Foreword

In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.

Eric Hoffer

These are certainly times of change. What is less certain is what kind of change do we want from our formal education to prepare our students for tomorrow?

Fortunately, *Evidence-Based Strategies for Leading 21st Century Schools* provides wise counsel for educational leaders, policymakers, and interested citizens around how we might "reimagine learning."

As chief executive officer of the Consortium of School Networking (CoSN), the association of school district technology leaders, I believe we all need to be focused like a laser beam on the core questions:

- How can we create an educational system that is more participatory, more engaging, and—most important—better at enabling learners to move at their own pace?
- How do we move entire institutions to leverage emerging technologies like mobile devices, blended learning, and collaborative tools?
- How do we do this in a time of deep economic crisis where the so-called new normal requires us to "do more with less"?

Lynne Schrum and Barbara Levin's new book provides excellent answers to these critical questions for those who are given the big responsibility of leading our school systems. It should be on the "must-read" list of every technology leader/chief technology officer, curriculum leader/chief academic officer, principal, and superintendent who want to lead 21st century learning environments. What I particularly found useful were the leader-tested strategies, case studies, and exemplars woven throughout the book.

In the high-performing school systems I visit, one thing stands out. They have created a systemic culture aiming toward continuous improvement. In other words, powerful learning environments are all about creating a supportive and innovative environment for the entire team. In these places of innovation, they have a distributed model of leadership.

As this book documents, school improvement cannot be the sole responsibility of its leaders, yet leaders play a critical, perhaps decisive, role. Leaders clearly set the vision and tone. In places where leaders don't create this environment, innovative teachers make it happen in spite of the system, and all too often those islands of innovation are not scalable or sustainable.

It is also more than simply providing the infrastructure and technology to get to transformation, yet that is also an increasingly essential element of 21st century learning. Today's learners need a robust education network that connects them to rich digital resources, experts, and, most important, enables collaborative environments for learning. Technology is increasingly the key to using formative data that provides constant feedback to learners and educators so we can personalize learning by going deeper and faster.

All that said, the reality is that sustained school improvement also requires rethinking and reallocating financial resources, providing ongoing and job-embedded professional development, defining rigorous and relevant curriculum and instructional practices, and building community support. This book provides a great road map for starting on that path.

I suppose it would be easier if there was one cookie-cutter solution that could be mass produced and imposed on all schools that would get us to a better education system. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—sustainable change doesn't happen that way. We live in a decentralized educational environment in North America that requires new, collaborative leadership models. For that reason, Schrum and Levin provide a variety of approaches to leveraging technology, creating infrastructure, and implementing changes in teaching and learning when school improvement is the ultimate goal.

As you read this book, you will hear the authentic voices of teachers and administrators describing innovative solutions to key education challenges in their communities. You will learn about educators facing challenges similar to those faced in your community. I encourage you to think about how you can adapt, apply, and modify those strategies and start the process in your institution.

As I speak with educational leaders around the United States and the world, I find a great interest in how digital media can improve learning. And, I see more and more school systems trying to not simply layer technology on the way they have always done it, but to really rethink and reimagine what learning can look like today.

Yet, you only have to pick up the front page of the *New York Times* in recent months to see there are many doubters that technology is worth the cost. That is why we must move toward evidence-based strategies, documenting the value of investing in technology. It is why I am so excited about the cutting-edge work being done to calculate the "value of investment" in technology. We all must get better at articulating the full cost of our investments and more clearly measure the value to improve learning, be it tangible or intangible benefits.

Despite the challenges we are currently facing around funding of education, and particularly of technology in schools, I am optimistic. That is because if we frame the conversation around what sort of skills our children need to succeed both for work and life, we have no choice but to boldly reimagine learning. As Hoffer points out, we must avoid holding on to an educational system preparing kids for a world that no longer exists.

As this book so aptly points out, technology is not a silver bullet. But, it can be a transformative agent when leaders provide the vision, leadership, and well-thought-through implementation strategies. When done right, ICT in education enables personalized learning, bridges formal and informal learning, and provides engaging learning environments.

Are you ready to lead?

Keith Krueger

CEO, CoSN

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