

Foreword

As I begin this task of writing a foreword for a work that has earned my full support for its commitment to quality education and professional development, I share with you that I am a fellow sojourner on the journey focusing on school improvement. Whether you have just begun your journey or are well along the way, you will hopefully find, as I have, that what school improvement should seek, year in and year out, is an understanding of (a) what we need to do to help our students improve their learning and (b) how our systems need to align to serve the needs of teachers.

Over the past thirty-five years, I served in a number of roles, each with its own perspective of school improvement and the change process. As a teacher, the goal was right in front of me daily in the presence of between twenty-five and thirty-five students. As an assistant principal and principal, school improvement was all around me in the form of working with students and teachers to meet diverse needs and the location of scant resources. As assistant superintendent for instruction, school improvement was centered on the curriculum and policy development. As a superintendent, the goal was in the eyes of every student, parent, teacher, business owner, and community member I met: It was about meeting the needs of individual students and serving the needs of the community. Standards guided us and assessments measured us. At times, school improvement was reduced simply to year-end assessments. However, we know that school improvement is much more. For the professional educator, school improvement is in the process of designing, implementing, assessing, and reflecting and acting on our ever-increasing awareness of what our students need.

I learned to ask a question of instructional teams and others: "What evidence do we have that this system has the capacity to perform at the level of our expectations?" That question focused on reality and the essential needs. Assessing capacity should be a regular component of data-based decision making. Building capacity is fundamental in the Whole-Faculty Study Group (WFSG) System. The WFSG approach aligns the professional learning needs of teachers with data on the students they teach, and then provides a process to meet the needs of learners. The key to higher performance embodied in the WFSG model is the work of planning, doing, assessing, and reflecting as an ongoing process.

I have found that there are many distractions to claim the attention of faculty, making it highly challenging to focus and sustain conversations on teaching and

learning. Consequently, the WFSG approach embeds the change process in the school plan and supports the faculty and the school in addressing student needs and skill development for success. It means taking precious time to develop our skills to meet identified goals, but it is no longer acceptable to say we are doing the best we can unless we can show how our practice is improving student achievement on a daily basis.

In my experience, there are few models that successfully promote authentic collaboration among teachers, focus clearly on student data for instructional improvement, and set a higher expectation for success as the WFSG System does. It is a student-centered and a teacher-driven model that refocuses the conversation and culture of the school. Throughout this fieldbook you will have the opportunity to view the model from many different perspectives and experience the WFSG model and general school improvement through the eyes of practitioners at all levels. Here are real-world examples of the model that have the potential to guide the conversation toward core values, effective teaching, and improved student learning.

Where do you go from here? The choice is yours. Start in any chapter that meets your needs. The experiences shared in this fieldbook will be helpful in improving schools and in your use of the WFSG System. As you will see, successful implementation of this model requires a commitment to people development, collaboration, and improved professional practice. It is not for the faint of heart, but worth every minute. Good luck!

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