

## Chapter 1

# **NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTED SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS REGARDING THE QUALITY AND CONDITION, MAINTENANCE, AND IMPROVEMENT AND RENOVATION OF EXISTING PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES**

### Introduction

The quality and condition of existing public school facilities have been a topic of growing concern among educators across the country. Each year, the cost of maintenance, and improvement and renovation needed to maintain public schools continues to increase (Earthman, 1994). National studies conducted during the last fifteen years clearly indicate rising costs. In 1983, a random survey of school administrators in thirty-three states and the District of Columbia was undertaken by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). This study was also supported by the Council of Great City Schools and the National School Boards Association (NSBA). A previous study was completed twenty-three years earlier in 1960 by AASA. The 1983 report revealed that at least \$25 billion would be needed to address facility maintenance, and improvement and renovation needs, not including funds needed for new construction (AASA, 1983). The study reported “. . . schools throughout the nation, particularly those in the older inner cities, have deferred billions of dollars of repairs” (p. 13).

Six years later (1989), the Educational Writers Association (EWA) published its study, Wolves at the Schoolhouse Door. This study analyzed information received from twenty-eight state departments of education and the District of Columbia regarding the quality and condition of public school facilities. The report from the study revealed that the price tag for maintenance, and improvement and renovation of these facilities had

climbed to \$41 billion, not inclusive of funds needed for new construction purposes (EWA, 1989).

Wolves at the Schoolhouse Door was followed by the 1992 AASA study, Schoolhouse in the Red. This study utilized a random survey of school district administrators across the country at the elementary and secondary level (2,418 elementary and secondary school administrators, yielding a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error +/- 3 percent). Sponsored by the Honeywell Corporation, the survey addressed the quality and condition of school facilities, school energy and environment concerns, and education finance issues. Results of the study reaffirmed findings from the EWA report, though on a broader scale, and revealed that 30.6 percent of the public school buildings in this country were constructed prior to 1950. Forty-three percent were built in the 1950s-60s era when construction was done as cheaply as possible. Concerns regarding quality and condition of school facilities, maintenance, and improvement and renovation were clearly apparent. The cost of deferred maintenance alone was estimated to be in excess of \$100 billion (AASA, 1992).

The most recent study was completed by the United States General Accounting Office at the request of the United States Senate. The study was conducted from April to December 1994 and consisted of a stratified random sample survey of school system facility directors and other central office administrators in 5,000 school districts. Its report further supported and illustrated wide-scale concerns regarding the quality and condition of public school facilities throughout the United States (GAO, 1995). Clearly, maintenance, and improvement and renovation issues were found throughout the public school systems across America.

### Statement of the Problem

What are the perceptions of school board members regarding the quality and condition, maintenance, and improvement and renovation of public school facilities? Aging public schools require maintenance, renovation and improvement to maintain the quality and condition of the education environment for all students. A well-maintained

school building can contribute to a positive school climate conducive to teaching and learning. The support given to the maintenance, and improvement and renovation of school facilities is an important ingredient in the teaching learning process. School board members are responsible for policy and budget decisions that determine the level of support for facility maintenance, and improvement and renovation. Their decisions clearly affect the quality and condition of the schools in their districts. These decisions are made in conjunction with competing demands for limited fiscal resources needed to address all school issues. School board members are instrumental in maintaining the quality and condition of the public schools in a responsible and timely manner. Grover, State Superintendent of Wisconsin, said it this way (EWA, 1989):

The state has been spending more money to provide safe housing for its 5,600 prisoners than it has for its 760,000 school children. We build golf courses and jails by fiat, but we put our children in storefronts and church basements. . . .

That says a lot about what's wrong with America. (p. 2)

Ambach, Executive Director of The Council of Chief State School Officers, was quoted in the Schoolhouse In The Red study (AASA, 1992):

If national goals for student performance are to be met, our students must have learning environments that support high productivity. Investments in high-tech plants and overcoming the neglect of maintenance is essential for a 21<sup>st</sup> century opportunity to learn for every student in America. (p.7)

Finally, an interview in the February 1997 American School and University Journal included comments from Hawkins, Superintendent, Gary Community Schools Corporation, Gary, Indiana. He responded to a question about alternative funding strategies for construction and renovation this way:

Because many districts are experiencing difficulty at a local level in passing bond issues, it is evident that the federal government must assume a larger role in assisting school districts. Failure at both levels, local and federal, in providing sufficient funding to build or renovate school facilities means that we will have failed miserably in our

commitment to children. If our students are not capable of becoming productive citizens, they will become liabilities. And the resulting consequence, if not properly addressed, will be “pay me now or pay me later”. (pp. 19-20)

