

Preface

Let me begin my overview of *The Portable Mentor* by telling you what this book is not. This is not an educational textbook, replete with philosophy, conceptual frameworks, and research studies. An abundance of such material exists, much of which, I presume, you encountered in your preparation courses.

Now, allow me to tell you what this book is. Originally, I designed this book as a practical “nuts-and-bolts” resource for new principals. Later, I added material for people who were mentoring new principals for the first time. In its present form, this book serves those two primary target groups—first-time principals and first-time principal-mentors. In addition, while field-testing this material, I learned that it also assists two other groups of educators—individuals who are exploring the idea of becoming a school principal and students who are enrolled in preparatory programs in pursuit of their principal licenses. Some students reported that upon finishing their preparatory programs, they used the content in this book to prepare for job interviews.

Additionally, the second edition of *The Portable Mentor* includes an expanded section on the topic of improving student achievement. This is in response to the increased emphasis on the principal serving as the school’s instructional leader.

The Portable Mentor stems from my continuing passion for the principalship and my desire to help those who assume the role as the school leader. My first formal opportunity to assist beginning principals occurred when I retired from a 34-year career as a building principal and assumed a principal-mentoring role. In the 12 years since that initial mentoring experience, I codesigned a principal development project at the University of Dayton (UD), which subsequently became an Internet-based, distance-learning program for the Department of Educational Leadership at UD. That project led to my role as a regional coordinator with the Ohio Entry-Year Principal Program, sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Concurrently, I wrote curriculum for the ODE Entry-Year Principal Program and served as a trainer of entry-year principal mentors.

Unabashedly steeped in practicality, this handbook serves primarily as a portable and prescriptive resource for entry-year principals. It provides a focused, organized approach that helps the novice school leader maneuver through the management and organizational demands of the job. Yes, I used the *M* word: *management*. While I have no quarrel with the current emphasis on the importance of principals being effective leaders, I maintain that effective leaders must also be effective managers. If they are not, they will not survive on the job long enough to do much leading.

By now, you may have noticed that I am delivering the content of this book in the first person. This “from me to you” style of writing is the personal approach that

I prefer. I hope that my attempt to “converse on paper” will give you the sense that I am serving as a mentor to those of you who are first-year principals and a peer to those readers who are serving as principal mentors. In this way, I hope that you can imagine the two of us sitting together discussing the great adventure of being a first-year principal or first-time principal-mentor.

I have organized the content of this book into four parts: The first three parts, “Defining the Job,” “Doing the Job,” and “Deciphering the Job,” address issues related to the entry-year principal. The fourth part focuses on principal-mentoring issues. Here is a brief overview of each part:

- Part I (“Defining the Job”) focuses on the importance of developing a conceptual model of the principalship. This part includes information about the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Educational Leadership Policy Standards*, which you can use as a conceptual model of the principalship.
- Part II (“Doing the Job”) provides a chronological listing of tasks that principals encounter during the course of the school year, from preparing to open the school, through the first day and week of school, to the closing of school and getting ready for the following year. The chronological perspective presents a traditional fall-to-spring, nine-month school year. With minor adjustments, persons engaged in year-round school programs will find the content applicable to their situation.
- Part III (“Deciphering the Job”) presents a list of generalized conclusions and “lessons learned” that have broad-based application to the challenges of being the school leader. The first topic addressed in Part III is “how to improve student achievement,” which reflects the priority given to this ongoing challenge for the school principal.
- Part IV (“Mentoring the Mentor”) addresses issues that a first-time principal-mentor should consider. While the content focuses on the principal-mentor, I encourage the beginning principal to read and draw upon the information in this part as well.

To the entry-year principal, I want to stress that I do not presume that my written thoughts can substitute for the human touch. If you have access to the services of a knowledgeable, competent mentor, then you are fortunate; many beginning principals do not have mentors. However, even if you do have a mentor, it is doubtful that he or she can be constantly available. *The Portable Mentor* is available whenever you want to take advantage of it. You may carry it with you and refer to it at times and places of your own choosing. You may use it to plan and meet your short- and long-term administrative responsibilities in an organized fashion. I trust that you will find the ideas and material in this book helpful as you plan for and conduct the activities that are associated with the school principalship.

To the first-year principal-mentor, I presume that the material in the first three parts of this book will be very familiar to you. Drawing from your experience as a school administrator, your strength will be in helping your mentee interpret and apply the content of this book to the mentee’s workplace. Together, I trust that you and I can help the beginning principal succeed and grow on the job. I also hope that the content in this book (especially Part IV) will help you succeed and grow as a principal-mentor.

NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION

Most recent version of the ISLLC *Standards* (revised and released in February 2008)

Expanded section on strategies for improving student achievement:

- Identification of ten core characteristics of successful strategies for improving student achievement
- Referenced excerpts from other educational authors and organizations to provide supportive rationale for the ten core characteristics

Clarifying language in the “tasks” section regarding the following:

- Building and/or campus security, plus an emergency crisis plan
- Technology
- Student-led conferences regarding academic progress

New A-to-Z tips regarding the following:

- Competition for students (related to school choice and public relations)
- Delegating
- Equity and fairness
- Grace under pressure
- No Child Left Behind law
- Personal welfare
- Policies and procedures
- Research: results and relationships
- Time and time management
- Visibility
- WITPOTA: **What Is The Purpose Of This Activity?**

Clarifying language in Module 28:

- Helping your mentee to document leadership