

# PREFACE

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Leaders don't lead alone. Leadership necessarily involves followers—people who buy into the leader's vision of where the whole bandwagon is headed. Leadership doesn't just happen, and it's hard to teach. The best leaders relate to their followers and work at understanding them. They know how to bring people together in common cause. They invoke a higher moral authority. They are storytellers, persuaders, conveners, reframers.

Our most powerful leaders speak to the hearts, the minds, and the souls of those they would lead. In the enormously demanding work of education (as Paul Houston—one of the editors of this series, together with myself and Alan Blankstein—pointed out in Volume 4, *Spirituality in Educational Leadership*), “the work we do is really more of a calling and a mission than it is a job.” Our calling, whether we lead or follow, is to prepare young people for life.

The volume that opened *The Soul of Educational Leadership* series, *Engaging Every Learner*, was selected to send a signal of all-inclusiveness. Every student matters deeply, to all of us in and around schools and in our society. Volume 2, *Out-of-the-Box Leadership*, called for transformative leadership, which can come only by thinking differently about the problems and challenges we face. Volume 3, *Sustaining Learning Communities*, looked beyond inclusiveness and transformation to how best to work together to create learning communities that support enduring change. And in Volume 4, Paul Houston observed, “These jobs of ours as educational leaders are difficult and draining. They sap our physical and moral energy. We have to find ways of replenishing the supply.”

Replenishing our supply is what this series is all about. From the beginning, we have aimed to provide contributions from leading thinkers and practitioners on the soul-work of educational leadership. In this volume, *Leaders as Communicators and Diplomats*, we have enlisted, among others, five superintendents or former superintendents—one of whom was named National Superintendent of the Year and one who was State Superintendent of the Year—as well as the former head of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the head of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).

In “The Superintendent as Communicator and Diplomat,” Paul D. Houston (recently retired AASA executive director) sets the tone for the volume by observing that leaders in education must lead even in the absence of authority and power. The leader’s biggest tool, according to Houston, is “the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively to the staff, and to the public and policy makers, about what the issues are and how they must be handled.” Leaders must listen both with their ears and with their heart. Along the way, diplomacy comes into play: True leaders respect people, show their respect, and work with their followers for a better outcome.

“As a rookie superintendent I quickly learned that all that goes right and all that goes wrong in a school district ultimately can be traced back to communication—or a lack thereof,” writes Krista Parent, superintendent of the South Lane School District in Oregon (and the 2007 National Superintendent of the Year). In “The Leader as Communicator and Diplomat,” she lays out a refreshingly specific strategic plan for creating a dynamic, effective districtwide communication system, with the superintendent at its hub. Her caution is this: “If your communication system is a ‘reactive’ one, it is time to rethink your plan.”

John R. Hoyle, professor of educational administration at Texas A&M University, tunes into the concerns at the heart of this series when he writes, “America definitely needs school leaders with heart and soul, but leaders also need skills in communicating and influencing policy makers about necessary changes in school policy to promote equity and justice for all children.” In Chapter 3, “The Educational Leader: Diplomat and Communicator for All Students,” Hoyle (selected in a 2004 national survey as one of four “exceptional living scholars” in educational leadership) counsels programs of leadership education “first to recruit individuals who lead with soul

and have a record of success in various leadership capacities, and then to teach these individuals the skills to manage effective schools and school districts.”

In “Learning to Be a Leader,” the fourth chapter in this volume, Betty Rosa provides a deeply personal, from-the-trenches account of her learnings as a principal and a superintendent in New York City. “I realized that leadership is a personal journey that allows us to connect our inner world with the world that we want to affect,” Rosa writes of her career, which recently culminated in her election to a 5-year term as the Regent for the Twelfth Judicial District (Bronx County, New York). “The most important lesson for me was the importance of everyone understanding our interdependence,” she reflects.

“Being successful as a superintendent will not happen if you don’t make a commitment to communication,” writes Rich Bagin, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association since 1992. In his chapter, “Leaders as Communicators and Ambassadors,” he reports that “the most successful school communication programs start at the top with leaders who are committed to the importance of communication and who then make sure that all central office leaders, principals, and other supervisors follow through on that commitment. Successful superintendents are the gatekeepers when it comes to communication.”

Donald A. Phillips, superintendent of Poway Unified School District (a suburban K–12 district with more than 33,000 students) and 2008 California State Superintendent of the Year, recalls a harrowing example from his district in “The Superintendent as Key Communicator and Diplomat: A Case Study.” He concludes with practical lessons for leaders, including this: “During challenging times, it is essential to stand up and be counted for what we value as system leaders and what we believe is the right thing to do—even if it is not the most popular position. Leadership, in its most difficult hour, is taking a divergent path.”

Now an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of Wyoming, Mark J. Stock created a highly popular weblog called “The Wawascene” when he was superintendent of Wawasee Community Schools in northern Indiana. In “The Superintendent as Blogger,” he describes how to start blogging and writes, “Blogging is just one more tool for the communication-oriented school leader. The more avenues you can provide to educate and inform the public about

the important issues that affect our schools and our children, the better chance we have of sustaining and improving our public schools.”

Far more important to children’s life chances in the Conceptual Age than the ability to take tests, Daniel H. Pink tells us, are “high-concept and high-touch” qualities that are tougher to quantify: imagination, joyfulness, and social dexterity. Pink, author of the *New York Times* and *BusinessWeek* bestseller *A Whole New Mind*, contributes an adaptation titled “A Whole New Mind for Schools.” One lesson he poses for educators is this: “When facts become so widely available, each one becomes less valuable. What begins to matter more is the ability to place these facts in *context* and to deliver them with *emotional impact*.”

Finally, in an Endnote to this volume, Edward B. Fiske, former education editor of the *New York Times*, writes, “I like the notion with which this volume opened: namely that, unlike their counterparts in the business world, school leaders lack the power to control their raw materials. I tend to think of their power as comparable to that of governors and college presidents—the power not to control but to set agendas and to persuade.” Author of the best-selling annual *Fiske Guide to Colleges*, he concludes that leaders in education “need powerful communication skills to carry out their jobs, and they will be most successful when they use the power of their words and images in the service of a vision of where our country’s education system has been, where it is now, and where it is going.”

Two years ago, at the beginning of this series, Alan Blankstein sounded the theme that continues to guide our effort: “Saving young people from failure in school is equivalent to saving their lives!” We know how to do what needs doing; research and innumerable examples of best practice have illuminated the way. As always, it is our aim to help strengthen you for this vitally important task.