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# A Qualitative Multi-Case Study of the Influence of Personal and Professional Ethics on the Leadership of Public School Superintendents

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A QUALITATIVE MULTI-CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL  
AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ON THE LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC SCHOOL  
SUPERINTENDENTS

A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
and Research in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Education

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December 2010

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Title: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study of the Influence of Personal and Professional Ethics on the Leadership of Public School Superintendents

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The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics on the leadership of public school superintendents. A multi-case, qualitative research design was used to gather data from four practicing public school superintendents. Transformational leadership theory and the three pillars of ethics of leadership identified by Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) served as the theoretical framework from which the data were viewed.

The population and sample for this study were purposefully selected. Subjects had to meet two criteria. First, they had to be members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). Second, the district they work for had to have renewed their superintendent's contract. The information gleaned from the interviews, field notes, and documents were considered using the constant-comparative method of categorizing data.

Once the data from the various sources were analyzed, two general themes emerged; (1) an ethic of responsibility and (2) preserving principles and integrity. These themes are interconnected and related to the topics that evolved from the questions asked during the field interviews. The topics include: guiding principles, personal values, philosophy of life, leadership, ethical dilemmas, and advice from the participants.

The superintendents in this study recognize the greatest challenge to their ethic of responsibility is to do what is in the best interest of students while working through the intrinsic political and cultural structures that are unique to all locally-controlled school districts. The commitment to remain true to their principles and lead with integrity is practiced at a high level for these superintendents.

Superintendents will continue to be faced with situations that will confront their commitment to what they value [principles] and have opportunities to exhibit the courage to act upon their commitment [integrity]. Articulating ethical beliefs and values by aligning them to everyday actions will communicate clearly to the organization the character of the superintendent.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

Public school superintendents provide professional leadership to the nation's schools. The ethical challenges that school leaders confront are enormous. "Nothing less than the quality of western civic life is at stake" (Starratt, 2004, p. 4). Foster (1986) expressed the seriousness and importance of ethics in educational administration stating, "Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life; that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas" (p. 33).

Arguably, today's superintendents hold one of the most demanding jobs in America. The challenges are complex, the hours are long, and the dynamics of the job change almost daily (American Association of School Administrators, 2005). Factors such as limited funding, increasing accountability for student achievement, and less local control are significant influences on how superintendents lead. Superintendents must accommodate these challenges by "seriously considering whether these adjustments will address the moral vacuum of the school that empties the work of students and teachers of its authenticity and significance" (Starratt, 2004, p. 2).

In order to be effective leaders, superintendents need to base decisions on both professional and personal ethical standards. As society becomes even more demographically diverse, superintendents will need to be able to develop, foster and lead tolerant and democratic schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Superintendents are confronted with the task of providing leadership, structure, and coherence to the school's primary mission of educating all students while responding to societal and governmental demands for student achievement. At the same time, superintendents are adhering to professional and personal standards that are characterized by "a blend of human, professional, and civic concerns; cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible" (Starratt, 2004, p. 3).

All schools rely on the leadership and decision-making of key individuals, beginning with the superintendent. At the 2005 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) National Superintendent of the Year Forum, executive director Paul Huston encouraged superintendents to rethink their traditional approach to leadership. "We have to move from command and control to tapping the personal power of our teachers, principals, and others with whom we work" (p. 7). Houston suggested that school system leaders think of

themselves more like an orchestra conductor and encourage the best from all the members of their "orchestra" (American Association of School Administrators, 2005, p. 7). In their commitment to lead schools, superintendents must also consider their moral and ethical responsibilities to the schools they serve.

Superintendents are ultimately responsible for the success of the school system they administer and guide. Superintendents are the school leaders who affect change most in the system they lead (Dobel, 1998). They influence the strategic planning, the allocations of resources, and overall programs of the schools. Superintendents have a professional obligation to examine their work and personal ethical practices and lead with unyielding integrity for the students and community they serve (Bennis, Burke, Gery, & Juechter, 2003).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics on the leadership of public school superintendents. Data were collected from practicing Pennsylvania public school superintendents with renewed contracts primarily through a qualitative, multi-case study process. The findings of this study will add to

the existing body of research on ethical leadership in the public education environment.

### **Importance of the Study**

Ethical leaders must rely on moral courage and moral reasoning to make rational, ethical decisions (Kidder & Born, 2002). It is important to investigate ethical leadership qualities demonstrated by superintendents in order to determine congruence and validate any uniform consistency of these qualities that are associated with the duties and work they perform. Superintendent search committees could strengthen their applicant pool by looking for these common characteristics. In addition, aspiring superintendents would be interested in knowing what ethical characteristics may be enabling these educational leaders to lead effectively. Leaders perceived as unfair, unjust, inhumane, or capricious in their decisions lose the trust of their staff, faculty, and community members and become ineffective (Strike, Haller & Soltis, 1998).

Another benefit of investigating ethical leadership qualities is the positive effect the findings could have on graduate level certification programs of administration or educational leadership. Until recently, relatively few school administration preparation programs have given little attention to ethical issues (Beck & Murphy, 1994).

Sergiovanni (1992) professed that instruction in ethics should accomplish more than simply assisting educational administrators in the decision-making process; he specified that ethics instruction must help educators understand the purposes, values, and commitment behind their work.

The attempts to identify characteristics of effective leaders are well documented in the research. Stogdill (as cited in Wren, 1995) discussed personal factors associated with leadership and reported 10 characteristics that have the highest overall correlation with leadership. Kouzes & Posner (2003) identified 20 characteristics of admired leaders. Covey (1991) identified four levels of principle-centered leadership with seven character traits or habits of highly effective people. Collins (2001) identified five levels in a hierarchy of executive capabilities with corresponding characteristics for each level. Starratt (2004) provided an ethical analysis of the virtues needed to infuse and energize the work of school leaders. Although leadership characteristics transcend all leadership roles, this study examined the influence of ethics on public school superintendents as they administer and lead public schools in fulfilling the fundamental mission of providing educational opportunities for all students.



## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics that affects superintendents' leadership. Specifically, this study explored the following questions:

1. What are the values and beliefs that influence the educational leadership by superintendents?
2. How do superintendents maintain ethical standards while coping with the pressures of the job?
3. What core ethical beliefs are associated with the decision-making strategies of superintendents' educational leadership?
4. How do superintendents deal with situations that conflict with their own personal or professional ethics?
5. What are the similarities or differences related to how superintendents resolve ethical dilemmas?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following are definitions of terms used in the context of this study:

1. Ethics - "a summary ordering of principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values into a logical dynamic that characterized a moral way of life" (Starratt, 2004, p. 5).

2. Ethical Leadership - "connecting people morally to each other and their work by developing shared purpose, beliefs, values, and community building" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 83).
3. Leader - a person, by word or personal example, who markedly influences the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (Gardner, 1995, p. 8).
4. Leadership - the act of leading. Leadership is the orchestration of people and mobilization of resources of an organization to face the difficult problems they face (Heifetz, 1994).
5. Professional Ethics - acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. Transformational Leaders - "inspire followers to commit to a shared vision and goals of an organization, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and develop follower's leadership capacity through coaching, mentoring and provision of both challenge and support" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Today's public school superintendents face ethical challenges involving accountability for student achievement and conflicts related to educational and political ideals. In order to lead effectively, superintendents must rely on

professional standards as guiding principles and a personal commitment to their own ethical standards when confronted with these challenges in making decisions that are in the best interest of students.

A qualitative multi-case study will allow this researcher to study this aspect of leadership from the perspective of practicing superintendents. A qualitative design is dynamic and flexible enough to gather rich detail of conditions as they exist while allowing for the evolution of insightful data to emerge (Eisner, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000). This study explored how superintendents' personal principles of integrity, honesty, trust, or authenticity influence not only their decision-making but also their leadership style.

Covey (1989) described a framework of universal and timeless principles of character and human effectiveness or "habits" for individuals to not only be effective in their lives, but also effective as leaders. Superintendents have a responsibility to act and lead with one fundamental imperative and that is to serve the "best interest of the student" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Embedded in professional organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) are codes of conduct and professional standards that serve as guideposts for

superintendents to recognize their primary responsibility is to the student. To that end, the theoretical foundation of this study supports these contentions regarding the practice of ethical leadership including selected tenets and theories of leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, and professional codes for leading schools in this era of reform.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) contended that the ethics of leadership rest upon three pillars:(1) the moral character of the leader, (2) the ethical values imbedded in the leader's vision, articulation, and programs which followers either embrace or reject and (3) the morality of the processes of social ethical choices and actions that leaders and followers engage in and collectively pursue. In transformational leadership, leaders and followers unite in pursuit of higher-level goals common to both (Sergiovanni, 2007). In Burns' words, "such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

Transformational school leaders recognize that, in the real world, schools operate far more loosely than organizational charts depict (and most commonly assume) and often more loosely than most are willing to admit

(Sergiovanni, 2007). Superintendents need to continually model ethical principles for the purpose of teaching members of the school organization to think for themselves, exercise self-control, and accept responsibility and obligation (Kelly, 1988).

School leaders, and especially superintendents, are well aware of the expectations that are associated with personal leadership qualities and professional codes and standards. Transformational leadership is more closely associated with the types of leadership skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that most people have in mind when they describe their ideal leader.

### **Limitations**

Researchers conducting case studies are continually making judgments about the significance of the data collected. For that reason, a key determinant of the quality of case study research is the quality of the insights and thinking brought to bear by the particular researcher (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). The challenge is to subjectively analyze the data without prejudice or bias (Gay, 1996; Merriam, 2002). Case studies can make no claims to be typical or generalizable. Because the sample is small and idiosyncratic, and because data is predominantly

non-numerical, there is no way to establish the probability that data are representative of some larger population (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). In addition, it is assumed the superintendents participating in this study have limited their responses to their own personal and professional experiences.

### **Summary**

Today's public school superintendents arguably have one of the most difficult leadership roles in our society. Their responsibility to 21<sup>st</sup> century schools and students is often misunderstood and under-appreciated. The real purpose of superintendents' work is overshadowed by balancing the political environment, inadequate funding, state, and federal mandates, and being the chief spokesperson for the district on all issues.

Schools are complicated, multifaceted organizations that have varying situations where superintendents will need to rely upon knowledge, skills, and most importantly, their commitment to core values and principles to do what is right to promote success for all students. "The work of educational leaders should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral, an activity characterized by the blend of human, professional, and civic concerns; a work of

cultivating an environment or learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible" (Starratt, 2004, p. 3).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The existing body of research is examined in this chapter to identify characteristics or traits of leaders, transactional theory, transformational theory and leadership from an ethical, moral, and authentic leadership perspective. In addition, this chapter will examine the definition of leadership and how it transcends various leadership roles. A review of the educational reform movement, effective educational leadership, and professional educational organizations' standards will also be addressed. Reviewing the literature will provide a theoretical foundation for the ethical leadership characteristics of effective public school superintendents and the skills, knowledge, and values essential to support the entire learning community.

#### **Defining Leadership**

Defining leadership requires a synthesis of points of view from the experts in the field of leadership study. The word "leader" appeared in the English language as early as the year 1300; however, the word "leadership" did not appear until the first part of the nineteenth century in reference to British Parliament (Bass, 1990).



Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, an issue of personality, a matter of inducing compliance, the exercise of influence, particular behaviors, a form of persuasion, a power relation, an instrument to achieve goals, an effect of interaction, a difference role, initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions (Wren, 1995). Defining leadership may depend on where leadership is taking place. Susan Moore Johnson states, "Leadership looks different, and is different, depending on whether it is experienced, in a legislature, on a battlefield, at a rally, on a factory floor, or in a school district" (1996, p. 14). Additional examples of leadership definitions include (Wren, 1995, pp. 41-42):

- The creative and directive force of morale (Munson, 1981).
- The process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner (Bennis, 1959).
- The presence of a particular influence relationship between two or more persons (Hollander & Julian, 1969).
- Directing and coordinating the work of group members (Fiedler, 1967).

- An interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to (Merton, 1957)
- Transforming followers, creating visions of the goals that may be attained, and articulating for the followers the ways to attain those goals (Bass, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986).
- Actions that focus resources to create desirable opportunities (Campbell, 1991).

This variety of definitions of leadership underlines the complexity of defining a concept that has multiple interpretations by researchers of different aspects of leadership in a variety of domains. Despite a depth of empirical studies yielding hundreds of definitions of leadership, no consensus on any one definition exists. Further complicating the matter, researchers remain unclear about what specifically distinguishes leaders from non-leaders and strong leaders from weak ones (Evans, 1996).

We do know that the definition of leadership is influenced by the leaders we have known and that leadership requires qualities, behaviors, and values that support the existing culture's way of life (Bennis, Burke, Gery & Juechter, 2003). Embedded in American culture throughout

history are the stories of great men and the impact they had on our society (Heifetz, 1994).

The following authors' perspectives on leadership will aid in the definition of leadership. Both organizational and personal characteristics of effective leadership are reviewed.

### **James Collins: Level 5 Leadership**

Some of the existing research on leadership focuses on the behavior, personality, or qualities of leaders; other research has studied the leader as a change agent. Harry S. Truman is quoted as saying, "You can accomplish anything in life; provided that you do not mind who gets the credit" (McCullough, 1992, p. 564). Truman defined in simple terms what Level 5 leadership represents. According to James Collins, author of *Good to Great* (2001), a Level 5 leader is "an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will" (Collins, 2001, p. 21).

Collins studied 11 good-to-great companies and identified characteristics common to their success in moving each organization from good to great. One of those characteristics was the definition of leadership at the highest level in a hierarchy of executive capabilities, identified in his research as Level 5. Collins (2001, p.

20) identified five different levels of executive capabilities:

Level 1 - Highly-Capable Individual; makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits.

Level 2 - Contributing Team Member; contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting.

Level 3 - Competent Manager; organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives.

Level 4 - Effective Leader; catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.

Level 5 - Executive; builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.

A Level 5 leader must exemplify all five levels. They must be driven to produce sustained results, display worker-like diligence and compelling modesty, and be self-effacing and understated (Collins, 2001). Schools, like business, need their top executive and upper management to model leadership that is effective and

demonstrate humility that allows others to contribute to the success of the organization.

### **Howard Gardner: Six Constants of Leadership**

Gardner (1995) defined a leader as "a person who, by word or personal example, markedly influences the behaviors, thoughts, or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings" (p. 8). A clear connection needs to be established between the leader and those being influenced related to their shared values and ethical behaviors. Gardner (1995) identified six constants in leadership in a study of eleven effective twentieth-century leaders in *Leading Minds: Anatomy of Leadership*.

**Constant one.** A leader needs to have a message that identifies with individuals and as a group. That message or vision must align with the values of the group. The message or story provides background and frames future options. The story becomes the central mission for the leader (Gardner, 1995). As an example, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani used the 9/11 crisis as "his story" in time of crisis which encouraged individuals to think of themselves as members of the much broader community affected by the attacks on the Twin Towers.

**Constant two.** Every story needs an audience willing to listen and respond to the message. Leadership can affect small changes in a large audience fairly easily and sometimes affect large change in a dedicated and knowledgeable group. The greatest challenge the leader faces is to bring about significant and lasting changes in a larger and heterogeneous group. The best chance for success in affecting the audience is a steady concentration of the same core message with variation in how it is presented (Gardner, 1995).

**Constant three.** A leader can speak directly to a large audience and achieve initial success via the perceived bond between himself and his audience. Enduring leadership demands some kind of institutional or organizational basis (Gardner, 1995). Organizations, such as churches, provide leadership opportunities for the message of a leader heard by a large number of willing and knowledgeable members.

**Constant four.** The "story" must be embodied in the leader to achieve lasting leadership. If a leader contradicts the story by the fact of his existence, if he appears hypocritical, the story probably will not remain convincing over the long run (Gardner, 1995).

