

URBAN SCHOOL BOARD SURVEY

Characteristics, Structure, and Governance of Large
Urban Public School Boards



Council of the Great
City Schools
Fall 2011

Introduction

The Council of the Great City School's *Urban School Board Survey: Characteristics, Structure, and Benefits of Large Urban Public Schools* is the third in a series of biennial reports on the makeup and structure of school boards in the nation's large urban school districts. Over the years, the Council has worked closely with school boards and school board members in each of the Council's 67 member districts to elevate the quality of urban public school systems. In 2005, the Council began surveying school boards and reporting organizational trends.

This report details the dimensions of school board operations that include school board governance, benefits, committee structures, campaigns, and training on key issues affecting urban school districts. This report also highlights demographic trends in the makeup of school boards in urban school districts.

The survey was administered to the Council's school board representatives via *SurveyMonkey* during the Fall of the 2011-2012 school year. To increase response rates, the survey was resent to school board representatives through January 2012. Surveys were received from 40 of the 65 member districts that received the survey – a response rate of 62 percent (Refer to page 18 for a list of district respondents).

The data are reported in the aggregate of all CGCS school boards. The report is divided into two sections – Demographics and School Board Structure and Governance. Together, they represent a detailed look at our nation's big city school boards and highlight trends in changing demographics, board members' tenure, engagement in issues, and school board elections.

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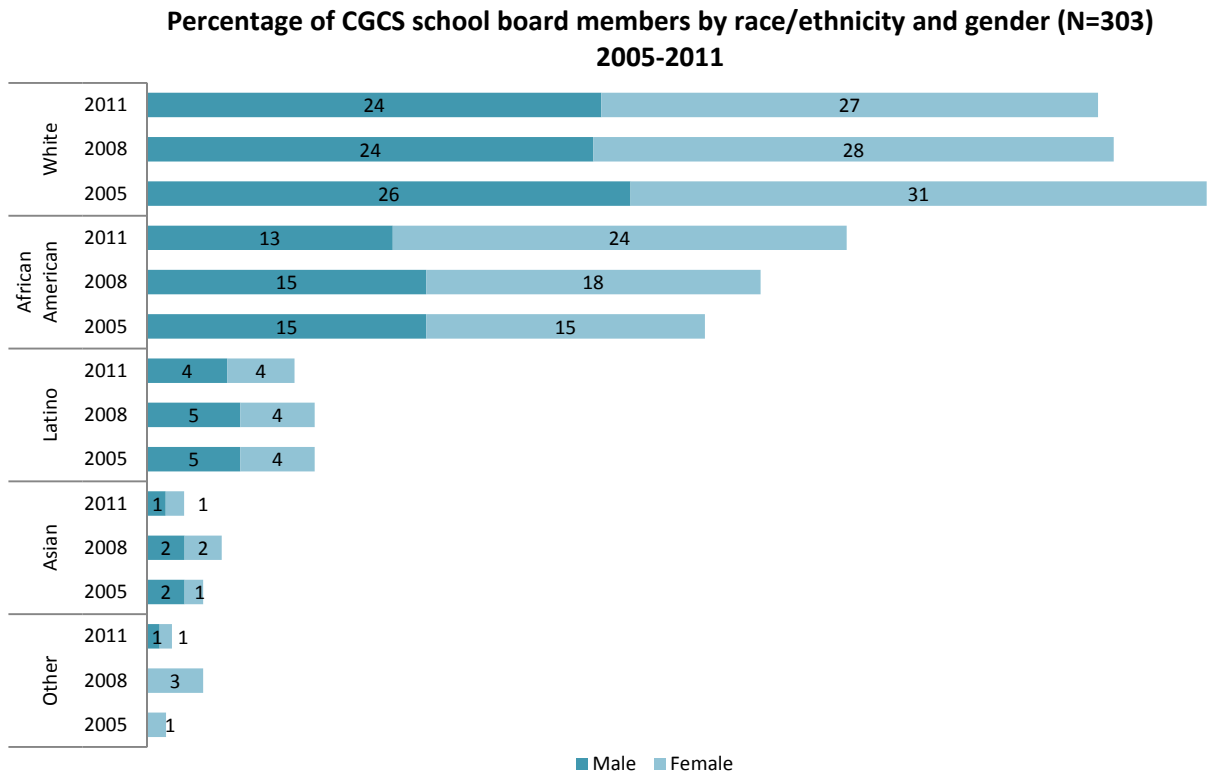
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Demographics

School Board Demographics

- Between 2005 and 2011, the racial composition of school boards has shifted. The percentage of White school board members dropped from 57 percent to 51 percent. The percentage of African American board members increased from 30 percent to 37 percent. The percentage of Latino board members decreased slightly from 9 percent to 8 percent. The percentage of Asians board members increased from 1 percent to 2 percent. (Figure 1).
- A growing majority of CGCS school board members are women, increasing from 52 percent to 56 percent between 2005 and 2011. The percentage of White females has decreased from 31 percent to 27 percent while the percentage of African American women has increased from 15 percent to 24 percent. The percentage of Latina and Asian females has remained stable at 4 percent and 1 percent, respectively. (Figure 1)
- The percentage of CGCS male school board members has decreased from 48 percent to 44 percent between 2005 and 2011. The percentage of White males has slightly decreased from 26 percent to 24 percent; African American male school board members decreased from 15 percent to 13 percent; Latino males from 5 percent to 4 percent; and Asian males from 2 percent to 1 percent. (Figure 1)

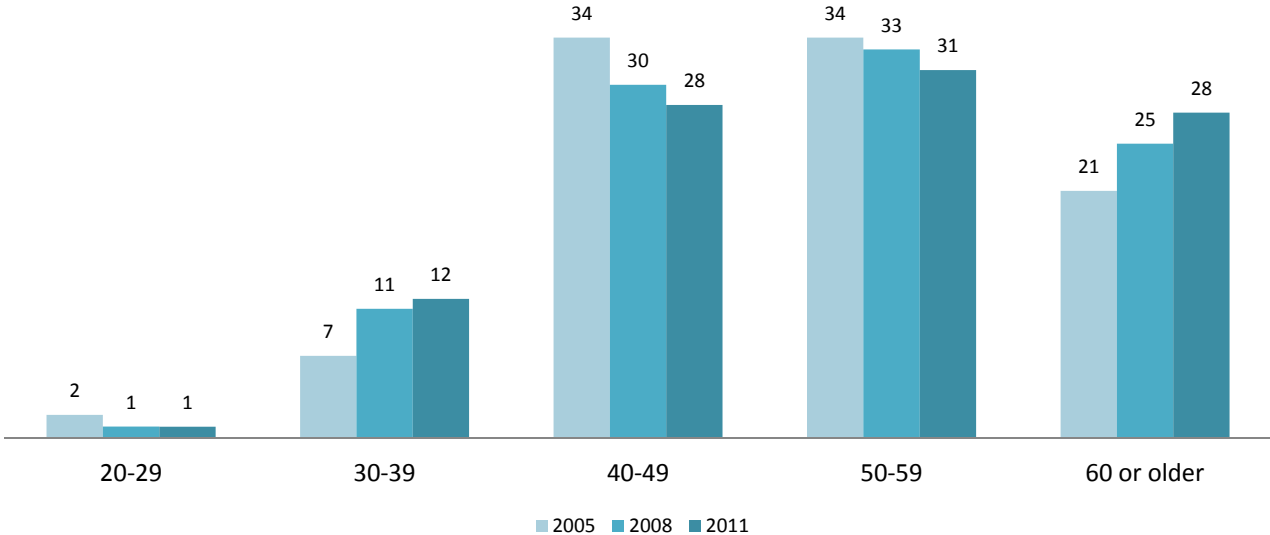
Figure 1



- The age distribution of CGCS school board members slightly shifted between 2005 and 2011. The percentage of school board members age 60 and older increased from 21 percent to 28 percent. Likewise, board members between the ages of 30-39 increased from 7 percent to 12 percent (Figure 2)
- However, since 2005 there was a decrease in the percentage of board members between the ages of 40-49 (34 percent to 28 percent) and 50-59 (34 percent to 31 percent). Meanwhile, there was also a slight decrease of CGCS school board members between the ages of 20 and 29 (2 percent to 1 percent).

