

PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
AND THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF ETHICS TRAINING, PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE AND PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS
ON ETHICAL DECISION MAKING:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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CODES OF ETHICS ON ETHICAL DECISION MAKING:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the decision making processes of public school superintendents and to identify those factors that influenced decision making. Ethics education/training, professional experience and professional codes of ethics were considered as possible influencing factors. Thus, this study sought to answer how superintendents' perceive ethics education/training and professional experience influence their ethical decision making. This research further examined the use or non-use of professional codes of ethics by public school superintendents and the perceived impact these codes have on administrative decision making.

This study collected data from 10 public school superintendents throughout nine regions in Missouri. Superintendents were recruited based on variety in school district size and type. Both male and female superintendents participated in the study. Research data was obtained via personal interview with the participants.

Findings concluded that professional experience was by far the greatest perceived influence on study superintendents' decision making. In contrast, both ethics education/training and professional codes of ethics had little, if any, perceived impact on the ethical decision making processes of study superintendents.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A superintendent is the chief administrative officer of a school district, but he or she is also the most visible and significant link with the district community (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier & Glass, 2005). Greenfield (1991) upholds the premise that school leaders' decisions affect the complete school community; therefore the leader's conduct must be deliberately moral. Naturally, school leaders depend on public support to accomplish district goals. This support is demonstrated in a variety of ways including backing for bond issues and tax levies, student activities and event attendance, committee involvement, business partnerships and fundraising. To garner and maintain this needed support administrators must make decisions and take actions that build public trust. Public trust is essential for the success of a district. Further, a lack of trust in one's district leaders effectively undermines that district's mission. Undoubtedly, superintendents can be supported in making decisions that forge public trust.

In recent years, the issue of ethics in public schools has gained attention. More and more leaders have made headlines due to questionable ethical behaviors. Due to society's perception of moral weakness and general mistrust within school organizations, the professional and personal ethics of educational administrators have become an issue for concern and debate (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Mijares (1996) states "The strength of our country depends on the success of our public schools and the success of our public schools depends on the noble behavior of public educators, especially its leaders" (p.29).

Educational leaders are characteristically responsible for decision making. A decision can often pose an ethical dilemma for school leaders (Walker, 1995). During the

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decision making process, it can be unclear what decision is right or wrong; nor is a correct moral action always apparent (Greenfield, 1991). For example, a superintendent may make a decision that benefits some students, but not all students; the converse can also be true. In other cases the law dictates a decision that benefits a few, but at the same time, takes away valuable resources from the majority. In some instances, one decision may be neither more nor less ethical than another decision. Consequently, stakeholders, staff and students scrutinize and sometimes criticize school administrators for the decisions they make.

The search for right and wrong is not a contemporary concept. Throughout history man has established rules of conduct that were intended to provide models for societal behavior. These rules of conduct are typically classified in the field of moral philosophy. Moral philosophy can further be divided into three basic divisions, metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics (Kagan, 1998). This multiple case study focused on normative ethics. According to Kagan, normative ethics explores the topics of how to act, how to live and what kind of person to be. Kagan asks the questions, “Which acts are morally permissible, which ones morally required, and which ones morally forbidden – and what makes them so” (p.7)?

In discussions of morals and ethics, confusion often exists. Fisher (2004) suggests that authors are frequently unclear concerning the exact meanings of the terms they use. Such vagueness leads to confusion and misunderstanding. Both terms, ethics and morals, relate to right and wrong behavior. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, ethics can be defined as a series of rules provided to an individual by an external source, such as a profession or culture, and for a given time and place (Deigh, 1999). By

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comparison, morals relate to an individual's internal ideals and principles (Gert, 1999). Although both ethics and morals impact leaders, their decisions and their behaviors, the current multiple case study will focus primarily on ethics and the decision making process. Steps can be taken to gain a deeper understanding of the role that certain influences play in the decision making process. Administrators who have little or no superintendent experience can be supported to gain the experience needed for ethical decision making. Boards of education can be assisted in hiring candidates that will meet their school districts' needs. More research and greater knowledge of ethical decision making in school administration can support young, aspiring and veteran superintendents in taking ethical actions that will benefit students and entire school communities.

Background

Corporations such as Enron, Arthur Andersen and WorldCom have recently made headlines due to their leaders' questionable ethical behaviors (Reisenwitz, 2012). When leaders display a lack of integrity, it undermines trust in the organization as a whole (Bennis, 1994). Leaders, who have integrity, manifest a consistency between their values and subsequent behaviors (Yukl, 2006). Bennis points out that the continuous display of corporate malfeasance through daily media outlets appears epidemic in nature. Schools are organizations. As such, Pardini (2004) suggests that educational leaders are not immune to the same corporate malfeasance recorded in the media outlets. Mounting demands, increased accountability to the public and government and the demand for successful schools has added to the pressure placed on educational leaders. This increased demand for academic success has possibly contributed to a willingness to disregard certain ethical and moral standards. Choong and Brown (2007) found that

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school administrators were involved in inflating students' test scores and altering statistical data. In 2004 a Michigan superintendent was charged with embezzlement (Keller, 2004). In a further instance, a grand jury indicted a superintendent on charges of obstructing information related to felony charges brought against his wife for stealing more than \$180,000 in tuition and fees from classes she ran as the district's coordinator of adult education (Fla. District, 2009). Such unethical behavior affects organizational performance as well as each employer, employee and stakeholder associated with the organization (Cox, Friedman & Edwards, 2009).

A superintendent's decisions affect students, the entire school district and the community. Walker (1995) suggests that a more concise understanding of the nature of ethical decision making enables educational leaders to make ethical choices with integrity. Further, a superintendent, as the chief school administrator, has an opportunity to affect the ethical climate and culture of a school district. Research has shown that ethical climate influences organizational members' ethical attitudes and behaviors (Cullen, Victor & Bronson, 1993; Victor & Cullen, 1988; Weber, 1995). Thus, an ethical superintendent sets the standard for other school district administrators, teachers and students.

Decision Making for Educational Leaders

The decision making process is not simple; rather it is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors (Trevino, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006). Jungermann (2004) describes a decision as a commitment to a plan of action. It can represent that point in time when the commitment to act was made or it can include the entire planning process, the carrying out of the action and the monitoring of outcomes. Researchers,

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including James Rest (1986), Linda Trevino (1986, 1990, 1992, 1998, 1999, 2006) and Michael O'Fallon (2005) have studied the many phases of the decision making process. Scholars and philosophers have sought answers for how people identify various options for action, how they choose an action and finally how the effectiveness of the action is evaluated. Decisions require varying amounts of cognitive attention depending on the importance of the issue, familiarity with the problem and the experience level of the decision maker (Jungermann, 2004). The more complex, important and unfamiliar the problem is to a person, the greater the degree of attention needed to make a decision. Such complexity suggests a need for extra support for new and experienced educational leaders charged with the task of decision making. It's possible that professional codes of ethics can assist in providing this additional support.

Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders

Formal support for decision making is important for individuals and professionals who are charged with finding ethical answers to problems. Many professions, including physicians, lawyers and counselors, establish codes of ethics to guide professional behavior and set standards for a profession. Professional codes of ethics embody "the highest moral ideals of the profession," thus "presenting an ideal image of the moral character of both the profession and the professional" (Nash, 1996, p.96). Professional codes of ethics can potentially serve to support professionals during decision making. In addition, there is power in writing down the ethical expectations for all members of a profession (Ramsey, 2006). A written record of expectations prompts all members to acknowledge the same professional guidelines and also provides a basis for imposing sanctions for professional misconduct.

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Educational leaders occupy a unique position in that their consumers are children and young adults who are sensitive to experiences that may have lifelong significance. As important as a leader's decisions and actions are for students, the bigger picture reveals an impact on the entire district and surrounding community. All district stakeholders expect conduct and decision making that is moral and ethical. Like many professions, educational administrators have a code of ethics. In 1962 the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) adopted a code of ethics. Currently, The AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders states

An educational leader's professional conduct must conform to an ethical code of behavior and the code must set high standards for all education 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 (¶ 1, 2014).

In addition to a national code of ethics, many states, regions and professional organizations have their own codes. Since this multiple case study was conducted in Missouri and used Missouri superintendents as participants, the Missouri state code of ethics for educational leaders was of importance to this study.

MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders. The Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) is a statewide professional association whose purpose is to serve the needs of school superintendents and central office administrators (MASA, 2013). Ninety-three percent of Missouri public school

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superintendents were members of MASA during the 2013-2014 academic year (MASA, 2013). MASA has adopted the AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders. MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders consists of 13 standards (See Appendix A). These standards were established to guide professional conduct for Missouri's educational leaders.

Mijares (1996) asserts that school administrators must adhere to a strong code of ethics, evade political expectations, and do the right thing at all times. If school administrators choose to ignore an established professional code of ethics, the question is why? Maxcy (2002) suggests that various professional educators are either accepting of their unethical stance or are unknowledgeable of ethical standards. Bebeau (1994) suggests that professionals who fail to perform to professional ethical standards are guided by non-moral values. Perhaps there are additional reasons. Research indicates that such factors as ethics training and ethics education as well as professional experience may affect ethical decision making (Choong & Brown, 2007; Kohlberg, 1984; Dellaportas, 2006; Cron, 1984; Weeks, Moore, McKinney & Longenecker, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

This multiple case study examined the process of ethical decision making and how public school superintendents arrived at decisions. A specific decision outcome or whether a particular decision was ethical or unethical was not the focus of this study. Such evaluation was beyond the scope or intent of this study. Instead, this research explored the process of decision making and the possible factors that influenced decision making.

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Although studies have examined ethical decision making against codes of ethics, training and experience, these studies focused primarily on the ethical outcomes of decision making. They did not examine the process of ethical decision making. This multiple case study attempted to fill this gap by exploring superintendents' perceptions of the ethical decision making process. Further, this study investigated the conceived roles that ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics had on superintendents' decision making.

Some recent literature suggests that ethics training/education affects ethical decision making (Choong & Brown, 2007; Kohlberg, 1984; Dellaportas, 2006; Cron, 1984; Weeks et al., 1999). Conversely, other literature finds no relationship between ethics training/education and ethical decision making (Bloodgood, Turnley & Mudrack, 2008; Greenberg, 2002; Mayhew & Murphy, 2009). Although a majority of research on ethics in leadership has been conducted in the field of business, some doctoral research on this topic has been conducted in the education field. These findings, too, are mixed. Dexheimer's (1969) national study of superintendents and ethical decision making examined the relationship between superintendents' responses to hypothetical dilemmas and superintendents' graduate preparation courses that contained some discussion of ethical behavior in decision making. Dexheimer found no significant relationship between superintendent responses and course discussions of ethics. Other doctoral education research has attempted to determine if a relationship exists between superintendents' ethical decision making and ethics training. A majority of research suggests there is no relationship between ethical decision making and ethics training (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008; Winters, 2003; Millerborg, 1990). However, Grove (1999)

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found that administrative ethics training did impact decision making. While these studies examined ethics training and ethical decision making, they did not specifically define ethics training nor what specific activities or programs were considered ethics training. Dexheimer, as well as subsequent researchers, used survey questionnaires to illicit information from respondents regarding the impact of ethics training and education on ethical decision making. This researcher utilized personal interviews and hypothetical ethical dilemmas to determine the study participants' decision making processes. Further, previous studies did not examine whether superintendents perceived that ethics training/education impacted their ethical decision making or its process. As a result, little was known regarding superintendents' perceptions of the importance of ethics training on their decision making. This multiple case study of 10 public school superintendents attempted to fill this research gap.

There are several reasons why research findings on this topic appear to be mixed. Often in these studies the mechanism for obtaining ethics training information was a single query answered with a yes or no response. Questions related to the specific types of training were not asked, leaving it to the study participant to determine what constituted ethics training. The current study elicited more detailed information concerning participants' ethics training/education and yield specific information regarding its perceived influence on decision making.

Much of the available literature on professional experience and its impact on ethical decision making emanates from the field of business. While the fields of business and education have some similarities, a superintendent is essentially the CEO of a school district, there are differences. Obvious differences relate to the mission of the

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organization and the age of the consumer receiving services. Similarities between the two fields allow for some generalization of findings for professional experience and its impact on ethical decision making. Again, some doctoral research based on professional experience and ethical decision making has been initiated in the field of education. Dexheimer (1969) and subsequent research conducted by Fenstermaker (1994), Segars (1987) and Walker (1999) looked at job experience and ethical decision making of school superintendents. Interestingly, both Dexheimer and Fenstermaker found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical choices than those superintendents with greater professional experience. Simply, the longer an individual remained a superintendent, the less ethical their decisions became. Segars and Walker found no significant difference in superintendent responses regardless of the number of years in the current district or total number of years as a superintendent. More recently, Winters (2003) concluded that more experienced superintendents displayed higher levels of moral reasoning. Conversely, Wenger (2004) found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical decisions. Some additional research showed no relationship between professional experience and ethical decision making (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008). None of these studies explored superintendents' perceptions of the role professional experience played in their decision making processes. The current study not only provided additional information on the perceived role of professional experience in superintendents' ethical decision making but also yielded empirical evidence to address the gap in research.

Previous studies have attempted to measure superintendents' ethical decision making against professional codes of ethics. However none of the studies examined whether superintendents perceived that their decision making was influenced by a

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professional code of ethics and what role, if any, professional codes play in the decision making process. The current study explored the perceived role that professional codes of ethics played in decisions made by public school superintendents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine the perceived relationship between superintendents' ethical decision making, ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics. The study setting was Missouri with case research focused among 10 individual superintendents. Previous research that examined superintendents' ethical decision making and the impact of ethics training/education, professional experience, and professional codes of ethics on decisions had reported mixed findings. Further, these studies focused on ethical outcomes to solving dilemmas and not on the ethical decision making process. No research was found that defined ethics training/education; nor had studies solicited participants' perceptions of what they thought constituted ethics training. Respondents were left to determine independently the definition of ethics training and what constituted having had training. The current study gathered more detailed information regarding participants' ethics training/education and the degree to which superintendents' conceived that ethics training/education influenced the decision making process. Ethical decision making was explored more fully by using hypothetical ethical dilemmas as starting points for superintendents to walk the researcher through their decision making processes. These simulated dilemmas represented ethical challenges typical for school leaders. After reading each dilemma, the superintendents verbally described the decision making processes they would use to resolve the dilemma. While the creation of actual dilemmas was improbable, hypothetical

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vignettes served as a threshold for discussion of the decision making process. The use of these vignettes allowed the researcher to determine how superintendents arrived at an ethical decision and what accompanying factors influenced their decision making. In this way, this study adds to the available information regarding the perceived influence of ethics training/education, professional experience, and professional codes of ethics and how these conceived influences shaped superintendents' decision making. (See Appendix B for Definitions of Key Terms.)

In addition to the primary purpose of this study, the research added to the current literature on ethical decision making and public school administrators with a focus on Missouri superintendents serving as study participants. Since professional experience and education/training allow superintendents to learn from their own or others' mistakes, this researcher expected to find that the more professional experience and ethics training/education a superintendent had, the more he or she would perceive that these factors influenced decisions. Similarly, this researcher also expected to find that superintendents would consider a professional code of ethics as an influencing factor in decision making. Although Missouri superintendents served as participants for this multiple case study, the findings are of value to new superintendents nationwide who are dedicated to making ethical decisions as well as providing opportunities for discourse among practicing superintendents and those charged with preparing future administrators for leadership roles.

Research Questions

The following research questions direct this multiple case study.

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1. How do superintendents perceive their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?
2. What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?
3. What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents' decision-based responses to dilemmas?

Conceptual Framework

Ethical decision making process can be studied from a variety of perspectives. The current study utilizes The Multiple Ethical Paradigms. This framework attempts to respond to the unique ethical situations frequently encountered by school communities.

The Multiple Ethical Paradigms

There exist many ethical themes, theories or paradigms from which researchers and theorists work. One conceptual framework grounds this multiple case study of public school superintendents and the ethical decision making process. The framework, known as The Multiple Ethical Paradigms, derives from the field of educational leadership (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). It is an appropriate framework for this multiple case study since it emphasizes educational leadership and was created in an attempt to respond to the unique ethical situations frequently encountered by school communities. The Multiple Ethical Paradigms encompasses and builds on the work of Starratt (1994) and his conceptualization of the ethics of justice, care and critique and Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2011) ethic of the profession.

The ethic of the profession. Originally, Starratt (1994) supported the ethic of justice, care and critique as sufficient for administrative decision making. However,

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Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) argued that there was a missing ethical element from the ethics of justice, care and critique. They termed this professional element the ethic of the profession. The ethic of the profession is a broad umbrella term that encompasses some elements of the ethic of justice equated with codes, rules and principles, but also embodies additional concepts such as professional judgment and professional decision making (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003).

Robbins and Trabichet (2009) describe the ethic of the profession as pertaining to unique ethical situations occurring in educational environments. These situations prompt educational leaders to compare their own personal ethical codes with the ethical codes of the institutions and communities in which they serve. Schools do not exist in isolation, but exist in neighborhoods where certain customs and practices have been established by the school community or the general community. Behavior, deemed unethical in one community, was found to be a matter of personal preference in another community. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) noted that a number of their students had experienced such situations. A leader, aware of the ethical codes of their institution and the surrounding community, may avoid the possible consequences of clashing stances between his own ethical codes and those of the institution or community.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) suggest that ethical requirements for the field of educational leadership would bring legitimacy to the profession; a legitimacy for the education profession when compared to professions in law, medicine, dentistry and business that have established ethical requirements. According to these authors, there has been an increasing advocacy in recent years to prepare school administrators for ethical decision making. The ethic of the profession examines the expectations of the profession

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for its administrators and the subsequent decisions made by those professionals.

According to Stefkovich and Shapiro (2005) the ethic of the profession considers not only the moral aspects of the profession, but also includes an educational leader's own personal and professional code of ethics.

The ethics of justice, care and critique. Starratt (1994) suggests that the ethics of justice, care and critique are complimentary paradigms interwoven to encourage a human response to ethical situations the school community faces daily. According to Starratt, the ethics of justice, care and critique is a multidimensional construct, a joining of three paradigms. He proposes that while each sole theme is inadequate to support educational administrators in their decision making, together the three themes provide a framework for balanced practice. Quick and Normore (2004) suggest that educational leaders frequently utilize one ethic to the exclusion of others. They encourage educational leaders to consciously find the balance, often a difficult proposition. A leader's use of a single paradigm, at the exclusion of other paradigms, results in decisions that do not best serve the district community. To fully understand the ethic of justice, care and critique, there must be an awareness of the elements that comprise each individual ethic.

The ethic of justice. The ethic of justice derived historically from a philosophy that viewed society, rather than individuals, as central. This idea of ethics as justice existed as early as Aristotle and Plato (Stefkovich, 2006). Individuals were taught how to live in communities. Created from a liberal democratic tradition, the ethic of justice focused on laws, rights, and policies (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Shapiro and Gross suggest that today's professionals, who support a justice perspective, are concerned with rights and impartiality. These concepts of rights and impartiality are a part of distributive

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justice. Administrators who approach ethical dilemmas from a justice standpoint will concern themselves with the interpretation of law, rights and policies as well as the more abstract concepts of fairness, responsibility and liberty (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). These concepts may include questions concerning “equality versus equity, moral absolutism versus situational ethics and the rights of individuals versus the greater good of the community” (p.22). Denig and Quinn, (2001) purport that a basis for the justice approach is a discussion of what is right and what is wrong. Accordingly, ethical dilemmas should be solved by choosing a solution that brings the greatest amount of good to the most people, a principle of utilitarianism (Stefkovich, 2006).

The ethic of care. According to Stefkovich (2006), the ethic of care developed out of the ethic of justice. The ethic of care places emphasis on compassion and empathy. Special attention focuses on the additional concepts of loyalty, trust and empowerment. Recently, the ethic of care has been connected with feminists; however men and women jointly support its relevancy and significance (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). The solving of ethical dilemmas using the ethic of care theme requires a shift in how administrators should be prepared for decision making (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). According to these authors, educational leaders trained under the justice theme were taught using business and military models, utilizing concepts of hierarchy, following those at the top, being in command and directing subordinates. Conversely, the ethic of care requires that administrators consider multiple voices as they demonstrate a concern for others during decision making (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Education manifests through relationships. Noddings (2012) adds that care ethics can be categorized under a form of what might be called relational ethics. As such, caring is tied to human beings and their relations to each

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other (Noddings). According to Noddings, caring involves face-to-face personal encounters, although groups or organizations can create the environments in which caring can flourish. An additional element of this ethic is that the face-to-face encounters are done out of love and a natural inclination rather than from a sense of duty (Noddings). According to Quick and Normore (2004), an ethically responsible educational leader focuses on relationships and understands the interconnectedness of all stakeholders while promoting a climate of equality for all members within the community. Under the ethic of care, school leaders affirm relationships and connections when making decisions (Stefkovich, 2006).

Noddings (2012) proposes that under an ethic of caring, moral education takes the form of modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. For example, a teacher models desirable modes of interpersonal interaction and patterns of intellectual activity. Dialogue is open without preconceived conclusions on the part of either the caregiver or the cared-for individual. Students are allowed to practice caring by supporting peers and maintaining quality interactions with others. Confirmation involves helping a student construct his own ethical ideal, thus arriving at an attainable image of himself.

The ethic of critique. Concurrently, the ethic of critique emphasizes negative practices in society (Stefkovich, 2006). It also highlights the innate problems of the justice ethic, the idea that some groups in society, those with the advantage of power, privilege, culture and language, have had a greater voice when it comes to determining what is legal, just and ethical (Stefkovich, 2006). The ethic of critique arises out of critical theory with its focus on social class and its inequities (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). An ethic of critique promotes self-understanding and the improvement of social

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conditions (Stefkovich, 2006). Shapiro and Gross (2008) suggest that the ethic of critique forces a reframing of such concepts as privilege, power, inequality, culture and language. This reframing allows for an examination of who makes the laws and further, how the laws apply to diverse groups. According to Shapiro and Gross (2008), this ethical theme emphasizes the tension between the justice ethic and ideas of democracy and social justice. This ethic of critique is important in that it challenges educators to reevaluate the traditional views of law and justice and to focus on educational injustice at all levels (Shapiro & Gross, 2008).

Multiple ethical paradigms and the statement of ethics for educational leaders.

Each of the paradigms, the ethics of justice, care, critique and the profession speaks to one of the three categories of standards found in MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders. The ethic of justice relates to the standards dealing with statutes, rules, regulations and contracts. The ethic of critique corresponds to the ethic of justice in an attempt to reframe and balance the statutes, rules, regulations and contracts with social justice, democracy and equity. The ethic of care correlates with the Statement of Ethics standards concerning student and human rights. Finally, the ethic of the profession corresponds to those ethical standards pertaining to a leader's professional performance with elements of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, responsibility, accountability and work directed at improving the profession. As such, this framework, with its elements of justice, care, critique and profession and their alignment with MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders, was appropriate for this examination of school superintendents, utilization of a code of ethics and ethical decision making. The framework, with its ethics of justice, care, critique and profession, assisted in defining,

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categorizing and analyzing the study data. It was expected that superintendents with more ethics training and professional experience would perceive that their responses to ethical dilemmas aligned more closely to MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders.

Significance of the Study

Public school administrators daily encounter high profile issues including sex education, gender equality, sexual orientation of students, racial and ethnic diversity, school safety, school choice, drug and alcohol prevention education, separation of church and state and freedom of speech; every decision with ethical and moral implications (Pardini, 2004). As a result, "The work of educational leaders has become much less predictable, less structured, and more conflict-laden" (Begley & Johansson, 2008, p.424-425). Administrators are asked for increased job-related time commitments causing the lines of what are personal and professional responsibilities to blur. The general public has placed increased demands on school leaders for transparency and accountability. School staff, students and the local community scrutinize school leaders for the decisions they make, often in circumstances when there may be no solution that will satisfy all. These decisions often pose ethical dilemmas that school leaders must confront as part of the decision making process (Walker, 1995). "Executives today work in a moral mine field. At any moment, a seemingly innocuous decision can explode and harm not only the decision-maker but also everyone in the neighborhood" (Messick & Bazerman, 1996, p.9). Walker suggests that a more concise understanding of the nature of ethical decision making will ultimately enable educational leaders to make tough ethical choices with integrity.

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The decision making process is not simple; rather it is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors. Three such factors are ethics training/education, professional experience, and the use of a professional code of ethics. Presently, research findings are mixed regarding superintendents' ethical decision making and the impact of ethics training/education, professional experience, and a professional code of ethics on ethical decision making. Prior research has focused solely on these influences as they affected ethical outcomes. Instead, this research examined these factors as superintendents perceived they affected the decision making process. Emphasis was placed on the decision making process, not ethical outcomes. Research results can be used not only to support administrative decision making, but may suggest needs for leadership preparation programs and assist boards in hiring candidates who best meet the requirements of the district. Findings will specifically add to the literature for public school superintendents and specifically for Missouri superintendents. Findings will allow for a deeper understanding of the perceived role of ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics on ethical decision making. This multiple case study may serve as a valuable tool for new superintendents by providing a reference for ethical decision making. Findings may also facilitate discourse among practicing superintendents and possibly result in improvements for practice.

Summary

Effective school leadership is essential for high performing school districts. Increasingly, today's educational leaders have a difficult role where increasing demands dominate. Superintendents are the chief school administrators for public school districts. Superintendents are charged with making decisions for their respective districts. To assist

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with ethical decision making, school administrators have a national professional code of ethics, the AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders (AASA, 2013), that guides ethical decision making and supports ethical behavior. Missouri school superintendents also have a state code of ethics, MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders (MASA, 2009). The decision making process is not simple; rather it is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors. Possible factors include ethics training/education, professional experience and the use of professional codes of ethics. Increased knowledge as to how superintendents conceived these factors wield influence over ethical decision making will benefit public school superintendents and those who have a stake in public schools. Public trust is vital to the success of public schools. Without a community's support, a school cannot maintain needed partnerships with area services, pass bond issues and perpetuate the goodwill necessary to educate children.

Chapter Two reviews the pertinent research and literature on the subject of ethical decision making and the roles of the individual, organization, ethics training/education and professional experience in the decision making process. Chapter Two also reviews professional ethics and the use of codes of ethics for educational leaders. Chapter Three reports the methodology used for conducting the study. Chapter Four reports the findings of the study. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a review of literature pertaining to educational leaders, ethical decision making and professional codes of ethics. The review begins with a general discussion of leadership and ethical decision making. Further discussions in research examine how such factors as ethics training, professional experience, individual and organizational characteristics influence the ethical decision making process. This chapter concludes with a look at professional ethics and the importance of a professional code of ethics for public school superintendents.

Frequently, the appropriate response to ethical dilemmas is unclear. Hitt (1990) depicts this uncertainty when he states “Oftentimes... decisions do not call for simple right or wrong choices. Instead, they frequently call for a decision between two wrongs, with undesirable consequences associated with both alternatives” (pg.33). The following vignette illustrates the gray areas that often accompany ethical dilemmas. The original scenario was created by Strike, Haller and Soltis (2005). The following version is a simplified modification, but contains similar themes of the original. Specific details have been changed.

Superintendent Stern enjoyed looking through travel guides to warm and sunny locations during the long and harsh Wisconsin winters. Fortunately, his Board of Education provided a generous professional development allowance. Usually this allowance was enough for travel to southern U.S. climates, a nice hotel and great food. The challenge was to find a professional conference that met Superintendent Stern’s requirements for warm temperatures and sun in the mid-winter months. He could usually

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depend on finding a conference that met his criteria. Although these conferences weren't always of great benefit to the school district, Superintendent Stern could usually find at least one productive session to attend. Superintendent Stern always took work with him, making an attempt to be somewhat attentive to his responsibilities during his winter conference getaways. Stern often learned something of value and felt his district received a return on its investment. He always returned from these winter conferences rested and reenergized, ready to devote time to the district. This arrangement seemed a fair trade. The Board of Education always approved his trips, although the recreational component was evident to all. The arrangement worked for Stern, didn't seem detrimental to the district and didn't raise concerns among the school board members. Why shouldn't Superintendent Stern use his professional development allowance for a mid-winter getaway?

As the above vignette suggests, ethical dilemmas are not black and white nor are ethical responses to dilemmas always apparent. Rather, ethical decision making is a complex process. Stefkovich (2006) suggests that ethical decision making involves knowledge of various approaches to ethics as well as reflection, consistent self-assessing and reassessing.

Questions of Right and Wrong

Ethical decision making has been supported throughout history as man established rules of conduct that were intended to provide models for societal behavior. The most well-known rules of conduct include the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. Not only have societies and religions developed codes of conduct for individual behaviors,

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professional organizations have also established rules or standards of behavior that guide professional decisions and procedures.

Ethics or moral philosophy focuses on questions of right and wrong, what is good, and why practices are either moral or immoral (Stefkovich, 2006). In recent years, the issue of ethics has gained attention. More and more leaders have made headlines due to questionable ethical behaviors. Chief Executive Officers of large corporations such as Enron, Arthur Andersen and WorldCom as well as the banking and auto industries, have come under fire for practices that the public deemed unethical. Such unethical practices included destroying, altering or fabricating records, fraudulent accounting methods and defrauding shareholders. Educational leaders are not immune to these questionable behaviors either (Pardini, 2004). A simple internet search yields numerous headlines implicating educational administrators in the use of improper accounting practices, cheating and testing scandals and even sexual misconduct.

Callahan (2004) suggests that such headlines are not isolated instances; instead they represent a shifting pattern of widespread cheating in American culture. Further, not only are Americans cheating more, Callahan says they feel less guilt for their actions. Callahan adds that these episodes of cheating behaviors indicate a profound moral crisis that highlights serious economic and social problems in America. The values of a society are shaped by a number of forces including social and religious movements. Callahan purports that mass media has played a definitive role in changing and shaping America's current values. The implication of Callahan's premise is that the things we value as a society, that is, what it means to be successful or what we find attractive is defined by the few individuals or corporations who control mass media.

