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A Mixed Method Study Investigating a Gap in Ethical Knowledge Training, Supports, and/or Practices for Current Elementary Administrators

Kristie J. Lehde

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by

Kristie J. Lehde

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in

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School of Education

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This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment

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Dr. Donna Jahnke   July 9, 2021

Dr. Donna Jahnke, Committee Member   Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Your Full Name as it Appears in University Records

Signature: _Kristee Lehde_____ Date: _7/9/2021_

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Abstract

Ethical decision making impacts every school leader; 100% of interview participants in this study recognized that they made ethical decisions at least daily. This study was designed to identify if there was a gap in ethical knowledge, trainings, supports and practices and then investigated the knowledge, trainings, supports and practices that were in place to support currently practicing elementary leaders. The researcher sent surveys to elementary principals in the state of Missouri and shared the survey via social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The researcher also asked survey participants to participate in a one-on-one interview to gather more information. The study found a variety of ways in which leaders had been trained to handle ethical dilemmas and how they were supported by universities and school districts. A majority of their training happened in a university education program through conversations embedded within a course. Over 82% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that there was in fact a gap in ethical knowledge, trainings, supports or practices. The biggest gap was in supports and practices available to these leaders. At the time of the study, the most common forms of supports or practices in place were collaboration with colleagues or mentors and the use of board policies to support their decisions. The intent of this study was to provide more information to universities and school districts around the country to better equip their leaders with the skills needed to make the ethical decisions.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The news regularly painted a grim picture of the ability for school administrators to make ethical decisions in their line of work. Teachers and administrators constantly made ethical decisions throughout the day. Vogel (2012) stated, "Leaders make decisions every day that impact the lives of others, making the act of leadership a moral issue" (p. 1). Despite this, decisions some school leaders made became newspaper headlines such as "Principal Placed on Leave after Family Claims Boy with Autism was Locked out of Elementary School" (Shannon, 2019, p. 1) and "Indiana School Superintendent Arrested for Allegedly Using Own Insurance to Help Sick Student" (Burke, 2019, p.1).

While there were many conversations and topics related to ethics discussed throughout the course work to become an administrator, for many universities there was not a specific course that focused on ethical decision-making, strategies, practices, or protocols that were recommended to support administrators in the decision-making process. There needed to be more support and direct instruction given prior to one becoming a leader as well as during that person's leadership. There was also no consistent training, practices, or supports in place from one district to the next to aid administrators in being well-equipped to make the ethical decisions necessary.

Because decision-making was something that administrators did daily, recognizing the fact that these decisions impacted the lives of the students and families they served was the first step to making those decisions in an ethical manner. However, there was much more to the process of understanding and practicing ethical decision-making. In a study from the journal of business ethics, Kapstein (2009) stated that

throughout several studies, a positive relationship existed between ethical training

programs and the ethical culture of an organization. Therefore, it was critical for the

researcher to attempt to determine where the breakdown in ethical knowledge, training,

supports and practices were for educational leaders.

Rationale

Ethics and ethical decision-making played a large role in many aspects of life.

Beginning in childhood, as a person grew, their experiences, relationships, and exposures

throughout their life made up their moral and ethical compass. Due to the complexity and

variety of impactful events in one's life, there was no real way to know what factors

impacted a person's ethical decision-making and what external factors within a situation

might have changed their decision-making. Often when left to their own accord, people

made the best decision they could, weighing the pros and cons of the situation and

making the decision that they believed would impact them in the best way. However, this

was not the only factor that impacted how people went about making ethical decisions.

The theories, practices, and trainings that occurred to ensure that professionals were

making ethical decisions were vast, specifically in the medical and business worlds. In an

article about protecting the profession of education, Hutchings (2016) stated

> codes of ethics have been at the core of most professions for
>
> decades…this does not hold true for educators, who by nature of
>
> their jobs, face a series of gray areas with only their personal
>
> experiences and values as a guide. Research indicates that few
>
> educators have been prepared at the preservice or in-service levels in

professional ethics, and the profession as a whole has not adopted a

unified code of ethics to guide practitioner decision-making. (p. 3)

Throughout a program for aspiring administrators, it was often discussed that the

code of conduct or expectations in which teachers and administrators should act were

represented within evaluation tools. The evaluation tools were not taught explicitly, and

each district's evaluation tool looked different. More was needed to support and ensure

ethical decisions. The researcher hoped that identifying a gap in knowledge or practices

for ethical decision-making would outline reasons to push for further learning, supports,

and practices at a state and national level, thus better preparing administrators for the job

they did serving communities and districts.

In doing research for this study, the search results from education databases

continually came from the *Journal of Business Ethics* or referred to a particular section of

the medical field. For example, when searching for a need for ethics training in

education, the results came up with titles in support of research ethics. Upon further

investigation, these referenced ethical teachings that needed to happen within the

physiology section of the medical field (Forsha, 2017). Research demonstrated that ethics

instruction existed largely in fields other than education. Multiple studies on ethics had

been done, but there was limited research focused on the need for current best practices

regarding decision-making or actual training that was happening within the world of

education.

Within the business and medical worlds, there were dedicated ethics courses

throughout the university curriculum. Upon entering the field, there were ethical review

boards to ensure that the decisions that were made met the ethical standard that had been

set. It had also been shown that within the business world, many researchers viewed developing trust as an important part of ethical culture. Ethical audits also played an important role along with utilizing codes of ethics, ethics committees and training committees within different organizations (Svensson & Wood, 2011). While many leadership courses had components of ethical decision-making within the content taught, there was not a specific guide post or explicit ethical education taught to students that supported the ethical decision-making for educators and leaders. In an article regarding business ethics, a positive relationship was found between the implementation of an ethics program and the culture of an organization (Kaptein, 2009). An ethical culture was necessary for supporting ethical decisions. Imbedding an ethics program at the university level or as professional development at the school district level for administrators was necessary. This research investigated if the perceived gap in ethical understanding or decision-making practices played a part in the problem of unethical decisions.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study was to investigate if there was a gap in ethical knowledge, ethical training, and/or a gap within practices or supports administrators used when making decisions. If there was a gap in knowledge, training, supports or practices, then there was much that could be done to implement learning and supports for administrators to ensure ethical decisions were made. If there was not a gap, then more research was necessary to determine why local media sources were publishing that administrators were making poor decisions. This study also looked at the differences in what practices were in place based on demographic data. This was done to determine if different settings, such as urban or rural, public or private, how many years as an

administrator, or gender might have played a role in the amount of training, practices, or

supports an administrator received regarding ethics and ethical decision-making.

Information about Study

Identifying a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, and/or practices was

the first step in ensuring administrators have a process for consistently making ethical

decisions. Within the business world and the medical communities, there was ethical

coursework prior to entering the profession, ethical review boards, and continued ethical

trainings that helped to create the ethical culture that was necessary. The ethical trainings,

practices, and supports within the world of education were hit or miss and dependent

upon the university one attended or school district in which one worked. Even though

educators were held to a higher standard than others, there was a thought that there was

no need for ethical trainings or supports because those in the profession naturally did

what was best for children. This line of thinking was flawed. Identifying whether there

was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, practices, and/or supports was the first step to

directing the profession to the next step.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

R-1: In what ways did university administrator preparation courses prepare

currently practicing administrators for the ethical decisions they make in their

career?

R-2: What trainings, practices, and/or supports do school districts have in place to

teach and ensure ethical decisions are made?

R-3: Where do gaps exist in ethical knowledge, training, practices, and/or

supports?

R-4: What practices and/or supports do administrators need to make ethical

decisions?

R-5: What are the perceptions of practicing administrators regarding ethical

decision-making?

R-6: In what ways do ethical practices or supports differ based on demographic

data?

NH-1: There are no differences in ethical practices based on demographic data.

NH-2: There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by

administrators based on demographic data.

Methodology

This was a mixed-method study that focused on surveys and interviews as the

sources of data. Once the researcher obtained IRB approval, the study began with an

email introduction of the researcher and the research study. Participants were provided

with all of the information about the study in order to make an informed decision as to

whether or not they should participate in the study. The researcher shared that the survey

and interview questions would be about ethical decision-making. They were assured that

the information collected would be confidential and would be gathered in the form of a

survey regarding their experiences and expertise. If the participants agreed, they clicked

the link to take the survey. Clicking the link acted as signing the informed consent. At the

completion of the survey, participants were asked if they were willing to do a follow-up

interview. If they chose to participate in the interview, one was scheduled via phone or

Zoom. At the end of the survey and interview process, participants had the option to sign

up to receive the data shared with them upon completion. The researcher sent thank you

notes to participants for supporting the research. Once all data were collected, the

researcher assigned a letter of the alphabet to each participant and removed all identifying

information. The researcher analyzed results from the surveys and interviews in order to

reach conclusions about the research questions and hypotheses.

Information about participants

All elementary head principals in the state of Missouri were emailed and asked to

participate in the research survey. The survey was also posted on social media sites such

as Twitter and Facebook in which the researcher was connected to many elementary

school leaders from across the country. Participants in the study did not include any

elementary leaders in the role of assistant principal or administrative intern. These

positions were left out of the study as not all schools had an assistant principal or

administrative intern and therefore could not accurately compare head principal

experiences with those of assistants or interns.

Definition of Terms

Elementary Administrator – For the purposes of this study, an elementary administrator

was any building leader guiding multiple grade levels beginning in kindergarten and

continuing up through eighth grade at a maximum.

Ethics - The principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; a guiding

philosophy, a consciousness of moral importance (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Ethical Decision-Making –For the purposes of this study, ethical decision-making is

when one makes a decision of conscious and moral importance and has considered legal

ramifications, equity, district policies and practices, commitment to the school and

community, fairness of all parties, and demonstrates responsibility to look at multiple

options, choosing the best option for all parties.

Policies – For the purposes of this study, policies refer to the rules and expectations set

forth by a school district that all those within the organization are to adhere to. These

policies were approved by the board of education and were used as governing documents.

Practices – For the purposes of this study, practices referred to the act of performing an

activity or methodology on a routine basis, whether mandated or not, that guide the work

of a school district employee.

Model Code of Ethics – A guiding document that outlines the principles that educators

should follow regarding ethical decision-making (National Association of State Directors

of Teacher Education and Certification, 2015).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Running a nationwide study that

gathered information from all demographic groups would have provided the best

information regarding the needs within the profession. However, due to time and access

restrictions, this study looked at the experiences of elementary principals, mostly from

Missouri. The emails that were pulled from the Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education only listed the head principal of the school building. No assistant principal or

administrative interns were emailed to participate in the study as a limitation of the DESE

reporting system. The study was dependent on whether or not participants took the time

to read the email and chose to respond to the request to participate. There was also no

way to know if when sent, emails went to an inbox or to junk mail. For the interview,

there was a limitation in the number of people who were interested and willing to

participate in the interview and who followed up with the researcher to schedule the interview.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 78% of public-school principals were white and 11% were black. All other ethnicities combined made up 11% of school principals (Characteristics of Public School Principals, 2020). While the researcher hoped to achieve a racially diverse representation through the survey and the interview, the number of people in those positions who represented different cultures and ethnicities was limited.

The state of Missouri represented a wide variety of municipalities from major cities such as St. Louis and Kansas City with populations between 300,000 and 500,000, to small towns such as Agency, Missouri with a population under 750. There was a gap in resources and funding to these municipalities. Because a significant amount of school funds came from property values, those in smaller towns with cheaper home values had less money to spend per student and on trainings and supports for administration, even including state and federal funds given to districts. The funds they did have were often designated for teachers who were working directly with students. Therefore, another limitation of this study was the number of resources, trainings, and supports that each participant had exposure to or was working with in different positions or districts.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, principals across the country were working harder and more hours than ever before to ensure that their buildings were running smoothly and safely for students and staff in attendance and to ensure that students receiving learning online were also receiving the best learning experience possible. Due

to this increase in the amount of work for elementary leaders, the number of respondents were likely lower than it may have been during a typical year.

When talking about ethics and ethical decisions, administrators were aware that the decisions they made impacted the lives of students and families of their communities. Therefore, it was possible that participants may have felt uncomfortable sharing the whole truth when it came to their own ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices. Even though the researcher assured confidentiality throughout the process, participants may have feared it made them look incompetent or that they could have been judged for the decisions they had or would have made. This could have limited the accuracy of the study or may have been a reason some decided not to participate in the first place. The results may have been skewed in that those who chose to participate felt confident in their ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices.

Conclusion

The educational profession, and in particular educational leaders were known for integrity and purpose. The integrity of the profession was questioned every time a leader made an unethical decision. Due to the profession being one of public service, it was easy for the media to find out about unethical decisions and to run stories about them. The goal of this dissertation was to provide more information for universities and school districts around the country to better equip their leaders with the skills needed to make the ethical decisions necessary, and to provide suggestions on what and how administrators were supported in making ethical decisions. The researcher was searching for commonalities amongst administrators' knowledge, trainings, supports, and practices based on demographic data.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Defining ethics was the first place to begin when trying to understand all of the integral parts that played into what ethics in education was really all about. A universal definition for ethics was "the principles of conduct governing an individual or group" (Merriam-Webster, n.d. Para. 1). Often, ethics for educators or professional ethics was seen as a set of societal expectations for teachers or school professionals, similar to having a code of ethics (Gluchmanova, 2014). Professionals such as lawyers and doctors spent a significant amount of time learning and discussing the code of ethics in which they were expected to practice (Hutchings, 2016). This was not the case for many in the education field, because there was not much training on the code of ethics. Teachers often developed their own moral compass, utilizing their values and beliefs along with the laws to help guide them in their decision-making (Darden, 2014). Ethical dilemmas and decisions were not always easy to identify, let alone make decisions on, when there was so much gray area and often no clear right or wrong answer.

Morals vs. Ethics

The term *ethics* came from the ancient Greek word *ethikos* meaning custom or habit. The term *morals* was the Latin equivalent to the term *ethikos*. The two terms originally had the same meaning; each one was just the translation of the other (Weinstein, 2018). However, as time passed, the terms took on different meanings in different areas. Weinstein suggested that organizations needed to avoid both terms and use more broad language to describe the goal of actions such as "doing the right thing," "leading an honorable life," or "acting with high character" due to the fact that the terms

ethics and *morals* had strong meanings for some, and the goals of the conversations were lost once those words were used (Weinstein, 2018, p. 7).

Defining the two had its benefits, though. The Ethics Centre (2016) suggested that the terms should be differentiated because they could conflict with one another. The organization stated that ethics worked to answer the question "What should I do?" and was a "reflection in which people's decisions were shaped by their values, principles, and purpose rather than unthinking habits, social conventions, or self-interest" (The Ethics Centre, 2016, p. 2). This provided those making a decision with a reference point for potential courses of action when considering a decision. Morality was often inherited from one's family or community. This term worked to answer the question "How should I live?" The authors suggested that many individuals never really stopped to assess their morality (The Ethics Centre, 2016).