Figure 2

Percentage of CGCS school board members by age range (N=304)
2005- 2011

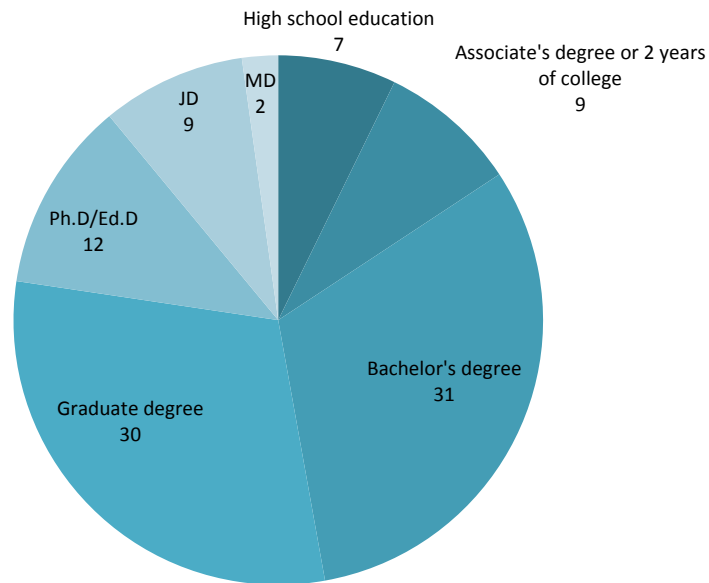


Educational Attainment and Occupation

- Between 2005 and 2011, the percentage of CGCS school board members whose highest educational attainment was a bachelor degree decreased from 44 percent to 31 percent. However the percentages rose for those holding an Associate’s Degree (4 percent to 9 percent), a Graduate degree (28 percent to 30 percent), and PhD’s (10 percent to 12 percent).
- In 2011, a relatively small percentage of CGCS school board members held a high school diploma (7 percent), a law degree (9 percent), and a medical degree (2 percent) as their highest level of educational attainment (Figure 3).

Figure 3

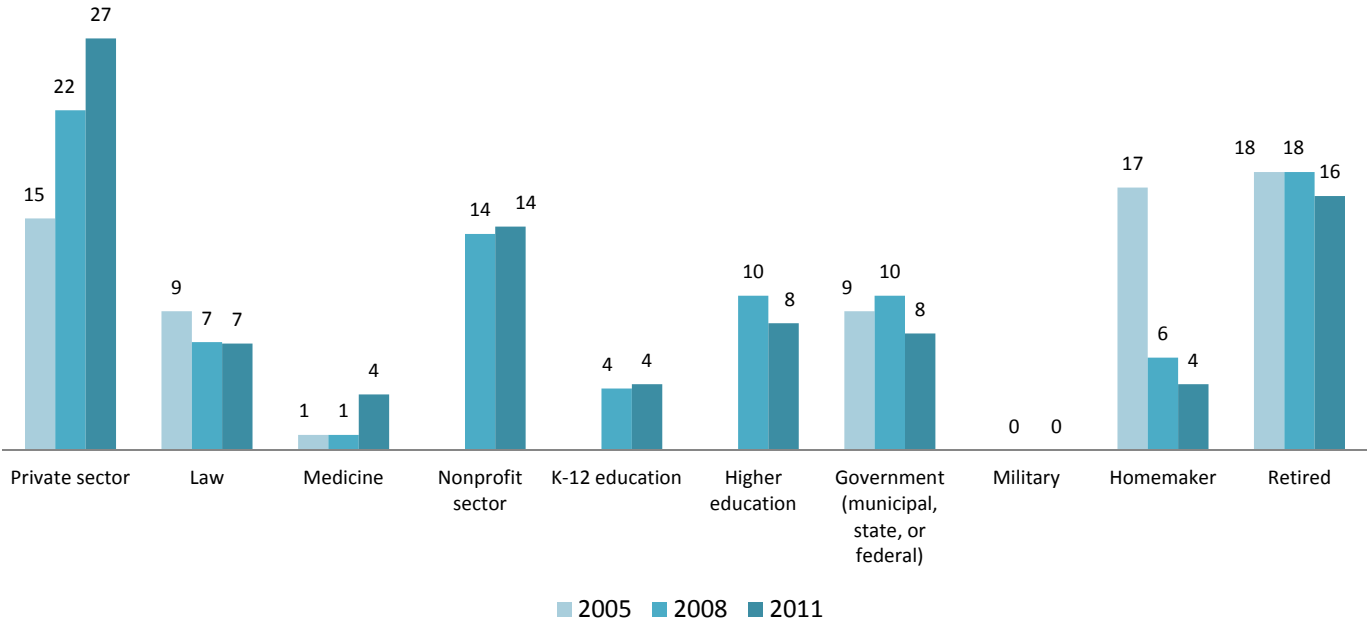
Percentage of CGCS school board members by highest level of educational attainment
(N=318)
2011



- Between 2005 and 2011, there was an increase in the percentage of urban school board members who worked in the private sector (15 percent to 27 percent) and medical field (1 percent to 4 percent). However, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of board members who worked in the legal sector (9 percent to 7 percent), higher education sector (10 percent to 8 percent), and the government sector (9 percent to 8 percent).
- Additionally, there has also been a decline in the percentage of urban school board members who are homemakers (17 percent to 4 percent) and members who are retired (18 percent to 16 percent) (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Percentage of CGCS school board members by profession (N=304)
2005-2011



School Board Structure & Governance

Tenure

- The average CGCS school board has approximately 8 board members – unchanged since 2005. In 2011, approximately 88 percent of CGCS school boards operate within 4 year term lengths, 8 percent grant 3 year term lengths, and 3 percent allow for 2 year term lengths (Figure 5).
- Additionally, 27 percent of CGCS school board members have served on the school board for less than 2 years, 28 percent have served 2-4 years, 26 percent have served 5-8 years, 12 percent have served 9-12 years, and 7 percent have served more than 12 years (Figure 6).