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This shift in culture is further illustrated by surveys that were conducted of 12,000 high school students in 2002 (Callahan, 2004). Callahan reports that students ranked a high paying job above being ethical, honorable, attractive or popular. They also felt that financial success was more important than following current events or participating in politics. Forty three percent of students surveyed felt that it was necessary to lie or cheat to be successful. This 2002 percentage represented a ten percent increase over students who felt that way in a 2000 survey. Interestingly, these same students said they felt they were more ethical than most people they knew. In addition, 91 percent of students were satisfied with their own ethics and character. These students represent America's future business, political, social and educational leaders.

Leadership and Ethical Decision Making

Repeated incidents of unethical behavior along with a lack of scholarly consensus for conceptualizing decision making models and theories suggests that there is no consensus as to how people make ethical decisions (Elm & Radin, 2012). Some scholars suggest that ethical decision making is no different from general decision making, advocating that all types of decisions have moral implications and consequences (Freeman, 1994; Paine, 2004; Crary, 2007). Ethical decision making is not a simple concept; rather it emerges as a complex phenomenon impacted by the interplay of individual differences, how individuals perceive ethical decisions, and how organizations reward ethical behaviors (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990). As a result, ethical standards are constantly in flux, changing from situation to situation and organization to organization (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985).

Values and Ethics

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A comprehensive analysis of ethical decision making must examine the concepts of values and ethics. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) suggest that controversy exists as to the relationship between these two ideals. One of the difficulties of defining the relationship between values and ethics is that there is no clarification as to the meaning of the word ethics. Langlois (2004) suggests that the term loses meaning when used without context. A context stripped ethic requires clarification for application to social or cultural situations (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007). Begley and Stefkovich conclude that professionals are attracted to practicality and relevance. Context-stripped philosophical discussions on ethics and values are considered to be neither practical nor relevant (Begley & Stefkovich). Ethics should be conceptualized by focusing on values and their relationship to actions (Langlois, 2004). She further states that ethics requires individuals to rely on self-discipline to direct actions rather than using the rules, regulations and penalties for bad behavior that prevails in organizations.

When examining school administrators' values, Stefkovich and Begley (2007) suggest that there is a tendency for authors to simply describe the values demonstrated. Manifested values have been alternately characterized as personal, professional, organizational, or sociocultural in nature (Begley & Johansson, 2008). In contrast, ethics are culturally derived. For administrators in our culturally diverse schools who need to be accountable for their decisions, ethics can be a problematic category of values to utilize as guides to action, especially when administrators are attracted to values based in rational consequences and consensus (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Stefkovich and Begley propose that, regardless of whether values and ethics are deliberately used as guides to decision making, they are a significant influence on the thought processes of

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individuals. These authors suggest that administrators typically use ethics as a guide for action in specific circumstances, when consensus is impossible, when dealing with unprecedented situations, for hot-button social issues and in cases of high stakes urgency.

Educational leadership.

Scholars in educational leadership approach the study of values and ethics from various fundamental perspectives (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Stefkovich and Begley summarize that Starratt's (1994) work is grounded in philosophy, while Stefkovich (2006) utilizes a legal perspective. Gross and Shapiro's (2004) work reflects a social justice orientation, whereas Begley (2004) focuses on the cognitive processing associated with administrative problem-solving. Langlois's (2004) orientation is through applied ethics and moral theory. According to Stefkovich and Begley, those theories grounded in philosophy (Hodgkinson 1996; Starratt, 2004) favor a focus on motivations and intentions, while other theories adopt a specific moral order such as an ethic of care (Noddings, 2003) or an ethic of community (Furman, 2003). Various perspectives are defined in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Sergiovanni (2005) suggests that leadership is associated with finding solutions to problems that people face, when actually leadership is about helping people understand, manage and even live with the problems they face. Garza Mitchell (2012) believes that the issues facing leaders today require a precise balance between stakeholders' needs and institutional resources, mission, vision, and values. Garza Mitchell proposes that the way in which leaders share and frame information, interpret the institutional mission and conceive of their own role as leader derives from the leader's own ethical perspective.

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Garza Mitchell (2012) further proposes that current leadership literature supports ethical values emphasizing collaboration and the social good. She adds that the more traditional images of leadership, authoritarian and transactional styles, continue to be upheld as good models. The ethical values indicated by these styles of leadership focus more on rules and the institution than on individuals within the institution or community. Garza Mitchell concludes that it is important for leaders to acknowledge their own leadership styles so not only can they understand why they make the decisions they do but can better explain those decisions to stakeholders.

Decision making. Begley and Johansson (2008) define decision making as the making of choices; an activity they say is familiar to most administrators. Decision making is highly influenced by an individual's personal values system (Eddy, 2010, Harris, 1994). Garza Mitchell (2012) indicates that leadership style is anchored in a leader's core values which guide organizational and external decisions. Leadership styles have even been linked to ethical perspectives. Starratt (2005) proffered five domains of ethical responsibility that are fundamental to educational leadership. These tenets of ethical responsibility connect leadership to the ethical values associated with the common good rather than individual gain. These domains include: responsibility as a human being, as a citizen and public servant, as an educator, as an educational administrator, and as an educational leader.

Ethical decision making involves a dilemma or situation that requires a choice between two legitimate options (Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). According to Robbins and Trabichet such dilemmas and their resulting decisions can be viewed from two perspectives. One perspective states that there is a best outcome to a dilemma and that

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best outcome should be sought. The second perspective suggests that a choice should be made according to norms. The difficulty with this second perspective is determining what set of norms to use. Both perspectives require a sifting of criteria in order to arrive at a decision. A common element of decision making is the degree to which ends justify means. Yukl (2006) suggests that when reviewing the ethics of a decision one should consider purpose, consistency of moral standards and outcomes.

The Role of the Individual in Ethical Decision Making

Ethical decision making involves a complex combination of both individual and organizational contingencies. Since ethical decision making is influenced by both the individual and the organization, a discussion follows for each of these factors with additional detail as to how they influence ethical or unethical choices. The role of the individual will be reviewed first, with an assessment of the role of the organization following.

Leaders positionally influence the values and beliefs of individuals, society and the organizations they lead. In fact, Yukl (2006) indicates that influence is the basis of leadership. Research has focused on the part leadership plays in influencing ethical conduct (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). This research indicates that ethical leadership is demonstrated by appropriate personal conduct and interpersonal relations. A leader's appropriate conduct is conveyed to followers through the use of communication, reinforcement and decision making (Brown et al.). Such influence can have a powerful impact on followers. How employees' perceived their supervisors' ethical leadership was found to impact their willingness to report problems to management (Brown et al.). Perceptions of ethical leadership were also linked to employees' job dedication and

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supervisor satisfaction (Trevino et al., 2006). Influence can be ethical or unethical, proper or improper, for the greater good or for personal gain. Leaders can use their power and influence for career advancement and personal economic profit at the expense of the public or the organizations they lead. Leaders can even cause their followers to perform crimes of obedience by making their own unethical actions appear legitimate (Yukl, 2006).

The elements of influence are complex. According to Yukl (2006) some influential acts are beneficial at times, but may be harmful in other ways or at other times. The same acts that benefit some may be detrimental to others. The use of influence then becomes an issue of ethics. The use of power and the control of information in order to alter perceptions of events or issues are clearly wrong. A leader's use of influence to change the underlying values or beliefs of individuals is also wrong, especially when those followers are weak or lack self-confidence. In attempting to balance the effects of influence, there must be a consideration of rights, accountability and social responsibility (Yukl, 2006). An evaluation of a leader's influence should examine the degree to which the basic laws of society have been violated, whether the influence has endangered the health or safety of others, if rights have been denied and whether people have been exploited for personal gain (Yukl, 2006).

Although a leader's decision making can occasionally affect only the leader, more often it affects a few, a group or even multitudes of people as in the case of an institutional decision. Since decision making has the potential to affect many, those who make decisions frequently wield power, influence and the ability to do good or cause harm in equal measure.

Decision Making and Power

Power is relationship specific (Pfeffer, 2005). According to Pfeffer, power manifests in specific social relationships. Within given social settings, individuals expect a certain influence or power to evolve. Pfeffer further explains that when such power is legitimized, it is defined as authority. When employees accept the norms of an organization, they begin to expect the exercise of influence. Power that is legitimized into authority is no longer threatening, but is accepted as natural (Pfeffer, 2005). This legitimized authority can be beneficial for both employees and an ethical leader. In the case of an unethical leader, such legitimized authority can be detrimental to employees.

Professional relationships that operate within hierarchal structures, such as schools, exhibit an element of power. The power of office refers to those who make decisions for designated others who exist on the lower end of the hierarchal structure. Power of office has six aspects: inspirational, charismatic, expert, persuasive, knowledge and coercive (Rebore, 2001). When administrators use these power strategies, subordinates may counter with strategies of their own as they attempt to make a favorable impression. In an attempt to look good, employees may use conformity, flattery, excuses, apologies or favors (Rebore).

The use of authority over time may actually increase and enhance the amount of authority available to a leader. Social acceptance and approval can result in making the use of power and influence more effective. In the case of an ethical leader, power is a mechanism through which individuals and events can be positively affected. Conversely, in the case of an unethical leader, there is great potential for the misuse of power, influence and authority to the detriment of subordinates.

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In examining a leader's influence or power, it is important to note the difference between an individual leader's ethics and the ethical behavior of certain types of leaders (Yukl, 2006). A discussion of power and individual leaders includes such issues as personal values, intentions, choice, stages of moral development, the use of ethical or unethical behavior and the type of influence used. There is subjectivity in determining the criteria that will be used in the examination of a leader's ethics. As a result, the outcome of a leader's final evaluation can be influenced as much by the characteristics of the judge as by the leader's decisions (Yukl, 2006).

The American public collectively looks to leaders to demonstrate the values that have been historically significant, such as social responsibility, compassion for the less fortunate, civic duty and the ideals of character, ethics and integrity. Callahan (2004) has suggested that those values are frequently dismissed today. He concludes that an increased emphasis on money and economic gain are at fault.

Decision making and integrity. Often in discussions of ethical leadership the issue of integrity is foremost, although an inarguable definition has not been established (Yukl, 2006). According to Yukl, the most basic definition contains some concept of consistency between the values held by leaders and their subsequent behaviors. Yukl also acknowledges that a variant definition of integrity includes a requirement that the values held are moral and that the behaviors exhibited are ethical. Carter (1997) stipulates that being integral requires three steps. According to Carter, an individual must determine what is right or wrong and then act upon that determination. Thirdly, an individual must openly acknowledge that he or she is acting on what is understood to be right. Carter summarizes the three steps as moral reflectiveness, keeping commitments and being

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unashamed to do right. Carter states “The rest of what we think matters very little if we lack essential integrity, the courage of our convictions, the willingness to act and speak in behalf of what we know to be right” (p.7).

Rather than living an integral life with concepts of right and wrong formed by religious education or role models who emphasize character or ethics, Callahan (2004) suggests that the majority of individuals, including leaders, form their ideas of right and wrong based on winning social approval or staying out of trouble. Often these ideas of right and wrong are perpetuated by the changing values of societal culture.

Individual factors that influence decision making. Mahoney (2006) suggests that there are four areas where individual differences affect decision making and behavior. He identifies these areas as personality, change and growth in adult development, change and growth in career development and gender issues. According to Mahoney, each of these areas has the potential to lead to dishonest or unethical behavior. In his research of school administrators, Mahoney identifies six areas where administrators were less than honest in their decision making and behaviors. In order of frequency these six areas are compromising policies, procedures, rules or laws; hiding bad news; using nondisclosure or strategic ambiguity; hiding funds and engaging in differential treatment. Mahoney concludes that the role of administrators as protectors of the interests of others often conflicts with organizational rules or policies.

Ferrell and Gresham (1985) suggest that personal background and socialization characteristics such as education and business experience may affect individual ethical decision making. Ferrell and Gresham support the premise that individual ethical decision making can be impacted by increased opportunities to commit unethical behavior and by

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those significant others associated with the individual. In searching for the reasons why individuals engage in certain ethical behaviors, Callahan (2004) explains that there are four basic reasons why leaders obey the rules. According to Callahan, individuals choose to obey rules or policies because they believe the cost of breaking the rules overrides the benefits. Individuals also obey the rules in response to peer pressure or social expectations. Similarly, certain rules conform to a leader's personal morality. The final reason that Callahan gives for enforcing laws and obeying authority is that in the end, it works toward the long term best interests of the individual. As a result, conflict that arises from an administrator's role as protector and his desire to obey rules and policies can result in less ethical decision making.

Individual factors for superintendents. Langlois (2004) proposes that the superintendency as a practice is comprised of human relationships governed by commitments, duties, rules and standards. Begley and Johansson (2008) suggest that in value conflict situations an individual's nonnegotiable personal core values may be at variance, one internal value warring with another, or personal values clashing with professional or organizational demands. In Langlois's research on superintendents' decision making processes, superintendents indicated a desire to be consistent with their beliefs and values while also being authentic in their communication and action. Further, the superintendents "stated that they often thought about the consequences and the impact of their decision on others for a long time. This process made them very aware of the operational leeway and actual power they had" (p.85).

Even when a decision is made that is in the best interests of students and the district as a whole, a superintendent's decision can change a life or lives negatively. For

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example, a superintendent may terminate an employee for cause, but at the same time know that the individual has a family that will be negatively impacted by the termination and the subsequent loss of income. Superintendents don't make these decisions lightly, and they think about their decisions long after the decisions are made. A study using hypothetical ethical dilemmas can in no way approach the gravity, seriousness and emotion that real life dilemmas inspire. Further, unethical decisions and behaviors undermine the public's trust in the superintendent and the school district. A loss of public trust could lead to declining student enrollment as well as a lack of community support for bond issues and levies.

The Role of the Organization in Ethical Decision Making

A variety of organizational factors influence ethical behavior and decision making. Jones (1991) suggests that a myriad of environmental factors work to affect the ethical decision process. In addition, school organizations are experiencing increasing social pressure for greater stakeholder involvement in decision making (Begley & Johansson, 2008). An organization's success is measured by the routine performances of its employees. Anything, including ethical behavior that takes away from the profit or goals of the organization, is considered an impediment to attaining organizational purpose (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). Ferrell and Gresham (1985) identify three major predictors of unethical behavior within organizations. These predictors of unethical behavior include internal organizational pressure, association with others within the organization who are perceived to be engaging in unethical behavior and opportunities to commit unethical behaviors. Unmet organizational goals contribute to unethical behavior even when no economic benefits are gained (Schweitzer, Ordonez, & Douma, 2004).

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Schweitzer et al. indicate this fact is especially true when individuals are just slightly removed from the achievement of a goal.

Organizational pressure to engage in unethical behavior can manifest in a variety of ways. Generally, research has indicated that authority figures can greatly influence employees to behave unethically (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Milgram, 1974). Specifically, organizations that have strong expectations for employees to obey leaders have been found to have increased levels of unethical behavior compared to other organizations (Trevino, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998). These organizations were also characterized by employees who were less willing to report ethical problems to administration (Trevino, Weaver, Gibson & Toffler, 1999). Weaver and Agle (2002) further theorize that an individual's religious identity and associated ethical propensity can be influenced by organizational expectations, resulting in either increased or decreased ethical decisions. Trevino and Youngblood (1990) studied decision making in the organizational environment. They support a "bad barrels" philosophy that maintains that "good apples" can be poisoned by the organizational environment (p.378). After reviewing much survey and laboratory research on the subject, Trevino and Youngblood conclude that unethical behavior in organizations can be attributed in part to competitive pressure, a lack of reinforcement of ethical behavior, management's results orientation, requests from authority figures to behave in unethical ways and extrinsic rewards for unethical behavior.

Rewards and Punishment

Organizational rewards and punishments have been shown to impact ethical behavior and decision making. Numerous studies have shown that the existence of

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rewards or inducements for unethical behavior increase that behavior (Ashkanasy, Windsor & Trevino, 2006; Tenbrunsel, 1998; Trevino & Youngblood, 1990). However the relationship of rewards to ethical behavior and decision making is more complex. Interestingly, offering incentives for ethical behavior does not necessarily escalate that behavior, since the reward undermines the internal value of ethical behavior (Trevino & Youngblood. Economic gains for ethical behavior have been shown to weaken motivation for engaging in prosocial behavior (Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). In addition, individuals expect to not suffer for their ethical behavior (Trevino & Ball, 1992, Trevino, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999). There is also an expectation among the organizational community that those who violate ethical expectations will be disciplined (Trevino, 1992; Trevino & Ball, 1992; Trevino & Weaver, 1998). Self-protective or unethical behavior can result when that fairness principle fails (Trevino et al., 1999).

Similarly, organizational punishment influences ethical behavior. This relationship is complex as well. Tenbrunsel and Messick's (1999) studies show that behavior is less ethical when there are weak sanctions in place compared to no sanctions at all. The presence of sanctions results in viewing behavior or decisions from a mission-driven framework rather than an ethics framework. In summary, an organization's management of rewards and punishments greatly impacts ethical decision making and behavior within that organization (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990).

Issue-Contingent Decision Making

Jones (1991) suggests that there are two points at which organizational decision making and moral behavior are affected. According to Jones, these points are establishing

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moral intent and engaging in moral behavior. He supports the idea that organizational factors can result in either ethical or unethical behavior regardless of good or bad intention. Jones maintains a model of decision making that he refers to as an issue contingent model. This model purports that the degree of moral intensity of an issue impacts subsequent decision making and behavior. Jones explains that distance, whether physical, psychological, cultural or social, influences how individuals perceive moral issues. The importance of moral issues is impacted directly by the decision maker's perception of decision consequences, the degree of effect, probability of effect and immediacy of effect (Jones). Decision makers will behave more positively when the issue is closer and more important to them in contrast to a dilemma that is perceived to be more distant and less important. For example, a superintendent who is retiring or leaving a district may apply less scrutiny or intensity to working on a projected budget or salary schedule, since he will no longer be personally affected by outcomes. Consequently, hypothetical dilemmas and questions about decision making, as they relate to this study, will not have the same intensity as real life dilemmas.

The Role of Training in Ethical Decision Making

In the aftermath of increasingly publicized ethics scandals, ethics education is receiving renewed consideration. Historically, legislators have attempted to promote ethical behavior with the Securities Act of 1933 and 1934, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Improvement Act and the SOX of 2002 (Beggs & Dean, 2007). Such legislation has been criticized for attempting to mandate ethics. Beggs and Dean question the implication that legal is ethical. Further, they suggest that most leaders would agree that legal is not always ethical, but legal, compared to moral and

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ethical principles, is easier to understand, teach and enforce. As corporations scrambled to instill moral sensitivity into their organizations after the Enron collapse, Wipperfurth (2002) reports an increase in corporate ethics training programs. Such extensive programs included ethics advice and counseling, written standards of behavior, ethics instruction and channels for anonymously reporting ethics violations (Coates, 2004). Likewise, school districts are influenced by circumstances and situations that affect neighboring school districts or even distant schools who experience news worthy events. Such events allows superintendents to prepare their districts for possible situations whether they relate to finance, school safety or ethics.

Criticism of Ethics Training and Education

Some critics of legislated ethics believe that educational institutions should be charged with teaching personal ethics. Beggs and Dean (2007) report that the concept of virtue and whether it can be taught has been debated by philosophers dating back to Plato's (1961) work titled *Meno* written in 380 B.C.E. In this work Plato and Meno argue the point of whether virtue is teachable. The debate continues today. Current research findings on ethics education and its impact on behaviors are mixed (Beggs & Dean; Liebler, 2010). Liebler proposes that there is no real evidence to prove that ethics education is a solution to unethical behaviors.

In addition to the effectiveness debate, researching ethics education and its impact on ethical decision making is fraught with difficulties. Beggs and Dean (2007) found problems measuring the degree to which ethics education affected behavioral change. They also had problems with determining how decision making corresponded to actual behaviors. Liebler (2010) points out that much of the current ethics education literature

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emphasizes judgment, reasoning and perception. Action is not emphasized. Waples, Antes, Murphy, Connelly, and Mumford (2009) found that action was the focus in only 2 of 25 ethics education studies. Previously Kohlberg and Hersh (2001) reported there was no defined relationship between moral judgment and moral behavior. Research has also shown that ethical decision making in the workplace is situation specific. As a result, a leader's reasoning is influenced by specific situations, making measurement difficult (Weber & Wasieleski, 2001). In addition to situations affecting ethical decision making, Jones (1991) and Trevino (1986) also found that in corporations, both relational and issue-specific factors influenced the actions individuals took when presented with ethical dilemmas. Another problem with studying ethical decision making and ethics education is the social desirability bias. This bias reflects an inclination to either over or under estimate the probability of completing either a desirable or undesirable action (Chung & Monroe, 2003). Although this bias could potentially be a factor, the current study's primary focus is the process of making a decision and will not focus on a specific outcome.

Trends in research findings. Research has shown that ethics training is less influential on attitudes and actions when certain individual characteristics exist (Bloodgood, Turnley & Mudrack, 2010). One such characteristic is Machiavellianism. Russell and Swartout (2007) describe Machiavellianism as a form of behavior whereby others are manipulated and deceived in the pursuit of one's own interests. A number of pioneering studies conducted in the 1960s resulted in the development of scales, The Mach IV and Mach V, used to measure Machiavellianism (Russell & Swartout). According to Bloodgood et al., Machiavellianism describes the tendency of individuals to

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perceive some forms of cheating as acceptable. These high Mach individuals focus on their own self-interest and disregard society's behavioral expectations. The characteristic of Machiavellianism can affect ethical attitudes and actions (Bloodgood et al.). In their study of ethics instruction, students and cheating, these researchers found that upon receiving moral instruction, low Machiavellian (Mach) and high GPA students benefited most in their attitudes toward cheating. Choong and Brown (2007) again found that students with higher GPAs as well as older students engaged in less flagrant cheating.

Research has exposed additional trends as they relate to ethics education and moral reasoning. Some researchers (Kohlberg, 1984; Dellaportas, 2006) found that moral reasoning expanded with increasing levels of formal education. Similarly, Myyry and Helkama's (2002) findings indicate that students aged 24-31 years without a college degree experienced greater gains in ethical sensitivity upon receiving ethics education. In an additional study, Candee (1976) investigated the relationship between the structure of moral reasoning and specific moral choice. Candee found that in moral dilemmas individuals who were at higher stages of moral structure more frequently made decisions that were consistent with human rights and less often made decisions that supported conventions or institutions. Candee's findings supported Kohlberg's claim that at the highest stage of reasoning all persons, given the same information, should reach the same answer. Collectively, these research findings offer some insight as to the elements that make ethical education most beneficial.

Similarly, Rest (1986) found that moral education programs, especially those lasting longer than three weeks and including moral dilemma discussions, do promote moral judgment development. Rest further indicates that the natural development of

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moral judgment is sped up by students' moral problem solving and interactive exchange. According to Rest, moral education facilitates faster moral development than would occur progressively with age. The current case study will not provide evidence to support Rest's theory. However, this study's findings may assist in driving qualifying institutions to add ethics courses to their curriculums.

Educational leaders and ethics education. Dexheimer's (1969) national study of superintendents and ethical decision making examined the relationship between superintendents' responses to hypothetical dilemmas and superintendents' graduate preparation courses that contained some discussion of ethical behavior in decision making. Dexheimer found no significant relationship between superintendent responses and course discussions of ethics. Additional research that attempted to replicate elements of Dexheimer's 1969 study, did not examine ethics training and its possible relationship to superintendents' ethical dilemma responses (Fernstermaker, 1994; Segars, 1987; Walker, 1999). More recently, a majority of doctoral education research suggests there is no relationship between ethical decision making and ethics training (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008; Winters, 2003; Millerborg, 1990). However, Growe (1999) did find that administrative ethics training did impact decision making. Often in these studies the mechanism for obtaining ethics training information is a single query answered with a yes or no response. Questions related to the various types and depths of training are not asked, leaving it to the participant to determine what constitutes ethics training. Further, these studies did not examine whether superintendents perceived that ethics training/education impacted their ethical decision making. As a result, little is known regarding superintendents' perceptions of the importance of ethics training on their

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decision making. The current study will elicit more detailed information concerning participants' ethics training/education and yield empirical evidence regarding its influence on decision making. Whereas previous research has focused on decision outcomes and whether those decisions were ethical or unethical, this multiple case study will examine the process of decision making and the perceived influence of ethics training on the decision making process.

While the debate regarding ethics education's effectiveness continues, some literature (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003; Beck Murphy and Associates, 1997) advocates that ethics training promotes professional values. According to Stefkovich and Shapiro, many professions require graduate students to take at least one ethics class before graduation. While educational administration does not yet have an ethics requirement, there has been increased interest in colleges of education to provide ethics classes (Stefkovich & Shapiro). This upsurge in ethical interest may partly be related to the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). ISLLC is a consortium of 32 education agencies and 13 education administrative associations that have worked cooperatively to establish an education policy framework for school leadership. ISLLC has collaborated with the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA) to establish the study of ethics as outlined in the ISLLC's standard number 4 (Stefkovich & Shapiro). In support of establishing required ethics education in the profession of educational administration, Beck, Murphy and Associates (1997) suggest that ethics education provides socialization into the profession and also instills basic professional values. In addition to interstate standards, states also have standards for educational

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administrators. Missouri requires that superintendents meet certain certification requirements prior to filling the role of superintendent in Missouri public school districts.

Missouri superintendent certification standards. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, certification requirements for Missouri superintendents (K-12) have remained constant since October 2005 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). These standards consist of initial professional requirements and career continuous professional elements. The initial requirements are comprised of the following:

- A permanent or professional Missouri certificate of license to teach or related equivalent
- A minimum of one (1) year's experience as a building or district-level administrator at a public or accredited nonpublic school
- Successful completion of the district-level administrator's assessment designated by the board
- Completion of a course in Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child
- Completion of an educational specialist or advanced degree program in educational leadership and recommendation from the designated official of a college/university approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The approved graduate credit shall include:
 1. Foundations of educational administration;
 2. City school administration;
 3. School supervision;
 4. Curriculum construction;

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5. Research and evaluation;
 6. School finance;
 7. School law;
 8. School staff personnel administration;
 9. School/community relations;
 10. School plant design and operation;
- A recommendation from the designated certification official from a state-approved educational specialist or advanced degree program for the preparation of superintendent; this must be part of the Application for Superintendent's Certificate.

Although superintendent certification requires the completion of 10 specific graduate courses, none of the courses are ethics based. Despite this fact, various courses do contain some ethics discussions. The required assessment, Missouri Educator Gateway Assessments for superintendents also has an ethics component. The required assessment is a computer-based test with 80 multiple-choice questions and 2 written assignments. The time limit for this assessment is 3 hours and 15 minutes. Gale Hairston, Ed.D., Director of Educator Preparation for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, provided information regarding the assessment and those competencies appraised by the test. The assessment measures a range of competencies from 0001-0011. Ethics questions are included in a section of the assessment that covers five competency areas (0005-0009) and makes up 32 percent of the test.

Ethics are covered in Test Competency 0008 which states "Understand the personal and professional responsibilities of superintendents, including legal and ethical principles and practices." According to the Missouri Educator Gateway Assessments content alignment table, Test Competency 0008 relates to Missouri Superintendent

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Standards 5 and 6. Missouri Superintendent Standard 5 states “Superintendents have the knowledge and ability to ensure the success of all students by acting with integrity, responsibility and in an ethical manner.” Missouri Superintendent Standard 6 states “Superintendents have the knowledge and ability to ensure the success of all students by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.” Test Competency 0008 also relates to ISLLC Educational Leadership Policy Standards 5: Community of Care for Students. Standard 5 states “An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of every student by promoting the development of an inclusive school climate characterized by supportive relationships and a personalized culture of care.” No additional certification requirements address an ethics component.

The addition or lack of ethics training or professional preparation is relevant to the discussion of ethical decision making. Formal ethics training within educational administration programs is a relatively recent concept, historically speaking. Beck, Murphy and Associates (1997) believe that in recent years there has been a shift in the perception of ethics and its importance in preparing educational administrators. They reviewed responses to a questionnaire sent to education program chairpersons at 48 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member schools. In summary, over one-third of the institutions questioned had ethics classes with some institutions requiring students to take an ethics class in at least some degree programs.

Those researchers, theorists and educators, who promote ethics education’s positive influence on ethical decision making frequently stipulate that courses or training should be structured with specific elements. Starratt (2004) provides some

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recommendations for preparation programs. Starratt advises that preparation programs should move away from the simplistic practice of students analyzing cases containing complex ethical issues. Rather he promotes that leaders should be challenged to examine their basic morals, values and principles as human beings, educators and citizens. He is strongly critical of professors who resist this direction on the basis that it is representative of religious ministry or psychological counseling. According to Starratt, such resistance ignores the perilous condition in which schools find themselves and reflects a “dysfunctional separation of professionalism from moral responsibility” (p.136).

McDowell (1991) who taught in law schools for over thirty years offers some insight for professional schools and professional educators. McDowell began privately asking students about ethics. He reports that most students indicated that they wanted to be decent, honorable professionals, but felt they could not be successful without compromising their personal ethics. These students felt that acting unethically gave others a competitive edge that ethical individuals could not overcome. McDowell charged professional schools and professional educators with bringing these assumptions out into the open, testing them, and then working to change existing operating assumptions.

The Role of Professional Experience in Ethical Decision Making

Another probable factor which impacts ethical decision making is a leader’s professional or career experience. Similarly to the mixed research findings in studies of the impact of ethics education on ethical decision making, research results exploring the impact of professional experience on ethical decision making is also mixed (Eweji & Brunton, 2010).

