Comparing School Board Governing Dynamics in Small Rural and Suburban Districts

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Abstract

In this paper I use original data collected from American school board members serving small school districts to compare the governing dynamics present on rural and suburban school boards. I find that rural school board members are less diverse, perceive higher levels of interpersonal conflict, and higher levels of interest group influence compared to their suburban colleagues. The results reveal the need to consider contextual factors such as urbanity when studying local governance in school districts of similar size. The results are relevant to scholars of small group dynamics, municipal governance, and school boards.

There are almost 14,000 school districts overseeing the delivery of public education in the United States. An overwhelming majority of these school districts (94.8%) enroll fewer than 10,000 students. Over half, 54.5%, serve fewer than 1,000 pupils. Those districts serving fewer than 1,000 pupils include large numbers of both suburban rural districts that, though similar in size, operate in fundamentally different governance contexts. In this article I use original data collected from a national survey of school board members to test several hypotheses regarding the governance differences between school boards overseeing small rural and small suburban school districts.

I use the case of American school boards because they offer several structural and practical advantages for learning about the nature of local governance. One, every American is exposed to public education as a student, parent, or taxpayer. Hence school boards and their mandate are familiar to most American citizens. Two, public education is the most expensive function of state and local government (Mullins & Pagano, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the 2013-2014 school year state and local governments spent $586.1 billion on K-12 education. In addition, there are over 3.6 million teachers, and millions of additional administrators and support staff, employed by U.S. school districts. Though some scholars have questioned the relevance of public education to the study of public administration, its place in the family of local governments is indisputable given its scope and size (Raffel, 2007). Three, the broad exposure of citizens to public education governance makes school boards a uniquely contested governance environment with large variation in goals, board member conflict, interest group pressures, and spans of authority (Alsbury, 2008; Howell, 2005; Manna & McGuinn, 2013). Four, school boards have the unique advantage of overseeing a compulsory service whose performance outcomes are measurable via

mandatory standardized testing. As such, school boards can be a venue where governance can be linked to hard measures of organizational performance. In summary, the case of American school boards and their members is of both practical and theoretical significance to the study of local governance.

In the following sections I use the case of American school board members to explore the differences between governance in small rural, and small suburban school districts. I first present a review of the literature on public governance, school boards, and theories of small group dynamics. I then present several hypotheses informed by the literature review. Next I describe a national survey of school board members used to measure the perceived small group dynamics present on American school boards. Then I use several quantitative models to test my hypotheses. Finally, the implications of my results, as well as a roadmap for future study, are presented.

Theory and Literature Review

Theories of local governance posit that the context in which governance actors operate affects their agendas, interactions, group dynamics, decision-making, and governance outputs. But what exactly is meant by governance? Lucas (2016) defines governance as "the changing patterns of rule in and through which public policies are produced (7)." As such understanding governance requires studying the perceptions of individuals in the governing process, the context in which governing actors operate, and the products of the governing process, i.e. policies and outcomes. The concept of governance in the public sector is a direct outgrowth of the changing reality of how public goods and services are produced and distributed. Traditionally, government services are produced and overseen by centralized rule-driven bureaucracies (Goodsell, 1994; Weber, 1946). Under traditional notions of bureaucracy public administration

is studied by exploring the formal relationships, structures, and rules governing agencies and their employees. However, the human relations school of public administration problematized traditional approaches to studying public administration by emphasizing the importance of studying human beings and all of their complexities in the governing process (Simon, 1946; Frederickson et al., 2012). Simply, understanding organizations requires understanding the behavior and perceptions of human beings within organizations.

The reinventing government movement, as well as theories of managerialism and New Public Management, furthered the rise of governance as a framework for understanding oversight of the provision of public goods and services (Politt, 1993; Osborne & Gaebler, 1993; Osborne & Plastrick, 1997; Kettl, 2005). The conceptual framework that is governance accepts that networks comprised of public, nonprofit, and private actors often provide public goods and services to citizens. Further, governing networks have amorphous boundaries that challenge traditional bureaucratic ideals such as span of control and hierarchy (Milward & Provan, 2003). Though Stillman (1999) and Frederickson (1996) suggest that governance is a normative term promoting the thinning of administrative institutions, it is generally accepted in the public administration literature that the framework of governance reflects the reality of modern service delivery (Osborne, 2010).

The case of American school boards mirrors the evolution of the modern governance framework. Ashby (1968), in one of the first studies of American school boards, describes the roles of school board members in traditional terms of fiscal oversight. Board members were described as ensuring that tax dollars were spent correctly, and that school district policies were followed. Missing from Ashby's (1968) work was any mention of school district performance, school districts customers (i.e. students and parents), the constraints of federalism, pressures

from outside interest groups, or the perceptions of board members themselves. However, over the fifty years following Ashby's work several trends regarding the changing nature of school board governance surfaced.

