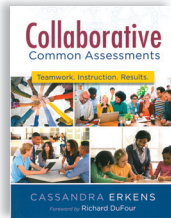


Collaborative Common Assessments: Teamwork. Instruction. Results. Cassandra Erkens. Solution Tree, 2016, 157 pp.

Assessment is an established foundational element in education but, despite its pivotal role as a guide in teaching and learning, assessment often lacks energy and becomes mundane and common. To only compound the issue, educators often find themselves “data wealthy, but information bankrupt.” It is that concern that author Cassandra Erkens seeks to address in her book.

Erkens defines collaborative common assessment as “any assessment, formative or summative, that is either team created or team endorsed in advance of instruction and then administered in close proximity by all instructors so they can collaboratively



examine the results, plan instructionally agile responses, analyze errors, and explore areas for program improvement.” Building on that thorough definition, Erkens guides readers through the process of establishing that assessment tool—from preparation to delivery and analysis.

A major premise throughout the book is that it is not the tool, quality, timing, or intent, but it is how the assessment is used that makes the largest impact. Educators must understand the systems they are involved with, which requires a knowledge of the educational system, as well as the influence of a vibrant professional learning community. Erkens spends a significant number of pages discussing the extended impact of educators collaborating to design and employ assessments, and then continuing on to collaborate on how to best use the data to impact instruction.

From there, she provides practical

instruction and examples of making the data work for you—of using assessment data to improve instruction and results—all while emphasizing the need for a passion to use data not just to monitor or sort, but to inform and guide.

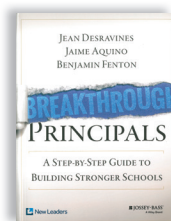
Erkens’ work is practical, credible, and real. She uses numerous real-life illustrations and extensive research to support her claims. Quotations from teachers personally involved in the process—of both successes and struggles—bring reality to the scene and give readers true insight as to the daily challenges of using assessment to impact teaching and learning. *Collaborative Common Assessments* is a fairly easy read, and one in which readers can relate and act on without additional extensive research or study.

Reviewed by Jennifer Klipp, elementary assistant principal of Bob Jones Academy in Greenville, South Carolina.

Breakthrough Principals: A Step-by-Step Guide to Building Stronger Schools. Jean Desravines, Jaime Aquino, and Benjamin Fenton. Jossey Bass, 2016, 336 pp.

Being a principal who works in a high-poverty school, I love stories about leaders who overcome all odds and succeed despite their disadvantages. However, these stories often focus on the charismatic leader who triumphs by sheer force of will and purpose. *Breakthrough Principals* teaches us that sometimes it’s not about being “Superman,” but about the right practices that can make any principal or school super.

Breakthrough Principals is a step-by-step, how-to book concerning school success. It outlines a research-driven, systematic process that takes principals from diagnosis all the way through implementation. As an



added bonus, the book provides extra resources for principals and instructional coaches.

The Transformational Leadership Framework that *Breakthrough Principals* works from consists of five areas that are key for effective schools: learning and teaching, school culture, talent management, planning and operations, and personal leadership. The authors make clear that these are not five stand-alone components, but five areas that are interwoven throughout the fabric of our schools. For example, negative personal leaders have a direct effect on school culture, which in turn could affect classroom instructional outcomes.

After discussing the framework, the authors go into their three stages of school development. Each component of the framework falls into one of the three categories. In the first stage, leaders develop the systems and structures that their schools need for success, then introduce it to staff. Next up is stage two, which speaks to building staff capacity. This second

stage focuses on how to make staff better at performing the structures, interventions, and practices established in the first stage. The final stage is based on ownership. This sense of ownership extends beyond the principal and teachers, and involves community partners, families, and staff.

Another aspect of *Breakthrough Principals* is its liberal sharing of charts, graphs, sample schedules, and surveys. For those principals looking for real-world examples of the explained strategies in action, this would be a great book for you.

The important takeaway from *Breakthrough Principals* is simply—the next level. Whether you’re a beginning principal or have been leading schools successfully for years, you will find something in *Breakthrough Principals* that makes you want to try it immediately or wish you had thought of it sooner!

Reviewed by Brian Bond, principal of Hunter Hills Elementary School in Corbin, Kentucky.