservatives differ in how they conceive of the purpose of government, political ideology shapes whether board members believe they should take a dominant role or be receptive to the recommendations of the professionals and the demands of the public (Cibulka, 1999). Individuals also differ in the value they place on collaboration and shared decision-making (Brunner, 1998). Finally, knowledge and trustworthiness (or the appearance of being knowledgeable and trustworthy) increases an individual’s power (Petersen & Short, 2001).

**Effects of institutional context.** Research has found that variables like district size, urbanicity, homogeneity, and socioeconomic status affect how much power boards delegate to superintendents or reserve for themselves. Boards in larger or more urban districts are more responsive to the professional recommendations of the superintendent rather than the political demands of their constituents (Boyd, 1976; Greene, 1992). In smaller or more homogeneous communities, the boards more often prioritize the demands of the citizens (Boyd, 1975). The effects of socioeconomic status is unclear; districts with high socioeconomic status may have more professional boards (Zeigler, et al., 1974), or the two may be unrelated (Greene, 1992).

**The use of power strategies between boards and superintendents.** Against the background of a district’s environmental context, boards and superintendents frequently conflict over how power should be delegated (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997). The empirical literature on the board-superintendent relationship has shown that each leverages their resources to protect a variety of interests: parent, voter, employee, and interest group demands, organizational goals such as
solvency and student performance, and personal ambitions like legitimacy and job security. Power is therefore contested, both because those interests do not coincide and because board members and superintendents prioritize each interest differently. Many actors believe they should have more power over decisions like budget, personnel, and program (R. P. McAdams & Cressman, 1997; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981). Some superintendents feel that their board is overly responsive to external demands, while board members believe superintendents do not understand that, as elected representatives, the board members’ primary obligation is to the public (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Gross, 1958; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; Norton, Webb, & Sybouts, 1996).

Given these internal disputes, researchers found a significant amount of maneuvering by these actors as they use various strategies to influence decision-making. Board members render superintendents powerless by micromanaging them or giving direct orders to cabinet members, constrain their ability to make program decisions by enacting a district strategic plan that has programmatic and operational mandates, or circumvent them by responding directly to parents and community members (Glass, et al., 2000; Gross, 1958; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2012). In turn, superintendents and other administrators use the fact that they are closer to the site of policy implementation to act decisively on issues that do not require board approval (Ehrensal & Frist, 2008; Land, 2002; Tallerico, 1989).

In order to protect their sphere of influence, superintendents and administrators were found to socialize new board members (Kerr, 1964) and administrators (R. O. Carlson, 1972; Crowson, 1987; Pettigrew, 1973) to existing organizational practices so
that relative power advantages remain unchallenged. For example, if district norms dictate that administrators, not board members, drive policy, a superintendent may be motivated to inculcate the custom in new board members so that he can keep that particular positional resource. Socialization to existing norms limits risk taking and discourages individuals from displaying divergent values (May & Finch, 2009). It motivates actors to make major changes quietly, avoid moral dilemmas, appear committed to the organization, and keep disputes private (Cline & Necochea, 2000; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). The hierarchy of decision-making is reified as less powerful actors accept inequality and avoid actions that might make them vulnerable (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). Survey data shows that superintendents have ample opportunity to use this strategy: The vast majority of superintendents (90% in a nationwide survey of 1,900) provide the orientation for new school board members, nearly double the percentage that did so ten years ago (Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011).

While researchers observed conflict between boards and superintendents, empirical literature also shows that boards and superintendents can have a positive working relationship. Many have a high degree of ideological consensus (Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003). Boards generally perceive superintendents as trustworthy experts: they frequently seek and often defer to the superintendent’s professional expertise (Greene, 1992; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Newman & Brown, 1993; Petersen & Short, 2001), and nearly always pass superintendent-recommended agenda items (Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011; Petersen & Short, 2001). In turn, superintendents do not feel that their effectiveness is significantly inhibited by the board (Glass, et al., 2000) and many
are willing to encourage shared decision-making because they see more power in collaboration than in authority (Brunner, 1998).

A positive relationship, however, does not automatically mean that actors are not using power strategies. Superintendents may feel constrained by the values of a powerful board and therefore only propose policies that they know the board will pass (Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003; Petersen & Short, 2001). Along with financial management and success in achieving goals, the board-superintendent relationship is weighted very highly by school boards when they evaluate the superintendent (Hess & Meeks, 2011); superintendents may be motivated by concerns over their own job security and be particularly attentive to the demands of a powerful and popular board (Maeroff, 2010).

Conversely, the superintendent can have such a comparative advantage over knowledge and positional resources that he can decide which problems merit board attention and influence the written agenda for board meetings (Hess, 1999; Zeigler, et al., 1974). Boards very rarely have sole control over their own meeting agendas. More frequently, board members and superintendents collaborate to place items on the agenda, or the superintendent alone determines the board agenda and initiates policy (Glass, et al., 2000; Kerr, 1964; Petersen & Short, 2001). And while good leadership practices require that the superintendent respond to the demands of the board, some superintendents attend to board members as a way to placate board members they see as uninformed, politically motivated, or unqualified (Gross, 1958; Maeroff, 2010).

The superintendent’s use of micropolitical strategies to manage the board is not only acknowledged but encouraged by leadership experts (Burlingame, 1981; Crowson,
Experts justify the use of strategies by arguing that internal discord hinders a district’s ability to make effective decisions. They also contend that superintendents should strategically manage boards because when the two disagree, the board has the authority to settle the issue in its favor even if that decision is politically-motivated rather than in the interests of students (Sharp & Walter, 2004). In the extreme, boards are portrayed to superintendents as the most significant obstacle to effectively doing their job (Crowson, 1987; Gross, 1958).

In addition to teaching basic leadership skills such as communication, transparency, and conflict-resolution, journal articles and books aimed at superintendents advise them how to be politicians: how to manage boards (Sharp & Walter, 2004) and heed the existing political culture, factions, and power structures (Callan & Levinson, 2011; Negroni, 1992). Administrators are encouraged to anticipate and avoid conflict with the board if they can, keep the board informed but only with straightforward, narrow information, and suffer an occasional tactical loss so that board members feel empowered (Blumberg, 1985; Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985; Burlingame, 1981; Shannon, 1989). While books like The Board-Savvy Superintendent (Houston & Eadie, 2002) urge superintendents to treat boards as assets, not liabilities, it also advises that superintendents “pay close attention to the psychological ‘care and feeding’ of board members, focusing on meeting their ego needs, and employing strategies to build feelings of ownership and commitment” (pg. 13). Superintendents are also told be aware that boards resent attempts at manipulation, and that superintendents should be careful when using such strategies (Shannon, 1989). Gaining the trust of the board is imperative; while
much of a superintendent’s power comes from his position as gatekeeper of information (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Zeigler, et al., 1974), the board will doubt that information if they do not trust its source. And superintendents receive advice on how to keep power when it is contested. Burlingame (1981) recommends mystification and cover-ups when dealing with zealots, cynics, faddists, and old-liners, saying “I seriously doubt that honesty is the best policy for superintendents who wish to retain power” (pg. 429).

Although practitioner manuals portray boards as obstacles to the superintendent that require careful treatment, approximately 15% of superintendents nationwide reported that their board was a liability to them (Kowalski, et al., 2011) or inhibited their effectiveness (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), while 80% said they viewed school boards as an asset (Kowalski, et al., 2011). So while superintendents are encouraged to manage their boards, the superintendents themselves may not see the need to use micropolitics to completely nullify them.

The use of power strategies among board members. Conflict over the distribution of power is not limited to the board and superintendent. Research shows that board members disagree among themselves about how much authority to give the superintendent (Carol, et al., 1986; Merz, 1986), or how responsive they should be to their immediate constituents. Intra-board conflict is higher when board members feel that their colleagues are motivated by personal or special interests rather than collective ones (Danzberger, 1994; Mountford, 2004). Board members who feel beholden to a particular constituency are also more likely to micromanage the superintendent and other board members, thereby inhibiting collaboration (Mountford & Brunner, 1999). And if the
community sees board members as overly responsive to special interests, motivated by personal gain, or internally conflicted, they are less likely to be satisfied with district leadership (Maeroff, 2010; Mountford, 2008).

But just as board-superintendent conflict is not necessarily the norm, neither is intra-board conflict. Both superintendents and board members report that, in the far majority of districts, board members are aligned with one another and share common interests (Glass, et al., 2000; Strunk & Zeehandelaar, unreleased data). Board members run for a variety of reasons, not all of them personal; many serve because they feel a sense of civic duty or want to solve a particular problem (Alby, 1979; Cistone, 1975; Mountford, 2004; National School Boards Association, 1975; Zazzaro, 1971).

Again, a good relationship, this time among board members, does not necessarily mean that actors are not using power strategies to protect their interests. Many board candidates are encouraged to run by current board members to maintain a uniformity of values and priorities (Zeigler, et al., 1974), so unity is a natural consequence. Incumbents use power to encourage consensus by socializing novice members to board operating practices and established core values; this also increases the relative power of the senior members by reinforcing existing patterns of decision-making (Cistone, 1977; Kerr, 1964). The appearance of consensus can be a power strategy itself, because boards engaged in open conflict risk losing public confidence (Danzberger, 1994; Hess, 1999). As a result, boards may try to reach consensus quickly and publicly so that the superintendent, other district employees, and the community place more trust in the board’s decisions (Firestone, 2009) and believe in their competence as leaders (Hess,
This helps the district maintain its legitimacy, especially in the face of negative public opinion: “Open conflict is simply not considered legitimate in the dominant community” (McCarty & Ramsey, 1971, pg. 45).

**The success of power strategies.** While the literature is clear that boards and superintendents do use power strategies, the findings on whether and how such strategies actually affect the balance of power are inconclusive. Although most of the work is descriptive, three empirical pieces used democratic and organizational theory to analyze the board-superintendent relationship. Kerr (1964) used year-long case studies of two large districts, while McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and Zeigler et al. (1974) relied on interviews in 51 and 83 districts, respectively. Bjork (Bjork, 2001a; Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Keedy & Bjork, 2002) combined the work and theoretical model of McCarty and Ramsey (1971) with a descriptive study of the superintendency by Glass et al. (2000) to further understand the board-superintendent relationship. That study surveyed nearly 2,300 superintendents nationwide. A decade later, Kowalski et al. (2011) surveyed 1,900 superintendents as a follow-up to the Glass et al. (2000) work.

Both Kerr (1964) and Zeigler et al. (1974) found that district decision-making is dominated by the superintendent. The superintendent is the source of professional expertise, the gatekeeper of information, and often the instigator and author of board policies. For decisions that require board approval, the school board approves, and therefore legitimizes, the recommendations of the superintendent without much debate. While the board has the formal decision-making authority, they often find it difficult to use this resource because they are multimember bodies that contend with both internal
and external politics (Zeigler, et al., 1974). McCarty and Ramsey (1971) also saw that many boards defer to the professional expertise of the superintendent, but that the superintendent’s discretion is constrained by certain community structures.

The superintendent surveys conducted by McCarty and Ramsey (1971) and Glass et al. (2000) show that both superintendents and the community are powerful, especially in relation to the board. When asked about their own role, virtually all of the superintendents reported that they are either decision-makers who initiate actions that the board easily approves, or professional advisors who balance the needs of multiple stakeholders and give the board policy alternatives based their expert opinion. This finding was confirmed by a follow-up survey of 1,900 superintendents a decade later (Kowalski, et al., 2011). Additionally, two-thirds of the 2,300 superintendents reported their boards are status-congruent, meaning that they respond to and debate the demands of a pluralist community (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Keedy & Bjork, 2002). Together, the findings from these studies seem to indicate that the distribution of power in school districts favors superintendents and community organizations, and boards find themselves responding to the demands of both.

The general conclusion that the distribution of power favors superintendents is supported by three additional statistics reported by Glass et al. (2000). First, more than half of the responding superintendents said that either they or the central office staff had the lead responsibility for developing policy, while the board assumed that role only eight percent of the time. Approximately a third of the superintendents reported that power was shared. Second, more than half said that the board’s primary expectation of the
superintendent was to be an educational or political leader, while only 36% reported the board expected them to fill their traditional role as the district’s managerial leader. Third, superintendents take advantage of their role as mediator and communicator between the community, the board, and the district staff. Stakeholders trust them to gather and distribute information; in this role, a superintendent manages, and therefore influences, the decision-making process (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981). Nine out of ten superintendents in both 2000 and 2011 responded that they give boards recommendations on most, if not all, issues, and that boards take their recommendations at least 90% of the time (Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011).

While these results suggest that the superintendent may be comparatively more powerful than the board, this does not necessarily imply that he is the most powerful actor in the district. Superintendents only act within the small zone allowed to them by the public (Boyd, 1975; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981), the state and federal government (Glass, et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Keedy & Bjork, 2002; Kowalski, et al., 2011), union collective bargaining agreements (Glass, et al., 2000), and the constraints of site-based management (Keedy & Bjork, 2002). Superintendents reported that they frequently or always actively seek parent and community input on a variety of district decisions (Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011). Their power is further limited because it is often tenuous: a placid, superintendent-managed district can easily become conflicted when an issue arises that runs against a strongly-held community value (Boyd, 1975; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978) or if it involves the allocation of scarce, contested resources (Boyd, 1982). Because of these constraints, superintendents can be both “captive and
commander” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982), more powerful than the board but subservient to factors beyond administrative control.

**Teachers’ Unions in Practice**

Along with boards and superintendents, local teachers’ unions have a significant effect on the outcomes of district decision-making. Their participation is required during negotiations and on committees as stipulated by the collective bargaining agreement. They can be formally invited to district meetings, or informally consulted by board members and administrators. And as external interest groups, they use their well-defined membership, regular funding from dues, and a permanent administrative staff (Hrebenar, 1997; Moe, 2005) to engage in policymaking, electoral, and issue/image politics. Teachers’ unions can leverage these resources to not only lobby for policies but to also help elect their own management, effectively influencing the agenda of those sitting across the bargaining table (Freeman, 1986; Moe, 2006b).

Researchers have focused on the processes of interaction between boards and superintendents, not the outcomes of decision-making. In contract, the literature on unions has examined one process and one outcome – electoral politics and collective bargaining agreements. Micropolitical strategies, and other macropolitical actions (policymaking and image politics), have not yet been studied. Negotiated provisions and overall contract strength have received attention, but unions’ influence on board policies and administrator actions is unknown. In this section I first review the limited literature on how unions use power strategies to influence district decision-making. Then, I summarize the research on union effects on negotiated outcomes.
Teachers’ unions and decision-making processes. Teachers’ unions can use both micro- and macropolitical strategies to influence decision-making outcomes. When union members are internal participants to decision-making, either because their participation is required or they are invited, they are micropolitical actors. Unions are also macropolitical interest groups. They lobby directly for favorable board policies and administrator actions (or protest after the fact), they engage in electoral politics, and they can mount image campaigns to sway public opinion.

Researchers have not yet explored unions as micropolitical actors. The literature that examines unions and negotiations studies the outcomes of negotiations, but does not delve into the bargaining strategies negotiators actually use to gain more or less union-favorable contract provisions.\(^\text{12}\) Even less attention has been paid to either the processes or the outcomes of unions as invited consultants to non-negotiated board policies and administrator actions. Consultation usually takes the form of joint district-union committees. These committees can be a valuable way for unions to affect the distribution of power in a district, since union presidents report that the normal role of unions-as-negotiators alone creates a major power asymmetry in favor of superintendents (Currall, 1992). While there is evidence to support that many contracts have provisions for teacher participation in committees (Eberts, 1983; Finch & Nagel, 1984; McDonnell & Pascal, 1979; Perry, 1979), the few case studies that examine the effects of committee participation focus on how district-union interaction facilitates trust, not how unions may

\(^{12}\) I review the outcomes of negotiation in the following section.
use committees to influence district decisions (Grimshaw, 1979; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Klaus, 1968).

Unions’ use of macropolitical processes has received slightly more attention. The small body of empirical work on unions as local interest groups focuses on electoral politics. It seems to indicate that unions do affect school board elections, but that other contextual variables such as district size and plurality may have confounding effects. It is also unclear whether boards and superintendents are receptive to these strategies (Hess & Leal, 2005). Although the prevailing assumption is that unions are powerful interest groups because they provide school board candidates with resources during elections, which in turn creates boards that are favorable to union interests, empirical evidence does not yet find the link between electoral strategies and union-favorable decision-making outcomes (Moe, 2006b). Here, I review the literature on electoral, policymaking, and image strategies.

Several comprehensive nationwide surveys of board members revealed some common themes in the ways that unions engage in electoral politics (Hess, 2002; Hess & Leal, 2005; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Moe, 2005). While most board members finance their campaigns either from personal funds or with the help of family and friends, teachers’ unions contribute to campaigns more than any other external interest group, and they give significantly more in large districts. If there are local laws that limit campaign donations, then the union can form a political action committee (PAC) behalf of candidates to fund advertising, print campaign materials, and provide volunteers to walk precincts and make telephone calls (Masters & Delaney, 2005).
Teachers’ union support increases the likelihood that school board candidates – both new candidates and incumbents – will be elected (Moe, 2006b). Union support is also associated with more internal conflict among board members after they are elected (Grissom, 2010). Yet, community and demographic factors can moderate the effects of union support (Moe, 2005). School board members who reported active unions also saw high levels of electoral activity from other groups, such as parent, community and business organizations (Hess, 2002; Hess & Leal, 2005; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Moe, 2005; Rose & Sonstelie, 2010).

The only study that explored the association between electoral strategies and decision-making outcomes found that districts have contracts that restrict the flexibility of administrators (Strunk & Grissom, 2010). However, it is possible that unions are highly active because they sense competition and want to maintain favorable contracts, rather than these activities causing a contract to be favorable. Further, contextual variables such as size and urbanicity interact with union activities (Grissom, 2010).

The assumption that unions are most influential when they contribute time, money, endorsements, and volunteers to a candidate also fails to acknowledge two other electoral power strategies: recruiting candidates and mobilizing members to vote in elections (Moe, 2006b).13

First, while unions and other community interests certainly recruit candidates (Hess & Meeks, 2011; Zeigler, et al., 1974), the impact of recruitment is unknown (Delaney, Fiorito, & Masters, 1988). Second, rallying union members and sympathizers

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13 There is significant work on the impact of organized labor at the national level in the areas of voter turnout and the success of electoral strategies; see Masters and Delaney (2005) for a recent review.
can prove especially important in school board elections, where voter turnout is traditionally low (Moe, 2006c). Unions do raise voter turnout (Clark & Masters, 2001; Sousa, 1993). Compared to nonmembers, union members and their families are more likely to vote for candidates endorsed by labor (Delaney, et al., 1988; Sousa, 1993). However, union density has declined in the last three decades (Farber, 2006). In urban areas especially, the impact of teachers-as-voters is limited because teachers may actually live in adjacent suburbs (Hess, 1999).

Unions themselves are also sites of intra-organizational politics (Booth, 1984; Jessup, 1978; Poole, 2000), which may dilute the effects of teachers-as-voters. Not all union members necessarily support the position of their association (Clark & Masters, 2001; Poole, 2000; Popiel, 2011) or agree with the values and decisions of their leadership (Black, 1983; Popiel, 2011), so mobilizing members to vote might not increase the likelihood that a union-endorsed candidate is elected (Zullo, 2002). The ideological disconnect between union leaders and rank-and-file members is particularly pronounced in the teachers’ unions of large districts, where the local association president is often more liberal than the members (Antonucci, 2010). In conservative communities, union endorsement may actually decrease the likelihood that a candidate is elected: unions tend to endorse liberal candidates, and teachers may vote for more conservative ones. And because a conservative political ideology is most often associated with the Republican party, which is traditionally wary of organized labor, conservative voters may vote against a union-endorsed candidate (Masters & Delaney, 2005).
As interest groups, unions’ spending is not limited to electoral politics; they also dedicate resources to the direct lobbying of district leaders (Delaney, et al., 1988). While unions do lobby district leaders, other interests groups do as well; the American Association of School Administrators reported that more than 90% of the superintendents in large urban districts said a plurality of interest groups and individuals exert political pressure on boards through direct lobbying (Glass, et al., 2000). Unions also face competition from internal actors. High percentages of superintendents nationwide said that they are influenced by the school board (97%), other administrators (93%), teachers independent of their union (84%), and parents (81%); only 46% of superintendents said they are influenced by employee unions, 23% said they are influenced by business elites, 32% by community special interest groups, and 32% by the media. The influence of these groups on the board is similar: superintendents reported that their boards are most influenced by the superintendent (98%), parents (85%), administrators (81%), and teachers (70%), with fewer percentages saying their boards are influenced by unions (37%), business elites (24%), interest groups (36%), and the media (32%) (Kowalski, et al., 2011).

As in electoral politics, the link between lobbying activities and decision-making outcomes is indeterminate. To protect their professional reputation, some superintendents ignore interest group demands and push for reforms that the public will perceive as apolitical (Bjork & Lindle, 2001). Research has also suggested that the responsiveness of district leaders to political pressure is varies with the status of the pressuring group. Superintendents are more likely to choose reforms they believe will garner positive
political feedback from people with power in order to appeal to voters and increase their community prestige (Bjork, 2001b; Hess, 1999; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971; V. Riley, Conley, & Glassman, 2002). If a union is not popular with the larger community, therefore, district leaders will not respond to union lobbying or prioritize community demands over demands from its employees. This is the case in many districts: Eighty percent of superintendents nationwide reported that community involvement is an asset to schools, but only 14% said the same of employee unions (Kowalski, et al., 2011). Numerous other studies indicated that boards and superintendents are responsive to interest group pressure in general, but not necessarily to unions in particular (Anderson, 1992; Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Danzberger, 1992; Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003; Greene, 1992; Jane Hannaway, 1993; Jennings & Zeigler, 1971; Newman, Brown, & Rivers, 1983). In fact, many board members report that their colleagues are unduly influenced by community interests (Danzberger, 1994; Mountford, 2008).

**Teachers’ unions and decision-making outcomes.** Separate from the literature on the processes of union influence is a body of work on the association between unions and decision-making outcomes. Studies in the former category have explored collective bargaining agreements in particular because they can be quantified and compared among districts, whereas there is no comprehensive record of board policies and administrator actions.

As the onset of teacher unionization generated interest in whether working conditions of unionized districts were significantly different from those in non-unionized ones, the differentials in collective bargaining outcomes between unionized and
nonunionized districts were well-studied in the 1970s and 1980s, More recent work examined the unionization differential by comparing bargaining outcomes in districts with states that allow bargaining to those that do not (Cowen, 2009; Lovenheim, 2009). Once the majority of districts in states that allow collective bargaining became unionized, some researchers turned to how unions of different strength affect bargaining outcomes in districts that are already unionized (Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Hoxby, 1996; Moe, 2006a, 2009; P. Riley, et al., 2002; Strunk, 2011; Strunk & Grissom, 2010; Strunk & McEachin, 2011; Strunk & Zeehandelaar, 2011; Zwerling & Thomason, 1995). Here, I differentiate the effects of unionization from the effects of union strength. I also discuss the different ways this literature defines “strong” unions.

The majority of the interaction between districts and unions takes place during negotiations (Eberts & Stone, 1984), and three negotiated policies in particular – compensation, transfer and assignment, and work rules such as schedules and class size – have great potential to affect district spending (Hess & West, 2006). Research in this area indicates that when teachers unionized they achieved favorable policy outcomes in these three areas, especially higher salaries (Baird & Landon, 1972; Baugh & Stone, 1982; Chambers, 1978; Eberts & Stone, 1984; Hoxby, 1996; Thornton, 1971). However, the effects of unionization interact with other contextual variables and the compensation differential may not be solely attributable to bargaining status alone (Cowen, 2009) or as large as previously believed (Kleiner & Petree, 1988; Koedel & Betts, 2007; Lipsky & Drotning, 1973; Lovenheim, 2009).
Recent work has also examined the unionization effect on the terms of compensation, rather than on the dollar amounts. Unionized districts are less likely than non-unionized ones to offer performance-based salaries (Ballou, 2001; Goldhaber, DeArmond, Player, & Choi, 2008). Unionized districts are also more likely to reward experience and education, and have salary schedules that offer higher returns the longer a teacher remains in the district (Babcock & Engberg, 1998; Ballou, 2000; Ballou & Podgursky, 2002; Grissom & Strunk, 2011; Hess & Loup, 2008; Strunk & Grissom, 2010; Vigdor, 2008; West & Mykerezi, 2011; Winters, 2010; Zwerling & Thomason, 1995).

By studying the unionization differential, researchers asked how contract provisions are different in districts that have unions as compared to those that do not. Other researchers are now probing a different, more nuanced question: in districts that have unions, what is the relationship between union strength bargaining outcomes? Like the findings from research on unionization, the conclusions from studies on the impact of union strength are mixed. Some studies concluded that strong unions have contracts that favor spending on teachers; other studies disagree. However, the way that the researcher defined “strength” may substantially influence the findings (Moe, 2009). Scholars that use the percentage of teachers belonging to the union as a proxy for strength found that districts with strong unions pay their teachers more (e.g. Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Hoxby, 1996; Rose & Sonstelie, 2010; Zwerling & Thomason, 1995). Yet Strunk (2011) defined union strength more rigorously, instead using a measure of restrictiveness of a district’s contract, and found that districts with strong unions have higher spending
overall but that the increase is due in part to greater expenditures on administrator salaries and instructional services, not teacher salaries. This challenges conventional wisdom that a strong teachers’ union can control a district’s financial resources, and prompts further questions into whether and how union “strength” affects the outcomes of negotiations.

Work that examines if transfer and assignment rules favor union interests raises similar uncertainties about the impact of teachers’ unions on bargaining outcomes. Much of the existing research is descriptive, finding that although staffing rules often favor seniority, they also grant significant administrator discretion over transfers and reassignments (Ballou, 2000; Cohen-Vogel & Osborne-Lampkin, 2007; Hess & Kelly, 2006; Koski & Horng, 2007; P. Riley, et al., 2002). While both board members and principals reported that existing bargaining agreements are a barrier to removing ineffective teachers and prevent them from assigning teachers as needed (Hess & Meeks, 2011; Levin, Mulhern, & Schunk, 2005), recent work suggested union strength and district demographics affect how much the contract restricts administrator actions (Moe, 2009; P. Riley, et al., 2002; Strunk, 2012). State laws rather than union strength also play a significant role in determining the content of contracts (McDonnell & Pascal, 1979).

Studies on class size and other working conditions are inconclusive as well. Unionization led to smaller class sizes (Eberts & Stone, 1984; Hoxby, 1996; Kleiner & Petree, 1988; Perry, 1979), a reduction in non-teaching duties (Johnson, 1984), more paid preparation time (Eberts & Stone, 1984), and greater teacher control over the school calendar (McDonnell & Pascal, 1979; Perry & Wildman, 1970). However, the relationship between union strength and working conditions is unclear. It may again be
that demographics interact with union strength when determining how strength is related to bargained provisions for teacher working conditions (Moe, 2009; Strunk, 2012).

While these studies look at the outcomes of bargaining, other researchers have asked how those outcomes actually affect district practices. Only six percent of 1,400 superintendents nationwide reported that their district’s collective bargaining agreement inhibited their effectiveness (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), down from 13% who agreed just a few years earlier (Glass, et al., 2000). Superintendents and administrators have also found ways to work around union contracts by pursuing actions that are not strictly prohibited, developing strong working relationships with union leaders so that they may mutually work around contract language, and negotiating for clauses that give them discretion to make decisions that are in the “best interests” of schools and students (Hess, 2010; Koski & Horng, 2007). This suggests that a district with a strong contract does not necessarily have a union that is comparatively more powerful than its administrators, but as yet there is no empirical evidence to support this hypothesis.

**Remaining Questions**

Conventional wisdom presumes that unions are strong because they have substantial material and social resources which they use in a number of highly visible ways, enabling them to influence school board elections, negotiate favorable contracts, and exert pressure on administrators. But findings from the empirical literature have challenged this basic assumption. The effects of union strength on negotiated outcomes are mixed. District leaders may actually be more responsive to internal influence than external actions, or put community and parent demands over those of employee unions.
There are several possible explanations for the lack of clarity and agreement among the extant literature: powerful superintendents might balance the influence of a strong union, board members may appease union interests whether the union is strong or not, or strong unions are using other, less visible strategies besides electoral politics and lobbying. Strong unions may not even be active at all: resource-rich unions could choose not to use power strategies because they are already satisfied or because they fear repercussions from the central office or community. It is also possible that contextual variables confound, or even override, the strategies of even the strongest union, or that unions in large urban districts are only perceived as strong because they are more visible, but do not actually have significantly commanding power resources. However, these are only hypotheses.

The research does agree that the relationships among boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions are complicated, and that each uses a variety of power resources and strategies to ensure that decisions protect their interests. Board members have substantial material and positional resources and the legitimate authority to use them; superintendents capitalize on trustworthiness and information to expand their power relative to the board; unions use both micropolitical and interest group strategies to leverage their material, social, and informational resources. But what, exactly, a “strong” union does, and how the institutional context, community and organizational structure, public opinion, and personal traits of leaders affect the balance of power in a district, is still unresolved.
Thus far, researchers have utilized three tactics to study how unions affect decision-making. First, they used econometric methods to examine the processes of electoral politics (Hess & Leal, 2005; Moe, 2005, 2006b; Strunk & Grissom, 2010) and the outcomes of negotiations (Berkman & Plutzer, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2006; Moe, 2009; P. Riley, et al., 2002; Strunk, 2011, 2012; Strunk & Grissom, 2010). But these studies cannot link the process to the outcome. Candidates endorsed by the union may win their elections more frequently (Moe, 2005, 2006b), but endorsements may not ultimately lead to a union-friendly contract (Strunk & Grissom, 2010), and board members tend to be less sympathetic toward union interests the longer they stay in office (Moe, 2005). Districts in which board members report that the teachers’ union is strong are more likely to have contracts that restrict administrator actions (Strunk & Grissom, 2010), but may not pay their teachers more (Strunk, 2011, 2012) or consistently offer other “union-friendly” contract provisions (Strunk & Zeehandelaar, 2011).

The second method researchers have used to examine union effects on decision-making are large-scale surveys of boards and superintendents (Glass, et al., 2000; Hess, 2002; Hess & Meeks, 2011; Kowalski, et al., 2011). While these surveys take a broad descriptive approach and examine multiple uses of power, they also do not connect board, superintendent, and union resources and strategies with decision-making outcomes. The question of whether and how specific union power strategies are successful in affecting board policies, administrator actions, and contracts cannot be addressed by these descriptive studies. The effects of environmental context also cannot be explained using the survey method.
The econometric work on unions tends to look at one power resource at a time and provides evidence for associations, but not necessary causal inferences. The literature on boards and superintendents remains largely disconnected from the work on unions. Some researchers have therefore used a third method to study district-union interactions: case studies that examine power resources, strategies, and outcomes among all district actors. These works take an integrated approach to studying the educational reform process, and the union’s role in that process, in a single district or state (e.g. Boyd, et al., 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Fuller, Mitchell, & Hartmann, 2000; Johnson, 1984; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, & Clayton, 2008; D. R. McAdams, 2000; O'Day, Bitter, & Gomez, 2011; Reville & Coggins, 2007; Shipps, 2006; C. N. Stone, 1998; C. N. Stone, et al., 2001). While informative, these case studies tend to be descriptive rather than analytic, look at the implementation of a single district reform rather than the outcomes of decision-making, and are not meant to be generalized across districts or to expand an existing political theory.

Given the extant literature, there is room for work that combines the holistic methods of the case study with the theory-driven approach of quantitative research in order to better explain how boards, superintendents, and unions influence decision-making outcomes. We know that each has resources, but we aren’t sure which ones. We know that each leverages those resources in an attempt to affect board policies, administrator actions, and union contracts, but we don’t have a complete picture of which strategies each uses, whether or not those strategies work, and why. We know that district
leaders and unions are strong – each has said as much of the other – but we do not know what “strong” actually means. We do not know how contextual variables confound, or even override, the strategies of even the strongest actor. This dissertation starts to address those gaps.
CHAPTER 3
Research Design and Methods

As I argued at the end of Chapter 2, the interactions among board members, superintendents and administrators, and union leaders are complicated and contextually-bound. Existing research is descriptive but not explanatory, explanatory but not generalizable, or inferential without claiming causality. A holistic, theory-driven case study addresses some of the gaps in understanding the processes and outcomes of district decision-making.

