

## What Your Colleagues Are Saying...

As our world changes, we must also change the way we think about leading, teaching, and learning. *7 Mindshifts for School Leaders* offers practical strategies for how to make meaningful change to positively impact school communities for the better. This is a must-read book for all school leaders.

### **Starr Sackstein**

Author and COO of Mastery Portfolio, LLC  
Oceanside, NY

*7 Mindshifts for School Leaders* is a stand-out game-changer! Hamilton, Jones, and Vari offer real-time ideas and examples to support you with current leadership strategies. They provide a blueprint for implementing effective change to bolster student achievement.

### **Matthew X. Joseph**

CEO X-Factor EDU  
Boston, MA

Hamilton, Jones, and Vari empower school leaders to craft new solutions for age-old problems. This framework is an inspiring pathway and highly doable. Each new lens offered is complemented with a plethora of relatable examples, strategies, and resources.

### **Aubrey Patterson**

CEO and Founding Partner of Warm Demanders Inc.  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

The seven mindshifts shared by Hamilton, Jones, and Vari give current and upcoming school leaders a fresh way to think about the unique problems their schools are facing. The easy-to-read format offers the models and mindshifts school leaders need to develop solutions to issues such as classroom management, achievement gaps, teacher retention, and more. It is a must-read for all leaders.

### **Nathan Maynard**

Author/Coach/Founder of the Restorative Group  
Indianapolis, IN

In *7 Mindshifts for School Leaders*, Hamilton, Jones, and Vari lay the foundation for how leaders of the next generation will need to think differently to effect change and impact our schools. Reading this book is the first step in creating the mindshifts needed to fight decades-old battles in education. Let's start the revolution!

**Salome Thomas-EL**

Award-Winning Principal, Speaker, and Author  
Wilmington, DE

I love a book that is unabashedly deep. *7 Mindshifts* is brimming with new insights and ideas for action. Each of the mindshifts is unique and rich with analysis and directional solutions. Take time with each mindshift. Savor it in its own right. Each one is a change theory on its own. The seven together cross-cut and stimulate more ideas about how we might find new ways to think about old problems in education.

**Michael Fullan**

Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

We exponentially increase our chances of solving the vast challenges facing education when we adopt a crisis mindset. Enough with planning and strategizing! *7 Mindshifts for School Leaders* is an all hands on deck call to action.

**Daniel Bauer**

Chief Ruckus Maker, Better Leaders Better Schools  
Syracuse, NY

Hamilton, Jones, and Vari redefine what we mean by crisis and explain the mindshifts needed for effective school leadership. Their ambition is no less than to solve persistent, fundamental problems in education. This book should sit on school leaders' desks with many dog-eared pages and highlighted sections. It leads educators to the right place to start and the methods to sustain the positive changes all students desperately need.

**S. David Brazer**

Brazer Education Consulting  
Petaluma, CA

# 7 Mindshifts for School Leaders

Finding New Ways to Think  
About Old Problems

Connie Hamilton  
Joseph Jones  
T.J. Vari

Foreword by Joe Sanfelippo

 CORWIN

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# FOREWORD



By Joe Sanfelippo

“You have the build for running. You should be a runner.” That comment made me laugh so hard that I was thankful I hadn’t just taken a sip of water, or I would have spit it out. My friend, Tony, then went into a monologue on the benefits of running. The only time I had ever thought of running was during a bad dream in which I was being chased by a wild animal. But Tony was so convincing that the next day I went out and bought a brand-new pair of shoes, new ear buds, and one of those things runners use to attach phones to their arms. In less than 24 hours, I had gone from never running to setting a goal to be a marathon runner. I woke up the following day to begin “marathon training.” The Couch to 5K app, apparently knowing more than I do about running, indicated that I only needed to run for 7 minutes. Clearly the app didn’t understand that I was a marathoner. I decided instead to run until I was tired. Afterward, I felt really good. I even got a taste of what Tony called “the runner’s high.”

On my way to work, I felt amazing. I drank a lot of water because us runners, we hydrate. I stretched in the hallways so I could tell people I was stretching from my run. That day, I was a runner and I saw marathons in my future. The next morning, however, I couldn’t feel my legs. I started to rationalize everything in my world. I thought, *I am going to be traveling next week. I don’t know if my shoes are going to fit in my bag. I don’t even know if they have roads where I am*

*going. I'll just wait until I get back to start my running career.* That week turned into months and months turned into years. I have the most expensive lawn mowing shoes in the county and I have never even run a 5K, let alone a marathon.

