

# Preface

The journey into 21st century learning begins with a compelling, collectively developed vision. Whether your school is large or small, rural or urban, high-achieving or struggling, traditional or charter, diverse or homogenous, low socioeconomics or high socioeconomics, visioning is an essential ingredient for success. It clarifies beliefs, understandings, and expectations. A vision shared is a vision that has grown to permit risk, encourage growth, and allow for the expansion of knowledge and experiences.

*Visioning Onward* will prepare teachers and educational leaders to guide schools through a systematic visioning process. Although our primary audience is school principals, teacher leaders and district administrators will also find value in this book.

In this book, you will learn about the journeys the authors have taken—about our dreams and visions for people and schools in America and around the world. You will hear from exemplary practitioners about their visioning, the processes they underwent to implement changes, and the results of their efforts. Whichever population of students you serve, wherever your school is located, we believe you will find relevant information here.

With *Visioning Onward*, we offer school leaders a stimulating and inspirational resource and a practical guide for creating a vision that transforms schools into 21st century learning environments—environments that strengthen student engagement and cognition, provide safe and nurturing learning opportunities, and produce students who have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to be successful in their life, work, and community.

We will accomplish the following:

- Point to the why and how for developing a sustainable, yet practical 21st century learning vision for your learning community

- Provide thought-provoking historical information on visioning in education and industry
- Highlight lessons learned about what exemplar schools are doing to turn their visions into reality
- Share the common trends that have emerged across schools and appear to be at the heart of impactful, positive change
- Explain key strategies and tools for clarifying collective beliefs and building a shared vision
- Suggest the use of practical implementation ideas provided from exemplar school leaders
- Provide a case study to further clarify our suggested process
- Contribute insight on breakthrough possibilities that may emerge in the near future

*Visioning Onward* is designed as a practical guide that will also provide readers with interesting observations about the inspirational visions of major organizations and exemplary schools. In reading it, you will find gems as you learn about how visionary leaders worked with teams to bring about substantive changes to their schools and businesses. We urge you to take the time to marvel at the brilliance at some of the visions we share!

We have organized the book in three sections: Part I—the Historical and 21st Century Foundations for Visioning, Part II—Practical Considerations and Steps to Visioning, and Part III—Visioning at the Macro Level. In Part I, we address the relevance of visioning for schools and the opportunities afforded with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We also share examples of visions from major businesses such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Starbucks and consider a vision from a global nonprofit organization that works with schools and other organizations, Ashoka. Michael Fullan describes the need for 21st century technology to be “irresistibly engaging and elegantly efficient.” We believe these terms can be applied to the visioning process in schools as well. The last thing we need is visioning to be a deadly, mundane exercise. Part I helps set the stage for a provocative look at ways to move successfully into the future.

Part II takes the reader through our proposed Steps to Visioning, with a discussion of considerations for obtaining buy-in from key

stakeholders and sustainability. The visioning process we recommend is iterative—we provide a graphic organizer to help guide this process. However, visioning is not always a walk in the park. Sometimes it can be more like climbing a mountain or stumbling over a rock as you strive to gain footing. Like preparing for a hike on the Appalachian or Pacific Crest Trails, principals will be better positioned after learning from others and mapping out their own course ahead of time. In many ways, visioning is like chopping down trees, removing boulders, and clearing brush to forge ahead. Part II will help prepare readers for their journeys by sharing some of the challenges principals faced as they championed their visions while considering the role of their schools within their districts, negotiating with district-level administrators, and building consensus within their school communities.

Part III describes visioning and experience on a global scale as well as challenges and opportunities that exist on the macro level. We end with a discussion of the implications for individual schools and districts.

## **How to Approach *Visioning Onward***

Principals and others may find it easiest and most straightforward to read this book front to back. That approach will ground you in the context for the book, take you through a step-by-step process, and lead you into future considerations. However, the most will be gained if readers go beyond “reading” this book and fill in the blanks for their own schools and districts. A small study team or core learning team may wish to select a leader and implement the steps we recommend, taking your school through a trial run and preparing for more widespread collaboration with the larger school community, including ways to engage parents and community leaders. Or you may want to begin with a book study group to discuss and learn about what we are recommending before undertaking your own journey.

