

Foreword

Who is your hero? Growing up you might have identified with Captain America, Aquaman, Superwoman, or a host of other famous heroes. As adults, those characters might have evolved into real-life heroes such as a parent, spouse, student, or mentor. Regardless of who you choose, the characteristics of heroes are similar. Heroes demonstrate compassion, have a strong moral compass, and are brave, selfless, and relentless in the pursuit of achieving what they have been called on to accomplish.

Educators today are modern-day heroes. They wake up every morning with their purpose and moral compass guiding them towards best practices and creative strategies to support the success of all students. As an early learning educator, I saw on a daily basis how much students looked up to their teachers—from the drawings they did during play centers of their teachers as their day-to-day heroes to the expression on their faces when their teacher solved yet another math problem, read a story with enthusiasm, or flew down the slide on the playground with ease. As a secondary principal, I have the honor of serving alongside heroes every day at Ellis Middle School. It could be in the form of Assistant Principal Ryan Barnick (@BarnickRyan), who relentlessly engages and empowers students who have felt like adults have been more like the enemy than the ally in their life. Or it could be in the relentless ways that teams of teachers meet weekly to adjust lessons and curriculum to meet and reach all students they serve. The compassion and care is evident in these middle

school superheroes in Austin, Minnesota, even outside of the school when I see these educators at student concerts, sporting events, or even at their students' homes after the funerals of loved ones.

Dr. Ziegler and Dr. Ramage are creating a movement to not only show the importance of hero building in schools but to highlight and share stories of modern-day heroes in our schools and classrooms today. Their work and extensive research is evident in each chapter, and the vision they have for this work is clear, important, and necessary to continue to be the very best for every stakeholder in our school.

Becoming a hero today doesn't require a costume or a superpower. Today's schools are seeking real-life heroes. Our families are looking for selfless leaders ready to advocate for the complex needs, skills, and strengths their children are bringing into school. Our teachers and support staff are looking towards leadership that has a strong purpose, drive, and direction to move the lever towards a positive and productive school climate. And our students, well they deserve an inspirational leader whose vision is large enough that each of them can see a successful version of themselves reflected in it.

By reading this book you are committing to taking the first step to become the hero your school needs you to be. Dr. Ziegler and Dr. Ramage share rationale, strategies, and support to show how to take the qualities of what it means to be a hero and implement them in our schools. Through this journey, you will gain tools, resources, and new powers to guide the path.

The journey starts by finding your moral compass through stories of everyday heroes in our school hallways today. After establishing that foundational core you will learn how to access a deeper call for compassion in leadership and deeper understanding of the why of knowing who we serve on a deeper level. Early on in this book you will have established the why, then Bill and Dave dive right into how to advocate and use these hero building skills to enhance student voice in meaningful ways.

xii You Don't Need Superpowers to Be a Kid's Hero

As your journey continues, leading with courage will infuse skills such as innovation and risk-taking in your daily rituals and routines. And while we may be superheroes in the eyes of who we serve, self-care and grace are required to protect us from what lurks in the dark corners in our schools. Fear, frustration, burnout, and secondary trauma fill our halls, and in Chapter Six you will learn ways to build the resilience necessary to lead this work well into the future.

The final part of the journey will be filled with stories of leaders in the field accomplishing this work and ongoing inspiration we all need to be reminded of in our schools today. You will leave this book feeling accomplished, gaining the courage to move forward with the resilience needed to move past obstacles that are placed in your way.

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Practice and Action