

The Administrative Paradox: Assessing How Teaching Experience Affects Superintendents' Perceptions of the Importance of Educational Law to Agricultural Educators

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Over time, education has become increasingly more legalistic and litigious. The danger of litigation is an imminent threat for agricultural educators due to the potential financial and professional ramifications. In many cases, agricultural educators may be at higher risk for a lawsuit than teachers of other subjects due to the increased liability and safety hazards of the agricultural education classroom. In most public-school districts, the superintendent manages all school-related legal action. These responsibilities regarding the legal undertakings of the school district are coupled with many superintendents having little-to-no teaching experience. In this study, superintendents (N = 1074) rated the importance of 32 educational law issues to agricultural educators. In the first research objective, we used independent samples t-tests to assess how teaching experience affected the perceptions of superintendents regarding the importance of educational law issues to agricultural education. The results found that superintendents with less teaching experience valued agricultural education specific law issues significantly less than superintendents with more teaching experience. Furthermore, in the second research objective, we used a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to extract four components named: 1) General Educational Law Issues, 2) Special Education/Student Interaction Issues, 3) Student Safety/Teacher Contract Rights, and 4) Student Behavior/Curricular Modification Issues. Ultimately, the superintendents chose issues related to mandated reporting, special education accommodations, and safety as the most important educational law issues for agricultural educators. As a result, we recommend integrating educational law coursework into teacher preparation programs for preservice educators and providing practical professional development on educational law for in-service educators.

Keywords: administrators; agricultural education; career development; educational law; superintendents.

Introduction and Review of Literature

Agricultural educators are tasked with training youth on a myriad of agricultural topics. The responsibility of educating students for their future careers, while also kindling passions for the agricultural industry has traditionally been held in high regard (Croom, 2008). While this profession can be fulfilling, the constant immanence of liability and legal repercussions can often overshadow the rewarding nature of the vocation (Hainline et al., 2019, Hainline et al., 2021). Similarly, educators are asked to follow strict administrative, statutory, judicial, and constitutional laws that directly impact the operation of schools (Hainline et al., 2019; Hainline et al., 2021). These legal sources govern educational law interests and guidelines related to student rights, employment contracts, student discipline, and statutory immunity

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(Walsh et al., 2014). As a result, education has become increasingly more litigious for classroom teachers in the past few decades (Hainline et al., 2019; Redfield, 2003; Wagner, 2008; Walsh et al., 2014; Zirkel, 2006). As educational law continues to evolve, its impact on the local school system will continue to grow. Therefore, to avoid legal issues, practicing educators must possess a firm understanding of jurisprudence and educational law (Hainline et al., 2021; Schimmel et al., 2011; Wagner, 2008).

Developing insights toward educational law and its effect on teachers is a major point of interest for educators (Bon et al., 2008; Hainline et al., 2019; Littleton, 2008). Furthermore, federal law requires educators to report any suspected physical or sexual abuse of students through mandated reporting (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). While many educators are interested in learning more about educational law, some studies show that classroom teachers lack knowledge on the subject (Andreasen et al., 2007; Cotton, 2000; Fischer et al., 2007). This lack of knowledge can also transcend into the educator's self-efficacy and confidence levels, which can also lead to lower career engagement due to fear of conflict with legal implications (Hainline et al., 2019; Hainline et al., 2021).

In many cases, teacher preparation programs do not adequately educate pre-service teachers on educational law (Gajda, 2008; Imber, 2008; Littleton, 2008; Mirabile, 2013). This lack of understanding could be detrimental to the career of an educator due to the financial and professional ramifications (Schimmel et al., 2011). According to Schimmel et al. (2011), "Educators ignore the law at their peril since the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that teachers and administrators may be held personally liable ... for violating students clearly established constitutional rights" (p. xii). This liability in the classroom can be particularly fastidious for agricultural educators due to the experiential nature of agricultural education. Experiences provided in the agricultural mechanics shop, greenhouse, on-campus livestock facilities, and numerous other locations create another layer of potential liabilities for the agricultural educator (Chumbley et al., 2018; Dyer & Andreasen, 1999; Saucier et al., 2014). Furthermore, this perpetuates the need for teachers to have a working knowledge of current laws and must be cognizant of future changes to legislation and education-based laws (Hainline et al., 2019; Schimmel et al., 2011). In most educational litigation, the process flows through the school district superintendent. According to Kowalski et al. (2011), "Superintendents today, more than ever, are involved with the legal system given state and federal legislation and ensuing litigation" (p. 48). In addition, many states are facing a shortage of applicants for open superintendent positions, which has caused many states to reduce the rigor of receiving administrative licensures (Kottkamp, 2011). The superintendent shortage has often caused districts to hire individuals with unrelated educational backgrounds that lack experience and knowledge of educational legal issues (Novak, 2012). Furthermore, Novak (2012) also suggested, "While many superintendents share the conventionality of teaching experience, a small percentage of superintendents have business backgrounds but no teaching experience" (p. 3). Similarly, in many cases, the district superintendent has some teaching experience but has often transitioned out of the classroom early in their teaching career to pursue other administrative positions in the school district (Novak, 2012). In addition to some superintendents having little to no teaching experience, they are supposed to be experts on educational law with some studies suggesting that educational administrators understand educational law better than classroom teachers (Gajda, 2008). This wide range of experiences and expertise can also affect the superintendents' perceptions of the importance of educational law to agricultural educators. As a result, identifying critical educational law issues to agricultural educators and understanding how teaching experience affects the perceptions of superintendents on the importance of legal issues to agricultural education can help teachers avoid any potential financial or professional ramifications from legal exposure.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of superintendents in Kentucky, South Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, Virginia, Georgia, and Mississippi on the importance of various educational law issues to agricultural educators and how teaching experience affects superintendents'