There was clearly no definitive answer to the definition of morals or ethics. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, *ethics* was defined as the shared norms amongst a group. This could have been teachers on a team, teachers within a building, or administrators within a district. It was a two-way process in which both parties took part. It was often unspoken yet understood. *Morals*, on the other hand, referred "to the notions of right and wrong that guide each of us individually and subjectively in our daily existence" (Hazard, 1995, p. 451).

Many articles were written on the importance of one's morals and ethics and how they played a role in decision-making. Even the Department of Natural Defense showed interest in how morals and ethics played a role in decision-making. A literature review that looked at moral and ethical decision-making of military personnel suggested "Both

rational and intuitive decision-making process are likely to play an important role in

ethical decision-making" (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 1). The study also found that factors

such as a person's self-concept, the culture in which they were raised, and emotion

played a role in the decision-making. While educational leaders were not often making

the life-or-death decisions that military professionals might have been, the stress of the

effects of one's decisions on another person's life can play a role in decision-making. A

person's morals or beliefs of right from wrong impacted decisions along with the ethical

culture of an organization. In addition, "There is no one universally accepted way of

deciding whether something is ethically acceptable or not" (Reiss & Hall, n.d. para. 1).

Instead, there were many different ethical frameworks suggested that would have

supported an ethical decision.

History

The origin of ethics has changed since its origination as a form of philosophy.

While it stemmed from philosophical frameworks, "Ethics remains distinct from

such disciplines because it is not a matter of factual knowledge in the way that the

sciences and other branches of inquiry are. Rather, it has to do with determining the

nature of normative theories and applying these sets of principles to practical moral

problems" (Singer, 2021, para. 1).

Many would agree that a person's values and morals were linked to their past

experiences and could be significantly impacted by their childhood upbringing. The

simple fact that no two people had exactly the same experiences throughout life were

what made each person unique individuals, learners, and contributors to society. The fact

that individuals with different previous experiences meant that all value and moral

developments were influenced by those experiences. Therefore, each person's moral and ethical compass navigated them in a direction that was mapped by their past.

There was limited research on the role of ethical decision-making and ethical trainings for educational leaders. Beck (1994) wrote a book titled *Ethics in Educational Leadership Programs: An Expanding Role*. It was clear then that there was a need for more ethical training and knowledge on the part of educational leaders (Beck, 1994). Beck's work focused on three different topics that needed to be incorporated into coursework for aspiring administrators. Coursework that focuses on knowledge of ethics, courses that focus on ethical issues, or courses that offer a blend of the two (Beck, 1994). Levinson and Fay (2018) wrote a book that solely focused on dilemmas in educational ethics. They believed that students, educators, and citizens deserved a school system that enacted ethical practices and policies. The authors focused on different ethical dilemmas that educators faced, and at how to approach those dilemmas from several different vantage points. They shared that many teachers and school and district leaders "lack tools for, and practice in, analyzing and making collective decisions about these kinds of practical ethical conundrums" (Levinson & Fay, 2018, p. 2). Several universities also recognized the need for this type of issue-oriented work. Many universities added components to their existing course work that delved into the ethical decisions educational leaders were facing.

One problem many leaders faced when trying to make ethical decisions was that often the culture and climate of an organization impacted the ethical decisions made by leaders. There were many factors that impacted an organization. Of these factors, culture and environment and leadership were the two biggest factors (Martin, 2020). Changing

the culture and climate of an organization took significant time and learning and was

often not the priority over increasing test scores or meeting the academic needs of

students when a new leader took a position.

Examples of the Ethical Problem

The media often highlighted negative events that happened within schools. With a

simple search, the researcher was able to find multiple headlines where educational

leaders were placed in the eyes of the public in a negative fashion for making unethical

decisions. The headlines were all examples of the extreme; however, if these were

happening, then there were certainly other unethical decisions that were happening that

did not get published in the daily newspaper. One headline focused on a principal being

put on leave after a family claimed a boy with autism was locked out of an elementary

school (Shannon, 2019). Another indicated that an Indiana school superintendent was

arrested for committing insurance fraud by using her own child's insurance to get

medical help for a sick student (Burke, 2019). Yet another shared that teachers from a

school in Mississippi had been instructed to uphold unethical statewide testing practices

(LeCoz, 2014). The most appalling of the headlines stated "Superintendent Accused of

Pooping on School Track Resigns" (Kimble, 2018, p. 1). These examples were only a

few that plagued the educational profession.

Due to laws that protected an investigation, follow up information was often not

shared in the media. In addition, teachers and administrators were not allowed to share

their perspective or details of situations due to privacy laws that protected others. The

public often saw a negative headline with no knowledge or evidence that the headline

was truly based on the results of the investigation. There was no option for reactive

follow up from these types of situations; therefore, it was more necessary than ever to

have proactive teachings for teachers and administrators to ensure that everyone in the

role had knowledge, practices, and supports in place to ensure ethical decisions were

being made to prevent the need for reactive publicity. There is an unwritten expectation

that leaders act as ethical and respectful members of society at all levels; whether as

educators or educational administrators (Cherkowski et al., 2015).

Model Code of Ethics for Educators

Within the world of education, those "preparing for school administration careers

receive systematic education about ethics related leadership. Unfortunately, this has not

been the case" (Bown et al., 2006, p. 1). Along with this lack of systematic training,

another major problem within the world of education was that, as a profession, it did not

have a defined code of ethics. Without having a code of ethics, the profession turned to

creating policies and practices to help when members of the profession stepped outside

the lines of expectations regarding ethical decisions. These policies and practices did not

help in many situations as they were often reactions to situations instead of being put into

place in a proactive manner to equip teachers and leaders with the skills they needed to

make ethical decisions. Due to the fact that teachers and administrators often made many

decisions daily, it was impossible to have a law or policy to cover every possible situation

that could arise (Darden, 2014). Thus, it was necessary to create the model code of ethics.

This document was the driving force for educators to consult and assure that the decisions

they were making were meeting the ethical standards. The model code of ethics was

within the realm of frameworks that were put in place to support those in the education

field. However, there was no formal training on the model code of ethics that was consistent within the university trainings or within school districts.

The model code of ethics was a standard that supported teachers in their practices; however, there was not something specifically in place for administrators. Administrators spent a significant amount of their time making decisions that impacted the lives and learning of teachers and students. Their decisions impacted not only the well-being of individual children, but the entire school and community. The decisions administrators made impacted the culture and climate of the school as well (Durish, 2017).

The world of education had long needed a code of conduct to support the work and decisions that were made every day in schools. Within many districts, it was part of the orientation process to assure that new teachers and administrators were aware of the expectations on which they would be evaluated. These evaluation tools were used to ensure that teachers and administrators knew district and state expectations. According to the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), "All other fiduciary professions have articulated clear guidelines for professional ethics. The education profession, however, has not adopted a model code of conduct to assist educators with making ethical decisions" (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification- Rationale, 2015, p. 1). Prior to the writing of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE), all 50 states had their own laws and rules in which they measured educators regarding their ethical practices. While not all 50 states had completely adopted the MCEE, it was a place to start to support the work that needed to be done. This association declared that it was time for the education profession to have a set of common standards to be shared. These codes of conduct or

expectations of actions were not taught; educators were shown where to find them and then sent off to make the best decisions they currently knew how to make. MCEE was created as a result of the need for some form of consistent expectations across districts and states to assure educators and leaders knew the expectations and to provide a guiding document regarding ethical decision-making (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification-Rationale, 2015).

The National Council for the Advancement of Educator Ethics created MCEE under the leadership of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification [NASDTEC], 2015). This document was created to be a guiding document for all educators in the realm of ethics and ethical decision-making. Their mission stated the following: "Model Code of Ethics for Educators is to serve as a shared ethical guide for future and current educators faced with the complexities of P-12 education" (NASDTEC, 2015, p. 1). The problem was that even though MCEE was created and supported by NASDTEC, there was no accountability or expectation of where it would be used or how it would be used.

MCEE consisted of five principles. Within those five principles, there were three to five sub-topics which then were broken down to provide three to eight specific guidelines for educators. This carefully planned document helped provide educators with the specific information that they needed to be thinking about when making a decision that impacted others. However, it had not been widely used within the universities or school districts in Missouri in a consistent way (NASDTEC, 2015).

Educational Testing Service (ETS) created a program called ProEthica. This training program was designed "to help educators and educator candidates develop an understanding of professional ethics and provide guidance in applying professional ethics in practice" (Hutchings, et.al., 2018, p.1). ETS conducted a study to document whether or not the ProEthica program aligned with MCEE. "Overall, panelists identified each of the 18 principle/categories as being explicitly or directly addressed by one or more of the modules" (Hutchings, et.al, 2018, p. 9). While this program had promising results with regard to being aligned to the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, more research was needed to investigate the effectiveness of the program's implementation.

While MCEE was meant to be used as a guide for all educators, including administrators, there were also other organizations that created their own code of ethics just for administrators. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) adopted a code of ethics for educational leaders that expected leaders to "conform to an ethical code of behavior, and the code must set high standards for all educational leaders" (American Association of School Administrators, 2007, p. 1). This was similar to the code of ethics that the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) created. However, their document stated that "the code must be idealistic and at the same time practical, so that it can apply reasonably to all educational administrators" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1976, p. 118). All three documents served the same purpose in attempting to create a guiding ethical document to support the decisions that educators and leaders needed to make. The problem was that there was no accountability or consistency about how these documents were utilized or enforced.

Codes of Conduct, Policies and Practices, Mandated Trainings

Organizations around the country created a code of conduct in order to promote

responsible and ethical behavior from their members (Nijhof, et al., 2003). Schools did

the same thing; they implemented policies, practices, and codes of conduct as a way to

promote and hold educators to an ethical standard. However, having policies or codes of

conduct in place were not enough to ensure that all of those serving in a district knew

what the policies were, and that they were held accountable for the standards set within

those policies or codes of conduct. When accountability for set policies or standards

regarding codes of conduct were not held, the code then became nothing more than a

useless paper in a drawer, without serving its purpose (Nijhof, et al., 2003). Educators

and educational leaders had so much on their plates that there was often not time to

search for a policy or a written expectation to provide guidance when making a decision.

Creating policies, practices, and codes of conduct was not enough. These documents

often sat on a website or in a binder and were not referred to in a proactive way again.

They were a reactive way to hold someone accountable for having made a poor decision.

More needed to be done to ensure that universities were preparing teachers and

administrators to enter the profession. Maxwell (2017) found that "education students are

not leaving colleges and universities with a clear understanding of what is expected of

them by society, their peers and the profession" (p. 323). This research was one more

piece of evidence to prove the need for more training at the university level but also

should have been an indication to individual districts that work needed to be done to

prepare those within their organization. Many institutions had a code of conduct or

policies that supported ethical decision-making; however, it was unknown what occurred

beyond the reading and agreement of said policies or code of conduct.

Double Standards for Educators

Teachers were held to a different standard of professionalism from any other

professions. Rothestein (2015) talked about how administrators from a veteran's hospital

had reported false information to avoid losing funding, stating that they treated patients in

a timely fashion when, in fact, doctors were not available. He compared that to teachers

in Atlanta who had changed student responses on standardized tests to avoid losing their

jobs due to No Child Left Behind laws. Both groups broke the law and reported false

information. However, the teachers were sentenced to years in prison while the

administration of the veteran's hospital was asked to resign, but no prosecutions took

place. While both groups had a reason for their actions that were similar, they were not

handled in the same manner. This was just one example of how teachers were held to a

higher standard than other professions. These higher standards often made it difficult for

teachers to feel comfortable talking about their small dilemmas with others for fear of

disciplinary actions. According to Hutchings (2016), affected teachers who faced difficult

decisions in that they had no acceptable way to discuss these challenges and were left

alone to make these decisions quietly. The discrepancy of being held to higher standards

while having no code of ethics caused significant problems for educators. "This is why

teaching – like law, medicine and counseling – needs a framework that recognizes the

challenging situations in which educators often find themselves" (Hutchings, 2016, p. 7).

Due to the nature of ethical decisions, unethical decisions were often a difficult

thing to report. There were many negative consequences for being the one who revealed

another's unethical decisions. Calling out unethical decisions could cause a teacher to be

fired or treated so poorly that they needed to leave. Not only did they fear for their job,

but also their reputation. Being seen as a whistleblower impacted their relationships with

peers and their working conditions (Darden, 2014). Therefore, many educators decided to

remain silent about the issues to avoid any consequences.

All educators were evaluated on the standard of ethics. Evaluating a teacher's

ethical behavior was somewhat subjective. Some guidelines that could be utilized in

assisting with the evaluation were necessary. The National Education Association (NEA)

had a code of ethics for their members. This organization's code of ethics was a guideline

for its members to follow; however, not all teachers were a part of this organization.

Teachers who were paying members were held to standards that displayed commitment

to all students and to the profession and were provided a guide from which to work

(National Education Association, 2020). Several of these standards still had gray areas in

which certain situations did not apply. Benninga (2003) wrote about visible teacher

actions that were associated with ethical behaviors. These visible descriptors made it

easier for leaders while evaluating their staff. Items such as collaborating with peers and

following school policies in order to promote effective work throughout the building or

"tactfully, but firmly criticizing unsatisfactory school policies and proposing constructive

improvement" (Benninga, 2003, p. 3) promoted the ethical environment which was

necessary. These practices, along with others, helped school leaders support staff in

making those ethical decisions. It provided a guide in the expectations of their decisions.

There also needed to be more training on ethics within school settings. Few educators had

been trained in the area of professional ethics either at the university level or within their

first few years of teaching (Hutchings, 2016). This was where the change needed to

begin.

Ethics within Business and Medicine

There was significant ethics education throughout the business and medical fields,

but there had not been much dedicated to those in the field of education. Business and

medical professionals had been through ethical trainings, and ethical review boards were

put in place to support the ethical decision-making that happened throughout those

professions. Sinason (2005) wrote about 12 ways to audit the ethical environment. His

article was written with regards to the business world and how businesses could

internally audit their own ethical environment. Within the 12 steps, he stated several

suggestions that would be of benefit to the world of education. Procedure seven stated

that leaders should "inquire of human resources personnel regarding the use of the code

of ethics in recruiting and hiring personnel" (Sinason, 2005, p. 2). He also stated in

procedure eight, the importance that the "internal auditor should ensure that ethics

training is provided for all new hires (Sinason, 2005, p. 3). These two simple concepts

could easily be integrated into the education field. As a part of the Missouri School

Improvement Plan (MSIP-5) the state of Missouri mandated a new teacher program

within every district. This would have been an easy place to put in more review of ethics

education to support the work that people hoped would be done at the university level.

Reinforcing the work in two places guaranteed better understanding and provided a sense

of importance around the topic. It was known that teachers and aspiring administrators

were not getting direct ethical training. It was known because there were so many other

demands of a degree program that there is little time for professors to dedicate to the

ethical training that was needed for educators and educational leaders.

The Four Paradigms

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) pioneered many topics that supported the few

ethical frameworks that were in place for educators. Much of their work was based on the

four paradigms of ethical thought. These four paradigms helped educators understand

their own ethical framework and the ideals they used to make decisions. The four

paradigms were ethic of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care and ethic of the profession.

Each paradigm could be explained as a framework for an individual's decision-making.

