

Title: *An investigation of ethical leadership perspectives among Ohio school district superintendents*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents. Secondly, this study examined to what extent ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics. Furthermore, the study examined to what extent ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school leader demographics. A survey was used to collect data of both superintendent demographics and school district characteristics. Included in this survey were an Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) and Social Desirability Scale (SDS). The ELS was used to measure ethical leadership perspectives of the superintendents. The SDS was used to measure social desirability of the superintendents. The survey was sent to 606 public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio of which 231 responded. Additionally, this study included an ancillary study in which the researcher conducted interviews with 15 superintendents from across the State of Ohio. The goal of these small group and individual interviews was to gain further information regarding ethical leadership perspectives and social desirability of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and furthermore, to identify school district characteristics and school leader demographics associated with ethical leadership perspectives. Included in these interviews, the researcher administered the ELS and SDS instruments to each participant.

An Investigation of Ethical Leadership Perspectives Among Ohio School District Superintendents

Over the last decade, the role of leadership in developing ethical conduct has become an area of increased interest due to the large number of ethical scandals by leaders across the globe (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005; Colvin, 2003; Mehta, 2003; Revell, 2003). Today, many employees search for ethical guidance from significant others versus the workplace (Kohlberg, 1969; Trevino, 1986). Researchers (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005; Colvin, 2003; Metha, 2003; Revell, 2003) suggested that leaders in the workplace should exhibit sound ethical leadership, and help guide the ethical leadership perspectives¹ of their employees. Too often, this is not the case. Even though ethical scandals continue to occur today, researchers know “little about the ethical dimension of leadership” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 117). Ciulla (1998) wrote “it’s remarkable that there has been little in the way of sustained and systematic treatment of the subject of ethical leadership by scholars” (p. 3).

In this study of ethical leadership, researchers and scholars can begin to better understand what may affect the ethical leadership perspectives of school leaders, and also how such perspectives relates to other variables throughout any given organization. Existing research of the ethical dimension of leadership has predominantly focused on transformational and charismatic leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Brown et al., 2005; Burgess, 2002). In many cases, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership are separate entities, but theoretically they are somewhat similar. Oftentimes, researchers describe the two as if they are interchangeable (Bono & Judge, 2003; Brown et al., 2005;

¹ Ethical leadership perspectives are defined as to how a leader perceives or views their own ethical leadership as well as what they consider to be ethical conduct versus what is not.

Conger, 1999; Shamir, 1999). The ethical dimension of leadership seems to represent a smaller component that “falls into the nexus of inspiring, stimulating, and visionary leadership behaviors that make up this transformational and charismatic leadership” (Brown, Harrison, & Trevino, 2005, p. 118). Thus, this research on the ethical aspects of the two (transformational and charismatic leadership) has been almost solely focused on, conceptualized as and conveyed from a normative perspective (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Brown et al., 2005; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003).

Although some literature does exist regarding ethical leadership, much is written from a philosophical and theoretical perspective, proposing how leaders should lead. Thus, the literature supports that “a more descriptive and predictive social scientific approach to ethics and leadership has remained underdeveloped and fragmented, leaving both scholars and practitioners with few answers to even the most fundamental questions, such as “What is ethical leadership?” (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 595).

Background and Relevant Literature

Today, school leaders continue to be held accountable for effectively responding to shifting societal issues that are the result of current social trends (Bryant, 2011; Campbell, 2008; Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992). In many cases, school leaders can use the values described in their school vision/mission statement as a source for ethical guidance and reflection in the decision-making process (Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992).

Research indicates that many aspects of leadership including leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and leadership ethics, may be associated with many school district characteristics. Such characteristics include the size of the school district, locale (i.e, rural, suburban, urban), and academic achievement (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan,

Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Bowers, 2009; Campbell, 2008; Ebbs & Wilcox, 1992; Lyse & Lapointe, 2007; Temel, Ulukan, Sahan, Bay, & Sahin, 2011). Additional researchers (Bailey, 1997; Bowers, 2009; DeVore & Martin, 2008; Lyse & Lapointe, 2007; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Neuman & Simmons 2000; Schultz, 2000; Senge, 1990; Starratt, 2004; Strike, 2007) showed us that school leader demographic variables such as the gender of school leaders, years of experience as a leader, and age, may also affect a school leader's leadership style, leadership effectiveness, and leadership ethics.

