PART I

From Challenges to Possibilities

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The Myth of the Great Principal

Lee stared at the door as Fran, the superintendent of the small urban district, left the principal's office in Horizon Elementary School. Lee was not sure whether to feel excited or sad—or just plain scared.

"Phew, he wants me to take over Marshall Middle. This will be my third principalship—first Vibrant Springs, then Horizon for five years, now another. Fran said that because the other two schools are doing so well, he knows I can turn around Marshall. I'm not so sure. Let's face it, both Springs and Horizon have all the components of a dynamic school: teachers who press for instructional improvement, lots of programmatic options for teachers to use with students, a rich and varied and connected curriculum, people willing to act as instructional leaders, parents and a community willing to engage with us in positive and supportive ways. And resources. OK, not a lot of money, but ample materials, lots of energy and willingness to put in time to get things done. The union reps at both schools never took the hard line, like when I wanted the inquiry teams to meet before school."

But Marshall was not Horizon. The superintendent's words rang in Lee's ears "You did a great job at Horizon—you moved the teachers, but more important you moved the students forward. You really knew those kids. You brought the community into the school in meaningful ways that worked—not just parents with their personal agendas and not contrived rhetoric. Bridged that gap between school and the world outside. Now I need you to work your magic at Marshall Middle. I'm behind you all the way." Lee translated his words as "I have a tough assignment for you. You can do it. Good Luck!"

Now Lee was both exhilarated and uncertain. "Can I do it? What is my magic? Grades 6 through 8 are so different. And what do I know about Marshall?" The previous principal, Stan, had been the face of this school for 15 years. Lee had never heard anybody question the operations and teaching practices of Marshall. On the surface, everything seemed straightforward and simple: This middle school's achievement scores were OK, and the school community was silent. Only recently when the state forced the district to look at student achievement data by subgroups did Marshall's image become more complex. The data revealed that several subgroups were below the mastery standard set by the state. Specifically, the African American students were below standard in seventh-grade math and eighth-grade reading, the English language learner (ELL) and many Latino/Latina students were below in seventh-grade reading, and the special education students were well below in all areas.

Reaction to a newspaper article that publicized the scores was swift and extensive. Parents suddenly wanted to know why their children were deficient and what was going to be done. Some, those of traditionally successful kids, considered sending their kids to private schools. The local NAACP chapter wanted a specific action plan detailing how the school would address the inequities across racial groups. At the same time, a school board member campaigned to add a gifted and talented program to the school. Another board member called for a back-to-basics approach. Meanwhile, Marshall's health and art teachers wrote a letter to the editor voicing their concerns that a narrow focus on basics would rob students of a well-rounded educational experience. Teachers complained that class size made it impossible to meet all kids' needs. The assistant superintendent for curriculum issued a memo reminding teachers to adhere to the district curriculum and Pacing Guides. The superintendent charged Stan to develop a school improvement plan that would show results. Stan retired.

Another image of Marshall surfaced from the back of Lee's mind. The district administrative council's meetings rotated around the schools, so Marshall's turn to host the meeting had come during the past year. Lee had been shocked at the climate in the halls—teachers made no eye contact with anyone else, no hellos, no casual conversations; students shuffled listlessly in bunches, no high fives, indolent near-whispered talking. No student work visible. No energy. No connections. No curiosity. Something was wrong. Marshall seemed to be imploding under all the pressures.

Precarious times at Marshall, thought Lee. All the forces are striking at once. But wait. Horizon was not immune to these pressures. How did I deal with everything there? I could have chosen to take command and issue directives. But instead, I remember taking the time to understand what was behind each force and what the various groups wanted. I could not just react to each demand in isolation. Then came the real work—bringing people on board to recognize that we all really want the same thing—to create a place where each kid can learn and grow. Then we acted, working together toward solutions.

Can I do this at Marshall? Yes. I can draw on my Horizon experience and on what I've been learning about successful schools and the principals who run them. One certainty—as principal, I can make a difference.

The position Lee accepted is typical, challenging, and critical. Lee's job is *typical* because schools are caught in a new era of educational demands. Lee's job is *challenging* because it remains relatively unknown what exactly a principal does to improve student achievement. Lee's job is *critical* because a principal has the most influence on what happens in a school. Therefore, Lee matters. Lee will make a difference at Marshall Middle School, one way or the other.

In this chapter, we identify forces that currently impact schools. Then, we critique the myth of the great principal, choosing not to perpetuate this myth that shapes current practices and policies related to school leadership. Instead, we recognize that the principal does not act alone but operates within a complex interactive environment. Still, the principal matters. So next we offer cases of successful school reform efforts and summarize what is known about how successful principals lead.

