
Preface to the Second Edition

As a school leader, you have a lot to do and little time to spare. There's the governor's demand that you close the achievement gap. There's pressure to join Race to the Top (RTTT). And, of course, your board members often fall out among themselves or with you, while parents request expensive new programs that your taxpayers are often reluctant to support. You have a lot on your plate. Why should you spend any of your time on another book about school leadership? Because the world is changing. You won't be able to get by with yesterday's ideas. Many of the lessons in this book can make a difference in children's lives . . . and some of them may save your career. This orientation introduces you to how that world is changing and what it means for you and the schools you lead.

So, you're sitting at the school superintendent's desk, or you aspire to be behind it. Congratulations. It's a wonderful profession. Your career choice is a sign of your commitment to young people and your community. It's a good feeling, isn't it? Your family is proud of you. Your neighbors look up to you. But what are you going to do if any of the following scenarios unfolds?

- Directed by your board to bring student achievement up to national norms, you've created a national profile for your leadership. But the price has been high. Contention with principals and the teachers' union has alarmed and divided the board. And this morning, your finance director drops a bombshell. The district is facing an immediate \$40 million budget hole, a consequence, apparently, of the new computer system's inability to work with the old financial program. Your job is on the line.

- Asked to make a presentation to the local business community about student achievement, you turn to your research director for data. What you learn is alarming. As you work through the numbers with her, it becomes apparent that respectable districtwide averages disguise an

alarming achievement gap. The correlation between student performance and family income is almost perfect. You can bury this information in your presentation, but can you live with yourself?

- At a public meeting, a local activist stands up to harangue you. Research says the public is paying more for education and getting less, he reports. American standing on international assessments has fallen off the cliff. You and your buddies are putting the nation at risk. How do you respond?

- Your worst nightmare as an educator comes to life. In the middle of routine meetings one morning, you learn of a shooting at one of your elementary schools. Soon, it emerges that a deranged gunman with an assault rifle has murdered 20 six- and seven-year-olds, six staff members, and his mother before killing himself. How do you help heal this shattered community?

- The telephone rings as you return from lunch with the union president. It's the local reporter who's been questioning district spending on technology. Today, he has a new issue. Parents at one of your elementary schools are picketing the school about a library exhibit on the family. It seems the exhibit includes pictures of gay couples and their children. What do you say?

- Newly elected board members realize that an oversight on the previous board's part coupled with a new court ruling offers the board the opportunity to terminate your contract. Unceremoniously, you are deprived of your title and your office and find yourself assigned to an empty desk without a telephone, a computer, or any work. Several months later, you are informed that your services are no longer required in the district in any capacity. How do you protect yourself from that?

There's nothing theoretical about any of these scenarios. Working with more than 300 superintendents in the past 20 years, the authors of this volume have encountered each of them. And many of these developments cost someone a job. We could cite dozens of similar examples. The truth is that the high-minded pursuit of what's best for children often runs into the rough realities of budget catastrophes, interest-group politics, human folly, and the residue and by-products of the nation's racial past. School superintendents have to be prepared to confront and deal with these challenges.

That's why this book is important. As a potential or current superintendent, you must understand that what you do not know can kill you professionally. The world is changing. Your world as an educator is changing with it. Where once school superintendents could be content to define themselves as managers, today, they must understand that they are leaders of learning who are simultaneously public figures. This *Fieldbook* can help you cope with these challenges. It is called a *fieldbook* because it draws on the stories and accumulated wisdom and experience of more than 300 school leaders—members of either the National Superintendents Roundtable or the Danforth Foundation's Forum for the American School

Superintendent—as they struggled with the problems of leading today’s schools. (See Appendices B and C for list of these leaders.)

WHAT’S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE SECOND EDITION?

Whenever authors ask readers to deal with a second edition of a book, they have an obligation to explain what’s different in the new volume. We want to point to several things. First, the school policy and political environment has changed with warp speed since our first edition went to press in 2004. Even then, it was clear that accountability and assessment were becoming new hallmarks of American education, but these developments have since accelerated at a jaw-dropping rate. Today, in addition to a transformed policy environment, you face new pressures for privatization and the challenges of dealing with the wild card of technology.

Second, this volume adds the experience of 100 school leaders active in the superintendency in the last five years to the lessons learned from 200 superintendents who contributed to the first volume.

Readers familiar with the first volume will also find that the book has been dramatically changed to reflect the latest thinking in learning and assessment, including the emerging debate about performance-based teacher compensation.

All told, readers will find more than 100 pages of new and reshaped material in this second edition of the *Fieldbook*, most developed by members of the National Superintendents Roundtable, and the elimination or reduction of a comparable amount of other material from the original.

Over some 20 years, the 300 superintendents who helped us develop this *Fieldbook* and its predecessor worked extremely hard. They examined the latest research on brain development and tried to understand how it applies to early learning and school programs. They worried about how to respond to public demands for higher standards and new assessments. They fretted about how to defend a system in which they believed while the broader environment criticized it. They explored district governance with their boards and unions. And they wrestled with the challenges of race and class in the United States, the great fault lines in our national life. Although four of us developed this book, in a very real sense, these superintendents wrote it. You’ll find their stories and the lessons of their experience here.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

We developed *The Superintendent’s Fieldbook: A Guide for Leaders of Learning* with several audiences in mind:

- School superintendents in districts of all kinds (urban, rural, and suburban) who want to ratchet up their effectiveness will find this text a