Foreword

This book, by Ellen Goldring and Mark Berends, deals with the practical, day-to-day aspects of data collection and analysis. As one principal who reviewed the book said, "This is a wonderful and comprehensive resource that is very practical and easy to understand." It is full of examples, cases, vignettes, and useful advice, but it does not burden the reader with minutia. And yet the book is much more than a how-to-do-it manual.

The two professors nest the use of data, broadly defined, in research on leadership and school improvement. They demonstrate how school leaders can use evidence of many kinds to develop the kind of practices and cultures that produce increased student learning.

Much of the interest in data utilization in schools has understandably focused on how best to use student-achievement data to meet the challenges of high-stakes accountability. Goldring and Berends take a broader and more proactive stance. They believe that although the collection and analysis of achievement data are critically important, understanding student performance also requires the use of other measures of student learning. And they recognize that knowing the extent to which students of different backgrounds and needs meet achievement goals is only the first step in the school-improvement process. Understanding why some students outperform others is also essential to data-based decision making. That understanding comes only from collecting, analyzing, and using data from many sources, including families and students themselves.

Data-based decision making is not just for school leaders and improvement teams. Nor is it just a beginning- and end-of-the-year activity. Goldring and Berends make a persuasive case for continuous collection and extensive use of evidence by the entire school community for both individual students and the school as a whole.

The authors add their voices to a growing chorus of scholars who advocate the wisdom of using data-based decision making for student achievement. Scarcely anybody argues against the approach. Schools in which student-centered collaborative problem solving is a way of life outperform others over and over again. But if it were easy, there would

be many more schools in which evidence-based decision making was ubiquitous.

As Goldring and Berends illustrate, the use of data as a pathway to improvement is not just a technical process. The continuous examination of individual and school performance constantly calls into question whether there are more or better things to do to facilitate student learning. The constant use of data creates *disequilibrium,* and the attendant tensions can result in positive outcomes. Or it can create discouragement, which may lead individuals or the school community to retreat to more comfortable and less changeful postures. The outcome depends on the ways (there is not just one) leaders develop and sustain a culture of shared responsibility and ensure that teachers, staff, and students have the resources and support they need to sustain change based on their data analysis.

This book is one of a series edited as part of the Leadership for Learning initiative of the American Association of School Administrators. The primary purpose of the series is to provide school-level leaders with support in developing and sustaining a schoolwide capacity for continuous improvement. This book achieves that goal exceedingly well.

—Willis D. Hawley and E. Joseph Schneider