Because this study examined the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, some background information is necessary to explain the current environment in Ohio for public schools. In the State of Ohio, the push for school improvement and reform has increased (Burgess, 2002). This increase intensified mainly as a result of a series of laws passed by the Ohio General Assembly (Burgess, 2002). These laws are focused on raising academic standards as well as increasing accountability for individual school leaders, school buildings, and school districts.

Annually, district report cards are issued for all Ohio public school districts and buildings. With the annual release of the report cards, school districts' and a schools' performance and rank are released to the public and are easily accessible. As a result, public school superintendents are subjected to pressure to achieve and maintain the highest possible designation and performance index for their respective school districts.

In June 2011, further adding pressure to Ohio school district superintendents, Ohio approved "a provision that required the Ohio Department of Education to produce a ranking of all public schools, including joint vocational schools and privately operated

charter schools” (Candisky, 2011, p. 1). In 2011, for the first time in history, ODE released the school rankings of all 936 school districts, including all public school districts, joint vocational schools, and private charter schools in the state of Ohio.

This focus on forcing school improvement through legislative mandate may be argued, but the current climate in Ohio has underscored the importance of effective school district leadership. Leadership that not only meets the immediate demands and challenges of the job itself, but leadership that will guide school districts toward genuine and lasting improvements in both teaching and learning (Burgess, 2002). Now more than ever, there is a push for school leaders in the State of Ohio to improve both teaching and learning.

Methodology

For this study, I focused on the ethical leadership perspectives of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. Secondly, I examined the extent to which ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics. Furthermore, I examined to what extent do ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics.

I used an on-line survey and in-depth interviews to collect data for this study. The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) was used to gather the ethical leadership perspectives of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. The Social Desirability Scale (SDS) was used to measure the social desirability of public school superintendents in the State of Ohio. The accompanying survey questions regarding school district characteristics and school leader demographics was used to gain pertinent

information regarding both the school leader and the school district in which they serve. The goal of the small group and individual interviews was to gain further information regarding ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and furthermore, to identify district characteristics and leader demographics affecting those ethical leadership perspectives.

The questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents?
2. To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics?
3. To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics?

Results

To characterize the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents, the ELS item mean score for all participants was computed (See Table 1). No norms for scoring on the ELS have been developed; however, enough research has been conducted using the ELS to provide some guidance and interpretation. On a five-point Likert scale response format (as used in my study), three is the mid-point. We can consider scores above three to be evidence of having positive ethical leadership perspectives, whereas, scores below three represent negative ethical leadership perspectives. We could further discriminate and consider four and above as having strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives and below two as having strongly negative ethical leadership perspectives. As shown in Table 1, the lowest ELS item mean score was ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.71$), showing

little variation in the ELS item mean scores. That is, all ELS item mean scores were between 4.2 and 5.0.

Table 1

Ethical Leadership Scale Scores (N = 189)

ELS Statement	SD	M	N
S1. Listens to what employees have to say	0.61	4.53	189
S2. Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards	0.66	4.53	189
S3. Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner	0.58	4.70	189
S4. Has the best interests of employees in mind	0.70	4.43	189
S5. Makes fair and balanced decisions	0.61	4.57	189
S6. Can be trusted	0.54	4.80	189
S7. Discusses ethics or values with employees	0.71	4.20	189
S8. Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics	0.61	4.65	189
S9. Defines success not just by results, but also the way they are obtained	0.59	4.64	189
S10. When making decisions, asks	0.54	4.74	189

The SDS was included in this study to control for possible response bias on the ELS. A product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the ELS and SDS. The SDS was not significantly correlated with the ELS ($r = .027, p = .741$). Thus, respondents were not just answering the questions on the two scales in a socially desirable fashion. That is, it appears the respondents were being honest in answering the questions on the two scales. The ELS item mean scores are all strongly positive, but the SDS item mean scores varied from zero to 10.

