Preface

*To be a great principal you have to be a great manager and a great leader.
. . . Don't do either well and the school fails.*

—Middle School Principal

*True leaders are not born but made and not made as much by others as by
themselves.*

—Bennis (1989, p. 37)

*There is nothing more satisfying than seeing hordes of people engaged to
do good together because of the leadership you helped to produce.*

—Fullan (2005, p. 104)

Throughout the past century, the work of school administrators has emphasized "management" functions rather than leadership and, in particular, instructional leadership. Since World War II, factors such as the increasing size of schools and school districts, increasing numbers of students, expanding school bureaucracies, community expectations, pressure from unions, and expectations of state governments have reinforced a principal-as-manager model (Drake & Roe, 2003; Kowalski, 2003).

During the past two decades, demands that principals focus on instructional leadership have been made by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (Gronn, 2002). This led to the work of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the creation of "standards" for school leaders (McCarthy, 1998) that emphasize "leadership" rather than old-style school management/administration[1] (Thompson, 1998). The new standards derived from research that demonstrated a strong link between school leadership and student learning (Gronn, 2002).

Clearly, the role of school leaders has dramatically expanded and intensified in recent years and now includes a host of new expectations for both management and instructional leadership. Cusick (2003), for instance, found that principals work 10-to-12-hour days, the number and types of responsibilities

in which they engage have increased, and many of their duties and responsibilities are overlapping and conflicting. Other studies have demonstrated that principals work, on average, between 60 and 70 hours per week (Buckley, 2004; McPeake, 2007). Moreover, despite a string of strong new demands by educational scholars and policy makers, the actual work of school principals today comprises *more school management than school leadership;* for example, in a major study of principals' time-on-task from 1960 to the twenty-first century, McPeake (2007) found that principals have devoted the greatest amount of time to school management as compared to all other task areas. Several studies have reported that although principals valued instructional leadership and school improvement, routine management and administration and the demands of "putting out fires" have increased and consume most of principals' work days (Buckley, 2004; Chan & Pool, 2002; Gould, 1998). Similarly, Kellogg (2005) reported that regardless of their career stage, principals devoted more time than they preferred to managerial responsibilities. McPeake (2007) concluded that, in part, requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation have been largely responsible for the recent proliferation of management responsibilities.

Indeed, new responsibilities and activities have been added to the principal's role, but the old responsibilities and activities have remained. The role is now considered overloaded, highly complex, and composed of a multitude of conflicting demands (Cunningham & Cordiero, 2006; Cusick, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Kowalski, 2003; Murphy, 1994). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has attributed the shortage of qualified leaders for the school principalship to the problematic nature of the principal's role (Quinn, 2002), which includes

> increased job stress, inadequate school funding, balancing school management with instructional leadership, new curriculum standards, educating an increasingly diverse school population, shouldering responsibility that once belonged at home or in the community, and then facing possible termination if their schools don't show instant results. (p. 1)

Upon reviewing the voluminous additions to the principal's role, Fullan (2007) remarked,

> The net effect is that the principalship is being placed in an impossible position. In short, the changes required to transform cultures are far deeper than we understood; principals do not have the capacity to carry out the new roles; and principals are burdened by too many role responsibilities that inhibit developing and practicing the new competencies—add-ons without anything being taken away. Hard change, low capacity, plenty of distractions—a recipe for frustration. In sum, the principal is key, but we haven't yet figured out how to position the role to fulfill the promise. (p. 165)

Similarly, Elmore (quoted in Farrace, 2002) noted,

> Although instructional leadership is a central article in the belief system about principals, the empirical evidence has always indicated that a relatively small proportion of principals are actually able to practice instructional leadership. (pp. 39–40)

It appears that federal and state policies designed to promote a principal-as-instructional-leader model have largely failed and, in fact, may have inadvertently reinforced a principal-as-manager model in practice. *This is particularly discouraging in light of strong evidence that effective instructional leadership by the school principal is a key within-school factor in promoting school improvement and is second only to teaching in contributing to student learning.* This point is supported by numerous studies and discussed in subsequent sections in this book.

