Preface

After years of working with schools, we are even more deeply convinced of the potential for the professional learning community model to bring about significant change in the way in which teachers practice their craft and in improved educational outcomes for our students. Like its first edition, this book is about strategies for providing learning opportunities for teachers that lead to the building of community in schools and improved learning outcomes for both teachers and students.

The challenges faced by teachers today are formidable. The national education mandate set forth in the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, the impact of the high-stakes testing movement, and the debate over what constitutes best practice have had an impact on what gets taught, how it gets taught, and what students have an opportunity to learn.

The literature on school reform offers a light in the tunnel created by these mandates. The shift in focus from the paradigm of schools as organizations to schools as learning communities essentially represents a new way in which to view schools and the relationships among staff members in schools. The importance of a strong, healthy school culture as an essential element of effective schools has been given increased attention by leading educational writers. Additionally, a body of research is gradually emerging that supports the efficacy of the model and its constructs as a new way of looking at how our schools can best serve our children.

One purpose of this book is to prepare those in leadership positions to serve as the leaders of learners in learning community schools. In selecting the content for this book, we set out to arm these leaders with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to work effectively with teachers, parents, administrators, students, and their school community members at large. We believe that the learning community paradigm is central to the development of an improved pedagogy and that improved teaching, learning, and educational outcomes for students can be achieved when teachers come together to collaboratively search for and resolve the problems of practice in their schools. The position that we put forward is grounded in our deep belief that educational leadership is an ethical calling, grounded in the principles of collegiality, collaboration, and genuine caring about the impact that we have on students. With these beliefs as

a scaffold, the central ideas that informed the development of this text, which have been borne out in the literature, are as follows:

1. The leadership of schools can come from any member of the school community.

2. Ongoing support and collaborative learning opportunities for teachers can result in improved learning opportunities for students.

3. To improve practice, teachers must have meaningful opportunities to talk to other teachers about their teaching, their learning, and what they have learned about learning and teaching.

We have selected activities and strategies for this text from the extensive research base, from literature, and from discussions with practitioners, teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors. But even more important, we refined these activities in extensive staff development programs that we have conducted and observed while assisting many schools and leaders of schools in their improvement.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION?

In writing the second edition, we selected new content designed to assist schools in enhancing and sustaining their professional learning communities. The most notable new feature is the addition of a section at the end of each chapter aptly titled "Making It Work." The Making It Work resources are designed with our conviction that teachers must have opportunities to continually reexamine their educational beliefs and the assumptions that guide their behavior. The Making It Work activities have a day-to-day practical application for the promotion of a culture of collaboration in the school community; provide structured approaches for improving professional development; promote a deeper understanding of the use of data for school improvement; and lead teachers to a deeper understanding of the importance of school culture. The Making It Work feature clearly demonstrates that although the strategies used in learning-community schools are described independently of one another, in practice they are interdependent and work together to achieve learning community outcomes.

Other new and important material in this edition include a presentation of the School Improvement Framework for Learning Community Schools and a discussion of new strategies for classroom observation, including the lesson study and observing the differentiated classroom. To keep our readers up to date on topics that are relevant for learning community educators, new or additional information has also been added on e-portfolios, coaching, the importance of emotional intelligence, and the impact of NCLB.

Each chapter can be read independently, but we strongly suggest that a reading of the first three chapters before reading other chapters will provide the foundation for a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the strategies provided throughout the book. The activities provided throughout and at the end of almost every chapter are appropriate for use by study groups or school leadership teams as they seek to build their learning communities.

The vignettes about the Merlo schools, which are to be found throughout the book, are fictitious, but they represent a compilation of the experiences of the authors over many years of working with school districts. The names of the people working in the Merlo schools are also fictional. Other schools and people mentioned by name are real.

The Web sites selected for inclusion in the text, which give examples of the nature of the resources available on the Web, were current at the time of publication. Given the ever-increasing volume of relevant resources, readers are encouraged to supplement these sites by conducting their own searches of the World Wide Web.