What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

Dr. Collado reminds us that strong leadership is critical for accomplishing the journey to success we want for all students, especially for our students in poverty. By providing practical strategies for strengthening the connections of the school and classroom to the family and student, a pathway is created for changing the outcomes for those who are traditionally underserved.

—Emily Freeland
Dropout Prevention Specialist, National Dropout Prevention Center
Hoover, Alabama

Dr. Collado's brilliant work sheds light on the essential principles that guide educators in transforming schools into havens of opportunity for students in poverty. The four pillars offer a compelling framework for creating equitable and effective learning environments. This book should be in the hands of everyone who works in a school or school district.

—Renato M. Lajara
Assistant Superintendent, School District of Philadelphia
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

An invaluable resource for school leaders committed to improving educational outcomes for students from vulnerable communities. Combined with actionable strategies, reflections, and key takeaways, the text constitutes a comprehensive guide for those invested in equitable change in education.

—John Hardman
Coordinator, IDEAL Master's Degree for School Leaders,
Florida Atlantic University
Deerfield, Massachusetts

This is a must-read for school leaders aiming to uplift students living in poverty. Collado's insights empower educators to foster inclusive environments, making it an invaluable resource for transformative leadership. The book emphasizes creating a clear vision, finding purpose, and leading with equity—offering practical strategies for academic and social-emotional support.

—Ted Toomer Jr.
Central Region Superintendent, Boward County Public Schools
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

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Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators *is an indispensable guide for structuring schools that uplift students in poverty. This book is a transformative resource for educators committed to creating equitable and nurturing learning environments.*

—Victoria Kaufman
Retired Principal
Pompano Beach, Florida

I've known Dr. Collado for nearly three decades. His heart has always been dedicated to uplifting students and inspiring leaders to authentically enrich the lives of our students. In Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators, *he unlocks a clear methodology for building equity and systematic support systems to ensure success for all students.*

—Bardetta D. Haygood
Principal, The College Academy at Broward College
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The text is strategic yet dynamic, research-based yet relatable, classic yet timely, aspirational yet attainable. Dr. Collado challenges the boundaries of traditional leadership through thought provoking and practical assessments of how we lead schools and districts. By developing these Four Pillars, he has drawn us a road map to successfully lead our scholars and teachers.

—Cedrick Gray
Author, *The Successful Middle School Leader*
Associate, Creative Leaders Solutions
Millington, Tennessee

Dr. Collado provides actionable steps to create sustainability. He balances the research with practice, providing the reader vignettes and ready-to-use strategies. This book is easy to read and serves as a comprehensive guide for district and school leaders working in high poverty and turnaround schools.

—Patricia Ordóñez-Feliciano
Executive Director, Multicultural Education & School Transformation
West Palm Beach, Florida

Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators *is the ultimate road map to building a school culture that is transformative, inclusive, and empowering by creating conditions that will ensure meaningful community engagement and academic success for all students.*

—Hector Montenegro
Former Superintendent
Austin, Texas

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Dr. Collado has assembled a wonderful book for dedicated and focused leaders. Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators *provides a grounding structure full of strategies, activities, and tools for leaders. This book is a must read for anyone who is serious about serving all students and truly engaging their community.*

—Ann McCarty Perez
Director of Professional Learning, Creative Leadership Solutions
Holland, Ohio

With practical strategies and real-world examples, this book provides a compelling road map for education leaders to create supportive and equitable learning environments. Its insights are essential for transforming educational practices and ensuring that every student, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can succeed.

—Gerrilynn Philippe
Elementary School Teacher
Lauderdale Lakes, Florida

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Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators

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For Mamá, Maria Tejada, my inspiration and star.

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You all are the greatest blessings a man can ever have.

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Four Pillars to Guide Visionary Educators

Structuring Schools That Serve Students in Poverty

Washington B. Collado

Foreword by Douglas Reeves

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Foreword

We will not achieve a just society until every child, regardless of socioeconomic status, has the opportunity for a great education. In this practical and compelling book, Dr. Washington Collado brings his passion and experience to the central question of our time: How can school leaders create outstanding educational opportunities for all students? The answer is not merely with the actions of leaders and teachers, though certainly they bear a heavy burden in achieving equity. Rather, these pages provide practical guides for including families and communities as part of the solution.

This is not a feel-good book that paints a rosy picture of resilient children who, though living in poverty, rise to the challenge and succeed. It is not the movie version of heroic teachers who sacrifice themselves to save the day. The author does not shy away from the challenges of high poverty schools, challenges that are present not only within the school walls but also throughout the community. Washington Collado, the leader of a school where the roof literally fell in, pulls no punches. This is hard work and along with the successes, come exceptional challenges and disappointments. Without the tools in this book—and most especially without the "why" that guides leaders and teachers every day—then the chances of enduring the challenges of a high-poverty school are limited.

Educational writers are famous for taking simple ideas and making them unnecessarily complex. Collado does the opposite, breaking the complexity of leading high-poverty schools into four pillars:

Vision and Mission

Family and Community Engagement

An Equity-Driven Focus

Academic and Social-Emotional Support

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Simple, however, is not easy. Each of the four pillars requires a commitment to planning and execution that depends on a team, within and outside of the school—not merely the actions of a driven leader who often burns out in the process of saving the school. For those who know him, one of Nino's (Collado's) great gifts is his modesty, sharing credit and responsibility with colleagues, student, and families. If the first pillar, vision and mission, is only the creation of the leader, it will have no impact on the community of learners who must together achieve that vision.

Especially noteworthy is the emphasis throughout the book on collaboration. This does not come easy, particularly in an environment full of daily challenges in which leaders and teachers can feel isolated and lonely. The pressures in schools are enormous, and those pressures are multiplied in high-poverty schools. Sometimes the hard work of teachers and leaders is met not with appreciation but with resistance from students, families, and even colleagues. Sometimes the love and respect that great teachers give to students and families is returned with cursing and misbehavior by frustrated students, weary parents, and even threats to the physical safety of the staff. The author is not naïve about these challenges and therefore insists that collaboration and mutual support, not the myth of nobility associated with a heroic solo performance, is the only path to success and survival.