Figure 5

Percentage of CGCS school boards by term length (N=40)
2008-2011

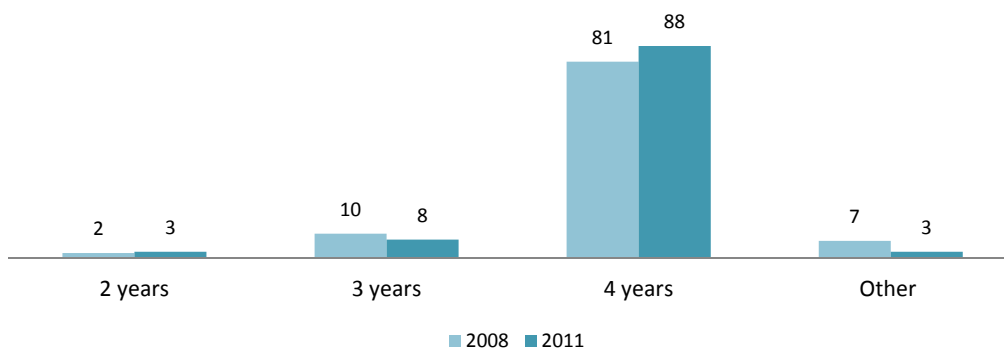
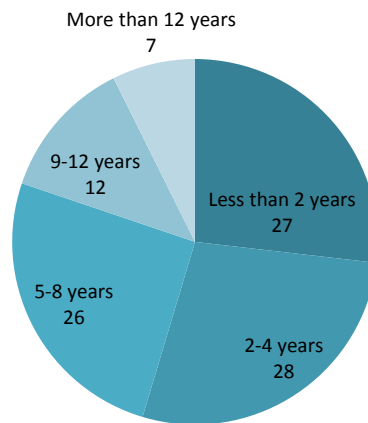


Figure 6

Percentage of CGCS school board members by average length of service (N=313)
2011



School Board Structure

- Approximately 83 percent of CGCS school boards are elected while 15 percent are appointed positions (Figure 7). Of those school boards that are appointed, they may be appointed by either the mayor, the city council, sitting school board members or a combination of the governor, mayor and the city council.
- Since 2008, there has been an increase in the percentage of CGCS school boards that elect/appoint school board members on a geographic basis (38 percent to 48 percent) and a decrease in the seats elected/appointed on a citywide basis (36 percent to 25 percent) (Figure 8).

Figure 7

Percentage of CGCS school boards by board structure (N=40)
2011

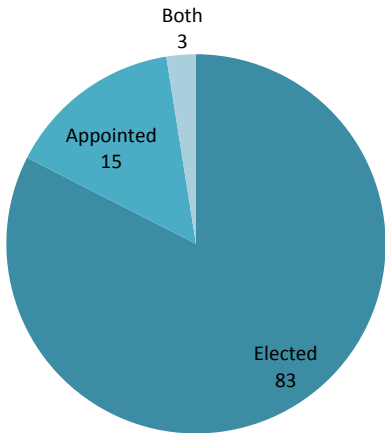
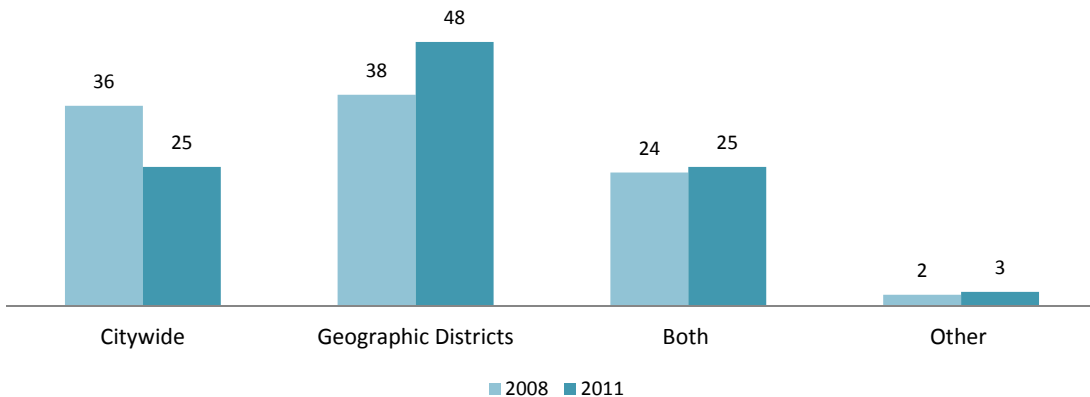


Figure 8

Percentage of CGCS school boards by seat type (N=40)
2008-2011



School Board Meeting Characteristics

- Approximately 37 percent of CGCS school boards meet on a biweekly schedule (twice a week), 24 percent meet on a bimonthly schedule (twice a month), 18 percent meet on a weekly basis, and 5 percent meet on a monthly basis (Figure 9).
- According to respondents, the majority of board meetings last between 3 and 4 hours (58 percent). Another, 24 percent of board meetings reported lasting between 1 and 2 hours, and 18 percent reported lasting over 5 hours (Figure 10).
- The majority of respondents (63 percent) indicated that, on average, school boards spend over 6 hours a week on Board business. Approximately 18 percent respondents indicated that school boards spend between 3 and 4 hours a week on school board business; 13 percent indicated between 5 and 6 hours; and 5 percent indicated between 1 and 2 hours per week on Board business (Figure 11).

Figure 9

Percentage of CGCS school boards by meeting schedules (N=38)
2011

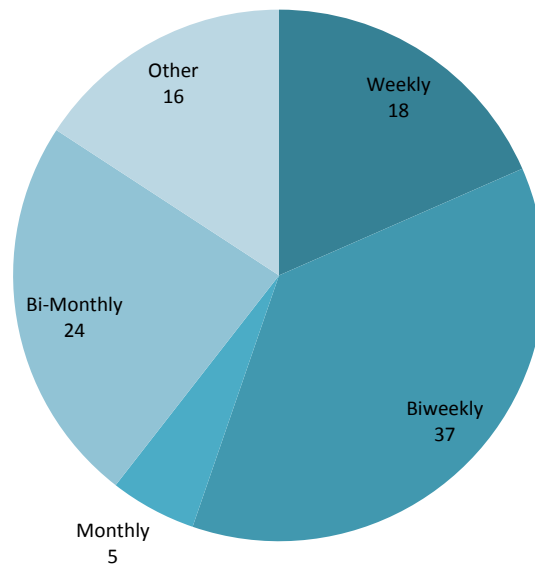


Figure 10

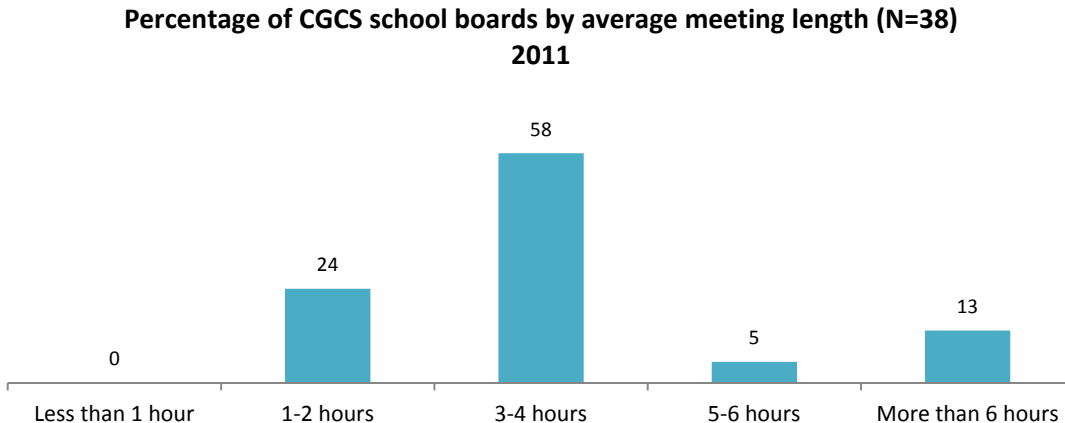
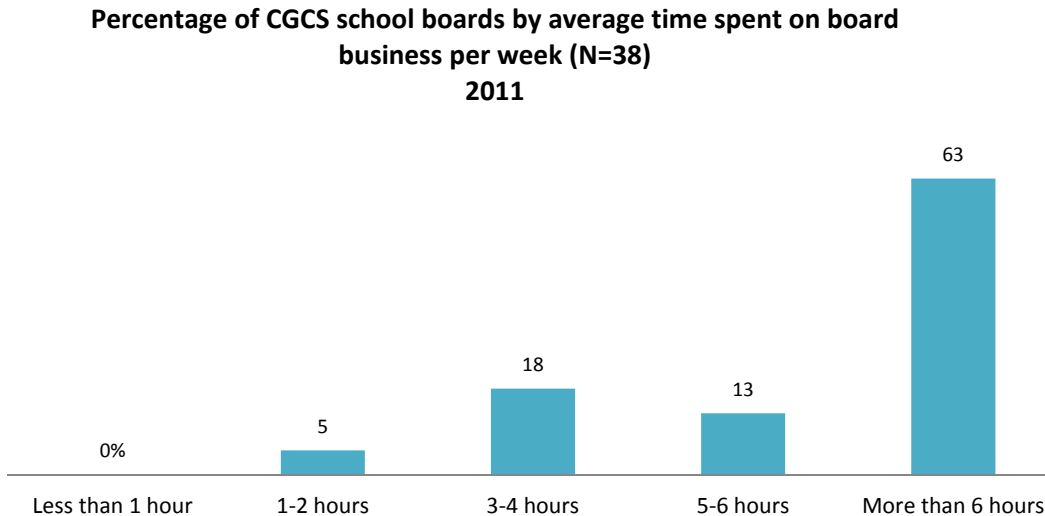