Table 2

Social Desirability Scale Scores (N = 185)

SDS Statement	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>
S1. I like to gossip at times	0.49	0.72	185
S2. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone	0.49	0.71	185
S3. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake	0.42	0.10	185
S4. I always try to practice what I preach	0.39	0.05	185
S5. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget	0.45	0.84	185
S6. At times I have	0.42	0.27	185

really insisted on
having things my
own way

S7. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things	0.50	0.46	185
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S8. I never resent being asked to return a favor	0.50	0.46	185
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S9. I have never been irked when people express ideas very different from my own	0.43	0.72	185
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S10. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings	0.50	0.41	185
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To determine what extent the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents varied according to school district characteristics and leader demographics, a regression was run with all school district characteristics and leader demographics in predicting the ELS scores. The analyses were run separately and together, but provided similar results both ways. Initially, a regression analysis was run with the school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to answer research questions two and three. In this analysis, both models produced the same results as the full model, that is, when the school district characteristics and school leader demographics were run separately, the same variables were statistically significant in explaining variance in the ELS scores. The model with the school district characteristics predicting the ELS scores was statistically significant, $R^2 = .107$, $F(7, 149)$

= 2.557, $p = .016$. The model with the school leader demographics predicting the ELS scores was statistically significant as well, $R^2 = .159$, $F(9, 147) = 3.089$, $p = .002$. Thus, both models were statistically significant when using school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to predict the participants' ELS scores, the variance explained were significantly different than zero. Although a regression analysis was run with the school district characteristics and school leader demographics separately to answer research questions two and three, because they produced the same results as the full model, the latter was deemed more interesting to report. Additionally, more variables (both school district characteristics and school leader demographics) are being controlled in the combined model (full model). The same four strongest predictors (Age, State Designation, Highest Educational Degree [Doctorate Degree or No Doctorate Degree], and Gender) did not change when the other set of variables are added as predictors. However, it should be reported that when the school district characteristics and school leader demographics were run separately, there was a significant difference between rural and suburban school districts, but the significant difference became non-significant in the full model. That is, superintendents of suburban school districts had a higher score on the ELS after controlling for other school district characteristics.

The five largest school districts (15,000+ students) were all identified as outliers on the predictors using Mahalanobis distance. The regression analysis was run both with them, and without them. The only substantive difference in the results was that gender became not statistically significant when the largest districts were excluded. This may be because two of the largest five school districts in the State of Ohio have female

superintendents. The decision was made to keep these districts in the sample because it was important to include large districts in the analysis.

Only the State Designation for 2010-2011 was used in the final regression analysis (See Table 3). This was completed intentionally because state designation years 2010-2011, 2009-2010, and 2008-2009 showed multicollinearity, that is, all three predictors together are highly correlated. This does not reduce the predictive power or reliability of the model as a whole, at least within the sample data themselves; it only affects calculations regarding individual predictors. That is, a regression model with correlated predictors (i.e., state designations for 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011) can indicate how well the entire bundle of predictors predicts the outcome variable (ELS scores).

After the initial analysis of running the variables separately in predicting the ELS scores, this researcher made a decision to run a regression using all variables to predict the ELS scores (See Table 3). This model proved to be statistically significant, $R^2 = .233$, $F(15, 141) = 2.851$, $p = .001$. With all school leader demographics and school district characteristic variables accounted for, the results of the regression showed that State Designation, Gender, Highest Educational Degree, and Age were the strongest predictors of the ELS scores. Table 3 indicates all variables, their beta (β), and their p-value (p) with the dependent variable set as the ELS scores. The four strongest predictors are bolded within Table 3.

