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# Preface

It has been approximately 4 years since Congress passed the most comprehensive federal education legislation since the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) it approved in 1965. Although not particularly significant, it is probably more of an irony that the first ESEA was signed into law by a Democratic president, Lyndon B. Johnson, and was intended to help disadvantaged children receive a higher quality education. The newest ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), approved overwhelmingly by a bipartisan Congress, was signed into law by a Republican president, George W. Bush, in January 2002. NCLB was basically intended to require states to

1. have an accountability plan for benchmarked results using standards;
2. use proven programs that work;
3. ensure that teachers are qualified for their teaching assignments; and
4. narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers in U.S. schools.

Forty-nine years after the federal government became significantly involved in the operation of public schooling, it is still clear that education remains in the domain of both of America's major political parties. Despite the fact that the U.S. Constitution makes no mention of education, federal policymakers have gradually

carved out a role for themselves that has transformed from merely offering funding to help disadvantaged students to proscribing a framework for accountability that demonstrates that all students are achieving proficiency on their states' assessments. Although not stipulating specifically what those assessments must measure, Congress was careful to apply a universal benchmark, the National Assessment of Education Progress, to determine the rigor of each state's education standards.

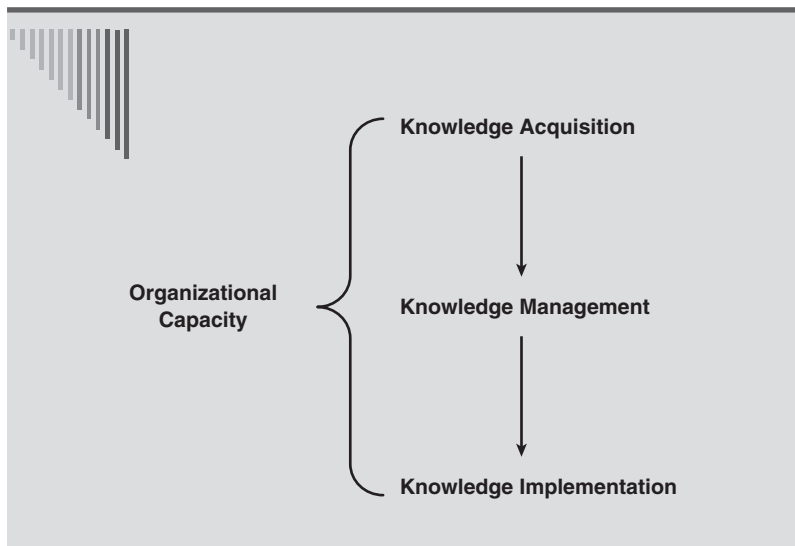
The No Child Left Behind Act has had an incredible response from educators and others interested in education. After more than 35 years as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent, consultant, and adjunct education professor, I cannot remember one instance when a federal education law had as much impact so quickly. Previous education laws and initiatives came and went; national commission reports were publicized and faded into relative oblivion. Consider the report, *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), warning of impending danger if U.S. schools did not improve. It seems like it received more attention in 2003, 20 years later, than it did when it was initially released. Also, it likely had more influence on education reform in 2003 than it did in 1983. Other reports, *Prisoners of Time* (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994) and *Before It's Too Late—A Report to the Nation From the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century* (U.S. Department of Education, 2000) (a commission on which I served as a member), have had very limited influence on education reform. The National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century was chaired by former astronaut and Ohio U.S. Senator John Glenn, an American icon from the days of America's first manned space program, Project Mercury. The commission also included the CEOs of Intel and State Farm Insurance; members of Congress; a governor; representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Defense Department, and the President's cabinet; as well as education practitioners. Despite the prestigious membership of the commission, it has had little impact on mathematics and science education reform.

Why is it that NCLB aroused so many people in both positive and negative ways? Was NCLB innovative or the result of many years of pent up frustration from business leaders and national and state policymakers regarding the low achievement of many U.S. students? Why did the education establishment protest many of the NCLB rules promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education? What strategies can be used to successfully implement NCLB to improve schools?

This book is an attempt to be a useful resource for understanding how NCLB became a law. More important, however, this book is intended to help educators realize that standards, accountability and assessment, teacher quality, parental options, and reforming schools were important but ignored issues for a long time before NCLB became a law. It is my hope that understanding what may well have been the mistakes of the past by not recognizing and implementing the trends or recommendations from policymakers and business leaders may prevent repeating the mistakes in the future. Certainly the recent and increased rhetoric from governors and business leaders on the need for high school reform is analogous to what I have attempted to offer in this book. Educators must understand the importance of building their organizational capacity and undertaking the process of reform on their own to prevent more policy mandates in the future. This book focuses on building organizational capacity through a knowledge model to meet the rigorous requirements of NCLB and to successfully implement school improvement initiatives (Figure A). It will not break new ground but, rather, will encourage practitioners to recognize the importance of acquiring, managing, and implementing knowledge to inform decision making. Instead of drawing on what might be perceived as a complex model, I have chosen to describe the concept in a simple, straightforward manner.

As you will realize, this book is different because it identifies organizational capacity as a three-part knowledge process. It is not a "cookbook" for education practitioners; instead, it is a contextual framework that should guide the process for developing professional wisdom. It is intended to be used by educators who have an

**Figure A** Organizational Capacity-Building Knowledge Model



active role in leading their school or district improvement activities. The first step is a collaborative learning community that will focus on research and evidence-based practices. Board of education members, superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders will all find the information in this book useful as a starting point for their work. College professors can use it to encourage their students to create a mind-set for research- and evidence-based school reform initiatives.