**Constant five.** Leadership can take place directly or indirectly. Indirect leaders have the advantage of more

time for reflection and revision, and often their impact proves more enduring if slower to emerge. Direct leadership is more tumultuous and risky, but in the short run, can be more efficient and more effective (Gardner, 1995).

**Constant six.** Expertise in a particular leadership domain, whether it is education, business or politics, relates to the knowledge base the leader possesses about that domain. Leadership within a domain is unlikely to achieve credibility unless the leader's work is seen as being high quality. (Gardner, 1995).

#### **Ronald Heifetz: Adaptive Work**

Heifetz (1994) found that looking at defining leadership as an activity is more useful rather than as a position of authority in a social structure or defining leadership as a personal set of characteristics. He used four criteria to develop a definition of leadership that takes values into account. First, the definition must sufficiently resemble current cultural assumptions so that, when feasible, one's normal understanding of what it means to lead will apply. Second, the definition should be practical, so that practitioners can make use of it. Third, it should point towards socially-useful activities. Finally, the concept should offer a broad definition of social usefulness.

Considering values when defining leadership separates Heifetz's (1994) definition from studies with a value-free connotation. Values clarify a definition of leadership in a moral opinion as opposed to defining leadership when someone has authority or simply a following. For example, the term "leader" is associated with an individual's perceived leadership role in a gang or team with a non value-free implication clouding an individual's personal definition of leadership.

Heifetz (1994) viewed leadership in terms of adaptive work. Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Leadership, then, is the orchestration of people and mobilization of resources of an organization to face the difficult problems they face.

### **Steven Covey: Personal Human Effectiveness**

In his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Covey laid out a framework of universal and timeless principles of character and human effectiveness for individuals to not only be effective in their lives, but also effective as leaders. Covey applied the Seven Habits to organizational leadership in *Principle-Centered Leadership* (1991) by claiming that deep systemic



transformation begins when individuals change from the inside out. Personal change must precede organizational change, just as authentic, personal character qualities must precede organizational qualities.

In his book *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*, Covey (2004) built upon that effectiveness and defined the next level needed for individuals to lead organizations and to excel and thrive in order to be successful. Covey professed that the key to organizations reaching and maintaining greatness is to have great focus and execution; surround the organization with great people and have great leadership. Covey (2004) defined leadership as "communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves" (p. 98). He described four roles of leadership as a proactive intention to affirm the worth and potential of members of the organization to increase the capacity and success of its purpose. The leadership roles are qualities of personal leadership defined as follows: pathfinding (vision), aligning (discipline), empowering (passion), and modeling (conscience). These qualities are based on ethical standards and values associated with human effectiveness.

Covey (1989) recognized that an individual's success becomes more a function of personality, public image, attitudes and behaviors, skills and techniques that enhance

the processes of human interaction. Covey (1991) further developed this concept by centering a person's philosophy of life and leadership of organizations and people on certain "true north" principles. A true north principle is the external or natural law of a virtue such as honesty. True north is the indicator by which leaders align and build their values. There is little disagreement that universal beliefs of fairness, equity, honesty, trust, dignity, integrity, and patience are all true north principles (Covey, 1991). Schools need superintendents to follow true north principles to guide their ethical decision making processes that affect the communities and students they serve. Covey (1991) professed that leaders can transform their organizations and their people by communicating vision, clarifying purpose, making behavior congruent with belief, and aligning procedures with principles, roles, and goals. "People may then achieve a heightened sense of personal contribution through their commitment to the organization's mission" (p. 69).

**Robert Starratt: Ethical Leadership**

Starratt (2004) provided an ethical analysis of the virtues of responsibility, authenticity, and presence specifically for educational leaders. Educational leaders and, even more specifically, superintendents need to view their work as a moral activity that engages the entire school community.

An educational leader must be "responsible as a human being, as an educator, as an administrative leader, and as a citizen administrator" (Starratt, 2004, p. 49). Being responsible as a human being allows leaders to look at the situation from another's perspective. Being human implies that leaders are capable of human limitation, including failing. As an educator, the leader is responsible to continue to learn about how the curriculum relates to the human, social, political, and cultural conditions of the current time. The educational leader is responsible as an administrator to seek useful perspectives on school culture and develop a comprehensive understanding of how various elements of the school mesh into the primary mission of the school. As a citizen administrator, the leader must keep in mind the common good of the civic community while providing the education for its future citizens (Starratt, 2004).

"Authenticity requires one to choose to be authentic; it is an ongoing moral imperative" (Starratt, 2004, p. 81). Authentic leaders apply their beliefs and values to their work. Evans (1996) shares Starratt's view of authenticity by arguing that leadership is less than how leadership principles are applied but more a matter of who the leader is. As an educational leader, the virtue of authenticity involves the responsibility of sustaining the integrity of the activity of learning and providing educational opportunities for all students (Starratt, 2004).

Connecting the virtues of responsibility and authenticity is presence. "Presence" takes place through the medium of language and body expression. To be virtuous, presence communicates hospitality, inviting a person's authenticity to others (Starratt, 2004).

Educational leaders bring the presence of leadership by affirming the common commitment of the school community to the education of all children in order to reach their fullest potential. Affirming leadership presence by school leaders, and especially by superintendents, demonstrates the responsibility to be authentic when working towards the mission of the organization. "Authenticity needs both presence and responsibility; responsibility expresses both

presence and authenticity; the three virtues interpenetrate and complement each other" (Starratt, 2004, p. 111).

### **Leadership Defined**

All of these notable authors lend significant influence to the definition of leadership for this researcher to apply to today's superintendents leading in a complex educational environment. A broad definition of leadership from an organizational perspective, such as schools, could be the interactions among members of the organization that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems and attain goals (Bass, 1990). Leadership defined from an individual's perspective involves "connecting people morally to each other and their work by developing shared purpose, beliefs, values, and community building" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 83).

### **Leadership Theories**

Theories of leadership attempt to explain the factors involved either in the emergence of leadership or in the nature of leadership and its consequence (Bass, 1990). There is little doubt that leadership is a complex, multi-faceted concept that no one theory can explain. Many theories of leadership have been prominent in guiding and defining leadership in all types of organizations and at

all levels. Leadership is essential for the success of all organizations; public schools are no exception.

### **Trait Theory**

Trait theory evolved from the "great man theory" early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It needs noted that reference to great man is not intended to reflect gender bias but only to discuss the origin of Trait Theory. Great-man theories profess history is shaped by the leadership of great men. Without Moses, the Jews would have remained in Egypt. Without Winston Churchill, the British would have given up early in the war (Bass 1990). Thomas Carlyle examined the personality characteristics of "great men," suggesting that the rise to power is rooted in a "heroic" set of personal talents, skills, or physical characteristics (Heifetz, 1994). As Sidney Hook (1943) described in *The Hero in History*, some men are eventful, while others are event-making.

Trait theories do not make assumptions that leadership traits were inherited or reserved for the ruling class; they assert that leaders' characteristics are simply different from non-leaders (Wren 1995). Early trait studies identified personality and physical characteristics as well as abilities of people who were recognized as natural born leaders. The assumption was that if a person were found to

possess these characteristics, he would also possess the skill of leadership.

Stogdill (1948) questioned the theories of possessing certain traits identifying leaders from non-leaders during the middle of the century. After reviewing the literature, he concluded, "A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combinations of traits" (p. 64). Stogdill surmised no characteristics were universally associated with effective leadership. For example, educational leaders do not necessarily have the identical traits of military leaders. Stogdill believed situational factors were influential in leadership roles.

Earlier trait theory fell into disfavor in the 1940s. However, the idea remains that if an individual possesses certain characteristics, he or she has the potential to be a leader. Although there is no comprehensive theory of traits of leadership, researchers continue to identify patterns of traits that are associated with leadership (Bass, 1990). Trait theory may differentiate leaders from followers, or effective from ineffective leadership. However, individuals emerging as leaders may be influenced by the situation of the environment, culture or the element of change (Bass, 1990).

## **Situational Theory**

Researchers identify a shortcoming of trait theory in that it does not take into account all of the variables that explain effective leadership. The situation influences the way in which these traits and behaviors are applied in leadership roles. Situational theory takes into account how the situation requires different leadership approaches.

Fiedler (1967) studied leadership by examining the people, tasks, and organization that make up its context, or situation. The situational factors of importance identified by Fiedler were leaders' relationships with subordinates, for example, the extent to which leaders structured tasks assigned to subordinates' and leaders' degree of authority derived from their position in the organization. In his model, Fiedler classified situations according to the extent to which they were favorable to the leader, and he classified leadership styles as task-oriented or relationship-oriented.

Bass (1990) contends situational demands and the personal attributes of the leader must both be considered in trying to understand the effectiveness of the leader. What is required for leadership in a stressful situation may differ from what is needed in calm and steady circumstances.



Hersey and Blanchard (1996) developed a situational leadership model at the Center for Leadership Studies located in Escondido, California. Hersey founded the center in the mid-1960s to help develop potential leaders and assist organizations in being successful. Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model focuses on the appropriate relationship between the leader's behavior and a particular aspect of the situation - the readiness level exhibited by the followers (Wren, 1995). Their model suggests the situation defines a dynamic interaction between the leader and the followers, where the readiness level of the followers may dictate the leader's behavior in order to maintain the performance of the followers. They identified four readiness levels based on the follower's ability and willingness and four leadership behaviors based on task and relationship. Dependent on the readiness level of the followers, the leader would use the appropriate leadership task and relationship level.

Effective leaders need to be able to adapt their styles of leadership to fit the situation. The followers' effectiveness will ultimately depend on the manner in which the leader applies the appropriate combinations of directive and supportive behaviors (Wren, 1995).

## **Transactional and Transformational Theory**

The study of leadership theory has evolved from research on traits and situations to leadership that is contingent on a transaction or exchange between the leaders and those being led (Bass, 1990; Hollander, 1992). In this view, leaders exchange promises of rewards and benefits to subordinates for the subordinate's fulfillment of agreements with the leader (Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership reflects the reality of most organizations, including schools, where the focus is on extrinsic motives and needs. Owens (2000) wrote that "transactional educational leaders can and do offer jobs, security, tenure, favorable ratings, in exchange for the support, cooperation, and compliance of followers" (p. 209). Sergiovanni (2007) related transactional leadership in education as being organized like the workings of a clock. Leaders only need to control the master gear to manage predictable and reliable results.

Transformational leadership is in some ways an extension of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership focuses on the transaction that occurs among leaders, colleagues, and other members. This transaction is based on the leader's discussion with others and the

requirements and specific conditions and rewards these others will receive when they fulfill those requirements (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

James McGregor Burns (1978) defined leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations of both leader and follower. The genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own as well as their followers' values and motivation. Burns understood leaders to be both transformational and transactional. Bass (1985) modified that understanding by proposing that transformational leadership augments the effects of transactional leadership on the efforts, satisfaction, and effectiveness of subordinates.

Transformational leadership raises leadership to the next level. It involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals of an organization, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity through coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Burns (1978) proposed the idea of the transformational leader as opposed to the transactional leader. He described it not as a set of specific behaviors but rather a process

by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivations (Wren, 1995). The transformational leader asks followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization, consider their needs to develop themselves, and become aware of what is really important (Bass, 1990).

School leaders, and especially superintendents, are well aware of the expectations that are associated with school reform or school improvement movements. Transformational leadership is more closely associated with the types of leadership skills, knowledge and personal attributes that most people have in mind when they describe their ideal leader. Furthermore, transformational leaders are more likely the type of role model with which members of the organization want to identify (Bass 1990). Hoyle (2007) asserted:

Transformational leaders create an environment where persons are empowered to fulfill their highest professional needs and are more encouraged to become members of a supportive learning community.

Transformational leaders are servants to others and guide them in creating and embracing a vision for the organization that inspires, and brings forth top performance, diversity of thought, and inclusion of

all races and ideologies.(pp. 20-21)

A number of theories have included a moral or ethical element in transformational leadership (Greenfield, 1987; Sergiovanni, 1992). It is useful to distinguish between transactional leadership as leadership behavior and transformative leadership as moral action (Sergiovanni, 2007). Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) stated:

The literature on transformational leadership is linked to the long-standing literature on virtue and moral character, as exemplified by Socratic and Confucian typologies. It is linked, as well, to the major themes of the modern Western ethical agenda: liberty, utility and distributive justice deception, sophistry, and pretense are examined alongside issues of transcendence, agency, trust, striving for the congruence of the values, cooperative action, power, persuasion, and corporate governance to establishes strategic and moral foundation of authentic transformational leadership. (p. 1)

### **Moral Leadership**

Sergiovanni (1992) believes that a high level of leadership authority lies in the professional and moral beliefs of the individual. "When professional authority

becomes a source for supervising the performing of duties and responsibilities, leaders rely on standards of practice and professional norms as the motive to appeal for action or change" (p. 40). Sergiovanni (1992) also contended that people are, by nature, morally responsive and are capable of responding to duties and obligations that stand above their own interests. Wong (1998) studied the integration of Maslow's (1954) *Hierarchy of Needs* with Sergiovanni's (1992) *Sources of Leadership* and Burns' (1978) *Leadership Models*. He found Sergiovanni's propositions to be consistent with Burns' transformational leadership and Maslow's higher level of needs. Transformational leadership appeals to higher order, intrinsic, moral motives and needs; it also elevates followers to higher levels of moral character. Wong concluded the moral leadership proposed by Sergiovanni carries dual implications. First, the leader must appeal to the follower's sense of righteousness, obligation, and goodness as motivations for action and work. Second, the leader must possess a sense of righteousness, obligation, and goodness. Hence, to argue a moral dimension of leadership implies a moral standing on the part of the leader. Without this, it is difficult to conceive how followers could be motivated to follow a moral path (Wong, 1998).

Hoyle (2007) based moral leadership on dignity and respect for the rights of others to self-determination within moral boundaries of the organization. Moral leadership in schools commits to focus on the safety, health and welfare of each student, teacher, and staff member and inspires all to fulfill higher levels of purpose. Martin (2005) indicated that schools need to select and prepare leaders who can help shape a moral society as society becomes more politically, racially, and economically divided. Winters (2003) researched the moral development of Pennsylvania superintendents. She found experienced and inexperienced superintendents share similar characteristics of higher levels of moral development. High levels of moral development in inexperienced superintendents might be explained by the lack of pressure to conform, resulting from limited experiences with dilemmas. Higher levels of moral development may occur in experienced superintendents because of age, confidence, and a "big picture" approach when making decisions (Winters, 2003, p. 131).

Covey (2004) believes ultimately at the core of any leader's leadership style are "true north" principles like respect, honesty, kindness, integrity, service and fairness, that control the consequences of our choices.

This "moral compassing" places responsibility on individuals to examine their lives and determine if they are living and applying these principles to all aspects accordingly.

Defending the morality of transformational leadership, Bass and Steidlmeier (1998), stated:

In leadership, character matters; truly transformational leaders, who engage in moral uplifting of their followers, who move them to share in the mutually rewarding visions of success, who enable and empower them to convert the visions into realities, should be applauded, not chastised.(para. 1)

"Schools are ever-changing organizations reflecting the inconsistent and dichotomous values of society itself" (Rowe, 1997, p. 65). The influence of society's social pressure, political realities, and environmental influence affect the decisions of superintendents. Superintendents need to develop skills and knowledge in making moral decisions when faced with dilemmas. Without high levels of moral development, superintendents will be less likely to take risks in the decision-making process and transform the school during periods of conflict or change (Winters, 2003).



## **Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leaders are distinguished not by their techniques or styles but by their integrity and savvy (Evans, 1996). Integrity is a fundamental consistency between personal beliefs, organizational aims, and working behaviors. Savvy is practical competence, "a hard-to-quantify cluster of qualities that includes craft knowledge, life experience, native intelligence, common sense, intuition, courage, and the capacity to handle things" (Evans, 1996, p. 184). Gardner (1995) related the question of authenticity to the issue of embodiment; leaders who do not embody their message are not authentic and will be found out eventually. Terry (1993) professed that authenticity is genuineness and a refusal to engage in self-deceptions. Terry believes leadership's primary purpose is to enhance one's authenticity as a person in service to community and stated, "If leadership is to enhance authenticity, it must embody what authenticity requires" (Terry, 1993, p. 151).