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A first step in reviewing literature on professional experience is to look at Cron's (1984) introduction of a career development framework and Weeks et al.'s (1999) work in developing a career stage construct. Cron (1984) and Weeks et al. (1999) suggest that individuals' attitudes toward ethical issues may vary depending on the stage of career. Researchers in this field acknowledge four career stages through which individuals progress (Cron, 1984; Weeks et al., 1999). According to these researchers, individuals begin with the exploration stage, proceed through the establishment stage and the maintenance stage, and then enter the final stage, disengagement. The first stage, exploration, is a worker's introduction into a career. Individuals in this stage are concerned with peer acceptance; their desire for peer acceptance may lead them to make shortcuts or ethically questionable actions in order to achieve acceptance. The second career stage is establishment. The focus of this stage is promotion and superior performance. Individuals are committed to a specific career and may feel pressure to compromise ethical behavior in order to excel. The third stage, maintenance, is characterized by an individual's sense of job security, high self-esteem stemming from past achievements and an overall reduced competitiveness. In this stage, individuals are willing to help younger colleagues. Since many career goals have been achieved by this time, the allure of compromising ethical values is reduced. Disengagement, the final stage, is characterized by the individual's preparation to leave the career. In this stage, the employee gradually detaches from the organization and other elements of organizational life. Further, Weeks et al. propose that individuals in advanced career stages display higher levels of ethical judgment than do individuals in the lower stages of career development. If this premise is correct, there is an expectation that Missouri

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superintendents, who have been employed the longest in the superintendency, would report ethical decision making processes that differ significantly from less experienced superintendents.

Eddy (2010) suggests that a leader's ethical perspective and related choices derive from a lifetime of experiences. Eweje and Brunton (2010) found a relationship between work experience and ethical judgment. They discovered that the more experienced worker was more ethically oriented and demonstrated higher ethical judgments. Kidwell, Stevens and Bethke (1987) found a relationship between ethical beliefs and length of employment. In a study of students, respondents who had worked for a lengthy period of time again appeared to be more ethical than those students with limited work experience (Ruegger & King, 1992).

However, not all research found a meaningful relationship. Some research findings indicate that a relationship between length of service and ethical behavior was insignificant (Dubinsky & Ingram, 1984; Callan, 1992; Serwinek, 1992). Other authors have proposed that more work experience related research is warranted (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Loe, Ferrell & Mansfield, 2000).

Professional Experience for Superintendents

Much of the available literature on professional experience and its impact on ethical decision making also emanates from the field of business. However, some doctoral research based on professional experience and ethical decision making has been initiated in the field of education. Dexheimer (1969) and subsequent research conducted by Fenstermaker (1994), Segars (1987) and Walker (1999) looked at job experience and the ethical decision making of school superintendents. Interestingly, both Dexheimer and

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Fenstermaker found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical choices than those with greater professional experience. Simply, the longer an individual remained a superintendent, the less ethical their decisions became. Segars and Walker found no significant difference in superintendent responses regardless of the number of years in the current district or total number of years as a superintendent. More recently, Winters (2003) concluded that more experienced superintendents displayed higher levels of moral reasoning. Conversely, Wenger (2004) found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical decisions. Some additional research showed no relationship between professional experience and ethical decision making (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008). The expectation for the current study of public school superintendents is that there will be a perceived positive relationship between professional experience and its perceived influence in the ethical decision making process. Decision responses to ethical dilemmas will be explored from a career-based strategies perspective. Presently, there is no known research that has examined superintendents' perceptions of the role professional experience plays in their decision making processes. As such, this multiple case study's findings will fill the research gap and add to the research literature for educational leaders, professional experience and its perceived influence on ethical decision making.

Professional Ethics

In addition to personal and organizational ethics, professionals often look to professional ethics when making decisions. Barker (2005) offers a brief definition and summary of professional ethics. According to Barker, professional ethics provides codes of conduct that rule over professional duties. These codes of conduct may be formal or informal, spoken or systemized. Professions are allowed to establish their own standards

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and to create disciplinary procedures for enforcing existing standards. A code of ethics exists to which members of the profession subscribe. These rules of conduct are created to protect the public and to encourage a level of trust. In general, society grants professions measures of control over their activities. In return, society receives better quality service from the profession in addition to less professional exploitation. Barker further elaborates that a profession maintains three separate responsibilities; responsibility toward clients, responsibility toward the profession and responsibility toward society. Airaksinen (1998) suggests that since a profession has no challenge to its expertise, the profession should use its power with caution.

Lebacqz (1985) promotes the idea of professional character. She suggests that taking on a professional role is not simply taking on certain duties, but includes taking on an array of expectations about behavior. Lebacqz adds that professionals are not only expected to perform certain duties, but to perform those duties with character, virtue and integrity. Further, such standards as competence and commitment are closely linked to integrity (Lebacqz).

Although professionals have defined responsibilities to clients, the profession and society, these responsibilities are not without the possibility of conflict. In his introduction to *Conflict of Interest in the Professions*, Davis (2001) discusses the standard view of conflict of interest. He uses the terms “relationship,” “judgment,” “interest” and “proper exercise” to illustrate the conflict of interest concept (p.8). According to Davis, a relationship is simply a connection between one entity and a second entity. The relationship may be formal or informal and of short term or long term duration. A conflict of interest exists when the first entity is charged with executing judgment over the second

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entity; in addition, the first entity has a special interest that interferes with the proper exercise of judgment in that relationship. Judgment, used in this context, means knowledge, skill and insight gained from professional competence. Davis further explains that the relationship between the two entities must be fiduciary or requiring trust that one entity will do something for the second entity. Davis indicates that professionals who do not respond to a conflict of interest are negligent since their exercise of ethical judgment will be less than reliable. For example, a superintendent who has a relative employed within the school district must consciously avoid decisions making that is directly influenced by that familial relationship.

Professional Codes of Ethics

To assist with ethical decision making, professionals possess a code of ethics established by their profession. In fact, McDowell (1991) suggests that the creation of a code of ethics is a defining characteristic of a profession. Codes of ethics are becoming more common, due to increasing demands for accountability and a reassurance that standards of conduct will be applied to the work of professions and organizations (Plant, 2001). McDowell indicates that codes of ethics may be viewed as a set of rules that a professional is ethically obligated to follow. These rules require at least minimal compliance on the part of the professional. Ramsey (2006) indicates that there is power in writing down the ethical expectations for all members of the profession. He adds that the code effectually becomes a covenant connecting all parties to the same circumstances and standards of conduct. According to Plant, codes of ethics do little to define values such as honesty or personal integrity, but rather work to define basic societal standards for right and wrong. Further, codes of ethics are valuable for their role in educating and

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training professionals in the societal expectations of honesty and competency in addition to regulating individual behavior.

A code of ethics is more than just a list of lofty ideals. It's a "do's and don'ts" directory of the right ways to act. It's a practical guide to honoring the highest standards of professional performance. A code of ethics defines appropriate day-to-day ethical conduct and moral behavior (Ramsey, 2006 p. 169).

Like physicians, lawyers, dentists and accountants, school administrators have a code of ethics to guide professional behavior and decision making. Professional codes of ethics embody "the highest moral ideals of the profession," thus "presenting an ideal image of the moral character of both the profession and the professional" (Nash, 1996, p.96). As a leader, it is important to understand what the professional code of ethics requires and to follow it consistently (Ramsey, 2006). According to Ramsey, a written code of ethics eliminates the "I didn't know" or "I forgot" excuses for misbehavior (p. 169).

While a code of ethics cannot make individuals ethical, it does set forth to the public and to other professionals a formal set of expectations (Macmillan, 1993). Some national literature (Dexheimer, 1969; Fenstermaker, 1994) suggests that in practice school superintendents do not use professional codes of ethics to guide decision making. Other research (Segars, 1987; Walker, 1999) suggests that codes of ethics are utilized for decision making. While research has been conducted on the national level, it remains unclear whether school administrators perceive that they use a professional code of ethics when making ethical decisions.

Professions often have one basic tenet that drives the profession. For physicians, it is "First, do no harm." For attorneys, it is the premise that all clients merit "zealous

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representation” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p.25). Shapiro and Stefkovich suggest that the moral imperative for educational leaders is to serve the “best interests of the student” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p.25).

Best interests of the student. “Best interests of the student” is a concept in educational literature that emerges from philosophy, psychology, critical theory and case law (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). Stefkovich and Begley suggest that “best interests of the student” manifests in a variety of research directions with some studies focused on individuals, groups or organizations and others examining societal, governmental or cross-cultural issues. “The challenge then is to present a model of best interests that may serve as a guide to practitioners while taking into consideration the complexity of research that undergirds this concept” (Stefkovich & Begley, p. 206).

Stefkovich and Begley (2007) advise that the phrase “student’s best interests” is construed differently by school leaders resulting in a wide variety of possible action outcomes. In an examination of over 60 law review articles containing this phrase or a variation of the phrase, Stefkovich, O’Brien and Moore (2002) found no common theme or shared use for the phrase. Similarly, in an analysis of 71 news articles, the phrase “best interests of students” covered over 21 themes and was used to uphold a variety of administrative decisions (Stefkovich & Begley, p.214).

There is an obvious lack of clarity for the phrase “best interests of the student.” However Stefkovich and Begley (2007) argue that the phrase deliberately refers to students as an individual rather than to students as a group, although they add that the rights of one should not cause harm to the group. If a conflict of needs emerges, the educational leader should determine if the individual is acting judiciously in asserting his

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rights (Stefkovich & Begley). Further, Stefkovich and Begley recommend that school leaders operate with discretion and professional judgment in each individual situation to determine the “best interests of the student.”

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) define “best interests” using the well-known phrase “the three Rs.” In this instance the three Rs refer to respect, rights and responsibility. Administrators are to respect students, protect the rights of students and provide an environment where students learn to take responsibility for their behaviors. The American Association of School Administrators’ Statement of Ethics for School Administrators has as its first standard the following: “The educational administrator... makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions” (§ 3). In addition, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in collaboration with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) set forth six standards for the profession. Standard 5 of the Educational Leadership Policy Standards states: “An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner” (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ¶ 1).

Challenges prevail even in the discussion of professional codes of conduct. Conflict may exist between an individual’s personal and his professional codes of ethics. There may also be clashes within professional codes. This clash occurs when an individual has been prepared in two or more professions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Codes of one profession may conflict with another. Clashes of professional codes may erupt between educational leaders. What one leader perceives as ethical, another may

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deem unethical. Shapiro and Stefkovich further suggest that additional differences may exist between professional codes and community practice.

School administrators' national code of ethics. Many professional education organizations including the National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and American Association of School Administrators (AASA) have adopted codes of conduct for its members (Ramsey, 2006). Ramsey adds that many states have created stricter codes of ethics for school administrators that carry stiff penalties for violations. In 1962 the American Association of School Administrators adopted a Code of Ethics. Currently, The AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders states

An educational leader's professional conduct must conform to an ethical code of behavior and the code must set high standards for all education 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 (§ 1).

School administrators' state code of ethics. Subsequently, the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) has adopted the AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders for Missouri administrators. MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders consists of 13 standards. These standards were established to guide professional conduct for Missouri's educational leaders. Each of the 13 standards

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can be loosely grouped into one of three categories. These three categories include legal issues, student and human rights or relates to aspects of educational leadership as a profession.

Statutes, rules, regulations and contracts. Five of the 13 standards listed in MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders pertain to legal or contractual issues. Standards 4, 5, 6, 10 and 13 propose that educational leaders abide by local, state and national laws, implement board policies, carry out administrative rules and regulations, honor all contracts, adhere to business practices that are in compliance with statutes and finally, work to change laws or policies that are not in the best interest of students or are inconsistent with cogent educational goals. Wagner and Simpson (2009) support the necessity for school administrators to understand educational law with its court precedents, legislation and administrative policy. Further, they suggest that administrators understand the purpose of law and the specifics for a given situation. School policies tend to be broad and allow for administrative interpretation; administrators should attempt to follow the intent of the policy when making decisions.

Student and human rights. Three of the 13 standards listed in MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders pertain to student or human rights. Standards 1, 3, and 12 charge educational leaders with making decisions that prioritize student welfare, protecting both student and human rights and serving others above self. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) suggest that the moral imperative for educational leaders is to serve the "best interests of the student" (p.25). According to Shapiro and Stefkovich, administrators are to respect students, protect the rights of students and provide an environment where students learn to take responsibility for their behaviors.

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The profession. Five of the 13 standards listed in MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders pertain to the profession of educational leadership. Standards 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 speak of fulfilling the leadership position with honesty and integrity, acting in a trustworthy and responsible manner while accepting responsibility and accountability for actions and behaviors, improving the profession through research and continuing professional development and refusing to use one's position for personal gain through political, social, religious or economic inducements.

Summary

School administrators are bombarded daily by high profile issues including gender equality, separation of church and state, freedom of speech, racial and ethnic diversity, school safety and drug and alcohol prevention education. All related decisions have ethical implications. Ethical responses to educational dilemmas are not black and white nor are the appropriate courses of action always clear. Ethical decision making is not simple, but rather a complex process impacted by both individual and organizational differences. The role of the individual, the role of the organization, the role of training, the role of experience and the role of professional codes of ethics are important considerations in the discussion of ethical decision making. Leaders affect decision making by their use of power, influence and authority. Individual factors such as ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics can impact decision making. Similarly, organizations influence ethical decision making in various ways, including leadership, opportunity, rewards and punishment.

Professionals look to professional ethics when making decisions. Professionals are not only expected to perform certain duties, but to perform those duties with character

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and integrity. Professions are allowed to establish their own standards and to create disciplinary procedures for enforcing existing standards. These rules of conduct are created to protect the public and to encourage a level of trust. To assist in ethical decision making, the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) has adopted the AASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders for Missouri administrators. Although some studies have attempted to measure superintendents' ethical decision making against professional codes of ethics, none of these studies have examined whether superintendents perceived that their decision making was influenced by a professional code of ethics. The current study will explore the perceived role that professional codes of ethics plays in the decision making of public school superintendents.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is comprised of six parts. The first section consists of a Statement of Research Purpose. The next part contains the study Research Questions. These questions served to guide the study in exploring superintendents' perceptions of the relationships existing among ethical decision making, ethics training, professional experience and the use of professional codes of ethics. The third section, Research Design and Rationale, provides an overview of the study approach and the reason the approach was used in this multiple case study. The Population and Sample section details the process for selecting the population and sample size. The Data Collection and Analysis Procedures section explains how the data for this study was collected and analyzed. The final section summarizes the methodology that was utilized for the current study.

Statement of Research Purpose

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the perceived relationships between superintendents' ethical decision making process and their prior ethics training/education, professional experience and their use of a professional code of ethics. Previous research findings on the relationship between ethics training and decision making are mixed. Although some research suggests there is no relationship between ethical decision making and ethics training (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2009; Winters, 2003; Millerborg, 1990), Growe (1999) did find that administrative ethics training influenced decision making. Often ethics training has not been well defined in these studies. In addition, these studies focused the research on the ethical decision outcomes of superintendents when presented with hypothetical dilemmas. This study differed from

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previous studies in that this research focused on the decision making process and how superintendents arrived at ethical decisions. Although prior research studies have found contrasting results, this researcher expected superintendents to perceive a positive association between ethics training and ethical decision making. Previous research findings on the impact of professional experience on ethical decision making are also mixed. This study sought to examine, from a career based strategies perspective, how superintendents' perceive professional experience influences their ethical decision making. This research further examined the use or non-use of professional codes of ethics by superintendents' and the perceived impact these codes have on administrative decision making.

Research Questions

The following research questions directed this study.

1. How do superintendents perceive their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?
2. What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?
3. What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents' decision-based responses to dilemmas?

Research Design and Rationale

A multiple case study approach was used to examine how public school superintendents perceive that ethics training, professional experience and professional codes of ethics impacts their ethical decision making. According to Merriam (2009), case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Merriam further

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defines a bounded system as a case that is finite in terms of time, space or other components that comprise the case. Multiple case studies purposefully reflect more than one case in order to identify similar and dissimilar results (Yin, 2008). In essence, multiple cases are examined in order to show different perspectives on a particular phenomenon. When cases provide similar results, there can be support for preliminary theories.

The heart of qualitative research is the concept that meaning is socially constructed (Merriam, 2009). Merriam introduces four major characteristics that are common to qualitative research and to this study. The first characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher's goal is to understand the participants' perspective of the phenomenon and what it means to function in and maneuver within the participant's world. The implication for this study is that the researcher examined the phenomenon of ethical decision making from various superintendents' perspectives and experiences by questioning what the decision making process entails and what factors influence decision outcomes.

The second characteristic of qualitative research is the concept that the researcher is the key instrument in data collection (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). This researcher collected all study data via face-to-face interviews with participants. Common to qualitative research, the researcher determined how and where to insert personal understandings of the study (Creswell).

The third qualitative research characteristic is inductive analysis. As data is analyzed, certain themes, categories and theories emerge (Merriam, 2009). As this researcher identified data patterns, sets of themes were established. There were elements

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of structural inclusion or exclusion that appeared. As the study progressed, there was a need to accommodate for shifts in data collection, questions and other modifications to the original plan. One such change occurred following the transcription of the first interview. There was a recognized need for additional information regarding the characteristics superintendents' related school districts. Thereafter, the researcher asked superintendents during their interviews to describe their districts and, in addition, to identify whether the district was considered rural, suburban or urban.

The final characteristic of qualitative research is the rich description that results from the data (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2007). This researcher identified elements of the decision making process for each superintendent and then fully reported accompanying perspectives. In this way, the researcher produced rich, complex and thorough descriptions of the study participants and their ethical decision making experiences including the influence or non-influence of certain factors, including ethics education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics. The descriptive data was used to address the three research questions that directed this study.

A Multiple Case Study

A multiple case study, also known as collective case study or comparative case study, involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) further defines case study research as an approach that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system, through detailed, in-depth data collection and reported through case description and case-based themes. The current multiple case study was an examination of 10 individual superintendents. Each superintendent represented a bounded system or case to be studied.

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The research setting was Missouri with participants deriving from nine different regions throughout the state. According to Merriam (2009), the case study approach is used when researchers are interested in gaining insights rather than hypothesis testing, as was the case with this study of public school superintendents and their perceptions of the ethical decision making process.

The multiple case study approach was appropriate for this bounded study of public school superintendents, the ethical decision making process, ethics training, professional experience and professional codes of ethics. Merriam advises that in a multiple case study, the cases share a common characteristic or condition. In the instance of this study, the participants shared a common role, the title of public school superintendent. Further, the more cases in a study, the more compelling the findings are likely to be (Merriam). This study sought to understand how public school superintendents interpret their ethical decision making experiences, how they construct their roles as ethical superintendents and what meaning they attribute to their ethical decision making experiences. Further, this multiple case study related these experiences and perceived meanings back to The Multiple Ethical Paradigms concept that framed this study.

Population and Sample

This multiple case study was focused on individuals rather than sites. Organizations cannot make decisions. Only people within organizations can make decisions. Superintendents are the chief executive officers and ultimate decision makers for school districts. While some superintendents' ethical decision making may be dictated by school district policies, the school district itself cannot make decisions and was of no

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interest to this study. Sample selection concentrated on superintendents as decision making individuals. The current study used purposeful sampling for recruiting 10 study participants. Creswell (2009) suggests that purposeful sampling is generally used in case study designs when the researcher selects individuals for study in order to purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem in the study. Ten superintendents were recruited since qualitative research samples tend to be relatively small due to the amount of information that is sought from each participant (Mertens, 2010). Further, Yin (1994) suggests that six to ten cases are sufficient for supporting initial constructs. The term “point of redundancy” is used to indicate the limit when data analysis is not significantly enriched by additional cases added to the sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, the primary criterion for study selection was the participant’s title of public school district superintendent. In addition, all superintendents were employed during the 2014-2015 academic year. Since Missouri was the research setting, 10 Missouri superintendents were recruited for participation in this multiple case study.

Missouri School Directory

Annually the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education publishes a Missouri School Directory (DESE, 2014). This document is freely available online. The directory contains considerable information on every school district in Missouri. The 2013-2014 version of this document was used to access information regarding potential study participants and participants’ school districts, including school district enrollment, number of schools in the district and district assessed valuation.

Recruitment Regions

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A variety of superintendent perspectives and experiences were necessary for developing an overview of the processes involved in ethical decision making. To assist in getting varied perspectives and experiences, the 10 study participants were selected from each of the nine Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDC) regions established throughout the state of Missouri by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (See Appendix C). These nine included Southeast, Heart of Missouri, Kansas City, Northeast, South Central, Southwest, St. Louis and Central regions.

The researcher made initial telephone contact with the study participants (See Appendix D). Contact information was obtained from DESE's Missouri School Directory. Ten superintendents agreed to participate in the study. During initial telephone contact, one study recruit requested a follow-up email further describing the research study and the email was sent (See Appendix E).

Diverse Participant Perspectives

As a means of obtaining varied perspectives and experiences, this researcher used purposeful sampling to recruit superintendents from a mixture of rural, urban and suburban districts as well as large, small and mid-sized school districts. For potentially different perspectives, both male and female superintendents were recruited for the study. Seven participants were male and three participants were female. Five superintendents had doctoral degrees and five had educational specialist degrees. Three superintendents were employed in small rural school districts. Three superintendents were employed in mid-sized school districts, with two considered rural and one considered urban. The four remaining superintendents were employed in large school districts, with three considered suburban and one consider rural (See Table 1).

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TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS

Small = 0-760
Med= 761=4200
Large= 4201 and up

Respondent	Experience			Degree Granted/Yr	District Size			Gender		District Type		
	Years in Ed	Years in Admin	Years in Supt		Small	Med	Large	Male	Female	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Superintendent A	23	12	7	Ed.D. 2007			X		X		X	
Superintendent B	38	33	30	Ed.S. ABD		X		X				X
Superintendent C	31	17	2	Ed.S. 2001			X	X				X
Superintendent D	26	13	6	Ed.S. 2009	X			X				X
Superintendent E	19	16	2	Ed.D. 2012			X	X			X	
Superintendent F	25	18	15	Ed.S. 2000	X			X				X
Superintendent G	19	14	9	Ed.D. 2013	X			X				X
Superintendent H	18	12	3	Ed.S ABD		X			X	X		
Superintendent I	22	17	5	Ed.D. 2006			X		X		X	
Superintendent J	27	23	13	Ed.D. 2000		X		X				X

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Some of the study participants were known to the researcher prior to the study, while others were not. The researcher had never worked under the supervision of any of the participants nor had the researcher ever worked in the same school district with any of the study superintendents. In keeping with IRB policies, superintendents selected to participate in this multiple case study remained anonymous to all except the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This section outlines the methods that were utilized to gather data for this multiple case study. In addition, this section also describes the processes that were implemented to analyze the data.

Data Collection

Data was collected from participants in face-to-face personal interviews. Interviews ranged in length from 20-55 minutes. The interviews were conducted over a two month period during the fall semester 2014. Nine of the interviews were conducted in the respective superintendent's office. At the request of one study participant, the interview was conducted at a restaurant near the superintendent's office. Creswell (2007) found comfort level and assurance of confidentiality to be most important in assuring interviewees' truthfulness of responses. The focus of the interviews was to determine superintendents' decision making processes and to ascertain to what extent superintendents believed certain factors influenced their decision making. Open-ended interview questions were dynamic and followed a flexible design (See Appendix F). This protocol allowed subjects to construct their reality of the decision making process as they perceived it and offered open-ended interpretation to the researcher. Questions allowed for variation in wording and order of inquiry. A basic interview protocol of open-ended

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questions related to ethics education/training, professional experience and professional codes of ethics assisted the conversational flow. This method was best suited for this multiple case study given its explorative and interpretive focus. The final three elements of the interview protocol represented hypothetical ethical dilemmas that might be experienced by superintendents. These simulated dilemmas were taken from the American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) The Ethical Educator, a column in the AASA's Connect resource. The AASA's Connect is a print and web periodical that provides resources specific to superintendents. The Ethical Educator poses a monthly ethical challenge for school leaders along with four experts' recommendations for solving the dilemma (AASA, 2014). Superintendents were allowed to read a dilemma. After reading each dilemma, the superintendents verbally described the decision making process they would use to resolve the dilemma. As necessary, the researcher supplemented the dialogue with follow-up questions as listed in the interview protocol to ensure that all areas related to the research questions were covered (See Appendix F). This study's focus was the process of ethical decision making and not ethical decision outcomes.

Digital audio recordings were made for each of the interviews. Transcription software was used to create written versions for each interview, allowing for more efficient data analysis. Both recordings and subsequent transcripts were secured to maintain participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Communicating an understanding of a case is the primary goal of data analysis (Creswell, 2009). Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed, data analysis was

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performed using the constant comparative method, a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The analytic process involved the researcher's immersion into the data. The data analysis process comprised three phases, open coding, axial coding and a final analytical organization that allowed for the formation of conclusions.

Analysis began with the examination of each interview to obtain an overall understanding of the data, a process known as open coding. Open coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is the process of organizing the data into segments of text prior to assigning interpretation to the data. The research questions served as initial organizers for the data.

As recommended by Merriam (2009), axial coding was used to interconnect the major categories that emerged during the open coding process. The researcher established relationships through a systematic comparison of data. Superintendents' language guided the development of themes and categories. For this study, key statements and phrases were identified as they related to superintendents' ethical decision making and those perceived factors that influenced their decision making. The researcher searched for similarities and differences between participant comments. Similar comments were grouped together to form general categories. The emerging themes and categories were labeled using short descriptors. These themes and categories were systematically compared and contrasted.

In multiple case studies there are two stages of analysis (Merriam, 2009). These two stages are within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. According to Merriam, the use of this two-stage analysis results in a combined description that leads to categories and themes that conceptualize the data from all cases. The researcher utilized this two

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stage analysis by first treating each case as separate and analyzing each case individually. Once the analysis of each case was completed with established themes and categories, cross-case analysis was conducted. Comparisons were made between the cases in order to identify similarities and differences that fundamentally lead to research conclusions.

Trustworthiness. Upon finishing qualitative research, Creswell (2007) suggests that a reoccurring question of “Did we get it right?” exists for researchers (p. 201). Lincoln and Guba (1985) take the position that the trustworthiness of a research study is valuable for determining the study’s implications. The researcher must persuade the study participants and the scholarly community that the exploration is worthwhile. According to Lincoln and Guba, the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is established by ensuring credibility, transferability and confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility is demonstrated by the confidence that can be placed in the legitimacy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba suggest that the researcher must convey a sense that participants’ trust will not be betrayed and that their anonymity will be protected. Equally, the participants should believe that the goal of the study has been honestly portrayed and that the interests of both the researcher and study participants have been respected. Lincoln and Guba propose a number of techniques for establishing credibility.

One such technique is prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement requires the researcher to spend sufficient time in the field in order to understand the phenomenon of interest, establish trust and develop rapport with the study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This researcher met with superintendents in locations designated by the respective superintendent. A certain level of trust was expected since the researcher was employed

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in a central office capacity and was familiar with the workings of that office. This similar position allowed for easier access and transference of information. In some cases, rapport and trust were already established since the superintendent was known to the researcher previously through conferences, committees or other professional affiliations. In other cases, sufficient time was allowed for the superintendent and researcher to establish rapport prior to the interview through a mutual exchange of professional pleasantries. One superintendent displayed an initial hesitancy and lack of trust, however as the interview progressed, she became more comfortable with the focus of the interview and trust was established.

An additional technique used for establishing credibility is member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is used for promoting the validity of an account and can be performed both formally and informally. In the case of this study, the technique was used informally during the interview procedure. This researcher would repeat certain pieces of information back to the superintendents so that they could confirm the accurateness of a statement or interpretation.

Transferability. Transferability is the premise that study findings have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba propose that by using detailed description to illustrate a phenomenon a determination can be made as to whether the conclusions drawn from one study can be transferred to other people, settings, situations and times. Nevertheless, research findings for this study apply only to the study superintendents and cannot be generalized to other populations.

Confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that confirmability is the degree to which study findings can be attributed to the study participants and not to

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researcher motivation, interest or bias. Since this study's focus was on superintendents' perceptions of the ethical decision making process, there was less motivation for researcher bias to factor into the findings. The researcher simply reported those superintendents' perceptions of the decision making process. Nevertheless, the researcher used memoing to establish a research trail. An audit trail documents the decision making path that occurred during the progression of the research including changes that transpired (Mertens, 2010). The audit trail recorded the steps that were taken from the start of the research and concluded with the report of the findings.

Study Limitations. There are possible limitations to this multiple case study.

Researcher positionality.

As researcher, I am a white middle-class male with an educational specialist degree. I have 24 years of experience in education and 20 years of experience in administration. I was employed as a middle and high school principal for 4 years in a small school district. For the past 16 years I have been employed in central offices as the director of school operations. I have been employed in this position in both a mid-sized public school district and most recently for a large school district. I believe my current position in central office made my access to superintendents easier and increased their willingness to speak with me regarding the research topic.

“A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p.483). Although I have not been a public school superintendent, I have experienced many of the same challenges that superintendents

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experience. I have recommended the hiring and firing of employees. I have made decisions that affected the livelihood of other individuals. I have worked with school boards and have considered how my decisions might affect kids, parents, teachers, support staff and the school district as a whole. Nevertheless, I have never served as a superintendent. The distance between my position and the superintendency is a long two feet. Essentially, the buck stops with the superintendent. The superintendent is held responsible, directly or indirectly, for everything that happens in a particular district. As a result, I cannot fully realize the experiences of a superintendent.