It is important to set the context for change before organizations can respond to transformational work. John Kotter, a respected writer on change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 61), outlines important steps that must be taken before change can be implemented successfully. One of those steps is creating a vision. Clearly, NCLB lays out the vision Congress has for all students in the United States. To implement that vision, however, it is necessary to get “buy in” from the stakeholders. Unfortunately, that part of the process has not worked as well as policymakers had hoped. From

the time NCLB became a law, it was not embraced by those who had to implement it. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the path that many of the education reforms traveled up to the time NCLB became a law. This will enable you to understand the context in which the law was passed.

In Chapters 2 through 5, I discuss the use of knowledge to build organizational capacity. To successfully improve schools will require an intense effort that is necessary to acquire, manage, and implement knowledge. Also, that knowledge must be credible and research and evidence based. I address the concept of building organizational capacity for successful implementation of NCLB and identify a variety of publications and products that can be used to build organizational capacity that can help practitioners with the daunting challenge of accountability for school improvement. This book is not intended to be a step-by-step guide to get you there but, instead, should be used as a starting point to set the context for continuous improvement to comply with the fundamental underpinnings of NCLB. I offer a plan with the hope that those charged with the task of school improvement will fill in the details.

Chapter 6 provides a mind-set for undertaking significant challenges. It was unrealistic for Congress and the U.S. Department of Education to think that, suddenly, every school and state in the country was going to rapidly embrace the notion that every student would make "adequate yearly progress" regardless of whether it was educationally possible, or that every school district would be able to ensure that all its teachers would be "highly qualified" by 2006. Although noble objectives, rather than accept the challenge, many educators and their organizations simply chose to put their energy into opposing the provisions of the law despite the fact that it was considered by many to be morally and ethically appropriate. I include stories about explorers and business leaders who confronted significant challenges and chose not to be defeated by them but instead to overcome them. These explorers and business leaders might be just like some of those unheralded teachers and school administrators who work in challenging situations but have

remarkable success with their students. It is hoped that my examples will link your thinking in that context—examining how a positive mind-set makes a difference and how particular leadership styles affect overcoming insurmountable challenges.

Finally, successfully implementing NCLB is not about merely complying with rules and regulations but, rather, it is about building the capacity of teachers, administrators, and schools as organizations to continuously improve. Knowing how to be successful is the essential ingredient to achieve the challenging goals of NCLB. Even with the best curriculum, a teacher who lacks content knowledge and the necessary pedagogical skills will ultimately be ineffective.

A great deal can be learned from business leaders such as Jack Welch of General Electric, Lou Gerstner of IBM, and others who needed to transform their organizations during the 1990s to remain viable in a global economic society. Although they are from the business sector, their work can serve as a model for today's education leaders, who have similar daunting challenges to create a new standards-based, assessment-driven accountability culture in their districts and schools.

So where should we go from here? As noted previously, this book is not intended to be a cookbook for building the capacity to implement NCLB. Instead, it provides a knowledge model for building organizational capacity. It includes examples of current practices, research, suggestions, and reflective questions along with some theories and "envelope pushing" thoughts with the intent that they will be used by school learning and improvement teams to implement their own plans based on evidence- or research-based practices or both. Far too many school improvement initiatives begin by jumping on a new idea. Often, they are called the fad of the year. Also, school improvement leaders often implement them without setting a context for the project. For instance, they do not discuss why the project is necessary, how they can go about implementing it successfully in their own organizational culture, or research what others have done to succeed in similar circumstances.

I use examples for building organizational capacity from business and sports as well as education. The reason for this is because

I believe business, in particular, has undergone the cultural transformation that education is currently being challenged to go through. Sports teams offer excellent examples of how data and statistics are applied to analyzing performance. One need only consider how many successful businesses had to transform their business plans or face going out of business because of the Internet.

Many people are questioning the quality of the public education system. We only need to observe the growth in home schooling, charter schools, and private sector services to public school students using public funds and also the use of vouchers. There is also sufficient evidence, as noted in Chapter 1, that business leaders have been actively involved in setting the agenda for education with policymakers to ensure that the transformation will take place. Ideas and concepts such as continuous improvement based on benchmarks, worker quality improvement through professional development, and using resources wisely are all part of this transformation. Educators do not have to look long and far to know how difficult it is to raise funds both locally and at the state level to support programs. Difficult decisions are being made by education leaders regarding what programs to retain and what ones to eliminate. Business leaders have been doing this during the past decade, and educators can learn from their successes and failures.

This book offers a model that should guide school improvement work. The purpose of the knowledge model is to provide structure and focus to school improvement efforts. I believe that the menu for school improvement is far too eclectic to result in the type of organizational success that will lead to meeting the requirements of NCLB. Certainly, local politics and decision making play a significant role for the work in schools. There is also a critical need to specifically delineate what are the core essential priorities for educating students, however, and to focus on them with an intense improvement effort. There is more than enough anecdotal evidence pointing to the facts that effective teachers have the greatest influence on student learning, effective principals are essential for high achievement in their schools, and high-quality systemic leadership from superintendents that focuses on district performance and accountability is critically important for school success.

To successfully incorporate these three concepts in schools necessitates a plan that builds organizational capacity by using knowledge acquisition, knowledge management, and knowledge implementation. The movement to use more research and evidence in education decision making will require organizations to be smart, which will only be done through building organizational capacity by acquiring, managing, and using knowledge wisely.