I had the shoes, the app, the ear buds, the thing on the arm. What I didn't have were the two things that I needed to make it work: persistence and the immediacy to change my behavior. Had I been chased by a wild animal I wouldn't have had the chance to rationalize or delay, I would have run and continued running because survival is worth the time and effort.

This same mindset applies to our roles as leaders in education. When we fail to see the urgency of issues, or rely on things instead of our own commitment, our practice remains the same and our problems persist. The pandemic was our wild animal. It removed the option to delay. We had to do *something* and do it quickly. Schools across the country were able to accomplish in weeks that had previously taken years. The crisis mindset required us to take immediate action and out of those efforts came incredible benefits to students and families. We now have systems that give us the ability to connect from anywhere, the aligning of curriculum because we weren't afforded the amount of time we had in the past, and new ways to demonstrate because we were in different places. We now need to ask ourselves if we can use that mindshift to move faster and provide better opportunities for those we serve.

*7 Mindshifts for School Leaders* does just that. Connie, T.J., and Joe have done an amazing job of breaking down how school leaders can use the crisis mindset of the pandemic to take on the problems that have plagued us for decades. Each chapter offers school leaders a new way of thinking that will help them find solutions to persistent problems. The authors relate success stories from outside of education to show how those mindshifts and strategies can be used as game changers in education. Technical tips such as the Crisis Filter tool in Chapter 1 will help you determine whether a problem should

be treated as a crisis. The end of chapter reflection questions will not only help you and your team delve into thoughtful analysis regarding the particular challenges in your school, they also prompt readers to take immediate action in their own settings.

The strategies in this book are practical, but more importantly, you will see yourself and your team in the examples. That connection sets this book apart and will set your group apart from those who aren't willing make the mindshifts necessary to provide better opportunities for those we serve. As you read this book, prepare to face your own wild animals and be challenged, but also supported, in a way that will change the way you lead.

**Joe Sanfelippo** is the superintendent of the Fall Creek School District in Fall Creek, Wisconsin. The International Center for Leadership in Education named the Fall Creek School District a National Innovative District in 2016 and 2017. Joe started the #1minwalk2work Leadership Challenge, co-authored multiple books, including *Hacking Leadership: 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love*, and most recently authored *Lead From Where You Are*. He was selected as one of fifty superintendents as a Personalized Learning Leader in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Education, and Education Dive named Joe their National Superintendent of the Year in 2019.

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# PREFACE

## FROM FLAWED THINKING TO NEW MINDSHIFTS

The way we see the problem is the problem.

—Stephen Covey (1989)

### *Embracing Mindshifts*

Consciously choosing to think about old and ongoing problems in new and intentional ways is what we call a *mindshift*. This book is about mindshifts that educational leaders can make to generate new and necessary changes to established practices that currently aren't solving the important, urgent, and persistent issues within our schools—problems that should be approached with the same level of commitment and urgency as a crisis. In fact, we argue that there are perennial problems in education that have gone unresolved for so long that they have reached a crisis level. Our ultimate hope is that by demonstrating the flaws in the present thinking and by describing new ways of approaching old problems in education, you'll shift your mindset about how we do school.

**Mindshift:** Consciously choosing to think about old and ongoing problems in new and intentional ways

**Mindset:** A current mentality that influences how a leader perceives, thinks about, and reacts to a situation

We use the term *mindset* to reference a current mentality that influences how a leader perceives, thinks about, and reacts to a situation. Even when leaders have a “growth mindset,” as defined by Dweck (2007), their perception and actions regarding old problems can still be limited by flawed thinking. Therefore, each chapter spotlights a new shift in thinking to a mindshift that is often used when faced with a crisis.

Each of the seven chapters follows a consistent structure that contains five distinct sections to help you analyze one mindshift at a time. Reflection questions are offered to close each chapter to help you process and connect the mindshift to your leadership role. The following describe each of the five sections per chapter and their purposes for readers.



## Outside Story

Inspiring leaders are found both within schools and within the corporate world. Every chapter of this book begins with a story that comes from outside of education that highlights how successful individuals and companies have exhibited the mindshift that the chapter will describe. These stories are not only meant to characterize the necessary thinking to initiate change but also provide the inspiration that change leadership and innovation are possible. New ways of leading are within our reach, and we have to look beyond the walls of our schools to find new ways of approaching old problems.



## Flawed Thinking

In each chapter, we provide you with a clear understanding as to why the current thought processes are unsuccessful in solving old problems. We take great lengths to explain how the



prevailing logic, even the notions of making change, are failing to resolve our biggest and oldest problems. We have to come to terms with the fact that our best efforts aren't yielding the results that our most historically marginalized students need from their schools. You'll likely cringe as we candidly describe today's reality, even in systems that embrace the need to do things differently. As the chapters unfold, you will uncover why we believe that a mindshift is so desperately needed to combat our educational crises.