Table 3

Beta and p-value of Variables predicting Ethical Leadership Scale scores

Variable	β	p
Age	.251*	.020
State Designation 2010-2011	-.283*	.012
Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not)	-.193*	.026
Gender	-.166*	.044
Years of Experience in Administration	.101	.264
Years of Experience as a Superintendent	-.001	.992
Performance Index Scores for Years 2010-2011	-.104	.430
Number of Ethical Courses Completed	.043	.594
Completed Mentoring Program in Sup. Lic. Prog	.075	.381
Ethics Training or In-service in Sup. Lic. Prog	.069	.380
Enrollment Size	-.067	.807
Annual Budget	.003	.992
Locale Urban	-.051	.569
Locale Suburban	.098	.325
SDS Score	-.004	.955
R^2	.233	
F	2.851	

Note: * $p < .05$.

Although the regression analysis included all school leader demographic variables and school district characteristic variables, this researcher decided to run another regression using only the four strongest predictors (Highest Educational Degree, Gender, Age, and State Designation 2010-2011) in predicting the ELS scores. The SDS was included in this regression as a covariate in order to help control for any social desirability response set that might explain ELS. In the Four Strongest Predictors

Regression Model below (See Table 4), the same subset of respondents were used as previously used in the first regression (See Table 3). This model proved to be statistically significant in predicting the ELS scores, $R^2 = .193$, $F(5, 151) = 7.217$, $p < .001$. Table 4 below indicates the model summary when Highest Educational Degree, Gender, Age, and State Designation 2010-2011 were used to predict the ELS scores. The beta (β) reported in Table 4 is the standardized coefficient.

Table 4

Four Strongest Predictors Regression Model

Variable	B	SE _B	β
Gender	-.163*	.064	-.188
Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not)	-.163**	.059	-.212
State Designation 2010-2011	-.115**	.030	-.280
Age	.114**	.030	.289
SDS Score	-.001	.011	-.006
R^2	.193		
F	7.217		

Note. * $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Based on the unstandardized regression coefficients, as participants change from Female (0) to Male (1), the ELS mean score goes down by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As participants change from no doctorate to doctorate (Highest Educational Degree), the ELS mean score differs by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As participants change by 1 on the state designation, the ELS mean scores decrease by 0.12 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As state quality rating increases, the mean score on the ELS increases. Superintendents of higher-level school districts (i.e., Excellent with Distinction,

Excellent) have higher ELS mean scores. In addition, the older the superintendent, the higher the ELS mean score. When moving up from one age range to another, the mean score on the ELS goes up by 0.11. The SDS is not significant.

The standardized coefficient for age is largest ($\beta = .289$). Age seems to be related to the largest change in ELS mean scores, when all variables are controlled and looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for state designation 2010-2011 is the second largest ($\beta = .280$). State Designation 2010-2011 seems to be related to the second largest change in ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for Highest Education Degree (Doc or not) is third largest ($\beta = .212$). Highest Educational Degree (Doc or not) seems to be related to the third largest change in the ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale. The standardized coefficient for Gender is the fourth largest ($\beta = .188$). Gender seems to be related to the fourth largest change in the ELS mean scores, when all variables are looked at on the standardized scale.

Ancillary Study

This section will report all qualitative data collected from the ancillary study that included 15 interviews with active public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio. The interviews were conducted face to face both individually and within small groups. Of the interviews conducted, seven were individual, and the remaining eight were split amongst two groups.

In order to determine the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents, this researcher produced the ELS mean score (M) for each of the superintendents that participated in the interviews (See Table 5). Each interviewee

completed the interview form, which included the ELS. As shown in Table 5, the overall average score on the ELS by superintendents that were interviewed was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5. This suggests that the superintendents interviewed have strong positive ethical leadership perspectives. Results of the ELS completed by the interviewees are included in Table 5. In addition to the ELS, the SDS was included within the interview form. The overall mean (M) on the SDS by superintendents that were interviewed was ($M = 6.0$). As shown in Table 6 below, the scores on the SDS varied from 3-10. Whereas the ELS scores were all strongly positive, the SDS scores varied from 3-10, thus, just as within the survey results, the ELS and SDS are not strongly correlated based on the data collected in the interview sessions. In Table 6, the SDS mean scores for each of the 15 superintendents that participated in the interviews conducted is reported.

