

**MORAL JUDGMENT AND PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS  
IN TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

MICHAEL WAYNE HOPE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2008

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Chair of Committee,	John R. Hoyle
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**ABSTRACT**

Moral Judgment and Public School Superintendents  
in Texas. (August 2008)

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The purpose of this study was to examine moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas when faced with moral dilemmas. The *Defining Issues Test-2* was used to measure levels of moral judgment. A demographic survey was also used in order to examine the relationship between moral judgment levels and certain demographic variables.

A stratified random sample of all public school superintendents based on district size were surveyed. Surveys were mailed to 200 small districts, 100 medium districts, and 50 large districts. A total of 104 superintendents participated in this study. T-test for independent samples, one-way analysis of variance, and linear regression were used for purposes of data analysis. An alpha level of .05 was used as the level of significance. Data were entered and manipulated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software.

Results of the study indicated no statistically significant relationship existed between the superintendent's moral judgment level and certain demographic variables

using t-test and analysis of variance measures. However, results from the linear regression showed that four of the independent variable subgroups contributed to moral judgment levels. The four independent variable subgroups were respondents who had served 16-20 years as a superintendent, who had served 16-20 years in his or her current district, who had a salary in the \$50,000-\$74,999 range, and whose ethnicity was Hispanic.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my wife, Shayne, my children, Abbi, Jonah, Amy, Alli, and Baby Hope, and my parents, Gerald and Linda Hope. This accomplishment would not have been possible without their love, support, and sacrifice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Without the love, sacrifice, and encouragement of my sweet wife, Shayne, I could not have achieved this goal. No one can match her as a wife or mother.

I would like to thank my children for their understanding and love throughout this adventure. Abigail, Jonah, Amy, and Allison have been a joy for me.

I thank my parents, Gerald and Linda Hope, for supporting me throughout my life in every endeavor. I hold on to the example they set for me.

Finally, I thank God for blessing me with a life rich in love, friends, and family.

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION: MORAL JUDGMENT AND PUBLIC SCHOOL**  
**SUPERINTENDENTS IN TEXAS**

“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” (Mijares , 1996, p. 29). A leader cannot waver when facing the complexities of the modern school environment. School districts need leaders with known and demonstrated integrity (Hoyle et al., 2005). Men and women who live by a higher standard can guide organizations through even the most difficult circumstances. These “extraordinary leaders are those who inspire people and make lasting contributions” (Hoyle et al., 2005 p. ix).

The role of today’s school administrators has become increasingly difficult as they face a unique set of ethical demands (Fullan, 2003; Maxcy, 2002). Confronting high stakes testing, collaborating with stakeholders, and appropriating resources represent a few of these demands. A school leader’s responsibility is complex and multi-dimensional, rooted less in technical expertise and more in simple human integrity (Lashway, 1996). With the difficulties that face today’s schools, administrators must “have the resolve of character to stand by a strong code of ethics and shun political

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This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

expediency. Their quest should be to do the right thing at all times” (Mijares, 1996, p. 29). Lashway (1996, p. 1) agrees that “real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not on doing things right.” Doing the right thing means being personally moral. Bottery (1992) believes being the leader of a school or district carries the responsibility of being personally moral. Although admonitions for high moral and ethical standards of behavior are easy to understand, they are increasingly difficult to adhere to in contemporary society (Hoyle et al., 1998).

Various scholars (Fullan, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) have conducted research and reconfirmed the importance of ethics, morals, and values in educational administration in a changing political, social, and economic environment. Lashway (1996, p. 1) points out that a “leader’s moral duty expresses itself not only in the day-to-day ethical dilemmas, but in the mundane policies and structures that may have hidden ethical implications.” The most difficult decisions involve having to choose one “right” over another “right” (Kidder, 1995). School leaders find that it often is not clear what is right or wrong, or what one ought to do, or which perspective is right in moral terms (Greenfield, 1991). The choice could be to favor one moral value over another. When a school administrator has to decide whether scarce resources should go to a gifted and talented curriculum or a drop-out prevention program, the dilemma is which value will gain and which will lose because of the administrator’s decision (Kidder, 1995). This leadership challenge “represents a moral challenge even more than it does a technical or managerial challenge” (Starratt, 2004, p. 29).

Today, school CEOs are playing a greater role in shaping the learning communities for all children (Hoyle et al., 2005). Since school leaders' decisions affect the entire school community, the leader's conduct must be deliberately moral (Greenfield, 1991). The leader is a moral role model who must work to create a climate, culture, and community ethic that exemplifies the very values that he or she espouses (Furman, 2004). Ciulla (1998) believes that the ethics and morals of a leader affects all individuals in the organization and serves as the basis for how others make choices and decisions. Hoyle et al. (2005, p. 193) conclude that school leaders "are responsible for establishing and maintaining the ethical and moral climate of staff and students."

As leaders, school administrators have a special responsibility to exercise authority in an ethical way (Lashway, 1996). Administrators must know that the decisions they make will have moral implications for the entire school community (Denig & Quinn, 2001). Therefore, they must follow high standards of behavior while incorporating community needs and values into world-class educational opportunities for children. "The charge for school leaders is clear—model accepted moral and ethical behavior" (Hoyle et al., 1998, p. 169).

Standards of behavior have become increasingly important over the past 40 years. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has established the best set of standards for school leaders. Ethical expectations are clearly defined in AASA's *Professional Standards for the Superintendency* (Hoyle, 1993). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) created another set of standards for chief state school officers. Along with these national standards, many regional and state

organizations have echoed the same expectations in their standards and codes. School leaders must embrace these standards to guide their daily operations and actions.

Past national studies have indicated a lack of ethical behavior and decision-making of chief school leaders. In 1969, C. Roy Dexheimer conducted a study about the ethical decision-making of superintendents. Dexheimer used the American Association of School Administrator's Code of Ethics as his comparison standard. This nationwide study produced an ethical score of 47.3 percent. Less than half of the survey questions were answered ethically. Twenty-five years later, William C. Fenstermaker (1996) tested the same question to superintendents. Fenstermaker sought to compare the ethical choices of those school leaders to their counterparts twenty-five years earlier. He found only 1,341 ethical responses out of a possible 2,790. The results yielded a 48.1 percent ethical response. A change of less than one percent during the twenty-five year period suggested no significant change.

Fenstermaker (1996, p. 17) stated that "the survey responses from superintendents nationwide showed either a severe confusion about ethical standards or a disturbing disregard of them. What is likely is that the superintendents responding to the survey failed to recognize any ethical issues in many of the situations given. What is also possible is that they follow their instincts and their experience in making decisions, and their instincts or experience may not generally take the ethical factors into consideration."

Dexheimer and Fenstermaker's studies showed a distinct lack of ethics in school leadership decision-making. In Fenstermaker's conclusions, he stated that "there is a

need for a higher level of awareness of the ethical issues that administrators face every day, and a need for practice in both recognizing and dealing with those issues” (1996, p. 18). Unless ethics impact the school leaders more, the American people will become increasingly skeptical of those positions of power and authority. The alternative will be a gradual degradation of the profession as a whole – a loss of trust extending not only to school leaders, but also to the entire public school system (Fenstermaker, 1996).

To many people, the school leader represents all employees and programs of the school district (Hoyle et al., 2005). Therefore, administrators are obligated to act ethically and must make undominated, ethical decisions (Johnston, 1994). If moral leadership begins with moral leaders, then a leader cannot be considered ethical without making ethical decisions (Lashway, 1996). Administrators cannot apply ethics in decision-making only when it is convenient or someone is watching. “Ethical behavior is not something that can be held in reserve for momentous issues; it must be a constant companion” (Lashway, 1996, p. 4). Hoyle et al. (1998, p. 170) states “doing the right thing may be difficult and take more time, but anything less is wrong.”

### **Statement of the Problem**

Administrators are in an ethically demanding position that requires serious attention. “The common thread that holds the schools together is an ethical one, not an administrative one” (McKerrow, 1997, p. 217). Since the school leader’s position influences students, staff, and the school environment, he or she must be an ethical and moral individual (Lashway, 1996). These moral agents of schools have the responsibility to create an ethical institution. A way to create such an institution begins

with the school leader making ethical decisions (Starratt, 1991). Thomas Sobol, who teaches ethics at Columbia University's Teachers College, believes that the school leader has the responsibility to provide an "ethical dimension" to education that addresses moral obligations and decision making (Pardini, 2004).

Past national research has shown that the majority of superintendents surveyed proved to be unethical in decision-making (Fenstermaker, 1996). Ethical responses increased by less than one percent after a twenty-five year period elapsed (Fenstermaker, 1996). Fenstermaker (1996) purports that potential reasons for the unethical responses could be either from the lack of the school leaders to recognize ethical dimensions of issues or that the leaders decisions were made from instinct or experience which did not include ethical factors being considered. School leaders must be able to recognize ethical issues and make moral decisions based on ethical standards to prevent the degradation of both school leadership and the public school system (Fenstermaker, 1996).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the moral judgment of public school superintendents when faced with moral dilemmas. A determination will also be made regarding whether or not a relationship exists between certain demographic variables and the moral judgment of those superintendents. This study will evaluate a sample of superintendents working in public schools in Texas.

More specifically the study will address the following questions:

1. To what extent are the judgments that public school superintendents in Texas make moral?
2. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the size of the superintendent's school district?
3. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the number of years of experience as a superintendent?
4. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the salary of the superintendent?
5. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the gender of the superintendent?
6. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the highest degree attained by the superintendent?
7. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on whether or not the superintendent took college-level coursework or professional development in ethics?
8. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the number of years the individual has been superintendent in his or her current district?



9. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the number of districts the individual has served as superintendent?
10. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the age of the superintendent?
11. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the ethnicity of the superintendent?
12. Is there a difference in the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas based on the type of district: rural, suburban, or urban?

### **Operational Definitions**

Ethics: Ethics refers to the rules or principles that define right and wrong conduct for an individual or a profession (Davis and Frederick, 1984).

Moral Reasoning: This is Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. Each subsequent stage reached is more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than the previous one (Kohlberg, 1984).

Moral Judgment: This is the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments (Kohlberg, 1984).

Superintendents: Superintendents include chief school administrators of independent school districts within the public school system in Texas. Deputy, Assistant, Associate, or Area Superintendents are not included in this study.

Demographic Variables: These variables include the superintendent's school district's size and type, years of experience as superintendent, salary, gender, ethnicity, educational level, college coursework, age, and type of superintendent experience.

Small-Size District: A district with an enrollment of 1,599 or less based on Texas Education Agency figures from October 2006.

Medium-Sized District: A district with an enrollment between 1,600 and 9,999 based on Texas Education Agency figures from October 2006.

Large-Sized District: A district with an enrollment of 10,000 or more based on Texas Education Agency figures from October 2006.

### **Assumptions**

1. The researcher was impartial in collecting and analyzing data.
2. Interpretation of the data collected accurately reflects that which was intended.

### **Limitations**

1. The scope of this study will include a sample of public school superintendents within Texas.
2. This study is limited to the moral judgments made by a sample of superintendents in Texas public schools.
3. The findings of this study will be generalizable only to public schools that respond in this study, though it may have implications for all schools.

## **Statement of Significance**

Administrators make critical decisions that affect all educational stakeholders (McKerrow, 1997). As such, “the superintendent is not only the chief academic and administrative officer of a district but also the most visible and important link with the entire community” (Hoyle et al., 2005, p. 202). Unfortunately, the decisions made by the district’s most important link to the community have not always been ethical ones. This lack of ethical decision-making has produced public skepticism of the school administrator position (Fenstermaker, 1996). Although all administrator organizations have adopted codes of ethics to guide their members in their actions and behaviors, it is up to the individual to do the right thing (Mijares, 1996 ; Lashway, 1996). The school leader must consistently seek ethical standards in decision-making to create an ethical institution (Starratt, 1991). Educational administrators must take the moral high ground. “They need to be conscientious arbiters of education and as such must act from some moral position” (McKerrow, 1997, p. 219). In order to be an effective moral leader, a person must make a strong commitment to “making a positive difference in the lives of individual students and teachers” (Fullan, 2003, p. 31).

Most people assumed that superintendents and other school leaders “possessed the qualities necessary to conduct themselves personally and professionally according to accepted moral standards” (Beck, 1996, p. 8). The studies of Dexheimer (1969) and Fenstermaker (1994) showed a very different result. Lynn Beck (1996) suggested four characteristics of the professional lives of administrators that compel all to take the current educational and societal situations seriously. The four characteristics are the

following: 1) The situations that challenge our moral reasoning are complex; 2) The stakes are high in situations that challenge our moral reasoning; 3) The impact of our moral decisions and actions is enormous; 4) Institutions that traditionally guided our moral reasoning are crumbling.

This study will examine the moral judgments made by public school superintendents in Texas when faced with moral dilemmas. Also, the study will determine if differences exist in the moral judgments of public school superintendents based on certain demographic variables. This information has significance for all who are involved in current trends in educational administration such as aspiring superintendents, principals, school boards involved in the hiring of school leaders, and any other employee who will be involved with education in the future.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The review of literature presents the pertinent research and theory for the moral reasoning, moral judgment, and ethical behavior of school leaders. This review of literature examines both moral judgment and the outcome of moral judgment, moral behavior. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of theories related to an individual's moral development and associated moral reasoning and judgment. The second section emphasizes the importance of moral reasoning and judgment in the educational system and society as a whole. The third section details the previous research studies of moral judgment. The fourth section examines professional codes of ethics. This chapter concludes with a summary of the reviewed literature.

#### **Theories of Moral Reasoning and Judgment**

Analysis of an individual's moral judgment, reasoning, and development continues to expand. Researchers have tried and continue to try to define, comprehend, and explain the moral and ethical behavior of people across society. Beck & Murphy (1997) found in previous studies that the major component of leadership was decision making. Therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of what affects the moral behavior and decision making strategies of individuals. The following is a review of the pertinent theories relating to moral development, reasoning and judgment.