In this chapter, I first introduce my research questions. Second, I address research design: I describe a case study and argue that it is the best approach to examine questions that are inseparable from their context and where participants’ interpretations of events are important. I explain the purpose (description and explanation), motivation (to learn more about general phenomena rather than a specific case), and design (comparative multisite) of my study. I also briefly outline how others have used case studies to build theory about politics in school districts. Next, I detail my research methods, including sample selection and procedures for data collection and analysis, and I address criteria for rigor: validity, reliability, and objectivity/confirmability. Finally, I introduce my sample districts.

Research Questions

The review of the empirical literature reveals questions and contradictions in the ways in which school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions use power. The understanding of what defines a “powerful” board, superintendent, or teachers’ union, what resources they have, how they leverage those resources, and why they are
successful, is limited. Where possible, that understanding is based on a small number of limited-scope empirical studies, but so far the findings are inconclusive. Assumption and anecdote have been used to fill in many of the remaining blanks. The overall message is that researchers, district leaders, and the public are not defining “powerful” in the same way.

This dissertation addresses some of the open questions around how boards, superintendents, and unions influence the outcomes of decision-making to protect their interests. Specifically, I ask:

1. What power resources are available to school board members, superintendents and district administrators, and teachers’ union leaders?
2. When actors use power strategies to leverage their resources, what types of strategies do they use, where are those strategies located, what is the goal of each strategy, and which dimensions of power do those strategies represent?
3. How do environmental factors affect the resources to which actors have access, the strategies that actors choose, and whether or not actors successfully leverage their resources so that outcomes of decision-making reflect their interests?

To answer these questions, I used an instrumental, comparative case study.

**Research Design**

In response to funding cuts, McKinley Unified School District, along with countless other government organizations nationwide, negotiated furlough days into their employee union contracts. During negotiations, the teachers’ union encouraged their members to attend a school board meeting en masse. Union leaders wanted to
demonstrate that their membership was solidly in favor of the union’s position, and to put a human face in front of the board and superintendent. The union president told me there were 140 teachers there, the superintendent said 100, and two assistant superintendents said there were around 50. An article in the *McKinley Press* reported there were 110. I counted 130. In my field notes, I wrote that turnout was impressive and that, for the first time, board members acknowledged that the furlough dispute wasn’t just about the district’s bottom line. Two union leaders said they were very pleased with their demonstration of strength and solidarity, especially because they gave the teachers only a few days’ notice. A school board member told me that the action was all for show. And the superintendent and deputy superintendent reported that they saw it as counterproductive, a militant but ineffective minority blindly following the directives of union leaders while the majority of the rank-and-file teachers actually supported the district.

Power and influence are inherently subjective, and this situation was one of many when actors did not agree with one another. It was also one of many in which my direct observations did not align with what was reported to me in interviews. Researchers use case studies to resolve the challenge of understanding subjective processes and attempting to measure difficult-to-quantify variables by conducting observations in their natural setting, preserving the holistic and contextual characteristics of events, focusing on participants’ perspectives and constructions of events during interviews, using multiple data sources for triangulation, and analyzing data recursively and inductively (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Strauss & Corbin,
The case study design acknowledges that a particular event like the collective action of teachers’ unions at a school board meeting can inspire varied perspectives and interpretations and lead to ambiguities in understanding concepts like power. The case study also offers a way to resolve those ambiguities, by using a social anthropology approach: look for patterns using observations in context; combine observations, interviews and other data sources; use theory as a guide for data collection and analysis; and validate conclusions with participants. Through this process, the researcher seeks patterns in the way people use language, in the rituals of interaction, or in relationships (Van Maanen, 1979). These are the “inferential keys” to the case under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Unique events can give valuable data, even if they only happen once (Stake, 1995). The case study captures both regularities and singular events, in context, and from multiple perspectives.

To answer my research questions, therefore, I used a case study with three key considerations: purpose, motivation, and design. The purpose was both descriptive and explanatory, the motivation was instrumental, and the design was multisite and comparative. In the following section I explain each of these choices, then briefly review how others have used similar case studies to explore school district governance.

Purpose, Motivation, and Design

My purpose in this work was to both describe and explain the use of power resources and strategies within a school district. My first two research questions are descriptive; I ask what types of power resources school board members, superintendents, and union leaders have, and what strategies they use to leverage those resources. My final
question is exploratory: I explore how environmental factors affect actors’ access to resources, choice of strategy, and success in influencing decisions. Both portions used theoretical models and propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Stenhouse, 1978; Trochim, 1989; Yin, 2008). The reference model was presented in Chapter 2 as Figure 2.1: the legitimate political system, consisting of the superintendent and administrators, the school board members, and in certain circumstances the teachers’ union, translates the demands and supports of external actors into policy outcomes. The guiding proposition supposes that school board members, superintendents, and teachers’ union leaders act politically as well as rationally.

Because my motivation is to describe and explain political decision-making in school districts in general, I used an instrumental case study approach. An instrumental case study begins with questions that could apply to any case (in this instance, school districts) and then gathers evidence from particular cases to answer those questions (Creswell, 2007; Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Stake, 1995). Unlike an intrinsic case study, where the particular case itself is of primary interest, an instrumental case study establishes new, or modifies existing, general rules that pertain to similar activities observed in similar situations.

Finally, I designed a comparative, or collective, rather than a single site, study. I asked the same research questions and used similar data collection and analysis procedures in two different districts (George & Bennett, 2004; Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The systematic application of rigorously designed procedures across multiple cases generates more supporting evidence for inferences than
does a single case, without sacrificing a high level of contextual detail (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995). In a multisite instrumental case study, the research questions become the focus of inquiry rather than the specific case itself – the researcher asks the same questions in different contexts and makes comparisons among the results (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The research design of this work is comparative because it draws explicit comparisons within and between the two cases. However, it is important to note that while my theoretical framework spans three research traditions – comparative politics, political psychology, and organizational behavior/politics – my research method does not match the methodology of comparative case study as defined by these fields.14 In political science, “comparative case study” refers to a specific research method, not a general multi-case research design (Yin, 2009). Comparative studies in political science are a small-sample alternative to experimental studies, intended to establish empirical relationships among a few well-defined variables while keeping all other variables constant between cases (Gerring & McDermott, 2007; Lijphart, 1971). The goal of comparative politics is to identify and explain the differences and similarities in the outcomes of political systems by systematically comparing different governance structures (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999; Mair, 1996; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Researchers using this type of study focus on the outcomes of different political systems, most often nations, and use statistical analyses to make causal inferences about how differences in governance structure might account for observed variation in outcomes

14 I discuss my methodology in much greater detail later in this chapter.
(Dion, 2003; Mair, 1996; Rogowski, 1993). Scholars then apply the findings from the cases to predict the outcomes of other systems (Stenhouse, 1978). Political science comparative case studies are most often intrinsic, asking about specific nations or political systems (Ragin, 1987) rather than general phenomena such as political behavior.

The use of case study design in political psychology and organizational behavior is rare (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999; Lee, 1999). Research in political psychology tends to use experimental or other quantitative methods to study political identity, voting behavior, terrorism, leadership qualities, and patriotism, or uses a single individual as a case (see, for example, Bekkers, 2005; Brewer, 2001; Caprara et al., 2006; McGraw, 2000; Post, 1991). Likewise, researchers in organizational behavior and politics generally employ quantitative methods to study worker and firm productivity, organizational culture, management practices, job satisfaction, and human resources (Conner, 2006; Ferris, 1999; Hodgkinson, Herriot, & Anderson, 2001; Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Saal & Knight, 1988; Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000). The scant studies that examine politics within the public sector also employ quantitative, statistical methods (Hochwarter et al., 2006; Vigoda, 1999, 2000).

Despite the proliferance of quantitative methods in political psychology and organizational behavior, however, researchers are realizing that there are questions that are better suited to qualitative inquiry (Johns, 2006; Lee, 1999). Scholars in both fields have called for an extension of the comparative research methods frequently seen in social science to address those questions (George & Bennett, 2004; Hodgkinson, Herriot, & Anderson, 2001; Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). George and Bennett (2004) have gone as
far as to suggest a specific comparative research method – the structured, focused comparison – in which the researcher answers specific, theoretically-driven questions with standardized data-collection procedures and protocols and then develops theory through within-case analysis and controlled comparison. This method is similar to the constant comparative method used elsewhere in social science, wherein the researcher aggregates data from several cases and inductively looks for patterns within and between cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lee, 1999; Yin, 2009). However, the purpose of the structured, focused comparative method is to generate theory using a multi-site case study design; it is not to test existing theory and/or apply existing theory to new situations as I did in this study. I therefore classified my design as comparative but did not strictly use the comparative methods of political science, political psychology, or organizational behavior. Rather, I used a variety of social science comparative methods: inductive procedures of direct interpretation, categorical aggregation, and cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), and deductive methods of pattern-matching and explanation-building (Yin, 2009). I discuss these methods in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Explanatory, Instrumental Case Studies in School Districts**

Social and political scientists turned to explanatory case studies to examine local governance and urban power structures after deductive, statistical methods failed to predict the actions of political systems during World War II.\(^{15}\) Early studies sought to

\(^{15}\) In this brief review on how case studies have been used to explore school district governance and stakeholder interactions, I use the term “case study” for works intended to build, refute, or refine theory. I therefore omit purely descriptive works such as accounts of district reform efforts or district-union
observe and measure the theoretical concepts of authority, legitimacy, and power in actual communities. Beginning with the work of the Community Studies Project at the University of Oregon in 1952, the 1950s and early 1960s were marked by a number of prominent theory-generating single-case studies of cities and communities (see, for example, Belknap & Smuckler, 1956; Dahl, 1959, 2006; Haer, 1956; Meyerson & Banfield, 1955; Schulze, 1958; Schulze & Blumberg, 1957).

Researchers turned to case studies of power in public education in the mid-1960s after statistical-experimental studies did not substantially improve governance practices (Stenhouse, 1978; Wirt & Kirst, 1972). Much of their work used variations of democratic theory to explain the interactions between the public and the district. Researchers like Kimbrough (1964), Gittell (1967, 1968), Pois (1964), Rogers (1969), and Sayre and Kaufman (1960) used case studies to theorize about the interaction between school districts and external actors, including organized interests, civil rights groups, community and parent organizations, and local elites. Opfer’s (2005) more recent work extended the use of democratic theory to explain the actions of district leaders and interests as they debated over science curriculum. Researchers have also used democratic theory to relate voting behavior to school board and superintendent actions (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Lutz, 1962).

Other scholars focused not on democratic or systems theory but on organizational and participatory theories. Kerr (1964) used organizational theory to frame how community structures affect the board-superintendent relationship, and Peshkin (1978)

relationships (for example, Stone (1998) on urban education politics and Kerchner and Koppich (1993) on reform unions). However, I include the most rigorous of these works in my literature review in Chapter 2.
built theory around the community-district relationship in a rural district. Salisbury (1980) used case studies to examine parent and community participation in schools, while Tracy et al. (2003, 2007, forthcoming) developed theory on public participation and intra-board debate at school board meetings.

Researchers have also used case studies driven by organizational learning theory to explain the internal politics of a school district. These works examine the activities of the central office (Burch & Spillane, 2004; J Hannaway, 1989; Honig, 2003, 2004) and the interactions between a central office and its schools and teachers (Finnigan & O'Day, 2003; Gallucci, 2008; Honig, 2006). Finally, scholars have employed case studies extensively at the school, rather than district, level, to explore the micropolitics among principals, teachers, parents, and students; Malen and Cochran (2008) provide a comprehensive review.

While the researchers who have studied school- and district-level politics have taken a variety of theoretical approaches, the common thread among them is that they acknowledge actors behave both rationally and politically. They are driven by organizational goals and group interests and make decisions based on the evaluation of consequences and persuasion by others (Estler, 1988). Like these researchers, I also acknowledge that school district and union leaders are simultaneously rational members of bureaucratic organizations and participants in political institutions, constrained by a district’s history and context, and planned my research methods to capture this complexity.
Research Methodology: Sample Selection, Data Collection, and Sources

There are a number of practical considerations to a multisite case study. Here, I will address the selection of cases and the recruitment of participants, the methods of data collection, and the data analysis process.

Selecting Cases and Recruiting Participants

Although the purpose of an instrumental case study is to answer questions about phenomena that occur in a variety of districts, the theory that is built from these case studies is not intended to describe or explain every use of power resources and strategies by every school board, superintendent, and teachers’ union in every district. Such a task would require knowledge and measurement of every variable that might affect how these stakeholders interact. Rather, the purpose of an instrumental case study is to build robust hypotheses that describe or explain the use of power resources and strategies in the case study districts and districts that are similar to them (Yin, 2008). The researcher is tasked with defining the universe of cases to which the hypotheses can be applied (Robinson, 1951).

Therefore, when selecting school districts for this study, it was neither appropriate nor possible to use random sampling. Since my results can’t be generalized to the entire population of school districts, it made no sense to choose cases that represented the whole population. And, given the diversity of districts and large number of variables that might contribute to variations in political decision-making, choosing a representative sample simply wasn’t possible (Platt, 1992; Yin, 2008). Rather, I chose cases using theoretical
sampling: districts became cases because they were theoretically useful (Eisenhardt, 1989; George & Bennett, 2004; Platt, 1992).

**Sample districts: McKinley and Rainer Unified.** Theoretical sampling logic dictated that, to select case studies that would yield the best data, I needed to identify the characteristics predicted by theory or determined by research that would be good indicators that board members, superintendents, and teachers unions are likely to act politically (Yin, 2008). I also looked for variables that predicted districts would have a variety of potential power resources and strategies available to those actors. As such, I sought:

*Districts with large numbers of students (10,000-20,000+) and teachers*

- Teachers’ unions play a potentially large role in local politics because they have resources to leverage; these resources grow as the number of union members increases. Unions in larger districts have more money to spend on elections, more members to help with campaigns, and more potential voters to mobilize (Hess & Leal, 2005; Masters & Delaney, 2005).

- While teachers’ unions are active during elections in large districts, so are other unions, community organizations, business groups, ethnic groups, religious organizations, and parent groups (Hess, 1999; Hess & Leal, 2005; Kowalski, et al., 2011), and board members in districts with diverse, competing interests are more likely to act politically (Greene, 1992; Prewitt, 1970; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2012). Elections in larger districts are more competitive than elections in smaller ones (Hess & Leal, 2005),
• School boards, unions, parents, community interest groups, business elites, and
the media are more likely to engage in overt political action, and successfully
influence the superintendent, in large districts than in smaller ones (Kowalski, et
al., 2011).

• Board members in large districts more often represent distinct factions than do
board members in smaller districts (Glass, et al., 2000).

• Not only are communities more politically active in large districts, but
superintendents are also more likely to actively seek community participation than
in smaller districts (Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2011).

• The lead responsibility for making policy decisions is shared among board
members, the superintendent, and central office staff more frequently in large
districts than small ones (Glass, et al., 2000). This shared responsibility can lead
to confusion over role definition, which in turn creates political conflict (U.S.
Chamber of Commerce, 2012).

• Community pressure, internal board conflict, and disputes over board-
superintendent role definition are more likely to occur in large districts than in
smaller ones (Glass, et al., 2000; Grissom, 2010).

• Voters in large districts are more likely to form their opinions about district
leaders based on the media, public relations cues, or the ideology of a larger group
with which they identify, whereas voters in smaller districts can rely on firsthand
knowledge of the system (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Hess, 1999).
**Urban districts**

- Urban areas have a high degree of active interests (Hess & Leal, 2005) and boards do not reach consensus as easily as they do in suburban or rural districts (Zeigler, et al., 1974).

- Urban districts have more competitive elections than do rural or suburban districts (Hess & Leal, 2005).

- Urban districts tend to have more heterogeneous populations; in turn, the voters have diverse values with differing expectations about education (Danzberger, 1992, 1994).

- Urban districts are faced with a number of challenging issues, such as increasing diversity and declining socioeconomic status (Hess, 1999; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008), which creates more conflict among district leaders (Grissom, 2010) and between district leaders and the community (Danzberger, 1992, 1994).

- Superintendent (Buchanan, 2006) and board member (Danzberger, 1992; Hess, 1999) turnover is higher in urban districts than anywhere else, which can increase political activity as leaders seek to keep their positions. Board members in urban districts are also more likely to run for higher office (Hess, 1999).

- Collective bargaining agreements tend to favor teachers’ unions in urban districts; this could serve as a proxy for union strength (P. Riley, et al., 2002).

**Districts with at-large elections**

- Board members who are elected, rather than appointed, tend to be more politically motivated (Maeroff, 2010).
• At-large elections are more competitive than elections in districts where board members are selected by ward (Hess & Leal, 2005).

*Districts in the same county and state, which are affiliated with state organizations*

• When they create their budgets, districts use recommendations from their county office of education, which in turn bases its funding projections on state-level analyses (California Assembly Bill 1200, 1991; personal communications with McKinley and Rainier CFOs).

• Laws, policies, and initiatives at the state level have a large effect on local decision-making (Bjork, 2005); examples include labor laws, education budgets, and reserve requirements.

• Local unions and school boards can have affiliations with larger organizations, which in turn provide them with additional material, knowledge, and social resources (Antonucci, 2010).

Given the criteria of large urban districts in the same state with at-large elections and affiliations to larger organizations, I compiled a list of 15 districts that were relatively close to one another. I read news articles and watched archived school board meetings, and eliminated the districts I felt would not contribute substantive data.

Before I made a final selection, I had to decide how many cases to include. A key strength of the case study is it allows for multiple data sources and data collection techniques. This is especially important in an explanatory case study, since robust conclusions require internal validity.\(^\text{16}\) One way to increase validity is through data

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\(^{16}\) I address validity and other trustworthiness considerations later in this chapter.
triangulation, which necessitates multiple accounts of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1984). Decision-making involves a large number of actors in a diverse range of situations. Given time and resource constraints – I conducted all of the interviews and observations myself, and I needed a significant amount of time to build enough trust to be allowed access to internal meetings and observe enough so that I could ask meaningful questions during interviews – I decided that I would not be able to gather data with sufficient depth in more than two districts at the same time. While I could have included more districts and focused on each one sequentially rather than concurrently, I realized that this would pose a threat to validity: I could not aggregate data from districts if I was observing each under different conditions, and important external factors, especially state budget projections and funding allocations, change every few months.\(^\text{17}\)

Based on these criteria, I selected McKinley and Rainier Unified School Districts.\(^\text{18}\) Each district has more than 25,000 students and 1,200 teachers, is located in the same large metropolitan area, and has at-large elections. I describe each district and its decision-making processes in depth in Chapter 4, and explore the demographic factors that affect decision-making strategies and outcomes in Chapter 5.

**Study participants and access.** After I selected McKinley and Rainier as the instrumental cases and attended a number of their public school board meetings, I

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\(^{17}\) I had initially proposed to include three districts as cases and conducted 35 hours of observations in a third district. However, I realized this was compromising the quality of data I was collecting from the other two districts. Of the original three, I dropped the district which had the fewest opportunities for direct observations, because they did not grant me full permission to attend internal meetings and because many joint meetings occurred infrequently and not within the window of data collection.

\(^{18}\) Districts will be referred to by these pseudonyms from this point forward.
outlined my project to the school board president, the superintendent, and the president of the teachers’ union in each district. I formally requested their participation, and asked if I could contact other members of the school board and district and union staff for interviews. The two recruitment letters, one asking leaders for general permission to observe in the district and the second asking each board member, administrator, and union leader for an interview, are included in Appendix A. I gave most participants the letters in person, although some were delivered via email. During interviews, I asked each respondent about district and union meetings, and requested permission to observe those as well.

**A note on anonymity.** I assured all participants that all discussions would be kept confidential, that I would use a pseudonym for each district (and that I would obscure identifying details), and that I would refer to individuals by their job titles only. However, because of the sensitive and potentially damaging nature of some of the information I learned during interviews, I took additional steps to maintain the anonymity of both the districts and the informants. In this dissertation, I refer to all board members and administrators as male and union leaders as female. I assigned these genders because the majority of the union leaders were female, and most administrators were male. One board was majority male, and the other female, but overall there were more male than female members and I therefore assigned the male pronoun to school board members. I feel confident in concealing informants’ gender because I did not observe, nor did they report, that gender was an important determinant of actor behavior.
To further protect informants’ identities, if it is not salient then I do not attribute quotes to a specific person – for example, sometimes quotes from the superintendent are simply credited to “an administrator” or statements from the union president to “a union leader” if their position is not germane to the point they are making. When an informant accused another of improper or dishonest behavior, if I did not observe the behavior myself I note the accusation as speculative only. Finally, not only did the districts receive pseudonyms but all programs and committees did as well, and identifying details and dates have been omitted or changed.

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Any qualitative study of political activity inevitably involves contested descriptions; participants and researchers will likely have divergent accounts of the same event. Triangulation – using multiple data sources – helps substantiate contested or dubious descriptions, confirm critical data, and clarify a researcher’s interpretations (Denzin, 1984; Mathison, 1988; Stake, 1995). To increase the opportunities for triangulation, I combined interviews, observations, and documents. Table 3.1 lists the data sources used in this work and the timeframe during which each was collected. Interview protocols and observation guides are included in Appendix B.
TABLE 3.1. Data sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>McKinley</th>
<th>Rainier</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td>School board meetings: 13</td>
<td>School board meetings: 11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District cabinet meetings: 2</td>
<td>District cabinet meetings: 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union meetings: 5</td>
<td>Union meetings: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District-stakeholder meetings: 1</td>
<td>District-union meetings: 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Furlough day site visits: 4</td>
<td>Standing committee meetings: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community meetings/events: 1</td>
<td>Community meetings/events: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>School board members: 4</td>
<td>School board members: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superintendent and cabinet: 6</td>
<td>Superintendent and cabinet: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union leaders: 5</td>
<td>Union leaders: 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Board meeting agendas, minutes, and video archives
- Administrator reports, budgets, and board policies
- Union meeting agendas, minutes, and other information distributed to participants
- Collective bargaining agreements
- Newspaper articles and accompanying online comments, op-eds, letters to the editor, and paid advertisements
- School board election materials

a In McKinley, the superintendent and executive leadership team met regularly with a group that consisted of representatives from all three employee unions, the PTA president, and other central office staff. In Rainier, the superintendent and executive leadership team met regularly with the president and executive director of the teacher’s union alone.
b During the time I observed in McKinley, the superintendent, Chief Financial Officer, and Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources conducted meetings at school sites. They gave information to and answered questions from the teachers about the ongoing furlough day negotiations. The teachers’ union president and other members of the teachers’ union executive board were present at some, but not all, of these meetings.
c In Rainier, I observed meetings of the Rainier Financial Oversight Committee (RFOC) and the Health and Welfare Benefits Committee; McKinley also has a standing benefits committee but they meet once per year rather than once per month, and did not convene during my observation period of that district.

d **Observations.** Observations of decision-making during school board meetings, union executive board meetings, district cabinet meetings, and a variety of other locations provided crucial data for this study. I conducted detailed observations at a number of different meetings over a period of ten months, for a total of approximately 200 hours.

The school board meetings gave extremely rich data on the interactions among superintendents, board members, and teachers’ union leaders. Occurring every two weeks, these were the only times during which the board, the superintendent, the executive leadership team, the teachers’ union leaders, and the public could
simultaneously interact. With only a few exceptions when union leaders did not attend a particular meeting, I was able to observe every major district decision-maker at the same time. The meetings were also easily accessible. By law, they are open to the public, must have posted agendas, and may be recorded. In addition, the board is prohibited from meeting in private except in regard to confidential personnel issues, pending litigation, and negotiations with labor unions.

I began attending school board meetings in April of 2011 and continued my observations through January 2012. Depending on the district and the week’s agenda, meetings ranged between two and seven hours each. During these meetings, I recorded a variety of data. I noted what was being said and by whom, audio-recording some and otherwise taking notes as close to verbatim as possible. This “operational data” (Van Maanen, 1979) consisted of a running description of the reports, discussions, and debates. I also documented non-verbal actions or “presentational data” (Van Maanen, 1979); for example, I noted if a board member left the room during a report, if the superintendent rolled his eyes or checked his phone, if administrators were paying rapt attention or taking notes as board members spoke, or if two people held a side conversation.

Observing the ways in which people talked and acted in their natural setting served several important purposes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). First, I could see decision-making processes as they occurred, rather than relying solely on the recollections of the participants. Second, I used observations to support or counter what subjects said during interviews. Finally, I recorded power strategies that the participants themselves may not have been aware of. An important caveat is that presentational data is
inherently more subjective than operational data (Van Maanen, 1979). While my notes on someone looking bored, acting defensive, or speaking sarcastically were based on observable qualities like body position or tone of voice, the interpretations of those qualities were mine.

When I began observing school board meetings, I had not yet finalized my sample selection, nor had I informed any district stakeholders that I was observing them. During this time, my research was at a preliminary stage: the literature review was in an early form and my research questions were quite general. The early observations served a number of important purposes. First, they allowed me to refine my research questions, interview protocols, and observation guides. Social processes are highly complex; while I began my observations with a loose conceptual framework, I used early board meetings to understand how my constructs of power resources and strategies might actually be studied. I was then able to develop more specific research questions and create protocols and observation guides that could answer those specific questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Second, as I observed the school board meetings I began to gather general issues and particular interactions that I would later integrate into my interview protocols. Rather than asking an informant to describe any contentious issue, I could prompt them with a specific one. Subjects tended to be more talkative when asked these specific questions because they knew unambiguously what information I was seeking (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). At the same time, the interviewees were also more open because they felt like I had sufficiently ‘done my homework’ and wasn’t simply fishing for answers.
Third, I could eliminate a potential source of response bias because initially, the meeting participants did not know that I was observing their behavior. I could compare these meetings to my observations after the participants knew I was watching them and look for changes in behavior.19

Between September 2011 and January 2012, I also observed, with permission, a number of other meetings in which district staff and teachers’ union leaders interacted. I was invited to internal meetings by both the district and the union. I attended district cabinet meetings, during which the superintendent and assistant superintendents (and occasionally other district administrators as necessary) discussed operations, budget, and school board meeting agenda items. Cabinet meetings occurred weekly or biweekly; according to both superintendents and most of the executive staff, these sessions are where the bulk of major issues are discussed and decisions are made. Each lasted between two and five hours. I was also able to observe internal meetings of the teachers’ unions in both districts. In McKinley, I was invited to union executive board meetings, strategy sessions, and the regular meeting between the union executive board members and the school site representatives. Rainier’s teachers’ union chose to limit my observations to the meeting between the union board and the site representatives. And while I was not permitted by law to observe any closed school board sessions, I asked board members about closed board meetings during our interviews.

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19 I also checked for response bias after the official end of data collection. In January 2012, I told district leaders that my observations were complete. But I actually observed one board meeting in each district after this date, again to see if participants altered their behavior when I was in the audience because they knew I was watching for board-superintendent-union interactions. In McKinley, I was able to watch the school board meeting over the Internet, and in Rainier I asked an uninvolved party to record the public meeting on my behalf. In both districts, there were no marked differences in behavior of actors before, during, and after the formal observation period.
I was also able to gather data during a number of interactions, both formal and informal, between district administrators and union leaders. In Rainier, the superintendent and executive staff meet monthly with the teachers’ union president and executive director, and in McKinley the district leaders meet with the presidents of the teachers’ union, classified union, administrators’ association, and PTA. In addition, each district has standing committee meetings, usually defined in the collective bargaining agreement, during which district administrators and union members interact and make decisions on a variety of issues such as budget, health and welfare benefits, and curriculum. I observed meetings of the Financial Oversight and the Health and Welfare Benefits committees in Rainier. My time in McKinley did not coincide with any committee meetings, but I asked multiple participants to describe what took place.

Further, in McKinley the superintendent, Chief Financial Officer, and Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources held meetings at school sites about the current furlough day negotiations. The district administrators gave information to and answered questions from the teachers directly. The teachers’ union president and other members of the teachers’ union executive board were present at some but not all of these meetings. Finally, in each district I observed a handful of community meetings or events, during which board members and administrators interacted with the public.

Interviews. While my observations allowed me to record decision-making as it happened, I also used interviews to ask board members, superintendents, and union representatives about decision-making processes. Between September 2011 and January 2012, I formally interviewed 29 subjects; five were interviewed twice, for a total of 34
interviews. Interviews were approximately 70 minutes in length, although several were substantially longer. I conducted all interviews in person, and each was recorded and transcribed. I also spoke informally with a number of informants, including executive assistants, past superintendents, teachers, PTA leaders, and local reporters.

I conducted the formal interviews only after I had observed each district’s school board meetings for at least five months; this gave me time to use observational data to shape interview protocols. Each interview followed a similar structure. I began by asking biographical questions, and then requested that each participant describe his or her own job and responsibilities. I next asked each to describe his or her interactions with other stakeholders, focusing on whether and how each tried to influence one another and whether and why they were successful. These questions often focused on specific processes such as negotiations, school board elections, and contentious issues like furlough days, although I encouraged the subjects to provide their own examples as well. Sometimes I asked about past events for which I was not present, such as collective bargaining, while other questions asked for clarification or interpretation of events that I did observe. The final portion of the interview was about interests and power: I asked the participants about their own interests and the personal and organizational interests of others, and which people and/or organizations they believed to be the most influential and why.

Interviews were moderately-structured. I designed the initial questions and a follow-up strategy of prompts, probes, and topics, but deviated from the pre-determined protocols as the respondent offered more or less information on certain topics, or if the
session was more narrative than question-and-answer (Wengraf, 2001). I also did not assume that the subject and I shared meanings; I asked all the subjects to define concepts like “power.” If they described an action as “political” or a relationship as “positive,” I asked what those words meant. By encouraging my informants to reflect on their responses, I acknowledged that they were constructing knowledge about their interactions with others during the interview itself (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I wanted to better understand how what the interviewee was saying related to the interactions he or she was experiencing. Finally, I did not assume the subjectivity of my interviewees (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), nor did I assume, despite assurances of confidentiality, that they were always telling the truth as they saw it (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Van Maanen, 1979).

While all of the interviews were similar in structure, the protocols for each informant varied from one to the next. I focused some questions on areas in which that subject might have particular knowledge. For example, an assistant superintendent for human resources has firsthand knowledge of contract negotiations, while a school board member does not. That same board member has more direct information on the teachers’ union involvement in school board elections than the superintendent for human resources. I also asked ‘outsiders’ to comment on events they observed but in which they did not participate directly, finding that they were frequently more willing to share an opinion when they felt they were an impartial observer with little to lose by being candid (Rosenblatt, 2003; Van Maanen, 1979).

In addition, protocols varied from person to person because I frequently asked subjects about events which I had observed during my fieldwork. Sometimes I simply
sought clarification or background, but I also asked interviewees to confirm or refute my own inferences about the events (Stenhouse, 1978). Many of these events simply hadn’t occurred yet during early interviews, which led to variation in the interview questions over time.

**Document review.** Documents were the final source of data for my analyses. I gathered the agendas, minutes, meeting materials, and archives from every meeting that I attended, to look for which issues were addressed and how information was presented. From the district, I collected reports, budgets, and collective bargaining agreements. I collected similar materials from the teachers’ union, as well as their newsletters, informational fliers from the union to its site representatives, and internal memos. I asked for the materials they produced during the most recent school board elections, and I joined their Facebook pages to receive the updates they gave to their members. I also accumulated news reports and articles, letters to the editor, press releases, and paid advertisements. These documents served two useful purposes: as additional supporting evidence around the processes I was observing or inquiring, and as unique data points themselves.

The primary use of the documents was to add to the body of evidence around a particular issue. For example, fiscal solvency was a high priority of the board members and administrators in both districts. During interviews, board members said that they relied on the executive staff to inform them about the district’s revenues and expenditures, and to determine the feasibility of funding a particular initiative. Before they could make decisions, board members needed to know how much money the district
had in reserve and how long that money would last; it was the responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer to relay this information to the board. In both McKinley and Rainier, I asked the Chief Financial Officer about the decisions they made when preparing their presentations to the board, I asked the board members how they received the information from the Chief Financial Officer, I observed the board meetings during which the reports were presented, and I analyzed the budget report documents. This amassed evidence created a detailed picture of this single issue, and helped corroborate or contradict the statements of others on that same issue. In one district, union leaders reported to me that the Chief Financial Officer presented the budget report in a certain way in order to persuade the board members that money should not be spent on teacher salaries. To assess this claim, I compared the report on district finances from the financial officer to the board with the report on district finances from the teachers’ union to its members to better understand the ways in which each was presenting information in order to gain support for their goals.