Table 5

ELS Scores of Interviewees (N = 15)

ELS Scores	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>
	4.2	1
	4.3	3
	4.4	2
	4.5	1
	4.6	3
	4.8	2
	4.9	2
	5.0	1

Table 6

SDS Scores of Interviewees (N = 15)

SDS Scores	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>
	No Response	1
	3	2
	4	2
	5	3
	6	2
	7	2
	9	1
	10	2

Once the data from the various sources were carefully analyzed, several themes emerged. Below is a summary (including the interview open-ended questions) of the emerging themes from the interview transcriptions, field notes, and the open-ended questions from the surveys. An overview of the interview questions, the responses, and the emerging themes are reported below.

The first interview question was: Do you believe that your ethical leadership perspectives are affected by your school district characteristics (i.e., district size, locale, student achievement, budget, etc.)? Superintendents responded similarly to this question. Superintendents agreed that “it should not” affect ethical leadership perspectives overall, and furthermore, that their personal belief system, ethical compass, should not “sway” regardless of what school district they are in, and/or regardless of the school district characteristics. It should be noted, however, that the superintendents also agreed school district characteristics might affect style, but not their decision-making. For example, one response supported the idea that if an individual is in a larger school district where the media has a stronger presence, a superintendent may “choose my words more carefully because you have a few more cameras in your face and a few more reporters.”

Another superintendent commented that, “in other words, there would be less talking off the cuff, and I would probably have a little more prepared responses and information.”

Other themes that emerged was that although the superintendents did not believe that their ethical leadership perspectives were affected by school district characteristics; they did feel it was affected by other things such as “community norms...in terms of dress, culture, local folklore”, “budget” (see below - opposing themes), “school district culture”, and “disciplining of employees”. One superintendent responded to this question stating that “When you live and work in a fantastic community, you want to live up to those expectations.”

Beyond some of the general themes that emerged within the interview responses to this question, two oppositional verbal responses should be noted. One superintendent responded to this question saying that he believes “budget” (i.e., a school district characteristic) affects their ethical leadership perspectives, and another simply replied “Yes”, that they believe school district characteristics do in fact affect ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Finally, one superintendent responded that “Ethical leadership perspectives are shaped and molded by the institution you serve. What is acceptable practices in one district, can be completely unacceptable in another”. The overall general theme that emerged based on the interview responses to question one was that school district characteristics should not and did not affect ethical leadership perspectives.

The second interview question was Do you believe that your ethical leadership perspectives are affected by your own leader demographics (i.e., age, years of experience, gender, etc.)? Superintendents responded similarly to this question as well. Many of the

superintendents expressed that age and experience affected their ethical leadership perspectives. One superintendent simply responded by saying that “you might have done something in your past that you did not have the knowledge or experience to realize that it was unethical, but it is something you did because you did not know any better” with regard to age and experience. More than one superintendent said that “experience would help a superintendent/leader with ethical decision making.” Another superintendent responded by saying, “Yes, age and experience helps one to develop his or her ethical code.” Another superintendent responded, “With age and experience my perspectives have changed in a few areas. I have always been ethical in my decisions, but I may have done some things differently.”

The general theme that emerged based on the interview responses was that superintendents believed leader demographics affect ethical leadership perspectives. Thus, the overwhelming common theme emerging with regard to the responses for this question was ‘Age’ and ‘Experience’. This does not support the quantitative data entirely. In the survey results, ‘Age’ was a strong predictor of the ELS scores, but ‘Experience’ was not. However, based on the survey results, ‘Age’ and ‘Experience’ were significantly correlated, $r = .55$.

The third interview question was What do you believe to be the most pressing issues facing school district superintendents? Many themes emerged with regard to the responses given by the superintendents to this question. The themes that emerged were “budget”, “finance”, “money”, “an anti-public education movement”, “fiscal accountability”, and “legislative changes.” Overall, the theme that constantly re-emerged was school funding in some shape or form. Another reoccurring item related to political

agendas from local, state, and national entities. The feeling amongst the superintendents was that those entities were taking the approach of “an anti-public education movement.” This sentiment was felt by many of the superintendents in the interviews. One superintendent responded, “The potential extinction of public education...dwindling revenue in the face of political inertia toward privatizing education.”

