Preface

This book is for busy school principals: principals who want to support and challenge their teachers but for whom the urgent keeps getting in the way of the important; principals who know they should be instructional leaders but whose days are quickly filled with emergencies, operations, student discipline, community relations, phone calls, and meetings; principals who believe in research-based best practices, but who do not have time to read volumes or spend days attending conferences.

How will this book help? By doing three things. First, it will provide practical suggestions for supporting and facilitating teachers' professional development; suggestions that are both big-picture and doable, strategic and immediately actionable; suggestions that assume the principal will not be the one leading every initiative, but will need to know how to decide among varied approaches, how to plan, share leadership, stay focused on student learning, and make multiple initiatives cohere.

Second, this book will succinctly synthesize the research and theory behind those suggestions. It will explain *why*, in readable and easily digestible ways. It will provide rationales that principals can use to explain and justify their school's professional development foci to governing boards, communities, outside funding agencies, and anyone else concerned with the reasoning behind the choices.

Third, this book will link teachers' professional development to student learning. These links are what can build both teachers' and communities' support for the school's professional development directions. That support is critical to the development efforts' progress because neither the suggested actions nor the rationale will be heeded without it.

In sum, actionable strategies grounded in sound rationale and connected to student learning are the three aids this book provides.

Distinctiveness

How is this book different from the many others on the market that address staff development? First, it focuses on interpreting current national standards for professional development and applying them specifically to the work of school leaders. Second, rather than including detailed elaboration of each and every standard, this book is intentionally selective. It centers, instead, on seven key questions whose answers capture what current and aspiring principals most need to know about using the standards to improve their schools. I know of no other resource that is as compact, focused, and readable enough to help busy educators stay up-to-date on expert thinking and best practices for supporting teachers' on-the-job development.

Additionally, this book appends a handy glossary to acquaint readers with terms that often surface in this and other resources relevant to professional development. And, for readers who wish to pursue any of the topics mentioned in greater depth or detail, a contemporary reference list is also included.

Description of the Book

What, more specifically, will you find in this volume? National standards for professional development center on three essential elements: content, process, and context (National Staff Development Council, 2001). This book is organized into three parts consistent with those standards. Additionally, each chapter is constructed around a question fundamental to school leadership.

For example, Part I includes two chapters, both centered on means of determining what the substance (content) of a school's professional development efforts should be. Chapter 1, "How Should Adult and Student Learning Be Linked?" explains and illustrates simple data analysis techniques for homing in on gaps between where students are and where you would like them to be. It challenges school leaders to move away from traditional paper-and-pencil surveys of teachers' needs or interests toward more student-driven focusing of adult learning content.

Chapter 2 introduces five distinct ways of thinking about evaluating professional development initiatives. It suggests steps principals can take to use evaluation results to adjust and refine adult learning content. To help avoid the common pitfall of flitting from one hot topic to another, Chapters 1 and 2 together reinforce

strategies for solidly connecting teachers' professional development to your school's top priorities for student learning.

Whereas Part I is focused on the *what* of adult learning, Part II examines the *how* (process). Chapter 3, "Which Models Best Suit Your Goals?" identifies five fundamental designs that all school leaders should be familiar with: Individually Guided, Collaborative Problem Solving, Observation and Assessment of Teaching, Training, and Action Research. This chapter succinctly summarizes the rationale for each model and offers ideas for deciding among design options. Its companion chapter in Part II addresses the question, "What do we know about effective staff development practices?" It synthesizes state-of-the art thinking to bring you up-to-date on the most salient aspects of the knowledge base relevant to school leaders. Regardless of the models you and your teachers determine to be most appropriate for your school, this growing body of research on best practice will help you plan, implement, and sustain improvements in your adult learning programs.

Importantly, neither strong content (Part I) nor well-grounded design (Part II) alone will ensure the success of teachers' professional development in schools. Favorable systemic conditions are also required. Accordingly, Part III, "Creating Supportive Contexts," addresses three questions integral to establishing and maintaining nurturing environments for adult learning. Chapter 5, "How Can Leaders Focus Improvement Efforts?" centers on setting clear direction and integrating multiple innovations. Together, these actions can increase coherence and decrease the fragmentation and overload that so often plague professional development and school improvement initiatives. Chapter 6, "How Are More Enabling Cultures Shaped?" describes strategies for communication and everyday acts of leadership that foster favorable contexts for adult and student learning. This chapter also challenges conventional notions about teacher resistance to change, instead encouraging attention to the school structures and systemic conditions that support the status quo. Two key resources—time and funding—are the focus of Chapter 7, "How Can Resources Be Optimized?"

A brief concluding chapter wraps up and reinforces salient messages for school-based administrative leadership of teachers' professional development. It is followed by a glossary and list of references. Consistent with the approach taken throughout the book, the appended resources were chosen for their relevance to current and aspiring principals.

Summary and Use

Three premises underlie this volume. First, student learning is the goal and the desired end. Continuous teacher growth and development is but one of several means toward that end.

Second, there are more similarities than differences between adult learning and student learning. If savvy administrators emphasize and capitalize on the similarities, teacher and community ownership will follow more readily. And shared ownership increases the odds of long-term commitment, follow-up, and collective responsibility for improving student learning.

Third, leadership matters. Every school has numerous and varied programs, goals, special projects, partnerships, and hopes. Principals are in a unique position to see and understand how each contributes to—or detracts from—the whole. With that needed perspective comes responsibility for big picture sense making, focus, prioritizing, and oversight.

In sum, school-based administrative support and guidance are key to building coherence among multiple improvement initiatives. And important among those initiatives is teachers' professional development.

Audience and Other Uses for This Book

The primary audience for this volume is current and prospective PreK–12 principals, assistant principals, and other school building leaders (e.g., department chairs, grade-level heads). Prospective includes students in college and university educational leadership preparation programs—the future pool of school administrators.

Professors of educational leadership will find this book's contents a welcome blend of theoretical and practical insights, addressing needs to expose prospective administrators to multiple perspectives while satisfying graduate students' interest in concrete action and understandable illustrations. This volume can be used as a supplementary text in courses such as "School Personnel Administration," "Human Resources Management," "The Principalship," "Leadership for Adult Learning," "Professional Development in Schools" or "Foundations of Educational Administration."

Staff development committees, school improvement planning teams, teachers, central office administrators, curriculum coordinators, educational consultants, and school board members will also find

this book accessible and useful. These audiences will likely appreciate the broad overview of best practices for professional development. They will also increase their understanding of why and how generic strategies need to be tailored to each school's uniqueness.

A Final Thought

The continuous growth of students and staff has always been central to the vision of strong school leaders. Recent state policy directions and the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 further increase administrative responsibility for improving student achievement, retaining highly qualified teachers, and grounding school practices in sound research. This book is a useful resource for all leaders concerned with exercising those responsibilities well.