perceptions of the importance of educational law to agricultural education. The following research objectives guided the study:

1. Evaluate superintendents’ perceptions of the importance of educational law issues to agricultural educators based on their classroom teaching experience.
2. Analyze the principal component analytic properties of educational law issues and determine any correlational relationships within the components.

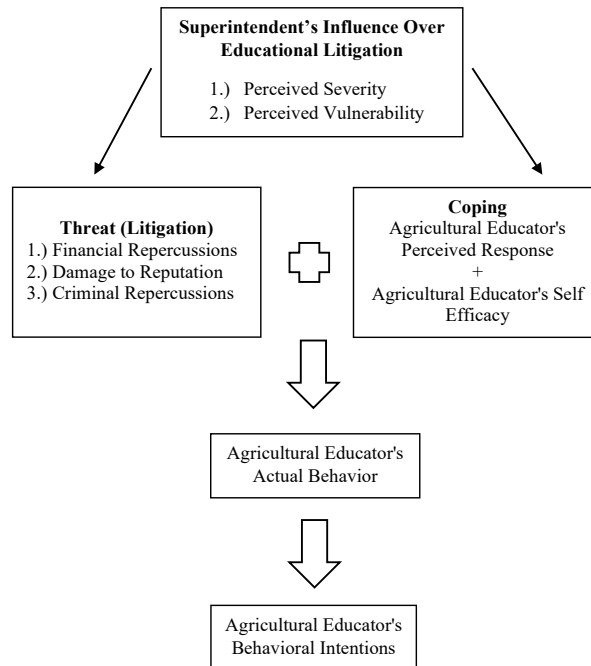
Theoretical Framework

The protection motivation theory (Rogers, 1983) served as the theoretical guide for this study (see Figure 1) as it aims to predict an individual’s reaction to a threat and their process of managing the risk associated with the threat. According to Rogers (1983), “The emotion of fear has been of interest because of its role in mediating attitude and behavior change” (p. 4). In this study, agricultural educators perceive educational litigation as a threat due to the potential financial and professional ramifications, which could include damage to their reputation or even criminal repercussions (Hainline et al., 2019, Hainline et al, 2021).

Coping “provides a psychological construct that includes behavioral and cognitive events” to occur (Tunks & Bellissimo, 1988, p. 171). As the agricultural educator gathers their perceived response to the threat of litigation and combines it with their perceived level of self-efficacy, coping can occur. When the threat of litigation compounds with their coping mechanics, the agricultural educator’s actual behavior can be determined. Especially in stressful litigious situations, educators’ behavior may also be influenced by their perceived risk related to the threats from the scenario.

Figure 1

Protection Motivation Theory and its Interaction with Legal Issues in Agricultural Education



Note. Adapted from Rogers (1983).

While agricultural educators perceive educational litigation and educational law issues as possible imminent threats, research shows that their overall understanding of educational law is lacking (Andreasen et al., 2007; Cotton, 2000; Fischer et al., 2007). In addition, superintendents often have influence over litigation involving the school district and its employees (Gee & Daniel, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2011). As a result, a superintendent's influence can impact an agricultural educator's perception of the severity of the repercussions of litigation and their vulnerability to litigation. These perceptions directly influence legal exposure of agricultural educators and their coping of this threat. Ultimately, these factors will influence the agricultural educator's behavior.

Understanding the perceptions of school district superintendents on the importance of educational law and evaluating how teaching experience influences their perceptions of educational law in agricultural education will assist in determining the most important and relevant educational law issues to agricultural educators. This will further the knowledge of exactly what educational law issues are the most threatening and relevant to agricultural educators in the classroom. Similarly, it could also provide insight on how to prepare future administrators and educators in topics related to educational law.

Method

We used a descriptive correlational research design for this study. The research instrument consisted of two sections—section one outlined demographic data, and section two measured superintendents' perceptions on the importance of various educational law issues to agricultural educators.