The documents served a second important purpose: they were valuable data for events that I simply could not observe (Stake, 1995). For example, two seats on the school board and a district bond measure were on the ballot in McKinley in early April 2011, before I began observations. I combined the election materials – flyers, advertisements, and commercials – created by the candidates and the teachers’ union with newspaper articles, news reports, and letters to the editor. I also watched archived school board meetings. Even though I was not observing in McKinley during the campaign, I was able to generate data on the electoral politics surrounding the election using these
documents. Just like the data gathered from events that I observed in person, I used these results to guide interviews and substantiate statements made by the participants.

**Data Analysis**

My general approach to data analysis was to combine analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Katz, 1982; Robinson, 1951), also called explanation-building (Yin, 2008), with pattern-matching (Trochim, 1989). Based on my detailed field notes and my pre-transcription interview notes, I developed early working hypotheses and preliminary answers to my research questions. These hypotheses were founded on theory and early observations. In the former case, I drew general principles from theory and then used pattern-matching to compare my data to those principles. In the latter, I used analytic induction to look for themes and patterns in the data independent of any existing framework. I held the working hypotheses up to the data as I continued to collect it. I recursively modified my hypotheses as I encountered (or in some instances actively sought) data that did not support them, until ultimately I was able to develop convincing answers to my research questions.

There were three main elements to my ongoing hypothesis testing. During data collection, I used ongoing triangulation and reflexivity to modify my interview protocols and observation guides (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003; Denzin, 1984). At the end of each day I reviewed my notes from the day’s interviews and observations, then adjusted the instruments for the next day accordingly. This informal process of “following the data” allowed me to follow leads, test assumptions, and refine ideas (Charmaz, 1995). It also helped me compare what I thought was happening to what my informants told me was
happening, and to think carefully about why one account might vary from another (Van Maanen, 1979). When data points matched each other, I was more convinced that the data were accurate. When they did not, I theorized why a person might have given me that particular interpretation (and what they might not be able to tell me) (H. S. Becker, 1958; Rosenblatt, 2003). I did not assign more weight to my direct observations than the reports of my informants, or vice versa. I did not treat events that I observed directly as what ‘really happened,’ nor did I use interviews as a proxy for direct observation (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). I acknowledge that, as I wrote down my observations, I constructed them by choosing to give prominence to certain activities and not recording others, and by using the descriptive words that I did. My notes were a representation of reality as I saw it, not a record of some objective reality that existed apart from my observations (Atkinson, 1990; M Hammersley, 1992). I used interviews to support or refute my representations; for example, I might ask a union leader, “It appeared to me that during the meeting you seemed to trust the superintendent’s intentions; would you agree with that?”

Second, I used a number of formal inductive methods during and after data collection to create working hypotheses. My goal was to break down my data into discrete parts, examine these chunks to establish preliminary themes and hypotheses, and develop rough answers to my research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used open coding to conceptualize observation notes and interviews line-by-line, inductively looking for patterns and connections (Charmaz, 1995; Emerson, et al., 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss &
Corbin, 1990). I also made a list of codes drawn from the literature on macro- and micropolitical theory, and used pattern coding to compare these codes to my data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Walton, 1992; Yin, 2008). Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program, facilitated coding. To visualize decision-making, I built and added to event listings, created and re-created checklist and effects matrices, and modified my diagrams that conceptualized the institutional environment for each case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The final version of the conceptual model for decision-making in school districts appears as Figure 2.1.

During data collection, I also used initial memos to expand on specific events, and integrative memos to clarify and link events and themes together (Emerson, et al., 1995). As I went, I continued to recursively modify my hypotheses, gather more data, and compare the data to my hypotheses until I had reached theoretical saturation.

Third, after data collection was complete I used focused coding to build and clarify definitions (such as types of power resources, or which strategies represented which dimension of power), examine how one category was different from another, and establish causal timelines (Charmaz, 1995; Emerson, et al., 1995). The list of codes is located in Appendix C.

**Validity, Dependability, and Confirmability**

Validity (whether the measurement instruments are accurate), dependability (whether the instruments and conclusions are credible and logical) and confirmability (whether the research procedures and researcher are trustworthy and transparent) are critical to producing rigorous research (M. M. Cooper, 1997; Martyn Hammersley, 1987;
Miles & Huberman, 1994; Slavin, 2007). In this section I will describe how I addressed these criteria for rigor.20

*Internal validity* in explanatory qualitative research is the degree to which a study is able to convincingly rule out alternative explanations for the relationships observed among variables (D. T. Campbell, 1957; Slavin, 2007). Although an instrumental case study begins with *a priori* propositions, I also considered rival explanations for my observations, including the explanation that my observations themselves were inaccurate (Yin, 2008). By constantly comparing my working hypotheses to both data and theory, I increased my sensitivity to alternative explanations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In one fairly major instance, an alternative explanation proved more fitting than my original theoretical construct. When I first began my study, I had briefly encountered literature on the importance of community structure and public opinion and their effects on district decision-making. But I chose not to integrate these factors into my original theoretical framework because the bulk of recent work pinpointed institutional context and organizational structure as significantly more important, or it did not include community structure and public opinion at all. However, I soon realized that the existing community structure was crucial to understanding why unions in McKinley and Rainier chose certain power strategies, and why those strategies did or didn’t work. I returned to the literature and integrated community structure and public opinion into my proposed determinants of strategy selection and success.

20 In this work I approach validity, reliability, and objectivity from the postpositivist paradigm (M. M. Cooper, 1997; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). There is a “reality” but it is never perfectly knowable. “Facts” are constructed by people but can be close representations of true reality. If findings are replicated then they are likely true. Hypotheses can be supported or falsified but not proven. Individuals, including the researcher, are unpredictable and subject to bias.
In addition, I increased internal validity by using a multi- rather than single-site case study. I could better ensure that my inferences were valid and the relationships among variables that I observed were genuine because I had more, and more diverse, data from which to draw my conclusions (Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Slavin, 2007).

The definition of external validity as the ability to generalize findings to an entire population is not a particularly useful standard for a case study, given the uniqueness of the institutions and their contexts (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings from an instrumental case study should be generalized to theory, rather than to the population. That theory should only be subsequently applied to other cases within a limited universe defined by the researcher. I have no evidence to suggest that my findings are applicable to small districts, rural districts, districts in states other than California, or any number of other conditions. I also do not presume that all of the independent variables that affect how boards, superintendents, and unions interact are measurable, or even that the entire set of independent variables can be identified. This is analytic (as opposed to statistical or predictive) generalization (Abbott, 1992; H. S. Becker, 1990).

Construct validity – that what was intended to be measured is what was actually measured – is generally applied to qualitative research as precision (Golafshani, 2003). For qualitative work, precision is an important consideration because scholars of sociopolitical theory have specific definitions for concepts like “power” or “authority.” Respondents do not necessarily define those concepts in the same way that I, or theorists, do (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). For my work to be precise,
every hypothesis and conclusion needed to pass two tests: it had to hold up against multiple data sources, and informants had to confirm that I did not misrepresent how they constructed an event or defined a concept (D. T. Campbell, 1960). To address the former, I used triangulation. To address the latter, if I wasn’t sure how someone interpreted an event or defined a concept, I asked him or her to clarify either during or after the interview. I also performed member checks during and after data analysis – I presented participants with some portion of my findings and asked them their opinion.

Research is *dependable* when the work is consistent across all the cases and when other researchers find the instruments and conclusions credible (Guba, 1981; Slavin, 2007). If a dependable study is repeated in other districts, the inevitable variation in findings should be attributable to changes in context, in the subjects, and in the researcher (Guba, 1981) and not to poor design and analysis. For this study to be dependable, another researcher should agree to the logic of my research design, link the design and methods to my research questions, follow the chain of evidence from questions to data to conclusions, and be able to use the same procedures to reach similar findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2008). To increase dependability, I carefully followed interview protocols and data analysis guides, performed member checks, and consulted outsiders – academics, and practitioners in other districts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2008). I also documented my methods; by keeping them transparent, another researcher could substantiate my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

Finally, *confirmability* is a measure of the neutrality of the research procedures and findings. While producing objective data is impossible, the subjectivity of data can
be controlled (Stenhouse, 1978). Confirmable observations and conclusions depend on
the “subjects and conditions of the inquiry,” not on the researcher (Lincoln & Guba,
1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I acknowledge that I chose the way I applied theory,
made hypotheses, designed instruments, gathered data, drew conclusions, and presented
my findings, and I acknowledge that these choices were all shaped by my existing
knowledge, predispositions, and biases (Stenhouse, 1978). Even the research questions
themselves were not chosen objectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – I believed they
examined an important part of education policy that was yet unexplored by existing
literature, including my own previous quantitative work. I increased confirmability
through data triangulation, member checks, consultation with experts, and transparency.
This allowed other people to verify, or challenge, my findings (Miles & Huberman,
1994). To further increase the confirmability of my work, I thought very carefully about
my own history; I was a teacher who valued reform in a large urban district with an
oppositional, industrial-style union and a dominating superintendent. With this history
came tacit assumptions about political behavior in school districts. Because I recognized
rather than ignored my biases, I was able to critically evaluate my own work and
hopefully limit the effects that my bias had on the integrity of the research.
CHAPTER 4
Describing Power Resources and Strategies

My first two research questions are descriptive: what resources are available to
district actors, and what strategies (by type, location, goal, and dimension) do actors use
to leverage those resources? I address those questions here, drawing conclusions from my
interviews, observations, and document review. First, I give an overview of the political
climate in each district. Next, I detail four examples of the processes and outcomes of
political decision-making, two each from Rainier and McKinley. I then answer Research
Questions 1 and 2, drawing on the examples for evidence of the resources and strategies
available to district actors. In Chapter 5, I summarize the environmental factors in each
district and argue how those factors affect access to resources, strategy choice, and
decision-making outcomes, again using the four examples for supporting evidence.

Overview of Decision-Making in McKinley and Rainier Unified

McKinley and Rainier Unified School Districts shared a number of common
characteristics. Both districts were large (each serving between 25,000 and 35,000
students across grades K-12), located in the same urban metropolitan area in Southern
California. Many of their challenges were similar: raise and maintain student
achievement under state and federal accountability requirements; contend with severe and
unpredictable cuts in state revenue; meet the dual obligations of achievement and fiscal
stability while responding to the demands of parent, community, and employee groups;
and protect the image of public education in an environment where its legitimacy is
increasingly threatened.
In other respects, these two districts were radically different. The relationship between the school board, superintendent and executive administrators, and teachers’ union in McKinley was strained at best and openly acrimonious at worst. Decision-making was governed by a superintendent that was well-liked by the community and trusted by the board. The United Teachers of McKinley (UTM) felt that district leaders did not value teachers, while the school board and administrators saw a rancorous union that was purposefully oppositional, unwilling to compromise, and with leaders who did not represent the majority of the teachers. Yet despite this discord McKinley Unified had many successes: it kept high monetary reserves in uncertain financial times, posted test scores that are well above the state average, avoided layoffs, maintained funding for arts, language, and early education programs, and passed a multi-million dollar bond measure.

The board-administrator-union interactions in Rainier Unified were completely unlike those in McKinley. Union and district leaders, employees, and the state teachers’ association all touted the positive working relationship between the district and the Rainier Teachers’ Association (RTA). There was a sense of camaraderie, mutual respect, and shared responsibility among district leaders. It too had marked some major successes. While Rainier’s students tested below the state average, the districts’ scores have grown not just in aggregate but also for its English Language Learner, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and special education students. Rainier was hiring teachers when most districts were laying them off, largely due to a jointly-negotiated and wildly-popular early retirement buy-out plan. The teachers’ union felt involved in district decision-making, and administrators and union leaders actively sought its participation and advice.
However, this seemingly placid district had a significant amount of internal friction. Some actors characterized the school board members as micromanagers, driven by community ties, political aspirations, or ego. Administrators saw the board as a hindrance to effectively running the district. The teachers’ union was an incredibly powerful behind-the-scenes player in local politics. And in the eyes of some, the camaraderie among leaders bordered on insularism.

**Examples of Decision-Making: Resources, Strategies, and Power**

In the ten months that I observed in McKinley and Rainier, I saw the legitimate political system make hundreds of decisions, translating external demands and internal preferences into policy outcomes (Figure 2.1). Over the course of 24 school board meetings, the board members passed more than 750 action items and policies, and formally discussed 120 others. The vast majority of board action items were approved as part of the meeting’s consent calendar with little public debate. A large portion of every school board meeting was allocated not to board member discussions or administrator reports but to recognitions, awards, and public comment. The discussions and reports that did occur focused on a few recurring issues: in McKinley, the budget, spending/oversight of their recent facilities bond measure, and the district’s strategic plan; in Rainier, the opening of a new technology high school, updates on student achievement and attendance, and parent concerns over a teacher accused of bullying. I also witnessed countless actions by administrators, mostly dealing with important but ordinary operational decisions. These decisions were made without much discussion, and few outside the central office were even aware of them.
There were a few high-activity, high-impact decisions that involved extensive
deliberation, required the participation and consent of multiple individuals and groups,
and ultimately had a significant impact on students, teachers, district leaders, and the
public. These are particularly illustrative of political decision-making: in McKinley, the
selection of a school reform model called Achievement Plus (A+),\(^{21}\) and the negotiation
and eventual ratification of a contract reopener on furlough days; in Rainier, the renewed
status of the Rainier Financial Oversight Committee (RFOC) and the search for a new
superintendent.

I chose these examples for McKinley because the decision-making processes in
both cases were particularly emblematic of the use of power resources and strategies in
that district. Like many of the processes I observed there, these two decisions had a high
degree of district-union conflict. In both examples, district leaders reported they were
acting in the best interests of students, but did not trust the union to do the same. They
leveraged their positional and knowledge resources, and there was little information
sharing or voluntary inclusion. The union, in turn, reacted defensively to the perceived
power asymmetry and accused the district of manipulation or even impropriety. I
witnessed this process firsthand during the furlough day negotiations, and district and
union leaders alike repeatedly mentioned A+ as an example of the district-union conflict
that frequently accompanied decision-making.

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\(^{21}\) According to the participants, the selection process for Achievement Plus mirrored the way the district
chose its current elementary math curriculum. Because of the repeated congruence reported between these
two processes, I combined the two examples and report them together as Achievement Plus.
From the range of examples that demonstrated similar decision-making processes, I selected these two illustrations because similar processes resulted in different outcomes. The union believed that A+, like many of the decision-making outcomes in McKinley, reflected only the preferences of the board and superintendent. Atypically, union and district leaders maintained that the furlough day agreement was a negotiated compromise that served the interests of both.22,23

I selected the two Rainier examples because they were also illustrative of decision-making in that district, but for different reasons. In those two examples, the decision-making outcomes were similar to each other, and were representative of every other decision outcome I observed or was reported to me, in that they reflected the goals of the district and union leaders as well as the teachers’ union’s interests.24 However, the outcomes were the result of two contrasting processes. The RFOC reinstatement was similar to the majority of the district-union interactions that I observed. Union leaders used micropolitical action to quietly leverage their systemic knowledge, trusted connections to board members and administrators, and history of information-sharing. To successfully influence board members and convince them to begin a search for a new

22 Here and elsewhere in this chapter, I present outcomes as they were constructed by the participants. However, their construction of each decision, and whose interests that decision protects, may differ from my own interpretation. I note where this is the case (see Footnotes 2 and 3).

23 The description of the furlough day agreement as “negotiated compromise” is from the participants themselves. Since both sides described the outcome as compromise, I do as well, but with reservations. The final agreement was very close to the union’s original proposal. Some stipulations of the agreement combined the intermediate proposals of both sides, while some were concessions (mostly by the district).

24 In Rainier Unified, district and union leaders maintained that they had a shared goal: provide students with a high-quality education. By the informants’ construction, decision-making outcomes reflected the goals of both the district and the union. However, I observed that actors had different preferences for how those goals should be achieved, and those preferences often did not agree. When that was the case, decision-making outcomes most often represented the union’s preferred method to achieve the shared goal. As such, I characterize typical outcomes as reflecting both shared goals and union interests.
superintendent, however, the Rainier Teachers’ association acted macropolitically. Based on my observations and confirmed by the participants, this was unusual behavior, utilized when their micropolitical attempts to sway the board members did not work.

Below, I present these examples. I will refer to the examples in general, and actors’ use of specific resources and strategies within them, when I answer my three research questions.

Decision-Making in McKinley Unified: Achievement Plus

For over a decade, McKinley Unified’s white and Asian students performed very well on standardized tests, but its Hispanic, English Language Learner, special education, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students lagged behind. Low test scores in these subgroups placed many district schools in Program Improvement status under No Child Left Behind, even though the schools’ overall scores ranked them above the state average. Five years ago, McKinley Unified administrators proposed, and board members approved, a district-wide comprehensive school reform model called Achievement Plus (A+) to address the achievement gap.

Union leaders and McKinley school board members and administrators had dissimilar interpretations of the decision-making process that led to the selection of A+. Union leaders saw it as one instance of many in which McKinley administrators used their positional resources – the authority to invite participants or make unilateral decisions, and the high degree of discretion granted to them by the board to implement

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25 Achievement Plus was adopted several years before I began data collection in McKinley Unified. Therefore, I do not have observations to corroborate interview data. However, I performed member checks with the informants quoted here, all of whom were involved in the selection and implementation process, and with other district administrators and teachers.
the board’s strategic plan – to exclude the union. The union president at the time was inexperienced; she related that when she met with the former superintendent, immediately after A+ was selected, “I said, ‘You can’t do this, this is a change in our working conditions. We need to bargain this.’ I was new. I didn’t know what I was doing too well yet. I didn’t know the routines to stop [the program], so it was just pushed on us.”

UTM leaders believed McKinley administrators were strategic in their decision to inform the union only after A+ was already approved. “Things are constantly being foisted on us, like Achievement Plus. That’s just how it works,” said the UTM president. “I have no idea these things are happening until I get calls from teachers.” Another union leader agreed: “There are examples after examples of the district imposing its will upon the union and the teachers on significant issues that matter to us.” According to UTM leaders, the school board used closed sessions to shield the decision-making process from union input. One cited A+ as one example of “[the board and administrators] deciding in closed session. That is where all the arguments take place, and the big debates and stuff.”

Union leaders reasoned that when district leaders used direct authority rather than collaborative decision-making, they were motivated by three factors other than their professional interest to close achievement gap. First, UTM leaders believed that the board used closed decision-making in order to protect themselves against public vulnerability and maintain their organizational legitimacy. “We did a survey of our members about A+, and 90% of them thought it was a waste of money. I presented that to the school board and they didn’t like that, of course,” said a UTM leader. Another union leader
agreed: “They want to look infallible. [It keeps] their standing, their position with the community, and it keeps the community’s faith in them.” Second, union leaders offered that the former superintendent’s professional interests motivated UTM exclusion. “He didn’t want to look as if someone else was calling the shots or in control,” said a union leader, “and so if he were to…say to us, ‘Let’s see what we can do about A+, let’s create something that works for everyone,’ it would look weak in his eyes. It would look like the union has some influence or power.”

Finally, one union leader offered that district leaders excluded the union voice because they had a highly personal interest in the outcome of decision-making: “You can’t prove these things, but [I’ve heard from multiple sources] that there is some sort of kickback going on with Achievement Plus.”

According to McKinley leaders, UTM resisted A+ not because they were excluded from its selection but because it threatened teacher autonomy and gave administrators control over instructional practices that did not first require collective bargaining. “A+ forced an enormous change where classrooms were no longer the private domains of teachers,” explained a McKinley school board member. Another board member agreed, saying, “It doesn’t matter to the union whether it works. It’s just an expectation of resistance.”

District leaders also denied that the union was excluded. “I know that there have been all sorts of allegations about Achievement Plus, that there was no union representation, but there was!” said an assistant superintendent. However, they admitted that teacher recommendations in McKinley were non-binding. They also agreed that there
were no standard protocols for involving the teachers’ union in decisions in which their participation is not mandated.

With Achievement Plus, McKinley school leaders successfully protected their professional and personal interests by using micropolitical strategies to leverage resources and limit union involvement. There were many similarities between the decision-making process through which A+ was adopted and the way that the district and union negotiated their current furlough day agreement. Both involved actors using strategies of conflict and exclusion to leverage positional and knowledge resources. However, there were two important distinctions. First, union involvement was not required during the selection of A+, while furlough days must be negotiated between McKinley and UTM. This gave the teachers’ union more positional resources, and more opportunities to leverage its existing social resources through collective lobbying and image politics. Second, the outcome of the furlough day negotiations reflected the preferences of the union, although not necessarily because of any actions by UTM.

**Decision-Making in McKinley Unified: Furlough Days**

In 2010, McKinley Unified and the United Teachers of McKinley negotiated a three-year contract. Teachers would take two furlough days in the 2010-2011 school year, three in 2011-2012, and four in 2012-13. Last year, the district eliminated the days scheduled for 2010-2011 because it received unexpected federal funds. Per contract stipulations, the three days for the 2011-2012 school year were reopened to negotiation in early summer of 2011. The McKinley union asked that the district rescind all three days. The district proposed pushing the furlough days to the 2013-14 school year. If the district
and union did not come to an accord, the 2010-2013 contract would remain in effect and
the teachers would take all three days.

McKinley leaders and the teachers’ union fought bitterly and publically for six
months before they reached an agreement. Union leaders maintained that the district
manipulated information, hid its mistakes, and divided the union president from rank-
and-file teachers and community members in order to avoid spending its reserves on
teachers. The union attempted to influence decision-making through collective action, but
district leaders did not take their efforts seriously.

Much of the district-union conflict took place at school board meetings – not
necessarily by choice of any of the involved actors, but because the union had few other
opportunities to address district leaders directly. At a board meeting in September of
2011, the UTM president used public comment to argue that the district could easily
afford to buy back the furlough days but was misreporting its reserves. She spoke
quickly, rushing to fit her statement within the five minutes allotted to each speaker.
Later in the meeting, McKinley’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) gave a report on the
district’s interim budget. He pointed out errors in the union president’s calculations, and
then concluded with, “Yes, we have reserves. But we need them, we’re using them, and
they’re running out.” Board members expressed pride that McKinley had substantial
savings in a time of economic uncertainty, and thanked the CFO for his expertise. The
superintendent concluded the report by avowing that his goal was to ultimately eliminate
the furlough days, but “we’re going through a roller coaster at the state level, and we’re
trying to deal with that here in the district.”
School board meetings over the next several months became locations for heated micropolitical activity. Each followed a similar pattern. The union president used public comment to address the board and the public, accusing McKinley of misrepresenting its financial need and petitioning the district to eliminate the furlough days. Then a cabinet member, usually the CFO, used knowledge of district finances and decision-making processes to present convincing evidence for the district’s position: he would give a report, stress the need for financial conservatism, and present specific recommendations to the board. The board members supported the recommendations and implored the teachers and union leaders to cooperate with the district. One or two board members regularly disparaged the leadership capacity of the union president. Once, a board member asked her how many teachers voted for her, knowing turnout had been low and implying that union members did not support their president. At another meeting, a board member thanked the CFO for his report by saying, “I appreciate the presentation because it helps educate a person with a little bit of common sense as to what’s going on. I know that’s been challenging for some people…”

By late November, negotiations were at a complete impasse. The union exercised the protections offered to them by state labor law and stated that the district’s proposal to push the furlough days to 2013-14 was illegal. They refused to offer a counterproposal. District leaders, unwilling to negotiate against themselves, would not proceed until the union made an offer.

During their December executive leadership meeting, UTM leaders brainstormed possible macropolitical collective actions given that board meeting public comment had
failed to change the district’s position. One suggested an email protest, while another recommended a postcard campaign. The former UTM president disagreed; she worried that they were overestimating the number of teachers who would participate, and a low number would make UTM look weak. She argued that UTM should leverage the negative publicity McKinley Unified was already receiving: “If they want to keep $100 million in the bank and take away the instructional days for the kids, that will already play poorly with the community.” Leaders discussed newspaper ads aimed at parents, community members, and teachers that would blame the district, not UTM, for lost student instructional minutes. One recommended a press conference on the first furlough day, with teachers standing in front of an empty classroom holding signs reading “Ready To Work.” The UTM leadership eventually decided to organize the teachers to assemble en masse at the next school board meeting, and use the media campaign if necessary.

Four days later, approximately 100 UTM members wearing dark red shirts sat in the audience of McKinley’s board room. “I’m here today with a few of my friends, to clarify points that may be confusing people,” said the UTM president during public comment, to enthusiastic teacher applause. “The facts don’t fit with the district claims…The United Teachers of McKinley have proven time and time again that we are willing to make concessions. The last thing we want is for this district to go broke! We just want the district to be fair to students and employees. Respect the parents, students, and teachers; the district can more than afford to do so.” The school board members avoided eye contact with her while she spoke. They sighed and gestured when the assembled teachers left immediately after the UTM comments. Later, a board member
described his thoughts on the assembly: “Everything is a battle with them and it’s to the point where it’s like, ‘Ooh, it’s them again.’ I don’t take their arguments very seriously.”

During the same period – late November and early December – the United Teachers of McKinley were not the only district actors using political strategies to affect negotiations. The superintendent, CFO, and assistant superintendent for human resources held informal question-and-answer sessions at every McKinley school to connect with the rank-and-file teachers, whom they believed did not align with UTM leaders. They used their access to teachers, and their control of information and calendars – they did not give UTM leadership the meeting schedule – to limit UTM’s ability to leverage the social resource of its own membership.

These meetings were well-attended by site employees. During most of the meetings, the superintendent, often with his sleeves rolled up and his tie loosened, made direct appeals to the teachers. “Look, my main job as superintendent is fiscal solvency,” he told them at one meeting. “That’s the easiest way to get fired, not maintain solvency. After that, academically we have to continue to grow. I know that in order for students to achieve, I need the teachers. Philosophically, I want you to be happy. I don’t lay in bed at night thinking, ‘How can I piss them off this week?’” The teachers appeared pleased with the accessibility of their superintendent. Many expressed confusion as to why the two sides could not come to an agreement when it seemed like neither actually wanted to take the furlough days; the superintendent, careful to differentiate UTM leaders from rank-and-file teachers, responded that everyone seemed to want to move discussions forward
but couldn’t because union leaders still offered no counterproposal. Most of these information meetings were civil, if not amicable.

Some sessions, however, dissolved into sparring matches between the superintendent and the UTM president. Despite multiple requests, the UTM president was not given the master meeting schedule, and McKinley leaders made it clear that she was not welcome. However, on occasion, she was invited to a few sessions by a site teacher. At these meetings, the superintendent emphasized that, while he did not want to make the conflict personal, because the meetings were organized by McKinley Unified and not the union she would not be allowed to speak until all teacher questions had been answered. To the frustration of the teachers, she frequently interrupted him. The superintendent was usually able to maintain his composure while the union president became more agitated and emotional. These meetings ended in bickering.

To the immense surprise of the public and many of the teachers, in January of 2012 McKinley Unified and UTM abruptly reached an agreement. The teachers would take no furlough days that year. McKinley Unified’s original offer was to push all three days to 2013-2014; the final agreement pushed one day to 2012-13. Following UTM’s proposal, two of the three scheduled days were rescinded completely. McKinley leaders attributed the outcome to two factors. First, the superintendent wanted the conflict to end because it was worsening the community’s already negative opinion of American public education and therefore undermining district leaders. “Public education is being villainized,” said the McKinley superintendent to a group of teachers at a furlough day
information session. “And the community just sees us fighting. It doesn’t help me as a
district, it doesn’t help you as teachers.”

Second, McKinley Unified received a substantial rebate from its health care
provider, enough that it could eliminate two furlough days instead of pushing them
forward. But had there not been an agreement, McKinley leaders would have used
macropolitical action just like UTM was threatening: “If they weren’t going to give us a
proposal, we were going to do a press release on what we were going to do. We wanted
to get that out to the public that we were in a position to offer no furlough days for 2011-
12.”

Decision-Making in Rainier Unified: The Rainier Financial Oversight Committee

Decision-making in McKinley Unified was antagonistic and exclusionary. Actors
had few opportunities to share resources, and little desire to do so. While they used both
micro- and macropolitical strategies, these actions were overt and public. In contrast,
Rainier Unified had a variety of structures and norms that allowed for resource sharing
and, if necessary, quiet resolutions to conflict using internal political action. One example
is the renewed strength of a joint district-union committee.

In 1995, Rainier was on the verge of bankruptcy, employees faced massive
layoffs and pay cuts, and the unions threatened to strike. To avoid similar problems in the
future, district and union leaders proposed the Rainier Financial Oversight Committee
(RFOC) to “collaboratively monitor the budget rather than pulling it out for negotiations
once a year…It would be our contractual responsibility to see how we could work
together to keep the district afloat,” related the union president. The RFOC became an
institutionalized conduit for sharing information and building trust. “We keep our unions very well appraised about what we’re doing financially,” said Rainier’s Chief Financial Officer, “and it’s...how we get [the unions] to accept when we have to make cuts. If they don’t trust us, why should they accept furlough days?” The RFOC chairperson, also an RTA leader, agreed, saying that the teachers understand that “there really is less money. There really is declining enrollment. There really are problems. It’s negotiations back and forth and we have some ideas about how to meet [the district’s] needs.”

Over the past year, however, union leaders expressed that the district’s responsiveness to RFOC requests had waned. Rainier’s finance office, responsible for setting committee meeting agendas, was no longer providing the agendas in advance. RFOC leaders had to ask Rainier cabinet members for the same information that used to be freely provided. In the past, the Rainier CFO, along with several other cabinet members, regularly attended meetings; lately their attendance was sporadic. And while the RFOC was required to give twice-yearly reports and recommendations during school board meetings, it had been over a year since the committee’s last report.

When the RFOC met in early November, most of meeting was spent on purely informational issues. Lower-level Rainier administrators reported on facilities and construction projects, but did not ask the committee for its advice. Only one Rainier cabinet member attended. Midway through the RFOC meeting, committee members voiced concerns to one another. “At this point the committee is more like a formality to please the associations,” said the RFOC chairperson, “and last year we saw our requests not met.” The RTA president agreed: “Our commitment is to watch taxpayer money, but
we’ve lost mojo, we’ve lost luster. I want to see more power brokers here. I want to be on the school board agenda, and I want people to report to us.”

As they spoke, the lone Rainier Unified cabinet member took notes. It was his first time attending an RFOC meeting, and as the meeting progressed he became more and more involved in the discussion. At the end of the session, he assured the committee that he would bring their requests back to the district and confirm that the RFOC report to the board would be on the agenda of the next school board meeting. The next day, he contacted the RFOC chair and told her that the changes were already in progress. A few days later, the superintendent discreetly approached the RFOC chair and the RTA executive director; he confirmed that administrators were addressing the problem and told them to inform him if the situation did not immediately improve.

At the board meeting two weeks later, the RFOC was included on the agenda. Before she presented the committee’s report, the RFOC chairperson addressed the board members and administrators. Calmly but firmly, she stated, “We want to make sure that the purpose of the RFOC continues and the transparency continues. We voiced our concerns because of the lack of attention that the committee has gotten in the last year. …There isn’t anything in the bylaws that says what we have to cover. It was just a norm that was set, and now we’ve fallen back from that.” She then reported on, among other topics, the RFOC’s recommendations on how Rainier should react to new state categorical funding definitions and the committee’s work to reduce energy and facilities costs. The school board members nodded and asked her questions.
When she concluded, four of the five board members praised the work of the committee and recognized the important role it plays in guiding Rainier’s financial decisions. The remaining board member bluntly asked who in the district office was not providing the RFOC with timely and complete information. He admonished the finance department for not doing its job. The RFOC chairperson declined to blame a specific person but instead tactfully cited central office staff turnover as the cause of the delays.

A month later, the RFOC met again. This time, seven central office employees were present: three members of the executive cabinet plus four finance office administrators. Well in advance, the committee received the meeting agenda and detailed reports from Rainier staff on a variety of high-impact issues. Cabinet members asked for the committee’s advice on complying with a complicated state statute on student fees. In the several months following, Rainier administrators implemented many of the RFOC’s suggestions, including consolidating an elementary school, filling teacher vacancies left by the early retirement plan, restructuring health benefits, and reallocating funds in reaction to the student fee law.

This was a subtle but very important example of the union’s use of micropolitical action to protect its interests – in this case, to re-strengthen the RFOC. The RFOC chair approached district leaders directly. She did not assign blame in public. She reminded leaders of the norms of transparency and joint oversight. The RTA did not use collective action, did not mobilize its general membership, and did not threaten the district or its leaders. “The union knows how to exercise their power eloquently,” said a school board member. “They know when to show it. They are sophisticated.”
Decision-Making in Rainier Unified: Superintendent Search

The Rainier Teachers’ Association usually used micropolitics successfully, so Rainier’s superintendent search is an important outlier case because, in that instance, the RTA engaged in electoral politics. In 2010, Rainier’s superintendent retired. Rather than conduct an open search, the school board appointed Rainier’s Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services as interim superintendent. Board members cited multiple benefits of the decision. The interim superintendent still performed the duties of the pupil services position, and Rainier saved $180,000 by not filling the vacancy. In addition, the interim had nearly 40 years of experience in Rainier, beginning as a classroom teacher. He had deep knowledge of district operations and was well-liked and respected by the other cabinet members, Rainier’s employees and parents, and union leaders.