First, there was significant consolidation of American school districts. According to the NCES there were 22,010 school districts in 1968. By 2011 that number was down to 13,588. Correspondingly, consolidation let to an increase in the average size of the American school district. Second, the span of authority of American school boards shrunk (and is still shrinking). As Howell (2005) detailed in an edited volume entitled *Besieged,* the ability of school boards to make basic decisions such as setting the tax levy, making assessment policies, and making spending decisions is increasingly restricted by state and federal laws. The seeming inability of school boards to enact meaningful policy change has led to calls for the abandonment of the model altogether (Finn Jr. & Petrilli, 2013). Indeed, these calls are not idle threats. Alternative governance models such as private school vouchers, charter schools, cyber schools, and mayoral control of school districts are growing in both urban and rural areas (Henig, 2013; Hill, 2013). As these alternative models grow the language and lessons of network governance in public administration increasingly applies to education governance (Provan & Milward, 2001). As the Author (2017) details in previous work, the growth of alternative governance models creates management challenges resulting from the need to oversee collaborations rather than manage single bureaucracies. In most cases existing structures lack the authority and/or capacity to effectively manage in such an environment.

More recent school board research explores the link between school board governance and academic performance. Delagardelle (2008) identified linkages between the governance behaviors of school board members, school culture, and student outcomes. Grissom (2014), in a

study of California school districts, linked board member conflict to lower student test scores. Ford and Ihrke (2015; 2015a; 2016), in a series of studies, showed how adherence to best practices, minimizing interpersonal conflict, and board member alignment on the meaning of key concepts like accountability and strategic planning, are linked with higher student test scores and graduation rates. Overall the school board governance literature is recognizing that boards have serious constraints on their decision-making, that student performance is a key governance goal of boards, that parental satisfaction is increasingly important given the increase of school choice programs, and that overall student performance is often a function of student poverty and special needs status (Manna & McGuinn, 2013).

Much of the school board literature focuses on large urban school districts (see Portz, Stein, & Jones, 1999; Viteritti, 2005). But, as discussed in the introduction, over half of U.S. school districts enroll fewer than 1,000 students. This understudied population is unique for several reasons. Foremost, these smaller districts are diverse in the issues they are facing. Small suburban districts are frequently dealing with problems of growth (Fry, 2009). A growing school district must deal with rising facility costs, rising personnel needs, and the reality that most school finance formulas are based on previous year's enrollments, meaning funding may be inadequate for the current year. Suburban districts also struggle with human capital retention given the presence of multiple school districts in most metropolitan areas (Odden, 2011). A small rural district, on the other hand, often deals with declining enrollment, high fixed costs, the challenge of talent retention, inadequate offerings for gifted students, the threat of school district consolidation, and high transportation costs (Mathis, 2003; Odden, 2011). The contrasting contexts in which rural and suburban districts operate, I argue, is likely to have implications for the small group governing dynamics on the school board.

But what is meant by small group governing dynamics? The basic theory of small group governing dynamics is that the perceptions of governing board members, as well as the context in which they operate, influence organizational performance. The theory of small group governing dynamics is often used to explain board behaviors in the public and nonprofit sectors. Ihrke and Niederjohn (2005), for example, explore the sources of board member conflict on Wisconsin city councils. Brown (2005) uses the case of nonprofit boards to link positive group dynamics to higher perceptions of organizational performance. Ford and Ihrke (2015a) use the case of Wisconsin school boards to show how board member perceptions of accountability influence school district performance. Gabris and Nelson (2013) provide a broad overview of the characteristics of a positive governing dynamic on a municipal board. A high functioning group will have clear leadership, minimal negative conflicts types (such as relationship conflict), a strong relationship between the governing board and organizational CEO, and a willingness to support a decision by the group once it has been made regardless of their initial opposition or support. I use the confluence of the governance, school board, and small groups dynamics literature to inform the following three hypotheses. Below is each hypothesis, and a short specific justification.

Hypothesis One: Conflict is higher on suburban boards than rural boards.

Ihrke & Niederjohn (2005) examined the level of negative group conflict types on municipal governing boards, finding lower levels of conflict in smaller municipalities. However, I question if population is too broad a construct in regards to determining conflict. Instead, I suspect that suburban boards will be more similar to higher conflict urban boards given their inclusion in a larger metropolitan area (Peterson, 1976).

Hypothesis Two: Suburban school board members are more diverse than rural school board members.

Though research generally finds municipal governing boards serving smaller populations are less diverse than those serving larger ones (see Ford & Ihrke, 2016), I again suspect differences exist between boards that are part of a metropolitan area and those serving a rural population due to the generally higher potential for diversity in larger metropolitan areas.

