

# Preface

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**M**aking *Schools Smarter: Leading With Evidence* is a practical tool (we refer to it throughout as a “monitoring system”) for helping to solve three of the problems central to district and school leadership. The first problem is to determine a defensible and compelling image of future schools and districts. Such an image provides a framework for decisions about immediate goals and priorities, and decisions about the capacities to be developed among staff, for example. *Making Schools Smarter* addresses the problem by offering a relatively comprehensive and detailed image of future schools and districts conceived of as “professional learning communities.”

Second, *Making Schools Smarter* highlights those aspects of one’s organization wherein changes are most needed if progress toward a valued future image is to be made. It provides not only detailed indicators of professional learning communities but also specific techniques and instruments for assessing the extent to which schools and districts reflect these indicators. Increasingly, leaders are expected to make decisions with their colleagues based on systematic, and many would say, both “objective” and “transparent” evidence. The monitoring system is designed for those who aim to “lead with evidence,” rather than by “hunch” or “gut feelings” or anecdotal information alone.

Finally, because school leaders are being pressed as never before to be accountable, *Making Schools Smarter* provides leaders with the tools to demonstrate and improve on their accountability. This is not an easy task, and the challenge is exacerbated when the demands for accountability become as comprehensive and unyielding as does the No Child Left Behind legislation in the United States. Although obviously a critical element, evidence of student learning alone, for example, will not solve the problem, because so many factors outside the boundaries of schools and districts influence such learning. What school organizations can control and therefore legitimately be held accountable for is the use of best practices (for example, instructional practices, administrative practices) and the development of organizations that foster the development of such practices (demands for “adequate yearly progress” notwithstanding). This third edition of *Making Schools Smarter* reflects our experiences in working with many superintendents and principals over the past 7 years to use the periodically refined and updated instruments and procedures outlined in the book to improve their organizations.

**X** IMPROVING READING SKILLS ACROSS THE CONTENT AREAS***Overview of Contents***

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a synopsis of the school and district monitoring system, the evidence on which it is based, and the assumptions that lie behind it. Chapters 2 and 3 extend the argument, begun in the first chapter, for conceiving of an ideal school and district as a professional learning community. These chapters clarify a number of features important to an understanding of the monitoring system. Chapters 4 through 9 describe the core of the monitoring system: the indicators and illustrative measures of those specific features of the model school and district. Inputs are described in Chapter 4, Outcomes in Chapter 5, and District and School Processes in Chapters 6 through 10. Chapter 11 provides some basic information about the application and interpretation of the survey instruments included in Appendices A and B for the monitoring system for schools and districts, respectively. Guidelines for ensuring productive use of monitoring information are included in the concluding chapter (12).

***Audience***

The concepts and tools available in this book are intended primarily for district and school leaders. In addition, however, developers of indicator systems, evaluation specialists, and policymakers ought to find the contents helpful. Other researchers have used our instruments for their studies as well.