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# The Change Creation System 1

**C**an you imagine a school where the school board and the superintendent support the principal in deliberately creating an environment that nurtures excellence, trust, risk taking, and creativity? Where faculty and staff develop meaningful relationships, build collaboration and action teams for solving priority learning issues, and share findings across the school toward becoming an authentic learning community? Where members see the big learning improvement picture, create shared values and vision, and empower and inspire each other? Where all personnel are committed to learning, sharing, and relearning to improve learning for all students? Where time and preparation are provided to help everyone understand the essentials of change, share them collectively, and execute them effectively to create learning innovations?

This book is all about providing a process that helps schools create the above environment with effective learning results. In particular, it lays out step-by-step the necessary concepts and the transitional approach for a change creation system for building innovative schools and increasing student learning. If the concepts and processes outlined in the remaining chapters of this book are fully and effectively implemented, the school improvement results can be remarkable.

## **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

High expectations for school improvement are and will continue to be a priority in the minds and thinking of people and organizations across the country. Consider the following illustration of this statement.

A teacher from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century visiting a typical classroom today would find many things quite familiar: teacher lectures; chalk or similar boards; and desks, chairs, and textbooks. However, this same teacher would be surprised at the demands placed on teachers and schools today. For example, a century ago, relatively little was expected of high school students. It was anticipated that high school students could recite from prescribed texts, relate simple scientific facts, and be able to handle basic arithmetic problems. Today, high school students are expected to be able to read and discuss a wide variety of texts and complex materials, understand the nature of

science and scientific inquiry, write meaningfully, use computers and basic technologies, and develop serious mathematical skills.

During the twenty-first century, as information and knowledge continue to grow rapidly and become even-increasingly more complex and as the demands of the workplace increase significantly, the expectations for an effective and more relevant school education will become the societal norm. Simply put, schools of the future will face growing demands to provide an education for their graduates who are well prepared to successfully enter the workforce and to deal with a more sophisticated and technological world.

## SCHOOL REFORMS

If school improvement is going to be the order of the day for the future, what has come about from all of the school reform efforts that schools have had to endure?

Over the last several decades, there have been many and varied reform movements, including the following:

- A Nation at Risk
- National Education Summit (1989, President and Governors)
- Charter Schools
- Goals 2000: Educate America Act
- No Child Left Behind
- Common Core
- Race to the Top

In his presentation, “School Reform: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” at the 2010 Dean’s Symposium at Florida State University, Thomas Good, professor and head of the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Arizona, said, “Reform efforts have uniformly failed. . . . Teachers are responsible for too many things. If you want reforms to be successful you must give teachers time and support to be creative and develop new ways of doing it.” Furthermore, he asked, “Will ‘Race to the Top’ also suffer the same fate?”

In his article in the *Washington Post*, “Five Myths About America’s Schools,” Paul Farhi (2011) provides a sense of overview of school reform:

Today’s school reform movement conflates [merges] the motivations and agenda of politicians seeking reelection, religious figures looking to spread faith, and bureaucrats trying to save a dime. Despite an often earnest desire to help our nation’s children, reformers have spread some fundamental misunderstandings about public education.

Farhi (2011) also talks about charter schools, a central part of the reform movement. Contrary to many public pronouncements, he relates that a 2009 study of charter schools by Stanford University found that

Nearly half of the charter schools nationwide have results that are no different from the local public school options and over a third, 37 percent,

deliver learning results that are significantly worse than their students would have realized had they remained in traditional public schools.

Sometimes school reforms not only don't help but, instead, do harm. In the *Education Week* blog on "The Futures of School Reform," Jal Mehta (2011), assistant professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, shares that

Bureaucratic structures erected in the Progressive Era seek to address the problem [inadequate school performance] but only compound it. Policymakers distrust teachers and schools; teachers and schools distrust policymakers. Efforts to rationalize schools through NCLB [No Child Left Behind] style accountability just double down on the existing structure, and are largely impotent to create the kind of significant improvement we say we seek. *If we keep doing what we're doing, we're not going to get there.*

Joel Klein (2011), former chancellor of New York City's School System, writes in his article, "The Failure of America's Schools," that

Nearly three decades after *A Nation at Risk*, the groundbreaking report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned of "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people," the gains we have made in improving schools are negligible—even though we have doubled our spending (in inflation-adjusted dollars) on K–12 public education. (p. 1)

As we ponder past and future school reforms, the wise words of Linda Darling-Hammond, founding director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and current director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, might be helpful to us. In her article, "Restoring Our Schools" in the *Nation*, she writes,

While we have been busy setting goals and targets for public schools and punishing the schools that fail to meet them, we have not invested in a highly trained, well-supported teaching force for all communities, as other nations have; we have not scaled up successful school designs so that they are sustained and widely available; and we have not pointed our schools at the critical higher-order thinking and performance skills needed for the twenty-first century. (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 2)

Among the key things that our comprehensive system presented in this book, the Change Creation system endeavors to promote are strategies—through relearning, learning and relearning, collaborative relationships, and the creation of new teaching and learning approaches—to help deal with the three concerns that Linda Darling-Hammond addresses in the above quotation.