FORCES IMPACTING SCHOOLS

The enterprise of schooling would be simple if students were all that teachers and principals had to deal with. But schooling is not that simple. Multiple, complex, compelling—and often competing—internal and external forces demand attention. However, a successful school does not allow these forces to define it. Rather, a successful school harnesses these forces to support the work and outputs that are the core of schooling: *student emotional and cognitive learning.*

The context of setting, population, and the current political and social demands have created ebbs and flows in the enterprise of schooling. Therefore, there is no single prototype of a successful school—they can take many forms. Nevertheless, there are a number of defining features that span content and context boundaries. Rallis and Goldring (2000) identified what they called "dynamic schools" that all exhibited the following characteristics: (1) teachers who press for improvement, (2) programmatic and curricular options, (3) instructional leadership focused on teaching and learning, (4) engaged parents and communities, and (5) the utilization of readily available resources. Horizon was successful because it was a dynamic school; it leveraged the forces to serve children's learning. Lee now needs to learn which forces are in play at Marshall and how Marshall is responding to these forces. Then, Lee can harness the forces to reinvent Marshall as a dynamic school. In this section we describe forces common across today's educational landscape in which all principals work.

Currently schools have to act and react to the following forces:

- Accountability
- Student diversity
- Globalization
- Competition
- Community-district-school relationships

Accountability

Today's educational accountability is, put simply, assessment accountability. Federal accountability via No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has placed heavy weight on outcome assessments. For example, adequate yearly progress (AYP) mandates improvement on standardized state outcome measures. The main source of state outcomes is state-based, NCLB-sanctioned, assessments. Today's accountability is now synonymous with outcome testing of students and the sanctions that accompany the results (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003). Historically, educational sanctions have been directed at the district level. This era of assessment accountability targets the building level—specifically, students, teachers, and principals. Students are targeted in states with high-stakes testing because the assessments are used as a requirement for graduation. The impact on teachers is the public dissemination of classroom assessment results. Principals are sanctioned by threats—placement in a different building or, at worst, losing their jobs.

Often lost in the mire of the sanctions is the possibility for using assessment data to improve instruction for all. Federal and state mandates require schools to report subgroup progress on assessments rather than aggregate scores. Some laud this policy as a new educational rights movement (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2004). That is, it spotlights subgroup achievement gaps that have been previously ignored. The availability of this disaggregated data can encourage educators to make more informed decisions about instructing specific groups of students. The focus on student achievement data moves away from deficit thinking—as Rothstein (2004) stated, "Demography is not destiny" (p. 61). Looking at data can serve to debunk superstitious beliefs about achievement (e.g., family circumstances) (Massell & Goertz, 2002) and can help educators focus on root causes of assessment inequalities rather than on symptoms (Valencia, Valencia, Sloan, & Foley, 2004).

Others see standardized outcome testing as simply an underfunded, superficial policy that has limited impact on student achievement; some even suggest more dangerous impacts as a result of the emphasis on assessment. The expected "huge infusion of new federal funds that would add resources to the schools required to produce large improvements" (Orfield, 2004b, p. 4) was never realized. In the end, schools were told to improve with no additional resources or support but were still held accountable for improving student achievement. This created an overemphasis on testing without acknowledging the connection among curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Today, the assessment "tail has definitely been wagging the curriculum/instruction canine" (Popham, 2004, p. 420). Research has exposed unintentional consequences of assessment accountability:

- Teaching to the test (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Carnoy, Loeb, & Smith, 2003; Earl & Katz, 2002; Earl & Torrance, 2000; Haney, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2004; Kornhaber, 2004; Massell, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Popham, 2001)
- Overdepartmentalization as a result of the curricular isolation (Siskin, 2003)
- Steady decline and marginalization of the nontested (e.g. vocational and humanities) courses in schools today (Siskin, 2003)
- Decrease in student efficacy (Black, 2005; Merchant, 2004)

For good or bad, assessment accountability raises the stakes for student performance and has moved the unit of analysis from the community and district level to the school and classroom level (Fuhrman, 1999).