In the end, most scholars agree that principals must be knowledgeable and competent in management and administration without undermining leadership and instructional leadership. School principals must create both well-managed and well-led schools; they must be able to balance the overwhelming number of competing and often conflicting demands of the role (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Kowalski, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2007; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Sharp & Walter, 2003). Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. To state the problem differently, *school principals must now be able to do what most have failed to do in the past—provide instructional leadership—but in the context of more management responsibilities, responsibilities which have consistently negated that possibility,* at least for most principals. Our study goes a long way in cracking open what has historically been considered a "black box" in educational research; in this book we provide a research-based answer to the question, *How do principals create instructionally-effective schools?*

OUTLINE OF THE *HANDBOOK OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT*

Part I of the *Handbook*—Administrative Leadership for School Improvement—begins with a brief discussion of two key questions: What is a high-performing school? And, What does a principal do to create a high-performing school? The chapters in this part of the book describe defining *action foci* of principals who create high-performing schools derived from our study of 20 such principals. In the perspectives of these principals, their work on nine action foci promoted the development of school-based *learning subsystems* that support school improvement. Thus, the term *administrative leadership* includes managerial and organizational leadership functions, responsibilities, and behaviors that provide the foundation (i.e., support structure) for school improvement and, thereby, impact teaching and learning.

Part II of the *Handbook*–Instructional Leadership for School Improvement—focuses more directly on high-performing principals' approaches to instructional leadership for school improvement. Drawn from our study, the chapters in

this part of the book describe *five primary goals* of high-performing principals that directly impact teaching and student learning, including (1) maintaining a focus on teaching and learning, (2) developing a culture that supports and sustains instructional improvement, (3) establishing a context for dialogue about instruction, (4) referencing research-based elements when observing and talking with teachers, and (5) providing effective, ongoing professional learning. Gleaned directly from our study data, the *systems-development approach* (i.e., the systematic development of coordinated subsystems in the school to address all administrative and instructional leadership functions) is discussed throughout this book.

Part III of the *Handbook*—Conclusion: Systems Thinking and the Systems-Development Approach in Educational Leadership—includes a discussion of Wagner et al.'s (2006) "systems framework," a powerful and practical diagnostic approach to school improvement; and a discussion of the importance of a systems perspective and the systems-development approach for school improvement and for preparation programs in educational leadership.
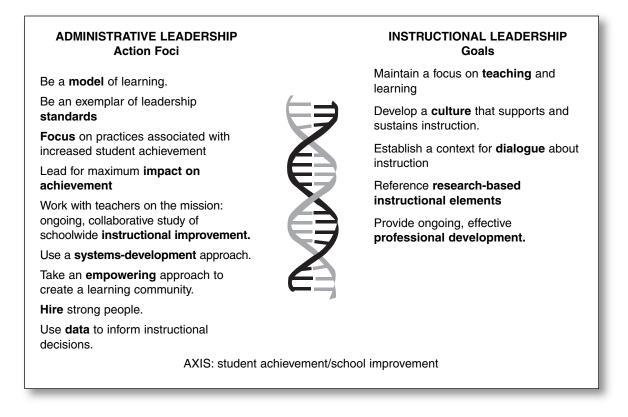
THE DOUBLE HELIX MODEL OF LEADERSHIP: A SYSTEMS-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