Hypothesis Three: Suburban board school members perceive more special interest pressures than rural school board members.

Berry & Howell (2005) found that negative impacts of interest group pressures are more pronounced in large school districts. Once again, I suspect the presence of interests groups is determined by urbanity rather than size. A suburban area likely has more potential for multiple competing interest groups, and more potential funding for said interest groups, than a rural area.

Data and Methods

I test these hypotheses using unique data from 113 school board members serving in suburban school districts with fewer than 1,000 pupils, and 788 school board members serving in rural school districts with fewer than 1,000 pupils. The data were collected via a national survey of 28,214 school board members conducted in 2013 and 2014. The 89-item survey was developed by the author and was informed by a previous school board member survey conducted by Hess and Meeks (2011) on behalf of the National School Boards Association, and municipal governance surveys used by Ihrke and Niederjohn (2005) and Heidbreder et al. (2011). A total of 5,002 board members returned the survey for an overall response rate of 17.7%. Though this

response rate is lower than the 23.6% response rate of the Hess and Meeks (2011) survey, the total number of respondents is over five times greater.

Of course, the deployed methodology introduces potential bias concerns. For one, because it is dealing with board member perceptions, individual board members may be biased in their responses. Secondly, it is possible that respondents and non-respondents differ from one another in meaningful ways that may impact results. To test for bias I compared the characteristics of school districts represented by survey respondents with the characteristics of American school districts generally. The results, displayed in Table One, indicate that the districts represented by board members in the sample are similar in most ways to the actual population of school districts. The exception, however, is that districts represented by board members in the sample have a lower overall percentage of low-income pupils. As an additional check I compared the demographic characteristics of board members in the sample with the sample collected by Hess and Meeks (2011). The comparison, displayed in Table Two, indicates that both my sample and Hess and Meeks' (2011) sample are comprised of a similar demographic population. Though neither of these comparisons can fully eliminate the possibility of response bias, it does confidence in the representativeness of the sample.

TABLES ONE AND TWO ABOUT HERE

As mentioned previously, for this paper I reduced the dataset to a sample of 901 school board members, 788 of which represent rural districts as classified by the NCES, and 113 who represent suburban districts. Tables Three through Five display summary statistics for all variables used in the analysis. Table Three lists four statements respondents were asked to state their agreement with on a five point likert scale where 1 = Strong Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. All four statements represent different conflict

types in small groups identified by Jehn (1995) and Jehn and Mannix (2001). The index variable, which holds together well with a Chronbach's Alpha of .84, measures the total level of perceived negative conflict types on a governing board. The second index variable, displayed in Table Four, measures the extent to which board members go above and beyond what is required by their state in the areas of academic standards, standardized testing, and behavioral policies. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with each statement on a five point likert scale where 1 = Strong Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The index holds together well as evidenced by a Chronbach's Alpha of .76.

TABLES THREE AND FOUR ABOUT HERE

Summary statistics for all other variables used in the analysis are displayed in Table Five. Note that statistics for the sub-populations of board members representing suburban and rural school districts are also displayed. Superintendent as Partner measures the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statement on a five-point likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree: "We view the Superintendent as a full partner in the governing process." The variables Students, Revenue Per-Pupil, Pct. Low-Income Pupils, and Pct. Minority students are all school district demographic variables obtained from the NCES in 2014. Note that suburban districts enroll more students, have higher revenues per-pupil, a lower percentage of low-income pupils, and a higher percentage of minority pupils compared to rural districts represented in the sample. The variable Clear :eader measures the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statement on a five-point likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree: "The school board has a clear leader." The variable Little Board Turnover measures the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statement on a five-point likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree: "In the past five

years our school board has had very little board member turnover." Finally, the variable High Interest Group Influence measures the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statement on a five-point likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree: "Organized interest groups have significant influence over board decisions." In the following section I use the presented data to test the three previously stated hypotheses.

TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE

Results

Before testing the formal hypotheses I display, in Table Six, a comparison of the priorities of suburban and rural school board members in the sample. Board members were asked to rank their priorities, from one to 10 with one being most important and 10 being least important. Overall both groups have very similar priorities, with only two significant differences. Rural board members place comparably less importance on making assessment policies, and comparably more importance on monitoring fiscal performance. The difference in import placed on monitoring fiscal performance suggests that rural board members have a more traditional limited approach to the role of school board member along the lines of Ashby's (1968) early work

TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE

I test hypothesis one, that conflict is higher on suburban boards than rural boards, using a state-level fixed-effects regression model. State-level fixed-effects were used due to the different state-level policy environments in which school boards operate. Note that only 39 states are included in the sample due the absence of respondents from small school districts in 10 other states (Hawaii is excluded because it has one statewide school board). The results, displayed in Table Seven, yield several statistically and substantively significant findings. First,

contrary to the stated hypothesis, board members representing suburban districts perceive less negative conflict than those serving rural districts. Specifically, suburban districts score .74 points lower on the 20-point conflict index. A graphical representation of the difference between perceived board member conflict in rural and suburban districts is displayed in Figure One. In a finding consistent with previous work by Ford & Ihrke (2016), board members who view their superintendent as a partner in the governing process perceive less conflict. School district characteristics and student demographics are not linked with perceptions of conflict. Finally, board members who score higher on the More Rigorous Index, i.e. those that are more active in policymaking in key areas, as well as more stable boards with less turnover, observe less negative conflict types on their board. Though the R-Squared statistic is relatively low at .152, regression diagnostics reveal the error term is not correlated with fitted values, and that all regression assumptions are met.

TABLE SEVEN AND FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis Two states that suburban school board members are more diverse that rural school board members. I test this hypothesis using a series of chi-squared tests comparing several diversity indicators across suburban/rural location. The results are presented graphically in Figure Two. As can be seen, there is no significant difference between gender diversity on small rural and suburban boards. However, there is a statistically significant relationship at the 95% level between political affiliation and suburban/rural location. Board members representing small suburban districts are more likely to identify as liberal, much less likely to identify as conservative, and more likely to identify as moderate or non-partisan than their rural colleagues. The percentage of liberal and conservative board members serving suburban districts are fairly even, while conservatives are much more prevalent than liberals on rural boards. Finally, there is

a statistically significant relationship between board member race and suburban/rural locale. Suburban board members are more likely to be non-white than their rural colleagues. The results support hypothesis two, as suburban school board members exhibit comparably more ideological balance and racial diversity.

FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE

The state-level fixed effects regression model displaced in Table Eight predicts the extent to which board members agree that "Organized interest groups have significant influence over board decisions." The overall model has poor overall explanatory value with a R-Squared of .065. Note that the low R-Squared is likely a reflection of the limited variation in the dependent variable, which was measured using a five-point likert scale. As a check, an additional ordered logistic regression model was also deployed. As can be seen in Table Nine, the results of the ordered logistic regression model are consistent with the state-level fixed effects model. There is a statistically significant relationship between suburban school board members and perceived interest group influence, however, it is opposite of the theorized hypothesis. Board members serving suburban districts actually perceive lower levels of interest group influence compared to their rural counterparts. A visual representation of the differences between the two groups is displayed in Figure Three. There is no relationship between school district characteristics and student demographics and perceived interest group influence. However, board members who view their superintendent as a governing partner, who believe their board has a clear leader, and that experience little turnover perceive less interest group influence over board decisions. Overall there is support for a link between location and interest group influence, but not in the hypothesized direction.

TABLES EIGHT AND NINE AND FITURE THREE ABOUT HERE

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper began with a discussion of governance and the importance of understanding the contextual factors impacting governing dynamics on municipal boards. Though size, as indicated by population of municipalities and students in school districts, is well represented in the public administration literature, there is little nuance in discussions of how size may be influenced by other contextual factors. Bluntly, suburbs and rural areas are fundamentally different in the governing challenges they face. It follows that governing dynamics will be different in suburban and rural areas. From a practical standpoint, it is problematic that state school-aid formulas, and statewide policy initiatives, are often premised on school district size. Meaning, funding and policy decisions operate under the premise that a district of 500 pupils is operationally similar regardless of its urbanity.

As the preceding analysis shows, there are identifiable differences between suburban and rural school board members serving districts of similar size. First, there is actually more perceived conflict on rural boards. Though this finding is inconsistent with existing literature on urbanity and board conflict, as the first subgroup analysis of board members serving smaller school districts there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the findings. Future study on the sources of interpersonal conflict on rural and suburban school boards overseeing small school districts is a logical next research step. The author suspects the unique dynamic of rural areas, i.e. the likelihood that individuals are more likely to interact socially and professionally with one another in a diversity of settings due to the absence of a broader metropolitan area, introduces more potential sources of conflict that may manifest during the governing process. It is also possible that the number of potential board members is smaller in a rural area, meaning board members serve for longer periods of time, hence giving conflict a longer time to develop.

Regardless, determining the sources of conflict is important so as to be able to mitigate a group dynamic demonstrated to have a negative impact on organizational performance (Ford & Ihrke, 2016).