I believe that good leaders are ethical by nature. I believe that most superintendents are good leaders. Those who are not good leaders are weeded out over time. Sometimes good superintendents make poor decisions and those poor decisions eventually catch up to them usually amid public and media judgment. I wonder what motivates superintendents to make poor decisions and can they be supported in making better decisions. My beliefs and my interactions with superintendents did influence my approach to this study of ethics and superintendents. Essentially, I believed that superintendents would perceive that ethics education/training impacted their decision making. Clearly, my assumption was untrue and was negated as I proceeded through the interviews. I worked to overcome my bias by consistently asking the same questions of all the superintendents in order to get full and fair representation. Conducive to overcoming researcher bias was the study's emphasis on the perceptions of the decision making process and not decision outcomes.

Self-report. Participants were the sole providers of information regarding their decision making processes. The study was reliant on the honesty of participants to report

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accurately. The subject of professional ethics can be considered a sensitive topic; however the focus of the study was the decision making process and not ethical decision outcomes. As a result, there was an expectation that superintendents would be direct and forthright in their responses to questions. Interview questions required superintendents to be introspective and to have the ability to provide an accurate verbal presentation of their reflections.

Influence of context. There existed limitations to the researcher's understanding of the circumstances in which each superintendent operated in his or her role as superintendent within their given districts. The researcher also lacked understanding of the events that might have influenced superintendents' conversation on the day of the interview. On a different day, there may have been different answers to the same questions. There were also limitations in the researcher's assessment of superintendent dialogue and the nuances that were behind certain statements.

Influence of organizational factors. There are known organizational factors that can influence ethical decision making and could, therefore, be a limitation to this study. In the case of superintendents, such factors would include the school boards' expectations for either ethical or unethical behavior as well as organizational rewards or punishment for acting ethically or unethically. While these factors may influence any one decision, it is less likely that these factors will influence the decision making process.

K-8 public and private schools excluded. Only superintendents who were employed by K-12 public schools participated in this study. No superintendents of K-8 public or private schools were invited to participate. K-8 and private schools were excluded for several reasons. Ninety percent of the schools in Missouri are K-12 public

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schools. Compared to K-8 schools, K-12 schools contain an older student population that engage in extracurricular activities or other events that can contribute to the number of ethical dilemmas experienced by superintendents. Further, private and K-8 schools aren't always required to follow the same state regulations as K-12 public schools.

Use of simulated ethical dilemmas. The use of ethical vignettes can be considered a limitation. A fictitious scenario does not have the same impact, emotion or urgency that a real time dilemma provides. Nevertheless, the vignettes served a useful purpose as a starting point for discussion of the decision making process.

Human Subject Protection

“There are specific implications for ethical behavior related to the protection of people who participate in... studies” (Mertens, 2010, p. 336). Prior to data collection, a formal request to conduct research was presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Missouri as part of an exempt application for Human Subjects Research.

In keeping with IRB policies, superintendents selected to participate in this multiple case study remained anonymous except to the researcher. Potential risks associated with study participation were unlikely and of low risk. There was little likelihood of any physical or emotional risk as a result of research participation. Research subjects were not asked to perform any tasks as a part of any discussion that could result in harm. Prior to data collection, participants were given a formal statement of consent to read (See Appendix G). The researcher also explained the consent to the participants. Participants signed the form indicating that they understood they were participating in a research study.

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During interviews, superintendents were given the option to refuse to answer any question(s) they considered threatening. Participants were advised that all collected information, including names, other identifying information and recordings, would be kept strictly confidential. Information linked to individuals was kept securely locked in a location only accessible to the researcher.

Summary

The decision making process is not simple; rather it is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors. Such factors may include ethics training, professional experience and the use of professional codes of ethics. The goal of this multiple case study was to better understand through multiple qualitative case study research how public school superintendents process ethical decisions, whether superintendents perceive that certain factors affect those decisions and the role that professional codes of ethics play in the decision making process. This section began with the rationale for the study design, followed by a description of the population, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, study limitations and finally a discussion of human subjects protection.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter is comprised of five parts. The first section contains an introduction to the study participants. The second part outlines how the data is reported. The third portion contains the results of the within-case analysis. The cross-case analysis follows in the fourth section. The fifth and final section provides a summary of the chapter.

Research findings concluded that professional experience was by far the greatest perceived influence on study superintendents' ethical decision making. In contrast, both ethics education/training and professional codes of ethics had little, if any, perceived impact on the ethical decision making process of study superintendents.

Participants

Ten public school superintendents participated in this study. Each superintendent led a school district located within each of the nine different RPDC regions established throughout Missouri by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Study superintendents were selected for participation based on district enrollment that varied from small, medium and large districts, as well as rural, suburban and urban environments and superintendent gender.

Participants' years of experience in the superintendency ranged from 30 years to 2 years. Superintendent B had the most years of superintendent experience. Superintendents C and E had 2 years of superintendent experience each. The study participants are presented in order of their interview with the researcher. The introduction to the participants provides the superintendents' years of experience in education, administration and the superintendency. It outlines the highest degree obtained for each

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superintendent and when the degree was granted. In addition, there is a brief sketch of the districts they lead as well as each superintendent's definition of professional ethics.

Finally, each superintendent gave a summary of what they perceived to be the most challenging ethical dilemmas in their role as superintendent and what situations, they believed, were the most difficult for school leaders to act ethically.

Superintendent A

Superintendent A had been in education for 23 years. She had 12 years of administrative experience and 7 years of experience in the superintendency. Her doctorate was granted in 2007. She leads a large suburban school district. Superintendent A reported that her ability to make a difference and build relationships were the things she liked best about being an educator. Early in her career those relationships centered on students. Currently, her relationships were involved less with students and more with staff and community members. Dealing with "politics" was the element of her role as superintendent that she liked least.

Superintendent A defined professional ethics as "doing the right thing, arriving at a decision by utilizing all your resources and making sure it follows a moral or professional code." She indicated that, for her, the definition of ethics did not change for a school setting. She stated that board policies are there for a reason. As a result, she wanted her decisions to align with board policies.

She indicated that the most challenging ethical decisions in her role fall into personnel and student discipline areas. While she stated that she had never walked away from a decision where she felt she hadn't done the right thing, she added that when a superintendent makes a decision, such as suspending a student long term and it doesn't

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bother you, then something's wrong with that person. She further stated that, for her, the situations that were most ethically challenging were those where the school board was involved. The school board wanted to act ethically also, but sometimes in personnel or student situations, they knew or really liked the person involved. Board members' personal feelings toward an employee or a student made it difficult for them to come to terms with what an investigation said happened. In such situations, she must always go back to the facts, how she collected her information, the process she followed and how she arrived at her decision. She thought that those situations when the board questioned the process were the most challenging.

Superintendent B

Superintendent B had 38 years of experience in education, 33 years of administrative experience and 30 years of experience in the role of superintendent. Superintendent B had an educational specialist degree. He had completed all coursework for a doctorate degree, however due to various personal and professional challenges; he put the dissertation on hold and then never completed it. Currently, Superintendent B leads a mid-sized rural school district. He indicated that the school district was situated in a farming community. He further described his district as having "good kids with a good work ethic ... coming from people who value education." He added that he grew up in a little farming community where he didn't know anybody that didn't value their kids' education. When he taught he was intrinsically rewarded when he saw students grasp a concept and "light up" when they got it. As an administrator, especially a superintendent, he liked that he had the ability to affect the environment for teachers, staff and students. He could "set a tone" for what is expected, both ethically and morally. Conversely, he

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disliked when people tell superintendents how to do their jobs, when those people have never done the job. He disliked when parents don't value education for their kids. He added, frankly, that he also disapproved when people who don't like kids go into the education profession.

Superintendent B related his definition of professional ethics back to an old saying which states that professional ethics is demonstrating actions that are good and correct even when people don't know you're taking those actions. He added that his definition included doing what is right for kids, regardless of whether it's the popular thing to do or the easiest thing to do. His final caveat was "treat people humanely."

The most challenging ethical dilemmas for Superintendent B were those situations dealing with personnel. When financial decisions or other issues required him to let "someone go," he would "lie awake in bed at night thinking about those people, their families and what was going to happen to them." He found it most challenging to act ethically when his superiors or peers didn't want him to make a particular decision.

Superintendent C

Superintendent C had 31 years of experience in education. He had 17 years of experience in administration and 2 years of experience in the role of superintendent. He had an educational specialist degree that was granted in 2001. He leads a large rural district that he described as diverse in a community that was primarily blue collar. He indicated that people in that community work hard and 98% of community members pay their taxes on time. He stated that the amount of uncollectable taxes is very low, which aids the school district in its budgeting. Superintendent C liked being involved with young people. As a superintendent, he isn't hands on personally with young people,

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however he stated that the decisions he makes affects the programs that are afforded to students. He indicated that he is hands off, but hands on at the same time when it comes to hiring extracurricular/co-curricular people. He believed academics are hugely important, but that education is inclusive of more than test scores. He believed that it is interscholastic activities and the social aspects of school that kids remember most and are what makes students well rounded. The element that he disliked about his role as educator is the need to be politically correct all the time. Although he didn't think that kids have changed, he did think that parenting had changed. He indicated that society has gone from a "work for it" philosophy to a society of entitlement. He was frustrated by the media or people in general who criticize public education. These critics don't realize that they are talking about the 5% and not the 95%. He further stated that 90-95% of their district kids "come to school every day to have fun and to learn, to be a kid, to go to school." He realized that learning isn't always number one on their agenda, but "they're good kids." He hears the public beat up education based on 5% of the problems. He indicated that he doesn't like the negativity that's undeserved.

Superintendent C defined professional ethics as doing what is right when nobody's watching. He further added that it is being able to sleep at night. It's important to him that when he makes a decision, he does what's right and what's best for the whole. Every once in a while, that means he has to do something that he may not like to do. He summarized "I think you just try to do what's right and you'll be able to sleep at night."

He has found that the most challenging ethical dilemmas for him in his role as superintendent involve the district community. Individual community members donate gifts, services or money in support of the district, and then later expect a decision in their

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favor. It essentially comes down to the question of who is really running the district, the superintendent and the board or the community member. He asked “Do we start making decisions based on what we think they want us to do?” He also believed this same situation is when it is most challenging for school leaders to act ethically. He added that donors can apply significant pressure to school leaders.

Superintendent D

Superintendent D had 26 years of educational experience. He had 13 years of experience in administration and 6 years of superintendent experience. He had an educational specialist degree that was granted in 2009. He leads a small rural school district. He described his district as very rural where most community members commute to surrounding towns or cities for work. He further stated that a very high percentage of district kids receive free or reduced lunch. He added “It’s not a rich district by any means.” Superintendent D related that what he likes most about being an educator is having a positive impact on students’ lives. He disliked having to make difficult decisions and dealing with a lack of revenue. His first year as a superintendent was the first year the state formula wasn’t fully funded. He added that it has been that way ever since. He concluded that it makes it very difficult in a small district to keep the budget balanced when one has such limited funds. Finally, he stated “having to tell people that they’re out of a job... that’s not a fun thing to do.”

He defined professional ethics as a matter of doing what’s right, doing what’s legal and being honest. In his position, it’s making sure that he’s honest, making sure that he doesn’t do things that are illegal or knowingly cheat. He added that manipulating numbers here and there is not ethically appropriate.

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Superintendent D explained that he is uncertain of whether any one ethical dilemma can be weighted more than another. He said he just deals with ethical situations all the time. He indicated that it is most challenging for school leaders to act ethically when it deals with revenue. He used residency as an example. In his scenario a large family with six children applies to the school for enrollment. In the course of enrolling the children, the district discovers the family technically resides in another school district. The addition of six children would provide a much needed boost to his district revenue, however he also knows that his district would be taking revenue from another district. For Superintendent D, the situations that are most ethically challenging “are involving revenues and monies.”

Superintendent E

Superintendent E had 19 years of work experience in education. He had 16 years in administration and 2 years of experience as a superintendent. He had a doctorate degree that was granted in 2012. He leads a large suburban school district. The district’s enrollment contains less than 10% minority students and less than 30% of students receive free and reduced lunch. Superintendent E indicated that what he likes best about being an educator is seeing kids be successful. He added that success looks different for different kids at different ages. What he likes least about his role as an educator is the red tape, in essence, all the rules and regulations that he is responsible for knowing and implementing. Although necessary, many of the rules and regulations are time consuming and get in the way of the district’s core mission.

He defined professional ethics in education as making decisions that are in the best interests of students within all the policy and legal requirements that go with the job.

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He added that it's a combination of doing what's best for kids, at the same time being in compliance and responsible to any governing policies or regulations that covers him or the district.

He stated that two things come to mind when thinking about the most challenging ethical dilemmas in his role as a superintendent. One is the public trust issue which goes with being in an administrative role in a school district. School district leaders go to their public for support in a lot of different ways, whether it's a tax levy bond issue or programming or other support that is needed. Superintendent E stated that the public trust element is so important. Any time there is a decision made that somebody can perceive as unethical, the public trust is undermined. According to Superintendent E, that's why it's key for all administrators to make good solid ethical decisions on a regular basis so that public trust can be built and maintained over time. The other area that he thought might be problematic in today's world is the high level of accountability that goes on within school districts that sometimes encourages people to make poor decisions. He further stated that state and/or federal accountability systems, and the pressure that goes along with that in terms of rating school districts and accreditation, in some ways raises the bar in terms of what a superintendent can expect out of people. At the same time, it also gives people incentive to do something that might be considered a shortcut. He thought that managing that pressure, keeping it in balance and keeping the expectations out there so people don't think shortcuts are an option are important. He thought it was a collective concern for all public school districts.

He thought it was most challenging for school leaders to act ethically in the area of personnel. He suggested that at times there are pressures from the local community

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and even the board to make personnel decisions that don't match the best interests of the organization as a whole. He stated that when he was interviewing for his current position he made it clear that the best candidate for any position is the candidate that should be hired. "It can't be who we know, who we are related to or anything like that including board members or anybody else." He saw the personnel area as potentially problematic, especially in smaller communities.

Superintendent F

Superintendent F had 25 years of educational experience. He had 18 years of experience in administration and 15 years of experience in the superintendency. He had an educational specialist degree which was granted in 1999 or 2000. He leads a small rural district in a community that is solely agriculturally based. The farms are large and very few community members are involved in industry. Approximately one-third of the district's student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch. He described a portion of the community as transient due to a significant amount of available low income housing. He reported that there are a lot of people moving in and out of the district. Superintendent F liked that, as an educator, he can affect so many kids. He acknowledged that teaching is the most "vital hand-to-hand combat ... with kids," however as a superintendent, he can make a lot of decisions that affect how teachers can do their jobs more efficiently.

Superintendent F stated that professional ethics are not much different from personal ethics. He spoke of an old principal with 30 years of administrative experience, who once told him, "Get on the side of right and let them chip away at you." Superintendent F added that doing so will often cost you your job because you're doing the right thing regardless of who is involved, what the situation might be or how you feel

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that morning. He further stated that he has to have a baseline for every judgment call that he makes and it's difficult. "We can all justify any decision we make. But ultimately there's one Being to answer to at the end of this thing. That's the One I want to be able to go to face-to-face." He further illustrated his definition of profession ethics with another individual who once told him, "You have to get up every morning and look in the mirror ... Do you like what you see?" He concluded that for the most part, at least in what he chose to do for a profession, about 98% of the days he can look himself in the face and say he made the right decision.

Superintendent F has found that the most challenging ethical dilemmas in his role as a superintendent involved discipline decisions that he made that negatively impacted the children of school board members and influential community members. He knew of at least two instances in his career where he thought he would lose his job over such decisions. These types of decisions are when, he believed, it was most challenging for school leaders to act ethically. It becomes necessary to weigh doing the "right thing" against how the decision will affect his family and his ability to provide for his own kids. He concluded that his decisions that have affected or potentially affected his own kids personally and negatively were hard.

Superintendent G

Superintendent G had 19 years of work experience in the field of education. He had 14 years of experience in administration and 9 years of experience in the superintendency. His doctorate was granted in 2013. He leads a mid-sized rural school district characterized by little diversity. He described his student population as 99% Caucasian. What Superintendent G liked about being an educator was the everyday grind

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of the education business itself. He enjoyed each aspect of it. He stated that his biggest dislike, right now, was the way parenting skills are these days. He remembered 18 or 19 years ago, when he was getting started, there was a lot of parent support. He reported that today the support is absolutely terrible. He said this lack of parental support was the biggest downfall of education right now.

He stated that his definition of professional ethics is simple. It is just doing what is right. Superintendent G reported that the ethical dilemmas he finds most challenging involve personnel issues. He grew up in the area where he now leads. Superintendent G has many family and friends who still live in the community. He has immediate family members who also work for the district. He thought these relationships at times caused his building administrators difficulties. He suspected that his building administrators “shy away from providing me with all the information that needs to be provided...”

Apparently, these administrators perceived a possible conflict of interest and were hesitant to provide information to Superintendent G that might be construed as negative regarding his family members who are employed by the school district. Superintendent G suggested that it was possibly most challenging to act ethically when an immediate decision was required and insufficient time was allowed for reflection and thought.

Superintendent H

Superintendent H had 18 years of educational experience. She had 12 years of administrative experience and 3 years of experience in the superintendency. She had an educational specialist degree. She was currently working on a doctorate degree and was involved in research for her dissertation. Superintendent H leads a mid-sized district that she described as an urban type experience. She described the district as transforming with

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more affluent people moving into the community. Superintendent H further described her district enrollment with the phrase “the haves and the have nots” which is about 50% district wide. In other words, half of the student population is considered at poverty level and the other half is middle or upper class. This dichotomy is challenging in that the school district must attempt to meet the needs of both economic classes. What Superintendent H likes about education is that there is never a boring or monotonous moment. She loves the teaching piece and the interaction with the community. There is always an opportunity to talk about the work, their mission and their vision for the work. Conversely, she dislikes the politics. She stated, “You never really know until you sit in the seat how political things are.” She reported that one wise person once told her, that if there are three people in the room, there are going to be politics.

Superintendent H considers multiple things when defining professional ethics. First she asks, “What is our focus for the district? Am I supporting or compromising with this decision? Is this moving us away from who we are and what we believe in?” She stated that she can’t make everyone happy, but she can look to what’s best for the greater good in order to ensure equity and excellence for all. Her goal to “ensure equity and excellence for all” is, perhaps, the challenge she referred to earlier with the district’s variance in students’ economic status.

Superintendent H’s most challenging dilemmas have involved personnel. She had a situation early in her career that was a defining experience. She stated that she believes in due process. She had a problem that she had to address, but had inherited a poor process. She stated that if she knows a person has been given every opportunity and it’s been laid out to them what the concerns are, then she can live with the “nasty,” the

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conflict and the uncomfortable situations. She remembered that situation as a hard time and that personnel issues are always hard. She believes in the process, time and work.

She suggested that it is most challenging for school leaders to act ethically when issues are high profile in the public sphere. Social media has contributed to more decisions being high profile. She used the weather and school closings as an example.

Superintendent H stated that she can't make everyone happy. With social media, every decision is now public. "... you make a decision and people have a forum to criticize you and this, that and the other and you just have to hold your nose and push through."

Superintendent I

Superintendent I had 22 years of experience in education. She had 17 years of administrative experience and 5 years of experience in the superintendency. She had a doctoral degree that was granted in 2006 or 2007. She leads a large suburban school district. The district's student population is predominantly white with minorities making up 12% of the total enrollment. Superintendent I liked that, as an educator, she is around kids and in the business of serving others. She is fulfilled by the work of helping kids. She has found that her best days are when she can be in the buildings, working with kids, being in the classroom, talking with teachers or talking with principals. She has witnessed so many people in the field of education, who go above and beyond their jobs in some fashion, because they're dealing with kids. She suggested that these individuals want to do what they can to make sure kids are successful. On the other side, she disliked dealing with people who don't take their jobs seriously enough or don't do the work they were hired to do. For her, the toughest days are those when she must deal with personnel related issues.

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Superintendent I defined professional ethics as the code by which she operates every day. She indicated that it isn't necessarily different for a school setting. She has her core values that drive her decision making. Those basic beliefs that include how you treat people, what you stand for, what you believe in, what you are willing to go to the mat for, and what you fight for every day. At the same time she also, in her position as superintendent, works for a board of education that has a constituency that they follow who are representative of her community, so she has to understand where they are coming from. Essentially, the decisions that she makes every day are made on core values that she believes in.

The most challenging ethical dilemmas for her are those situations when a higher authority, such as the state or judicial system, makes a decision that she must then implement even though that decision may not be what she or her district board think is best for kids or best for the district as a whole. Such situations can create internal conflict for superintendents as well as other school leaders. Decisions mandated by higher authorities do not always reflect the decisions that school leaders believe are ethically correct for students or districts. As a result, superintendents may implement decisions that are not perceived to be in the best interests of students although these same superintendents evince an ethical intent to serve and support students and district members.

Superintendent J

Superintendent J had been in education for 27 years. He had 23 years of administrative experience and 13 years of experience in the superintendency. His doctorate was granted in 2000. He leads a mid-sized rural school district. The student

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population is primarily white with less than five percent of students considered as minority. Superintendent J described the district community as primarily working class. He reported that what he liked best about being an educator is building relationships. As a teacher and principal, he built those relationships with kids. Since his move to the central office, the focus of those relationships has shifted to adults. Dealing with mandates and politics are the elements of his role as superintendent that he liked least. He stated that, in a perfect world, people would just get out of the district's way and let the district do what's best for kids.

Superintendent J defined professional ethics as more than just following the law. He believed it is a matter of always trying to do what's in the best interest of kids while staying within the law, regulations, policies and guidelines. He added that there are times, based on the situation, when he wants to push the envelope with laws, rules and regulations because he knows it's what's best for the situation. For him, that is where the ethics piece seems to come in. How far can and should he go to help this person or this situation and what kind of precedent is he setting?

He indicated that the most challenging ethical decisions in his role are those that deal with personnel and those that deal with a student's status such as course credits, suspension, expulsion and major discipline issues. He tries to run decisions through the same filters, no matter what the situation is. He indicated that there are always policies in place, but sometimes there is leeway for the interpretation of those policies. He stated that very few things are black and white. When discussing the situations where it is most challenging for school leaders to act ethically, Superintendent J used zero tolerance policy as an example. Such a policy removes all the decision making from the

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superintendent. He predicted that such policies will bite a superintendent sooner than later.

Data Results

Study results are reported as they correlated to the research questions and themes that emerged during superintendents' interviews. Results are reported in order of when the interviews were conducted. Superintendent A was interviewed first and Superintendent J was interviewed last. Findings are reported respectively.

Within-Case Analysis

In multiple case studies there are two stages of analysis (Merriam, 2009). The first stage is within-case analysis. Research data was analyzed for each case resulting in a detailed description of each case including emerging themes. Within-case analysis for research questions one, two and three for each of the 10 cases follows. Findings indicated that only one of the three studied influences was perceived by superintendents to impact their decision making (See Table 2).

The conceptual framework for this study was the Multiple Ethical Paradigms, a decision making schema that emphasizes educational leadership and responses to the unique ethical situations frequently encountered by school communities. Since superintendents in this study perceived that professional experience was the greater influence on decision making when compared to ethics training and professional codes of ethics, discussions of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms as it relates to decision making in this study is included under the findings for professional experience. Thus, information related to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and its relation to this study is presented under findings for Research Question 2.

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Simulated ethical dilemmas were used as a starting point for the superintendents to walk the researcher through their decision making process (See Appendix F). The steps that superintendents described are encompassed in the various components of the decision making process and are discussed in detail in the findings for Research Question 2 and the influence of professional experience on ethical decision making. These dilemmas were indirectly referenced in such comments as “hiring the best candidate for a position is what is good for kids” (The Double-Headed Job Search); “You don’t go back to the person you just hired. You know, they’re ours now” (The Secretive Coach) and “We want to honor and show empathy for this person” (A Bullish Board Demand). The simulated ethical dilemmas allowed the researcher to experience the process of decision making with the study superintendents.

Research Question 1: How do superintendents perceive their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?

Superintendents were asked, using the interview protocol, to describe all the ethics training they had received. The researcher provided no definition of ethics training/education, but allowed study participants to report through description those elements that they perceived constituted training and education. In addition, each superintendent was asked if that training was sufficient for preparing them to make ethical decisions in their roles as superintendents. Further, superintendents were asked what additional training they perceived would either have been beneficial to them or might be beneficial to new superintendents. A variance of themes emerged for each case. Most superintendents perceived that formal ethics education/training did not influence ethical decision making. Some superintendents credited less formal influences such as

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mentors or family with providing an ethical foundation for decision making. Additional themes related to potential ethics training emerged. Some superintendents perceived that additional training would be beneficial whereas other superintendents did not perceive that ethics training would benefit superintendents.

Superintendent A

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent A stated that she had some master's and doctoral program course work that touched on the topic of ethics. These courses were not specifically designed for the subject of ethics, but generally "lumped" ethics discussion in with other subjects. She did not recall any other ethics training during her career. She reported that the ethics education she had probably was not enough to prepare her for ethical decision making in her role as superintendent. She added, "... I don't know that we, in our studies, are ever truly prepared to do the job until you are actually in it." By her statement, Superintendent A suggested that education and training do not support superintendents as effectively as experience. Further, Superintendent A could not recall ethics education/training specifics. Consequently, she perceived that ethics education/training provided little or no influence on her ethical decision making.

Role models, mentors and respected peers. Superintendent A attributed her current ethical decision making, in part, to the guidance of an early mentor. She reported that the interim came to the district because the previous leadership left two weeks before the start of school. The school district was left in a "lurch" two weeks prior to school beginning. The board acted quickly and hired an interim superintendent which she found to be a tremendous mentor. She stated, "That six months of transition I probably learned

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more than I could have ever learned... It was rapid fire. You sink or you swim at that point.” Following the six month period, she was named superintendent for the district. Rather than perceiving that ethics education/training was an influence, she credited the less formal mentoring as an influence on her current ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent A stated that she believes more “practical exposure” can be done within graduate study programs, training programs and perhaps in the new superintendents’ academy. She added, “We touch on some things in our graduate studies, but sometimes depending on where you go, just like finding a teacher, depending on where they went to undergrad what they come to you knowing, it is all up in the air.” She advocated for ethics training for new superintendents in the areas of “decision making, policy reference, collaborative approaches and situations where they actually work through scenarios and are tested in practical matters”. She added that conflict usually occurs when what she perceives as right goes against what a group, either in the community or the board, wants her to do. Therefore, how superintendents deal with conflict when someone is asking them to bend is probably where the training should occur. Ultimately, Superintendent A perceived that additional ethics education/training in certain areas could benefit new superintendents.

Superintendent B

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent B didn’t remember having any formal ethics training in his college preparation. He added that there was nothing in the profession itself that taught him how to act ethically or morally. He did recall a particular professor making certain statements. One such remembered statement was, “You’re going to have to make decisions sometimes that aren’t popular

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and you just got to have the fortitude to move forward and do it.” Superintendent B remembered the professor also commenting that at times a certain decision might put one’s employment at jeopardy. The professor further added that when one has to make a decision and one’s family is depending on one for his/her income, ethical decision making is hard. Superintendent B recalled the professor saying that he understood when sometimes a superintendent might not make an ethical decision when his family’s wellbeing was being impacted. While Superintendent B did not feel that he received significant formal ethics training/education from his higher learning instruction, he did feel that he received ethical training from other sources.

Family, church and the cultural environment. Superintendent B advised that he got his ethics training, in part, from his family. He talked about his parents’ and maternal grandparents’ significant influence over his ethical decision making. He reported that his mother took him to church every Sunday. His desire to teach was nurtured by teaching his Sunday school class from the fifth grade until they graduated from high school. Superintendent B also attributed the farming community where he grew up as teaching him about responsibility and obligation to his fellow man.

Role models, mentors and respected peers. Superintendent B also believed that individuals may get some ethics training from peers, cohorts and other superintendents. He disclosed that he sometimes talks to a confidant, “somebody that guides me or that I have confidence in” and asks, “Have you ever faced this?” and “What would you do?” There are also times when he meets with other superintendents outside their local districts in an effort to support each other. He disclosed that he also feels a responsibility to help young administrators in his school district learn how to do things ethically. In his

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administrators' meetings he will put certain situations "on the table" for discussion.

Inevitably questions arise. "How would you all handle this?" How would you like this to be done if you were the person on this side of the issue?" "What's right and what's wrong." "What's best for kids in the long run?" Superintendent B attributed his current ethical decision making, in part, to his peers and other superintendents. Rather than perceiving that ethics education/training was an influence, he credited less formal peer relationships as influences on his current ethical decision making and a potential future influence for less experienced administrators.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent B suggested that possibly MASA could provide ethics training by having some tenured superintendents do some short ethics sessions for young or aspiring superintendents. MASA is a statewide professional association in Missouri existing for the purpose of serving the needs of school superintendents and central office administrators with an interest in the superintendency. Superintendent B added that role playing could be a part of that ethics training. Ultimately, Superintendent B perceived that additional ethics education/training could benefit new and aspiring superintendents.

Superintendent C

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent C stated that he probably had a class at one time when he was in college or perhaps when he was working on his master's or specialist degrees. He added, "I don't remember too much about that. There wasn't a lot of it, I think." By his statement, Superintendent C suggested that education and training do not support superintendents as effectively as experience. Further, Superintendent C could not recall ethics education/training specifics.

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Consequently, he perceived that ethics education/training provided little or no influence on his ethical decision making.

Family. He stated that his ethics training came from his parents. His parents and his upbringing helped him to be ethical. He added that the older he becomes, he thinks more about ethical decisions than when he was younger. He concluded that maybe time makes the identifying of ethical situations easier. Superintendent C attributed his current ethical decision making, in part, to his family. Rather than perceiving that ethics education/training was an influence, he credited the less formal familial upbringing as an influence on his current ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent C proposed that ethics is an inborn trait. Therefore, he didn't see how training could help. He compared ethics to classroom management. "If a teacher doesn't have good classroom management, I'm not sure you can teach them how to be a classroom manager. If a person doesn't have ethics, you can't teach him ethics." He added, "I think folks are either ethical or not. You can put on a charade, I guess, but when nobody's watching and you have to make decisions behind the scenes ..."

