

Preface

The *Whole-Faculty Study Group Fieldbook: Lessons Learned and Best Practices From Classrooms, Districts, and Schools* is the natural companion book to the editors' earlier three books on Whole-Faculty Study Groups: *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning* (1998), *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Student-Based Professional Development* (2001), and *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Professional Learning Communities That Target Student Learning* (2005). As Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSGs) and their application have been refined since their creation in 1987, many especially effective WFSG initiatives have emerged as excellent real-world examples of WFSG models. In its 31 chapters, *The WFSG Fieldbook* provides an array of successful WFSG and WFSG-related initiatives, providing a comprehensive collection of relevant and helpful illustrations and models of the WFSG System in action in the field.

The Whole-Faculty Study Group (WFSG) System has spread to school systems across the country, and the implementation and work of study groups has now become a daily occurrence in many schools, districts, and school systems. Because such work is continuous in these schools, the process and its refinement are constantly evolving. What one study group does has the potential to affect other schools that use the WFSG System.

In addition, as Murphy and other consultants travel from school to school around the country in their consulting role and Lick continues to research the application and theoretical bases for study groups, new ideas are generated that help strengthen the WFSG System. These changes accumulate over time and lead to major adjustments that make the process even more effective. In the eight years since the first WFSG book was written, several hundred schools have implemented the WFSG System. This translates into several thousand individual study groups. From these and continuing groups, new insights into the WFSG approach have created a wealth of new and helpful material.

If the study group model were a paper-and-pencil design, it might stay in a fixed or rigid state. Because the model continually evolves from how teachers actually work together in schools, it is fluid and readjusts itself. As leaders in schools chronicle the movement of study groups, we examine why some are high-performing groups and others struggle. What we learn is shared with schools already involved in WFSGs and those that are considering or just beginning the process. This fieldbook offers snapshots of numerous successful WFSG initiatives and provides a valuable

addition to the literature for keeping schools up-to-date with a broad base of findings on what is working best in the field.

NEED AND PURPOSE

School reform and school improvement are on the minds of everyone today, including school administrators and teachers, parents and students, those in business and industry, and the general public. The concerns of all of these people and their organizations will not go away easily or quickly; it will require school reform processes and improvements well beyond anything that this nation has ever seen (see Chapter 31). Consequently, effective transformational processes will be essential to successfully reforming and improving schools and transitioning them so that they meet the students' and the country's future needs.

The WFSG System, as described in Chapter 1 and discussed in more detail in *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Professional Learning Communities That Target Student Learning* (2005), has been shown to be one of the most successful school reform and school improvement processes in the country. When applied properly, it has resulted in extraordinary school and student results.

The purpose of this fieldbook is to deepen administrators', teachers', parents', students', and others' understanding of and ability to use effective school reform and improvement approaches, especially those of the WFSG process, to significantly enhance the potential of their reform and improvement efforts. The many concepts and approaches modeled and illustrated, along with the numerous examples and illustrations, will provide a dramatically enriched collection of new understandings and tools for implementing major and successful school reform and school improvement. There is no other such resource now available in the marketplace. It will be relevant not only to those using the WFSG process, but also to others involved in or preparing for school reform and improvement undertakings.

In particular, the fieldbook will: (a) demonstrate how critical concepts can be applied in a wide variety of school reform efforts; (b) provide a broad array of relevant strategies, concepts, and activities; (c) help readers bring ideas to life by illustrating how to use and apply them in their "real-world situations"; (d) contain first-hand case studies that highlight the details of how concepts worked for a variety of activities and in different settings; and (e) offer tips, strategies, and lessons learned on a wide range of pertinent circumstances, approaches, processes, problem areas, and concepts and ideas.

WHO SHOULD READ AND USE THIS FIELDBOOK?

The primary audience for this book is everyone involved in school reform and school improvement in the country, as well as in other countries. The most natural audiences and potential users of this fieldbook would be all of those who have been involved or are becoming involved with our earlier WFSG books (e.g., school systems and districts, individual schools, administrators, teachers, parents, and their

xii THE WHOLE-FACULTY STUDY GROUPS FIELDBOOK

community leaders), and this now represents a sizable proportion of the school and general population. This fieldbook would be a particularly valuable addition to their library and in their WFSG applications now under way.

In addition, since this fieldbook will provide a wide variety of experiences, examples, and illustrations of concepts and approaches common to *most* school reform and school improvement efforts, this fieldbook should be especially of value to anyone seriously involved in or interested in other school reform and improvement undertakings. Specifically, this fieldbook will be unique in its approach, broadly understandable, and relevant to those who want to lead, be involved in, or support school improvement and reform movements going on around the country now and in the foreseeable future.

Organization and Contents

The fieldbook is organized with chapters conceptually grouped into eight major sections, called Parts, reflecting their commonality and logical placement under the specific section title, and with sequencing of Parts appropriately following in a natural order. The titles of the eight Parts are, in order: Getting Started, Leadership and Sponsorship, Study Groups and Learning Communities, Key Success Elements, Instructional Strategies, Perspectives for Teachers and Teaching, State and National Initiatives, and An Overview of School Reform.