The lack of diversity and ideological balance on rural school boards is a potentially troubling finding in the context of theories of representativeness (Frederickson et al., 2012). It is possible that racial and ideological minorities are not being represented on these school boards. However, it is also possible that the comparably less diversity is a function of the communities represented by rural school board members (Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008). It should also be noted that, though more diverse, suburban school board members serving small school districts are also a very homogenous group. It is possible the lack of diversity on both rural and suburban school boards serving small districts is a reflection of the broader lack of diversity on American school boards in general (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Future research on the representativeness of rural and suburban school boards relative to their student body would shine further light on the sources and consequences of racial and ideological diversity on school boards serving smaller districts.

The comparably higher perceptions of interest group influence on rural boards is somewhat confounding, and perhaps an indicator of the need to dig deeper into the diversity of interest groups and how that diversity correlates with district size. For example, much of the interest group literature relating to school boards assumes that unions and business groups are the dominant external forces placing pressure on school board decision-making (Hess, 2008). However, limited informal interviews conducted as part of this project suggest that rural interest groups tend to be highly specific, and highly influential. Examples of such interests groups include sports boosters, parent-teacher-organizations, and groups created specifically for purposes of influencing an initiative such as a building referendum. More research is needed on

rural and suburban interest groups, however it is likely that traditional approaches to studying interests groups in regards to school boards do not generalize well to smaller school districts.

Overall, the presented results and discussion demonstrate the need to differentiate between smaller municipal governments based on location. There is evidence that the governing dynamics, external pressures, and basic characteristics of those who serve are influenced by the context, i.e. suburban or rural, in which the governing board operates. Case studies of individual boards, more in-depth work on the nature of conflict on governing boards in these locations, and greater examination of active interest groups would all move the local governance literature forward. From a practical standpoint, this work suggests policymakers should consider location-based education governance policies, i.e. those policies that determine resource allocation and extent of local control, in addition to size. The simplest and most obvious takeaway is that rural and suburban school board members operate in uniquely different contexts, and that those contexts must be considered when studying school board governance.

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Table One - Comparison of Sample and Population School District Characteristics

	Sample Characteristics	**Actual Population Characteristics**
Graduation Rate	82.74%	82.10%
Revenue Per-Pupil	$13,441	$14,393
Instructional Spending Per-Pupil	$6,999.75	$7,122
Pct. ELL	4.60%	4.40%
Pct. IEP	13.60%	13.60%
Pct. Low-Income	33.64%	45.30%
Pct. Black	7.80%	7.00%
Pct. White	73.00%	72.40%
Pct. Hispanic	12.10%	13.20%

Table Two - Comparison of Survey Respondents in Hess and Meeks (2011) and Author Sample

Sex	**Hess and Meeks**	**Total Author Sample**
Male	56.0%	54.3%
Female	44.0%	45.7%
Education		
Bachelor's Degree	27.7%	31.8%
Advanced Degree	46.5%	45.0%
Ideology		
Liberal	20.3%	19.0%
Conservative	30.3%	31.9%
Moderate/Non-Partisan	49.3%	49.1%
Age		
Age 60 or over	34.0%	30.4%
Age 40 of over	95.4%	92.0%

Table Three: Conflict Index

Survey Statements (Measured on 5 point Likert scale)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Conflict among some school board members is high	2.51	.93
School board tend to form along predictable lines	2.66	.94
During board negotiations, prior conflicts often resurface	2.54	.83
Disagreements between board members often become personalized	2.25	.92
Conflict Index	9.95	2.96
Chronbach's Alpha	0.84	

N=901

Table Four: More Rigorous Index

Survey Statements (Measured on 5 point Likert scale)	Mean	Std. Dev.
We consistently set academic standards more rigorous than those required by the State Board of Education	3.03	1.04
We consistently use standardized assessments that are more rigorous than those required by the State Board of Education	2.96	.98
We set and consistently update student district behavior policies that are more rigorous than those required by the State Board of Education	3.04	.95
More Rigorous Index	9.03	2.44
Chronbach's Alpha:	.76	

N=901

Table Five: Summary Statistics

	Total N=901		Suburban N=113		Rural N=788	
Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Superintendent as Partner	4.07	0.74	4.13	0.78	4.06	0.74
Students	533.71	271.9	614.89	282.97	522.07	268.45
Revenue Per-Pupil	14235.99	4579.51	16149.66	4780.63	13961.56	4486.59
Pct. Low-Income Students	0.35	0.21	0.28	0.27	0.36	0.2
Pct. Minority Students	0.15	0.19	0.22	0.2	0.14	0.18
Clear Leader	3.62	0.81	3.59	0.89	3.63	0.8
Little Board Turnover	2.81	1.08	2.71	1.06	2.82	1.09
High Interest Group Influence	1.83	0.74	1.71	0.71	1.84	0.74

Table Six – School Board Member Priority Comparisons

Priority	**Suburban**	**Rural**	**Absolute Difference**
Interacting with the Public	6.53	6.48	0.05
Making Student Behavior Policies	6.16	6.33	0.17
Board Development	7.76	7.57	0.19
Setting Academic Standards	3.24	3.43	0.19
Hiring the Superintendent	4.99	4.78	0.21
Holding School Staff Accountable for District Performance	5.31	5.52	0.21
Strategic Planning	3.53	3.31	0.22
Collaborating with Interest Groups	8.05	8.28	0.23
Making Assessment Policies	5.22	5.59	0.37*
Monitoring Fiscal Performance	4.21	3.72	0.49*

*Significantly different at the 95% level of significance

Table Seven – State-Level Fixed-Effects Regression Results Predicting Conflict Index

Variables	Conflict Index
Suburban	-0.740**
	(0.345)
Superintendent as Partner	-0.789***
	(0.132)
Students (log)	0.0151
	(0.128)
Revenue Per-Pupil	3.76e-05
	(2.80e-05)
Pct. Low-Income	0.630
	(0.574)
Pct. Minority	0.953
	(0.681)
Clear Leader	-0.695***
	(0.120)
More Rigorous Index	-0.118***
	(0.0408)
Little Turnover	-0.295***
	(0.0883)
Constant	16.68***
	(1.146)
Observations	896
Number of States	39
R-squared	0.152

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure One

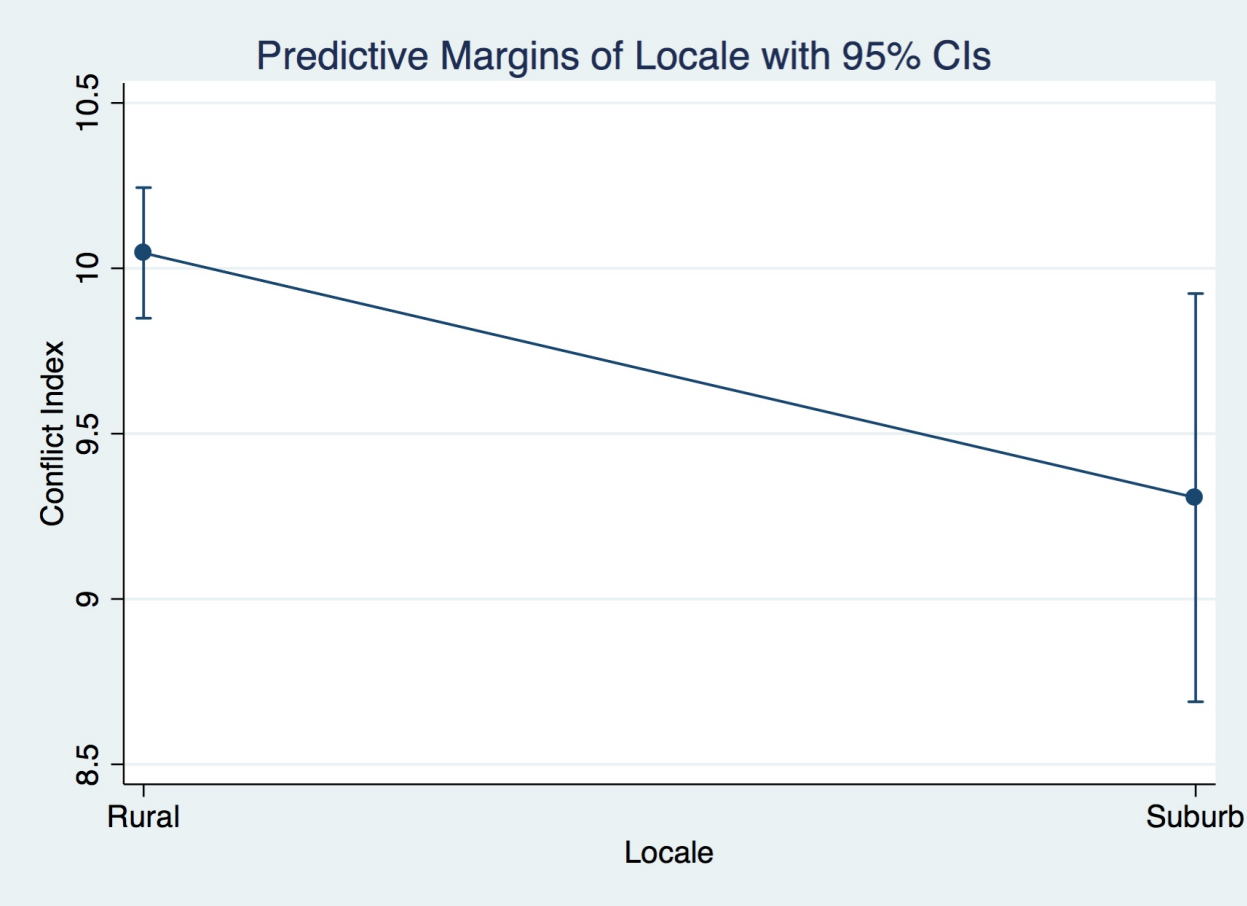
Predictive Margins of Locale with 95% CIs
Conflict Index
10.5
10
9.5
9
8.5
Rural
Suburb
Locale

