

# Preface

This is a book about caring in school leadership. In the many years that the three of us have worked in the areas of leadership and school improvement, in academic and professional settings, we have come to believe that caring is essential to effective schooling. And we have come to believe that caring lies at the heart of good school leadership.

In recent years, we have witnessed a growing emphasis on academic expectations, curricular and instructional specification, and accountability as primary levers for improving schools and raising student achievement. This emphasis has narrowed the primary focus of education to academic achievement, test scores, and “college and career” readiness. It has displaced attention to students’ social, emotional, and psychological development; their preparation to live in and foster democratic society; and their overall well-being. This emphasis on the academic side of schooling has not come with commensurate attention to sources of caring and support that would help students succeed. Moreover, as research has begun to show, nearly exclusive emphasis on press and accountability makes it more difficult for educators to develop caring, supportive relationships that promote students’ success in school. Indeed, the challenges to developing strong and caring relationships in schools appear part of the general erosion of social bonds in schools, in the workplace, and in communities at large.

We know that both academic press and support are necessary for student success in school. We know that both are necessary for students’ overall learning, development, and well-being. The educators with whom we speak know this, and many are working hard to provide students with the support they need to grow and succeed. We are beginning to see some reconsideration of accountability as a primary lever of school improvement. We see more attention to students’ social and emotional development and to creating schools that are more caring and supportive of students. More generally, we see renewed recognition of the human side of schooling and school leadership.

## Purpose and Audiences

The purpose of this book is to examine the principles and practices of what we call *caring school leadership*. We recognize the importance of caring in leadership, and we wish to encourage more of it. We argue that caring is not some abstract notion, nor is it necessarily an additional domain of leadership work. It is the matter, the manner, and the motivation of all aspects of school leadership, manifest in many ways.

We wrote this book for several audiences but primarily for aspiring and practicing school leaders. While we refer mostly to principals and their practice, we see this book as useful to assistant principals, deans, department chairs, and others, including teachers, who perform leadership work in schools. It is for individual school leaders, for programs that prepare school leaders and promote their ongoing professional development, and for professional associations that guide and nurture school leaders and their practice. It is also for teachers and parents who may be interested in caring in schools and how all members of a school community can work together to promote the caring and support of students.

We take as a given that principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders care deeply about students, their learning and development, their well-being, and their success in and beyond school. We say the same for teachers, parents, and caregivers—those nonparent adults who raise children (e.g., relatives, older siblings, etc.). And we take as a given that in their day-to-day work, school leaders want to be caring of students they serve. School leaders are drawn to the profession because they care about children and feel a calling to support them. Yet we know that caring about students and being caring of them are not necessarily synonymous. We know that for myriad reasons school leaders' actions and interactions do not always reflect attitude and desire.

We hope that this book will inform and guide acts of caring school leadership. We wish for it to reveal possibilities, inspire, and motivate and for it to shape expectations that school leaders hold for themselves and that others hold for them. By focusing on practice, we hope that this book might help bring these expectations to life.

## Organization of the Book

This book is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 explores the concept of caring as the heart of caring school leadership. Chapter 2 applies the concept of caring to school leadership, presenting a model that lays out three arenas of caring leadership practice. The next three chapters explore these arenas. Chapter 3 examines how principals can be caring in their relationships with students. Chapter 4 discusses how principals can work with teachers and students to cultivate their schools as caring communities. Chapter 5 considers what principals can do to foster caring for students beyond the school in families and in the broader community. Chapter 6 explores different ways that caring school leadership can be developed. It presents activities and experiences of leadership development and the characteristics and qualities that make them effective. This chapter and the book conclude with a look at self-care as a means of caring school leadership development.

## “You Are Here”

We are not the first to write about caring in school leadership, although this book is among the first to focus particularly on its practice. We follow several others who have explored the meaning and importance of caring in

schools and in school leadership, notably Lynn Beck, Catherine Marshall, Nel Noddings, Leonard Pellicer, Kathleen Sernak, and Thomas Sergiovanni. Much of this earlier work stresses the role of human relationships in leadership and the importance of a supportive school community for student success.