Cooper and Sawaf (1996) described the specific personal characteristics that define authentic leaders. Authentic leaders manifest high levels of:

- Self-awareness of feelings and actions.
- Self-control of feeling and gratifications needs.

- Sensitivity and empathy towards others.
- Trustworthiness toward and in relationships.
- Openness to new ideas and experiences.
- Integrity to move words into action.
- Intuition that puts them in touch with their subconscious.
- Resilience and adaptability in the face of disappointments.
- Renewal and optimism when faced with the challenge of change.
- Laughter and fun especially during difficult challenges.

In an effort to develop a reliable and valid measure of authentic leadership, Lagan (2007) examined the relationship between authentic leadership and relevant variables. His findings confirmed one of the basic assumptions of authentic leadership theory by demonstrating that the modeling of authentic actions can result in positive follower outcomes (Lagan, 2007). Leading by example consistently emerged as the strongest predictor of follower outcomes in tests of mediation. Leading by example has also shown to mediate the relationship between

authentic leadership and followers' perceptions of the leader's ethics (Lagan, 2007).

### **Ethical Leadership**

The ethical challenges that schools are confronted with are enormous. High levels of student achievement accountability, increased diversity, budgetary constraints, local, state and federal political climate and regulations have made schools more complex and overextended (McGhee & Nelson, 2005). Additional challenges include competition in a global society, demographic changes within cultural conflicts of educational and political ideals, and mandated and politically-implied school reform. While these challenges are daunting enough, superintendents must lead within a system of intrinsic structures and institutional culture that distinguishes schools as organizations in need of guiding principles to apply the appropriate leadership style to a given situation (Starratt, 2004).

School leaders, especially superintendents, are held to higher standards mostly because of their position as a public official. Their ethical and moral behaviors are held to such a high standard due, in part, to being entrusted with the public's money and the education of the public's children (Ramsey, 2006). Ramsey identified four reasons why

the public expects school leaders to be honest, truthful, ethical, moral, and upstanding:

1. School leaders are the most public of public officials. They are more visible than most other leaders. The doors of the school are open to almost everyone. School leaders are known throughout the community; they are close, available and accessible.
2. Principled people expect principled leaders. The teaching profession tends to attract many idealistic men and women who champion family values and espouse old-fashioned virtues such as truthfulness, honesty, fidelity, and loyalty. Many teachers will look up only to leaders who share their values and who demonstrate these characteristics in their daily living.
3. School leaders are still teachers. People want their schools to exemplify the best that our society can offer. Principals and superintendents set the tone for the entire organization by modeling ethical and principled conduct; they influence everyone else's behavior.
4. Children are involved. The public not only entrust school leaders with their tax money and community

facilities, they place in their school's their most precious resource their children and their children's future.

High (2005) conducted a study where 56 of the 62 participants identified critical thinking as the most important ethical principle for educational leaders. Critical thinking is associated with a complex process which promotes ethical conduct including thinking and acting ethically. Maxwell (2003) simplified the complexities of ethics by establishing a foundation for one's personal and professional values by asking a single question; much like the Golden Rule. "How would I like to be treated in this situation?" (p. 16). Starratt (2004) defined ethics as:

a study of the underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles, and values that support a moral way of life; the product of that study is an ethics - a summary ordering of those principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values into a logical dynamic that characterizes the moral way of life. Moral leadership involves the moral activity embedded in the conduct of leading; ethical leadership is the attempt to act from the principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values in the leader's espoused system of ethics (p. 5).

In leadership, character matters. Leadership provides a moral compass and, over the long term, a moral compass that reads true and best serves both personal development and the common good (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). In order to serve effectively, superintendents must possess a wide and deep set of skills and knowledge, including an effective personal leadership style. In assessing the ethical dimensions of leadership, Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) asserted that there are two principle criteria: 1) the characteristic and virtue of leaders and; 2) the legitimacy of social processes, or the interpersonal dynamics that govern social moral choices.

At the core of living ethically is a personal mission statement or philosophy concerning what a person wants to be (character), and do (contributions and achievements), as well as values or principles upon which being and doing are based (Covey, 1991). DeVore (2006) suggests ethics and values are essentially one's belief system and are rooted in family values and developed through the influences of ethical people. DeVore studied the perceptions and insights of four practicing superintendents. Consistent themes that emerged were the superintendent exercised concern for others, a decision-making process belief system, and an ethic of care.

## **Professional Codes and Standards**

Superintendents must contend with political decision making at the local, state, and federal level, the social and economic composition of the communities served by the district, legal considerations, and the cultural make-up of the district (Hessel & Holloway, 2002). Many other professions have one basic principle driving the profession. In medicine, for example, it is "first, do no harm." In law, it is the assertion that all clients deserve "zealous representation." In education, the moral imperative is to serve the "best interest of the student" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

The American Association of School Administrator's *Statement of Ethics for School Administrators* (2007) begins with the assertion, "an educational administrator's professional behavior must conform to an ethical code," and has as its first tenet, "the educational administrator makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions." The Pennsylvania Department of Education's *Code of Professional Practice and Conduct of Educators* (Professional Standards and Practice Commission, 1992) makes explicit the values of the education profession. As part of the Code's purpose, "professional educators recognize the obligation to provide

services and conduct themselves in a manner which places the highest esteem on human rights and dignity" and "recognize their primary responsibility to the student and the development of the student's potential" (Professional Standards and Practice Commission, 1992, Section 3(a)). Pennsylvania enacted into law an 11 section code of conduct called: "*The Pennsylvania Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators.*" In essence, when educators receive a teaching certificate, they make a moral commitment to uphold the values of the education profession described in the Pennsylvania school code under this chapter (Appendix A).

Serving the best interests of the student is consistent with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) 2008 document *Standards for School Leaders*. Standard 5 states, "a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 18). An established professional code, the ISLLC standards specify the basic, prescribed knowledge, dispositions, and performances expected of educational leaders. Designed to provide a professional framework for school administrators, one of the standards requires leaders to have a strong



commitment to ethical behavior and serve as moral agents and social advocates for students, families and communities (Hessel & Holloway, 2002).

The ISLLC Standards (Appendix B) are nationally recognized model standards for state policies of education administration certification and licensure. The standards are published by the Council of State School Officers (CCSSO). The CCSSO is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials that head state departments of elementary and secondary education.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school administrators to cabinet members, professors, and aspiring school system leaders. A revised Code of Ethics (Appendix C) was approved at the March 1, 2007, AASA Governing Board meeting demonstrating the organization's commitment to providing its membership professional ethical leadership.

Public school superintendents must be able to make sound ethical decisions every day. Davis (2007) determined the status and need for ethical standards in educational leadership and administration programs. Being able to

follow self-imposed standards and to act in a fair and consistent manner were concerns raised by the participants. Making decisions related to fairness, honesty, and equality were predominant themes that emerged when participants identified ethical dilemmas. Those ethical dilemmas almost always involved student needs and decisions impacting individuals in negative ways. Davis found a need for aspiring public school administrators in educational leadership programs to be provided ethics instruction noting, "A clearly defined program of ethics education is essential to ensure that administrators recognize the ethical nature of their work" (Davis, 2007, p. 70).

### **Educational Reform**

The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, conducted by the National Commission on Excellence, had a strong impact on how public education in America is conducted today. The report led to comprehensive school reform efforts, was the impetus for the academic standards movement, drew attention to the importance of education policy, and led to a focus on school accountability (Weiss, 2003).

The report acknowledged that the educational foundation of our society was being eroded by a "rising tide of mediocrity" that threatens our very future as a

nation and a people (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, para. 1). As an example, a variety of reform movements such as open classroom, whole language, and site based management attempted to correct the existing delivery system by focusing on centralized controls and standards (Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin & Cusick, 1986). Another wave of reform movements focused on restructuring school initiatives such as site-based management, educational choice, and teacher empowerment (Bacharach, 1990). Many of these restructuring efforts were ineffective due to poor implementation and lack of focus (Prestine & Bowen, 1993).

The Koret Task Force, a group organized by the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, studied the status of education reform including the effects of *A Nation at Risk*. Their report states that there was inconsistent implementation and only minor gains in academic achievement during the time following the report. The Koret Task Force argues that the report, *A Nation at Risk*, did a good job of pointing out the problems in American schools, but was not able to identify the fundamental reasons for the problems or address the political influences in the public education system (Peterson, 2003).

The report *A Nation at Risk* signaled the recognition of educational performance as a national concern and

eventually led to President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) bipartisan education reform initiative in public education. NCLB calls for academic standards in reading and math and for every student to be proficient in these areas by 2014. Annual testing results are publicly reported and show which schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The scores of student subgroups, like minorities, students with Individual Education Plans (IEP), economically disadvantaged students, and non-English speaking students are reported separately. Schools that fail to make AYP, whether by overall student group scores or by any subgroup, face sanctions ranging from warnings to the takeover of all school operations by the state.

As described earlier, the report *A Nation at Risk* predicted the need for educational systems to undergo systemic reform including the way educational administration was viewed. School superintendent and principal roles were managerial and administrative. During that same period of time, other issues had a significant impact on the need to reform education including the Supreme Court rulings on the inclusion of handicapped and educational opportunities for all, the shift to a more post-industrial society, and the advance of the global marketplace. In addition, the increasing reliance on

technology and a growing infatuation with market-based solutions to social needs posed significant new challenges for educators. These issues and challenges, as well as dealing with a changing society, could have possibly marked the reform of educational administration and required a new type of leadership in our schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

*A Nation at Risk* report began to redefine the characteristics of an effective school leader as a strong educator anchored in the central issues of student learning and teaching and school improvements. NCLB reinforced *A Nation at Risk* for school leaders to become social advocates and moral agents for the children and the communities in which they serve. Effective school leaders make strong connections with other people, valuing and caring for others as individuals and as members of the school community (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

In 2001, President George W. Bush presented his NCLB blueprint for education reform. NCLB priorities include: increased accountability for student academic performance; a focus on researched-based proven methods; increased flexible funding at the local level; and empowering parents. Much of the accountability for producing results

is placed closest to where the activity is taking place, at the school and district level.

Today's superintendents play a critical role in developing school reform initiatives. Superintendents must exercise leadership skills and ethical decision making based on reform efforts that are in the best interest of student achievement.

### **Effective Educational Leadership**

Effective superintendents need to create a culture in which leadership is distributed and encouraged; communication is honest and open; there is focus on the use of data, teamwork, and researched-based best practices; and emphasis on ethical, principled, and goal-oriented action (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007). Adding to educational reform is the movement to create more community-focused, caring-centered schools and to move away from the established notions of school bureaucracies (Hessel & Holloway, 2002). Waters and Marzano (2006) developed a working paper titled *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*. They concluded that a substantial and positive relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement exists when the superintendent, district office staff, and school board members do the

"right work" in the "right way" (p.20). The four major findings from the study were:

1. District level leadership matters - Researchers found a statistically significant positive relationship between district leadership and student achievement.
2. Effective superintendents focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts - Researchers identified responsibilities related to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals that have a statistically significant correlation with average student academic achievement.
3. Superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student achievement.
4. Autonomy is defined - Superintendents may set clear, non-negotiable goals for learning and instruction, yet provide school leadership teams with the responsibility and authority for determining how to meet those goals. (p. 3-4)

Shannon and Bylsma (2004) identified effective school leadership by the superintendent as one of the four central factors that can improve schools by "setting the stage and tone" (p. 14). The study identified the role of the superintendent to establish and communicate focus,

parameter, priorities, and expectations important in leading educational reform.

Effective superintendents are strong advocates for children while performing multiple roles and setting and carrying out district initiatives through strong partnerships (Ohio Department of Education, 2008). Superintendents engender trust through competence, integrity, ethics, and high expectations (American Association of School Administrators, 1993). What they do and say influences the moral development of the entire organization and community in which they serve.

### **Summary**

Superintendents must be many things to many people. Most importantly, they must provide leadership that provides moral uplifting of their followers and moves them to share in the mutually-rewarding visions of success as they fulfill the most fundamental purpose of school. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ISLLC) define the professional practice that school leaders need to develop skills, knowledge, and values essential to support the entire school community. Transformational leadership provides the theoretical foundation for superintendents to lead by modeling,



mentoring and coaching the education community to meet goals and share in the vision of the organization.

A variety of leadership theories and definitions of what a leader is and does are addressed in this chapter. A definition of leadership should transcend all roles and levels of leadership positions. Covey (2004) defined leadership as "communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves" (p.98). Gardner (1995) defined a leader as a person who, by word or personal example, markedly influences the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of a significant number of his/her fellow human beings. Heifetz (1994) saw leadership as the orchestration of people and the mobilization of organizational resources to face difficult problems. Collins' Level 5 Leader must embody all five levels, be driven to produce sustained results, display workman-like diligence and compelling modesty, and be self-effacing and understated (Collins, 2001). Starratt (2004) viewed an educational leader's work as a moral activity that engages the entire school community. All view leadership as influencing others by genuine words and actions, motivating others to behave in a way that drives them to perform their role in the organization to their fullest capacity and beyond.

Hoyle (2007) contends, transformational leaders create an environment where persons are empowered to fulfill their highest professional needs and are more encouraged to become members of a supportive learning community. Superintendents must create a common shared understanding of the purpose of schools and commit to the ownership of a set of beliefs and goals that focus everyone's attention (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007). In order to effectively lead schools, superintendents need to display courage by relying on ethical principles when making decisions that are in the best interest of students.

In Chapter Three, a description of the research design and methodology to be utilized in this study is presented. A multi-case study provided this researcher an opportunity to gain a perspective from practicing superintendents how they practice ethical leadership.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design and methodology of this study that examined the influence of ethics on public school superintendents' practice of effective educational leadership. A qualitative, multi-case study approach was used to inform the research questions. A statement of the problem and purpose of the study provides background information concerning the research questions.

The population and sample are identified and the procedure for conducting the study is detailed. The use of a pilot study to validate the field interview questions is outlined; and specific procedures, data collection, and data analysis issues are addressed.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Superintendents who are leading schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century grapple with defining their own personal and professional code of ethics, taking into account the diverse backgrounds of the students and communities they lead (Nash, 1996; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). It is often difficult to separate professional from personal ethical codes, especially when making a professional judgment that has the best interest of the student at the center. Actions taken by superintendents are likely to be strongly

influenced by personal values (Begley & Johansson, 1998; Willower & Licatra, 1997) and personal codes of ethics built on personal values and experiences (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1997, 1998, 2001). Leading in today's society creates an expectation of educational administrators to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in consideration of individual personal principles, values and ethics, as well as standards set forth by the profession, when making complex and multidimensional decisions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

Professional codes of ethics serve as guideposts for the professional organizations and their members, giving statements about their image and character (Lebacqz, 1985). Professional codes of ethics embody "the highest moral ideals of the profession; presenting an ideal image of the moral character of both the profession and the professional" (Nash, 1996, p. 96). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) believe educational leaders should be given the opportunity to develop their own personal code of ethics based on life stories and critical incidents. They also believe educational leaders should develop their own professional code based on the experiences and expectations of their working lives as well as a consideration of their personal codes.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as American society becomes even more demographically diverse, educational leaders will, more than ever, need to be able to develop, foster and lead tolerant and democratic schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Foster (1986) expressed the seriousness and importance of ethics in educational administration when he wrote, "Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life; that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas" (p. 33).

Educational leaders are responsible for cultivating a caring and productive learning environment within the school for all students while sustaining working relationships with students, teachers, parents, district officials, and other stakeholders in an ethical and moral manner. Moral leadership involves the moral activity embedded in the conduct of leading. "Ethical leadership is the attempt to act from the principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values in the leader's espoused system of ethics" (Starratt, 2004, p. 5).

