

Forewords from ***Breaking the Low-Achieving Mindset***

Foreword by Mary Louise Gomez

With this text, Sue Abplanalp successfully captures a schoolwide change process in which I was involved for several years. I witnessed teachers making critically reflective changes in ways they thought about, talked about, taught, and evaluated students' literacy learning. She unpacks her thoughtful, skillful leadership so that readers can understand how a community of people working for change developed over time. My work with school faculty was a small part of a carefully designed process. Sue's curriculum leadership enabled teachers to enact their collective values, teaching in a more focused and intensive manner. A result was not only higher test scores, but students who felt more successful at school and were more successful at school. Teachers, too, felt they were and became more effective professionals. But these results did not happen serendipitously. They occurred because Sue is an outstanding school leader who put into effect policies and procedures that made possible collaboration among many stakeholders. In part one of this book, Sue tells the story of her remarkable work in one school, and in part two, she places it in a larger context of research-based principles and practices for school change.

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Foreword by Jan O'Neill & Anne Conzemius

Imagine the corner of a busy city block where there sits an old, two-story brick school building. On the side of the building, a paved playground is separated from the parking lot by chain-link fence. Entering with the children who stream through the front doors, you find yourself in a rabbit warren of small classrooms and narrow hallways. Yet in spite of the age and urban nature of this school, the place fairly hums with the energy of learning.

This was the school where we first met Sue Abplanalp, an extraordinary leader and learner. We have the pleasure of introducing you to her in these pages. When we toured Sue's building, we saw students who were focused, whether working alone or in groups, and adults who were focused, whether working with students or with other adults. We

saw collaboration as teachers sat in each other's classrooms, observing instruction and how students were learning; collaboration as they later met as a team to discuss their observations so they could fine-tune lessons and assessments together. We saw student

reflections on the quality of their work, which was posted on every wall in every classroom and in every hallway. We saw data walls that showed strategic, specific, measurable goals and how the students' performance on different measures compared to district performance. We heard laughter, conversations, engagement.

In the privacy of her office, Sue informed us that it hadn't always been this way. The staff had loved the former principal and enjoyed a strong sense of collegiality. But when Sue arrived three years before, test scores had been consistently among the lowest in the district. When Sue shared this data with the staff for the first time, there was shock initially and then excuses. Sue then began leading the staff through a process of change which she was documenting, with the staff's permission, for her dissertation.

When we started looking more deeply at the process that Sue was using to lead this change, we were struck by how beautifully it supported best practices in professional development, which we all know lies at the heart of improving student learning.

It was then, with Sue's permission, that we "captured" what she was doing as the "30+ Minute Meeting Process"—the schoolwide, data-driven, goal-focused, collaborative instructional improvement process we have been teaching for over 10 years through our books and consulting services. Hundreds of schools at all levels—elementary and secondary—have since adopted (and adapted) this process with great success, finding that by focusing their entire school community on just one or two goals, they have been able to not only dramatically improve student performance, but also have built a strong professional learning community that shares responsibility for student learning, values collaboration, engages in continuous adult learning and development, and embraces the responsibilities of shared leadership. Linda Lambert would say Sue led a "Quadrant 4" school, one with high "leadership capacity." Researchers Shirley Hord, Fred Newmann, and Gary Wehlage would call Sue's school a professional learning community. We would call it a "S.M.A.R.T. school."

Although Sue was relatively unfamiliar with our work at that time, she intuitively used the powerful concepts of focus, collaboration, reflection, and leadership capacity building to help her school achieve dramatically improved results. Later, as she became more familiar with S.M.A.R.T. goals, tools, and processes, she came to appreciate how these could have helped her accelerate the learning process and avoid "reinventing the wheel."

Today Sue is using S.M.A.R.T. methods and tools as she mentors other principals in her new role as Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Schools. Fortunately for all of us, she is finally far enough away from the forest to see the trees and was able to capture both her story of change and her lessons learned.

In this book, Sue takes us all back to the beginning of her journey with the school and then becomes our guide on the side as she leads us through each step of the change process. In the second half of the book, she reflects on her learning, making connections to the S.M.A.R.T. model and tools, as well as providing us with the valuable lessons she learned as an instructional leader, participant learner, and change agent. The children and adults in this school community were truly fortunate to have experienced renewal and cultural transformation. On behalf of Sue and all of us at QLD, we hope you find you are inspired by this book to shape your own school story of transformation and renewal.

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