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multinational organization, a hospital, or more to our interests, a school. The job of an effective principal is to find the talents that are needed to realize the vision of a school where all children learn. This is truly the driving force of any school as it interacts with many different individuals and groups. This book will help you address and overcome common barriers to creating communities in many schools.

School principals today face many challenges. At the same time, they are limited by a reality faced by all leaders who seek to improve their organizations. Each day has only 24 hours and at times, it seems that the expectations facing school leaders is based on a 25-hour (or more) clock. The issue of professional overload of principals is certainly an increasingly serious concern for all school leaders. As a result, the call for leaders to commit themselves to the creation of learning communities might be viewed as unrealistic. Our effort in this book is to assist you in your efforts to transform the culture of a school from one where isolation among people reigns to one where people work together to achieve common goals for learners.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Through the chapters in this book, we look at many of the issues and people that can be recruited to help you in your transformative efforts. Chapter 1 begins with what may well be the most critical actor to be involved with promoting any significant change in a school—you as the leader. It specifically centers on the need for a leader to become attuned to her or his personal values as they relate to the principles of developing a sense of community in a school. Chapter 2 builds upon the issue of the values of a leader as it lays out the steps for creating an effective mission statement derived from a leader's vision of a school focused on shared values. Chapter 3 presents a brief review of some of the thinking that has gone into the current creation of efforts to promote community development in schools.

Chapter 4 explores how to create a culture that promotes community building and collaboration. Using the “Four Cs Model” for analyzing culture, this chapter shows leaders how to move staff and others toward a goal of collaboration. Chapter 5 focuses on the impact of the external community—parents, the neighborhood, community members—on a school and shows leaders how to analyze their community to understand its potential influences on the practices of the school. Chapter 6 offers insights into effective strategies to increase positive involvement by members of the external community to work with parents and others with a

direct interest in what takes place in your school. Another group often forgotten in discussions of building community in schools is considered in Chapter 7. This group is collectively described as the invisible heroes in your school, and it includes such community members as custodians, security officers, office staff, and food service workers who need to be included as important contributors to your school community. In Chapter 8, we look at the importance of increasing your awareness of a variety of social service agencies which exist in your community and which may provide numerous needed services to your students and their families. Finally, Chapter 9 suggests the ways in which you might be able to work with key members of the central administration in your district who need to be included in your efforts to bring about change to a learning community.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE BOOK

The overall goal of this book is to provide practical strategies and tips to assist you in your work of creating a more effective school. Each chapter begins with a **brief scenario** based on actual experiences we have witnessed over the years in real schools by real principals and others. This short case is meant to illustrate some of the fundamental issues that face a leader in terms of the topic for each chapter. No real names are used because the situations described, while based on real events, are but composite representations of a variety of behaviors and events that we have witnessed at different points in our careers. Next, there are **Points to Ponder**, inserted at various points in each chapter to promote some additional reflection on your part regarding the practical ways in which ideas presented in each chapter may be implemented in the reality of your school. **Tips for Practice** help you consider strategies that you may wish to follow in the unique reality of your own school as you move toward creating an effective learning community. Finally, summarizing each chapter are **Points for Practice**, which highlight key chapter concepts that are critical to building effective learning communities.

We wish you well in your important work to provide students with the best quality of educational programs available. We know that your time is limited and so are other resources, but we hope that what you read here will help you serve learners even more effectively in the future.

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The concept of creating learning communities in schools, however, is far from a new “canned” inservice program, series of books, or consultant interventions. Creating the image of a school functioning as a true community is a much more effective proposal if for no other reason, there is simply not a single model to be bought or implemented. Creating a sense of community requires little more than a fundamental belief that everyone in a school has something to contribute to the quality of life in a school. In that regard, the assistant principals in the scenario should feel confident that they are working with an experienced principal who sees the opportunities, not the obstacles, for working toward community as a school goal.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the concept of what community means was discussed. It began with a consideration of the definition of this term, and also a review of why making modern schools feel more like real communities has evolved over the years. In short, schools have often become so large and impersonal that ways of reducing the sense of isolation among students have become critical goals of those who would work toward reform of modern educational practices.

Work by Peter Senge was noted as influential in promoting much of the recent dialogue in schools regarding the importance of systemic thinking as a first step in promoting greater sense of shared purpose and vision that is needed to support any effort to change practice. Schools must strive for greater clarity with regard to focusing their efforts on the needs of students. This clarity must begin with a commitment of all adults who work in schools to join with colleagues to create a collaborative environment where students actually do come first.

The chapter concludes with a review of the steps that need to be followed in creating the conditions that need to be considered by school leaders who wish to create learning communities in their schools. These steps were recommended by Richard DuFour, a strong proponent of schools dedicating themselves to the concept of community. While these steps are designed to serve as a kind of recipe for the creation of community, it is important to note that there is an essential quality of each item with the most critical one being the first on DuFour’s list. Simply stated, schools wishing to re-form themselves according to the learning community must begin their efforts through a sincere commitment to the importance of students and their learning as the ultimate and most critical goal for all who work in and around schools.