The fourth interview question was What do you believe most affects your ethical leadership perspectives in decision making? The most common reoccurring theme here was ‘upbringing’. That is, how an individual was brought up or ‘raised’. Respondents said, “How you were raised”, “the things that make up you as an individual; the values and beliefs, core values, how you grew up, your family, your relationships, and our experiences”, “The way I was raised by my parents” and “Product of my parental ethics, holding me to high standards growing up.” Another theme that emerged was “doing what is best for all students.” To this end, superintendents responded saying that “trying to do what is best for kids”, “asking myself, what is best for my students?”, “what is the best interest of the kids”, “Doing what is best for children”, “Student centered decision making”, and “What is best for kids, period” as the driving force behind their ethical leadership perspectives and decision making. Another response that I heard more than once was “honesty”, that is, “being honest to yourself, the community in which you serve, and the children in which you lead.” One superintendent stated “Superintendents should be honest, sincere, and trustworthy” and another said “Decision making based on truth and fairness.”

Interpretation and Conclusions

The purpose of this final section is to provide an overview of the study. This section places emphasis on the results as they relate to public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio, their ethical leadership perspectives, their leader demographics, and the school districts characteristics of the school districts in which they lead. The first research question was What are the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents?

The results of this research study suggest that public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio have strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives. This research question was tested using the ELS to describe the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio. The ELS item mean score was calculated for each of the 10 items on the ELS from all public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio that participated in the survey ($N = 189$) and/or chose to participate in the interviews ($N = 15$). The ELS item mean scores from the surveys are presented in Table 1. The ELS mean scores from the interviews were presented in Table 5.

One of the potential limitations of this study was the possibility that all superintendents would rate themselves as having strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives. My results confirmed this limitation. According to Dr. Michael Brown, one of the creators of the ELS, scores below three are not very common on the ELS. Again, my results supported this, that is, individuals tend to rate their ethical leadership perspectives as being strongly positive when completing the ELS. In Table 1, the ELS item mean scores from all public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio who

completed the survey are reported. In Table 5, the ELS mean scores from all public school district superintendents who participated in the interview sessions are reported.

The overall ELS mean score for all respondents who completed the ELS was strongly positive. The overall ELS mean score from the on-line survey was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5 ($N = 189$). The overall ELS mean score for all respondents who completed the hard copy version of the ELS during the interview sessions ($N = 15$) was ($M = 4.57$) out of 5, which is represented in Table 5.

The second research question was To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to school district characteristics? State Designation was the only school district characteristic that was statistically significant in predicting the ELS mean scores of superintendents in the State of Ohio. State Designation proved to be the second strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores. As participants change by 1 on state designation, the ELS mean score decreases by 0.12 on average after controlling for all other predictors. As state designation increases, the mean score on the ELS increases. Thus, superintendents of school districts with higher state designations (i.e., Excellent with Distinction, Excellent, etc.), have slightly stronger positive scores on the ELS. It should be noted that state designation was an ordinal predictor. In the interviews, the emerging theme in response to research question two was that superintendents did not believe school district characteristics affected their ethical leadership perspectives whatsoever. However, they did agree that it might affect their leadership style.

Additionally, it should be reported that there was a significant difference between rural and suburban school districts (i.e., district locale). However, the significant

difference only appeared when the regressions were run separately. Superintendents of suburban school districts had a higher mean score on the ELS after controlling for the other school district characteristics.

The third research question was To what extent do the ethical leadership perspectives of Ohio public school superintendents vary according to leader demographics? Age, Highest Educational Degree [Doctorate Degree or No Doctorate Degree], and Gender were statistically significant in predicting the ELS mean scores of superintendents in the State of Ohio. Age proved to be the strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores. Highest educational degree was the third strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores, while gender was the fourth strongest predictor of the ELS mean scores.