The ethic of justice referred to those who turned to the rules, laws, and regulations

to support their decision. Their focus was often on the fairness, equity, and justice that

surrounded a situation. When thinking of a school district, ethic of justice fell in line with

many of the policies, rules, or regulations within a school district that were put into place

regarding an administrator's actions and decisions (Shapiro & Stefkocich, 2005).

The ethic of critique challenged the ethic of justice and focused on asking

questions, and actually critiquing the laws and processes used to determine the laws to

assure that the decisions were ethical. This critical theory "emphasizes ethical behavior as

that which addresses inequities among individuals and groups, related to social class and

other factors which impact one's power and voice, as well as the ensuing treatment,

resources and other benefits" (Vogel, 2012, p. 3). This ethic asked educators to look at

the whole picture and grapple with the possibility that social class, race, or gender

impacted the inequities among students and played a role in decision-making.

The ethic of care was formed with education as a profession at the center of its creation. Being a highly female-dominated profession, the ethic of care put students at the center of all decision-making. Those who made decisions within this realm tended to depend of the care, concern, and connection of others when looking for the answers to moral dilemmas (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2005). The ethic of care urged "educators to nurture the emotional and moral development of children rather than stress academic achievement as the main or sole purpose of schooling" (Vogel, 2012, p. 3). Current educational practices looked at the education of the whole child with a focus on the social and emotional needs of students. Students who had experienced trauma in their lives needed to have their basic needs met prior to focusing on their academic needs. The ethic of care set the foundation and supported the importance of this work for all children.

Finally, the ethic of the profession focused on the aspects of moral decision-making that supported the educational profession. This paradigm focused on the educational setting (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). It was the culmination of the three previous ethics and asked educational leaders to examine "his or her own values and the ethical codes set forth by various professional organizations" (Vogel, 2012, p. 3). These paradigms often intertwined with one another. There was no clear beginning and end to any of them. Often, a person's upbringing played a role on which paradigm dominated their decision-making. It was important for all educators and leaders to be aware of each of the paradigms to assure that they were making conscious decisions and knew what influences played a part in their decisions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

Structures and Frameworks of Ethical Decision-making

A variety of organizations worked to provide a framework to support and promote ethical decisions, creating different frameworks in which decisions could be made. Scholars worked to find a universal framework for ethical decision-making that could support everyone and the needs of a society. However, there was not one framework that had been universally accepted. Different professions, such as medicine, law, or business had different codes of ethics and promoted different frameworks for those professionals to work from in order to support ethical decisions. "Researchers continue to argue that the teacher education field should approach professional ethics in ways similar to other licensed professions, such as psychology, medicine, and law" (Mathur & Corley, 2014, p. 136).

There were many different types of theoretical approaches towards a decision in education. While the pool of theories was deep, one framework that helped explain thoughts behind decision-making was outlined by Bonde and Firenze (2013). They concluded that there were three main theories from which individuals made decisions: The consequentialist theories, non-consequentialist theories, and agent-centered theories. These theories helped provide a framework behind the thoughts of those making decisions that impacted themselves and others.

Within the three theories were several different approaches to decision-making. The consequentialist theory focused on the consequences of one's decisions. The first approach that supported the consequentialist theory was the utilitarian approach, which focused on making a decision that produced the lowest level of pain or distress. The second approach, the egoistic approach, focused on the self-interest of the one or ones

making a decision. How would it impact the decision maker? The third and final

approach was the common good approach that focused on what was in the best interest of

the community and people it served.

Non-consequentialist theory focused on the intent of the person making the

decision. The approaches that supported the non-consequentialist theory were the duty-

based approach, which believed that it was important to have the right intention when

making a decision. The rights approach was the second approach under this theory and

focused on the rights of those that would be impacted by the decision. The third approach

for this theory was the fairness or justice approach that focused on equality and what is

believed to be fair. The final approach for this theory was the divine command approach.

This approach believes that "what is right is the same as what God commands" (Bonde &

Firenze, 2013, p. 3).

Finally, the agent-centered theory focused on the ethical aspects of the person

making the decision. The approaches under the agent-centered theories were the virtue

approach which focused on the virtues of human life and how those virtues impact ethical

actions and decisions. The feminist approach focused on the human life and how one's

life impacts the way ethical decisions are made. Each approach within each of the three

theories used different thinking to assess decision-making. For example, the common

good approach was a framework of thinking that a society should be guided by the

"general will" of the people within the community. The divine command approach was

used by those who believed that "what is right as the same as what God commands, and

ethical standards are the creation of God's will" (Bonde & Firenze, 2013, p. 3). Each

approach was linked to a philosopher or idea. Some of these frameworks had been adapted by others as well.

The frameworks for decision-making helped educators and leaders understand the thought processes behind decisions. However, many leaders looked for concrete ideas or structures for how to achieve an ethical decision or step-by-step instructions on how to make an ethical decision. This benefited organizations as well as the individual because there was some consistency as to how decisions were made. One example started with recognizing an ethical issue, considering the parties involved, gathering all of the relevant information, formulating actions and considering alternatives, making a decision and considering it, acting on the decision, and finally reflecting on the outcome (Bonde & Firenze, 2013). This step-by-step process, created by academics at Brown University, was just one example of the many different ways to apply a framework for ethical decision-making. Another example was presented by Dorbin (2012) regarding the ability to make a better ethical decision in five easy steps. Starting with gathering the facts, then making a prediction, followed by identifying feelings about the situation, then to ask whether one could live with oneself if a particular choice was made and then the final step would be the ability to explain reasoning to other people. While these were only two examples of step-by-step strategies, they both held a similar construct which was to take the time to stop and think about the decision being made and making a conscious decision that was supported through reasoning.

Cherkowski et al. (2015) looked at two platforms for decision-making that included personal moral behavior and moral influence. The authors suggested that there were varying degrees of moral leadership that played out in two ways. The first combined

their attitudes regarding decision-making and their ability to make quick decisions with good judgement that was consistent with their professional ethics. The second looked at how they acted on behalf of others including others best interests (Cherkowski et al., 2015).

While all of these structures and frameworks provided a guide for being thoughtful regarding ethical decision-making, they did not take all facets into account. "Educators facing ethical dilemmas have three main guideposts to help choose between right and wrong: laws, professional codes of ethics, and personal values and beliefs" (Darden, 2014, p. 70). When thinking of the about these three guideposts, it is essential to realize that "a true ethical dilemma isn't just a choice among competing alternatives. It is the kind of knotty problem that makes you stop, forces introspection, and requires a searching look at your deepest tenets" (Darden, 2014, p. 70). That realization was necessary as a basis of understanding prior to any structure or framework being put into place.

Ethics and Culture & Climate

"Educational leaders are responsible for more than their own moral behaviour [sic]. They are also accountable for the actions of those whom they are charged with leading and so are required to establish an ethical environment in their schools" (Cherkowski et al., 2015, p. 4). Creating an ethical culture and climate was not easy to achieve. There were many pieces to creating a positive and ethical culture and climate within a school. The findings within this research were to highlight the importance of how a culture and climate could impact the decisions that were being made. Parson (2014) examined ethical climate and unethical decision-making and found that "the

ethical climate of an organization exerts a strong influence on how employees recognize

and act on ethical issues, and largely supersedes the organization's actual policies,

procedures, rewards, and punishment systems" (p. 27). These reasons supported the

vitality of facilitating an ethical culture and climate within an organization. The work of

creating an ethical culture and climate was not an easy task to achieve; however, the first

place to start was to recognize that the "ethical culture of the organization becomes a

powerful tool for leaders to communicate the organizational values to all members of the

organization" (Apriliani et al., 2014, p. 228).

When thinking of the culture and climate of a school, both the mission and vision

played an integral part in the development of an ethical environment. These statements

shared the core values that a school community agreed upon as a representation of the

"principles of the school and staff and are in the interest of delivering the best possible

educational experience for the students" (Burleigh, 2020, p. 366). The mission and vision

helped to guide those in a community to ensure they were making decisions that

promoted the best experiences for students. Child-centered mentality was also a factor

that impacted decision-making and was a marker for how different leaders would

approach a decision.

While the mission and vision helped guide the culture and climate of a school,

there were several articles written in support of the ethical environment and fostering an

atmosphere where decisions were carried out in order to ensure the best outcome for the

organization. (Sinason, 2005). Bartels et al. (1998) examined the relationship between the

ethical climate and ethical problems and found "a statistically significant positive

relationship between an organization's ethical climate and success in responding to ethical issues" (p. 799).

There were different theories as to how to create an ethical culture and climate within a school, yet there was no clear theory that was the most effective. Sternberg (2021) believed that ethical reasoning needed to be taught at the university level rather than just ethical principles. Ethical reasoning, which was the determination of wrong or right, was necessary for the development of an ethical culture and climate. Because developing an ethical culture and climate rested mostly on the shoulders of a school leader, the process of ethical reasoning needed to be taught at the college or university level. This was necessary because ethical reasoning was often not taught anyplace else and was necessary to create an ethical culture and climate within a school (Sternberg, 2021). Others believed that more than just ethical principles needed to be taught. Beck (1994) identified three categories of ethical curricula that needed to be taught. She believed that "courses that stressed knowledge about ethics, issue-oriented courses, and those that offer some combination of the two" (Beck, 1994, p. 137) were necessary to ensure ethical understanding.

Ethical Decision-making and Social Justice / Equity

Social justice was another piece that played into the culture and climate of a school. "Ethical leadership development in schools, university program, businesses, and other organizations is a critical dimension of building socially just and equitable communities" (Gardiner & Tenuto, 2015, p. 3). Within a world where social inequities existed, work needed to be done, and those within the profession needed to be mindful to assure that the decisions that were made did not affect any one population in a way that

was different from other populations or cultures. This was a piece of ethical decision-making that needed more attention. It was known that emotion played a role when a leader reflected on a dilemma and how that dilemma related to their own values and personal code of ethics (Yamamato, et al., 2013). It was no longer acceptable to allow decisions to impact those in different populations, especially those that might differ from the decision makers own values or personal code of ethics. Leaders needed to analyze their decisions with an equity lens to ensure that equitable decisions were made that supported all students.

When looking at school outcome data, the history of racism, classism, and exclusion in the United States was evident. Systems of privilege and preference often created enclaves of exclusivity in schools, in which certain demographic groups were served well while others languish in failure or mediocrity (Howard, 2007, p. 3).

Training was needed to ensure that the decisions leaders were making were not fostering inequities. The work of ensuring equity-for-all through decision-making could not be done alone. This work required the entire community to recognize and support the needs surrounding equity for students and the role leaders had to ensure their ethical decisions looked different. Maya Angelou clearly framed the work, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better" (Paler, 2018, p. 1). This quote outlined the actions that needed to be taken regarding equity and ethical decision-making. It was necessary for more professional development to be in place to support inclusion, equity and excellent schools (Howard, 2007, p. 6). This process would take time, but the work needed to be done. This was the beginning of some very important work in society. Ethical decision-making was already an area that needed significant

study. The sheer awareness of how a leader's decisions impacted those they served needed to be addressed. "Ethical lives are comprised of compromises, of considering where to take stands and where not to make waves" (Strauss, 2015, p. 8). It was necessary, in order to move forward, that educational leaders made the connection between their decision-making and the equity within schools. The topic of ethical decision-making and how it impacted each member of the community needed more study and attention.

Looking to the Future

One of the largest issues with ethical decision-making was there was no clear right or wrong answer for many dilemmas. Choosing a framework to approach a decision would determine the outcome of the decision so much so, that deciding on the framework used in approaching the dilemma would often times determine the decision. Levinson and Fay (2018) wrote *Dilemmas of Educational Ethics – Cases and Commentaries* solely about dilemmas of educational ethics. They presented six common educational dilemmas. Once the dilemma was presented, the researchers had multiple people from many different areas of expertise respond to those prompts to determine the different ways decisions could be made. Their purpose was to provide case studies "to initiate a collective conversation about these kinds of questions" (Levinson & Fay, 2018, p. 3). The authors recognized the following:

> ethical challenges remain private affairs, embarrassing for educators and policy makers to reveal to others lest they expose themselves as having potentially perpetrated unjust or ethically questionable acts. Ethical uncertainty is treated as an admission of weakness rather than an opportunity for collective learning.

(Levinson & Fay, 2018, p. 2)

These case studies provide an opportunity for educators to begin the process of recognizing and analyzing dilemmas. There was also the potential of providing a safe place for leaders to discuss these dilemmas that they may encounter within their careers. The learning could be done due to the fact that no actual person was impacted by the decision and there was an opportunity to deliberate and discuss possible options. (Shafer, 2016). The goal was to strengthen educators' abilities to handle ethical dilemmas in their own work (Levinson & Fay, 2018). Creating a culture where hard conversations were encouraged and supported was necessary to ensure that educational leaders were successful in making ethical decisions. Having a "moral awareness of the situation decreased unethical decision" (Sturm, 2017, p. 1).

Where and when training needed to occur for educators was something that had also been in question. Whether universities focused their work on supporting the ethical education of those going into the profession or whether school districts themselves needed to provide initial and continual professional development surrounding ethical decision-making was still in question. Initially, the thought was that preservice educators should receive ethical instruction at the university level prior to being a part of the profession. In Maxwell's (2017) international study on codes of professional conduct and ethics education for future educators, he looked at teacher preparation programs. He shared that:

> such greater awareness on the part of teacher educators would, I hope, be
> favorable to a necessary change of attitude about the value and contribution of
> ethics content in preservice teacher education. Teaching and learning about the

ethical dimensions of education seems to be perceived as a frill rather than part of the core business of teacher preparation. I pointed out above that the survey found fairly strong support among teacher educators to increase ethics education and a sizeable majority felt that at least one course dedicated to the ethics of teaching should be mandatory. (Maxwell, 2017, p. 338)

Sternberg (2021) believed that ethical reasoning needed to be taught at the university level, while others believed that individual school districts needed to provide more training on their code of ethics.

Throughout the research, looking at frameworks, codes of ethics, policies and practices currently in place or suggested, there was no one clear "best practice" that could or should have been implemented into universities or individual school districts. Each piece of research was a piece in the puzzle towards creating educational leaders who were prepared and supported to make daily ethical decisions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

While Chapter Two reviewed the literature regarding ethical theories, ethics, and decision-making, Chapter Three discussed the research methods used to identify if in fact there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, practices or supports for currently practicing administrators. The researcher decided that the best way to identify if a gap existed was to go directly to currently practicing administrators and ask them about their knowledge, training, practices, and/or supports. The researcher worked on discovering where training, if any, had been received, whether at the university level, from the district, or from their own professional learning. It was also important to the researcher to find out if there were any inequities regarding knowledge, training, practices, or supports based on which university they attended or what district/school they currently served, as well as the demographics of the university or district/school.