For accountability to improve educational outcomes, certain conditions must exist:

1. An equal focus on instruction and outcomes
2. Authentic use of multiple data sources (including formative assessments and perceptional data) as well as state assessment data
3. Incentives that support instructional innovation balanced with best practices
4. Balance between school-based professional autonomy and reasonable organizational constraints, such as alignment with state-level student learning benchmarks

Student Diversity

Another force with which the principal contends daily inside the school is the diversity of the student body and the variant and pressing needs students bring with them. This diversity carries opportunities as well as challenges. The changing demographics of our nation are evident in our schools' student bodies, which reflect an array of colors, languages, and national heritages. This multicultural cornucopia can provide a rich resource to a school if the principal and teachers can recognize and tap into the riches. Doing so, however, can be a challenge. The school will serve as a primary opportunity for socialization, but as student diversity increases, the task becomes more difficult and the outcome more unpredictable. To provide a just and authentic learning environment, school leaders must be aware of the myriad diversity factors against a background of normative elements within their schools. While traditional conceptions of diversity have focused primarily on race, more nuanced understandings of diversity also take into account economic status, language, able-bodiedness, sexuality, gender identity, and religion.

Race remains the most outward symbol of diversity in American schools. Currently 59% of students in K–12 schools are White, 17% are Black, and 18% are Hispanic (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2006). By the year 2020, less than half of students in public schools are projected to be White. While this diversity offers both great opportunities and challenges, it is also misleading. For a White student, the average school is composed of almost 80% White students. For a Black or Hispanic student, the school has approximately 60% similar race students (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Dropout rates continue to decline across ethnic groups (more than 10 percentage points from Blacks and Hispanics); nonetheless a substantial gap between groups exists (NCES, 2008; Orfield, 2004a). As such, principals must still address issues commonly associated with 1960s era desegregation; overt and subtle racism, peer integration, systemic oppression, and inequitable expectations.

Beyond racial diversity, socioeconomic diversity is widely acknowledged as a major factor in schools. Today, over 40% of all fourth graders are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (NCES, 2006). Increasingly researchers and practitioners are identifying social class as a larger predictor of cultural and performance indicators than race (see Rothstein, 2004). Thus, school leaders must deal not only with racial inequities and tensions but also with issues of socioeconomic class.

The racial and economic mix is augmented by the influx of immigrants: students from Southeast Asia, the Caribbean Islands, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Currently U.S. public schools house more than 15 ethnic groups with populations greater than 100,000 students. More than 20% of students in public schools speak a language other than English at home, up from 9% in 1979 (NCES, 2008). As a result, rates of students needing English as a second language (ESL) instruction or limited English proficiency (LEP) classes continues to rise. On top of language needs, increasingly large numbers of children come from war-torn countries where they experienced physical and psychological trauma. In all cases, the principal is challenged to bring these children into a safe, nurturing school community where they will be in mainstream classes and assessed on state measures.

Also at play in the lived diversity of schools are issues of able-bodiedness, sexuality, gender identity, and religion. Over 6.5 million students, or 16% of all students, have specific disabilities (NCES, 2006). These students are characterized by differences in learning, emotion, and physicality. Some require extensive medical attention, others require subtle adjustments to lesson planning, and still others receive no services. While legislation has focused considerable amounts of energy on creating equitable spaces for children with disabilities, the same cannot be said for those with differing sexualities and gender identification. These diversity factors also require attention in schools. In 2007, Human Rights Watch, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) that investigates and reports on war crimes and governmental oppression, cited the U.S. public school system for the prevalence of violence and harassment against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students and the lack of action from school administrators. The brief cites student, teacher, and administrator violence and harassment.

Students in today's schools worship the pantheon of world religions. While religious diversity and tolerance is guaranteed by the First Amendment, schools have become a testing ground for this right. Beyond court decisions, judgments can be made by community norms, in the hallways and playgrounds, and in instructional choices. With increased media attention to systemic cases of religious intolerance and continuing questions about the role of prayer, evolution, and religious preference in schools, leaders must be aware of the nuances in their school's religious environment.

While current trends in judicial and legislative decision making may aim to simplify conceptions of diversity, diversity is not a simple issue for principals. Principals must not only meet the myriad of needs that this diverse mix of students brings but must also actively work to ensure that past injustices are not replicated. Whatever their needs, these children are in our schools, and to some extent, society looks to the school to meet their needs. Today's conceptions of diversity move beyond tolerance and accommodation to inclusion, acknowledgment, and celebration. The opportunity is to capitalize on each group's contribution to the environment; the challenge is to address the inequities and to reduce the tensions. This requires a special type of leadership. In sum, the awareness of the needs, rights, and contributions of the various groups introduces a vast set of demands and expectations on curricular, as well as extracurricular, offerings and on those who lead the school. Today's principals can view student diversity as a resource for teaching and learning.