Jean Piaget made a brief venture into morality research in the 1930s. “Piaget determined that morality can be considered a developmental process” (Murray, 2007, p. 1). However, it was not until Lawrence Kohlberg’s research pertaining to moral development in the 1950s and 1960s that interest in moral thinking really caught on. Narvaez (2005, p. 41) claims “Piaget and Kohlberg gave life to the psychological study of moral development.” Kohlberg’s research and theories presented a vastly different viewpoint than his contemporary psychologists. The most prevalent view of what is morally right and wrong was determined by society. Moral development was believed to be a matter of learning the norms of one’s culture, of accepting them and internalizing them, and of behaving in conformity to them. Social norms dictated what was considered right and wrong. Adversely, Kohlberg argued that it is the individual who determines what is morally right and wrong. Kohlberg said that the individual interprets situations, derives psychological and moral meaning from social events, and makes moral judgments. He believed that psychology should study how individuals arrive at moral judgments – moral cognition (Kohlberg, 1984). Kohlberg’s views were vastly different from his contemporaries.

Rest (1994, p. 3) states that Kohlberg’s line of theory and research into the study of morality was focused in the following ways:

1. He focused on cognition—the thinking process and the representations by which people construct reality and meaning.
2. He assumed that there would be stages in the organization of moral judgment.

The primary task of the psychologist was to describe stages of moral judgment

development and to devise a method for assessing a person's stage (a staircase metaphor is used—all people advance developmentally by going up the staircase one step at a time, without skipping any steps, and always in the same order).

3. He collected data by posing problems to subjects, asking subjects to solve the problem, then probing into how the subjects went about solving the problem. From moral dilemmas, Kohlberg wanted to understand how intuitions of fairness arise.
4. He favored studies that presented moral dilemmas to children of different ages, looking for age differences in their basic problem-solving strategies. He wanted to explain the differences between problem-solving strategies of very young children to older children and then to adults and older adults.

Kohlberg built his theory, *Six Stages of Moral Development*, from research results using the Moral Judgment Interview instrument. According to Kohlberg's theory, all people throughout the world use six problem-solving strategies. Those six strategies (or stages) comprise a developmental sequence that must begin with Stage 1. Table 2.1 illustrates Kohlberg's theory:

**Table 2.1 Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development**

Preconventional Level	Stage 1	The morality of obedience: Do what you are told.
	Stage 2	The morality of instrumental egoism and simple exchange: Let's make a deal.
Conventional Level	Stage 3	The morality of interpersonal concordance: Be considerate, nice, and kind: you'll make friends.
	Stage 4	The morality of law and duty to the social order: Everyone in society is obligated to and protected by the law.
Postconventional and Principled Level	Stage 5	The morality of consensus-building procedures: You are obligated by the arrangements that are agreed to by due process procedures.
	Stage 6	The morality of nonarbitrary social cooperation: Morality is defined by how rational and impartial people would ideally organize cooperation.

(Kohlberg, 1984, pp. 174-176)

James Rest (1994, p. 5) describes Kohlberg's theory as six conceptions of how to organize cooperation. Stage 1 represents being "good" and being obedient to the demands of superiors as equal. At Stage 2, "doing good" means "doing what is instrumentally satisfying to me," not doing what another person demands. Stage 3 consists of making and nurturing friendships by being loyal, considerate, and caring. At Stage 4, a basis for cooperating with society in general (and not just friends) was created. This stage uses the concept of law to continue a cooperative order.

Stages 5 and 6 are usually described together. These stages use an orientation to principles in shaping the laws and systems a society will have. At these stages, a person



realizes that societies can be governed by diverse systems of laws. “The hallmark of Stages 5 and 6 is their orientation to principles that shape whatever laws and role systems a society might have. The principles determine, regulate, and criticize the laws and role systems of a cooperative society” (Rest, 1994, p. 6). Stages 5 and 6 categorize what is morally right by what best furthers the principle.

Rest (1994, p. 8) also notes that the stages are defined so that “as we move upward through the sequence, the scope of human interaction is widened, more things are considered, and the higher stages deal with more complex social problems than the lower stages.” Kohlberg’s research provided a foundation for the study of the multi-faceted concept of moral reasoning. Although Kohlberg’s theory of moral judgment provided empirical data concerning individual’s moral judgments, it did not include other aspects of moral cognition included in making judgments such as moral sensitivity, moral motivation, or moral character.

One of Kohlberg’s students, Carol Gilligan (1982), explored one of the “missing” components of Kohlberg’s research. Gilligan researched a stage theory of moral development for women. Kohlberg’s work had only focused on men. Gilligan’s argument was that Kohlberg’s theory was biased toward explaining how boys and men think about moral and ethical dilemmas. She felt that Kohlberg’s research questions focused upon justice and principle-oriented thinking. Gilligan believed that this view left out girls and women who tend to think about the “caring” side of situations (Maxcy, 2002).

Gilligan's approach to morality argues that people have responsibilities toward others. To be moral is to exercise care toward others. Caring is expressed through the responsibility of duty and obligation to others. Her theory focused upon changes in self-concept as well as the relationship of the self to the social setting. (Maxcy, 2002).

Although Gilligan's claims that gender differences exist in stage development have been cited in many publications, there is little empirical evidence to support her theory. Rest (1994, p. 12) states that "more than a decade has passed since Gilligan claimed that women follow a different path of moral development than men, but there is still no cross-sectional or longitudinal evidence that this is the case." In fact, Rest (1986) claims that Kohlberg's theory can be considered universal. Rest showed that in studies that have been conducted in over 40 countries, the similarities are more striking than the differences among these countries (including the United States).

Rest was confident that moral behavior must include more than just moral judgments. He was attempting to find what other elements exist in morality and how those pieces fit together. After doing a review of morality literature and through empirical research, Rest concluded that there are four determinants of moral behavior. The Four Component Model of Moral Behavior examined moral behavior from the areas of moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. The following table (Table 2.2) shows the Four Component Model of Moral Behavior:

**Table 2.2 Four Psychological Components Determining Moral Behavior**

Moral sensitivity	Interpreting the situation
Moral judgment	Judging which action is morally right/wrong
Moral motivation	Prioritizing the moral over competing concerns
Moral character	Having courage, persisting, overcoming distractions, implementing skills

(Rest, 1994, p. 23)

Moral sensitivity is “the awareness of how our actions affect other people. It involves being aware of different possible lines of action and how each line of action could affect the parties concerned. It involves imaginatively constructing possible scenarios, and knowing cause-consequence chains of events in the real world; it involves empathy and role-taking skills” (Rest, 1994, p.23) Moral sensitivity can be defined as having the “big picture” in mind when making decisions. How will this decision affect not only me and my immediate surroundings but also the entire society is the focus of an individual with high moral sensitivity.

Moral judgment is the determination of which line of action is more morally justifiable (which alternative is just, or right). Although justification for a line of action can be made to appear right (acts of terrorism justified because of past wrongs), moral judgment must include other factors (Rest, 1994). Rest (1994, p. 24) states that “moral judgment is important, but it is not the only determinant of moral behavior.”

Moral motivation “has to do with the importance given to moral values in competition with other values” (Rest, 1994, p.24). The importance of doing what is

right must always outweigh the values of self-actualization or protecting one's organization. Rest (1994) contends that "Hitler and Stalin set aside moral considerations in pursuit of other values" such as the Reich that would last 1,000 years.

Moral character "involves ego, strength, perseverance, backbone, toughness, strength of conviction, and courage. A person may be morally sensitive, may make good moral judgments, and may place high priority on moral values, but if the person wilts under pressure, is easily distracted or discouraged, is a wimp and weak-willed, then moral failure occurs. Psychological toughness and strong character do not guarantee adequacy in any of the other components, but a certain amount of each is necessary to carry out a line of action" (Rest, 1994, p.24).

Whereas Kohlberg's theory dealt primarily with moral judgment, Rest's theory expands the determinants of moral behavior to four. Kohlberg's model uses a "stair-step" model moving upward from stage to stage. Each stage must be performed before the next one can be reached. However, Rest's four components have complex interactions between them are not confined to a progressive order. The four components "comprise a logical analysis of what it takes to behave morally" (Rest, 1994, p.24).

Schrader (1993, p. 98) claims "Rest's ethical decision making components—the ability to identify problems, generate alternatives, reason through outcomes, and act morally—and the ability to reflect on moral judgments and experiences, are important for professionals to develop because educators act autonomously in their practice.

Kohlberg's approach to moral education provides the theoretical bases for assisting

moral stage development as well as for developing these components in future educational professionals.”

Rest’s four components claimed there were a greater number of determinants affecting a person’s actions or behaviors. Youseff & Luthans (2005, p. 4) state that “in addition to Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, Rest’s (1986) seminal theory building and subsequent research supports that ethical behavior is the outcome of a process that starts with moral recognition, followed by moral evaluations, moral intentions, and finally actions.”

Erik Erikson (Rebore, 2001, p. 27) began his research of moral development by focusing on the aspects of human life manifested in the somatic, societal, and ego processes. He viewed these processes as interrelated and emphasized that all three must be taken into consideration when analyzing a particular human situation. Erikson’s stages of development are based on epigenesis. This principle states “that as a person develops in intervals, certain significant potentialities come to pass only during later intervals in life; therefore, although the beginnings of development are important, development that occurs later in life is important also.”

Erik Erikson’s Stages of Moral Development present phenomena, called crises of development, that are critical points during times of transition from one stage to the next. Each person must resolve these crises during a given life period in order to be prepared for the next stage. To go to the next stage without a positive resolution of the crisis from the current period will cause problems in the person’s further development. It is not necessary however for the resolution to be totally positive. He believes some negativity

can be helpful as a person progresses through the life cycles. The goal for a person should be achieving a favorable ratio of positive to negative. Therefore, the stages of moral development should be considered as a continuum rather than as discrete periods. Erickson's stages follow closely with Kohlberg's stage theory (Rebore, 2001). The following table (Table 2.3) illustrates Erikson's Eight Stage of Moral Development:

**Table 2.3 Erikson's Eight Stages of Moral Development**

Stages	Crises	Strengths
One: Infancy	Basic trust vs. basic mistrust	Hope
Two: Early Childhood	Autonomy vs. shame, doubt	Will
Three: Play Age	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose
Four: School Age	Industry vs. inferiority	Competence
Five: Adolescence	Identity vs. identity confusion	Fidelity
Six: Young Adult	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love
Seven: Adulthood	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care
Eight: Old Age	Integrity vs. despair	Wisdom

(Rebore, 2001, p. 28)

The moral behavior of individuals has been the subject of philosophers and researchers over the past fifty years in America. Building on Piaget's work in moral development, Kohlberg established the Six Stages of Moral Development. Unlike, the thought of his day, Kohlberg based his theory on the individual's role in moral

development rather than moral development being influenced by social norms. Erikson also developed a stage theory similar to Kohlberg's theory. Rest created a more comprehensive theory of moral development. His theory incorporated moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral character along with Kohlberg's moral judgment to help explain an individual's moral behavior.

### **Moral Judgment and Behavior**

School leaders face a myriad of issues each day. They must recognize and evaluate the moral implications involved in each issue. Once those determinations are made, then action is taken. The action is called a moral judgment. Moral judgments represent "different ways that people define situations; the differences in situational definition lead to differences in judging what is important, and consequently to differences in judging what course of action is appropriate" (Thoma, & Rest, 1986, p. 135). The good and bad behaviors of school leaders have become water cooler discussions throughout the country. The following section examines the importance of moral judgment and its resulting behaviors for school leaders.

"There seems to be a growing consensus that our society faces a crisis in professional ethics . . . There is certainly unease about professional ethics, not only by the professionals themselves, but by the general public . . ." (McDowell, 2000, p. 1). The sensationalized lapses in moral judgment are seen every day in newspapers, on television, and on the Internet. These depictions of the leaders of our public and private institutions have chipped away at the trust people have in them. Does the lack of sound

moral judgment have an impact on others? Should parents, staff members, and students be concerned about the moral behavior of their educational leaders?

School leaders ethical behavior has always been essential to a quality educational system. Rockwell (1991, p. 3) reminds us that “leadership involves moral choice. It is not just the ethical balancing of established precepts, but the courage and humility to divine, weigh, and balance ‘first principles’ in the face of uncertainty. It is this responsibility that reveals leadership as not a right or a privilege but an awesome duty.”

As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the behavior and actions of school leaders were scrutinized. The public expected them to be “managers of virtue” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). During that time, “school leaders were well grounded in values through their own elementary and secondary school training, family upbringing, and situation in the community” (Maxcy, 2002, p. 13). Beck (1996) argues that the institutions that have been responsible for establishing an individual’s moral code are crumbling. This loss of direction from family, friends, religious institutions, and others affect the moral behavior of all society. The importance of superintendents and other school leaders to exercise sound moral judgment is paramount for the future decision makers of society.

McDowell (2000) believes that we learn partly by observing others and partly from the reactions we receive because of the way we have acted. Children as well as new professionals learn the same way. Whether in a business or a school, new employees watch how others act to determine what are the accepted formal and informal moral codes. The moral decisions made by superiors will be observed and possibly



emulated by others. If McDowell's suggestions are true, then school personnel must display the best in moral behavior and judgment for students, staff, and parents to emulate. Kidder (1995) suggests that all of the actions and behaviors of a person send clear ethical signals to everyone around. Whether intended or not, each person is a teacher of moral values. Therefore, each person must purposefully live at the highest moral level possible. Each generation watches the previous generation to determine what is morally acceptable.

