
Foreword

The education profession occupies a well-deserved position of honor in the hearts and minds of Americans. Most Americans fondly recall the “life-changing” impact that one teacher had on their lives. Many remember the teacher, or teachers, who inspired them and put them on the course to becoming the citizens they are today. Our nation’s leaders and public figures also respect the role of educators in society. In the final debate prior to the 2008 presidential election, both candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama, spent significant time discussing the need for greater rewards for effective teachers. Most notably, public opinion polls show that Americans revere teachers, with the teaching profession repeatedly topping the list on surveys identifying the most prestigious occupations (Harris Interactive, 2007). All of this confirms that the public overwhelmingly admires the education profession.

Does this admiration carry over to the education profession’s leaders? Well, there is a disturbing trend. According to a study by Rosenthal, Pittinsky, Purvin, and Montoya (2007), from the John F. Kennedy School of Government’s Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University, the public’s confidence in the education sector’s leadership has eroded for two consecutive years. A saving grace for educational leaders is that they are not singled out. According to the study, “more than three quarters of those surveyed now believe there is a leadership crisis in this country, up from 69% in 2006 and 65% in 2005” (p. 1).

The decline in the public’s faith in today’s educational leaders has serious implications for the profession and, more important, children in our nation’s schools. Already, we are seeing the manifestation of this declining confidence. More parents are looking for, and choosing, alternatives to traditional educational settings for their children. According to the Center for Education Reform, over 1.2 million students were educated in 4,100 charter schools around the nation during the 2007–2008 school year. This represents a one-year growth of 8% in the number of new charter schools. Data show that home schooling is on the rise, and a majority of parents cite

dissatisfaction with academic instruction as the main reason. Despite these shifts, a promising factor for educators is that the public still believes that professional educators should be making decisions about schools. Overwhelmingly, they report that educators, not businesspeople or politicians, should guide decisions about our nation's schools.

It is for these reasons that this book by Paul Kimmelman on the pressing issues of compliance, leadership, and innovation in education is so timely and important for the field. Paul asks readers to consider the opportunity to leverage policy and compliance structures in order to make the changes they know will benefit children. He helps draw inferences from the study of leadership theory, about which many of us could use a refresher. Finally, he makes the important call for innovation in education. Paul's three points sound the alarm for what is now critically needed in education to protect its important status in our country and restore faith that educators and the education system will prepare the nation's youth to lead our now global society.

The public desperately wants to support educators, and I believe reflection on Paul's clear insights and historical perspectives in this book will help the field protect its revered position in society. I offer the following three points of advice to those who will become the new leaders in education, which correlate with Paul's themes of compliance, leadership, and innovation.

EMBRACE AND LEVERAGE LEGAL/POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND COMPLIANCE STRUCTURES

Educators have a tradition of being extremely obedient. They are responsive to laws governing their practice and often follow mandates without complaint. This does not mean that they agree with all of the policy mandates to which they are subjected. In fact, they are usually the first to see the flaws in education laws and regulations that govern schools. However, out of respect and deference to policymakers, they dutifully execute. Despite this compliance, policymakers and the general public often feel dissatisfied with the response of educators. The critical question is, Why the dissatisfaction? Obviously, there is a mismatch between public and policymaker expectations and educator actions.

I propose that educators will thrive and public leaders will increase their faith in them when educators work to understand the underlying motivations for the laws, policies, and regulations imposed on them. So I suggest that the job of new leaders in education is to help educators discover the authentic motivations behind legal and policy frameworks and work to address those while they comply with the bureaucratic rules. I am confident that when this occurs, the public will increase its satisfaction with schools and educators will feel fulfilled by their work.

INCREASE ATTENTION AND SENSITIVITY TO THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS

Understanding and embracing policy actions is one responsive step that educators can take to protect their status in society and improve teaching and learning in schools. A more proactive step that new leaders in education ought to take is to become more externally focused. As the world we live in grows more interconnected, we must remind ourselves that leadership occurs within a social context. Throughout history, schools have enjoyed some protection from external pressures. Professional educators maintained control over their own domain and were, for the most part, free from micromanagement from political and business leaders. The general public practiced deference to teacher authority and professional judgment. That is all in the past. In the current age of interconnectedness, fueled by Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, podcasts, and wikis, the schoolhouse doors have blown wide open.

The world today requires leaders to be more perceptive than in the past. Leaders in education can regain their status as “thought leaders,” like past luminaries John Dewey and Albert Shanker, if they carefully observe the world around them while attending to the core work of educating students within the schoolhouse walls. Leaders in education should expose themselves to new thinking outside of the traditional education community. They must regularly scout out what’s on the minds of parents, business leaders, and national leaders inside and outside the education arena. This proactive stance will allow them to be active in constructing solutions and contributing to policy debates rather than merely reacting to them.

SUPPORT FOCUSED INNOVATION IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

The final recommendation for new leaders in education is to create an environment that fosters innovation in schools and classrooms. It is no secret that schools have been fairly resistant to change. Many people argue that the majority of classrooms are no different today than they were a century ago despite the completely different world that currently exists. Critics say that education systems retain outdated models of learning that no longer fit with students today nor prepare students for future societal needs.

This can and must change. New leaders should establish a culture of innovation in schools. They can foster this culture by creating processes such as structured and facilitated collaboration. It is in these processes that educators will be empowered to identify barriers to success, for students as well as themselves, and develop effective solutions. I am confident that

this empowerment will engender a feeling of self-efficacy that will promote retention of educators as well as motivate new promising individuals to join the profession.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

As you read this book, I encourage you to accept Paul's challenge to move away from outmoded educational leadership and join the ranks of new leaders in education. I believe that your contribution in embracing compliance, assuming leadership, and fostering innovation will ensure that education retains its critical role in making America great.

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