In August of 2011, the school board voted to make the promotion permanent. Although RTA leaders had not protested the initial appointment, they now voiced serious objections. First, they maintained that the appointment was not in the best interests of students and teachers. “We need a true educational leader,” said the RTA president, “someone who actually understands curriculum.” Second, RTA leaders saw the decision as a way for the board to purposefully exclude the union. By law, boards have the direct authority to hire the superintendent. But only a few months prior, union leaders had successfully lobbied for stakeholder participation in hiring central office executive directors. They were upset that board members did not apply that precedent to the superintendent search. “There was never an interview process,” said a union leader. “He was just appointed. And that did not go over well with a lot of people.” Another RTA
leader expanded that the invitation to the hiring process was as important as the process itself: “We want to be involved in the decision-making process, as much as we’re going to have a say. Even if it’s superficial, or not really, the fact that we’re there at the interviews is important.”

Third, some union leaders believed the board wanted to retain a superintendent whom they knew they could dominate. The appointment “was never meant to be permanent,” explained an RTA leader, “so from my perspective, he hasn’t had the power to influence policy or influence even hiring and firing. The board believes they have more power by having a less powerful superintendent.” A board member countered that he was motivated not by domination but by ease of transition in a district with many entrenched traditions: “I am personally not looking forward in my tenure to training a newbie.”

In light of these objections, union leaders insisted that the school board immediately open a search for a new superintendent and hire him or her as soon as possible. RTA first expressed their demands through a letter to the board, but board members were not receptive. Union leaders then met with board members individually, but again the board members did not open the search.

The Rainier union then turned to electoral politics. School board elections in Rainier were contested but not competitive. Incumbents rarely faced genuine challenges from viable candidates, and the elections were more of a formality. Despite this, the Rainier union has traditionally been active during elections, always supporting the incumbents. “Unions in general are very powerful here [during elections],” reported a
Rainier administrator, “by endorsing, making phone banks, walking the streets, and providing financial resources.”

The November 2011 election was even less competitive than usual – two seats were open, and the two incumbents were running unopposed. At a school board meeting in mid-September, the RTA president used part of her regular report to update the board on the union’s activities: “The RTA has been doing a lot for the upcoming elections, privately with individual board members and with my endorsement committee. It’s like a marriage, and we renewed our vows. We all share the same values, and you’re all RTA-endorsed candidates.”

It appeared, however, that her promise of endorsement was premature. RTA leaders did want to endorse the incumbents, even though the board had not responded to union demands to open a superintendent search. Their support was based on political considerations. “We have nothing to gain by not endorsing,” said one union leader. “I think later on if there’s people we truly don’t want on the board, that’s when we make our move. Why piss them off in the interim? [The incumbents] were two of the friendlier board members to us.”

The general council of union members, however, did not share their leaders’ far-sighted reasoning. “RTA leadership had taken the position that we were looking at their full body of work and felt that they deserved endorsement,” explained a union leader, “but the council was more concerned about the immediate lack of action on the superintendent search.” Without approval from its general council, RTA could not give the endorsements.
The Rainier school board responded immediately after RTA informed the incumbents of the union’s decision. They hired a consulting firm that specialized in superintendent recruitment. The board then invited RTA leaders to meet with the consultants, to help define the qualifications of the ideal candidate. Once final candidates were identified, the union would participate in interviews and visit candidates in their home districts. One of the incumbents explained the response: “The teacher’s union decided not to endorse us even though we were running unopposed, and not give us any money, because they wanted to see a new superintendent. So they exercised their power. They knew where to get us. That prompted a lot more discussion on the board about expediting the superintendent search.”

Afterwards, district actors raised two important questions about the search. First, after two years of inaction, why did the board respond to union demands when the incumbents knew they had already lost RTA’s endorsement? And second, could RTA count the outcome as a true success?

Rainier board members offered one reason for the board’s reaction: they needed stakeholder buy-in during the leadership change. “If I want less headaches with the new superintendent transition, I’m gonna include the stakeholders to identify what’s important to them. It’s cynical, but it’s really self-serving,” said one Rainier board member. Another board member agreed: “The reason we keep all of our unions in the loop and we value their input as to the superintendent is because we will need their cooperation in the future no matter what.” Union leaders identified a different reason for the board’s response, related not to board members’ professional interests but to their political ones.
An RTA leader explained, “[they respond to us] just to appease us. It’s like everything around here, it’s political. Some of these people have a higher aspiration or they have to run for re-election and they want our endorsement.”

The second question – whether the outcome favored RTA interests – also had two possible answers. The RTA president had an optimistic view, citing the outcome as a victory for the union. Others had a more pragmatic interpretation. The union’s executive director agreed that the union achieved minor successes – the board hired a consulting firm and invited the union to interviews. However, the board allowed the consultants to set the hiring timeline, and a new superintendent would not be selected until the start of the following school year. “We have not been successful,” the RTA director said bluntly. “Are we able to make this board get a superintendent within a reasonable period of time? No. Well really then, we failed.” That failure was not lost on a Rainier board member. He recalled the firm’s presentation during a board meeting in late October: “The consulting firm reported they have been directed by the board to move forward immediately and take all the time they need. So what is that saying? We move forward just the way we were before we had this discussion. We don’t do anything different other than publically make a statement that we’ve pacified the stakeholders.”

Each of the preceding examples has a clear decision-making outcome: in McKinley, the selection of Achievement Plus and a furlough day agreement with two of three days rescinded; in Rainier, the reinstatement of the RFOC and the opening of the superintendent search. Each also raises a host of complicated questions. How did district actors influence the decision-making process such that these were the outcomes? What
resources did each have available, and how did they leverage those resources to influence one another? Did one actor fail while another succeeded because they lacked resources, because they could not use them, or because they chose not to? And how much were decision-making processes and outcomes affected by actor behavior as compared to environmental conditions? In this chapter, I describe the power resources and strategies available to board members, superintendents, and teachers’ unions.

**Research Question 1: Available Power Resources**

*What power resources are available to school board members, superintendents and district administrators, and teachers’ union leaders?*

In both cases, I observed a number of power resources available to district actors. Figure 2.1 shows how external groups offer resources to actors in the legitimate political system in return for decision-making outcomes that reflect the interests of those groups. The teachers’ union could grant or deny resources to district leaders; these resources in turn give weight to the unions’ demands should district leaders lack, and desire, them. Internal district actors also use power resources as they interact; while internal actors more frequently exert pressure on one another instead of making explicit demands, the desire to gain or keep resources motivates actor behavior because power resources are scarce, and unequally distributed.

To identify the specific power resources that Rainier and McKinley actors had available to them, I categorized the resources I observed and which were reported in interviews into the four types I defined in Chapter 2: material, knowledge, positional, and social. Some of the resources I observed have also been named in the literature: for
example, the work on the role of teachers’ unions in school board elections identified material resources, such as union dues, which can be used to donate to candidates or run campaigns on their behalf (e.g. Hess, 1999; Moe, 2005). However, many of the available resources I observed, such as the ability to set and describe the budget, or the authority to hold closed meetings, were the result of open coding during data analysis. In this chapter, and in Chapter 5, I present only resources and strategies that I observed directly or that were reported to me by the study participants, regardless of whether the resource or strategy was mentioned in the extant literature. While I summarize my observations in these two chapters, in Appendix C I include a list of every power resource I observed or that was reported to me by my informants.

Table 4.1 summarizes available power resources, compared between McKinley and Rainier and organized by actor and resource type. Some resources were context-independent – they were guaranteed by the law or the nature of the position, regardless of any environmental factors. Other resources were context-dependent, meaning that their availability was shaped by external or internal conditions which varied from district to district. Stars in Table 4.1 indicate context-independent resources, and check marks indicate context-dependent resources. For example, board members, superintendents and cabinet members, and union leaders all might have had a dedicated staff and infrastructure such as a permanent office and technology for communication.

Superintendents and administrators always had that resource (shown by a star), since it is

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26 Because the right to bargain, the scope of bargaining, and the right to strike are determined by state law, these resources are not necessarily guaranteed in other states/districts. In this work, I define contracts, grievances, and strikes as context-independent because McKinley and Rainier are in California and state law guarantees those rights to unions.
part of their position in the district office. Board members in neither of the two districts had a dedicated staff, but in Rainier the teachers’ union had a full-time executive director, a full-time executive assistant, and office space in a building they owned. In some cases, resources are blacked out because they are not available to a particular actor: boards and superintendents do not collect dues, so they do not have that material resource available to them at all.

When I compared the resource distribution of boards, superintendents, and unions in each district, I found that certain actors had a clear comparative advantage. The shading in Table 4.1 shows this; the darker red color indicates a comparative advantage in a particular type of resource over the actor(s) with lighter shading. The comparative advantages in a particular type of resource varied by district – for example, in McKinley, the board and superintendent had an advantage in social resources over the teachers’ union, whereas in Rainier, the advantage was reversed. I conjecture as to how environmental factors led to these differences in resource distribution in Chapter 5.
Table 4.1. Available power resources for boards and board members (B), superintendents and administrators (S), and teachers’ unions (U).
Stars (★) show context-independent resources and checks (✔) indicate contextually-independent resources; a blank square means the actor in that district did not have the resource even though it was available, and a blacked-out square shows resources that were not available to a particular actor at all.
Shading indicates an observed comparative advantage in a particular resource type.
Material Resources

The first section of Table 4.1 shows the material resources available to each actor. In both McKinley and Rainier, the most significant material resources were time and money. Both unions had money from member dues, but only one had dedicated staff; many Rainier leaders reported the RTA’s executive director was among the most powerful people in the district.

Because the teachers’ unions had financial resources and discretion over how to spend them, they had an advantage in material resources over other district actors. Superintendents and board members arguably had financial resources too, because they controlled district reserves. However, their power to allocate or reallocate those reserves was limited by state and federal law, local policy mandates, employee contracts, and the district’s strategic plan or pre-stated goals. When negotiating furlough days, for example, the McKinley superintendent had, months earlier, committed to eliminating these days should sufficient funding become available. While the district was not required to use the health care rebate to rescind the days, the superintendent’s public dedication to preserving student instructional minutes severely limited the discretion he had over allocating the rebate money.

Knowledge Resources

I organized the available knowledge resources into four general varieties: systemic knowledge (decision-making structures, district norms, and public opinion), operational knowledge (status, operations, budgets, schedules, and agendas), and professional knowledge (job-specific information, experience, and training), and personal
knowledge (general intelligence and skills, plus independently-gained information on education laws, policies, and research).

A comparison of the two districts showed little variation in the distribution of operational information: in both cases, the superintendent and cabinet were the primary source and filter of operational information, and therefore had a tremendous advantage in knowledge resources over boards and unions. Because they operate and manage the district, administrators were aware of every detail of revenues and expenditures, facilities, personnel, student performance, and countless other elements. Administrators also decided how to represent operational data, at what point in the decision-making process the information would become available, and to whom. Often this was delegated to cabinet members. “[The superintendent] trusts that we are giving [the board] appropriate information and that we’re supporting the same goals [as he is]” related a McKinley administrator. For example, when negotiating furlough days, McKinley school board members depended on administrators’ financial reports, especially those who did not have personal experience with budgets or accounting. At the same time, union leaders expressed frustration at their comparative disadvantage in operational knowledge – UTM did not have direct access to the district’s financial data (and often lacked the business acumen to interpret the data for themselves). Unlike the union in McKinley, the RTA shared much of the administrators’ operational information, either through firsthand knowledge or because administrators shared it with them.

Systemic knowledge is arguably one of the most important power resources of all – an actor may have an advantage in any other type of resource, but without knowledge
of how to leverage those resources effectively within the given system, their other
resources are essentially useless. Again, a comparison of McKinley and Rainier shows
administrators in both had the advantage in systemic knowledge; they knew how
demands were translated into policies and actions because they were responsible for that
translation process. Union leaders in Rainier had systemic knowledge as well. For
example, RTA knew who within the central office was responsible for financial
decisions, how to access them, and who to pressure so that they provided the RFOC with
the information it requested. The unions in both districts had one other form of systemic
knowledge: they received information about state funding projections from the state
teachers’ association. In Rainier especially, this information was coveted by district
leaders and the union used it to its advantage. However, McKinley leaders received much
of the same information through its connections to an education lobby organization, and
therefore the union’s information did not hold much value. Neither did the union’s
personal and professional knowledge: because district leaders questioned the professional
expertise of UTM leaders, that resource was not a particular helpful asset for the union.

**Positional Resources**

School boards should have the comparative advantage in available context-independen
tical positional resources because they were the legitimate government of the
school district. No district policy (including budgets and layoffs), bargaining agreement,
or administrator hiring can pass without their approval. They can severely limit the
discretionary power of the superintendent should they so choose, or grant him the option
to act with little oversight, as they did in McKinley. Even when the board delegated
policy-writing responsibilities to the administrators, it still set the direction and priorities of the district. As a McKinley cabinet member explained, the role of the senior administrators is “to implement the instructional program of the district and to implement the direction of the board.”

The superintendent and cabinet in both districts also had important positional power resources: they set school board calendars and agendas, had the authority to hire and fire teachers and interview and recommend administrators, and, crucially, reserved the right to invite or exclude external participants (including the teachers’ union) in the decision-making process. However, a district-to-district comparison showed that positional resources were context-dependent, largely determined by how much autonomy the school board permitted the administrators. In McKinley, the board granted the superintendent a high degree of discretion; the superintendent and cabinet then used administrative actions to make high-impact decisions like the A+ selection with minimal board oversight. So while the McKinley board theoretically had the advantage in positional resources, it deferred their advantage to the superintendent. The McKinley superintendent summarized his strength: “The superintendent is the most powerful person in the district. Ultimately all major decisions come through this office.”

The Rainier Unified board, in contrast, used micromanagement to limit the context-dependent positional resources of its administrators. “Because we don’t have a strong superintendent, the board directs [the administrators]. ‘You do this. You do that.’ It’s a little warped,” observed an RTA leader. The reinstatement of the RFOC is an example of board micromanagement: because board members valued union support, they
used a public board meeting to insist that administrators respond to RFOC requests even when the cabinet was already handling the issue.

Both unions also had the context-independent positional resource of mandated involvement in contract negotiations. Board members, administrators, and union leaders all acknowledged the power of the union contract during interviews. Regardless of the specifics of any particular contract provision, every informant believed that it was a powerful resource because its existence limited the discretionary power of the board and superintendent. However, evidence from both districts suggested that three factors substantially diminished the power of the McKinley and Rainier contracts. First, contracts are not unilateral decisions made by the teachers’ union, but are rather negotiated agreements between the union and the district. Second, there are a number of decisions that affect teachers but are outside the scope of bargaining. Layoffs are implemented through board policies, and the selection of instructional programs like A+ is an administrator action. Employee unions must be invited to participate in these decisions. Third, administrators reported that they were more hindered by the state budget and funding model, and by underfunded state and federal mandates, than the contracts with their unions.

In McKinley Unified the teachers’ union had few contextually-dependent positional resources – McKinley leaders did not give the union entrée to board policies and administrator actions. In contrast to UTM, the Rainier Teachers’ Association had invited access to important financial decisions through the RFOC and other standing advisory committees. Reports from employee unions were on the agenda of every school
board meeting. The superintendent and deputy superintendent met bi-weekly with the union president and executive director, and each was in constant communication with one another.

One key positional resource available to all district actors was the ability to meet privately. Private meetings enabled actors to determine the group’s position first without revealing it an opponent and allowed for private debate so that dissenting participants could express their views while the group appeared publically united. McKinley leaders demonstrated the utility of this resource when they selected A+. While the law permits that only confidential personnel, legal, and negotiations issues are discussed during closed school board sessions, district and union leaders in both districts reported that this was not the case. A board member in Rainier related that closed meetings hid disagreement: “Sometimes not everyone comes out of closed session happy, but we’ve learned to accept losses. We don’t feel that our community needs to hear our sausage-making and our issues.” A UTM leader related that this placed the board at an advantage over the union. “Our board has usually operated that all discussion and debate takes place behind closed doors so that they come out as a united front…They feel that they have a responsibility to stick together,” she reported. “It affects us horribly because we don’t know where the real issues are…which makes speaking with them [in open session] pointless and a waste of time.”

Social Resources

I divided the considerable social resources I observed in McKinley and Rainier into three general categories: community, district, and internal.
Community social resources were connections to political elites and influential families, organized groups, and broad-based support. A comparison of the two districts showed that different community social resources were important in different districts. In Rainier, board members were tied to local political elites and families. Some had family members currently elected to state and local office, or formerly held those positions themselves. Others had careers in city government or with national NGOs. “A lot of them were elected through the community or through their names,” said a Rainier school board member of his colleagues.

Broad-based constituent support from employees, parents, and voters was another sought-after community social resource for Rainier leaders. Rainier is ethnically and politically homogeneous. The community is almost completely Hispanic and working-class, liberal and Democratic, pro-labor and pro-union (and often union members themselves). District leaders reported that most of Rainier Unified’s teachers live in Rainier’s attendance boundaries, so they are parents and voters as well as employees. “The teachers, their kids are in the school district. We all decided to move back after college,” said a board member. An RTA leader, herself a teacher, resident, and parent of two current Rainier students, stated that Rainier Unified is “almost incestual, with a political underlay, because there’s so many people that are in the district, that teach in the district, that live in the voting district. We’re their constituents, we’re a vote.” The responsiveness of board members to external demands illustrated the high value of broad-based constituent support and elite allies in Rainier. Because of these community social resources, “so much of the board is like a favor/crony board” said a union leader.
In McKinley, there were no political elites or well-established political families. Rather, social interest groups were the dominant community social resource. Residents are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse, and heterogeneity fostered a handful of powerful social interest groups from which district leaders sought support. Each of these groups – a community-based service club, the local arts council, the PTA, and a fund-raising booster organization called the McKinley Education Foundation (MEF) – had social resources to grant its allies. McKinley’s active European immigrant population, many of them business owners, was largely represented in the service club; the arts council and education foundation was made up of mostly affluent Caucasian parents and retirees. The MEF consisted of residents, local business owners, district leaders and alumni, and teachers. Nearly three-quarters of the McKinley parents belonged to the PTA.

These organizations were important resources not just because of their members, but because they funded programs that the district could not afford because of limited financial resources. In the past six years, the MEF donated over $500,000 to McKinley Unified to support arts, technology, and health programs, ensuring the district could still offer these programs while surrounding districts had eliminated them. The PTA gave scholarships, training, and grants to students and teachers.

The second general form of available social resources was district allies. Every board member, administrator, and union leader in both districts was aligned with, or at least receptive to, someone from another group. Some district allies were gained through
institutionalized or formal procedures. Board members, for example, had an ally in the superintendent because they hired him.

Informal connections were an equally important source of valuable district social resources, although these connections took different forms in the two cases. In McKinley, administrators and board members shared social connections through community groups, churches, or youth sports. Rainier actors had district allies because nearly every administrator, board member, and union leader had history in the district and in the community. “Half of the teachers in the union are my friends from high school and college,” said a Rainier school board member. Most of the administrators, including the superintendent, were promoted from within after many years of service in the district. “The cabinet members, the superintendent, the assistant superintendents, many of them were former students, former teachers here,” said the Rainier Teachers’ Association president. “Many of them were actively involved in the RTA…We have a really family-owned entity.”

For unions, an important district social resource was the board majority. The McKinley superintendent explained: “As soon as you get the majority of the board going in one direction, the will of the majority starts to kick in.” Rainier’s union president concurred, saying, “[district leaders are receptive us because] we worked very, very hard to get involved with board elections. And we’re happy to report that all of the current board members were endorsed by the Association.”

Finally, the teachers themselves were a crucial district social resource. A Rainier board member noted, “The teachers hold the power here. They have numbers. We can do
policies, we can govern, we can lead and manage, but they’re the ones that are in the
classroom every day.” When McKinley administrators appealed to teachers directly with
furlough day site visits, they demonstrated the value of the teachers as a social resource.

Internal allies are the third general type of social resource. In both districts, each
group of actors – board members, administrators, and union leaders – was more powerful
if they had internal unity. The administrators in each district reported that they were
highly cohesive with one another because of a combination of similar ideologies, similar
work ethics, and personal history. In McKinley, cohesion was the result of personnel
selectivity: the superintendent hired nearly all of the cabinet members himself.

While administrators in both districts had internal allies, the union did so only in
Rainier. Union leaders reported that the rank-and-file teachers supported them, and that
the RTA executive board members generally agreed with one another. The United
Teachers of McKinley, however, did not have internal unity. There was little cohesion
among UTM leaders, and between UTM leaders and their membership. “[UTM has] a lot
of their own members that are not happy,” said a McKinley school board member, when
asked about the UTM march on the school board meeting during furlough day
negotiations. “There were 50 teachers there but there were 2,000 teachers that weren’t
there. I know a lot of people that are saying to me, ‘How can I get out of the union, they
don’t speak for me.’”

Determining which district actor held the comparative advantage in available
social resources was difficult because all of the potential resources were context-
dependent. A teachers’ union might, in theory, hold a comparative advantage in social
resources because of their large membership, but their access to those resources can be constrained by environmental factors. Demographics, local political ideology, and community structure increased the community social resources of the teachers’ union in Rainier, yet decreased the same social resources of the union in McKinley. Comparative advantage was also difficult to assign because not all social resources were equally valued. The Rainier Teachers’ Association had both in-district allies and broad-based community support. When union leaders regained RFOC’s autonomy they only leveraged the former; board members responded to union pressure during the superintendent search only after the union threatened to mobilize the latter. I discuss how environmental context affects resource availability in detail in Chapter 5.

While district actors in Rainier and McKinley had a wide variety of resources available to them, having access to a resource, or having a comparative advantage in a resource, did not ensure that an actor influenced decision-making. In order to affect decision-making, three other conditions were required: the actor had a strategy available to leverage their resources, the actor chose to use the strategy, and other actors responded to the action. Research Question 2 addresses available strategies.

**Research Question 2: Available Power Strategies**

*When actors use power strategies to leverage their resources, what types of strategies do they use, where are those strategies located, what is the goal of each strategy, and which dimensions of power do those strategies represent?*

As argued in Chapter 2, possessing power resources does not alone ensure that an actor will be able to exert influence. The actor must also deploy those resources in such a
way that the action is likely to work. Figure 2.1 conceptualizes power strategies as arrows, indicating that one actor is performing an action in order to affect the behavior of another. Power strategies take place outside of the legitimate political system – external actors without any governance authority offer or deny their resources to district leaders in exchange for a favorable decision-making outcome. Power strategies are also internal the legitimate political system, since even actors who do have legitimate authority still cannot control all the outcomes of decision-making and must therefore use a power strategy to sway those who do.

In both McKinley and Rainier Unified, I observed numerous power strategies. To classify them, I used the three dimensions of political power drawn from the literature: direct authority, constraint, and manipulation. For each of these dimensions, or faces, power is defined as the domination of one actor by another; domination occurs when actors’ interests conflict. In the first two dimensions, conflict is overt. In the third, it is latent. During data analysis, I created a fourth category of action to describe how political actors protect their interests: strategic accommodation. Strategic accommodation is the calculated exchange, combination, or concession of resources in order to reach a mutually agreeable goal. I label strategic accommodation “zero face” actions and use it as a counterpart to third-face strategies, which I defined as a willing act on the part of actor A to encourage the compliance of actor B without actor A conceding any of his own resources. A zero-face strategy promotes compliance, but unlike third face strategies it also requires concession. Strategic accommodation can still represent domination, and is not necessarily altruistic or selfless (although it can be). Actors may cooperate because
their interests truly coincide, or their interests can conflict but they may choose to concede to one another without reaching genuine consensus.\footnote{Strategic accommodation is not a new concept. It combines aspects of sociological, economic, and organizational theories. Sociological theory defines “power with” or “power through” as power exercised within and through coalition (McFarland, 2006; Sabatier, 1988). Economic/ecological theory recognizes productive, integrative, and exchange power as collaborative activities that involve reciprocity or compassion (Boulding, 1989). In organizational theory, “negotiated accommodation” is willful concession to minimize conflict or more efficiently accomplish organizational goals (Kimbrough, 1964; Willower, 1991). Here I use it as a political concept because strategic accommodation is not necessarily altruistic or selfless (although it can be). Actors may cooperate because their interests coincide, or their interests can conflict but they may choose to concede to one another without reaching true consensus.}

As I analyzed and compared my data, I identified hundreds of individual strategies actors used to leverage their resources. Some strategies, such as endorsement or donation, were explicit and overt. Others – for example, information control – were subtle, tacit, and subject to interpretation. At times, actors were unaware that a routine procedure was also a power strategy. For example, the lack of time dedicated to a UTM report on McKinley’s board meeting agenda had been an institutionalized practice for longer than most administrators had been in office.

In the tables (4.2-5) below, I present the power strategies available to district actors in McKinley and Rainier. The tables are not intended to be exhaustive, but are rather meant to highlight key strategies that substantially changed (or dramatically failed to change) the balance of power and influenced decisions. Strategies are organized by description and dimension, and each table follows a similar format. The column headings label the actor using the strategy; “Board\( \rightarrow \)Admin” means that board members, either as individuals or as a group, used that particular strategy to influence the superintendent or cabinet members, and “Admin\( \rightarrow \)Board” indicates that administrators used that strategy to influence the board. Columns also are color-coded by the actor using each strategy – the
board is green, the superintendent and cabinet yellow, and the union purple. Because these tables are built from data, I only checked strategies which I observed at least once, an admitted limitation of a two-district case study. If I observed a strategy in both districts, the box is checked. If I observed a strategy in only one district, the boxes are marked with either an M (McKinley) or an R (Rainier). As in Table 4.1, blank boxes are strategies that were available but not used, and blacked-out boxes are strategies that were not possible.

In the text that follows each table, I describe in detail selected influential, or potentially influential, available power strategies. I also include which actors I observed using each strategy, and the strategy’s location and goal. I highlight these particular strategies for two reasons. The first is frequency. Some were particularly frequent or pervasive in both districts. Others were more common in only one of the two districts. Some, like rallies or endorsements, I only observed once but at key moments. My second selection criterion is success. I observed that some strategies were successful in both districts, whereas some were only successful in either McKinley or Rainier. A discussion of why some strategies were more or less common, and more or less successful, is reserved for Chapter 5.

**First-Face Power Strategies of Direct Authority**

Table 4.2 summarizes observed first-face power strategies and the actors who used each. For example, the first row in Table 4.2 represents the first-face strategy of using legal authority to make decisions for others. In both cases, the board used its authority to make governance decisions for the district. Likewise, the union used its
official authority to approve and veto contracts and other negotiated provisions to control the board and administrators. However, actors in two districts also showed distinct differences in the way that they used first-face strategies. In McKinley, the union and administrators used direct authority more often than those actors did in Rainier, whereas in Rainier, the board was more likely to use direct authority to influence administrators than was the McKinley board. In the text following Table 4.2, I describe specific first-face strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Face Strategies: Direct Authority (Goals: Dominate, Coerce, Threaten)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official authority: exercise legal right to make decisions for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board → Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board → Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board → Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin → Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin → Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union → Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union → Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official authority: apply state labor laws, threaten lawsuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official authority: cite contract, threaten grievances or strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional authority: micromanage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional authority: fire, demote, or fail to promote employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. First-face power strategies available to board members, administrators, and unions.

Strategy(ies): Use official authority to make decisions for others; micromanagement
Actor(s): School board
Location: Micropolitical
Goal: Dominate, coerce

As the governing body of a school district, the school board has the direct authority to make decisions for others. They approve or veto all policies, budgets, and contracts. School boards can act without oversight from the administrators they appoint. Should they so choose, they can micromanage the superintendent and cabinet or give them more discretion. While school boards are subject to the same constraints as any other local governing board in that they must follow state and federal law (an often-exhaustive list that includes state education code and labor law, ESEA and other federal
policies, and the *Brown Act* which in California limits the private communication between board members), they are the only actor in the local legitimate political system for education that is legally sanctioned to govern it.

Board members in both districts exercised their direct authority, but in different ways. In Rainier, board members used micromanagement, even turning it into a public show. During a board meeting, when the RFOC chairperson expressed concern about not receiving information, one board member was quick to blame central office staff and instruct them to respond to the RFOC’s requests. He did not acknowledge that the issue had been resolved days earlier through communication between the financial office, the superintendent, and RFOC leaders.

Rainier administrators and union leaders saw micromanagement as a political strategy that board members used to protect their interests. The Rainier superintendent described board member action, saying, “By their nature, and by their position, they are more political than I am…If there are ever attempts at micromanaging, generally they are because there is some political agenda.” A teachers’ union leader offered a more blunt description: “They’re into this strange little control freak stuff where they don’t want anything to happen without their approval.” As a result, the superintendent found that one of his primary activities was brokering board member demands. The superintendent described how he keeps these demands in check: he reminds board members of the potential political consequences of their requests. “The board members are political animals,” he related. “Recognizing that doesn’t mean that they don’t have the best interest of the students at heart, but it’s my job, in part, to guide them through that and
say, ‘Please be mindful of the fact that if you do things for political reasons…then there could be the downside.’”

In Rainier, the board used direct authority only with the administrators, not with the teachers’ union. To save money, the board could have fired teachers, but it did not. “Most districts automatically give out pink slips to protect the organization because of financial uncertainty,” related a Rainier board member, “but we also know from the human side what that does. It is those types of things that go long ways with the teachers’ organization.” Rather than fire teachers, district and union leaders negotiated an early retirement plan.

Unlike in Rainier, the McKinley Unified board members rarely exercised direct authority beyond approving administrator-recommended policies. Instead, they delegated a significant portion of their official authority to the superintendent. However, they did not grant the superintendent and cabinet complete discretion. Rather than issuing mandates, the board used a second-face strategy, and set the vision for the district by designing a strategic plan that included arts, language, technology, and college readiness; implementation, again, was left to the superintendent.

Strategy(ies): Cite contract and state labor laws; threaten grievance or lawsuit  
Actor(s): Teachers’ union  
Location: Micropolitical  
Goal: Coerce, threaten

Teachers’ unions have direct authority as well, although instead of forcing others to act, they instead prohibit district actions that violate the terms of their labor agreement. Should the district breach the terms of the contract, a union can enter a formal grievance. Contract provisions cannot be changed by district leaders without negotiation, and if the
district and union not do come to an agreement during negotiations the parties usually resort to external mediation or arbitration. Further, a union can file a lawsuit if it believes that a district is in violation of state labor laws. Because mediation, arbitration, grievances, and lawsuits are often costly and time-consuming, even the threat of such action can be enough to impel a district to comply with union demands.

Unions in the two districts demonstrated a sharp contrast in the way they used their direct authority. The United Teachers of McKinley frequently relied on its contract to control district actions. “They hate the fact that we have a contract. Their goal is to get rid of the union and get rid of the contract,” said a UTM leader. “They would like to be able to pay us at will, how much they want, when they want. They’d like to be able to fire teachers whenever they want.” Nearly all of the UTM leaders reported that their role was to “protect” the teachers from violations to the collective bargaining agreement. A striking illustration of this strategy was the UTM leaders’ willingness to take the scheduled 2011-2012 furlough days even though neither they nor McKinley leaders wanted them to. UTM feared that, should they concede to district pressure to breach their own contract by pushing the days past the end of the contract’s term, the other protections afforded to them under their contract could be further undermined.

While the McKinley union frequently used first-face strategies to leverage their positional resources, the Rainier Teachers’ Association rarely did so. Negotiations in McKinley went to arbitration twice in the past five years; in Rainier they have not done so in decades. In the fall of 2011, UTM filed several grievances regarding teacher pay, hours, hazardous working conditions, and professional autonomy, plus a lawsuit related
to maternity leave. During that time, RTA filed none. Union leaders in Rainier largely saw their role as brokering communication with a receptive district, not protecting members from a district that imposed its own direct authority. “My main function is to hear the concerns of our members,” said the union president. “We have such a good relationship with the superintendent’s cabinet that I can literally go to an assistant superintendent, say we have a particular issue, and make arrangements to have someone work with the problem.”