Figure Two

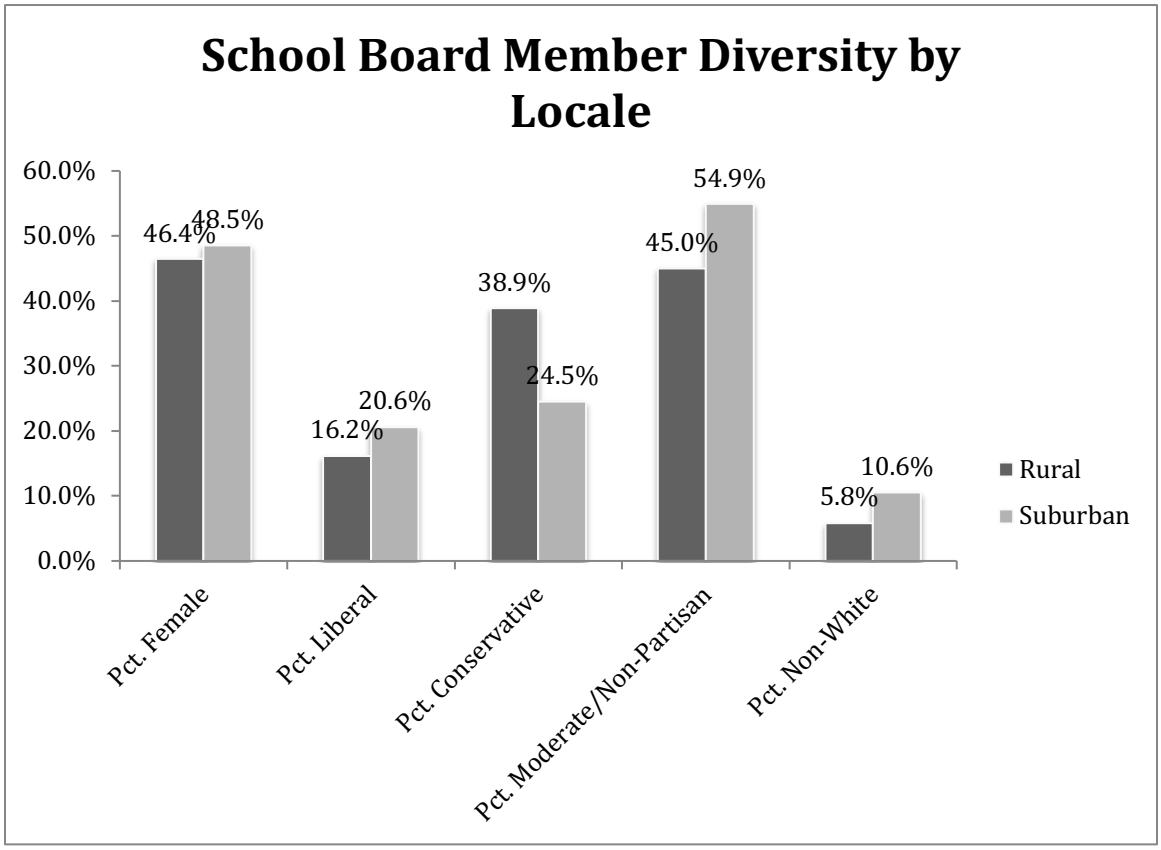
School Board Member Diversity by Locale
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
46.4%
48.5%
16.2%
20.6%
38.9%
24.5%
45.0%
54.9%
5.8%
10.6%
Pct. Female
Pct. Liberal
Pct. Conservative
Pct. Moderate/Non-Partisan
Pct. Non-White
Rural
Suburban

Table Eight - State-Level Fixed-Effects Regression Results Predicting High Interest Group Influence

VARIABLES	High Interest Group Influence
Suburban	-0.226**
	(0.0906)
Superintendent as Partner	-0.132***
	(0.0348)
Students (log)	-0.0103
	(0.0337)
Revenue Per-Pupil	1.19e-05
	(7.35e-06)
Pct. Low-Income	0.204
	(0.151)
Pct. Minority	-0.172
	(0.179)
Clear Leader	-0.123***
	(0.0314)
More Rigorous Index	0.00410
	(0.0107)
Little Turnover	-0.0591**
	(0.0232)
Constant	2.813***
	(0.301)
Observations	896
Number of States	39
R-squared	0.065

