

Foreword to the Third Edition

The school bell sounds at 9:00 a.m. at Estelle Elementary in Marrero, Louisiana. Serving 930 students pre-K through 5, Estelle sits in a working-class suburb across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. We enjoy a wonderful mix of ethnicities and family groups which range from two-parent homes to grandparents rearing grandchildren or even great-grandchildren, to father-only or mother-only homes, to foster families. In these trying post-Katrina times, many families still live in cramped FEMA trailers or with multiple family groups.

We at Estelle also have been entrusted with the most medically-fragile special needs students in our school district. As young as three years of age, our students with special needs give all of us the courage to face whatever challenges come our way. Who could complain when they see a child who is severely involved use a switch device to communicate a want for the first time? Or a child confined to a wheelchair laugh with glee as he dog-paddles unfettered across the therapy pool? The School Reflection Garden is a memorial to the 58 students who have passed on from this life over the last 20 years. Just today we lost another angel. Each student who has gone on to the next life is depicted as an angel on a ceramic tile that was hand painted by an Estelle student in the Talent Program. The tile has the names of the student who passed away as well as the student artist who created it. Our special children are gone but never to be forgotten.

Many of our students attend Estelle because their parents or grandparents attended Estelle. Our parents take pride in being involved in their children's school. We receive many requests from

parents living outside of the attendance zone for their children to be given permits to attend Estelle.

What is the magnet that draws these families to want their children to attend Estelle? I believe that the pull, the natural draw, is that Estelle is an inviting, supportive, and nurturing learning environment. Our mission is simple: “Estelle = Educating Students to Experience Life-Long Excellence.” Testimonials about the positive impact of our faculty and staff on the lives of Estelle students support our claim. Former students return to share their success stories: making the honor roll in middle or high school, receiving scholarships, or succeeding on the job.

The school bell sounds a familiar chime, for I have arrived at this school every morning for 20 years. I confess that this is not “just a job” for me. It is my passion. I am not a middle manager, as principals were considered when I first started the principalship. I am a leader, a transformational leader, who has the power to create a school climate that supports students, faculty, staff, parents, and the school community by my words, gestures, and deeds.

I start every day by telling our students that I love them. Parents are always welcome. Teachers know that I am here to remove any barriers that stand in their way of being the most effective teacher for their classes and teacher leaders for our school.

Support, assistance, and reinforcement is what is needed by both adults and children in the greater New Orleans area as we continue to struggle back from the physical and emotional destruction of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Two years later, many remain scarred. But our school is a sanctuary that I will protect.

The work of Blase and Kirby resonates clearly for me. Although I am a seasoned principal, it still serves as a gut check for principals struggling not just with a storm’s aftermath and children with unimaginable challenges, but also with the taxing mandates of No Child Left Behind and its hallmark, high stakes tests, with a disillusioned profession, and an accusatory public. But we know that we must educate every child, regardless of the gifts or limitations the child brings to the public school. If I want our students to be successful, I must support our teachers in creating education that is meaningful and engaging.

Bringing Out the Best in Teachers: What Effective Principals Do gives teachers voice in identifying what they need to be successful. It provides relevant research in an easy-to-digest format. Blase and Kirby have given principals a gift, a means to assist us in getting a grip on priorities, especially for those who grasp school keys for the first time. The third edition provides a blueprint for principals. It is an excellent springboard for reflecting on our own strengths and challenges. Those aspiring to leadership roles are well-advised to read this book first. It takes the right personality and skill set to motivate heretofore unappreciated, underpaid, and overworked teachers. The third edition of *Bringing Out the Best in Teachers* validates the role of the principal—we are the shepherds who tend to the needs of teachers, bringing them together as a collegial, professional learning community.

We praise, we support, we expect, we empower, we suggest, we model, we care. The school bell sounds and we are ready.

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