A purpose for moral reasoning and ethical behavior of educational leaders is not only to establish a moral climate of a particular district or school but also for education as a whole. Strike et al. (1998, p. 106) believes "the question of the possibility of objective moral reasoning is crucial both for our view of education and our view of administration. A belief in the possibility of moral reasoning permits a view of education that is itself moral in nature. It provides the grounds for administrators to pursue, with their staff and students, those moral commitments that define us as a free people in a free and democratic society."

Defining what constitutes ethical or unethical behavior or decisions is essential to the understanding of the need for ethics. Jones (1991) believes that an ethical decision is one that is both legal and morally acceptable to the larger community. On the other hand, an unethical decision is one that is either illegal or morally unacceptable to the larger community. Therefore, just because a decision meets the definition of being legal, it does not necessarily make that decision ethical. Laws cannot always be depended upon to govern "right" behavior. Laws can really only govern legal behavior. However,

codes of ethics and conduct do have the ability to govern what is acceptable behavior.

The following subsections will examine different areas that emphasize the importance of the moral behavior of school leaders. Those subsections will cover the need for moral behavior and decision making of school leaders, examples of negative behavior by school leaders, the effects of negative behavior by school leaders, and difficulties in making moral judgments.

#### *Need for Moral Behavior*

Educational leaders are responsible for providing a moral purpose to the school. Fullan (2002, p. 14) explains that the leader must not only help reduce the gap between high and low academic performers, but also must “transform the working (or learning conditions) of others so that growth, commitment, engagement, and the constant spawning of leadership in others is being fostered.” Educational leaders are the moral compass for their districts and schools. The influence that each school leader has on the students, parents, staff members, and community is tremendous. Hodgkinson (1991, p. 129) states “that great schools, great institutions of learning are, in infinitely subtle and complex ways, the reflection and manifestation of the moral integrity of their leaders.” Moral decisions made by a leader define his or her moral character and forms a code of professional and personal conduct. In turn, the decisions made by school leaders redefine the moral code and atmosphere of the school (Maxcy, 2002).

Administrators are leading those who will be the future leaders. “As a result, educational leaders must be vigilant about the values implied by their actions, as those actions speak volumes about the values that the educational leader supports. It is

impossible for an educational leader to take an action that does not also make some comment about how things should be done—which, by definition is a moral action” (Normore, 2004, p. 1). These moral actions set the organizational climate. These actions establish the ground rules of what is proper and improper conduct. Although the ground rules may not exist in written form, the “how we do things around here” is communicated through words, actions, and impression. “The leaders of an organization are the principal agents in establishing an organizational climate and determining whether it promotes or inhibits ethical conduct on the part of the organization’s members.” (Hitt, 1990, p. 2).

Hester (2003) argues that a combination of ethical conduct and effective leadership practices can transform organizations. Hester’s belief illustrates just how influential the ethical actions (or inactions) of a school leader can be. Several studies consistently found that a leader’s attitude and behavior greatly influenced a subordinate’s decision making and behavior (Brenner & Molander, 1977; Posner & Schmidt, 1984). Although the previous citation comes from the business world, its application is universal. Maxcy (2002, p. 15) states that “school leaders who lead their schools with moral character help provide a model of ethical behavior for every student, teacher, staff member, and parent associated with that school.”

Strike et al. (1998, p. 14) mentions the various responsibilities required of educational administrators. They “facilitate the work of faculty, make up budgets, hire faculty, evaluate staff, and allocate resources. They deal with students, parents, and school boards. Many, perhaps all, of these administrative tasks involve an ethical or

moral component.” Whatever action taken by the school leader, it must be viewed as just, fair, equitable, and humane. If the leader’s decisions or actions cannot be described in those terms, then the leader will probably be ineffective. The leader must keep in mind that the public’s view may not be justified. However, in today’s society, the perception of dishonesty, bias, etc. is often just as destructive. School leaders have to balance all facets of their job to be effective. Administrators must deal with “fairness, equality, justice, and democracy as much as they deal with test scores, teachers’ salaries, parents and budgets” (Strike et al., 1998, p. 14). Therefore, administrators must make moral judgments as well as management judgments.

Beyer (2004, p. 53) suggests that “educational leaders are under public scrutiny as a distinct group and are expected to foster and exhibit ethical behavior in their day-to-day work.” They must demonstrate concern for and responsibility to others, and consideration of the community as a whole in their decision making and service to students and the community. School leaders are not attempting to create an inanimate product as in the business world. School leaders work with children’s lives. The desired outcome is a positive educational and moral impact on those lives. Kimbrough (1985) implies that since parents commit the care of their children to school administrators each year, they have a right to expect that school personnel will treat their children with dignity and fairness. Similar to the past century, parents still should expect high moral standards demonstrated by school leaders. He suggests that accepting an administrative position also carries an obligation to be decent, caring, law abiding, and honorable. The expectations, responsibilities, and stresses of leading schools today are clearly enormous.

Educational administrators live and work in a fishbowl. Their professional and private worlds are on display, especially their decisions and behaviors. Like an administrator's life, Youseff & Luthans (2005, p. 7) state that "ethical behavior does not take place in a vacuum." It impacts and is impacted by the social context within which it occurs. Without sound moral judgments, confidence in not only the administrator but also the entire school district or educational system can be damaged or even destroyed. Rebores (2001, p. v) relates the public's mindset concerning administrator's jobs and lives in the following:

Ethical issues in education now concern not only the conduct of administrators, teachers, and staff members in relation to how they fulfill their responsibilities in school districts, but also the ethics of their private lives. The public makes little distinction between the arenas in which educational leaders deal with ethical situations. People are concerned with the moral fiber of superintendents, principals, and other administrators regardless of the situations in which they perform an action. They are public figures and as such are expected to be role models for students, other educators, and the public in general.

The need for a moral leader in schools or any organization cannot be emphasized enough. The administrator must "demonstrate moral authority and wise decision making" (Kidder & Born, 2002, p. 28). This person must be able to lead with integrity as well as inspire, challenge, and energize others (Hester, 2003). Individuals who work in schools "must possess certain qualifications—character traits, values, and the like—that will enable them to teach and model morality for students" (Beck & Murphy, 1997, p. 1). Those who can measure up to these qualifications are the ones needed to lead the school systems. That type of school leader can create a community of moral purpose that will have an impact on students, staff, and the community long after he or she is

gone. Thornton Bradshaw, former chairman of RCA, conveys a clear understanding of the importance of moral leadership by the following:

I'm a great believer that leadership, in large part, is moral leadership. And people want to follow moral leadership. They respect it. And they expect it too. That's not being specific, but if the head of a business, for instance, accomplishes everything the shareholders want in terms of increasing the price of shares and increasing dividends and earnings and so forth—if he still fails in terms of his moral leadership, in the long run, that company is not going to prosper. (Hitt, 1990, pp. 135-136).

### *Examples of Negative Behavior*

The need for moral leadership can be best established by looking at the unethical behaviors of school leaders. Outright crimes and unthinkable acts by the leaders of our school systems demoralize the educational environment. Although many of these unethical actions are actually illegal, the actions that are defined as legal by the letter of the law can be just as harmful to the educational community.

Priscilla Pardini examined several real-life lapses in moral judgment. Pardini (2004, p. 10) begins her article with the statement, “the actions of malfeasance by a few superintendents undermine the credibility of honest, hard-working educators.” She goes on to give the following examples of unethical behaviors:

A superintendent in Maryland accepts as a top honor in a national recognition program a \$25,000 cash prize from a textbook vendor doing millions of dollars worth of business with his school district.

The wife of an elected superintendent delivers her husband's campaign literature to the schools in his Alabama district and asks principals to distribute the material in the mailboxes of the school staff.

School board members in an Indiana district spend \$4,100 of the money earmarked for public relations on an engraved Rolex watch for the district's retiring superintendent.

(Pardini, 2004, p. 10).

Her examples of a lack of moral reasoning and judgment are disheartening. Do her few examples really suggest a growing problem of unethical behavior in the higher echelons of school administration? The following section will try to answer that question.

Unfortunately, additional examples would tend to answer an emphatic yes to the posed question. Pardini (2004, pp. 11-12) gives the following quote in the AASA's *The School Administrator*:

. . . one need to look no further than the newspaper headlines to discover school officials in legal trouble. During just a four-week period at the end of the school year, the news media reported on a Long Island superintendent accused of embezzling more than \$1 million from his school district, a North Dakota superintendent sentenced to probation for stealing a school district Jeep and securing reduced-price lunches for his children, a Colorado superintendent sentenced to six years in prison for padding his annual salary by up to \$44,000 a year, a Nebraska superintendent arrested on a misdemeanor public indecency charge, an Arkansas superintendent who resigned after engaging in a fight with a local broadcaster, a Nebraska superintendent faced with losing his certification after using school district technology to distribute pornography and sexual jokes, and a Louisiana superintendent suspended for three days for plagiarizing a California superintendent's letter to the community.

Even though these extreme lapses in moral judgment are probably a rare occurrence, their effect in their community and throughout the entire educational system is detrimental.

Although the unethical actions of a school leader has far reaching effects on the educational system, the actions rarely lead to the dissolution of an entire school district. However, in Texas, the unethical actions of a superintendent and the district's board of trustees caused the closure of a school district serving thousands of students and a community. From falsely reporting attendance records to not making needed repairs on schools to misusing publicly approved bond money to instructing staff members to

destroy public records, the failure in the moral leadership in this district was phenomenal (Benton, 2005). Was the superintendent and the board the only people involved in improprieties? The answer was no. However, the belief that employees may emulate the actions of the leader of an organization appears to hold true in this case.

Administrators have displayed many other types of behavior lacking sound moral reasoning and judgment. They have pressured other school employees to change student's grades for athletic or other reasons (McIlroy, 2007). In a recent news story, a school leader was found to have segregated Latino students from white students at an elementary school (NBC Universal, 2007). Even when an action is not determined to be illegal, the unethical behavior is still just as wrong.

The search for examples of unethical behaviors and actions of school leaders was far too easy and yielded far too many examples. Many of the failures of sound moral judgment centered around financial gain. A New York superintendent received kickbacks from his girlfriend's software company that his district did business with (Fuller, 2006). In Pennsylvania, a superintendent paid his unqualified girlfriend, sister, and brother-in-law thousands of dollars in consulting fees for work they often did not even attempt to perform (Snell, 2004). A Michigan superintendent was charged with felony embezzlement that included running a non-profit organization that benefited from large no-bid contracts with his district. In Illinois, prosecutors are accusing a superintendent, of a financially troubled district, of taking money out of an after-school program fund to pay for his daughter's tuition. The superintendent had also supposedly used the money to buy Chicago Blackhawk hockey tickets and gift cards to various



stores (Schulte, 2005). Although many other incidents involving falsifying records, taking bribes, and committing credit card fraud could be examined, the fact that there is, to some extent, a moral behavior and judgment problem among school leaders appears to hold true.

The stories mentioned cover a wide array of unethical behaviors across the nation. Regardless of the state, the city, or the community, these behaviors affect more than just the individuals involved in the action. In the following section, the effects of poor moral judgment of school leaders will be discussed.

#### *Effects of Negative Behavior*

“The quality of leadership is functionally related to the moral climate of the organization and this, in turn, to the moral complexity and skills of the leader” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 129). Leadership does not only influence the practical success of an organization but also, and more importantly, its moral success. Because of its importance, Greenfield (1991) argues that educational administration must train future school leaders to have competence in moral reasoning and judgment. In today’s environment, ethical behavior is finally recognized as indispensable for long-term success and effectiveness . . . organizations, as well as, their leaders and associates from top to bottom, need to equip themselves with the capacity to act ethically if they aim to meet the expectations of today’s very scrutinizing stakeholders (Youseff & Luthans, 2005). Administrators must be able to meet the demands of their stakeholders (students, parents, staff, and the community as a whole) in an ethical manner.

Beck & Murphy (1997) describe the failures of some school leaders. Their description shows a total disregard, or at the very least ignorance of, the critical moral dimensions of their position. Example after example today gives credence to Beck's argument. Brockett (2004, p. vi) echoes most of Beck's thoughts by the following: "Ethics and ethical decision making are important because of the amount of power that professionals wield." The power seen mostly by the leader's actions can also be equally evident by the leader's lack of action. Brockett (2004, p.vii) continues that "although there are certainly situations where a professional may engage in behavior deemed questionable or inappropriate by others, it can be argued that in the vast majority of instances, unethical behavior is not so much the result of deliberate misconduct as unintentional misunderstanding or lack of awareness." Regardless of the issues that proceed the ethical behavior, the behavior itself has far reaching consequences.

"When any type of administrator lapses into immoral, unprofessional conduct, everyone loses . . . when educational administrators commit acts of misconduct, the damage to the organization is frequently accompanied by passage of restrictive statutes and board policies that place additional burdens on the innocent. The school board loses credibility and prestige, and the impact on students when someone they admire fails is incalculable" (Kimbrough, 1985, p. 3). A true leader that understands the incredible influence he or she has on countless children (and community members) must be able to make ethical decisions. Menzel (2005, p. 155) relates that "sadly, there is evidence that even what might be regarded as minor incidents of wrongdoing can breed an

organizational climate of deceit, incompetence, and corruption.” The cost of not making moral decisions is too great.

Logsdon & Young (2005, p. 103) explain the problems seen by leaders from the business world in the following:

Moral leadership of responsible organizations is the socially desired and expected model for business as well as for government and nonprofit entities. Yet many contemporary organizational crises and business failures are blamed on the moral lapses of top executives, involving misappropriation of funds, lying about business performance and product characteristics, exploitation of employees, political manipulation, and many other illegal and unethical practices. Accusations of excessive pride, personal greed, expediency, and other human failings are common criticisms of executives. In other cases, organizations seem to operate amorally by not considering the impacts of their activities on everyone who is affected.

(Logsdon & Young, 2005, p. 103)

Their explanation from the business world holds true for the education world as well.