Purpose

Administrators made many decisions daily. Hopkins (2000) followed several principals to see what their day was like. He found that principals made dozens of decisions daily. Some were big and others small, with some having major consequences for those in the community and others only having minor consequences. Decisions surrounding topics such as student discipline, budgets, class placement, teacher/student interactions, upkeep of facilities, hiring practices, student services, fundraising, and equitable practices were just the starting point regarding decisions that were made at the building level by administrators. Some decisions were made jointly with fellow administrators or district office administration; some were made with a team within the

school; and many were made independently. Regardless of who was a part of the decisions that were made, the consequences of those decisions rested on the shoulders of the administrator in the building. When making dozens of decisions a day, it was challenging to dedicate the appropriate amount of time needed to evaluate or reflect on all of these decisions.

The world of education was constantly changing. Best practices were always questioned, and new theories or practices were continually introduced. Administrators were constantly asked to jump on the latest band wagon to support student growth. The decisions made by school administrators required them to continually try to balance student growth and achievement, staff morale, professional growth, the interests of the community, as well as others. All of those decisions impacted the lives of the teachers and the students they served. Many administrators were the only administrator in the building. Ethics and morals played a big role in decision-making. When the researcher first began investigating how administrators were trained in order to make decisions, it was discovered that most universities in the state of Missouri did not have a specific ethics course. While some had dedicated the time and curriculum of an entire course to learning about ethics and ethical decision-making, many other universities were only able to have conversations surrounding ethics and making ethical decisions within other courses. There was no consistent or guaranteed way to know if an aspiring administrator had received any formal ethical training without asking a candidate directly. Even when asking them directly, their answers varied based on what they believed to be ethical training.

As an educator, teachers and leaders were expected to work with an ethical mind and follow a moral compass solely because they had made the decision to work in education. It was a common belief that those who wanted to serve the children wanted to do good things. Nightly media illustrated that just because teachers or administrators wanted to work with children, did not mean they necessarily had the knowledge, supports, or practices to enable them to make ethical decisions.

There were many factors that influenced a decision. One's personal upbringing or personality and one's morals and values were two that had a large impact on a person making decisions. However, even if that person had a high standard for morals, values, and doing the right thing, there were other factors that could impact a person's decision. The associated risk and potential consequences affected the decision. The one making the decision had to consider several questions: Who would find out? Whom does it impact? Was there any personal gain for the decision? Would anyone know about the personal gain? In addition, a supervisor may direct an administrator to make a decision that they know to be unethical. However, not following through with the expectation could result in consequences or even termination. This significantly impacted whether or not a person with an innate moral conscience would make an unethical decision. This could go beyond just one supervisor as well. The culture of an organization might be one in which certain decisions were acceptable, whether they were ethical or not. These situations happened more frequently than one would hope in an educational institution, as was evidenced by media reports of the unethical decisions that were regularly published.

The business and medical worlds both required ethics courses at the university level, often with additional training once someone was in a position. Both fields also had

ethical review boards in order to ensure that the decisions that were made were ethically

sound. However, these concrete training opportunities did not universally exist in the

education field. It was a compilation of the perplexities of the role of educational leaders

and the impact of the decisions they made and how internal and external factors

influenced their decision that led the researcher to the final research question. Is there a

gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports and practices that impact the work of an

administrator?

Hypotheses and Research Questions

NH-1: There are no differences in ethical practices based on demographic data.

NH-2: There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by

administrators based on demographic data.

R-1: In what ways did university administrator preparation courses prepare

currently practicing administrators for the ethical decisions they make in their

career?

R-2: What trainings, practices, and/or supports do school districts have in place to

teach and ensure ethical decisions are made?

R-3: Where do gaps exist in ethical knowledge, training, practices, and/or

supports?

R-4: What practices and/or supports do administrators need to make ethical

decisions?

R-5: What are the perceptions of practicing administrators regarding ethical

decision-making?

R-6: In what ways do ethical practices or supports differ based on demographic

data?

Data Analysis

The researcher collected contact information from Missouri's Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education regarding the names and email addresses of

currently practicing elementary principals in the state of Missouri. Surveys were sent to

everyone on the list. While the surveys were anonymous, the participants were asked

several demographic questions along with questions regarding any training, knowledge,

supports, or practices that were in place for them. They were asked about their

perspective regarding if there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or

practices. Upon completion of the survey, the participants were also asked if they were

willing to be contacted to do a follow-up interview to collect further information. The

researcher contacted participants who left any form of contact information to schedule a

follow-up interview. The interview consisted of more questions regarding any

knowledge, training, supports, or practices and also further investigated their responses

from the survey. The participants also responded to several scenarios by identifying the

ethical implications of the scenario. They also discussed if they had experienced

something similar, and if so, how they handled it. If they had not experienced it before,

they shared what approach they might take to make a decision regarding the scenario.

The Research Site/Context

Currently practicing elementary principals in the state of Missouri were selected

to be a part of the study. Each currently practicing elementary principal was sent the

survey individually. The surveys were sent in online formats either via email or via social

media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it was unknown exactly where the participants were from.

All participants were practicing administrators who worked in a school that served anywhere from kindergarten through eighth grade. The job of a high school administrator was different from an elementary administrator in many ways; therefore, the researcher wanted to focus on one population to prevent more variables that could have potentially impacted the results. When pulling the data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE's) website, it was clear that there was not a consistent definition of elementary. Some school administrators served buildings that had kindergarten through second grade students in the building, and others were leading buildings preschool through twelfth grade with many variants between. Many of the more rural communities within Missouri had schools that hosted kindergarten through eighth grade. For this reason, the researcher focused on any administrator that led a school that encompassed grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Therefore, it was known that while not all schools were serving older students through eighth grade, all administrators surveyed and interviewed had classes in their schools from the primary grades of at least kindergarten through second grade.

If participants chose to participate in the interview, they received either an email or a phone call to set up a time to complete the interview. Once scheduled, the researcher sent a Zoom link code and password to the participant and informed them that the conversation would be recorded for research purposes. The researcher collected the audio version of the call-in order to transcribe the conversation at a later time. All participants in the interview were coded with a letter of the alphabet, and all identifying information

was removed from the documents. No demographic information was collected during the

interview to maintain anonymity. Due to the unknown demographic information, it is

unclear where each of the interview participants were located.

Developing the Study

Without proper training, ethical decision-making was a very personal journey that

was influenced by one's upbringing and moral compass alone. There was no concrete

program or formal training that every administrator had been through. This made it

difficult to assure that all administrators were prepared for the number and kinds of daily

decisions that were made. The goal of this study was to survey practicing elementary

administrators to determine their experiences and expertise and to answer the research

questions posed. Throughout conversations with peers who were currently practicing

administrators, the researcher found that many administrators had not even thought about

the implications surrounding ethical decision-making. Many had to think about what was

in place and really contemplate what, if any, training they had received. There seemed to

be almost no metacognition regarding ethical decision-making, and it was then that the

researcher realized the importance of this topic. A review of local universities indicated

that due to no state requirement for a full ethics course in order to become a certified

administrator, universities had a difficult time requiring one in their coursework. While

the universities recognized the importance of an ethics course, they could not require one

as it was an added cost to the students in the program that was not mandated by the state

for certification.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Surveys and interviews were the main sources of data collected throughout the study. The initial survey was created by the researcher and was intended to collect data that would help answer each of the research questions. Each question added to the survey was purposeful in supporting the research questions. The short survey was limited to 15 questions in order to encourage more participants to respond to the survey.

The researcher was very cognizant that the timeline of this research was during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was also sent out during the time in which schools were working to find a safe way to provide instruction, especially to the younger students who benefitted more from in-person learning. All administrators during this time were working hard to establish practices and procedures throughout their buildings to support in-person learning. There was a significant amount of unknown during this time. Due to this pandemic and the time expectations on administrators, there was a smaller number of participants that completed the survey than the researcher had anticipated.

The researcher left the survey open for longer than initially intended in order to provide the opportunity for more participants to complete. Once the survey was closed, the researcher began the process of scheduling the interviews. The interviews were scheduled for approximately 30 minutes. Some lasted the 30 minutes while others lasted over an hour depending on the amount of information the interviewee had to share.

The timeline for data collection was as follows:

- IRB approval – September 2020

- Initial survey sent to potential participants – Mid October 2020

- Reminder survey sent – End of October 2020

- Final survey reminder sent – November 2020

- Survey closed – December 2020

- Interviews scheduled – November 2020 – January 2021

- Reviewed survey data – January – February 2021

- Transcribed interviews – November 2020 – January 2021

Participants

The participants of this study were all currently practicing elementary principals from schools that served some variation of students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The participants of the interview were those who chose to be contacted and were comfortable enough with the topic to be interviewed regarding their knowledge, training, supports, and practices in ethical decision-making. They were also willing and able to give their time to the research. The participants of the interview were from different areas and different-sized districts. There was not a demographic with a clear majority when it came to interview participants.

Sample Sizes and Selection Criteria

The survey was sent to over 1200 potential participants from the state of Missouri, and was posted online via social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Of those potential participants, there were 69 who choose to respond and complete the survey. Twenty of the participants were willing to move on to complete the interview. The researcher contacted all 20 participants and between scheduling conflicts and those no longer able to participate, there were 10 who completed the interview. Everyone who had mentioned they were willing to participate in the interview was contacted attempts to connect for the follow-up interview were made by the researcher.

Conclusion

In looking at administrators as the leaders of schools, many of whom were left on their own to make decisions, it was clear that external factors impacted the decisions that they made. It was important for the researcher to verify if there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices to be able to then do further research to determine what and where those gaps were and what those who were currently practicing believed was needed to ensure ethical decisions. The researcher believed in the work that was done and its importance to the profession. Taking the time to look at identifying a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices from a school, district, state, and university standpoint was the first step to creating a standard for ethics education for currently practicing administrators. The researcher then hoped to encourage further research to support administrators in the vital work they did in supporting students, staff, and the communities they served.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there was a gap in ethical knowledge, trainings, supports, or practices for currently practicing elementary administrators. The researcher created a survey, sent it to every practicing elementary principal in the state of Missouri, and shared it on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to get feedback from leaders in Missouri and from around the country. The survey consisted of 15 questions regarding knowledge, training, supports, and practices that surround ethical decision-making. The researcher included several demographic questions in order to analyze whether demographics played a role in the responses regarding ethical decision-making. At the end of the anonymous survey, the researcher asked for contact information if they were willing to do a follow up interview with more specific questions.

The survey yielded 69 responses, and the researcher was able to conduct 10 individual interviews to complete the gathering of data to answer the null hypotheses and research questions. This study was conducted during the Covid-19 Pandemic, which could explain why there were not more participants.

Null Hypotheses

The researcher investigated the following null hypotheses for the study:

Null Hypothesis 1: There are no differences in ethical practices based on demographic data.

Null Hypothesis 2: There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by administrators based on demographic data.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: In what ways did university administrator preparation courses prepare currently practicing administrators for the ethical decisions they make in their career?

Research Question 2: What trainings, practices, and/or supports do school districts have in place to teach and ensure ethical decisions are made?

Research Question 3: Where do gaps exist in ethical knowledge, training, practices, and/or supports?

Research Question 4: What practices and/or supports do administrators need to make ethical decisions?

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of practicing administrators regarding ethical decision-making?

Research Question 6: In what ways do ethical practices or supports differ based on demographic data?

Participants

As indicated in Chapter Three, the researcher-created survey was sent to every practicing head elementary principal in the state of Missouri who worked in a school that served some form of kindergarten through eighth grade students as well as was shared on social media sites. Due to the nature of how the survey was distributed, it was assumed that most of the responses were from those serving in the state of Missouri; however, that could not be verified. The results from the survey provided demographic data of the participants. While those results varied for some of the demographic data, others were pretty consistent. Two specific examples were that 99% of the responses came from

leaders serving in a public school, and only one response came from a leader serving in a

parochial school. There were zero responses from private school principals. The other

demographic piece that yielded little variance was in the race category. Eighty-eight

percent of respondents were white, t10% were black, and 1% were multi-cultural. The

researcher did not disaggregate or analyze data based on type of school, due to the lack of

variability. While the researcher did analyze the results based on race, it was important to

understand the results were from the survey sample size which might not have been

representative of a larger population.

Null Hypothesis 1: There are no differences in ethical practices based on demographic

data.

Figure 1 showed the overall results of all participants. When disaggregating the

data based on gender, the results were very similar between males and females.

Approximately 89.5% of males and 84.8% of females shared that their district had

supports or practices in place to support ethical decision-making. All other demographic

data supported a similar response to this hypothesis.

Figure 1

My school district has ethical practices or supports in place to help me make ethical decisions.
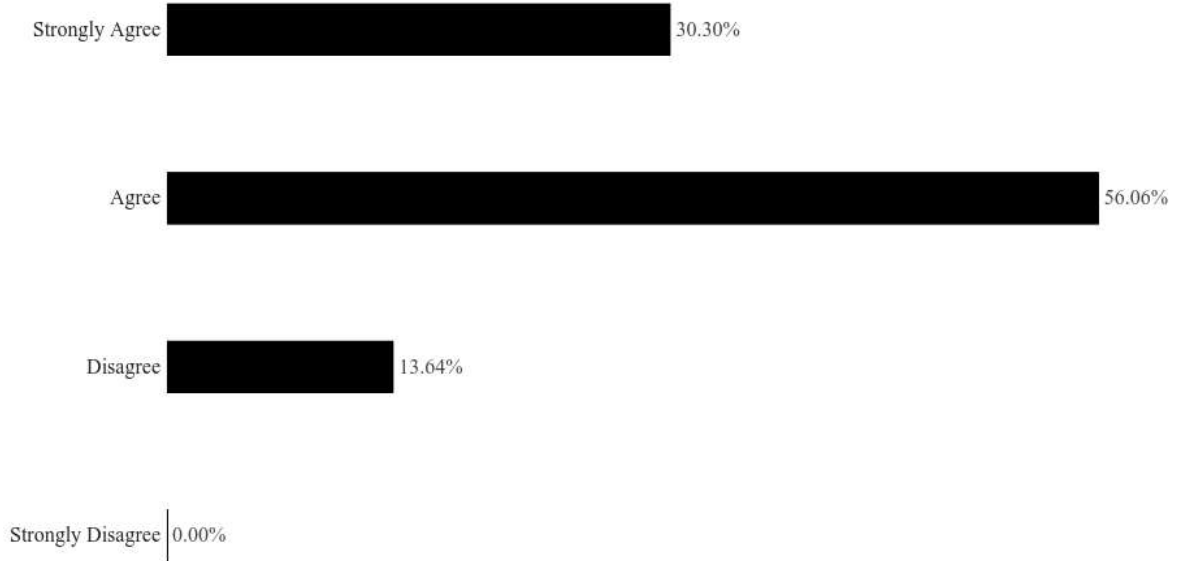
The only two with a slight variance were based on level of education and race. Figure 2 indicated that those leaders with a master's degree agreed less that there were practices in place. As the education level increased, the participants agreed more with the statement that their district had supports and practices in place to support ethical decision-making. Approximately 77% of those with a master's degree either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that there were practices in place; 91.7% of those with a doctorate agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. The same was true when cross analyzing race and having practices in place. Figure 3 showed that the black and multi-cultural sample population 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that there were supports or practices in place in their district.