Public school superintendents are faced with ethical challenges in every aspect of the job. A growing number of standards of expectations, laws and regulations, policies and procedures have resulted from a myriad of ethical dilemmas surrounding student proficiency, student safety,

increasing diversity, and school policy implementation (Furman, 2003). Langlois (2004) stated:

One of the ironies of school administration is that despite the numerous rules, regulations, laws and policies that have been established to channel decision-making democratically, it is precisely because of this legal and administrative maze that one's faculty of judgment could conceivably disappear if everything continues to be codified leaving little room for individual judgment. (p 78)

Superintendents are at the pinnacle of educational leadership in the public schools. As such, their leadership and decision-making process will be scrutinized for adherence to ethical principles and professional codes when making decisions that are expected to be in the best interest of the students. Mijares (1996) asserted that, "ethical problems are especially fragile and shameful when they involve school administrators because they occupy a high profile of public trust" (p.26). Moreover, if there is anything that undermines trust, "it is the feeling that people at the top [superintendents] lack integrity and are without a solid sense of ethics." (Bennis, 1994, p. 164)

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics of superintendents in the leadership of the districts they serve. Data were collected primarily through a qualitative, multi-case study process allowing this researcher to gain the perspective from public school superintendents. The findings of this study will add to the existing body of research on ethical leadership in the public education environment.

### **Research Questions**

School leaders, especially superintendents, are confronted with ethical dilemmas daily. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics practiced by superintendents and what factors, experiences, or skills influence their ethical decision-making process. Specifically, this study will attempt to discover, explore, and clarify the following questions:

1. What are the values and beliefs that influence the educational leadership by superintendents?
2. How do superintendents maintain ethical standards while coping with the pressures of the job?

3. What core ethical beliefs are associated with the decision-making strategies of superintendents' educational leadership?
4. How do superintendents deal with situations that conflict with their own personal or professional ethics?
5. What are the similarities or differences related to how superintendents resolve ethical dilemmas?

Table 1 demonstrates how the research questions (what is needed to know?), the issues (why is this important to know?), and the lessons to be learned from the data collected (how is data gathered?) are related.

In order to answer the research questions, this researcher will use a qualitative approach. A multi-case study design will provide a format where the influence of each superintendent's own personal and professional ethics can best be documented.

### **Research Design**

Campbell (1999) suggests "what ethical or moral leadership actually means in practice is seemingly difficult to identify, define, describe, achieve, and comprehend an elusive concept that may signify many and different things to many people" (p. 151). Qualitative research is an effective tool when attempting to understand



Table 1, *Research Questions Matrix*

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	How do I gather the data?
What are the personal values and beliefs that influence the educational leadership by superintendents?	To gain an understanding of the fundamental values and principles that guide educational leadership.	Analysis of data from interviews, field notes, and strategic plan.
How do superintendents maintain ethical standards while coping with the pressures of the job?	To determine the application and commitment of personal and professional ethical standards.	Analysis of data from interviews, follow-up questions, and field notes.
What core ethical beliefs are associated with decision-making strategies of superintendents' educational leadership?	To determine the influence of professional codes or standards on effective ethical leadership.	Analysis of professional codes or standards of ethical behaviors from interview transcripts.
How do superintendents deal with situations that conflict with their own personal or professional ethics?	To determine personal or professional ethical commitments superintendents adhere to when guiding districts toward their mission, vision, and purpose.	Analysis and coding of ethical behaviors from interview transcripts.
What are the similarities or differences related to how superintendents resolve ethical dilemmas?	To assess whether ethical standards are congruent among effective educational leaders.	Compare analysis and coding of interview transcripts.

how individuals perceive and interact with their environment (Creswell, 2003; Gay, 1996; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003). Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, and Dillon (2003) described qualitative research as that which encapsulates the influence of circumstances or settings on a variable.

This researcher used a qualitative research design utilizing a multi-case study approach to explore the influence of ethics on practicing superintendents. A multi-case study approach allowed this researcher to gather comparative data from a minimum of four participants. Creswell (1998) suggested no more than four cases when conducting a multi-case study. "What motivates the researcher to consider a larger number of cases is the idea of *generalizability*, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers" (p. 63). This multi-case study added more value to the existing body of research beyond the circumstances of a single-case study, since they are commonly criticized for being unique and idiosyncratic and, therefore, limited to the single case (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006).

Gay (1996) determined that "the qualitative researcher looks for categories, patterns, and themes which will facilitate a coherent synthesis of the data" (p. 277). Overall, the compilation of the data yields a rich, thick,

description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). In addition, a multi-case study may strengthen the findings through deliberate and contrasting comparisons of the data (Yin, 2003).

The theoretical foundation of this study is supported by the contentions of superintendents committing to their own personal ethics, reflecting upon professional codes and standards as guideposts, and providing leadership. Selected influence of ethical, moral, authentic, and transactional leadership theories also support the theoretical foundation of this study. However, transformational leadership provides a theoretical foundation for superintendents leading in today's complex schools where the interests of students come first, and where followers seek an inspirational leader who will challenge them, provide empowerment, and encourage high performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

### **Participants and Setting**

Practicing Pennsylvania public school superintendents who are members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) with renewed contracts served as potential participants for this study. PASA's primary focus is supporting top executives [superintendents] in public schools in Pennsylvania. It designs its programs and

services so that school leaders have a supportive network for dealing with the complexity, responsibility, and challenges of their role (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, 2006).

Superintendents who are members of PASA share the mission, values, and Code of Ethics (Appendix C) of their parent organization The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) mentioned earlier in Chapter II. As a member of PASA superintendents would be exposed to the need for ethical leadership in schools through professional development opportunities and publications provided to its members.

Superintendents with renewed contracts would have experience dealing with ethical decision-making situations and have a high approval rating by their boards possibly explaining the continuation of their service. They are involved in the most current ethical dilemmas providing the richest data possible for this study. It needs to be noted that years of experience do not necessarily equate with being ethical, merely that superintendents with more years of experience would have more opportunities facing and resolving ethical dilemmas.

Data collection took place in the district office where the superintendents work. The setting was quiet, free

from distractions, and conducive to audio-taping and accurately recording information.

### **Population and Sampling**

Although there are thousands of superintendents nationally, less than 500 in Pennsylvania alone, superintendents who are members of Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) with renewed contracts served as the population from which this researcher drew a sample.

As mentioned earlier, superintendents who are members of PASA would be exposed to state and national standards of practice in a wide range of school governance issues including an established code of ethics. PASA is actively committed to achieving quality public education for all learners through strategic advocacy of pertinent positions, forward-thinking professional development, and vigorous support of its members (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, 2006).

Selecting PASA members as a sample criterion provides this researcher with confidence that potential participants are exposed to a credible and respected professional organization's standards and practice. This is not to say that only superintendents who are members of PASA would adhere to professional standards and practices.

In order to choose the sample of superintendents who are members of PASA with renewed contracts, this researcher used purposeful sampling or what LeCompte and Preissle (1993) call criterion-based selection. Patton (1990) suggests selecting a sampling strategy which allows the researcher to learn as much about the issues that are important to the study as possible. Merriam (1998) determined that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). Purposeful sampling allowed this researcher to select participants who presented their experiences, in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to the participants' experiences (Seidman, 1998).

A list of practicing Pennsylvania superintendents was obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Education Names and Addresses (EdNA) website. The EdNA website contains each superintendent's contract status as "new" or "renewal" with start date and expiration. Superintendents with new status were eliminated from the sample pool due to the fact that their contracts would be 3 to 5 years according to Pennsylvania School Code, 24 PS

10-1073, Manner of Election or Approval (Levin, 2008).

A 2009-2010 membership directory from the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) was obtained from the Association. Superintendents listed in the membership directory were cross-referenced with the list with renewal status from the EdNA website. To avoid the specter of a conflict of interest, the superintendent under whom this researcher serves was not included in the prospective pool to be contacted for participation in this study. Of the approximate 500 public school superintendents in Pennsylvania, 114 were found to have renewal status and members of PASA.

### **Contacting Participants**

Proper protocol was followed to safeguard the protection of the participants through the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. A letter was mailed to potential participants inviting them to participate in the study and explaining their rights and protections. Included in the mailing was a brief description of the researcher and the study. In addition, a consent form to participate with a stamped, self-addressed envelope was also included for those willing to participate.

Once willing participants returned their signed consent agreeing to take part in the study, the scheduling of interviews took place. If more than the minimum number of participants responded, the required four were randomly selected by pulling numbers assigned to each from a hat. The researcher phoned and emailed the willing participants to introduce himself and schedule the interviews. The interviews were the primary means for collecting data.

### **Participants Protection**

Confidentiality of data was maintained by disassociating participants' identifying information from all data collected. There are no known potential risks to participants as a result of participating in this study. None of the protected population or sensitive subjects were included in this study. The age range for participants is 35-65, and both males and females may be participants.

All potential participants received an informed consent form. The informed consent included a statement that participation is voluntary and procedures for withdrawal from the study at any time. The informed consent also included any known risks and assurance procedures of confidentiality.



## **Data Collection**

This researcher used open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview setting as the primary means for collecting data from each of the participants. When conducting qualitative research, follow-up questions may evolve during the course of the interview creating rich, descriptive data (Gay, 1996). Descriptive data obtained in opened-ended questions allows the researcher to obtain information concerning the status of the perceptions of the participants and describes individual experiences (Slavin, 2007).

The field interviews for each of the consenting participants was conducted at the participant's convenience for approximately two hours in their office. Participants received a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview in order for them to possibly formulate responses and put them at ease. Field interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were provided the opportunity to receive drafts of the transcriptions to review for accuracy prior to coding for emerging themes. Table 2 correlates the research questions with the interview questions that produced data for the coding categories.

Table 2, *Research Interview Questions Relationship*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What are the values and beliefs that influence the educational leadership by superintendents? 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9 and 10	1. What is your philosophy of public education? What professional characteristics do you expect all educators to possess?
How do superintendents maintain ethical standards while coping with the pressures of the job? 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9 and 10	2. How would you define your role as superintendent? 3. What experiences or interactions do you credit from your past that influences your values today?
What core ethical beliefs are associated with the decision-making strategies of superintendents' educational leadership? 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10	4. Describe your philosophy of life? How do you perceive your philosophy of life in relationship to your philosophy of education? 5. Describe how you preserve "what's best for kids" when making decisions? What are the most difficult ethical dilemmas you face as a superintendent?
How do superintendents deal with situations that conflict with their own personal or professional ethics? 1,2,4,6,7,8,9 and 10	6. What guiding principles do you reflect upon when faced with difficult decisions? 7. What expectations do you set for yourself when resolving ethical dilemmas?
What are the similarities or differences related to how superintendents resolve ethical dilemmas? 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9 and 10	8. Elaborate on your districts' "Mission Statement" as part of your strategic plan, as it relates to your professional philosophy. 9. How would you define "leading effectively"? 10. What advice would you give aspiring superintendents regarding leading ethically?

Written field notes were taken during the interview sessions. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert, "The meaning and context of the interview can be captured more completely if, as a supplement to each interview, the researcher writes out field notes" (p. 108). In addition, a copy of each superintendent's district's strategic plan, including the visions, missions, and goals, was obtained through the district's webpage. Reviewing each strategic plan prior to the interview allowed this researcher to compare and contrast the reflections of the participant's responses. Demographic information about each superintendent's district was also researched. Awareness on the part of this researcher of the environmental and socio-economic conditions of the district may promote dialogue that results in rich data.

A pilot study was conducted by this researcher to formulate interview questions for the purpose of gathering data that answered the research questions. The pilot study is detailed further in the following section.

### **Pilot Study**

Careful planning and small-scale pilots are essential in developing interview questions that will elicit meaningful and accurate responses (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this purpose, the researcher conducted five pilot

interviews with practicing superintendents following proper Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board protocol and permission to conduct the pilot.

The pilot study gave the researcher an opportunity to understand how the research process will result in the type of data needed to answer the research questions (Slavin, 2007). From a practical standpoint, the pilot study gave the researcher an opportunity to revise, eliminate or restructure the interview protocol. The pilot study also gave the researcher interviewing skills practice and resolved any potential logistical concerns such as a quiet location free of distractions and using audio-recording equipment. Piloting helps ensure a stronger research design, develop comprehensive interviewing techniques, and ensures the researcher that the data collected will answer the research questions (Seidman, 1998).

The structured, in-depth pilot interviews with each of the five consenting participants were conducted at the participants' conveniences in their district office or in a setting appropriate and agreeable to conduct an interview. The setting for the interview was quiet, conducive to confidentiality, and comfortable for the participants to develop genuine dialog. Field notes were handwritten to help analyze the effectiveness of the questions asked and

to record the suggestions of the participants on how to revise and improve the interview questions. The researcher digitally recorded and saved each pilot interview to reference later in order to ensure accuracy of the respondents' interviews.

### **Interview Questions**

The pilot study proved to be a benefit by providing the researcher with valuable insight into the interview questions. One of the recurring suggestions was that the more important questions be asked as follow-ups to the initial question. Seidman (1998) stated, "It is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories" (p. 66). Interview questions developed as a result of the pilot study are as follows.

1. What is your philosophy of public education?  
What professional characteristics do you expect all educators to possess?
2. How would you define your role as superintendent?
3. What experiences or interactions do you credit from your past that influence your values today?
4. Describe your philosophy of life? How do you perceive your philosophy of life in relationship to your philosophy of education?

5. Describe how you preserve "what's best for kids" when making decisions?

What are the most difficult ethical dilemmas you face as a superintendent?

6. What guiding principles do you reflect upon when faced with difficult decisions?

7. What expectations do you set for yourself when resolving ethical dilemmas?

8. Elaborate on your districts' "Mission Statement" as part of your strategic plan, as it relates to your professional philosophy.

9. How would you define "leading effectively"?

10. What advice would you give aspiring superintendents regarding leading ethically?

Maxwell (1996) contends that "the research questions formulate what you want to understand; the interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding" (p. 74). The development of good interview questions requires creativity and insight, rather than a mechanical translation of the research questions into an interview guide. "It depends fundamentally on how the interview questions actually work in practice" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 74).

Along with responses to the questions asked during the field interview, written field notes were also collected. This enabled the raw detailed data to be analyzed later.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the aspect of qualitative research that most clearly distinguishes it from other traditions of research (Maxwell, 1996). A major trait of conducting qualitative research is that data is analyzed continually, throughout the study, from conceptualization through the entire data collection phase, into the interpretation and writing phases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative data analysis consists of "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 10). Reducing and condensing data, thereby beginning to seek meaning, should begin as the study begins and continue throughout data collection.

This researcher used the constant-comparison method of categorizing, or coding data as they are collected, and continually examined data for examples of similar cases and patterns. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) contends that researchers using the constant-comparison method look for patterns from the categorizing of data. The initial step in analyzing the data collected for this study was the reading

of the interview transcripts, field notes, and other documents and coding the data into categories of themes or relationships.

In qualitative research, the goal of coding is to organize the data and rearrange it into categories that facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and aid in the development of theoretical concepts (Strauss, 1987). These codes or categories emerged generally from the data beginning with the field interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding allows the researcher to manage the data by labeling, storing, and retrieving it according to the defined category.

For the purpose of this study, the three pillars of ethics of leadership identified by Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) served as the initial coding categories. The three pillars are: (1) the moral character of the leader, (2) the ethical values imbedded in the leader's vision, articulation, and programs, and (3) the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and actions that the superintendents engage in pursuit to their core mission. Bass and Steidlmeier's pillars of ethics of leadership align closely with the theoretical framework of transformational leadership proposed by this study



as the foundation for superintendents to manage and lead today's complex schools.

Researchers are aware that "procedures for collecting and analyzing data in qualitative research are somewhat subjective because investigators collect data by drawing on their capacities to observe and interact with other humans and the environment" (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993, p. 199). For this reason, issues of validity and reliability in the context of qualitative research need addressed.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity in a qualitative study is a goal rather than a product (Maxwell, 1996). Although little can be done to combat challenges concerning the generalization of case studies, "most writers suggest that qualitative research should be judged as credible and confirmable as opposed to valid and reliable" (Merriam, 1988, p. 85).

