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Authentic Leadership Practices Among Minnesota Public School Superintendents

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Authentic Leadership Practices Among Minnesota Public School Superintendents

by

Kurt Stumpf

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Dissertation Committee:
Frances Kayona, Chairperson
Amy Christensen
John Eller
David Lund

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions as it relates to the sixteen attributes of authentic leadership as well as the four constructs of authentic leadership. This quantitative study used independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size to compare the four constructs of authentic leadership practices. After an extensive literature review on the historical role of the superintendent, current roles and issues faced by superintendents, leadership background and an authentic leadership overview, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) was the survey tool selected and implemented to answer the research questions. Qualtrics, an online tool, was used to administer the survey.

A total of 145 Minnesota public school superintendents completed the survey, equating to a 45% return rate. The results of the survey showed 14 of the 16 ALQ items had a mean score between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always), with *Ethical conduct* having the highest mean (3.80). The combined mean scores of the four major authentic leadership constructs of self-awareness (3.07), relational transparency (3.29), balanced processing (3.33), and internalized moral perspective (3.54) were between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always) with combined standard deviations for each construct of less than one. Internalized moral perspective had the highest combined mean score for every disaggregated demographic category while self-awareness had either the lowest or tied for the lowest combined mean score for every demographic category.

This study found Minnesota public school superintendents self-report high levels of authentic leadership practices, according to the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). Minnesota public school superintendents also self-report a high degree of authentic leadership practices based on the four constructs of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective. Finally, this study found no differences in the four constructs based on the independent variables of gender, district enrollment and numbers of years serving in the superintendency.

Acknowledgement

The first group of people I would like to acknowledge is my doctoral student cohort. This group of people was inspiring, challenging, and extremely dedicated to the success of others.

Secondly, I could not have completed this dissertation without the commitment of my committee members. Dr. Eller, Dr. Lund, Dr. Christensen, and Dr. Kayona. The timely feedback and clear direction proved to be extremely helpful.

Last but not least, I need to acknowledge Dr. Kayona. She was my advisor for my master's program and recently chaired my dissertation committee. She has spent countless hours meeting with me, challenging me, and encouraging me. For her unwavering commitment, I am forever grateful.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone at St. Cloud State that helped me achieve a bachelor's degree to a doctorate.

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Chapter I: Introduction

This study examines Minnesota public school superintendents' self-reported authentic leadership practices. The four constructs of authentic leadership (self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency) are also examined with three independent variables. The three independent variables include gender, district size and years serving in the superintendency.

Background of the Study

The role of the school superintendent has continued to evolve since its inception in the 1830s (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). Research dating back to the 1830s define five widely recognized stages with which superintendents view their role: teacher-scholar (1865 to 1910), business manager (early 1910 to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1954), applied social scientist (1954 to mid-1970s) and communicator (mid-1970s to present) (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). These five roles remain embedded into the superintendent position today along with a focus on leadership development (Kowalski et al., 2011). The role of the school superintendent continues to evolve given new emphasis on more intrinsic leadership development such as mindfulness (Mahfouz, 2018), authenticity (Anderson, 2021), reflective thinking (Reardon et al., 2019) and moral decision-making (Davidson & Hughes, 2020).

The school superintendent position is often viewed as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the educational organization or school district, which aligns with the American private businesses model in today's world (Kowalski et al., 2011). As a CEO, Worner (2010) believes the school superintendent position holds more accountability than most business CEO-level positions. District leadership, in particular the superintendent, plays a critical role for developing

and sustaining highly effective schools (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Tienken (2021) wrote an effective superintendent is able to balance mandates, constraints and the conflicting expectations and priorities from different stakeholders. Indeed, Owens and Valesky (2015) submit that effective school leaders are competent, confident, and comfortable in environments characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, and chaos. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create additional stress and conflict in the superintendency.

The role and responsibilities of the school superintendent has become even more complex in light of the current pandemic (Heim & Strauss, 2021; Taylor & Nierenberg, 2021). Dan Domenech, the executive director of the School Superintendents Association (AASA), says that pandemic-related issues, conflict, and decisions have led to a higher than typical amount of turnover in the superintendency (Taylor & Nierenberg, 2021). Domenech says, “It’s a combination of stress on the job and being confronted with a no-win situation, when half of parents want their kids in school and the other half want them at home” (Sawchuk, 2021, p. 2). Navigating these complex circumstances requires self-reflection and leadership, which this study will examine through authentic leadership attributes.

This study will add to the body of work that sheds light on the extent school leaders are cognizant and reflective of their authentic leadership practices and behaviors. Furthermore, this study will help illuminate the extent that Minnesota public school superintendents self-report their athletic leadership practices, as they relate to the four constructs, within their role of the school organization.

In order to better understand the leadership practices and behaviors necessary for an effective superintendent in the present-day, a distinction is made between leadership theory and

leadership styles. A leadership theory is the framework or qualities in which leader operates (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). The main premise of a leadership theory is to articulate the way in which a person leads and the grouping of characteristics (Vasilescu, 2019). Whereas, a leadership style is the manner in which a leader interacts and communicates with their followers (Henman, 2011). There are various leadership styles such as laissez-faire, authoritarian, democratic, servant and transformational (Bird & Wang, 2013). Authentic leadership is viewed as a foundation or model for leading and behaving in one's role (Bird & Wang, 2013; Vasilescu, 2019). For this study, authentic leadership is viewed as a leadership theory (the framework in which a leader operates) and not a style of leadership (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003).

Authentic Leadership

Research in the early 2000s brought to light the concept of Authentic Leadership as a model of leadership development (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leadership is defined as:

A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, as internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94)

There are four major constructs to authentic leadership practice, they are:

1. Self-awareness
2. Internalized moral perspective
3. Balanced processing
4. Relational transparency

Walumbwa et al. (2008) writes that “self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of how one derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning-making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time” (p. 95). Leaders that demonstrate behaviors and decisions are guided by a clear understanding of one’s individual standards, which is known as internalized moral perspective (Peus et al., 2012). Next, “balanced processing refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). And finally, relational transparency encompasses a leader’s ability to present his or her genuine or true self (rather than presenting a “fake”, distorted, or misrepresented self) in order to create open relationships that promote trust through opening sharing information, thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Therefore, this study centers on examining the four constructs of Authentic Leadership practices among a current, practicing group of Minnesota public school superintendents.

Organization of the Study

The following study is organized into a five-chapter format. Chapter I includes the introduction and rationale of the study. Chapter II provides a review of related literature on the topic of authentic leadership. Chapter III describes the methodology, data collection procedures, organization, and data analysis. Chapter IV contains the findings or results of the study. Finally, Chapter V provides the conclusions and recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

Superintendents are in essence CEOs of a public-school system (Björk et al., 2018). As the acting CEO of an often-complex organization, there are many opinions from a wide range of

stakeholders trying to influence decisions (Björk et al., 2018). Since the pressures and expectations of a superintendent in a public-school system are challenging to navigate, the leadership development of the superintendent is crucial for success (Orr, 2007). Simply stated, the leadership of the superintendent matters greatly in a public-school system (Marzano & Waters, 2009). George (2015) believes “leadership starts with being authentic, the genuine you ... discover your True North-the internal compass that guides you successfully through life” (p. 1). There is limited research on the self-reported strengths and areas of growth for superintendents as it relates to the four constructs of authentic leadership.

This study is designed to examine the four constructs of authentic leadership, as identified by Walumbwa et al. (2008). Specifically, this study will gather self-reported data on the four authentic leadership practices among a group of Minnesota Public School Superintendents. Selected demographic variables include gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size (based on student enrollment) will also be gathered. A 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), developed by Avolio et al., with permission from the author, will be used to determine superintendents’ self-perceived authentic leadership practices. This instrument is designed to seek perceptions around the use of the four constructs of authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2007-2018). The subset of questions pertaining to each of the four constructs of authentic leadership practice will be scored by individual item and combined by mean score for comparison across the four groups. This study will also examine self-reported data subdivided by select demographic characteristics to determine which construct of authentic leadership practice are strengths and areas for growth specific to these groups. It should be noted

that any demographic group of less than five participants will not be included in the disaggregate data analysis as it would be inappropriate.

Purpose of the Study

Education is assumed to be the great equalizer as it allows for social and economic mobility, as was stated by Horace Mann in 1848 (Grove & Montgomery, 2003). Education is also considered the foundation of the American Dream (Grove & Montgomery, 2003). Superintendents are considered the leaders of a local public educational system (Björk et al., 2018). Since education plays a major role in our society and superintendents are ultimately responsible for the education of students within their community, the impact of superintendents is great.

Superintendents contribute greatly to a school district's performance and have the ability to substantially impact the education of students and create effective schools (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Marzano and Waters (2009) published a study in 2006 after finding "a statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement" (p. 3). Successful superintendents "are unwilling to compromise personal and professional integrity in the performance of these complex and challenging duties" (Worner, 2010, p. 2). Simply stated, superintendent leadership matters to student achievement and successful school organizations.

George (2015) said great leaders search for leadership opportunities and experiences in which development is possible. George (2015) noted, "self-awareness should be the starting point in every leader's development" (p. 84). Self-awareness and development typically are enhanced through authentic self-reflection (Wakeman, 2017).

There is ample research on leadership styles; autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, situational, servant, and transformational (Bird & Wang, 2013). Examples of successful leaders using any one or a combination of the leadership styles can be found. The application of any leadership style will have a greater impact and be accepted by followers if authenticity is the foundation, or model, of a leader's style and decisions (Bird & Wang, 2013). After conducting research on superintendents' leadership style, Bird and Wang (2013) concluded, "It is not the leader's style that counts but rather the authenticity of their motives and the authenticity of their actions that counts in the minds and hearts of their followers" (p.17). In short, authentic leadership undergirds one's overall leadership practice; it is a model of leading designed to enhance effectiveness and trust among internal and external stakeholders.

This study will gather Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions regarding the four authentic leadership components in order to identify common strengths and areas for growth. There is very little research on authentic leadership and the superintendency, which this study hopes to add some clarity.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions as it relates to the 16 attributes of authentic leadership as well as the four constructs of authentic leadership.
2. Provide areas for leadership growth and development, based on the data, for specific authentic leadership constructs and/or a specific demographic of Minnesota public school superintendents.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to determine self-reported authentic leadership strengths and areas of growth for Minnesota public school superintendents.

1. To what extent do Minnesota Public School Superintendents report their authentic leadership practices based on the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)?
2. How do the four major constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) of authentic leadership compare in relation to one another?
3. How do the independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size compare with the four constructs of authentic leadership practices?

Basic Assumptions

Assumptions are the elements of the study that are believed to be true (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The assumptions for this study are:

1. The Minnesota public school respondents will answer questions with honesty.
2. Superintendent leadership is essential for an effective and high function learning organizations.
3. Assumes a normal distribution among the population of state-wide public-school superintendents.

Delimitations

Delimitations help to define the scope or limits of the study and the areas covered or not covered in the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The study delimitations are:

1. The location of the study was limited to a single state, Minnesota.
2. This study includes limited demographic variables, race and ethnicity are not part of this study due to too few candidates in the field in Minnesota.
3. The study includes only public-school superintendent members who are listed on the Minnesota Department of Education website. Therefore, this study can only be generalized back to this group.
4. Data will be gathered in fall 2021 during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Design

This study entails a cross-sectional survey design that has been drawn from a predetermined population sample. The information collected will reflect one point in time. This study uses a 19-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert rating scale including three demographic items. This study will be analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. A quantitative approach explores and describes an issue based on numerical data and “allows for reducing the complexity of our data-rich world into easily understandable parts” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 67). The questionnaire contains 16 closed-ended items and because all participants will respond to the same option, standardized data will be provided as results. Basic descriptive statistics will be used to analyze results. Results will be analyzed by item and by participant attributes compared within and between each construct of authentic leadership. Raw scores will be gathered as aggregate data, therefore, no individual scores will be revealed. The descriptive data to be

reported will include item and group averages and other measures of central tendency. All data will be reported in table format.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are the major tasks or activities that are needed in order to complete the study. The following are the objectives of the study:

1. Secured research permission from *Mind Garden* © to use Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ).
2. Secure participation from potentially small demographic groups.
3. Communicate items from the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) in such a manner that meets the research permission received.

Definition of Terms

Definitions of essential terms that are not well-known are outlined to provide meaning and context for readers of this study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

1. ***Authentic Leadership***. Authentic leadership is defined as:
A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, as internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94)
2. ***Self-awareness***. “Self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of how ones derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process

- impacts the way one views himself or herself over time” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95).
3. ***Internalized Moral Perspective.*** Behaviors and decisions that are guided by a clear understanding of one’s individual standards (Peus et al., 2012).
 4. ***Relational Transparency.*** A leader’s ability to present his or her genuine or true self (rather than presenting a “fake”, distorted, or misrepresented self) in order to create open relationships that promote trust through opening sharing information, thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008).
 5. ***Balanced Processing.*** “*Balanced processing* refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95).

Human Subjects Approval

SCSU requires all research activities involving human subjects—whether or not they are supported by federal funds—to comply with the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. According to this policy, research activities that intervene in people’s lives, observe human beings, or use data about human beings must be reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board to ensure that:

- Risks to subjects will be minimized and reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits;
- Informed consent will be obtained from subjects and appropriately documented; and,
- The privacy and safety of subjects will be maintained.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The following literature review explores the evolution of the school district superintendent position, current roles and issues faced by superintendents, leadership background and an authentic leadership overview. In order to lay foundational work for superintendent leadership, the first part of the literature review divides the research into five conceptualized stages of the superintendency; teacher-scholar (1865 to 1910), business manager (early 1910 to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1954), applied social scientist (1954 to mid-1970s) and communicator (mid-1970s to present) (Callahan, 1996; Kowalski, 2005). The historical significance of women in the superintendency is highlighted at the end of the first section.

The second part of the literature review features the current roles and issues faced by superintendents. The current role of the superintendent is complex and continuously evolving (Tienken, 2021). This literature review summarizes information from the School Superintendents Association (AASA) studies in 2000, 2010, and 2020.

The third part of the literature review gives background information on leadership. Both leadership theories and leadership styles are discussed in-depth to provide context for authentic leadership.

The final part of the literature review highlights the evolution of authentic leadership. The four constructs of authentic leadership include self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency as established by Walumbwa et al. (2008) and continue to be applied today. Each construct will include background information, related areas, and a definition.

Historical Role of the Superintendent

The role of the school district superintendent was established in the 1830s and coincided with the formation of the public-school system in the United States (Callahan, 1966). City officials in Buffalo, New York, created and selected the first superintendent position in 1837 and city officials from Providence, Rhode Island followed in 1839 (Callahan, 1966). Kowalski (2005) reports the superintendent position was appointed in thirteen school systems of large cities by 1850. The slow growth of the superintendent position aligned directly to the relatively slow growth of public schools as there were only 27 superintendents by 1870 (Callahan, 1966). Although there is much agreement on the formation of the superintendent position, there is variation and discrepancies from historian's perspective on the role of the superintendent in the early stages of the position (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

The role of the superintendent in the early stages is not as well documented as the position itself, therefore there is some room for interpretation by historians (Kowalski, 2005). One perspective, often cited as the role of the superintendent of schools in the mid-1800s, was the oversight of the daily operations of the schoolhouses within the jurisdiction (Glass et al., 2000). Meanwhile, Kowalski (2005) suggests the main focus of school district superintendents, from the time the position originated to the early 1900s, was the implementation of the state curriculum and oversight of teachers. A third perspective of the role of superintendents in the mid-1800s was that of promoting education (Glass et al., 2000). Glass et al. (2000) report that early superintendents traveled from large cities to small villages, trying to disseminate information about a free public education. Finally, Peterson and Barnett (2003) contend the early role of the school superintendent was primarily a clerk for the school board. The literature review

revealed that while historians do not agree on the early roles for the superintendent, some do explain and provide rationale for the discrepancies.

The different viewpoints in the early roles of the superintendent positions are often highlighted in research to demonstrate transparency. Peterson and Barnett (2003) reported there are three reasons for the discrepancy in historical accounts for the early role of the superintendent: different sources of literature, different analysis of historical accounts, and the approach used to analyze information. Another reason often cited for the discrepancies in the early roles of the superintendent outline the differences in the developmental phases compared to the discursive stages (Brunner et al., 2002). The developmental phases refer to the evolution of the position while the discursive stages refer to the rhetoric or discourse from the superintendent position (Brunner et al., 2002). Brunner et al. (2002) argues the discursive stages “not only determine the rhetoric of the superintendency, but also tend to drive the responsibilities, priorities, and activities of superintendents” (p. 212). Callahan (1966) says that prior to 1865, schools had differences and the establishment of a common school did not exist. Although there are differences in the perceptions of the early role of the superintendent, there is a framework of five widely recognized roles found in the literature (Kowalski & Björk, 2005).

There is wide agreement among researchers regarding the stages of the superintendent beginning around 1965 and going into the 2000s (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016). Callahan (1966) was the first historian to publish a broad view of the superintendent role broken down into four major stages and classified into time periods. Callahan first published the stages and time periods for the U. S. Office of Education in a report titled *The Superintendent of Schools: An Historical Analysis* in 1966. According to Callahan (1966), the four widely recognized stages

that superintendents viewed their role were: teacher-scholar (1865 to 1910) business manager (early 1910 to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1954), and applied social scientist (1954 to mid-1970s). Kowalski (2005) discusses a fifth stage of the superintendent role as a communicator (mid-1970s to present). These five stages lay the framework for a thorough analysis of the superintendent position starting with teacher-scholar (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2018).

Teacher-Scholar

Throughout the period of time when superintendents viewed their role as teacher-scholar from 1865 to 1910, they viewed themselves as scholarly educational leaders (Callahan, 1966). Moreover, superintendents regarded their role in the education system as teachers of teachers and scholars of education (Callahan, 1966). Another major role of the superintendent during this time period was to oversee the implementation of a state curriculum (Glass et al., 2000). Kowalski (2005) suggests that the necessity for a uniform state curriculum came after the Civil War and included standards for both elementary and secondary education. Finally, superintendents were also linked to the teaching profession, they were strong members in the National Education Association (Kowalski, 2005) and enacted professionalism to block themselves from political positions (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). As city school systems grew in size, superintendents were unable to be shielded from politics and criticism. The role of the superintendent became increasingly challenging and their role began to change from a teacher-scholar into a business manager (Callahan, 1966).

Business Manager

Superintendents began to view their role as a business manager or school executive around 1910 as the result of school systems growth into large organizations, the high regard for managers of business and industry as well as the desire to relate business concepts to other areas (Callahan, 1966). Callahan (1966) reports superintendents were under pressure to apply scientific management and efficiency to improve operations. In response to the pressure for school leaders to improve efficiently and align with business leadership, universities began offering courses and degrees in school management (Kowalski, 2005). According to Kowalski and Björk (2005), “The primary management duties assigned to superintendents during this period included budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility manager” (p. 80). Kowalski (2005) noted that although management was enhanced in both large city and small rural districts, the work of the superintendent was different due to the amount of support staff employed. In both large city and small rural districts, the view of the superintendent as a business manager was increasingly criticized after 1930 and began to change (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

The criticism of superintendent as a business manager after 1930 occurred as a result of the stock market crash and the Great Depression that followed, which deteriorated the trust in leaders who applied scientific management (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). Another reason the perspective of the superintendent as a business manager was highly criticized is a result of local school district stakeholders who wanted local control and strongly objected to the perceived loss of local governance in their school (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Finally, highly-regarded education leaders criticized the blending of business values into the superintendency stating the

scientific management of schools did not align with the principles of a democratic society (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). Therefore, the change to the superintendent being viewed as a democratic leader began to evolve (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Democratic Leader

The view of the superintendent as a democratic leader was grounded in both the political nature of the position and philosophy starting in the 1930s (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Kowalski and Björk (2005) stated, “During the economic depression of the 1930s, for example, scarce resources heightened funding competition between public schools and other governmental agencies” (p. 82). The difficult challenge for superintendents was balancing the need for enough funding to run a school in an economic-minded society and at the same time seem to be frugal with school budgets (Callahan, 1966). In essence, a major part of the superintendent’s role turned into a lobbyist and a political strategist (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). The role of the superintendent as a democratic leader also had implications at the local level (Callahan, 1966).

Callahan (1966) stated there was a need for superintendents to have training in the social sciences in order to build an educational philosophy that would provide a foundation for educational leadership. The most influential leader of the democratic leadership movement was Ernest Melby (Callahan, 1966). Melby (1955) believed educational systems played a vital role in the success of communities and administrators must “mobilize the educational resources of communities” (p. 250). Advocating for educational resources while supporting small local government and managing the district operations was a challenge to superintendents (Callahan, 1966). Therefore, the superintendent’s role as a democratic leader began to lose support in the mid-1950s (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Critics believed the democratic leader role of the superintendent was excessively idealistic and was not attentive enough to the everyday realities of the position (Kowalski, 2005). Callahan (1966) stated the job of the superintendent became more demanding and people expected more out of superintendents. The demands, expectations and vulnerability of the superintendent to be accountable for an educational system led to the change from a democratic leader to a social scientist in the mid-1950s (Callahan, 1966).

Applied Social Scientist

The role of the superintendent as a social scientist emerged with the greater demand on the superintendent position in the mid-1950s and the transition to using research, practice and data to make decisions (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). There was growing dissatisfaction with the superintendent position that coincided with the decline of student achievement in the mid-1950s (Brunner et al., 2002). Kowalski and Björk (2005) argue that superintendents “were expected to apply scientific inquiry to the problems and decisions that permeated their practice” (p. 84). There was a growing expectation that superintendents have a knowledge base that was beyond teaching to eliminate the social injustices in the public school systems (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). According to Kowalski (2005), “superintendents are expected to have the expertise necessary to deal with social and instructional ills such as poverty, racism, gender discrimination, crime and violence” (pp. 10-11). Coupled with social sciences, the emergence of the superintendent role as a communicator began to evolve in the 1970s during the start of the information age (Kowalski, 2005).

Communicator

The increased expectation in the role of the superintendent as a communicator in the 1970s was based on society's demand for greater transparency and the need to view school districts as open systems (Björk & Browne-Ferrigno, 2016). Carter and Cunningham (1997) reported a need "in American education for leadership, political savvy, reform, community responsiveness, and improved education. As a result, the superintendent serves as the professional advisor to the board, leader of reforms, manager of resources, and communicator to the public" (p. 24).

The reforms and major school improvement concepts called for the superintendent to work collaboratively with staff, students, parents and the tax payers (Kowalski & Björk, 2005). This expanded role of the superintendent has continued since the 1970s, and with the expanded and complex role has come more controversy in the position (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

The knowledge and skills associated with each conceptualized superintendent role is outlined in Table 1. This table summarizes the essential skills for each superintendent role as discussed in the previous section.

Table 1

Knowledge and Skills Associated with Superintendent Role Conceptualization (Kowalski & Björk, 2005, p. 87)

Role	Pertinent Knowledge and Skills
Teacher-Scholar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogy • Educational psychology • Curriculum • Instructional supervision • Staff development • Educational philosophy
Business Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law • Personnel administration • Finance/budgeting; • Facility development/maintenance • Collective bargaining/contract maintenance • Public relations
Democratic Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community relations • Collaborative decision making • Politics
Applied Social Scientist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative research • Behavioral sciences
Communicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal communication • Written communication • Listening • Public speaking • Media relations

Reform and School Improvement

The collaborative expectations of the superintendent and pressures to improve education created some challenging times for superintendents (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Glass et al. (2000) believes “the displeasure of parents and citizens during the 1960s and 1970s, combined with growth in the number of unionized teachers, resulted in the superintendency where leaders often found themselves in continuous defensive postures, both personally and on behalf of their districts” (p. 5). The heightened call for reforms and school improvement were duly noted in the 1983 report by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The*

Imperative for Educational Reform. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, education and the superintendency have become more politicized and calls for reform to improve the quality of education continue (Brunner et al., 2002).

Kowalski (2005) noted, “*A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) sounded the alarm that public schools were not sufficiently performance-driven with respect to preparing students to be competitive in a global society” (p. 11). An excellence movement followed the initial report, but reformers were more concerned about broad goals for educational outcomes than actual strategies or plans (Peterson, 2008). The broad goals have wandered back and forth between accountability and choice (Peterson, 2008). Chubb et al. (2003) noted in response to *A Nation at Risk*, “Accountability, choice, and transparency are the essential trinity of principles by which to reconstruct America’s schools. Each must be in place for the others to work” (p. 15). The position of school superintendent plays a vital role in school improvement and communicating progress to stakeholders (Marzano & Waters, 2009). In order to manage educational improvement, Kowalski et al. (2011) suggests the role of the superintendent as an effective communicator to create broad coalitions with internal and external groups is a vitally important role, which continues to exist today. Along with reform and school improvement, the significance of women in the superintendency has and continues to evolve over time.

Women in the Superintendency

The final piece of historical significance is women in the superintendency.

Though women have never held the majority of school leadership positions, in the early decades of the twentieth century their numbers increased impressively—and some hoped

or feared that women eventually would dominate school administration just as they had teaching. (Blount, 1999b, p. 2)

The percentage of female superintendents rose during the 1910 to 1930 time period, which is sometimes referred to as the “Golden Age” (Blount, 1999b; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

The increase of female superintendents during the early 1900s can be attributed to a couple factors (Blount, 1999a). First, the certification requirements for teachers began to increase, which led to more women in the teaching profession and available to be promoted to superintendent positions (Blount, 1999a). The increased certification requirements often included weekend or summer programs conflicting with men’s agricultural work (Blount, 1999a). Secondly, during the women’s suffrage movement, “Suffrage activists, including teachers’ and other women’s organizations, campaigned aggressively for female superintendent candidates, because the position was one of the few available to women” (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 643). There was a positive trajectory for women in the superintendent position until the end of WWII (Blount, 1999b).

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, often called the GI Bill, was passed after World War II (Blount, 2004). The GI bill federally supported veterans of WWII to receive additional training and educational degrees, which included educational leadership (Blount, 2004). There was a push for graduate-level education for school administration positions following WWII and some colleges would not accept women into programs (Blount, 1999b). School administration also began to solidify an identity as a masculine position following WWII, which again led to less females in the superintendency (Blount, 1999a). Women in the superintendency fell drastically following WWII from 9.1% in 1950 to 3.4% in 1970 (Blount,

1999a). There was an increase in female superintendents between 1970 and 1998 (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The increase was due to “increased activism by women’s administration organizations, the creation of women’s caucuses in professional organizations, expanded career options for women overall, and increased efforts to bring more women into school administration” (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, pp. 644-646). Table 2 shows the percentage of female superintendents in the United States from 1910 to 2020.

Table 2

Percentage of Female Superintendents in the United States from 1910 to 1998 (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tienken, 2021)

Year	Percentage of Female Superintendents
1910	8.9%
1930	11.0%
1950	9.1%
1970	3.4%
1990	4.9%
1998	10.0%
2000	13.1%
2010	24.1%
2020	26.7%

Summary

The historical roles of the superintendent highlighted five widely recognized stages that superintendents view their role as teacher-scholar (1865 to 1910), business manager (early 1910 to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1954), applied social scientist (1954 to mid-1970s) and communicator (mid-1970s to present) (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). These roles existed during the push for more accountability and reforms, such as *A Nation at Risk*. The push for accountability and reforms in the superintendency highlighted the need for in the position to be a communicator.

The final overview of historical significance discussed in this section was women in the superintendency. While the number of women in the superintendency rose from 1910 to 1930, that trend did not continue, in part due to the GI Bill (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Based on the most recent data from 2000, 2010, 2020, there has been a shift to more women in the superintendency.

Current Roles and Issues Faced by Superintendents

The majority of researchers on the superintendency view the role of the superintendent as the chief executive officer, which aligns with the American private businesses (Kowalski et al., 2011). According to Worner (2010), the school superintendent position holds more accountability than most business CEO-level positions and high achieving superintendents embrace the high standard of accountability. The high standard of accountability and business CEO concepts align with the concept of managerial leadership (Björk et al., 2014).

Jones and Howley published a study in 2009 comparing superintendents' time allotment in three different leadership categories: (a) educational, (b) managerial, and (c) political. Although the research surveyed and compared superintendents in states with varying accountability measures, the results were the same across all four states (Jones & Howley, 2009). Jones and Howley (2009) found that superintendents dedicated the majority of time to managerial leadership, followed by educational leadership with political leadership having the least time allotment. Even though superintendents across four states prioritize managerial leadership the most, the challenges and circumstances superintendents face is more unique to individual districts as a result of the vast differences in school districts across the country (Jones & Howley, 2009).

While generalities can be made regarding superintendents, Kowalski and Brunner (2011) point out two issues with overgeneralizing the issues facing superintendents. The first issue is that context matters and issues or problems can vary greatly even among local school districts (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The second issue Kowalski and Brunner (2011) state in overgeneralizing is when separating research questions on perceived superintendent challenges or issues, it is difficult to decipher individual and organizational issues. Although based on their research, the areas identified by superintendents as challenging are “fiscal support, social contexts, school reform, and school board relationships” (p. 157). Additional information on the areas of challenges cited by superintendents is embedded later in this current roles and responsibilities section.

Given the current role of the superintendent is complex and challenging to compare, the knowledge and skills of the historical superintendent role conceptualization stages are still in existence today (Kowalski et al., 2011). Kowalski et al. (2011) finds in a survey of roughly 1,200 superintendents in 2009,

Respondents indicated that although their school boards emphasized each of the five major roles traditionally assumed by superintendents, the extent to which they did so varied considerably. The highest level of substantial emphasis was placed on being an *effective communicator*, followed by *manger*, *instructional leader*, *statesman/democratic leader*, and *applied social scientist*. (p. xvi).

The emphasis of communication is seen in multiple contexts of the superintendent role. Worner (2010) states, “Whether speaking, writing, presenting, listening, or using technology, superintendents build and influence an impression about the quality of the educational system

they represent” (p. 51). Communication is also essential for effective superintendents to work directly with stakeholders and invest time into building and maintaining relationships with constituents (Meador, 2016).

School district communication is the focus of The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The NSPRA under the direction of Henry and Reidy, conducted a study in 2007 highlighting the essential qualities for success in the superintendency. The study included 17 superintendents that were named superintendent of the year by a state or national association (Henry & Reidy, 2007). The most important skill identified by the superintendents was “Leadership/vision/strategic thinker/problem solver” (Henry & Reidy, 2007, p. 3). Within the most important skill of leadership, every superintendent in the study rated communication skills as “very important” to accomplish each of those areas. Some of the superintendents rated communication skills as the most important skill. All of the superintendents in the survey also linked good communication to high student achievement (Henry & Reidy, 2007).

Communication was also identified as an essential trait for superintendents in a survey conducted by Person et al. (2021) published in *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* titled, “Leadership Traits of Superintendents in a Rural, Midwest State: Perceptions of School Board Presidents and Superintendents.” A total of 88 people responded to a survey, including 61 superintendents and 27 school board presidents (Person et al., 2021). From a list of 24 different dimensions of eight leadership traits, the top three leadership dimensions identified by superintendents was a calm confidence when issues arise, trustworthiness through a perception of integrity and trustworthiness through a perception of high moral character (Person et al., 2021). Intelligence was listed as the lowest trait of importance for superintendents. According to

the same survey of superintendents, trustworthiness and communication, respectively, were identified as the top two leadership traits out of eight total possibilities (Person et al., 2021). School board presidents selected the same top leadership dimensions and overall traits as superintendents reported (Person et al., 2021). This alignment between perceptions of superintendents and school board president's highlights the importance of the identified dimensions and traits.

Studies from American Association of School Administrators (AASA)

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), a national association for school superintendents, has been surveying superintendents every decade since 1923. The most recent study published in 2021 was conducted by Tienken, *American Superintendent 2020 Decennial*, had 1,218 respondents from 45 states. The study published in 2011 conducted by Kowalski, *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*, had 1,838 respondents from all 50 states. The 2000 study conducted by Glass, Björk and Brunner, *The Study of the American Superintendency: 2000; A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium*, had 2,262 respondents from across the nation. Descriptions of the findings from 2000, 2010 and 2020 are highlighted below.

Demographics of Superintendents. The percentage of female superintendents has steadily increased from 13.1% in 2000, to 24.1% in 2010 and 26.7% in 2020. Superintendents of color has also increased from 5% in 2000, to 6% in 2010 and 8.6% in 2020. Tienken (2021) notes that 78% of superintendents of color lead districts that serve more than 26% students of racial/ethnic minority. The 2000 study of superintendents reported the average age of the superintendent was increasing and reported an average of 52.5 years old. The 2020 survey

showed 59% of the respondents were a superintendent by the age of 45 compared to 49.5% in 2010. According to the 2020 survey, the percentage of superintendents who reported being married or partnered was 86%, including 89% of male and 82% of female superintendents.

Education. Roughly 94% of superintendents held a master's degree in 2020 while 31.2% had an Educational Specialist degree. In both the 2000 and 2010 survey, about 45% of superintendents held a doctoral degree. The percentage of superintendents with a doctoral degree remained constant in 2020 with 44.8% reporting they have earned a Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education or Juris Doctor.

Career Path. According to the 2020 study, 96% of superintendents began their career as a teacher and then 84% of superintendents went onto to become a principal. This career path is consistent with the 2000 study where roughly 80% reported a path of teacher, principal and superintendent. Most superintendents in the 2020 survey reported teaching for 5-8 years (38.1%), followed by 9-12 years (24.3%) and 13 or more years (20.5%).

Career Plans. When superintendents in 2010 were asked to identify their career plans in 5 years, 32% said they were going to be retired but continue to work part-time, 31.9% intended to stay in their current position, and 18.8% planned to be a superintendent in a different district. The percentage of superintendents in 2020 that intended to stay in their same position increased to 42.8%, while those who planned to be retired and work part-time decreased to 25.1%. In 2020, 16.7% of superintendents planned to remain a superintendent in 5 years but in a different district. Total, only about 60% of superintendents planned to remain in the superintendency in 5 years, with other people planning to retire, work as a consultant, continue in education in a different position or work outside of education.

Job Satisfaction. In the 2020 study when asked how satisfied they were in their current position, 49% of the respondents reported being “very satisfied” and 43% of respondents chose “satisfied.” Tienken (2021) reported “More than half of the superintendents (51.4%) indicated they would definitely choose to be a superintendent again if they started their career over, followed by 29 percent who indicated they would probably choose to be superintendent again” (p. viii).

Instructional Leadership. In 2020, roughly 58% of the superintendent’s survey stated that the school board hired them to be an instructional leader. This was a major increase from 2010 when 20% of superintendents reported the school board hired them to be an instructional leader. In 2010, 33% of superintendents who are female reported that instructional leadership was one of the top three main reasons for their hire and that number increased to 72% in the 2020 survey.

Time Consuming Issues. According to the 2020 survey of superintendents, the most time-consuming issues were finance (45%), personnel management including collective bargaining (41%), conflict management (37%), superintendent-school board relationships (35%), school-community relations (30%) and facility planning/management (30%) (Tienken, 2021). Tienken (2021) notes that only 7% of superintendents reported that educational equity/diversity is a time-consuming issue. There was no data collected in the 2010 survey to compare. Although a high percentage of superintendents reported being hired by their board to be an instructional leader, this area was not identified as a time-consuming issue.

Common Problems. The most common problems superintendents experience, according to the 2020 survey, is job-related stress (61%), excessive time requirements (55%),

social media (40%), role conflict (30%), political divisions in the community (27%), unethical employee behavior (26%) and unethical school board behavior (24%) (Tienken, 2021). The excessive time requirements are a result of meetings, board meetings, community organizations, and visibility at student events (Tienken, 2021). There was no data collected in the 2010 survey to compare.

Effectiveness. Superintendents reported, according to the 2020 survey, feeling “very effective” with enhancing perceptions of the school district (68%), finance and budgeting (64%), and school climate (64%) (Tienken, 2021). On the contrary in the 2020 survey, superintendents reported feeling the least effective in academic performance of students (45%), diversity issues (35%) and social-emotional learning (29%) (Tienken, 2021). Tienken (2021) stated “A strong majority of superintendents (89%) who responded to the survey indicated that conversations about race within their community were an extremely important or an important factor in ensuring student progress and success” (p. 50). There was no data collected in the 2010 survey to compare.

Improvement Areas. In the 2020 survey of superintendents, roughly 40% reported they want to improve their ability for continuous improvement, 31% look to improve their knowledge on the law and legal issues, and roughly 29% wanted to improve their knowledge and expertise in school safety and crisis management (Tienken, 2021). Superintendents also reported wanting to improve their knowledge in finance and budgeting (24%) and 22% of the superintendents surveyed wanted to learn more in school reform/improvement (Tienken, 2021).

Summary of AASA Studies. The percentage of women in the superintendency has increased to 26.7% in 2020. The 2020 study also highlight that a high majority of

superintendents (96%) began their career as a teacher and 92% are either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” in their current position. Although a high percentage of superintendents reported being hired by their board to be an instructional leader (58%), this area was not identified as a time-consuming issue. According to the 2020 study, the most common problems superintendents experience included job-related stress (61%) and excessive time requirements (55%). Also in contradiction to their instructional leadership hiring focus by the school board, 45% of superintendents felt least effective in the area of academic performance of students.

Minnesota Superintendent Studies

After reviewing statistics from national studies of superintendents from AASA, two studies of Minnesota superintendents will be highlighted. First, Nelson conducted a survey in 2010 of Minnesota superintendents with 213 responses representing 56% of current and retired Minnesota Association of School Administrators members. Nelson’s study focused on school board and superintendent relationships in Minnesota. Secondly, Stewart, Raskin, and Zielaski conducted a survey of Minnesota superintendents in 2012 with 212 responses representing roughly 60% of acting superintendents. Stewart et al.’s study focused on the barriers to enacting reform and change in Minnesota school districts according to the perceptions of superintendents. Both of these studies will be discussed in separate sections below.

Nelson’s Study. The demographics of superintendents in Nelson’s survey in 2010 included 48% of respondents in school districts with 0-999 student populations, 30% from districts with 1,000-2,999 students, 9% from districts with 3,000–4,999 students, 8% from districts with 5,000–9,999 students and 5% from district with over 10,000 students. From the superintendents surveyed, 41% were superintendents for a total of 10 or more years, 33% were a

superintendent for 5 years or less and 21% were in one of the first 3 years as a superintendent (Nelson, 2010).

Roughly 95% of superintendents reported school board relationships as very good or good and about 88% reported satisfaction within their current positions by marking very satisfied or satisfied in job satisfaction (Nelson, 2010). According to Minnesota superintendents in the 2010 study, the top two factors “contributing to MN superintendent effectiveness are the ‘Board of Education’ followed in ranking by ‘Interpersonal Relationships skills’” (Nelson, 2010, p. 4). Minnesota superintendents also identified “Inadequate Financing of Schools” and “State and Federal Mandates” as the top two elements that hinder their effectiveness (Nelson, 2010, p. 5).

Stewart et al.’s Study. Superintendents in Stewart et al.’s (2012) study identified mandates (92.9%), federal requirements (89%) and lack of funding (87.2%) as the biggest barriers for district level reform. Roughly half (51.2%) of superintendents also reported the school district in which they serve does not have a long-range strategic plan that outlines reform efforts (Stewart et al., 2012). Although half the school districts reported the lack of a strategic plan, roughly 81% of superintendents surveyed said the leadership skills to establish change and/or reform existed within their school district (Stewart et al., 2012). Although the leadership skills exist in district’s for change, Stewart et al. (2012) stated that 78.2% of superintendents surveyed agreed that their district had a passive resistance to change. The areas of change identified by superintendents most frequently were technology integration (20%), professional learning communities (19%) and response to intervention (17%). The ability to implement and sustain effective school change is often dependent on the effectiveness of the superintendent’s

leadership skills (Stewart et al., 2012), mainly, it is the skills associated with school change that are often highlighted by the development and implementation of a strategic plan.

The need for highly effective leadership in the superintendent position has continued since the inception of the position, even though some areas of focus and demographics fluctuate over time (Tienken, 2021). Experienced and effective superintendents are able to navigate these changes in the position (Marzano & Waters, 2009). “Experienced (and savvy) superintendents understand that these issues – political, social, moral, legal, and economic – affect and influence their leadership and effectiveness” (Worner, 2010, p. 3).

Summary. “In order to appreciate the complexity of the superintendency and persons occupying the position, one must know the past and the present” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 30). In this final section, Minnesota public school superintendents reported “Interpersonal Relationship Skills” as one of the top two most important areas for superintendent effectiveness (Nelson, 2010). The interpersonal relationship skills relate to the next section’s area of focus- leadership.

Leadership Background

The study of leadership, including classifications, definitions, and traits, continues to be refined over time (Henman, 2011; Khan et al., 2016; Vasilescu, 2019). Even though the study of leadership continues to evolve, it is a common belief that the success of organizations, including schools, is often determined by the effectiveness of leaders (Aalateeg, 2017). In order to better understand the leadership practices and behaviors necessary for an effective superintendent in the present-day, a distinction is made between leadership theories and leadership styles. Both areas will be reviewed in the next section.

There have been many leadership theories introduced over the past 100 years in order to better understand how and why people become highly effective leaders (Cherry, 2016). The main premise of a leadership theory is to articulate the way in which a person leads and the grouping of characteristics (Vasilescu, 2019). Therefore, a leadership theory is the framework in which a leader operates (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). There are eight leadership theories that are viewed as foundational (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2016; Vasilescu, 2019). The eight foundational leadership theories include: Great Man, Trait, Contingency, Situational, Behavioral, Participative, Management, and Relationship (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2016; Vasilescu, 2019).

Leadership Theories

The first two leadership theories to be discussed are Great Man theory and Trait theory. Great Man theory has the premise that people are “born to lead” and it is a natural-born skill (Cherry, 2016). Trait theory builds upon Great Man Theory, but further identifies certain characteristics or traits which encompass effective leadership (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2016; Vasilescu, 2019). Henman (2011) further explains Trait theory as “an atomistic approach, viewing each personality variable as something that acts independently to determine leadership” (p. 2).

The next three leadership theories overviewed are Contingency theory, Situational theory and Behavioral theory. Contingency leadership theory believes that a leader’s impact is dependent (or contingent) upon certain environmental variables (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). The success of a leader, according to Contingency theory, is based on factors such as situational factors, follower’s characteristics, and other variables (Cherry, 2016). While Contingency

leadership theory is based on the environment, Situational theory implies that leaders choose their path and response based on the situation (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Cherry (2016) stated that Situational theory tends to be more task-oriented. Behavioral theory insists that leaders are not born with leadership traits (Great Man), but effective leadership is learned over time (Cherry, 2016). All three leadership theories of Contingency, Situational and Behavioral have an awareness factor of environment, task, and self, respectively.

The final three leadership theories discussed in this section are Participative theory, Management theory, and Relationship theory. According to Participative theory, leaders take other people's thoughts, opinions and ideas into account prior to making decisions (Vasilescu, 2019). Participative theory is in contrast to Management theory in which leaders focus on supervision, productively and the operations of an organization (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2016). Finally, Relationship theory is based on the connections that are formed between a leader and their followers as well as the interactions (Khan et al., 2016). All three leadership theories, Participative, Management, and Relationship are defined in terms of the interactions and connections between leaders and followers. After reviewing the eight primary leadership theories, which is the framework in which a leader operates (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003), the concept of leadership styles will be discussed in the following section.

Leadership Styles

Amanchukwu et al. (2015) stated that "Leadership styles are the approaches used to motivate followers" (p. 9). Henman (2011) expands the concept of leadership styles to include the manner in which a leader interacts and communicates with their followers. A leadership style is also encompassed by a leader's attitudes and behaviors (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). There are

various leadership styles, however the most common include laissez-faire, authoritarian, democratic, servant and transformational (Bird & Wang, 2013; Vasilescu, 2019). Each of these five leadership styles will be highlighted next.

Laissez-faire leadership style provides little or no influence on the group and all people are seen as equals (Henman, 2011). Aalateeg (2017) describes the laissez-faire leadership style as inactive rather than reactive. The Laissez-faire leadership style is vastly different than the authoritarian leadership style where leaders rely on power, compliance and coercion over their followers (Henman, 2011; Vasilescu, 2019). Unlike the authoritarian leadership style where decisions are made by the leader, in the democratic leadership style, decisions are made by including others and coming to a consensus (Bird & Wang, 2013). A servant leadership style is focused on meeting the needs of others as opposed to self-serving (Bird & Wang, 2013). Finally, the transformational leadership style focuses on organizational improvement through collective commitment that is grounded in a shared purpose and mission (Bird & Wang, 2013; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). These leadership styles focus on the interactions or lack thereof between a leader and their followers.

After reviewing the concepts of leadership theories—the framework in which a leader operates (Zaccaro & Horn, 2003) and leadership style—the manner in which a leader interacts and communicates with their followers (Henman, 2011), the concept of authentic leadership will be examined in relationship to leadership theories and styles. Authentic leadership is viewed as a foundation or model for leading and behaving in one's role (Bird & Wang, 2013). For this study, authentic leadership is viewed as a leadership theory (the framework in which a leader operates)

and not a style of leadership. The next section will examine in more detail the origins of authentic leadership and its constructs.

Authentic Leadership Overview

“Leaders are entrusted with power, which brings with it a moral obligation to serve the interests of their followers including people whom they may not know personally, especially in large organizations” (Wilson, 2014, p. 482). The manner in which a leader conducts himself or herself through actions and behaviors impacts and influences the people they supervise, which permeates throughout the entire organization (Datta, 2015; Hirst et al., 2016). Organizations, including schools and businesses, spend significant amounts of energy, time, and money each year on leadership development with the goal of increasing leadership quality (Waldman et al., 2012).

Studying, research and the development of leadership and its principles has occurred throughout history (Bird et al., 2009; Bishop, 2013). Bird et al. (2012) believes that educational leaders face challenging times with increasing expectations for student achievement and inadequate financial resources. Worner (2010) says, “Even the most optimistic, seasoned superintendents have moments of doubt about how effective they can be against the barrage of so many issues that interfere with the mission and goals of the organization” (p. 3). Even in the face of issues, superintendents can have a positive impact on student achievement when effective leadership actions are executed (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The challenge for superintendents is to know him/herself and have a value-orientated perspective in order to effectively lead (Wilson, 2014).

In order to counter the moments of doubt, Walumbwa et al. (2008) views the concept of authenticity in leadership through a lens of self-esteem where individuals identify their own strengths and weaknesses while maintaining high levels of self-esteem. “Genuine high self-esteem reflects the convergence of publicly presented positive self-feelings and privately held inner positive self-feelings” (Kernis, 2003, p. 4). Along with the working through the outside pressures, George (2015) insists that for leaders, “the hardest person you will ever have to lead is yourself” (p. 7). Leaders are encountering many unique stressors in today’s world and there is a call for genuine and authentic leadership whereas a leader knows himself or herself (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) report the concept of authenticity has its roots in Greek philosophy, “To thine own self be true” (p. 319). Wilson (2014) expanded the root of authenticity by writing, “the word ‘authenticity’ has its origins in the ancient Greek *authentikos* and *authentēs*, the latter term, from the prefix *auto* (self) and the suffix *hentēs* (doer), denoting one who acts independently” (p. 483). In a simplistic view, the core of the authenticity philosophy is to “know, accept and remain true to one’s self” (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 802). In knowing himself or herself, a leader can make certain the actions and behaviors match their true self (Datta, 2015; Woods, 2007).

When an educational leader knows and understands his or her true self, including values, beliefs, and strengths, and assists others in the organization to do the same, leadership can positively impact follower’s performance (Datta, 2015; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Bird and Wang (2013) concluded that “leaders exuding authenticity can improve their efficiency, decision-making, relationships, problem-solving, strategic planning, communications, and governance

regardless of their pattern of leadership behavior” (p. 16). Leaders who are authentic are far from perfect, but taking accountability for mistakes, learning and demonstrating humility will lead to real connections with people (George, 2015).

Authentic Leadership has been emerging since the early 2000s (Avolio et al., 2004; George et al., 2007). Avolio et al. (2004) established Authentic Leadership as:

Individuals who are deeply aware of how they think, behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient and high on moral character. (p. 4)

Shamir and Eilman (2005) went on to further develop the concept of authentic leadership through four characteristics: (1) authentic leaders are true to themselves, rather than pretending leadership persona; (2) authentic leaders are motivated and lead through a value-based cause and mission and work to promote the cause and mission rather than leading for status, prestige or personal advantage; (3) “Authentic leaders are originals, not copies” (p. 397) and have foundational values and convictions; and (4) the authentic leaders actions are based in the foundational values and convictions. The authentic leadership construct from Shamir and Eilman (2005) did not include any predetermination of a leader’s style and was based solely on the ability to be authentic.

The concept of authentic leader has been further developed as time has passed. In 2008, Walumbwa et al. went on to advance the original definitions from Avolio et al. (2004) and Shamir and Eilman (2005) of authentic leadership and highlight specific underlying dimensions. Walumbwa et al. (2008) defines authentic leadership as:

A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, as internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 94)

The four components of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency established by Walumbwa et al. in 2008 continue to be the foundation for authentic leadership research and studies today (Banks et al., 2016; Bird & Wang, 2013; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Levy-Gazenfrants, 2016).

Self-Awareness. The concept and impact of self-awareness in authentic leadership has been solidified through the work of Walumbwa et al. (2008), “Self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of how ones derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time” (p. 95). Self-reflection is a requirement in order to make meaning of the world and increase self-awareness (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Self-awareness is a continuous journey and process where a person constantly reflects on his or her strengths, weaknesses, talents, motives, standards, beliefs and reason for the work (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Leaders must reflect on each of these areas constantly for the purpose of maintaining and evolving their own self-awareness and true self (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010).

The practice of reflecting and being self-aware are prerequisites for authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). May et al. (2003) says that a leader’s core beliefs and values must be embedded into a leader’s disposition in order to develop a foundational sense of self-awareness. In addition to the concept of a continuous journey of awareness and reflection, Peus et al. (2012)

argues that leaders who are self-aware are constantly receiving feedback from others to re-evaluating one's self-concept and impact on others in an honest and moral manner.

Receiving feedback is imperative for self-awareness. George (2015) believes the most difficult component to becoming self-aware is accepting accurate feedback in order to recognize blind spots and see himself or herself as others do. The ability to accept feedback in order to enhance self-awareness, instead of self-protection, is a characteristic of authentic leaders, according to Brown (2018). It is not merely good enough to just accept feedback, authentic leaders actively seek out feedback to learn and grow (Brown, 2018). Feedback assists in developing the core foundation of self-awareness (Brown, 2018).

A leader who is self-aware aligns his/her actions to core values and beliefs. Avolio and Gardner (2005) point out that authentic leaders have a real and extensive sense of self that is at the core foundation to enable them to stay the course and lead through personal example. The personal examples and modeling of a leader's self-awareness can grow self-development and self-discovery among followers (Gardner et al., 2005). Growing follower's development and discovery aligns with the philosophy that leadership is about impact (Gardner et al., 2005).

In summary of self-awareness, Walumbwa et al. (2008) states that two foundational components of authentic leaders are: "(1) Seeks feedback to improve interactions with others and (2) Accurately describes how others view his or her capabilities" (p. 121).

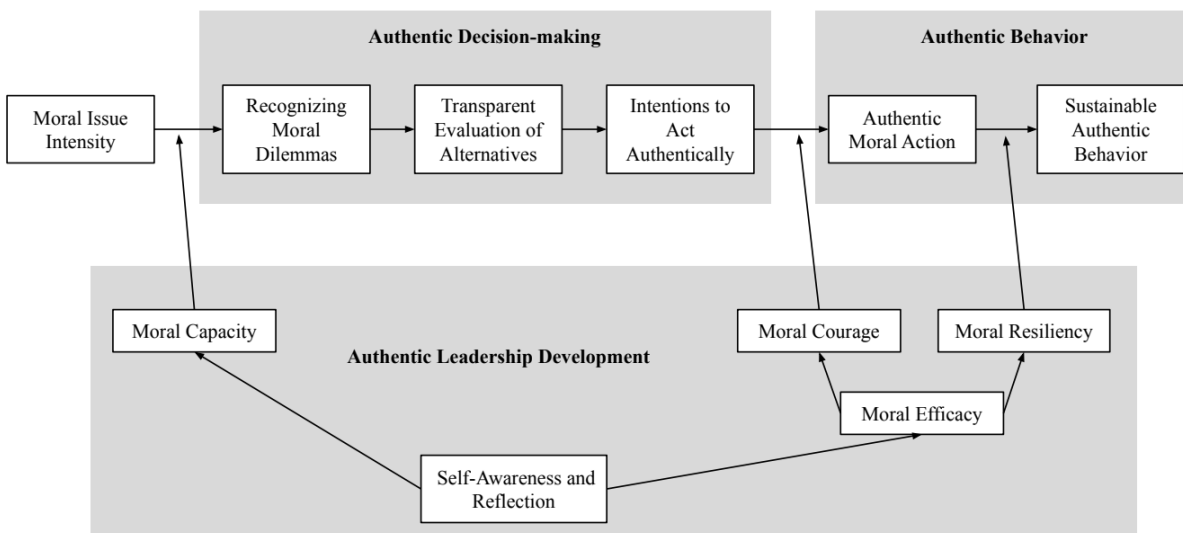
Internalized Moral Perspective. The second component of an authentic leader is an internalized moral perspective. Avolio and Gardner (2005) believe an internalized moral perspective is an inherent quality of authentic leaders. Authentic leaders demonstrate that behaviors and decisions are guided by a clear understanding of one's individual standards,

known as internalized moral perspective (Bishop, 2013; Peus et al., 2012). May, Chan, Hodges, and Avolio unpacked the moral aspect of authentic leadership in their 2003 publication, *Developing the Moral Component of Authentic Leadership*.

May et al. (2003) provides an extensive background and well-defined components for developing the moral components of authentic leadership. They note “To sustain authentic moral acts in the face of extreme adversity requires the leader to be resilient in dealing with difficult moral issues (May et al., 2003, p. 1). May et al. (2003) describes a process to achieve sustained and moral actions that are grounded in moral courage, moral resiliency, moral efficacy, a transparent evaluation of possibilities, and the intention to act authentically through the entire decision-making process.

Figure 1

Developing the Moral Component of Authentic Leadership (May et al., 2003, p. 4)



Moral courage is highlighted in many authentic leadership studies. Walumbwa et al. (2008) states that authentic leaders must have the courage to act based on “deep personal values

and convictions to build credibility and win the respect and trust of followers” (p. 96). At times, there is immense pressure pulling leaders in opposite directions. Leaders must have the moral courage and fortitude to do the right thing, regardless of the circumstances (May et al., 2003). Simply put, Brown (2018) says that authentic leaders need to “choose courage over comfort” (p. 272).

In summary of internalized moral perspective, Walumbwa et al (2008) states that two foundational components of authentic leaders are: “(1) Demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions and (2) Makes decisions based on his/her core beliefs” (p. 121).

Balanced Processing. The four core components of authentic leadership are interconnected, especially between balanced processing and internalized moral perspective (May et al., 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008). In 2003, Kernis explored the term unbiased processing to articulate a basic component of authenticity whereas a leader is aware of a lack of information, embellished facts, distortions, and the lens of one’s own personal experiences and evaluations. Paired with unbiased processing, May et al. (2003) believes authentic leaders must evaluate issues and circumstances through a transparent process that uncovers all available alternatives and consequences for each solution. The transparent process must involve as much interaction, listening, feedback and collaboration with stakeholders as possible (May et al., 2003). This transparent process also has to be grounded in moral principles and doing what is fair and just (May et al., 2003). The components of unbiased processing, uncovering alternatives, understanding consequences for decisions braided with self-awareness and an internalized moral perspective lay the foundation for balanced processing (Gardner et al., 2005).

Leaders are often judged and are accountable for the actions or decisions made or not made during their tenure (Gardner et al., 2005). The root of making decisions or executing actions is the ability to process information and data (Gardner et al., 2005). “Balanced processing refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). Seeking out information and removing ego is imperative for balanced processing in authentic leaders (Wakeman, 2017).

Authentic leaders are able to remove their own ego and intentionally seek out opinions and views that challenge their deep-rooted beliefs in order to make balanced decisions (Gardner et al., 2005). Removing ego helps leaders to see reality, learn, and decipher information prior to making decisions (Wakeman, 2017). Brown (2018) simply states that authentic leaders are always learning instead of always knowing.

In summary of balanced processing, Walumbwa et al. (2008) states that two foundational components of authentic leaders are: “(1) Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions and (2) Listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions” (p. 121).

Relational Transparency. An extensive review of literature and leadership theory will find that at the core of leadership, especially authentic, is relational (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Shamir and Eilam (2005) acknowledge that leadership is the relationship connecting a leader to his or her followers. “Followers are part of the equation and authentic leaders develop strong, open and honest relationships with others” (Bird & Wang, 2013). In a study by Avolio et al. (2004), authentic leadership and relationships were found to influence followers’ actions,

attitudes and trust. Leaders understand that leadership is about relationships (Crippen, 2012). The core component of authentic leadership weaves transparency into relationships.

Beard (2013) notes “Transparency refers to the degree in which the leader reinforces a level of openness with others that provides them opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions” (pp. 1031-1032). Being relational involves appreciating and attaining openness, honesty and sincerity in a person’s close relationships (Kernis, 2003). Thus, relational transparency encompasses a leader’s ability to present his or her genuine or true self (rather than presenting a “fake”, distorted, or misrepresented self) in order to create open relationships that promote trust through opening sharing information, thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

There are some additional considerations for leaders in expressing emotions and feelings. Peus et al. (2012) say that the behaviors of the leader’s true self must have contextual considerations and avoid inappropriate, although authentic, emotional expressions. Gardner et al. (2005) believes that authentic leaders should be “relatively transparent in expressing their true emotions and feelings to followers, while simultaneously regulating such emotions to minimize displays of inappropriate or potentially damaging emotions” (p. 358). An authentic leader must know him/her true self, and have a willingness to be open and share when appropriate and consider the context (Gardner et al., 2005).

One of the outcomes of establishing relational transparency is that information is exchanged between a leader and his or her followers in a more rapid and accurate manner, thus having a positive impact on performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Beard (2013) connects positive working relationships with a leader to securing high-impact results in organizational

practices. Covey (2004) suggests that with established relationships between a leader and his or her followers, every problem encountered by a leader is an opportunity to invest and build “the Emotional Bank Accounts that significantly affect interdependent production” (p. 202).

In summary of relational transparency, Walumbwa et al. (2008) states that two foundational components of authentic leaders are: “(1) Says exactly what he or she means and (2) Is willing to admit mistakes when they are made” (p. 121).

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). The last part of this literature review will highlight a tool for leaders to self-identify strength strengths and areas of growth within the four authentic leadership areas of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing and relational transparency. In 2008, Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa tested and validated the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) Manual*. Further research and studies in 2009, 2010 and 2017 have validated the questionnaire and support the foundational work (Avolio et al., 2007-2018). The ALQ is a sixteen-item assessment with four reflection questions in each of the four areas of authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2007-2018). Included in the manual is a self-assessment for a leader and a “Rater” version of the assessment for followers to evaluate a leader’s actions in relation to authentic leadership. Each item within the self-assessment contains a leadership behavior and instructs the person completing the questionnaire to rate “Not at all, Once in a while, Sometimes, Fairly Often or Frequently, if not always” (Avolio et al., 2007-2018, p. 6).

Summary

Chapter II, Literature Review, focused on four major areas of research: (1) historical roles of the superintendent; (2) current roles and issues faced by superintendents; (3) leadership theories and styles; and (4) authentic leadership.

The historical roles of the superintendent highlighted five widely recognized stages that superintendents view their role: teacher-scholar (1865 to 1910), business manager (early 1910 to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1954), applied social scientist (1954 to mid-1970s) and communicator (mid-1970s to present) (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005a). These roles are still embedded into the superintendent position today.

The current roles and issues faced by superintendents has evolved over time and increased in complexity. The superintendent position has seen an increase in female and nonwhite superintendents since 2000 (Tienken, 2021). Even though roughly 58% of the superintendent's survey stated that the school board hired them to be an instructional leader in a 2020 survey, instructional leadership did not make the list of time-consuming issues faced by superintendents (Tienken, 2021). The current role of the superintendent requires leadership to embrace a high degree of accountability, effectively communicate and navigate the pressures and demands of the position. These characteristics are directly linked to the superintendent's leadership.

The final major area of research contained in this literature review was on authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is defined by Walumbwa et al. (2008) as:

A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, as internalized

moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 94)

While there is interconnectedness between the four components, the research went deep into each component to uncover the unique characteristics of each area.

“Self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of how ones derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). Authentic leaders demonstrate that behaviors and decisions are guided by a clear understanding of one’s individual standards, known as internalized moral perspective (Peus et al., 2012). “*Balanced processing* refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). Relational transparency encompasses a leader’s ability to present his or her genuine or true self (rather than presenting a “fake”, distorted, or misrepresented self) in order to create open relationships that promote trust through opening sharing information, thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

The leadership of a school district superintendent is vital for organizations to achieve their educational goals. There are very few Chief Executive Officer positions that have as many different and challenging expectations as a school district superintendent (Worner, 2010). The effectiveness of a superintendent’s leadership ability permeates through an entire school organization and impacts all systems, including student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). With student achievement at the forefront of educational goals, the superintendent position continues to evolve and highly effective leadership is required (Tienken, 2021). Tienken suggests,

In the coming years, it is undeniable that superintendents will need to continue to adapt to new and lofty expectations placed on school districts to meet the individual needs of their students, while also implementing innovative strategies that drive achievement for an increasing diverse student population. (2021, p. xii)

Chapter III: Methodology

This study was designed to examine the four components of authentic leadership, as identified by Walumbwa et al. (2008). Specifically, this study will gather self-reported data on the four authentic leadership practices among a group of Minnesota Public School Superintendents. Selected demographic variables which include gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size (based on student enrollment) will be used to disaggregate the data.

Purpose of the Study

There is very little research on authentic leadership and the superintendency, which this study hopes to add some clarity.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions as it relates to the sixteen attributes of authentic leadership as well as the four constructs of authentic leadership.
2. Provide areas for leadership growth and development, based on the data, for specific authentic leadership component(s) and/or a specific demographic of Minnesota public school superintendents.

The organization of Chapter III includes: research questions, research design, instrumentation, study respondents, sampling procedure, variables, data collection procedures, data protection and security, data organization, data analysis, and the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to determine self-reported authentic leadership strengths and areas of growth for Minnesota public school superintendents.

1. To what extent do Minnesota Public School Superintendents report their authentic leadership practices based on the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)?
2. How do the four major constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) of authentic leadership compare in relation to one another?
3. How do the independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size compare with the four constructs of authentic leadership practices?

Research Design

This study entails a cross-sectional survey design that has been drawn from a predetermined population sample. The information collected will reflect one point in time. This study uses a 19-item questionnaire with a five-point rating scale including three demographic items. This study will be analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. A quantitative approach explores and describes an issue based on numerical data and “allows for reducing the complexity of our data-rich world into easily understandable parts” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 67). The questionnaire contains 16 closed-ended items and because all participants will respond to the same option, standardized data will be provided as results. Therefore, basic descriptive statistics will be used to analyze results. Results will be analyzed by item and by participant attributes

compared within and between each construct of authentic leadership. Raw scores will be gathered as aggregate data, therefore no individual scores will be revealed. The descriptive data to be reported will include item and group averages and other measures of central tendency. All data will be reported in table format. The instrument will be discussed in the next section.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this study is the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio et al., 2007). In 2008, Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa published the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) Manual*, which provides more information on the testing and validation of the instrument. The ALQ was validity and reliability tested with “Cronbach’s alpha scores of .76-.92, with best fit-model factor loadings of .66-.93” (Avolio et al., 2007-2018, p. 7). Further research studies in 2009, 2010 and 2017 have validated the questionnaire and support the foundational work (Avolio et al., 2007-2018). The ALQ is a sixteen-item assessment with three to five reflection questions in each of the four constructs of authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2007-2018).

Included in the manual is a self-assessment for a leader and a “Rater” version of the assessment for followers to evaluate a leader’s actions in relation to authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2007-2018). This study will only use the self-assessment component. This researcher received written permission from the author to use the instrument. Each item within the self-assessment contains a leadership behavior and instructs the person completing the questionnaire to rate “Not at all, Once in a while, Sometimes, Fairly Often or Frequently, if not always” (Avolio et al., 2007-2018, p. 6). Therefore, this instrument uses a 5-item Likert-type rating scale. There are no open-ended comments contained in this instrument. Three additional demographic

items will be added to the original questionnaire, resulting in a 19-item survey for respondents participating in the study. The three additional demographic questions relate to gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size. The demographic questions will be at the end of the survey based on the study of Fernandez et al. (2016). According to the study, Fernandez et al. suggests, “to avoid stereotype threat or related priming, it is most appropriate to place demographic questions at the end of an instrument” (2016, p. 8). The order of the three demographic questions at the end of the survey will be gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size.

Study Respondents

The study respondents are Minnesota public-school district superintendents during the 2021-2022 school year. Surveys will be e-mailed to study respondents using the Minnesota Department of Education glossary. The sample size is 321 Minnesota public-school district superintendents. The number of Minnesota public-school district superintendents is less than the number of public-school districts because some superintendents serve more than one school district.

Sampling Procedure

A criterion sampling procedure was used to identify participants. This study does not include private school administrators or charter school executive directors. Only public-school superintendents who are listed on the Minnesota Department of Education website will be included in this study. Therefore, the results of the study can only be generalized back to public-school superintendents in the state of Minnesota. However, this study does assume a normal distribution of respondents among the population of superintendents receiving a questionnaire.

Variables

Burkholder et al. (2020) describes variables that reflect intrinsic characteristics of the study population that cannot be manipulated or controlled such as gender or age as attribute or independent variables. As such, the independent variables for this study include gender, district size and years of superintendent experience. The dependent variables in this study are authentic leadership and the four constructs of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency and balanced processing. The responses from participants will reveal perceptions around authentic leadership practices based on their attributes. Therefore, data results from this study will be computed as the dependent variable. Variables from the study will be discussed in the following sections.

Independent Variables

Gender. Study participants will be asked their gender as male, female or other. The category of other is added to this survey in order to be inclusive. The choices of male and female align with the AASA 2020 study that had two choices available for gender demographic information (Tienken, 2021). According to the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, during the 2020-2021 school year, there are “323 superintendent members, 264 are male and 59 are female” who were members of MASA (D. Larson, personal communication, June 7, 2021). Therefore, according to MASA during the 2020-2021 school year the percentage of male superintendents in Minnesota is 81.7% and females account for 18.3% of the positions (D. Larson, personal communication, June 7, 2021). This study will also compare against the national demographics of superintendents where 26.7% of the respondents were female and

73.3% were male (Tienken, 2021). If the number of respondents in a category is less than five, the gender category will not be included in the disaggregate data analysis.

District Size. There are 326 public-school districts in the State of Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.b.). Average Daily Membership (ADM) for students in Kindergarten through grade 12 is used to calculate student enrollment as some students transfer to different districts during the school year (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.b.). The most recent official ADM data available from the Minnesota Department of Education is for the 2019-2020 school year. The smallest public-school district in Minnesota is Pine Point with 71.79 ADM (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.a). The largest school district in Minnesota is Anoka-Hennepin with 38,357.59 ADM (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.a).

For the purposes of this study, the interval scale for student enrollment was broken into three categories. The district size intervals are set-up to ensure the sample size of each interval had an adequate population sample and the ratio in the smallest student enrollment interval is comparable to the ratio in the largest student enrollment interval. The ratio for the smallest student enrollment interval is roughly 12.7 (899 students divided by 71 students). The ratio for the largest student enrollment interval is roughly 12.8 (38,357 students divided by 3,000 students).

The three intervals for kindergarten through grade 12 student enrollment for this study include: 0-899 K-12 students (roughly 157 public-school districts); 900-2,999 K-12 students (roughly 104 public-school districts); and; 3,000 students and above (roughly 65 public-school districts) (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.a).

Table 3*Demographic Options for District Size Question*

Question: What is the current K-12 student enrollment of your district?	
Option 1	0-899 students
Option 2	900 – 2,999 students
Option 3	3,000 students and above

Years Serving in the Superintendency. Respondents in a study conducted by Nelson (2010) reported “41% have been a Minnesota superintendent for 10 or more years, 21% are in the first three years as a superintendent, and 33% have five years or less of superintendent experience” (p. 15). The Minnesota Superintendent Act (2021) limits superintendent contacts to a maximum of three years. Based on the previous study and the Minnesota Superintendent Act, the following years serving in the superintendency categories are used in this study: 2 years or less, three to 5 years, 6 to 8 years, and 9 years or more.

Table 4*Demographic Options for Years Serving in the Superintendency Question*

Question: How many years have you been a public-school superintendent?	
Option 1	Two years or less
Option 2	Three to five years
Option 3	Six to eight years
Option 4	Nine years or more

Dependent Variables

There is one major dependent variable and four other dependent variables, the four constructs, in this study. The dependent variable, or criterion variable, in this study is authentic leadership and the four constructs of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency and balanced processing. Participant response to the 16 items that reflect the four constructs of authentic leadership will result in a numerical outcome. Due to the outcome variable being quantitative, this investigation will compute participant responses as the dependent variable.

Authentic Leadership.

1. ***Self-awareness.*** “Self-awareness refers to demonstrating an understanding of how ones derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time” (Walumbwa et al, 2008, p. 95). There are four questions on the self-assessment that relate to the self-awareness construct.

2. ***Internalized Moral Perspective.*** Behaviors and decisions that are guided by a clear understanding of one’s individual standards (Peus et al., 2012). There are four questions on the self-assessment that relate to the internalized moral perspective construct.

3. ***Relational Transparency.*** A leader’s ability to present his or her genuine or true self (rather than presenting a “fake”, distorted, or misrepresented self) in order to create open relationships that promote trust through opening sharing information, thoughts and feelings (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008). There are five questions on the self-assessment that relate to the relational transparency construct.

4. **Balanced Processing.** “*Balanced processing* refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). There are three questions on the self-assessment that relate to the balanced processing construct.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection will be secured through approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB process will ensure confidentiality and protection of respondents prior to sending the survey. The survey will be distributed on November 9, 2021 to 321 Minnesota public-school superintendents via e-mail list from the Minnesota Department of Education. The survey will be linked in the email using a web-based tool called Qualtrics. The first email to all study respondents will include a brief description of the study, highlight the 10-minute time frame for taking the survey, appreciation for their time, responses are voluntary, confidentiality and access to research study findings at the conclusion. Two weeks after the initial email to all participants, a second e-mail will be sent to all study respondents thanking them for completing the survey, encouraging them to complete the survey if they have not already done so and communication of a one-week deadline to complete the survey. The survey will be closed at 3:00 p.m. on November 29, 2021.

Data Protection and Security

The results of this study will be published and made public at the conclusion. Results will not be individually identifiable to the researcher. Protection and confidentiality of participants will follow all IRB regulations. Data will be stored online using a password protected account in Qualtrics. Access to Qualtrics account will be available on a password-protected laptop computer in a locked office.

Data Organization

Data will be displayed in table format. A table containing the frequency of the 5-item Likert-type rating scale for each of the 16-item questions will be displayed and aggregated by item. Since the four components of authentic leadership correspond to specific questions in the 16-item survey, the second table will aggregate the total frequency counts for all questions linked to each component. Additional frequency tables will be displayed based on the three demographic areas when there are more than five respondents for a subgroup. The frequency tables for the three demographic areas will be disaggregated by subgroup for comparison within the groups.

Data Analysis

Basic descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the data. “Descriptive statistics reduce the complexity of your data set by summarizing them into two sets of statistics: (1) central tendency (i.e., a measure of the center) and (2) variation (i.e., a measure of how your data are spread around the center)” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 74). The measures of central tendency included in the data analysis are mean and standard deviation along with frequency counts and percentages. Each of the 16-items will be ranked in descending order by mean and standard deviation from highest to lowest aggregate score. Combined items grouped under the four constructs of authentic leadership will be summarized by a single aggregate mean score and compared across the four constructs. Participant subgroup data will be disaggregated and compared within each demographic subgroup by combined item mean and standard deviation.

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)

Permission is secured from *Mind Garden*©¹ in order to administer, score and report results from the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire. As part of the permission from *Mind Garden*©, the items cannot be published in their entirety. Permission from *Mind Garden*© is given to publish a selection of four items provided by the authors. To honor the agreement the researcher has rephrased each item with a descriptor that characterizes each item using similar but different language. The exact items as written will be contained in the survey that is administered to participants. The new language is used to report the findings for the study without revealing the exact items due to copyright conditions. For example, item one on the questionnaire is “say exactly what I mean” (Avolio et al., 2007, p. 7) and the descriptor for the purposes of this dissertation is “speak directly”. The descriptors provided for each of the 16 items are listed below. The original item language is provided in italics with permission from the authors.

1. Speak directly “*say exactly what I mean*”
2. Acknowledge mistakes
3. Support risk-free conversations
4. Tough love
5. Align emotions with feelings
6. Align beliefs with actions “*demonstrate beliefs that are consistent with my actions*”
7. Align core values with decisions
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions

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9. Ethical conduct
10. Seek diverse perspectives “*solicit views that challenge my deeply held positions*”
11. Data-driven decision-making
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making
13. Seek feedback “*seek feedback to improve interactions with others*”
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities
15. Make changes midstream based on information
16. Understand impact of decisions

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of the study is to examine Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions as it relates to the 16 attributes of authentic leadership as well as the four constructs of authentic leadership using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). This survey uses a 5-item Likert-type rating scale as follows: Not at all = 0, Once in a while = 1, Sometimes = 2, Fairly Often = 3 and Frequently, if not always = 4 (Avolio et al., 2007-2018, p. 6). Each of the 16 attributes of authentic leadership is assigned to one of the four constructs, which will result in a combined mean score for each construct. The combined mean score for each construct is used to compare against other constructs. Tables will be described in rank descending order, when possible, by the mean from highest to lowest. Three demographic variables of gender, district enrollment and years serving in the superintendency are utilized to disaggregate the data. Tables that have specific item analysis will include the item description, frequency count, mean and standard deviation.

This chapter will be organized according to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Minnesota Public School Superintendents report their authentic leadership practices based on the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)?
2. How do the four major constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and moral decision-making) of authentic leadership compare in relation to one another?

3. How do the independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size compare with the four constructs of authentic leadership practices?

Return Rate

A total of 321 Minnesota Public School Superintendents were eligible to complete the survey. One hundred and forty-five superintendents completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 45.17% (45%) response rate. The Principle Investigator sent a reminder to participants one week after administering the initial survey. No further reminders were sent out to participants. The gender breakdown of responses will be discussed in Table 11.

Basic Descriptive Results

Research Question 1

To what extent do Minnesota Public School Superintendents report their authentic leadership practices based on the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)?

Data presented in Table 5 shows the item descriptor for each of the 16 items, frequency of each response choice, mean score ratings and standard deviations. The items are listed in descending order by the mean from highest to lowest value in order to illustrate those actions that superintendents have indicated occur the most frequently.

Scores range in mean values with a high score of 3.80 to the lowest score of 2.18. A score of 4 correlates to the leader identifying they “Frequently, if not always” display the authentic leadership quality. A score of 3 signifies the leader “Fairly often” displays the authentic leadership quality and 2 correlates with “Sometimes.” A score of 1 equates to the leader displaying the authentic leadership quality “Once in a while” and 0 means “Not at all.” Item nine

is the highest ranked mean item (3.80) and has the lowest standard deviation (0.47), relates to *Ethical conduct*. The second, third and fourth highest ranked items are *Acknowledge mistakes* (3.74), *Align beliefs with actions* (3.63) and *Align core values with decisions* (3.53), respectively. Item 5 is the lowest ranked mean item (2.18) and the highest standard deviation (0.92), corresponds to *Align emotions with feelings*. The other lowest ranked items by mean are *Seek diverse perspective* (3.00), which ranked fourteenth out of sixteen, and *Valid self-perception of capabilities* (2.83), which resulted in the fifteenth ranked item out of sixteen. Item 1 (*Speak directly*) and item 12 (*Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making*) ranked directly in the middle of all items, with mean scores of 3.49 and 3.47, respectively. The highest frequency count for any item response is 120 out of a possible 145 for “Frequently, if not always” in *Ethical conduct*.

Table 5*Basic Statistical Results by Item (N = 145)*

Item Descriptors	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
9. Ethical conduct	0	0	4	21	120	3.80	0.47
2. Acknowledge mistakes	0	0	2	33	110	3.74	0.47
6. Align beliefs with actions	1	0	4	42	97	3.63	0.61
7. Align core values with decisions	0	1	8	49	87	3.53	0.64
3. Support risk-free conversations	0	0	10	50	85	3.52	0.63
11. Data-driven decision-making	0	0	7	57	81	3.51	0.59
4. Tough love	0	0	9	55	81	3.50	0.61
1. Speak directly	0	1	2	67	75	3.49	0.57
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making	0	0	7	63	75	3.47	0.59
16. Understand impact of decisions	0	0	9	67	69	3.41	0.61
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions	1	1	20	65	57	3.22	0.76
13. Seek feedback	0	6	24	69	46	3.07	0.81
15. Make changes midstream based on information	0	3	26	81	35	3.02	0.71
10. Seek diverse perspective	0	5	33	64	43	3.00	0.82
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities	1	4	41	70	28	2.83	0.79
5. Align emotions with feelings	1	34	61	36	13	2.18	0.92

Research Question 2

How do the four major constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) of authentic leadership compare in relation to one another?

Tables 6-9 display information relating to one of the four authentic leadership constructs. The items that relate to each construct, based on the sixteen item characteristics on the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) survey, are organized in the table in descending order by mean from highest to lowest. Each item line contains an item descriptor, total frequency count, item mean and standard deviation. Also depicted on the last line of every table are the totals for the construct: frequency count totals, combined mean, combined standard deviation.

Table 6 displays descriptive results from five items that correspond to the *relational transparency* construct. Items one through five from the ALQ survey correspond to the relational transparency construct.

Mean scores for the five items relating to relational transparency range from 3.74 to 2.18, with a combined mean average of 3.29. The standard deviation of the five items range from 0.47 to 0.92, with a combined average standard deviation of 0.86. *Acknowledge mistakes* has the highest mean value of 3.74, the lowest standard deviation of 0.468, and has the second highest mean among the sixteen items. *Aligns emotions with feelings* had the lowest mean score of 2.18, the highest standard deviation of 0.92, and is the lowest ranked mean out of the 16 items. The other three items connected to relational transparency of *Support risk-free conversations*, *Tough love* and *Speak directly* cluster together with mean scores of 3.52, 3.50 and 3.49, respectively.

Table 6

Construct for Relational Transparency Items: Basic Statistical Results (N = 145)

Item Descriptors	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
2. Acknowledge mistakes	0	0	2	33	110	3.74	0.47
3. Support risk-free conversations	0	0	10	50	85	3.52	0.63
4. Tough love	0	0	9	55	81	3.50	0.61
1. Speak directly	0	1	2	67	75	3.49	0.57
5. Align emotions with feelings	1	34	61	36	13	2.18	0.92
Total	1	35	84	241	364	3.29	0.86

Table 7 illustrates descriptive results from four items related to the *internalized moral perspective* construct. Items six through nine from the ALQ survey correspond to the internalized moral perspective construct.

Mean scores for the four items relating to internalized moral perspective range from 3.80 to 3.22, with a combined mean average of 3.54. The standard deviation of the four items range from 0.47 to 0.76, with a combined average standard deviation of 0.66. *Ethical conduct* has the highest mean value of 3.80, the lowest standard deviation of 0.47, and has the highest mean score among all the sixteen items. *Encourage others to align core values and decisions* had the lowest mean score of 3.22 among the four items of internalized moral perspective and the highest standard deviation of 0.76. The other two items connected to internalized moral perspective are *Align beliefs with actions* and *Align core values with decisions* have mean scores of 3.63 and 3.53, respectively.

Table 7

Construct for Internalized Moral Perspective Items: Basic Statistical Results (N = 145)

Item Descriptors	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
9. Ethical conduct	0	0	4	21	120	3.80	0.47
6. Align beliefs with actions	1	0	4	42	97	3.63	0.61
7. Align core values with decisions	0	1	8	49	87	3.53	0.64
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions	1	1	20	65	57	3.22	0.76
Total	2	2	36	177	361	3.54	0.66

Results from the three items in the *balanced processing* construct are presented in Table 8. Items 10 through 12 from the ALQ survey correspond to the balanced processing construct.

Mean scores for the three items relating to balanced processing range from 3.51 to 3.00, with a combined mean average of 3.33. The standard deviation of the three items range from 0.59 to 0.82, with a combined average standard deviation of 0.71. *Data-driven decision-making*

has the highest mean value of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.59. *Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making* has the second highest mean score of 3.47 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.59. *Seek diverse perspective* has the lowest mean score of 3.00 among the three items of balanced processing and the highest standard deviation of 0.82.

Table 8

Construct for *Balanced Processing* Items: Basic Statistical Results (N = 145)

Item Descriptors	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
11. Data-driven decision-making	0	0	7	57	81	3.51	0.59
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making	0	0	7	63	75	3.47	0.59
10. Seek diverse perspective	0	5	33	64	43	3.00	0.82
Total	0	5	47	184	199	3.33	0.71

Table 9 represents the results of the four items related to the *self-awareness* construct. Items 13 through 16 correspond to the self-awareness construct.

The range of mean scores are 3.41 to 2.83 for the four items relating to self-awareness, with a combined mean average of 3.07. The standard deviation of the four items range from 0.61 to 0.81, with a combined average standard deviation of 0.76. *Understand impact of decisions* has the highest mean value of 3.41 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.61. *Seek feedback* has the second highest mean score of 3.07 and the highest standard deviation of 0.81 among the four items connected to the self-awareness construct. *Make changes midstream based on information* had the third highest mean in the self-awareness construct with a score of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 0.71. The lowest mean score of 2.83 is connected to a *Valid self-perception of capabilities*, which also had a standard deviation of 0.79.

Table 9

Construct for Self-Awareness Items: Basic Statistical Results (N = 145)

Item Descriptors	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
16. Understand impact of decisions	0	0	9	67	69	3.41	0.61
13. Seek feedback	0	6	24	69	46	3.07	0.81
15. Make changes midstream based on information	0	3	26	81	35	3.02	0.71
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities	1	4	41	70	28	2.83	0.79
Total	1	13	100	287	178	3.07	0.76

Table 10 illustrates the combined results of all four constructs including the frequency counts for all items contained within the construct, as well as the combined mean and standard deviation. For Table 10, please note the number of items for each construct is different, so frequency counts are not compared. The constructs are listed in the table in descending order by mean from highest to lowest.

Internalized moral perspective has the highest mean value of the four constructs at 3.54, with the lowest standard deviation of 0.66. Balanced processing has the second highest combined mean score of 3.33, with a standard deviation of 0.71. The third highest construct based on the combined mean score is relational transparency at 3.29. Relational transparency also has the highest standard deviation of 0.86. Self-awareness has the smallest combined mean score among all four constructs at 3.07, and a standard deviation of 0.76.

Table 10*Four Constructs of Authentic Leadership (N = 145)*

Construct	Rating scale (f)					Mean	SD
	Not at all 0	Once in a while 1	Sometimes 2	Fairly often 3	Frequently, if not always 4		
Internalized Moral Perspective	2	2	36	177	361	3.54	0.66
Balanced Processing	0	5	47	184	199	3.33	0.71
Relational Transparency	1	35	84	241	364	3.29	0.86
Self-Awareness	1	13	100	287	178	3.07	0.76

Research Question 3

How do the independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size compare with the four constructs of authentic leadership practices?

Demographic Responses. Table 11, 12 and 13 represent the three demographic questions in the survey. Table 11 corresponds to item 17 in the survey relating to gender. Table 12 corresponds to item 18 in the survey relating to K-12 district enrollment. Table 13 corresponds to item 19 in the survey relating to years serving in the superintendency.

Table 11 highlights the gender demographic variable breakdown, including 27 *females* (19%), 117 *males* (81%) and one blank response. These demographic results align with MASA (Minnesota Association of School Administrators) data during the 2020-2021 school year which stated the percentage of male superintendents in Minnesota is 81.7% and females account for 18.3% of the positions (D. Larson, personal communication, June 7, 2021).

Table 11*Demographics by Gender (Item #17)*

Demographic	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Male	117	81%
Female	27	19%

Table 12 displays the number of responses for each of the total K-12 district enrollment demographic data. Of the respondents, 63 superintendents (43% of the total responses) have a K-12 district enrollment between *0-899 students*, 24 superintendents (17% of the total responses) have a K-12 district enrollment between *900-2,999 students* and 58 superintendents (40% of the total responses) have a K-12 district enrollment at *3,000 students and above*.

Table 12*Demographics by District Enrollment (N = 145) (Item #18)*

Demographic	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
0-899 students	63	43%
900-2,999 students	24	17%
3,000 students and above	58	40%

Table 13 provides data from survey respondents for years serving in the superintendency. Based on the survey results, 25 superintendent respondents are serving two years or less, 34 superintendents are serving 3 to 5 years, 26 superintendents are serving 6 to 8 years and 60 superintendents are serving 9 years or more. The highest percentage of total responses is 41% (9 years or more), followed by 24% (3 to 5 years), 18% (6 to 8 years), and 17% (2 years or less).

Table 13

Demographics by Years Serving in the Superintendency (N = 145) (Item #19)

Demographic	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Two Years or Less	25	17%
Three to Five Years	34	24%
Six to Eight Years	26	18%
Nine Years or more	60	41%

The next series of Tables 14-18 are all disaggregated by gender. The total number of male respondents was 117 and there were 27 female respondents. Each line item contains an item descriptor, mean and standard deviation disaggregated by gender. Also depicted on the last line of every table are the totals for the construct, including combined mean and combined standard deviation disaggregated by gender.

Table 14 displays the five item descriptions associated with *relational transparency*. *Acknowledge mistakes* had the highest mean score for males (3.72) and females (3.85) for all five items in the relational transparency construct. *Acknowledge mistakes* also had the lowest standard deviation for males and females at 0.49 and 0.36, respectively. The second highest mean score for males was *Tough Love* (3.50), followed by *Support risk-free conversations* (3.48) and *Speak directly* (3.47). The second highest mean score for females was *Support risk-free conversations* (3.67), followed by *Speak directly* (3.59) and *Tough Love* (3.44). *Align emotions with feelings* had the lowest combined mean score for males (2.18) and females (2.19) and the highest standard deviation at 0.93 and 0.92, respectively.

The total combined mean in the relational transparency construct for males was 3.27 with a standard deviation of 0.86. This compares to the total combined mean in the relational transparency construct for females of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 0.86.

Table 14***Relational Transparency Construct Compared by Gender***

Item Descriptor	Male N = 117		Female N = 27	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Speak directly	3.47	0.58	3.59	0.50
2. Acknowledge mistakes	3.72	0.49	3.85	0.36
3. Support risk-free conversations	3.48	0.65	3.67	0.48
4. Tough love	3.50	0.60	3.44	0.70
5. Align emotions with feelings	2.18	0.93	2.19	0.92
Total	3.27	0.86	3.35	0.86

Table 15 summarizes the four items related to *internalized moral perspective* disaggregated by gender. The ranking of mean scores among the four items are exactly the same for males and females. *Ethical conduct* had the highest mean score for males (3.78) and females (3.89), with the lowest standard deviation of 0.48 and 0.42, respectively. *Align beliefs with actions* had the second highest mean score for males (3.59) and females (3.78), with standard deviations of 0.65 and 0.42, respectively. *Align core values with decisions* had the third ranked mean among males (3.51) and females (3.59), followed by the fourth ranking of *Encourage others to align core values and decisions* for males (3.20) and females (3.35).

The combined mean score for all four items of relational transparency for males was 3.52, compared to the combined mean score for females of 3.65. The combined standard deviation score for the four items of relational transparency for males was 0.70, compared to the combined standard deviation for females of 0.57.

Table 15***Internalized Moral Perspective Construct Compared by Gender***

Item Descriptor	Male N = 117		Female N = 27	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
6. Align beliefs with actions	3.59	0.65	3.78	0.42
7. Align core values with decisions	3.51	0.65	3.59	0.57
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions	3.20	0.80	3.35	0.70
9. Ethical conduct	3.78	0.48	3.89	0.42
Total	3.52	0.70	3.65	0.57

Results of the three items for the *balanced processing* construct, disaggregated by gender, are displayed in Table 16. The ranking of mean scores among the three items of balanced processing are exactly the same for males and females. *Data-driven decision-making* ranked the highest for males (3.53) and females (3.44), with standard deviations of 0.60 and 0.58, respectively. The second highest mean score for males (3.50) and females (3.37) was the item *Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making*, with standard deviations of 0.58 and 0.63, respectively. The lowest ranking item mean score for males (3.02) and females (2.89) was *Seek diverse perspective*, with corresponding standard deviations of 0.84 and 0.70.

The combined mean score for all three items of balanced processing for males was 3.35, compared to the combined mean score for females of 3.23. The combined standard deviation score for the three items of balanced processing for males was 0.72, compared to the combined standard deviation for females of 0.68.

Table 16

Balanced Processing Construct Compared by Gender

Item Descriptor	Male N = 117		Female N = 27	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
10. Seek diverse perspective	3.02	0.84	2.89	0.70
11. Data-driven decision-making	3.53	0.60	3.44	0.58
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making	3.50	0.58	3.37	0.63
Total	3.35	0.72	3.23	0.68

Table 17 displays the four items connected to the *self-awareness* construct disaggregated by gender. *Understand impact of decisions* had the highest ranked mean for males (3.40) and females (3.52), with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.62 and 0.51. The second highest mean for males was *Seek feedback* (3.10) followed by *Make changes midstream based on information* (3.03). The second highest mean for females was *Make changes midstream based on*

information (2.96) followed by *Seek feedback* (2.93). The lowest ranked mean item for the self-awareness construct was a *Valid self-perception of capabilities*, equating to a mean score of 2.86 for males and 2.73 for females.

The combined mean score for all four items of self-awareness for males was 3.10, compared to the combined mean score for females of 3.04. The combined standard deviation score for the four items of self-awareness for males was 0.78, compared to the combined standard deviation for females of 0.69.

Table 17

Self-Awareness Construct Compared by Gender

Item Descriptor	Male N = 117		Female N = 27	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
13. Seek feedback	3.10	0.83	2.93	0.68
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities	2.86	0.82	2.73	0.67
15. Make changes midstream based on information	3.03	0.73	2.96	0.65
16. Understand impact of decisions	3.40	0.62	3.52	0.51
Total	3.10	0.78	3.04	0.69

Table 18 depicts the mean and standard deviation of the four constructs of authentic leadership disaggregated by gender. The internalized moral perspective construct had the highest ranked mean for males (3.52) and females (3.65) with the lowest standard deviations of 0.68 and 0.57, respectively. The construct for males with the second highest mean was balanced processing (3.35) followed by relational transparency (3.27) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.72 and 0.86, respectively. The construct for females with the second highest mean was relational transparency (3.35) followed by balanced processing (3.23) and with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.86 and 0.68, respectively. Self-awareness was the lowest ranked mean for both males (3.10) and females (3.04) with a standard deviation of 0.78 and 0.69, respectively.

Table 18*Four Constructs of Authentic Leadership Compared by Gender*

Construct	Male N = 117		Female N = 27	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational Transparency	3.27	0.86	3.35	0.86
Internalized Moral Perspective	3.52	0.68	3.65	0.57
Balanced Processing	3.35	0.72	3.23	0.68
Self-Awareness	3.10	0.78	3.04	0.69

Tables 19-23 are all disaggregated by district student enrollment. The total number of respondents for the 0-899 students enrollment category was 63. There were 24 respondents in the 900-2,999 students' enrollment category and 58 respondents in the 3,000 students and above district enrollment category. Each item line contains an item descriptor, mean and standard deviation by district student enrollment. Also depicted on the last line of every table are the totals for the construct, including combined mean and combined standard deviation disaggregated by district student enrollment.

Table 19 provides the five item descriptions associated with *relational transparency*. All three categories of district student enrollment had the same item score with the highest mean and same item with the lowest mean score. *Acknowledge mistakes* had the highest mean for 0-899 students (3.84), 900-2,999 students (3.79) and 3,000 students and above (3.62) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.37, 0.42 and 0.56. *Align emotions with feelings* was the lowest ranked item for each enrollment category, including 2.21 for 0-899 students, 1.96 for 900-2,999 students and 2.24 for 3,000 students and above. The standard deviation for *Align emotions with feelings* was also the highest in all three enrollment categories, including 0.95 for 0-899 students, 0.75 for 900-2,999 students and 0.94 for 3,000 students and above.

The other three items were in different orders for each of the three demographic categories. The second, third and fourth ranked item mean for 0-899 students was *Tough Love* (3.48), *Support risk-free conversations* (3.46) and *Speak directly* (3.43), respectively. For the 900-2,999 student enrollment category, *Support risk-free conversations* ranked second with 3.75, *Speak directly* ranked third with 3.50 and *Tough Love* was fourth with 3.42. Finally, there was a tie for the second highest mean in the 3,000 students and above category between *Speak directly* (3.55) and *Tough Love* (3.55), while *Support risk-free conversations* (3.48) ranked fourth.

The combined mean score for all five items of relational transparency for the 0-899 students' category was 3.28, compared to the combined mean score for the 900-2,99 students category of 3.29 and 3,000 students and above of 3.28. The combined standard deviation score for the five items of relational transparency for the 0-899 students' category was 0.86, compared to the combined standard deviation score for the 900-2,99 students category of 0.86 and 3,000 students and above of 0.87.

Table 19

Relational Transparency Construct Compared by District Student Enrollment

Item Descriptor	0-899 students N = 63		900-2,999 students N = 24		3,000 students and above N = 58	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Speak directly	3.43	0.56	3.50	0.51	3.55	0.60
2. Acknowledge mistakes	3.84	0.37	3.79	0.42	3.62	0.56
3. Support risk-free conversations	3.46	0.67	3.75	0.44	3.48	0.63
4. Tough love	3.48	0.62	3.42	0.58	3.55	0.63
5. Align emotions with feelings	2.21	0.95	1.96	0.75	2.24	0.94
Total	3.28	0.86	3.29	0.86	3.28	0.87

Table 20 highlights the four item descriptions related to the *internalized moral perspective* construct. All three demographic categories had the same ranked order of combined item means. *Ethical conduct* had the highest ranked mean for 0-899 students (3.83), 900-2,999

students (3.96) and 3,000 students and above (3.71) with corresponding standard deviations of 0.42, 0.20 and 0.56, respectively. The second ranked highest item mean was *Align beliefs with actions*, with mean scores of 3.59 for 0-899 students, 3.71 for 900-2,999 students and 3.63 for 3,000 students and above. *Align core values with decisions* was the third highest ranked mean for all three district student enrollment categories with a mean score of 3.44 for 0-899 students, 3.63 for 900-2,999 students and 3.59 for 3,000 students and above. Finally, *Encourage others to align core values and decisions* ranked fourth out of four items in the internalized moral perspective construct with a mean of 3.11 for 0-899 students, 3.42 for 900-2,999 students and 3.26 for 3,000 students and above. The standard deviation for *Encourage others to align core values and decisions* included 0-899 students at 0.86, 900-2,999 students at 0.72 and 3,000 students and above at 0.64.

The combined mean score for all four items in the internalized moral perspective construct were 3.49 for 0-899 students with a combined standard deviation of 0.70, 3.55 for 900-2,999 students with a combined standard deviation of 0.62, and 3.68 for 3,000 students and above with a combined standard deviation of 0.64.

Table 20

Internalized Moral Perspective Construct Compared by District Student Enrollment

Item Descriptor	0-899 students N = 63		900-2,999 students N = 24		3,000 students and above N = 58	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
6. Align beliefs with actions	3.59	0.56	3.71	0.86	3.63	0.56
7. Align core values with decisions	3.44	0.69	3.63	0.50	3.59	0.62
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions	3.11	0.86	3.42	0.72	3.26	0.64
9. Ethical conduct	3.83	0.42	3.96	0.20	3.71	0.56
Total	3.49	0.70	3.55	0.62	3.68	0.64

The three items correlating to **balanced processing** are displayed in Table 21. *Seek diverse perspective* had the lowest ranked mean for all three categories at 2.98 for 0-899 students, 3.29 for 900-2,999 students and 2.90 for 3,000 students and above with corresponding standard deviations of 0.81, 0.69 and 0.85. The combined mean for *Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making* was first for the 0-899 student category with 3.51, first for the 900-2,999 student category with 3.54 and second for the 3,000 students and above category with 3.40. Finally, *Data-driven decision-making* ranked second for 0-899 students with 3.49, second for 900-2,999 students with 3.50 and first for 3,000 students and above with 3.53 based upon the combined mean. The standard deviation for *Data-driven decision-making* was 0.56 for 0-899 students, 0.66 for 900-2,999 students and 0.60 for 3,000 students and above.

The combined mean score for all three items in the 0-899 student category was 3.33 with a combined standard deviation of 0.71. The combined mean score for all three items in the 900-2,999 student category was 3.28 with a combined standard deviation of 0.74. Lastly, the combined mean score for all three items in the 3,00 students and above category was 3.44 with a combined standard deviation of 0.63.

Table 21

Balanced Processing Construct Compared by District Student Enrollment

Item Descriptor	0-899 students N = 63		900 – 2,999 students N = 24		3,000 students and above N = 58	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
10. Seek diverse perspective	2.98	0.81	3.29	0.69	2.90	0.85
11. Data-driven decision-making	3.49	0.56	3.50	0.66	3.53	0.60
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making	3.51	0.62	3.54	0.51	3.40	0.59
Total	3.33	0.71	3.28	0.74	3.44	0.63

Table 22 displays the four items contained in the **self-awareness** construct. The item with the highest ranked mean for all three demographic categories was *Understand impact of decisions*. The combined mean for *Understand impact of decisions* in the 0-899 students' category was 3.32 with a standard deviation of 0.62, compared to a combined mean of 3.67 and standard deviation in the 900-2,999 students category of 0.57 and the 3,000 students and above category with a mean of 3.41 and a standard deviation of 0.59. The three demographic categories didn't have any other similarities in their rankings.

The remaining item rank order, from highest to lowest, for the combined mean in the 0-899 students' category was 3.10 (*Seek Feedback*), 3.06 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 2.85 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*). This compares to the remaining item rank order, from highest to lowest, for the combined mean in the 900-2,999 students' category of 3.29 (*Seek Feedback*), 3.08 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 3.08 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*). Finally, the 3,000 students and above category had a remaining item rank order, from highest to lowest, for the combined mean of 2.95 (*Seek Feedback*), 2.95 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 2.71 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*).

The total combined mean for all four items in the self-awareness construct in the 0-899 students' category was 3.08 with a standard deviation of 0.74. This compares to a combined mean score for the four items in the self-awareness category of 3.00 (900-2,999 students' category) and 3.28 (3,000 students and above), a standard deviation of 0.79 (900-2,999 students category) and 0.72 (3,000 students and above).

Table 22*Self-Awareness Construct Compared by District Student Enrollment*

Item Descriptor	0-899 students N = 63		900 – 2,999 students N = 24		3,000 students and above N = 58	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
13. Seek feedback	3.10	0.82	3.29	0.81	2.95	0.78
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities	2.85	0.72	3.08	0.72	2.71	0.88
15. Make changes midstream based on information	3.06	0.74	3.08	0.65	2.95	0.71
16. Understand impact of decisions	3.32	0.62	3.67	0.57	3.41	0.59
Total	3.08	0.74	3.00	0.79	3.28	0.72

Table 23 portrays the combined mean and combined standard deviation of the four constructs of authentic leadership disaggregated by the three district student enrollment categories; 0-899 students (63 respondents), 900-2,999 students (24 respondents) and 3,000 students and above (58 respondents).

The internalized moral perspective construct had the highest ranked mean for all three categories at 3.49 (0-899 students), 3.55 (900-2,999 students) and 3.68 (3,000 students and above) with standard deviations of 0.70, 0.62 and 0.64, respectively. The construct with the second highest mean for the 0-899 students' enrollment category was balanced processing (3.33) followed by relational transparency (3.28) and self-awareness (3.08) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.71, 0.86, and 0.74, respectively. The construct with the second highest mean for the 900-2,999 students' enrollment category was relational transparency (3.29), followed by balanced processing (3.28) and self-awareness (3.00) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.86, 0.74, and 0.79, respectively. Finally, the construct with the second highest mean for the 3,000 students and above enrollment category was balanced processing (3.44), followed by a tie for third with relational transparency (3.28) and self-awareness (3.28) and a corresponding standard deviation of 0.63, 0.87, and 0.72, respectively

Table 23*Four Constructs of Authentic Leadership Compared by District Student Enrollment*

Construct	0-899 students N = 63		900–2,999 students N = 24		3,000 students and above N = 58	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational Transparency	3.28	0.86	3.29	0.86	3.28	0.87
Internalized Moral Perspective	3.49	0.70	3.55	0.62	3.68	0.64
Balanced Processing	3.33	0.71	3.28	0.74	3.44	0.63
Self-Awareness	3.08	0.74	3.00	0.79	3.28	0.72

The final series of Tables 24-28 are disaggregated by years serving in the superintendency. The four demographic categories for years serving in the superintendency include: 2 years or less (60 respondents), 3 to 5 years (26 respondents), 6 to 8 years (34 respondents) and 9 years or more (25 respondents). Each item line contains an item descriptor, mean and standard deviation by years serving in the superintendency. Also depicted on the last line of every table are the totals for the construct, including combined mean and combined standard deviation disaggregated by years serving in the superintendency.

Table 24 shows the five items that encompass the **relational transparency**. All four demographic areas had the same item with the highest and lowest combined mean score. *Acknowledge mistakes* had the highest mean score across all four categories at 3.76 (2 years or less), 3.82 (3 to 5 years), 3.77 (6 to 8 years) and 3.68 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.44, 0.46, 0.43 and 0.50, respectively. *Align emotions with feelings* had the lowest mean score across all four categories at 2.44 (2 years or less), 2.26 (3 to 5 years), 2.27 (6 to 8 years) and 1.98 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.96, 0.90, 1.04 and 0.83, respectively.

The following is the second, third and fourth ranked items, by combined mean, for the 2 years or less category: 3.68 (*Support risk-free conversations*), 3.60 (*Speak directly*), and 3.32

(*Tough love*). The 3 to 5 years category had the following combined mean rankings for second, and a tie for third: 3.56 (*Tough love*), 3.47 (*Speak directly*) and 3.47 (*Support risk-free conversations*). The 6 to 8 years category also had one item rank second and a tie for third for combined mean: 3.50 (*Speak directly*), 3.46 (*Tough love & Support risk-free conversations*). Finally, the following is the second, third and fourth ranked items, by combined mean, for the 9 years or more category: 3.55 (*Tough love*), 3.50 (*Support risk-free conversations*), and 3.45 (*Speak directly*).

The total combined mean for all five items in the relational transparency construct in the 2 years or less category was 3.36 with a standard deviation of 0.80. This compares to a combined mean score for the five items in the relational transparency construct of 3.32 (3 to 5 years), 3.29 (6 to 8 years), and 3.23 (9 years or more) with a standard deviation of 0.86, 0.88, and 0.88, respectively.

Table 24

Relational Transparency Construct Compared by Years Serving in the Superintendency

Item Descriptor	2 Years or Less N = 60		3 to 5 Years N = 26		6 to 8 Years N = 34		9 Years or More N = 25	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Speak directly	3.60	0.50	3.47	0.56	3.50	0.58	3.45	0.59
2. Acknowledge mistakes	3.76	0.44	3.82	0.46	3.77	0.43	3.68	0.50
3. Support risk-free conversations	3.68	0.56	3.47	0.75	3.46	0.65	3.50	0.57
4. Tough love	3.32	0.63	3.56	0.61	3.46	0.71	3.55	0.57
5. Align emotions with feelings	2.44	0.96	2.26	0.90	2.27	1.04	1.98	0.83
Total	3.36	0.80	3.32	0.86	3.29	0.88	3.23	0.88

Table 25 displays the four items that correspond to the **internalized moral perspective** construct. The item with the highest and lowest combined mean score were the same for all four demographic areas. *Ethical conduct* had the highest mean score across all four categories at 3.72 (2 years or less), 3.82 (3 to 5 years), 3.88 (6 to 8 years) and 3.78 (9 years or more) with a

corresponding standard deviation of 0.61, 0.39, 0.33, and 0.49. *Encourage others to align core values and decisions* had the lowest mean score across all four categories at 3.33 (2 years or less), 3.24 (3 to 5 years), 3.12 (6 to 8 years) and 3.22 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.76, 0.74, 0.95, and 0.69.

Align beliefs with actions ranked second in the categories of 2 years or less, 3 to 5 years, and 9 years or more with a combined mean score of 3.58, 3.68 and 3.72, respectively, and ranked third in the 6 to 8 years category with a combined mean score of 3.38. *Align core values with decisions* ranked third in the categories of 2 years or less, 3 to 5 years, and 9 years or more with a combined mean score of 3.40, 3.56 and 3.62, respectively, and ranked second in the 6 to 8 years category with a combined mean score of 3.42.

The total combined mean for all four items in the internalized moral perspective construct in the 2 years or less category was 3.51 with a standard deviation of 0.75. This compares to a combined mean score for the four items in the internalized moral perspective construct of 3.57 (3 to 5 years), 3.45 (6 to 8 years), and 3.58 (9 years or more) with a standard deviation of 0.64, 0.75 and 0.59, respectively.

Table 25

Internalized Moral Perspective Construct Compared by Years Serving in the Superintendency

Item Descriptor	2 Years or Less N = 60		3 to 5 Years N = 26		6 to 8 Years N = 34		9 Years or More N = 25	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
6. Align beliefs with actions	3.58	0.88	3.68	0.54	3.38	0.70	3.72	0.45
7. Align core values with decisions	3.40	0.71	3.56	0.71	3.42	0.70	3.62	0.52
8. Encourage others to align core values and decisions	3.33	0.76	3.24	0.74	3.12	0.95	3.22	0.69
9. Ethical conduct	3.72	0.61	3.82	0.39	3.88	0.33	3.78	0.49
Total	3.51	0.75	3.57	0.64	3.45	0.75	3.58	0.59

Table 26 displays the three items that relate to the **balanced processing** construct. The item with the lowest combined mean score was the same for all four demographic areas. *Seek diverse perspective* had the lowest mean score across all four categories at 3.08 (2 years or less), 3.09 (3 to 5 years), 2.96 (6 to 8 years) and 2.93 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.70, 0.87, 0.77 and 0.86, respectively.

Data-driven decision-making ranked the highest in the categories of 2 years or less, and 3 to 5 years with a combined mean score of 3.64 and 3.59, respectively, and ranked second out of three items in the 6 to 8 years category with a combined mean score of 3.54. The category of 9 years or more had two items with the same combined mean score of 3.40: *Data-driven decision-making* and *Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making*. *Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making* ranked second out of three items in the categories of 2 years or less and 3 to 5 years with a combined mean score of 3.48 and 3.50, respectively, and had the highest ranking in the 6 to 8 years category with a combined mean score of 3.58.

The total combined mean for all three items in the balanced processing construct in the 2 years or less category was 3.40 with a standard deviation of 0.68. This compares to a combined mean score for the three items in the balanced processing construct of 3.39 (3 to 5 years), 3.36 (6 to 8 years), and 3.24 (9 years or more) with a standard deviation of 0.73, 0.70 and 0.71, respectively.

Table 26*Balanced Processing Construct Compared by Years Serving in the Superintendency*

Item Descriptor	2 Years or Less N = 60		3 to 5 Years N = 26		6 to 8 Years N = 34		9 Years or More N = 25	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
10. Seek diverse perspective	3.08	0.70	3.09	0.87	2.96	0.77	2.93	0.86
11. Data-driven decision-making	3.64	0.64	3.59	0.56	3.54	0.58	3.40	0.59
12. Take in various viewpoints prior to decision-making	3.48	0.59	3.50	0.66	3.58	0.58	3.40	0.56
Total	3.40	0.68	3.39	0.73	3.36	0.70	3.24	0.71

Table 27 shows the four items that relate to the **self-awareness** construct. Each of the four demographic categories had different item rankings based on the combined mean score. The highest combined mean score in the 2 years or less category was a tie between *Understand impact of decisions* and *Seek feedback* with 3.44, followed by 2.96 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 2.88 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*). The highest combined mean score in the 3 to 5 years category was 3.38 (*Understand impact of decisions*), followed by 3.15 (*Seek feedback*), 3.06 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 2.88 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*). The highest combined mean score in the 6 to 8 years category was 3.50 (*Understand impact of decisions*), followed by 3.00 (*Make changes midstream based on information*) and 2.88 for both *Seek feedback* and *Valid self-perception of capabilities*. Finally, the highest combined mean score in the 9 years or more category was 3.38 (*Understand impact of decisions*), followed by 3.03 (*Make changes midstream based on information*), 2.95 (*Seek feedback*) and 2.77 (*Valid self-perception of capabilities*).

The total combined mean for all four items in the self-awareness construct in the 2 years or less category was 3.18 with a standard deviation of 0.70. This compares to a combined mean

score for the four items in the self-awareness construct of 3.12 (3 to 5 years), 3.07 (6 to 8 years), and 3.03 (9 years or more) with a standard deviation of 0.68, 0.83 and 0.80, respectively.

Table 27

Self-Awareness Construct Compared by Years Serving in the Superintendency

Item Descriptor	2 Years or Less N = 60		3 to 5 Years N = 26		6 to 8 Years N = 34		9 Years or More N = 25	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
13. Seek feedback	3.44	0.71	3.15	0.70	2.88	0.91	2.95	0.81
14. Valid self-perception of capabilities	2.88	0.67	2.88	0.70	2.88	0.77	2.77	0.91
15. Make changes midstream based on information	2.96	0.68	3.06	0.69	3.00	0.85	3.03	0.69
16. Understand impact of decisions	3.44	0.58	3.38	0.55	3.50	0.65	3.38	0.64
Total	3.18	0.70	3.12	0.68	3.07	0.83	3.03	0.80

Table 28 displays the combined mean and combined standard deviation of the four constructs of authentic leadership disaggregated by the four categories of years serving in the superintendency: 2 years or less, 3 to 5 years, 6 to 8 years and 9 years or more.

All four demographic categories had the same order of constructs based on the combined mean score. The highest construct was internalized moral perspective with a combined mean score of 3.51 (2 years or less), 3.57 (3 to 5 years), 3.45 (6 to 8 years) and 3.58 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.75, 0.64, 0.75 and 0.59, respectively. The second highest construct was balanced processing with a combined mean score of 3.40 (2 years or less), 3.39 (3 to 5 years), 3.36 (6 to 8 years) and 3.24 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.68, 0.73, 0.70 and 0.71, respectively. The third highest construct was relational transparency with a combined mean score of 3.36 (2 years or less), 3.32 (3 to 5 years), 3.29 (6 to 8 years) and 3.23 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.80, 0.86, 0.88 and 0.88, respectively. The lowest ranked construct based on combined mean scores was self-

awareness with 3.18 (2 years or less), 3.12 (3 to 5 years), 3.07 (6 to 8 years) and 3.03 (9 years or more) with a corresponding standard deviation of 0.70, 0.68, 0.83 and 0.80, respectively.

Table 28

Four Constructs of Authentic Leadership Compared by Years Serving in the Superintendency

Construct	2 Years or Less N = 60		3 to 5 Years N = 26		6 to 8 Years N = 34		9 Years or More N = 25	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational Transparency	3.36	0.80	3.32	0.86	3.29	0.88	3.23	0.88
Internalized Moral Perspective	3.51	0.75	3.57	0.64	3.45	0.75	3.58	0.59
Balanced Processing	3.40	0.68	3.39	0.73	3.36	0.70	3.24	0.71
Self-Awareness	3.18	0.70	3.12	0.68	3.07	0.83	3.03	0.80

Chapter V: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine Minnesota public school superintendents' perceptions as it relates to the 16 attributes of authentic leadership as well as the four constructs of authentic leadership. This quantitative study also used independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size to compare the four constructs of authentic leadership practices.

Summary

“In order to appreciate the complexity of the superintendency and persons occupying the position, one must know the past and the present” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 30). Therefore, an extensive literature review on the historical role of the superintendent, current roles and issues faced by superintendents, leadership background and an authentic leadership overview was highlighted in Chapter II.

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) was the survey tool selected and implemented to answer the research questions. Qualtrics, an online tool, was used to administer the survey. The survey, sent to 321 Minnesota public school superintendents, included a 5-item Likert-type rating scale for the sixteen authentic leadership questions (Avolio et al., 2007-2018, p. 6) and three demographic questions.

A total of 145 Minnesota public school superintendents completed the survey, equating to a 45% return rate. The results of the survey showed 14 of the 16 ALQ items had a mean score between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always), with *Ethical conduct* having the highest mean (3.80). The combined mean scores of the four major authentic leadership constructs of self-awareness (3.07), relational transparency (3.29), balanced processing (3.33),

and internalized moral perspective (3.54) were between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always) with combined standard deviations for each construct of less than one. Internalized moral perspective had the highest combined mean score for every disaggregated demographic category while self-awareness had either the lowest or tied for the lowest combined mean score for every demographic category.

Conclusions

This study had three major research questions. Each research question will be answered in the order presented.

Research Question 1

To what extent do Minnesota Public School Superintendents report their authentic leadership practices based on the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)?

A high inter-rater reliability was observed with all 16 items having a standard deviation less than one. Fourteen of the 16 ALQ items had a mean score between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always), with *Ethical conduct* having the highest mean (3.80). Two items, *Valid self-perception of capabilities* (2.83) and *Align emotions with feelings* (2.18), had mean scores less than 3. Therefore, Minnesota public school superintendents' self-report high levels of using authentic leadership practices.

Research Question 2

How do the four major constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) of authentic leadership compare in relation to one another?

The combined mean scores of the four major authentic leadership constructs of self-awareness (3.07), relational transparency (3.29), balanced processing (3.33), and internalized moral perspective (3.54) were between 3 (Fairly often) and 4 (Frequently, if not always) with combined standard deviations for each construct of less than 1. Although the self-awareness construct is the lowest construct based on the combined mean scores, the construct did not contain the lowest-ranked item (*Align emotions with feelings*), which had a mean score of 2.18. The lowest-ranked item (*Align emotions with feelings*) is contained in the relational transparency construct. Therefore, the four constructs of authentic leadership, as self-reported by Minnesota public school superintendents, reveal that internalized moral perspective is the highest rated construct, followed by balanced processing, relational transparency and self-awareness, respectively.

Research Question 3

How do the independent variables of gender, number of years serving in the superintendency, and district size compare with the four constructs of authentic leadership practices?

The difference between the combined mean scores by gender for the four constructs were all within 0.13 points. Relational transparency had a combined mean difference of 0.08 (male = 3.27, female = 3.35), internalized moral perspective had a combined mean difference of 0.13 (male = 3.52, female = 3.65), balanced processing had a combined mean difference of 0.12 (male = 3.35, female = 3.23), and self-awareness had a combined mean difference of 0.06 (male = 3.10, female = 3.04). Internalized moral perspective had the highest combined mean score for both genders while self-awareness had the lowest combined mean score for both genders. Therefore,

there are no self-reported differences in the four constructs of authentic leadership based on gender.

The highest combined mean score difference in a construct between all three district student enrollment categories is 0.28 in self-awareness (900-2,999 students = 3.00, 3,000 students and above = 3.28). The internalized moral perspective construct had the highest ranked mean for all three categories. The self-awareness construct was either the fourth ranked construct (0-899 students and 900-2,999 students) based on combined mean or tied for the lowest combined mean (3,000 students and above). Therefore, there are no self-reported differences in the four constructs of authentic leadership based on district enrollment size.

All four demographic categories for years serving in the superintendency (2 years or less, 3-5 years, 6-8 years, and 9 years or more) had the same order of constructs based on the combined mean score. Internalized moral perspective having the highest combined mean score for every demographic category for years serving in the superintendency, followed by balanced processing, relational transparency and self-awareness. The highest combined mean score difference in a construct between all four categories of years serving in the superintendency is 0.16 in balanced processing (2 years or less = 3.40, 9 years or more = 3.24). Therefore, there are no self-reported differences in the four constructs of authentic leadership based on years serving in the superintendency.

Discussion

This study revealed that Minnesota public school superintendents view their decisions, actions and standards as in alignment with their core values and beliefs (internalized moral perspective). This finding is significant as it aligns with the research from Person et al. (2021)

that identified two of top leadership characteristics for effective superintendents as being trustworthiness through a perception of integrity and high moral character. Since the position of superintendent comes with an extremely high degree of responsibility, authority and pressure, it is imperative that superintendents are firmly grounded in their core values and beliefs, which are encompassed in the internalized moral perspective construct of authentic leadership. Even though the results of this survey are self-reported, this finding must be considered not only imperative, but also impressive due to the high impact, and leadership expected, of the superintendent position.

The results of this study also revealed the need for growth in the area of *Align emotions with feelings* in the relational transparency construct. Nelson's (2010) study of superintendents reported "Interpersonal Relationship Skills" (p. 4) as one of the top two factors contributing to superintendent effectiveness. This study seemed to suggest that Minnesota public school superintendents' interpersonal relationship skills could be positively influenced if they developed a practice of reflecting on aligning emotions with feelings with respect to their decision making. Superintendents are generally expected, by themselves and others, to be professional, articulate and to keep composure at all times. In short, never show a sign of weakness—never allow one's vulnerability to surface. These standards are in conflict with the concept of aligning emotions with feelings. Based upon my experience as a new superintendent, providing professional development for superintendents to reflect on the practice of aligning emotions with feelings would help to foster transparent and trusting relationships with stakeholders. Even as I write this, reflecting on my role as a public school superintendent, allowing others to witness vulnerability on my part would certainly take me out of my comfort zone.

In order to align emotions with their feelings, Minnesota public school superintendents would have to become more vulnerable and be exposed, which is a core tenant of authentic leadership—“To thine own self be true” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 319). I think the ability to be more vulnerable and exposed is incongruent to the current role and expectations of the superintendency. As a current Minnesota superintendent for the last three years, I believe superintendents face challenging situations on a daily basis due to the variety of perspectives on issues, the isolating nature of the superintendency and polarizing politics. Superintendents are trying to navigate complex issues, while publicly maintaining professionalism and limiting and/or hiding emotions. There is definitely a balance in professionalism and showing emotions, but this study highlighted the need for growth and self-reflection in relational transparency.

While the first step for superintendents to grow in the area of aligning emotions with feelings is recognition of the deficit, I believe the professional development provided by professional organizations needs to be more intentional regarding this leadership topic. The professional development provided by these organizations typically revolve around legal issues, resource management, student achievement as well as support, and more recently COVID-19 related challenges. The professional development for aligning emotions with feelings for superintendents needs to be formative in nature, that is, more frequent and routine.

Finally, the results comparing how male and female superintendents self-report their views on authentic leadership was indeed surprising. When comparing authentic leadership and the constructs by gender, the results of this study failed to show any difference in the mean scores. This took the researcher by surprise. It was expected that male and female superintendents would have difference views and perspectives around authentic leadership and

the four constructs. However, both groups self-rated similarly across all constructs. The results of this study might assume that the professional preparation (certifications and degrees) received by our superintendent candidates, regardless of their gender, may be characterized by a significant focus on moral leadership. After further consideration, another possibility could be that because many superintendents flow out of the ranks of teachers, and teachers still being considered moral pillars of their learning communities, authentic leadership may be a natural carry over from one's role as classroom teacher. In Goldstein's book "The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession" (2014), she writes that female teachers recruited, in mass, to teach out west were encouraged to act as "a new source of moral power" (p. 46) and were "promoted as the equivalent of the ministry" (p. 47). Goldstein concludes that the common school movement was politically successful due to its emphasis on "accessible moral education over more academic concerns" (p. 47). Even today, teachers and school leaders are expected to teach and lead with moral integrity, first and foremost. Moral leadership has been deeply embedded within the psyche and culture of K-12 public education since the dawn of the common school movement. The results of this study seem to support this thinking.

Limitations

Limitations are aspects of the study that may have affected or impacted the results (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations experienced during this study include:

1. This study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which public school superintendents were dealing with various and often times unexpected issues. This may have been a cause for the low participation rate.

2. This study only gathered data on self-perceptions of respondents. The data is only as reliable as the honesty of the respondents completing the survey.
3. This study only included Minnesota public school superintendents making it difficult to generalize the findings to private school leaders, charter school executive directors or other state superintendents.
4. This study only included quantitative data with Minnesota public school superintendents responding to 16 closed-ended questions on authentic leadership.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for practice include:

1. Provide professional development to Minnesota public school superintendents in emotional intelligence, based upon the lowest ranked item in the 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire of *Align emotions with feelings*. Professional development could be provided at a Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) conference or during university's superintendent preparation program.
2. During performance evaluations, superintendents should intentionally seek feedback from school board members and other school personnel in order to increase self-awareness and recognize blind spots in order to see himself or herself as others do (George, 2015).
3. Continue to make decisions and ensure actions are based upon strong ethical conduct and an internalized moral perspective grounded by a clear understanding of one's individual standards (Bishop, 2013; Peus et al., 2012).

4. Provide opportunities for Minnesota public school superintendents to discuss with colleagues the challenges and opportunities for growth in the four constructs of authentic leadership.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research include:

1. Replicate the study with a larger sample of school leaders and retest for reliability. Due to the larger sample size, examine additional independent variables, such as ethnicity. For example, survey public school superintendents in the Midwest or include charter and/or private school leaders.
2. Conduct a study to thoroughly examine the role of gender in school leadership and compare with the findings in this authentic leadership study.
3. Use the Rater version of the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), which is a 365-degree feedback tool, in order to examine the authentic leadership of the superintendent. The Rater version of the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) could be given to school board members, principals, teachers and other people that interact with the school leader.
4. Conduct a qualitative study in addition to a quantitative study in order to better understand people's life stories, the human experience and allow opportunities for respondents to provide context in responses.
5. Conduct a causal-comparative research design using probability statistics to determine if differences were statistically significant.

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Appendix A: Authentic Leadership Questionnaire Permission



To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is to grant permission for Kurt Stumpf to use the following copyright material for his/her research:

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire

The four sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.

Sample Items:

As a leader I....

say exactly what I mean
demonstrate beliefs that are consistent with actions
solicit views that challenge my deeply held positions
seek feedback to improve interactions with others

My leader....

says exactly what he or she means
demonstrates beliefs that are consistent actions
solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions
seeks feedback to improve interactions with others

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Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

Updated 27 July 2020

Appendix B: Initial Invitation to Participate in Survey

Dear Superintendent,

You are invited to participate in my dissertation study with regard to authentic leadership in the superintendency. This study will gather information on the extent Minnesota school superintendents perceive their authentic leadership practices.

I have received permission to administer a brief survey for you to take in order to gather this important data. Results from this study will be made public through St. Cloud State University dissertation repository.

This 19-item survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The consent form required for this research is attached to this email and no signature is required. Completing this survey means you will be a consent respondent to this study, with all your information remaining anonymous. This survey is voluntary with no foreseeable risks to any of the respondents.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and helping me collect vital data for my dissertation around this topic. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact me by phone at (320) 360 - 0999 or by email at kstumpf@go.stcloudstate.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Frances Kayona, at fakayona@stcloudstate.edu.

To access the survey, click here: [Survey Link](#)

Appendix C: Final Request to Participate in Survey

Dear Superintendent,

I hope the school year is off to a great start. Two weeks ago, on November 9, I sent you an email asking for your participation in a survey I am conducting as part of my doctoral research. I am researching the extent Minnesota school superintendents perceive their authentic leadership practices.

If you have completed the survey, I thank you, and you can disregard this email. If you have not completed the survey, I hope you will take the time to do so; your response is critical to the accuracy of the data. I have included the link to the survey below. You will also have access to the data once my degree is completed.

To access the survey, click here: [Survey Link](#)

Kurt Stumpf
Pequot Lakes Interim Superintendent
SCSU Doctoral Student

Appendix D: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Kurt Stumpf
Email: kurt.stumpf@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Exempt Review

Project Title Authentic Leadership Practices Among Minnesota High School Superintendents
Advisor Frances Kayona

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Mili Mathew
Chair and Graduate Director
Assistant Professor
Communication Sciences and Disorders

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Claudia Tomany
Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB#: 2050 - 2672	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 10/25/2021
1st Year Approval Date: 10/25/2021	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date: