In an era of public scrutiny and pressures applied from both the state and federal level for high student achievement, superintendents and school board relationships can become strained. In this roundtable session, the presenters will engage in a conversation with participants about a dissertation study completed at Widener University that provides insight on constructive superintendent/board relations. The purpose of this study, conducted by Dr. Gregory Puckett, was to identify the factors that contribute to a constructive relationship between a superintendent and his or her school board. In addition, this study also focused on the challenges the superintendent and the school board may have in maintaining such a successful relationship. Superintendents and school boards can use the information from this study to assist them in finding the best match for a school district.

Superintendents and school board presidents in Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery County, Pennsylvania were the target population. A mixed-methods study, combining a survey with an interview, was used to collect the data. Waters and Marzano from the McRel Leadership Institute developed superintendent responsibilities which were converted into the survey questions using a 5-point Likert Scale for the responses. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results from the survey. Superintendents (N=45) and school board presidents (N=45) were asked to complete the survey. Seventeen superintendents and their school board presidents completed the survey. The participation rate was 38%.

The researcher interviewed the superintendent and his/her school board president from four school districts in order to further explain the data results from the survey. The data
collected from the quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed and connections were drawn to identify the factors that contribute to a constructive relationship between the superintendent and school board.

The superintendents and school board presidents identified three themes that contribute to a constructive relationship. The three themes include understanding the role of the superintendent, developing mutual trust, and communicating effectively. According to the superintendents, the challenges for maintaining a constructive relationship with the school board are school reform/improvement, social media, and working with new school board members. The school board presidents agreed with the superintendents that school reform/improvement is a challenge in maintaining a constructive relationship; however, they only identified the budget as the other challenge in maintaining that relationship.

Participants who are part of this roundtable discussion will gain new insights from the research conducted and from the presenters and their colleagues. The objective of the session is to utilize the research to discuss the application to the everyday practices of superintendents in working with board members.