Participants

The demographics of the participating superintendents are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Participating Superintendents

Demographic	Descriptor	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Female	95	67.9
	Male	45	32.1
Race	White	122	87.2
	African American	15	10.7
	Other	3	2.1
Highest Degree Earned	Bachelor's Degree	1	0.7
	Master's Degree	22	15.9
	Specialist	44	31.9
	Doctoral	71	51.5
School District Size	0–3,000 Students	85	60.7
	3,000–9,000 Students	35	25.0
	9,000–25,000 Students	12	8.6
	25,000+ Students	8	5.7
School System Type	City School System	34	24.3
	County School System	90	64.3
	Charter	1	0.7
	Other	15	10.7

Agricultural Education	Offered	120	85.7
	Not Offered	20	14.3
Educational Background in CTE	Yes	27	19.3
	No	113	80.7
Years of Teaching Experience	Induction Phase (0–7 Years)	66	47.1
	Non-Induction Phase (8+ Years)	74	52.9

Note. Retained partial responses causes the n to vary in some demographic categories ($n = 145$).

The participants in this study were school-district superintendents in Kentucky, South Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, Virginia, Georgia, and Mississippi. The average years of classroom teaching experience among the participants was 9.3 years ($SD = 5.4$), and the average total years of experience in education was 28.6 years ($SD = 7.7$). Among other notable demographics, 85.7% of superintendents led a district with 9,000 or less students ($f = 120$), 85.7% offered agricultural education in their district ($f = 120$), 67.9% of participating superintendents were female ($f = 95$), and 87.2% were white ($f = 122$).

Instrumentation

In the first section, the demographic questionnaire gauged the participants' gender, race, educational level, size of school district, etc. These foundational demographic descriptors provided a helpful context to superintendents' perceptions of prominent legal issues. The second section measured superintendents' perceptions of the importance of educational law issues related to agricultural educators. We modified Hainline et al.'s (2019) instrument for this study.

In Hainline et al.'s (2019) three-phase Delphi study, participants responded to two qualitative questions gauging participant responses to: 1) which general legal issues were the most prominent for teachers, and 2) which legal issues related to agricultural education were the most prominent for teachers. From the open-ended questions, Hainline et al. (2019) identified 52 individual educational law issues where they gauged the threshold for consensus in statements and retained the individual issues. Due to the comprehensive Delphi approach in Hainline et al.'s (2019) study, we adapted their instrumentation to further gauge levels of concern through school superintendents. As such, we only used 32 of the items that reached round two or three consensus in Hainline et al.'s (2019) study for the instrument in this study (see Table 2). We used a five-point, Likert-type scale rating (1 = *Not Important at All*; 2 = *Somewhat Important*; 3 = *Moderately Important*; 4 = *Very Important*; 5 = *Extremely Important*) to evaluate superintendent perceptions of the importance of educational law issues to agricultural educators based on their classroom teaching experience.

Table 2*Educational Law Concerns Related to Agricultural Educators***General Educational Law Issues**

- Accommodations for students with disabilities.
- Complying with special education mandates (IEPs).
- Duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Educator code of ethics.
- Harassment issues based on sex, race, color, religion, etc.
- Inappropriate communication via texts.
- Inappropriate contact between educators and students.
- Liability of dealing with hostile students.
- Properly dealing with student behavioral issues.
- Sexual harassment.
- Student discipline in school.
- Student confidentiality (FERPA).
- Teacher contract rights.
- Title IX complaints.
- Understanding teacher employment contracts.
- Understanding school district/board policy.

Agricultural Education Specific Educational Law Issues

- Communication with parents.
- Communication with supervisors and administrators.
- Dealing with booster club/support organizations.
- Financial literacy regarding the proper handling of money.
- Liabilities associated with the handling of livestock.
- Mishandling state and federal CTE funds.
- Operating and maintaining a motorized vehicle.
- Student discipline on extracurricular activities.
- Student safety at the school farm.
- Student safety in the agricultural mechanics shop.
- Student supervision at extracurricular events.
- Student supervision at livestock shows.
- Student transportation using other methods.
- Student transportation using a personal vehicle.
- Supervising students on an overnight stay.
- Supplemental duties as an extracurricular sponsor.

Note. We modified the statements above from Hainline et al.'s (2019) study, and participants sorted their perceived importance on a five-point Likert-type scale rating (1 = *Not Important at All*; 2 = *Somewhat Important*; 3 = *Moderately Important*; 4 = *Very Important*; 5 = *Extremely Important*).

Validity and Reliability

We measured the reliability of the survey instrument *post hoc* and deemed the instrument suitable for the purpose of the study. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for scales measuring the importance of general educational law issues was .936, and the reliability coefficient for agricultural education specific educational law issues was .951. These figures indicate that the scales are reliable (Ary et al., 2010). In addition, Hainline et al. (2019) assessed the validity and reliability of the instrument by forming a panel of seven experts to evaluate the instrument. Furthermore, the Delphi process conducted in Hainline et al.'s (2019) study further strengthened the reliability and validity of the instrument (Dalkey et al., 1972; Goodman, 1987).

Data Collection

We compiled a list of superintendents using resources from each state's department of education website and school system websites. This frame allowed us to contact the superintendents through their employer email and invite them to participate in the study. Due to possible entry errors in the resources used to establish the frame, frame error is a possible limitation of the study. This list contained viable emails for 169 superintendents in Kentucky, 75 in South Carolina, 260 in Arkansas, 54 in Louisiana, 62 in Florida, 128 in Virginia, 191 in Georgia and 135 in Mississippi ($N = 1,074$). These eight states were purposively selected due to their close geographic proximity to each other.