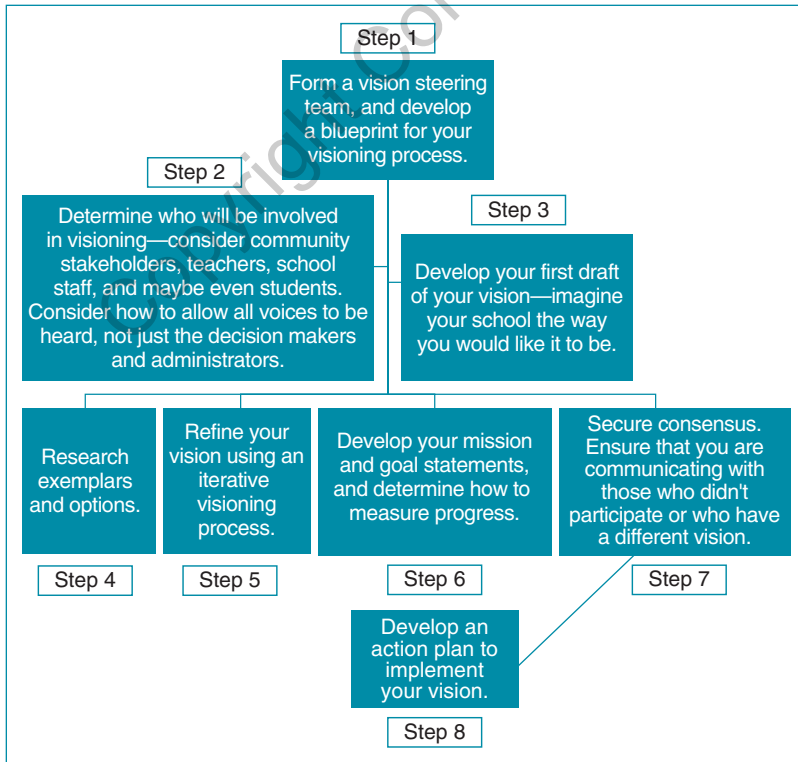
Whatever approach you take, we believe you will benefit from taking time—time to read, consider, reflect, dialogue, research, and plan. We have captured perspectives on visioning from a diverse group of businesses, schools, and leaders. As you proceed through the book, we try to ask a series of critical questions to guide your reflection. However, even when you are in a reflective mode, you may find that there’s a wealth of decisions to be made—with many potential

activities (see the exercises at the end of Chapter 3), many models to follow (Chapter 2), and even as you and your team conduct research (Chapter 3), you may find so many options in terms of directions to head. So please, take time to process, find those gems that speak most to you and your team, and piece together a plan (see Chapters 4–6) that best suits your circumstances and needs. The final chapters focus on issues of sustainability and a global view of visioning.

With each chapter, you can count on a connection to the prior chapter, practical exercises, authentic voices, and resources. At the end of the chapters are Practical Points to Ponder and Ideas for Leading and Learning.

We lay out the foundation for visioning and the steps depicted in Figure 0.1 in Chapters 1–6 (you will see this figure again in the concluding chapter as Figure 9.1). In Chapter 7, we provide strategies for sustainability, including how to remove barriers, and lay the groundwork for visions to last beyond the leadership that helped bring a

**Figure 0.1** Implementing Your Vision: 8 Critical Steps



particular vision to the forefront for a particular school or district. However, visioning does not end with Step 8—after that step comes the need for developing a mission statement, goals, and an action plan.

### **One Size Does Not Fit All**

When we review successful schools, whether they are schools that are led by award-winning principals or schools that have received awards from others, a few key things stand out. First among these are that the schools are responsive to their local communities. Yes, many of the most successful schools may demonstrate high academic gains. Many of the most gifted principals have been charismatic. Many of the most successful schools have not had to overcome great adversity. Yet, these schools did not operate rigidly according to a formula that formed a blueprint for allocation of resources, parent involvement, or professional development for staff. Instead, the experts who led these schools had freedom, and with that freedom they worked with teams to design schools that took their schools light-years into the future. In essence, leaders figured out that what worked well in New Mexico may or may not be one of the best approaches in Atlanta.

So, we encourage you to think of shoes. You will have some miles to cover to move ahead. You may want hiking boots, sandals, or a pair of heels. Or perhaps you will do better with wing tips or sneakers. In any event, it is most important that your shoes fit! To get a good fit takes some measurement and comparison—and sometimes trial and error. So, sit down, put on a comfortable pair of shoes, and get ready to take a few steps into your future.