

THE ARCHITECTURE
of School
Improvement

*This book is dedicated to colleagues whose labors
in the school improvement vineyard
unlocked these lessons for me.*

JOSEPH MURPHY



THE ARCHITECTURE
of School
Improvement

LESSONS LEARNED





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The DNA of School Improvement



Common Wisdom of School Improvement

Set and Pursue Challenging Targets of Performance

For Everyone

Hire and Retain Good People

Provide Everyone with the Tools They Need to do Their Work

Create Coherence; Get All the Pieces of the System Aligned

Pay Attention to Your Customers

Hold Everyone Accountable for the Quality of

Their Performance

The Enemies of School Improvement

Helplessness

Denial

Complacency

Blame

Distrust

Isolation

Fragmentation

Overload

Preface



This volume follows a quite straightforward design. On each page, I label, then explain an “essential lesson” of school improvement, lessons that I have been accumulating for the past 35 years. These lessons are intended to take us into the part of the school improvement story line that is least developed. The more well-developed part of the narrative is concerned with the “content” of school improvement (e.g., quality instruction, leadership). The content can be thought of as the building material of school improvement. The essential lessons are best thought of as the rules of school improvement construction (e.g., in building, we need to attend to both academic press and school culture; neither one alone is sufficient). We can also think of them as “guiding principles.”

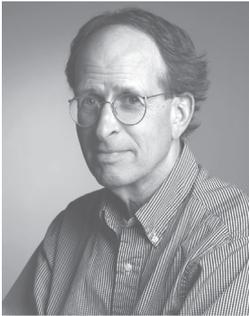
I attempt to deepen the story line on essential lessons in a unique, and I hope engaging and explanatory manner. Specifically, I illustrate these lessons in three “tales” of school reform, all centered on the death and return of Mr. School Improvement and the work of three forensic school improvement detectives—Mr. Wolf, C.B., and Barnabus Dolphin. The tales are a bit of a blend of the work of A. A. Milne and Kenneth Grahame and their leading actors and Arthur Conan Doyle and his gifted protagonist Sherlock Holmes. Each tale is scaffolded on the essential lessons described in the book but in a way that allows the reader to discover them for himself or herself. One can also return to the tales and see the lessons clearly once they are presented in a more direct manner.

Depending on your point of view, you will find the characters in the tales odd or cute or endearing. My intent and my hope is that you will fall on the right-hand side of the interpretative continuum. Wherever you land on that assessment, because good schools are

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always a combination of the right content and the right guiding principles, I believe that you will find these lessons to be of real assistance in the work of building schools in which all youngsters are truly successful.

About the Author



Joseph Murphy is the Frank W. Mayborn Chair and associate dean at Vanderbilt's Peabody College of Education. He has also been a faculty member at the University of Illinois and The Ohio State University, where he was the William Ray Flesher Professor of Education.

In the public schools, he has served as an administrator at the school, district, and state levels. His most recent appointment was as the founding president of the Ohio Principals Leadership Academy.

He is past vice president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and was the founding chair of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). He is coeditor of the AERA *Handbook on Educational Administration* (1999) and editor of the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) yearbook, *The Educational Leadership Challenge* (2002).

His work is in the area of school improvement, with special emphasis on leadership and policy. He has authored or coauthored twenty-one books in this area and edited another twelve. His most recent authored volumes include *Turning Around Failing Schools: Leadership Lessons from the Organizational Sciences* (2008), *The Educator's Handbook for Understanding and Closing Achievement Gaps* (2010), *Homelessness Comes to School* (2011), *Leadership Lessons for School Leaders* (2011), and *Homeschooling in America* (2012).