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## *Preface*

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# **A Moment Remembered . . .**

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On my first day of school as a new principal, I arrived early only to discover that the bells, which had been turned off all summer, weren't calibrated. And the custodian was absent! I realized that in all my years of preparation for the principalship, nothing had prepared me for this. Fortunately, the secretary knew how to program the bells. Right away I realized I would have to depend on others, as well as myself.

Despite having read dozens of books on leadership, having spent hundreds of hours in the classroom, and having been selected as the most qualified candidate for the position, often principals find themselves unprepared for the twists and turns on the leadership path. While calibrating bells may not seem a significant piece of content for an administrative class, bells ringing intermittently in the schoolhouse and interrupting precious instructional time can become a significant obstacle in realizing a vision of student learning.

This situation also reminds one of the subtle complexities of the principalship in action. A seemingly managerial task,

programming bells, ultimately is intertwined with an instructional leadership responsibility: protecting quality learning time.

Day in and day out the principal faces surprises—some obstacles—and some opportunities. You can never predict each challenge that will occur on the leadership journey. Decisions made on the spot and the strategies employed to solve problems will determine success or failure. Reflective principals come to realize that they do not have all the answers. In the previous scenario, the act of reaching out to tap the talents of others helped foster uninterrupted instructional time for students.

## Why This Fieldbook?

The purpose of *The New Principal's Fieldbook: Strategies for Success* is to provide newcomers to the principalship with research-based practical strategies and sage advice from practitioners designed to help them succeed—right from the start. The fieldbook concept is intended to provide a guide for newcomers by offering a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges that beginning principals experience. The book will help to assure that principals develop capabilities that will enable them to proactively respond to the day-to-day responsibilities of the principalship and to the surprises that can throw leaders off center. Additionally, a critical concern of the authors is that patterns or habits developed in one's initial years of service tend to influence success in the remaining years of one's career (Parkay & Hall, 1992). Thus, it is vital that new and aspiring principals be provided with clear, concise, and practical information, along with effective strategies to help them become visionary leaders, skilled in promoting the success of students and teachers, facilitating a positive and learning-focused collaborative culture, and building strong home-school-community bonds.

In each chapter the reader will find (1) content based on research and practice, (2) short stories and scenarios about successful practice, (3) activities designed to invite the reader to

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## **Vision as the Compass**

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It was her very first faculty meeting as a principal. Christine knew this first meeting with the staff would be a pivotal one. She decided she must share her vision in a way that would invite the staff to follow so that, as a consequence, daily life in the building would be guided by a shared vision that places serving students well at the heart of the school and every classroom. After welcoming staff members, Christine explained:

I have a vision that at this school we will create a culture of care. While this is currently my personal vision, I hope it becomes a vision every one of us will come to embrace. I believe that such a shared vision will become a beacon that guides our efforts to make a positive difference in every student's life at this school.

To understand what a culture of care would entail, I'd like us to begin thinking about a time in our own lives when we felt cared for, and I'd like us to share these experiences. I'll take a risk and begin. As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. She always spoke softly to me, listened carefully, made me laugh, and took time for me. She had raspberry bushes in her yard. Together, we plucked raspberries from the bushes and talked about what we would make with

- What do you do first when you arrive at work?
- How do you greet people?
- How do you interact with students?
- What's on the front door of the building?
- What's on display in the office? In the halls?
- What's first on the daily bulletin?
- How is the faculty meeting agenda prioritized?
- How are day-to-day decisions made?
- What do you notice when you walk the halls or walk around campus?
  - What do you pay attention to when visiting classrooms?
  - What do you expect from others?
  - What do you celebrate?

What leaders value and care about is communicated by their actions. In the end, it's the little things that matter in shaping school culture.

**Use a Large Toolbox.** Culture shaping involves a variety of situations, and no one tool will be appropriate for every context. Sometimes confrontation will be the appropriate tool. At other times, shaping culture will require hiring, firing, or transferring staff. At still other times, the right tool will be focusing energy and resources on positive aspects of, or members within, the culture. Tools can also involve inventing and relating new stories, creating and implementing new traditions and ceremonies, and designing new schedules that maximize common planning time for staff members and quality learning time for students.

**View Trust as Key.** "After a 10-year study of Chicago school reforms, researchers Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider have concluded that schools with a high degree of 'relational trust' are more likely to make the kind of changes that help raise student



## Reflective Field Notes

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Please use this space to jot down notes that are important for your personal leadership journey. You may do this in a structured way, by responding to questions, or in an unstructured way, perhaps by creating a graphic organizer.

- Why might it be important to understand the *hidden history* as a newcomer to an organization?
- What strategies do you believe are most helpful in reading or assessing school culture?
- What are the tools you typically use to shape culture? What new tools do you wish to add to your toolbox?
- Create a T-chart. On one side, list positive aspects of the culture in which you work. On the other side, list potentially toxic features. Select one item from the positive list, and develop a strategy to enhance that aspect of the culture. Select one item from the potentially toxic list, and plan a strategy to minimize its negative impact.
- How will knowledge of culture affect your personal leadership journey?