Globalization

Thomas Friedman used the "flat world" term to signal how technological advances have created a different kind of world economy and communication system (see Friedman, 2007). While Copernicus fought to prove that our world was *not* flat, Friedman uses the metaphor to demonstrate how the economic and communicative changes in our world are having (or should have) an impact on the traditions of schooling from kindergarten to postsecondary. Specifically, this globalized world has created a new demand for a new economy. Historically, societies have targeted schools to develop the kinds of workers needed to sustain and expand an economy. Countries around the world (Friedman uses India and China as primary examples) have developed national strength through a burgeoning economy. Today, technical skills and English are being taught to workers in these countries. The result has been a steady transition of jobs outside the United States. While such outsourcing has increased consumer buying power in the United States, critics cite the decreasing rate of employment. This outsourcing also raises demand for higher skill-level jobs. As a result, the call to better prepare U.S. students, especially in math and science, has become a *real* pressure in K–12 schooling.

As a consequence, there is a palpable shift in the purpose of education. Labaree (1999) described the purpose of education as (1) democratic equity, (2) social efficiency, and (3) social mobility. Today, schools have the added burden of preparing for survival in a global market. Educational policy and schools have responded with a clearer focus on academic rigor in math and science. Schools have begun to "double-block" core subject courses to the detriment of the arts, physical education, and the humanities (see Siskin, 2003). While obtaining proficiency in core subject areas is not questioned, the need to take into account creativity, innovation, and artisanship continues to be a hallmark of strong economies (see Florida, 2002; Pink, 2006). Rothstein (2004) cites the consistent desire for employers to have workers with basic communication skills and a strong work ethic over specific cognitive skills. Interestingly, Friedman's (2007) most recent version of the flat world cites how countries like Singapore and China are looking for a more holistic educational experience for their children.

While the road to economic success may be paved with proficiency in the core subject areas, sustainability and growth are rooted in striking a balance between core knowledge and creativity and innovation. Today's schools stand as the fulcrum in this debate. Schools not only have to educate all students; they must educate the whole child, affectively and cognitively. Moreover, schools must educate students with a variety of special needs and a diverse set of supports outside the schoolhouse doors. Success in a global or flat world will not hinge on more narrowed and specified curricula. Rather, schools must stick to their holistic mission to teach all children. This will require curricular and pedagogical diversity aimed at fully developing and preparing today's students for tomorrow's world.

Competition

Recent reform policies have attempted to apply market principles to K–12 schools. These policies are framed as offering parents choices among school options for their children (see Chubb & Moe, 1990). One argument for offering choice is that competition among educational providers (for students and resources) will force public schools to improve. Proponents of choice assert that local governments hold monopolies over public education. The inherent lack of competition has "spawned a culture of mediocrity, unresponsiveness, and indifference to student performance. Requiring schools to compete for students and funding . . . will force them to demonstrate their capacity to deliver a quality product in order to survive in a market where parents, as education consumers, can choose to vote with their feet and leave a school with which they are dissatisfied" (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002, pp. 146–147).

Competition or choice encompasses an array of different arrangements, including public vouchers for private and parochial schools, charter schools, interdistrict public school choice, intradistrict public school choice, magnet or desegregation programs, vocational options, special education programs, and homeschooling. In addition, perhaps the most pervasive form of school choice is family selection of particular communities in which to live, based on perceived school quality. Federal and state standards-based reforms have aided in this competitive pressure by making school and district test results more publicly available for comparison.

School choice has been touted as a promising education reform strategy for a range of reasons. Some advocates argue that from an equity standpoint, school choice provides expanded educational opportunities to low-income students, who have been trapped within persistently underperforming schools. Others believe that students' motivation and performance will be greater if families are able to choose the direction of their children's education. Still others assert that choice will lead to better matching of students and schools, thus improving their educational experience. Proponents of market economics believe that the mainstream educational delivery system will become more efficient and effective because increased competition drives innovation and improvement. Many contend that schools that are freed from the constraints of the traditional system will become beacons of learning and laboratories of innovation, developing and sharing new educational ideas. Philosophically and pedagogically, advocates believe that school choice offers hope for expanded educational equity, opportunity, and improvement.

On the other hand, opponents cite concerns that include the demise of the American common school and the potential for further balkanization of public education by ethnicity, race, class, and income. Others criticize vouchers and the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court *Zelman* decision for blurring the separation between church and state. Critics of market-based public education oppose the profiteering of private companies that are engaged in school and district management, while some resent any diversion of funds from mainstream schools. Others warn that people who are most at risk (the poor) will not benefit from a market-based system because they are the least equipped to navigate such a system and may lack the means (e.g., transportation) to participate. Similarly, schools that are most at risk will not benefit from the market-based system because they lack the financial means to advertise and they are viewed as having little to offer and thus cannot compete for students.