However, in education, the impact is felt by its most precious product—children’s lives.

The impact of unethical decision making has more than just psychological effects. Unethical decision making can also have an economic impact. Kimbrough (1985, pp. 3-4) explains how the lack of ethical behavior by school leaders can have economic consequences:

The sole purpose of ethical behavior is not merely a nicety that educational administrators ought to observe just to be good but it has economic consequences as well. Unethical behavior has a serious economic impact. Children who are deprived of educational opportunities because adults fail to assume their obligations for leadership pay for the rest of their lives.

The process of adjudicating or otherwise dealing with instances where administrators have not done their duty or have committed immoral acts is very expensive. This expenditure in administrative time and money represents a loss to the main purpose of educating children. The decline in morals traced to what children learn from immoral adults seriously impacts the economic opportunity and quality of life for all.

When districts have to use money to settle lawsuits or contract buyouts due to bad moral judgments, the students and community lose. That same money should be used for the educational programs that meet the needs of those same students.

Kimbrough's reflection on the economic impact of unethical behavior of educational leaders is just the tip of the iceberg of related damages. Unethical decisions made by school leaders affect students, parents, staff members, the community, and eventually all of society in more than just economic ways. Rebores (2001) contends that unethical actions by individuals can have power that can induce others to be unethical. Also, unethical attitudes can be transmitted to children and other people (staff members) that can lead to the mistreatment of others. In a sense, we inherit the unethical actions of past generations.

"Educational leaders with deadly values can poison creativity, and ultimately the good-making characteristics, of organizations" (Maxcy, 2002, p. 13). Can a single rotten apple really spoil the whole barrel? When the rotten apple is the leader of an organization, then yes is the answer. In Maxcy (2002), David Hemsath called this "toxic leadership." Hemsath's view stems from the absence of caring in today's high stakes testing and accountability environment. Maxcy (2002, p. 13) says "schools have begun embracing theories and models of leadership, which cast principals, teachers, counselors, students, and parents in the role of enforcers and duty sergeants. Education has abandoned the norms of caring and creativity in exchange for the narrower, stifling values of efficiency and effectiveness."

*Difficulties in Making Moral Judgments*

Lyndon Johnson was fond of saying, “It’s not what is right that’s hard for a President. It’s knowing what is right” (Califano, 1991, p.124). As President Johnson must have realized and encountered, there are often complex policies and structures that have hidden implications for moral decision making along with the obvious day-to-day dilemmas (Greenfield, 1991). Many other factors also add to the complexities of a school leader’s job. Beck & Murphy (1997) cite a decline in social structures as reasons. Social structures such as “stable family life, intergenerational influence, etc . . . previously produced a homogeneity of value. The decline of these social structures, in combination with the introduction of a wealth of diversity through mass media exposure, through the growth of cities, etc., has produced a society where there can be little presumption of shared value . . . Consequently, the schooling enterprise operates in a heightened atmosphere of distrust and hostility.” This decline in social structures puts added importance on ethical school leadership. Knowing and choosing the best “right” is paramount in making decisions in today’s diverse society.

School leaders are faced with various ethical dilemmas. They must be able to make the right versus wrong decisions as well as the more complex decisions. These decisions deal with “right” versus “right.” Seseske (2006, p. 3) states that “usually there will be more than one good affected in a given situation and, as such, a person must be able to make a judgment when a number of goods are in conflict.” Beck & Murphy (1997, p. 193) state “leaders live and work in environments of uncertainty where problems require choices between competing goods (or competing bads), where persons

legitimately hold different perspectives and call for different courses of action, and where one is frequently unsure, even after taking action, that she or he did the right thing.” If school administrators have an insufficient sense of right and wrong, they may be dangerous to both themselves and to others (Kimbrough and Nunnery, 1983).

Principled reasoning is a method administrator’s can use to ease the uncertainty in decision making. Strike et al. (1998) encourages school leaders to use ethical principles and virtues when faced with dilemmas. Along with those principles, the leader should use other skills (cognitive, moral, and social) to help in making the judgment. The combination of reasoning and skills should help guide any leader in making ethical decisions.

Administrators are in the “business of creating persons” (Strike et al., 1988, p. 84). Therefore, the importance of school administrators exhibiting ethical behavior at all times cannot be emphasized enough. With such responsibility, the school leader must be proficient in ethical reasoning and in adhering to ethical codes (Klinker, 2003). Not only are administrators responsible for the day-to-day operations of school districts, but also they are to a great extent responsible for the moral climate of the entire school system. The set of norms that govern the behavior of all people in the organization comes from them. The leader sets the moral tone of the organization (Hitt, 1990). Rebores (2001, p. 275) believes “the ethical school administrator is a person who makes decisions with the dignity of each person in mind, who empowers others, who has a sense of solidarity with at-risk students, who promotes equality in all aspects of education, and who is a responsible steward of school district assets.”

## **Research Studies of Moral Reasoning and Judgment**

This section will examine research studies of the ethical decision making of school superintendents. Although there has not been extensive research done in this area, the studies that have been conducted have had both a regional and national scope. Each subsequent researcher added more demographic variables that has expanded the data in understanding the ethical decision making of superintendents.

Roy Dexheimer (1969) conducted the first study of ethical decision making of school superintendents. Dexheimer was interested in how superintendent's responses to moral dilemmas measured up to the American Association of School Administrator's (AASA) Code of Ethics. Dexheimer created a survey instrument consisting of fifteen moral dilemmas and sent it to 443 school superintendents. Each superintendent surveyed was a member of AASA. In the survey, each person was asked to indicate what he had done or would do when facing the same or similar situation. Each dilemma represented a borderline decision involving professional ethics that could be expected to be encountered by a superintendent.

Along with the survey responses, each person was asked to include certain demographic data. This information included the following: age, undergraduate major, years of experience in current district, years of experience in all districts served, position held before superintendency, district size, years attending the AASA National Convention, degree of being religious, graduate course taken that discussed moral aspects of role and decision making, and salary.

Of the 443 surveys mailed to superintendents (all male) in all 50 states, 242 replies were received. Dexheimer recorded 1,725 ethical responses of 3,630 possible. The percentage of ethical responses for his study was only 48.1 percent. Dexheimer's results implied that superintendents frequently made choices that were inconsistent with the AASA's Code of Ethics. At the very least, they indicated that less than half of the survey questions were answered ethically. According to the demographic data, no variable met the level of significance. However, two of the variables did at least make a straight line progression from least to most. Those two variables were the size of the district and the salary paid to the superintendent. The higher both of those rose, the higher the ethical response score rose.

Since Dexheimer's study was the first to research the ethical decision making of superintendents, it immediately had an impact on educational administration (Segars, 1987). A glaring reason for more research into this area of ethical decision making of superintendents is best explained by Dexheimer himself from his original study: "There is a discrepancy between ethical standards that chief school officers publicly acknowledge are binding upon them, and the standards of conduct that many of those same administrators observe in fact" (Dexheimer, 1969, p. 53).

In 1986, Glenda Segars (1987) conducted a study of administrative ethics of public school superintendents in Mississippi and those named to the Executive Educator 100 that year. Her purpose was to determine the degree to which the behavior of certain groups of public school superintendents conformed to the AASA's Code of Ethics. She also wanted to compare those results to certain variables and to Dexheimer's results.



Segars developed a survey from Dexheimer's original survey. Again, situations that deliberately fell within the grey area according to the AASA's Code of Ethics were used. The survey required each participant to answer on the basis of actual experience or by what the person might have done if faced with a similar situation. She sent surveys to 154 Mississippi superintendents and 84 superintendents that were named to the *Executive Educator* 100 for 1986. Segars received 168 useable responses of the total 238 sent.

Segars found that for the most part the superintendents surveyed conformed to the AASA's Code of Ethics. Not only did she find no major discrepancies between their respective ethical behavior patterns, she also found no practical differences in the behavior patterns of large or small district superintendents or superintendents named to the *Executive Educator* 100. One notable finding of Segars study was the difference in the mean scores of her participants as compared to Dexheimer's participants. The mean score of correct responses in Segar's study was 11.26. In Dexheimer's study, the mean score of correct responses was only 7.1. Finally, Dexheimer's conclusion that superintendents who were successful, highly paid, and administered large districts behaved more ethically was not found to be valid in Segar's study.

William Fenstermaker (1994) also conducted a study of ethical decision making of school superintendents. The principal question he wanted answered was whether or not superintendents of that day selected ethical choices more consistently than superintendents of 25 years ago. Fenstermaker sought to update the previous research conducted by Dexheimer. Using an updated version of Dexheimer's survey instrument

(several questions were eliminated and the choices for one question were revised), he sought responses from 420 randomly selected superintendents from the AASA membership roll. Fenstermaker received 242, or 60.6 percent, replies of the survey. The demographic data that Fenstermaker collected from the participants was the following: district size, years of experience with current district, years of experience in education regardless of position, salary, and gender.

Fenstermaker's research of ethical decisions of superintendents showed that not much had changed since Dexheimer's research in 1968. Instead of Dexheimer's 47.3 percent, Fenstermaker found a 48.1 percent nationwide ethical score. This is very little improvement in a twenty-five year period. Unlike Dexheimer, Fenstermaker (1994, p. 17) found that the "majority of non-ethical replies came from actual experience" instead of respondents answering hypothetically. This result means that the day-to-day decisions associated with an administrative position are for the most part unethical. Fenstermaker (1994, p. 17) concluded that this "showed either a severe confusion about ethical standards or a disturbing disregard of them." He further mentions it is probably a combination of both. If this statement is true, then current educational problems are only minor compared to what the future could hold. Following your instincts, the old way of making decisions, may not always be the best solution in today's complex society as Fenstermaker's study indicates.

According to the ethical responses and the demographic data, Fenstermaker also found that no variable met the significance level. He concluded however, that Dexheimer's results held true on two of the variables – size of district and salary of

superintendent. He did note one surprising finding in the years in current position as superintendent. The study showed a linear decline in ethical responses as each step of experience moved higher (with the exception only in the 25 to 32 year range).

Karen Walker (1999) completed a dissertation that also examined ethics and the decision making of school superintendents. Walker wanted to determine if California superintendents chose ethical responses consistent with the Statement of Ethics adopted by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). She also used demographic information similar to the previous studies. Walker sent the Superintendents' Decision Making Questionnaire (SDMQ) to 269 superintendents in California. She received 172 for a return rate of almost 64 percent.

Walker found that the responses of California superintendents were consistent with the ACSA's Statement of Ethics. She also found that there were no significant differences among the subgroups of the demographic data used. Walker (1999, p. iv) concluded that "California school superintendents make ethical decisions the vast majority of the time. Most school superintendents make decisions that he or she believes to be 'right,' even when it is difficult."

Heath Burns (2001) completed a research study of ethical decision making of superintendents in 2001. Burns examined the relationship between ethical decision making practices and public school superintendents in Texas. As in the past studies, the purpose was to determine the degree to which the behavior of superintendents conformed to the AASA's Code of Ethics. Burns also compared the results with the following demographic variables: district accountability rating, gender, rating, salary,

years of experience, degree attainment, ethics course, participation, district size, undergraduate major, and graduate major.

Burns continued the use of Segar's (1987) Superintendent's Decision Making Questionnaire (SDMQ), which was modified from the original instrument developed by Dexheimer. He sent the surveys to all public school superintendents in Texas. Of the 1,041 sent, Burns had 434 completed surveys returned. He had a 41.6 percent return rate. Overall, the mean score of correct responses in Burn's study was 10.18. The mean score of correct responses in Segar's study was 11.26 while in Dexheimer's study, the mean score of correct responses was only 7.1. The variables that had not been a part of a previous research study produced interesting results. According the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) accountability rating, the higher the rating the more correct responses were given. Also, the ethical responses were greater in those superintendents who had taken an ethics course than those who had not. Similar to the TEA rating, the degree held by a superintendent was found to be a factor in ethical responses. The higher level of degree attained, the higher the number of correct responses. The last variable that had previously been untested was the ethical responses of superintendents with education and non-education degrees. Non-education degreed superintendents were found to give slightly more correct responses than education degreed superintendents.

### **Professional Codes of Ethics**

The educational system has slowly evolved into a multi-faceted profession. Maxcy (2002, pp. 5-6) states that "as administrators and teachers we have taken upon ourselves the trappings of a professional life. We have degrees from colleges and

universities signifying that we are prepared to practice a set of educational skills . . . Diplomas, certificates, licenses, and credentials highlight our commitment to the standards of a profession. Often codes of conduct or standards of practice are set out as models of good practice. These standards of conduct are moral and ethical in nature (although many are based on legal principles as well).” He infers that these standards guide how educators (especially school leaders) deal with students, parents and other school staff members.

“Every profession has had to fill the breach between what is morally right and what simply satisfies the letter of the law.” (Knezevich, 1970, p. 17). The instrument that organizations have created to guide behavior is a code of ethics. “A code of ethics is a statement of intent, a vow” (Burns, 2001, p. 24). Goens (1996, p. 13) believes that “ethics are standards for judgment in the pursuit of appropriate practice” and that they are the cornerstones of any profession. Goens (1996, p. 13) also states “they provide nonbureaucratic structure that guides professional conduct and decisions. A code of ethics is an invisible force that can be more potent than traditional power and controls.” MacMillan (1993, p. 196) adds that “by establishing and living by a sanctioned code of ethics, members of a profession protect themselves and their professional realm of autonomy by assuring the public that all members must live up to the profession’s ideals . . . the code itself stands to warrant to the public and to other professionals that the ideals and standards are taken seriously in a formal way.”

According to Hitt (1990), there are certain characteristics that make up a quality code of ethics. First, the code must be grounded in a philosophy of ethics. Second, it

should include a generic code for all employees and then a focused code for each functional area. Third, the code should respond to the concerns of various stakeholders. Fourth, it should be written in everyday language. Finally, the code should be positive in tone. A code of ethics adhering to these guidelines should be sufficient for almost any organization.

