

Preface

A principal interacts with hundreds of individuals on a daily basis, but the work life is ironically often one characterized by isolation, for there is no colleague on site with the same role. Although constantly engaging in social interaction, the principal often recalls feeling isolated when reflecting on the merit of key decisions. Alone, the principal often wonders, “Am I doing the right thing? Is this the best and most ethical way to approach the task?” For example, alone in her office a high school principal wonders about the subtle and not-so-subtle remarks students are making about ethnicity. Having 54 nationalities represented in the school could make it a potential tinderbox or an incredible context for teaching tolerance, valuing diversity, and building understanding. Her leadership actions will have a profound affect in determining which of these situations becomes reality.

Many principals reflect on the nature of their work and describe it as characterized by paradox. For instance, some say that they feel like they are alone and in the spotlight at the same time. Alone, in the privacy of his office, a middle school principal, having heard from teachers about students suffering from respiratory symptoms, contacts the central office about the need to have the air conditioning filters replaced and the roof checked for mold. As the principal gets off the phone, the secretary lets him know that three reporters from local papers are waiting to interview him about environmental health hazards in the school. Now in the spotlight, the principal must quickly prepare to speak with reporters who were alerted to the potential environmental problem by a parent who had been volunteering in the school.

Principals feel alone when asked to lead an effort in an area in which they have no formal training. One district sent out a memo to all principals indicating that their evaluation will be based in part on their ability to lead efforts to improve test scores in their schools. Upon reading this message, an elementary principal reflects, “I value the notion of using student data to drive instructional decisions, but how do I get the training to do this? How do principals get data from various sources, interpret it, and make decisions for instruction? It is a big part of my job, yet I have never really had any help on how to do this.”

Creating a learning environment that capitalizes on diversity to promote lessons on tolerance as well as academics, ensuring school safety, adhering to environmental guidelines that protect the health and general welfare of staff and students, raising student test scores, promoting social and emotional learning . . . never before has the principal’s role as a public figure been so demanding. What’s more, there is pressure to perform in a context where others frequently offer “expert” advice. After all, everyone’s been to school! But, what is the best decision? How can the principal ensure what is in the best interest of students and staff? Because of questions like these, we wrote *The Principal’s Companion*.

■ WHY A THIRD EDITION?

Although some educational issues remain constant, practitioners, researchers, and the daily news remind us that much of the educational landscape has changed since the 2003 second edition of

The Principal's Companion. In response to these changes, the third edition examines the principal's role in relation to various topics, including the following:

- federal legislation that affects practice
- shifts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- data-driven decision making and high-stakes accountability
- teacher leadership
- a prescription for student learning (a new graphic, Figure 9.3, The Student Learning Nexus Model, has been added to assist supervisors and teacher leaders)
- teacher supervision and evaluation that focuses on enhancing the quality of student work, including walk-through supervision approaches
- forms of professional development that build individual and schoolwide capacity to address differentiated student needs in ways that leave their mark on policy and practice
- shaping school cultures to promote professional learning communities
- instructional implications of brain research
- social justice
- storytelling as a powerful culture-shaping leadership tool
- social and emotional learning
- the high school dropout crisis
- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004
- ethical leadership
- technology
- opening a new school
- addressing cyberbullying and social responsibility

Some of these issues have historically been part of the administrator's work life, but many are new or are being spotlighted more emphatically now than in the past. As authors, we continue to feel compelled to explore both research and practice to support principals in their quest to effectively address important issues. However, we are quite cautious about taking on topics simply because they are in vogue. Our focus in *The Principal's Companion* is steered by a continuing commitment to promoting those actions that best serve all students and a belief that relationship building and communication skills represent critical leadership abilities. For example, high test scores on challenging state and national performance measures are certainly important. But equally important is developing within students a reverence for learning and those social and emotional skills that enable them to become contributing citizens in a democratic society. Although these attitudes and skills often are not measured formally, research shows that they are essential to leading a satisfying life and fostering a healthy society.

ENDURING FEATURES OF THE BOOK ■

The Principal's Companion seeks to explore both classical issues of leadership and current issues that are likely to impact student learning for many years to come. The primary purposes of this book remain the same—to provide ideas, approaches, strategies, resources, tools, techniques, and reflective opportunities for practicing and aspiring principals and to facilitate educational improvement when and where it counts, in every classroom and school, each and every day.

There are countless theories and ideas about leadership, but there is no one secret formula for success. Effective leaders invent creative solutions as they face challenges associated with new demands on their role or new situations. As one principal put it, "I try to make thoughtful

decisions. Operating by the seat of one's pants is not the best way 'to do' the principalship. Yet the work demands that one address issues as they emerge. The bottom line is you try to do what is best for students and staff." Although principals cannot succeed without a fundamental understanding of theory, because of the immediacy of workplace demands, they often hunger for tried-and-true practices. Both theory and practice are essential for effective leadership.

Experience tells us that many principals have discovered strategies to tackle problems similar to those faced by their colleagues. However, because of the isolation that characterizes the principalship, there are seldom avenues to tap this tremendous potential treasure. *The Principal's Companion* mines multiple sources to provide practical strategies for principals who often operate alone. School principals need to know that they are part of a learning community of educational companions working together to help colleagues be the best they can be. This combined collegial effort will help principals create the kind of teaching and learning environment that supports teachers' efforts to bring about successful student performance. The interactive nature of the book, with reflective questions at the end of each chapter, is intended to help principals feel as if there is a colleague out there with whom to interact. The reader also will "hear" the voices of many practitioners who are quoted throughout the text. This will give aspiring principals a perspective of what it is like in the field and help them connect with others. Ultimately, these newcomers will learn that all of us make mistakes, meet challenges, and succeed.

Although this book is written primarily for current and aspiring principals, it will also be of interest to staff developers, university professors, school board members, directors of national and international principals' centers and associations, and leadership consultants. To assist programs using *The Principal's Companion* and the *Educational Leadership Policy Standards* (2008), a matrix aligning the book's chapters with the standards can be found on the inside cover.

Recognizing that principals are quite busy and have little time to waste, the chapters in this book have been kept short and to the point. Each one reflects a topic that principals have indicated is important. The ideas, experiences, strategies, and techniques described in each chapter are grounded in research and practice. Each chapter concludes with a set of questions, and there is space between the questions for the reader to write reflections inspired by the chapter or note strategies that he or she wants to try. This is an invitation to write between the lines, to add to one's collective knowledge base, thus enhancing the value of the book for the reader. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own and can be read in one sitting. Because of this feature, some ideas will appear in several chapters but may be addressed with a different perspective.

Success in the principalship depends on many factors. This book addresses these factors in seven parts, with chapters included under umbrella themes:

Part I: The Principal's Many Roles describes the roles of learner, manager, communicator and leader during a crisis, co-creator of the learning organization, and shaper of school culture. This section makes a strong case for recognizing that effective principals play a variety of roles—all of which are necessary for success. Fulfilling the roles that create a climate for growth, making sure schedules work, and setting a personal example of learning from successes and mistakes are some of the issues we address in this section.

Part II: Critical Skills for Effective Leadership examines and makes many suggestions regarding effective human relations strategies characterized by Emotional Intelligence and the vitally important function of time management and working effectively with the central office. We emphasize that these are critical areas because one cannot get the job done without succeeding in cultivating, practicing, and maintaining collegial relationships at the school site and central office and without taking control of one's time.

Part III: Honoring the School's Mission concentrates on the importance and process of mission building as a guiding force in the organization. We examine how to implement change in a way that provides meaning and constant renewal of the school's mission and generates commitment to the change among organizational members.

Part IV: Working Together to Build a Learning Organization links a variety of components that must interact synergistically if a school is to truly be a learning community. These components include building a collaborative environment; addressing critical issues in instruction, curriculum, and assessment that relate to classroom decisions that enhance student work; effectively using faculty meetings as a tool for capacity building; and meeting a variety of professional growth needs focused on building teachers' collective capacity to promote student learning. Additional components include supervision and evaluation of teachers to promote quality teacher decision making based on student learning and strategies to maximize feedback to teachers regarding their performance in meeting professional goals and student needs.

Part V: Starting Effectively and Staying the Course looks at the importance of providing meaning to traditional events such as the first days of school or the opening of a new school. Often principals miss opportunities to see how these events can serve as key tools for shaping the school's culture and providing a foundation for continuous growth. We also include an expanded section on tips to enhance a principal's effectiveness. Here, the reader will find ideas about organizing time, using technology efficiently, and incorporating helpful strategies to stay on task.

Part VI: Understanding Your Constituencies provides strategies to enhance one's interactions with students, parents, and the greater community, including businesses, emergency service personnel, social services, senior citizens, politicians, and the media. This section takes a holistic approach, viewing parents and the greater community as an integral part of the school, and examines social justice and the high school dropout crisis.

Part VII: The Principals' Professional and Personal Worlds looks at the individual principal. The focus here is to examine ways for the principal to grow, personally and professionally, and to remain vibrant, healthy, and continuously engaged in the pursuit of best practice regarding teaching, learning, and ethical school leadership.

The individual chapters serve as a menu of options from which the reader can select to meet pressing needs, assist in planning, or use as a resource. Many readers of the first and second editions commented that *The Principal's Companion* validated their existing practices, foreshadowed situations that needed to be addressed, and raised the bar for professional practice. In lonely moments of reflection, it also served as a companion. Collectively, the chapters offer a concise library of both research-based and tried-and-true practices. As professional colleagues, we welcome you in joining a continuous conversation about the principalship and wish you much success in what we believe is one of the most sacred professions.

PAM ROBBINS
Napa, CA, and Mt. Crawford, VA
HARVEY B. ALVY
Cheney, WA