Figure 2

My school district has ethical practices or supports in place to help me make ethical decisions disaggregated by level of education

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Master's Degree: 30.77%, 46.15%, 23.08%, 0.00%

Educational Specialist: 31.03%, 55.17%, 13.79%, 0.00%

Doctorate: 29.17%, 62.50%, 8.33%, 0.00%
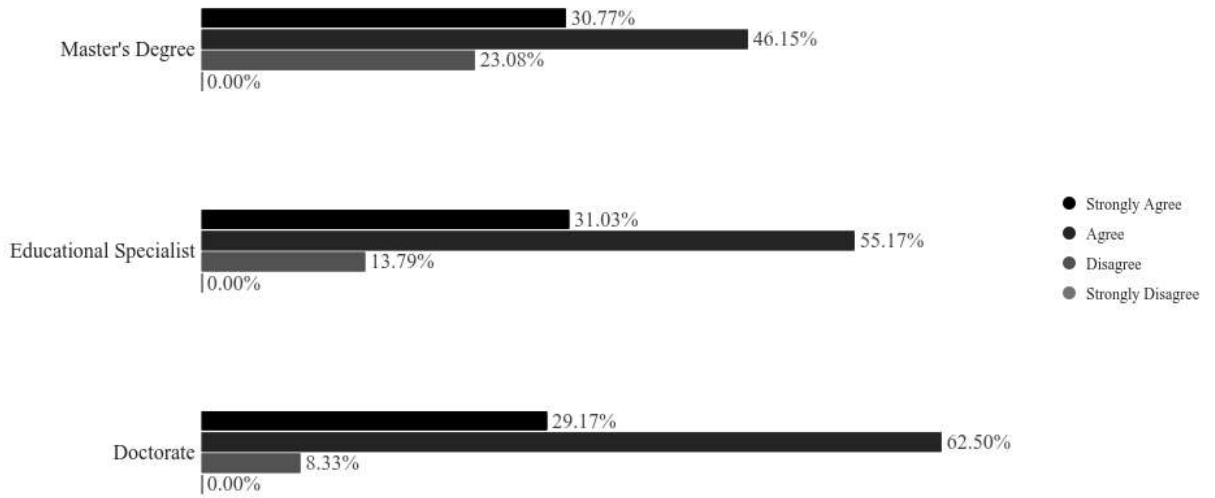
Figure 3

My school district has ethical practices or supports in place to help me make ethical decisions disaggregated by race

Legend:
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Black: 33.33%, 66.67%, 0.00%, 0.00%

White: 28.81%, 55.93%, 15.25%, 0.00%

Multicultural: 100.00%, 0.00%, 0.00%, 0.00%
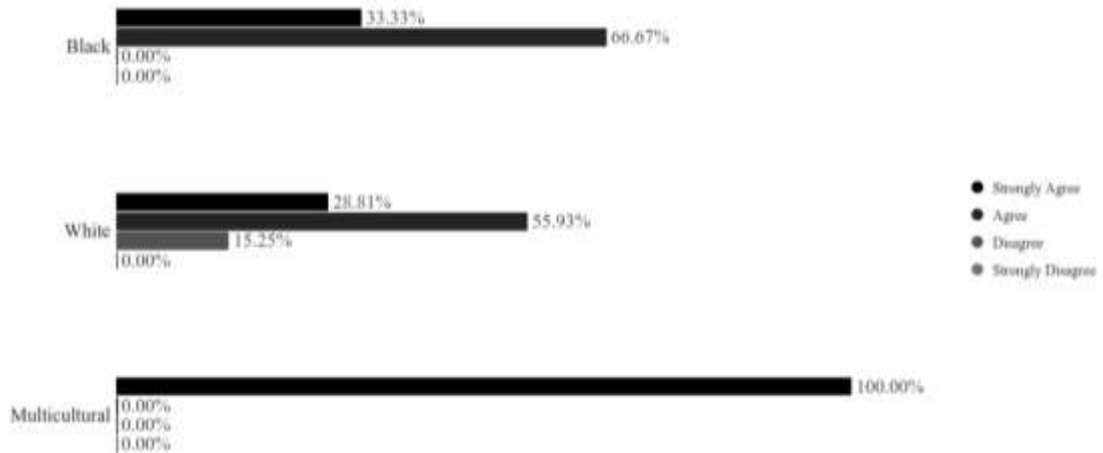
Even though there were slight differences based on responses, statistical analysis was necessary to ensure accuracy of these statements.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there was a difference in ethical practices from school districts as perceived by males and females. A preliminary test revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical practices scores for females (M = 3.11, SD = 0.64) were not significantly different than those of males (M = 3.32, SD = 0.67); t(63) = -1.17, p = .247. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between the way males and females answered this question.

All participants responding to this survey were from public schools with one exception. Therefore, there was not enough data to be able to run statistical analysis comparing demographic data between those from public, private, or parochial schools.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there were perceived differences in ethical practices by those serving in a small or large district. A preliminary test revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical practices scores for those in a large district (M = 3.09, SD = 0.68) were not significantly different than those of small districts (M = 3.20, SD = 0.63); t(64) = -0.67, p = .505. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between how leaders in large and small districts answered this question.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there was a difference in ethical practices as perceived by race, specifically black and white. A preliminary test revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical practices scores for those identifying as black (M = 3.33, SD = 0.52) were not significantly different than those identifying as white (M = 3.15, SD = 0.66); t(64) = 0.66, p = .512.

The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between how black and white respondents answered this question.

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether or not the perceptions of ethical practices for those in rural, suburban, or urban schools were the same (see Tables 1 and 2). The analysis revealed no difference between the means of the three groups. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the perceptions were the same for all three types of schools.

Table 1

ANOVA Table Comparing ethical practices within rural, suburban, and urban schools

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.81	2	0.41.	9.97	0.383	3.143
Within Groups	26.35	64	0.42			
Total	27.17	65				

Table 2

ANOVA Summary Table comparing ethical practices within rural, suburban, and urban schools

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
Rural	35	114	3.26	0.37
Suburban	19	57	3.00	0.44
Urban	12	38	3.17	0.52

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether or not the perceptions of ethical practices for those with a differing number of years of experience as an administrator were the same (see Tables 3 and 4). The analysis revealed

no difference between the means of the three groups. The researcher failed to reject the

null hypothesis and concluded that the perceptions were the same for all five groups.

Table 3

ANOVA Table Comparing ethical practices with the number of years as an administrator

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	2.55	4	0.64	1.64	0.176	2.523
Within Groups	23.76	61	0.39			
Total	26.32	65				

Table 4

ANOVA Summary Table comparing ethical practices with the number of years as an administrator

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
1-2 Years	8	28	3.50	0.29
3-5 Years	10	33	3.30	0.46
6-10 Years	17	51	3.00	0.50
11-15 Years	17	59	3.47	0.26
15 + Years	14	48	3.43	0.42

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether or

not the perceptions of ethical practices based on the highest degree attained by the

participant were the same (see Tables 5 and 6). The analysis revealed no difference

between the means of the three groups. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis

and concluded that the perceptions were the same for all three groups.

Table 5

ANOVA Table Comparing ethical practices with the highest degree attained by participant

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.15	2	0.07	0.17	0.843	3.143
Within Groups	27.02	63	0.43			
Total	27.17	65				

Table 6

ANOVA Summary Table comparing ethical practices with the highest degree attained by participant

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
Master's Degree	13	40	3.08	0.58
Specialist Degree	29	92	3.17	0.43
Doctorate	24	77	3.21	0.35

Null Hypothesis 2: There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by administrators based on demographic data.

When asked to respond to the statement "In my current position, I feel supported by the district to make ethical decisions," 95.5% agreed or strongly agreed. When looking at responses to this question based on demographic data, the only one with a variation was in disaggregating the demographic of race. With black and multi-cultural participants in the sample size, 100% either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported. Whereas only 94.9% of white responses agreed or strongly agreed to the same question (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

In my current position, I feel supported by the district to make ethical decisions disaggregated by race
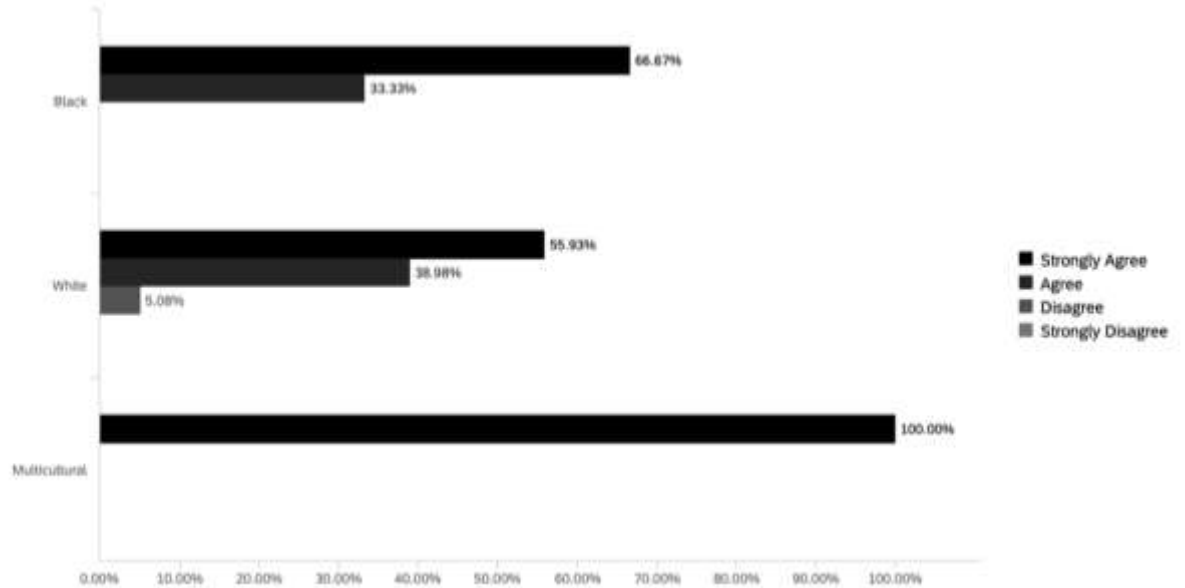
Even though there were slight differences based on responses, statistical analysis was necessary to ensure accuracy of these statements.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there was a difference in support felt from school districts to make ethical decisions as perceived by males and females. A preliminary analysis revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical practices scores for females (M = 3.52, SD = 0.59) were not significantly different than those of males (M = 3.53, SD = 0.61); t(63) = -0.03, p = .978. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between the way males and females answered this question.

Everyone who responded to this survey was from a public school with one exception. Therefore, there was not enough data to be able to run statistical analysis on this question.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there was a difference in support felt from school districts to make ethical decisions as perceived those identifying as black or white. The sample population was not large enough with other ethnicities to include in the analysis. A preliminary test revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical support scores for black participants (M = 3.67, SD = 0.52) were not significantly different than those of white participants (M = 3.52, SD = 0.60); t(64) = 0.59, p = .555. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between the way black or white participants answered this question.

The researcher conducted a t-Test of two means to see if there was a difference in support felt from school districts to make ethical decisions based on the size of the district. A preliminary test revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the ethical support scores for those in a large district (M = 3.45, SD = 0.60) were not significantly different than those in a small district (M = 3.57, SD = 0.59); t(64) = -0.74, p = .463. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no difference between the way males and females answered this question.

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether or not the perceptions of support from districts to make ethical decision for those in rural, suburban, or urban schools were the same (see Tables 7 and 8). The analysis revealed no difference between the means of the three groups. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the perceptions were the same for all three types of schools.

Table 7

ANOVA Table Comparing support to make ethical decisions within rural, suburban, and urban schools

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	2.21	2	1.11	3.45	0.038	3.143
Within Groups	20.23	63	0.32			
Total	22.44	65				

Table 8

ANOVA Summary Table comparing support to make ethical decisions within rural, suburban, and urban schools

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
Rural	35	129	3.69	0.28
Suburban	19	62	3.26	0.32
Urban	12	42	3.50	0.45

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether or not the support from districts to make ethical decision was felt for those with a differing number of years of experience as an administrator were the same (see Tables 9 and 10). The analysis revealed no difference between the means of the five groups. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the perceptions were the same for all five groups.

Table 9

ANOVA Table Comparing ethical practices with the number of years as an administrator

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	2.79	4	0.70	2.17	0.083	2.523
Within Groups	19.65	61	0.32			
Total	22.44	65				

Table 10

ANOVA Summary Table comparing ethical practices with the number of years as an

administrator

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
1-2 Years	8	32	4.00	0.00
3-5 Years	10	37	3.70	0.23
6-10 Years	17	57	3.35	0.49
11-15 Years	17	59	3.47	0.26
15 + Years	14	48	3.43	0.42

The researcher conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine

whether or not support was felt to make ethical decisions from the district based on the

highest degree attained by the participants were the same (see Tables 11 and 12). The

analysis revealed no difference between the means of the three groups. The researcher

failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the perceptions were the same for

all three groups.

Table 11

*ANOVA Table Comparing ethical practices with the highest degree attained by
participant*

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.34	2	0.17	0.49	0.616	3.143
Within Groups	22.10	63	0.35			
Total	22.44	65				

Table 12

ANOVA Summary Table comparing ethical practices with the highest degree attained by participant

Groups	n	Sum	Mean	Variance
Master's Degree	13	45	3.46	0.60
Specialist Degree	29	101	3.48	0.26
Doctorate	24	87	3.63	0.33

Research Question 1: In what ways did university administrator preparation courses prepare currently practicing administrators for the ethical decisions they make in their career?

Over 77% of responses shared that their ethics training was provided through conversations around ethics embedded within a course (see figure 5). Only 13.6% of participants had a specific course dedicated to ethics. The "other" response shared that they had received an ethics course prior to going into education.

Figure 5

What ways did your university administrator program prepare you for the ethical decisions you make
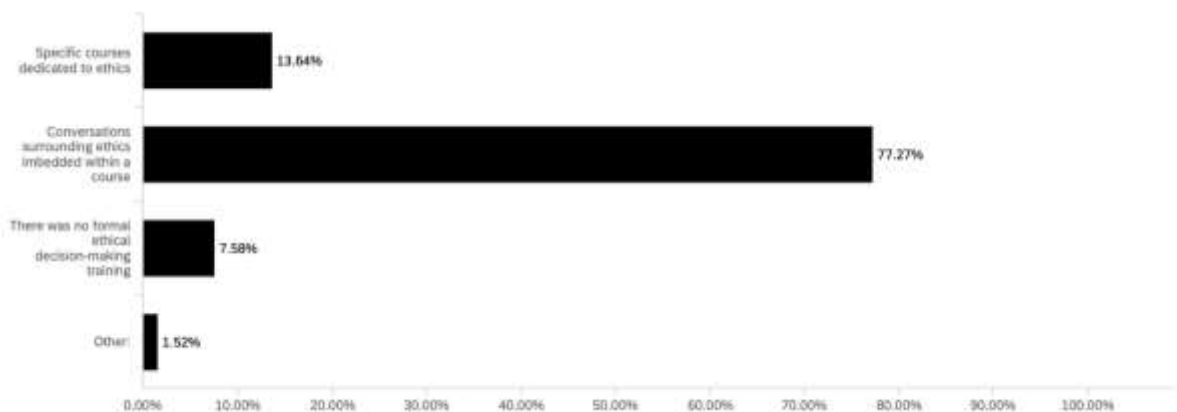
Research Question 2: What trainings, practices, and/or supports do school districts have

in place to teach and ensure ethical decisions are made?