Figure 11



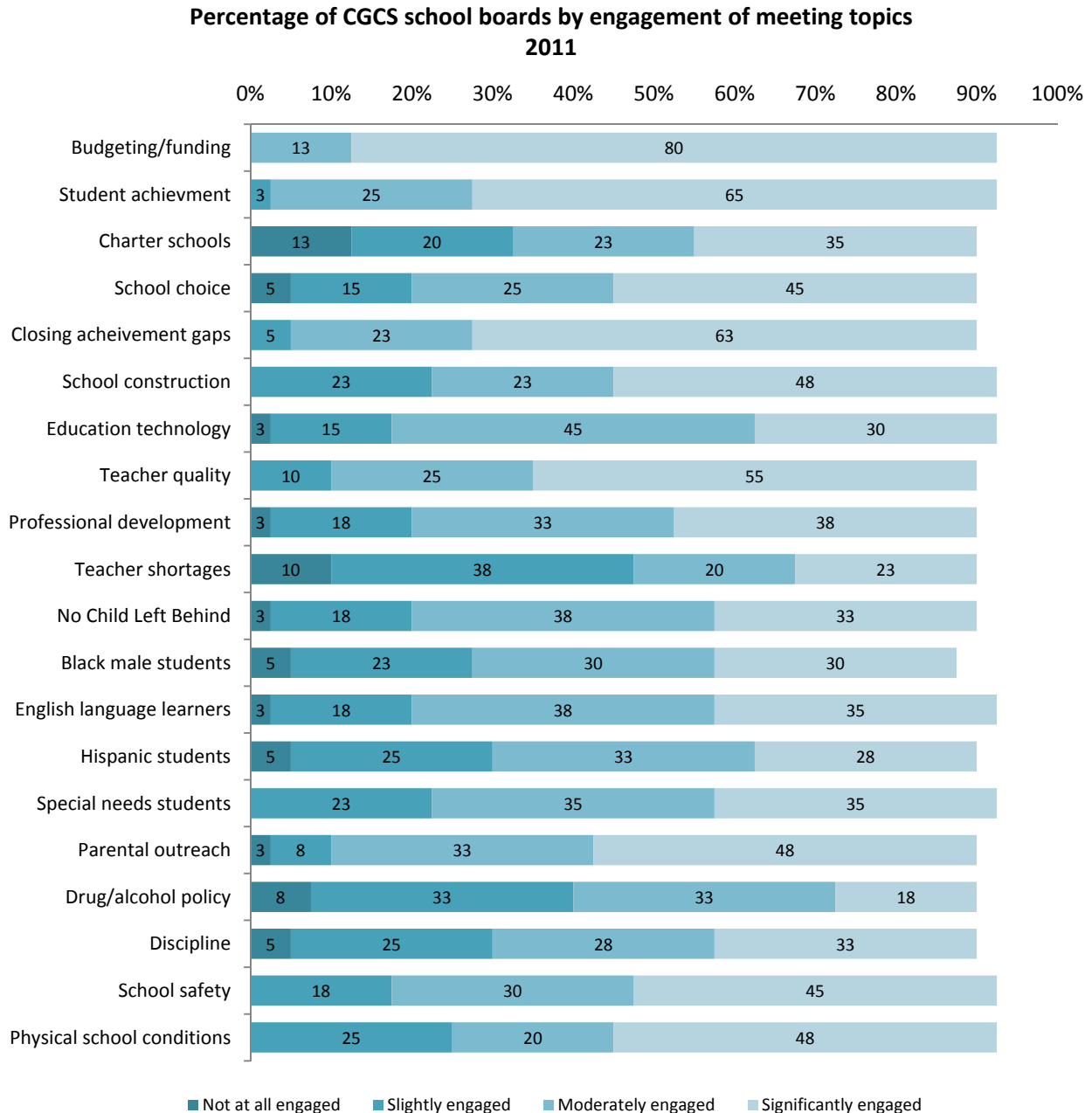
School Board Involvement and Professional Development

- Surveyed about the degree the school board engaged in a variety of issues, 93 percent of CGCS respondents indicated that the board was either moderately or significantly engaged in budgeting/funding issues; 90 percent were moderately or significantly engaged in student achievement; and 86 percent were moderately or significantly involved in closing achievement gaps (Figure 12).
- In matters of charter schools and school choice, 58 percent of respondents indicated that their school boards were either moderately or significantly engaged in the issue of charter schools; while 70 percent of respondents noted that their school boards were moderately or significantly engaged in issues of school choice.

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- Among other issues that CGCS respondents reported relatively high levels of moderate to significant engagement were teacher quality (80 percent), school safety (75 percent), English language learners (73 percent), professional development (71 percent), No Child Left Behind (71 percent), education technology (75 percent), and special needs students (70 percent).
- Among the issues in which CGCS school boards were the most likely to be “slightly engaged” or “not at all engaged” were teacher shortages (48 percent) and drug/alcohol policy (41 percent).