According to our study data, high-performing principals create high-performing schools through both (1) administrative leadership for school improvement (Part I of the *Handbook*) and (2) instructional leadership for school improvement (Part II of the *Handbook*). We found that these two dimensions of high-performing, school-based leadership were, in practice, highly connected and interrelated (as well as supported by a systems-development approach, as discussed in Part III of the *Handbook*); thus, we refer to the double helix model of leadership, which is graphically illustrated in Figure 0.1. In geometry and molecular biology (the latter represents the structure of DNA), a double helix consists of two helices with the same axis and grooves connecting the two. In high-performing schools, principals enact the nine *action foci* discussed in Part I (Chapters 2–9) of this book while maintaining their focus on the 5 *goals* discussed in Part II (Chapters 10–14). Each of these action foci and goals, in turn, revolves around the *axis of student achievement/school improvement* and is pursued by way of carefully developed *subsystems* (i.e., the workhorses of school improvement) at the school level. In sum, all of what is done by high-performing principals is more or less *administrative* or more or less directly *instructional;* but all major leadership actions are structured in subsystems (as discussed in Part III, Chapters 15–16), appropriately interrelated, and serve the metagoal of student achievement and school improvement.

THE RESOURCES

In addition to presenting our findings about how high-performing principals create high-performing schools, throughout the *Handbook* we refer the reader

Figure 0.1 The Double Helix Model of Leadership: A Systems-Development Approach to Administrative and Instructional Leadership for Creating High-Performing Schools

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP
Action Foci

Be a **model** of learning.

Be an exemplar of leadership **standards**

Focus on practices associated with increased student achievement

Lead for maximum **impact on achievement**

Work with teachers on the mission: ongoing, collaborative study of schoolwide **instructional improvement.**

Use a **systems-development** approach.

Take an **empowering** approach to create a learning community.

Hire strong people.

Use **data** to inform instructional decisions.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
Goals

Maintain a focus on **teaching** and learning

Develop a **culture** that supports and sustains instruction.

Establish a context for **dialogue** about instruction

Reference **research-based instructional elements**

Provide ongoing, effective **professional development.**

AXIS: student achievement/school improvement

to the *best* resources available for professional learning and school improvement, including books, annotated bibliographies, articles, Web sites, standards, videos, kits, tools, workbooks, career plans, and interviews. We also describe individual and group activities that can be used by administrators and teachers working together for school improvement; thus, the *Handbook* is a complete guide to leadership for school improvement.

THE STUDY

The study that serves as the basis for this book investigated the question, How do high-performing school principals create high-performing schools, establish and manage effective administrative routines, and how do they manage inevitable daily crises and ongoing administrative challenges? This incredibly important question has dogged the field of educational leadership for decades. Our goal was to describe principals' perspectives on this critical issue. Therefore, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 20 principals in one southeastern state, *each of whom had been designated by the state*

department of education and/or recognized by other education-based organizations, agencies, and entities as a high-performing principal of a high-performing school or a significantly improving school. Given space limitations, we present excerpts from our database to illustrate select ideas. (For a detailed description of the study, see the Research Method and Procedures section at the end of this book.)

OVERVIEW OF HIGH-PERFORMING PRINCIPALS' ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH

We found that all high-performing principals use a bottom-up *systems-development approach* (a concept we derived from our study data) to create high-performing schools. That is, they systematically create or build, in collaboration with others, a deeply embedded network of mutually-reinforcing *organizational* and *cultural* subsystems, large and small, to effectively cope with both managerial and administrative, and instructional leadership responsibilities while *persistently and single-mindedly focusing on school improvement.* They create a school-based system to maximize each subsystem's ability to contribute directly and/or indirectly to school improvement. In essence, all principals use a systems-development approach to *reorganize* and *reculture* their schools to focus on school improvement, as both reorganization and reculturing are required to create a high-performing school.

Reorganizing a school requires that a principal create and sustain, in collaboration with all relevant others (as in distributed or shared leadership), a school-level system (and subsystems) that include, among other things, teams, policies, procedures, plans, schedules, and routines to address all major management and administrative responsibilities (e.g., technology, hiring, physical plant) and leadership and instructional leadership responsibilities (e.g., professional development, instructional observations, and conversations) to maximize school-improvement efforts; usually the creation of these subsystems derived from the principals' realization that their schools were, in varying degrees, instructionally problematic (i.e., stagnant, underachieving, or inefficient). The reorganization of each school is a bottom-up process, and its particular development is dependent upon its context (i.e., a school's specific human and physical needs and available resources). *The system developed at each high-performing school we studied was unique, but all were predicated on school improvement.*

