Preface

Schools that serve children and young people well are defined by two anchoring pillars, strong academic press and supportive culture, a mixture of nurture and intellectual challenge. We know that focusing primarily on the academic side of the equation is insufficient, especially for students placed in peril by poverty. That is, schools with strong press can still prove inadequate if they provide little attention to the social and relationship dimensions of education.

At the same time, we know that nearly exclusive attention to culture is problematic as well. A number of landmark studies have revealed how over emphasis on culture can lead to a lowering of academic expectations. More recent analysis confirms that featuring culture at the expense of academic press is not a wise pathway for school leaders to pursue, nor a destination to which principals should steer their schools. We must not lose sight of the fact that community is in the service of learning.

We also know that because there is an essential connection between learning and social interaction, that press and support work best when they are viewed as an amalgam or conceptualized as two strands of DNA that wrap around each other. They should be braided together to work best. Thus while in this book we focus on the cultural element of schooling improvement algorithm, academic emphasis is never far from the center stage. It is threaded throughout our analysis of culture.

According to Sweetland and Hoy (2000, p. 705), culture is a "concept used to capture the basic and enduring quality of organizational life." It encompasses the values and norms that define a school. It is those aspects of schooling organization that reflect underlying assumptions and beliefs. It can be thought of as the personality of the school. We describe school culture in terms of community, a construct that is defined in a variety of overlapping ways. It consists of ingredients such as membership, trust, and influence. As we illustrate throughout the book, community stands in juxtaposition to institutionalism and hierarchy as an organizational frame of reference and an approach to leading.

We begin our analysis by focusing on communities of pastoral care for students. We suggest that understanding of such communities is critical because at the heart of the educational narrative is this essential

truth: Learning is voluntary for students and students do not volunteer effort when they are detached from school. Creating attachments is key to the work of educators and we need to learn all we can about accomplishing that goal. Analysis is also critical because supportive community for students exercises strong influence on school improvement defined in terms of student learning.

We provide a model of personalized community. We see there that supportive learning community is defined by essential norms (i.e., care, support, safety, and membership). These norms combine to produce intermediate outcomes such as student learning dispositions which, in turn, lead to academic engagement. All of this powers student learning.

The model employs a two-stroke engine, one working to overcome liabilities and the other to build up assets. To begin with then, communities of pastoral care suppress factors that undermine hopes for success, such as the formation of dysfunctional and oppositional peer cultures. Personalization damps down aspects of schooling that push students away from engaging the work of "doing school" well. Concomitantly, supportive learning environments create assets, social and human capital, to draw youngsters into the hard work that is required to be successful in school.

In the second part of the book, we address professional culture, culture reflected in collaborative communities of practice. We examine the "seedbed" from which professional culture grows as well as what some of the flowers look like when they have emerged. We provide definitions and list well-known frameworks of the components of professional learning communities. We present and unpack a model of community of professionalism for teachers.

On the "what" side of that model, we see that a professional learning culture is characterized by six core elements (e.g., shared work, shared accountability). It is these ingredients that define professional learning culture. On the "how" side, we see that a community of practice works by adding capital to the school. One dimension of this capital is knowledge. Thus professional community promotes learning (e.g., deeper content knowledge, enriched pedagogical skills). The other dimension is professional cultural capital. A community of practice deepens professional norms (e.g., efficacy) and accompanying attitudes (e.g., commitment). Increased capital, in turn, leads to changes in the ways teachers conduct their work with students, which in turn leads to better learning outcomes.

In the final part of the book, we focus on communities of engagement for parents and the larger group of stakeholders beyond the school building. We establish the framework to turn work with these critical players from public relations and simple involvement to meaningful engagement. The focus is on forging norms (e.g., trust) that support collaboration, collaboration that fosters student academic and social learning.