The contents include the key elements in WFSG and change processes and their implementation, along with a large number of real-world examples and illustrative cases. The fieldbook is written so that it can serve as a textbook, a detailed reference book, or a stand-alone guide for many effective conceptual initiations and implementations, and successful completion of the WFSG approach to staff development and major improvements in schools.

Part I. For those who want to gain a better perspective on school improvement in general or develop an overview sense of the WFSG System, the three chapters in this section provide: (a) a detailed introduction to study groups and effective faculty and school development for using them; (b) an explicit application of WFSGs in a typical school; and (c) an overarching perspective on the pivotal role professional development standards play in school improvement.

Part II. The three chapters in this section illustrate authentic leadership and sponsorship situations, one relating to principals as leaders and sponsors, one with the school district as sponsor, and one with union collaboration to strengthen leadership and sponsorship. These chapters: (a) focus on practices of principals who help their teachers and WFSGs experience success, while enhancing the principals' effectiveness as instructional leaders; (b) unfold an implementation sequence that began centered on student learning, moved to process alignment at all levels, and continued with district-level support for quality implementation and an uncompromising expectation for results; and (c) describe given circumstances and how schools and the union can partner in future relationships to enhance progressive change efforts for significant school improvement.

Part III. This section contains three chapters that discuss (a) research on the effectiveness of study groups and learning communities in school improvement and

(b) examples of special types of study groups, i.e., student and principal study groups, and their applications.

Part IV. This section contains six chapters that give important insights into the key issues affecting school improvement. In particular, these chapters: (a) provide a comprehensive rubric for understanding and generating professional learning communities; (b) show how to build commitment for effective study groups and create and sustain learning communities; (c) use study groups and the WFSG process to bring about necessary and meaningful changes in the school culture; and (d) discuss in detail the process of data-based decision making and its application to enhance student achievement.

Part V. This section contains five chapters devoted to illustrating the successful application of *instructional strategies* in the WFSG process for improving student achievement in the classroom. The chapters in this section: (a) cover primary, elementary, middle, and high schools; (b) focus on such things as: strategies and activities, application of ideas in “real life,” first-hand case studies, implementation of the WFSG System, action plans, rubric development, gap closing, data-based decision making, creation of quality teaching, lesson development, instructional troubleshooting, examination of student work, peer observation and mentoring, effective and ineffective lesson sharing, current literature, and action research; (c) contain several content areas, including reading, mathematics, English Arts, and languages; and (d) have among their success factors: a consistent and supportive administrative team, strong instructional leadership from within, a belief that study groups work, a decision to bring in “expert voices” for writing instruction and sound practices, use of data to drive instructional decisions, a commitment by all faculty members to make a difference in the life of a child, a study group intent on content “that matters” and an instructional focus.

Part VI. This section contains five chapters that offer perceptive stories relating to teachers and teaching. In particular, these chapters: (a) tell how meaningful professional learning for teachers is required for effective student learning; (b) explain how changing teachers’ beliefs about students and learning can positively impact student learning; (c) recount a teacher’s first-hand point of view of the transition and journey toward achieving school success; (d) describe team efforts of a principal and instructional specialist in planning and implementing school improvement that led to true collaboration, different learning styles, opposing viewpoints, and clashing personalities, all uniting together at one school for the purpose of improving teaching and learning and student achievement; and (e) introduce teacher evaluation into a model of sustained teacher collaboration that integrates expectations for self-directed professional growth and elements of shared instructional leadership, empowering both processes and providing a consistent and cohesive focus for increasing student achievement.

Part VII. This section contains four chapters that deal with state and national initiatives. These chapters: (a) unfold the story of how Louisiana and educators throughout the state are implementing in 170 schools, through their Learning-Intensive Networking Communities for Success (LINCS), an effective multidimensional

xiv THE WHOLE-FACULTY STUDY GROUPS FIELDBOOK

professional development process to support improved teacher and student performance; (b) tell how Georgia, in cooperation with business and nonprofit organizations in the state, created the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, providing unique approaches to leadership development, policy influence, and research and development that are positively affecting systematic changes with long-term implications for student success; (c) relate insight into the roles and responsibilities of the Georgia Department of Education and the significant potential they have to influence proper school development; the critical ingredient being statewide dialogue followed by true, meaningful, long-term collaboration with and among all education stakeholders, particularly schools, unifying ideas to ignite and sustain the required change to perpetuate far-reaching, future-oriented school improvement; and (d) describe the National Whole-Faculty Study Group Center, whose mission is "to ensure student achievement through the authentic application of the WFSG System in schools worldwide," accomplished through people, programs, products, and resources.

Part VIII. School improvement and reform are both "significant local, state, and national issues" and "truly global issues." What happens in this global arena will become a critical part of the foundation for the long-term future growth and development of each member-nation in the world community. The chapter in this section discusses both sides of "school improvement and reform" issues and then tries to illuminate the positive and negative factors and circumstances for us for today and tomorrow, as we attempt to prepare our people and country for the long-term future.

As a final editors' comment, the chapters in this fieldbook have been written by thirty-five different people and offer a comprehensive content and wide variety of perspectives. Consequently, we have tried to keep the "voice" of the authors in each of the chapters so as to capture their essence as if they were talking directly to you, the reader.