School board members have not been surveyed regarding these issues on a national level. Their perceptions regarding the quality and condition, maintenance, and improvement and renovation of existing public school facilities are critical to the support of the public school system in America today because school board members make policy and budget decisions that directly influence support for these areas. This study is designed to assess the perceptions of selected school board members in the United States regarding these issues. Previous studies have not included the perspective of these important policy makers whose decisions affect the quality and condition of America’s existing public school facilities.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of selected school board members regarding the quality and condition, maintenance, and improvement and renovation of existing public school facilities. The study represented the perceptions of selected school board members from nine geographical regions throughout the United States. The primary question in this study was: What are the perceptions of selected school board members regarding the quality and condition of existing public school facilities and actions taken to maintain, and improve and renovate these facilities? The research questions were supported by twenty-one survey items, administered through a stratified random sample of nationally selected school board members. Additionally, this study reflected an analysis of previous studies, dialogue with practitioners in the field and a review of the literature (American Association of School Administrators, 1960 and 1983; Educational Writers Association, 1989; American Association of School

Administrators, 1992; and, the General Accounting Office, 1995-1996). The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do selected school board members perceive the quality and condition of school facilities within their district?
2. How do selected school board members perceive the maintenance of existing public school facilities in their district?
3. What actions have been taken by selected school boards to address the improvement and renovation of existing school facilities?

Appendix A shows the relationship between the research questions and survey items to be used in this study. Appendix B contains The American School Board Journal survey and possible responses for each question.

### Significance of the Study

School board members are responsible for policy and budget decisions that determine the level of support for facility maintenance, and improvement and renovation of public school facilities. As school facilities continue to age, they require maintenance, and improvement and renovation to maintain the quality and condition of the education environment. Competing demands for public funds place increasing challenges upon school boards to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and concern for these needs. This study assessed school board members nationally for the first time regarding their perceptions on these issues. Results of this study will be used to make recommendations for addressing public school facility maintenance, and improvement and renovation in support of enhancing the quality and condition of existing public schools in America.

### Definitions

1. Quality and condition of school facilities - There is relative agreement in the literature that this phrase applied to public school buildings relates to factors of aging,

structural integrity, indoor environmental hazards, and general efforts to maintain public school buildings in original condition (Earthman, 1994). Several court decisions have examined this issue and have defined the quality and condition of “decent facilities” as “. . . structurally safe, contain fire safety measures, sufficient exits, an adequate and safe water supply, an adequate sewage disposal system, sufficient and sanitary toilet facilities and plumbing fixtures, adequate storage, adequate light, be in good repair and attractively painted as well as contain acoustics for noise control. (Pauley v. Kelly, No. 75-C1268 {Kanawha County Cir. Ct., W. Va., May 1982}; Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby, N. 362, 516 {259<sup>th</sup> Dist. Ct. Travis Cty., Tex., June 1, 1987}, rev’d. 761 S.W. 2<sup>nd</sup> 859 {Ct. App. Tex., 1988}, rev’d 777 S.W. 2<sup>nd</sup> 391 {1989}) (GAO, 1995).

2. Maintenance - those actions which will help to keep a building in a state of good repair, functioning properly and as near as possible to the condition it was in when it was first constructed” (Earthman, 1994). He references activities that range from painting to boiler replacement but have in common keeping the facility in good working order in relationship to the building’s initial design and configuration.

3. Improvement and renovation - major renewal projects, roof replacement, modernization of the electrical and plumbing systems; all fall within this category. Renovation also refers to major modifications and changes in space utilization within the existing facility. A complete renovation would refer to a major overhaul, upgrade and replacement of all the key systems within the school facility, to including wiring, lighting, acoustics, plumbing, HVAC, and key structural components (Earthman, 1994).

4. Operational - This study was based on a construct of three research questions addressing respondent perceptions about selected issues related to existing public school building quality and condition, maintenance, and improvement and renovation. Each research question is supported by seven survey items. Appendix A defines this construct.

5. Demographic - This study disaggregated respondents by geographic region, community type and district enrollment. It indicates respondent gender, ethnicity, age, current occupation, educational attainment, family income, marital status and type of school that children attend. Finally, it indicates school board related characteristics of respondents to include political classification, number on board of selected members

responding, selection process for board membership, years of service on the board, number of years in a term, and compensation.

### Limitations

This study was defined by a population composed of school board members across the country who subscribe to The American School Board Journal. Surveys were mailed to a stratified random sample of these subscribers who make up one-third of the total number of school board members across the United States. The sample represents three percent of the subscribers, which is slightly more than one percent of the total number of school board members in the United States. Results were limited to the number of surveys returned from selected school board members in each of the nine geographical regions specified by The American School Board Journal in the study. Confidentiality for the selected school board members was a requirement of the National School Boards Association. Responses received by the researcher were assumed to be true perceptions of board members based on their personal experience, preference or observation.

### Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, statement of the problem, statement of purpose, significance of the study, definitions, limitations of the study, and the study's organization. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature pertinent to this study. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 contains a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies.