

**Power And Leadership Practices By The  
Superintendent: What Do They Mean  
To Leaders And Followers?**

**Margaret L. Rice**

**The University of Alabama**

**Harold Bishop**

**The University of  
Alabama**

**Michele Acker-  
Hocevar**

**The University of  
Alabama**

**Barbara Pounders**

**Sheffield City Schools**

**We are grateful for the loyal support of our subscribers and members that make this website possible. National FORUM Journals is one of the few professional journals that provide free access to published articles. Your contribution of any amount will ensure continued free access to the published articles of our family of journals. Donations may be sent to: National FORUM Journals, 4000 Lock Lane Suite 9/KL, Lake Charles, LA 70605**

### **Abstract**

**This article provides results of research that examined whether or not secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives differed in their perceptions regarding leadership styles of superintendents and the bases of power that these educational executives use in their leadership roles. Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) LEAD-Other instrument was used to determine the perceptions of principals and teachers about the leadership styles of superintendents and a researcher-developed instrument, Power Base Profile-Superintendents (PBS-S), was used to determine the principals' and teachers' perceptions of the most frequently used power bases of superintendents. Both surveys were mailed to a sample of 135 randomly selected secondary principals and the 135 local teacher association representatives at each principal's school. Data were analyzed to determine if there were significant differences in perceptions of leadership styles and corresponding power bases between secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives. The research indicated a strong correlation between perceived leadership styles and power bases between these two groups. Results of this study have implications for superintendents in term of adjusting leadership styles and power bases to reflect a collaborative work structure.**

The success of a superintendent is influenced by how the teachers and principals in a school district perceive the leadership of the superintendent. The leadership style of a superintendent also influences the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding how a superintendent uses power. Certainly, if a superintendent always uses a "telling" or autocratic style of leadership, there is a possibility that he or she may be viewed with fear, but not respected as the most effective leader. Superintendents and other leaders may gain valuable insights if there exists information that shows a correlation between the use of perceived power with specific leadership styles. A study to examine the issue was conducted among Alabama secondary school principals and local school teachers who were elected representatives to the local professional association for their schools.

The researchers examined five hypotheses and four research questions. The hypotheses stated in the null format were:

Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference in the perceptions of secondary principals and local teacher association representatives regarding leadership styles of superintendents.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no difference in the perceptions of secondary principals and local teacher association representatives regarding the types of power bases used by superintendents in decision making.

Hypothesis 3: There will be no relationship between leadership styles and power bases as perceived by secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives.

Hypothesis 4: There will be no difference in the perceptions of males and females regarding the leadership styles of superintendents.

Hypothesis 5: There will be no difference in the perceptions of males and females regarding the power bases used by Alabama superintendents in decision making.

The research questions examined were: (a) What leadership styles are most frequently used by superintendents as perceived by secondary school principals and teacher association representatives? (b) What power bases are most frequently used by superintendents as perceived by secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives? (c) What is the common pattern of leader behavior and use of power as perceived by principals? and (d) What is the common pattern of leader behavior and use of power as perceived by local teacher association representatives?

### **Methodology**

The population of this study was the principal and local teacher association representatives from all secondary schools in the state of Alabama consisting of any grade or combination of grades 9-12. According to the Alabama State Department of Education, there are 170 secondary schools that qualify for this population. One hundred seventy principals and 170 teachers represented the total possible respondents. A sample of 135 schools was selected and surveys were mailed to the principals and teacher association representatives of these schools. According to a sample selection method developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1979), this represents an adequate sample. Of these, 93 principals and 90 local teacher association representatives returned completed and usable responses. The total percentage of returns for principals was 71% and for teachers, 70%. According to Best (1981), this is a very adequate response rate.

The information used for this study included responses from two instruments. The first instrument used was *The Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description*, (LEAD-Other) developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982) to measure specific leadership styles of superintendents as perceived by secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives. Leadership style is divided into four quadrants: "telling," "selling," "participating," and "delegating." It is important to note that the work of Hersey and Blanchard (1982) added to the research originated by Halpin (1959). The second instrument used was the *Power Base Profile-Superintendents* (PBS-S) to determine the principals' and teachers' perceptions of the most frequently used power bases of superintendents.

The LEAD-Other contains descriptions of 12 incidents that involve a leader/follower situation. Each situation has four possible actions or behaviors that might be taken by a leader. The respondents choose the action that most closely describes the behavior their superintendent would use in the situation presented. These alternative actions are categorized as High Task/Low Relationship behavior, High Task/High Relationship behavior, Low Relationship/High Task behavior, and Low Relationship/Low Task behavior. One situation described was:

Recent information indicates some internal difficulties among followers. The group has a remarkable record of accomplishment. Members have effectively maintained long-range goals. They have worked in harmony for the past year. All are well qualified for the task.

Alternative Actions: This leader would . . .

- A. Try out solution with followers and examine the need for new practices.

- B. Allow group members to work it out themselves.
- C. Act quickly and firmly to correct and redirect.
- D. Participate in problem discussion while providing support for followers (Center for Leadership Studies, Inc., 1993).

In scoring the LEAD-Other, the researchers determined the number of responses given in each of the four basic leadership quadrants. Normal procedures were used in scoring the LEAD-Other as outlined by Hersey and Blanchard (1982). Scoring tables were used in recording the responses to each of the 12 situations. The quadrant with the highest total became the perceived primary leadership style.

The second research instrument, the *Power-Base Profile-Superintendents* (PBP-S), was developed by the researchers for identification of a particular power base that might be used by superintendents. Based on French and Raven's (1959) description of power approaches, a superintendent may employ five different bases of power. French and Raven's five types of power are: legitimate power, which exists as a result of one's position or the board and legal mandates that established the position; expert power, which exists as a result of one's ability to accomplish a task due to some distinct knowledge, skill, or training; referent power, which evolves as a result of respect from individuals within the organization; coercive power, which exists when the leader controls all need factors relating to followers; and reward power, which exists when a leader is able to provide favors as a result of his or her status. The most easily understood definition of power is that power is the ability to control the behaviors of others. A power base is used to accomplish the mission, goals, priorities, and tasks that exist within a school system. According to Hicks and Gullett (1975), power is necessary to prevent chaos.

The PBP-S consisted of six specific scenarios. Respondents were asked to review each scenario and choose one specific action for each one that they perceived their superintendent would implement. Topics of each scenario were constructed around issues facing superintendents that require immediate action. Each was constructed to reflect, as nearly as possible, realistic situations. Five action responses followed each vignette and were constructed through the use of descriptors to represent each of the given bases of power. Words and phrases were carefully chosen that would specify each power base.

The content validity of the PBP-S was established by a panel of three judges. These judges met the following standards: (a) each possesses a doctorate degree in educational administration; (b) each holds or has held a superintendency or assistant superintendency in a public school district, and (c) each has served as a teacher and a principal in a public school district. Each judge was mailed a packet consisting of a feedback sheet and a PBP-S. Each responded to the appropriateness of scenarios to public school superintendents and verified that the action options actually represented the intended base of power for which it stood. Consensus was established as to the content validity of the instrument.

All secondary school principals and local teacher representatives who were part of the sample were mailed a packet consisting of a cover letter, PBP-S, LEAD-Other, and an information sheet. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes were also enclosed for the return of the information. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study, provided an explanation of the instruments, and guaranteed anonymity. The two instruments were numbered identically so that no confusion would result in matching the two. To preserve anonymity, each principal and teacher respondent were assigned an individual number. Two weeks from the date of the first mailing, a postcard was sent requesting participation. Two weeks later, a second follow-up packet was sent which was identical to the first except for a new cover letter. This method continued until a response rate of 71% and 70% was reached for principals and teacher respondents, respectively.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered from respondents. All tests were conducted at the .05 level of significance. Mean scores for the perceptions of principals and teachers

concerning the leadership styles of telling, selling, participating, and delegating are presented in Table 1. To determine whether a difference existed between the perceptions of secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives regarding the leadership styles of superintendents and relevant to Hypothesis 1, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. The 178 principals and teachers responded to each of 12 situations which gave a possibility of more than 2,000 responses.

Table 1				
Mean Scores for Principals and Teachers Concerning Leadership Styles				
	Telling	Selling	Participating	Delegating
Principals	3.370	4.337	2.913	1.359
Teachers	3.256	3.767	2.872	2.105

To analyze Hypothesis 2, each type of power was given a numerical code. The code was used for the identification of a power base, but not to demonstrate a particular value. The total number of codes for each power base was averaged for principals and teacher representatives. Mean scores for principals and teachers concerning the power bases of referent, legitimate, coercive, and expert are presented in Table 2. One-way ANOVA tests were then computed to determine if any differences that existed in the average scores of these two groups for each power base identified by the respondents might be significant.

Hypothesis 3 was analyzed by performing a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. For Hypotheses 4 and 5, one-way ANOVA tests were calculated to determine any differences between the male and female perceptions of superintendents' leadership styles and power bases. Frequencies and percentages were used in the analyses of responses to research questions 1 and 2. Total mean scores of leadership styles and power bases were also analyzed. Research questions 3 and 4, related to common perception patterns by principals and teachers of leader behavior and use of power by superintendents, were answered by reviewing frequencies and percentages from research questions 1 and 2.

Table 2					
Mean Scores for Principals and Teachers Concerning Power Bases					
	Reward	Referent	Legitimate	Coercive	Expert
Principals	0.791	0.956	2.132	0.846	1.242
Teachers	0.722	0.878	1.944	0.967	1.222

## Results

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether any difference between the perceptions of secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives regarding leadership style used by superintendents was significant (Hypothesis 1). This analysis was conducted for each of the leadership styles of "telling," "selling," "participating," and "delegating," where the dependent variable was the leadership style and the independent variable was the position of principal or teacher. The calculated F-values for "telling," "selling," and "participating" were 0.08, 2.96, and 0.02 respectively,

which were less than the critical F-value of 3.89. Therefore, no significant difference in the perceptions of secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives were found concerning the leadership styles of "telling," "selling," and "participating" used by superintendents. However, the calculated F-value for the leadership value of "delegating" was 4.55, which was greater than the critical F-value of 3.89. Thus a statistically significant difference existed in the perceptions of principals and teachers concerning the leadership style of "delegating."

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there was a difference between the perceptions of secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives regarding the power base used by superintendents (Hypothesis 2). This analysis was conducted for the different power bases of reward power, referent power, legitimate power, coercive power, and expert power. The dependent variable was the power base and the independent variable was the position of principal or teacher. The calculated F-values for the five power bases were 0.31, 0.27, 1.03, 0.60, and 0.01, respectively. These values were less than the critical F-value of 3.89. Therefore, no significant difference in the perceptions of secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives was found for the power bases of reward, referent, legitimate, coercive, or expert that are used by the superintendents.

Utilizing a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient to determine whether a relationship existed between leadership styles and power bases (Hypothesis 3), it was determined that certain leadership styles and power bases are significantly positively or negatively related. The following positive correlations were found between leadership styles and power bases: "telling" and legitimate power, "telling" and coercive power, "participating" and referent power, "participating" and expert power, and "delegating" and coercive power. Although these relationships are only slight, they are statistically significant. A moderately high negative relationship, -0.36, existed between the leadership style of "participating" and coercive power. This relationship is statistically significant and has meaning for prediction. (See Table 3)

This means that, based on this study, employees believe that if one has legitimate or coercive power, there is a high likelihood that a "telling" mode of administration will exist. Similarly, persons in leadership positions who are perceived as possessing referent or expert power are more likely to use a participatory leadership style. Interestingly, the analysis revealed that leaders who delegate are more likely to use a coercive leadership style.

Table 3				
Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Leadership Styles and Power Bases				
	Telling	Selling	Participating	Delegating
Reward	-0.098 0.196	0.052 0.494	0.108 0.155	0.045 0.556
Referent	-0.238 0.002*	0.088 0.246	0.271 0.000*	-0.067 0.380
Legitimate	0.239 0.002*	-0.092 0.225	-0.230 0.002*	0.030 0.689
Coercive	0.276 0.000*	-0.187 0.013*	-0.361 0.000*	0.199 0.008*
Expert	-0.180 0.017*	0.144 0.056	0.253 0.000*	-0.162 0.031*

n = 176, \*p < .05

The perceptions of males and females, stated in Hypotheses 4 and 5, regarding leadership styles and the types of power bases were also addressed. In this study, 79 male and 14 female principals and 18 male and 67 female teachers participated. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there was a difference between male and female respondents concerning each of the four leadership styles of "telling," "selling," "participating," and "delegating." (Hypothesis 4). The independent variable was the gender and the dependent variables were the leadership styles. Calculations for each style revealed that no significant differences existed based on gender.

Using the same method of analysis, an examination of the difference between male and female respondents concerning the power bases used by superintendents was determined. (Hypothesis 5). No significant difference was found to exist in legitimate, referent, coercive, or reward power based on the variable of gender.

Research question 1 asked about the leadership styles most frequently used by superintendents as perceived by secondary school principals and teacher association representatives. Table 4 provides frequency and percentage data that answer research question 1. The most frequently used leadership style of Alabama superintendents as perceived by secondary school principals is "selling." The most frequently used leadership style of Alabama superintendents as perceived by local teacher association representatives is also "selling." The second most frequently used style, as perceived by principals and teachers, was leadership style "telling." Table 4 reveals that both principals and teachers responded less frequently than their superintendents "delegate."

Research question 2 asked what power bases are most frequently used by superintendents. Table 5 provides frequency and percentage data. The power base most frequently used by superintendents in Alabama as perceived by principals is legitimate and as perceived by local teacher association representatives, is also legitimate power. Both principals and teachers agreed that the second most frequently used power base was expert power. Frequencies indicated principals' and teachers' perceptions were similar regarding the five power bases.

Research question 3 asked if a common perception pattern of leader behavior and the use of power would emerge from teacher representatives. The distribution of responses revealed that 31% of the teachers perceived a common pattern of leader behavior. These teach-

Table 4								
Frequency and Percentage Responses to Leadership Styles								
	Telling		Selling		Participating		Delegating	
Group	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Principals	310	28	397	36	268	24	125	11
Teachers	289	28	324	31	247	24	181	17

Table 5					
Frequency and Percentage Responses to Power Bases					
	Reward	Referent	Legitimate	Coercive	Expert

Group	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Principals	72	13	87	16	194	36	77	14	113	21
Teachers	65	13	79	15	174	34	87	17	110	21

ers perceived "selling" as the most common leadership style of superintendents. A total of 34% of this group also perceived that superintendents use legitimate power (See Tables 1 and 2). In second place, teachers perceived superintendents as operating from a leadership style of "telling" and a power base of expert.

Research question 4 asked if a common perception of leader behavior and the use of power would emerge from principals. Principals responded in the identical pattern as teacher respondents. Thirty-six percent of principals perceived "selling" as the most frequently used leadership style of superintendents. Likewise, 36% of principals perceived superintendents utilizing legitimate power. In second place, principals also perceived superintendents as operating from a leadership style of "telling" and using expert power.

### Summary of Results

The findings of this study show that the leadership styles and power bases utilized by Alabama superintendents are perceived similarly by secondary school principals and local teacher association representatives. Since "selling" was the most frequently perceived leadership style, it may be assumed that superintendents exhibit behaviors of high task and high relationship.

With a leadership style of "selling," followed by "telling," superintendents are perceived as showing a reluctance to delegate authority to employees. This is exhibited by the low frequency score by both principals and teachers for the leadership style of "delegating." Frequency data suggested that slightly more teachers perceive superintendents as exhibiting more "delegating" behaviors than do secondary school principals. According to the results of this study, Alabama superintendents were perceived as using legitimate power followed secondly by expert power.

Superintendents who were perceived to use "telling" as the primary leadership style were more likely to use legitimate and coercive power. It can also be concluded that superintendents who used "telling" as the primary leadership style were not likely to use referent and expert power.

Superintendents who were perceived as using "participating" as the primary leadership style were more likely to use referent and expert power. Conversely, those leaders perceived as using "participating" as the primary leadership style were not likely to use legitimate or coercive power.

Finally, superintendents who were perceived to use "delegating" as the primary leadership style were more likely to use coercive power and less likely to use expert power. Those leaders who were perceived to use "selling" as the primary leadership style were not likely to use coercive power.

The results of this study have implications for decision makers in K-12 settings. Training programs for educational leaders have always examined the current research relative to leadership, leadership styles, models, and theories. Contemporary programs are now examining how best to use power that results in appropriate leadership behaviors. The results of this study also indicated that there is a need for leadership training programs to clarify those types of power that relate to collaboration and cooperation within the work force. The results clearly indicated that superintendents are perceived as depending on their legitimate and expert power more frequently than upon referent power. Since referent power results from respect,



which is more closely associated with collaboration, newly developed training programs should emphasize leadership skills and a more frequent use of referent power.

Superintendents must also develop strategies that will help to contribute to the success of site-based management. Since the process of site-based management demands that much legitimate power be surrendered, there is a need for inservice programs that will provide training regarding the effective use of referent power.

Clear evidence was provided that there is a need for educational leaders to encourage personal self-study and reflection. The reflection should focus on the following:

1. A general understanding of the type of leadership style and power base from which superintendents operate.
2. An awareness of leadership styles and power bases that will enable superintendents to appropriately adjust their behavior in varying situations.
3. An awareness of the need to consider contemporary leadership theories and suggested practices when faced with current challenges to empower their organizational personnel.

### References

- Best, J.W. (1981). **Research in education** (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Center for Leadership Studies, Inc. (1993). **LEAD-Other leadership style/perception of other**. Escondido, CA: Author.
- French, J.R., & Raven, B. (1959). *The basis of social power*. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), **Studies in social power** (pp. 150-165). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.
- Halpin, A.W. (1959). **The leadership behavior of school superintendents**. Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago.
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. (1982). **Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources** (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hicks, H.G., & Gullet, C.R. (1975). **Organization theory and behavior**. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Krejcie, R.V., & Morgan, D.W. (1979). *Determining sample size for research activities*. **Educational and Psychological Measurement**, 30, 607-610.