Professional behavior or professionalism must be guided by the recognized ethical principles of practitioners. Many people may only consider personal values when making decisions. However, the school leader “must formulate and examine their own professional code of ethics in light of individual codes of ethics, as well as, standards set by the profession and then . . . place students at the center of ethical decision making” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 23). Beyer (2004, p. 54) states “within an educational organization, ethical professionalism is exemplified by promoting success for all students, acting with integrity and fairness, following professional codes of ethics, and developing and following ethical practices.” One of the important parts of Beyer’s statement is the “following professional codes of ethics.” It does not matter how well written or applicable a code of ethics is unless it is actually followed. Administrators must actively know and live by the accepted code of ethics governing his or her role.

A professional code of ethics is not designed to be the complete standard of morality. (Kimbrough, 1985). “There is no possible way to program ethical behavior for all situations through written codes of ethics or books no matter how voluminous they may be. Consequently, the educational administrator must, to some extent, be his or her own moral philosopher.” (Kimbrough & Nunnery, 1983, pp. 398-399).

Kimbrough & Nunnery (1988, p. 413) go on to say that “as helpful as a code of ethics is in assisting an individual in understanding the expected behavior of a profession, the statutes and codes will never substitute for a personal commitment to a moral philosophy.”

Marshall (1992, p. 382) contends “transformative leaders . . . bring to the surface our recognition that values are part of organizations and that leadership is value-laden.” The influence of one’s personal values in the decision-making process is inescapable. Goens (1996) believes the ethical code to which each person conforms, internalizes and takes for his or her own, is a significant factor in ethical decision making. Strike et al. (1998) argues that professions may influence a person’s moral conduct by codes of ethics. However, the virtues that the person possesses is the major determinant in ethical competence.

As many have concluded in the previous statements, a written code of ethics does not make individual professionals ethical or guarantee ethical behavior. However, it can serve as a guide in helping school leaders decide what is ethical when dealing with a situation. For a code of ethics to be worthwhile to an individual, that person must make a personal commitment to, and understanding of, the profession’s ideals as exemplified in the standards of practice (MacMillan, 1993).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) established a Code of Ethics in 1962. This code of ethics supported the integrity and dignity of professional educators, the value of public education, the centrality of student welfare, and the importance of educational opportunity (Rebore, 2001). AASA revised their Code of

Ethics in 1976 and 1981. The later editions included ten statements detailing appropriate practices and a preamble. Although much of the wording had changed over the years, the main intent of the document has held constant. The preamble to the 1962 Code of Ethics gives a great sense of the purpose for any code:

Every member of a profession carries a responsibility to act in a manner becoming of a professional person. This implies that each school administrator has an inescapable obligation to abide by the ethical standards of his profession. The behavior of each is the concern of all. The conduct of any administrator influences the attitude of the public toward the profession and education in general.  
(AASA, 1966, p. 16).

In 1981, AASA replaced the Code of Ethics with the Statement of Ethics for School Administrators. This Statement was adopted by the organization after reviewing the original Code. The Statement of Ethics that was adopted follows:

#### Statement of Ethics of the American Association of School Administrators

An educational administrator's professional behavior must conform to an ethical code. The code must be idealistic and at the same time practical so that it can apply reasonably to all educational administrators. The administrator acknowledges that the schools belong to the public they serve for the purpose of providing educational opportunities to all. However, the administrator assumes responsibility for providing professional leadership in the school and community. This responsibility requires the administrator to maintain standards of exemplary professional conduct. It must be recognized that the administrator's actions will be viewed and appraised by the community, professional associates, and students. To these ends, the administrator subscribes to the following statements of standards.

The educational administrator:

1. Makes the well-being of students the fundamental value in all decision making and actions.
2. Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity.
3. Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.



4. Obeys local, state, and national laws and does not knowingly join or support organizations that advocate, directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government.
  5. Implements the governing board of education's policies and administrative rules and regulations.
  6. Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals.
  7. Avoids using positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic, or other influence.
  8. Accepts academic degrees or professional certification only from duly 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 or release.
- (AASA's statement, 1981).

AASA has provided the guidelines of expected behavior of all school administrators. Hitt (1990) believes this to be an extremely important step in setting an ethical tone for any organization. Srivastva & Cooperrider (1988, p. 18) state that an organization's "active and explicit position on the importance of the moral dimension can best be presented in the form of a written code of ethics."

A professional code of ethics is an essential component in creating an ethical environment within an organization. The code must be easily understood and practical to follow. In order for the code to be effective, it must be a very real part of the day-to-day activities in the organization. In the school setting, administrators must let the code guide their daily decisions from the significant to the mundane. The code becomes another part of the decision making process to make consistent moral judgments.

### **Summary**

This review of literature presented research and theory concerning moral judgment and behavior. The moral development of an individual directly affects the

moral judgment and behavior of that individual. Although there are other components involved in understanding the process of making a moral judgment, this study concentrates on the actual moral judgment from Component 2 of Rest's Four Component Model. The importance of sound moral judgment among the leaders of schools cannot be emphasized enough. The many references of how influential a leader's decisions and behaviors are on an entire organization is staggering. School leaders' moral decisions and behaviors are a major component to the success of a student, teacher, school and even community.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study that includes research method, population and sample, null hypotheses, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which public school superintendents in Texas make moral judgments. Specific variables were also compared with the superintendents' moral judgment scores. The following variables were examined: size of the district, years of experience as superintendent, salary, gender, educational level, whether or not ethics coursework or professional development was previously taken, number of years as superintendent in current district, number of districts in which he or she has served as superintendent, age of superintendent, ethnicity of superintendent, and the type of district (rural, suburban, urban).

#### **Research Method**

Survey research methodology was used for gathering and reporting data in this study. The data collection tools in survey research were used to obtain standardized information from subjects (Gall et al., 1996). The purpose of this study was to seek accurate information from superintendents relating to their moral judgments when confronting an ethical dilemma and the how the results of their decisions compared against certain variables.

## **Population and Sample**

The population selected for this study was superintendents of the 1,025 public independent school districts in Texas as indicated by information from the data files maintained by the Texas Education Agency. Interim superintendents, deputy superintendents, assistant superintendents, associate superintendents, or area superintendents were not included within this study.

The researcher used a stratified random sample of the population based on specific subgroups. Stratified sampling allows the researcher to select a sample in such a way that identified subgroups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population (Gay 1992). This study used a stratified sample of all superintendents based on the size of the superintendent's school district.

A database of all public school superintendents in the state of Texas was created using the Texas School Directory 2006-07 (TEA, 2007). All members of the population were categorized as representing a small, medium, or large-size district. For this study a small-size district was defined as having a population of less than 1,600 students. A medium-size district had a population between 1,600 and 9,999 students. A large-size district had a population of 10,000 or more students. The subgroups were organized by using school district enrollment categories from the Texas Association of School Boards' Salaries and Benefits in Texas Public Schools: Superintendent Report 2007-08 (TASB, 2007). TASB organized each district into one of nine enrollment groups. For this study, the smallest three groups were assigned the small district subgroup, the middle three groups were assigned the medium district subgroup, and the largest three

groups were assigned the large district subgroup. In order to compare the performance of the three subgroups, a minimum sample size of fifty superintendents from each subgroup was used. Using a table of random numbers, a sample was taken from each subgroup. The total sample size of superintendents was 350. Table 3.1 represents the population and sample size from the respective subgroups:

**Table 3.1 Study Sample Size and Percentages**

	Subgroup Size	Sample Size	Percent of Subgroup
Small (1,599 or less)	659	200	30.3%
Medium (1,600 – 9,999)	275	100	36.3%
Large (10,000 or more)	91	50	54.9%
Total	1,025	350	100%

### **Null Hypotheses**

For research purposes, null hypotheses were designed to assist the researcher in specifically analyzing the similarities and differences posed in the research questions.

1. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas.
2. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the size of the superintendent's school district.

3. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the number of years of experience as a superintendent.
4. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the salary of the superintendent.
5. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the gender of the superintendent.
6. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the highest degree attained by the superintendent.
7. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on whether or not the superintendent took college-level coursework or professional development in ethics.
8. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the number of years the individual has been superintendent in his or her current district.
9. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the number of districts the individual has served as superintendent.
10. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the age of the superintendent.

11. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the ethnicity of the superintendent.
12. There is no significant difference in the moral judgments made by superintendents in Texas based on the type of district: rural, suburban, or urban.

### **Instrumentation**

Unlike many of the past researchers (Dexheimer, 1969; Segars, 1987; Fenstermaker, 1994; Walker, 1999; Burns, 2001), the focus of this study was on the results garnered from an instrument that determines the moral judgment scores of individuals. Previous research used a survey instrument to determine an ethical score from questions answered after reading an ethical dilemma. Although unnamed with the first research study, subsequent studies named the instrument, the Superintendent Decision Making Questionnaire (SDMQ). This researcher used the Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2) developed and validated by James Rest and Darcia Narvaez (1998).

The DIT2 is an objective measure of moral judgment. It is a paper and pencil test designed to measure moral judgment based on Kohlberg's moral stages (Kohlberg, 1984). The DIT2 is an updated version of the DIT. Compared to the original DIT, the DIT2 has updated, shorter stories. It also has clearer instructions, retains more subjects through subject reliability checks, and is slightly more powerful on validity criteria (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003). The increased power of the DIT2 over the DIT is due to the new "N2" index and new data quality checks rather than changes in the dilemmas, items, or instructions (Rest et al., 1999).

The DIT2 consists of five hypothetical dilemmas. Respondents read each dilemma and were presented twelve issue statements related to each dilemma. Each issue statement must be rated as to how important the issue is to making a decision about the dilemma. The issue statements are rated using a five-item Likert scale ranging from “great importance” to “no importance.” In addition, the issue statements must be ranked, with the respondent picking the four most important issues to consider when making a decision about the dilemma (Rest, 1986).

Based on the responses given, each respondent receives a “P” and “N2” score. The “P” score represents the proportion of items selected that appeal to Stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg’s moral stages (Kohlberg, 1984). The “P” score is a sum of scores from Stages 5 and 6 converted to a percent. The “P” percent score can range from 0 to 95 and is interpreted as the extent to which a person prefers post-conventional moral thinking (Bebeau, & Thoma, 2003).

The “N2” score incorporates the respondent’s preference for postconventional reasoning and the respondent’s rejection of self-centered reasoning. The “N2” score is correlated strongly with the P score. A higher “P” score and a higher “N2” score represent a more sophisticated style of moral reasoning. However, the “N2” score generally outperforms the “P” score on the six criteria for construct validity and is “the better index of moral judgment” (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003, p. 41).

Data have been collected on tens of thousands of respondents from around the world. The DIT and now the DIT2 have been used to measure moral judgment for almost 30 years. The validity strategy for the DIT and DIT2 has made it one of the best-



validated measures in psychology. The following outlines several of the validation criteria and research findings: 1) The DIT differentiates groups with different levels of expertise, 2) Longitudinal studies show significant upward gains in DIT scores, 3) The data show evidence of a developmental hierarchy, 4) DIT scores are sensitive to interventions designed to improve moral judgment, 5) DIT data significantly predict real-life moral behavior, and 6) DIT scores significantly predict political choices and attitudes (Narvaez, 2005). In studies so far, the DIT2 does not sacrifice reliability or validity (Bebeau, & Thoma, 2003).

Reported test-retest reliabilities on the six-story version of the DIT have been in the high .70s or .80s and Cronbach's alpha index of internal consistency has been reported to be in the high 70s. The DIT2 had similar reliability results when tested side-by-side with the DIT. The correlation of DIT with DIT2 is .79, nearly the test-retest reliability of the DIT. The value for Cronbach's alpha is .77 for the "P" score (Bebeau, & Thoma, 2003).

In addition to the DIT2, a demographic survey was used. The demographic survey included questions seeking the following data: size of the district, years of experience as superintendent, salary, gender, ethnicity, educational level, whether or not college-level coursework or professional development in ethics had been taken, number of years as superintendent in current district, number of districts in which he or she has served as superintendent, and age of superintendent, and classification of the district as rural, suburban, or urban.

### **Data Collection**

The administration of the survey was performed in the fall of 2007. The researcher obtained the addresses of all public school superintendents in Texas. Prior to mailing out the instrument, all surveys were coded and numbered for identification so that follow-up mailings would be possible to attain the desired return rate.

Data for the study was collected through the U.S. mail. The DIT2 and demographic surveys were mailed on October 31, 2007. Each respondent received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and assuring anonymity in reporting the responses, a copy of the survey instrument with instructions, and a demographic survey. Respondents were asked to return answer sheets and demographic information in an enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Follow-up emails were sent and phone calls were made to respondents approximately 21 days after the initial mailing. A second mailing occurred for respondents who did not return the instrument. A return rate goal of 65% was established before conducting the data analysis (Kerlinger, & Lee, 2000).

### **Data Analysis**

When the surveys were returned, they were opened and checked for completeness. The DIT2 and the demographic surveys were separated. All DIT2 answer sheets were sent to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Minnesota for analysis. The results from the Center included “N2” index scores to be used to produce demographic profiles of the population and to test differences of means for independent samples. Once the analysis was received from the Center for the Study of Ethical Development, t-tests and an analysis of variance

(ANOVA) were used to determine whether significant differences existed between the mean “N2” index scores of the independent groups detailed in each hypothesis.

Analysis and interpretation of the data followed the principles prescribed in Educational Research: An Introduction, by Gall et al. (1996). This data was analyzed using a statistical program entitled Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2007). The level of significance for all tests was set at .05. If statistically significant differences were found, then post hoc tests were to be used to determine where the differences lie.

### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The scope of this study included a stratified random sample of public school superintendents within Texas.
2. This study was limited to the impact of ethics on the decision-making process in Texas public schools.
3. The findings of this study are generalizable only to public schools that respond in this study, though it may have implications for all schools.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The purpose of this study was to examine the moral judgment of public school superintendents when faced with moral dilemmas. The study collected information relative to moral judgment. Results of this study are presented in four sections: 1) descriptive data; 2) statistical analyses; 3) presentation and analysis of findings related to each research question; and 4) summary.

#### **Descriptive Data**

The population of this study consisted of a stratified random sample of the 1,025 public school superintendents in Texas. Specifically, surveys were sent to superintendents at 200 small sized school districts, 100 medium sized school districts, and 50 large sized school districts.

Superintendents from 104 of the surveyed districts responded for a response rate of 30%. Of the 104, 58 were from small sized districts, 30 were from medium sized districts and 16 were from large sized districts. Table 4.1 shows the breakdown of the surveys.

**Table 4.1 Percentage of Returned Surveys by District Size**

	Mailed	Returned	Percent
Small (1,599 or less)	200	58	29
Medium (1,600 – 9,999)	100	30	30
Large (10,000 or more)	50	16	32
Total	350	104	30

Of the 104 scored DIT2 surveys, ninety-nine yielded “N2” scores (moral judgment scores) that could be used in the study. Five respondents were not assigned a “N2” score by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development. Although the five respondents were assigned a “P” score (moral judgment score from the original Defining Issues Test-DIT), their scores were not considered in any analysis. Only those respondents who were assigned a “N2” score were analyzed. Therefore the number used in all analyses was 99.

**Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Stratified Random Sample of Public School Superintendents in Texas**

	N	M	SD	Subgroup %
Overall				
All Respondents	99	29.90	13.65	100
District Size				
1,599 or less	56	29.12	11.08	57
1,600 – 9,999	29	29.81	15.39	29
10,000 or more	14	33.19	19.00	14
Years as Superintendent				
0 – 2	21	25.93	12.79	21
3 - 5	27	30.01	14.08	28
6 – 10	23	30.71	10.20	23
11 – 15	15	30.19	14.06	15
16 – 20	8	40.06	21.36	8
21 or more	5	21.36	8.53	5
Salary				
\$50, 000 - \$74,999	10	21.30	11.17	10
\$75,000 - \$99,999	46	30.07	11.02	47
\$100,000 - \$149,999	23	29.61	15.19	23
\$150,000 - \$199,999	13	37.35	15.21	13
\$200,000 or more	7	28.08	19.72	7
Gender				
Male	86	29.49	13.61	87
Female	13	32.59	14.18	13
Highest Degree				
Masters	57	29.11	13.00	58
Doctorate	42	30.97	14.58	42
Course/PD in Ethics				
Yes	77	29.77	14.67	78
No	22	30.34	9.51	22

**Table 4.2 Continued**

	N	M	SD	Subgroup %
<b>Years as Superintendent in Current District</b>				
0 -2	35	27.23	13.41	35
3 - 5	35	31.93	15.37	35
6 - 10	18	33.21	10.20	19
11 – 15	9	28.00	8.55	9
16 – 20	2	19.51	30.32	2
<b>Number of Districts Served as Superintendent</b>				
1	61	28.32	12.83	62
2	25	33.51	16.24	25
3	5	32.30	14.23	5
4	3	26.39	14.27	3
5	3	32.46	10.87	3
6 or more	2	28.02	4.85	2
<b>Age</b>				
30 – 39	10	24.15	9.50	10
40 – 49	35	31.00	12.68	35
50 – 59	40	32.18	15.07	41
60 – 69	14	24.71	12.93	14
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
African American	2	31.03	8.45	2
Hispanic	8	21.48	15.05	8
White	89	30.62	13.48	90
<b>Type of District</b>				
Rural	75	29.42	13.05	76
Suburban	17	31.10	13.08	17
Urban	7	32.03	21.77	7

Table 4.2 shows the frequencies, “N2” means, standard deviations, and subgroup percentages of all respondents according to the demographic variables surveyed. This descriptive data was used in the analyses discussed later in this chapter. Examining all

demographic variables, the most frequent responses received came from superintendents who were white males with a mean age of 51 who lead rural school districts that had under 1,600 students.

The most frequent responses from the other categories included superintendents who had a salary range of \$75,000 to \$99,999 annually (N=46). The \$100,000 to \$149,999 was the next highest salary range reported (N=23). Approximately seventy percent of all superintendents in this study fell within these two ranges. Twenty percent of the remaining respondents make above these ranges and the other ten percent make less.

The majority (N=57) of superintendents had a masters or other professional degree compared to those with a doctoral degree (N=42). The number from that group who had either taken college-level coursework or professional development in ethics was an overwhelming 77.

Years of service and other variables that concerned the superintendents' professional service provided a varied array of data. Of all respondents, 71 had been a superintendent 10 or less years. The 3 to 5 year range produced the highest frequency (N=27). The number of years the superintendents had served in their current district was less than that. 70 of the 99 respondents had served in their current district for 5 or less years. The number who had served 0 to 2 years and 3 to 5 years was equal (N=35 each). Respondents also reported that most had only served in 1 or 2 districts throughout their career as superintendent (N=86).



The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) conducts an annual salary study of superintendents throughout the state. The data from the most recent Salaries and Benefits in Texas Public Schools: Superintendent Report (TASB, 2007) conducted in the 2007-08 school year can be compared with some demographic data from this study. Similarities were found in variables that dealt with district size, average salary, and the number of districts served as the superintendent. TASB reported that of the 829 respondents, 59% (N=489) were in districts with less than 1,600 students. Salaries were reported from 792 school districts. Of the reporting districts' superintendents, approximately half made a salary between \$70,000 and \$99,999. If the salary limit is extended up to \$144,999, an additional 29% (a total of 79%) of superintendents are included. Of the number of reporting districts (N=791), 83% (N=659) had been a superintendent in no more than 2 districts throughout their career. The results of this study showed that 62% of respondents had been the superintendent of only one district.

### **Statistical Analyses**

The Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT2) was used to measure levels of moral judgment of the respondents. The DIT2 yielded a "N2" (moral judgment) score for each respondent. The score represents the proportion of items selected by the respondent that appeal to Stage 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development. The "N2" score is interpreted as the extent to which a person prefers post-conventional moral thinking (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003).

The DIT2 asks respondents to read five narratives about social problems. After each narrative, a list of questions must be answered. The questions represent different

ways of judging what is important in making a decision about the social problem. The respondent must then rate and rank each question in terms of how important each one seems to the respondent. The five different narratives from the DIT2 deal with stealing food during a famine for family, a reporter deciding to possibly withhold damaging information about a political candidate, a school board chairman deciding to have or not have an open meeting for the public on a controversial issue, a doctor being asked to give a dangerous increase in medicine by a cancer patient, and whether or not illegal demonstrations held by college students were justified.

A demographic survey provided information that was used to determine if differences existed between superintendents' moral judgment scores and certain variables. Each respondent was asked to report the following as it applied to him or her: size of the district, years of experience as superintendent, salary, gender, educational level, whether or not ethics college-level coursework or professional development was previously taken, number of years as superintendent in current district, number of districts served as superintendent, age, ethnicity, and the type of district (rural, suburban, urban).

The completed DIT2 surveys were sent to the University of Minnesota's Center for the Study of Ethical Development to be scored. The data received from the University of Minnesota provided the moral judgment score that was used in all further analyses. The results provided do not break down how respondents scored for each narrative. Only an overall "N2" score was received for each respondent. Therefore, analysis for each narrative was not possible.

After determining the mean “N2” score of all respondents without consideration to demographic variables, the researcher then ran statistical analyses to determine any significant differences between the subgroups of variables. The variables consisting of more than two subgroups were measured with a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The variables relating to gender, ethics coursework or professional development, and the highest degree attained were analyzed using a two-tailed t-test since these variables contained only two subgroups. Finally, a linear stepwise regression was also performed to determine if any independent variables significantly contributed to the sample’s “N2” scores.

All data were entered and manipulated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2007) software. An alpha level of .05 was used as the level of significance.

### **Research Questions**

In the following section, the researcher addressed each of the twelve research questions outlined in Chapter I. A detailed discussion of the findings is located in Chapter V.

The first research question examined the moral judgment scores of all respondents to the DIT2 without consideration of any demographic variables. This question was examined by observing the mean of all respondents and associated data. The mean of all superintendents was 29.90 with a standard deviation of 13.65. The range of scores was from a minimum of -1.93 to a maximum of 68.45. “In general, the DIT scores of Junior High students average in the 20s, Senior High students average in

the 30s, College students in the 40s, Students Graduating from Professional School Programs in the 50s, and Moral Philosophy/Political Science Doctoral students in the 60s” (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003, p. 8). According to the results of this study, the superintendents’ moral development level was about the same as high school students from previous research.

The second research question examined whether or not a statistically significant difference existed among the “N2” scores of superintendents based on the size of the superintendent’s school district. The districts were labeled small, medium, or large based on their enrollment. Small districts had enrollments of less than 1,600 students. Medium districts enrollment ranged from 1,600 to 9,999 students. Large districts had enrollments of 10,000 or more students. The results of this question can be seen in Table 4.3. The researcher used an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyze this research question. The computation of the ANOVA yielded an F-value of .493 (see Table 4.3). This value is well below the critical value of 3.09 needed for statistical significance at the .05 level. Thus a relationship between district size and moral judgment does not exist. The means of the scores did increase as the districts’ size increased.

**Table 4.3 Analysis of Variance Data for Comparisons Between Moral Judgment Scores and Demographic Variables**

	df	SS	MS	F
<b>District Size</b>				
Between Groups	2	96185.72	92.86	.493 (NS)
Within Groups	96	18075.37	188.29	
<b>Years as Superintendent</b>				
Between Groups	5	1292.38	258.48	1.417 (NS)
Within Groups	93	16968.71	182.46	
<b>Salary</b>				
Between Groups	4	1488.07	372.02	2.085 (NS)
Within Groups	94	16773.08	178.44	
<b>Years as Superintendent in Current District</b>				
Between Groups	4	839.22	209.80	1.132 (NS)
Within Groups	94	17421.87	185.34	
<b>Number of Districts Served as Superintendent</b>				
Between Groups	5	569.49	113.90	.599 (NS)
Within Groups	93	17691.59	190.23	
<b>Age</b>				
Between Groups	3	957.82	319.27	1.753 (NS)
Within Groups	95	17303.27	182.14	
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Between Groups	2	616.68	308.34	1.678 (NS)
Within Groups	96	17644.41	183.80	
<b>Type of District</b>				
Between Groups	2	73.19	36.59	.193 (NS)
Within Groups	96	18187.89	189.46	

The third research question examined whether or not a statistically significant difference existed among the “N2” scores of the superintendents based on the number of

years of experience as a superintendent. The researcher analyzed this research question with an ANOVA. The ANOVA provided an F-value of 1.417. With 5 and 93 degrees of freedom, the critical value of 2.31 was not met at the .05 level. Significance was not met for this variable.

The highest mean for this question was for those superintendents who had between 16 and 20 years of experience. However, this subgroup consisted of only 8 respondents. With the exception of the 20 or more subgroup, the mean for this question also increased as level of experience increased.

The fourth research question examined whether or not a statistically significant difference existed among superintendents based on the superintendents' salary level. The results of an ANOVA yielded an F-value of 2.085 which was not significant at the .05 level. The critical value for F with 4 and 94 degrees of freedom was 2.47. Of all variables tested, salary level came the closest to statistical significance.

Based on the data in Table 4.2, the mean of superintendents making a salary between \$150,000 and \$199,999 was approximately 8 points above the overall mean. Superintendents in the two subgroups with salaries between \$75,000 and \$149,000 were bunched closely around the overall mean. The lowest salary range (\$50,000 - \$74,999) yielded the lowest mean (21.30).

**Table 4.4 Two-tailed t-Test of Two Population Demographic Variables**

	N	M	df	t
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	86	29.49	97	.761 (NS)
Female	13	32.59		
<b>Highest Degree</b>				
Masters	57	29.11	97	.667 (NS)
Doctorate	42	30.97		
<b>Ethics Coursework/PD</b>				
Yes	77	29.77	97	.174 (NS)
No	22	30.34		

The fifth research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents based on gender. The researcher analyzed this question using a two-tailed t-test. The computation of the t-test yielded a t-value of .761. Table 4.4 demonstrates the results of the t-test. This t-value with degree of freedom of 97 was not significant at the .05 level. The critical value that needed to be reached for significance was 1.985. Table 4.2 shows that the mean scores of females were higher than the mean scores of males.

The sixth research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents based on their highest degree attained. Once again, a two-tailed t-test was used to test for differences. The t-test yielded a t-value of .667 (Table 4.4). With the same degree of freedom as gender, significance was not reached. No relationship existed between highest degree attained and moral judgment.

Whether the superintendent had attained a doctorate or a master's degree, their means were similar to the overall mean. Both the highest and lowest individual "N2" score was found among the superintendents who had attained a doctorate.

The seventh research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents who did or did not take college-level coursework or professional development in ethics. The researcher analyzed this research question using a two-tailed t-test. The computation of the t-test yielded a t-value of .174. With degree of freedom 97, the t-value was not significant at the .05 level. Whether or not a superintendent had taken an ethics course or professional development showed no significant difference (Table 4.4). As shown in Table 4.2, the respondents who did not have college-level coursework or professional development in ethics had a higher mean than those who did.

The eighth research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents based on how long they have been the educational leader in their current district. Using an ANOVA, the critical value of 2.47 needed for significance was not reached. The F-value was 1.132.

The data in Table 4.2 does not show any trend according to years as superintendent in the current district. The highest mean was found within the subgroup of superintendents in their current district for 6 to 10 years. Although there were only 2 respondents, the 16 to 20 year subgroup yielded the lowest mean.

The ninth research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents based on the number of districts they had



served as superintendent. The ANOVA produced an F-value of .599. At the .05 level, the critical value of 2.31 was not attained. Table 4.2 shows that the highest mean came from the superintendents who had led two districts.

The tenth research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents according to the respondents' ages and moral judgment scores. With the many age subgroups to be tested, an ANOVA was used. The computation of the ANOVA yielded an F-value of 1.753. No significant difference was shown between age groups. However, the subgroup that had the most respondents (50 – 59) also had the highest mean. The lowest mean was found in the youngest subgroup (30 – 39).

The eleventh research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents of different ethnicity. Only superintendents from three ethnic groups responded to this survey. The responses were analyzed with an ANOVA. The ANOVA yielded an F-value of 1.678. Since the critical value of 3.09 was not reached, no significant differences were established. The majority of respondents came from one ethnic subgroup (White N=89).

The twelfth and final research question examined whether a statistically significant difference existed between superintendents from differing types of districts. Respondents from rural, suburban, and urban districts completed the survey. With degrees of freedom of 2 and 96, the critical value of 3.09 had to be met for significance. The ANOVA yielded an F-value of .193. No significant differences were shown between the different district types. Although subgroup sizes were not equal among

respondents, an increase in the mean of scores was evidenced from rural to suburban and from suburban to urban.

After no significant differences were found between the variables and moral judgment scores, post hoc analyses were not required. However, possible independent relationships to the “N2” scores were examined using linear regression. The stepwise linear regression analyzed all variables to determine if they contributed to the moral judgment score.

**Table 4.5 Linear Regression Model Summary Between Moral Judgment Scores and Demographic Variables**

Models 1 - 4	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
16 – 20 Years as Superintendent	.222	.049	.039
16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District	.333	.111	.092
16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District; \$50, 000 - \$74,999 Salary	.384	.147	.121
16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District; \$50, 000 - \$74,999 Salary; Hispanic	.427	.182	.148

The stepwise regression model (Table 4.5) indicates the different levels of variance in “N2” scores that can be predicted from the listed variables. The largest amount of variance accounted for was found in Model 4. Model 4 shows that 14.8% of

the variance of “N2” scores can be predicted from the variables 16-20 Years as a Superintendent, 16-20 Years as Superintendent in Current District, \$50,000-\$74,999 Salary level, and Hispanic. This is only a measure of the strength of association and does not reflect the extent to which any particular independent variable is associated with “N2” scores.

**Table 4.6 Analysis of Variance Data from Linear Regression**

Models 1 - 4	df	SS	MS	F
<b>16 – 20 Years as Superintendent</b>				
Regression	1	899.57	899.57	5.026 (S)
Residual	97	17361.51	178.99	
<b>16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District</b>				
Regression	2	2025.76	1012.88	5.989 (S)
Residual	96	16235.33	169.12	
<b>16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District; \$50, 000 - \$74,999 Salary</b>				
Regression	3	2692.66	897.55	5.477 (S)
Residual	95	15568.43	163.88	
<b>16 – 20 Years as Superintendent; 16 – 20 Years in Current District; \$50, 000 - \$74,999 Salary; Hispanic</b>				
Regression	4	3329.91	832.48	5.241 (S)
Residual	94	14931.18	158.84	

The ANOVA performed in the regression run yielded significant F-values for all four models at the .05 level. The models showed levels of significance at .027 for model 1, .004 for model 2, .002 for model 3, and .001 for model 4. The independent variables of 16-20 Years as a Superintendent, 16-20 Years as Superintendent in Current District, \$50,000-\$74,999 Salary level, and Hispanic reliably predict the “N2” scores of respondents in this study (Table 4.6). Once again, this overall significance does not address the ability of any particular independent variable to predict “N2” scores.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the analysis of data received from 104 (99 analyzed) superintendents in Texas public schools. This study was conducted to examine the level of moral judgment of the superintendents based on Kohlberg’s Six Stages of Moral Judgment. An examination of possible differences between the superintendents’ moral judgment and certain demographic data was also conducted.

Two instruments were used to collect data. The DIT2 was used to measure moral judgment levels. A demographic survey was used to collect demographic data. Both instruments were sent to participants via U. S. mail. A stamped, addressed envelope was provided for respondents to return the surveys.

After computing the moral judgment mean of all respondents, several statistical measures were used to analyze possible differences in the demographic categories. Differences in gender, college-level coursework or professional development in ethics taken, and highest degree attained were analyzed using a t-test for independent samples. Differences in school district size, number of years as superintendent, salary, number of

years in current district, number of districts served, age, ethnicity, and type of district were analyzed using a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). After no significant differences were found from the t-test and ANOVA results, a linear stepwise regression was run to determine if any variables could reliably predict the moral judgment scores over other variables. The stepwise regression did show that four of the independent variables subgroups contributed to the moral judgment scores.

Chapter V will summarize these findings. It will also provide limitations, conclusions, and ideas for future research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study focused on the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of moral judgment of Texas superintendents and if differences existed between certain demographic variables relating to these superintendents. This chapter will present a brief summary of findings, limitations of this study, conclusions drawn from the data analysis, recommendations for the field, and recommendations for future research regarding the moral judgment of educational leaders.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The importance of the judgments made by leaders from all areas of society cannot be overemphasized. Not only do their judgments establish the direction of an organization but also they establish the moral compass of that organization. The educational leader not only must be reminded that the organization he or she leads affects not only district staff but also and most importantly the students of that district. Although previous studies have attempted to examine different areas of decision-making and ethics regarding Texas superintendents, few have examined superintendents' moral judgment. The DIT2 used in this study measured the moral judgment level of respondents. Specifically, the data analyzed provided the level of moral judgment of each respondent according to Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development. In Kohlberg's theory, all people throughout the world use six problem-solving strategies.

Stages 5 and 6 were the focus of this study. These stages have an orientation to principles that shape whatever laws and role systems a society might have. The principles determine, regulate, and criticize the laws and role systems of a cooperative society (Rest, 1994). Stages 5 and 6 considers what is morally right by what best furthers the principle.

Previous studies (Dexheimer, 1969; Segars, 1987; Fenstermaker, 1994; Walker, 1999; and, Burns, 2001) had mixed findings when examining the decisions made by superintendents. Some of the studies found the decisions were mostly unethical and some of the studies found their decisions to be mostly ethical. The studies looked at the right and wrong aspect of an individual decision. This study, however, examined the overall judgment of a superintendent when presented with a moral dilemma. Previous research did not use this approach or instrument in their studies.

The results from the data analysis of the DIT2 provided a moral judgment level that was used to determine if differences existed among each variable's subgroups. This moral judgment level also allowed the researcher to make some conclusions regarding the results. As was presented in Chapter IV, Bebeau & Thoma (2003) gave the norms for DIT2 scores by educational level. Scores of junior high students averaged in the 20s, senior high students averaged in the 30s, college students averaged in the 40s, students graduating from professional school programs in the 50s, and moral philosophy/political science doctoral students averaged in the 60s. The researcher can look for both differences between subgroups and where each subgroup level lies regarding the norms.

Twelve research questions were examined to determine the level of moral judgment of respondents and whether statistically significant differences existed between moral judgment and certain demographic variables. The results of all tests yielded no statistically significant differences between variables and the moral judgment scores. The stepwise regression did show that four of the independent variable's subgroups contributed to the moral judgment scores. However, without significant relationships to examine, the comparisons of the results were of the mean scores from the descriptive data.

The overall moral judgment level of all respondents without consideration to demographic variables was 29.90. According to Rest et al. (1999), the moral judgment level comparable to this mean would be that of senior high school students. Comparing this overall mean to those from previous research utilizing the DIT or DIT2, superintendents have a lower mean. Table 5.1 shows the comparable means presented by Wilkins & Coleman (2005) with the addition of the mean from this study.

**Table 5.1 Mean Scores from Various Professions**

Seminarians/philosophers	65.1	Veterinarian students	42.2
Medical students	50.2	Navy enlisted personnel	41.6
Practicing physicians	49.2	Orthopedic surgeons	41.0
Journalists	49.7	Adults in general	40.0
Dental students	47.6	Business professionals	38.1
Nurses	46.3	Accounting undergraduates	34.8
Lawyers	46.0	Accounting auditors	32.5
Graduate students	44.9	Business undergraduates	31.4
Undergraduate students	43.2	High school students	31.0
Pharmacy students	42.8	Superintendents	29.9



Although a statistically significant difference was not found regarding district size, variations in the means were shown. The small districts had the lowest mean, the medium districts had the next highest mean, and the large districts had the highest mean. The maximum individual scores also followed this same pattern. The highest individual scores from small, medium, and large were the following respectively: 49.76, 57.48, 68.45. The superintendents from the larger districts were shown to have scored higher in moral judgment than those at smaller districts. Previous research (Dexheimer, 1969; Fenstermaker, 1994) surmised that superintendents from large districts tended to behave more ethically (at least they gave more correct ethical responses on their instrument).

Experience as a superintendent provided no positive or negative trends in regard to moral judgment means. Most of the subgroups means gathered around the overall mean (3 – 5 years = 30.01; 6 – 10 years = 30.71; 11 – 15 years = 30.19). The lowest subgroup's mean (25.01) was superintendents with 21 or more years experience as superintendent. The number of respondents for this subgroup was also the smallest at 5. The next lowest mean was from the subgroup with the least amount of experience (0 – 2 years). They had a mean of 25.93. The highest moral judgment mean came from superintendents with 16 to 20 years of experience. This subgroup's mean was 40.06. However, the subgroup included only 8 respondents. These results conflict with Fenstermaker's (1994) study. His study found a linear decline in correct ethical responses as each step of experience moved higher. The only exception he found was the range of 25 to 32 years experience.

The highest moral judgment mean (37.35) was found with the superintendents who made an annual salary between \$150,000 and \$199,999. The majority of respondents were in the \$75,000 to \$99,999 range. These superintendents' moral judgment mean was the second highest at 30.07. Dexheimer (1969) and Fenstermaker (1994) both reported a higher number of correct ethical responses from superintendents with higher salaries. This study shows some similarities. However, the respondents from the highest salary level produced the second lowest mean in this study.

The gender of the respondents showed a slight difference in means. The female respondents (32.59) scored higher than male respondents (29.49). Of all respondents, 86 were male and 13 were female. The highest and lowest individual scores came from the male group at -1.93 and 68.45 respectively.

Superintendents who had attained a doctoral degree had a higher moral judgment mean than those who had attained a master's or other professional degrees. Superintendents with a master's degree had a 29.10 mean and those with a doctoral degree had a 30.97 mean. The highest and lowest individual scores came from the doctoral group. Burns (2001) reported more correct ethical scores for respondents with doctorates than those with master's degrees or lower.

The resulting means of superintendents who had and had not taken college-level coursework or professional development in ethics was surprising. The higher mean (30.34) was found with the subgroup of superintendents that had not taken any college-level coursework or professional development in ethics. Those who had a course or professional development in ethics had a 29.77 mean. When measuring moral judgment,

an assumption was made that instruction or coursework in the area of ethics may influence the moral judgment means positively. Although the highest individual score did come from the subgroup who had taken ethics work, the lowest score came from that same subgroup.

The highest scoring subgroup had served in their districts between 6 and 10 years (33.21). There was no pattern of subgroup means for this category. The order of means from highest to lowest after the 6 to 10 subgroup was the following: 3 – 5 years scored 31.93, 11 – 15 scored 28.00, 0 – 2 scored 27.23, and 16 -20 scored 19.51. There were no respondents who had been in their districts for 21 or more years.

The response of superintendents who had served in two districts showed the highest moral judgment mean (33.51). This subgroup also was the second largest group of respondents. The majority (61) of respondents had been in only 1 school district. They had the third lowest mean of all subgroups at 28.32. The lowest mean (26.39) between subgroups was found with superintendents who had served in 4 school districts.

A superintendent's age did not show any statistically significant differences. Superintendents between the ages of 50 to 59 produced the highest mean (32.18) of these subgroups. The lowest mean between subgroups was with superintendents between the ages of 30 and 39. With the exception of the 60 to 69 subgroup, the moral judgment mean increased with the increase in age range.

The number of respondents from each ethnic group was extremely disproportionate. Of the 99 scored respondents, 89 were white, 8 were Hispanic, and 2 were African American. The means for each group are shown in the following: African

American – 31.03, Hispanic – 21.48, and White – 30.63. A larger sample from the smaller groups was needed to make sufficient comparisons.

Similar to the size of a superintendent's district, the type of district a superintendent served showed minor differences in means. Moving from rural to suburban and then suburban to urban, the means of the subgroups increased. The following means represent those of rural, suburban, and urban respectively: 29.42, 31.10, 32.03.

The results of the regression analysis showed that four independent subgroups contributed to the moral judgment scores of superintendents in this study. From these variables, 14.8% of the variance in the moral judgment scores can be predicted. The coefficients produced from the analysis indicated that the effect of three of the variables on the scores was negative and the effect of the other variable was positive. The variables with the negative effect were 16-20 Years as Superintendent in Current District, \$50,000-\$74,999 Salary level, and Hispanic. The only variable with a positive effect on moral judgment scores was 16-20 Years as a Superintendent.

### **Limitations**

The findings from this study may have been affected by several limitations. The limitations of this study were in the number of completed and returned survey instruments, the testing setting, the self-reported demographic survey, and the sample population chosen.