References to caring and to related constructs can be found in recent work on school cultures that promote student learning and academic success (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Murphy & Torre, 2014). This work points to the importance of environments that are student centered and characterized by personalized relationships with teachers, physical and psychological safety, and support for academic learning. Such environments are populated with programs and practices that provide academic and social support relevant to students' learning and developmental needs. They are anchored in norms of trust, valuing and respect, accessibility, fairness, and, importantly, care.

We also locate caring leadership within the broader construct of *positive school leadership* (Murphy & Louis, 2018). Derived from positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship, positive school leadership rejects deficit models of human behavior and the tendency to focus on ways to correct problems and punish misbehavior rather than to promote growth. Instead, it proceeds from optimistic and asset-based views of human nature and potential. It emphasizes capacity and agency in persons and communities and the building up of persons and communities through empowerment and learning. Positive school leadership stresses the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership. It emphasizes equity, fairness, and justice. It underscores character and virtues in leadership. Positive school leadership requires leaders at all levels of the educational system to act in the best interests of others. It brings to the fore personalism, trust, and respect. Many of these qualities are present in caring school leadership.

Finally, this book can be situated within the professional practices embodied in the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). PSEL sets as the priority of school leadership the academic success and the broader learning, development, and well-being of students. Leadership is directed not simply toward the success and well-being of students generally but specifically toward the success and well-being of *each* student. Reflecting core ideas of positive school leadership, PSEL incorporates a humanistic and relational perspective of leadership. PSEL recognizes that student success in school depends on both robust academics and strong systems of social support working in tandem. Caring is relevant to each of PSEL's ten standards. Accordingly, we hope that this book can serve as a resource to bring PSEL to life.

## Our Sources

We derived the ideas in this book from a number of sources. Through teaching aspiring and practicing school leaders, working with practicing school leaders in schools and at workshops and conferences, consulting with school

leaders' professional associations, and hearing students, we gained insights into the importance of caring in school leadership and into issues concerning caring in school leadership practice. We sought input and feedback from individual school leaders and teachers about the general idea for this book and about specific substantive aspects as we were developing it.

We reviewed scholarly and professional literatures on caring in education and educational leadership, and we searched for additional perspectives in literatures of related academic fields and disciplines, including philosophy, ethics, sociology, political science, and the organizational sciences. We also looked for insights and lessons in the scholarly and practice literatures of other human service professions that recognize the importance of individual caring, the cultivation of caring environments, and even caring in the public. These professions include health care and social-services administration, nursing and medicine, and the ministry. Several of these human service professions provided useful insights for our thinking about how to develop caring in school leadership.

Much of our work with these literatures can be found in our earlier academic writing (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Murphy, 2016a; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016). These books and articles lay the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical foundation for this book on practice.

## Selection of Practices

Throughout this book, we discuss specific practices as examples of caring school leadership. We selected practices for their fit within our model of caring school leadership. Each has a foundation in theory and research and can be found in publications of a professional association, a research and development group, or a professional and academic publishing house. While we are not able to present empirical validation of all these practices, we believe that their grounding in theory and research, their logic, and their consistency with our ideas about caring and caring school leadership make them worthy of consideration. Moreover, we do not present these practices as “must do” recommendations. We present them to illustrate general principles of caring leadership practice.

## How to Use This Book

This book is unlike many other books about school leadership practice. Readers will not find in this book “to-do” lists or scripts. Readers will not find compilations of strategies that are universally effective. This book is an exposition of ideas, principles, and values, illustrated with examples of how to make school leadership practice more caring. We present caring school leadership as situational, dynamic, relational, and personal. There is no “one size fits all” for caring leadership. We eschew the notion of recipes, of telling readers specifically what to do. Instead, we present a framework, principles, and possibilities to inform and inspire.

We encourage you to take the principles and possibilities contained in this book and consider them in relation to your current practice and the practice to which you aspire. Use these principles and possibilities to challenge yourself. Try to reflect upon different practices presented herein, but keep in mind the big ideas that underlie them. Choose among and adapt them to your particular situation. Create and experiment with practices that are consistent with principles of caring school leadership and are appropriate for you and for others in your school and community.

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