The older the superintendent of a school district, the higher their ELS mean scores were. Age was an ordinal predictor in which this researcher used age ranges for age. When moving from one age range to another, the mean score on the ELS goes up by 0.11 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The common themes that emerged from the interviews supported this outcome. Superintendents in the interviews believed age did affect their ethical leadership perspectives.

Superintendents with doctorate degrees had higher ELS mean scores than superintendents who did not have a doctorate degree. As participants change from no doctorate degree to doctorate degree (Highest Educational Degree), the ELS mean score differs by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The interviews did not support this outcome as no common themes emerged with regard to highest educational degree obtained.

Female superintendents had higher ELS mean scores than male superintendents. As participants change from female (0) to male (1), the ELS mean score goes down by 0.16 on average after controlling for all other predictors. The interviews did not support this outcome as no common themes emerged with regard to gender. That is, superintendents in the interview sessions did not believe gender to be a factor in their ethical leadership perspectives. However, it should be noted that as a limitation to this outcome, out of 207 respondents to this question in the survey, 37 (17.87%) were 'Female', and 170 (82.13%) were 'Male'. Additionally, only one female participated in the interview sessions.

Readers should note that two of the five largest school districts (with a student population of 15,000+) in the State of Ohio employ female superintendents. As previously reported, when the five largest school districts were determined outliers (because of their size), and excluded from the regression analysis, the only significant difference in the results was that gender became non-significant. The decision was made to keep these districts in the sample.

This researcher grouped the last two research questions for the rest of this analysis because the variables (i.e., leader demographics and school district characteristics) were grouped together during the final analysis of the data. The results of this research study suggest that ethical leadership perspectives of public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio did in fact vary according to some school district characteristics and leader demographics. Although, it should be noted that all the ELS scores were strongly positive, and there was little variation in the ELS mean scores. However, some variation did exist. The second and third research questions were tested using a regression

analysis. With all school leader demographics and school district characteristic variables accounted for, the regression showed that State Designation 2010-2011, Gender, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and Age were the strongest predictors of the ELS mean scores. The beta, p-value, and standardized coefficients for each of the variables with the dependent variable set as the ELS were presented in Table 3.

After it was determined that State Designation, Gender, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and Age were the strongest predictors of the ethical leadership perspectives (ELS mean scores) of public school district superintendents when accounting for all school leader demographics and school district characteristics, an additional regression was tested only using these four strongest predictors. Based on the results of my study (See Table 4), we could argue that Gender, Age, Highest Educational Degree (doctoral or not), and State Designation have the strongest relationships on ethical leadership perspectives of public school district superintendents in the State of Ohio ($R^2 = .193$).

As previously mentioned, an ancillary study was conducted as part of this research study in which 15 superintendents were interviewed. The common themes emerging from the individual interviews and small group interviews are reported. Of the interviews conducted for this ancillary study with public school district superintendents across the State of Ohio ($N = 15$), and responses to the open-ended questions within the on-line survey ($N = 531$), the common themes that emerged supported the survey results except for 'State Designation' and 'Experience'.

State Designation is considered a school district characteristic. In the interviews, the emerging theme in response to research question two, was that superintendents did

not believe school district characteristics affected their ethical leadership perspectives whatsoever. However, they did agree that it might affect their leadership style.

The common themes that emerged in the responses to research question three supported the quantitative data as well, except for 'Experience'. In the interviews, superintendents felt age and experience did affect their ethical leadership perspectives. In the survey results experience was not a statistically significant predictor, but age was. However, it should be mentioned that Age and Experience were significantly correlated in the survey results, $r = .55$

The superintendents in the interviews believed their ethical leadership perspectives were affected by their own leader demographics. However, superintendents in the interviews did not believe that gender affected their ethical leadership perspectives. The on-line survey results determined that 'Gender' (also a leader demographic – as defined in this study) was also a variable associated with ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. By using field notes, transcriptions of the recorded interviews, observations made during the interviews, audio recordings, and careful analysis of the open-ended questions from the on-line survey, the findings from the qualitative data do not entirely agree with the quantitative data.