Figure 12

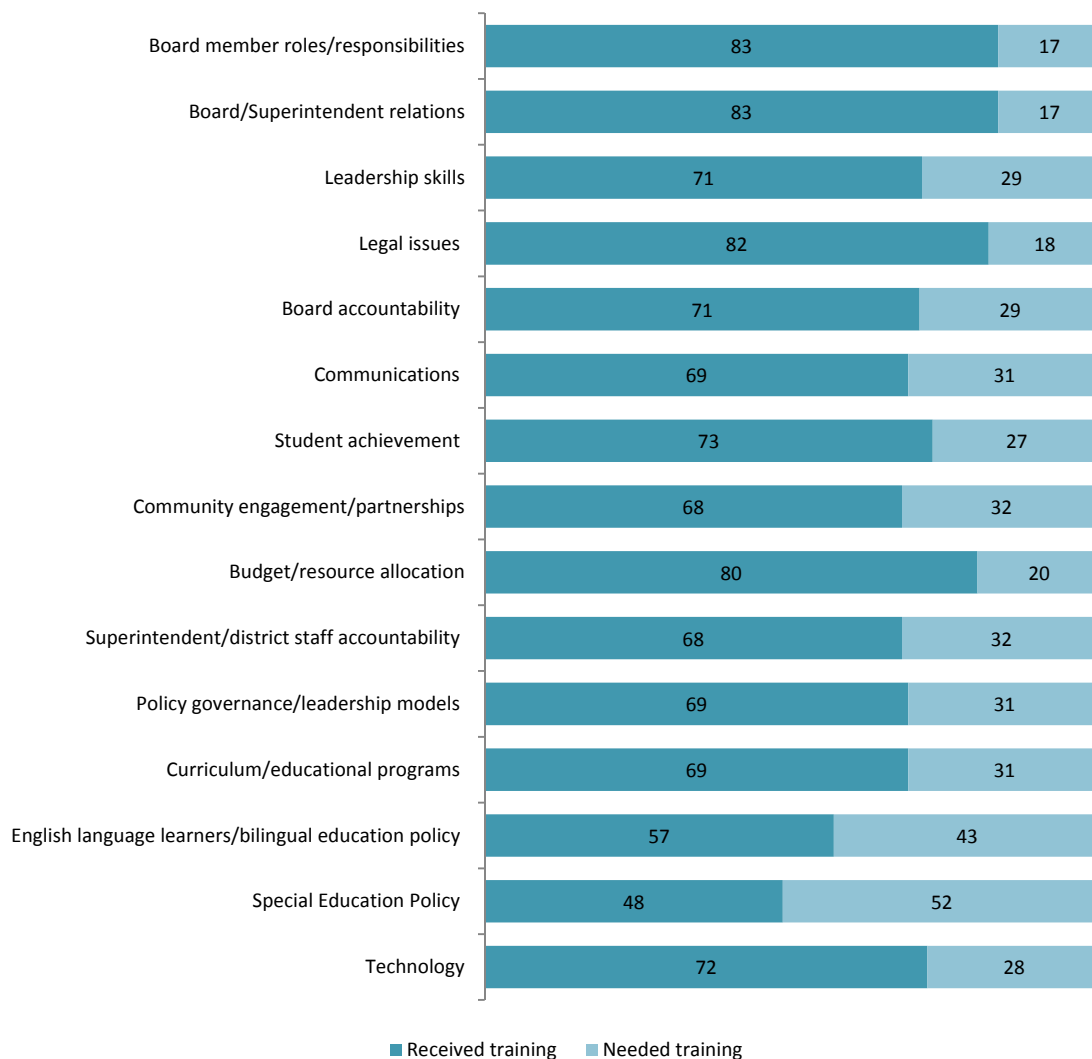


NOTE: The number of respondents ranges from 35-37 for each issue (See Appendix A).

- On issues of training and professional development for school board members, at least 80 percent of school boards received training on board member roles and responsibilities (83 percent), board/superintendent relations (83 percent), legal issues (82 percent), and budget/resource allocation (80 percent) (Figure 13).
- A large percentage of CGCS school boards also reported receiving training in student achievement (73 percent), technology (72 percent), leadership skills (71 percent), and board accountability (71 percent).
- Respondents also indicated that specific areas warranted further training including special education policy (52 percent) and English language learners and bilingual education policy (43 percent).

Figure 13

**Percentage of CGCS school boards by type of board training
2011**

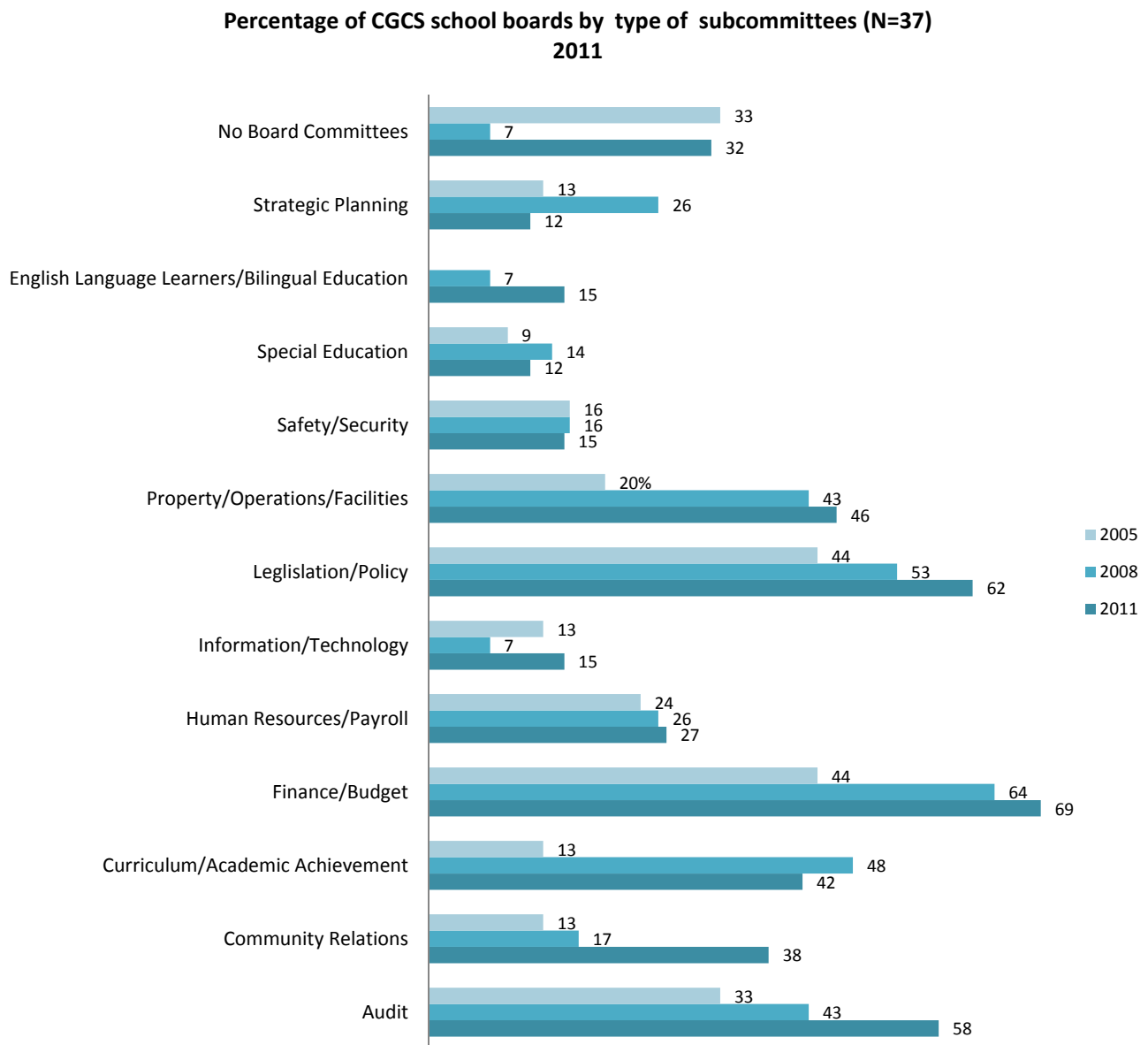


NOTE: The number of respondents ranges from 31-36 for each area of professional development (See Appendix B).

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- In 2011, 68 percent of school boards have a subcommittee structure compared with 93 percent in 2008. Thirty-two percent of school boards reported having no subcommittee structure at all (Figure 14).
- Compared to 2005, there was a large increase in the percentage of CGCS school boards with a legislation policy subcommittee (44 percent to 62 percent), finance and budget subcommittee (44 percent to 69 percent), and curriculum and academic achievement subcommittee (13 percent to 42 percent).
- Since 2005, respondents also indicated an increase in the percentage of urban school boards with a property and facility subcommittee (20 percent to 46 percent), community relations subcommittee (13 percent to 38 percent), and an audit subcommittee (33 percent to 58 percent).