Superintendent D

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent D didn't know that he had any formal ethics training. He had law classes, but he wasn't sure that qualified as ethics. He didn't remember having any training. By his statements, Superintendent D suggests that ethics education and training do not support superintendents' decision making. Consequently, he perceived that ethics education/training provided little or no influence on his ethical decision making.

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Proposed training/education. Superintendent D indicated his thoughts regarding the benefits of ethics training for superintendents. He also expressed the uncertainty he had occasionally felt when presented with potentially ethical situations.

I think (training) would be beneficial. Knowing what you should and should not do ethically. I do remember in one class talking about superintendents being in a position where they might take gifts from vendors or something like that and is that an ethical thing? At the time I didn't really see it as an issue, but they kind of pointed out why it could be an ethical decision to do that. I don't see the big issue with it. I guess if it influenced you in making a decision, but if it is people that you have already done business with in the first place is that ... I don't know... it's tough. I think about it. I don't see it as a big deal myself. Maybe it is. Maybe I need some ethics' training to see if that's right or wrong.

Ultimately, Superintendent D perceived that additional ethics education/training that helps administrators know what they should and should not do ethically could benefit new superintendents.

Superintendent E

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent E could not recall any specific ethics education that came through his course work. He was vaguely familiar that it is included in some course work that students take now, because he has had interns that ask him about ethics classes and ethics related questions. Personally, he didn't recall any specific course work. He assumed there were times when there were ethical discussions that took place as part of regular administration courses, but he didn't recall any specifics. Superintendent E, did credit professional organizations as

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responsible for his ethics training. His involvement in certain professional organizations and their codes of ethics has supported his decision making. By his statements, Superintendent E suggested that ethics education did not support superintendents' decision making. Further, Superintendent E could not recall ethics education specifics. Consequently, he perceived that ethics education provided little or no influence on his ethical decision making.

Role models, mentors and respected peers. Superintendent E stated that he has been fortunate that the people he's learned from have been, as far as role models administratively, highly ethical people. The superintendents that he's worked for have been people that always had a high standard for themselves and for others. That has made it fairly easy for him to see, what he thought was, the right choice. By the same token, he stated that he is around people on a regular basis that just don't seem to have the same set of ethical standards. Superintendent E attributed his current ethical decision making, in part, to the guidance of early supervising superintendents. Rather than perceiving that ethics education was an influence, he credited the less formal superintendent supervision as influencing his current ethical decision making.

Professional organizations. Superintendent E advised that professional organizations have been responsible for his ethical training. His involvement in those associations and their codes of ethics has supported his decision making. He concluded that what's been done in more recent years through professional organizations has brought ethics to a higher profile. According to Superintendent E, there are now avenues for administrators to get the prerequisite training that maybe wasn't there 15 years ago when he started down the administrative path. Rather than perceiving that ethics

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education was an influence, Superintendent E credited the training he received from professional associations as an influence on his current ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent E indicated that collectively, as administrators, there is work to be done in terms of formal training. He further reported that as far as what's in administrative coursework, there are "in-basket activities" that have ethical aspects to them. Such "in-basket activities" expose new administrators to a range of problems or issues that they might experience during their roles as administrators. Superintendent E further added that in terms of structured curriculum that identified the tenets of ethical behavior and how to use the tenets to make decisions, it wasn't concrete.

Superintendent E added that he was optimistic when he was interviewed by students in graduate programs that have courses in ethics. He believed that ethics informs so much of superintendents' decision making. Superintendent E thought it was unfortunate that there was a need to train people in ethics and that there was no assumption that people were going to behave ethically. He indicated that the extra attention that goes to ethics now is good. Superintendent E thought that, over time, there would be a need to train the next generation of administrators in good decision making process. Ethics will simply be a part of that. Ultimately, Superintendent E perceived that additional ethics education and training in certain areas, especially decision making, could benefit new superintendents.

Superintendent F

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent F reported that he has probably had very little formal ethics training. He suggested that he had a

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little ethics education in his undergraduate and graduate course work. These classes included the subject of ethics alongside other topics. He continued by saying that “a 3 hour course in ethics” didn’t happen. By his statements, Superintendent F suggested that formal ethics education and training did not support superintendents’ decision making. Consequently, Superintendent F perceived that ethics education/training provides little or no influence on his ethical decision making.

Professional organizations. Superintendent F indicated that he had been to some workshops offered by MOASBO (Missouri Association of School Business Officials) or MSBA (Missouri School Boards’ Association) or MASA that hit on the topic of ethics. Although Superintendent F stated that he had attended professional association workshops that touched on the subject of ethics, he did not provide any specific details. Further, he did not indicate any perception that these workshops impacted his current ethical decision making. It is possible that he either could not recall the ethics content presented at the workshops, the content was not perceived as significant or that the content did not apply to him specifically.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent F believed it was important for preparation classes or workshops to have people, who are “in the muck and mire every day,” dialogue with graduate students or administrators. He stated that a professor needs to ask very pointed ethical questions. Superintendent F thought that the students sitting in graduate classes want to be superintendents or administrators, but they don’t know what questions to ask since they’ve never done the job. He offered that these students have a one sided perspective of what the job entails. Superintendent F also thought that students’ views of the job were typically negative since the reason they want to be administrators

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was to change things. He compared administration to teaching. “You didn’t know how to teach until you had taught... You didn’t know how to be a principal until you had done it. You definitely didn’t know how to be a superintendent until you got in there and did the job.” He concluded with the thought that a college professor who may or may not have ever been an administrator was probably not the person that needed to be teaching people how to be administrators. Ultimately, Superintendent F perceived that additional ethics education/training could benefit new superintendents if the education/training was conducted by individuals who have practical experience.

Superintendent G

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent G indicated that he recently had a doctoral course that contained ethics discussions. He did not recall any course work in his undergraduate studies that examined ethics. By his statements, Superintendent G suggested that ethics education and training did not support superintendents’ decision making. Further, Superintendent G could not recall ethics education/training specifics. Consequently, he perceived that formal ethics education/training provided little or no influence on his ethical decision making.

Professional organizations. Superintendent G also indicated that he had some ethics training “through all the professional organizations and those types of things.” He also indicated that each year he filled out something for the Ethics Commission. He added, “That’s not necessarily a training, but there is some background information provided there with that.” Although Superintendent G mentioned professional associations, he did not provide any specific details as to their influence on ethical

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decision making. Further, he did not indicate any perception that the associated workshops impacted his current ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent G didn't know that any ethics training would be sufficient for preparing an individual for the role of superintendent. "So I don't know that there is any training ... I mean, on-the-job training is the best training for any decision that you make, whether it be ethical or not." Ultimately, Superintendent G did not perceive that additional formal ethics education/training could benefit new superintendents.

Superintendent H

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent H stated that she never received any training. She added that she thought there might have been some ethics conversation in graduate courses. She concluded, "It's discussed, but how do you determine training? If you are being trained, it's rigorous. And it's also assessed. I don't really feel ..." By her statement, Superintendent H perceived that she has received no ethics education or training and could not recall ethics education/training specifics. Consequently, she perceived that ethics education/training provided little or no influence on her ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent H believed that ethics training could be beneficial in preparing graduate students for administration. She noted that ethical decision making is very situational and dependent on culture. To be successful, she indicated that a person needed to understand social situations. She stated that she didn't know how to teach someone that. She thought that when individuals are pursuing the superintendency position that they should be made aware that there will be politics.

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She thought there was a way to do that. She stated that the use of case studies, shadowing and internships could help potential superintendents with managing all the various areas and departments that must be managed. She added, "... honestly, this is what makes or breaks you." She recalled a former superintendent who once told her, "I can teach someone to be a leader, but I can't teach someone to be a good person." She added that his statement has resonated with her for ten years now.

Superintendent I

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Superintendent I indicated that she probably had a course or two that had "ethics" in the title. She stated that it didn't stick with her as having ever had ethics training. Consequently, she perceived that ethics education/training provided little or no influence on her ethical decision making.

Proposed training/education. Superintendent I thinks thought that it was important that before individuals get into situations where they have to answer, react to, or be in charge of ending results, that they have thought through, "What do I believe in? What do I stand for?" She stated that she didn't know if everybody, until called up and push comes to shove, has those tough kinds of self-reflective conversations about these kinds of issues. She thought that however these conversations could be incorporated into coursework; it was probably a good idea. She concluded, "Every day (as a superintendent/administrator) you're solving problems all day long. So how it is that you come to solve your problems is important." Ultimately, Superintendent I perceived that additional ethics education/training, especially self-reflection, could benefit new superintendents.

Superintendent J

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Formal ethics training/education supports decision making. Superintendent J recalled a class in his doctoral program that focused on ethics a lot. He indicated that the subject of ethics was touched on in a variety of ways, either directly or indirectly. He further remembered some discussion of ethics “even at the master’s level.” Superintendent J perceived that his ethics training/education influenced his decision making. He advised,

I think that the background and knowledge that you pick up, directly or indirectly, through the entirety of your educational training ... does apply and you do apply it when you go through that decision making process ... I think there is a sufficient level of training, especially once you get through your doctorate. I think you’ve been exposed to a variety of ethical kinds of information and instruction.

Having said that, it sticks with some people better than it does with others.

By his statements, Superintendent J suggested that ethics education and training did support his own and other superintendents’ decision making.

Professional organizations. Superintendent J stated that certain professional organizations have supported his ethical decision making. He recalled, “ ... not just in coursework, but in different workshops ... that I participated in with MASA. Maybe even ... with DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), there may have been some ethics.” Although Superintendent F stated that he had attended professional association workshops that supported his ethical decision making, he did not provide any specific details. Nevertheless, he perceived that these workshops provided him with the ethics training needed to support his ethical decision making.

Research Question 2: What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?

The second research question related to the perceived impact of professional experience on participants' ethical decision making processes. Superintendents were asked to describe their professional experience. In addition, the researcher asked each superintendent if they perceived that their years of professional experience impacted their ethical decision making and their responses to ethical dilemmas. Further, superintendents were asked if their responses to ethical dilemmas differ today from how they might have responded early in their careers.

Superintendents identified experience as a primary element in their ethical decision making. Within the experience component, certain other elements emerged as guiding influences in the decision making process. Some of these components were common to all superintendents and some elements were common to fewer superintendents (See Table 3). The various decision making components that emerged included a consideration of whether a decision would be good for kids; whether it was the right thing to do; some form of collaborating with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws; delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered; career stage and finally, prayer for Superintendents B and C. These decision making components are briefly described.

One component of all study superintendents' decision making process considered whether a decision was "good for kids." The terms "good for kids," "best for kids" and "best interests of the student" were used interchangeably by superintendents. Essentially,

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these terms all referred to the concept of a decision that resulted in a positive outcome for students and that decisions were made accordingly.

A second component that emerged as a part of decision making could be categorized as “the right thing to do.” This concept was somewhat ambiguous and was personally interpreted. For the most part, this term was used to summarize those superintendent responses that referred to the treatment of others, as well as other characteristics or phrases that emphasized certain ethical or moral tenets. Sometimes, superintendents referred to such characteristics as honesty, consistency, fairness, and transparency.

A third component of the decision making process included some form of collaboration or input into their decision making. Sometimes this collaboration included a single trusted advisor. Other times it included a group of district administrators, other superintendents, teachers, school professionals, students, parents and school board members.

A fourth component was represented by some kind of information seeking or research as part of the decision making process. Superintendents reported asking lots of questions as well as gathering available district data, finding out what other districts had done in similar situations or obtaining outside information.

A fifth component included referring to board policy, rules, regulations, local practice or precedence when making decisions. Although this theme did not emerge for all superintendents, it is certain that all the study superintendents refer to policies during decision making. When laws or regulations are ignored, consequences result. Superintendents would be forced from their positions if they ignored mandates.

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A sixth component referred to a time element in the decision making process. Most of the superintendents agreed that rarely does a decision, at their level, require an immediate response, except in the case of safety. They usually have the benefit of time and contemplation before handing down a decision. Unlike other administrative positions in the school district, a superintendent has the time and opportunity to consider available options.

Career stage and prayer were the final two components of the decision making process that emerged for study superintendents. Although late career stage and prayer did not emerge for all superintendents, they were decision making components for two superintendents. In these cases, the superintendents indicated that at the final stage in their careers, they found it easier to make what they perceived as the ethical decision. They felt no need to compromise their own ethical beliefs in order to maintain their superintendent positions. For two superintendents, prayer was also part of the decision making process. A specific discussion of these decision making components as they pertain to each superintendent follows.

Superintendent A

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. For superintendent A, experience was a definite influence on her decision making process. She indicated that every year that she was in an administrative position or served as a superintendent she got several new things under her belt that made her more comfortable in how she handled situations the next time. She indicated that she started out in human resources. That experience was helpful in certain situations. She stated, “You just don’t realize how much, unfortunately, goes into the hiring and firing process and everything in between.”

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Superintendent A thought that some of the experiences that individuals have outside schools could also lend knowledge to the role of superintendent. She stated that some superintendents come with backgrounds outside the school such as business administration. These experiences could support the decision making process. She reported that she has had a lot of exposure to many things since she was quite young. Superintendent A believed these experiences had served her well. She added, “As soon as you say you’ve seen it all, you realize that you haven’t.” Superintendent A had a kind of test that she used for potentially ethical decisions. She stated,

... I gather information to arrive at a decision, make sure I take my time, do my research, check our board policies, research what maybe other districts are doing depending on what the situation is. Then I align it to what our practice has been in the past. If I feel like it is good for kids, it makes sense, it is moral, it follows policy, then I’m going to move forward with it.

By her admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent A’s ethical decision making and her decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent A’s decision making process exemplified six different components that she considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent A, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as

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well as regulations and laws and finally delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered.

Good for kids. One of the questions that Superintendent A asked when considering a decision was whether or not the perceived outcome was good for kids. She indicated that student safety was the number one priority. Any situation that threatened student safety must be dealt with immediately. Superintendent A clearly identified professional experience as an influence on her ethical decision making.

The right thing to do. Any decision that Superintendent A made would also align with her idea of the “right thing to do.” Although a somewhat abstract and personal concept, this influence involved the respectful treatment of others as well as moral and ethical decisions that could be defended over time. Within her discussion of ethical dilemmas, Superintendent A mentioned consistency, trust, fairness and transparency when dealing with others. At one point she related a professional incident that impacted her and influences how she now treats others in similar situations, “... That is what happened to me as an assistant before and I didn’t like it very much. So I did learn from that situation ... I would not do that to others.” Through her professional experience, Superintendent A considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do. This component weighed in her ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. Collaboration looked differently for different superintendents. For Superintendent A, collaboration had several different facets. She mentioned that early in her career, she had a mentor from whom she learned a tremendous amount. In other instances, she stated that when a decision affected multiple people, she liked to get input from others. She also collaborated with various school districts regarding similar

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decisions. In some situations, it was necessary for her to collaborate with the school board to come to a decision. She reported, “So we would probably go back to closed session and we would ... have a conversation about how I am to react ...” By her statement, Superintendent A seemingly acknowledged that some decisions were not solely her own, but rather a compilation of input condensed to a final decision.

Summarily, Through her professional experience, Superintendent A considered whether or not she had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. In the decision making process, Superintendent A referred to information seeking as gathering information and doing her research. Information seeking was the act of gathering pertinent data in order to make an informed decision. Gathering data often involved asking lots of questions regarding a specific situation. Through her professional experience, Superintendent A considered a research or information seeking component during her ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent A informed, “I think board policies are there for a reason. So a lot of times if I’m making a decision, I want to align it to board policy.” She also looked at past practices as well as current processes when making a decision. Within the professional experience influence, Superintendent A considered an additional component of policies and mandates that must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. Superintendent A indicated that with many of the decisions that she makes, the decision need not be made immediately. There was usually a period of time before she made a final decision. She stated, “I make sure I take

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my time, do my research.” Through her professional experience, Superintendent A allowed for time to consider all the possible options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of her ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent A’s discussion of decision making and her responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in her interpretation of board policy and local practice. The ethic of care was embodied in her talk of relationships with others and the concern she feels when dealing with personnel issues or dispensing student discipline. The ethic of the profession was displayed in her discussion of ethical and moral decisions and professional judgment.

Superintendent B

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. For superintendent B, experience was a definite influence on his decision making process. He had been in the field of education for 38 years and had been a superintendent for 30 years. During this span of years, he had experienced a lot of situations, both positive and negative, with students, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards and communities. He stated that his early experience included working in a little rural school. He said it was good for him since it afforded him the opportunity to learn lots of school related duties. His decision making process was a consideration of many elements. By his statements, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent B’s ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

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Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent B's decision making process exemplified eight different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent B, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws; delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered; career stage and prayer.

Good for kids. Superintendent B considered whether a particular decision would be good for kids. In making personnel decisions he looked at whether the decision would help or hurt kids. He stated, "I'm not going to ... have kids spend any more time, than I have to, with a bad teacher." Student safety was also a primary concern and any subsequent decision would ensure the safety of students. Superintendent B clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making. Yet within his professional experience, he further considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids. Whether or not students benefited from a decision weighed in his decision making process.

The right thing to do. For superintendent B, the right thing to do often related to his relationships with other people. He stated, "Inevitably I would always come back to how I would want to be treated if I was on the other side of this situation. How would I want somebody to make a decision that impacted me?" He said that sometimes when cuts and reductions have to be made, people are negatively impacted. He advised,

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I think they can still be done, nothing is going to make them rosy, but they can still be done in the best way possible. I like to go talk to people face to face. I like to explain to them sometimes, ‘This isn’t a personal issue. This is a business decision and I’ll give you a good recommendation.’ And I’ve even tried to help people get jobs before.

Superintendent B talked about the need to be forthright and honest in his relationships with others. In decision making he asked the questions: Is it right or wrong? Is it correct? Is this the right way to treat people? He further talked about his own professional code that included the appropriate use of funds that he has access to as a superintendent and recused himself from a vendor decision when he had a conflict of interest. Superintendent B stated that he had a commitment to teachers and administrators to be honest regarding their skills and where they needed to grow to be better employees. He talked of treating people equally and supporting his administrators in their decision making. Superintendent B also acknowledged that any decision he made for one individual sets a standard for how he will need to treat others in the same scenario.

Collaboration. Superintendent B indicated that he has, at times, sought the confidence of a respected peer who might have experienced a similar situation and inquired as to the decision he eventually made. Occasionally, he would meet with a few other superintendents to discuss district events. These sessions also provided support for decision making. Within his professional experience, Superintendent B considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

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Information seeking. During the course of decision making, it was often necessary for Superintendent B to gather more information in order to make an informed decision. When presented with the simulated ethical dilemma, The Secretive Coach, Superintendent B stated “I would basically spend a lot of time talking about this with the A.D. We would see if we could find out some information on what happened.” Through his professional experience, Superintendent B considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. When he had tough decisions to make, Superintendent B stated that he tried not to make snap judgments or rash decisions. “I typically would go home at night, sit and think about (the decision). Even when the TV was on, I would be looking at it, but my mind was elsewhere thinking about (the decision).” He added that he would sleep on decisions a night or two, if he could. Within his professional experience, Superintendent B allowed for a time element which gave him the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of his ethical decision making process.

Career stage. Superintendent B was eligible for retirement and could leave the superintendency at any time. He stated that when he was a young superintendent, he knew the difference between right and wrong. It came down to whether he had the guts to make the right decision. There have been times, during his years as superintendent, that board members have asked him to “get rid” of a teacher or coach in order to fill the position with the member’s relative. He had also worked with boards whom he felt were willing to cross the ethical line. In one district he resigned his position after the school

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board asked him to do things that he didn't feel were right and that he was unwilling to do. In speaking about ethical decisions, he stated,

I believe they're easier (to make) today, because of the experience and because, at this point in my life, my family isn't dependent on my income and my being able to provide for them ... The decisions are easier because I don't have to put my whole family behind that decision now. It is just me and my employment.

Within his professional experience, Superintendent B's late career stage was a component in his decision making process. This specific component was a perceived motivator to make decisions that were more ethically aligned regardless of any consequential threat to his employment.

Prayer. Superintendent B indicated that there have been times when he prayed over a decision. He prayed, "I don't know what to do here. What's the right path?" Superintendent B's discussion of prayer speaks to the influence of religion on personal ethics. Within his professional experience, Superintendent B considered prayer a component in his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident throughout Superintendent B's discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in his concepts of fairness and responsibility. The ethic of care was embodied in his discussion of relationships, his treatment of people and his desire to have face-to-face communications. He empathized with others, asking such questions as "How would I feel if I was on the other side of this issue?" He demonstrated the ethic of the profession when he spoke of his own personal code of ethics and the moral expectations of his professional role as superintendent.

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Superintendent C

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent C perceived that his professional experience was an influence on his decision making process. He stated, “I think experience has a bigger impact on decision making than training does.” He also attributed his decision making knowledge to other superintendents who talked of their experiences. Superintendent C worked in human resources for eight years. This exposure provided him with a base for making personnel decisions. He added that he also had the experience of a board member at a previous district who would become upset when the district hired someone without doing thorough background checks. By his admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent C’s ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to the perceived impact of ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics. Superintendent C clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent C’s decision making process exemplified seven different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent C, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered; career stage and prayer.

Good for kids. Superintendent C indicated that hiring the best candidate for a position is what is good for kids. Like the Double-Headed Job Search dilemma,

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Superintendent C said a similar scenario had recently occurred in his district. He wanted to hire an administrator whose spouse was a teacher. The district had current openings for elementary teachers. Superintendent C told his elementary principals “I want you to interview her (the spouse). I will not tell you that you have to hire her.” The spouse was interviewed, but not hired. She subsequently found employment in a nearby district. As indicated in his scenario, Superintendent C has asked his administrators to interview a certain candidate, but has established an expectation that the best candidate will be hired.

The right thing to do. Superintendent C stated that being an administrator is about having tough conversations. He made some statements about these tough conversations. “Everybody deserves to be respected. They deserve to know the truth. You need to have honest conversations.” He added that teachers and students are being cheated when honest hard conversations are not taking place. When teachers are not doing what they need to be doing, it is the administrator’s job to work with teachers to fix the problem or coach them into another profession. Sometimes “doing the right thing” is about mending relationships. Sometimes it is about second chances. He stated, “Everybody deserves a second chance, unless they’ve molested a child or unless they stole money or they brought a gun to school... But if they make a mistake, everyone deserves a second chance.” While professional experience is a major influence, Superintendent C also considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do. This component weighed in his ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. Superintendent C believed that when it comes to leadership that the only time he doesn’t wait for input is a safety situation. In such circumstances, decisions have to be made immediately. Otherwise, Superintendent C advised that in

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decision making he often “bounces” a situation off his assistants or gets input from other superintendents. He also collaborated with the school board and the board president. He confided, “I learned a long time ago that the most important thing about your seven board members is who the president of the board is ... The board president is usually your strongest most influential board member that can convince other people” of what needs to be done. Again, the discussion of board members and their power to influence suggests that district decisions are not solely the decisions of a superintendent; rather a decision is often a compilation of input that results in a final decision. While professional experience is a primary influence, Superintendent C also considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. According to Superintendent C, decision making requires some background work including asking questions, talking to district experts and gathering pertinent information. He acknowledged, “You have to make decisions based on what’s best for your district. So you would have to look at your data... talk to your counselors, talk to your social workers, talk to your administrators...” While Superintendent C advised that professional experience was a major influence, he considered research or information seeking as a component during his ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. While Superintendent C reported that professional experience was a primary influence on his ethical decision making, he allowed for an extended time element prior to making a final decision. He advised that he delayed a decision temporarily in order to consider various options and to make the best ethical decision for a given situation. Superintendent C further explained,

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I think as an administrator you have to address issues in your building. That doesn't mean you can't wait a day or two to see if it's really a big deal. I tell our principals, hey, if it's not a safety situation... put whatever it is on the left corner of your desk. Set it there for 24 hours. Don't jack an email off that you're going to wish you could pull back. Let it sit there and the next morning, come back, pick it up and say, okay, is this as big a deal as I thought it was? And if it is, then prepare your email, prepare to bring the person in, prepare to fix the situation. But unless it is somebody that was seen with a weapon or you got a report that a teacher has abused a student, it can wait 24 hours. Let it sit.

This deliberated time span was part of Superintendent C's ethical decision making process.

Career stage. Superintendent C was eligible for retirement at the time of his interview. He stated,

I think that in my younger years I might have been tempted to be less ethical than I would be now. I don't know that you could tempt me now. This is my 31st year. I've got a three year contract.

He added, "I have no desire to have any controversy. I want to leave on good terms. At the same time, I don't want to go against my own personal beliefs." Career stage can affect individuals' behaviors. Younger professionals may be competing for more advanced positions or providing for families. Whatever the pressures for Superintendent C, he seemed to suggest that in the current stage of his career, he no longer felt those demands. While Superintendent C acknowledged the importance of professional experience on his ethical decision making, late career stage was a component of his

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decision making process. This specific component was a perceived motivator to make decisions that were more ethically aligned regardless of any consequential threat to his employment.

Prayer. Superintendent C reported that he prayed over tough decisions. “If I got a tough decision to make, I pray about it. I just ask the Lord to give me wisdom and to help me make a decision that is best for the district. I’m not going to sit here and say that I pray about every decision, but if it is a really tough decision, then I pray about it.” While Superintendent C stated that professional experience was a major influence on his ethical decision making, he also considered prayer as a component in his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The various components of the framework were apparent throughout Superintendent C’s discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of care was embodied in his talk of mending relationships, his respectful treatment of people, building trust, his discussion of second chances and his desire for honest conversations with others. He demonstrated the ethic of the profession when he talked of ethical attributes such as honesty and the merging of his own personal beliefs with the professional expectations for a superintendent.

Superintendent D

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent D indicated that his years of experience has supported his decision making process. He indicated that he puts a lot more time into making a decision. He now takes an overall big picture look at an issue during the process of decision making. By his admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent D’s

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ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent D's decision making process exemplified six different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent D, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws and finally, delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered. Superintendent D clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making.

Good for kids. Whether or not he perceived a decision was good and safe for kids became a focus for Superintendent D during his decision making. Personnel decisions are based on whether the individual was the best candidate for a position. Kids learn better when they have an instructor who is highly qualified rather than a teacher who is hired for alternative reasons. Programming decisions, are likewise, based on what was good for kids.

The right thing to do. During decision making, Superintendent D considered whether a decision aligned with the right thing to do. Superintendent D recalled a specific personnel situation. He reported,

I waited way too long to get rid of somebody whose spouse was working here too and was a good employee. And had that person not had that spouse here, I mean because, you get rid of one are you going to lose the other one? Or are you going

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to create feelings? As it turns out, I waited. Two superintendents before me that should have fired (the one employee), but didn't. Probably for those same reasons. Ultimately you have to do what's right.

Within his professional experience, Superintendent D also considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do. This additional component was a consideration in his ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. For Superintendent D, collaboration was calling on others, both inside and outside the district, for input. Further, collaboration included working with the school board to "do what's right" and to "do what's best for the district." Within his professional experience, Superintendent D considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Making an informed decision means gathering information related to the situation. Superintendent D reported, "I always try to research things." Sometimes this research included asking questions and "trying to get at the truth." At other times, it was seeking "input from others who know more than me." Within his professional experience, Superintendent D also considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent D spoke to the importance of following local procedures and referring to those processes in decision making. He also mentioned the legal aspects of situations and state standards for academics. These elements weigh in his responses to ethical dilemmas. When Superintendent D discussed the Bullish Board Demand scenario, he reported, "... you're going to sacrifice academics... you have state standards on the academic side that you

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have to be sufficient in.” Within his professional experience, Superintendent D considered an additional component of policies and mandates that must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. As far as his role as superintendent was concerned, Superintendent D suggested, “I think most of the time you don’t have to make on the spot decisions for the most part. So it gives you a little bit more time to consider and look at all the options.” Within his professional experience, Superintendent D allowed for a time element which gave him the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation and provided assurance that he was making the right decision. This deliberated time span was part of his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent D’s discussion of decision making and ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in his interpretation of local procedures, legal aspects of situations and state standards for academics. The ethic of care was embodied in his empathizing with others. The ethic of the profession was displayed in his often voiced desire “to do what’s right,” an apparent internal dialogue between his perception of what is right and what is wrong.

Superintendent E

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Professional experience was an influence on Superintendent E’s decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. In his words,

I think experience has been a tremendous teacher for me because it allows you the opportunity to be involved in decision making that has ethical tenets to it. Being

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able to walk through those at a classroom level, then a building level and eventually at a district wide level and then watching others be a part of that decision making process is a tremendous teacher. There is no doubt that experience is a huge issue for ethics or any other aspect of leadership.

By his admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent E's ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent E's decision making process exemplified six different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent E, these components include a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws and finally, delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered.

Good for kids. Superintendent E indicated that besides some preeminent legal or policy factors, he was bound by what he thought was best for kids. Hiring the best candidate for a specific position was what was best for kids. Superintendent E clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making. Yet within that professional experience, he further considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids. This component weighed in his decision making process.