We used a census approach to alleviate potential sampling bias. Ramsey and Schafer (2012) suggested that at least 30 responses are necessary for descriptive research. In this study, we collected 153 responses for a total response rate of 14.25%. We excluded ($n = 13$) partial responses from all parametric statistical analysis and retained ($n = 2$) partial responses. We based the exclusion criteria on participants who completed at least 50% of the instrument. This exclusion resulted in 140 usable responses.

Data Analysis

The analysis of all data occurred using SPSS Version 28.0. To effectively measure Likert-scale data with parametric statistics, five or more items must be combined to form constructs (Johnson & Creech, 1983; Norman, 2010; Sullivan & Artino, 2013; Zumbo & Zimmerman, 1993). In this study, we combined 16 items to form the general education law issues construct and 16 additional items to form the agricultural education specific law construct. We used independent samples *t*-tests, central tendencies, and descriptive statistics to analyze research objective one. Research objective one assessed differences in superintendents' perceptions on the importance of educational law issues to agricultural educators based on if they transitioned out of the classroom in the induction or non-induction phase of their teaching career. Thornton et al. (2020) described early career educators as having 1–7 years of teaching experience, mid-career educators as having 8–23 years of experience, and late-career educators as having 24+ years of experience. In addition, Huberman (1989) suggested that educators can remain in the induction phase for six years. For this study, we combined these two teacher career phase models, and educators in the induction phase had 1–7 years of experience, and educators in the non-induction phase had 8+ years of experience (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

A Blend of Educator Career Phase Models

Thornton et al. (2020)	Early-Career 1–7 Years	Mid-Career 8–23 Years	Late-Career 24+ Years
Huberman (1989)	Induction Phase 1–6 Years	Non-Induction Phase 7+ Years	
Combined	Induction Phase 1–7 Years	Non-Induction Phase 8+ Years	

We evaluated the second research objective using a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The data were rotated using promax rotation with Kaiser normalization for the 32 originally assessed educational law issues (Kaiser, 1958). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), “PCA is the solution of choice for the researcher who is primarily interested in reducing a large number of variables down to a smaller number of components” (p. 612).

While there are a multitude of recommendations on the appropriate sample size for a quality PCA, the sample ($n = 140$) was deemed appropriate. Recommendations from Gorsuch (1983) and Hair et al. (1998) suggested that a minimum of 100 samples is necessary. In addition, Kline (1979) proposed that a 2:1 ratio of observations to total number of factors is sufficient. While some researchers advocate for higher sample sizes, much of the existing literature suggests that the sample size of 140 is appropriate for a PCA.

To assess non-response bias, we compared differences between early respondents and late respondents using an independent samples t -test (Lindner et al., 2001). We sent an introductory email followed by three reminder emails to each superintendent (Dillman et al., 2014). To determine nonresponse bias, we considered participants who responded to the first introductory email as early respondents ($n = 53$), and participants who responded to the three reminder emails as late respondents ($n = 87$). After analyzing non-response bias, no statistical differences were found between early respondents and late respondents in the agricultural education specific law issues $t(138) = .04, p = .97$ or in the general educational law issues $t(138) = -.29, p = .78$. The results of the independent samples t -test are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Results of t -test Assessing Non-Response Bias

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen’s <i>d</i>
Constructs							
Early Responders	53	4.50	0.56				
Ag Ed Specific Education Law Issues				.04	138	.97	0.01
Late Responders	87	4.49	0.55				
Early Responders	53	4.45	0.53				
General Education Law Issues				-.29	138	.78	-0.05
Late Responders	87	4.48	0.56				

Note. $\alpha = .05$.

Limitations

The findings of this study should not be generalized beyond the participating superintendents. While this study assessed superintendents from eight different states, it only assessed states in one geographical area of the United States. In addition, the limited response rate of 14.25% may also not be representative of the entire population. Another limitation of the study is that all 32 items in the PCA had high correlations with the first component. This makes the interpretation of the first component more challenging to delineate. In addition, the instrument did not account for variations in the law between each state but rather asked about each issue as a general concept. This could lead to some state-by-state variability in the superintendents' responses.

Results

Research Objective One

The first research objective aimed to assess any differences in the perceptions of superintendents regarding the importance of educational law issues to agricultural educators based on years of teaching experience. Educators in the induction phase had 0–7 years of teaching experience, and non-induction phase educators had 8+ years of experience (see Figure 2). When analyzed by the career phase in which the superintendents transitioned out of the classroom using an independent samples *t*-test, we found a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of superintendents regarding the importance of agricultural education specific law issues, $t(138) = -1.93, p = .03$. We found no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of superintendents regarding the importance of general education law issues when analyzed by which career phase the superintendent transitioned out of the classroom, $t(138) = -2.21, p = .06$ (see Table 4).

Table 4

Comparison of Perceptions of Superintendents on the Importance of Educational Law Based on When They Transitioned Out of the Classroom

Constructs	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Induction Phase	66	4.39	0.60				
Ag Ed Specific Education Law Issues				-1.93	138	.03	-0.33
Non-Induction Phase	74	4.59	0.48				
Induction Phase	66	4.37	0.52				
General Education Law Issues				-2.21	138	.06	-0.37
Non-Induction Phase	74	4.55	0.56				

Note. $\alpha = .05$.

Superintendents who transitioned out of the classroom in the induction phase and the non-induction phase agreed that “duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect” and “complying with special education IEPs” were the top two most important general education law issues to agricultural educators. Furthermore, both groups of superintendents had “student safety in the agricultural mechanics shop” as the most important agricultural education specific law issue. The superintendents who transitioned out of the classroom in the induction phase ranked “student safety at the school farm” as the second most important educational law issue and superintendents who transitioned out of the classroom in the non-induction phase ranked “student supervision at extracurricular events” as the second most important (see Table 5).

Table 5

Superintendent's Perceptions of Educational Law Issues by Their Years of Teaching Experience

Factors	Induction Phase		Non-Induction Phase		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Educational Law Issues	4.38	0.75	4.55	0.73	4.46	0.74
Duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect.	4.80	0.56	4.78	0.56	4.79	0.56
Complying w/ special education mandates (IEPs).	4.65	0.60	4.76	0.46	4.71	0.53
Harassment issues based on sex, race, etc.	4.64	0.60	4.72	0.61	4.68	0.61
Student confidentiality (FERPA).	4.59	0.68	4.74	0.62	4.67	0.65
Educator code of ethics.	4.53	0.66	4.72	0.69	4.63	0.68
Inappropriate contact between educators and students.	4.64	0.71	4.59	0.76	4.62	0.74
Sexual harassment.	4.55	0.68	4.68	0.70	4.62	0.69
Accommodations for students with disabilities.	4.44	0.64	4.65	0.63	4.55	0.64
Student discipline in school.	4.38	0.67	4.54	0.67	4.46	0.67
Properly dealing with student behavioral issues.	4.33	0.71	4.58	0.60	4.46	0.66
Inappropriate communication via texts.	4.39	0.76	4.50	0.82	4.45	0.79
Title IX complaints.	4.21	0.92	4.51	0.76	4.36	0.84
Understanding school district/board policy.	4.26	0.77	4.46	0.76	4.36	0.77
Liability of dealing with hostile students.	4.20	0.79	4.45	0.78	4.33	0.79
Understanding teacher employment contracts.	3.70	1.08	4.07	0.98	3.89	1.03
Teacher contract rights.	3.64	1.09	4.05	1.08	3.85	1.09
Ag Ed Specific Educational Law Issues	4.38	0.77	4.59	0.64	4.49	0.71
Student safety in the agricultural mechanics shop.	4.71	0.60	4.92	0.28	4.82	0.44
Student safety at the school farm.	4.70	0.55	4.76	0.49	4.73	0.52
Student supervision at extracurricular events.	4.58	0.73	4.80	0.50	4.69	0.62
Supervising students on an overnight stay.	4.57	0.81	4.73	0.48	4.66	0.65
Student supervision at livestock shows.	4.56	0.61	4.66	0.58	4.61	0.60
Communication with parents.	4.42	0.75	4.73	0.48	4.58	0.62
Communication w/ supervisors and administrators.	4.42	0.79	4.58	0.70	4.50	0.75
Liabilities associated with handling livestock.	4.39	0.76	4.58	0.70	4.49	0.73
Mishandling state and federal CTE funds.	4.36	0.84	4.62	0.70	4.49	0.77
Student discipline on extracurricular activities.	4.36	0.84	4.57	0.64	4.47	0.74
Student transportation using a personal vehicle.	4.33	0.77	4.49	0.88	4.41	0.83
Financial literacy regarding CTE finances.	4.27	0.85	4.53	0.67	4.40	0.76
Student transportation using other methods.	4.26	0.76	4.51	0.65	4.39	0.71
Operating and maintaining a motorized vehicle.	4.06	0.91	4.39	0.87	4.23	0.89
Supplemental duties as extracurricular sponsor.	4.12	0.89	4.34	0.80	4.23	0.85
Dealing with booster club/support organizations.	4.02	0.83	4.20	0.88	4.11	0.86

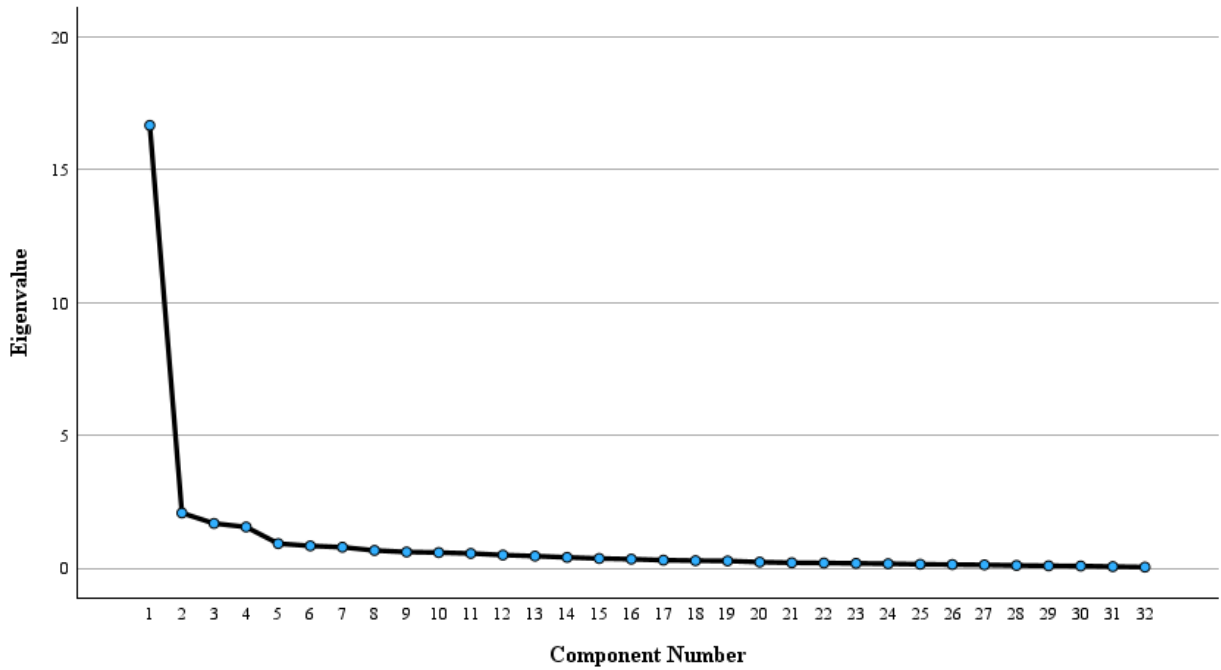
Note. Superintendents used the following 5-point Likert scale to rate the importance of the educational law issue (1 = *Not Important at All*; 2 = *Somewhat Important*; 3 = *Moderately Important*; 4 = *Very Important*; 5 = *Extremely Important*).

Research Objective Two

Research objective two utilized a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The communality scores of each individual factor ranged from 0.50–0.84. This meets the standard threshold of a communality score of .40 or higher (Osborne et al., 2008). The main methods to screen the original 32 variables included eigenvalues greater than or equal to one and a scree plot to evaluate slope changes in eigenvalues (see Figure 3 and Table 7; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Figure 3

Scree Plot for Eigenvalues within the Principal Component Analysis (PCA)



In addition, we also used factor loadings of $\pm .40$ to further screen variables in each component. The factor loadings for each component are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Principal Component Analysis Factor Loadings

	Components				Communalities
	1	2	3	4	
Accommodations for students with disabilities.	.60	.40	-.01	.44	.71
Properly dealing with students' behavioral issues.	.70	.26	.05	.53	.84
Inappropriate communication via texts.	.74	.18	.12	.00	.59
Inappropriate contact between educators and students.	.74	.25	.05	-.30	.70
Student discipline in school.	.68	.13	.23	.28	.61
Complying with special education mandates (IEPs).	.64	.51	-.01	.29	.75
Understanding teacher employment contracts.	.72	-.22	.33	.23	.74
Teacher contract rights.	.66	-.26	.50	.22	.81
Educator code of ethics.	.68	.24	.31	-.21	.66
Sexual harassment.	.73	.22	.29	-.34	.79
Student confidentiality (FERPA).	.73	.39	.19	-.16	.75
Duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect.	.68	.45	.04	-.27	.75
Harassment issues based on sex, race, color, religion, etc.	.81	.29	.02	-.24	.81
Title IX complaints.	.75	-.11	.18	-.14	.63
Understanding school district/board policy.	.65	-.20	.19	.04	.50
Liability of dealing with hostile students.	.83	-.14	.21	-.05	.76
Supervising students on an overnight stay.	.63	-.08	-.47	-.10	.63
Communication with parents.	.73	.10	-.22	.20	.64
Financial literacy regarding the proper handling of money.	.73	-.10	-.29	.23	.68
Mishandling state and federal CTE funds.	.82	-.10	-.16	-.22	.76
Student safety in the agricultural mechanics shop.	.61	.13	-.40	.11	.58
Student supervision at extracurricular events.	.77	.15	-.33	.06	.73
Student transportation using personal vehicle.	.80	-.14	-.14	-.26	.76
Student transportation using other methods.	.76	-.23	-.14	-.19	.69
Communication with supervisors and administrators.	.79	-.16	-.05	-.05	.65
Liabilities associated with the handling of livestock.	.79	-.21	-.10	-.11	.69
Student discipline on extracurricular activities.	.79	-.29	-.15	.01	.73
Student safety at school farm.	.74	.01	-.40	.05	.65
Student supervision at livestock shows.	.74	-.13	-.18	.02	.60
Dealing with booster club/support organizations.	.66	-.37	.04	.16	.60
Operating and maintaining a motorized vehicle.	.72	-.38	.11	-.07	.68
Supplemental duties as an extracurricular sponsor.	.69	-.39	.15	.16	.68

Note. Extraction method was Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with promax rotation.

See Table 7 for the retained components' eigenvalues, the percentage of variance explained by each component, and the cumulative percentage of the variance explained in the study. We named the retained components: 1) General Educational Law Issues, 2) Special Education/Student Interaction Issues, 3) Student Safety/Teacher Contract Rights, and 4) Student Behavior/Curricular Modification Issues.

Table 7

Eigenvalues and Variance for Four Retained Components

Components	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
#1- General Educational Law Issues	16.81	52.52	52.52
#2- Special Education/Student Interaction Issues	2.10	6.56	59.08
#3- Student Safety/Teacher Contract Rights	1.69	5.26	64.34
#4- Student Behavior/Curricular Modification Issues	1.53	4.77	69.19

Conclusions and Recommendations

As educational litigation becomes more prevalent in school districts, the burden on agricultural educators will continue to increase (Hainline et al., 2019; Hainline et al., 2021). Even with the imminence of negative financial and professional ramifications, research shows educators do not have an adequate understanding of educational law (Andreasen et al., 2007; Cotton, 2000; Fischer et al., 2007). This lack of understanding is largely due to the absence of undergraduate educational law preparation for pre-service educators (Gajda, 2008; Imber, 2008; Littleton, 2008; Mirabile, 2013). Traditionally, because a superintendent serves as the chief administrator and leader of the school system, they manage the legal actions of the school system (Gee & Daniel, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2011). This responsibility to manage the legal duties of the school system is coupled with many superintendents having little to no teaching experience (Novak, 2012). To examine this further, this study's research objectives evaluated how years of teaching experience impacts superintendents' perceptions of the importance of educational law to agricultural education. Furthermore, this study examined the most important educational law issues for agricultural educators. This information will aid in identifying which educational law issues are the most threatening and relevant to agricultural educators in the classroom.

In analyzing the participant's demographics, the average superintendent was a white female with a doctoral degree who led a school district of less than 3,000 students. Furthermore, the average responding superintendent led a county school district with agricultural education. We recommend replicating this study in other regions to investigate if different demographics could influence variables. We also recommend comparing the demographics of the communities in which these superintendents serve. Legal issues may vary based on demographics in the schools and the communities. As such, various issues could be more prominent for different descriptors compared to others.

The first research objective aimed to assess any statistical differences in the perceptions of superintendents on educational law's importance to agricultural educators based on years of experience as a classroom teacher. We divided the superintendents into two career phases, including the induction phase (0–7 years) and the non-induction phase (8+ years; see Figure 2). When evaluating the perceptions of the superintendents, the analysis showed a statistically significant difference, $t(138) = -1.93, p = .03$, in how superintendents who transitioned out of the classroom in the induction phase ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.60$) and those that transitioned out in the non-induction phase ($M = 4.59, SD = 0.48$), regarding the importance of agricultural education specific law issues. In addition, we found no statistical differences, $t(138) = -2.21, p = .06$, between the perceptions of superintendents on the importance of general educational law issues to agricultural education based on whether they transitioned out of the classroom in the induction phase ($M = 4.37, SD = 0.52$) or the non-induction phase ($M = 4.55, SD = 0.56$). Overall, the construct averages for the perceptions of the superintendents roughly corresponded to the *Very Important* to *Extremely Important* descriptors. Similarly, Hainline et al.'s (2019) study also determined that school district superintendents

and educational law attorneys agreed that educational law issues were important to agricultural educators. Much of the published literature showed that agricultural educators have more legal exposure than other educators due to the experiential and hands-on nature of agricultural education (Chumbley et al., 2018; Dyer & Andreasen, 1999; Saucier et al., 2014). Experiences provided in the agricultural mechanics laboratory, on-campus farms, at-home SAE visits, etc., can become a liability to the agricultural educator if not managed properly (Chumbley et al., 2018; Dyer & Andreasen, 1999; Saucier et al., 2014). The finding that superintendents who had less teaching experience valued agricultural education specific law issues significantly less than superintendents with more teaching experience may suggest that classroom experience makes superintendents more aware of the unique legal pressures to which agricultural educators are exposed.