## THE ROOTS OF THE CHANGE CREATION SYSTEM

The primary approach in this book, the Change Creation system, is about creating new effective learning environments and new successful learning practices; that is, creating innovative schools and meaningful *student learning* change. This system has its roots in the schoolwide change system referred to as Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) that was first introduced in 1998 in the book *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning* by Murphy and Lick. From their related research, and that of many others in the WFSG movement, this book was followed by two further editions in 2001 and 2005, a field-book in 2007, and a book in 2008 on the schoolwide action research process embedded in the WFSG system. Over the years, these books have laid the foundation for the WFSG movement to become one of the few successful whole-school improvement processes available to schools across North America.

An example of a major school system that showed significant success with the WFSG system was the Springfield, Missouri, Public Schools. Anita Kissinger (2007), director of staff development, reported the following:

1. In the early 2000s, the Springfield Public Schools were 1 point above being “provisionally accredited.”
2. During the first year of implementation of the WFSG System, the percentage of schools using the system was 60% and increased to 90% in years 2 and 3.
3. During years 2 and 3, the Springfield Public Schools were “accredited with distinction” and have continued to maintain a high level since then.
4. The Springfield Public Schools continues to use a locally enhanced WFSG system in its schools.

Kissinger (2007) also discussed Springfield Public Schools perspectives on their rationale for continuing to employ “collaborative teams” (e.g., *study groups* in WFSG and *action teams* in this book) from the WFSG system:

- They work!
- They have the greatest chance of changing the culture.
- They provide a vehicle for dealing with change, now and in the future.
- They can be accomplished with a limited budget.
- Professional development became site specific, which creates buy-in.

Research by the authors on school improvement and the WFSG system has continued during recent years. We have attempted to look not only at new approaches to various aspects of school improvement processes, but also how such processes, including the WFSG system, could be improved, for example, what needed to be added, deleted, or changed in some way; what needed to be refined, simplified, or adjusted; and what new concepts could be incorporated to make the system more effective. The result of all these efforts, the Change

Creation system, has as its basis the WFSG system, but goes well beyond it in substance and practice and, we believe, in total effectiveness.

The Change Creation system, relative to the WFSG system, has been simplified and streamlined to make it easier to use and to provide additional new materials and approaches for such things as

- Leadership and leadership development
- Creation of a culture more consistent with the goals of school innovation and student performance improvement
- A transition plan that more clearly and effectively develops an environment for accepting and creating change
- Generation of sponsorship and a broad base of support both from above and below

## **NO SILVER BULLET, ONE BRICK AT A TIME**

School reform efforts over the past twenty years tell us that there will be no silver bullet for significantly improving our schools. If we want to improve our schools substantially, especially teaching and student learning, we'll have to do it ourselves one brick at a time, that is, one improvement after another. If major buildings can be built one brick at a time, then we, as educators, can also do it one improvement at a time, together, over time.

There is a powerful old saying that appears to be very true for education improvement in the future: "If it is to be, it is up to me." For us, as educators, this translates into, "If real, ongoing school improvement is to be, then it is up to us as educators to find ways of doing it." We know that genuine progress requires crucial change. Consequently, through our knowledge, experience, and ingenuity, we must lead the critical efforts *to create* the changes that are needed to make our schools and learning approaches more meaningful and effective.

The whole sum and substance of this book is about doing just that, giving a step-by-step process, called the Change Creation system, so that together, we can create the right school environment and culture, preparation of personnel, support, and road map to help our schools become more innovative and measurably increase student performance. This may sound reasonably easy, but it won't be; it will challenge each of us to the fullest. In particular, as an example, it will require a *culture of discipline*. As Jim Collins (2001) explains in his book *Good to Great*, it will require us developing and implementing in our schools a culture of

- Disciplined people
- Disciplined thought
- Disciplined action (p. 142)

But, haven't we been waiting for years for the freedom and appropriate circumstances to do just that?

Jim Collins (2001) gives additional depth to our understanding of this level of “freedom and circumstances” in “Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve,” *Harvard Business Review*, by sharing that

When you have disciplined people, you don’t need hierarchy. When you have disciplined thought, you don’t need bureaucracy. When you have disciplined action, you don’t need excessive controls. When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get the magical alchemy of great performance. (p. 5)

## STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE

As part of the right framework needed for our successful effort toward accomplishing the goal outlined in the last paragraph above (i.e., our developing and implementing in our schools a culture of disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action), we must also follow the necessary professional standards. There are three especially relevant sets of professional standards relating to professional learning that this book will subscribe to closely. These are the Standards for Professional Learning by Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council), 2011 Edition; Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 by the Council of Chief State School Officers; and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The Standards for Professional Learning, adopted by Learning Forward (2011, p. 21), are the following.