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The right thing to do. Superintendent E spoke of doing the right thing when it comes to hiring people. He stated, “The right thing to do is to treat each person separately and they should stand on their own merit for any position they apply for.” He added that his experience tells him that he will have double the challenge if he doesn’t hire the best candidate. He explained, “You will have a person that you should not have had in the organization and another disgruntled person because they had to deal with that situation.” He also mentioned another situation that had received attention recently. The situation involved the relationship between school leaders and business vendors. This extra scrutiny has modified the way Superintendent E relates to vendors. He indicated that these relationships are receiving a lot of publicity from the state auditor’s office. He explained,

So that’s a vendor relationship issue where it was very common to have that vendor do things for the district, for the school board or for the administrators, whether it is tickets to activities or lots of meals, things of that sort. That cozy relationship has been called into question in a variety of different ways, with the state auditor’s office being one that has really had that issue at the forefront. ... So where it used to be that you formed relationships with vendors and at times would spend time with that vendor doing things that were social in nature, I am much more hesitant to do that now. Not because I think it changed my decision making process, because there was always a fair exchange of information to go with that, but the perception issue that goes with it. It’s been included in ... our reports now, when administrators go to a football game or what have you. I’ve tried to make sure that I’ve kept a significant distance between me and vendors in that regard.

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That's not common everywhere yet. I would say that's a fair challenge that's out there.

Within his professional experience, Superintendent E also considered the additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do. This component weighed in his ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. Superintendent E explained that he had a number of highly ethical role models in his career. His work under ethical superintendents supports his current decision making. In addition, he likes to get a variety of perspectives so he has an understanding of everybody's perspective on a particular solution or concern or issue. He stated, "It's real easy to have your own opinion about what should happen. You're limited to one person's point of view and you need to make sure you understand where other people are coming from." Superintendent E also spoke of utilizing the districts' professional staff, teachers, counselors and administrators, as well as working with the school board to reach decisions. Within his professional experience, Superintendent E also considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Prior to arriving at a decision, Superintendent E indicated that he gathers the information necessary for making an informed decision. In his discussion of The Secretive Coach scenario, Superintendent E stated, "Before I make any recommendations, I would have to look at some additional information. I would want to know ... " Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent E considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

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School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent E stated that he always starts decision making by searching for anything that's in writing, whether it's policy, procedure, guidelines, or regulations. He uses these written records as guiding documents. He indicated that the last thing a superintendent wants to do is make a decision that is contrary to something that is already in place. Superintendent E stated that every decision he makes sets a precedence of some sort or another. As a result, he is cognizant of what the long term implications might be for any particular decision. He advised that there are times when what might be best for a particular staff member, or what a parent or even a board member requests may not be something a superintendent can sustain over time. He spoke of due diligence, fair treatment and local processes. He advised,

As I move through my professional experience cycle, moving from smaller districts to larger districts made it clearer to me that processes are very important. Processes are what help you stand up for important decisions that you make. It keeps situations from happening in the first place. It prevents many things by having clear processes.

Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent E considered that policies and mandates must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. As a young administrator, Superintendent E indicated that he thought he knew what was right and wrong and acted accordingly. Due to the type of decisions he made as a buildings administrator, he had to make decisions in a quicker time span. As superintendent, his decisions often do not require an immediate response. He reported, "In my current role, most of the time, I take more time to be

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reflective and spend more time considering other points of view.” Within his professional experience, Superintendent E allows for a time element which gives him the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent E’s discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. There was a strong ethic of justice element in his discussions of local processes, due diligence, fair treatment, policy, procedure and written guiding documents. The ethic of care was embodied in his desire to get different perspectives and to consider multiple voices. The ethic of the profession was displayed in his discussion of his own personal ethics and his desire to be perceived as an ethical superintendent and meeting the ethical expectations of his profession.

Superintendent F

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent F asserted that professional experience has an influence over his decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. He stated, “Especially when you are dealing directly with a kid or parent, the longer you do the job, the easier it becomes because you have an experiential base to choose from. When you first start out, you don’t.” He added that he thinks he has gotten smarter in how he deals with situations and how he interacts with people. He stated that he came from a family that liked to debate everything. This influence was a factor early in his career. He said that today when situations arise that are potentially volatile, he doesn’t say much. He doesn’t argue every little point that is incorrect about others’ views. He indicated that, typically, people just want to vent. He added, “So, 15

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year ago I would have sat there and argued with them and they would have left angrier than when they came in.” Experience has taught him about relationships and how to interact with people. By his admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent F’s ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent F’s decision making process exemplified five different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent F, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision and finally, a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws.

Good for kids. Superintendent F stated, “We make decisions based on what’s best for kids. Every kid is different and we’re going to treat them different.” His responses to ethical dilemmas illustrate his concern for children in personnel decisions. Student safety is a priority. Unless student safety is threatened, huge changes that negatively impact children should not be made. He concluded that hiring the best candidate for a given position is what is best for kids. Superintendent F clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making. Yet within that professional experience, he further considers an additional component of whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids.

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The right thing to do. Superintendent F spoke of building trust in the community. He stated, “I think I’ve been here long enough that they trust me.” He has had the opportunity to show the community that he will do the right thing. He recalled a situation with the editor of the local newspaper when he first became superintendent. The editor would report negative stories regarding situations or decisions within the school. One spring, the school district did not offer a contract to a teacher who had not made the necessary improvements for rehire. Superintendent F went to the editor of the newspaper and said, “Hey, I think this person can leave here and be very successful in another school district. But depending on what you put in the paper, it’s going to follow them.” The editor didn’t put anything in the paper about the decision to release the teacher. Later, Superintendent F went back to the editor and said, “It doesn’t matter to me, but I think that teacher, not even knowing, appreciates what you did.” The teacher did go on to get another job 100 miles away and has been teaching for 20 years. He further related, “So, dealing with him (the editor) was difficult at first cause he was crucifying me on... every little decision.” Once he started going to the newspaper office and saying, “Hey, I’d just as soon this not be in the paper ... It’s not going to help anybody by having that information in the paper” the contentious relationship improved. The related incident shows that Superintendent F had empathy for the teacher and indicated his willingness to protect the individual from negative treatment. He wanted to do the right thing by the teacher and acted in a way that he perceived would help the teacher move forward. While professional experience was a primary influence, Superintendent F also considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do and it weighed in his ethical decision making process.

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Collaboration. Superintendent F collaborated with his local school board to make decisions. He also reported that he gains a lot of insight from conferences and networking with other superintendents. He stated,

Being around people that do the same job that you do is important. The conversations that take place ... how somebody does something or has dealt with something or deals with their particular school board ... although the conversations and the things that you pick up aren't really the design of the professional meeting. That's where, I think, it has helped me a lot.

Within his professional experience, Superintendent F considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Superintendent F indicated that informed decision making requires that he both ask questions and obtain more information related to the situation. In his discussion of The Secretive Coach dilemma, Superintendent F stated "I would ... ask them to find out what it was (that caused her release) ... because if it was something illegal or immoral against children, then obviously, she's got to go." Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent F considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent F considered district policy and local processes when making a decision. In his review of The Secretive Coach scenario, Superintendent F discussed local policies and their importance. In reference to the scenario, he stated " ... the A.D. (athletic director) should have known that (she was released) and never hired her in the first place. So the A.D.'s not doing his job (following policy by checking references). So there's problem number

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one.” Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent F considered policies and mandates as components that must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent F’s discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in his discussion of local policy and processes. The ethic of care was embodied in the importance he placed on relationships, his treatment of others, building trust and the empathy he expressed for others and their situations. The ethic of critique and the reframing of the traditional idea that “all students should be treated equally” was evident in his statement, “every kid is different and we treat them differently.” The ethic of the profession was represented in Superintendent F’s discussion of professional judgment and professional decision making.

Superintendent G

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent G believed that professional experience was a strong influence on his ethical decision making. He stated,

I think that today, in year nine, I’m a lot better at it than I was in year one. I think a lot of that comes about with learning experiences that you go through. But with any decision, whether it is ethical or not, I think you have to stop and weigh your options.

By his admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent G’s ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

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Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent G's decision making process exemplified six different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent G, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws and finally, delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered.

Good for kids. Superintendent G considered the impact on kids when making decisions. He advised,

The bottom line is all of us are sitting in this seat to do what's best for kids.

Sometimes when we think about those employees who are working for us we really want to protect them, but is that really the right thing for kids?

From his words, Superintendent G apparently felt a responsibility to help his employees maintain their employment, to perhaps give them second chances as long as that responsibility to employees didn't conflict with his greater obligation to do what was best for kids. Superintendent G clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making. Yet within his professional experience influence, he further considered whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids. This component was instrumental to his decision making process.

The right thing to do. Superintendent G stated that if he can look himself in the mirror and say that he made the right decision, then he made the right decision. He believed he needs to stand behind his decisions. He reported that he is a firm believer that

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when he makes a decision, he goes with it and doesn't backtrack. He also spoke of the importance of being honest with others. There have been some situations in neighboring school districts that have caused media attention. Superintendent G said that these situations have prompted him to go back and question himself to make sure that he is doing things right. He related a situation of a superintendent who was being sued by his previous school district over the misuse of a district credit card. He continued, "I think you have to make sure that you go back and cover your tracks on everything you do ..."

Within his professional experience, Superintendent G considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was the right thing to do and weighed in his ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. Superintendent G indicated that he collaborates with the school board to make decisions. He also stated that, at times, he calls other superintendents to inquire about what they would do in a given situation. He acknowledged, "Your professional experience is always going to influence your decision ... whether it be by professional training or by another superintendent that you called up and asked what they would do in that situation." Within his professional experience, Superintendent G considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Superintendent G stated that he asked questions and searched for additional information in order to make informed decisions. In his discussion of The Secretive Coach dilemma, Superintendent G stated, "One thing I would do is question the A.D." By his statement, Superintendent G suggested that additional

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information would inform his decision making. Thus, Superintendent G considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent G indicated that local processes support decision making. Local practice and processes also serve as protection against alleged wrongdoing. Within his professional experience influence, Superintendent G considered that policies and mandates must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. Superintendent G indicated that he is currently more deliberate in his decision making. He explained,

I think you learn to slow down. It really affects your responses. I used to make a knee jerk decision and just go with it. I've never been one that would backtrack on it. But a lot of times I would feel that it wasn't the right thing. So I think you've got to sit back, relax a little bit and think about who it's going to affect.

Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent G allowed for a time element which gave him the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent G's discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was evident in his discussion of local procedures and processes and related concepts of fairness. The ethic of care was embodied in his desire to protect and support his employees. The ethic of the profession was displayed in

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the importance he placed on honesty and his goal to do what was best for kids within his role as superintendent.

Superintendent H

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent H reported that professional experience influenced her decision making and her responses to ethical dilemmas. She indicated that she takes a personal perspective on experience. “I lean into these challenges and I pay attention and I want to learn from them so I don’t repeat them.” She believed her responses to situations today differ from her responses early in her career.

I’m much calmer now. Of course you still get that feeling in your stomach when a board member’s child’s involved in something or you know you’re going to have to tell somebody who’s pretty well connected ‘no.’ But through experience I feel more skillful in going there. It’s still never a pleasurable experience, but I’m a lot calmer now about it.

By her admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent H’s ethical decision making and her decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent H’s decision making process exemplified six different components that she considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent H, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as

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well as regulations and laws and finally, a delay in a final decision in order that all available options were considered.

Good for kids. Superintendent H reported that whether or not a decision was good for kids weighed heavily on her decision making and her responses to ethical dilemmas. In considering various options, she asks if the decision meets the district's mission that speaks to preparing young people for a diverse world. She stated that part of her core values was ensuring equity. She also asked if the decision was providing equal playing ground for all students. In her opinion, "what is good for kids" was choosing the most qualified candidate for a position rather than granting favors. Superintendent H clearly identified professional experience as an influence on her ethical decision making. Yet within her professional experience, she further considered an additional component of whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids.

The right thing to do. Doing the right thing also contributed to Superintendent H's decision making. She referred to her own moral compass and allows it to lead her. She made the statement, "You're not going to make everybody happy, but I know it's for the greater good to ensure equity and excellence for all." In a discussion of The Secretive Coach scenario and a new hire that left information off her resume, Superintendent H advised, "You don't go back to the person that you just hired. You know, they're ours now." Her relationships with others in the community were important. She spoke of having empathy for a board member who was going through an emotional struggle (Bullish Board Demand). She stated, "We want to honor and show empathy for this person." Within her professional experience, Superintendent H considered whether or not

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a decision was the right thing to do. This component weighed in her ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. Collaboration plays a role in Superintendent H's decision making. She spoke of bringing her core central office administrators to the table. She indicated that she also works with the school board to gain support for decisions. She stated that her first defense was with her board president. She tried to make sure that she and the board president were on the same page with decision making for any particular situation. Then she worked with the other board members so that they had an understanding. In addition, she described a small group of local female superintendents with whom she networks. She related,

... So we kind of created our own little network. It's safe and we can talk about certain things. When we share, we're like how did you do that? What does your evaluation tool look like? ... So it's cathartic, it's supportive ... but you also learn. You're always picking up tricks and tips and things like that so ... I do have a support system in place amongst the region.

Within her professional experience, Superintendent H considered whether or not she had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Superintendent H indicated that she was very information driven, since that helped her decide what decision she was going to make. She stated, I have to get really clear on all the background information and what are my contingency plans ... I always have what I want to do and, if I can't do what I want to do, what can I live with? And if I can't do that, ok, what's the worst

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possible scenario? And if I'm at that third place, how can I build from there to get ... what the need is at the time?

Within her professional experience, Superintendent H considered a research or information seeking component during her ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent H stated that she believed in due process. She added that she always tries to be as fair as possible with the process. In her discussion of The Secretive Coach dilemma and possible outcomes, Superintendent H suggested, "Just use process right now ... meaning the evaluation tool, our instrument that we have in place." Thus, within her professional experience, Superintendent H considered a compliment of policies and mandates that must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. Superintendent H advised that she doesn't wish to make decisions that are "knee jerk reactions." Instead she wanted to take the time to pull from her experience, knowledge and resources. Thus, Superintendent H allowed for a time element which gave her the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of her ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent H's discussion of decision making and her responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in her talk of due process. The ethic of care was embodied in the time she puts into those relationships around her. She honored, empathized and had face-to-face conversations with others. The ethic of critique was evidenced by her discussions of equity and equality for students. The ethic of the

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profession was expressed in her conversation regarding her own moral compass and doing the right thing for kids as she carries out her professional duties as superintendent.

Superintendent I

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent I indicated that professional experience was an influencing element in her decision making process and her responses to ethical dilemmas. She stated,

I have had many conversations with parents, teachers and students in very difficult situations. So I've had lots of experiences having these conversations... I am a community member. I've been a principal. I've been a parent, a teacher. I've worn many hats so I think that my training and my personal experiences help me to filter those and be empathic, if you will, to situations that people find themselves in. ... Just having had many many experiences helps you to better make some of those decisions ... It just gives you a broader perspective on dealing with situations and problems.

She further explained that it is important for communities to hire administrators who have core values congruent with the values of the community in which they serve. Such discrepancy makes it difficult to work through issues or problems or to agree on a decision making process. She added,

Unfortunately, you get a lot of this (one's core values) by life's experience... how you make your decisions and what your core values are... Often when people get into these types of positions (superintendency) where there is that incongruence with values, you just won't last long.

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By her admission, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent I's ethical decision making and her decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent I's decision making process exemplified five different components that she considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent I, these components include a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision and finally, a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws.

Good for kids. During the decision making process, Superintendent H considered how a decision would impact kids. Student safety was a priority in her decision making. In her discussion of The Double-Headed Job Search dilemma, Superintendent I stated that the best candidate for a teaching position was the one that should be hired. She advised, "At the end of the day ... the fact of whether kids learn or not is the teacher standing in front of them." She stated that, early in her career, she was probably a little heavier handed. She added, with humor, that when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. She confessed, "Now we know that we do have alternatives for kids and we can work on making some things happen for kids." Superintendent I seemed to suggest that as a superintendent, she feels she has more options available to her to positively affect kids and outcomes, than she did when she was a teacher or a building administrator. Superintendent I clearly identified professional experience as an influence on her ethical decision making. Yet within her professional experience, she further

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considered whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids. This component weighed in her decision making process.

The right thing to do. Superintendent F indicated that the decisions that she makes every day are made on core values that she believes she has. These core values include how she treats people. What is it that she stands for? What does she believe in? What she is willing to “go to the mat for?” What does she fight for every day? She stated that she has certain core beliefs. For Superintendent I, these core beliefs included ensuring that every student has the opportunity to learn, be productive, feel safe and feel respected. She advised that it is the school’s responsibility every day to ensure that every child gets quality learning time. She added that the district can’t expect every student to come to school as a finished product, because they certainly aren’t. They are coming in need of guidance, help and some support. It is the school’s duty to take care of them and treat them as she would want her own child treated. According to Superintendent I, sometimes a decision has to consider the greater good to be gained for students or the district as a whole. Finally, Superintendent I spoke of other districts and superintendents who have received media coverage for alleged misconduct. She gave her own philosophy, “If you don’t want to read about it in the newspaper, don’t be doing it.” Superintendent I seemed to suggest that schools and their efforts to do the right thing for kids are news worthy. When ethical failures occur and the public trust is undermined, superintendents and school boards are a legitimate media mark. Thus, Superintendent I considered whether or not a decision was the right thing to do. This component weighed in her ethical decision making process.

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Collaboration. Superintendent I collaborated with teachers, students, parents, administrators and the school board to make decisions. She stated,

Your board represents your community. I can have my personal thoughts about things, but at the end of the day, like the board or not like the board, they are representing your community and they were elected to provide that representation. I think to allow the board to have discussions is healthy and making sure they have an understanding of what you do or don't do in your school district is important.

Seemingly, Superintendent I admitted that all decision making was not solely her own. In reality, a final decision was a compilation of input from representatives appointed by the community to uphold the interests of the district. Thus, within her professional experience, Superintendent I considered whether or not she had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. Superintendent I indicated that they collect a lot of data in her district. Decisions were often based on what this data reflected. Her research into situations included asking a lot of questions from whatever sources were appropriate for getting the information she needed to make an informed decision. She related, "I think the more knowledge you have, you can make better decisions." Within her professional experience, Superintendent I considered a research or information seeking component during her ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. Superintendent I referred to the review of policies and local practice when making decisions. She asked

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what decisions were made in similar situations and, as a result, were established as local practice. She added,

I guess one of my core beliefs and values is just to be as completely transparent with your work as possible. And then that doesn't leave people to wonder or guess at what you're doing. If you give them all the primary information and primary documents, they can draw their own conclusions from those documents. I think that has a level of protection in and of itself.

By her statement, Superintendent I suggested that if a superintendent is ethical in decision making, he or she will be transparent since they have nothing to hide. Further, within her professional experience, Superintendent I considered the additional component of policies and mandates that she must examine during the ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent I's discussion of decision making and her responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in her talk of policy, local practice, primary documents and the concept of the greater good for students and district members. There was a strong ethic of care evident in her discussion of her relationships with others, her treatment of people and her empathy for others in difficult situations. The ethic of the profession was evidenced by her adherence to her own core beliefs and values while acknowledging the values of the community in which she serves. In conclusion, she added,

I think that sometimes people in these jobs have difficulty because they're not sure who they are and what they stand for ... I think you need to be able to have

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respectful professional conversations ... that absolutely there are times that we disagree, but at the end of the day, what is it that we stand for?

Superintendent J

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. Superintendent J indicated that, absolutely, experience has an influence over his ethical decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. He stated that experience had given him a much better feeling for the big picture or how a decision that he makes today might come back to visit him in the future. He advised that the more he serves as an administrator, the more cautious he becomes. He tries to think about how a certain message will be received and will resonate with various groups. He stated, "I think early on, you just made a decision and went on. As you have had issues that have come up, you become a little more cautious I think." By his statements, professional experience was the greatest perceived influence on Superintendent J's ethical decision making and his decision making process when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that Superintendent J's decision making process exemplified six different components that he considered when making a decision, including ethical decisions. For Superintendent J, these components included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws and finally, delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered.

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Good for kids. Superintendent J indicated that what's best for kids weighed heavily in his decision making. He elaborated, "One of the things that I always tell our principals, board and community is that we are always going to try to do what's best for kids. There may be different opinions about what that is, but that has got to be the focus." For him, student safety was his number one concern. He advised, "We want our students to feel safe when they come to school." Finally, he suggested that if you think you've done what's best for kids, then you can sleep at night. Superintendent J clearly identified professional experience as an influence on his ethical decision making. Yet within that professional experience influence, he further considered whether or not a decision was ultimately good for kids.

The right thing to do. Superintendent J indicated that he had always been a person who gave people the benefit of the doubt. He indicated that sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's not. In his responses to ethical dilemmas, Superintendent J spoke of good relationships, face-to-face meetings with individuals and empathizing with others during emotional times. He indicated that there have been some events in neighboring school districts that have influenced his decision making. He stated, "... especially in today's world with instant media, Twitter, Facebook and all those things where information can be spread so quickly. It can be nearly anonymous and extremely inaccurate and spread like wildfire. You have to be aware." Superintendent J often thought about his decisions retrospectively. He stated, "I can think back to times when decisions were made, that ... you rehash ... you think, I could have done this or I could have done that or I wish I had handled that situation better." He concluded with the idea that there are some decisions where it doesn't matter what you do, you are going to make

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somebody mad. He advised, “ ... matter of fact, a lot of decisions you can’t win.”

Nevertheless, it was up to him to do what he perceived was the right thing to do. Within his professional experience, Superintendent J considered whether or not a decision was the right thing to do.

Collaboration. Superintendent J indicated that one tactic he had used in decision making was the creation of a committee to research and arrive at a solution to an issue. He indicated that the committee contained students, parents, teachers and board members. He advised, “Then they’re participating in the process.” As a result, committee members have a sense of ownership in the final outcome and were more accepting of the decision. Within his professional experience Superintendent J considered whether or not he had included, as appropriate, all pertinent stakeholders in the decision making process.

Information seeking. In his responses to ethical dilemmas, Superintendent J stated that he asked lots of questions and sought information in order to make the best possible decision during the decision making process. He advised, “Get all the information you can.” Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent J considered a research or information seeking component during his ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. In the beginning of the decision making process, Superintendent J thought about any policies that would guide his decision making. He asked, “If there is (a policy), does it specifically apply? Does it kind of apply? Is there some interpretation?” He also thought about the legal implications outside of policy. In addition, he also considered the precedence he was setting with a decision. Was it a precedence that in six months or a year may come back to haunt him? Thus, within his professional experience, Superintendent J considered an additional

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policies and mandates component that must be examined during the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. Superintendent J advised that tough decisions need time and contemplation. He indicated that one of the benefits of being at the superintendent level was that the superintendent “usually has more time to go through that thought process ... sometimes when you are in the office and sometimes at 2:00a.m. when you wake up and you’re thinking about it.” Within his professional experience, Superintendent J allowed for a time element which gave him the opportunity to consider all the options for a specific situation prior to making a final decision. This deliberated time span was part of his ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The multiple ethical paradigms framework was evident through Superintendent J’s discussion of decision making and his responses to ethical dilemmas. The ethic of justice was apparent in his talk of policies, legal implications and setting precedence. The ethic of care was embodied in his discussion of building relationships, empathizing with others and face-to-face communication. The ethic of critique was evident in his discussion of pushing the envelope where policies, rules and regulations were concerned. This “pushing the envelope” could be conceived as a reframing of the traditional views of law and justice to focus on what’s best for kids, the district or a given situation as well as what is just and right. The ethic of the profession was evidenced by Superintendent J’s discussion of the leeway present in the interpretation of policy and the professional judgment required for this interpretation.

Research Question 3: What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents’ decision-based responses to dilemmas?

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The researcher asked study superintendents to identify any professional codes of ethics that they perceived applied to them in their role as superintendent. These questions inquired as to the role and impact of professional codes of ethics on the superintendent and subsequent decision making. Themes that emerged included superintendents who were unaware of any professional codes of ethics, a superintendent who was familiar with both national and state professional codes of ethics and two superintendents who were only aware of a local professional code of ethics. For the one superintendent who was able to identify national and state professional codes of ethics, additional themes emerged. Responses and themes for each case follow.

Superintendent A

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent A was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. She stated “Well, I don’t know that we have an overarching code of ethics. We might each have personal codes of ethics.” She advised that integrity and acting as a leader required her to make sure that she was following her policies, communicating with people, being honest and following her own moral code as she arrived at decisions. She further added, “I don’t know that I’ve seen a code of ethics specific to the superintendency. I think it is more specific to the individual.” By her admission, Superintendent A was unaware of any formal professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, Superintendent A perceived that formal professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on her ethical decision making process.

Superintendent B

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No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent B was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. He advised,

I don't know that there is one written, but I think we all feel that. I think we all feel that we have, in a sense, a Hippocratic Oath, to the things we do in an ethical fashion. I don't know that all of us do, just like any profession. But I would like to think that the great majority of us do ... and it weighs on you greatly.

Although Superintendent B was unaware of an established written professional code of ethics, he felt there was an unstated expectation for the profession to act ethically. By his admission, Superintendent B was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent B's ethical decision making process.

Superintendent C

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent C was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. Instead, he described certain tenets that he believed were essential for administrators. These tenets included respecting others and honesty. Such themes as relationships and honesty were identified as emerging themes for "The Right Thing to Do" findings for Research Question 2 and the influence of professional experience on decision making. By his admission, Superintendent C was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent C's ethical decision making process.

Superintendent D

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Professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent D was unfamiliar with any established state or national codes of ethics for public school superintendents. He advised, “If they’re out there, I haven’t seen them.” By his admission, Superintendent D was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, national or state professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent C’s ethical decision making process.

Local level professional codes of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent D described a code of ethics that applied to him as superintendent. He stated, “I know our board ..., we have a code of ethics, a district policy. It’s a code of ethics.” By his admission, Superintendent B was aware of a local professional code of ethics that existed for him. Superintendent B perceived that this local professional code of ethics did impact his ethical decision making process and that he followed this local professional code when making decisions including ethical decisions.

Superintendent E

Professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent E stated that he was familiar with two or three codes of ethics established through professional organizations. He provided insight as to the role and impact of these professional codes on his ethical decision making process.

State and national professional codes of ethics for superintendents.

Superintendent E was a member of the Missouri Association of School Business Officials (MOASBO). He stated that the association had a code of ethics that dealt mostly with the operational side of working with school districts. The parent organization which was the national organization, Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International,

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had a professional code of ethics that he had studied. He added that the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA), the superintendents' group, also had a code of ethics that was fairly consistent with MOASBO's.

Local level professional codes of ethics for superintendents. There was also a code of ethics that applies to Superintendent E on the local level. He reported, "Then, really we have at the district level, a code of ethics and policies ... a little more generic in nature, more global, if you will." He summarized, "So we have guiding documents now that are out there, for the professional, at the state, national and local levels."

The role of professional codes of ethics. Superintendent E reported that professional codes of ethics are helpful reminders. He stated,

In reality, if your personal ethics aren't in line with those codes of ethics, you're in the wrong profession. I guess my belief is, I use those as a check to make sure my personal code of ethics are in line with what the professional organizations believe should be a minimum standard. That's a good cross-check, but I don't think I've always found it to be very consistent.

Impact of professional codes of ethics on daily decision making. Superintendent E suggested that professional codes of ethics have no direct impact on decision making. Rather, he indicated, it is more of an indirect ongoing internal dialogue whereby he double checked himself to make sure his decision making is in line with the professional codes. Although these professional codes provided an internal check for Superintendent E, the codes had no direct impact on his ethical decision making. If formal professional codes of ethics truly have no impact on decision making, the researcher might ask if professional code of ethics are necessary.

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Superintendent F

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent F was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. He stated, “If you go into education it’s just unwritten. I don’t know as I’ve ever read one ... I mean, other than my job description ... That’s kind of a professional ethical statement. By his admission, Superintendent F was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, formal professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent F’s ethical decision making process.

Superintendent G

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent G was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. He mentioned certain “codes” that he must abide by as a superintendent. These codes included such issues as insurance confidentiality, student confidentiality and protecting his employees in a school board meeting. Although Superintendent G was unaware of any written professional code of ethics, he felt compelled to meet certain professional expectations that he personally identified as ethical codes. By his admission, Superintendent G was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, formal professional codes of ethics have little or no impact on Superintendent G’s ethical decision making process.

Superintendent H

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent H was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. She confided, “I guess it is my own moral compass right now, more than anything ... There is

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nothing there in writing ...” By her statement, Superintendent H was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, formal professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent H’s ethical decision making process.

Superintendent I

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent I was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. She admitted, “I don’t know that I have a specific professional code of ethics that I follow every day.” She communicated that her primary responsibility was about making sure that every student had the opportunity to learn and be productive, felt safe, and felt respected. Superintendent I’s identification of this responsibility may come from the school’s mission statement or her personal vision for education. By her admission, Superintendent I was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, formal professional codes of ethics have little or no impact on Superintendent I’s ethical decision making process.

Superintendent J

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Superintendent J was unfamiliar with any established code of ethics for public school superintendents. He added that he got his licensure and certification just as the ISLLC standards were coming in. He knew there were some ethical pieces to those standards but didn’t know specifics. By his admission, Superintendent J was unaware of any professional code of ethics that existed for superintendents. As a result, formal professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on Superintendent J’s ethical decision making process.

Cross-Case Analysis

The multiple cases were first analyzed within each case to establish themes and categories. Following within-case analysis, the themes and categories were further examined across cases (Creswell, 2007). This cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to look for similarities and differences among the cases (Yin, 2003). For example, themes across all cases emerged clearly has superintendents similarly perceived that ethics education/training and professional codes of ethics had little or no impact on their ethical decision making. All superintendents perceived that professional experience was by far the greatest influence on ethical decision making. Differences emerged in the superintendents' perceived benefits of certain ethics education/training. Some superintendents suggested that certain types of ethics training could support decision making while others felt that no ethics training could support decision making. The comparisons between cases and the identification of similarities and differences lead to research conclusions.

Research Question 1: How do superintendents perceive their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?