Implications

Age is the strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Furthermore, this study determined that the older the superintendents were, the slightly more positive their ethical leadership perspectives were. If this result is a representation of the superintendents in the State of Ohio, this could be an item of concern, as there is an anticipated exodus by school leaders from their respective school districts across the State

of Ohio. It is estimated that 23 or more districts across the state will lose their superintendents after this school year (Bush & Boss, 2012), not only because of the increasing pressure of their jobs, but also because of changes in their retirement that will potentially force them out. Jerry Klenke, Deputy Executive Director of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) reported at the North Central Ohio Educational Service Center (NCOESC) 2012 conference that there were 102 new superintendents in the State of Ohio entering the 2012-2013 academic school year. This means that a total of around 125 superintendents (out of 614) across the State of Ohio will be relatively new superintendents (many as first time superintendents) to start the 2013-2014 academic school year. This estimation may be low based on the results of my survey. As reported in Table 1, 159 superintendents indicated that they were in the top three ages ranges² (46-65+), and 77 of them reported that they were in the top two age ranges (56-65+). This may imply that many of the superintendents in this survey are close to retirement age. This possible mass exodus by school leaders in the state could potentially lead to the hiring of many younger inexperienced superintendents in the near future.

The second strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio was state designation. Based on the results of this study, superintendents who lead school districts with a higher state designation rating had stronger positive ethical leadership perspectives than that of superintendents who lead districts with a lower state designation rating. Due to the new state school district rating

² The ages ranges used within the survey of this study were: <35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 65>. Thus, in reporting the results in text, some age ranges have been combined in order to better describe the respondents.

system, this researcher was prevented from developing practical suggestions relating to this construct.

Highest educational degree obtained was the third strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. Based on the results of this study, superintendents who had their doctorate degree (49) had more strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives than that of superintendents who did not have their doctorate degree (157). Of the 206 superintendents who responded, only 41 had taken three or more ethical leadership courses in their degree programs, 66 had taken two courses, 65 had taken only one course, and 34 had taken none. However, superintendents who had doctorate degrees did not necessarily complete more ethical leadership coursework. Of the superintendents who held doctorate degrees, 11 had taken only one ethical leadership course, 10 had taken only two courses, four had taken three courses, one had taken four courses, six had taken five or more courses, and four had taken none. Thus, it may be that with advanced doctoral coursework, superintendents develop better skills in reflection, abstraction, and personal practical theories. It may be that in Masters programs, superintendents are taught the tools they need to know how to be a superintendent. Whereas in doctoral programs, there is more abstraction, that is, superintendents start thinking about why they do certain things versus how. Furthermore, this outcome may suggest that individuals preparing future superintendents should look at standards within accreditation and pay closer attention to the standards that address ethical leadership and how they are taught, reinforced, and cultivated within existing courses. Finally, 123 superintendents reported as to having completed a mentoring program/experience as part of their superintendent license program. This may suggest

the need to evaluate how we train, develop, mentor, and provide meaningful experiences that prepare future superintendents.

Gender was the fourth strongest predictor of the ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents. According to the results this study, female superintendents have more strongly positive ethical leadership perspectives than male superintendents in the State of Ohio. Although the female superintendents had slightly more positive ethical leadership perspectives than male superintendent, both genders scored strongly positive on the ELS. Due to the limited number of females in this study, I was prevented from developing any practical suggestions relating to this construct. Only 17.87% of the respondents in this study were female.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible connections between ethical leadership perspectives of superintendents in the State of Ohio, and how such perspectives may vary according to school district characteristics and their own leader demographics. More specifically, I attempted to identify how ethical leadership perspectives among Ohio public school superintendents varied with regard to their respective school district characteristics and their own leader demographics. The results of this study revealed the ethical leadership perspectives of school leaders across the State of Ohio, and furthermore how those perspectives might vary depending on the school district in which they lead, and their own leader demographics. This researcher hopes that this study will generate conversations in the educational community about the importance of ethical leadership perspectives of all school leaders, and furthermore, the relationship between those ethical leadership perspectives, and the school district in which they serve.

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