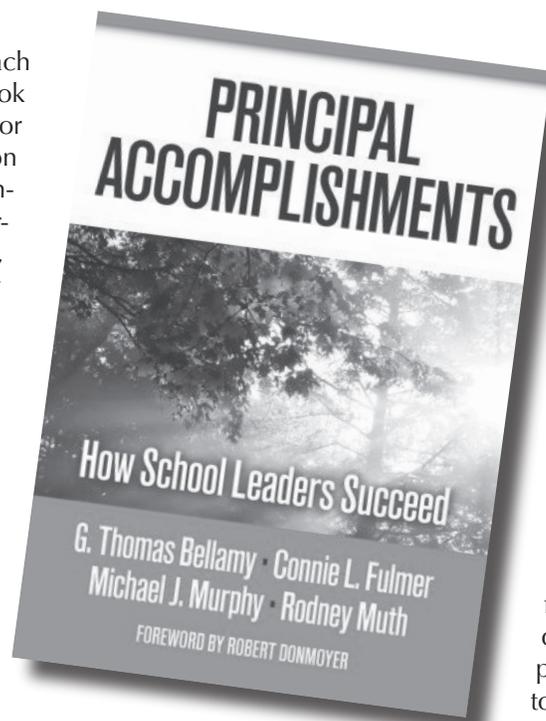# Principal Accomplishments: How School Leaders Succeed
Book Review by Maria Elena Rico, California

Offering a novel approach to principalship, this book provides a framework for school leadership by focusing on accomplishments rather than conditions for effective school leadership. Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, and Muth propose a new way of thinking about the role of the principal in the face of an increasingly challenging environment. The authors' purpose is threefold: (1) to help leaders think differently about their work, (2) to provide practical leadership strategies, and (3) to help the academic community improve its support of principals. They define accomplishments as "the positive results, or conditions, that schools and their leaders strive to create in order to support student learning and reach other school goals" (p. xv). The book is divided into three sections, with the first section providing the theoretical framework for school leadership as accomplishment-minded practice, the second section offering practical ways for the practicing principal to implement the framework, and the third section focusing on the knowledge needed to support the principal's work.

Accomplishment-minded leadership focuses on four domains: (1) defining school goals for student learning and school conditions, (2) deciding which school conditions, or accomplishments, require attention at a specific point in time, (3) guiding the solution of day-to-day problems to foster conditions principals wish to sustain in their schools, and (4) working to build and sustain the social capital needed for the school community to collectively reach decisions and take action related to the school's accomplishments. These four domains serve as the lens for the principal's actions, and interact with accomplishments in nine critical areas that are both the means and ends of schooling. The Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments (FSLA) identifies the nine positive conditions through which schools influence student learning, namely learning goals, instruction, student climate, related services, resources, school operations, staff support, renewal, and family/community partnership. The FSLA serves as "a mental model for understanding major responsibilities of school leadership and organizing those responsibilities around student learning" (p. 40).

Once the authors clearly explain the leadership domains and the idea of school accomplishments, they focus on how the accomplishment-minded practice helps school leaders improve their practice. The four domains, leadership for sustainable goals, leadership for strategic focus, leadership for effective action, and leadership for social capital, represent distinct responsibilities. The principal uses these domains to attend to different aspects of the school and work with different constituencies, with an intended result of a school vision and goals that are articulated in success criteria for accomplishments, school structures to reach all accomplishments, better school conditions, and more interconnection among teachers and with community members. Each leadership domain is closely examined: specifically, how it supports student learning as well as responsive leadership strategies for the daily challenges principals face. The authors provide real-world examples of each leadership domain and how the FSLA offers a framework to focus daily actions on student learning.

The final section of this book addresses the professionals who frame educational leadership programs or offer professional learning opportunities for principals. The authors address the knowledge principals need to succeed in their role of instructional leader. They propose organizing this professional knowledge around an accomplishment-based structure that "invites simultaneous consideration of a more eclectic knowledge base that includes consideration of moral, legal, critical, and practical aspects of the school circumstances that principals face" (p. 137), while making professional knowledge more accessible to the practitioner. Along with the development of this accomplishment-based knowledge base, the authors advocate narrative or practitioner craft knowledge,

a combination of case studies and self-reflections. The benefits of professional cases include the extension of the profession's knowledge base by recognizing the value of the practitioner's knowledge, connecting practitioner knowledge with formal research, supporting transitions in responsibility that may facilitate smooth leadership succession, easing communication among various school constituencies, and becoming a basis for professional development and learning. Such professional case studies provide real-world examples for educational programs as well as practicing principals, affording both groups the means to study practices and develop strategies to address daily challenges. Finally, the authors explore the knowledge that individual principals bring to their school. They examine the important knowledge for principals, how principal candidates can structure their developing knowledge, suggest performance tasks that support the development of structured knowledge, and propose contexts to help principal candidates use their knowledge.

Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, and Muth provide a fresh approach to rethinking the design of school leadership practices while offering valuable insights and ideas for analysis and reflection for principal leadership. The four leadership domains and the Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments challenge the principal to establish measurable goals and identify desired results that improve student learning. These domains provide a means for principals to embrace the core tenets of critical friends groups, namely a press for achievement, adaptive practice, and improved student learning. Indeed, the authors' call for an "annual case [study] of school leadership" (p. 139) in support of continuous learning provides a vehicle for principals and their case teams' to address the mission of the NSRF by reflecting on their practice and working collaboratively to create powerful learning experiences that improve student learning. This book is a must-read for anyone open to having their assumptions about effective school leadership challenged! ∎

"Principal Accomplishments: How School Leaders Succeed," G. Thomas Bellamy, Connie L. Fulmer, Michael J. Murphy, Rodney Muth Teachers College Press, © 2007

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ing their dilemma in a way that ensures that the focusing question is focused around what's going to make the greatest difference for students with the greatest needs. It helps to surface some of the assumptions we bring into the work.

This vice principal left with great ideas for getting better attendance records, but I would argue that it didn't create more powerful learning experiences for students. Our mission states that our end goal is to "create and support powerful learning experiences for **everyone**." As practitioners and as an organization, I think we have barely dipped our toes into unpacking what our mission statement really means and what it looks like in action.

CFG work has changed the lives and practice of many educators, including myself, but the elephant in this room is that most of us doing the work are white. If this work, as we're currently doing it, really empowered all voices, wouldn't we see more faces of color at our national meetings? Wouldn't we see stronger data around equitable student outcomes connected to our work?

What do we need to do to think differently about our work in the future as we shift our thinking and our structures to better engage the "everyone" in our mission statement? I'm left with the conviction that we still need protocols to support our collaborative work across difference. However, my conviction is now tempered by an awareness that protocols are guidelines that must be revised, interrupted and sometimes scrapped, in the moment, if the process is not serving the needs of our most underserved students. I'm talking about stepping into the "zone" of dissonance and staying there because we know we can't really grow until we are disturbed and uncomfortable enough to change our practice. ∎

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Visit our website at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html to download Kim Feicke's Framing Dilemmas tool as cited in this article.