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students

- Occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment (*Learning Communities*)
- Requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning (*Leadership*)
- Requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning (*Resources*)
- Uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning (*Data*)
- Integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes (*Learning Designs*)
- Applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change (*Implementation*)
- Aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards (*Outcomes*)

The Learning Forward standards for professional learning are especially relevant to this book because of their emphasis on learning communities as an

essential condition of professional learning for all educators, which is central to our Change Creation system for schools. Throughout the book, we make connections between our Change Creation system and the Learning Forward standards.

The Educational Leadership Policy Standards (2008, p. 19) reflect the wealth of new information and lessons learned about education leadership over the past decade. These leadership standards and requisite functions specified for principals to attain these standards are particularly relevant to the actions principals take to create and sustain a school culture of “collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations”; “develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff”; and “ensure a system of accountability for every student’s academic and social success” (pp. 14–15).

In addition to the standards for professional learning and the leadership standards for principals, standards for teachers are also important for understanding the context of schooling. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), founded in 1987, has developed standards for accomplished teaching in sixteen different subject areas with students at various developmental levels and offers twenty-five certificates for teachers who wish to become National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). The standards and certificates for NBCTs are based on a set of Five Core Propositions (NBPTS, 2002, pp. 3–4) that describe the NBPTS perspective on accomplished teaching. These NBPTS core propositions emphasize the importance of teachers being reflective practitioners who work collaboratively with others to continually improve their practice and student learning.

Taken together, these standards for high quality professional learning, leadership, and teaching provide a rich framework for our Change Creation system.

## THE CHANGE CREATION SYSTEM

The Change Creation system is a schoolwide change and creation system. The two critical things that the Change Creation system effectively helps schools generate are

1. The right leadership, vision, culture, and relationships within the schools for innovation and creativity
2. A change process for developing new teaching and learning approaches that measurably improve student performance

### **Right Leadership, Vision, Culture, and Relationships**

The right leadership, vision, culture, and relationships essence of the Change Creation system for school innovation and increased student performance is given in the first paragraph of this chapter. The Change Creation system will model the way and assist schools and their personnel in becoming what is imagined there—and even more. It will help the school and its people develop an overarching culture (i.e., how we do things in this school and what is appropriate and inappropriate—the assumptions we make, our values and

beliefs, and our behaviors) and climate (i.e., how we feel about things), and relationships. In particular, this includes, among other things, the following characteristics:

- Being humble and having respect for one another
- Nurturing an environment of excellence, trust, risk taking, creativity, and fair and balanced reward and incentive systems
- Having an intense will to be part of a change creation process to build innovative schools and increase student performance
- Seeing the big picture for the school and its improvement, with broad and motivated support from within and from above
- Having the right values for the school and the people connected to those values
- Developing transparency across the school
- Collaborating effectively and working together in teams and across teams
- Sharing general leadership and with everyone being a leader in their area of focus
- Accepting of relearning, learning and relearning, sharing, creating, testing, reflecting, and repeating (as necessary) together

### **New Teaching and Learning Approaches**

The second key to the Change Creation system, in addition to appropriately changing the culture, is the creation of new, more effective teaching and learning approaches. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, virtually all of the traditional school improvement reforms of the past have had minimal or no success, with some even doing damage. Consequently, isn't it time to turn school improvement—especially academic school innovation and increased student performance—more directly over to the school leaders and teachers and provide them with the environment, time, and support necessary to create the new learning approaches that will make measurable differences?

Many teaching approaches of earlier times predate much of the scientific knowledge about learning and intellectual development. Current job responsibilities for most teachers and professional school personnel provide little discretionary time for them to think, inquire, and plan, modify, and test new teaching and learning approaches. As a consequence, teachers too often must ignore research literature, including literature on such things as cognitive development, behavior analysis, learning strategies and theory, collaboration, reflection, simulation, metacognition, learner strategies, assessment, and the serious application of technology.

What this says is that “academic improvement” progress will be limited if we continue to use only the current teaching and learning approaches. That is, if we want to increase student learning performances, then we must create new teaching and learning approaches. The Change Creation system, on the other hand, has the potential to modify significantly teaching and learning approaches, giving new opportunities for generating new, more effective teaching and learning approaches for increasing student learning performance.

New approaches to teaching and learning are generated through the Change Creation process.