**Second-Face Power Strategies of Constraint**

In addition to authoritative action, actors used strategies of constraint to control who had access to the decision-making process and which issues were open for decisions at all. Table 4.3 lists a number of such second-face strategies. Comparing McKinley and Rainier yielded two observations. First, second-face strategies were much more prevalent in McKinley than they were in Rainier. Second, these strategies were used by both the board and the administrators to exclude the teachers’ union, while the teachers’ union rarely used second-face strategies to constrain district leaders. I describe several strategies in detail in the text following Table 4.3.
Second Face Strategies: Constraint (Goals: Exclude, Limit, Marginalize, Nullify)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy(ies): Access control: electoral politics to affect school board composition</th>
<th>Actor(s): Teachers’ union, school board members</th>
<th>Location: Macropolitical</th>
<th>Goal: Exclude, limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access control: electoral politics to affect board composition</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access control: change board rotation to keep members out of leadership positions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access control: involve/invite others only when required</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access control: restrict communication with leaders, limit speaking during meetings</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access control: debate/decide in private, appear unified in public</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access control: hire weak/like-minded superintendent or staff (friends, allies, internal promotions)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information control: inform only as required, inform retroactively</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior control: use norms to encourage compliance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda control: determine meeting agendas and issue calendars</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda control: dictate district vision/goals, create strategic plan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar control: set inconvenient meetings; withhold schedules</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar control: deliberate time delay</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3. Second-face power strategies available to board members, administrators, and unions.

Union leaders in both districts reported that, by altering the composition of the school board, they controlled who made the decisions that affected teachers and their working conditions. Electoral activities are therefore second-face power strategies. When they used this strategy, unions offered their financial and social resources – money and members – with the goal of gaining at least one union-friendly seat on the school board, or even a board majority.

While unions in both districts used electoral politics, the strategies of each differed markedly. In McKinley Unified, board elections were competitive. To shape the composition of the board, UTM endorsed candidates, made donations, provided volunteers to candidates’ campaigns to walk precincts and make telephone calls, created
a political action committee (PAC) to campaign on behalf of a candidate, offered expert advice to new candidates, and ran a negative campaign against an incumbent. In the most recent election, the union spent $40,000 through their PAC campaigning for two board members and against a third. UTM far outspent every other external interest group and outstripped the personal investments of all but one of the nine total candidates.28 The election ended with one union-endorsed candidate winning, filling the lone pro-union seat on a 4-1 board; the incumbent opposed by the union was reelected as well.

While the same electoral strategies were available to the Rainier Teachers’ Association, the RTA rarely offered more than endorsement and small direct donations. “A school board race is about $100,000 and the union typically gives anywhere from $7,500 to $10,000 so the money is not a big deciding factor,” said a Rainier board member. “They don’t aggressively walk or talk for you or phone bank and they don’t give you a lot of money. They don’t bankroll campaigns.” In Rainier, because of the high value leaders placed on broad-based support, endorsement is the union’s primary strategy. “We are heavy participants in the elections and heavy parts of the community look to us for political endorsement,” said the RTA executive director. “Some of [the board members] have political interest to go further and they want to stay in our good graces.” RTA strategically used endorsement – or lack thereof – to affect the election ended with one union-endorsed candidate winning, filling the lone pro-union seat on a 4-1 board; the incumbent opposed by the union was reelected as well.

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28 Federal election law prohibits nonprofit organizations from participating in political campaigns, including endorsing or donating to candidates, distributing campaign materials, and forming PACs (Panepento, 2007). However, labor unions are subject to the same campaign finance restrictions as for-profit corporations, regardless of their nonprofit status (Liptak, 2010). Therefore, the PTA and other nonprofit community organizations are limited in what they can do during elections: they can host a forum for candidates where all are invited to participate, publish a questionnaire given to all candidates, register voters regardless of political affiliation, remind members to vote, and provide information to candidates (National Parent Teacher Association, n.d.). Members of non-profits can support candidates or PACs as long as they do so as private citizens not affiliated with the non-profit.
superintendent search. The incumbent board members did not need endorsement to win that election, but one had family members in state office and the other was likely to run for state assembly in the near future. The threat of going without the union’s endorsement and social resources was enough that the board members granted RTA access into the superintendent search process.

One similarity emerged in unions’ use of electoral politics: unions in both districts recruited candidates to affect the composition of the board in their favor. Said Rainier’s union president, “Right now, we’re putting out all kinds of feelers. I’m looking for somebody who really has an understanding of public education, who understands the role that unions play.” UTM leaders were likewise concerned that candidates understood the work of teachers, especially important in the face of prevailing public opinion that McKinley teachers were overcompensated with salaries and benefits protected against economic recession. “We look for someone who’s been a teacher or been involved in education so that they really understand what teachers are going through,” said a McKinley union leader, “and they’re not just seeing it from the rose colored glasses of a parent, thinking that ‘Oh these teachers are fine, they have benefits’.” Another reported that UTM sought a candidate who would not be controlled by the board majority: “We want someone who is savvy enough to not be swayed like [our previous candidate] was.”

Unions did not have a monopoly on electoral politics in either district, a surprising finding given the scrutiny, and criticism, unions have received for influencing elections. In both Rainier and McKinley Unified, sitting board members recruited new candidates and gave them advice on how to run their campaigns. In Rainier, a cabinet member
reported that he and other administrators recruited candidates as well. Sitting board members in both districts gave one another endorsements on several occasions when a board member ran for state office. McKinley board members and administrators campaigned heavily for a school bond measure; when the popular measure passed, the public image of McKinley leaders (and McKinley’s reserves) received a substantial boost.

**Strategy(ies):** Control meeting agendas and issue calendars  
**Actor(s):** Superintendent and executive cabinet  
**Location:** Micropolitical  
**Goal:** Exclude, limit, marginalize

Creating board meeting agendas and issue calendars – what issues and policies will be discussed and when, and who will present reports – is nominally the responsibility of the school board. However, in both McKinley and Rainier Unified the superintendent and executive cabinet members performed these tasks. This strategy was especially common in McKinley. In that district, union leaders and the single union-endorsed school board member cited two reasons why agenda control limited their ability to act while increasing the power of administrators and the board majority. First, only certain decisions were open for discussion. The union-endorsed board member related, “As I was reviewing my agenda for the next meeting, I got frustrated and I wrote myself a note that said ‘this is a waste of time.’ …The real issues happen in the consent items [created by the administrators] and I am left with responding to the board agenda, rather than creating it.” By controlling meeting agendas, McKinley administrators therefore eliminated the union’s opportunities for proactive involvement in decision-making.
Second, in McKinley there was no time on board meeting agendas allotted for reports from employee unions. District administrators had unlimited time to make reports to the board, but UTM leaders could only speak, for five total minutes, during public comment. “When I first became president, I was always invited to go up to the dais and give notes to board members, to ask questions on items,” said the union president. Yet during furlough day negotiations, she was restricted to public comment and was not permitted to ask questions or speak at any other point during the meeting. McKinley leaders did not allow her to use the boardroom projector to show slides and graphs. Further, board members used the rules of public comment (“Board Members may question the speaker but there will be no debate”) as a reason to neither acknowledge nor engage with her at all.

Rainier administrators likewise set the agenda of school board meetings. It was the Rainier administrators, for example, who reinstated the regular report from the RFOC. Unlike their counterparts in McKinley, Rainier employee unions had the opportunity to address the school board, with no time limit, at every meeting. These reports were not bound by anything other than district norms, and board members would often respond to, or even joke with, the RTA president when she spoke.

Third-Face Power Strategies of Manipulation

Actors use first- and second-face power strategies when their interests diverge. One can either force a decision upon the other (first face) or exclude the other and their interests from the decision-making process (second face). Actors have a third way to use power: manipulate the interests of others such that they willingly or unwillingly comply.
with the acts of domination and act contrary to their original goals. Table 4.4 describes some of these strategies. A comparison of third-face strategies between the two cases shows a large variation in the strategies used, and by whom. The McKinley board and administrators frequently used third-face strategies to manipulate the union, while the same was not true in Rainier. In that district, the board used third-face strategies more often than any other actor, but the recipient was not the union but the administrators.

Below, I describe specific strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Face Strategies: Manipulation (Goals: Persuade, Divert, Placate, Interfere)</th>
<th>Board → Admin</th>
<th>Board → Union</th>
<th>Board → Board</th>
<th>Admin → Board</th>
<th>Admin → Union</th>
<th>Union → Board</th>
<th>Union → Admin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: policymaking strategies (collective action, lobbying, direct appeals to the public)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: issue/image strategies</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: cultivate powerful internal or external allies</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: filtering/spinning facts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: ask other to protect image of district/public education</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: pressure to save jobs and money in uncertain economy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: appeal to common sense, ask for help to avoid conflict</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: portray issue as complicated and requiring simplification or specialized expertise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion: pressure to act quickly, with inadequate information</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversion: hide mistakes, damage control</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversion: blame external conditions for unpopular decisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placation: token involvement, consultation without action</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference: publically question intelligence/aptitude of others</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference: divide actors from their base of support</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Third-face power strategies available to board members, administrators, and unions.

**Strategy(ies):** Information control (spin/filter, portray issue as complicated)

**Actor(s):** Superintendent and executive cabinet

**Location:** Micropolitical

**Goal:** Persuade, divert, placate

As I argued earlier, district administrators have an automatic comparative advantage in knowledge resources. This information is highly specialized, and often requires a significant amount of professional expertise (not to mention intelligence and
systemic knowledge) to understand and apply it. One way actors leveraged this information was by withholding it, a second-face strategy. However, board members expected that administrators used their professional expertise to inform the lay board on how to best govern the district.

Administrators were therefore more likely to manipulate information than constrain it when they made reports and offered policy recommendations. Nearly every administrator in both cases reported that their strategy for persuading school board members to adopt a particular course of action was to either filter or spin information. Filtering information is strategic selectivity. The Rainier superintendent described how he used this strategy when communicating with school board members: “I need to provide them data and information but I don’t want to inundate them.” McKinley administrators reported using similar strategies to affect board member behavior, especially during the furlough day negotiations which involved complicated financial data. The McKinley CFO explained his role as a broker of knowledge resources: “You think about how you can make [information] legitimate to [the board], that they know you are not just pulling numbers out of the air, and then you simplify it to make whatever point you are trying to make.”

When actors spin information, they present data in a way that it makes a particular course of action seem favorable. Rainier administrators used this strategy frequently, to placate board members or divert them from politically-motivated demands. In Rainier, board members’ ties to community groups or elites often led them to call for actions that were financially impractical, or went against administrator plans. Administrators used
information control to convince board members to change their position. “They have to believe [what we’re telling them] is the truth,” said a Rainier administrator, “so you take several passes, and then you have to spin…Sometimes you have to even bring in somebody from the outside because they won’t take it from you, but they’ll take it from an expert.”

Teachers’ union leaders in both districts begrudged that a certain amount of information control was necessary given the sheer quantity of information and the fact that a lay board does not have the professional expertise required to interpret raw numbers. However, the degree to which union leaders trusted administrators to relay information to the board and the public was not the same in each district. The Rainier Teachers’ Association viewed committees such as the RFOC as watchdogs to assure that administrators controlled information only for the sake of clarity and not to serve anyone’s personal interests. While they knew the district was not always perfectly transparent, RTA was generally satisfied with way that the superintendent and administrators gave their reports.

McKinley administrators stated that transparency was a high priority for them because it engendered trust with the school board; however, UTM believed district leaders used information control to manipulate the board. “The board members are only privy to the information that they’re given. Their opinions are based on that information, and they trust the assistant superintendents and the superintendent to give them accurate information. But what they get isn’t always accurate,” said one UTM leader. During contract negotiations, UTM leaders insisted that the district was underestimating its
reserves so that it could claim the furlough days were necessary. The UTM president bluntly described how this affected leaders’ behavior, and ultimately resulted in decision-making outcomes that did not favor the union: “[The CFO] is the most powerful person in the district, because he is the financial guru and he’s able to present his case financially in such a way that everyone is afraid not to do what he says. …And I get the impression that he really doesn’t like teachers.”

Strategy(ies): Cultivate district and community social resources (offer information, attention, or flattery; image politics)
Actor(s): Board members, administrators, teachers’ union leaders
Location: Macropolitical, micropolitical
Goal: Persuade, placate

In-district social resources are valuable because they give actors access to resources that they wouldn’t otherwise have. For example, a teachers’ union might not normally have the knowledge or positional resources to affect district budgets, but an in-district ally such as a sympathetic administrator might grant them access to those resources. Actors in both districts used this strategy, but with the goal of cultivating different types of social resources.

The Rainier union was highly successful at leveraging its in-district allies on the board and in the central office when it reinstated the RFOC. “Our union is pretty good about playing the board against the superintendent,” said an RTA leader. “If we don’t get what we want from the superintendent we’ll go to the political end and use more political power.” In Rainier Unified, one of the most sought-after allies was the teachers’ union executive director. She related that board members regularly contacted her to trade information for future union support. “On the stuff they know is important to us they’ll
tell us a little something or say ‘I need your support.’” she said. “It’s not like anything major. It’s more just to keep me in the loop, because they want to keep the relationship.”

Besides in-district allies, the other most desirable social resource in Rainier was broad-based community support. To gain it, board members would offer parents and constituents their time and attention, unusual for elected officials in a large, urban district. Rather than micromanaging administrators privately, board members would do so during the open session of school board meetings – they hoped to curry favor with parents by demanding immediate action from the cabinet to resolve parent complaints. “If [a community member] is unhappy with something, even though their issue was already taken care of by the cabinet but maybe not to their liking, they’ll use the speaker’s podium to get the desired results,” related a Rainier cabinet member. “It’s manipulation, to some extent.” A Rainier union leader characterized the strategy similarly: “I think a lot of what we see in the actual board meeting is for show. They’re playing to an audience and they think it’s going to make them look good.”

District actors used macro- as well as micropolitical actions to cultivate allies. While negotiating furlough days, nearly every McKinley board member and administrator appeared at local events like holiday parades, plays, and award ceremonies. Union leaders responded by sending representatives to the same holiday parade and encouraging members to join the same organizations. A UTM leader explained why this was an important strategy in an anti-union community: “My goal is for people to know a teacher and know that they are regular people…not lazy or whatever we are made out to
be, but that we also want to make a decent living and put food on the table for our own families."

**Strategy(ies):** Divide actors from their support, question the intelligence/aptitude of others  
**Actor(s):** Board members, administrators, teachers’ union leaders  
**Location:** Micropolitical  
**Goal:** Persuade, interfere

As actors gathered social resources, they also sought to strategically undermine the social resources of others. This was far more prevalent in McKinley, where district leaders exploited the union’s lack of internal unity. For example, when discussing furlough days at school board meetings the four majority school board members subtly, but publically, marginalized the teachers’ union president and patronized the single pro-union delegate. “[The four] will be talking and walking out while he’s asking questions and giving his report,” said a union leader. “I mean, just being rude, just out and out rude.”

Other strategies to divide actors from their support were much more overt. During furlough day negotiations, McKinley administrators scheduled site meetings so that they could speak to teachers without union interference. The UTM president was not invited to meetings and not allowed to speak when she was there. If no UTM leaders were present, the McKinley superintendent told teachers that the district was ready to move forward with negotiations, but that union leadership was stubbornly holding up bargaining with little regard to either teacher or student interests. “Whenever there is anything that we’re not agreeing with, they try to divide our membership,” explained a union leader. “[Board members] are very frustrated with the union leadership,” related the McKinley CFO, “and
they are very responsive to teachers that contact them and email them. They feel that
UTM leadership is not open to really hearing what they are about, so they are working
with the teachers directly.” By dividing the union from its members, McKinley leaders
used UTM’s own resources – the teachers – to persuade UTM that it was in their best
interest to offer a counterproposal and eventually close the negotiations.

**Strategy(ies):** Policymaking strategies (lobbying, collective action)
**Actor(s):** Teachers’ union
**Location:** Macropolitical
**Goal:** Persuade

Collective action is a macropolitical activity commonly associated interest groups,
and was fairly common in McKinley Unified. In comparison, I did not observe this type
of action in Rainier. UTM tried to leverage its social resources by mobilizing its
members, as well as students, parents, and other employees. It encouraged them to write
letters, attend school board meetings, and march or rally on behalf of (or against) a
specific policy. Several years ago union leaders protested for wage increases outside a
board member’s fundraising event. Last year, they conducted a candle-lit vigil outside the
same board member’s home in response to proposed layoffs. During furlough day
negotiations, teachers rallied during a school board meeting.

Direct lobbying as a macropolitical strategy did not necessarily entail collective
action, however. The McKinley teachers’ union took out ads in the local newspaper, and
both union and district leaders wrote letters to the editor explaining their respective
positions to the public. Both sides also threatened a press conference to blame the other
for forcing students to lose instructional minutes, should no agreement be reached.
Zero-Face Strategies of Strategic Accommodation

Strategic accommodation is the final dimension of political action. A number of these actions are shown in Table 4.5. As the table illustrates, the use of zero-face strategies was quite different between the two cases. In Rainier, the board-union and administrator-union relationships were marked with strategic accommodation, while board-administrator interactions were not. The opposite was true in McKinley: board members and administrators frequently used strategic accommodation, with board members more often conceding to administrators than vice versa. Neither engaged in zero-face strategies with the teachers’ union.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero Face Strategies: Strategic Accommodation (Goals: Collaborate, Share, Compromise, Bargain)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative structures: formalize joint committees for sharing responsibility/accountability/information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: emphasize common goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: acknowledge adversity, agree to disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: make requests when could make demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: ask for advice, value other as expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: facilitate open communication, encourage transparency, allow informal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative norms: discourage personal alliances/favoritism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared resources: voluntary information exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared resources: invite others to participate without requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared resources: allow discretion, grant autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromise: trade expensive demand for inexpensive one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargain: trade support or concession now for future action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5. Zero-face strategies available to board members, administrators, and unions.

Overall, I rarely observed zero-face strategies in McKinley Unified. The interactions among district actors over the selection of A+, the furlough day negotiations, and the bulk of other district decisions were predicated on conflict. When the district and the union came to an agreement over furlough days, they did so not by using zero-face
strategies but rather because of changing external conditions – namely, unanticipated federal funds. The only zero-face strategies I saw in McKinley were between the board and the administrators, allowing them to create a united, centralized power structure; there were few, if any, zero-face strategies used between district and union leaders.

In Rainier Unified, however, strategic accommodation between district and union leaders was common practice. While each acknowledged that some of their interests conflicted, “we’ve worked hard to get rid of the adversarial roles,” said a long-time cabinet member. Board members saw their role not as authorities but as facilitators. “My leadership style over the years has been one of consensus-building, coalition-building, …respecting people’s opinion and getting people’s input,” said a Rainier board member and several-time board president. “Obviously, there’s tough decisions you have to make, but it’s easier to make them when you have heard the different spectrum of opinions.” He continued that this has contributed to his success in passing board policies: “If you don’t get buy-in from the people in the institution itself, it is going to be more difficult to get support [on an issue]. …But when you have issues that everyone agrees with it is just so much easier to move as a united organization.”

This is not to say, however, that actors in Rainier were not self-interested. During school board meetings, union leaders were very careful to appear assertive yet deferential. “If you yell at the school board every single time, that doesn’t help,” said a union leader. “Some issues, you don’t want to bring up. You want to make sure that when you make a statement to the board you do it for a reason. It’s not just an open conversation. It’s their meeting, it’s not our meeting. This is all strategic.” Another RTA
leader stressed that the union for years has deliberately avoiding antagonizing district
leadership with collective action. “You have to have a seat at the table,” she
acknowledged. “You’re not gonna win every battle but you have to win the important
ones. If you get a seat at the table, I think that takes care of a lot of things.” A Rainier
school board member confirmed this assessment: “Ultimately RTA knows that there will
be mandatory cuts, and they’d rather have a say-so on how those cuts are gonna be
made.”

In McKinley Unified, there was no accommodation, strategic or otherwise.
District administrators and board members saw union leaders as agitators. “It’s just an
expectation of resistance,” said a board member. “The union is powerful in blocking
efforts, and at making life difficult when could be easier in a hard [economic] time.”

The use of zero-face strategies was one of the largest disparities in decision-
making processes between McKinley and Rainier. Other differences were apparent in
resource distribution, strategy choice, and decision outcomes. In Rainier, the teachers’
union had an advantage in nearly every type of resource, including many that were
context-dependent. Union leaders rarely used first- and second-face power strategies, and
when they did those strategies were almost always micropolitical. On the rare occasion
that union leaders used a macropolitical strategy, they were able to influence board
member behavior with electoral politics even during an uncontested election.

The comparison to McKinley Unified is stark. The teachers’ union had very few
context-dependent resources and was at a comparative disadvantage to other actors in
every type of resource. The union frequently used first- and second-face power strategies,
and those strategies were often macropolitical. The outcomes of decision-making rarely reflected union interests, and when they did it was not the result of union action. My final research question asks how the environmental factors of institutional context, organizational and community structures, public opinion, and personal traits accounted for the similarities and differences in resources, processes, and outcomes presented in this chapter. In Chapter 5, I answer this question.
CHAPTER 5
Explaining Power Resources, Strategy Selection, and Decision-Making Outcomes

In the sociopolitical system of school district decision-making (Figure 2.1), actors use power resources and strategies because they want to influence the outcomes of the system: board policies, collective bargaining agreements, and administrator actions. Each actor, motivated by the mandates of their job, the demands of students, parents, employees, and community members, and their personal and political interests, leverages their available resources to affect the behavior of others within that system. With my first two research questions, I described the power resources and strategies available to district actors. As described in Chapter 4, power was distributed very differently in McKinley than it was in Rainier. The data suggested that environmental factors explained a considerable amount of the variation between the two districts. In this chapter, I present an explanatory argument for how environmental factors – institutional context, organizational and community structure, public opinion, and personal traits – affected resource distribution, strategy selection, and strategy success in these two cases. First, I apply the lens of Figure 2.1 to McKinley and Rainier, briefly describing sociopolitical decision-making in each district and outlining the environmental factors that affected actors’ resources, strategies, and outcomes.

Environmental Factors in McKinley and Rainier Unified

In Chapter 2, I described how political and organizational theories posit (and empirical research agrees) that political systems are embedded in institutional environments which affect the way that actors make demands on the system, and the way the system responds to those demands. The data from my two case study districts support
the hypotheses that context affects decision-making outcomes: each district had markedly different institutional environments, and actors and direct observation confirmed that the environment did have an effect on outcomes. Table 5.1 summarizes a number of environmental factors in each district that the study participants regarded as important; I corroborated their reports with the analyses of observational data and documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McKinley</th>
<th>Rainier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Context</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location and Demographics</td>
<td>Location and Demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed urban/suburban, white-collar</td>
<td>Urban, blue-collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average home value, home ownership rate, and median income higher than county avg</td>
<td>Average home value, home ownership rate, and median income lower than county avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racially heterogeneous</td>
<td>Racially homogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More registered Republican voters than state avg</td>
<td>More registered Democrat voters than state avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational attainment than state average</td>
<td>Lower educational attainment than state average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little overlap among parents, teachers/district employees, and voters</td>
<td>High degree of overlap among parents, teachers, and voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaders &amp; Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leaders &amp; Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board composition: 4 endorsed, 1 not endorsed by teachers’ union</td>
<td>Board composition: all 5 members endorsed by teachers’ union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average term, current school board: 6.5 yrs</td>
<td>Average term, current school board: 13 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time in district, current admins: 4.5 yrs</td>
<td>Average time in district, current admins: 22 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time in district, teachers: 12.75 yrs</td>
<td>Average time in district, teachers: 15.5 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test scores above state average</td>
<td>Test scores below state average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores show slight but steady improvement</td>
<td>Scores show consistent and major improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores comparable to districts with similar demographics</td>
<td>Scores far higher than districts with similar demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Organizational Structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures &amp; Practices</td>
<td>Structures &amp; Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralized, top-down hierarchy</td>
<td>Horizontal, bottom-up arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union involvement based on requirement</td>
<td>Union involvement based on necessity/mutual benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited standing committee meetings between administrators and union</td>
<td>Regular meetings between administrators and union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No standardized protocols for union involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed Roles and Norms</td>
<td>Assumed Roles and Norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board: set overall goals, support superintendent</td>
<td>Board: set specific goals, respond to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent: drive policy design and implementation</td>
<td>Superintendent: respond to board demands; management and operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators: operations, support superintendent</td>
<td>Administrators: management and operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union: protect members from district</td>
<td>Union: broker communication between district and teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Environmental factors in McKinley and Rainier Unified.

Data sources (unless otherwise specified): participant interviews, observations, and document review

a From US Census, www.city-data.com, and public records from the city clerk offices. City boundaries are roughly, but not exactly, concurrent with district boundaries.

b Current administrator tenure is an average of total time in any central office administrative position, not necessarily the person’s current position.

c Leader data from interviews; teacher data from public employment records (CA Dept. of Education)

d Data from CA Department of Education, US National Center on Education Statistics
McKinley | Rainier
---|---
**Community Structure**
- Factional/neocorporate. Board members are affiliated with a few powerful community groups, and tend to represent those groups during discussion.
- Several groups (PTA and MEF) are invited into decision-making by district leaders.

**District** is inert. All of the candidates were endorsed by the union. No other interest groups compete with the union for district power.

**City** is pluralist. Board members are from established political families or organizations. Community power is contested and fluid.

**Image and Public Opinion**
- Constituents characterize public education as ineffective and mired in politics.
- Constituents like the schools and see board members and administrators as effective…
- but the public sees and disapproves of fighting among district leaders and teachers.
- Constituents see the union as petty and political, but are generally pro-teacher.

**District** has maintained arts, music, language, and health programs when other districts have not.

- Constituents characterize public education as ineffective and mired in politics.
- Constituents see board members and administrators as effective…
- as long as they are responsive and maintain solvency.
+ Constituents see the union as important, productive community members.

**Elections**
- Highly contested, many viable candidates
- Multiple groups recruit and endorse candidates; union-endorsed candidates occasionally win
- Frequent incumbent turnover

**Low conflict, few viable candidates**

- Union is the primary recruiter/endorser of candidates; union-endorsed incumbent candidate usually win
- Little incumbent turnover

**Personal Traits**

- Expertise, professional reputation
- Neutrality, logic, rationality
- Honesty, directness, follow-through
- Ties to organized groups, volunteerism
- Experience, service to the district, respect of colleagues
- Altruism, dedication, teamwork
- Candidness, personal integrity and ethics
- Dedication to community and family

**Avoided, Mistrusted**

- Emotional responses, rash action
- Overt politics, single-issue candidates
- Alliances with teachers’ union
- Militancy, combative behavior
- Entrenched insiders reluctant to challenge status quo
- Depersonalized responses, acting on data alone
- Aspirations for higher office, egotism, posturing, self-promotion
- Alliances with political elites, pet projects
- Rocking the boat, subverting well-liked norms
- Impulsive outsiders who question customs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valued, Trusted</th>
<th>McKinley</th>
<th>Rainier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expertise, professional reputation</td>
<td>Experience, service to the district, respect of colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutrality, logic, rationality</td>
<td>Altruism, dedication, teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty, directness, follow-through</td>
<td>Candidness, personal integrity and ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ties to organized groups, volunteerism</td>
<td>Dedication to community and family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.1 Continued. Environmental factors in McKinley and Rainier Unified.**

Just as resource distribution and strategy use differed between the two districts, a side-by-side comparison shows a wide variation in a number of environmental factors.

On the whole, McKinley residents were affluent, well-educated, and ideologically conservative; the median income, home value, home ownership rate, percentage of adults who are college graduates, and percentage of voters registered as Republicans were all well above the state average. The community had a fairly positive view of the McKinley
school board and administrators. Students were high-achieving, and the district offered a number of popular programs that other districts had cut. Voters were not traditionally pro-labor, nor were they particularly supportive of their local teachers’ union.

McKinley had a union-excluded neocorporate community structure. Not only did the community have a number of well-established organized groups, but two of them – the PTA and the MEF – were closely associated with McKinley Unified. The PTA had an office inside McKinley’s district headquarters, and PTA representatives were invited to the monthly meeting of the superintendent, cabinet members, and employee unions. Although the PTA is defined as representing both parents and teachers, “we joke that it’s not PTA anymore,” said a UTM leader. “There was a T in there for teachers. But now, you could say it’s ‘PBA’ for school board. We’ve been sort of eliminated.” Another UTM leader explained how the behavior of district leaders demonstrated the union-excluded neocorporate structure: “They doesn’t care what the teachers say. They only care what the parents say.”

The district’s organizational structure was hierarchical and centralized around the board and superintendent, with no formal mechanisms or norms of union inclusion. The superintendent and cabinet members, trusted by the board for their expertise and professional reputations, were the primary drivers of policy design. Administrators were reluctant to invite union leaders to participate in decision-making because of a history of mistrust between the district and union, and district leaders valued neutrality – they did not respond well to individuals they perceived to be associated with UTM or who favored emotional responses and militant action as UTM leaders did. Further, the community
disdained district-union conflict; given UTM’s past use of disruptive macropolitical tactics such as marches, rallies, and media appeals, administrators found that the best way to avoid conflict was to make unilateral decisions and inform the union afterwards.

Resources in McKinley Unified were distributed asymmetrically among actors. unequal, the superintendent and administrators had a comparative resource advantage over both the board and the union. In the case of the former, the advantage was voluntary – the board ceded much of its positional resources to administrators, giving them an advantage in both knowledge and positional resources. The United Teachers of McKinley did what it could to change the balance of power, but to little avail. It was located outside of the legitimate political system and could only make demands on district leaders from that position; instead, the PTA took its place. The union was unpopular in the district and the community, and although it had financial and social resources district leaders did not value them. Further, McKinley had no institutionalized practices for union inclusion. As a result, UTM’s positional resources were limited to access to negotiations and decision-making outcomes rarely favored the union. District leaders chose the Achievement Plus program with little union input. McKinley leaders did not attribute the union-favorable furlough day agreement to any of the union’s political strategies.

Other than size and urbanicity, Rainier Unified had little in common with McKinley. Residents were pro-labor and held a high opinion of the district’s leaders and its teachers. There was a significant amount of overlap among parents, teachers, and voters. Rainier Unified had a union-dominated inert community structure – all of the school board members were union-supported, residents shared the same broad interests
and values as the union, and there were no other organized groups. The district’s union-
friendly institutional context and horizontal organizational structure were conducive to
union involvement in decision-making, and the school board, largely focused on
micromanaging administrators and garnering community support, encouraged union
inclusion. With its substantial knowledge and social resources, the union enjoyed a
prominent position within the legitimate education governance system in Rainier. Union
leaders also embodied many of the personal traits valued by district leaders – they had
long histories with the district and strong ties to the community, and demonstrated much
of the same passion, altruism, and commitment to teamwork as the board members and
administrators did.

The distribution of power in Rainier was also quite different from that in
McKinley. Because of norms of joint decision-making, administrators shared their
knowledge and positional resources rather than hoarding them. Administrators also spent
valuable time placating the micromanaging board members, which weakened both in
comparison to the Rainier Teachers’ Association. Further, unlike in McKinley the
union’s material and social resources were highly sought-after by district leaders, who
were very responsive to union, and community, demands. As a result, the RTA was
internal to the legitimate political system, participating in the decision-making processes
that led not only to collective bargaining agreements but to board policies and
administrator actions as well.

Decision-making outcomes reflected RTA’s strength. The union quietly protected
its interests without any hint of militancy, and its efforts were well-received by district
leaders, employees, and community members. For example, union leaders revitalized the Rainier Financial Oversight Committee via subtle micropolitical pressure and informal communication with district allies. When the union used political power to affect the superintendent search, it acted macropolitically, but privately; it sent a message to board members by withholding its endorsement, not by rallying at a school board meeting.

Clearly then, the environmental factors, distribution of power, preferred influence strategies, and decision-making outcomes were significantly different between the two districts. I combined these environmental factors with the data presented in Chapter 4 to explore how environmental factors affected access to resources, selection of strategies, and strategy success.

Research Question 3: Effects of Environmental Factors

How do environmental factors affect the resources to which actors have access, the strategies that actors choose, and whether or not actors successfully leverage their resources so that outcomes of decision-making reflect their interests?

Environmental Effects on Access to Resources

In Chapter 2, I presented that access to available power resources partially depends on the institutional environment (Figure 2.1) and in Chapter 4, I showed that a number of power resources I observed were in fact context-dependent, as there was a high degree of variation in the distribution of resources in McKinley as compared to Rainier (see Table 4.1). For example, I found that teachers’ union always had the positional resource of mandated involvement in contract negotiations, but their access to board policies and administrator actions depended on others inviting them. In turn,
environmental factors affected whether or not district leaders allowed for union involvement in non-bargained decisions, which is a context-dependent resource. The Rainier union had such access, while the union in McKinley did not.