Competition from choice options can push mainstream schools in several different directions. On the one hand, schools may respond to, say, a nearby arts-focused charter school by increasing arts-related offerings. On the other hand, funding formulas in which per-student funds "follow the student" often reduce revenues for "sending" schools in significant ways, but reductions in student numbers may not be large enough on a per-classroom basis to enable "sending" schools to realize corresponding cost savings by laying teachers off.

Lubienski (2006) finds that "peculiarities of the public school sector" (p. 324) may keep schools from responding to competition as expected by advocates: (1) Instead of innovating in the classroom, new schools often embrace traditional practices; (2) innovations are often limited to administration and marketing rather than being fostered at the classroom level; and (3) the most innovative and diversified options appear to be produced by public-sector policies rather than by competitive pressures. Principals in schools that are troubled by competition would do well to focus not on attracting new students but rather on providing a rich, rigorous, and meaningful educational experience for students already in their schools.

Community-District-School Relationships

Today's school leaders are being pulled in many different directions by powerful, influential constituencies in their school, district, and community. An effective school leader must maintain balance among these groups through strategic diplomacy and skill (Lutz & Merz, 1992). An influencing force that is often underdeveloped in administrator training is parent and community involvement in schooling (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The ways in which community members and families interact with the school system are of crucial importance to the overall placement of schools within the community. Based upon this interaction, schools can look different. Some schools maintain a culture of authority and interact with the community formally and traditionally, while others actively seek to define the school as a valuable hub of social and community resources. Both extremes warrant very different approaches and implications for the management of community influence.

In traditional schools, managing the community involves recognizing powerful individuals and groups in the community and maintaining good public relations (i.e., attending the local Lions Club meetings, maintaining a weekly newsletter, participating in an annual food drive, etc.). However, now, more than ever, schools are seen as stable anchors in a tumultuous community setting. Reformers are thus linking schools with their communities in new ways. Many urban cities are combating fragmented social services to children by encouraging schools to join with their communities and collaborate with social service agencies (Mawhinney, 1996). Numerous models are in place that link schools with health and welfare agencies to serve children and their families (Adler & Gardner, 1994; Rothstein, 2004). These new initiatives, aimed at meeting the needs of a wide range of types of children and their families, place new and different demands on the school and the principal as "schools are considering what happens to children beyond the confines of the school" (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996, p. 206). The school is no longer responsible only for educating the child; it is responsible for the total well-being of the child.

But working to create a more "full service" school requires vision and skill beyond the simple management of community influence. Engaging with the community requires intentionally studying the school's capacity to connect school functions to the needs of the community (Rothstein, 2004). Principals are now involved in programs and activities beyond the school curriculum. Schools may expand programs into a noninstructional array of services, and in some cases, they may completely change a school's purpose (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). Whatever their scope, the newly created expectations about the place of schools in the larger community "demands a reorientation for both families and schools to a set of relationships which exceed the tenuous, negotiated parameters demarcating professional and private spheres" (Smrekar, 1993, p. 3). They interact with professionals beyond classroom teachers and guidance counselors. They also work with community leaders to involve students in community work (Eberly, 1993; Militello & Benham, in press).

Many leaders find the broader and complex community outside of their doors overwhelming and the needs of the community too great to address in schools. Despite the obvious difficulties, balancing the influence of the community through intentional programming may ultimately enable a spanning of boundaries as well as providing a natural buffer that protects the school from negative community influence (community dissatisfaction in schools, changes in local politics, voters denying funding, changes in demographics or economic status, or power shifts within the community) (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Therefore, effective leaders understand the long-term benefits of managing influencing factors. They willingly approach interactions with families and community members to address the positive and negative values and attitudes affecting school involvement; they create climates conducive to trusting family, community, and educator relationships; and they design strategies that promote a sense of shared responsibility (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). While these activities represent a great deal of work and collaboration, they pay dividends through the public value that family and community members place upon the school.

Schools do not exist in a void; they are embedded in the social context of their surrounding communities. The social fabric of society reveals a tapestry of families with diverse structures, employment arrangements, racial and ethnic backgrounds, health care needs, and support systems—all of which have tremendous impact on the school and the principal. Relationships with the multifaceted community place new demands on schools but also make principals pivotal in both meeting demands and in exploiting the resources within.

