
Preface

Leaders are held accountable for gains in student achievement through various measures, particularly state-identified assessments. Nationally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that students read on grade level by 2014. *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2007* (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007) shows that although students are making progress in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), it is slight. In reading, 67 percent of fourth graders performed at the basic level and 33 percent at the proficient level in 2007. Reading performance is similar at the eighth-grade level with 74 percent performing at the basic level and 31 percent at the proficient level. Perhaps more importantly, there remains a gap between the learning of African-American and Hispanic students and their white counterparts. It is not surprising that the same holds true for students living in poverty and those who are not. Nationally, the goal is for more students to perform at the proficient level on a nationally accepted assessment, such as NAEP, since the state assessments vary in where proficiency is set—below, at, or above grade level. To further address this goal, *Leading Learning: Change Student Achievement Today!* provides leader actions and examples where the gap in learning is closing through exceptional leadership.

Many leaders are seeking perfect solutions to this challenge in the form of instructional resources. As leaders at both the district and school levels consider steps to make these changes, they often find that only small improvements can be made with new resources alone and without implementing significant changes. These dramatic changes result in rethinking organization, roles of individuals, and how learning is approached; these are called *second-order changes*. Second-order change often makes people feel uncomfortable because it represents a departure from accepted practice in that district or school and means new learning for those involved.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) distinguish between first-order change and second-order change by identifying first-order change as incremental and gradual, and seen as the logical next step for a school or district. Second-order change is dramatic in both how the problem is

defined and how the solution is approached. Second-order change is deep change that alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting (p. 66).

Because of the need to improve achievement for all students and the accountability faced by leaders searching for solutions, I began examining what successful leaders do who lead second-order change. After a number of years as a school administrator, district administrator, and now university faculty member and consultant, I have spent many days in classrooms, schools, and districts seeking to find the perfect solution for making gains in student achievement. This interest led to researching what leaders who make significant change in schools do to make such gains in student achievement. After interviewing sixty-two leaders (fifty school principals and twelve district leaders), studying their data, and visiting their schools and districts, I found that there is no one best solution to improve learning for all students, but there are patterns and themes inherent in what leaders today do to have positive results. I call these patterns “leader action themes for second-order change” (see Table 1.4) and they are shared throughout the book in the context of the school or district setting.

The key finding is that leaders change the culture of the school or district to focus on all students learning at a higher level. Keep in mind that, for some, the mantra of all students learning at a higher level is second-order change, resulting in altered professional practice. This requires significant rethinking about leadership, teaching, and learning and is a departure from previous practice. For example, shared in this text, teachers in these settings are now expected to collaborate when they previously worked in isolation. Aligned with the expectation for teachers to collaborate is for leadership to hold teachers accountable for that collaboration and resulting change in student achievement. Prior to this change, teachers may have been independent in their curriculum implementation, instruction, assessment, or use of resources, but the second-order change is to align the curriculum and resource implementation. Another example, also included in this book, is the change in attitude that results in teaching more diverse students in high-level classes. This replaces the attitude of exclusion except for only a few selected students. These examples require different thinking about one’s work and the results expected from the work.

To accomplish these substantive changes, leaders begin with data study and sharing of that data with other administrators and teachers. Together, they come to conclusions drawing from their knowledge of the daily practice in the district or school. Following the contextualized data study, steps are determined for leading the enhancement of knowledge and skill, followed by daily practice related to the target change. Accountability for making the target changes is ever present. Strategic data study by all participants is ongoing to monitor implementation and to adjust decisions related to the target change. All decisions focus on the learning needs of the students.

WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK?

Since this book is based on actions that leaders believe influenced positive changes in student achievement in their schools and districts, practitioners and those interested in changing learning should find the ideas useful. District leaders who are responsible for improving learning will find examples in each chapter. Those who have school-level responsibilities will find examples for elementary, middle, and high schools. Examples are also included representing rural, suburban, and urban contexts. Demographic information is provided to assist the reader in relating to each example: keep in mind that many suburban districts have characteristics typically attributed to urban districts, indicating demographic change in some suburban communities.

This book may also be helpful for leadership teams, including teacher leaders and community leaders, as they consider steps to build support for making changes that may create some uneasiness. What readers may find interesting is that while the context and players in each chapter change, the leader actions remain consistent.

HOW IS THE BOOK ORGANIZED?

Each chapter of *Leading Learning: Change Student Achievement Today!* begins with a brief presentation of the research theme exemplified within. The theme discussions are followed with practical examples and insights provided by school and district leaders. These individuals represent varying levels of students and various demographic settings—from rural to urban and from high poverty to economically advantaged. Some of the examples are from my own experience working in districts and schools; therefore, the example may not be from an interview in the identified research. Because each of these leaders exemplifies at least eight of the themes, the scenarios include more than one theme to give the reader the context for the change, but are selected for a chapter as the best example for that particular theme.

A reflection on the theme is used to summarize key points. Next are a few practical tips for implementation. Following the practical tips, trends related to the chapter's theme serve as a quick reference. Each chapter then concludes with helpful terms. Within the Resources, the reader will find artifacts associated with the changes in these schools and districts which principals thought may be helpful in replication of a specific change.

Chapter 9 emerged as the ninth theme from the research through examples provided during the discussions. Most of those interviewed indicate that politics, as the participants interpreted the word, were not an issue and that school boards are supportive of the second-order changes. However, in my reflections, it has become clear that while most interviewees say that politics are not an issue, their leader actions are political, or they

leverage their position to influence second-order change, or, because of their unique position, influence second-order change differently.

The last chapter, “Reflections on Leading Learning for Second-Order Change,” provides a summary of the components of the second-order changes such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These components are trends of the target changes observed in the schools and districts making gains in student achievement. These components are represented in the outer band of Table 1.3.

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL FEATURES?

Because of the pressure on leaders to make improvements in student achievement and the accountability for doing so, there are numerous publications on the topic. What makes this book unique is that while it is based on research, it represents leaders *now*, dedicated to improving learning for all students. It is not a historical or theoretical perspective, but one of timely, real examples, which may provide guidance to those seeking to lead change. Furthermore, the examples are presented in context and it is noted that to make these successful changes, difficulties may arise, but can be facilitated with these leader action themes.

The organization of the book is unique and should be a helpful resource.

- Introduction of leader action theme
- Real examples in varying contexts
- Reflection summary
- Practical tips
- Summary of trends
- Helpful terms
- Tables showing data and examples
- Figures to create a mental model of change in learning
- Resources provided by schools

REFLECTION

Leading learning to improve achievement for all students requires deeper and different thinking than in previous years. Teachers and leaders cannot just do what they have been doing better. Educators have to think differently, do different things, and do them consistently well. Leaders must reconceptualize their role and the role of each of their faculty, staff, and administration to optimize success related to all students learning at higher levels.