Figure 14

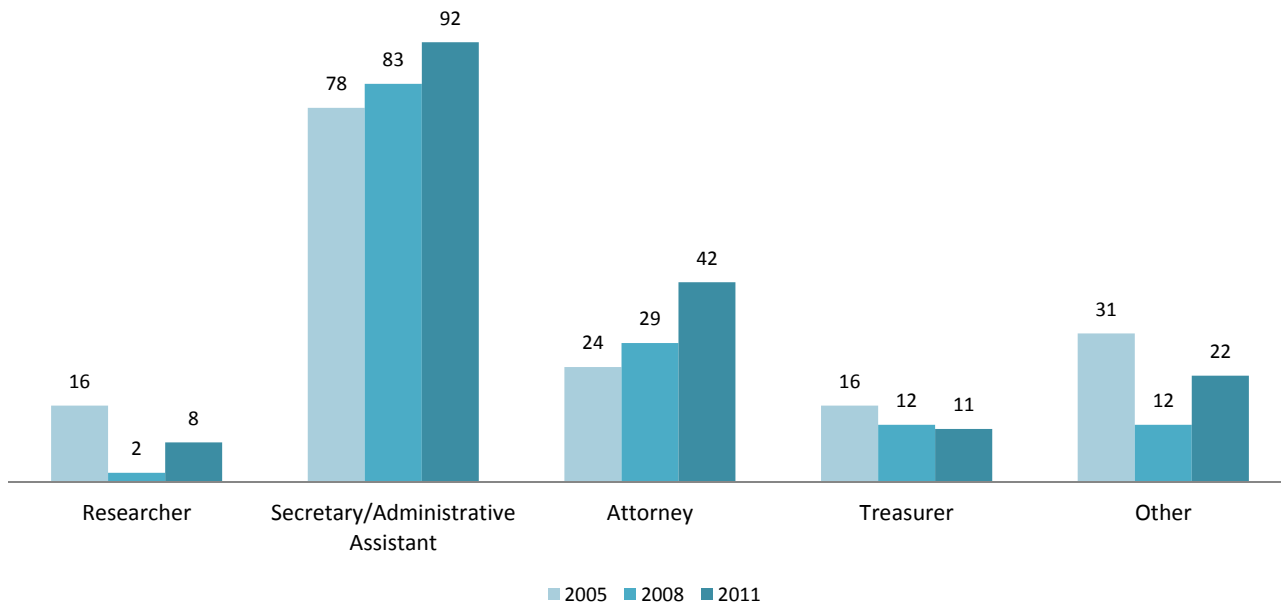


School Board Resources

- According to respondents, 95 percent of school boards have support staff assigned to the board while only 5 percent do not have any support staff – a decrease from 7 percent in 2008.
- Among CGCS districts that do have support staff, between 2005 and 2011 there has been a steady increase in the percentage of school boards that report having secretaries (78 percent to 92 percent), and attorneys (24 percent to 42 percent). However there has been a decrease in the large city school boards with a treasurer (16 percent to 11 percent) and a researcher (16 percent to 8 percent) (Figure 15).
- In 2011, 22 percent of CGCS school boards reported having other positions which include auditors, clerks, and board liaisons.
- In 2011, CGCS school boards were split on whether offices were provided at the school district’s headquarters. Approximately half of school boards (53 percent) do not have offices at the school district’s headquarters while 47 percent of school boards are provided offices at district headquarters.

Figure 15

Percentage of CGCS school boards by staffing levels (N=36)
2005-2011



School Board Benefits and Compensation

- In 2011, 61 percent of school board members received financial compensation compared to 55 percent of school board members in 2008 (Figure 16).
- The percentage of school board members receiving no compensation decreased between 2008 and 2011 (26 percent to 13 percent).
- In regards to the type of benefits available to CGCS school boards, since 2008 CGCS school boards are less likely to receive a meeting allowance, have access to a credit card, or have access to a car. However, 63 percent of school boards are reimbursed for travel expenses (Figure 17).

Figure 16

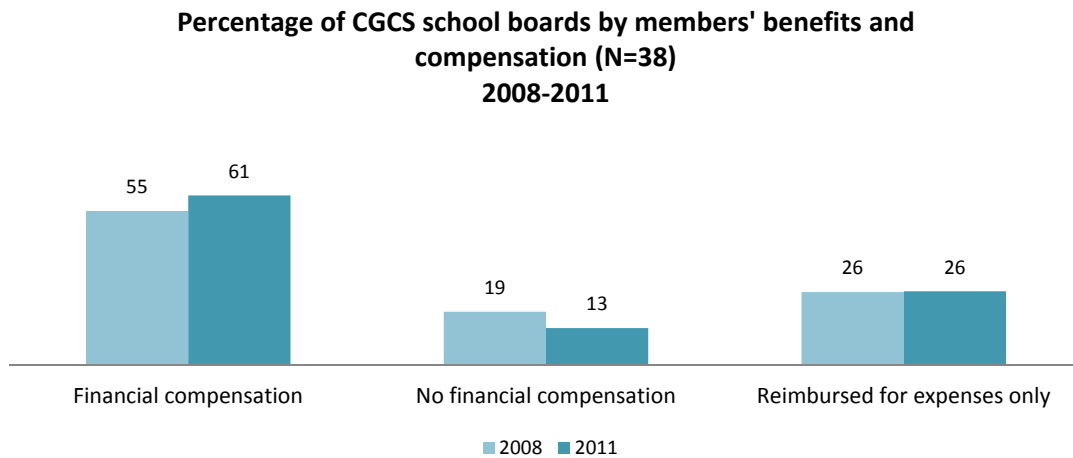
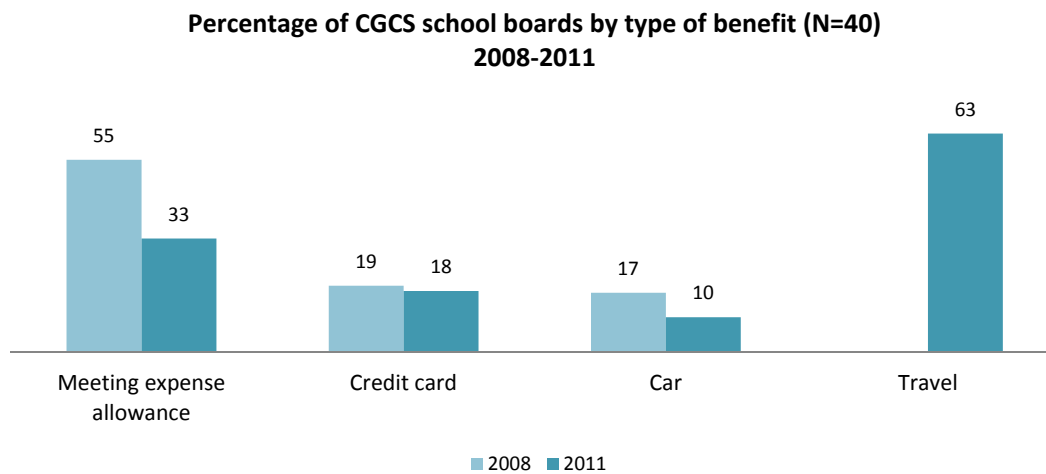