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure Three

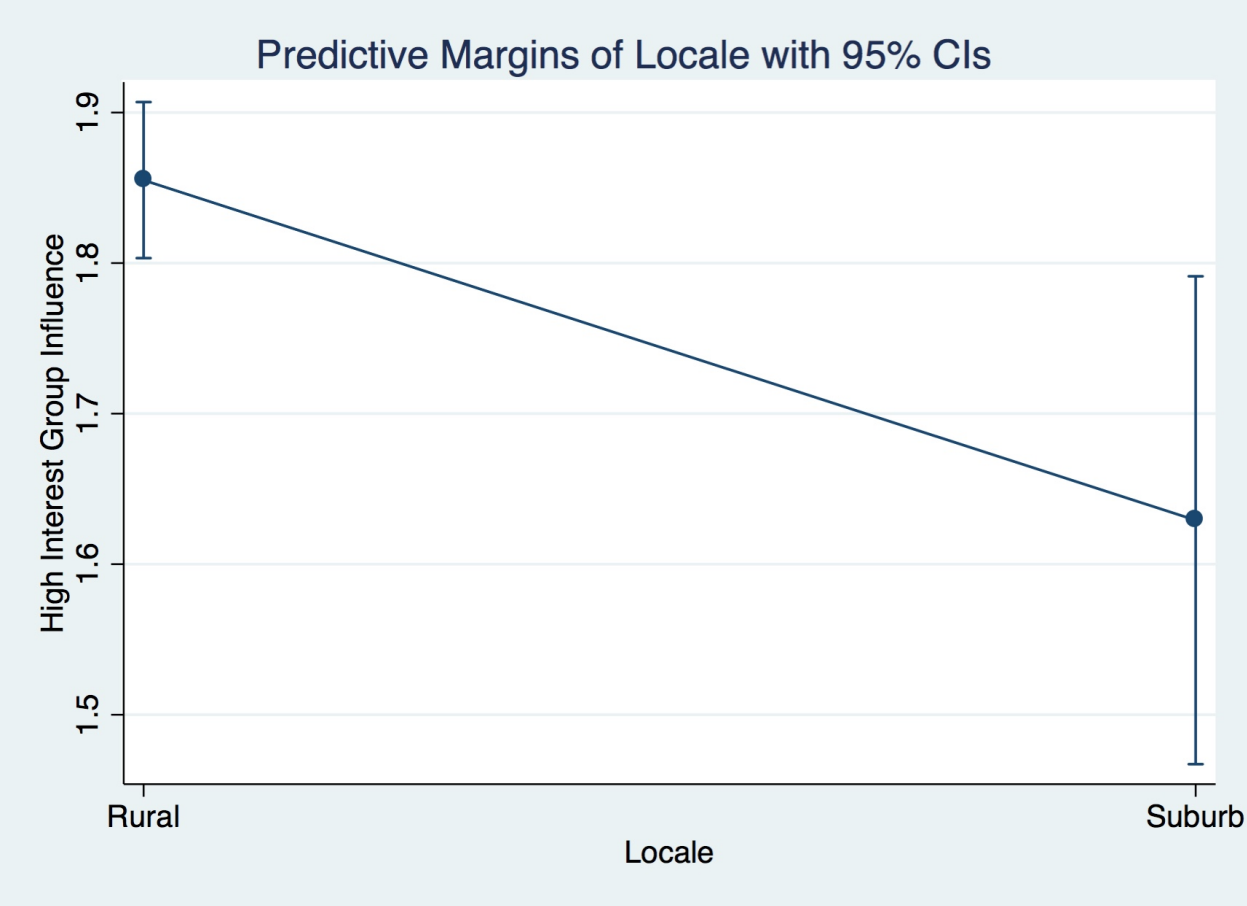

Table Nine – Ordered Logistic Results Predicting High Interest Group Influence

VARIABLES	High Interest Group Influence
Suburban	-0.448**
	(0.192)
Superintendent as Partner	-0.174
	(0.106)
Students (log)	0.0305
	(0.0714)
Revenue Per-Pupil	3.18e-05**
	(1.39e-05)
Pct. Low-Income	0.514
	(0.313)
Pct. Minority	-0.355
	(0.363)
Clear Leader	-0.264***
	(0.0892)
More Rigorous Index	0.0100
	(0.0312)
Little Turnover	-0.204***
	(0.0685)
Constant cut1	-2.350***
	(0.733)
Constant cut2	-0.535
	(0.731)
Constant cut3	0.699
	(0.731)
Constant cut4	1.839**
	(0.741)
Constant cut5	3.239***
	(0.792)
Observations	896

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1