Triangulating the data lends internal validity and reliability to a study (Gay, 1996; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003). In qualitative research, internal validity is the congruency of the researcher's findings with reality, where reality is the researcher's interpretation of the participant's perceptions or understanding of the topic of interest (Merriam, 2002).

"Reliability is confirmed by determining if the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam 2002, p. 27).

### **Triangulation**

In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). When collecting case study data, triangulation helps establish converging lines of evidence to make the findings of the study as robust as possible (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2006).

An advantage of a multi-case study is to have all of the sources of evidence, such as the field interviews, field notes, and the mission, vision and values of each superintendent's strategic plan compared to each individual case study data. Gay (1996) defines triangulation as "the use of multiple methods, data collection strategies, or data sources to crosscheck information" (p. 217).

## **Summary**

This chapter defines the design and methodology of this study in order to examine the ethical leadership characteristics of superintendents. This qualitative multi-case study approach was an appropriate method since it permitted this researcher to focus on issues in depth and in enough detail to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions.

Participants were selected based on purposeful sampling in order to gather data from practicing superintendents in Pennsylvania who are members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. A minimum of four participants with not less than 6 years of continued service in the same district were selected.

Through a pilot study, interview questions were developed and refined to answer the research questions of this study. The overriding theme of those interview questions is to investigate the leadership ethics of superintendents.

Data analysis of a qualitative research study requires the data to be analyzed continually. Using the constant-comparison method of categorizing, this researcher arranged the data into categories as it was collected by coding the data into patterns.

Chapter four reveals the findings of the data collected that was analyzed to demonstrate connection to this study's problem, purpose and address the research questions. Valid and reliable data resulted in sufficient detail to add to the existing body of research in the area of ethical leadership behaviors of practicing public school superintendents.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of personal and professional ethics on the leadership of public school superintendents. A multi-case, qualitative research design is used to gather data from four practicing public school superintendents. Transformational leadership theory and the three pillars of ethics of leadership identified by Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) served as the theoretical framework from which the data were viewed. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the core personal values and beliefs that influence the ethical leadership of superintendents?
2. How do professional codes of ethics influence the educational leadership of superintendents?
3. What core ethical beliefs can be credited to the effectiveness of superintendents' educational leadership?
4. To what extent are ethical behaviors consistent among superintendents?

The participating superintendents were interviewed at their respective district offices. Each superintendent's mission, vision, and goals, as they pertained to their respective district's strategic plan, were collected. As

members of Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), [one of the criteria for participation in this study] each superintendent would have knowledge of the parent organizations' ethical standards (Appendix 3). The information gleaned from the interviews, field notes [hand written notes of observations], and documents [strategic plan's mission, vision, and goals; professional organization's codes and standards] was considered using the constant-comparative method of categorizing data as they were collected and continually examined for examples of similar patterns (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The constant-comparative method allowed the researcher to continually look for information that represents a pattern until no new information provides further insight into that pattern (Creswell, 1998).

### **Collecting Data Protocol**

The researcher contacted potential participants for this study by mail with a letter of introduction stating the purpose of the study and the criteria for their selection. Also included was a copy of the interview questions and a letter of informed consent to be returned upon agreeing to participate. A follow-up e-mail was sent when a signed consent was received acknowledging the

receipt of the consent and thanking each for volunteering to participate. Additional contacts were made through e-mail and phone calls to set up and confirm interview dates, times, and locations.

The field interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience for two hours at their district offices. Field interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. The audio-recording of each interview was transcribed, and each participant was provided the opportunity to review drafts of the transcriptions for accuracy in order to demonstrate credibility of the data collected (Seidman, 1998). Upon arrival at each location where the interviews took place, an informal discussion was held to answer any questions the participants may have had concerning the study and to review the voluntary consent form.

Field notes of observations were handwritten during each interview providing additional insight into the interactions with the participants allowing this researcher to capture the context and meaning of each interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The information recorded as field notes was helpful in recreating the interview experience, identifying themes, and supporting other sources that triangulated the data. Each participant was asked the same

10 interview questions. Follow-up questions were asked for clarification or to expound upon a topic that emerged.

Copies of the participants' strategic plans were obtained through their respective school district's web site. The strategic plan provided a comprehensive perspective of the vision, mission, and goals established by the district and further triangulated the data from the field notes and interview transcripts.

### **Participants**

In order to ensure confidentiality, subjects were given fictitious names. A reference code is also assigned to each participant in order to identify quotes where the name was not included. (See Table 3.) Additional codes are assigned to data obtained from field notes [handwritten observations], and documents [strategic plans; professional organization's codes/standards] in Table 3. The following profiles of the actual superintendents provides background information on each. A brief profile of each superintendent's district is provided in Table 4 using a fictitious district name. All participants happen to be males; therefore, any reference to "him", "his" or "he" is not to be interpreted as gender insensitivity.



Table 3, *Reference Codes*

Superintendent's Name	Code
Dr. Abbot	S1
Dr. Barnes	S2
Dr. Clark	S3
Dr. Drake	S4
Field Notes (handwritten observations)	FN
Documents (Strategic plans, Professional organization's codes/standards)	DOC

**Dr. Abbot**

Dr. Abbot has a total of 28 years in public education—seven of those as superintendent. Liberty School District is Dr. Abbot's first superintendency and he is in his second contract. Dr. Abbot is a member of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA); Pennsylvania Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (PASCD); and, Pennsylvania Association of School Personnel Administrators (PASPA). He believes in surrounding himself with knowledgeable people, especially in areas where he may need to rely on their expertise.

**Dr. Barnes**

Dr. Barnes has nearly 39 years in education—the last eight of those years as a superintendent. He has worked in one other school district as a building administrator. Freedom School District is the first and only district where he has held the position of superintendent. Dr. Barnes is a member of PASA, PSBA, PASCD, and Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS). He relies on his experience and close, working relationships with other educational administrators, especially other superintendents, to solve issues and make ethical decisions.

**Dr. Clark**

Dr. Clark has a total of 39 years in education—15 of those years as a superintendent. Lincoln School District is the second district where he has served. He has held his current position for seven years and is in his second contract. Dr. Clark is a member of PASA, PSBA, PASCD, and PARSS. He believes in getting involved in all aspects of the job and that his experience as a building principal and curriculum director has benefited him significantly.

**Dr. Drake**

Dr. Drake has a total of 34 years in education. The last six of those years have been at Roosevelt School

District. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> district, all in Pennsylvania, in which he has served a total of 24 years as superintendent. Dr. Drake is a member of PASA, PSBA, PASCD, and Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO). He is confident in his abilities to lead school districts based on his experience as superintendent in two completely different districts.

Table 4, *Districts Profile*

Comparison Categories	Dr. Abbot Liberty School District	Dr. Barnes Freedom School District	Dr. Clark Lincoln School District	Dr. Drake Roosevelt School District
Number of Students	1,355	1,375	1,020	3,272
Number of Buildings	3 Total 1 HS 1 MS 1 Elem.	3 Total 1 HS 1 MS 1 Elem.	3 Total 1 HS 1 MS 1 Elem.	5 Total 1 HS 1 MS 3 Elem.
Number of Professional Staff	107	97	92	251
Designation	Rural	Rural	Rural	Suburban
Budget	\$13.3 million	\$14.2 million	\$13 million	\$51.1 million

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process. The initial step in analyzing the data collected for this study was listening to and transcribing the audio-recorded interviews. Next was reading the interview transcripts, reading written field notes of observations made during interviewing, reviewing the strategic plan documents and reviewing the ethical standards of PASA; then coding the data into themes or relationships. The goal of coding is to organize and arrange the data collected into useful categories or themes in order to support the theoretical concepts of the study (Strauss, 1987).

Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillars of ethics of leadership and transformational leadership are the theoretical framework proposed by this study as the foundation for superintendents to manage and lead today's complex schools. The ethics of leadership identified by Bass and Steidlmeier, served as the coding categories. The three pillars are: (1) the moral character of the leader, (2) the ethical values embedded in the leader's vision, articulation, and programs, and (3) the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and actions that the superintendents engage in pursuit of their core mission.

## **Themes and Topics**

Once the data from the various sources were analyzed, two general themes emerged; (1) an ethic of responsibility and (2) preserving principles and integrity. Related to the themes are the relationships to the theoretical foundation that supports this study regarding the practice of ethical leadership; including transformational leadership theory and personal and professional codes for guiding the educational leadership of public school superintendents.

These two themes are interconnected and related to the topics that evolved from the questions asked during the field interviews. The topics include: guiding principles, personal values, philosophy of life, leadership, ethical dilemmas, and advice from the participants.

### **Guiding Principles**

In order to lead schools effectively, superintendents need to rely on personal and professional ethical standards as guiding principles when confronted with the challenge of making decisions that are in the best interest of students. Educational administrative organizations provide guiding principles in the form of codes and standards for administrators

to reflect upon. In education, the moral imperative is to serve the "best interest of the student" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 23). Responses from the superintendents demonstrate their moral character—the first of Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillars of ethical leadership.

Each superintendent was asked to state his philosophy of public education. Dr. Barnes seemed surprised by his own quick and short answer (FN) that, "it is the first duty of public education to serve students and families. I don't know how to say it better than that." Another participant responded, "I believe public education needs to be an experience for students—experience as much as possible what is right and what's wrong" (S3).

Dr. Abbot expressed a more global view of his philosophy of public education. He believes public education is here to serve communities (FN):

Public education serves society, and it serves kids. We have a very important role in the development of the future of not only the local community, but of our state and of our government and for the future and direction this country is going.

Dr. Drake believes, "it is our job to do everything we can to give each and every child an opportunity to be successful when they leave." Dr. Drake sees students coming from different backgrounds and experiences with "varying preparation, intellects, potential, and capabilities."

Each participant was asked, "What guiding principles do you reflect upon when faced with difficult decisions?" Their responses indicated a high level of ethical responsibility to the work of the superintendent. Dr. Abbot commented that he focuses on students and student achievement. "The focus is on what will make students successful." Dr. Barnes responded, "what's best for students, the families, the employees, the taxpayers, school board, in that order. Always hope for what's best for students is number one." Another response was, "Don't run away from it. Deal with it. Be responsible for what you do. Stand up for what you think is right and take the hit" (S3).

When asked specifically about the influence of educational professional organization's standards or codes of conduct, Dr. Drake's passion for preserving his integrity (FN) is reflected in his comments:

I don't need somebody to give me a list of what constitutes honor, integrity, dedication, commitment, loyalty, forthrightness. I don't need that. Those are time-tested virtues that have been around since man was on the earth. Sure, I use the PSBA [Pennsylvania School Board Association] standards and share with the board, and for the good board member it's fine. For the ones that are difficult, they don't care what is written. They believe they are as right as you are. That is human nature and that is the challenge.

Dr. Barnes response concerning professional organizations' codes and standards:

I think in different words they all say, "We want to do what's best for kids." If not, what are they doing in the education business? They are all good organizations with different purposes. So they are all good. And if I did read missions and philosophies, I would agree with them because I think they all get to the same place.

A copy of each superintendent's strategic plan was available during the interview in order for each participant to reflect upon the mission, vision, and goals. The superintendents were given a few minutes to



review their district's mission statement and asked to elaborate on how it related to their own philosophy of public education. [Every school district is required to develop and file with the Pennsylvania Department of Education a strategic plan once every six years and review that plan for revision at the mid-point of implementation.]

Dr. Clark acknowledged his participation in the development of the district's strategic plan. His ethical values are personally embedded [pillar two] (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998) in the mission and vision. "I put a lot of effort in this. We talked about consensus of stakeholders. We wanted this school district and community committed to a student-focused environment. I'm all about promoting lifelong learning skills in kids" (DOC, S3).

Dr. Abbot shared his involvement in developing his district's strategic plan. His response reflects his ethic of responsibility to facilitate the strategic planning process (FN). "Myself and all the administrators were involved in every step. We actually had a retreat to develop the plan." "Keeping the district's mission statement simple, yet on target with

the strategic plan, was very important to what the committee wanted" (FN), (DOC).

Many districts have these wordy, flowery mission statements. They look good on paper or on a plaque, but who remembers it? Everyone is onboard with the mission statement, *success is the only option*. Because no matter what it is, we want our students to be successful. No matter what it is, we want our teachers to be successful. No matter what it is, we want our food services, custodians, administrators, our board to be successful. And yes, we want kids to succeed in athletics, in academics, and in their personal lives. Our goal is no matter what we do, have nothing interfere with getting to success.

Dr. Barnes and Dr. Drake both admitted that they pay little attention to mission statements. However, their ethical values agree with what is stated in the mission statements of their respective districts.

(FN, S2),(DOC, S2),(FN, S4),(DOC, S4). "They have to be general enough to apply for a long period of time. How do you argue with providing quality education, ethical and responsible behavior and good citizenship?" (S2).

"Actually the mission statement may have been done

before I got here. Students having an opportunity and resources to achieve at a high level to be productive citizens; that clearly is my philosophy" (S4).

Transformational leaders ask followers to share in the same values and vision of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Each superintendent was asked what professional characteristics they expect all educators who work in their schools to possess. Their comments align with the third pillar of Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillars of ethics for leadership by exemplifying the process for selecting ethical staff.

Dr. Clark remarked, "All educators are human beings. I expect them to be honest but not afraid to make mistakes. If you can't be honest with yourself, you can't be honest with the effort you put forth to do your job." Dr. Barnes shared the characteristics educators should possess are "fairness, ethical, and logic." Dr. Abbot offered two things all educators should possess: "a continual thirst for learning and the responsibility to do all you can to help kids learn." Dr. Drake elaborated in his response specifically addressing superintendents (FN), and again, emphasizing his personal principles and integrity:

I think number one is integrity; and that's easier said than done. Integrity is not something you turn on

or off. You either have it or you don't. You also need courage. It takes determination and persistence to stay the course. It means that sometimes standing up to where you put yourself in jeopardy, particularly the superintendency, where you don't have tenure. I think it becomes more and more difficult to find people with integrity because of the pressure of the job. You have to have the fortitude and the courage to do and say what's right. The fact that you're taking a different position than a board member or an administrator, that in itself causes conflict and controversy. And, over time, that can be detrimental to the relationship and to your longevity in that position. I think that we have people in the profession that have integrity and courage, but we have a lot that don't. Not that they don't want to, but because it puts you at risk.

### **Personal Values**

Effective superintendents need to create a school culture with emphasis on ethical and principled-driven practices (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007). Several of the interview questions in this study were designed to have the participants expound upon what values, beliefs, or principles influenced their

leadership capacity. Responses not only support the characteristics of the moral character [pillar one] of the superintendents, they also provide insight into the morality of ethical process [pillar three] utilized by each in providing leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). When asked, "What experiences from your past influenced your values today?" family and the influence of parents and colleagues were typically credited. Dr. Clark commented:

My dad would say, "You can't remember a lie."

It doesn't matter what happens, what matters is how you deal with what happens. Tough situations build character. You not only build character, but how you deal with the situation reveals your character.

Dr. Drake referenced the influence of his parents and the ethical values they instilled in him. He emphasized that honesty and a strong work ethic were highly regarded by his parents who were children of first generation immigrants (FN).

I was raised in an Irish Catholic family to be honest. We were poor, but I don't remember being poor because everybody was poor. My parents are good people. They are just good people. They put

others ahead of themselves. They always put family ahead of themselves and friends and people in need.

Dr. Abbot also credited his close family bonds while growing up in a household where success was valued (FN).

My grandmother lived with us. I remember the stories that she told me about her husband and her parents coming to this county. It was a cohesive family that worked together to provide for the family. Those values of integrity, honesty, and openness and stories told to me stay with me. It wasn't that society or school or government owes you something, it's that you work hard to get what you earn.