This book arrives at a critical point in history. While the world is emerging from the global pandemic, the lingering effects of school closures and the learning losses associated with the pandemic remain. Those learning losses were especially grave in high-poverty schools where, in many cases, students were home alone—with parents working in essential jobs—with eight-year-olds supervising five-year-olds changing the diapers of two-year-olds. The idea that these children were going to engage in effective on-line learning was a fantasy. Moreover, as federal funds designed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic are now withdrawn, schools are facing funding shortages that will lead to fewer resources precisely at the time when, as Collado argues, high-poverty schools need even greater support. Add to these challenges the national teacher shortage—more teachers leaving the profession and fewer new teachers in the pipeline—and we have the formula for the greatest educational challenges we have faced in generations. But do not despair, Collado argues. While resources are important, it is vision and mission, not money alone, that will keep the current and future generations of educators committed to our profession.

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Decades of leadership experience and mountains of research give the author perhaps the most important insight in the entire book—the imperative of focus. He warns of avoiding the typical laundry lists of programs and initiatives and insists on simplicity. Collado knows that a billion-dollar grant will not buy a 25-hour day and that there are always more good ideas than can possibly be implemented. Here is the wise leader who tempers the enthusiasm of those who want to do everything with the certain knowledge that deep implementation of the four pillars is far more effective than the typical 300-page strategic plan.

The greatest challenge to readers is the demand by Dr. Collado for courage. This is especially true in the fourth pillar, providing social, emotional, and academic support for students. Time is a zero-sum game. Every hour devoted to academic support is an hour deducted from someone's favorite program or activity. Therefore, leaders will inevitably receive criticism, sometimes brutal and personal, for the decisions that they make in the best interests of students. When a high-poverty school has become accustomed to only a fraction of its students performing on grade level in literacy and math, the leader who insists that all children can succeed and that "all means all" may be greeted not with enthusiasm but with contempt. The leader who insists that academic and emotional support are more important than the master schedule may be labeled as unrealistic and impractical. The response, Collado insists, is not compromise but courage. Make the call, change the schedule, risk unpopularity. We are not called, Nino concludes, to be popular. We are called to do what is right for kids.

Douglas Reeves
Author, *Fearless Schools*
Boston, Massachusetts

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Acknowledgments

As I write this page, my mind and heart are connected in guiding my thoughts: To God, who is at the center of my heart and universe. To my mother, Maria Tejada, my inspiration and guardian angel, my intent is to honor you and follow in your footsteps as an educator. To my wife and partner of almost 40 years, Carmen, and our sons, Mario, Alejandro, Miguel, and Victor, as well as, Rhayana, my daughter-in-law. To my grandchildren, Lucas, Gabrielle, and Adrian, your unconditional love is my Olympic flame that never extinguishes. To my sisters, Carmecita, Isabel, Belgica, only you know the tough road we traveled, but we traveled it together, and that made all the difference. To my father, Sergio Collado, who taught me self-respect, commitment to working hard, and the value of a handshake. To Don Miguel and Doña Maria, thank you for your unconditional love. To my compadres Joselito, Anthony, Jose, and Miguel, my life-chosen brothers. To my life-chosen sisters Vicky and Maria. To all my nieces and nephews, who fill me with pride every day. To Brianna, thanks for the love you brought Miguel and the family.

Throughout my career, I was blessed with great mentors like Anthony Randazzo, who encouraged me to work hard as a teacher, and Mary L. Henry, who trusted me with leadership opportunities. I also want to express my gratitude to Vilma Diaz, Joanne Harrison, Sharon Airaghi, Dawn Mauzy Rippley, and Vicky Kaufman. They served as leadership mentors and trusted me to lead and dedicate my heart and soul to serving students, families, and educators.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the educators I had the privilege of working with. Our shared commitment to serving and empowering our students and families created inspiring and supportive learning communities. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a dedicated team, from Norman Thomas High School (NYC), Miami Carol City High School, Coconut Creek High School, Coral Springs Middle

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To the Dominican Republic and my beloved little town of Jánico, a land where I learned life-long ethical values and found my calling of being an educator. I want to acknowledge the United States of America for giving my aspirations wings and the opportunity to achieve my dreams of becoming a teacher. The United States has been a beacon of hope and opportunity for me, allowing me to transform from an English language learner to being named Principal of the Year in 2021. Now, I have the honor and privilege of traveling the country and the world and sharing my experiences. I want to thank and acknowledge my Creative Leadership Solutions Family, led by the great Dr. Douglas Reeves and Lisa Almeida. At Creative Leadership Solutions, I'm proud to call them my colleagues; they are some very talented educators and leaders.

I want to acknowledge my students, every single one of them, particularly those who struggled academically or social-emotionally, those who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and those who had the tenacity to work hard and aspire with the support of their teachers. This book is a tribute to you. I still hold true that I don't know who taught whom more. I have learned more from you. In closing, I wanted to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to Desirée Bartlett, my editor and partner. She encouraged me to think deeper for this book, which started as an idea, evolved into a project. Now, it is a reality. Thank you, Desirée.

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About the Author

Washington B. "Nino" Collado, PhD, was born in the Dominican Republic, surrounded by educators, including his mother, María Tejada. In 1975, he immigrated to New York and began studying in New York City public schools in the seventh grade.

Dr. Collado began his career in education in 1986 in New York, where he taught Spanish and English as a second language in New York City Public Schools. In 1992, he moved to Florida and continued teaching at Miami-Dade Public Schools. In 1998, he accepted a job in Broward County Public Schools' Multicultural Department to conduct curricular training for teachers and administrators on the contributions of Latinos, African Americans, and women throughout the history of the United States.

Dr. Collado began his career in school administration as an assistant principal at Broward County Public Schools and was promoted to principal in 2005. He served 16 years as principal at schools in South Florida, serving socioeconomically diverse schools, and he served as president of the Broward Association of Principals and Assistants. He retired in 2022.

In February 2021, Dr. Collado received the Principal of the Year distinction for Broward County Public Schools, the nation's sixth-largest school district. He has also received several honors and recognitions

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nationally and internationally for his work in schools and communities. Throughout his career, Dr. Collado has traveled to over 30 states and several countries, training school leaders and educators about effective leadership and increasing family and community engagement in schools. He has written over 100 articles for newspapers and magazines and authored or coauthored five books.

Dr. Collado is an associate at Creative Leadership Solutions and an adjunct professor at Florida Atlantic University, teaching courses on educational leadership.

He is married to Carmen R. Collado, and together they are the proud parents of four sons, Mario, Alejandro, Miguel, and Victor, and the grandparents of three grandchildren, Lucas, Gabrielle, and Adrian.

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Introduction

"Is our society ready to take on this challenge? Are we able to provide education that will develop these more complex skills—not just for a small slice of students who have traditionally been selected for the kind of ambitious learning represented in elite schools and advanced programs, but for the vast majority of children in communities across the country?"

—Linda Darling-Hammond (2010)

Families send their children to school because they want to set their children on a path to success, independence, and the capacity to pursue their life dreams. They place immense hope in schools, trusting that the school has in place the systematic structures necessary to fulfill their mandate and provide students with an excellent education. All schools face obstacles from multiple fronts that make fulfilling their mandate challenging, but schools serving communities of high poverty have even more obstacles to overcome. Low-socioeconomic (SES) communities have unfortunate challenges, such as limited access to financial resources and limited access to health care; the families often have food insecurities and poor housing conditions, with limited access to technology and means of supporting their children's academic lives.

Schools serving these families require a special mandate to ensure that the students in their school are able to overcome the challenges of their environment and family economic status. These students deserve the same education as students from affluent communities, but they require additional support to attain that equity.

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Families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds often face additional academic challenges due to limited access to resources, such as books, technology, educational services, and supportive services. Furthermore, low-SES conditions affect access to food and health care and can lead to higher rates of absenteeism and transiency. Children from these communities often come from families with limited educational backgrounds, which limits their ability to support their children academically. English language learners and students with special needs, who are more prevalent in high-poverty communities, also require a greater degree of attention and services from the school community.

Certain educators find fulfillment in serving communities of poverty and creating educational opportunities where they are lacking. They know and understand the impact education can have on breaking the cycle of poverty. This urgency to meet the needs of families can sometimes result in a lack of strategic coherence—the proverbial "throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks" plan. Pressure from the community, families, the district, and the state, as well as political pressures, can lead schools to implement several disparate initiatives without coordination. This book proposes instead *a systemic coordination of strategic thinking, planning, and implementation of action plans that are borne out of real-life analysis of the students and their families' needs.* Students are better served when educators take on a cogent and organized approach, addressing students' needs with efficiency (Reeves, 2023).

In this book, I most often use the term "low-socioeconomic" to refer to families, students, and communities that are facing scarcity in regard to money, food security, home stability, health care, and access to technology and education, among other life necessities. I also use the terms "high poverty" and "low-SES," among others. I acknowledge that none of these terms are perfect or exact, nor do they describe the full breadth and diversity of the families of focus in this book. I have deliberately included stories of real students, families, and educators to emphasize their humanity and dignity above all rather than the obstacles—socioeconomic or otherwise—they may face. These terms describe life conditions that can be mitigated through equity-driven schools and visionary leadership on the part of educators.

Visionary leaders are educators who establish learning organizations supported by four essential pillars: The first pillar represents visionary

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leaders who have a vision for a path forward along with action plans; the second pillar represents those educators who cultivate and see the value of family and community engagement. The third pillar represents those educators who serve with an equity mindset and clarity to ensure that inequities do not prevail and negatively impact students' academic and social-emotional life. Finally, the fourth pillar represents those educators who provide personalized support for students to be able to achieve at their highest potential. This systemic coordination of the four pillars increases strategic thinking and increases vital alignment for coordination, which is crucial to meeting the needs of all students, particularly students from low-SES families.

The Four Pillars for Leading Beyond the Poverty Line

In architecture, a pillar—used to support the main frame or the entire building—must be strong, solid, and able to support heavy weight. In society, "pillars of the community" are the stand-out members who hold the fabric of the community together. They are individuals whose values, ethics, work, and credibility are, or should be, valued and emulated. I chose the symbol of "pillars" because I want to convey the physical image a visual that certain elements in education can serve as the stalwart and trustworthy supports that families from low-SES backgrounds can rely on to provide effective educational systems that will give their students the skills and confidence to fulfill their dreams. The pillars mentioned here (vision clarity, family engagement, equity, and emotional and academic support) work together in a coordinated fashion to serve the needs of communities in high poverty.

The book is written to be a practical guide for how educational leaders can serve the needs particular to students from high-poverty schools. In this book, you will find practical strategies focused on the four pillars that will support a coherent and systematic approach to educational excellence—for all students. These four pillars, designed with students from low-SES families in mind, support the essential elements of (1) purpose, (2) family engagement, (3) equity, and (4) teaching, learning, and social-emotional balance (see Figure I.1).

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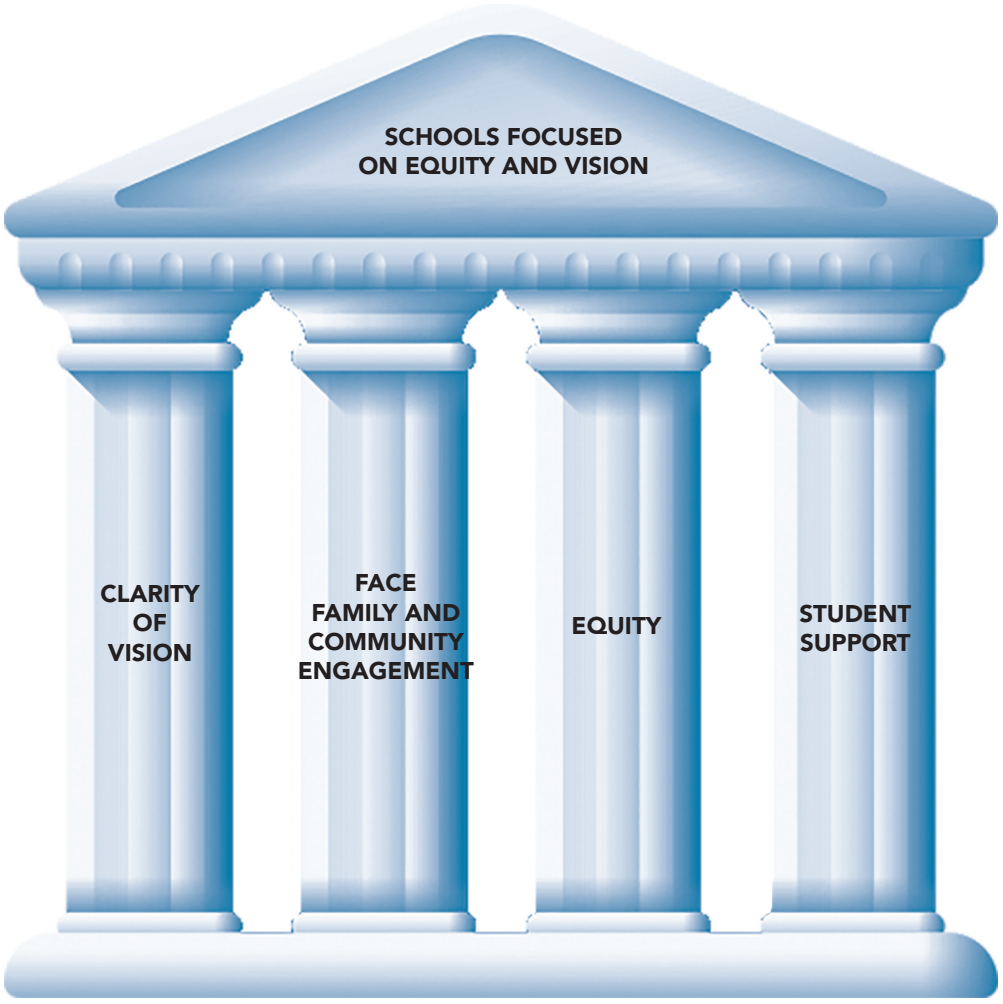
Figure I.1 The Four Pillars



- **Pillar 1:** Vision: Clarity of purpose and mission to achieve goals
- **Pillar 2:** Family and community engagement (FACE)
- **Pillar 3:** Equity-driven focus
- **Pillar 4:** Student social-emotional and academic support

Pillar 1 represents vision and mission. Schools can provide an exemplary education when school teams understand and accept their roles and responsibilities and look to collaborate with other teams. In the process, these educators discover or connect with their "why" (see Figure I.2). Pillar 2 represents family and community engagement. School leaders

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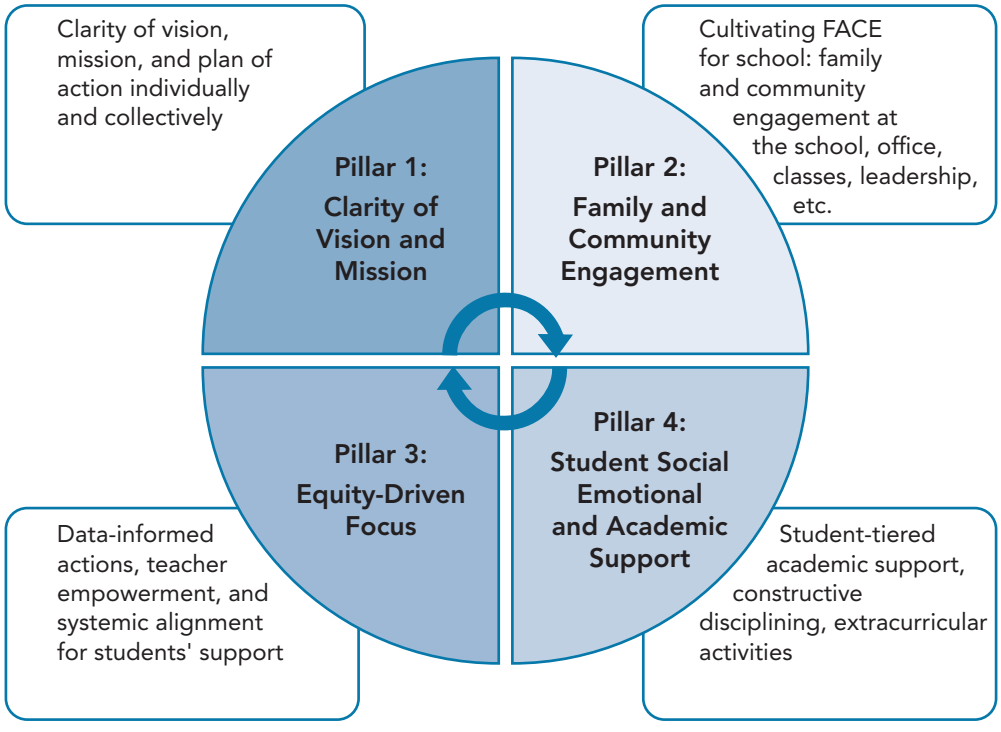
working in areas of high poverty need to become informed about the needs particular to their community and conscientiously and strategically reach out to families to encourage their input if they want students to be successful. Pillar 3 delves into practical ways of implementing equity-driven initiatives by addressing inequities and leveling the playing field to set the stage for Pillar 4—creating a collaborative, supportive network to guide the students toward academic proficiency and social-emotional balance. Academic proficiency and social-emotional balance are inextricably linked. Social-emotional and academic support must be in place to assure all students that they can succeed in school with the necessary help.

Figure I.2 How the Four Pillars Work Together



Who Is This Book For?

Leadership matters. Educators are called upon to maintain the trust society has placed upon our shoulders. This book is written for school-based educators with school-based leadership aspirations. Leadership is not limited to school administrators; school leaders are all educators with a desire to lead learning and a desire to create a systemic structure

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where teaching and learning can consistently take place. This leadership mentality can occur anywhere from the classroom, the counselor's office, the principal's office, the superintendent's office, and the boardroom. The need for coherent and focused leadership is all inclusive of individuals who said "yes" to serving as educators. This book is written with the following educators in mind:

- *Classroom and teachers in academic support positions*
- *Counselors and teachers providing social and emotional support*
- *Department chairs and grade-level leaders*
- *Educators leading family and community involvement*
- *Assistant principals and vice principals*
- *Principals*
- *District-based administrators working to support academic programs*

Leadership is not limited to school administrators; school leaders are all educators with a desire to lead learning and a desire to create a systemic structure where teaching and learning can consistently take place.

Features and Benefits

As a practical guide, this book is full of features to help you meet the particular needs of students living in areas of high poverty. These features include the following:

- **The four pillars:** A key feature of the book is the idea of the four pillars. These four support structures, when implemented systematically, work together to provide students with the help they need to succeed regardless of what obstacles they face.
- **Figures:** Throughout the book, you will find images and tables that present the research and information in easily accessible and digestible formats.
- **Quotable quotes:** In each chapter, a key point is highlighted in a pull quote. These serve both for emphasis and as a way for readers to easily find key passages as needed.
- **Vignettes:** These stories about real administrators and real students bring the research and strategies to life. They show that students living in poverty, learning a new language, and working with learning differences can succeed academically socially and emotionally when schools provide the support systems they need to reach their full potential. A few stories also show how the system has failed some of our students.

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- **Strategies:** Each chapter offers strategies for how school leaders can implement the four pillars in their own schools.
- **Activities:** Readers are encouraged to try the activities as a way to implement the ideas and strategies offered in the book in their own school contexts.
- **Key chapter takeaways:** The main points are listed at the end of each chapter as a quick reminder and review of what to focus on when applying the lessons on that topic.
- **Reflection questions:** The reflection questions are yet another way of inviting readers to consider how they can take the concepts discussed in the chapter and apply them in their own schools and districts.

When schools diligently realize the place they have in the community, understand the socioeconomic construct of the communities they service, and methodically address all elements within their control, and when their work methodically aligns their strategies with a clear vision motivated by ethical leadership, students, families, and educators win.

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PILLAR 1

Vision and Mission

> *"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?"* said Alice. *"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,"* said the Cat. *"I don't much care where,"* said Alice. *"Then, it doesn't matter which way you walk,"* said the Cat.
>
> —*Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll (1865)

I enjoy listening to music. I love listening to how exceptional bands harmonize and flawlessly combine different sounds, pitches, and musical notes to inspire joy and a love of music. Take, for instance, Earth, Wind, and Fire's "Boogie Wonderland" and Bob Marley and the Wailers' "Is This Love," El Gran Combo's "Brujería," or Cool and Gang's "Celebration"—in these bands, we hear disparate instruments working together in a unity of purpose. These gifted musicians know what, when, and how to execute a sound and synergistically engage with other musicians to produce one united, soul-moving rhythm. They also know precisely when to highlight the individuality of their instruments for special effects to accentuate a given sound or to showcase talent. By bringing this wealth of talent together with such precision and cohesion, they achieve organizational rhythm. When schools successfully form teams consisting of people who individually work in their own domain but who also work seamlessly with colleagues toward a common vision and mission, they are like great bands with organizational rhythm.

When schools successfully form teams consisting of people who individually work in their own domain but who also work seamlessly with colleagues toward a common vision and mission, they are like great bands with organizational rhythm.

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This book offers two chapters under Pillar 1: Chapter 1, "Leading for Organizational Vision and Mission," and Chapter 2, "Finding Purpose." These chapters will help the reader better understand how having a clear vision and mission has a direct impact on establishing plans of action. In Chapter 1, school leaders will find implementable ideas to establish clarity of vision and mission to develop action plans that reflect the school's aspirations for their students. Chapter 2 delves into how educators and school-based leaders can use the lessons from Chapter 1 to inspire action and, through equity-driven focus and professional, ethical, and moral leadership, identify their "why" to meet the needs of students and families in communities of poverty.

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Leading for Organizational Vision and Mission

1

"The leaders whom we admire the most help revitalize our shared beliefs and values. They have always spent a portion of their time teaching the value framework."

—John W. Gardner (1990)

The school's vision is the compass and direction the school community uses to drive its daily mission-focused actions. The vision is the destination, and the mission and action plans are the ways to get to the destination. In schools with a clear and well-communicated vision and mission, there is a direct relationship between daily work and the knowledge of what that work represents. The vision focuses on the future; it articulates what the school means and aspires for its students and educators. It is what the school stands for, and it delineates the path forward. The vision is often informed or based on past practices. In essence, schools build the future by working and addressing the present conditions and learning from challenges of the past while investing resources in future possibilities. Whether these lessons were errors or successes, we learn from past experiences. Many times in our history, a change of vision has represented parting with erroneous views and unjust practices. This is the most efficient way of knowing what to do and what not to do. Looking at areas in need of growth where the organization can do a better job is an ongoing process. This is particularly

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true in schools located in communities of poverty. There is no shame in wanting to improve if there is a commitment to improving failed practices. Schools with robust and clearly understood visions foster cultures of collaboration and the core belief among the school community that your job is an essential part of something great and valuable to society (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Being an educator is a service-oriented life choice. This is true for support staff working at a school as well. When educators and their support staff succeed, the students and the community they serve succeed. When educators fully grasp the significance of their work for students and families, it means they have clarity of personal vision. They know their "why," and their why is aligned with a collective why of others concentrating their efforts in a specific direction, as we will see in Chapter 2. This clarity of vision enables educators to pursue expertise and ways of improving their craft and their skill set to serve their students' needs better—for example, by improving lesson delivery, using data to help students maximize the benefits of parent–teacher conferences, or using formative feedback to move the students toward academic proficiency with formative feedback.

When educators fully grasp the significance of their work for students and families, it means they have clarity of personal vision. They know their "why," and their why is aligned with a collective why of others concentrating their efforts in a specific direction.

Lead for a Collective Vision, Mission, and Coordinated Plans of Action

The collective vision defines the organization's aspirational and inspirational paths, and the intention to achieve the school's goals as envisioned for the grade levels or subject area departments. In contrast, the collective mission means coordinating action-driven goals to progress toward increasing academic, social, emotional, and professional success, as well as toward engaging the families, community, and others. Each team enacts its collective vision, which it derives from the tenets of the communal vision and mission of the school (see Figure 1.1). The clarity of the collective vision and mission empowers individuals to adopt their

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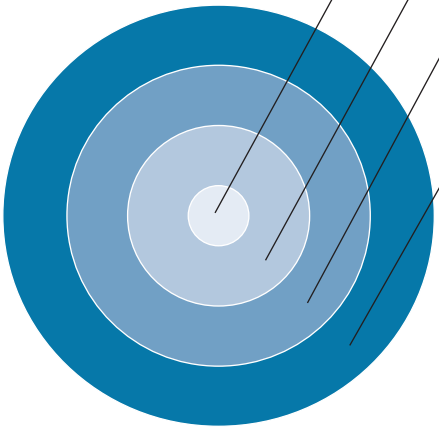
Figure 1.1 Four Concentric Circles of Principles-Centered Visions and Leadership



Personal Vision and Mission:
The vision and mission that define our values, principles, and work ethic and what we understand is the correct and appropriate task

Shared or Collective Vision and Mission:
The vision and mission that brings together a group of people to achieve accepted goals (grade, subject, etc.)

Communal Vision and Mission:
The vision and mission of the members of the school and the role it plays in the community across departments and grades

National/State Vision and Mission:
The vision based on history and national pride in pursuit of reaching a country with citizens who understand, demand, and accept the elements of democracy and progress

individual vision and mission and define ways to personally contribute to the school's goals.

In the following sample from a school in California, various elements aligned to build a program focused on equity and commitment. This focus on equity and commitment was the result of having clarity of vision and mission. This clarity of mission and vision provided the framework for personal vision and mission.

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THE STORY OF A DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM

When Equity-Driven Visions and Missions Align

Principal Watson was selected by the superintendent to create and lead a dual language immersion (DLI) program (Spanish and English). The superintendent chose well in selecting Dr. Watson. Dr. Watson is a white female and a passionate educator with a keen sense of equity-driven leadership. She is a proven leader and a successful principal. Notwithstanding, she is not bilingual and had limited knowledge of the DLI program. However, Dr. Watson had visionary leadership with a clearly defined "why" centered around serving students and their families, particularly low-SES communities. She is also a resourceful, knowledgeable principal who knows how to seek the talented educators she needed to succeed. She arranged the teams, built trust, established a collaborative mission with goals, and empowered her team to do their work consistently toward accomplishing the vision.

The team of educators worked tenaciously to make the vision a reality. Teachers like Mr. Rodriguez went above and beyond to mentor and coach other teachers in dual language classes. He also worked with the principal, who relied on his experience as a dual language teacher. Dr. Watson's leadership team also included her assistant principal, Mrs. Serna, a diligent educator passionate about DLI programs.

The district recognized the need for greater equity-driven initiatives for English language learners. However, earning the trust of families proved to be a difficult task, as the families of English language learners had negative experiences with school systems that promoted learning English—learning English often came at the expense of students forgetting their native language. However, these educators were committed to the vision of serving this low-SES community. They visited local churches, businesses, and organizations and successfully got the families to trust and sign their kids up for their program.

The result was a successful opening of a DLI program. The program's transition from a school-based program to a program-based school was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was resumed after a year's delay, much to the joy of families and students. To ensure consistency, the district supported the opening of the PK–8 Dual Language Academy. The students enrolled in DLI will follow a pathway to a local high school, allowing all students to continue their education in core classes in both languages and graduate with the Seal of Biliteracy. Students showed significant academic gains, including English language learners.

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Figure 1.1 shows how essential it is for visions and missions to align at each level of influence. If we apply Figure 1.1 to the DLI vignette, the outer level (National/State Vision and Mission) would corelate to the district level. The development and organization of the DLI program began with a clear vision based on the district's aspirations for greater equity and work for students to become biliterate and bicultural. The district selected the right leader to build the program based on this clarity of vision and mission. The next level (Communal Vision and Mission) relates to Dr. Watson's diligence, research, and teamwork approach, which became instrumental for building the (communal) school's vision and mission. The next circle in Figure 1.1 is the Shared or Collective Vision and Mission. The educators became well-versed in the goals of the program. They accepted their individual roles and together looked to sharpen their individual expertise in order to be productive members of the team, establishing a collective vision and mission. In the process, they sharpened their Personal Vision and Mission (the most interior circle). In the end, there was an alignment of aspirations and strategies between the district, communal, collective, and the personal visions and missions.

ALIGNING NATIONAL, COMMUNAL, COLLECTIVE, AND PERSONAL VISIONS AND MISSIONS

National/State/District vision and mission: The philosophy and aspirations that inform and guide policy, resources, and goals for education.

Communal (organization or school) vision and mission: This represents the school's or organization's set of specific and measurable actions that will lead to the realization of the goals. These actions represent or encompass the national or state's vision and mission.

Collective or shared vision and mission: This represents and encompasses the school's vision and mission in the way its individual teams, departments, and grades can contribute to achieving success.

Personal mission and vision: The set of specific and measurable actions that aligns with how each person, as an individual, will contribute to their team's success in realizing the team's mission and vision. See Figure 1.1.

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The organization's communal mission represents cohesion and synergy within the school, where the work of all individuals is strategically aligned so that all teams benefit other teams. Their work is coordinated, valuable information is shared, and the school values and encourages two-way communications and has ongoing discussions to ensure the action plans continue to be aligned. Monitoring systems are put in place to ensure that all individuals within the organization meet their goals in the short term, which should align with the long-term goals of the mission.

Alignment and organizational rhythm are essential for the success of the vision and mission. The dual-language program's success involved aligning several circles of visions, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. The superintendent's vision and mission were clear, with a specific focus. This is the first circle. This clarity at the highest levels empowered the principal to embody this vision and mission through the communal or organizational mission and vision, taking the actionable steps of enlisting the right people to do the job—for example, the assistant principal and teachers. These educators, in turn, worked to develop their collective mission and vision within their team by grade, subject area, and so forth. Lastly, this team cohesion and clarity enabled individuals to develop or clarify their own personal mission and vision, which motivated them to find their "why" and work purposefully to meet their objectives.

An organization's communal vision and mission cohesion depend on the healthy interrelations of the teams within the organization—the more robust the interrelation, the stronger the organization's potential to meet its goals. Effective leadership can facilitate the team interrelation process by leading and empowering educators around these four goals:

- Alignment of purpose
- Establishing organizational rhythm
- Having clarity of goals for cohesion
- Articulating vision and mission in high poverty schools

Alignment of Purpose

Personal vision and mission that are aligned with other colleagues' visions and missions (team, department, group within the school) empower the possibility of increasing results because their forces and collaborations feed off each other and their individual contributions as

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a team strengthen the team's collective vision and mission. Alignment of purpose refers to establishing priorities and setting the progression of support. In order for academic and social-emotional support to be effective, students facing scarcity and instability at home need to have certain needs met. In this sense, alignment can mean understanding how to address a student's home conditions, such as study conditions or what—if any—academic support they have.

Alignment also involves placing students with the right teachers. Teachers, like many professions, have special approaches and strengths. Some teachers develop special talents or master different skill sets for working with students who struggle academically, socially, and emotionally. Good alignment of purpose occurs when the master scheduler considers what teachers have a special disposition to work well with students: English language learners, students with special needs, low-performing students, and so forth. In this case, the right alignment is to schedule students with those types of teachers and provide teachers with the right support and resources for them to be able to do their best work.

The right alignment sets the tone for success—for example, an emotional and compelling drive to want to do the right things and do them well in regards to curricular coherence, professional growth and supporting students, data-informed student intervention, and more. This alignment can elevate any project or initiative to one for greater impact. Leading for alignment involves investing time in empowering teachers and teachers in support positions, time for planning, and creating the conditions for teams to align.

The right alignment sets the tone for success—for example, an emotional and compelling drive to want to do the right things and do them well in regards to curricular coherence, professional growth and supporting students, data-informed student intervention, and more.

An example of academic alignment can be a school where all departments establish professional learning communities (PLC) to address student proficiency; the teachers in these departments are knowledgeable of the students who are performing poorly and collaborate with an equity-driven mindset. Furthermore, guidance and support teachers work closely with classroom teachers. They are all mindful of struggling students or students from low-SES families who may need additional support. They know the students individually, not in generalized percentages. They know the students' names. Struggling students are discussed in the professional learning communities with specific intervention plans.

This collaborative ensemble of teachers' efforts reaches its highest potential when the school's leadership has a communal vision and mission,

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providing the time, support, and resources necessary to help serve their students and strengthen the bond of alignment. This cohesion of vision and mission is further maximized when district, state, and national policies (see Figure 1.1) provide educators with a clear vision and the resources needed to do their jobs effectively. This is the essence of Pillar 1.

STRATEGIES FOR ALIGNING VISION AND MISSION-FOCUSED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Strategy 1: *At the organizational (communal) level,* establish clear and achievable goals by considering past experiences and plans for the future. Be precise and specific with the selection of goals. Avoid aspirational laundry lists that do not reflect actionable commitments on the part of the individuals, departments, or schools. An example of an organizational goal might be that students' proficiency in reading, writing, math, and social skills will increase by 15%, with particular attention paid to English language learners.

Strategy 2: *At the grade, department, team (collective) levels*: Establish the role the division (department or grade level) plays in achieving organizational goals. Assess how closely the organizational goals and division goals are aligned. What is needed to improve alignment? What resources are needed? Do the division leaders have sufficient clarity of the communal vision, mission, and action plan to lead the execution of the collective plan as a team? Alignment with the organizational goal from Strategy 1 might be the number of students failing in X grades or subject areas will decrease by 20%, and these grades will focus on student support.

Strategy 3: *At the individual level*: Establish specific responsibilities for each team member and be clear about deliverables, ongoing communications, and ways of monitoring progress. Empower team or grade leaders with the right leadership philosophy and clarity of organization and team vision and mission. What training is needed? What communication strategies will allow individuals to remain engaged and work toward the vision and mission? An example at the individual level would be for teachers to identify struggling students and provide them with Tier 1, 2, or 3 academic and social-emotional support. Teachers can incorporate generating student-supportive ideas as part of every PLC discussion.

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Establishing Organizational Rhythm

When schools strategically align their efforts, the next logical level is working to establish an *organizational rhythm*. If alignment represents having all the pieces of the puzzle in the right place, organizational rhythm represents having all those pieces work well together, build trusting relationships, and maximize each other's impact, even in moments of disagreement. Organizational rhythm strengthens planning, collaboration, mentoring, moments of low morale or struggle, and celebrations of small and large victories. Organizational rhythm happens when individuals, departments, teams, and grades cohesively interact with one another so that they are meeting the goals in their mission and vision. Organizational rhythm includes strong communication, fostering a supportive environment, psychological safety to learn from areas of growth, ongoing monitoring of progress, and providing support, including working through disagreements or having different opinions and approaches.

School leaders looking to establish organizational rhythm take alignment to the next level and promote synergy within and between teams and individuals. They commit to each person's vision and mission, relate them to the organization's vision and mission, and empower them to act without compromising the creativity of the individuals in the school. This is crucial for schools serving low-SES families because the success of the students is often dependent on the academic and social-emotional support the school provides for the students. When the school successfully aligns collective visions and missions with individual visions and missions and strengthens this alignment with great relationships (organizational rhythm), it maximizes the effect of the network of support for students' achievement both academically and social-emotionally.

For instance, teachers have unique relations with the students and have a particular insight into how the students are developing academically and social-emotionally. Counselors and other teachers in supportive roles have a unique perspective on assisting students with individual needs to help overcome obstacles. When schools have a systemic organizational rhythm, these two groups of educators (teachers in the classroom and in roles of support) have consistent communication, strategize on the student's individual needs, and interact timely and precisely to meet the student's needs. The school strategizes for these teams to interact and address the needs of the students, including the families, discuss the best supportive interventions, and establish a calendar of planning, mile markers, and intervention with the students or each other.

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EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHM FOR STUDENT ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Identify students who are struggling and clearly analyze their struggle.
- The school strategizes to create conditions for scheduling support by pulling the students out or pushing them into classes for support.
- School personnel (including office staff) know how to communicate with families, including knowing if there is a language barrier.
- Teachers in support positions interact with classroom teachers and establish two-way communication to improve coordinating their support for students.
- School leadership invests time and planning to have continual data-informed communication for ongoing support and to monitor students' progress.

Effective school leaders work to achieve rhythm when they build a safe zone by investing resources (time, planning) for these groups to interact and help focus their energy with clarity of purpose. The leader listens to all perspectives, including opposing views, and looks for ways to facilitate the teams' collaboration and harness the power of creativity by knowing when to be dependent, interdependent, and independent.

Leadership's Effect on Creating Organizational Alignment and Rhythm

As a longtime principal, I can affirm that achieving organizational rhythm involves perpetual learning how to successfully provide support and guidance without removing responsibility and accountability. This means that principals must have a vision for the school with a clear mission on how to guide or empower the daily work of individuals and teams toward achieving short-term and long-term goals. Understanding, accepting, and implementing an organization's mission means that members accept their role and work by understanding the importance of their contribution. In turn, a leader's role is to encourage

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members of the organization to feel part of the mission. Leaders show conviction when they lead by example, make consistent decisions, know the path the organization must take, and are confident in establishing and trusting the right leadership in the school's teams: grade leaders, department chairs, PLC facilitators, office manager, head custodian, and so forth. Trust for leaders to make short- and long-term decisions (Pisapia, 2009). In the end, everyone wins! The team wins.

STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHM

1. Establish clear and achievable goals. It's best if goals are achieved by consensus.
2. Lead by example.
3. Trust in others to lead.
4. Be personable and approachable—this breeds honest discussions among team members.
5. Avoid counterproductive digression; stay focused on the process.
6. Ensure that communication is consistent and interactive.
7. Celebrate small victories. Each small victory is a step in the right direction.
8. Be data driven and specifically address students by name and situation.
9. Be honest about the data-informed decisions; avoid doomsday scenarios or "everything is rosy" scenarios.
10. Identify areas of success and areas in need of growth.

Having Clarity of Goals for Cohesion

School leaders can achieve clarity of vision and mission with alignment and organizational rhythm by serving as catalysts, being a living example of determination through their actions, and encouraging and motivating other members of the organization, such as staff, teachers, students, and the community. Strong leaders create a leadership

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mentality in others when they foster thinking, accept different ideas, promote thinking outside the box, and empower team members to contribute their own ideas to accomplish the goals of the project. Team members, in turn, will increase their commitment and have great ownership of the role they can play to make the necessary changes to take their organizations toward the path of progress. In essence, they assume their roles individually and collectively as a team. This collective energy catalyzes the creative forces of the school. This collective energy can only happen if all members of the organization are nurtured and their hopes and personal visions are transformed into goals. When hope, faith, and action come together and these become integral parts of a covenant to serve a purpose for the greater good of our students and teachers, they emerge and transform from purely managerial obligations into moral commitments.