## Change Creation Process

Schools follow a general cycle of work over the course of a school year—from new beginnings at the start of the school year when new and returning staff and students are welcomed and goals are set for the new year, to teaching and learning over most of the year, and ending with celebration and reflection on accomplishments and preparation for the next school year. Within this general cycle, a Change Creation system school follows a Change Creation process that is an annual five-step cycle guiding the school's action teams (i.e., designated groups of school personnel who work together to help accomplish the school's set goals) in improving teaching and increasing student learning. The five-step process is as follows:

### *The Faculty and Leaders*

Step 1: Identify student learning needs and form action teams.

### *Each Action Team*

Step 2: Create team action plans.

Step 3: Implement inquiry cycles to change practice and improve student learning.

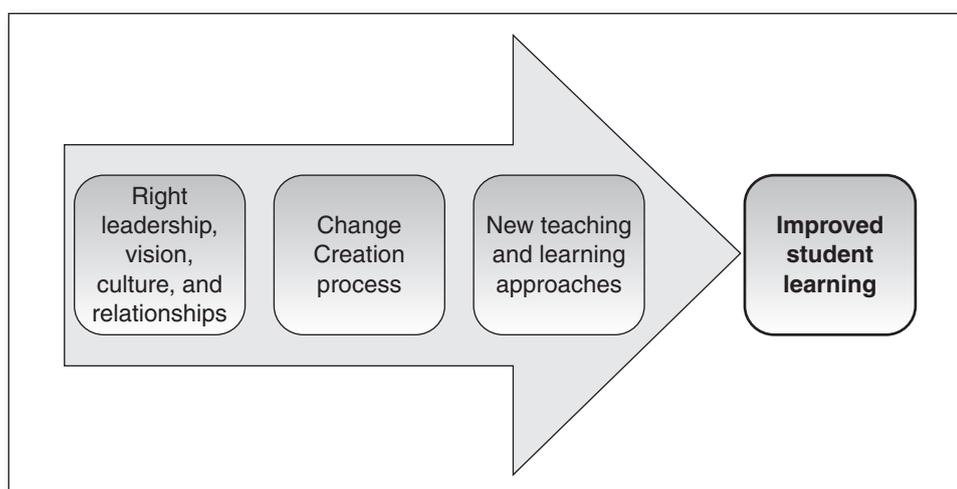
### *Each Action Team and the Faculty*

Step 4: Assess the impact of action teams' work on teacher practice and student learning.

Step 5: Share results and best practices across the school and apply lessons learned.

Figure 1.1 shows how these key elements relate. Having the right leadership, vision, culture, and relationships and a strong Change Creation process enables a school to create and sustain new approaches to teaching and learning.

**Figure 1.1** The Change Creation System



The Change Creation system, as unfolded in the remaining chapters of this book, provides the opportunity and mechanism for schools, school leaders, and teachers to regain their professional role as leaders of innovative schools and increased student learning.

## SUMMARY

Most of the major, general initiatives (e.g., A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind) have been disappointingly ineffective. As we compared these various general school improvement initiatives, we found that they were inconsistent and often at odds with the various professional standards for school leaders and teachers and for professional learning. As a consequence, there is no “simple silver bullet” for improving our schools effectively.

Instead, for genuine effectiveness in school improvement, it will take leaders and teachers intimately and creatively involved in a broad-based, creative change system that is aligned closely with the professional standards for leaders, teachers, and professional learning. One such system that has proven over the years to be successful in schools across the country when fully applied is the WFSG system introduced in 1998 and updated in 2001, 2005, and 2008. The Change Creation system with the three components shown in Figure 1.1, the right leadership, vision, culture, and relationships, a strong change creation process, and new approaches to teaching and learning, has its roots in the WFSG system but goes well beyond it in substance and practice and, we believe, in total effectiveness.

In the next three chapters of the book, Part I, we focus on creating the right leadership, vision, culture, and relationships. We discuss a number of *critical fundamentals of effectiveness* that are *required* for schools successfully becoming professional learning communities and improving teaching and increasing student learning, including fundamentals relating to school improvement (e.g., school culture, discipline, and leadership); successful change; and creating teams, learning teams, and professional learning communities.

In Part II, Chapters 5–12, we go into detail to explain how the Change Creation process helps schools become and function as professional learning communities of action teams by (1) becoming powerful learning teams; (2) taking direction from the school vision and improvement plan and, like experimental laboratories, generating content, materials, and instructional practices that improve teaching practices and increase student learning; and (3) sharing across the school and learning from each other.

And finally, please note that a set of helpful and valuable resources for implementing the Change Creation system in schools is provided online. A list of these resources is provided after the table of contents. You will find these resources by going to [www.corwin.com/schoolscanchange](http://www.corwin.com/schoolscanchange).