After comparing the environmental factors between the two cases (Table 5.1) and linking those to resource distribution (Table 4.1), I drew broad conclusions about how environmental factors might affect that distribution in McKinley and Rainier. Table 5.2 shows those conclusions. Each cell describes the conditions under which the distribution of a context-dependent resource shifted. For example, actors’ material resources changed when the institutional context promoted the accumulation of assets or granted more discretion over resource distribution, if the actor was a member of, or aligned with, an influential person or group, if the public endorsed the actor, if the organization had structures or norms for resource-sharing, if the actor was trusted, or if the actor already had resources valued by others and is willing to trade. In McKinley, board members benefitted from a wealthier community; they sought (and gained) the material resources of well-funded interest groups like the McKinley Education Foundation. Because of this, McKinley board members had a slight advantage over other actors in material resources, whereas those in Rainier did not (see Table 4.1). There were no interest groups in Rainier, and as such the environment did not provide board members with substantial material resources. In that district, the context-dependent social resource of broad-based community support was much more valuable to board members than any financial resource that residents might give.
Because I did not catalog every possible available resource in Table 4.1, or every potentially influential environmental factor in Table 5.1, I present only general guidelines in Table 5.2 for the way that the environment influenced resource distribution in these two districts.

In addition, during data analysis I found that while environmental factors accounted for many of the observed patterns in access to resources, strategy selection, and strategy success, the factors alone did not capture the simple fact that when an actor held a comparative advantage in a resource that was valued by another, that actor was more able to influence the behavior of others. To reflect this, I include the effects of the current resource distribution on resource redistribution, strategy selection, and outcomes in McKinley and Rainier in Table 5.2, as well as in Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource distribution shifts if…</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Positional</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional context</strong></td>
<td>…context promotes accumulation of assets</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>…state or federal law grants greater authority/autonomy</td>
<td>…community members are likely to mobilize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community structure</strong></td>
<td>…actor is a member of, or allied with, an influential, active, trusted external group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public opinion</strong></td>
<td>…public trusts and endorses actors</td>
<td>…public informs actors</td>
<td>…public favors actor discretion or involvement</td>
<td>…public becomes involved in district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational structure</strong></td>
<td>…structures and norms facilitate sharing/trading</td>
<td>…structures and norms prioritize transparency</td>
<td>…structures and norms encourage invitation and participation</td>
<td>…structures and norms support communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…and/or actor has influential in-district allies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current resource distribution</strong></td>
<td>…actor has the comparative advantage in another valued resource and is willing to trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2. Effects of environmental factors on resource distribution in McKinley and Rainier.

In both McKinley and Rainier, positional resources were among the most influential of the four types of available power resources. Without them, the UTM was
shut out of the legitimate political system (Figure 2.1) and decision-making was
dominated by the board, the superintendent, and the groups favored by McKinley’s
union-excluded neocorporate structure – the PTA and the MEF. Access was also the
resource over which there was the greatest disparity in distribution between the two
districts (Table 4.1).

Environmental factors played a large role in this disparity. In Rainier, six of seven
conditions described in the “positional” column in Table 5.2 favored an increase in
positional resources for the teachers’ union. Table 5.1 shows these conditions in Rainier:
The community structure was union-dominated inert, with the teachers’ union was allied
with (or in reality, the same as) the parents and voters to whom district leaders were
highly responsive. Public opinion favored teachers and unions in general, and the
community supported RTA’s efforts to work with the district as a partner. The district’s
organizational structure provided multiple channels for participation, including the
RFOC, regular meetings between RTA leaders and the superintendent, and numerous
avenues of informal communication. The union had a number of in-district allies who
could grant them access, as many Rainier administrators were former Rainier teachers
and RTA members themselves. Union leaders, especially the executive director, were
trusted and respected, which made district leaders more likely to respond to RTA’s
demands even if the union did not deliberately use a power strategy or if those demands
were unspoken. The union had social and knowledge resources, which were highly
valued by district leaders. These conditions fostered an environment in which board
members and administrators saw it in their organizational and personal best interests to give positional resources to the union.

In McKinley, environmental factors motivated district leaders to keep their positional resources to themselves (Table 5.1). The union had few allies inside the district and little broad-based community support. Many community members preferred that the union be excluded from decision-making. McKinley’s organizational structures and norms facilitated centralized decision-making that included the union only when required by law or contractual obligation. District leaders neither trusted nor respected UTM’s leadership, and UTM’s financial and social resources were not valuable in a community where many board candidates did not want to be endorsed by, or even associated with, the union.

One caveat is that the conditions listed in 5.2 did not necessarily create a favorable distribution of resources, only a change in the existing distribution. In McKinley, because of the competitive and antagonistic district-union relationship, if one actor gained a resource another lost it. For example, when the UTM president gained access to the district’s furlough day site visits because she was invited by site personnel, the superintendent concurrently lost a positional resource – the right to exclude. The conditions in Table 5.2 also do not require that one actor loses if another gains. The organizational structures in Rainier that prioritized transparency resulted in an increase in the knowledge resources of both administrators and union leaders.
Environmental Effects on Strategy Selection (Location)

Environmental factors affected not only resource distribution, but also the strategies Rainier and McKinley actors chose to leverage their resources. The standard model of political decision-making places board members and administrators internal to the legitimate political system (Figure 2.1), implying that they favor micropolitical action. Likewise, teachers’ unions are generally considered interest groups that use primarily macropolitical strategies to leverage their material and social resources from outside of the legitimate system.

The broad conclusion from my analyses is that the internal/external location of the actors in these two districts was far from absolute. Some conditions promoted the use of micropolitical actions by board members, administrators, and union leaders. In Rainier Unified, board members and the teachers’ union frequently acted outside of their traditional macropolitical location. Although both are conventionally deemed macropolitical – board members because they are politicians, and unions because they are interest groups – in Rainier they frequently opted for micropolitical strategies. Board members micromanaged administrators and each other; union leaders used quiet influence to leverage their internal social resources without public action.

A very different set of conditions encouraged actors to choose macropolitical strategies. Such strategies were used not only by union leaders and board members but, most notably in McKinley, administrators as well. The McKinley superintendent frequently turned to the public for support, seeking material resources from external groups, encouragement from the voters, and allegiance from the rank-and-file teachers; to
do this, he used macropolitical strategies more traditionally associated with politicians and union leaders.

Table 5.3 illustrates the observed relationship between environmental factors and the location of the strategies chosen by actors in McKinley and Rainier. The first two columns of Table 5.3 represent the school board. The left side describes under what conditions – both environmental factors and resource distribution – board members were more likely to select micropolitical strategies. The right side describes the conditions under which they were more likely to choose a macropolitical strategy. The table layout is repeated for administrators and union leaders. Despite the fact actors in the two districts chose markedly different strategies from one another (for example, the RTA frequently used micropolitical strategies while the UTM acted macropolitically), I found that the general rules shown in Table 5.3 applied to the *motivation* behind actors’ strategy choice in both districts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inst. Context</th>
<th>BOARD MEMBERS more likely to use</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATORS more likely to use</th>
<th>UNION LEADERS more likely to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>micro action if:</td>
<td>micro action if:</td>
<td>micro action if:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>macro action if:</td>
<td>macro action if:</td>
<td>macro action if:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racially homogeneous</td>
<td>Uncertain finances</td>
<td>History of spending on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers make up the</td>
<td>Long-serving leaders</td>
<td>teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voting majority</td>
<td>Leaders hired from within</td>
<td>Long-term leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racially heterogeneous</td>
<td>Stable finances</td>
<td>History of spending on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High quality of life</td>
<td>Short-term leaders</td>
<td>programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No clear voter majority</td>
<td>Leaders hired externally</td>
<td>Short-term leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Structure</td>
<td>Inert</td>
<td>Factional/neocorporate</td>
<td>Union-dominated inert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factional/neocorporate</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Union-invited neocorporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Union-included factional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion</td>
<td>Elections are uncompetitive</td>
<td>Dissatisfied with district,</td>
<td>Pro-union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public is satisfied with</td>
<td>mistrust leaders</td>
<td>Anti-union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>district leaders and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Structure</td>
<td>Top-down Board as micromanagers</td>
<td>Administrators design policy</td>
<td>Horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bottom-up Board as community</td>
<td>Administrators implement policy</td>
<td>Union solves problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Norms for inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Traits</td>
<td>Mistrustful of administrators,</td>
<td>Trusted and respected by the</td>
<td>Trusted and respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other board members, and</td>
<td>board and union</td>
<td>by district leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>union</td>
<td></td>
<td>Political behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tolerated/encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Resources</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Trusted and respected by the</td>
<td>Trusted and respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social (internal allies)</td>
<td>board and union</td>
<td>by district leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material Social (external allies)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Political behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>tolerated/encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positional Social (internal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>allies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social (internal allies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material Social (external allies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3. Effects of environmental context and resource distribution on strategy location in McKinley and Rainier.

* Only union-excluded neocorporate (McKinley) and a union-dominated inert (Rainier) community structures were represented by the two cases. However, I asked informants about hypothetical situations and conclusions can be drawn about other types of community structures based on their responses. These conclusions are shown in the community structure row of this table; see Notes 29 and 30 in the text that follows as well.
Community structure and public opinion in McKinley Unified persuaded district leaders, both board members and administrators, to choose macropolitical strategies (Tables 4.3 and 4.4). In McKinley, elections were competitive and incumbent turnover was frequent (Table 5.1) and board members behaved as if they believed their positions were at risk. Parents and voters demanded high-quality instructional programs, and because of state funding cuts, the sitting board members sought the financial resources of the handful of local interest groups in McKinley’s neocorporate community. These groups also each represented a portion of McKinley’s racially heterogeneous population, and board members could not keep their position if these groups did not mobilize their social resources to vote. 

Board members actively sought the support of powerful and resource-rich community groups – the PTA and the MEF – by making decisions that reflected the goals of those groups. These two groups represented the parents (PTA), the local business community (MEF), and active, affluent community members and property owners (MEF). As such, the groups demanded high-quality instructional programs that would help students get into competitive universities and provide them with skills desired by potential employers like technology and foreign language proficiency (PTA) and would make the schools and therefore the community attractive to affluent residents and businesses (MEF). When board members prioritized spending on programs and operations rather than teacher salaries when asking the union to take furlough days, and avoided negative public opinion largely by quieting dissenting voices while A+ was

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29 Theory and empirical research also argues that a pluralist community structure encourages board members to act macropolitically and publically prioritize constituent demands over superintendent recommendations and employee requests (Greene, 1992; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Prewitt, 1970). While neither district in this study was pluralist, informants’ responses to questions about community structure were consistent with this finding.
chosen, they were reflecting the interests of those groups. In addition, most board members distanced themselves from the unpopular union, and shunned the single union-endorsed school board member.

The McKinley superintendent and cabinet members also selected macropolitical strategies, a finding that challenges the presumption that administrators avoid external politics. Interviews and observations conformed that public opinion was a significant motivator of their behavior. Even though student achievement was high and the district maintained programs outside of the standard core curricula, many years of district-union animosity cast a negative pall on McKinley leaders. “The community sees [us clashing],” said the superintendent. “It doesn’t help me as a district, it doesn’t help the teachers. [The community] is like, ‘you guys don’t even have your own house in order.’”

Because they were highly motivated to keep the public satisfied, McKinley’s administrators chose many of the same macropolitical strategies as the school board members did. They aligned themselves with McKinley’s neocorporate factions and publically distanced themselves from the oppositional union and its leaders. Driven by environmental factors, particularly by an organizational structure which allowed them a large amount of discretion in policy design, administrators also leveraged their advantage in positional and knowledge resources through a variety of third-face micropolitical strategies (Table 4.4): minimizing or downplaying conflict, encouraging cooperation from dissenters to protect the image of public education, or, according to the UTM union president, covering its mistakes.
Rainier leaders, in contrast, tended to choose micropolitical strategies exclusively. Rainier Unified had a union-dominated inert community structure, and board members did not trust that district administrators would respond to community demands in a way that would satisfy the parents and teachers (Table 5.1). Rather than trying to curry favors with a union who had already endorsed them, board members needed the union’s social resources to protect their future positions as local leaders or state politicians. As such, board members opted for micropolitical strategies such as micromanagement of administrators to protect the interests of the students, the constituents or elites whom they represent, and themselves. As a Rainier board member confirmed, “We have board members that want to give directives [to administrators] without consensus or discussion with the rest of the board members. Flex their muscles I call it... They’re politically self-promoting.” Like the external actions of McKinley administrators, the internal location of Rainier’s union did not fit with the traditional model of decision-making in school districts (Figure 2.1).

**Discretion versus (perceived) necessity.** An interesting result of data analysis was the difference between strategy choice and necessity. Some actors related that their strategy choices were tactical, calculated to obtain the best possible result: successfully influencing the other without reducing their chances of future strategy success. Others reported that they acted not out of choice but out of necessity. They knew that their strategies were unlikely to work and/or would decrease the likelihood that their strategies would work in the future. However, they believed that the district’s resource distribution
and environment gave them few options. If the resources and environment were different, they said that they would use different strategies.

In the two districts, board members and administrators most frequently demonstrated strategy choice. Although district leaders in McKinley generally favored macropolitical strategies while leaders in Rainier preferred micropolitical ones, as a part of the legitimate political system board members and superintendents had positional resources that permitted them to act internally or externally at their discretion. While environmental factors influenced their choice of strategy location, their positional resources meant that board members and superintendents limited themselves to micro- or macropolitical actions largely by their own strategic choices.

I did not find the same to be true for teachers’ union leaders. For the unions, environmental factors and the distribution of resources were much more deterministic. Unions had context-independent access to only one type of decision-making outcome: collective bargaining agreements. Union leaders could participate in, and potentially influence, board policies and administrator actions only if they had the necessary context-dependent positional resources. The Rainier Teachers’ Association had the required resources, and was able to act micropolitically. If other actors do not grant unions positional resources, they must act as an external interest group. This was the case in McKinley; the United Teachers of McKinley acted macropolitically not because it wanted to, but because it had limited options.

The Rainier union had the positional resources it needed to act micropolitically for two reasons. First, as I argued above the environmental conditions in Rainier favored
union inclusion. Second, the RTA had a comparative advantage in highly-valued social and knowledge resources, and was able to leverage these resources for district leaders’ positional ones (Table 4.1). The RTA did not need to risk its reputation with the public and losing trust of district leaders by resorting to macropolitical actions like rallies or marches that could be construed as hostile. Instead, union leaders opted for micropolitical action even though the macropolitical strategies of collective action were available. Like board members and administrators, the Rainier union was able to make strategic choices.

Conversely, there were a number of factors that forced the United Teachers of McKinley to use macropolitical actions. The union was already at a comparative disadvantage in knowledge and positional resources (Table 4.1), and the McKinley environment did not favor resource redistribution, so the externally-located union had few micropolitical strategies available to it. The McKinley union acted as an interest group rather than an internal participant, not out of strategic choice but rather out of necessity – the district environment constrained its strategy options to macropolitical ones.30

Environmental Effects on Strategy Selection (Dimension and Goal)

Environmental factors and the existing resource distribution affected not only the location of the strategies chosen by McKinley and Rainier actors, but also strategy goal

30 There is a potential exception to the generalization that unions act internally when they can and externally out of necessity. Hypothetically, if a district has a pluralist community structure where power is contested and fluid among multiple interest groups, then a union may choose macropolitical action even if it has micropolitical strategies available to it. If the union does not use macropolitics, it might lose the competition for power and the district would be more responsive to the demands of other groups. In this situation, a more apt generalization would be that certain environmental factors constrain union options, while other conditions allow them to choose strategically from among strategies of different locations. Since neither of the districts in this study had a pluralist structure, there are not sufficient data to support this conclusion. However, informants’ responses suggested that the conclusion about pluralist communities would be true if their district was actually pluralist.
and dimension. My findings support the conclusions of the substantial literature on organizational conflict: organizations have more internal conflict when they are embedded in chaotic external environments (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Boyd, 1976; Danzberger, 1994; Greene, 1992; Grissom, 2010; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008; Zeigler, et al., 1974). To this conclusion, I add that internal conflict may be reduced even when organizations are faced with external chaos if actors opt for strategies to accommodate, rather than conflict, with each other as they did in Rainier.

In order to foster zero-face strategies, however, environmental factors must support resource redistribution. The environmental factors that encourage resource redistribution are addressed in Table 5.2 and the section that follows it. In McKinley, the district environment favored an ossification of the existing comparative advantages in resources rather than resource redistribution. Actors envisioned one another as competitors, not partners. Because their interests were in conflict, they did not see zero-face strategies as available options, and instead selected strategies to dominate, constrain, and manipulate their opponents (Tables 4.2-4.4). Decision-making in Rainier showed that different environmental factors can expand actors’ strategy options to include strategic accommodation. Because conditions allowed for resource redistribution and sharing, Rainier actors could instead choose zero-face activities to collaborate, accommodate, compromise, bargain, and share (Table 4.5). In most cases, both the district and the union selected zero-face actions even when coercive strategies were available. This finding is similar to the discussion at the close of the previous section, that some conditions permit actor discretion when choosing strategy location while others lead actors to act from
perceived necessity. Here, I find that some conditions constrain actors’ choices to strategies of a particular dimension, while others allow actors to choose from among strategies of different dimensions.

A caveat, however, is that in order to encourage zero-face strategies, resources must not only be redistributed, but equalized as well. As argued earlier, some environmental factors solidify existing resource imbalances; in McKinley, for example, the organizational structure increased the positional advantage of district leaders. When environmental factors reinforce or exacerbate resource inequality, actors will compete with one another and use strategies of conflict and domination. When environmental factors mitigate inequality and actors are no longer forced to vie for resources against one another, they are more likely to cooperate. This was the case in Rainier.

District and union leaders in both districts agreed on one other requirement, in addition to an environment that encourages resource equalization, for strategic accommodation: the actor with the comparative power advantage must be the first to use zero-face actions. During the initial stages of the furlough day negotiations in McKinley, union leaders did not attempt to cooperate or collaborate because they were afraid that voluntarily ceding their valuable (and scarce) resources would leave them even more vulnerable to exclusion. Personal traits were a particularly large impediment to zero-face strategies – union leaders did not have any personal characteristics that the district respected, and district leaders did not have any traits which the union trusted. In Rainier, each actor was trusted and respected by one another. Decades of joint accountability and reciprocity created an environment where comparatively disadvantaged actors trusted that
the advantaged groups would give up or exchange their power resources. When Rainier administrators reinstated the RFOC, they were already at a comparative disadvantage to the union in social and knowledge resources. But the administrators trusted that by increasing the union’s access to decision-making, the union would be more open to sharing those social and knowledge resources with the district.

**Environmental Effects on Strategy Success**

Whether they are internal or external to the legitimate political system, individuals and groups use a variety of resources and strategies to affect the outcomes of decision-making (Figure 2.1). Throughout this work, I have argued that the likelihood an actor successfully influencing those outcomes depends on three general conditions: whether they have a comparative advantage in valued power resources, whether they have the capacity and desire to strategically leverage those resources, and whether the opposing actor is motivated to react. Each of these three conditions is related to environmental factors. So far, I illustrated the resources available to actors in McKinley and Rainier, and reasoned how environmental factors affected resource distribution. I also described the strategies that actors used to leverage those resources, and argued how environmental factors influenced strategy choice. Here, I present my findings on how environmental factors affected actors’ reactions to the resources and strategies of others, and why some resources and strategies influenced the outcomes of decision-making while others did not.

Table 5.4 lists a number of specific conditions that contributed to strategy success in McKinley and Rainier. Like Table 5.3 earlier, while the actors did not behave similarly in the two districts, the conditions that motivated their behavior applied to actors in both
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOARD MEMBER likelihood of success will increase if:</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATOR likelihood of success will increase if:</th>
<th>UNION LEADER likelihood of success will increase if:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High community educational attainment</td>
<td>Stable finances</td>
<td>Liberal, Democrat, pro-union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as parents as voters</td>
<td>High/improving student achievement (especially if better than similar districts)</td>
<td>Low teacher mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low community educational attainment</td>
<td>Uncertain or limited finances</td>
<td>Teachers as parents as voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous community</td>
<td>Student achievement same/worse than similar districts</td>
<td>History of trust, collaboration, quiet/private action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous community</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>District has high-interest programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low community educational attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student achievement same/worse than similar districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Context</th>
<th>Increase if:</th>
<th>Decrease if:</th>
<th>Increase if:</th>
<th>Decrease if:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low community educational attainment</td>
<td>High community educational attainment</td>
<td>Stable finances</td>
<td>Liberal, Democrat, pro-union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers as parents as voters</td>
<td>Teachers as parents as voters</td>
<td>High/improving student achievement (especially if better than similar districts)</td>
<td>Low teacher mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homogeneous community</td>
<td>Uncertain or limited finances</td>
<td>Student achievement same/worse than similar districts</td>
<td>Teachers as parents as voters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low community educational attainment</td>
<td>Student achievement better than similar districts</td>
<td>History of trust, collaboration, quiet/private action</td>
<td>History of mistrust, militancy, public action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous community</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>District has high-interest programs</td>
<td>District has high-interest programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pub. Op'n</th>
<th>Satisfied with public education, district Low incumbent turnover</th>
<th>Dissatisfied with public education, district Low incumbent turnover</th>
<th>Satisfied with public education, district Low incumbent turnover</th>
<th>Dissatisfied with public education, district High incumbent turnover</th>
<th>Positive view of union and teachers High incumbent turnover</th>
<th>Negative/neutral view of union and teachers Low incumbent turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Majority-aligned factional/neocorporate Dominate</td>
<td>Inert</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Factional/neocorporate Dominate</td>
<td>Union-dominated inert</td>
<td>Union-excluded inert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inert</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-majority-aligned factional/neocorporate</td>
<td>Inert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominated</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org. Structure</th>
<th>Board unanimity established in private, encouraged in public</th>
<th>Board dissents in public Administrators manage/placate single-issue board members</th>
<th>Administrators proactively design policy Board, union rely on administrators for information</th>
<th>Administrators reactively implement policy Board micromanages administrators</th>
<th>Horizontal, structures for inclusion Teachers as professional experts Unified rank-and-file Access to information and decision-makers Able to be proactive</th>
<th>Centralized, no structures for inclusion Divided rank-and-file No access to information and decision-makers Forced to be reactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board unanimity established in private, encouraged in public</td>
<td>Board dissents in public Administrators manage/placate single-issue board members</td>
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<td>Centralized, no structures for inclusion Divided rank-and-file No access to information and decision-makers Forced to be reactive</td>
<td>Centralized, no structures for inclusion Divided rank-and-file No access to information and decision-makers Forced to be reactive</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</th>
<th>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</th>
<th>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</th>
<th>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trusted, liked, included</td>
<td>Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</td>
<td>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</td>
<td>Trusted, liked, included Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</td>
<td>Doubted, unpopular, marginalized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rsrc</th>
<th>Comparative advantage Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</th>
<th>Comparative advantage Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</th>
<th>Comparative advantage Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</th>
<th>Comparative advantage Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</th>
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<td>Rsrc</td>
<td>Comparative advantage in valuable resources</td>
<td>Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</td>
<td>Comparative advantage in valuable resources</td>
<td>Comparative disadvantage in valuable resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4. Effects of environmental factors and resource distribution on strategy success in McKinley and Rainier.

* See note in Table 5.3 regarding community structures other than union-dominated inert and union-excluded neocorporate.
cases. The conditions in Table 5.4 are most suitably applied to second- and third-face strategies, because the relationship between first-face strategies and successful outcomes is fairly straightforward: the more official authority an actor has over another, the more successful that actor will be in protecting his or her own interests regardless of the preferences of the dominated actor. I do not include zero-face strategies here since they are, by definition, successful in protecting actors’ interests because those interests are shared; I described the environmental conditions which might facilitate zero-face strategies in the section above.

Interviews and observations created an extremely nuanced field in which different conditions interacted to affect strategy success. Each of the factors in Table 5.4 was on its own was not deterministic – for example, informants in Rainier agreed that incumbent turnover should increase the power of a union because competitive elections would allow the union to compete with other groups for the board majority. However, because the district was already union-dominated inert, low incumbent turnover rather than high increased union strategy success because it made it unlikely that a union-endorsed candidate would not be elected. In that district, community structure and public opinion confounded the effects of the other.

Because of these confounding effects, in the discussion that follows I do not address specific conditions individually. Rather, I combine some of the environmental factors described in Table 5.4 to construct four general states that decreased the likelihood of strategy success in the case study districts: community constraint
(devaluation of existing resources), systemic exclusion (limited access to the resource exchange marketplace), external uncertainty (depletion or elimination of local resources by outside forces), and internal conflict (resources are frozen by disagreement before they can be used).

The first environmental state that reduced the likelihood of strategy success for district actors was *community constraint*. Under conditions of community constraint, factors external to the legitimate political system motivate (or force) actors to make certain decisions. Conditions of community constraint also devalue actors’ existing resources, especially those which are contextually-independent; for example, while unions always have financial resources from dues which they might to donate to political candidates, community constraint can devalue the union’s financial resources in a particular district because candidates may not want to be seen as aligned with the union.

The environmental factors that created a state of community constraint were the same in both districts: negative public opinion, a closed community structure, unfavorable demographics, and restrictive external policy mandates and funding requirements. While these factors affected all district actors, the teachers’ union in McKinley was particularly vulnerable to community constraint because of the environmental conditions in that district (Table 5.1).

First, community demographics limited the union’s potential for success. McKinley was conservative and Republican.\(^{31}\) Demographics combined with public

\(^{31}\) The effects of socioeconomic status could not be determined using data from this study. Previous research on the effects of SES has varied; some work has associated high SES with low community conflict, which means that leaders are more likely to rely on the professional expertise of superintendents and teachers (Adkison, 1982; Zeigler, et al., 1974), while other work did not find any relationship (Greene,
opinion and community structure to constrain UTM. In addition, the union-excluded neocorporate community structure permitted UTM constraint, and the anti-union public opinion encouraged it. Past collective action gave the public a negative opinion of the teachers’ union, which in turn meant that board members were unlikely to be sympathetic toward union interests. District leaders felt no obligation to respond to union demands; they believed union leaders did not represent the interests of the students, the voters, or even the teachers, and did not fear repercussions from the public if they excluded UTM. A McKinley board member explained how conditions for community constraint decreased the union’s impact on the outcomes of decision-making. “The union is relatively ineffective because all of us except for [our union-endorsed member] don’t really care so much,” he described. “They don’t have a lot of public support, especially after their candlelight vigil last year. I think they feel like that’s what you’re supposed to do when you’re organized, but here it’s not very influential.” The McKinley superintendent bluntly agreed, “Under the right circumstances,” he said, “they can mobilize. But see, they’re stupid about what they choose to do.”

Very few conditions for community constraint of union action existed in Rainier (Table 5.1). Demographics helped union leaders successfully influence decision-making outcomes because conditions were such that district leaders, board members especially, actively sought the union’s social and financial resources, and were willing to make

Further, other variables associated with high SES, such as high educational attainment (Hess & Leal, 2005; C. N. Stone, et al., 2001) and higher proportions of conservative or Republican voters (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Cibulka & Murphy, 1999) are also linked to more active communities with higher, not lower, community conflict. While union strategies were less likely to work in McKinley, which has a high SES, informants attributed it to resident’s conservative ideology, and explicitly disagreed that it was specifically because of voter’s socioeconomic status.
union-favorable decisions in trade for those resources. “A lot of people that are union members live in this community, so they vote, they can do phone banking, they can provide fiscal support if the union endorses candidates,” said the Rainier superintendent. “Union members are also the voters here. They play a big role.” Further, many union leaders had personal traits that made them appear trustworthy, which in turn motivated district leaders to include them in decision-making, sometimes without the union even having to ask.

Community constraint was related to the second state that decreased the likelihood of strategy success: systemic exclusion. Under conditions of systemic exclusion, actors internal to the legitimate political system limited or eliminated the influence of others. When conditions prevented an actor from even entering the decision-making arena, that actor could not successfully influence decision-making outcomes. Factors for systemic exclusion included a centralized organizational structure, limited access to decision-makers and information, an internally-unified political system, alignment with a non-favored external group in a dominated, inert, or neocorporate community, a history of militancy or public action, and personal traits which rendered an actor unpopular or untrustworthy. Limited access to resources and restricted strategy choices also created systemic exclusion – external actors could not increase their positional resources if they did not have other resources that were valued by internal actors and the means to trade those resources for access.

Environmental factors in McKinley fostered the systemic exclusion of UTM. The administrator-driven organizational structure gave the union few opportunities for
proactivity. For a limited number of issues, teacher (but not necessarily union) involvement was required – the collective bargaining agreement provided for teacher-district advisory committees on curriculum, benefits, grievances, and leave, and stated that a teacher representative must be present during the interviews of principals and other administrators. But on most decisions, central office staff only asked for teacher input when they felt it was absolutely necessary, which in McKinley occurred not because administrators valued teachers’ professional opinions, but because they wanted to avoid conflict. One McKinley administrator confirmed these as the district’s criteria for union inclusion. “It really is subjective,” he said. “We just kinda look and say, ‘Alright, what’s the size and scope? How much is this going to change things district-wide?’ And if it’s gonna be a large scale change, then yeah, we want a lot of input from all sectors. But we don’t have a formula.”

Systemic exclusion did not apply only to teachers’ unions. In McKinley, conditions for exclusion were such that the union-hostile board majority and administrators excluded the single union-endorsed board member. Even though he was technically a part of the legitimate political system, he had little impact on decision-making outcomes. “He’s probably the least influential person of the five of us,” said a McKinley board member. “[The other board members] just try to neutralize him as much as they can,” a UTM leader agreed.

Because environmental conditions in McKinley systemically excluded the teachers’ union, its strategies were unlikely to successfully affect the outcomes of decision-making. Conditions in Rainier, however, favored systemic inclusion of the
union, and therefore increased the likelihood of union success. The superintendent and cabinet met with the union president and executive director every two weeks to “talk shop,” exchange information, and solve problems. There were a number of formalized union-district advisory committees provided for in the collective bargaining agreement, including the RFOC and committees for benefits, calendar, class-size reduction, facilities, leave, safety, and salary. In addition, employee associations were on the agenda of every school board meeting, during which they could address the public and the board for as long as necessary. “From years of experience, [administrators] know that the more people you bring in, the smoother it goes,” said the union executive director. Furthermore, informal communication among Rainier actors, through email or telephone calls, was frequent and encouraged. “If I want to talk to the superintendent, I can talk with him right now and vice versa,” said the union president. “If he needs something done and we can accommodate, we do that and vice versa.”

These conditions for systemic inclusion greatly increased the likelihood that the outcomes of decision-making reflected RTA interests. They also decreased the success of anyone who goes against the norms of collaboration and communication. The RFOC typified that district’s inclusive norms, so reinstating the committee was a more natural outcome than continuing to limit its involvement. “Individuals that have come from other districts that maybe don’t have the transparency we do, or don’t have the RFOC, don’t have the same type of relationship with their own union, they get almost offended and ask, ‘Why do we have to include them?’” related an RTA leader. “But they are not familiar with the Rainier way. And they need to be told what the Rainier way is.”
Discretion rather than perceived necessity over strategy selection played a complementary role to environmental factors when creating conditions for systemic exclusion. Limited strategy choice fixed the outsider status of the union in McKinley; UTM leaders felt restricted to high-conflict macropolitical strategies, and when they used those strategies district leaders were even less motivated than before to include UTM in decision-making. In contrast, Rainier union leaders had a much wider array of potential actions, and chose strategically from among them. The RFOC chairperson related that, because the union used political action selectively, Rainier leaders were more responsive to her requests for information and inclusion: “They hear me saying these things, and they know that it’s a real issue, because I’m not running to the board once a day, once a week or even once a month.”

Third, *external uncertainty* decreased the likelihood of strategy success, especially by the two districts’ boards and superintendents, because it undermined the credibility of district leaders. Conditions for external uncertainty included potential changes in state funding, district enrollment patterns, student demographics, staffing needs, standards and curriculum requirements, and state and federal laws. External uncertainty was particularly damaging to McKinley leaders, who during furlough day negotiations insisted that legal or financial constraints forced them to make a particular decision. The district’s position eroded because they had originally based their budget on financial projections on state funding cuts, not the cuts themselves. The projections were dire, and district leaders insisted that they needed to keep the furlough days in order to balance their budget. When McKinley received a federal rebate and administrators
determined that they could in fact afford to rescind the furlough days, not only were they forced to concede the current negotiations, but they also gave the union reason to doubt their trustworthiness in the future.