Although a return rate of 30% is sufficient for the overall analysis of superintendents' moral judgment, it did have some effect on the analysis of the

demographic variables. A larger return rate should have produced larger subgroups to give more representative results of the entire group. This limitation could have been caused by several factors. The difficulty of the instrument could be one cause. The instrument's subject matter is complex in nature. Also, since many surveys are completed online today, the respondents having to complete a paper and pencil survey could have been prohibitive. The respondents' knowledge that the survey measured moral judgment could also have prevented some from responding due to personal information being disclosed to the researcher about their choices in dealing with moral issues. The final possible reason for a low return rate is the nature of superintendents' jobs. With the vast responsibilities of their jobs and constant interruptions, they simply may not have had the time or opportunity to complete the survey. The researcher completed two mailouts and followed up with both email and phone calls to help with the return rate.

The second limitation relates to the setting of the respondent when completing the instrument. Most of the past studies using the DIT2 have been in a classroom or clinical setting. The population tested completed the instrument in one sitting without interruptions. The researcher was also available to give more detailed instructions before respondents completed the survey instrument. The superintendents who responded to this study had to set aside time in which to complete the instruments. He or she may have been interrupted and may have had to complete the instruments in more than one sitting.

The third limitation concerns the demographic survey used in the study. Each respondent reported the information collected by the survey. Some of the respondent's responses could have been based on the respondent's views instead of data. The question related to the type of district could be one such question. The respondent may believe his or her district to be suburban while government reports may have the district labeled rural.

The final limitation of this study relates to the sample population chosen. Many of the previous studies either chose an entire superintendent population at the state level or a sample population from across the United States. Choosing the larger population gave the researchers a potentially larger amount of completed surveys to analyze.

Although these limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings, the results of this study are in no way invalidated. The conclusions of this study are discussed below.

## **Conclusions**

The educational leaders of school districts face decisions everyday that are important to the success of students, school, and community. Therefore, examining the moral judgment level of superintendents is important. The results of this study suggest that there were no significant differences in subgroup responses shown in the moral judgment of superintendents. Although no significant differences were found between the various groups of superintendents, some practical conclusions can still be made.

The groups of superintendents that comprised the districts described as small, medium, large and those described as rural, suburban, and urban showed similar trends.

As the size of the district increased so did the moral judgment mean of that group. Likewise, the districts that were considered rural produced lower means than those labeled as suburban or urban. The lowest mean was found in both the small and rural and the highest mean was found in both large and urban districts.

The gender of the superintendent showed a difference in the superintendent's moral judgment level. The results from the study suggest that females have a slightly higher tendency to make more ethical decisions than do males. Fenstermaker (1994) and Walker (1999) made similar conclusions from their studies of superintendents' ethical decision making.

A surprising result concerned the superintendents who had taken college-level coursework or professional development in ethics and those who had not. The respondents who had never taken coursework or had professional development in ethics had a higher moral judgment mean than those who had ethics coursework or professional development. The researcher expected to see at least a minimally higher mean for those who had previous ethics instruction. In fact, the standard deviation of those without prior ethics instruction was also smaller (9.51 compared to 14.67). According to the results of this study, the taking ethics either in college coursework or during professional development had no significant relationship on a person's moral judgment.

The most troubling result of this study is the overall moral judgment mean of the superintendents. Although there was an individual score in the upper 60s, the mean of 29.90 was extremely low when compared to other professions. Rest et al. (1999) equates that mean to be below a senior in high school. What does that say? It says that a senior

in high school makes decisions at Stage 5 and 6 or Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development more than the superintendents in this study. The extent to which the students preferred post-conventional moral thinking was greater than the superintendents. This result must be an aberration. The people who lead our children (and in many areas, the community) should have a higher moral judgment level than the students they are impacting.

This study promotes the importance of educational leaders and the decisions they make in school districts and the understanding of the moral aspect and effect of those decisions. The variables analyzed in this study had no significant relationship with a person's moral judgment. If there are factors or variables that can positively affect the moral judgment of superintendents, as well as other leaders, then discovering that information is essential. The public educational system that is scrutinized daily depends foremost on the integrity and decisions of its leaders. Additional studies must be conducted to produce a more comprehensive knowledge base of not only the importance of the leader's actions but also the variables that most influence those actions.

### **Recommendations for the Field**

Without a moral compass to guide the decisions of school leaders, the future of the entire education system is bleak. Educating future leaders is not just a task of knowing sound theory, performing technical skills, and managing an organization. This vital education must also include a moral component. As stated by Beck (1996), the institutions that once helped establish one's moral fiber have been and continue to



crumble. Therefore, the education field must take responsibility for this fading component of our society.

Institutions of higher education must raise the standard of moral expectations and competency of its students. The people who come through the educational system should at the very least have some course or part of a course devoted to ethical standards (codes of ethics, codes of conduct, etc.) and moral behavior. We must do all we can to prevent breeches of sound moral judgment. Although the biggest lapses in moral judgment usually draw media attention, the impact from decisions considered minor infractions can be just as great. Any behavior or judgment that does not reflect the right (moral) course of action should be prevented.

For the credentialing organizations and professional associations of school leaders, moral standards must be taught, emphasized, and enforced. Texas has begun an aggressive drive of removing educators who have had moral (and sometimes criminal) breeches of conduct and judgment from service. The credentialing agencies have begun revocations of their licenses to teach and lead. Yes, this is a necessary component to help stem the harm already done to those educators' students, schools, and communities. However, the first two parts of their responsibility must also be performed. Each agency and organization has established a code of ethics or standards of behavior for its members. There is very little emphasis on these standards until an inappropriate incident occurs. Each organization needs to use general sessions at its conferences or implement mandatory professional development regarding its standards.

Local education agencies must also play a vital role to ensure their children and community will not suffer the harmful effects of a school leader's poor moral judgment. From a reactionary perspective, don't allow leaders who have morally damaged one school district to be passed on to another district as if all is fine. Leaders who have committed lapses of moral conduct and judgment need to be held accountable for their actions. If these leaders continue to be passed around a city, region, or state, then the negative impact they can have on others can grow exponentially. Reporting such actions or behaviors should be the norm and not the exception regardless of potential negative attention.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Although no statistically significant differences between moral judgment and certain variables were found in this study, more research in this area should be continued. Beck & Murphy (1997) stated that almost all analyses of leadership underscore the fact that a central task of leaders is making decisions. Superintendents and the whole educational system of the United States are under intense scrutiny and tremendous pressure to achieve the highest results regardless of circumstances. These instructional and community leaders must make judgments at the highest moral level possible. Without moral leadership from the head of the local educational system, the hope of producing successful, well-rounded students is dimmed. Therefore, it is important to understand what affects the moral judgment of leaders.

The following are recommendations for further research:

1. The study be replicated with a sample from a larger population to provide greater generalizability among subgroups.
2. Studies be administered at one time in one location for less confusion and higher participation.
3. Studies be conducted with an online version of the DIT2.
4. Studies be conducted using an instrument other than the DIT2 that measures moral judgment.
5. Studies be conducted that also measure moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral character.
6. Studies be conducted using the DIT2 as a pretest and posttest in an experimental design.
7. Studies be conducted to determine the factors that have the strongest influence on the moral judgment of superintendents.
8. Studies be conducted that included other educational leaders (central office administrators, principals, assistant principals, directors, etc.)
9. Studies be conducted that included demographic data concerning code of ethics and district accountability ratings.
10. Studies be conducted that included both educational and non-educational leaders to seek influencing factors on moral judgment from different fields.

11. Studies be conducted that examine the moral judgment level of superintendents based on the level of diversity of their school districts.
12. Studies be conducted that examine the moral judgment level of superintendents based on the level of poverty of their school districts.
13. Studies be conducted that examine the moral judgment level of superintendents based on their reasons for leading the districts they serve.

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## APPENDIX A

### DEFINING ISSUES TEST 2 (DIT2)

Version 3.0  
University of Minnesota  
Center for the Study of Ethical Development  
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#### Instructions

This questionnaire is concerned with how you define the issues in a social problem. Several stories about social problems will be described. After each story, there will be a list of questions. The questions that will follow each story represent different issues that might be raised by the problem. In other words, the questions/issues raise different ways of judging what is important in making a decision about the social problem. You will be asked to rate and rank the questions in terms of how important each one seems to you.

This questionnaire is in two parts: one part contains the instructions (this part) and the stories presenting the social problems; the other part contains the questions (issues) and the answer sheet on which to write your responses.

Here is an example of the task:

#### Presidential Election

Imagine that you are about to vote for a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. Imagine that before you vote, you are given several questions, and asked which issue is the most important to you in making up your mind about which candidate to vote for. In this example, 5 items are given. On a rating scale of 1 to 5 (1=Great, 2=Much, 3=Some, 4=Little, 5=No) please rate the importance of the item (issue) by filling in with a pencil one of the bubbles on the answer sheet by each item.

Assume that you thought that item #1 (below) was of great importance, item #2 had some importance, item #3 had no importance, item #4 had much importance, and item #5 had much importance. Then you would fill in the bubbles on the answer sheet as shown below.

---

Great	Much	Some	Little	No	Rate the following 12 issues in terms of importance (1-5)
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	1. Financially are you personally better off now than you were four years ago?
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	2. Does one candidate have a superior moral character?
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 5	3. Which candidate stands the tallest?
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	4. Which candidate would make the best world leader?
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	5. Which candidate has the best ideas for our country's internal problems, like crime and health care?

---

Further, the questionnaire will ask you to rank the questions in terms of importance. In the space below, the numbers 1 through 12, represent the item number. From top to bottom, you are asked to fill in the bubble that represents the item in first importance (of those given to you to choose from), then second most important, third most important, and fourth most important. Please indicate your top four choices. You might fill out this part, as follows:

---

Rank which issue is the most important (item number).

Most important item	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Second most important	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Third most important	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12
Fourth most important	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> 7	<input type="radio"/> 8	<input type="radio"/> 9	<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 11	<input type="radio"/> 12

---

Note that some of the items may seem irrelevant to you (as in item #3) or not make sense to you—in that case, rate the item as “No” importance and do not rank the item. Note that in the stories that follow, there will be 12 items for each story, not five. Please make sure to consider all 12 items (questions) that are printed after each story.

In addition you will be asked to state your preference for what action to take in the story. After the story, you will be asked to indicate the action you favor on a three-point scale (1=strongly favor some action, 2=can't decide, 3=strongly oppose that action).

In short, read the story from this booklet, then fill out your answers on the answer sheet. Please use a #2 pencil. If you change your mind about a response, erase the pencil mark cleanly and enter your new response.

Famine—(Story #1)

Reporter—(Story #2)

School Board—(Story #3)

Cancer—(Story #4)

Demonstration—(Story #5)

**APPENDIX B**  
**MORAL JUDGMENT AND TEXAS SUPERINTENDENTS**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

**Directions: Please mark an "X" next to the appropriate answer for each question .**

**1. What is the enrollment of your school district?**

- 1,599 or less  
 1,600 to 9,999  
 10,000 or more

**2. How many years have you been a superintendent?**

- 0 - 2 years  
 3 - 5 years  
 6 - 10 years  
 11 - 15 years  
 16 - 20 years  
 21 or more years

**3. What is your salary?**

- under \$50,000  
 \$50,000 - \$74,999  
 \$75,000 - \$99,999  
 \$100,000 - \$149,999  
 \$150,000 - \$199,999  
 \$200,000 or more

**4. What is your gender?**

- Female  
 Male

**5. What is the highest degree you have attained?**

- Bachelors  
 Masters  
 Doctorate

**6. Have you ever had college-level coursework or professional development in ethics?**

- yes  
 no

**7. How many years have you been superintendent in your current district?**

- 0 - 2 years  
 3 - 5 years  
 6 - 10 years  
 11 - 15 years  
 16 - 20 years  
 21 or more years

**8. In how many district have you served as superintendent?**

- 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6 or more

**9. What is your age?**

- 20 - 29  
 30 - 39  
 40 - 49  
 50 - 59  
 60 - 69  
 70 or over

**10. What is your ethnicity?**

- African American  
 Hispanic  
 White  
 Native American  
 Asian/Pacific Islander

**11. Which of the following best describes your district?**

- rural  
 suburban  
 urban

**Please return the completed demographic survey along with the Defining Issues Test 2 answer sheet in the accompanying stamped envelope.**



**APPENDIX C**  
**COVER LETTER**

October 30, 2007

Dear Fellow Superintendent,

My name is Michael Hope. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A & M University-College Station. You have been asked to participate in a research study concerning the moral judgment of public school superintendents in Texas. You were selected to be a possible participant through a stratified random sampling process. A potential total of 500 people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine the degree that judgments made by public school superintendents in Texas are considered moral.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey instrument along with a demographic information sheet. This study will take approximately 30 minutes. The risks associated with this study are minimal. There are no known benefits of participation.

No compensation is given for participation in this project.

This study is anonymous. No personally identifiable information is used in the completion of this study. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. The numbers on the items will enable me to match your results during data collection and analysis. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A&M University. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the University, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact Michael W. Hope (216 Baker Lane Robinson, TX 76706 / 254-662-6180 / hope401@yahoo.com) or John R. Hoyle (Texas A & M University / 979-845-2748 / jhoyle@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board - Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Melissa McIlhaney, IRB Program Coordinator, Office of Research Compliance, (979)458-4067, [mcilhaney@tamu.edu](mailto:mcilhaney@tamu.edu).

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. This information sheet is for your records.

Please complete both items (survey instrument and demographic information sheet) and return them to me in the enclosed, addressed, and stamped envelope.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this study!

Sincerely,

Michael Hope  
Doctoral Candidate

John R. Hoyle  
Dissertation Committee Chair

Enclosures

## VITA

Name: Michael Wayne Hope

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Education: B.S., Education, Baylor University, 1990  
M.S., Education, Baylor University, 1992  
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Employment: Midway Independent School District, 1992-1994  
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Robinson Independent School District, 1995-1997  
Robinson High School

Administration Robinson Independent School District, 1997-present  
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Robinson High School Principal, 2000-2003  
Robinson Independent School District Superintendent, 2003-present

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