Dr. Barnes related his experience and learning from his mistakes as the factors that shaped his ethical values today. His prior experiences also provided a committed foundation to his ethic of responsibility towards all endeavors he pursues (FN): "I had a lot of autonomy which is good in that you have control over what goes on, but you also take blame for what goes on."

Schools need superintendents to follow and preserve ethical principles to guide their decision-making processes that affect the students they serve. Covey (1991) offered that leaders can transform their organizations by making behavior congruent with what they believe, allowing members to achieve a heightened sense of contribution to the organization's mission. To that end, each participant was asked, "What expectation do you set for yourself when resolving ethical dilemmas?" Dr. Clark's response emphasizes his moral character [pillar one] as a leader and the depth to which his moral processes are embedded [pillar two] in his commitment to his job (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998):

Easy, do the right thing for the right reason in the right way. Doing the right thing will create problems for some people. If I can answer those three questions, I feel pretty good about the decision. I don't like myself if I make a decision just to make someone happy.

Another superintendent responded:

I expect to be the best source of information; to provide the best information that I can to the board, to the administrative team, or to the staff. I want to provide the best information that I can for one

reason, the reason we are here, and that is to serve our students (S2).

Dr. Abbot's response to this question was:

The focus on what's best for students is always considered; However, I wish I could say I don't get mad. We are all human, so we get angry. I wish I had a better way of controlling that. You need to have a focus when making decisions. You need to give of yourself.

Dr. Drake's remarks were stated with the intention to exemplify the complexity of working with school boards while maintaining his ethical values of selecting the best person for a job (FN):

You have to look, first of all, is this right or wrong? Is it clearly right or is it wrong? Sometimes it's clear, and sometimes it's gray. You have to weigh whether; is this something worth sacrificing your career or the mission? Most of the time it's not, but you have to look at the depth and breadth of the issue. An example might be, is this one candidate for principal better than the other? But the other guy is not bad. You make the recommendation, and they [the board] like the other candidate. You've got to weigh things. I think the more experience you have the



better ability you have to apply to the decision-making process.

### **Philosophy of Life**

Covey (1991) claims personal character qualities must precede organizational qualities for leaders to effect positive change. A personal philosophy concerning what a person wants to be [character] and do [contributions] is at the core of living ethically. The responses by the superintendents accentuates the moral character [pillar one] and the embedded values [pillar two] of the moral processes [pillar three] they preserve when fulfilling their duties and responsibilities of the job (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). Each participant was asked to describe his philosophy of life and how that philosophy relates to the work he does.

Dr. Barnes shared his philosophy of life was "family first, friends second, everything else that is relevant is related to those things." How that relates to the job for Dr. Barnes is, "I hope that I treat my job and my co-workers not only as I would want to be dealt with, but also as I would want to deal with my family and friends."

Another participant expressed his philosophy of life as, "what matters is how you live your life and how you treat other people" (S1). That philosophy translated into

doing what is best for kids by providing what kids need and opportunities to succeed.

Dr. Clark stated:

I need to live for the Lord. That has never failed me. When things start getting tough, the more I talk to Him. I need His guidance, and it's amazing how I've learned not to worry about things I don't have control over. On a day-to-day basis, you have to do the right thing. You have to be honest with people, fair, be part of the solution not part of the problem. Treat all with dignity, discipline in private. If not, you're dealing with the results.

Dr. Drake described his philosophy of life is based on his faith, family and giving your best to make a difference. He related a quote from Theodore Roosevelt concerning his desire to be a leader and not a spectator in his efforts to make a difference in the lives of others (FN).

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again

and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat (Theodore Roosevelt, 1910, para. 2).

### **Leadership**

Transformational leadership involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals of an organization, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity through coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Participants were asked to define their role as superintendent.

Dr. Abbot related his situation at the time he was initially hired by the board as superintendent. "I knew the board was looking for a visionary, someone to take the district to the next level." Dr. Abbot credits the hard work of his staff and the continuous learning process in place. "I believe we have taken the district to the next

level in student achievement levels and state and national recognitions for athletic and academic awards."

Dr. Clark offered:

I think leading is managing. You need to lead by example and be organized. I understand most people want to be lead, not everybody can be a leader, and that's OK, there have to be followers. In order to be an effective leader, you better be organized and have an agenda, a game plan, and be willing to be flexible.

When asked specifically how he would define his role with the school board, the same superintendent described it more of a relationship. His ethic of responsibility is also demonstrated in his response:

It varies from board to board. I've worked with some boards that wanted me to run the show; and after an election, with a new board president, that all changed. My relationship with the board depends on the board. Some boards will want to know every little thing or most everything that goes on. Some boards say, "our job is to approve policy, hire people and establish procedures. Your job is to run the district." That's my comfort zone, I like that. There are some boards who want to micromanage. My relationship with boards is this; the school board is

my boss. As long as they direct me through motions, collaboratively, nothing unethical or dishonest; give me the opportunity to say I agree or disagree with them and why, that's good with me. Sometimes the politics get involved in things, that is reality. As superintendent, you got to work through that. I keep the board informed as much as they want to be kept informed.

Dr. Barnes related his role, as superintendent is dependent on his experience:

I see my role as all-encompassing; maybe like a clearinghouse for the flow of information between the school district, the public, the media; and between the school board and the professional staff and vice versa. A clearinghouse and a filter, and to use my experience even more than my level of education as the guidelines for what's best. I try to bring all of the different experiences I've had to bear on the situation at hand.

When asked to define his role specifically dealing with the school board, Dr. Barnes continued with his response that highlights his desire to maintain his values, principles, and integrity:

I'm a non-voting member of the board; so, in theory, I represent their interest and the interest of the rest of the district. I don't think that my role should be to be a "yes" man. I have to work hard to lead this board. Sometimes I'm at odds and disagreement with what the board wants. I then have an ethical dilemma to tell them what I think, but it's not a dilemma because I do tell them what I think more often than they like me to. But because it is what I think my role is. If I don't do that, then I think I am failing in my job. None of them have the educational experience that I have; none of them have the organizational experience that I have; so if I don't tell them what I think is wrong and what they are doing is wrong, I think I'm failing in my job. Sometimes the board thinks that they are to manage all aspects of the district. They forget the proper role of the board, and I try to remind them of that.

Dr. Drake exemplifies many of the characteristics of a transformational leader in his response defining his role as superintendent (FN).

I see my role as superintendent like a head coach or a conductor of an orchestra. You clearly have to have an understanding of where you want to go. You have to

have the vision that is greater than what is already there. You have to aspire for greatness no matter where you are, and you have to convince people that it can be done. You need to have a good grasp of the individual unique skill sets of your staff. What are they good at, and what they aren't good at. In Collins book, *Good to Great*, he talks about getting the right people on the bus, in the right seats. I believe there is a lot to that. You want to identify the skill sets of the individuals in your organization and use them to your best advantage. You have to routinely communicate what your expectations are, and you have to give the people you're delegating authority feedback. Feedback should be regular, honest and open. I believe in the adage, "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." You want to build that relationship based on trust. Celebrating success—we talk about that and build upon that and make that part of the ritual of the organization so people understand what is important. When asked how he viewed his role specifically with the school board, Dr. Drake's response related to the challenge of working with a board yet remained focused on his ethic of responsibility:

It's a very challenging role being a superintendent. You know how challenging it is to make your marriage work. It's like I'm in nine different marriages; all who have a different idea of what that marriage should look like, and have different expectations. I can't answer to any one of them. I have to answer to all nine as one. Even though we have different opinions and viewpoints around the table, we have to work to understand that consensus is what is going to drive us forward. You have to keep the board focused on the big picture. That's a challenge. You brief them on things like educational progress and initiatives that are related to the mission and the strategic plan. When an individual or group wants to divert away from the strategic plan, I have to ask, "Is it part of our mission? Is it part of our beliefs? Do we have the resources if we are already committed?" You have to have a lot of dialogue with board members, not just during meetings but between meetings. Some are more high maintenance than others.

Superintendents must be morally responsible as to who the leader is and what the leader is responsible for and to whom (Starratt, 2004). Each superintendent was asked how he preserved "what's best for kids" when making decisions. The



responses indicate alignment to the pillars of ethics of leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998) by stressing their commitment and passion to do what's in the best interest of students. Dr. Barnes stated, "All my decisions are about what's best for kids. I take the interest of the students and their families and put them first. Some board members get angry when I remind them of what we're supposed to be all about." Another superintendent responded, "What's best for kids is treating them the right way, being fair with them, having expectations for them, but recognize their individual differences" (S3).

Dr. Abbot shared how he preserves what's best for kids from the perspective of the budget:

That is what you have to think about with each decision you make. Right now, every district in the state is going through difficult budget times. I told my board that our belts are about as tight as they can get, and they may need to get a bit tighter. However, we are not going to take away from students. Around budget time, I always get the question, "What can we cut?" If you want to start cutting, let's take a look at what is not an educational priority. I reminded them of what we are supposed to be doing and where our focus is.

Dr. Drake also related how he preserves what's best for kids while maintaining programs and services during difficult economic times. His response supports his moral and ethical values while maintaining educational programs:

Boards expect that you demonstrate that things are working. If you have a program that is not working, using the business model of return on investment, then that is when you need to use data to demonstrate program effectiveness. Kids will fall behind if we don't continue programs, and it may actually cost more in the end if we discontinue some programs. You have to use reason and quantitative and qualitative data to preserve programs that are working. I think you have to go beyond that and have an ongoing analysis and assessment of all programs; just because they exist and people like them, doesn't mean they are working to the benefit of students.

Transformational leadership appeals to intrinsic motives and needs as well as elevates followers to higher levels of moral character (Wong, 1998). Transformational leaders must embody those characteristics in order to motivate members to become part of the organization. Much the same as Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillar two embeds the ethical values of leaders in their vision and

articulation of their core mission. When asked how he maintains the motivation for doing the job of the superintendent, Dr. Drake remarked:

Because it's about kids. It's about when those kids walk across that stage, and you grab their hands and look into their eyes and you see in some cases joy, high expectations, dreams of tomorrow. In others you see trepidation, anxiety. It's a mix. You know that you are setting the table for them for the rest of their lives. And so, doing everything you can to get them to believe that they can be successful, productive citizens and enjoy living; there is nothing more important than that. That is why I put up with the difficulty and the challenges and the attacks and everything that comes with the superintendency, because you know you are making a difference.

Dr. Clark reflected back on when he was a first-year administrator as an assistant principal and someone believed in him:

I was young; my superintendent believed in me. He said that I wasn't the best-qualified person for the job, but he liked my work ethic, my people skills and what people had said about me. I went into a challenging situation and learned a lot about myself. I caught a

couple breaks in life, and I remember that. We as educators have such power to defuse a kid's love for learning. Just one negative encounter is all it takes. I want to turn kids onto learning. That's our job sometimes, and maybe all a kid needs is a break.

Another superintendent's comment highlights his desire to preserve his principles and integrity as well as the moral choices of his actions [pillar three] (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998):

I am what I am. And, in this position, I need to confront the wrong. Perhaps I wear my heart on my sleeve too much. But if I don't make the attempt it will eat at me. Unfairness doesn't play well with me, so it is easier on me to try to do the right thing first. You have to be true to yourself to survive sometimes in this business (S2).

Effective superintendents have a professional obligation to lead with unyielding integrity for the students and community they serve (Bennis, Burke, Gery, & Juechter, 2003). Effective superintendents must engage in moral and ethical responsible actions when pursuing their fundamental mission of educating students. When asked to define leading effectively, Dr. Abbot acknowledged he "surrounds himself with knowledgeable people in areas he

needs to know in order to make a final decision." Dr. Barnes remarked, "Have your actions reflect what you value and the principles you stand for." Dr. Clark defines leading effectively as getting involved.

I think to lead effectively you have to get involved, and you have to feel comfortable with empowering other people to get some of the work done and to lead as well. An effective leader is someone who keeps people focused on the mission; empowers people to believe that they can do the job; lets them do it their way but hold them accountable.

Dr. Drake reflected upon his previous superintendencies to remark on what defines leading effectively.

I'll use the adage "you always leave the campsite better than you found it." To me, that is my legacy. I left two previous districts better than I found them when hired as their superintendent. You can measure that in many different ways. *Effectively* is to get people to buy into your vision and make it part of who they are—embed it in the culture and the system. Every district is different. You need to have a continuous process to achieve excellence.

## **Ethical Dilemmas**

Superintendents invoke trust through competence, integrity, ethics, and high expectations (American Association of School Administrators, 1993). What they do and say when faced with ethical dilemmas influences the moral development of the entire organization and community in which they serve and demonstrates the process of their moral actions [pillar three] (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998) as superintendents.

Each superintendent was asked, "What are the most difficult ethical dilemmas you face as superintendent?" Dr. Clark struggled with his answer (FN), because it affects one of his true north principles of trust (Covey, 1991) which demonstrates his desire to preserve what he stands for and his integrity:

One thing I deal with all the time is someone trying to pull the wool over my eyes, and 50% of the wool is synthetic; I can see right through it. Just be honest with me. Let's have an honest discussion instead of two—one where you're trying to pull the wool over my eyes and then one when I ask why are you being dishonest with me. People who aren't honest with me now or in the past won't be honest with me in the future.

Dr. Barnes has a similar issue with honesty, particularly with co-workers and board members. His response reveals his desire to maintain an ethic of responsibility as well as preserve his integrity:

If unfair, inaccurate or dishonest things are said in a board meeting, I don't let it stand. I don't know if that controls them or encourages them, but I've had some heated exchanges with board members. I have told one board member in a public meeting with the press there that I wasn't going to allow him to lie, and I would prove that it was a lie if he didn't withdraw it, and he withdrew it. I know that they are the way they are, and that won't change. I don't get angry at myself anymore if I try to correct a wrong even if it doesn't change the outcome.

Dr. Abbot shared his most difficult ethical dilemma is school business being discussed by board members outside of the group. Some insight into his moral processes [pillar three] (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998) are revealed by how he interacts with board members:

I have a board member who disagreed with my recommendation on a hiring. So he sent out derogatory emails about me. For me, I believe it is my ethical duty to discuss this with the board as a whole. It's

an ongoing issue that needs addressed regularly. As the superintendent, you just have to realize those things will happen. You just need to have thick skin. I take every opportunity I can to educate the board and to correct misinformation that is out there. I believe, in the long run, if you treat people right with honesty, respect, and dignity, that ethical dilemmas will fade.

Dr. Drake commented that he doesn't have a problem with ethics. "I always believe what is right is not necessarily easy. There are always decisions that are difficult. However, you make them based on what's best for the organization." Dr. Drake further elaborated on unethical situations he deals with:

I do have a problem with people who I have delegated authority to but don't have the courage to take on a difficult decision. I also have a problem with people who don't respect the chain of command. When I have staff members, administrators or board members do an end run, I have a problem with that. It doesn't matter to some people, because people are the way they are. For instance, if board members don't respect what you stand for, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how many times you tell them your position. Board



members are here for ambition or mission. If it's ambitions, it is what it is, power, prestige; you can confront that or sit back and let it happen, but there is a price to pay either way.

### **Advice from the Participants**

Transformational leaders create an environment where members are empowered, mentored, and encouraged to become part of a professional learning community. Leaders provide a moral compass that reads true and best serves both personal development and the common good (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998).

Each superintendent was asked what advice they would give to aspiring superintendents on leading ethically? Their responses relate well to Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillars of ethics of leadership as a foundation for aspiring superintendents to learn from. As well, their responses are embedded with an ethic of responsibility and a desire to preserve principles and integrity—the two themes that emerged from the data from this study.

One responded, "If you don't have a compass and don't understand what you stand for and believe that being a superintendent means following the winds of whoever has the most votes, that's a formula for disaster" (S2). When asked to explain the "compass concept" Dr. Barnes continued:

If the compass points to integrity, you have it. If it points to trustworthiness, you are. My biggest ethical dilemmas are around hiring. I don't have a problem hiring someone who is related to someone on the board or from the district as long as he is the best person for the job. If you're making a recommendation because you want favoritism from board members to get a contract renewed or a raise, then you have a bad compass. I always try to be fair and ethical and give what I believe to be the right direction. My advice to anybody accepting a position would be; be honest, be fair and be true to yourself and see where the chips fall. I can tell you from my experience that doing the right thing can still lead to bad results.