Both formal and informal sources of ethics education and training emerged as influences on ethical decision making for study superintendents. Higher education and ethics training provided by professional associations were considered formal sources of education/training. Other sources, such as family, mentors and culture, were considered informal causes of influence.

Perceived lack of formal ethics training/education. Ten superintendents indicated that there was some discussion of ethics in their graduate coursework.

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According to these reports, the topic of ethics was generally “lumped” alongside other topics. None of the superintendents could recall a specific graduate-level ethics course or a course that contained “ethics” in the course title. When discussing their ethics education, most of the superintendents were vague and could not remember specific details. Superintendent I’s statement, “I don’t remember that specifically but it doesn’t stick with me as having specific ethics training” was a reoccurring motif. Nine superintendents perceived that ethics education held no influence over their ethical decision making. Two superintendents, E and J, credited ethics training provided by professional associations as influencing their ethical decision making. Some of the superintendents attributed ethics training that impacted their ethical decision making to less formal sources.

Role models, mentors and respected peers. Three superintendents, A, B, and E, credited their ethical decision making to previous ethical mentors and role models. Superintendent E indicated that he was fortunate to have worked under highly ethical superintendents when starting his career in administration. These role models, mentors and respected peers, although a less formal source, were perceived by study superintendents to have influenced their ethical decision making.

Family, church and the cultural environment. Two superintendents, B and C, credited their parents or family members during childhood as providing them with an ethical foundation. Superintendent B indicated that attending church as he was growing up was instrumental in preparing him for ethical decision making. His desire to teach was nurtured by teaching his Sunday school class from the fifth grade until they graduated from high school. Superintendent B also attributed the cultural environment, a farming

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community in which he was raised, as formative to his ethical decision making.

Superintendents B and C similarly credited their upbringings with influencing their ethical decision making.

Professional organizations. Four superintendents, E, F, G and J, identified professional organizations as sources for their ethics training. These organizations were identified as MASA, MOASBO, MSBA and possibly DESE. Superintendent E advised, “There are avenues for administrators now to get the prerequisite training that maybe wasn’t there 15 years ago when I started down that path.” Only two superintendents credited these associations with providing training that influenced their ethical decision making. It remains unclear why the other two superintendents, while they advised that they had received training from these associations, did not perceive this training as an influence on their ethical decision making.

Formal ethics training/education supports decision making. Only Superintendent J identified ethics education as a support, albeit minimally, for his ethical decision making. Although he did not recall specific details of his ethics education, he advised that, within his doctoral program, there were a lot of discussions of ethics, both directly and indirectly. He perceives that his ethics education did influence his ethical decision making. He stated, “I think that the background and knowledge that you picked up, directly or indirectly, through the entirety of your educational training ... does apply and you do apply it when you go through that decision making process.” Although Superintendent J took a broad approach to ethics education/training, he did perceive that ethics education/training impacted his ethical decision making.

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No additional training/education needed for decision making. Three superintendents, C, G and J indicated that additional ethics education was unnecessary. Superintendent C advised that ethics was an inborn trait. As a result, additional education or training wasn't going to help. He added, "I think folks are either ethical or not." Superintendent G didn't believe that any amount of ethics training was sufficient for preparing an individual for the role of superintendent. He stated, "On the job training is the best training for any decision that you make, whether it be ethical or not." Superintendent J found that his ethics education was sufficient for his role as superintendent. He didn't perceive that any additional training was beneficial for decision making. He stated, "I think there is a sufficient level of training, especially once you get through your doctorate." All three superintendents acknowledged that either the previous training received was sufficient to meet ethical decision making demands or that any additional training would not benefit superintendents.

Proposed training/education. Seven superintendents, A, B, D, E, F, H and I, indicated that additional ethics education/training could be beneficial for preparing superintendents for ethical decision making. It was unclear why six superintendents who previously indicated that ethics education and training had no impact on their ethical decision making, perceived that additional training could be beneficial to new superintendents. Although not stated explicitly, superintendents may have felt that advanced exposure to some ethical scenarios might prepare administrators for future challenges. One superintendent, Superintendent E, acknowledged that ethics training provided by various professional associations did impact his decision making.

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Superintendents offered a variety of ideas as to the where, what and how of providing ethics education/training.

Where. Superintendents suggested that additional education or training could be provided in graduate programs, workshops and training programs for aspiring superintendents and the new superintendents' academy.

What. Superintendents recommended that ethics education/training could be conducted through practical exposure by practicing superintendents. Other suggestions included coverage of decision making, policy reference, collaborative approaches and self-reflective conversation. Self-reflective conversation would include such concepts as "What do I believe in?" and "What do I stand for?" Superintendent A suggested that students be tested in practical matters.

How. Superintendents suggested that the "how" might be accomplished by role playing, case studies, shadowing and internships. Further, tenured superintendents could lead practical ethics discussions utilizing relevant scenarios.

Research Question 2: What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. All 10 superintendents perceived that professional experience influences their ethical decision making. Some aspects of the ethical decision making process were common to all 10 superintendents. Other aspects applied to only a few superintendents. Superintendent F summed up the sentiment expressed by many of the superintendents. He stated, "The longer you do the job, the easier it becomes because you have an experiential base to choose from. When you first start out, you don't." Within the experience component, certain other elements

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emerged as guiding influences in the decision making process. Some of these components were common to all superintendents and some elements were common to fewer superintendents (See Table 3).

The various decision making components that emerged included a consideration of whether a decision would be good for kids; whether it was the right thing to do; some form of collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws; delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered; prayer and finally, career stage. These decision making components are briefly described.

Components of the decision making process. Findings indicated that all superintendents had some similarities in their decision making processes. These similarities emerged into eight different themes. The components of the decision making process included a consideration of whether the decision was good for kids; whether the decision was the right thing to do; collaboration with others in the decision making process; searching for information to make an informed decision; a review of local policy and practice as well as regulations and laws and finally delaying a final decision in order that all available options were considered. A discussion of the individual themes follows.

Good for kids. All 10 superintendents indicated that the question of whether a particular decision was “good for kids” weighed heavily in the decision making process. Sometimes superintendents termed it “good for kids” or “best for kids” or “best interests of the student.” Essentially, these terms all referred to the concept of a positive outcome for students and that decisions were made accordingly. Superintendent G expressed the

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response made by others, “All of us are sitting in this seat to do what’s best for kids.” All of the study superintendents identified this “good for kids” component as an essential consideration in the ethical decision making process.

The right thing to do. The concept of “the right thing to do” was somewhat ambiguous and is often personally interpreted. For the most part, this term was used to summarize those superintendent responses that referred to the treatment of others, as well as ethical or moral tenets. Sometimes, superintendents mentioned honesty, consistency, fairness, and transparency. All 10 superintendents referred to a component of decision making that could be categorized as “the right thing to do.” Superintendent B epitomized this concept with his statement, “Inevitably I would always come back to how I would want to be treated if I was on the other side of this situation.” All of the study superintendents identified the “right thing to do” component as an essential consideration in the ethical decision making process.

Collaboration. All 10 superintendents referred to some form of collaboration or input into their decision making process. Sometime this collaboration included a single trusted confidant. Other times it included other superintendents, administrators, teachers, school professionals, students, parents and school board members. Superintendent E gave a good illustration of this concept. He stated, “It’s real easy to have your own opinion about what should happen. You’re limited to one person’s point of view and you need to make sure you understand where other people are coming from.” All of the study superintendents identified some form of collaboration as essential to the ethical decision making process.

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Information seeking. All 10 superintendents engaged in some kind of information seeking or research as part of the decision making process. The process usually included asking lots of questions as well as gathering available district data, finding out what other districts were doing in similar situations or obtaining outside information from agencies or knowledgeable others. Superintendent I quoted Oprah Winfrey, “When you know better, you do better.” Superintendent I added, “I think the more knowledge you have, you can make better decisions.” All of the study superintendents identified a research component as an essential consideration in the ethical decision making process.

School board policy, local practice, regulations and laws. During the decision making process, eight superintendents, A, D, E, F, G, H, I and J, indicated that they refer to board policy, rules, regulations, local practice or precedence. Superintendent E advised, “I always start with anything that’s in writing, whether it’s policy, procedure or guidelines, regulations ... anything that you have that is a guiding document.” Seven superintendents identified the review of policy, procedure, regulations and laws as a component in the ethical decision making process.

Delay decision making temporarily. Eight superintendents referred to the time element in the decision making process. They agreed that rarely does a decision, at their level, require an immediate response, except in the case of safety. Otherwise, they had the benefit of time and contemplation before handing down a decision. There was opportunity to consider various options. Superintendent E stated, “In my current role, most of the time, I take more time to be reflective and spend more time considering other points of view.” Eight out of ten superintendents indicated that they delay decision making temporarily, except in the case of safety, in order to consider the best possible

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decision for a given situation. All eight superintendents considered this decision delay as part of their ethical decision making process.

Career stage. Superintendents B and C were both eligible for retirement. They both indicated that this specific fact supports their ethical decision making. Neither felt that they had to compromise their own ethical beliefs in order to maintain their superintendent positions. Superintendent B stated, “The decisions are easier because I don’t have to put my whole family behind that decision now. It is just me and my employment.” Superintendent C advised, “I think that in my younger years I might have been tempted to be less ethical than I would be now. I don’t know that you could tempt me now.” These two superintendents advised that a late career stage component influenced their ethical decision making process.

Prayer. Two superintendents, B and C, indicated that at times and with tough decisions, prayer was a part of the decision making process. Superintendent B indicated that he had prayed for guidance with tough decisions. Superintendent C stated, “I’m not going to sit here and say that I pray about every decision, but if it is a really tough decision, then I pray about it.” These two superintendents identified prayer as a component in their ethical decision making process.

Multiple ethical paradigms. Discussions of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms that framed this study are included under professional experience, since study superintendents unanimously perceived that ethical decision making took place through their professional experience and not through ethics education/training or the use of professional codes of ethics. All 10 superintendents verbalized some evidence of the various ethics that contribute to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms framework.

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Ethic of justice. According to Stefkovich and Shapiro (2003), administrators who approach ethical dilemmas from a justice standpoint will concern themselves with the interpretation of law, rights and policies as well as the more abstract concepts of fairness, responsibility and liberty. Eight superintendents mentioned some element that comprised the justice paradigm. These collective conversations mentioned district policy, local practice, rules, regulations, laws, precedence as well as responsibility and fairness. Two superintendents did not mention an element of the justice ethic. Both certainly do use the ethic of justice, i.e., the review of mandates, policies and regulations, at least to some extent in their decision making since superintendents who do not follow policies or law do not maintain their positions for long. However, this aspect of the ethic of justice was not readily apparent in their interviews. Superintendent E demonstrated a strong ethic of justice approach to his decision making. His first stage of decision making was to measure a decision against any written document, “whether it’s policy, procedure, guidelines, or regulations ... any guiding documents that cover our situation. The last thing you want to do is make a decision that is contrary to something that you already have in place.”

Ethic of care. The ethic of care placed emphasis on compassion, empathy and affirming relationships with special attention centered on such concepts as loyalty, trust and empowerment (Stefkovich, 2006). The ethic of care required that administrators consider multiple voices as they demonstrate a concern for others during decision making (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). All 10 superintendents expressed some component that embodied the care paradigm. These collective conversations included mention of relationships, the treatment of people, building trust and compassion for those who are in

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difficult circumstances. Superintendents B and I exhibited strong care ethics in their discussions of decision making. Superintendent I stated, “I’ve worn many hats so I think that my training and my personal experiences help me to filter those and be empathic, if you will, to situations that people find themselves in.”

Ethic of critique. An ethic of critique promotes self-understanding and the improvement of social conditions (Stefkovich, 2006). The ethic of critique challenges educators to reevaluate the traditional views of law and justice and to focus on educational injustice at all levels (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). The critique paradigm was demonstrated in the discussions of three superintendents, F, H and J. Superintendent F spoke of all kids being different and treating them differently. His statement was a reframing of the general concept that all kids should be treated equally and perhaps refocusing on potential educational injustice. Superintendent J confessed his willingness to “push the envelope” when it came to rules, regulations and mandates in order to do what, he perceived, was best for the district. Superintendent H displayed an ethic of critique when she stated, “We need that type of support to ensure equity.”

Ethic of the profession. The ethic of the profession is a broad umbrella term that encompasses some elements of the ethic of justice equated with codes, rules and principles, but also embodies additional concepts such as professional judgment and professional decision making (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003). Stefikovich and Shapiro (2005) suggest that the ethic of the profession considers not only the moral aspects of the profession, but also includes an educational leader’s own personal and professional code of ethics. All 10 superintendents displayed some aspects of the ethic of the profession paradigm. There were multiple discussions of experience and the professional judgment

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and decision making that flowed from that experience. There were also additional conversations regarding personal ethics and morals and how core values and beliefs were embedded in professional decision making. Superintendent H confided, “I guess it is my own moral compass right now ... ”

Research Question 3: What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents’ decision-based responses to dilemmas?

Ten public school superintendents were asked to identify any professional codes of ethics that applied to them in their role as public school superintendent. If professional codes were identified, superintendents were then asked what role these professional codes performed and what impact the codes played in daily decision making.

No known professional code of ethics for superintendents. Eight out of ten superintendents were unable to identify any national, state or local codes of ethics that applied to them in their role as public school superintendent. Superintendent A expressed, “I don’t know that we have an overarching code of ethics.” Superintendent D advised, “If they’re out there, I haven’t seen them.” Superintendent F concluded, “If you go into education it’s just unwritten. I don’t know as I’ve ever read one.” Superintendent H stated, “I guess it is my own moral compass right now, more than anything.” Superintendent I attested, “I don’t know that I have a specific professional code of ethics that I follow every day.”

Professional code of ethics for superintendents. One superintendent identified national, state and local professional codes of ethics for himself as superintendent. One additional superintendent identified a local code of ethics that applied to him as superintendent and that he followed in decision making.

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State and national professional codes of ethics for superintendents.

Superintendent E indicated that he was aware of several national and state professional codes of ethics established through professional organizations. He identified the professional codes of ethics for MOASBO and MASA on the state level and also their national equivalents.

The role of professional codes of ethics. Superintendent E was the only superintendent to identify national and state professional codes of ethics. As a result, he was the only one to speak regarding the role of professional codes of ethics. He perceived that the codes were helpful reminders. He added, “I use those as a check to make sure my personal code of ethics are in line with what the professional organizations believe should be a minimum standard.”

Impact of professional codes of ethics on daily decision making. Superintendent E was also the only superintendent to speak to the impact of professional codes of ethics on daily decision making. He concluded that professional codes of ethics have no direct impact on decision making. Rather they provided for an indirect ongoing internal dialogue whereby he checked himself to ensure his decision making was in line with professional codes.

Local level code of ethics for superintendents. On a very generic level, both Superintendents D and E identified local school board policy as a professional code of ethics that applied to them in their roles as superintendents.

Summary

This chapter contained a description of each study participant, including the years of experience, highest degree obtained and a brief description of each superintendent’s

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current district. Each participant provided a definition of professional ethics. Each superintendent identified the dilemmas that were most challenging for them in their role as school leader and when each felt it was most difficult to act ethically.

The chapter also briefly explained how the data was reported. The within-case analysis section examined each case individually and identified resulting themes and categories as they applied to the three research questions. The cross-case analysis reported the data similarly utilizing established themes and categories; however the focus was on the collective findings for all the cases.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results presented in the previous findings chapter. Chapter Five is comprised of five parts. The first section consists of a Summary of the Study which briefly identifies the purpose of the study. The Findings section follows with an explanation of the data obtained from superintendent interviews. The third section, Recommendations for Practice, suggests ways the study findings might guide the work of educational practitioners. The fourth section, Future Research, suggests directions for prospective inquiry in the area of ethical decision making and school leaders. The final section provides conclusions to this study of Missouri public school superintendents and their perceptions of the decision making process and what they discern as elements that influence ethical decision making.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the ethical decision making processes of public school superintendents and to identify those components that influence ethical decision making. Ethics education/training, professional experience and formal professional codes of ethics were examined as potential components of influence. Thus, this research explored superintendents' use or non-use of formal professional codes of ethics and the perceived impact these codes plus ethics education/training and professional experience have on administrative decision making. Previous research findings on the relationships between ethics education/training, professional experience and ethical decision making were mixed.

Findings

This study collected data from 10 Missouri public school superintendents. The data was obtained via personal interview with the participants. All superintendents were employed during the 2014-2015 academic year. Seven participants were male and three participants were female. Five superintendents had doctoral degrees and five had educational specialist degrees. Three superintendents were employed in small rural school districts. Three superintendents were employed in mid-sized school districts, with two considered rural and one considered urban. The four remaining superintendents were employed in large school districts, with three considered suburban and one consider rural. Discussions of the findings are organized under each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1: How do superintendents perceive their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?

Formal ethics education/training.

For the current study, all 10 superintendents acknowledged some discussion of ethics in their graduate level courses; however none could recall a specific ethics course. All were vague in their recollections of ethics content and none could recall specific course details. Only Superintendent J perceived that his ethics education influenced his current decision making. Superintendent J took a somewhat global position that everything that one picks up throughout the entirety of one's educational experience is applied during the decision making process.

In interview, four superintendents, E, F, G and J, identified professional associations as a source of their ethics training. Those organizations mentioned were state associations and included MASA, MOASBO and MSBA. When asked if ethics

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education/training influenced decision making, only superintendents E and J perceived that this professional training influenced their ethical decision making. It is unclear why, after mentioning these associations as sources of training, the other two superintendents did not perceive this training as an influence on ethical decision making. It is plausible to conclude that either the training wasn't effective for guiding ethical decision making or that these two superintendents simply didn't remember enough of the training to make it applicable for ethical decision making. This possibility raises questions. If training truly did not benefit these two superintendents, is it a waste of time and resources to provide training? Is training worth providing if only half of the trainees benefit from the training? Is it possible to provide training that would benefit all or most of the trainees? There are a variety of possible answers to these questions. Answers may depend on the variance in ethics curriculum design or professor delivery. Some ethics related curriculum and subsequent content delivery may be more effective than others. Perhaps the importance of ethics in the workplace has not been stressed to the point that administrators perceive its significance and value to the decision making process. Conversely, perhaps ethics education and training were effective, but have become so internally ingrained that personal ethics have simply become who administrators are and how they view themselves. If so, there may no longer be the perception that one's personal ethics developed through training or education. Finally, a decision to restrict ethics education/training prohibits any possible benefits that might result from the effort.

Although some previous research has been conducted on superintendents and ethical decision making, these studies have been primarily quantitative in design (Dexheimer, 1969; Segars, 1987; Fenstermaker, 1994; Walker, 1999). This study differed

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in that it sought to qualitatively examine the decision making process and how public school superintendents perceived that the elements of ethics education/training, professional experience and formal professional codes of ethics influenced their decision making. Some earlier research suggested that there was no relationship between ethical decision making and ethics education/training (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008; Winters, 2003; Millerborg, 1990). However, Growe (1999) found that administrative ethics training did impact decision making. Similarly, this researcher expected to find that superintendents would perceive a positive relationship between ethics education/training and their own ethical decision making, assuming that training in ethics would inform action. Contrary to that expectation, nine out of ten study superintendents perceived that ethics education had no influence on their ethical decision making. All study participants reported some ethics discussions in their graduate coursework; however none could recall a specific ethics course. According to the participants, the subject of ethics was incorporated in course discussions alongside other topics. This finding concurs with previous research findings that suggest that there is no relationship between ethical decision making and ethics education. Thus, this finding suggests a number of questions. If there is no relationship between ethics education and ethical decision making, should ethics education continue? Is ethics education being taught today in a manner that is significantly different from the way it was taught when the study superintendents received their administrative degrees? Is there a way to present ethics education that will benefit administrators and allow for recall of information? Answers to these questions remain unclear.

Informal ethics training. Three superintendents, A, B, and E, credited their ethics training to ethical role models or mentors. Superintendents B and C attributed their

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ethics training to family. Superintendent B also identified church and the cultural environment in which he grew up as sources for his ethics training. Superintendent E credited ethical mentors with his ethical training. All three superintendents perceived that these informal sources of ethics training did impact their ethical decision making. These findings suggest that, for two superintendents, ethics training took place during the early formative years prior to higher education. However, not all individuals receive this foundational ethics training at home. No assumption can be made that children will receive this training from their parents or childhood environment. A possible lack of foundational ethics training in the home would seemingly support character and moral education in elementary and secondary schools.

Finally, the study findings as they relate to ethics education/training and public school superintendents are specific only to the 10 superintendents who participated in this research. These findings cannot be generalized to other superintendents, either in Missouri or in other states. Nevertheless, the issue of ethics education/training and its influence on ethical decision making is a topic that is common to all public school superintendents in all states. Superintendents experience common situations and are in positions of power and control. New superintendents can benefit from receiving relevant training in potential dilemmas and being shown possible consequences of unethical behavior. Disclosure of unethical behavior is embarrassing to a superintendent, as well as to school districts and the superintendent profession as a whole. Therefore, study findings can be used to promote discussions regarding the niche that ethics education/training fulfills in preparing and supporting public school administrators nationwide.

Research Question 2: What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?

Experience: An influence in ethical decision making. All 10 superintendents unequivocally perceived that professional experience influenced their decision making processes. Experience yields confidence. Even when a decision fails, an individual learns from the experience and gains support for future action in similar situations. Likewise, an individual gains confidence when a decision is deemed correct. As a superintendent encounters different situations, he or she begins to develop a network of decision making history to pull from when needed, a history not available to young or new superintendents. In discussions concerning the simulated ethical dilemmas, some superintendents admitted that similar hiring and personnel situations had happened to them. The simulated dilemmas provided a good base for superintendents to walk the researcher through their decision making processes. Superintendents discussed the step-by-step procedures they used for decision making, allowing the researcher to grasp commonalities and differences among superintendents' processes. In addition to experience, superintendents identified eight other influences, such as collaborating with others and conducting research, that were components of the decision making process. Four of these components were common to all 10 superintendents. Two other components were common to eight superintendents while the remaining two components were influences for only two superintendents.

Some previous doctoral research based on professional experience and ethical decision making has been initiated in the field of education. Dexheimer (1969) and subsequent research conducted by Segars (1987), Fenstermaker (1994) and Walker

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(1999) looked at job experience and the ethical decision making of school superintendents. Interestingly, both Dexheimer and Fenstermaker found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical choices than those superintendents with greater professional experience. Segars and Walker found no significant difference in superintendent responses regardless of the number of years in the current district or total number of years as a superintendent. More recently, Winters (2003) concluded that more experienced superintendents displayed higher levels of moral reasoning. Conversely, Wenger (2004) found that less experienced superintendents made more ethical decisions. Some additional research showed no relationship between professional experience and ethical decision making (Fitch, 2009; Hope, 2008). However, none of these studies explored superintendents' perceptions of the role professional experience played in their decision making processes. This researcher expected superintendents to perceive that professional experience influenced their ethical decision making, since experience allows individuals to learn from previous situations and mistakes. Study findings concluded that all 10 superintendents unanimously perceived that professional experience influenced their ethical decision making processes. These findings concurred with Eweje and Brunton's (2010) work which found a positive relationship between work experience and ethical judgment.

Weeks et al. (1999) proposed that individuals in advanced career stages displayed higher levels of ethical judgment than do individuals in the lower stages of career development. Late career stage was an influence for two study superintendents who indicated that they were eligible for retirement. Both superintendents perceived that they were less tempted to unethical decisions in their later career stage than they were earlier

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in their careers when priorities focused on maintaining employment and providing for their families.

Components of the decision making process. Study superintendents unanimously identified experience as a primary element in their ethical decision making. Within professional experience, other elements emerged as guiding influences on superintendents' decision making processes. Some components were common to all superintendents and some elements were common to only a few.

During the decision making process, all 10 superintendents considered whether a decision was “good for kids.” The terms “good for kids,” “best for kids” and “best interests of the student” were used interchangeably by superintendents. Essentially, these terms all referred to the concept of a positive outcome for students and that decisions were made accordingly. The concept of “good for kids” is not instinctual; rather, it requires an administrator to separate from personal involvement, to research a situation and to foresee various consequences of a particular decision. Internal conflict arises when what is best for one group of students is not what is best for another group of students. Such conflict can be identified more clearly in the example of differing curricular needs. One group of students in a classroom would benefit from a field trip. Another group of students in the same classroom require more classroom study time. The needs of the two groups are different. Although the given scenario is certainly simplistic, a decision in favor of either group may be viewed as unfair treatment or discrimination of the other group, creating an ethical dilemma for the decision maker.

All 10 superintendents referred to a component of decision making that can be categorized as “the right thing to do.” This concept was somewhat ambiguous and was

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personally interpreted. For the most part, this term was used to summarize those superintendent responses that referred to the treatment of others, as well as other characteristics or phrases that emphasized certain ethical or moral tenets. Sometimes, superintendents referred to such characteristics as honesty, consistency, fairness, and transparency.

All 10 superintendents referred to some form of collaboration or input into their decision making processes. Sometimes this collaboration included a single trusted advisor. Other times it included a group of district administrators, other superintendents, teachers, school professionals, students, parents and school board members. Collaboration allowed for decisions that resulted from collective experiences and perspectives.

All 10 superintendents also engaged in some kind of information seeking or research as part of the decision making process. Superintendents reported asking lots of questions as well as gathering available district data, finding out what other districts had done in similar situations and obtaining outside information.

Eight superintendents indicated that they referred to board policy, rules, regulations, local practice or precedence when making a decision. It is certainly probable that the other two superintendents also referred to policies during decision making, since an inconsistency with the application of board policy or mandates will eventually result in conflict with staff, students and parents as well as potential law suits and the loss of the superintendent position. Nevertheless, this aspect of decision making was not mentioned by two superintendents during their interviews. Ethics and governing regulations should coexist for the good of school districts. Regardless, this beneficial coexistence is not

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always the case. In some cases, mandates require that educational resources be distributed to fewer students who are perceived to have greater needs, resulting in decreased resources for the general student population and possibly creating an ethical dilemma for school administrators. The ethic of the profession supports leaders to change policies or mandates that are truly considered unfair.

Eight superintendents also referred to a time element in the decision making process. Through their collective experience, they agreed that rarely does a decision, at their level, require an immediate response, except in the case of safety. Superintendents usually have the benefit of time and contemplation before handing down a decision. Unlike other administrative positions in the district, a superintendent has the time and opportunity to consider various options in order to make a best decision for a given situation.

At the time of the interviews, two superintendents were eligible for retirement. Their unique circumstances provided an additional perspective on ethics and decision making in the superintendency. Both superintendents indicated that, at this stage in their careers, they found it easier to make the ethical decision. During their interviews, both of these superintendents indicated that during their careers they had been asked by school boards or community leaders to make decisions that they, as superintendents, felt were not ethical. At earlier stages in their careers these superintendents felt they had to consider their own families and the potential impact of their loss of income if they were fired for making decisions that were contrary to the wishes of the school board or community leaders. At this final stage of their careers, neither felt that they had to compromise their own ethical beliefs in order to maintain their superintendent positions.

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If they were pressured to make unethical decisions, they could walk away from the job and retire. Their career stage allowed them the freedom to make those decisions that they believed were ethically correct. These same two superintendents indicated that, at times and with tough decisions, prayer was also part of the decision making process. Their use of prayer points to both the importance of personal ethics and also the impact of culture on ethical decision making.

The study findings for professional experience and its perceived influence on superintendents' ethical decision making are specific only to the 10 Missouri study participants. These findings cannot be generalized to all public school superintendents, either in Missouri or other states. The findings can, however, be used to explore the importance of professional experience on ethical decision making and how the benefits of experience can be extended to those administrators or future leaders who presently have little or no experience.

Multiple ethical paradigms. The conceptual framework for this study was the Multiple Ethical Paradigms, a decision making schema that emphasizes educational leadership and responds to the unique ethical situations frequently encountered by school communities. Discussions of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms are included under professional experience, since study superintendents unanimously perceived that ethical decision making took place through their professional experience and not through ethics education/training or the use of formal professional codes of ethics. Thus, information related to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and its relationship to this study is presented under findings for Research Question 2. All 10 superintendents verbalized some evidence of the various ethics that contributed to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms framework. From

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their discussions of ethical decision making and their responses to simulated ethical dilemmas, it was easy to identify those superintendents who had strong justice and care ethics.

Ethic of justice. Nine superintendents mentioned some element that comprised the justice paradigm. These collective conversations mentioned district policy, local practice, rules, regulations, laws and precedence. There was also the mention of “the greatest good” concept. Some superintendents mentioned the elements of fairness and responsibility, both characteristics that are considered a part of the ethic of justice. Superintendent C was the only superintendent who did not mention some element of the justice ethic. He probably does exhibit characteristics of the ethic of justice to some extent in his decision making; it just wasn’t readily apparent in his interview. Superintendent E demonstrated a strong ethic of justice approach to his decision making. His first stage of decision making was to measure a decision against any written document that existed for the district. Superintendent E’s statement illustrated the nature of the superintendent position. The position requires the implementation of policy and procedures. Ideally, superintendents would be instructional leaders. However, they are rarely provided that opportunity since their time is utilized with policy implementation. Decisions have far reaching consequences. As a result, consistency in decision making is vital.

Social justice and the fair distribution of educational resources and opportunity, within the ethical decision making context, were not the focus of this research study. However, references to social justice were voiced by superintendents indirectly in conversations regarding student populations. One superintendent noted that her district

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was comprised of the “haves” and the “have nots.” The reference alluded to students who have economic advantage and those who do not. Her district’s goal was to meet the varied needs of both student groups. Additional references to social justice included statements that advocated for “every” student to have the opportunity to learn, to be productive and be afforded quality learning time. Although social justice was not the focus of this research, it remains at the core of expectations for leaders in ethical decision making.

