

Table of Contents

About the Authors	xi
Introduction	1
School Improvement for All	3
Achieve Improvement	4
About This Book	5
Chapter 1: Charting a Course Focused on Learning	5
Chapter 2: Transforming Culture and Structures	5
Chapter 3: Focusing on 21st Century Learners	6
Chapter 4: Establishing a Common Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	6
Chapter 5: Creating and Using Common Assessments	6
Chapter 6: Planning Meaningful and Effective Instruction	6
Chapter 7: Embracing Accountability	6
Follow the Path Ahead	6
1 Charting a Course Focused on Learning	7
Determine Vision Versus Reality	8
Start Now.	9
Form a Team Capable of Leading Change	9
Develop Urgency and a Collective Vision for Change	12
Develop Collective Commitments That Lead to Action	17
Clarify and Communicate Expectations for Collaborative Teams	21
Reflect and Take Action	25
2 Transforming Culture and Structures	27
Determine Vision Versus Reality	28
Start Now.	29
Assess Culture	30
Transform Culture	31
Recognize Symbols and Artifacts	34
Celebrate	36
Examine Rituals	37
Get the Right People on the Bus	38
Reflect and Take Action	38

3	Focusing on 21st Century Learners	41
	Determine Vision Versus Reality	42
	Believe All Students Can Learn	42
	Understand the Skills of the 21st Century	44
	Start Now	46
	Address Student Needs With Classroom Intervention and Remediation	47
	Address Student Needs With a Schoolwide Focus on Student Learning	48
	Empower Students	50
	Reflect and Take Action	52
4	Establishing a Common Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	55
	Determine Vision Versus Reality	56
	Start Now	58
	Identify Priority Standards	58
	Create a Proficiency Map	62
	Unpack Standards Into Learning Progressions and Student Learning Targets	63
	Create Unit Plans	72
	Create Daily Plans	73
	Reflect and Take Action	73
5	Creating and Using Common Assessments	79
	Determine Vision Versus Reality	81
	Start Now	82
	Determine What to Assess Using Standards and Proficiency Scales	82
	Determine How to Assess Using Assessment Design	88
	Determine How to Communicate Results and Respond to Student Learning	102
	Reflect and Take Action	108
6	Planning Meaningful and Effective Instruction	113
	Determine Vision Versus Reality	114
	Start Now	116
	Design Classroom Culture	116
	Plan Units	117
	Use First-Best Instructional Practices	121
	Respond to Student Learning	130
	Reflect and Take Action	132
	Embracing Accountability	137
	Determine Vision Versus Reality	138
	Start Now	139
	Hold Collaborative Teacher Teams Accountable	139
	Model Leadership Accountability	147
	Hold Students Accountable	149
	Reflect and Take Action	150

Epilogue: School Improvement for All—Start Now! 153

 Embrace PLCs and Continuous-Improvement Cycles 154

 Plan to Start Now. 154

 Know That Everything Matters 158

References and Resources 159

Index 165

© Hawker Brownlow Education

Introduction

To aptly describe the state of education, one might paraphrase a familiar quote from the works of Charles Dickens (1859): it is the best of times and the worst of times (Eaker & Keating, 2011; Marzano, 2003). At this moment, the United States is experiencing the highest graduation rate in its history, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016b). The high school graduation rate reached 82 percent in 2013–2014, the highest level since states adopted a uniform way of calculating graduation rates in 2010 (NCES, 2016b). More students than ever before are succeeding in rigorous curriculum, with Advanced Placement (AP) program participation at an all-time high (College Board, 2014). Perhaps even more important, there is evidence that students with low socioeconomic status have greater access to such opportunities. Schools are encouraging more students to participate in AP classes, making access to rigorous courses possible for all students who want to learn. From 2003 to 2013, the number of students who have taken AP courses nearly doubled, and the number of low-income students taking AP classes more than quadrupled from 58,489 to 275,864 (College Board, 2014). According to the College Board (2014), more students earned qualifying scores of 3, 4, or 5 than took exams in 2003.

In addition, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reports increases in student achievement in reading and mathematics from 1990 (Nation's Report Card, 2015). Since 1990, NAEP has administered assessments to fourth- and eighth-grade students. In 2015, students had an average score in mathematics of 240 points at fourth grade and 282 points at eighth grade on scales of 0–500 points. Scores for both grades were higher than those from the earliest mathematics assessments in 1990 by 27 points at fourth grade and 20 points at eighth grade (Nation's Report Card, 2015). Reading achievement levels have risen slowly since 1992 with increases in fourth grade of 6 points from 217 to 223 and at eighth grade an increase of 5 points from 260 to 265 (Nation's Report Card, 2015). In addition, on the first NAEP Technology and Engineering Test, eighth-grade girls scored higher on average than eighth-grade boys (Zubrzycki, 2016), indicating the closing of the achievement gap for females.

The encouraging news continues with the improving results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). This is an assessment administered to approximately four thousand students in sixty-three countries. The results indicate that U.S. students have improved their scores from 1995 to 2015 in fourth grade from 518 to 539 and in eighth grade from 492 to 518 (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA], 2015a). In addition, in 2015, on the fourth-grade science assessment, U.S. students scored an all-time high of 546, and in eighth grade a new high of 230 (IEA, 2015b).

So, with all of this good news, how is it *also* the worst of times? Unfortunately, although the trends on the NAEP show growth for U.S. students from the start of the assessment through 2015, in reality, fourth-grade mathematics reached a high in 2013 of 242 and dropped 2 points in 2015; eighth-grade mathematics scores reached a high in 2013 of 285 and dropped 3 points in 2015. Similarly, eighth-grade reading scores reached a high in 2013 of 268 and dropped 3 points in 2015. Only fourth-grade reading achieved a high in 2015, increasing by 1 point over the results in 2013 (Nation's Report Card, 2015). Additionally, on the TIMSS assessments, fourth-grade mathematics dropped from a high of 541 in 2011 to 539 in 2015, while eighth-grade mathematics and fourth- and eighth-grade science showed growth in the same time period (IEA, 2015a, 2015b). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), given to fifteen-year-olds, shows that U.S. students have declined in both mathematics and reading scores: from 483 in 2003 to 470 in 2015 for mathematics and 504 in 2003 to 497 in 2015 for reading (NCES, 2016c).

Furthermore, although more students are graduating, according to state listings noting priority schools most in need of improvement, too many schools still do not meet needed growth targets or the equivalent of adequate yearly progress (AYP) defined by No Child Left Behind. Additionally, half of U.S. high school dropouts come from about 15 percent of high schools. Unfortunately, there are few examples to date of such low-performing schools producing substantial and sustained achievement gains (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010).

The gap in standardized test scores between affluent and low-income students has grown about 40 percent since the 1960s, and the imbalance between rich and poor students in college completion, the single most important predictor of success in the workforce, has grown 50 percent since the late 1980s (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013). Additionally, while the dropout rates of high school students are decreasing, there is a significantly larger percentage of students who drop out and are from families in the lowest quartile of family income—11.6 percent in 2014 compared to an overall rate of 6.5 percent (NCES, 2015). Education is the most powerful tool for helping students of poverty (Greenstone et al., 2013). Yet the numbers of students from low-income families who enter college after high school is unchanged in comparison to those from high-income families:

The immediate college enrollment rate for high school completers increased from 60 percent in 1990 to 68 percent in 2014. The rate in 2014 for those from high-income families (81 percent) was nearly 29 percentage points higher than the rate for those from low-income families (52 percent). The 2014 gap between those from high- and low-income families did not measurably differ from the corresponding gap in 1990. (NCES, 2016b)

To complicate matters further, the neediest schools experience the most difficulty in attracting and retaining leaders and teachers. A study of Texas administrative data concludes that principal-retention rates are related to both student achievement and student poverty levels, with higher turnover among low-achieving, disadvantaged schools (Fuller & Young, 2009). In addition, these schools lose more than half of their teaching staff every five years (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Hemphill & Nauer, 2009, as cited in Le Floch, Garcia, & Barbour, 2016). The constant change of principals and teachers eliminates the consistent focused efforts necessary to improve schools.

