

Leading Technology-Rich Schools

**Award-Winning
Models for Success**

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Foreword by Dennis Sparks



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Foreword

As a young teacher I believed that principals made little difference in their schools and that good principals basically left teachers alone to do their jobs. Early in my career, however, I had the opportunity as a teacher leader to assume districtwide responsibilities which enabled me to closely observe a wide variety of schools whose leaders displayed varying degrees of effectiveness.

Thirty years later, one school in particular stands out in my mind. When I first knew this school it had a poor reputation for student learning and staff morale. Its long-standing principal was reassigned, and his role was assumed by a more able replacement. Over the next 3 years student achievement steadily improved, as did staff and community attitudes about the school. When that principal took a central office position her successor was, unfortunately, more like her predecessor. The school again spiraled downwards, to the dismay of everyone who had observed its rise. As a result of that experience, I became a close observer of what successful principals did and did not do, a habit that has remained with me to this day.

Barbara B. Levin and Lynne Schrum offer their readers the distinct advantage of compressing into a single volume what it took me decades to learn. They not only present the big ideas of effective school leadership, but bring them alive through case studies that illustrate how those ideas manifest themselves in leaders' day-to-day behaviors. It is because these ideas and practices are relevant to any major change initiative that readers can apply them in a variety of situations.

The case studies presented make it clear leaders that engage the school community in the effective use of technology to improve student learning:

- Possess clarity about the instructional and collaborative uses of technology and engage others in creating a shared understanding of the ideas and practices essential to those uses. Likewise, they are clear about the developmental appropriateness of various types of technology and the ways in which technology supports the school's purposes and the ways in which it does not.

- Appreciate the power of school culture to support or to thwart continuous improvement. They know that culture trumps innovation and so co-create, with the school community, cultures in which meaningful teamwork based on trust is the primary force of professional learning and continuous improvement.
- Understand that the most powerful forms of professional learning occur when teachers solve meaningful problems with their colleagues in professional communities. Such learning is meaningful, profound, and collaborative. These leaders initiate and encourage others to engage in the courageous conversations that are essential.
- Recognize that school leadership is too large a responsibility for any one individual. It must be shared with teachers and others in the school community who contribute their strengths and expertise to ensuring the success of improvement efforts. Together they distribute leadership by providing opportunities for others to assume meaningful leadership positions and by supporting them in the development of skills to ensure their success.

The case studies of secondary schools in this book reveal the essential role leaders must play in engaging the school community in the tasks of planning and implementing new forms of teaching based on technology-enabled instructional designs. The importance of that engagement was illustrated by the cognitive demands placed on educators by the vision held for New Tech High School in Napa, California, that, according to Levin and Schrum, “would prepare students for a technologically rich work environment that would require 21st-century skills including communication and collaboration skills, problem solving and critical thinking, and innovation and creativity. The curriculum for this public, non-charter, small high school was designed to be interdisciplinary, project based, and technology infused.”

The only way in which any school can realize such a vision is when educators’ professional lives closely resemble, for instance, the experiences of students attending New Tech High School: “a technologically rich work environment that would require 21st-century skills including communication and collaboration skills, problem solving and critical thinking, and innovation and creativity.” In such settings, teachers and administrators would be absorbed in addressing the most pressing challenges of teaching and learning using sophisticated cognitive processes aided by technology and other relevant tools.

To stimulate educators’ imaginations about the design of schools in which they believed everyone would flourish, I ask them to describe the attributes

of such a school from the perspective of students, teachers, and administrators. I ask them to further imagine being assigned to one of those three roles and remain in that position.

Such an approach to school design requires that educators consider teaching and learning from a variety of perspectives, not just from the positions they currently occupy. The case studies provided in this book will help readers develop a more profound sense of the attributes of such schools. I encourage you to use the ideas and practices you find here to leverage technology to create schools in which all students and adults thrive.

–Dennis Sparks,
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