

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence the actions taken by school boards that advance student achievement in high-achieving rural public school districts. Much of what is discussed in the literature on school improvement efforts is centered on the work carried out by school personnel at the school level. What is missing is research-based evidence of the factors that influence board of education actions that increase student achievement, specifically in rural schools. Given this gap, I address the research question: In high-achieving rural districts, what factors influence the actions that school boards take to support the achievement of all students? Conceptually framed by the existing studies on rural school student achievement and on school boards and student achievement, I conducted a qualitative, multiple-case study of three rural school district boards of education. I interviewed board of education members and observe board of education meetings, and I analyzed related documents. I found the following factors as influences on board decisions in the three high achieving, rural school districts included in this study: financial resources, avoidance of conflicts, personal bias, board development, principals and teachers, board and superintendent relationship, data, and student achievement. The factors of conflict avoidance and personal bias serve to extend the findings of the existing literature while the other six factors support the existing literature. This study is important because the findings provide rural board members with critically important information to guide their actions to raise student achievement in their districts.