Dr. Clark provided practical advice for aspiring superintendents regarding leading ethically.

Do the work. You need to know how to do the work yourself. You need the experience of being the curriculum director, a building principal. You got to stay current with what's happening in education. Work smart. You got to be willing to do the work. We're all replaceable. Enjoy what you're doing, be honest, be your own person, work hard at it and enjoy the journey.

Dr. Abbot believes a core group of trusted colleagues is important when dealing with ethical situations.

My advice is don't do anything illegal. If it doesn't seem right for some reason, if you feel uncomfortable, you shouldn't be doing it, so don't. As a superintendent, you need to have thick skin sometimes. I have a small core group of people here that I can trust and know it will stay here. Listen to people you trust who have experience. You need to keep focused on your core values, and don't sacrifice what's best for kids. Don't sacrifice how you treat others. Treat others well, and you will be treated well in return. You will have many things thrown at you. Try not to get overwhelmed. Have an outlet that you enjoy doing.

Dr. Drake shares his advice from the perspective of holding the position of superintendent in three different districts (FN):

Keep your bags packed. You can be a terrific person and a terrific leader and still fail from the perspective that failure is you will not have your contract renewed. Because of politics, because of power relationships among board members and yourself. There are no guarantees even if you are an outstanding

leader. Frankly, I believe that the best superintendents are the ones that aren't in one place their entire career. I believe they are not quite as aggressive, ambitious or assertive. You should know that if you're going to stay true to your virtues and your integrity, that 3-5 years down the road you may be moving. It is a high-risk profession, particularly if you want to make a difference. I know, that is the reality of the position. Can you make a difference? Absolutely. I have and I am proud of that but there is a price to pay (S4).

#### **Summary**

Chapter Four is a presentation of the data gathered from various sources including transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews, written field notes of observations made during the interviews, each superintendent's strategic plan and professional organization's codes/standards [documents]. The protocol for collecting data were presented to demonstrate cohesion with the process described in Chapter Three. The data analysis process was discussed, clarifying the identification of the data collected into two themes: (1) an ethic of responsibility and preserving principles and integrity; and (2) organized by topics that supported the

theoretical concepts of the study. The topics include; guiding principles, personal values, philosophy of life, leadership, ethical dilemmas, and advice from the participants.

The data collected from the superintendents participating in this study was discussed in relationship to Bass and Steidlmeier's (1998) pillars of ethics of leaders which aligns closely with transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). A summary of the findings, limitations of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research is presented in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study examined the influences of personal and professional ethics on the leadership of public school superintendents. The effects of society's social pressure, local political realities, and state and federal government accountability measures for student achievement can influence the effectiveness of superintendents' leadership. Superintendents have a personal and professional obligation to examine their ethical work practices and lead with unyielding integrity for what's best for students and communities they serve (Bennis, Burke, Gery, & Juechter, 2003).

The population and sample for this study were purposefully selected. Subjects had to meet two criteria. First, they had to be members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). Second, the district they work for had to have renewed their superintendent's contract. Four superintendents meeting the criteria participated in this multi-case study. A multi-case study allowed for better understanding of the insights of the participants. Transcribed, audio recorded field interviews, field notes [written observations], and documents [strategic plans, professional organizations'

codes and standards] were utilized to triangulate the data as well as provide validity and reliability. Each superintendent was provided the opportunity to review the findings of this study to avoid misinterpretation of their input and to lend trustworthiness and credibility to the study (Seidman, 1998).

### **Summary of Findings**

Guiding this study were the following research questions. The researcher was able to answer these questions through a combination of background knowledge gained from the review of research in Chapter Two and analysis of data described in detail in Chapter Four.

#### **What are the Values and Beliefs that Influence the Educational Leadership of Superintendents?**

Sergiovanni (1992) professes that professional and moral beliefs of the individual are at the root of leadership authority. DeVore (2006) contends family values developed through the influence of ethical people are the sources of values and ethics that make up one's belief system.

Each superintendent related the influence of family values as the primary influence of what they believe about educational leadership today. All happen to be from about the same generation where families of multiple generations,

some first generation immigrants, made up the households. Working hard, everyone helping to support the family, nothing handed to you, and everything you had you earned were all common experiences. All of the participants were expected to attend college and make a better way of life for themselves than their parents. While growing up, they learned to maintain a cohesive family, treat people fairly, be honest, and possess a strong work ethic.

There is little doubt that our culture, family, and social and educational environment we grow up in shape our values and define what we believe is ethical and morally right. Although individuals cannot be forced to accept a particular set of values, they can be made aware of socially and professionally acceptable principles and ethical concepts when making decisions.

#### **How do Superintendents Maintain Ethical Standards While Coping with the Pressures of the Job?**

Each superintendent was well aware of the professional codes and standards of the many educational administrative organizations. They all basically agreed that, at the core, all professional organizations have the fundamental premise to do what is in the best interest of students. Dr. Barnes said it best. "I think in different words they all say we



want to do what's best for kids . . . I think they all get to the same place."

These superintendents rely upon their own principles and sense of morality when they are faced with a true ethical dilemma. Accepting the responsibility of their decisions and living with the effects of how others perceive their character and integrity as, not only a leader but a person, seem to be the defining events for these superintendents.

Each superintendent expressed the need to have an "escape" from the job. Dr. Drake keeps things in perspective by relying on his family and faith to keep him grounded. "I've been blessed. I've been married for 30 years—3 terrific kids. My mom is still living. My brother and his family and in-laws are very much a part of my life." Dr. Drake also shared his close friendship with a small group of mostly-educational professionals who he can confide in when dealing with difficult issues. Dr. Barnes also commented about his reliance on the close collegial relationship and experience he has with a group of local superintendents.

This researcher believes it is important, if not a necessity, to have a valued and trusted group of individuals who share common challenges of the job.

Experience is a great asset. Learning from experienced educational leaders may help avoid the ethical pitfalls that are associated with the politics and idiosyncrasies, at the local level, of the superintendency.

**What Core Ethical Beliefs are Associated with the Decision-Making Strategies of Superintendents' Educational Leadership?**

Starratt (2004) professes the work of educational leaders should be work that cultivates an environment that is "humanly fulfilling and socially responsible" (p. 3). Foster (1986) contends that, at the heart of educational leaders' decisions are the resolution of moral dilemmas. For the superintendents in this study, doing "what's best for students" is the litmus test for making educational decisions.

Associated with maintaining what's best for students is the challenge of preserving one's ethical standards in conflict with the politics of locally-controlled school boards and the cultural makeup of the community. It requires integrity and courage to stand on principles that may be printed in a mission statement or stated during an interview for the job. Each of these superintendents made reference to the challenges they face when conflicts over principles exist. Dr. Abbot stated, "As superintendent, you

just have to realize those things will happen. You just have to have thick skin. You can't be vindictive towards people. You have to keep focused." Dr. Barnes offered, "there is a lot of give and take. School boards are political. That's the nature of the beast. I don't need to be." Dr. Clark remarked, "Politics get involved in things. That's the reality. As superintendent, you got to work through that." Dr. Drake shared, "It's not by accident I'm on my third superintendency. I try to be diplomatic and professional. You can't win every battle. I've learned to moderate my behavior, not my expectations or lose focus of the mission."

#### **How do Superintendents Deal with Situations that Conflict with their own Personal or Professional Ethics?**

With all of the rules, regulations, laws, and policies that schools must abide by, along with the ever-present threat of litigations, it is conceivable that a superintendent's faculty of judgment could be impaired. However, superintendents are held accountable for adhering to laws and regulations mandated by state and federal government authorities while meeting societal expectations of increased student achievement, safety, and the individual rights of students.

These superintendents acknowledged that it is their responsibility to enforce the policies, laws, and regulations that govern public schools. They also acknowledged that they must be advocates for children, especially when the fundamental focus of schools becomes entangled in politics and extrinsic factors such as union contracts, non-academic activities [athletics], or conflicts over interpretation of policies, regulations, and laws.

Having well-written policies aligned with state codes and developing and implementing a working strategic plan may be the best defense in avoiding ethical disputes and conflicts. Superintendents must also embody the values and principles they profess when preserving what is in the best interest of students. Board members, community, staff, and administrators need to experience consistent behavior, attitude, and messages of what their superintendent stands for when those "moments of truth" in decision making occur.

**What are the Similarities or Differences Related to how Superintendents Resolve Ethical Dilemmas?**

Throughout educational administration preparation programs there are programs of study that discuss the different roles related to the duties and responsibilities administrators must perform. In recent years, there has

been an awareness of the need for ethics education in those preparation programs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

Greenfield (1993) pointed out that "a failure to provide the opportunity for school administrators to develop such competence constitutes a failure to serve the children we are obligated to serve as public educators" (p. 285).

At the core of making ethical decisions is the commitment to one's values and principles. The degree to which superintendents in this study embody those values and principles is relevant to their experience level and years of service in the education profession. Dr. Drake states, "It takes courage and integrity to do this job if you want to make a difference." Dr. Barnes believes, "You got to be true to yourself to survive in this business."

It is apparent that these four superintendents have a desire to perform their duties and act with integrity in a similar manner. There is a level of job preservation, in order to maintain a quality of life, that needs to be blended with preserving one's self respect, character, and integrity when working in a non-tenured position. Admittedly, the majority of these superintendents find it easier and more satisfying to do the right thing when they have 30 plus years of service and can either retire or find another superintendency.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Typically with case study research, due to the small sample size, the results will not be generalizable to the larger population of public school superintendents. Nor are these results generalizable to the larger population of superintendents that met the criteria for participation, but did not, as members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, and have their contracts renewed.

This study featured male participants only. It is assumed that the participating superintendents limited their responses to their own personal and professional experiences. Any bias on the part of the researcher was mitigated through triangulation of multiple sources of data.

### **Conclusions**

There is little doubt that public school superintendents have one of the most challenging and complex jobs in our society. One of the participants defined it as a calling. "There is no more important job in society than educating children." Because superintendents are at the pinnacle of educational leadership in the public schools, their leadership abilities will be analyzed for observance of standards and principles that are ethically

responsible, especially when making decisions that are in the best interest of students.

This study analyzed the insights and realities of four practicing public school superintendents' perceptions of how ethical standards, whether personal or professional, affected their leadership. Two themes emerged from the data as it were analyzed—an ethic of responsibility and preserving personal principles and integrity.

### **Ethic of Responsibility**

Public school superintendents are responsible for developing a comprehensive understanding of the culture and various elements of the organization and how they affect the primary mission of the district. Without question, the school board is the element that ultimately affects every aspect of the governance of schools. The superintendents in this study recognize the board's authority and acknowledge the greatest challenge to their responsibility is to do what is in the best interest of students while working through the intrinsic political and cultural structures that are unique to all locally-controlled schools.

The Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA) provides school board members the opportunity to participate in numerous programs and receive publications that promote the governance of schools. PSBA requires

persons to be of good moral character (Pennsylvania School Board Association, 2005). Statements of ethics do not guarantee ethical behaviors. In order to achieve anything by having a code of ethics, organizations must uncompromisingly emphasize that codes are guidelines and are only as effective as those who implement them (Dean, 1992).

This researcher determined that these superintendents hold in high regard the responsibilities and duties associated with the position. They all repeatedly emphasized their fundamental mission is to do what is best for kids and community and to improve the quality of the organization. Some transformational characteristics were revealed such as; clearly communicating their commitment and passion and maintaining the focus of what public education is all about.

Their frustration with working through the confines of the school board, compounded by societal and governmental demands of student achievement and accountability, was evident. One superintendent expressed his frustration concerning board members lack of respect for the superintendent's values, "They are here either for ambition or mission. If it's ambition, it is power, prestige. No matter what you say or how many times you state your



position, it doesn't matter." Another superintendent remarked, "I'm a non-voting member of the board. I tell them what I believe is the truth or the right thing to do. Sometimes it doesn't matter. Some members of the board have their own agenda." Williams (2007) found, as factors that influence superintendents to exit the profession, cultural fit, how not to take it personally, micro-managing by school boards, politics surrounding leadership and efforts to establish good relationships sabotaged among other themes.

Before assuming the office, every superintendent must take an oath swearing to defend the Constitution of the State and perform his or her duties with the highest level of responsibility and commitment. Although there are laws, statutes, policies, and mandates to rely upon for some decision making, superintendents will be held accountable and responsible to passionately advocate for what is in the best interest of students.

### **Preserve Principles and Integrity**

Because of their public servitude positions, superintendents are scrutinized for adherence to higher ethical and moral standards. They are expected to conduct themselves and make decisions in a manner that places the highest regard on students' basic rights as citizens—to

receive an appropriate education and to be treated with dignity.

The four superintendents who participated in this study have indicated their personal and professional need to preserve their principles and lead with integrity. They concede that the perceptions others have of their personality, image, attitudes, and behaviors is defined by the ethical choices and decisions they make, the values embedded in their messages, and the moral character they demonstrate.

For the most part, the commitment to remain true to their principles and lead with integrity is practiced at a high level for these superintendents. The challenge is, again, dealing with the frustration of saying and doing the right things but having the outcome of some situations be dictated by politics. Dr. Barnes commented, "You can be the most ethical person in the world, but it doesn't matter if the person making the final decision has a different agenda."

Superintendents will continue to be faced with situations that will confront their commitment to what they value [principles] and have opportunities to exhibit the courage to act upon their commitment [integrity]. Articulating ethical beliefs and values by aligning them to

everyday actions will communicate clearly to the organization the character of the superintendent.

### **Recommendations for Educational Leaders**

School boards will continue to maintain local control over governing schools in Pennsylvania. However, very little training is required of them to deal with the complexity of schools as organizations or ethical issues. Perhaps educational professional organizations, such as, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), and the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), could combine their political influence and address the legislators to enact school board education requirements.

School administration preparation programs could give additional attention to ethical issues associated with the practice of school administration. This researcher agrees with Sergiovanni (1992) that instruction in ethics should help educators understand the fundamental purpose behind their work and not just the decision-making processes.

This study revealed only limited influence of professional organizations' codes or standards on these superintendents' leadership abilities. However, there was enough awareness of such standards that professional organizations need to bring more focus to them.

Superintendents would benefit from organizing close collegial relationship with a group of local superintendents for the purpose of discussing ethical dilemmas. It doesn't have to be lonely at the top. Sharing similar situations with experienced colleagues may help resolve current issues or prepare for or even prevent difficult dilemmas in the future.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Personal values and principles along with professional codes and standards will continue to influence the decision making of educational leaders. The influence of one population of stakeholders in the educational decision making process that warrants research is that of school boards. This study touched upon the complex relationship between school boards and superintendents. Further research in the perceptions of school boards members' role in the governance of schools and the dynamics of how school boards operate could aid in understanding this complex relationship.

The fundamental purpose of public schools is to educate all students. All public school districts in Pennsylvania develop a strategic plan to guide them in accomplishing this purpose. A qualitative study in the leadership of superintendents on student achievement by

implementing the strategic plan could also benefit the existing research of effective educational leadership.

### **Summary**

Superintendents have a professional duty to scrutinize their work and personal ethical practices and lead with uncompromising integrity for the students and communities they serve (Bennis, Burke, Gery, & Juechter, 2003). The political realities of operating within a locally-controlled school board system of governance, influences the responsibility and commitment on the part of the superintendent to act ethically and with integrity.

Superintendents must accept the responsibility of preparing the next generation of citizens to be productive, contributing members of society. Superintendents must possess the fortitude to display courage when confronted with situations that challenge the principles they value. Furthermore, they must have the integrity to withstand the pressure to conform to the status quo.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### The Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators

#### **Section 1. Mission**

The Professional Standards and Practices Commission is committed to providing leadership for improving the quality of education in this Commonwealth by establishing high standards for preparation, certification, practice and ethical conduct in the teaching profession.