## New Mindshifts

This is the section where each chapter's mindshift is fully explored. We lay out a way of thinking about problems that will offer a fresh perspective and novel approaches to finding solutions. What we don't offer in this book are silver bullets or easy fixes to address your school's persistent problems; you need to know that before reading another word. We don't know your unique needs, and we don't propose to have all the answers. What we do offer are 7 mindshifts with a corresponding model for processing and solving lingering problems that will help you to move faster and more successfully toward your own solutions. We believe that this book, and what you can glean from it as a reader, is one of a kind. The models, as far as we know, have never been intentionally initiated in education before and only exist in other fields and in rare instances where success can be found.

Mindshifts and Their Models	
Mindshift	Model
Leading With a Crisis Mindset	Important, Urgent, and Persistent
Leading With a Battleground Mentality	Relentless, Experimental, Agile, and Learning Culture

(Continued)

Mindshifts and Their Models	
Mindshift	Model
Leading With a Beginner's Mind	Discover, Collect, Process, and Respond
Leading With an Octopus Approach	Learning, Independent Parts, Sensemaking, and Temperament (L.I.S.T.)
Leading With a Disciplined Tunnel Vision	Vision, Values, KPIs, Principles, Focus, and Models
Leading With a "Yes, And" Attitude	Define, Analyze, Identify, Select, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate
Leading With a "Go With What Is Known" Response	Accomplish, Understand, Decide, Initiate, and Test (A.U.D.I.T.)



### Applying the New Mindshifts to Schools

The mindshifts will apply to various problems that you might be facing. In this section of each chapter, we chose an obvious and persistent problem to which many school leaders will relate. While the provided connection aligns to only one problem, we expect that you will make your own connections to other problems that you face in your school or district. The mindshifts and their models are built to be used universally, but we apply them in each chapter as examples for how you might approach a needed change in your setting.



## Technical Tips

The technical tip at the end of each chapter is meant to help you get started in applying the mindshift to your school leadership role. We offer protocols, strategies, and techniques. Each will enable you to lead others in committing to eradicate persistent problems, preventing them from haunting our students, staff, and community yet another year in schools.

When you're done reading this book, you'll be a different kind of school leader than you are today. You'll learn to lead with a crisis mindset, and you'll attack old problems in new ways. You'll be less afraid, more empowered, and better equipped to challenge the status quo and do what needs to be done for our students. You will have reframed the concept of crisis in schools to see that persistent problems can only be solved if we approach them as the crises that they are.

## Reframing "Crisis"

When you hear the word "crisis" you probably think of emergencies, catastrophes, or even a pandemic. And, rightly so. In addition to these single, but serious events, there are lingering and consequential problems in education that live in our schools, and we classify them as another type of crisis. As educators, authors, and consultants, we have the privilege of traveling the United States and working with schools in our own states and around the country; we see the same perennial problems afflicting schools year in and year out in school systems of every size and zip code. Educators have been fighting the same battles for decades, using the same thinking and the same tools with mixed results. Our central argument is that these issues have evolved into crisis

proportions, and something new and different needs to be done about them.

Unfortunately, we also see some of our most deeply ingrained and inherent issues being left alone. And it's not because of ill-intended or apathetic leaders. What has happened over time is that our biggest issues have persisted for so long that we have grown accustomed to them. Maybe we even see them as a reality of our circumstances that is out of our control, conditions to accept or simply left as unsolvable given our current means. Whether it's a lack of resources or what seems to be an insurmountable effort, we find that busy school leaders have developed strategies and processes to *deal with* the outcomes of our most significant problems, but are just not able to *extinguish* them altogether. This, too, is becoming a crisis.

We can relate to how the day-to-day operations of a school or district can be so daunting that our mission to quell persistent problems takes a back seat to the problem du jour. This constant sense of urgency can create confusion on the difference between something that is an actual crisis and something that is important at the given moment. How we define a crisis is laid out in the first mindshift and threaded throughout the remaining chapters. In Chapter 1, you will find our three-part model that, when applied, will determine if an issue is in fact a crisis and should be dealt with accordingly using a new and intentional way of thinking about problems. We want leaders to know how and when to use what we call Leading with Crisis Mindset to make the difference that you intended to make when you became an educator. All of the other mindshifts in Chapters 2-7 are ways that we can lead with a crisis mindset to reach beyond the barriers of our oldest problems in schools. These are the mindshifts necessary to attack crises.