Ethic of care. All 10 superintendents expressed some component that embodies the ethic of care paradigm. These collective conversations included the mention of affirming relationships, the treatment of people and compassion for those who are in difficult circumstances. This ethic was also demonstrated in conversations that spoke of compassion, empathy and trust. Educators, by nature, want to help people. Building and maintaining relationships are vital to the process of helping others. Two superintendents, B and I, exhibited strong care ethics in their discussions of decision making.

Ethic of critique. The critique paradigm was demonstrated in the discussions of three superintendents. These conversations centered on the re-evaluation of the traditional views of law and justice to focus on educational injustice. Unfortunately, superintendents sometimes inherit bad policies. Identifying and critiquing bad policies are requirements for improving district policies and procedures. The identification of bad policies does not necessarily mean that a superintendent will be able to change those policies. School and organizational cultures differ for every school district. There are often protected interests that are specific to a given district. Although a superintendent may recognize the need for changes in policies, school boards or school communities may resist change. Essentially,

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all individuals within a school district are crucial for its successful operation; although policies don't always reflect that reality. Individuals should be made to feel vital and important and policies should support that concept. While all individuals are not equal, all should be treated fairly.

Ethic of the profession. All 10 superintendents displayed some aspects of the ethic of the profession paradigm. There were multiple discussions of experience and the better professional judgment and decision making that flowed from that experience. There were additional conversations regarding personal ethics and morals and how core values and beliefs are embedded in professional decision making. These conversations suggested that professional experience is important, but ethical decision making is still heavily influenced by superintendents' personal ethics, which is often nurtured in childhood by family and culture. Thus, ethical decision making is influenced by a combination of professional expectations and personal morals and values with varying degrees of each. Ideally, professional and personal ethics would coexist to successfully support ethical decision making.

Research Question 3: What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents' decision-based responses to dilemmas?

Nine out of ten superintendents were unable to identify any known national or state professional codes of ethics that applied to them in their roles as public school superintendents. One superintendent identified national, state and local professional codes of ethics. That superintendent indicated that he was aware of several national and state professional codes of ethics established through professional associations. He identified the professional codes of ethics for MOASBO and MASA on the state level

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and also their national equivalents. He perceived that professional codes were helpful reminders. He used a professional code of ethics to ensure his personal code of ethics was in line with what the professional organizations stated should be a minimum standard. He perceived that professional codes of ethics have no direct impact on decision making; rather they provided for an indirect ongoing internal dialogue whereby he checked himself to ensure his decision making was in line with the professional codes. This superintendent seemed to suggest that his own personal codes were most important, with professional codes of ethics existing as a means of aligning his own personal codes along a professional expectation.

Interestingly, of the four superintendents who advised that they received ethics training from professional organizations, only one superintendent identified the professional codes of ethics for those associations. On a very global level, one additional superintendent identified his local school board policy as a professional code of ethics that applied to him in his role as superintendent. School board policies are established by community members for the ultimate good of school districts. By their very existence, board policies, regulations and state mandates take ethical decision making out of the hands of superintendents. In some cases, school board policies, regulations and state/federal mandates prevent superintendents from making decisions that they perceive as ethically best for their districts. When conflicts arise between mandates and personal ethics, a superintendent will follow the law or face the consequences, either a loss of the superintendent position or legal ramifications.

Some previous national literature (Dexheimer, 1969; Fenstermaker, 1994) suggests that in practice school superintendents do not use professional codes of ethics to

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guide decision making. Other research (Segars, 1987; Walker, 1999) suggests that codes of ethics are utilized for decision making. While some quantitative research has been conducted with mixed results, it remained unclear whether school administrators perceived that they used a formal professional code of ethics when making ethical decisions. For the current study, this researcher expected superintendents to perceive that decision making was influenced by professional codes of ethics. To the contrary, study findings indicated that nine out of ten study superintendents did not identify any state or national professional codes of ethics that applied to them in their roles as superintendents. Further, the one superintendent that identified professional codes of ethics on both the state and national level perceived that these codes had no direct impact on decision making. Rather they provided for an indirect ongoing internal dialogue whereby he checked himself to ensure his decision making was in line with professional codes. If professional codes have no direct impact, as this superintendent suggested, perhaps professional codes are unnecessary. If professional codes are viable, in what ways can practice lend greater knowledge of the codes, thus supporting public trust?

The study findings for professional codes of ethics and their perceived impact on superintendents' ethical decision making are specific to the 10 study participants employed in Missouri. These findings cannot be generalized to all public school superintendents, either in Missouri or superintendents employed in other states. The findings can, however be used to explore the role of formal professional codes of ethics on superintendents' ethical decision making. Further exploration can support practices whereby codes of ethics can be utilized to support administrators and school leaders nationwide.

Discussion of the Findings

The research findings suggest a number of varied and competing interpretations, each with different implications for practice, policy and research. Peripherally, the findings seem to indicate that superintendents are not using the professional standards or codes established by professional associations. Nor do superintendents seem to be drawing ethical content from coursework designed to support ethical decision making. Given these suppositions, one possible interpretation of the research findings suggests that the study superintendents were not following the guidelines advocated by the profession for ethical decision making. Given this interpretation, findings might further suggest that superintendents were capricious in their decision making, willfully making decisions from within and ignoring professional standards.

A second possible interpretation suggests that professional associations and graduate preparation programs are doing a really poor job of instilling knowledge in administrators such that superintendents can recognize from where they are drawing their decision making rules. This interpretation might further suggest that graduate programs and professional associations shouldn't be involved in ethics at all, since superintendents are utilizing mentors and getting ethics content from other sources.

A third and seemingly more accurate interpretation is that while national and state codes of ethics do have a role in ethical decision making, how these codes are construed by superintendents varies by school district and community. Simply, superintendents know the codes, but have internalized them for ethical decision making. Superintendents may not acknowledge broad national and state codes since these broad standards are less relevant to them in complex situations in their specific communities. Essentially, ethical

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decision making is local. MASA standards are the same for all Missouri administrators, but in a heavily religious community the guidelines will be interpreted differently from a community where the school board makeup is different. Superintendents report to their school district boards, unlike doctors who report to a medical review board or attorneys who report to a law review board. School boards are representative of the communities in which they exist. Both superintendents and school boards may follow established codes, but the standards are interpreted differently depending on the culture of the community. Thus, it is necessary to adapt the broad state and national standards to local context and culture.

Two study superintendents, H and I, discussed their perception of the importance of community culture on ethical decision making. They confirmed the concept that the core values and beliefs of superintendents should match the beliefs and values of the communities in which they serve, if the relationships are to be successful. For example, a suburban school board comprised of CEOs and a rural school board comprised primarily of farmers may have differing views on the topic of expense accounts and their potential use by school administrators. Study findings indicated that a greater knowledge of the community culture in which superintendents serve might support the ethical decision making process. To avoid potential problems and future misunderstandings, new superintendents could benefit from sitting down with school boards to discuss the culture of the district. There will always be “sacred cows” or protected interests within a district. These interests often develop from previous events, administrations or school boards. In essence, these interests become the identity of the district. In order to avoid difficulties, it

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is important for new administrators to know these protected interests early in their tenure rather than later.

In summary, successful superintendents make decisions based on local context. It isn't so much that they aren't using previous training or utilizing professional codes of ethics, but that they incorporate a local view of ethics. As Begley and Stefkovich (2007) suggest, context-stripped philosophical discussions on ethics and values are considered to be neither practical nor relevant.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings for this study suggest several opportunities for graduate preparation programs and for those professional associations that support aspiring, new and veteran superintendents. Research Question 1 explored the perceived influence of ethics education/training on superintendents' ethical decision making. Study findings indicated that superintendents could not recall the specifics of their ethics education or training. In order to facilitate retention, an ethics component could be offered as part of continuing education certification requirements.

In addition, study superintendents offered some recommendations for formal ethics education and training. Seven superintendents, A, B, D, E, F, H and I, indicated that additional ethics education/training could be beneficial for preparing superintendents for ethical decision making. Superintendents suggested that additional education or training could be provided in graduate programs, workshops and training programs for aspiring superintendents as well as The Missouri Academy for New Superintendents, a twelve-month professional development experience for new superintendents. This attention to ethics education and training brings the topic of ethics to the forefront. Ethics

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education and training also allows administrators and future leaders, who have no experience in a given area, to gain experience. Study superintendents further recommended that ethics education/training be conducted through rational exposure by practicing superintendents. Specific topics that were suggested included decision making, policy reference, collaborative approaches and self-reflective conversation. Self-reflective conversation included such concepts as “What do I believe in?” and “What do I stand for?” Superintendents further suggested that education/training could be accomplished by role playing, case studies, shadowing and internships. Further, tenured superintendents could lead practical ethics discussions utilizing relevant scenarios. As evidenced in the findings of this study, experience is a great teacher. Ethics education and relevant training can provide that experience to school leaders and future administrators that they otherwise would not have.

Research Question 3 explored the perceived influence of professional codes of ethics on superintendents’ ethical decision making. The study findings indicated that most of the study superintendents were unaware of any formal professional codes of ethics that applied to them as administrators. As presented in the Discussion of the Findings, perhaps the broad state and national standards have been internalized and have become inseparable from the ethical decision making process. Nevertheless, the promotion of professional codes of ethics could be accomplished in some different ways. First, graduate preparation programs could teach the various professional codes of ethics that apply to school leaders including codes for the state associations, MASA, MOASBO and MSBA. Further, association guest speakers could support course instruction. In addition, these professional associations have annual conferences. The professional codes

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of ethics could be published and included in conference materials for all attendees.

Publishing the codes of ethics in conference materials puts ethics at the forefront. The written codes would provide a visual reminder that the codes exist as well as suggesting that ethical aspects of decisions should be considered during the decision making process.

Superintendents beginning work in new districts could benefit from collaborating with their school boards to adapt the broad state and national standards to local context and culture. These superintendents would also benefit from a structured mentoring relationship that would allow new administrators to know their community and its approach to ethics and ethical expectations. These measures will support superintendents in their ethical decision making and encourage success in their new communities.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest several directions for future research regarding the relationship between school leaders and ethical decision making. More information is clearly needed regarding the effectiveness of ethics education and training especially given the mixed results of previous research findings. It remains unclear why superintendents who reported having ethics discussions in graduate coursework did not perceive that these discussions impacted their decision making. Had the passage of time since the coursework lessened the impact of the discussions? Does experience usually trump education? Rest (1986) found that moral education programs, especially those lasting longer than three weeks and including moral dilemma discussions promoted moral judgment development. In the case of study superintendents, were the discussions not lengthy enough or did they not include the practical moral dilemma aspects recommended by Rest? Further study is also needed regarding the effectiveness of formal

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professional codes of ethics. How can these codes be utilized to support superintendents in the ethical decision making process? Would more explicit codes support ethical decision making? Would adding examples to the professional codes assist ethical decision making? In addition, for those superintendents who do not credit ethics education with forming their professional ethics, from where do they perceive those professional ethics come?

Furthermore, at least three superintendents mentioned the importance of community culture on decision making. School communities vary. For example, some schools exist in communities where there is a strong union presence in the work force. Superintendents in these districts should understand what this union presence means to employing staff, district maintenance and building projects as they relate to ethical decision making. Some communities are very faith based. These communities have little separation between church and state, a factor that can influence the ethics of district decisions. School boards are representative of their communities and superintendents must work with their school boards. Therefore, to what degree does community culture impact ethical decision making? Can knowledge of rural and urban communities' cultures be used to support superintendents in ethical decision making and assist in professional success in a given community?

Finally, some superintendents indirectly referenced the unequal distribution of educational resources and funding across student populations. Is the social justice ideal, either consciously or unconsciously, considered by administrators during ethical decision making? Further research should consider ethics and decision making as they relate to such social justice concerns as high stakes testing and the achievement gap in education.

Conclusions

Public school superintendents are bombarded daily by high profile issues including gender equality, separation of church and state, freedom of speech, racial and ethnic diversity, school safety, bullying and drug and alcohol prevention education. All related decisions have ethical implications. The decision making process is not simple; rather it is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of components. Increased knowledge as to how superintendents conceive that these elements wield influence over ethical decision making benefits public school superintendents and those who have a stake in public schools. Public trust is vital to the success of public schools. Without a community's support, a school cannot maintain needed partnerships with area services, pass bond issues and perpetuate the goodwill necessary to educate children.

The goal of this multiple case study research was to better understand how public school superintendents process ethical decisions, whether superintendents perceive that certain elements, such as ethics education/training and professional experience, affect those decisions and the role that professional codes of ethics play in the decision making process.

Findings concluded that professional experience was by far the greatest perceived influence on study superintendents' decision making when compared to ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics. These findings concurred with those of Eweje and Brunton (2010), who found a relationship between work experience and ethical judgment. In contrast, both ethics education/training and formal professional codes of ethics had little, if any, perceived impact on the ethical decision making process of study superintendents.

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These findings suggest opportunities for graduate preparation programs and for associations that support aspiring, new and veteran superintendents. Further, study results advance directions for future research. Greater knowledge that supports school leaders in their ethical decision making will empower not only the leaders themselves, but will benefit students as well as entire school communities.

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TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS

Small = 0-760
Med= 761=4200
Large= 4201 and up

Respondent	Experience			Degree Granted/Yr	District Size			Gender		District Type		
	Years in Ed	Years in Admin	Years in Supt		Small	Med	Large	Male	Female	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Superintendent A	23	12	7	Ed.D. 2007			X		X		X	
Superintendent B	38	33	30	Ed.S. ABD		X		X				X
Superintendent C	31	17	2	Ed.S. 2001			X	X				X
Superintendent D	26	13	6	Ed.S. 2009	X			X				X
Superintendent E	19	16	2	Ed.D. 2012			X	X			X	
Superintendent F	25	18	15	Ed.S. 2000	X			X				X
Superintendent G	19	14	9	Ed.D. 2013	X			X				X
Superintendent H	18	12	3	Ed.S ABD		X			X	X		
Superintendent I	22	17	5	Ed.D. 2006			X		X		X	
Superintendent J	27	23	13	Ed.D. 2000		X		X				X

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TABLE 2

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Respondent	RQ1 Ethics Training	RQ2 Professional Experience	RQ3 Professional Code of Ethics
Superintendent A	No	Yes	No
Superintendent B	No	Yes	No
Superintendent C	No	Yes	No
Superintendent D	No	Yes	Local
Superintendent E	Yes	Yes	Local, State, National
Superintendent F	No	Yes	No
Superintendent G	No	Yes	No
Superintendent H	No	Yes	No
Superintendent I	No	Yes	No
Superintendent J	Yes	Yes	No

TABLE 3

FACTORS IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS

	SUPT A	SUPT B	SUPT C	SUPT D	SUPT E	SUPT F	SUPT G	SUPT H	SUPT I	SUPT J
Experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Good for Kids	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Right thing to do	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaboration	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Information Seeking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School Board Policy, local practice, regulation	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Delay decision temporarily	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Career Stage		X	X							
Prayer		X	X							

Appendix A

MASA's 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 and complies with all local, state and national laws;
- 5) Advises the school board and implements the board's policies and all 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) Never uses his/her position for personal gain through political, social, religious, 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; and
- 13) Adheres to commonly accepted business practices aligned with audit standards that are in compliance with all applicable statutes, rules and regulations.

This document is a modified version of the AASA Statement of Ethics.
Modifications were made by the MASA Ethics Committee and approved at the MASA Business Meeting on October 23, 2009.

Appendix B

Definitions of Key Terms

There are a number of general and more specific terms utilized within the study of ethics and decision making. Some terms may have multiple definitions; however one meaning is more central to a given study. For the purposes of the present study the following operational definitions were used:

Code of ethics. A code of ethics represents a written standard adopted by an organization to establish rules for right and wrong behavior for its members and to support member decision making.

Decision making. Decision making refers to the processes by which individuals, or groups and organizations, decide actions or determine policies.

Ethical behavior. Ethical behavior refers to the conscious action taken by an individual or group because it is viewed as being correct (Berkson, 1968).

Ethics. Ethics refers to a series of rules provided to an individual by an external source, such as a profession or culture, and for a given time and place.

Ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemma refers to a situation that involves two moral choices.

Ethics education. Ethics education refers to a higher education course that is designed as either solely ethics content or a general course infused with professional ethics content.

Ethics training. Ethics training is instruction provided by an employer, association or profession to help members identify the ethical considerations of their decisions and introduce high ethical standards into the organization, association or profession.

Integrity. Integrity is a demonstrated consistency between the values held by leaders and their subsequent behaviors.

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Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA). MASA is a statewide professional association in Missouri existing for the purpose of serving the needs of school superintendents and central office administrators with an interest in the superintendency.

MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders. MASA's Statement of Ethics for Educational Leaders is written standards outlining expectations for professional conduct for Missouri educational leaders.

Morals. Morals relate to an individual's internal ideals and principles.

Professional ethics. Professional ethics refers to the ethical norms, values, and principles that guide a profession and the ethics of decisions made within the profession.

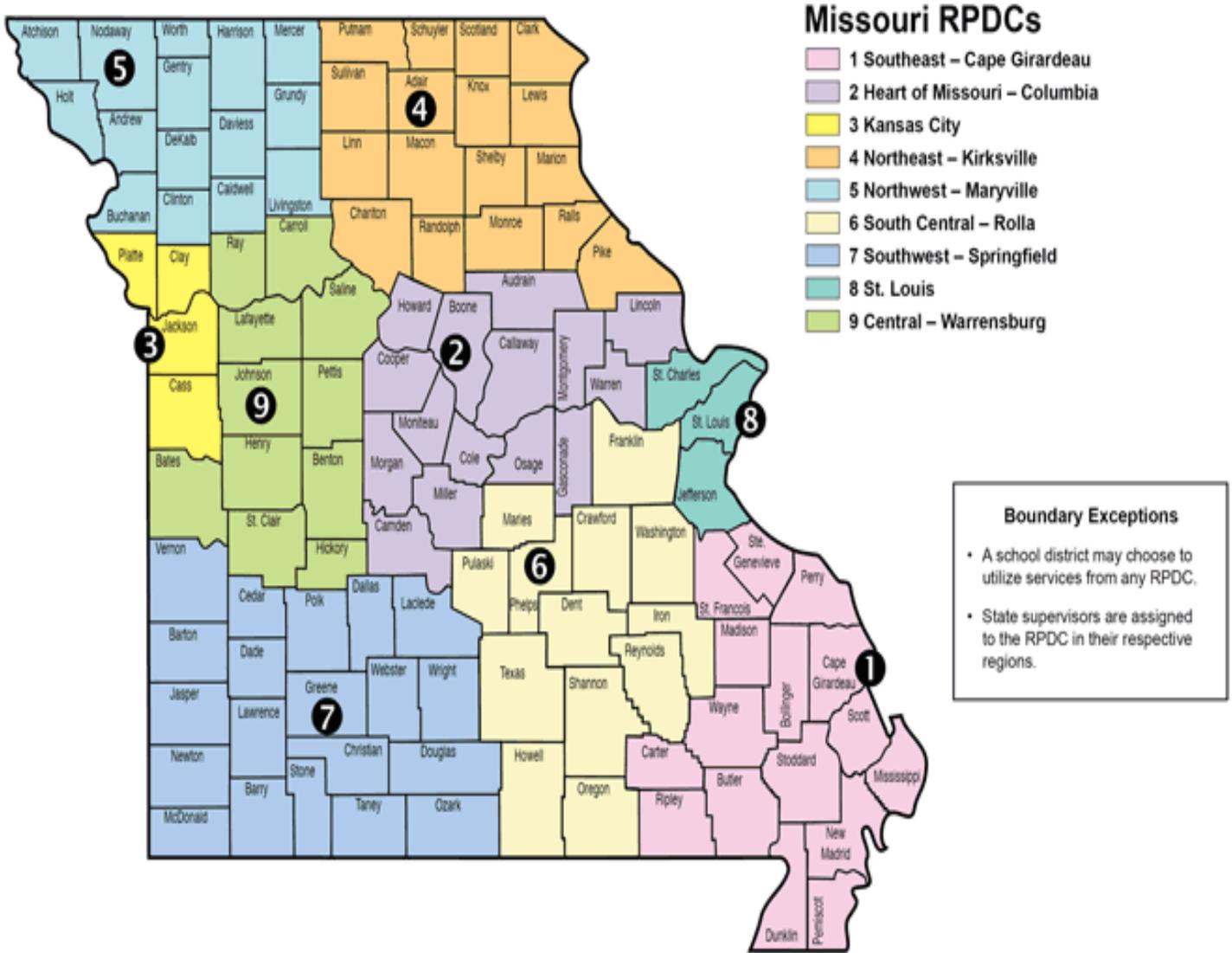
Professional experience. Professional experience refers to a length of time spent in a particular career position requiring specific education, training and skill.

Superintendent. Superintendent is the chief administrator for a public school district.

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Appendix C

RPDC Regions



Appendix D

TELEPHONE SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH RECRUITMENT

Public School Superintendents and the Perceived Impact of Ethics Training, Professional Experience and Professional Codes of Ethics on Ethical Decision Making: A Multiple Case Study

Hello, [Dr., Mrs., Mr.] _____.

My name is Terry Russell. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department at the University of Missouri. I am calling to invite you to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived relationship between superintendents' ethical decision making and certain influencing factors, including ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics. The focus of this research is the **process** of decision making and not decision **outcomes**. I hope the findings from this research will help to support superintendents in their roles as ethical decision makers.

Participation consists of a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview means that I will use questions to guide the conversation as you share your thoughts about the decision making process. The interview will take approximately one hour. This research poses a minimal level of risk to you. You will remain anonymous with no identifying links connecting you to your interview. All of the collected information will remain in strict confidence and stored in a secure location. No other individuals will have access to the information.

Do you have any questions regarding the purpose of this study or your participation in it? Will you accept my invitation to participate in the study?

[If yes] When is the best time for you to meet with me? Where is the most convenient place for us to meet? [After the meeting has been scheduled] Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am looking forward to meeting with you. If you should need to reschedule or you need to contact me, my email is tcruss@hotmail.com Good bye.

[If no] Thank you for talking with me. Good luck with your upcoming school year. Good bye.

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Appendix E

Recruitment Email

To: [Only one address in 'To:' line per message]

From: Terry Russell

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Public School Superintendents and the Perceived Impact of Ethics Training, Professional Experience and Professional Codes of Ethics on Ethical Decision Making: A Multiple Case Study

You have been selected to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived relationship between superintendents' ethical decision making and certain influencing factors, including ethics training/education, professional experience and professional codes of ethics. The focus of this research is the **process** of decision making and not decision **outcomes**. I hope the findings from this research will help to support superintendents in their roles as ethical decision makers for Missouri's public schools.

Participation consists of a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview means that I will use questions to guide the conversation as you share your thoughts about the decision making process. The interview will take approximately one hour. This research poses a minimal level of risk to you. You will remain anonymous with no identifying links connecting you to your interview. All of the collected information will remain in strict confidence and stored in a secure location. No other individuals will have access to the information.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. You may accept or decline my invitation to participate in this research by replying to this email within three days from the date of the email. Any questions about this research should be addressed to:

Terry Russell
tcruss@hotmail.com

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Appendix F Interview Protocol

Public School Superintendents and Ethical Decision Making

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Greetings and Pleasantries) Thank you for taking the time to meet. Briefly describe the project. Assure him/her that all responses are held in confidence.

Background

Please tell me briefly about yourself and your background? What was your path to becoming an educator? What do you like about being an educator? What do you dislike?

- A. How many total years of work experience do you have in education?
- B. How many years of work experience do you have in educational administration including the superintendency?
- C. How many years of work experience do you have in the superintendency?
- D. Describe in detail all the ethics training or ethics education you have had.
- E. What is your highest degree and when was it granted?

Definitions

- A. How would you define professional ethics?
- B. How would you define an ethical decision in your school setting?
- C. When faced with an ethical dilemma in your school, what is your decision making process?

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- D. What are the most challenging ethical dilemmas in your role as a superintendent?
- E. When is it most challenging for school leaders to act ethically?

RQ 1 How do superintendents perceive that their prior training in ethical decision making influences their responses to ethical dilemmas?

- A. Describe all of the ethics training you have received.
- B. To what extent has that ethics training impacted your decision making?
- C. Do you believe that you received sufficient ethics training to meet the ethical decision making demands required of a superintendent?
- D. What additional ethics training would have been beneficial in preparing you for your role as a superintendent?

RQ 2 What perceived influence might prior work experience (career stage) have on superintendents' responses to ethical dilemmas?

- A. Describe your years of experience as a superintendent.
- B. Further describe your years of experience in administration exclusive of the superintendency.
- C. How do your years of professional experience impact your responses to ethical dilemmas?
- D. How do your responses to ethical dilemmas differ today from your responses early in your career?

RQ 3 What perceived influence, if any, do professional codes of ethics have on superintendents' decision-based responses to dilemmas?

- A. Describe any professional codes of ethics that apply to your position as a superintendent.
- B. What role do professional codes of ethics play for you as a superintendent?

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- C. To what degree do these professional codes of ethics impact your daily decision making?

Simulated Ethical Dilemmas

The following three ethical dilemmas reflect situations that might be experienced by superintendents. These simulated dilemmas were taken from the AASA's The Ethical Educator and pose an ethical challenge for school leaders. Once a dilemma has been read, please think about the process you would take to make a decision. You will then be asked a series of questions. The focus of this study is to determine how you arrive at an ethical decision and what accompanying factors influence your decision making. The focus is not on the answer itself.

The Secretive Coach (January 2012)

Scenario: Your district's athletic director is recommending you fire the popular coach of the girls' tennis team at one of your high schools, two months into the season. The AD contends the coach did not include on her resume the fact she lost her coaching position previously at a college in another community. The coach says she left it off because "I did not feel it represented my performance." What should you, the superintendent, recommend?

1. How and why did you make this decision?
2. What are some factors that you considered in your decision and why?
3. In making decisions about this dilemma, was there any specific education or ethics training you had that helped you make this decision?
4. Did your professional experience influence your decision?
5. What, if any, specific professional code of ethics did you use in your decision making?

The Double-Headed Job Search (March 2012)

Scenario: After a lengthy search for a deputy superintendent with both budget experience and knowledge of curriculum and instruction, you find a "perfect" candidate who appears ready to relocate. At the final negotiation, the candidate indicates that because the spouse would be quitting her teaching job to relocate with him, that his acceptance is contingent on giving his wife first consideration for a position somewhere in the school district. The human resources director balks at the request, but you are

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reluctant to lose this candidate after such an extended search. What's the right thing to do?

1. How and why did you make this decision?
2. What are some factors that you considered in your decision and why?
3. In making decisions about this dilemma, was there any specific education or ethics training you had that helped you make this decision?
4. Did your professional experience influence your decision?
5. What, if any, specific professional code of ethics did you use in your decision making?

A Bullish Board Demand (May 2013)

Scenario: A board member has a 12-year-old nephew in another state who commits suicide in response to persistent bullying. The board member insists the district should require every student in grades K-8 to participate in an anti-bullying curriculum for 30 minutes a week. He contends student safety is the one priority that trumps academic achievement. At a public meeting, he says the superintendent would be "ethically remiss" for not tackling this problem — even if it means cutting out time from academics. How should the superintendent respond?

1. How and why did you make this decision?
2. What are some factors that you considered in your decision and why?
3. In making decisions about this dilemma, was there any specific education or ethics training you had that helped you make this decision?
4. Did your professional experience influence your decision?
5. What, if any, specific professional code of ethics did you use in your decision making?

Close/Wrap Up

Is there anything else you would like to say on the subject of ethical decision making that we haven't talked about?

Thank you for your time!

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Appendix G

Consent

Terry Russell
tcross@hotmail.com

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT LETTER

Title: *Public School Superintendents and the Perceived Impact of Ethics Training, Professional Experience and Professional Codes of Ethics on Ethical Decision Making: A Multiple Case Study*

Dear _____,

This study will examine public school superintendents' perceptions of how ethics training, professional experience and professional codes of ethics impact superintendents' ethical decision making processes.

If you choose to participate, your participation is purely voluntary. You may leave the study at any time. Participation consists of a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview means that I will use questions to guide the conversation as you share your thoughts about the decision making process. The interview will take approximately one hour. I would like to audio record the interview. I may follow up with you via phone or email to clarify answers.

This study poses a minimal level of risk to you. All of the information that is collected on the subject will remain in strict confidence and stored in a secure location. No other individuals will have access to the information.

If you choose not to participate there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you. If you have any questions about the study, you can email me at tcross@hotmail.com or call me via cell phone at 636-575-7289. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject participant, you may contact the University of Missouri – Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board at 573.882.9585 or at umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research study and that the study will involve an audio recorded semi-structured interview. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop at any time.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Campus IRB Approved 7/25/2014
IRB #1208563

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VITA

Terry Russell was born in Kansas City, Missouri. He grew up in the Kansas City area and graduated from Odessa High School. He received his Bachelors of Arts in Education from the University of Missouri – Kansas City with majors in K-12 physical education and 7-12 social studies. Terry began his teaching career at a small school in southwest Missouri where he served for two years. During that time, he taught physical education, social studies, coached basketball and baseball in addition to serving as athletic director. Next, he moved to northwest Missouri where he taught and coached basketball for one year.

Following the year in northwest Missouri, he returned to full time student status and received a Master's in Education with an emphasis in educational administration from the University of Missouri – Kansas City. Upon degree completion, he served as junior and senior high school principal, athletic director and coached basketball at Pilot Grove C-4 for five years. He then accepted a position at Macon County R-1 where he served for 12 years. During those years he held a variety of positions including Technology Director, Operations Manager and Assistant Superintendent. He obtained an educational specialist degree from the University of Central Missouri (formerly Central Missouri State University). Since 2010 he has been Executive Director of School Operations for Northwest School District in High Ridge, Missouri. Terry has been married for 28 years.