their boards allot one to three minutes of public comment per person, but no districts with 7,500 students or more allow more than six minutes of commentary [Table 46]. Though they allow for less public commentary, larger districts do make it easier for community members to track board activity, such as by providing live internet streaming, which is available in just over 16 percent of the largest districts [Table 47]. Nationally, 21.6 percent of board chairs report that their districts offer a live, televised showing of meetings, and 15 percent of districts offer archived video for later viewing. While meetings are much more likely to be streamed live over the Internet in large districts than in small ones (16.1 percent compared to 1.9 percent), there otherwise appears to be relatively little variation in public access to school board meetings across districts of different sizes. When asked how often their boards meet, nearly 94 percent of board chairs nationwide report meeting once or twice a month [Table 48].

Superintendents report that their boards have a substantial degree of autonomous authority. City or county councils have to approve school board budgets in only 9.3 percent of districts [Table 49]. Nearly two-thirds (65.8 percent) of boards have the authority to levy taxes, although such levies frequently require voter approval [Tables 50-51]. In 79.1 percent of cases, boards can independently choose to hold bond elections, which then go to the voters for an up or down vote [Table 52].

III Section 5: School Board Elections

Elections are the critical link in any system of democratic governance. Yet, while school board elections select a huge share of America's officeholders, remarkably little is known about them. How contested are school board elections? How much do they cost? How often do challengers win?

When asked how contested board member elections are, nationally 44 percent of board members describe their most recent election as "very easy," while just 5.8 percent describe it as "very difficult" [Table 53]. Nationally, just over two-thirds (67.8 percent) say their election was somewhat easy or very easy, while only about 19.5 percent say it was difficult or very difficult. Board members in large districts report much more competitive contests. While more than 75 percent of small district members term their last race somewhat or very easy and just under 10 percent say it was somewhat or very difficult, 56.7 percent of large district members say their win was very or somewhat easy and 31.4 percent say it was very or somewhat difficult.

While occasional media coverage of high-profile races may give the impression that school board elections are costly, the reality is very different [Table 54]. Fully 73.9 percent of elected board members report that their campaign spent less than \$1,000 in their most recent election, and 87 percent spent less than \$5,000. Just 2.6 percent of board members spent more than \$25,000. The patterns are very different in big and small districts, however. In small districts, 95.2 percent of candidates say they spent less than \$1,000, and none report spending \$10,000 or more. In large districts, on the other hand, 10.1 percent of members spent more than \$25,000, and over one-quarter spent \$10,000 or more, while just 33.2 percent spent less than \$1,000.

The most common sources of funds for these campaigns are board members' personal funds (used by 58.6 percent) or contributions by family and friends (used by 37.9 percent) [Tables 55a-g]. Just under one-fifth of members report receiving funds from the business community (19.4 percent), 12.3 percent from the teachers unions, and 7.6 percent from parent groups. These various interests are far more likely to contribute to board campaigns in large districts than in small ones. In large districts, 34.8 percent of members report that they received contributions from teachers unions, while just 1.2 percent of the smallest districts' board members say they did. Similarly, 56.2 percent of large district members received funds from the business community, while just 4.1 percent of small district members did.

In nearly 90 percent of elections nationwide, superintendents report that no party affiliation is listed on the

election ballot for board candidates [Table 56]. More than half of superintendents (53 percent) indicate that in their districts, school board elections are always held on the same day as national or state elections [Table 57]. Challengers face stiff odds when contesting elections against incumbent board members, with 46.8 percent of superintendents reporting that no incumbent board members have been defeated by challengers in the past five years [Table 58].

III Section 6: School Boards and Their Superintendents

The most significant decision school boards make is the decision to hire a superintendent to lead their school district. While a variety of measures were collected on the 120 superintendents who participated in this study, the report is focused on school boards. Those seeking a more detailed look at superintendents would do well to check out *The State of the American School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*²¹ or *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*.²² Our focus here is on how superintendents and school boards view each other and how they interact.

Superintendents' views of their district's top priorities are quite similar to those of board members [Table 59]. When asked to rate the importance of the same goals posed to board members, approximately 20 percent of superintendents say preparing students for college is a first or second priority, and 15 percent say the same about preparing students for the workforce. These results mirror the views expressed by board members, who ranked preparation for college or the workforce at only slightly higher levels (nearly 25 percent and 20 percent, respectively) when identifying the district's most important objectives. Both board members and superintendents think the two most important objectives are to "help students fulfill their potential" and to "prepare students for a satisfying and productive life," with 71.7 percent of superintendents deeming the former of first or second importance and 70.8 percent saying the same for the latter.

Superintendents also closely mirror board members when it comes to identifying the most urgent issues that boards confront [Table 60]. Just as nearly 90 percent of board members think budget and funding issues are extremely or very urgent, so too do 91.6 percent of superintendents. The next three most urgent priorities for superintendents are improving student learning across the board (76.5 percent think it extremely or very urgent), closing the achievement gaps among subgroups (69 percent), and improving the quality of teaching (67.5 percent). In these, as in the areas they consider less important, superintendents' views mirror those of board members.

Compared with school boards, superintendents are less likely to cite district policies and collective bargaining provisions as barriers to such efforts as hiring nontraditional teachers, and they are more likely to point the finger at federal or state laws overall [Table 61]. For instance, when looking at the biggest hurdle to removing ineffective principals, over 30 percent of superintendents cite federal or state law as a hindrance to such efforts, while only 13.3 percent indicate that district policies are a barrier. This rate is half that of school boards, 26. I percent of which find district regulations to be an obstacle in firing ineffective principals. When asked to identify barriers to removing ineffective teachers, superintendents again veer from school boards. Over 60 percent of superintendents cite federal or state law as an obstacle, compared with the 47 percent reported by boards.

While superintendents are less reticent than school boards to cite federal or state laws as barriers to improvement, boards and superintendents concur on the most significant barriers to raising student achievement. Over 70 percent of both boards (74.5 percent) and superintendents (79.2 percent) point to finances and funding as strong or total barriers to boosting achievement, while over 45 percent of both superintendents and boards see district customs and bureaucracy as at most a minimal barrier [Table 62]. Overall, superintendents are less inclined than boards to fault federal, state, or district policies as barriers to improving student achievement.