
Preface

School leaders maneuver within very complex and defined systems that converge on the ultimate objective of improving student achievement. They influence the efforts of the learning community to improve student achievement through the beliefs, skills, and experiences they bring to the position.

What would happen if a site administrator led without a clear vision or an understanding of the school and district mission? Can the change process be ignored? How much sharing or delegating must occur for a culture of shared leadership to exist? Can student achievement improve without teachers using student work to inform curriculum and instruction? Can teachers improve their practice without a coherent professional development plan? Most important, what is the role of site administrators in creating successful learning communities?

No effective leader, especially at a secondary school, can hope to monitor all of the complex priorities and initiatives alone. Nonetheless, the school leader will be held accountable for their success or failure, and ultimately, for student performance.

Common Beliefs

In developing the premise for this book, the authors have incorporated the following common beliefs about managing complex change in secondary schools:

- Schools must have a clear vision of what student performance will look like in the future.
- A successful learning community acknowledges that change is a process, not an event, and that it takes time and buy-in from all stakeholders.

- Change is intimidating and challenges comfort zones. Yet change is inevitable if success is to be realized.
- Effective leaders empower others to provide leadership within the learning community.

Leading Effective Secondary School Reform: Your Guide to Strategies That Work not only sets the stage for school leaders embarking on a new assignment or facing a new set of mandates, it also provides activities, agendas, and tips for successful planning and implementation around improving the achievement of all students. Strategies outlined in this book will empower secondary school leaders to successfully maneuver through the change process, provide needed and appropriate support to all stakeholders, and develop a comprehensive Single School Plan with an aligned professional development component within a professional learning community. The book presents a concise, easy-to-use guide for school leaders at secondary schools.

A myriad of books exist about leadership for school administrators facing complex changes in their schools. This book will focus on three variables that influence critical attributes of successful leadership at secondary schools. Variables are influenced by a leader's beliefs, skills, and experiences. The three variables presented in this book will provide a focal point for the three main sections of the book. These variables are (1) Vision, (2) Shared Decision Making, and (3) Assessment and Accountability.

Critical attributes are ingredients of effective school leadership that align with the identified variable. Each chapter highlights a critical attribute for leading effective secondary school reform. Eight critical attributes are covered in the first eight chapters of this book:

Part I: Vision

Chapter 1: School Culture

Chapter 2: The Change Process

Chapter 3: The Single School Plan

Part II: Shared Decision Making

Chapter 4: Professional Development

Chapter 5: Professional Learning Communities

Chapter 6: Parent Involvement

Part III: Assessment and Accountability

Chapter 7: Action Research

Chapter 8: Productive Classroom Observations

Chapter 9: Putting the Pieces Together

The last chapter synthesizes the strategies in the previous eight chapters into a checklist for getting started in the school reform process. Using a *case-study format*, this book will consider the actions made by four secondary school leaders as they wrestle with the challenges of implementing state and federal mandates. Each chapter will present a set of case study scenarios to describe how the principals' decisions about a critical attribute of leadership influenced their learning communities. *Points to consider* follow the case study scenarios. *Application activities* are also included, to allow school leaders to reflect on their own school environment and culture through the lens of each chapter.

Case Studies

The case study schools and leaders in this book represent a synthesis of characteristics from large and medium-size schools in urban and suburban areas. It should be noted that these case studies are based on real people and situations at schools across the nation. They are not figments of the authors' imagination. However, names have been changed to protect the innocent! All four schools are involved in an "underperforming" school program. Site administrators featured in this book are from two middle schools and two high schools. They represent various leadership styles that characterize their decision-making and problem-solving strategies. Mary M. and Tony R. represent middle school principals; Carl A. and Anna S. represent high school principals. All four are relatively new principals with zero to two years of experience. As you read the case studies and suggested strategies, you may recognize actions you have taken as a school leader.

Case Study Middle School Leaders

GMS

Mary M. is the principal at Greenview Middle School. She is beginning her first year as a principal. Her leadership experience has been primarily as a co-administrator at Greenview Middle School for three

years. She is known as a decisive, highly structured, and directive administrator. She is very task oriented and is motivated to complete assigned tasks.

RVMS Tony R. is the principal at Ridge View Middle School. He has completed his second year at the school. Prior to becoming a principal, Tony was a co-administrator for five years. He has worked on the district strategic-planning team and has been active in the district office staff-development program for the past three years. He is known as an organized, relationship-oriented administrator.

Middle School Demographics

Each middle school has approximately 1200 seventh- and eighth-grade students and has a principal and two co-administrators. Both schools are in their third year as designated "program improvement," based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) factors. The student population is made up of 40 percent white, 35 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Asian, 10 percent African American, and 5 percent other ethnic representation. Ten percent of the students are enrolled in special education classes and 35 percent of the students are designated Limited English Proficient. Both schools are designated schoolwide Title I schools. Each school is located in an urban, low socioeconomic neighborhood. Both schools were built approximately 10 years ago.

Case Study: High School Leaders

MHS Anna S. is beginning her second year as the principal at Municipal High School. Prior to her current assignment, she was a co-administrator at a middle school and a high school. Over the past four years, Anna has been an active member and leader of several district committees in curriculum and instruction, including literacy, textbook selection, and student assessment. She is known as a student advocate and an academically oriented administrator.

BKHS Carl A. is a first-year principal at Birch Knoll High School. He has been a co-administrator for six years, the past three years at Birch Knoll High School. Carl has participated in numerous school projects such as selection of library resource material, Back-to-School night, developing a school discipline plan, and identifying school-community partnerships. Carl is known as a team player,

delegator, and relationship-oriented administrator. Completing assigned tasks motivates Carl.

Each high school has approximately 2500 ninth- through twelfth-grade students and has a principal and three co-administrators. Both schools are in their third year as designated “underperforming schools,” based on AYP factors. The student population is made up of 48 percent African American, 27 percent Hispanic, 20 percent white, and 5 percent other ethnic representation. Twenty-five percent of the students are enrolled in special education classes and 15 percent of the students are designated Limited English Proficient. Both schools are designated schoolwide Title I schools. Each school is located in a suburban, medium socioeconomic neighborhood. Both schools were built approximately 70 years ago and are considered the “flagship” schools for their districts.

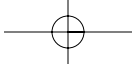
Secondary School Challenges

The authors believe that secondary schools present unique challenges for site administrators. The culture of secondary schools tends to be very different from that of elementary schools, with a whole different set of beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes. Secondary schools tend to be bigger, have more student activities, be departmentalized, and be more competitive in relation to other schools in the district. Secondary schools often have minimal parent involvement and are dealing with students in the throes of “hormone hell.” As a result of these unique challenges, we feel that it is important to view these schools from the secondary perspective, to allow school leaders to consider viable solutions as they manage complex change in leading effective secondary school reform.

Authors’ Note

This book does not address safety and security issues. The authors, however, recognize that it is extremely difficult to focus on an academic reform agenda if major safety concerns at the school are unresolved. Effective school leaders must ensure that these issues are continuously addressed to allow instructional reforms to move forward.

We hope that school leaders reading this book will recognize behaviors and decisions in the case studies and be open to considering some of the tips, strategies, and techniques outlined in the chapters.



Finally, like all good references, *Leading Effective Secondary School Reform: Your Guide to Strategies That Work* is intended to spark your creativity and ignite your resolve to develop strategies and solutions for your own environment.

As the English poet Samuel Butler once said, "*Life is like playing the violin solo in public and learning the instrument as one goes on.*"

