

Leading Schools in Challenging Times: Eye to the Future

reviewed by [David Edward DeMatthews](#) & [Becca Gregory](#) – November 14, 2016

Title: Leading Schools in Challenging Times: Eye to the Future

Author(s): Bruce A. Jones & Anthony Rolle

Publisher: Information Age Publishing, Charlotte

ISBN: 1681233673, **Pages:** 264, **Year:** 2016

[Search for book at Amazon.com](#)



The last 30 years have brought a broad range of educational policies, reforms, and research. These efforts have undoubtedly shaped how school leaders view themselves, their roles, their duties, and the necessary approaches needed to create high-performing schools that close racial achievement gaps and address other longstanding equity issues. High-stakes accountability and standards-based reforms ushered in by No Child Left Behind and more recent federal and state legislation have heavily influenced the types of leadership activity occurring in schools. In addition, many principals and teacher leaders continue to struggle with re-envisioning their roles and responsibilities in meeting the complex and changing needs of their students.

School leaders must have a critical awareness of how educational policies impact various student groups, especially with changing student and community demographics. This is the landscape where *Leading Schools in Challenging Times: Eye to the Future*, edited by Bruce A. Jones and Anthony Rolle, is written. This book considers issues associated with leadership values, managing systems to improve instruction, principal accountability in the context of high-stakes testing, principal preparation pipelines, principal leadership standards, the economics of education, and how leaders respond to equity issues confronting different students. Since this text is an edited volume, readers benefit from the expertise and experiences of both emerging and senior scholars who contribute interesting and insightful chapters relevant for current and aspiring leaders and faculty in the field of educational leadership.

Dantley's Chapter One provides a critical analysis of the field of educational leadership and its restrictive and technocratic grounding in managerial strategies to school improvement. He argues that school leadership requires an interdisciplinary approach that recognizes the social and cultural context where school reform must be implemented. The author does not simply focus on generic conceptions of instructional leadership where principals and other leaders are focused on curriculum alignment, teacher evaluation, and other reforms associated with neoliberalism. Instead, Dantley concludes that school leadership must include civil rights and social justice agendas. These approaches do not simply aim to increase student achievement as measured by a test, but also produce a critical citizenry that demonstrates democratic principles throughout society.

Chapters Two and Three focus on managing systems of instruction and principal accountability. In Chapter Two, Neale and Black investigate instructional leadership and evaluation protocols in a large school district to critically consider the roles principals are asked to play as both supervisors and instructional leaders. The authors find that despite the use of revised teacher evaluations and other district policies, principals and teachers remain deeply entrenched in the norms of their position that are embedded within the hierarchy of their district. In Chapter Three, Rinck, Rolle, and Burrello explore the usefulness of the Florida Principal Leadership Standards. The chapter discusses historical perspectives on national and state standards, the rationale for Florida's model, and how principals often find standards to be redundant and devoid of context. Chapter Four, written by Danzig, Black, and Martin, examines research on the principal preparation pipeline in Minnesota. It reviews literature and policy on university preparation, licensing, and continuing professional development.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven focus on education policy, leadership, and shifting student demographics. In Chapter Five, Johnson, Allen, Boundy, and Parnell offer national and regional descriptions of the country's shifting demographics while providing an analysis of different critical theories that inform school leadership. In Chapter Six, Rodriguez and Brazil-Cruz make an important argument for greater institutional responsiveness directed by school leaders for Latina/o student populations. They also provide recommendations for increasing leaders' abilities to create greater institutional responsiveness. Chapter Seven, written by Keels and Rusin, continues emphasizing the Latina/o and immigrant student populations by reviewing research findings that provide evidence of teacher biases against this population. The chapter concludes with recommendations for educational leaders and teachers.

Chapters Eight and Nine focus on philanthropy and the economics of education. In Chapter Eight, Jones, Van Der Velde, and Walter provide a policy implementation case study of a foundation that collaborates with a school district and a community college to increase interest in science-related careers. The role of teacher leaders and professional development is explicitly discussed. The book concludes with Alexander's Chapter Nine, which examines the economics of K-12 public education and its implications for leadership at various levels of government. This chapter highlights important issues in the economics of education literature regarding equity and efficiency. It also discusses supply and demand issues in relation to teachers and curriculum in different communities.

The foundational knowledge of education policy and school leadership presented in this book provides an excellent starting point for graduate students, aspiring leaders, and practitioners interested in learning more about key issues affecting educational reform. We applaud the editors and contributors for developing a text that discusses many key issues. I believe that many audiences will find this volume to be very important. While the text's strength is clearly its broad focus on school leadership issues and concerns about equity, the tradeoff is that it does not provide a specific or unified framework for equity-oriented school leadership that practitioners could adapt in their districts or schools. No book focused on leadership and the future of public schools can anticipate or address the current and emerging challenges within education. This text is a strong effort in covering diverse topics, including additional equity issues that have been overlooked or underemphasized (e.g., students with disabilities, racial discipline gap, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex issues, etc.).

In sum, we believe *Leading Schools in Challenging Times* makes an important contribution to the literature on principal preparation and educational leadership in the current context of school reform and shifting U.S. demographics. This book can be of even greater use when supplemented with other resources focusing more on educational leadership issues and the challenges associated with creating more equitable schools and communities (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Normore & Brooks, 2014; Ryan, 2012).

References

Anderson, G. L. (2009). *Advocacy leadership: Toward a post-reform agenda in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Normore, A. H., & Brooks, J. S. (Eds.). (2014). *Educational leadership for ethics and social justice: Views from the social sciences*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Ryan, J. (2012). *Struggling for inclusion: educational leadership in a neoliberal world*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Article Tools



Email this article



Print this article



Post a Comment

Related Articles

[Competing Priorities and Challenges: Principal Leadership for Social Justice along the U.S.-Mexico Border](#)

[Central Office Leadership in Principal Professional Learning Communities: The Practice Beneath the Policy](#)

[Taking Charge: Leading With Passion and Purpose in the Principalship.](#)

[Balanced Leadership: How Effective Principals Manage Their Work](#)

[What Every Principal Needs to Know to Create Equitable and Excellent Schools](#)

About the Author

David DeMatthews
University of Texas at El Paso

E-mail Author

DAVID EDWARD DEMATTHEWS is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations at the University of Texas at El Paso. His research explores issues related to school leadership, urban education, special education, bilingual education, and social justice. Recent publications include: "Social Justice Dilemmas: Evidence on the Successes and Shortcomings of Three Principals Trying to Make a Difference" in *International Journal of Leadership in Education* and "Competing Priorities and Challenges: Principal Leadership for Social Justice Along the US-Mexico Border" in *Teachers College Record*.

Becca Gregory
University of Texas at El Paso

E-mail Author

BECCA GREGORY is a Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations at the University of Texas at El Paso. She is currently a Ph.D. student in the Teaching, Learning, and Culture program at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her research focuses on issues surrounding autism, special education, social justice, and Latino/a communities. She has presented research at several national and international research conferences and has worked with various local Autism Advisory boards that focus on community involvement and awareness.