The effects of external uncertainty were similar to those of internal conflict, the fourth condition that limits strategy success, because internal conflict likewise undermined actor credibility. Board members, administrators, and union leaders in both districts reported that internal unity (whether real or perceived) was a crucial condition for the effective use of power for a number of reasons: it lowered the visibility and viability of arguments against a decision, it reduced the likelihood that others will protest, it increased the trust that people had in their leaders, and it excluded dissenting opinions. If a group had internal conflict then access to its own power resources was limited and it subsequently could not use those resources to influence others. When union leaders did not have the backing of their members, their comparative advantage in knowledge and social resources was reduced.

The conditions for internal unity varied by actor. First, intra-board unity required an organizational structure that allowed for private arguments, plus norms of agreement in public and full board support of resolutions and policies once they were passed. Intra-board unity was present in both districts. In Rainier, it was so crucial to strategy success for the board as a whole that some individual members sacrificed their own objectives for the sake of internal unity. One board member reported of his colleagues that “the person with the dissenting vote usually decides not to appear to always be the last guy out, for the sake of image.”
Second, intra-district unity occurred when internal actors had multiple in-district allies and the opportunity to communicate with them. Unity among district leaders increased strategy success by giving legitimacy to the information that administrators presented to the board and the public, who in turn were less likely to question their recommendations. Administrators in McKinley were closely aligned with each other and believed that mutual support was the primary means to accomplish the district’s goals; one cabinet member related that “if everybody in an organization is focused on making their boss look good, then the organization runs well and successfully.” In McKinley, intra-district unity allowed district administrators to select, and the board to approve, the A+ program without internal dissention. During the furlough day negotiations, intra-district unity increased the union’s perceived need to use macropolitical strategies, despite the unfavorable reaction to such strategies by both the district and the public.

Finally, intra-union solidarity required that union leaders were cohesive among themselves and had the full support of their members. This cohesion was not present in McKinley: the membership divided over UTM leadership elections several years ago, and many teachers were ambivalent at best towards the current UTM president. A UTM leader described how this divided membership made district leaders less likely to respond to union demands: “We tried to get members [to a rally]. Well, we got about 30 people to come and [the superintendent] went out and he literally counted and then he laughed out loud and walked in. And it was basically, ‘We can do whatever we want because not enough members are going to show up.’” During the furlough day negotiations, the lack of intra-union unity decreased the success of UTM’s strategies because district leaders
saw UTM’s internal discord as another reason not to take union demands seriously. When teachers wore red shirts to a school board meeting, the superintendent reported that the action “had very little effect. We know who those teachers are. They are the 5% of our teachers that are hardened UTMers…But we have 90% in the middle that ‘say leave me alone and just run the district and don’t create headaches for me.’”

The Rainier Teachers’ Association had a high degree of internal unity, which increased the success potential of its actions. Board members knew that they could not turn one RTA leader against another. A Rainier union leader described that “[our leadership team] has talked about that if you’re ever in a situation where a board member is talking to you and the subject was uncomfortable, you tell them anything we’ve discussed here will be discussed with my president. That’s a real important thing to do so they don’t divide you.”

An important note is that two of the states that drastically decreased the likelihood of union strategy success in McKinley – community constraint and systemic exclusion – are very similar to the conditions that force unions to act macropolitically, described earlier in this chapter. Given the outcomes of decision-making in Rainier reflected union interests while those in McKinley generally did not (and when they did, it was despite the efforts of district leaders), a broad conclusion is that the two unions were more likely to influence district decision-making when they used proactive, micropolitical, and zero-face strategies. I discuss this finding, and several other general conclusions drawn across my research questions, in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6  
The Local Politics of Education Governance

The union is certainly powerful in affecting the conversation. They are powerful in blocking efforts, in making life difficult that could be easier in a hard time. Everything is a battle with them. Their ideology trumps all.

–School Board President, McKinley Unified School District

The district draws a line and says “this is what we want” and they don’t ever change it. We try to work things out and they always say “no, this is what it has to be.” When they have decided what they want, that’s it. There’s no changing their mind.

–President, United Teachers of McKinley

Where other districts are just falling apart—furlough days, laying off teachers, losing benefits—we’re doing the opposite. It’s because we have a certain common denominator and that is that we want to provide quality education. But because of all that good negotiation, we’re an anomaly. We’re just a freak compared to other school districts.

–President, Rainier Teachers’ Association

School districts nationwide are facing a double-barreled challenge of potentially catastrophic proportions. On one hand, they must meet federal and state demands for student achievement or risk losing revenue, autonomy, and legitimacy. On the other, they must educate their students, pay their employees, and keep their facilities running in the face of debilitating funding cuts and rising operating costs. As school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions make decisions on how to meet that challenge, they negotiate among themselves to make sure that the outcomes of decision-making protect their professional, organizational, and personal interests. Each makes demands of one another, offering resources or making threats, against a background of environmental factors that affects the board decisions, collective bargaining agreements, and administrator actions that govern the district (Figure 2.1).

The quotes at the start of this chapter illustrate two very different approaches to decision-making in the face of conflict. In McKinley Unified, actors used authoritative
tactics to force or prevent action. District leaders made unilateral operational and management decisions, and the union resisted any decision that threatened teacher job security and the protections of their contract. Each chose strategies of direct authority when they could, and when such strategies were unavailable or unsuccessful, actors used high-conflict, high-visibility political action to manipulate one another until concession became their opponent’s most appealing option. In that district, the struggle to access decision-making and control its outcomes led to discord and domination. There was little united effort to rally against the external constraints and uncertainties that hindered board members, superintendents, and teachers.

District and union leaders in Rainier Unified found ways to minimize internal antagonism and conflict. In these districts, decisions were negotiated rather than dictated. Resources were shared rather than hoarded. Actors worked with one another to face external challenges, not against each other in an internal, zero-sum political battle.

With this work, I used a theory-driven two-site case study to better understand how school boards, superintendents and executive administrators, and teachers’ union leaders strategically leverage their resources to influence decision-making. In Chapters 4 and 5, I answered my research questions directly. In this chapter, I synthesize the results of my study into four main conclusions. I end with a discussion of the limitations of the work, and implications and recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

**General Conclusions and Discussion**

With the answers to my research questions, I formed four general conclusions about political decision-making in McKinley and Rainier: one each specifically about
unions, boards, and superintendents, and one broad conclusion about power resources and
strategies. Some of these conclusions agreed with conventional wisdom, political theory,
and empirical research: these districts were internally political with actors exercising
power over one another to control the outcomes of decision-making. Other conclusions
were unexpected, challenging theoretical and popular assumptions (including my own)
about the influence of boards, superintendents, and unions. Here, I present the general
conclusions. Each is drawn from the data and analyses of the two cases, and as such each
is suggestive of explanations of actor behavior in those two districts only. I address how
my findings might generalize to other districts, and how they relate to the findings from
empirical literature, the sections that follow.

General conclusion: Unions that used vocal, visible, high-conflict macropolitical power
strategies to leverage their material and social resources were more likely desperate than
powerful, and such macropolitical strategies were less likely to influence district
decision-making than micropolitical ones.

Of the three types of district decisions – board policies, negotiated contracts, and
administrator actions (Figure 2.1) – unions only have direct authority in negotiations.
Furthermore, collectively-bargained items represent only a fraction of district decisions
that affect teachers, and high-cost bargained items like salaries and benefits are severely
constrained due to cuts in state funding. Many non-negotiated decisions – board policies
like layoffs, and administrator actions like staffing and curriculum choices – are equally
if not more important to teachers. However, the structure of local education governance
dictates that, unless they are invited participants, teachers’ unions are external to the
political system that makes these decisions. In Rainier Unified, board policies and administrator actions were open to the union through structures such as the RFOC; in McKinley, district leaders chose instructional programs like A+ without union input.

When Rainier leaders decided to make the RTA a genuine participant in the decision-making processes that led to board policies and administrator actions, the union gained knowledge and positional resources. It acted internal to the legitimate system and, because it had discretion over strategy choice, it reserved unpopular macropolitical strategies like collective action and electoral politics as a last resort. The district’s organizational structure allowed it to be proactive, included them in decision-making, and permitted them to act micropolitically. Rainier union leaders’ strategy choices demonstrated this clearly: the RTA first tried to settle the superintendent search as they did with the RFOC, by relying on internal allies and direct communication. When those micropolitical actions did not result in the desired outcome, the union opted for the macropolitical strategy of withholding endorsement. The Rainier union tried to use internal strategies first, but when those strategies failed the union was forced to act as an interest group.

This conclusion challenges two assumptions: first, that unions are foremost macropolitical interest groups, most frequently located by political theory as external to the legitimate political system (Figure 2.1). Second, that a union’s most influential strategies are electoral politics and collective action to leverage their context-independent financial and social resources. The McKinley union tried these strategies to little avail. While macropolitical strategies can certainly help unions protect their interests (as
illustrated in the literature review in Chapter 2), in McKinley Unified, macropolitics did not. Participants cited a number of reasons why the union could not affect the balance of power: there was not a union-friendly board majority, the superintendent was not sympathetic to union interests, and the community was not receptive to the union’s public actions nor did they support traditional union interests. Because the UTM was not an internal participant in decision-making, its chances at successfully using macropolitical strategies rather than micropolitical ones to influence board policies and administrator actions were slim.

In these two districts, therefore, the quiet, subtle micropolitical union was the more powerful of the two. When the Rainier Teachers’ Association used micropolitical strategies to employ its context-dependent positional resources, Rainier Unified leaders responded. The outcomes of decision-making reflected union interests, and participants reported that the union was highly influential. However, a union-dominated inert community structure certainly increased the union’s influence, and RTA might not have had similar clout had power been distributed differently in the community. In contrast, when the United Teachers of McKinley used high-conflict macropolitical strategies, McKinley leaders ignored and marginalized them. External conditions did not favor unions, and UTM’s public action and electoral politics were counterproductive. McKinley leaders did not trust that the union would avoid militancy to protect the district’s reputation, and did not respond to union demands. Again, if conditions had been different – for example, a competitive, pluralist community structure rather than a union-
excluded neocorporate one – macropolitical actions may have been more successful while micropolitical ones labeled as shady political game-playing.

*General conclusion: While school boards are theoretically the strongest district actor because of their positional power, under certain conditions they were actually (voluntarily or involuntarily) comparatively weaker than either the superintendent or the community.*

School boards may cede their positional power and official authority to other district actors for a number of reasons. The superintendent was most frequently the recipient of the board’s positional resources. In both districts, board members often lacked the specialized knowledge and dedicated time required to design policy and delegated the task to administrators. In addition, the McKinley board opted to delegate power to the superintendent because organizational norms and procedures supported administrator discretion, the superintendent was well-liked and trusted, and board members viewed their role as setting the vision for the district and believed policy design and implementation should be left to the superintendent and staff.

The community received the board’s resources as well, especially in Rainier. Board members there reduced their own authority by constantly yielding to the demands of parents, voters, and interest groups, especially when they were concerned about their board position and status in the community. Board members in both cases even ceded power to one another: organizational norms stressed public unity, private debate, deference to seniority or experience, and marginalization of non-majority members. In
both districts, dissenting board members reported choosing to minimize conflict by
conceding to the others and keeping his opinions to himself.

The result of such board member decisions was that sometimes, but not always,
the designation of the McKinley and Rainier boards as the “ultimate authority” existed
only on paper. The boards could have used their legal power to dominate decision-
making, but in these two districts they did not. This is not to say, however, that the boards
always wanted to share positional resources. In McKinley, the board would have
preferred to pass the budget without union input. But by state labor law, the board could
not unilaterally decide on the terms of teacher employment. It is therefore important to
emphasize the “voluntarily or involuntarily” portion of this conclusion, because board
members can’t make all district decisions on their own, and in many cases they may not
want to cede any power to administrators, unions, or the public.

General conclusion: Superintendents were extremely powerful if they had the ability to,
and chose to, use their sizeable positional and knowledge resources (especially those
ceded to them by the board).

The McKinley and Rainier superintendents had substantial power resources. The
post guaranteed them many positional, material, and especially knowledge resources.
They had information about district decisions, they filtered that information and decided
who has access to it, and they decided when to invite other to, or exclude them from, the
decision-making process. They also had professional expertise and systemic knowledge,
they controlled board meeting agendas and issue calendars, and they hired (in McKinley)
or promoted (in Rainier) like-minded administrators. The McKinley superintendent was
even more influential because the board granted him additional positional resources and
discretion. He had both authority from the board and, because of favorable public opinion
and personal traits, consent from the public. As a result, the category of “administrator
actions” included policy design and collective bargaining in addition to the normal day-
to-day management and implementation responsibilities of the office.

Despite this power, however, there were a few factors which hindered the Rainier
superintendent’s ability to act, and deterred the McKinley superintendent from acting
even when he could. In Rainier, a micromanaging school board and a powerful and
popular union kept the Rainier superintendent from making unilateral decisions. In
McKinley, the community held a negative view of public education and the
superintendent was reluctant to endanger the position of the district in the eyes of
powerful interest groups and affluent parents, even if it meant conceding to union
demands. Yet even in the face of this constraint, there was not much the board, union,
and public could do to limit a determined superintendent. These actors often lacked
information, time, and opportunity. The McKinley superintendent especially was able to
work around constraint. His proximity to nearly every district decision, his position as the
gatekeeper of information and access, and his trustworthy personal traits allowed him to
use second- and third-face power strategies to quite successfully influence the outcomes
of district decision-making even when he could have used direct authority.

*General conclusion*: Knowledge and context-dependent positional resources were
typically more valuable than material and social resources, and micropolitical strategies
were more effective than macropolitical ones. However, certain environmental conditions significantly decreased resource value and strategy effectiveness.

Democratic and organizational theory acknowledge the importance of context when understanding how internal and external behavior affects the way the legitimate political system translates demands into policy outcomes (Figure 2.1). Unfortunately, there were no variables or equations that predicted the likelihood that McKinley and Rainier actor could successfully leverage power resources to influence one another during decision-making. In some instances, actors had a comparative advantage in power resources, but not the ability to use them – for example, the McKinley board ceded its positional resources to the superintendent, and the Rainier administrators gave positional resources to the union, because each did not have the expertise, time, information, desire, or political clout to use those resources themselves. In other instances, actors had the capacity to act but were not motivated to do so: the Rainier union had money and manpower, and the knowledge of how to run a campaign, but did not use electoral strategies because did not want to jeopardize their internal status. A particular combination of resources and strategies might have worked in one district but not in the other (or even in the same district at a different time) – electoral politics in McKinley created a divided board and marginalized the single pro-union board member. In contrast, electoral politics were successful in Rainier in the past, producing a union-sympathetic board majority. But union leaders preferred not to use them more recently, opting for micropolitical action instead.
In the section above, and in earlier chapters, I argued for some general conventions that applied to actor behavior in the two cases: knowledge and context-dependent positional resources granted by another actor were more influential than material, social, and context-independent positional resources. Micropolitical strategies were more effective than macropolitical ones at protecting actors’ interests, and zero-face strategies were most effective of all. Contextual constraint, external uncertainty, internal conflict, and systemic exclusion decreased the likelihood that an actor can influence decision-making. However, these are meant to be broad guidelines and not strict rules, and are intended to describe resources, strategies, and outcomes in these two cases at this particular time. For example, while micropolitical strategies were highly influential, what is defined as a “micropolitical strategy” (or a “knowledge resource” or “systemic exclusion”) varied from district to district and from time to time, and would not be the same in another case. In the next section, I address this limitation and a few others, and suggest how to apply the conclusions of this study to other cases.

Limitations and Applicability

As I presented in Chapter 3, qualitative methods are particularly useful in situations when variables are difficult to quantify, or even identify, and behavior is guided by subjective processes rather than absolute rules. Unfortunately, this is also a limitation of qualitative work. The conclusions that I draw in this case study are not universal rules, even for the two districts in which my case study took place. In the section that follows, I address three specific limitations of this work: variable imprecision, sample size, and the length of the study. In Chapter 3, I also introduced
conditions for generalization: my findings should be generalized to political theory, which in turn can be applied to understanding power in other districts only under certain conditions; in the following section, I also discuss conditions for analytic generalization of my conclusions.

**Variable Imprecision**

Each of the four conclusions above has inherent variable imprecision. For example, I argued that the McKinley and Rainier unions acted macropolitically primarily out of necessity, not preference. While “macropolitical action” refers to an external actor behaving strategically to influence the legitimate political system, there is no exhaustive list of macropolitical actions. The strategies I described in Chapter 4 as macropolitical were those that I observed during the duration of the case study in these two districts; certainly there are more possible strategies. Further, there is a certain amount of ambiguity over whether a particular strategy is macropolitical or not, even with such well-defined actions like endorsement. Endorsement is a strategy of electoral politics that allows an actor to trade money, volunteers, and connections to voters for a voice inside the legitimate political system. The Rainier teachers’ union withheld endorsement from two incumbent school board members because they did not respond to union demands that the board begin a superintendent search. But the Rainier union acted privately, not publicly. Instead of granting its resources, it withheld them. It relied on personal communication rather than collective action. Whether the Rainier union acted macro- or micropolitically is therefore a matter of semantics. Policy scholars in education and beyond have argued for, or against, any distinction other than a semantic one between
macro- and micropolitical action (see, for example, B.L. Johnson, 2003), and this is one example of that imprecision.

Similarly, in Chapter 4 I broadly grouped macropolitical actions into three types: policymaking, issue/image, and electoral politics. Again, there is no strict rule for what is a policymaking action versus an issue or image action. In McKinley, the union ran a negative campaign against a sitting school board member who repeatedly antagonized union leaders. UTM’s action can easily be classified as electoral politics because it involved a political campaign. However, the union-drafted election materials claimed that the school board member championed a policy that unreasonably prohibited teachers from having small appliances like coffee makers or microwaves in their classrooms. Fliers designed by the union maintained that the energy savings were negligible and the board member was spitefully punishing teachers who already worked hours above and beyond the call of duty. The fliers were not just against that candidate, but also bolstered the image of teachers and petitioned against the small-appliance policy. The negative campaign could therefore be labeled as any one of, or all three of, the macropolitical action types.

Likewise, I concluded that certain environmental factors affected whether the unions could act micropolitically. In Chapter 2, I described five categories of environmental factors: institutional context, organizational and community structures, public opinion, and personal traits. “Institutional context” encompasses countless variables that describe the immediate environment in which district actors work, but over which they have no control. In Chapter 5, I presented institutional context variables such
as district demographics, voter and community composition, district history, board and employee characteristics, student performance, and finances. When I selected these variables, it was not based on any pre-existing definition of exactly what “institutional context” means. Rather, I used my informants’ reports on what variables outside of their control affected decision-making in their districts. There are many other parts of the institutional context that I did not include in Table 5.1. For example, I listed only current population demographics but not how those demographics have changed over time. In these two districts no participants referenced changing demographics and my observations supported that current demographics were the more dominant part of the institutional context. This is not to say that changing demographics were not part of the institutional context, but they were not an important part of the institutional context in McKinley and Rainier.

**Sample Size and Length of Study**

The more data gathered over the course of a case study, the more robust the conclusions drawn from that data. Unfortunately, time and manpower limited this work to two districts and ten months. In many instances, ten months was enough time to saturate the data; for example, behaviors of the McKinley school board members towards UTM leaders, the union-supported board member, the PTA, and the McKinley Education Foundation repeated themselves every two weeks at board meetings. Once the RFOC restored its position, its meetings were nearly identical to one another. In other cases, however, ten months was not enough time. I observed contract negotiations only in McKinley, and a school board election only in Rainier. While I used interviews to fill in
some of the missing information, interviews and observations together would have provided more complete data. By observing for more time, and in more districts, I could have observed more decisions and behaviors to the saturation point.

**Conditions for Analytic Generalization**

Attending to internal validity meant that I selected cases that had a number of variables in common. By limiting the degrees of freedom and using multiple data sources to triangulate the same event, I was able to amass a large amount of data and I can therefore argue more convincingly that I have accurately described and explained power resources and strategies, and the effects of resources, strategies, and environmental factors on decision-making as I observed it. However, this restricts the generality of my conclusions: while I defend the validity of the findings, especially the explanatory ones, as they apply to these two cases and the decision-making processes and outcomes that I observed, I cannot maintain that I offer anything more than one of many possible explanations for actor behavior in other districts, or even in these districts at different times or regarding different decisions.

For example, Rainier and McKinley are large, both in enrollment and geography. They are urban, located fairly close to one another in the same politically-active metro area. Their teachers’ unions and school boards are affiliates of the same state and national associations. These two districts were not chosen randomly, but rather because they had certain characteristics which increased the likelihood that they would be the site of
political activity. The descriptions of power resources and strategies in Chapter 4 are not generalizable to other cases, nor were they intended to be. The extensions to political systems, micropolitical, and power theories offered in Chapters 5 and 6 can at best be extended to similar districts only (and should be done with extreme caution at that).

Unfortunately, limiting district demographics excludes a number of interesting cases. While I argued in Chapter 3 that more students and more teachers means more financial and social resources for teachers’ unions, unions in small districts can be just as politically active, and powerful, as their larger counterparts. Local politics play an important role in the decision-making of small, rural districts because of the strong social ties among actors (Strunk and Zeehandelaar, unreleased data) and the high degree of overlap between parents and voters. The very largest districts have even more factors which politicize decision-making: more political interest groups, foundations and non-profit organizations are involved in district operations, mayors and city councils are often active in education politics, and their actions have a national audience. Both larger and smaller districts merit more study.

Not only can the extensions to theory not be applied to districts with dissimilar demographics, but they should not be applied to districts in other states and in different economic conditions. Because McKinley and Rainier are both in the same general area in California, they are subject to the same county reporting requirements and state labor 32 I do not imply that only these districts are the sites of political activity. While I argued in Chapter 3 that more students and more teachers means more financial and social resources for teachers’ unions, unions in small districts can be just as politically active, and powerful, as their larger counterparts. Social ties in rural districts may be stronger than those in urban ones, especially because there is likely more overlap between parents and voters. Further, the very largest districts in a particular urban area are extremely complex and have many other conditions which affect decision-making beyond those which I have described here.
laws, policy mandates, and funding constraints. This condition deserves special consideration, because while all 50 states experienced drastic cuts in federal funding to education, only 37 states reduced spending on K-12 education between the 2010 and 2011 school years (Ceasar & Watanabe, 2011; Oliff & Leachman, 2011). The one- and five-year cuts in state spending are worse in California than in nearly any other state (Oliff & Leachman, 2011), and local districts have not been able to make up the difference which has left them with a 5% decrease in overall per-pupil spending over the past five years (California Department of Education, 2012; EdSource, 2011). External uncertainty is particularly acute in California as compared to other states for two additional reasons. First, the state budget calendar does not align with local districts’ budget submission deadlines, as determined by California education code, so district leaders must create their budgets with incomplete information. Second, California Governor Jerry Brown has twice used the threat of budget cuts to K-12 education as a tool to leverage action from voters and lawmakers. This has forced local districts to develop contingency plans for cuts that might not materialize. Although districts in other states are likewise experiencing external uncertainty, because conditions in those states are not the same as those in California, the resulting conclusions about how external uncertainty affects political behavior might not apply to districts in other states.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Research

I began this work with several objectives. By learning about the processes of district-level political decision-making, I sought to better inform policymakers and district leaders about how to leverage conflict for productive organizational change. I also
wanted to create a more comprehensive, integrated theoretical framework for investigating where the power in school districts lies, and what environmental factors affect the distribution and use of that power. Here, I present implications for policy, practice, and research.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

My recommendations for policymakers and practitioners are made with the goal of encouraging collaboration in the given environment of policy and financial constraint. This requires creating conditions that facilitate zero-face strategies to reduce conflict and increase organizational productivity. To be sure, zero-face strategies are not guaranteed to improve educational outcomes for students; in the vein of the administrative progressive ideology, an autocratic regime by an effective leader may actually see better, and faster, results than a collaborative system in which much time is allocated to discussion and compromise. But such a regime is not necessarily sustainable, and will not improve relationships among decision-makers or their capacity for effective governance. My recommendations therefore focus on supporting three types of collaborative relationships: intra-district, district-union, and district-state.

*Recommendation for practitioners: Increase intra-district collaboration by setting goals based on student achievement, community demands, and fiscal responsibility, and by allocating leadership responsibilities based on expertise, not politics.*

While collaboration among board members and administrators does not ensure improved student achievement, the literature has identified a number of characteristics of school governance systems that have been particularly effective in educating their
students. These characteristics include: structures for open communication between the board and administrators (especially the superintendent and Chief Financial Officer); school board support for administrator action without micromanagement; and intra-board relationships that allow for consensus while still acknowledging individual interests. (Anderson, 1992; Carol, et al., 1986; Danzberger, 1992; Goodman, et al., 1997; Land, 2002; Mac Iver & Farley, 2003; McCloud & McKenzie, 1994; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Unfortunately, these characteristics are difficult to develop under conditions in which participants strictly define and adhere to their leadership roles (Land, 2002).

School board members may see themselves as the sole protectorate of a specific constituency rather than the community as a whole, as evidenced in Rainier. The primary responsibility for policy-making is disputed often between a democratically-elected (but lay) school board and a superintendent who is a professional expert but cannot usurp the decision-making authority of the board. Crucial information about program effectiveness and cost may be lost during board-administrator communication if administrators prioritize high-visibility programs (that may or may not be linked to student achievement) over spending on teachers, like in McKinley Unified. To increase intra-district collaboration, I give two recommendations based on the findings from my case studies.

First, I recommend that school boards carefully balance community demands with expert-defined best practices, and that they consider that the needs and preferences all students are not necessarily represented by the most outspoken community groups and parents. The school boards in both districts tended to be overly responsive to community demands. In Rainier, the board needed the approval of the teachers (who were also the
parents and the voters) because of their political aspirations. In McKinley Unified, board member actions were motivated more by organizational interests than personal ones: board members pushed for spending on arts and language programs, reflecting the demands of parents and influential community groups like the MEF. To maintain funding for these programs, they sought a decrease in student instructional minutes by implementing teacher furlough days. This is not to say that arts and language programs are not important, but while McKinley students were performing above the state achievement levels they were doing no better than in districts with similarly high socioeconomic status. Yet district leaders did not research the effects of trading art and language for general instructional minutes. They also did they realize that by prioritizing high-demand programs, in arts and language as well as technology and athletics, teachers bore most of responsibility for educating McKinley’s socioeconomically-disadvantaged and English Language Learner students while the district provided little centralized support. Increased intra-district collaboration through open communication with teachers, careful consideration of all students (not just those represented by the PTA and MEF), and a better balance of community demands, accountability requirements, and student needs might ultimately increase outcomes for students.

My second recommendation to increase intra-district collaboration is for board members and administrators to define their leadership responsibilities by expertise, not personal interest or political action. Effective school boards do not micromanage; effective superintendents are the district’s CEO and instructional leader; effective administrators communicate with the superintendent and board members by clarifying,
not diluting or manipulating, information. While guidance on how to actually do this is vague at best (Land, 2002), perhaps the difficulty in attempting to establish general protocols for role-definition lies in the assumption that general protocols are possible. In McKinley, one of the school board members had extensive experience in corporate accounting. If she had more access to undiluted financial information and more time to work with, as opposed to simply be informed by, the CFO, she might have been a voice of neutrality and helped settle the district-union dispute over how reserves were reported and allocated. In Rainier, if community members had better communication with administrators about the resolution of their grievances, then board members might not have micromanaged the administrators on the community’s behalf. Each of these situations was unique to the districts in question. Ultimately, then, evidence from these cases suggests that board members and administrators might be trained to be sensitive to different methods of role-definition and how their district’s context can be taken into account when assigning responsibility and increasing intra-district collaboration.

The danger of intra-district collaboration, however, is that it might lead to intra-district insularity, to the detriment of the district-union relationship. I address this in my next recommendation.

Recommendation for practitioners: Increase district-union collaboration by establishing structures for joint responsibility, information-sharing, and problem-solving, and building relationships based on inclusion, transparency, and trust.

To increase instructional program effectiveness and student outcomes, research recommends the involvement of teachers and other professionals in program design and
selection; distributed leadership and joint responsibility among labor and management for student achievement; and teacher evaluation programs that combine teacher- and district-defined measures of instructor effectiveness (Bascia, 2009; Datnow, 2000; Elmore, 2000; Kerchner & Koppich, 2007; Koppich, 2006; Odden, 2004; Taylor & Tylor, 2011). In order to do this, however, district and union leaders must see the benefit of a progressive version of the traditional labor-management relationship called reform unionism. In reform unionism, the distinction between labor and management is blurred. Teachers and administrators use interest-based bargaining to negotiate for mutually-desired goals, and, labor law permitting, they expand the scope of negotiations to create new structures for accountability and performance (Koppich & Callahan, 2009). Reform unionism requires participants to invest in structures that foster partnership even if it means relinquishing the security given to each by the traditional labor-management relationship (Boyd, et al., 2000).

Rainier administrators and union leaders consistently emphasized that they were an example of successful reform unionism. Rainier students performed substantially higher on standardized tests than students in districts with similar demographics, and although it is impossible to establish a causal relationship between Rainier’s student achievement and its district-union relationship, the district exhibited a number of the characteristics of reform unionism listed above. It had organizational structures, like the RFOC, that fostered joint responsibility and immediate resource-sharing and problem-solving. All committee participants had access to the financial data necessary to genuinely participate in committee activities, and participants attributed the committee
with allowing the district to remain solvent without layoffs. Although avoiding layoffs has necessitated expenditure cuts elsewhere – for example, by raising class sizes, reducing transportation, and implementing early retirement – informants indicated that those choices had no impact student achievement because the district and union share the responsibility of effectively and efficiently educating Rainier students.

In addition, joint responsibility for shared goals positively affected other aspects of district governance. Contract negotiations were smooth and each side was more receptive to making concessions. The superintendent and cabinet members met regularly with union leaders; they acknowledged that each represents different interests, but that meetings and discussions can easily solve problems that would otherwise escalate to grievances or lawsuits. District and union leaders were also always available to one another through informal communication. Taken together, this is suggestive that in Rainier, reform unionism had a positive association with student outcomes and financial stability (although this conclusion is in no way definitive, for Rainier Unified or any other district, and further research is warranted).

In contrast, there were few conditions to foster district-union collaboration in McKinley Unified. Both district and union leaders rejected the foundational premises of reform unionism, adamantly believing the other side would never put aside their individual interests and that alignment of district and labor goals was therefore impossible. Each used private debate and information control and hoarded resources; as a result, institutionalized exclusion created seemingly insurmountable district-union conflict. Although both sides indicated that they would prefer not to fight with each other,
neither made any genuine attempts to concede to, or even listen to, one another and eliminate the conditions for exclusion and antagonism.

Using evidence from these districts, therefore, I propose several recommendations for increasing district-union collaboration. District leaders can establish protocols, standing committees, and advisory meetings to include teachers in the board policies and administrator actions that affect them. District and union leaders should meet regularly, not only on an as-needed basis, to informally discuss and solve problems. Administrators and union leaders can share information proactively so that they are not forced to react to decisions after they are already made. School board members, union leaders, and district administrators can attend joint trainings on strategic planning and budgeting, rather than separate trainings led by their state associations. Each can limit the use of closed sessions when making decisions that affect people or groups who aren’t there. Granted, private meetings do serve important purposes. They give boards time to discuss confidential issues, and they allow administrators to efficiently use their professional discretion to make operational decisions. However, districts should strive to increase internal transparency and access with regards to their own employees, in order to create more productive and trustful working relationships.

Recommendation for policy-makers: Increase state-district collaboration by supporting local implementation of state mandates, reducing uncertainty in district budgeting by providing complete and timely information, and allowing districts financial discretion contingent upon student outcomes.
Local school districts are subject to a number of external conditions over which they have no control. Many state lawmakers believe that restrictive policy mandates are in the best interests of students, yet leave the implementation of these mandates up to districts while concurrently cutting district revenue and reducing their discretion over what little money districts have left.