Summary of Forces

These forces are at work in schools. And there are other forces that exist, some unique to a community and others systemic (e.g., high teacher turnover that is especially chronic in low-income communities). How can principals cope with them? Faced with the challenges these forces bring, the principal has several options: The principal can ignore them—to the peril of the school; the principal can react to them—allowing them to drive the school; or the principal can take charge—using them ethically to shape the school. Principals like Lee do the latter; they use these forces to advance teaching and learning. Often, the burden for dealing with these forces falls primarily on the principal, thus establishing the myth that the principal does all.

THE MYTH OF THE GREAT PRINCIPAL

An effective school requires a manager competent in maintenance functions to insure a positive school climate. A building must run smoothly; activities must be coordinated; students and teachers must feel safe. At the same time, teachers in an effective school require an instructional leader to support their instructional efforts and their professional development. Both maintenance and development are essential components of an effective school, and in most schools, both functions are the duty of a single individual: the building principal. An effective principal has always been expected to keep a school running smoothly; now, current principals are also expected to spend more time as leaders of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The job can be overwhelming. Schools are complex organisms that respond to several levels of policy. At the same time, schools react to the immediate context-specific demands of the local community. Agendas vary across constituencies, each describing the purposes, activities, and resources of the school from a singular perspective. The principal may well be the only person in the school who is able to see the whole picture—and to make sense of it. Seldom does anyone other than the principal have access to all the varied systems operating more or less independently in the loosely coupled components of the school (see Weick, 1976). The demands on the principal are heavy and come from wide-ranging sources—from policy makers to local businesspeople to the children in the classrooms. To perform the many tasks of the job, principals need a broad knowledge base and multiple skills. They need to understand children and child development, pedagogy and learning styles, and philosophies of education. They need competence in operations and finance. They need familiarity with their community. They need skill in communication and in techniques for working effectively with adults.

Management alone could fill the principal's days. He or she must orchestrate all the loosely coupled structures of the building organization so that they work together smoothly. Before teachers can begin to instruct students, custodians must prepare classrooms and clean hallways; classes must be scheduled and students assigned; cafeteria workers must prepare meals; heat and electricity must be working; and most of all, there must be continual communication with parents and district offices. Principals manage the building operations by monitoring and coordinating activities so that teachers, students, and parents know what to expect and feel safe. And in fact, these management tasks are what principals are most often held accountable for at the district level.

Arguably the more important responsibility of the principal is that of instructional leader: identifying learning needs, establishing directions for curriculum and instruction, connecting to best practices, using data, and facilitating teachers' learning. Instruction, while still the heart of schooling, is only one of the many arenas for decision making in schools. And recent accountability demands on achievement outcomes have brought instructional leadership to the fore.

Throughout the past decades, numerous commissions, studies, and laws have aimed at improving student achievement by making schools more accountable. For principals this translated into "work harder"—making the burden of an already difficult job even greater. However, organizational structures and resource allocation remain largely unchanged, and teachers still are able to close their doors and do what they want in the classroom (see Lortie, 1975; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The charge for change falls on school principals; they are the ones expected to generate strategic solutions and lead day-to-day implementation. Moreover, there is little evidence that leadership training, compensation, and support have made notable gains in conjunction with the new demands to achieve the goals set forth by the assessment-accountability movement.

When sanctions are attached to policy and the stakes increase, organizations and their leaders tend to respond in a command style (Rowan, 1990). Administrators have tremendous burdens to comply symbolically (Ogawa et al., 2003) with mandates that may lead to highly centralized behaviors (Lemons, Luschei, & Siskin, 2003). Spillane (2000) characterizes this command style of leadership as behavioristic, where leaders are authoritarian in order to meet the compliance-based mandates of accountability. Specifically, accountability demands evoke a Pavlovian-like response to search for an immediate solution, often choosing the first to appear. This reactive process leads to organizational tunnel vision (Brown & Duguid, 2000; March & Levinthal, 1999) where the chosen alternatives are most often sought in the neighborhood of old ones (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; March, 1999c). Unfortunately, this process ignores the impact on the overall school environment, inhibits risk taking, inquiry, and conversation among the various players, and often results in the creation of a new set of problems that need an immediate solution. Such an approach is antithetical to building teacher capacity (Elmore, 2003a).