Figure 17

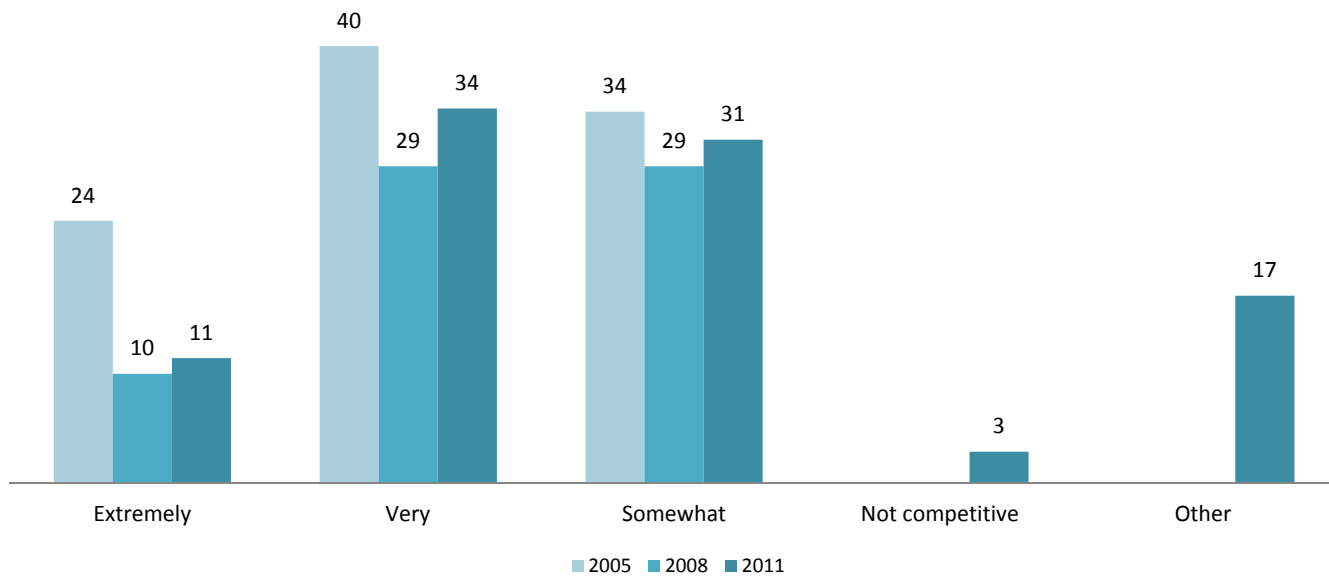


School Board Elections and Campaigns

- While school board elections range in terms of competitiveness, between 2008 and 2011 there has been a slight increase in the reported levels of competition in school board elections. There was an increase the percentage of respondents that characterized elections as “extremely” competitive (10 percent to 11 percent), “very” competitive (29 percent to 34 percent), and “somewhat” competitive (29 percent to 31 percent). However, generally elections were not as competitive as reported in 2005 (Figure 18).
- Additionally, 17 percent of respondents reported that the competitiveness of elections varied from year to year, depends on the specific seat up for election, or reported no electoral competition due to appointments.

Figure 18

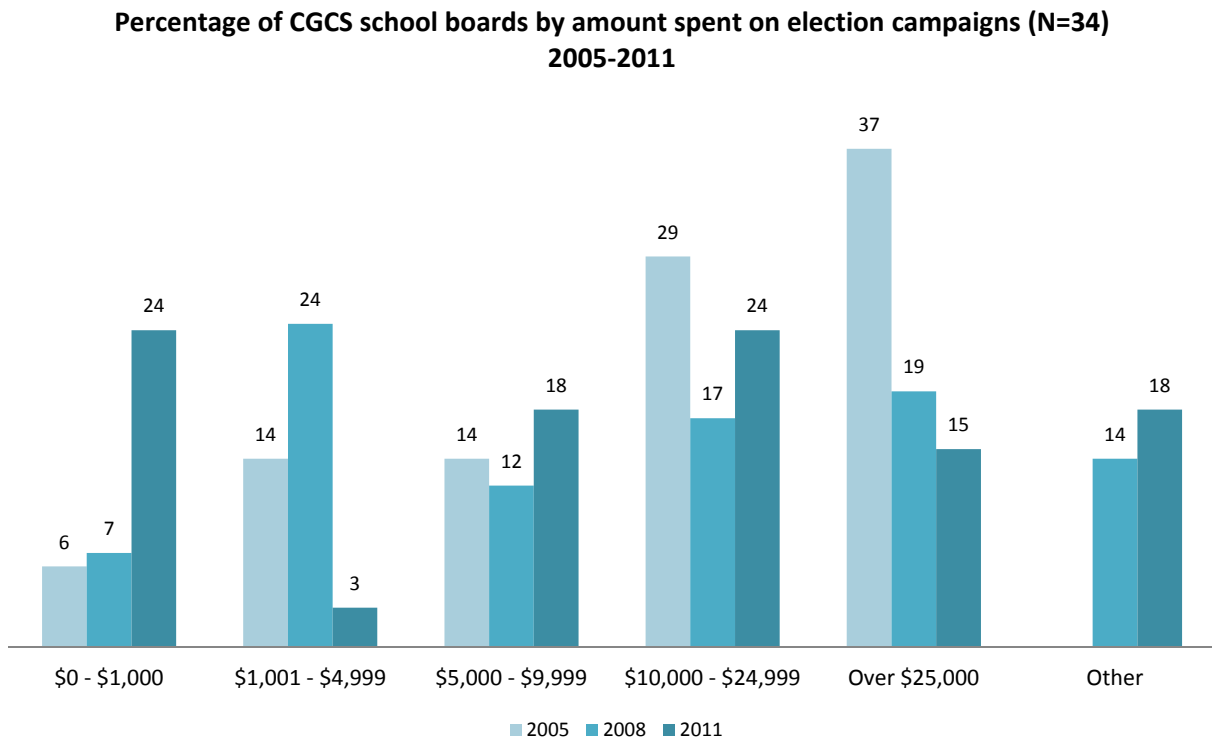
Percentage of CGCS school boards by competitiveness of school board elections (N=35)
2005-2011



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- Since 2005, CGCS districts have reported a drop in total campaign spending for individual school board elections. There has been approximately a 22 percent drop in campaigns spending over \$25,000 since 2005. While there has also been a drop in the percentage of school board campaigns spending between \$10,000 and \$24,999 since 2005, CGCS districts reported an increase in campaign spending within this range since 2008 (Figure 19).
- Compared to 2005, there has been an increase in the percentage of school board campaign spending between \$0 and \$1,000 (6 percent to 24 percent), and between \$5,000 and \$9,999 (14 percent vs. 18 percent).
- In 2011, 18 percent of CGCS respondents also noted that the amount spent on an election varies by individual seats.

