

# Preface to the Second Edition

---

In the first edition of *Assessing Educational Leaders*, I claimed that leadership evaluation was a mess. Our research revealed that the evaluations of educational leaders were frequently inconsistent, ambiguous, and unrelated to the strategic objectives of the school system—and that was when evaluations happened at all. In almost 20 percent of the cases we studied, leaders had never been evaluated in their present position. Finally, we found that the longer the tenure of leaders in their current position and the greater their responsibilities within a school system, the less likely they were to receive accurate and constructive evaluations. The response to these findings from a broad range of educational leaders, policymakers, advisers, and researchers suggested that it was time to update the book, add new resources for readers, and provide case studies of success.

**In this new edition**, I offer evidence that a growing number of school systems are making significant improvements in their leadership evaluation procedures, providing models for the educational world to consider. Moreover, researchers and scholars offer practical insights into the key distinction between *evaluation* of leaders—a process sometimes fraught with politics, subjectivity, and relationship-poisoning judgment—and *assessment* of leaders—a process designed to provide feedback that will improve leadership performance. That distinction is at the heart of the new content in this edition, including

- Principal Evaluation Rubrics (Resource E), an exceptionally creative contribution to the field by Kim Marshall, leadership coach for New Leaders for New Schools and the editor of *The Marshall Memo* ([www.marshallmemo.com](http://www.marshallmemo.com)). Marshall not only brings a singular grasp of educational research to this project but provides the most practical method of principal evaluation I have found.
- Hallmarks of Excellence Leadership Research (Chapter 10), a cutting edge leadership assessment and coaching tool designed to provide confidential feedback to senior leaders.
- Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring (PIM) Research (Chapter 11), revealing the specific actions of educational leaders that are most linked to improved student achievement.

## X ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

- Examples of real-world applications of the Ascension Parish Leadership Professional Growth Matrix found in Resource F.

While the new evidence in this edition offers some cause for optimism about the potential for improved leadership assessment, there is also considerable cause for caution. First, in the United States alone, we are about to witness a leadership turnover of unprecedented proportions, with the American Association of School Administrators (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) estimating that more than 40 percent of school leaders will be eligible for retirement within the next four years. Worse yet, the schools and districts most in need—poor, urban, and exceptionally challenging—are those least likely to retain effective leadership. Even among the nation's leading urban school systems, according to the Council of the Great City Schools, superintendent tenure averages only 3.1 years (2006), and cases of urban schools and districts with revolving doors in the executive suite are common.

Some of these challenges are systemic—high-need schools and districts can burn leaders to a cinder with unsustainable hours and extraordinary stress, and therefore higher turnover might come with the territory. But many of the challenges causing leadership turnover are self-inflicted wounds. In particular, boards of education place demands on superintendents and, in turn, superintendents place demands on subordinate leaders, that range from the unreasonable to the ridiculous: The superintendent reprimanded by the board for failure to attend the right service club meetings; the principal called on the carpet for attending the birth of twins rather than the right basketball game; the academic dean raked over the coals for requiring a student to participate in a reading intervention that prevented a failure but irritated an activist parent. If this book can be reduced to a single sentence, it is the following: *Leadership assessment must be focused on effectiveness, not popularity.*

Improvements in student assessment are a hallmark of the past two decades of educational research and practice. From a tradition dominated by multiple-choice tests and norm-referenced assessments, the work of Wiggins (1998) and Wiggins and McTighe (2005), Darling-Hammond (1997), Stiggins (2000), and Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, and Chappuis (2004) have brought authentic assessment and assessment *for* learning into the mainstream. It is therefore deeply ironic that the part of the educational establishment where advanced degrees predominate—building administrators and senior leadership—has failed to keep pace in the use of assessment that is designed to improve performance. If first-year teachers provided feedback to students in a manner that was ambiguous, inconsistent, and unrelated to performance goals, then their jobs would be in jeopardy. But if elected officials and administrators with terminal degrees commit the same offenses with their evaluations, then the too common reaction is resigned acceptance. Thus this edition of *Assessing Educational Leaders* is a clarion call to action. We should expect no less of policymakers and senior administrators than we require of novice teachers—evaluation, assessment, and feedback that is accurate, specific, and clear. Most important, we must change the fundamental purpose of assessment of leaders, following

the pattern of recent changes in the assessment of students. The purpose of assessment is not to rate, rank, sort, and humiliate. The purpose of assessment is to improve performance. Only when leadership assessment achieves that goal will this book have achieved its purpose.

—*Douglas B. Reeves*  
*Salem, Massachusetts*  
*January 2008*