The second research objective aimed to determine the principal component analytic properties of the assessed educational law issues. The PCA extracted four principal components: 1) General Educational Law Issues, 2) Special Education/Student Interaction Issues, 3) Student Safety/Teacher Contract Rights, and 4) Student Behavior/Curricular Modification Issues. This analysis reduced the original 32 educational law issues down to the four principal components by determining correlations in the responses of the superintendents. The correlating educational law issues primarily consisted of special education law, liabilities of extracurricular activities, and liabilities of not complying with district policy. These findings were consistent with Hainline et al.'s (2019) study, which found that 90–100% of superintendents reported consensus on the importance of similar issues. Furthermore, Hainline et al. (2021) also found that agricultural educators ranked related issues as highly important.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Several studies indicated that educators have an interest in educational law (Bon et al., 2008; Hainline et al., 2019; Littleton, 2008), but educators do not have adequate knowledge of the subject (Andreasen et al., 2007; Cotton, 2000; Fischer et al., 2007). This finding yields an important recommendation for future practice. To better prepare teachers for broad and specific legal implications in their classrooms, we recommend adding coursework to teacher preparation programs to ensure pre-service teachers understand their legal obligations as educators and how to avoid unnecessary legal exposure in their professional careers. Hainline et al. (2021) found that only 13% of Texas agricultural educators reported taking an undergraduate educational law course. The suggestion to increase undergraduate coursework related to educational law in agricultural education has been recommended previously (Imber, 2008; Littleton, 2008; Mirabile, 2013), but it has been investigated sparingly in the context of agricultural education. Professional development opportunities for in-service agricultural educators could also be beneficial in improving the educational law knowledge of agricultural educators (Hainline et al., 2021; Imber, 2008; Littleton, 2008; Mirabile, 2013).

Research objective one gave critical insight into the specific educational law areas in which undergraduate coursework and professional development for in-service teachers should focus. Superintendents ranked “duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect” and “complying with special education IEPs” among the most important educational law issues to educators. These two areas are particularly interesting because Schmidt et al. (2022) also found that agricultural educators are more likely to know about students’ experiences outside of the classroom than other educators. Furthermore, this heightened awareness of students’ potential personal situations could put agricultural educators in a better position to report abuse and neglect (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). On the other hand, Schmidt et al. (2022) found that agricultural educators’ heightened awareness of student experiences outside of the classroom can cause them to internalize additional stress. However, Ramage et al. (2021) found that preservice agricultural educators feel unprepared to accommodate students with special needs in the agricultural education classroom, which increases the need for specialized training in each legal area. The PCA also yielded results that are congruent with “Special Education/Student Interaction Issues” being one of the four

retained components of the analysis. Considering agricultural educators' unique positioning to know about student's experiences outside of school and superintendents' ranking the "duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect" as the most important general educational law issue to agricultural educators pose an even greater need for quality undergraduate coursework and professional development in this area. Furthermore, superintendents ranking "complying with special education IEPs" among the top educational law issues combined with agricultural educators feeling ill-prepared to properly accommodate students with special needs, could be a potentially threatening area for agricultural educators' legal exposure. As such, we recommend additional training for agricultural educators in their pre-service teaching experiences and through continuing education credits to help educators feel more prepared to handle these respective situations.

Superintendents who transitioned out of the classroom in the induction phase and the non-induction phase agreed that the top agricultural education specific law issues were "student safety in the agricultural mechanics shop," "student safety at the school farm," and "student supervision at extracurricular events." These findings support Chumbley et al.'s (2018) claim that teaching agricultural mechanics can have a higher liability than teaching other subjects. Furthermore, Ulrich et al. (2005) found that handling livestock can be dangerous, and if safety precautions are not followed, students handling livestock can be injured, resulting in possible litigation risks. This can be further extrapolated into more legal exposure for agricultural educators supervising students who are handling livestock on a school farm. Furthermore, the third component retained in the PCA included "student safety." Saucier et al. (2014), Dyer and Andreasen (1999), and Pate et al. (2016) also examined the importance of safety in agricultural education and determined it to be a critical factor in avoiding student injuries and subsequent legal exposure. These findings further support the need for additional undergraduate coursework and professional development in educational law.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend assessing agricultural educators' perceptions of the importance of legal issues. It could also be beneficial to gauge agricultural educator perceptions of the importance of legal issues at varying points in their careers. Similarly, a qualitative study gleaning educators' personal connections to legal concerns and issues in their classrooms could also further delineate meaning and relevancy to the four retained components: 1) General Educational Law Issues, 2) Special Education/Student Interaction Issues, 3) Student Safety/Teaching Contract Rights, and 4) Student Behavior/Curricular Modification Issues. Understanding these perceptions could provide further insight into developing practical and pertinent professional development and undergraduate coursework for preservice and in-service educators.

In addition, we also recommend investigating the insights of Career and Technical Education (CTE) administrators, specifically. Evaluating their perspectives could provide CTE-targeted insight that other administrators may not provide, which could be more related to an agricultural educator's experience. Additionally, we investigated the perspectives of administrators from eight states from the southern region of the United States. We recommend increasing the scope of the study to involve perspectives from other states and regions. Furthermore, the 32 items from the PCA were highly correlated with the first component. Investigating similar studies with additional populations could help delineate subtle differences when naming each component, namely the first component. Finally, because many educational law issues and risks may be unique to individual states (Schimmel et al., 2011), it would also be beneficial to conduct a literature review related to key educational law issues in each state and compare those to superintendent and educator associated ratings of importance.

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