Trapped in this tunnel vision, principals feel isolated. Isolation leads to loneliness. This bureaucratic model sets up a one-way response system. Constituents come to the principal's office dumping their problems and personal details. They do not want to leave without a solution they can be comfortable with. The often dysfunctional, linear nature of this interaction reminds us of the 1990s maxim *garbage in, garbage out*. The pressures on principals to find and implement solutions to poorly defined problems cause them to be reactive, which isolates them further. They are at the center of activity, but they are alone. Their loneliness is strange and disconcerting. Driscoll (2007) notes in Philip Jackson's experience as principal/director of the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools:

> But it is to loneliness that he returns more than once, and to the isolation that school leaders feel on a day-to-day basis, feelings that originate in part from the deep and surprisingly intimate knowledge of the faculty and school community that comes, often unbidden, to those in leadership positions; . . . to know and yet not to be able to share such confidence. (p. 98)

The ambiguity is exacerbated "by the sense that one is under constant surveillance" (Driscoll, 2007, p. 98). Responsible for both vision and management, in the public eye, privy to details both technical and private, and at the same time, isolated within the position, a principal can easily become overwhelmed. However, Spillane (2000) suggests that a "situative" or cognitive leadership approach is more effective to elicit deep teacher change and instructional improvement. Such an approach differs from the command style because it facilitates consideration of what is needed, who contributes, and the work to be done—all to reach an agreed upon goal.

The *Great Principal* is little more than a myth, as both attracting and retaining highly qualified principals has become problematic. The "revolving door" of the principalship has been fueled by pressure and demands that make the job nearly untenable. As Fink and Brayman (2006) speculate, principals are frustrated, having been stripped of autonomy, which has produced "an increasingly rapid turnover of school leaders and an insufficient pool of capable, qualified, and prepared replacements" (pp. 62–63). Quinn (2002) summarizes the pressures of the modern-day principal:

> Increased job stress, school funding, balancing school management with instructional leadership, new curriculum standards,

> educating an increasingly diverse student population, shouldering responsibilities that once belonged at home or in the community, and then facing possible termination if their schools don't show instant results. (p. 1)

Moreover, fewer and fewer prepared persons seek the job. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, half of the nation's school districts report a scarcity of administrator applicants (Quinn, 2002). The dearth of principals is particularly endemic in districts perceived to have challenging working conditions, large populations of impoverished or minority students, low per pupil expenditures, and urban settings (Forsyth & Smith, 2002; Mitgang, 2003; Pounder, Galvin, & Sheppard, 2003; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). Evidence suggests that many high poverty districts field six or fewer applicants per principal vacancy (Roza, Celio, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003).

The fact that few aspire to the job should not be surprising. Many believe that principals must be equipped with a "suit of armor" (Sykes, 2002, p. 146). That is, there are so many demands and responsibilities placed on school principals that they must work in a reactive manner to fend off the constant bombardment of forces, both acute and chronic. The problem may be the result of the perceived impossibility of meeting the superhuman expectations of the poorly conceived image of the Great Principal as the Lone Ranger and hero.

In reality, the principal hardly acts alone. Instead, principals' actions fit into the larger school and education environment. Understanding where they sit in the education community and how their actions relate to others may take some of the pressure off fulfilling the Great Principal image. Neither full glory nor blame should fall on the principal's shoulders alone.

Decades ago, Lightfoot (1983) offered portraits of principals who do not go it alone. In one school, the principal can "track down resources and broaden horizons" (p. 42) as he builds bridges by networking with community groups and leaders to establish programs that will link students with the working world. Another of Lightfoot's principals fosters participation and collaboration. She paints him "down in the trenches inspiring, cajoling, and encouraging people to 'do their best and give their most' " (p. 68). He also serves as a buffer, protecting his faculty members so that they have the freedom to do their best. In another high school, Lightfoot (1983) illustrates how a town meeting format changes patterns of power and decision making away from the principal to the entire school community. Other examples show that an effective principal does not work alone. Louis and Miles (1990) talk about a close, cohesive internal network when describing the relationships among staff in those high schools that successfully implement change. In *Horace's School* (Sizer, 1992), teachers themselves lead the press for changes. Goodlad (1984) emphasizes the need for a skilled principal who can secure a working consensus in the search for solutions. More recently, effective principals have been highlighted by their work leading communities of practice (see Militello, Schweid, & Carey, 2008; Printy, 2008; Supovitz & Christman, 2003), taking charge of initiatives centered on the core of teaching and learning (see Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hightower, 2002), investigating policies such as student retention (see Bryk, 2003), and using data to develop new support mechanisms and to implement new teaching and learning strategies (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Militello, Sireci, & Schweid, 2008; Supovitz, 2006). Such examples provide insights into how the school principal can debunk the myth of the great principal.

