

# Preface

**F**or much of the last quarter century, educators, policy-makers, and the general citizenry have been engaged in an unbroken quest to understand the school improvement equation. That is, there have been ongoing efforts, sometimes systematic and often ad hoc, to identify the factors that explain school performance and student achievement and to deepen our understanding of how they work, both as individual components and as parts of the system of schooling.

Research over these years has consistently underscored leadership as a critical theme in the school improvement narrative. Indeed, evidence from nearly every realm of investigation—beginning with effective school studies through the most recent work on comprehensive school reform—confirms leadership as an explanatory variable in schools where all students meet ambitious achievement targets.

Over that time, our understanding of leadership has deepened and become more complex. We have learned about the centrality of instructionally focused leadership and the importance of transformationally anchored leadership work. We have also learned that leadership is as much a property of the school and its culture as it is a dimension of administrative roles. The central place of teacher leadership in the school improvement play has been identified.

This book is designed to help the reader fully comprehend teacher leadership as a pathway to school improvement. We unpack teacher leadership into its core components and trace its evolution into a more mature reform concept. We reveal how teacher leadership fits into the larger array of school reform initiatives. We examine the ideological and empirical seedbed in which teacher leadership has been germinated. We investigate the larger forces underway in education that buttress efforts to

promote teacher leadership in schools. And we review the engine or theory in action that powers the growing teacher leadership movement.

We are not salespersons for teacher leadership. Rather, we examine the teacher leadership phenomenon and explore how it can function as one, albeit an important, piece of equipment in the school improvement toolbox. By necessity, at times we assume a critical stance, exposing flaws in the formulation of the initiative and pointing out how, regardless of the health of the reform model itself, the environment sometimes provides only limited support for that potential to thrive.

In Chapter 1, we describe how emerging perspectives on teacher leadership represent a break with prevailing views of leadership built up around formal administrative roles. We recount how teacher leadership is both a catalyst for and an outcome of a shift away from a near-exclusive focus on hierarchical organizational systems and institutional views of schooling. We also parse the concept of teacher leadership into its prime elements and provide a definition. We trace the history of teacher leadership over time.

In Chapter 2, we expose the three major pillars buttressing the teacher leadership movement. We provide an analysis of the struggle to rebuild the organizational foundations of schooling, examining the dysfunctionalities of traditional hierarchical structures and investigating postindustrial organizational forms that privilege collective conceptions of leadership. We highlight the changing nature of leadership in these adaptive organizations, capturing the general storyline as well as the implications for those in formal leadership positions. We reveal how teacher leadership is nourished by reform initiatives that honor professionalism and by the ongoing struggle to promote high quality education for all youngsters.

As with all reform movements, teacher leadership is propelled by a specific power train, one that shares multiple properties with engines driving other professionally focused reform models, such as school-based decision making. In Chapter 3, we peel back the covering on that driveshaft to reveal its inner workings. We review how teacher leadership is expected to promote professionalization and to enhance the health of school organizations. We report how changes in these areas are believed to link with classroom and school improvements. We also present some caveats to hold onto

while examining the hypothesized chain of benefits or theory of action fueling the teacher leadership movement.

In Chapter 4, we provide a brief portrait of teacher leaders. We offer a few words of caution about any attempt to craft a generic chronicle of this complex phenomenon. We provide a review of the limited research on factors motivating educators to assume the mantle of teacher leader and an overview of the central role of expertise in the teacher leadership narrative. We present some of the bedrock principles of teacher leadership. We provide an overview of the personal qualities that researchers often find associated with teacher leaders, as well as the essential skills often displayed by these educators. We also examine the nature of the tasks performed by teacher leaders.

In Chapter 5, we examine the variety of pathways to teacher leadership. We group these into two broad clusters: role-based pathways and community-based approaches. We organize the narrative around a set of variables (e.g., the embedded view of leadership) that allows us to illustrate and define each of the pathways.

In Chapter 6, we examine a collection of organizational conditions and a host of professional and cultural norms that can retard or promote the creation of a culture of shared leadership and constrain or enhance the activities of teacher leaders. We organize that analysis around the three broad topics of structure, support, and culture.

In Chapter 7, we explore the special role played by the building principal in locating, planting, and nurturing the seeds of teacher leadership. We discuss how the development of teacher leadership in general, and teacher leaders specifically, depends heavily on the quality of principal-teacher relationships. We emphasize the importance of principals arriving at new nonhierarchical understandings of leadership, including the willingness to share power widely among their teacher colleagues. We describe how recast organizational structures can be employed in the service of teacher leadership. We outline six key functions in which principals engage to promote teacher leadership: crafting a vision and delineating expectations for teacher leadership in the school, identifying and selecting teacher leaders and linking them to leadership opportunities, legitimizing the work of teacher leaders, providing direct support, developing the leadership skill set of teacher leaders, and managing the teacher leadership process at the school level.

## x CONNECTING TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In Chapter 8, we target professional development as a key ingredient that needs to be energized to bring teacher leadership to life in schools. We provide an analysis of the state of teacher readiness to assume the mantle of teacher leadership. We explore the elements of successful models for educating teacher leaders. We also unpack the skills and knowledge that anchor productive professional development experiences for teacher leaders.

In the final chapter, we introduce key issues that must be kept in mind as we move forward in our quest to link teacher leadership and school improvement. We raise some concerns and provide some challenges that, if met, could significantly enhance the viability of teacher leadership. Finally, we tease out some dilemmas associated with the motives that inform and the structures that buttress the teacher leadership movement, point out some thin spots in the teacher leadership tapestry, introduce a few caveats, and outline ways research on teacher leadership can be strengthened.

The book is designed to be of interest and use to a wide array of educators and other decision makers. It is intended to help teachers and principals bring teacher leadership to life in the service of school improvement. It is designed to facilitate the activities of educators at the district as they work on the school improvement agenda at the system level. It is also our hope that the teachers of future teachers and principals and those involved with professional development for sitting school educators will find the material herein to be helpful as we prepare colleagues for new forms of leadership. The book should be of assistance to school improvement researchers as they continue to deepen our understanding of ways to create more effective schools. In a similar vein, the book should be of interest to those colleagues who labor in the school reform vineyards, both those in the education and policy worlds.