The responses to this research question varied greatly. There was not a clear

definition as to what was considered trainings, practices, and/or supports. This was done

intentionally to find out what administrators viewed as trainings, practices and/or

supports. Table 13 highlights the most frequent responses. These responses were shared

by more than one participant.

Table 13

District supports and / or practices in place to promote and ensure ethical decision-making

Supports and or practices	Number of responses
An ethical school board	2
Collaboration with peers, cohorts, or mentors	29
Board Policies	17
Law Firm Workshops	3
Ethical culture based on needs of students	2
A character education program	2
Master agreement for staff or parent handbook	2

Note. This table only includes items that had two or more responses.

It was evident through the analysis that most participants viewed collaboration

with peers, cohorts, or mentors as the main support or practice districts had in place,

followed by board policies. Other supports that were mentioned by individual participants

included an annual audit, annual mandatory trainings, social workers and counselors in

every building, Mike Rutherford's training on decision-making, code of ethics or

behavior codes, or the response to intervention or (RtI) process.

Research Question 3: Where do gaps exist in ethical knowledge, training, practices,

and/or supports?

Before this research question could be answered, it was necessary to answer the

question of whether or not currently practicing administrators did, in fact, believe there

was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices. Based on the data shared

in figure 6, 82.8% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that there was a gap in

ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices for currently practicing elementary

principals.

Figure 6

Based on media reports and my own personal experiences, I believe there is a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices
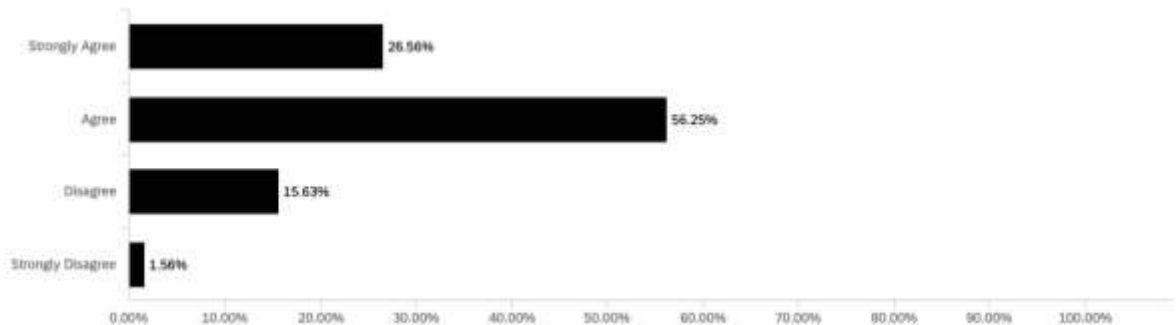
In response to the research question, participants favored the need for more

ethical supports and practices available to practicing administrators (see figure 7). While

the majority or participants shared the need for more supports and practices, it was

evident that there was a need in all three areas.

Figure 7

In which areas do you feel an ethical gap is located
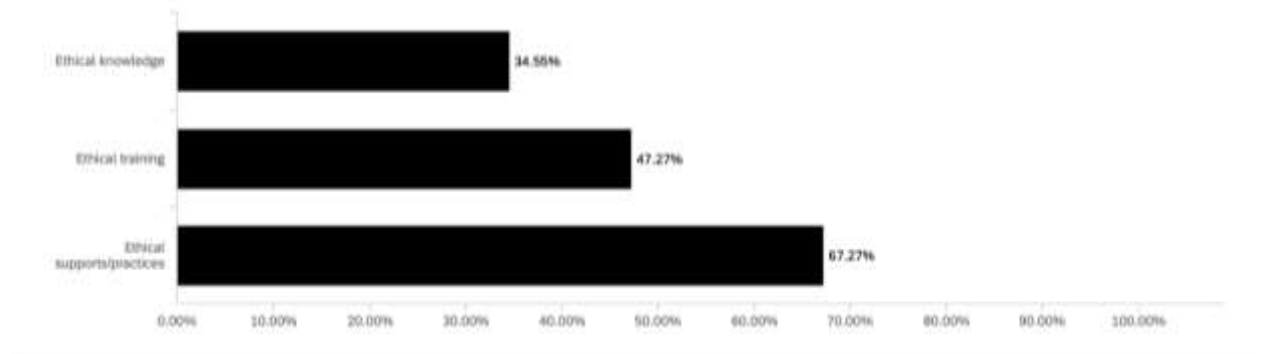
Research Question 4: What practices and/or supports do administrators need to make

ethical decisions?

The results for this research question came as a result of the individual interviews

conducted. The researcher utilized the questions indicated in Table 14. Interviews were

conducted via Zoom and were recorded and later transcribed.

Table 14

Open-Ended Interview questions 3, 4, 5, 6

3. As a leader, what practices have you put in place to assure you are making ethical decisions?

4. What specific supports do you utilize from your district?

5. You mention that there is a gap in ethical decision-making? What thoughts do you have to make that better?

6. What additional supports or practices would be helpful to implement to support ethical decisions?

Note: Interview was authored by researcher.

The first question asked was regarding what practices or supports they currently

had in place to ensure ethical decision-making. When discussing these supports or

practices that were already in place, the most frequent support or practice mentioned was

collaboration with peers. That collaboration looked different depending on the district

and participant. Interviewee A shared that they have "some checks and balances

including making sure that I'm surrounding myself with other people when I'm making

decisions. Checking in with other people whether it's your assistant principal or

counselor, other people on your leadership team." Interviewee B shared that it was

important to "bounce ideas off of them [colleagues] before making final decisions" or to

"have a group of other principal friends. We just have an ongoing text thread and often

we text each other." These responses were similar across the board with Interviewee E

sharing, "I'll bounce ideas off people just to kind of check" and Interviewee G sharing

that "I think it is also important to have a mentor." Each of these interview participants

surrounded themselves with other people as a way to collaborate through some of the

ethical decisions.

　　　　In contrast, others felt that they were making decisions on their own. Interviewee

B shared the following:

　　　　I am limited because we're out here on an island. I have called and talked to

　　　　quite a few of my friends that I've had and try talking to them but I really wish I

　　　　had somebody all the time that I could just talk through things. I have my boss

　　　　who is a good Christian man who makes good decisions based on the best of the

　　　　kids but that's still not the same as you know having somebody who's at the same

　　　　level.

Interviewee G felt similarly and shared, "I'm very reflective so just some personal

reflection and time to think is important."

Other participants had more structured practices or supports. Interviewee D shared, "I really try to weigh both sides of every situation; I always try to give the other person time to talk and kind of tell me where they're coming from." Interviewee E shared another practice was being "engaged in a number of book studies with members of my school district" or Interviewee F "really like(s) to read and listen to podcasts and do different things like that so that I'm always putting good things in my head instead of junk." Regardless of what supports or practices they were putting in place for themselves or were provided by a district, there was significant variability within what supports and practices were being used.

A few participants shared that their religion or religious beliefs influenced their practices. Interviewee C stated, "Most of my ethical framework is based on my faith and so that really kind of guides and puts everything in context." Another example of how religion plays a role as a support or practice was when Interviewee E commented, "I am a person of faith and as a result of that, I spend a lot of time reading about the lives of either people that have been recognized as Saints by the church or people that have done work for social justice throughout the ages." A third participant, Interviewee B shared that they "actually take time to pray and read the Bible" and that "God's truth is what I try to base it (decisions) on."

Once it was known what current supports and practices were in place, the researcher asked what additional supports or practices would be helpful. These answers varied as well. Interviewee A wished "there was a discipline handbook or some sort of guide for discipline to help make that more consistent at the district level." They also mentioned more one on one conversations with the superintendent to go over

expectations to ensure everyone is on the same page. Interviewee C wished for districts to "promote collegial sharing." They shared that they would benefit from dedicated time out of the building to be with other administrators in a relaxed format where administrators from different districts could gather and support one another. Interviewee E would like the following:

> If they would offer our own mentoring program that was somebody that wasn't your supervisor. I've kind of learned over the years, for better or for worse that it is nice to chat with a supervisor about things that you're thinking about but over time they may begin to start thinking you don't know how to handle what's going on at your school.

It was clear from the interviews that different leaders needed different things, and, in some cases, leaders in one district had in place what others wished they had. For example, Interviewee E would like to have a mentor program to support their work while a mentor program was listed as a district-level support or practice for Interviewee G. There was no consistency for what was in place or what was needed by administrators to make ethical decisions. Interviewee E had a suggestion to ensure some consistency:

> Start with those that are going into the teaching profession, making that (ethics coursework) a part of the curriculum for everybody. Having a foundational course on ethics and then perhaps a follow-up course that you are applying those things that you learned take that same sort of format and apply it to the Master's level for those studying to be an administrator.

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of practicing administrators regarding ethical decision-making?

The researcher asked individual interview participants the questions listed in

Table 15.

Table 15

Open-Ended Interview questions 1, 2, 7, 8

1. How often do you make an ethical decision in your position?

2. What decisions do you make that you would not consider an ethical decision?

7. In the survey, you either agreed or strongly agreed that it is your ethical duty to uphold the policies and practices of the district and to do what is in the best interest of students. What do you do when those ideals conflict?

8. Tell me about the process you went through to learn about ethical decision-making.

Note: Interview was authored by researcher.

When asked how often they make an ethical decision, all ten participants shared

that they made an ethical decision at least daily. Some shared even more frequently.

Interviewee B stated that they make an ethical decision "very much all the time" and

Interviewee C said, "You could say hourly." Interviewee G went on to share that the

decision-making that is made by a building leader had to take other people into account

and the impact the decision would have on those people played into the decision;

therefore, most, if not all, decisions made would be considered ethical.

On the contrary, a few participants shared that there were decisions that they

would not consider ethical decisions. Interviewee F shared "what I get the staff for

Christmas," and Interviewee I shared that they would say "day-to-day operations" were

not ethical decisions. Interviewee A shared that the "black and white budgetary"

decisions would not necessarily be an ethical decision. An example would be as follows:

A teacher has 23 students and they just got two more students. They said I need

more math consumable books, and I had the decision to say yes or no to that. You

would say yes because it is a black and white decision and they need those

supplies.

These responses made it clear that practicing administrators were aware that many

of the decisions they made were ethical decisions; however, their answers varied when

talking about specific examples.

Throughout the survey, many participants shared that they believed it was their

ethical duty to uphold the policies and practices of the district and when asked what

supports and practices were in place to support their decision-making, several referred to

board policies or laws that supported their decisions. Those same survey participants also

shared that they believed it was their ethical duty to do what was in the best interest of the

child. During the individual interview, participants were asked how they would handle a

situation where those two ideals might conflict. There was a lack of consistency within

these answers as well. Many shared that they would do what was in the best interest of

the child first. Interviewee G shared, "We do what's best for our students."

> I'm a rule follower overall, but there are times where you have to learn; yes, they
>
> said to do something one way but that way might impact a family a little bit
>
> differently. There are times where you have to think about what is best in this
>
> scenario and use the rules as guidelines rather than 100%.

Interviewee J stated, "It is in the best interest of the kid I sided with. The best interest of

the student and family over the district policy." This is in direct contrast to Interviewee E

who shared "Ultimately, I'm an employee of my district and so I have to uphold what

they are saying to do."

During individual interviews, the researcher asked participants about their learning surrounding ethical decision-making. The responses were very inconsistent. Several shared that there was some form of learning surrounding ethical decision-making within their university preparation program. However, many attributed the bulk of their learning to experiences prior to formal schooling. Interviewee A shared that their "greatest knowledge in the area of ethical decision-making has come from strong models and influencers as mentors that have been in front of me in my career." This was similar to Interviewee B who shared that their parents raised them to be "truth tellers." Interviewee C shared their learning around ethical decisions began with Boy Scouts and continued with their religion:

> My faith really guides the context in which I view most things. So not to get too religious on it, but I'm trying to do things as I would hope Jesus would do. [This] is honestly one of my guiding principles.

Interviewee I shared, "It comes from being a Christian and…teaching that I've learned ever since being in Sunday School and trying to follow the 10 commandments and the Golden rule." Interviewee J shared that he continues his learning by putting "myself in new situations and trying to find different professional development as well that maybe I'm not used to."

Research Question 6: In what ways do ethical practices or supports differ based on demographic data?

Research question 6 was in direct relation to Null Hypothesis 2 which stated "There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by administrators based on demographic data." Through statistical analysis the researcher failed to reject the Null

Hypothesis. This meant that there was no difference in ethical supports and practices based on demographic data. However, the researcher cross analyzed the responses of survey participants based on demographic data to those that agreed or strongly agreed that their district had supports and practices in place. In analyzing the list of supports and practices given by demographic data, there were a few notable differences.

When looking at the highest degree obtained, it was clear that those with a specialist degree or doctorate listed more supports or practices currently in place. This could be a result of an actual difference in supports or practices or could be a result of knowing about or being aware of more supports or practices based on degree level. This was also true when looking at the number of years as an administrator. As the number of years increased, the number of supports or practices listed increased.

When looking at differences between males and females, males tended to list board policies and support from upper administration whereas females listed those plus mentoring opportunities and collaborative conversations with other acting principals.

The most surprising difference came when analyzing rural, urban, and suburban communities and the amount of supports or practices. The researcher noted a large difference between rural versus urban or suburban. Of those participating and mentioning board policies as a support or practice they use to make ethical decisions, 61.5% of those in rural schools referenced board policies. Twenty percent in urban schools and 28.6% in suburban schools mentioned board policies as a support or practice they use to support making ethical decisions.

Other Results

The researcher made additional observations after further analyzing questions on the survey. Figure 8 shows that while a large majority of participants felt supported by their district to make ethical decisions, when asked if they had formal training regarding ethical decision-making from the district, their answers yielded very different results. While over 95% felt supported by the district, almost 55% of responses said they disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement "I have had formal training from my school district to make ethical decisions." This discrepancy needs further investigation.

Figure 8

I have had formal training from my school district to make ethical decisions
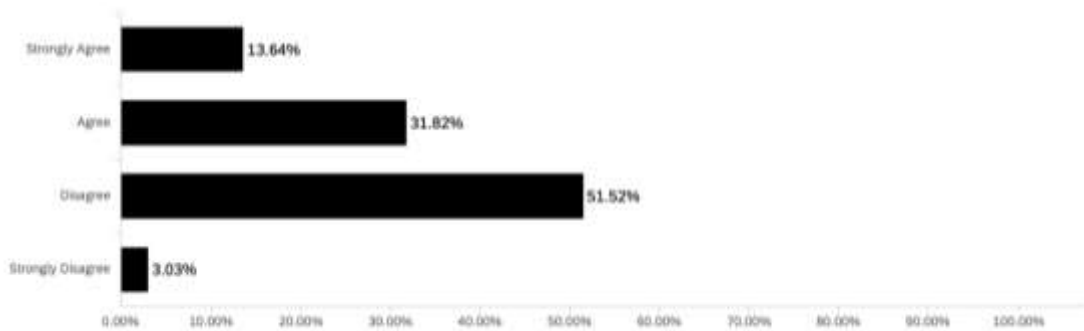
The researcher asked participants information regarding where they had received any ethical training (see figure 5) and where they felt that the training for supports and practices should happen. The researcher asked two separate questions: One regarding where administrators should gain ethical knowledge (see figure 9) and one regarding where they should receive training on supports and practices (see figure 10). For both questions, participants felt that the knowledge and training on supports and practices should happen at the school district level. However, when asked where training has

happened in the past, most shared they had some form of training at the university level, and less than half had received any kind of formal training from their current district.