In California, external uncertainty is exacerbated because school district administrators are required to create, and boards are required to pass, budgets that show how the district will maintain its required reserves over the next three school years. Administrators base their budgets on recommended scenarios provided to them by the county; the county analyzes state budget projections and prospective cuts, and then tells districts how much revenue to expect over the next three years. However, the state budget calendar and the district budget submission deadlines do not coincide, and the state rarely passes its budget on time. Further, state budgets are never certain until the last minute; when the state proposes mid-year cuts, or threatens them but does not actually make them, counties revise their projections and districts in turn adjust their budgets. The result is that a district’s budget can vary wildly over the course of a few months, or even a few weeks. Administrators must plan for the worst-case scenario without knowing what will actually happen; often the worst case involves layoffs, furloughs, or reductions to salaries and benefits. Administrators must also frequently make changes to their plans on how they will maintain their reserves.

The constant uncertainty and threats to employee job security creates an environment in which it is difficult to establish the trust that is so vital to maintaining
productive working relationships. Teacher morale suffers under constant threats to job security, and districts often issue more pink slips than necessary (Hahnel, Barondess, & Ramanathan, 2011; Sepe & Roza, 2010). Lower job satisfaction means higher voluntary attrition, especially among early-career teachers (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011; Keigher, 2010; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2006).

Further, the lack of coordination between state and local education agencies means that state policies intended to increase student achievement are rarely implemented with fidelity (Spillane, 1998). The federal government, with its Race to the Top program, recognizes the importance of state-district collaboration by incentivizing state education plans that use collaborative strategies to raise student achievement, support standard-based instruction, use data to improve student outcomes, and develop performance-based evaluation procedures for teachers and principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Both federal recommendations and evidence from this dissertation suggest that states should work with local districts to address solvency and student achievement. States might do this by better supporting local implementation of state mandates (or not giving districts mandates that they do not have the funding, personnel, or infrastructure to support). States could also reduce uncertainty in district budgeting by providing complete and timely information while not threatening and later rescinding cuts. Informants in both districts, especially the superintendents and Chief Financial Officers, confirmed that these actions would greatly improve the time and resources their local districts could allocate directly to students.
Implications for Research and Recommendations for Future Study

This work confirmed some of the assumptions about political decision-making in school districts, and challenged others. It also addressed some of the conflicting findings of empirical literature. Here, I summarize the major assumptions and conclusions in the empirical literature introduced in Chapter 2, and briefly discuss how this work relates to each one. I then give recommendations for future research.

Conclusion from literature: Superintendents can be the most powerful individual relative to other district actors, but they are constrained by external mandates and community demands (Boyd, 1975; Glass, et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Keedy & Bjork, 2002; Kowalski, et al., 2001; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

This study supports the conclusion that superintendents are comparatively more powerful than internal actors, but with three caveats. First, superintendents do not necessarily seize power from the board; sometimes the board gives power to the superintendent voluntarily. Second, while the empirical literature does not claim that superintendents are apolitical, it frames them as political/rational—they do what is best for the district. However, this ignores personal motivations and interests which may also affect decision-making, especially decisions related to unions and well-connected community groups. Third, superintendents are macropolitical actors as well as micropolitical ones: they engage in image politics to improve the public’s opinion of themselves, their district, and public education in general, especially when they believe their jobs are at risk.
Conclusion from literature: Teachers’ unions are powerful because they help elect their own management (Freeman, 1986; Hess & Leal, 2005; Moe, 2006b, 2009).

While it is true that teachers’ unions can affect school board elections and help seat board members who are sympathetic to union interests, their position as both employees and an interest group does not automatically make them powerful. A district’s environmental factors must be such that macropolitical strategies by a labor union result in the election of a union-friendly majority, not just a single pro-union board member. Sympathetic candidates must remain so throughout their tenure on the school board. Furthermore, the union must have other avenues of influence available, especially micropolitical strategies that might affect administrator actions. If unions only use electoral strategies, their impact on the outcomes of district decision-making may be negligible or worse, counterproductive.


Recent empirical literature questions the assumption a “strong” unions influences the outcomes of collective bargaining. The literature offers one explanation when union strength is not found to be associated with contracts that favor union interests: contextual variables such as size, urbanicity, poverty, and racial demographics play an important role in whether or not unions can successfully use power strategies during negotiations.
This work supports that explanation, but offers several others as well. First, a “strong” union is one that affects other decision-making outcomes in addition to contracts, or negotiates for union-favorable bargained outcomes that do not result in higher spending on teachers. While contracts are important determinants of district resource allocation because they dictate, among other things, salaries and benefits, class size, and the length of the school year, external financial constraints now severely limit what a union can demand. A pragmatic union may be doing little more than damage control during contract negotiations, because they know that it is not a question of whether funding to teachers will be cut but by how much and in what areas. A “strong” union might therefore influence not only collective bargaining agreements but also board policies and administrator actions. Second, the literature on contract strength and provisions examines only the absolute strength of the union, and not its strength in comparison to other district actors. It may be that a union can negotiate a favorable contract, but if administrators have more relative power than the union then the union is comparatively weak no matter how restrictive on paper the provisions of the contract. Third, the relationship between union and contract strength might be better captured by measuring the association between past union strength and current contract provisions (rather than current union strength). Contracts are historical documents, difficult to change substantially. If a strong teachers’ association negotiated a restrictive contract many years ago, the content of the contract now might not be related to the current strength of the union but rather to its strength at a past time when environmental conditions were more favorable towards it.
Finally, the assumption that a strong union seeks a “union-favorable” contract in order to limit administrator discretion might not be true in all districts. This assumption presumes that the interests of labor and management conflict and that the union needs a restrictive contract to protect its interests. But if the district has norms of trust and inclusion, and if the teachers’ union does not feel threatened by administrators and board members, the union does not need to rely on a contract to protect itself.

Recommendation for future research: Integrate micro- and macropolitical frameworks to examine all district actors and how they are involved in all types of district decisions.

The current tendency in the research on district politics is to separate actors and behaviors. Figure 2.1 models the traditional locations of district actors: external groups make demands on the legitimate political system, and then board members and superintendents translate those demands into policy outcomes from inside the system. There are three types of decision-making outcome – board policies, collective bargaining agreements, and administrator actions – and the way that researchers treat unions depends on the type of outcome. Unions are either interest groups that affect school board elections, or internal actors who negotiate contracts, but not both. Whether and how unions influence administrator actions and board policies is not known. Further, school board members are assumed to largely be macropolitical actors because they are politicians, and superintendents to be micropolitical actors because they are professionals.

My overall recommendation for research is to treat all district actors as both micro- and macropolitical, and to examine their use of power strategies as they interact and try to influence all three types of district decisions. There are many specific areas
which deserve careful attention. The role of unions on standing committees is unknown. The impact of communication between superintendents and unions, through channels such as regular meetings between administrators and labor leaders, merits future study as well. Board members should be studied as micropolitical actors, to determine the effects that closed sessions and micromanagement of administrators have on decision-making. In addition, researchers might better define a “powerful union” by studying the behavior of union-supported candidates after they are elected. The specific strategies of superintendents and administrators – the exercise of the discretionary power granted to them by the board, the control of information and access, the strategies used to divide other leaders from their bases of support, and their use of image politics – needs more study as well. Finally, researchers have studied the activities of teachers’ unions during elections, but not the activities of unions before elections; scholars should not ignore the role that unions play in recruiting candidates and preparing them to run their own campaigns.

Recommendation for future research: Compare and integrate local education politics to the work on city management.

School district and city politics bear a number of similarities: both involve questions of democracy, influence, status, and divergent interests, with publically-elected leaders driven by constituent demands and professionally-trained administrators responsible for maintaining the public good. The literature on city politics is rich with descriptions of different types of democratic systems, how community structure affects actor behavior, and how actors strategically use resources to influence one another (see
Banfield & Wilson, 1966; Dahl, 1961, 2005 for seminal pieces). This work acknowledges the multiple roles and demands of politicians and administrators and explicates the unique challenges of governing a city (rather than a state or a nation) where residents and leaders have personal familiarity with one another.

Municipal government differs from a school district in two important dimensions: in a school district, those served directly by the system (the students) are not allowed to vote and must therefore use proxies (the parents), and the district’s constituents are both those served directly by it (students/parents) and those served only directly (other residents). Yet much can be learned from both the methods and findings of scholars of city politics, most notably their integration of democratic and power theories. Scholars that apply urban regime theory to education have begun to adopt a more holistic perspective to district politics (Shipps, 2008; C. N. Stone, 2006), but existing studies provide a description of stakeholder interactions without linking interactions and environmental factors to decision-making outcomes.

Recommendation for future research: Examine the effects of collaborative intra-district, district-union, and state-district relationships on student outcomes.

One of the limitations of this study is that I explored the power relationships among district actors as they related to decision-making outcomes, not student achievement. While the limited research on collaborative intra-district and district-union relationships suggests that they ultimately benefit student achievement (Land, 2002; Rice, 2007; Urbanski, 2003), the link between collaborative (or conflict-laden) relationships and positive (or negative) student outcomes has not been established (Burroughs, 2008;
Koppich, 2006). Future work would benefit from a more rigorous exploration of that link, especially given the intense criticism faced by teachers’ unions and the pressure on them from politicians, district leaders, and the public to take a more reform-oriented approach. Rainier and McKinley Unified are particularly interesting cases because the former embodies the ideology of reform unionism and joint

Final Remarks

Politically and financially, nearly nothing has changed in the seven months since I stopped formal observations in Rainier and McKinley. McKinley is poised to repeat last year’s furlough day conflict as the 2012-2013 days come open for negotiation next month. The local media reports that both sides are as obdurate as last year. Rainier is still searching for a new superintendent. In an uncanny repeat of two years ago when the school board promoted the superintendent from within rather than opening an external search, this January board members self-appointed the replacement for seat left vacant due to a member’s sudden illness rather than holding general elections for the position.

These internal struggles pale in comparison to the next external threat. California school districts, McKinley and Rainier Unified included, are again facing financial instability: Governor Jerry Brown has threatened to cut almost $6 billion from the already-struggling K-12 public education system if voters do not approve his tax initiative in November 2012. Once more, districts must submit budgets based on projections that are far from certain, and their reserves are even more depleted than last year.
Both districts have few options remaining to reduce their operating costs and expenditures. McKinley has already gutted its central office staff, implemented teacher and administrator furlough days, threatened layoffs, and left extensive counselor, librarian, and aide vacancies. Rainier has raised class sizes, drastically reduced transportation, and lost nearly 10% of its experienced teachers to early retirement. And, Rainier’s finances are not as stable as last year; its budget received only a qualified certification from the state, meaning that the district may not be able to meet its financial obligations given its current revenues and expenditures. While the interactions among board members, superintendents and administrators, and teachers’ union leaders in the two districts present a study in contrasts, there is one thing on which every actor, irrespective of district or position, agrees: If public school districts are to survive, districts and unions must put their differences aside. Both sides must make concessions and find a common ground, or else they will fail to meet their financial obligations and, worse yet, fail the students whom they have promised to educate.

Why are we spending all this time fighting? Why aren’t we out together, getting the message out that we need to do things that are really going to have an impact on public education? Let’s put our energies into going together—teachers, administrators, custodians, everybody—and talking to parents and community members about progressive taxation, about closing the [budget] loopholes, about [state finance] that makes sense.

–President, United Teachers of McKinley

Whether you wear a white suit and you’re up on the top deck or you’re down below, either we’re going to work together or we’re going to drown. It won’t matter which side you were on, that ocean is going to swallow us all up. So, we really have no choice. If public education survives, we’re going to have to work together.

–President, Rainier Teachers’ Association
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APPENDIX A
District Participation and Interview Request Letters

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial district participation request letter, sent to school board president, superintendent, and teachers’ union president</th>
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Dear [NAME]:

My name is Dara Zeehandelaar and I am a doctoral student at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, working toward my PhD in urban education policy. My dissertation work is focused on the ways school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions work together to create district policy. I am specifically interested in the impact of the board-union-superintendent relationship on teacher-related policies such as compensation, class size, and furloughs, as well as the collective bargaining process.

We currently have a very limited understanding of how school boards, local teachers’ unions, and superintendents actually interact on a day-to-day basis, and how those interactions shape district policy. I am hoping that this research will inform the work of both practitioners and policy makers and help them more effectively meet the current demands for reform and accountability in times of financial constraint.

My research will be a qualitative case study of three school districts. I hope to include [DISTRICT] as one of my case study sites because the district has consistently maintained high achievement, even in the face of significant cutbacks to the state budget. You’ve probably seen me attending your school board meetings over the past six months, and based on my observations I feel like [DISTRICT] would be a very valuable addition to my study.

The research will consist of observations of board meetings and committee sessions, as well as interviews with board members, the superintendent and assistant superintendents, and teachers’ union leadership. I will also review public meeting notes and archived materials. I will not require access to students or schools, and I will only ask each participant for a single interview. I will gladly share the results of my research with the district upon completion. To show my appreciation, I would also like to volunteer my time for a project in [DISTRICT] as you see fit.
Please be assured that all data, including any informal conversations and communication, will be kept strictly confidential and on a secure computer to which only I will have access. All districts and individuals in the study will receive pseudonyms, and will never be identified by name. I will also make every effort to maintain anonymity of the districts by only referring to their general characteristics and omitting any identifiable features from any published materials. Any individuals mentioned in the study will be referred to by pseudonyms and/or their general job title only, and never by name. These procedures have approved by the University of Southern California’s Institutional Review Board (IRB); I am attaching their confirmation to this email. If you have any questions or concerns about these confidentiality procedures, please feel free to contact me via email or telephone (below), or the USC Institutional Review Board at (323) 223-2340.

There are no requirements for [DISTRICT] to participate in the study, but I sincerely hope that you will want to be involved. I am also sending identical requests to [BOARD PRESIDENT/SUPERINTENDENT/UNION PRESIDENT], because it is very important to my research that the perspectives of the school board, central office, and teachers’ union are all captured. Please contact me at the email address or phone number below if I have your permission to include [DISTRICT] as a case study site and begin asking participants for interviews. Please also contact me if you have any questions about my research and [DISTRICT]’s involvement in it, or would like more information before I proceed. I will be at the school board meeting on Tuesday October 4th, and I’m happy to talk in person as well.

I know that you are incredibly busy, and I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Thank you, and I am looking forward to speaking with you,

Dara Zeehandelaar
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zeehan@usc.edu
310.721.8518
Interview request letter, sent to school board members, senior district administrators, and teachers’ union leaders after initial permission was granted by board president, superintendent, and union president.

[DATE]

[NAME]

[POSITION/DISTRICT]

[DISTRICT ADDRESS]

Dear [NAME]:

My name is Dara Zeehandelaar and I am a doctoral student at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, working towards my PhD in urban education policy. My dissertation work is on how school boards, superintendents, and teachers’ unions work together to create local policy. I am specifically interested in the impact of the board-union-superintendent relationship on teacher-related policies such as compensation, class size, and furloughs, as well as the collective bargaining process.

Currently we have a very limited understanding of how school boards, local teachers’ unions, and superintendents actually interact on a day-to-day basis, and how those interactions shape district policy. I am hoping that this research will inform the work of both practitioners and policy makers and help them more effectively meet the current demands for reform and accountability in times of financial constraint.

My research will be a qualitative case study of three school districts. Based on my observations at your school board meetings, I feel like [DISTRICT] would be a very valuable addition to my study. As part of this work, I would like to interview you about your role as [POSITION]. I believe that you can provide significant insights into [DISTRICT]’s policy process. Broadly, the interview will cover the overall relationship between the school board, the central office, and the teachers’ union; the specifics of the policy-making process; and the nature of board-union contract negotiations. I will gladly share the results of my research with you upon completion.

Please be assured that all data, including any informal conversations and communication, will be kept strictly confidential and on a secure computer to which only I will have access. All districts in the study will receive pseudonyms, and will never be identified by name. In addition, I will make every effort to maintain anonymity of the sites by only referring to their general characteristics and omitting any identifiable features from any published materials. Any individuals mentioned in the study will be referred to by pseudonyms and/or their job title only, and never by name. This study has approved by the University of Southern California’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns about these confidentiality procedures, please feel free to
contact me via email or telephone (listed below), or the USC Institutional Review Board at (323) 223-2340.

There are no requirements that you participate in the study, and you may opt out at any time and/or for any reason, but I hope that you will decide to be involved. Please contact me via email or telephone if you agree to participate, and if so, the best way to contact you to schedule a date and time for an interview. I will follow up with you in about a week if you have any questions or concerns.

I know that you are incredibly busy, and I appreciate your consideration. Thank you, and I very much look forward to speaking with you,

Dara Zeehandelaar  
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Los Angeles, CA 90089  
zeehande@usc.edu  
213.821.4071
APPENDIX B
Interview Protocols and Observation Guides

The following is a combination of specific interview protocols for district and union leaders in McKinley and Rainier. The actual interview protocols varied slightly from participant to participant, depending on the individual’s position and district, particular issues in which they were involved, and when in the study the interview occurred.

Thank you so much for participating in this study. I am interested in the way that superintendents, school boards, and teachers’ unions interact to make decisions, and your point of view is crucial. All districts in the study will receive pseudonyms, and will never be identified by name. In addition, I will never refer to specific details and omit identifiable features. Anyone interviewed or referred to in the study will be given a pseudonym and never referred to by name. Only I will have access to my data, including any recordings, transcripts, and notes. No one else will ever hear or see my data, and I won’t reveal what you say during this interview to anyone else, nor can I even make reference to it when speaking to another person. If at any time you want me to stop recording or taking notes and go off the record, or stop the interview completely, please let me know and I’m happy to do so.

This interview will take about an hour. First I’m going to ask some quick background questions. Next I’ll ask you some general questions about your position as [POSITION], and how you interact with other board members, the superintendent and cabinet, and teachers’ union. Do you have any questions before we start? Do I have your permission to record this interview?

PART 1: Introduction/Biography
1. How long have you been a school board member in [DISTRICT]?
2. Have you held any executive positions on the board?
3. How long have you lived in [DISTRICT]? (If transplant, what brought you there?)
4. Do you have another occupation other than school board member? (If no, what was your previous occupation?)
5. What brought you to the school board?
6. Were you ever a teacher in [DISTRICT]? Somewhere else? Do you have any experience in education?
7. Do you have family members who currently attend school in this district? (Did you at some point? When?)
8. Do you plan on running for re-election?

9. Are you a member of any other community organizations? Which ones?

PART 2: Roles and Relationships
Next, I’m going to ask about your position, and your interactions with other board members, the superintendent and cabinet, and teachers’ union. Again, I want to assure you of confidentiality – not only will no one have access to this recording or my notes, but I will never under any circumstances mention or even allude to anything you tell me to another person. Basically, everything stays in here. So please feel free to be as candid, or not, as you want.

- Could you briefly describe your role as a board member?  
  [Probes: What are your overall responsibilities? What are your regular tasks or day-to-day activities?]

Next, I’m going to ask if you could briefly describe your interactions with other board members, the superintendent and cabinet, and with representatives from the teachers’ union. It’s essentially going to be the same set of questions for each.

INTRA-BOARD INTERACTIONS
- Under what circumstances do you interact with other board members?

- How would you describe that relationship? Positive or negative? Personal or professional?  
  [If answer is positive or negative, ask why do you think the relationship is good or bad? What do they do? What do you do?]

- Are there some that you interact with more often?

- Some that you relate to better?  
  [Why?]

- Do the others contact you, or do you contact them?
  - For what purpose? Any specific issues?
  - When you talk, are they giving you information? Are you giving them information? You’re telling one another about what you’re going to do? Asking for each other’s opinions? Collaborating to solve a problem? On which issues?

- Does the board tend to agree on issues?
- If there is a disagreement, how does it usually get resolved?

- Are there any issues that are particularly contentious among board members? Why?
- How much do you value presenting a “united” board? Why is it important to you?
- Do you think there is one board member that tends to have more of a voice than others? How does that effect board decisions?
- Do you think there is one board member who is very effective at persuading others? How are they able to do that?
- [EXAMPLE OR PROMPT] Can you give me an example of a decision that another board member made that you’ve disagreed with, and you’ve felt that you needed to change their mind? What did you do? Did it work? Why do you think it worked (or didn’t)?
- Can you give me an example of a decision you made that another board member has disagreed with, and they’ve tried to change your mind? What did they do to try and change your mind? Did it work? Why do you think it worked (or didn’t)?
- Do you think the other board members trust you? What makes you say that?
- Do you trust them? Why?

SUPERINTENDENT/CABINET INTERACTIONS

- In general, how do board priorities become policies? Does the board generally take the lead on policy decisions, or do administrators? How are responsibilities divided?
- What do you think the role of the superintendent is? [Do you think the rest of the board agrees with you?]
- Under what circumstances do you interact with the superintendent?
- How would you describe that relationship? Positive or negative? Personal or professional? [If answer is positive or negative, ask why do you think the relationship is good or bad? What does he do? What do you do?]
- Does he contact you, or do you contact him?
  - For what purpose? Any specific issues?
  - When you talk, is he giving you information? Are you giving him information? You’re telling one another about what you’re going to do? Asking for each other’s opinions? Collaborating to solve a problem? On which issues?
- Overall, do you think the superintendent trusts you? What makes you say that?
- Does he trust the board? Why?
- Do you trust him? Why?

- What do you think the role of the cabinet is? [Do you think the rest of the board agrees with you?]

- Who has the primary responsibility of interacting with the public? With teachers? Why?

- Under what circumstances do you interact with the cabinet members?

- How would you describe that relationship? Positive or negative? Personal or professional? [If answer is positive or negative, ask why do you think the relationship is good or bad? What do they do? What do you do?]

- Do they contact you, or do you contact them?

- When you talk, are they giving you information? Are you giving them information? You’re telling one another about what you’re going to do? Asking for each other’s opinions? Collaborating to solve a problem? On which issues?

- Do you generally agree with the recommendations of the central office?

- If there is a disagreement, how does it usually get resolved?

- Are there any issues that are particularly contentious between the board and superintendent? Why?

- What about issues that are particularly contentious between the board and a member of the cabinet?

- Can you give me an example of a decision that an administrator has made you’ve disagreed with, and you’ve felt that you needed to change their mind? What did you do? Did it work? Why do you think it worked (or didn’t)?

- Can you give me an example of a decision you made that an administrator has disagreed with, and they’ve tried to change your mind? What did they do to try and change your mind? Did it work? Why do you think it worked (or didn’t)?

- Overall, do you think the cabinet trusts you? What makes you say that?

- Do they trust the board? Why?

- Do you trust them? Why?

**UNION INTERACTIONS**

- When do you interact with representatives from the teachers’ union?

- How would you describe that relationship? Positive or negative? Personal or professional? [If answer is positive, or negative, ask why do you think the
relationship is good or bad? What do they do? What do you do? How are you defining “good” or “bad” relationship?

- Under what other circumstances do you interact?
  - Do you contact them, or do they contact you?
  - When you interact, are you giving them information? They’re giving you information? One is making a request of the other? One is asking for the opinion of the other? Are you collaborating to solve a problem? On which issues?
- Under what circumstances does each occur?
- How do you (or other board members) respond to requests from the union?

- To what degree are teachers involved in decision-making? How do you decide which issues should involve teachers?

- Can you give me an example of a decision the board made that they disagreed with, and they’ve tried to change your mind? One thing that comes to mind is the current structure with the interim superintendent, but feel free to bring up another example.
  - What was their position?
  - How did they try to persuade the board to adopt their position?
  - Did it work? Why do you think it worked (or didn’t)?
  - What wouldn’t have worked?

- What other strategies has the union used in the past? Have they worked? What were the ultimate results?

- What role does the teachers’ union play in school board elections?
  - What activities do they do?
- What are the implications of the union supporting a candidate? Of not supporting a candidate? Do endorsements carry weight? Why?
- What do you think are important factors that determine whether a board member gets elected?

- Do you feel constrained by the union contract? Which provisions? Which is more constraining, external mandates, the contract, or the budget?

- Do you think the union trusts you? What makes you say that? Do they trust the district? Why?
- Do you trust them? Why?
GENERAL

- Do you think political aspirations play a role in the way that board members make decisions? What about ties to the community? Time in the district? Endorsements? How so? Have these things mattered in the past?

- What is the impact of [DISTRICT]’s API scores on the way that the district makes decisions? What about [DISTRICT]’s SES? Political climate? State budget?

- Within [DISTRICT], where does the bulk of decision-making occur? Are most major policies those that have to be approved by the board, or are they day-to-day decisions made by administrators?

PART 4: Conclusion

I’m going to conclude by asking you some general questions about district policy decisions. Again, if you think that there are important aspects to these decisions that I did not ask about, please feel free to direct me.

1. First, some quick questions about priorities. One or two word answers are fine – I don’t need details, unless you feel that they’re important!
   - As a school board member, what would you say your top priority is?
   - What is the top priority of the entire board? [Would each board member agree?]
   - What about the superintendent?
   - The teachers’ union leadership? The union?

2. Overall, who would you say is/are the most powerful decision-maker(s) in the district?
   - What resources do they have that make them powerful?
   - How do they use those resources?

3. [If answer wasn’t union] Would you say the union is powerful? What resources do they have that makes them powerful?

4. [Same question if not answered for board and/or superintendent]

5. How are you defining power? What does it mean in this district to be powerful?

6. Anything else to add?

7. Thank you so much for your time. Is there anyone else I should talk to?

8. Would you mind if I followed up with you if I have any more questions?
General observation guide for school board, cabinet, committee, and union meetings.

**Guiding Questions:**
1. What power resources/assets does each actor have and use?
2. What strategies can and do actors use to leverage their resources? What is the description, location, and goal of those strategies?
3. What is the outcome of the decision-making process?
4. How did environmental factors affect the answers to (1, 2, and 3)?

**Meeting Type:**

**Time and Location:**

**Agenda File Name:**

**Participants:** Board, Superintendent, and Administrators (note absences):

**Other Attendees:**

**Room Set-Up:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes on Resources/Strategies/Mechanisms/Processes/Dimension</th>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
Final Questions (answer for each decision process or outcome, if applicable):
What was the objective of the meeting?

What stage of the policy process does this interaction represent?

During this interaction, what types of policies are being discussed? (What is the issue? Is it a board policy, administrator action, or negotiated provision?)

During this interaction, who is involved?

How did each get access?

What are the stated objectives of each actor?

What resources does each actor have at the start of the interaction?

What strategies does each actor use during the interaction?

What is the outcome of the interaction?

Whose objectives are most reflected in the outcome?

What resources does each actor have at the end of the interaction?

Are the strategies macro- or micropolitical?

What is the goal of the strategy? Is it high-conflict or low-conflict?

What is the effect of environmental context?
## PRIMARY DESCRIPTIVE CODES

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<th>Informant Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Board majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Board minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board president</td>
<td>Connected family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other administrator</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>Encouraged to run/recruited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union executive board</td>
<td>Endorsed by union</td>
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<td>Union executive director</td>
<td>Family are employees</td>
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<td>Union president</td>
<td>Family in district</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>District Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Former PTA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-union</td>
<td>Former teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous</td>
<td>Generally appears liked, trusted</td>
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<tr>
<td>High API</td>
<td>Grew up locally</td>
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<tr>
<td>High SES</td>
<td>Higher office</td>
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<td>MCKINLEY</td>
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<td>Low SES</td>
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<td>Pro-union</td>
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<td>RAINIER</td>
<td>Not running for re-election</td>
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<td><strong>Primary Location</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Other job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dist/Union Regular</td>
<td>Other Race</td>
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<td>District/Union Special</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Promoted from Within</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Negotiations</td>
<td>Ran because satisfied</td>
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<td>Standing Committee</td>
<td>Running for Re-election</td>
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<td>ADMIN non-binding recommendation</td>
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<td>Board member</td>
<td>BOARD budget</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>BOARD curriculum</td>
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<td>Community member(s)</td>
<td>BOARD discipline</td>
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<td>District general</td>
<td>BOARD facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hr</td>
<td>BOARD other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>BOARD personnel</td>
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<td>BOARD RIFs</td>
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<td>EXTERNAL other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>INTERNAL other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
<td>INTERNAL hiring</td>
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<td>Union general</td>
<td>INTERNAL layoffs/cuts</td>
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<td>NEGOTIATED calendar</td>
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<td>NEGOTIATED salary</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>UNION election</td>
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<tr>
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<td>UNION other</td>
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<td>Email</td>
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## ANALYTIC CODES: GENERAL ROLES, INTERACTIONS, AND INTERESTS

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<th>Actor Interests</th>
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<td>Students</td>
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<td>Superintendent</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>Union</td>
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<td><strong>Nature of Interaction</strong></td>
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<td>Nature of interaction (issue-specific/unique)</td>
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<td>District (general)</td>
<td>Power</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Superintendent/administrators</td>
<td>Is union powerful?</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Most powerful and why?</td>
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<td>Union/union president</td>
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<td>Voters/Public</td>
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### Analytic Codes: Resources

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<td>Allies in district</td>
<td>Members/employees (have to follow)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ally on the enemy’s side</td>
<td>Members/employees (staff)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charisma</td>
<td>Money</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Strike</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>Time to spend on job</td>
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<td>Patience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived as trying to get along</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived as unaligned with the enemy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived expertise/intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived open mind/approachable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived trustworthiness/honesty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties to larger org</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Resources: Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources: Knowledge</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence/expertise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ANALYTIC CODES: STRATEGY TYPES BY LOCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>External: Electoral Politics</strong></th>
<th><strong>Internal/Micropolitical (continued)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct donate</td>
<td>Divisiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement</td>
<td>Emphasize common goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative campaign</td>
<td>Find an insider ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Flattery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit candidates</td>
<td>Flexibility/concession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run campaign</td>
<td>Formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as voters</td>
<td>Hide unpopular actions, mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>Hire friends/like-minded people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External: Issue/Image</strong></td>
<td>Honor promises/follow through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make other look bad</td>
<td>I vs. We language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper ad</td>
<td>Informal request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Information control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press conference/release</td>
<td>Information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public appearance</td>
<td>Involve/inform early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External: Policymaking/Lobbying</strong></td>
<td>Involve/inform late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct lobbying</td>
<td>Involve/inform only if required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect lobbying</td>
<td>Involve/inform with no requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Limit speaking time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal/Micropolitical</strong></td>
<td>Micromanagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuse other of lying</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge adversity/agree to disagree</td>
<td>Play on fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda control</td>
<td>Play on lack of capacity of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint interims</td>
<td>Portray something as complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for advice</td>
<td>Pressure to save jobs/money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask versus demand</td>
<td>Private meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid micromanagement</td>
<td>Public dissent/confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame state/county</td>
<td>Public unity/restraint/concession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change board rotation</td>
<td>Publicize mistakes of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumvent leadership or procedure</td>
<td>Put down intelligence/aptitude of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite contract</td>
<td>Refer to research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare to other districts</td>
<td>Reference past success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate/decide in private</td>
<td>Share responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defer to age/history</td>
<td>Stick to norms/procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defer to attorney/cite law</td>
<td>Time pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay, wait for other to move first</td>
<td>Trade costly thing for cheap one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from ppl w/ questionable alliances</td>
<td>Trade support for something later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance self from unpopular group</td>
<td>Treat teachers as professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction/rudeness during meetings</td>
<td>Vote for, but don’t support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ANALYTIC CODES: STRATEGY DIMENSIONS AND GOALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change status quo (modify existing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change status quo (new)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep issue off agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclude/marginalize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ANALYTIC CODES: ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND CONTEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual and Personal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY: all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTY: all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: current structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: history/norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTRICT: strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEDERAL: all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER: all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### EMERGENT CODES: GENERAL THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Themes</th>
<th>EMERGENT CODES: GENERAL THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Marketing” to the people with power</td>
<td>Negotiating style (conversation vs offers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>No concessions if already feeling subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda-making</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree on facts, disagree on action (or v/v)</td>
<td>Personality trumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment of interests</td>
<td>Power in proactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for advice but don’t follow</td>
<td>Power of union = power of contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute success to teachers vs programs</td>
<td>Power of union = power to organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMs go outside process</td>
<td>Power of veto (board) vs power to act (dist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board in the way</td>
<td>Power of voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom up vs. Top down</td>
<td>Protect image of district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Protect image of public education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community trumps</td>
<td>Relationship change w/ leadership change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract as (necessary) protection</td>
<td>Role of union trumps compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided union as source of power</td>
<td>Simplification = manipulation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of alliances</td>
<td>Staff does on the ground work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Staff/board role is to support supt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History trumps</td>
<td>Strategy backfire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Teachers vs. Union interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information = involvement, confidence, trust</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference</td>
<td>Trust the numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust/marginalize someone b/c of alliances, history</td>
<td>Unified board to avoid owning decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust/marginalize someone b/c of aspirations</td>
<td>Union in the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unity as source of power</td>
</tr>
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</table>