## Feel the Shift

This book is written for school leaders—teachers, principals, and support staff—who care about leadership and the mindset that is needed to make a change. This book is for leaders who want to challenge the status quo in new ways. After reading this book, you will feel the following shifts:

1. *Think differently about old problems.* You'll understand why problems persist, and you'll shift to a new way of thinking about how to solve them.
2. *Discover new models for change.* We know that you are an instructional leader who supports a student-centered approach to equity for all kids. That's a given. What will help you, are the tools and tips for identifying the silent crises that are harming our schools and our students and the intentional mindset to eradicate them.
3. *Be equipped for change leadership.* We're inspired by literature regarding change leadership in education, and we know that this book will help leaders to initiate change by providing new ways of confronting our crises.

## Leading With a Crisis Mindset

This book is a call to action for a new mindset for solving perennial problems in education, one where leaders follow a problem to its core and unveil every related issue and then work to build a comprehensive response that employs resources within the school and within the community. This new mindset for solving problems entirely and turning to systemic solutions is what we call a crisis mindset. We define it as *an unfiltered, 360° view, and approach to solving problems with urgency that abandons conventional wisdom and*

*accepted restraints until a meaningful solution is found, implemented, and sustained.* It is an outlook and no-turning-back approach that responds with immediacy and urgency to old and ailing issues that are the Achilles heel of learning and progress in schools.

Leading with a Crisis Mindset is about finding new ways to think about old problems. With it comes new opportunities for engaging with our communities, accessing diverse resources, embracing radical new ideas, and charting a course of improvement—all actions designed to solve what is commonly held as an unsolvable issue. We challenge readers to consider long-standing problems in education as crises and approach them with the same tenacity that we did when the pandemic hit.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Producing anything of value and substance requires a great deal of time and sacrifice. And, that time and sacrifice doesn't only come from those who are completing the work. In the case of this book, it came from the people closest to us—our families, friends, and colleagues, who are constant sources of encouragement, support, and inspiration. Without them, it simply wouldn't be possible to write or contribute beyond our daily work. With three people coauthoring this book, there are too many people who deserve acknowledgment to name. With that, we simply express our sincere gratitude to our family members, close friends, and coworkers for providing the support system needed to write this book.

We also want to thank and dedicate this book to all of the tremendous front-line educators and personnel who worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to attend to student learning and well-being. Those in the trenches know how challenging the pandemic days were and the amount of effort and will that was required to maintain our connection with students. This book was inspired by the gravity of COVID-19 and how people responded to the huge demand for change that it required. Whether we look to teachers who made great strides in the classroom or to someone from nutritional services managing curbside food pickup, great efforts were made to reinvent what we once knew as the norm. Their commitment to students ignited in us an awareness and desire to identify what is possible when we make complete mindshifts about what we often accept as our reality.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Connie Hamilton, EdS, served in the field of education for 25+ years as a teacher, instructional coach, principal, and central office administrator. She earned her master's and educational specialist degrees in the area of School Leadership with emphasis on curriculum and instruction. Her best-selling book *Hacking Questions: 11 Answers That*

*Create a Culture of Inquiry in Your Classroom* was published in 2019. Along with Starr Sackstein, she coauthored *Hacking Homework: 10 Strategies that Inspire Learning Outside the Classroom* and also wrote *Strained and Drained: Tools for Overworked Teachers* with coauthor, Dorothy VanderJagt. Throughout her career, Connie has supported teachers and administrators to refine their instructional practices and be reflective educators. With experience throughout K-12, Connie is mindful of systemic needs and how to develop structures that create growth within the entire system. Connie presents internationally on topics centered around instructional practices such as questioning, formative assessment, teacher clarity, and student engagement. Leaders and teachers benefit from Connie's experience when she coaches them to put practice to action as they continue to learn and grow.



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the state's Outstanding Academic Achievement Award. He received his doctorate from the University of Delaware in Educational Leadership and was awarded the Outstanding Doctoral Student Award of his class. He presents nationally on topics of school leadership and is the cofounder of the leadership development institute, TheSchoolHouse302. Along with T.J. Vari, he coauthored *Candid and Compassionate Feedback: Transforming Everyday Practice in Schools*. And, with Salome Thomas-EL and T.J. Vari, he coauthored *Passionate Leadership: Creating a Culture of Success in Every School*, *Building a Winning Team: The Power of a Magnetic Reputation and the Need to Recruit Top Talent in Every School*, and *Retention for a Change: Motivate, Inspire, and Energize Your School Culture*.



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