THE PRINCIPAL MATTERS

Still, the principal matters. The leadership of a principal is crucial for school effectiveness, second only to the role of the classroom teacher and the quality of the curriculum (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2005). The role of the school principal is positioned to reshape a school's culture (Deal & Peterson, 1998) and to increase achievement. However, direct causal links between leadership and student achievement have proven elusive. Nonetheless, we can connect the principal's leadership with student achievement through organizational and relational properties that create conditions and capacities to influence teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2005; Leithwood & Wahlstron, 2008). Specifically, different types of leadership have an impact on student achievement outcomes (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Moreover, leadership has been shown to impact the creations and sustainability of professional learning communities (Printy, 2008; Wahlstrom & Seashore Louis, 2008). In short, the principal can develop school capacity. And school capacity leads to improved student achievement (see Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbeck, 1999; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Research tells what the principal can do to build such capacity.

The skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed by the school principal to improve instruction have been extensively explored (Elmore, 2000, 2002b, 2003a; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2005; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Research suggests that improving student learning in schools depends on strong leadership, as evidenced by findings that school leadership through interactions with teachers accounts for one quarter to one third of the total school effect on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). For example, a meta-analysis of empirical works conducted by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) sited the potency of specific behaviors for school leaders (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 McREL Behaviors Positively Associated With Changes That Ultimately Affect Student Achievement

Behavior	**Definition**
Flexibility	. . . adapts their leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
Monitors/evaluates	. . . monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
Change agent	. . . is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	. . . is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
Intellectual stimulation	. . . ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
Ideals/beliefs	. . . communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
Optimizer	. . . inspires and leads new and challenging innovations

These principal behaviors discovered through the McREL research are positively associated with educational leaders that can promote "second order" or systemic change that leads to improved student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Likewise, a meta-analysis of school leadership literature conducted by the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute found that effective principals (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) do the following:

- Develop deep understandings of how to support teachers
- Manage the curriculum to promote student learning
- Transform schools into effective organizations that build capacity for teachers to promote student learning for all students

The principal cannot simply expect teachers and other staff to engage in new actions without structures, supports, and resources. According to Newmann, King, and Young (2000), the development of a school's capacity has four core components: (1) the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individuals; (2) the existence of a functional problem solving professional learning community; (3) schoolwide program coherence; and (4) availability and accessibility of technical resources to support teacher and student work. Principals are in the position to add organizational coherence, to develop a stable platform, to develop individual capacity, to develop teacher-leaders, to advocate for appropriate resources, to implement support mechanisms, and to focus the entire school community on student learning.

Perhaps James March (1978) had it right when he stated that principals are provided directions that look more like "a bus schedule with footnotes by Kierkegaard" (p. 244). Nonetheless, there are examples of principals who have acted heroically—in concert with their school, district, and school community. The journey to debunk the myth of the great principal begins with the development of a team of educators and community members that surround the child in and outside of school. Principals do not have to be the sole superhero, although they may in fact develop and lead a legion of superheroes. They do, however, need a framework or process to build teams, access their energy, and support action for improvement.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

We know schools are under fire from multiple forces. We also know how important the principal is and that the notion of the Great Principal is a myth. This chapter identified forces surrounding schools as well as specific elements that make a principal effective. Principals do not have to be superhuman, but we say they must be super principals by harnessing the forces using the power of the people in the school community to develop collaborative inquiry-action processes. In the next chapter, we describe how successful and effective school leaders do not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the forces; rather, they harness the capacity, develop new capacity, and engage in inquiry-minded, action-oriented practice in order to leverage, buffer, and/or embrace new educational challenges. Principals of dynamic schools do this with both inquiry and action. This is not done alone. These principals lead teachers and school communities through a deliberate, mindful, focused, and grounded *collaborative inquiry-action cycle*.

Questions and Exercises for Reflection and Discussion

1. Make a table of the forces that impact schools. Across the top, list the five forces described in this chapter. You might also want to add additional forces that are unique to your school. On the side, create two rows: (1) your current educational setting and (2) a model or exemplar educational setting you want to learn more about and aspire to become (see note below). In each cell, write the challenges and the associated opportunities. *Such a table might look like the following.*

Forces

		Accountability	Diversity	Globalization	Competition	Community Relationships
Current School	Challenges					
	Associated Opportunities/ Strategies					
Exemplar School	Challenges					
	Associated Opportunities/ Strategies					

2. Create a table to demonstrate how the principal matters in your educational setting and in an exemplar setting. In each cell, write how you or the principal leads or facilitates activities in the specific categories. Then complete the row for what these practices look like in an exemplary school (see note on the next page). *Such a table might look like the following, with these possible column headings.*

How does the principal matter?

	Student Life	Student Achievement	Teacher Life	Teacher Professional Development	Parents	Other
Current School						
Exemplar School						