Reculturing a school requires that each principal's approach to leadership and instructional leadership promote values, beliefs, ways of thinking, and behaviors of individuals and teams based on trust, ownership, commitment, collaboration, responsibility, accountability, risk taking, mutual respect, reflection, and problem solving to focus on school improvement. *The cultures of the high-performing schools were similar: They consisted of the same configuration of values, beliefs, ways of thinking, and behaviors that emphasized school improvement.*

SOME FINDINGS ABOUT PRINCIPALS WHO CREATE HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

1. Becoming a high-performing principal is an evolutionary, ongoing, incremental process of recurring efforts to improve things coupled with reflection that, for most, began when the principals were teachers and assistant principals and has continued to the present. Principals also learn that, in practice, administration and instructional leadership are highly interrelated and intertwined. However, high-performing principals derive most of their knowledge about effective instructional leadership and effective teaching and learning from published research and other empirically based professional resources.

2. At the start of their administrative careers, most high-performing principals tend to be control-oriented rather than empowering and inclusive; as a result, they are neither effective administrative leaders nor instructional leaders. Over time, they learn that both efficient and effective administrative and instructional leadership require the best from all stakeholders and that an empowering approach (i.e., distributed or shared leadership) is essential to achieving deep levels of "ownership" in pursuit of school improvement.

3. High-performing principals learn that hiring strong educators who are team players is essential to addressing the overwhelming array of administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities. Further, such principals employ a professional development approach that is extensive and compelling, and it includes the principal (who models lifelong learning), assistant principals, teachers, and staff in a range of ongoing informal and formal professional-development experiences.

4. High-performing principals, assistant principals, grade and department chairs, and lead teachers work collaboratively to create and maintain a school's focus on school improvement via, for example, frequent classroom walk-throughs, professional dialogue, instructional planning, emphasis on standards-based instruction and effective teaching practices, and professional learning.

5. Once viable school-improvement-oriented organizational and cultural subsystems have been created, high-performing principals require ongoing vigilance (monitoring) by all stakeholders. The organization and culture of each school is always, to some extent, a work in progress that requires occasional tweaking.

6. High-performing principals are excellent administrative and instructional leaders. All believe that effective administrative leadership provides a stable, predictable, and supportive foundation for a high-performing school. All insist that effective administrative and instructional leadership are inextricably intertwined and interdependent processes and that leadership in schools frequently requires being engaged in both types of processes simultaneously. In other words, effective school-level leadership is an integrated, holistic, complex, dynamic process—one that cannot be understood by simply identifying behaviors associated with either administrative leadership or instructional leadership

alone. Therefore, principals use a bottom-up, systems-development approach to understand and to create an effective, integrated system (i.e., configuration) of both organizational subsystems and cultural components that *focus* the school on instructional improvement. As noted above, excellent performance in administrative and instructional school leadership is double helical in nature; this reflects the interactions among the principals' action foci and goals and a systems-development approach to student achievement and school improvement. In his classic book, *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, Warren Bennis (1989) noted,

> Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right. Both roles are crucial but they differ profoundly. I often observe people in top positions doing the wrong things well. (p. 18)

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Handbook of School Improvement* will demonstrate that the double helix model of leadership, a systems-development approach to school improvement, should be seriously considered by all prospective and practicing school leaders. Because every school is different, we strongly recommend that school leaders and their colleagues study the *Handbook* in its entirety before developing a school improvement plan; it will become apparent that a leader's readiness to take a systems-development approach to school improvement requires not only having the action foci and goals of high-performing principals (e.g., being a learner, understanding teaching and learning, empowering others, effectively hiring and using data, and developing subsystems) but also the ability to *reorganize* and *reculture* the school. This book was designed especially to help school leaders develop and refine all of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills represented on the double helix model of leadership.

NOTE

1. Throughout this book, we use the terms "administration" and "management" synonymously.