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# Preface

Nearly seven years after finishing my dissertation, titled “A Study of California Superintendents as Instructional Leaders,” I attended my state’s annual superintendents’ symposium, determined that this was the year I would begin to write about the day-to-day work of superintendents. The literature about the work of superintendents that existed was limited and written primarily by university researchers, not practitioners. My goal was to convince some colleagues to write a practical, useful book with me.

At the symposium I shared my short draft book outline with seven practicing and highly respected superintendent colleagues: Rene Townsend, Peggy Lynch, Gwen Gross, Lorraine Garcy, Benita Roberts, Patricia Novotney, and Libia Gil. To my great surprise and delight, they needed no convincing. Each one was enthusiastic and made a commitment to the project.

Over the next three years we met at each other’s homes and district offices and in hotel rooms at professional conferences to flesh out the outline and content for this book that would give readers a transparent view into our daily work. We chose to do this by writing stories and sharing the lessons we learned from our experiences.

The biggest challenge was scheduling group meetings since all eight of us were full-time superintendents, managing homes and families, involved in other professional and community affairs, and paying attention to our health. But we did it because we were excited about the project, believed it would help others, and frankly because we were learning so much from each other.

Our organizing structure for the book was through thinking about the people for whom we were responsible: our community, our

board, our organization and its people, our students, and ourselves. We laughed and sighed together as we shared our stories with candor, letting the frustration, anxiety, joy, and wisdom of our years of experience emerge in each chapter. We filled a void in the literature about public school superintendents that our colleagues appreciated—those doing the job or aspiring to it, and by those who studied superintendents. A number of our male colleagues commented on our first book, *Eight At The Top: A View Inside Public Education*, published in 2002, telling us they were surprised at how valuable and meaningful the book was to them. Since most education leadership books were written by males, and from a male point of view, they had expected the stories of female superintendents to be very different from theirs. They found that our work is shared regardless of gender or race.

Following the publication of our first book, we knew we had to continue our valuable collaborative experience, so we started a new project. Seven of the original eight laid out the plan for another book, this time focused on what it takes for superintendents and their elected school boards to work together to improve student achievement. Published in 2007, *Effective Superintendent–School Board Practices: Strategies for Developing and Maintaining Good Relationships With Your Board*, was dedicated to school board members across the country. At that time we had collectively worked with 137 board members in sixteen different school districts and were well aware of, and grateful for, the sacrifices and contributions these valuable community members make to the youth of the nation.

In this, our third book, *The Superintendent's Planner: A Monthly Guide and Reflective Journal*, we turned our attention to the increasingly complex and demanding day-to-day work of the superintendent. Surveying current books about superintendents, we decided there was another void. This led to a practical book for aspiring, new, and experienced superintendents; board members; and other school district leaders to help them plan for an entire calendar year, staying focused on the work at hand and simultaneously on the work ahead. Once again we reviewed our and our colleagues' experiences. We analyzed the results of planning well, or the serious consequences when planning and executing fell short. We hope our readers will benefit from the insights we gained from our mistakes and oversights, as well as our successes.

Several of us have retired from the superintendent position but, through our ongoing work in education, know a large number of superintendents are stepping into position for the first time, many

with little prior experience or mentoring. We are involved in recruiting, selecting, and coaching new superintendents and providing professional development for them, their board members, and others in their school districts. We plan to use this book as a guide with them and to encourage them to use it as a journal where they can record specific plans and reflections that will influence their course of action throughout the year.

While this book focuses on a yearlong look at the work of the superintendent in managing the day-to-day operations of the district, we truly believe the actions in each chapter are an opportunity for leadership. What you do and how you do it, how you communicate and to whom, and how you spend your time powerfully demonstrates your values and vision—critical elements of leadership.

Our profound hope is that you will enjoy the journey of the superintendent's life and that our book provides you with a practical and usable resource to make the journey perhaps not easier, but more effective and certainly more rewarding. We dedicate this book to you in appreciation for all you do for the students of this country. Like you, we know that public education is the lifeblood of democracy, and your leadership makes the positive difference in millions of students' lives.

Be well and thrive!

—Gloria L. Johnston