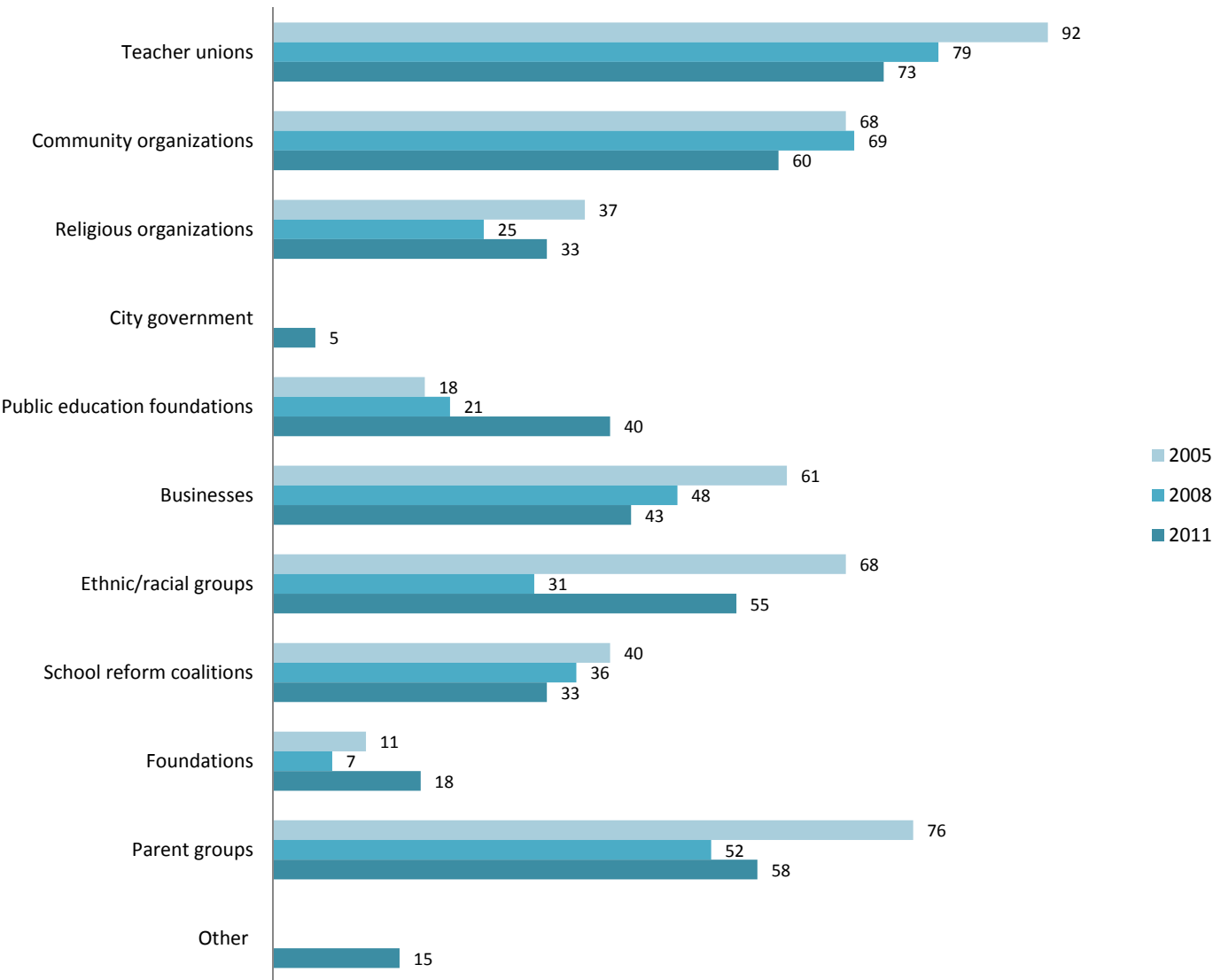
Figure 19



- Since 2005, CGCS school boards have reported that several stakeholder groups have become less active in school board elections including teacher unions, community organizations, businesses, and school reform coalitions.
- However, since 2008, several stakeholders have increased their presence in school board elections including religious organizations, ethnic/racial groups, foundations, and parent groups.
- In 2011, the percentage of CGCS school boards who reported that public education foundations are active in school board elections doubled since 2005 (18 percent to 40 percent).
- Other stakeholder groups who were listed as being active in school board elections included non-teaching labor unions and chambers of commerce.

Figure 20

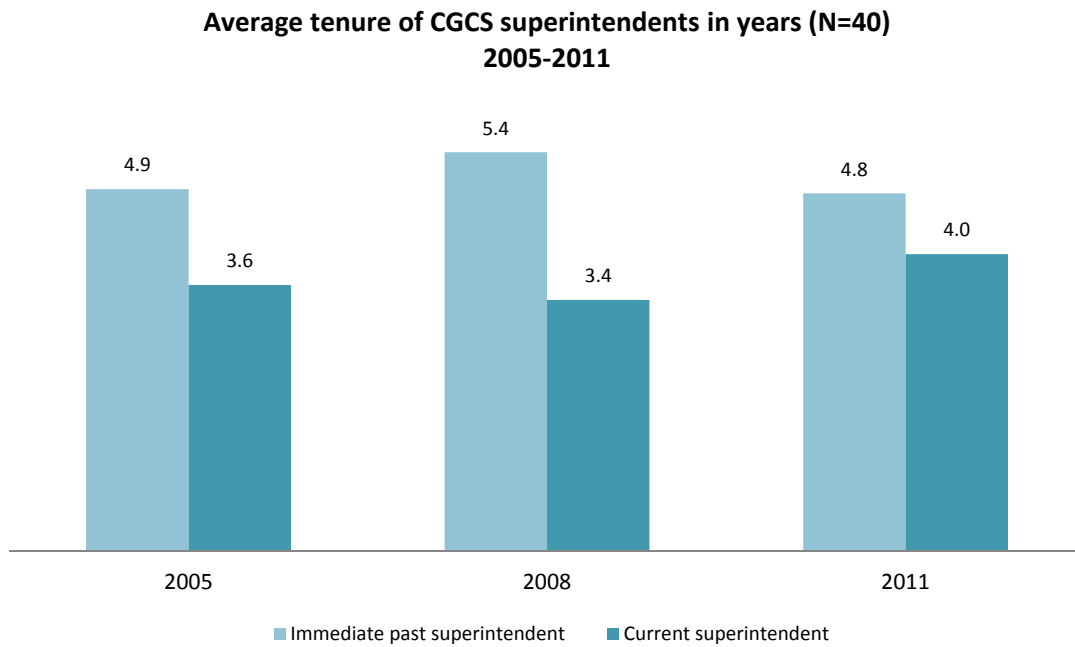
Percentage of CGCS school boards by active constituents in school board elections (N=40)
2005-2011



District Leadership

- In regards to superintendent tenure, the average tenure of current superintendents has increased from 3.6 years to 4 years since 2005. However, the tenure of immediate past superintendents reached a high of 5.4 years in 2008 but decreased to an average of 4.8 years in 2011 (Figure 21).

Figure 21



Participating Urban School Districts

Albuquerque Public Schools	Jackson Public Schools
Anchorage School District	Jefferson County Public Schools
Atlanta Public Schools	Kansas City Public Schools
Austin Independent School District	Little Rock School District
Baltimore City Public Schools	Long Beach Unified School District
Boston Public Schools	Memphis City Public Schools
Broward County Public Schools	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Cincinnati Public Schools	Minneapolis Public Schools
Clark County School District	Norfolk Public Schools
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	Oakland Unified School District
Columbus City Schools	Orange County Public Schools
Dayton Public Schools	The School District of Palm Beach County
Duval County Public Schools	Pittsburgh Public Schools
East Baton Rouge Parish School System	Portland Public Schools
Fort Worth Independent School District	Richmond Public Schools
Fresno Unified School District	San Diego Unified School District
Hillsborough County School District	San Francisco Unified School District
Houston Independent School District	St. Louis Public Schools
Indianapolis Public Schools	Wichita Public Schools

Appendix A

Percentage of CGCS school boards by engagement on meeting topic (Figure 12)
Number of respondents

Issue	Number of Respondents
Budgeting/funding	37
Student achievement	37
Charter schools	36
School choice	36
Closing achievement gaps	36
School construction	37
Education technology	37
Teacher quality	36
Professional development	36
Teacher shortages	36
No Child Left Behind	36
Black male students	35
English language learners	37
Hispanic students	36
Special needs students	37
Parental outreach	36
Drug/alcohol policy	36
Discipline	36
School safety	37
Physical school conditions	37

Appendix B

Percentage of CGCS school boards by type of board training (Figure 13)
Number of respondents

Training	Number of Respondents
Board member roles/responsibilities	36
Board/Superintendent relations	36
Leadership skills	31
Legal issues	33
Board accountability	34
Communications	32
Student achievement	33
Community engagement/partnerships	31
Budget/resource allocation	35
Superintendent/district staff accountability	31
Policy governance/leadership models	32
Curriculum/educational programs	32
English language learners/bilingual education policy	30
Special Education Policy	31
Technology	32