Policymakers and education leaders have sought to improve America's low-performing schools. The U.S. government has made substantial investments in the form of School Improvement Grants (SIG) and Race to the Top (RTT) grants. However, the current systems and reform efforts are not working. Even considering the increase in graduation rates, approximately 20 percent of students who enter high school will drop out. In the 48 percent of U.S. schools that need improvement, the number of high school dropouts is much greater (Kutash et al., 2010). Schools can predict which students are at risk of dropping out by as early as first grade and identify these students with accuracy by third grade (American Psychological Association, 2012; Sparks, 2013).

Unfortunately, there are serious implications for students who do not succeed in school. In the United States, dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed and therefore more likely to live in poverty with an estimated annual salary of \$20,241 (Breslow, 2012). They will earn thirty-three cents for every dollar a college graduate earns. This is the highest discrepancy in the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Also of concern is the fact that dropouts are more prone to ill health and are four times more likely to be uninsured or underinsured. The most astonishing statistic is that the life expectancy for dropouts is an average of ten and a half fewer years for women and thirteen fewer years for men than those with a high school diploma (Tavernise, 2012).

These alarming facts describe the urgency that failing schools face every day. The question is not *should* our schools improve, but *how*? The greatest challenge to school improvement is the overwhelming perception that no matter what teachers and administrators do, there seems to be no way out of failing results. Each year brings more state and federal mandates and sanctions to respond to with little hope of making a real difference for students. Failing schools want and need improvement—now!

So why haven't all the initiatives and reforms produced appreciable results that schools have sustained over time? Because "successful and sustainable improvement can never be done *to or even for* teachers. It can only be achieved *by and with* them" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 45). The missing element in all of these efforts is teachers and administrators. They are the only ones who can and do improve schools. Real school improvement occurs when a school harnesses the power within and focuses its efforts on higher levels of learning for all students. No amount of outside pressure will make schools improve; they only do so when the adults who work directly with the students decide it is their job to ensure all students learn at high levels. Helping students learn requires a collaborative and collective effort. Teachers and administrators must be ready to implement any necessary changes so that students can reach proficiency and beyond. Everyone focuses on evidence of student learning, every day, in every classroom—not just before administering a test.

School Improvement for All

The processes we detail in this book harness the power within a school or district to achieve high levels of learning for all students. It does not require years of workshops and professional development before teachers can do the actual work. It requires learning through action—for a staff to roll up their sleeves and start the work immediately. If a patient comes into the emergency room with difficulty breathing, the nurses and doctors do not take the patient's temperature; they perform immediate triage to save the patient's life. Failing schools need a triage plan—an immediate course of action to put a halt to the continual-failure cycle.

First and most important, Professional Learning Communities at Work™ (PLC at Work) is the foundation for *School Improvement for All*. When a school operates as a PLC, real improvement becomes much more possible. Schools that embrace the three big ideas of a PLC as described by founders Richard DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Rebecca DuFour (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016) understand the following.

1. The school's purpose is to ensure high levels of learning for *all* students. Therefore, there is a laser-sharp focus on student learning. In order to ensure high levels of learning, teachers must work together.
2. Only collaborative efforts will improve learning. No one person has all of the knowledge, skill, stamina, and patience to meet all student needs. Teachers have to hold hands and cross the street together because student needs are too great and the consequences of failure too dire to go it alone.
3. Schools must focus on results. Every teacher comes to school with good intentions, but if those good intentions do not materialize into greater learning for students, it doesn't matter. In the end, the proof is in the tangible results.

The schools and districts featured on AllThingsPLCs (www.allthingsplc.info) are examples of the PLC continuous-improvement cycle in action. Although each of their stories is unique, these schools have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness of PLC implementation that has resulted in higher levels of learning for all students.

How does *School Improvement for All* address the focus of PLCs that want to create the necessary environment for success for all students? The most distinct way is to use school-improvement efforts to target specific needs—determining the triage plan. Within a PLC, teachers must drive their work with a collaborative audit or needs-assessment process that takes a 360-degree view of a school's policies, practices, processes, and procedures in light of their effect on student achievement. The focus on data is relentless. The process is a true problem-solving model that leaves no stone unturned in the quest to ensure that all students learn at high levels. The true measure of success in schools that use *School Improvement for All* as a guide is that more students are learning at proficient or above-proficient levels on typical assessments from the school, district, state or province, or nation. This requires that teachers and administrators exert a focused, cohesive, and consistent effort over time; it demands a commitment from everyone to be *all in for student success*.

Although we recognize that all schools can and should improve, this book specifically supports schools and districts that are currently at risk or in danger of being designated in need of improvement by state or federal guidelines. It is also geared to support schools that have made few or no achievement gains over a number of years—in other words, schools with data that have flatlined. These schools are frustrated by their lack of progress and feel as if they have exhausted all of their options to improve, so triage is in order.

Achieve Improvement

It turns out that superhuman powers are not a requirement for school improvement. School improvement is possible no matter the school's size; students' demographics, poverty levels, and achievement levels; or the amount of resources the staff and students have.

Figure I.1 shows the key features of *School Improvement for All*. At the center are the students, focusing on their unique needs as 21st century learners. These students are growing up in a world that has changed drastically from the one that the majority of educators experienced as students. Students in the 21st century are poised to be active participants in their own learning. Teachers must focus on preparing them for the possibilities of their future, not our past.

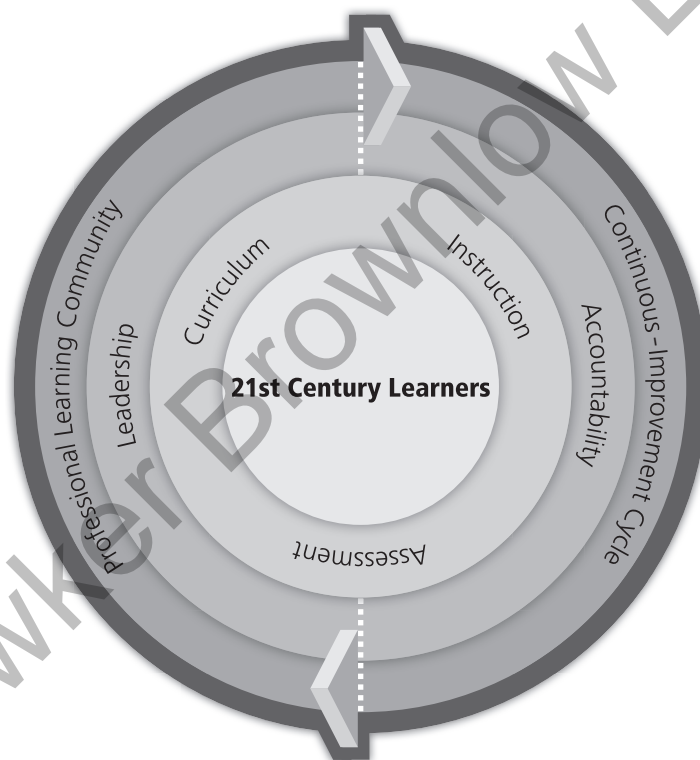


Figure I.1: *School Improvement for All* features.

To prepare students for their future, we must consider the question, What is the work that matters most? Teacher teams must do that work to yield increased learning for students. We know very well how hard teachers work on behalf of their students. They very often give up personal time to prepare lessons and activities. We are not suggesting that teachers need to work harder or longer; teachers already work hard enough. But it is important to engage in the right work—the work that yields better results. This means deeply understanding the standards they expect students to know and do, developing an assessment system that supports learning, aligning instructional practices

to the cognitive complexity of the learning expectations, and providing interventions and extensions based on the data teams collect as part of the ongoing improvement cycle.

The next ring in figure I.1 is leadership and accountability. All members of the school and district staff should share these responsibilities. Everyone serves in a leadership capacity and is accountable for ensuring that all students learn at high levels. Leadership includes creating and nurturing a culture of success. Culture is not the principal's sole responsibility; everyone has a role in defining and shaping the school's culture. Administrators engage their staff in charting the course that leads to student learning. This requires that everyone embrace accountability—not shy away from it. Students need to be accountable for their learning, teachers accountable to their students, and administrators accountable to teachers and students. Leadership for learning is not a solo act; it is shared and widely dispersed.