#### **Section 2. Introduction**

(a) Professional conduct defines interactions between the individual educator and students, the employing agencies and other professionals. Generally, the responsibility for professional conduct rests with the individual professional educator. However, in this Commonwealth, a Code of Professional Practice and Conduct (Code) for certificated educators is required by statute and violation of specified sections of the Code may constitute a basis for public or private reprimand. Violations of the Code may also be used as supporting evidence, though may not constitute an independent basis, for the suspension or revocation of a certificate. The Professional Standards and Practices Commission (PSPC) was charged by the act of December 12, 1973 (P. L. 397, No. 141) (24 P. S. § § 12-1251 - 12-1268), known as the Teacher Certification Law, with adopting a

Code by July 1, 1991. See 24 P. S. § 12-1255(a)(10).

(b) This chapter makes explicit the values of the education profession. When individuals become educators in this Commonwealth, they make a moral commitment to uphold these values.

### **Section 3. Purpose**

(a) Professional educators in this Commonwealth believe that the quality of their services directly influences the Nation and its citizens. Professional educators recognize their obligation to provide services and to conduct themselves in a manner which places the highest esteem on human rights and dignity. Professional educators seek to ensure that every student receives the highest quality of service and that every professional maintains a high level of competence from entry through ongoing professional development. Professional educators are responsible for the development of sound educational policy and obligated to implement that policy and its programs to the public.

(b) Professional educators recognize their primary responsibility to the student and the development of the student's potential. Central to that development is the professional educator's valuing the worth and dignity of every person, student and colleague alike; the pursuit of truth; devotion to excellence; acquisition of knowledge;



and democratic principles. To those ends, the educator engages in continuing professional development and keeps current with research and technology. Educators encourage and support the use of resources that best serve the interests and needs of students. Within the context of professional excellence, the educator and student together explore the challenge and the dignity of the human experience.

#### **Section 4. Practices**

(a) Professional practices are behaviors and attitudes that are based on a set of values that the professional education community believes and accepts. These values are evidenced by the professional educator's conduct toward students and colleagues, and the educator's employer and community. When teacher candidates become professional educators in this Commonwealth, they are expected to abide by this section.

(b) Professional educators are expected to abide by the following:

(1) Professional educators shall abide by the Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 1-101 - 27-2702), other school laws of the Commonwealth, sections 1201(a)(1), (2) and (4) and (b)(1), (2) and (4) of the Public Employee Relations Act (43 P. S. § § 1101.1201(a)(1), (2) and (4) and (b)(1),

(2) and (4)) and this chapter.

(2) Professional educators shall be prepared, and legally certified, in their areas of assignment. Educators may not be assigned or willingly accept assignments they are not certified to fulfill. Educators may be assigned to or accept assignments outside their certification area on a temporary, short-term, emergency basis. Examples: a teacher certified in English filling in a class period for a physical education teacher who has that day become ill; a substitute teacher certified in elementary education employed as a librarian for several days until the district can locate and employ a permanent substitute teacher certified in library science.

(3) Professional educators shall maintain high levels of competence throughout their careers.

(4) Professional educators shall exhibit consistent and equitable treatment of students, fellow educators and parents. They shall respect the civil rights of all and not discriminate on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, culture, religion, sex or sexual orientation, marital status, age, political beliefs, socioeconomic status, disabling condition or vocational interest. This list of bases of discrimination is not all-inclusive.

(5) Professional educators shall accept the value of

diversity in educational practice. Diversity requires educators to have a range of methodologies and to request the necessary tools for effective teaching and learning.

(6) Professional educators shall impart to their students principles of good citizenship and societal responsibility.

(7) Professional educators shall exhibit acceptable and professional language and communication skills. Their verbal and written communications with parents, students and staff shall reflect sensitivity to the fundamental human rights of dignity, privacy, and respect.

(8) Professional educators shall be open-minded, knowledgeable and use appropriate judgment and communication skills when responding to an issue within the educational environment.

(9) Professional educators shall keep in confidence information obtained in confidence in the course of professional service unless required to be disclosed by law or by clear and compelling professional necessity as determined by the professional educator.

(10) Professional educators shall exert reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions that interfere with learning or are harmful to the student's health and safety.

## **Section 5. Conduct**

Individual professional conduct reflects upon the practices, values, integrity and reputation of the profession. Violation of § § 235.6-235.11 may constitute an independent basis for private or public reprimand, and may be used as supporting evidence in cases of certification suspension and revocation.

## **Section 6. Legal obligations**

(a) The professional educator may not engage in conduct prohibited by the act of December 12, 1973 (P. L. 397, No. 141) (24 P. S. § § 12-1251-12-1268), known as the Teacher Certification Law.

(b) The professional educator may not engage in conduct prohibited by:

(1) The Public School Code of 1949 (24 P. S. § § 1-101-27-2702) and other laws relating to the schools or the education of children.

(2) The applicable laws of the Commonwealth establishing ethics of public officials and public employees, including the act of October 4, 1978 (P. L. 883, No. 170) (65 P. S. § § 401-413), known as the Public Official and Employee Ethics Law.

(c) Violation of subsection (b) shall have been found to

exist by an agency of proper jurisdiction to be considered an independent basis for discipline.

#### **Section 7. Certification**

The professional educator may not:

- (1) Accept employment, when not properly certificated, in a position for which certification is required.
- (2) Assist entry into or continuance in the education profession of an unqualified person.
- (3) Employ, or recommend for employment, a person who is not certificated appropriately for the position.

#### **Section 8. Civil Rights**

The professional educator may not:

- (1) Discriminate on the basis of race, National or ethnic origin, culture, religion, sex or sexual orientation, marital status, age, political beliefs, socioeconomic status; disabling condition or vocational interest against a student or fellow professional. This list of bases of discrimination is not all-inclusive. This discrimination shall be found to exist by an agency of proper jurisdiction to be considered an independent basis for discipline.
- (2) Interfere with a student's or colleague's exercise of political and civil rights and responsibilities.

**Section 9. Improper personal or financial gain**

- (1) Accept gratuities, gifts or favors that might impair or appear to impair professional judgment.
- (2) Exploit a professional relationship for personal gain or advantage.

**Section 10. Relationships with students**

The professional educator may not:

- (1) Knowingly and intentionally distort or misrepresent evaluations of students.
- (2) Knowingly and intentionally misrepresent subject matter or curriculum.
- (3) Sexually harass or engage in sexual relationships with students.
- (4) Knowingly and intentionally withhold evidence from the proper authorities about violations of the legal obligations as defined within this section.

**Section 11. Professional relationships**

The professional educator may not:

- (1) Knowingly and intentionally deny or impede a colleague in the exercise or enjoyment of a professional right or privilege in being an educator.
- (2) Knowingly and intentionally distort evaluations of colleagues.
- (3) Sexually harass a fellow employee.

(4) Use coercive means or promise special treatment to influence professional decisions of colleagues.

(5) Threaten, coerce, or discriminate against a colleague who in good faith reports or discloses to a governing agency actual or suspected violations of law, agency regulations, or standards.

## Appendix B

### The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

**Standard 1:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

#### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- learning goals in a pluralistic society
- the principles of developing and implementing strategic plans
- systems theory
- information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies
- effective communication
- effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

#### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- the educability of all
- a school vision of high standards of learning
- continuous school improvement
- the inclusion of all members of the school community
- ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults
- a willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and practices
- doing the work required for high levels of personal and organization performance

#### **Performances**

- The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that: the vision and mission of the school are effectively communicated to staff, parents, students, and community members
- the vision and mission are communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities
- the core beliefs of the school vision are modeled for all stakeholders
- the vision is developed with and among stakeholders
- the contributions of school community members to the realization of the vision are recognized and celebrated
- progress toward the vision and mission is communicated to all stakeholders
- the school community is involved in school improvement efforts
- the vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions
- an implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated



- assessment data related to student learning are used to develop the school vision and goals
- relevant demographic data pertaining to students and their families are used in developing the school mission and goals
- barriers to achieving the vision are identified, clarified, and addressed
- needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals
- existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals
- the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised

**Standard 2:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- student growth and development
- applied learning theories
- applied motivational theories
- curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement
- principles of effective instruction
- measurement, evaluation, and assessment strategies
- diversity and its meaning for educational programs
- adult learning and professional development models
- the change process for systems, organizations, and individuals
- the role of technology in promoting student learning and professional growth
- school cultures

### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- student learning as the fundamental purpose of schooling
- the proposition that all students can learn
- the variety of ways in which students can learn
- life long learning for self and others
- professional development as an integral part of school improvement
- the benefits that diversity brings to the school community
- a safe and supportive learning environment
- preparing students to be contributing members of society

### **Performances**

- The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:  
all individuals are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect
- professional development promotes a focus on student learning consistent with the school vision and goals

- students and staff feel valued and important
- the responsibilities and contributions of each individual are acknowledged
- barriers to student learning are identified, clarified, and addressed
- diversity is considered in developing learning experiences
- life long learning is encouraged and modeled
- there is a culture of high expectations for self, student, and staff performance
- technologies are used in teaching and learning
- student and staff accomplishments are recognized and celebrated
- multiple opportunities to learn are available to all students
- the school is organized and aligned for success
- curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular programs are designed, implemented, evaluated, and refined
- curriculum decisions are based on research, expertise of teachers, and the recommendations of learned societies
- the school culture and climate are assessed on a regular basis
- a variety of sources of information is used to make decisions
- student learning is assessed using a variety of techniques
- multiple sources of information regarding performance are used by staff and students
- a variety of supervisory and evaluation models is employed
- pupil personnel programs are developed to meet the needs of students and their families

**Standard 3:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- theories and models of organizations and the principles of organizational development
- operational procedures at the school and district level
- principles and issues relating to school safety and security
- human resources management and development
- principles and issues relating to fiscal operations of school management
- principles and issues relating to school facilities and use of space
- legal issues impacting school operations
- current technologies that support management functions

### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- making management decisions to enhance learning and teaching
- taking risks to improve schools
- trusting people and their judgments
- accepting responsibility

- high-quality standards, expectations, and performances
- involving stakeholders in management processes
- a safe environment

### **Performances**

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- knowledge of learning, teaching, and student development is used to inform management decisions
- operational procedures are designed and managed to maximize opportunities for successful learning
- emerging trends are recognized, studied, and applied as appropriate
- operational plans and procedures to achieve the vision and goals of the school are in place
- collective bargaining and other contractual agreements related to the school are effectively managed
- the school plant, equipment, and support systems operate safely, efficiently, and effectively
- time is managed to maximize attainment of organizational goals
- potential problems and opportunities are identified
- problems are confronted and resolved in a timely manner
- financial, human, and material resources are aligned to the goals of schools
- the school acts entrepreneurially to support continuous improvement
- organizational systems are regularly monitored and modified as needed
- stakeholders are involved in decisions affecting schools
- responsibility is shared to maximize ownership and accountability
- effective problem-framing and problem-solving skills are used
- effective conflict resolution skills are used
- effective group-process and consensus-building skills are used
- effective communication skills are used
- there is effective use of technology to manage school operations
- fiscal resources of the school are managed responsibly, efficiently, and effectively
- a safe, clean, and aesthetically pleasing school environment is created and maintained
- human resource functions support the attainment of school goals
- confidentiality and privacy of school records are maintained

**Standard 4 :** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- emerging issues and trends that potentially impact the school community
- the conditions and dynamics of the diverse school community

- community resources
- community relations and marketing strategies and processes
- successful models of school, family, business, community, government and higher education partnerships

### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- schools operating as an integral part of the larger community
- collaboration and communication with families
- involvement of families and other stakeholders in school decision-making processes
- the proposition that diversity enriches the school
- families as partners in the education of their children
- the proposition that families have the best interests of their children in mind
- resources of the family and community needing to be brought to bear on the education of students
- an informed public

### **Performances**

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- high visibility, active involvement, and communication with the larger community is a priority
- relationships with community leaders are identified and nurtured
- information about family and community concerns, expectations, and needs is used regularly
- there is outreach to different business, religious, political, and service agencies and organizations
- credence is given to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict
- the school and community serve one another as resources
- available community resources are secured to help the school solve problems and achieve goals
- partnerships are established with area businesses, institutions of higher education, and community groups to strengthen programs and support school goals
- community youth family services are integrated with school programs
- community stakeholders are treated equitably
- diversity is recognized and valued
- effective media relations are developed and maintained
- a comprehensive program of community relations is established
- public resources and funds are used appropriately and wisely
- community collaboration is modeled for staff
- opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills are provided

**Standard 5:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- the purpose of education and the role of leadership in modern society
- various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- the values of the diverse school community
- professional codes of ethics
- the philosophy and history of education

### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- the ideal of the common good
- the principles in the Bill of Rights
- the right of every student to a free, quality education
- bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process
- subordinating one's own interest to the good of the school community
- accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions
- using the influence of one's office constructively and productively in the service of all students and their families
- development of a caring school community

### **Performances**

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- examines personal and professional values
- demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
- demonstrates values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance
- serves as a role model
- accepts responsibility for school operations
- considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
- uses the influence of the office to enhance the educational program rather than for personal gain
- treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect
- protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff
- demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community
- recognizes and respects the legitimate authority of others
- examines and considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community
- expects that others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior
- opens the school to public scrutiny
- fulfills legal and contractual obligations
- applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately

**Standard 6:** A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

### **Knowledge**

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- principles of representative governance that undergird the system of American schools
- the role of public education in developing and renewing a democratic society and an economically productive nation
- the law as related to education and schooling
- the political, social, cultural and economic systems and processes that impact schools
- models and strategies of change and conflict resolution as applied to the larger political, social, cultural and economic contexts of schooling
- global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning
- the dynamics of policy development and advocacy under our democratic political system
- the importance of diversity and equity in a democratic society

### **Dispositions**

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- education as a key to opportunity and social mobility
- recognizing a variety of ideas, values, and cultures
- importance of a continuing dialogue with other decision makers affecting education
- actively participating in the political and policy-making context in the service of education
- using legal systems to protect student rights and improve student opportunities

### **Performances**

The administrator facilitates processes and engages in activities ensuring that:

- the environment in which schools operate is influenced on behalf of students and their families
- communication occurs among the school community concerning trends, issues, and potential changes in the
- environment in which schools operate
- there is ongoing dialogue with representatives of diverse community groups
- the school community works within the framework of policies, laws, and regulations enacted by local state, and
- federal authorities
- public policy is shaped to provide quality education for students
- lines of communication are developed with decision makers outside the school community

## Appendix C

### American Association of School Administrators Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders

An educational leader's professional conduct must conform to an ethical code of behavior, and the code must set high standards for all educational leaders. The educational leader provides professional leadership across the district and also across the community. This responsibility requires the leader to maintain standards of exemplary professional conduct while recognizing that his or her actions will be viewed and appraised by the community, professional associates and students. The educational leader acknowledges that he or she serves the schools and community by providing equal educational opportunities to each and every child. The work of the leader must emphasize accountability and results, increased student achievement, and high expectations for each and every student. To these ends, the educational leader subscribes to the following statements of standards.

The educational leader:

1. Makes the education and well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making.

2. Fulfills all professional duties with honesty and integrity and always acts in a trustworthy and responsible manner.
3. Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.
4. Implements local, state and national laws.
5. Advises the school board and implements the board's policies and administrative rules and regulations.
6. Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals or that are not in the best interest of children.
7. Avoids using his/her position for personal gain through political, social, religious, and economic or other influences.
8. Accepts academic degrees or professional certification only from accredited institutions.
9. Maintains the standards and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development.



10. Honors all contracts until fulfillment,  
release or dissolution mutually agreed upon by  
all parties.

11. Accepts responsibility and accountability for  
one's own actions and behaviors.

12. Commits to serving others above self.