Foreword

In *Common Core Mathematics in a PLC at Work™, Grades 6–8*, series editor Tim Kanold and authors Diane J. Briars, Harold Asturias, David Foster, and Mardi A. Gale provide the information and tools necessary to move educators from Common Core State Standards (CCSS) awareness to implementation—from *knowing* to *doing*. As this book advises, the best way to move this implementation effort forward is through the Professional Learning Communities at Work™ (PLC) model, in which teachers share their craft, knowledge, and wisdom; create new and more equitable learning experiences for students; and learn together how to meet the challenges of implementing the CCSS expectations for middle school students.

PLCs offer an approach to mathematics professional development that runs contrary to what many middle school math teachers have experienced. I know PLCs offer something very different than what I experienced as a middle school math teacher in the early 1980s. I worked in complete isolation from my other eight colleagues except for the one glorious day of collegial staff development we shared each year, only to return to our classrooms for the following 180 days of isolated instruction. Of course, we now know that effective staff development is embedded within the day-to-day practices of teaching and learning, and that adult learning is best sustained when it is facilitated through thirty to one hundred hours of collaborative time with colleagues in a six- to twelve-month period (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). This support is precisely what PLCs offer when done well, as in the PLC at Work model.

PLCs also help teacher teams address one of the most critical issues surrounding middle school mathematics instruction—equity. Ensuring that *all* students have the opportunities and the timely support needed to achieve at high levels is an ongoing challenge of middle school teachers in general and of middle school math teachers in particular. Equity is achieved when teachers, through their collaborative efforts, have similar expectations for all students and work together to see that *all* students are successful. They develop a sense of collective responsibility for all students and move away from the ideology of "my room, my kids." This book paints a vivid picture of that kind of powerful collaboration and provides both the information and tools needed to help teams make the *learning for all* mantra a reality rather than a clichéd chant.

I join many of my highly esteemed colleagues who have already pointed out that, while the CCSS are a step in the right direction, the simple act of adopting a new curriculum will not, on its own, improve student learning or provide the kind of equity schools desire. Over my forty years in education, I have noticed a strong tendency on the part of U.S. educators to look for that one silver-bullet solution to the challenge of providing high levels of achievement for all students. I was often amused in California

by how much attention was focused on the selection of the "right" reading series; as if we could help all students learn to read if we only selected the right books. I see some of this thinking finding its way into the conversations surrounding CCSS. Do we really believe that if we simply adopt the "right" set of standards that all students will learn at high levels?

Fortunately, this book makes an extremely valuable contribution toward this point by framing the discussion of CCSS around first- and second-order change. Goodman (1995) discusses *change without difference*, and identifies top-down, technical responses as first-order changes. These include, but are not limited to: changes in school and administrative structures, bell schedules, and class sizes. Over the years, teachers have been trained in a plethora of specific instructional strategies, such as writing standards or learning targets on the board, managing cooperative learning groups, and asking higher-order thinking questions—all are well intended, but are random acts of improvement. These efforts are usually met with teacher skepticism, subversion, and questions like "Why are we doing this?" As Fouts (2003) notes:

> There is evidence that one of the reasons schools remain unchanged is that the reforms or changes have been superficial in nature and/or arbitrary in their adoption. Teachers and schools often went through the motions of adopting the new practices, but the changes were neither deep nor long-lasting. In other words, the outward manifestations of the changes were present, but the ideas or philosophy behind the changes were either not understood, misunderstood, or rejected. Consequently, any substantive change in the classroom experience or school culture failed to take root. The illusion of change is created through a variety of activities, but the qualitative experience for students in the classroom remains unchanged when the ideas driving daily practice remain unchanged. (p. 12)

So, the question is simply this: will the CCSS be implemented as first-order change and, thus, end up on the pyre of well-intended attempts to improve learning for all students? This book, indeed this series of books, provides a compelling case to move forward with CCSS as not simply a new set of standards, but as the kind of second-order change that will be required in order for this educational reform to be accomplished and sustained over the long term.

—Austin Buffum

References

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