
As a first-year assistant principal, I was shown my office, handed a set of keys, and left to find my way. I had no idea where to begin. Thankfully, the other assistant principal sought me out, helped me get started, and became my informal mentor. I have little doubt my experience is very common for assistant principals.

Effective administrative teamwork requires that new assistant principals be provided with a higher level of guidance. Gary Bloom and Martin Krovetz offer a carefully orchestrated means of doing so in Powerful Partnerships: A Handbook for Principals Mentoring Assistant Principals. This is a workbook containing 28 activity-based sections dealing with a broad range of administrative responsibilities. Each section consists of three to four pages of background information, discussion questions, charts, and activities.

In the section entitled, “Dealing with Difficult Parents,” Bloom and Krovetz offer, “As a principal/assistant principal team, it is important that you support one another in dealing with parents.” Discussion questions focus on parent conferences and meetings that went well and those that didn’t—while reflecting on what might have been done differently to improve the outcome. Suggested activities include having the assistant principal and principal meet jointly with difficult parents, taking turns leading, and then debriefing each other afterward.

Another section of high interest to any new assistant principal is “Time Management.” “Time is the single greatest source of frustration for principals and assistant principals,” the authors note, and offer a number of useful tips for organizing the assistant principal’s day, and finding ways to eliminate wasted time. Assistant principals are asked to discuss, “How does the way you spend your day reflect your priorities?” and are provided with Stephen Covey’s Quadrants of Importance, a task analysis worksheet, and a daily log for use in helping organize a day’s workload.

While this workbook provides a methodological means for mentoring assistant principals, it would be a huge job to lead an assistant principal through the entire book in a single year. That said, it can be a highly useful tool for walking inexperienced administrators through the many and varied tasks they will encounter. This is an excellent resource not only for principals mentoring assistant principals, but for districts wishing to establish aspiring administrator programs.

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Do your teachers’ eyes glaze over at the mere mention of “data”? In fact, do your eyes sometimes glaze over? Then let Nancy Love’s book provide concrete steps to use in leading a staff through the process of using data effectively to improve learning.

In the first 95 pages, Using Data gives the how-to of using data for school improvement. A graphic representation shows the structure for collaborative inquiry with thorough explanations and examples of each of the necessary components, which include building a foundation, identifying student learning problems, verifying causes, generating solutions, taking action, and monitoring results. Short vignettes give readers pictures of what it looks like when a staff is involved in this process at different steps along the way.

A central theme throughout the book is that cultural proficiency, the ability to “see differences, respond positively, engage, and adapt,” is essential to an organization’s use of data. Our understanding of the learners’ culture will impact how we analyze, interpret, and act on student data. The book shares several tools to use with staff for building greater cultural proficiency within the organization.

The final 65 pages contain stories of organizations that have followed the steps outlined in this book. These stories give readers insight into the process of data inquiry and the impact these efforts have had on actual schools and districts.

The strategies, tools, and exciting stories found within this book hold great potential for making significant and continuous gains in student learning. The book offers encouragement as she acknowledges the difficulty of maintaining a focus on data amid day-to-day challenges and distractions. She gives concrete suggestions for starting small while emphasizing the need to stay focused on the overarching moral imperative of this work.

“The fact is that we care about data because we care about students,” she writes. “The data are only the means to the end, which is to offer every child the choice of life and hope.”

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