Further analysis also found that 92.5% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that their university had prepared them to make ethical decisions. However, when asked if based on media reports and their own personal experiences if they believed that there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports or practices, 82.8% agreed or strongly agreed that there was a gap in ethical knowledge training supports and/or practices. There was a discrepancy here that also needs further investigation.

Figure 9

Where do you believe administrators should primarily gain knowledge about ethical decision making
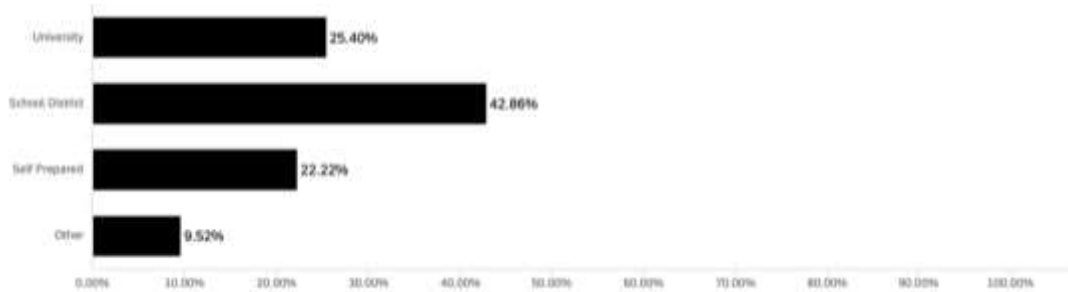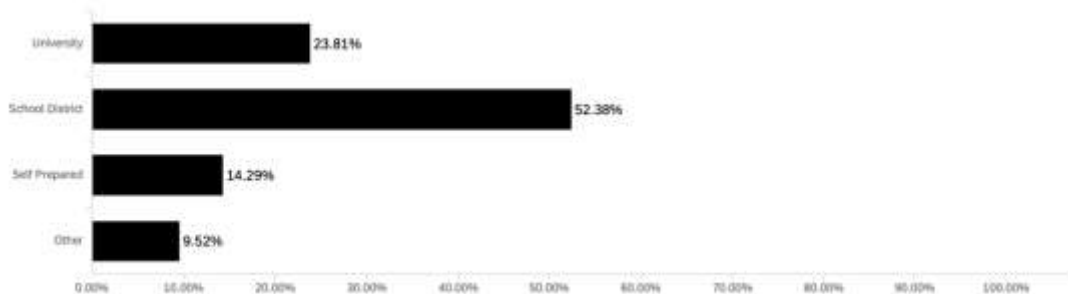

Figure 10

Where do you believe administrators should primarily learn about ethical practices and supports for ethical decision making

During the individual interviews, the researcher also asked scenario-based questions to participants. Upon sharing the scenario, the researcher asked the questions "What are the ethical issues in this scenario?" and "How have or would you approach this situation?" Participants either struggled or were not able to identify what the ethical issues were in the scenarios. Those that attempted only identified the problem they must solve as opposed to identifying the ethical issue and presenting both sides of the issue. Participants often went right into how they would go about approaching the issue based on their philosophy, policies, or previous experiences. It became evident that these practicing administrators needed further training in identifying the ethical issue in a scenario in order to be able to accurately work through the issue.

Summary

This study was just the beginning of research needed to investigate the need for ethics education, training, supports, and practices for practicing and aspiring administrators. The decisions made in schools daily required at least ethical consideration. The varying ways that leaders have been trained to handle ethical dilemmas and supported by universities and school districts varied greatly, and it was necessary to begin to bring this important topic to light. Putting ethical knowledge, trainings, supports, and practices at the forefront of the learning that needed to be done as educational leaders is critical.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Reflection, and Recommendations

Introduction

As stated in Chapter Four, this study examined ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices in place for current elementary administrators. The researcher conducted the study through an online survey disbursed via email, through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and through individual interviews virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Null Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis 1: There are no differences in ethical practices based on demographic data.

Null Hypothesis 2: There are no differences in the amount of support perceived by administrators based on demographic data.

The statistical analysis of the two hypotheses concluded that there was no difference in the ethical practices based on demographic data, and that there was no difference in the amount of support perceived by administrators based on demographic data.

Research Questions

The research questions yielded more variability. The researcher found that most acting administrators, over 77% of participants, received their ethical training through discussions during a portion of a course taken to obtain administrative certification. Based on the results of the survey and the interviews, the most common support or practice used by acting administrators was some form of collaboration with peers. Many of the participants from the study (82.8%) believed that there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices.

Research Question 1: In what ways did university administrator preparation

courses prepare currently practicing administrators for the ethical decisions they

make in their career?

Information for this question came from a multiple-choice question on the survey.

Participants indicated that there is currently no consistent ethical training supports or

practices at the university level. The responses were quite varied. Even within the 77%

stating that they received their ethical training as embedded within a portion of a course,

participants were unable to determine how much of the course was dedicated to ethical

decision-making. Further questioning was needed to find out more specifics regarding

their ethical training.

An element that could have impacted the results of this research question was that

there was no common definition as to what ethical training involved. The participants

used their own definition of what ethical training looked like from their experience;

however, there was no avenue for them to share those specifics within the survey.

Research Question 2: What trainings, practices, and/or supports do school districts

have in place to teach and ensure ethical decisions are made?

By far, the largest support or practice in place for currently practicing

administrators was some form of collaboration which was shared by 29 participants.

Some participants collaborated with peers or with upper administration. Some were

members of a cohort or a professional organization that met regularly, while others

shared that having an individual mentor was what helped support their decisions.

Following board policies was mentioned by 17 participants and came in as the second

most common support and/or practice in place by districts. Other supports and practices

mentioned only received two or three responses. The supports and practices listed by

participants were coded and tallied based on the number of participants who shared a

particular support or practice in use. When gathering data, the researcher only included

those supports or practices that were shared by at least two participants. The answers

were quite varied, showing a lack of consistency in what was in place to support

decision-making.

    Future questioning might provide a clearer understanding of the support systems

in place. For those who mentioned some form of collaboration, it was important to look

into what it means to be a member of a collaborative team. It was also important to find

out when meeting with an administrative team or with colleagues at the same level, if

there was any deliberate conversation surrounding ethical decision-making. Investigating

if there were ethical decision-making agenda items during those meetings, or were they

only brought up if someone was asking for support in a particular situation. Asking for

support would have been easier to do for those comfortable in their role or feel that they

have trust and job security with their supervisors. Assuring there was the process for

those new in a position and potentially in need of more support with these types of

decisions, and working to find out if there was a formal platform for supporting decision-

making. It was also necessary to ask if the current support or practice being used did or

did not need some form of adjustment.

    Beyond looking at the structure of the collaborative efforts, several participants

also mentioned that they utilized board policies to guide their decision-making. Further

investigation was needed in this regard as well. There was a need to know if there was

any training on board policies towards the beginning of their transition into the current role. Also, it was important to know if the board policies were used as a reference to review when trying to determine a decision.

During individual interviews, the researcher asked each participant if it was their ethical duty to uphold the policies and practices of the district, and if it was their ethical duty to do what was in the best interest of the child. If they answered yes to both questions, they were then asked what they would do when those two ideals conflict. Nine out of ten interview participants stated that they would choose what was in the best interest of the child over policies and practices. Again, further investigation needs to be conducted. Discussion was necessary to discover which policies and practice it was ok to go against in the best interest of the child. When policies were not followed, identifying if there was collaboration with supervisors done prior to the decision or did the decision maker just do what was in the best interest of the child and deal with ramifications that might or might not have resulted at a later time.

When looking at this research question through a broader lens, the real answer was that leaders did not know what they did not know. They shared what they were using as a way to justify the decisions they were making. It was clear there was no formal structure or clear best practice when looking at what trainings, supports, and or/practices were in place by school districts. The responses significantly varied, and it was evident from the survey and individual interviews that even though there is a model code of ethics and other ethical codes adopted by districts, there does not appear to be a comprehensive program available to ensure ethical decisions are made by administrators.

Research Question 3: Where do gaps exist in ethical knowledge, training,

practices, and/or supports?

The results of this research question were perplexing. Prior to asking this

question, the researcher asked participants if in fact they believed there was a gap in

ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices. Eighty-two percent of participants

agreed or strongly agreed that there was a gap. This showed that currently practicing

administrators were aware that they might not have been trained appropriately or might

not have been provided with quality supports or practices. It is clear that there was a need

for more training, supports, or practices for these decision makers. When asked where

they thought the biggest gap existed, participants stated the need for more supports and/or

practices to be put in place to utilize in the field.

The researcher wrote this question anticipating that participants might feel the

need to have a structured course on ethics similar to the medical and business fields. This

was not the case. Most participants were looking for more structured supports and

practices to utilize in their daily decision-making. While the majority (67.3%) felt the

supports and practices were what was needed, an even larger percentage (81.8%) felt the

knowledge and training combined were what was needed. All of these responses were

dependent on the definition each participant used for the term's knowledge, training,

supports, and practices. Depending on what they viewed those terms to mean could have

had an impact on how they responded.

Research Question 4: What practices and/or supports do administrators need to

make ethical decisions?

The results of this research question were limited. The best way to describe the

responses were that administrators do not know what they do not know. If a best practice

had been established already to support administrators to make ethical decisions in an

easy and functional way, then this study would not have been necessary. The work of an

administrator is so vast that there is no way for them to know what they do not know

without receiving further knowledge or training. This was where states, universities, and

individual districts needed to band together in order to create a cohesive and functional

approach to supporting ethical decision-making for all administrators. There was a clear

need for some form of innovative approach that was ready to be piloted at either the

university or district level. Based on the results of this study, it would be recommended to

start at a district level in order to support those who were currently practicing

administrators.

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of practicing administrators

regarding ethical decision-making?

The researcher focused the responses to two interview questions to gain insight

into this research question. During interviews, it was clear that administrators were aware

that they were making ethical decisions daily. All 10 participants stated they made an

ethical decision at least daily when asked how often they made ethical decisions.

Because there was no formal process or best practice in place for administrators,

when asked about the process they went through to learn about ethical decision-making,

seven out of 10 interviewees shared some form of learning outside of a formal

educational setting. Boy Scouts, religious beliefs, and family upbringing were examples

given when asked how they learned about ethics and making ethical decisions. Several

participants mentioned that "doing the right thing" guided their decisions. This type of

response confirmed that not all participants had a firm understanding of what an ethical

decision entailed.

Research Question 6: In what ways do ethical practices or supports differ based

on demographic data?

This research question was directly tied to null hypothesis 2. Statistical analysis

showed that there was no difference in the support perceived based on demographic data.

While the overall data showed no significant difference, the researcher drilled down into

the responses to discover that the higher the degree, the more supports and practices

leaders listed as being in place. The same was true when looking at the number of years

as an administrator. As the years increased, so did the number of supports and practices

listed. This makes sense that the more education and experience one has would yield a

greater list of things in place to support ethical decisions. The results that were the most

surprising were the individual supports and practices listed based on demographic data.

When comparing rural, urban, and suburban administrators, those working in a rural

setting were more than 50% more likely to list utilizing board policies as a support to

make ethical decisions over those in urban or suburban communities.

Implications

The results of this research study make it clear that more consistency is needed for

practicing administrators who are making ethical decisions every day. The results show

that there is not a standard for ethical training at the university or the school district level

for administrators. While many administrators feel supported and able to make those

often-difficult decisions, it is clear that some form of consistent teaching, practices, and/or supports need to be established to better support the decisions that are being made.

There is so much variability in how acting administrators approach and carry out decisions that some semblance of consistency, structure, or clear expectations is necessary for all administrators. For example, conversations surrounding breaking board policies in the best interest of a child need to take place, assuring leaders had a clear understanding of when it was acceptable to break policy. Structured conversations around ethical decision-making needs to be a part of monthly administrative meetings. Time will be the biggest obstacle in working to achieve some of this support for administrators.

The researcher anticipated finding a need for ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices. It was not expected that 40% of interview participants were utilizing their religious beliefs to guide their decision-making. One participant even shared that they ask themselves "what would Jesus do" when working to make an ethical decision.

The literature in Chapter Two helped the researcher understand what frameworks and structures were out there to support ethical decision-making. The sheer number of options were overwhelming. No one framework or structure rose to be the answer to all of the questions asked within this research study. While there has been an attempt with the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, other than the creation of expectations, there is not much teaching or continued conversation surrounding this code of ethics.

The Model Code of Ethics for Educators could be the starting point for future work and research. States or individual districts could adopt the code and create professional learning surrounding ethical decisions. They could also provide a platform

for continued learning around ethics and ethical decisions. It is recommended that

districts continue the collaborative conversations and efforts that may already be in place.

This would be an easy starting point. The most important piece is that ongoing

conversations need to occur.

Recommendations for Future Studies

As noted in Chapter One, there were several limitations that impacted this study.

The most notable was that the entire study was conducted during the COVID-19 global

pandemic. This was probably the largest factor in the number of participants who

participated in the study. Many administrators were working hard to figure out online

learning and what a transition into in-person learning might look like. Taking the time to

participate in a research study was likely not at the top of the priority list.

The results of the study were also impacted by the demographics of the

participants. When looking at education as a whole, the majority of educators were white

females. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2017-2018, 54%

of administrators were female as compared to 46% male. When looking at race, 78%

were white, and 11% were black.   The demographics of the survey mimicked this

information. Seventy-one percent of participants were female and 27.5% were male,

leaving one participant who chose not to respond. The same was true with race with

88.4% being white, 10.2% black, and one participant identifying as multi-cultural.

Therefore, this study mostly represented the experience of white females. In future

studies, it is hoped that a larger and more diverse demographic population would be

represented in the research. In order to achieve a more diverse demographic, future

studies should include administrators from other levels such as pre- school or secondary

to see if their experiences were similar or different from this study and also include different administrative positions such as assistant principals or directors to help broaden the demographics. It is also recommended to take a more national approach as a majority of responses in this study were from the state of Missouri.

