

Abstract

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

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

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

philosophy of life, leadership, ethical dilemmas, and advice from the participants.

The superintendents in this study recognize the greatest challenge to their ethic of responsibility is to do what is in the best interest of students while working through the intrinsic political and cultural structures that are unique to all locally-controlled schools. The commitment to remain true to their principles and lead with integrity is practiced at a high level for these superintendents. Superintendents will continue to be faced with situations that will confront their commitment to what they value [principles] and have opportunities to exhibit the courage to act upon their commitment [integrity]. Articulating ethical beliefs and values by aligning them to everyday actions will communicate clearly to the organization the character of the superintendent.