The outer ring in figure I.1 contains the foundation of school improvement: a continuous improvement cycle based in the big ideas that all students can succeed, staff must work in a collaborative culture, and they must focus on results. These big ideas form the basis for the PLC process (DuFour et al., 2016), and schools that reculture themselves to become PLCs have successfully improved student learning. For example, see Sanger Unified School District under the See the Evidence webpage on AllThingsPLC (www.allthingsplc.info/evidence).

In the PLC continuous-improvement model, SMART goals (goals that are strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound; Conzemius & O'Neill, 2013) and data drive the work of the entire organization. Schools work on sustaining their efforts from the beginning instead of waiting until they realize better results and only then asking how to sustain them. Sustainability begins with developing highly effective and efficient collaborative teams that engage in the right work, and schools can ensure they thrive by establishing the processes and protocols that represent the way the educators work together (DuFour et al., 2016). School improvement should never depend on who will do the work, but rather on how educators work together to achieve success for all students.

About This Book

We designed this book to further describe the elements of the PLC continuous-improvement cycle shown in figure I.1. The chapters answer the how-to questions of implementation by providing templates and protocols that any school or district can use to improve student learning.

Each chapter culminates with an opportunity for schools and teams to reflect on their current reality and determine actions that will increase student learning. A rubric guides the reflection process. Finally, questions to consider when doing the work in each chapter allow for collaborative team discussions to further target improvement efforts.

Chapter 1: Charting a Course Focused on Learning

This chapter outlines the actions necessary to chart a course focused on improved student learning. It demonstrates a model of leadership that is shared and widely dispersed to engage all stakeholders in the school-improvement process. The chapter also includes a collaborative audit, called a *needs assessment*, that helps teachers get at the root causes of stalled improvement and plan how to improve.

Chapter 2: Transforming Culture and Structures

In our experience, creating a culture of success is the number one challenge in underperforming schools. This chapter details specific and targeted ways to move schools from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset and outlines the differences between toxic and healthy cultures. It shows how staff within schools can envision the desired culture and determine a plan to get there.

Chapter 3: Focusing on 21st Century Learners

Students in 21st century classrooms face higher expectations for learning than ever before. To improve, schools and teachers must first answer the question, Who are our learners and what are their needs? To ensure high levels of learning for all students, teachers must focus on what each student needs. This chapter describes how to shift the focus to the individual needs of 21st century learners.

Chapter 4: Establishing a Common Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

All improvement efforts begin by asking, “What is it that students need to know and be able to do?” the first of four critical questions of a PLC (DuFour et al., 2016). The answer to this question cannot be up to each individual teacher. Collaborative teams of teachers work together to determine priority standards, unpack them into learning targets, and develop a common curriculum map that paces student learning. This chapter walks teachers through the rationale and process for developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

Chapter 5: Creating and Using Common Assessments

Common formative and summative assessments are the lynchpin around which student learning revolves. Using timely and specific data on student learning drives instruction on a daily basis and helps students reflect on their learning. This chapter lays out the steps to developing common assessments. These are a crucial part of a system that ensures more learning and aligns with the requirements of the state and national assessments. When done well, this aligned system has predictive value for the high-stakes assessments.

Chapter 6: Planning Meaningful and Effective Instruction

This chapter demonstrates how to plan effective instruction using the proficiency and curriculum maps that we establish in the two previous chapters. It describes the necessary shifts in instruction to meet the demands of increased rigor. We discuss the process of responding to student learning within core instruction (first-best instruction), as a collaborative team and as a school. We also outline the process of analyzing data and student work in a PLC that results in a targeted, effective response to student learning.

Chapter 7: Embracing Accountability

A continual focus on data is the key to school improvement. There is so much to learn from even the most negative data. This chapter takes a broad look at data sources that are extremely helpful in the school-improvement process. It reinforces the need for regular data review cycles in a PLC, which are necessary to monitor progress along the journey. These data reviews promote authentic ways to measure growth and celebrate small successes of both collaborative teams and students. The only way to reverse a cycle of failure is to celebrate small wins.

Follow the Path Ahead

We acknowledge that all schools are in need of improvement, but some more than others. We believe that if all students can learn, all schools can become models that others emulate. Our intent with this book is to further that cause for every school or district on an improvement journey.