During a conversation between the researcher and a faculty member of a Missouri university educational leadership program, it was shared that the university recognized the importance of discussing ethics and ethical decision-making, but struggled to mandate an entire course because it was not required by the state to obtain the degree. Currently, across the United States, there is no consistent expectation for what ethical training is necessary to obtain a degree in educational leadership. When looking at the 77% of participants who shared that they received ethics instruction from conversations surrounding ethics embedded within a course, it is important to find out more information surrounding those conversations. It is important to know what the overarching objectives were to obtain certification. We must investigate the format in which ethical understanding was taught and whether the learning was surrounding legal issues, moral ones, or both. It was important to Learn if there was any form of assessment on ethical understanding and to determine if there was any history of ethics or specific philosophers of ethics taught within those courses. Much more research could be done in this area. Consistency for all administrative candidates is necessary to create an understanding regarding ethics and ethical decision-making. This research could support identifying common expectations for all universities within the realm of education to dedicate and mandate ethical training, supports, and practices for aspiring administrators and educators at the university level.

Universities are not the only place it is recommended to make some changes. Based on the results of the interviews, it is recommended that individual districts work to have structured expectations surrounding the learning of ethics and ethical decision-making. Whether that be specific professional development, structured conversations, or expectations surrounding how ethical decisions are made and who is a part of those decisions, the need for learning and conversations was clear. The researcher was aware that a lack of a sample program in place that could be implemented on a larger scale and time needed to implement a program are the biggest hurdles in achieving this recommendation. Until further research is done to find a common protocol to put in place to support currently practicing administrators, it is recommended that districts continue the learning through trainings at the district level. This, along with providing individual supports and/or practices to administrators, was needed to promote and support ethical decisions.

There is a significant amount of further research that needs to be done in this area. As stated before, conducting research on whether or not collaborative teams or board policies are actually working to support administrators in ethical decision-making is necessary to know if those forms of support and practices should be continued. During this work of determining whether collaborative teams actually work, it would be important to assure that a requirement of that collaborative team is to be a safe place to ask questions about decision-making without worrying if any members of that team are questioning the decisions or practices of the individual looking for support.

Discussion

When looking at this study overall, several ideas come to light. This is just the beginning of the work that needs to be done. The overall take away from this study was that there is, in fact, a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices. Through the surveys and individual interviews, there was insight into how administrators have been trained and what has influenced their thinking of ethical decision-making. During individual interviews, prior to the formal interview beginning, several participants shared that they were nervous. One participant even asked for the difference between morals and ethics to be explained prior to beginning. Many participants continually asked "Is that what you were looking for" when answering questions. The researcher consistently shared that there was not a right or wrong answer, but rather the study was just looking at individual experiences. It is clear that there is a lack of comfort and confidence for many when talking about ethical decisions.

The work that needs to be completed would include research that specifically investigates what different school districts have in place via trainings, supports, or practices to continue the conversation regarding ethical decision-making. Future studies should focus on asking current leaders what they are using that is working, and investigating what structurally needs to change to ensure ethical decisions are being made. This is especially critical in those rural areas with fewer collaborative supports or checks and balances in place.

What was learned in Chapter Two was that decision-making is influenced by the culture it serves. The ethical training cannot stop at the university level. It must be continued throughout the career of a leader. Therefore, universities cannot be held

accountable alone. States and school districts need to find a platform for conversations, professional development, or continued learning beyond what was learned at the university level in order to assure those making decisions are the best equipped to make said decisions. In order for states or school districts to continue the conversation surrounding ethics beyond the university level, there was a need for a better connection between the universities that prepare educational leaders and the states/school districts that employee the educational leaders.

The work of closing the gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices needs to be facilitated sooner rather than later, and is a way for school districts to achieve one of the goals that many districts have in place right now, equity. The connection between ethical decision-making and social justice and equity within schools is closer than it may appear. While leaders might use different trainings, policies, supports, or practices to ensure that they are making ethical decisions, it is vital that they use these ethical decision-making tools and resources to ensure that they are promoting a learning environment that supports equity for all students and is examined with a social justice lens. Evaluating to ensure decisions that are made with an equity lens is yet another facet of ensuring ethical decisions. Making truly ethical decisions requires those making decisions to be considering equity as a part of all decisions.

Conclusion

The researcher in this study was new to the administrative field. While she had conversations surrounding ethical dilemmas throughout multiple courses at the university level, and knew that there were some supports and practices in place at the district level, there was still more that needed to be done based on frequency and the kind of decisions

that were required to be made. Administrators were aware that they were making ethical decisions and worked hard using the knowledge, training, supports, and practices they may have had to make those decisions. However, the news and media outlets show over and over again that the answers to ethical dilemmas are not always black-and-white. They often involve complex thoughts along with the impact those decisions have on those in the school and community. The administrators in the news did not set out to make poor decisions. They made the best decision they could with the knowledge, information, and support they had available at that time. It is for these situations that this research was necessary.

This study confirmed that there was a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, and practices. This gap might not be based on demographics or location, but rather a universal gap in consistency and a process to promote knowledge, training, formal supports, or practices. There was no consistent training at the university level across states or the country, according to those who participated in the study, or within the school districts in which participating administrators served. As stated in Chapter One, the goal of this dissertation was to provide more information for universities and school districts around the country to better equip their leaders with the skills needed to make the ethical decisions necessary for the profession. The time has come to move forward, accept this information, and work as a profession to ensure that ethical decisions are a priority for all.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. To which gender identity do you most identify:

        Male   Female   Choose not to respond

2. Race:

Black   White   Hispanic   Asian   Indian   Pacific Islander   Multicultural

3. Current Setting: Rural   Urban   Suburban

4. Setting for the majority of your administrative experience:

        Urban   Rural   Suburban

5. Are you a Public, Private, or Parochial school administrator?

                    Public   Private   Parochial

6. Size of district? Small (less than 5000 students) Large (more than 5000 students)

7. How many years have you been an administrator?

            1-2   3-5   6-10   11-15   more than 15

8. Highest degree attained: Master's Degree   Educational Specialist   Doctorate

9. I feel my university administrator preparation program prepared me to make

    ethical decisions as an administrator.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. What ways did University administrator preparation program prepare you for the

    ethical decisions you make?

Specific courses dedicated to ethics

Conversations surrounding ethics imbedded within a course

There was no formal ethical decision-making training

Other: _____

11. I have had formal training from my school district to make ethical decisions.

 Strongly Agree			Agree			Disagree			Strongly Disagree

12. In my current position, I feel supported by the district to make ethical decisions.

 Strongly Agree			Agree			Disagree			Strongly Disagree

13. My school district has practices or supports in place to help me make ethical

   decisions.

Strongly Agree			Agree			Disagree			Strongly Disagree

14. If you answered "agree" or "strongly agree" that your district has supports or

   practices in place to help you make ethical decisions, please list any that are in

   place.

_____

_____

_____

15. I have sought my own learning regarding ethical decision making.

Strongly Agree			Agree			Disagree			Strongly Disagree

16. I am aware of organizations or theoretical frameworks that could support me in

   ethical decision making?

Strongly Agree			Agree			Disagree			Strongly Disagree

17. Based on media reports and my own personal experiences, I believe there is a gap in ethical knowledge, training, supports, or practices.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

18. If you chose "strongly agree or agree" to question 17, in which of the areas do you feel the gap is located? Circle all that apply.

   ethical knowledge   ethical training   ethical supports/practices

19. As an administrator, it is my ethical job to uphold the policies and practices of the district.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

20. As an administrator, it is my ethical job to do what is in the best interest of students, regardless of policies or practices.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

21. Where do you believe administrators should primarily gain knowledge about ethical decision making?

University   School District   Self Prepared   Other: _____

22. Where do you believe administrators should primarily learn about ethical practices and supports for ethical decision making?

University   School District   Self Prepared   Other:_____

23. If you would be willing to participate in a follow up interview, please list a form of contact information below.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. How often do you make an ethical decision in your position?

2. What decisions do you make that you would **not** consider ethical decisions?

3. As a leader, what practices have **you** put in place to assure you are making ethical decisions?

4. What additional supports or practices would be helpful to implement in supporting ethical decisions?

5. In the survey, you either agreed or strongly agreed that it is your ethical duty to uphold the policies and practices of the district and to do what is in the best interest of students. What do you do when those ideals conflict?

6. Tell me about the process you went through to learn about ethical decision making.

Scenario based questioning

7. You are an administrator in a small school and a teacher shares that another staff member has been going out and drinking with many parents of their students and has been badmouthing the decisions of the administration (specifically you). The telling teacher wants you to know but does not want you to say anything to the offending teacher for fear of retaliation. Due to it being a small school, the offending teacher would know who told.

What are the ethical issues in this scenario?

How would you approach this situation?

8. You have a student in your school who in the past has received a significant

   amount of special services through an IEP and therefore was not in the classroom

   much. One of the new goals for this student is to increase their social participation

   with peers in the classroom. For this reason, the student is in the classroom way

   more frequently and is doing a great job towards achieving that goal. However,

   this student also has significant physical outbursts that are hard to predict and

   when they happen, they require a room clear. The outbursts are inconsistent and

   usually only happen about once a week. Last week, it happened three times. You

   now have parents who are calling and emailing concerned not only about the

   safety of their child but about the amount of instructional time that is lost due to

   continued room clears. The parents of the student with special needs hasmade it

   clear that the classroom is the least restrictive environment and wants him to be in

   the classroom as much as possible to interact with peers.

What are the ethical issues in this scenario?

What steps would you take to address this situation?

9. You are the administrator of a small elementary school. with only two sections

   per grade level. In second grade, Mrs. Harris has a positive reputation and the

   community genuinely likes and respects her. Mrs. Tucker has a negative

   reputation within the community of being too hard on the kids and giving too

   much homework. Mrs. Jones, a vocal parent complains to upper administration

   frequently. She has expressed that she does NOT want her child in Mrs. Tucker's

   classroom and wants Mrs. Harris for her child. You are working on class

   placement. There is a policy in place that says "no parent requests will be

honored". As you work, you are aware that putting this student in Mrs. Tucker's class allows you to follow the policy. However, it will also cause a year of headache for the teacher, you, and the upper administration.

What are the ethical issues in this scenario?

How would you approach this situation?

10. It is the middle of winter and the music teacher and PE teacher have entered your office. The music teacher wants to use the gym to practice with students for an upcoming performance that will be hosted in the gym. The PE teachers can't take the students outside due to the weather and have no other place to teach their already planned PE lessons. The PE teachers are frustrated that their space is always taken for assemblies and concerts and the music teacher wants to prepare the students.

What are the ethical issues in this scenario?

How would you approach this situation?

11. You have a student sent to your office for hitting another child in the face. This is not this child's first offense. The last time you called home for a discipline reason the parents were vocally angry with the child's actions. You have informed the child that you will be contacting the parent again due to the physical nature of his actions and the child cries and begs you not to call because the child doesn't want what happened last time to happen again. When you ask the child to elaborate, he refuses to share.

What are the ethical issues in this scenario?

How would you approach this situation?

Appendix C

Email and Social Media Correspondence

EMAIL

Dear School Leader:

I am an elementary administrator and a doctoral candidate, and I invite you to participate in a
a research study titled "A mixed method study investigating a gap in ethical training and or supports for current elementary administrators."

I am asking you to consent and complete an electronic survey that has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Lindenwood University. Your participation in this study is anonymous, voluntary, and free of risks. You are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. The survey should take up to 10 minutes to complete.

If you choose to continue beyond the survey and participate in a follow-up interview, your contact information will be coded, and you will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or this research project in general, please contact me at kl115@lindenwood.edu or my advisor Dr. Bob Steffes at rsteffes@lindenwood.edu.

Please visit this site to learn more about data, your rights as a data subject, and the privacy policy of our university: http://www.lindenwood.edu/academics/support-resources/information-technology/privacy-policy/

Your participation is appreciated.

Kristie Lehde, Doctoral Candidate, Lindenwood University

Advisor Dr. Bob Steffes, Department of Educational Leadership, Lindenwood University

SOCIAL MEDIA

– I am collecting data for my dissertation and need responses from any acting elementary school administrator in order to succeed. I would appreciate it if you could give 10 minutes of your time and help me with this survey. If you know other elementary administrators and you're willing to share it on your page or send it in a message to some of your contacts, I would be forever grateful! Thank you

Twitter

I am collecting data for my dissertation and need responses from any ACTING ELEMENTARY school administrator in order to succeed! If that is you, please consider filling out my research survey about ethical decisions!
https://lindenwood.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d6Z0vvLhAljjV2t

We invite you to participate in an online survey for a research project on ethical training gaps and/or supports for elementary school leaders. We need responses from any current elementary school leaders. This research study is being conducted by Kristie Lehde, (kl115@lindenwood.edu) and Dr. Bob Steffes (rsteffes@lindenwood.edu) through Lindenwood University. Just click this link to get started:

THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study regarding practices and supports for ethical decision-making of elementary school leaders.

The information you gave us will make a valuable contribution, and by telling us about your experience, you have helped us identify ways to improve educational leadership for others in future.

If you are interested in learning about the results from this research study, please reply to this email, and I will be sure to forward you the findings.

Should you have any inquiries about the project, please contact Kristie Lehde at kl115@lindenwood.edu or 314-368-0750.

Once again, please accept my sincere thanks for so generously sharing the details of your experience.

Kristie Lehde
Doctoral Candidate
School of Educational Leadership
Lindenwood University

Appendix D

Consent Form

LINDENWOOD

Survey Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Kristie Lehde under the guidance of Dr. Bob Steffes at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to better understanding of the needs for currently practicing elementary administrators to make the best ethical decisions possible. You are being asked to participate in an online survey that should take between 20-25 minutes. Once the survey is complete you will be asked if you would be interested in continuing the process by participating in an interview. If you choose not to move on, your participation in the study ends at the completion of the survey. If you do continue to participate in the interview, the researcher will contact you to set up a virtual interview. Upon completion of the virtual interview, your participation in the study has ended. You will be asked if you are interested in having the results of the study shared with you upon completion of the study. No identifiable information will be collection in conjunction of the study. The responses for both the survey and the interview are completely anonymous and no district or school affiliation will be asked.
It will take about 15 – 20 minutes to complete this survey.
Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.
There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.
WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?
If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:
Kristie Lehde at kl115@lindenwood.edu or Dr. Bob Steffes @ rsteffes@lindenwood.edu
If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.
By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.
You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window.
Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

Vita

Kristie Lehde is Assistant Principal at Barretts Elementary in the Parkway School District. Previously, Lehde was the Technology Integration Coach at Conway Elementary and a Third-Grade teacher at Spoede Elementary in the Ladue School District. Lehde earned her B.S. in Elementary Education (2004) and her M.Ed. in Educational Technology and Special Education (2009) from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and her Ed.S. in Educational Leadership from Lindenwood University (2018). Lehde was recognized as Conway Elementary's Teacher of the Year in 2017, and was awarded the Larry Doyle Outstanding Doctoral Student at Lindenwood University in 2018. Lehde led Conway Elementary in being recognized as an Apple Distinguished School in 2017 and was a key contributor in the application for Conway's recognition as a Missouri Blue-Ribbon School in 2019. Lehde supported the Character Education Committee at Barretts Elementary that earned recognition as a State and National School of Character (2021).

Lehde lives in Webster Groves, Missouri with her husband Aaron, and children Owen and Eleanor. During her free time, she enjoys board games with her kids, spending time with friends and family, and baking.