Strong leaders create a leadership mentality in others when they foster thinking, accept different ideas, promote thinking outside the box, and empower team members to contribute their own ideas to accomplish the goals of the project.

No sustained progress can be maintained without that dedication and belief that all students can succeed. School leaders are responsible for ensuring that all efforts are focused on the collective vision and mission of the school. Leaders of schools in high-poverty areas must be laser-focused on achieving equity and providing impoverished students with what they need to achieve their full potential. They need to provide clarity and support for educators to keep up morale and forestall cynicism and disappointment.

Managing these teams within a school to build on each other's strengths is conducive to organizational rhythm. Organizational rhythm happens when the various teams work in an environment guided by clarity of vision, focused on student achievement and social-emotional support, and enjoy a professionally supportive atmosphere with a strong communication practice, including families and community.

Create structures that ensure systemically embedded strategic alignment. Create protocols and provide support so that all teams understand their role and interact with other teams to maximize the impact of their work. Enthusiastically communicate with the organization so that each person understands what is expected. True leaders have the patience of a gardener, a politician's oratory skill, and a jazz musician's creativity to improvise (Pisapia, 2009). Strategic alignment is achieved when two essential elements are accomplished. The first element is understanding each person's importance to the team and the school's success, and the second element is understanding the details of actions and responsibilities necessary to achieve the team's goals.

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STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING CLARITY OF GOALS FOR COHESION

1. Motivate the office staff to
   - Have a plan for welcoming registering families.
   - Provide families with good and actionable information for involvement.
   - Share various ways families can communicate with teachers.
2. Support professional learning communities and authentic discussions on effective teaching and learning and how to help students.
3. Create a leadership team from a cross-section of the school so all voices are heard.
4. Motivate team cohesion by facilitating team discussions. Ask teams to identify ways other teams in the school can serve as allies to meet the team goals: classroom and support teachers, special education teachers and support personnel, registrar and office staff to establish family engagement right from the start, leadership, and department chairs or grade leaders, and teachers within the grade or department.
5. Provide planning and collaboration time that leads to fruitful discussions. Facilitate the discussions so they remain focused on the key goals.
6. Ensure that teams safely discuss areas of growth with a positive attitude and plan strategically for how to overcome obstacles for students.

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STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING TEAM COLLABORATIONS THAT LEAD TO ORGANIZATIONAL RHYTHM

1. Design team leaders that have credibility and a clear understanding of the goals.
2. Implement continued conversation among team leaders.
3. Guide teams in developing team goals aligned with the school's goals.
4. Encourage teams to share their team goals with other teams to expand ideas and possible goals.
5. Provide coaching and professional development.
6. Be present and knowledgeable about the work of the teams by staying engaged.

Articulating Vision and Mission in High-Poverty Schools

Schools serving communities of high poverty may run the risk of setting all types of priorities in the spirit of meeting students' diverse needs. This urgency to meet diverse and pressing needs may lead to disorganized and isolated initiatives. This lack of focus and coherence rarely leads to success. Leaders can avoid this frustration when they identify, specifically, areas for focus and concentrated effort. They then follow up by communicating and implementing alignment, rhythm, and clarity of vision and mission, providing the tools, and empowering teams to strategize, design, and implement plans of action.

Drafting or Rethinking Your Vision Statement

Start by establishing a clear vision for your school that encompasses its values, aspirations, and philosophy. Believing and accepting the fact that all students have potential and can achieve has to be an accepted fact when working in high-poverty schools. This conviction helps us avoid giving in to cynicism, helplessness, and excuse-making. Vision gives us a compass, a guide, an explanation of our why, and the reasons

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for our daily efforts and actions. Vision enables us to act on students' potential rather than dwelling on obstacles and rationalizing inevitable failure (Collado, 2014). The school's vision is a road map that guides its actions and goals. All of the work done in the school should be a reflection of the school's vision. Use the questions that follow to create new vision statements or to rethink existing vision statements.

VISION CHECKLIST

- ✓ *What are the aspirations that inform and guide our school?*
- ✓ *How effectively are we achieving those aspirations?*
- ✓ *Which of our actions are focused on those aspirations?*
- ✓ *How do we define success? How do we measure our progress toward achieving the vision?*
- ✓ *What is my role in moving toward realizing our vision?*
- ✓ *Does our vision include the role of the family?*
- ✓ *How do I assess my daily tasks, ensuring that they align with our collective vision?*

For educators in high-poverty schools, consider how socioeconomic obstacles affect students' potential and how these vision statements compel all involved in the organization to focus on being equity driven. As you contemplate your school's vision statement, consider examples of vision statements posted online.

EXAMPLES OF VISION STATEMENTS

Frost Elementary School: Cumberland, Maryland

The vision at Frost Elementary School is to prepare and motivate our students for a rapidly changing world by instilling in them critical thinking skills, a global perspective, and a respect for core values of honesty, loyalty, perseverance, and compassion. Students will have success for today and be prepared for tomorrow.

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James Blair Middle School * Williamsburg James City County Public Schools: Williamsburg, Virginia

Pursuing excellence and championing the success of all students.

Waipahu High School: Waipahu, Hawaii

Waipahu High School's vision is to provide student-centered educational programs that challenge all students to perform at their highest potential.

All Hawaii public school graduates will

- Realize their individual goals and aspirations
- Possess the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to contribute positively and compete in a global society
- Exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship
- Pursue post-secondary education and/or careers without the need for remediation

Premier High School: Phoenix, Arizona

Premier High School creates a pathway to assist students in achieving their educational and personal goals leading to a fulfilling future within the greater community.

These vision statements contain very specific philosophical definitions of the school's purpose and aspirations. The statements are written clearly and specifically enough for each team and individual within the school to set the mission's specific goals and action plan that would put them en route to accomplishing this aspiration. The more clarity, the easier it is to focus on strategies. In contrast, vague vision statements are less conducive to drafting a mission statement with specific goals because the vagueness of the vision statement will be subject to several different interpretations.

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ACTIVITY

Compare and contrast these four vision statements by applying the questions in the Vision Checklist. Jot down your notes here.

Drafting or Rethinking Your Mission Statement

A school's mission is comprised of a set of actions. Whereas the vision is a statement that describes the goal, the mission is the set of actions that will lead to achieving the goal. The action steps identified in the mission are specific and measurable and must be monitored for progress. Personal missions are made up of action steps and help individual administrators and educators establish the day-to-day commitment to walk purposefully and reach their proposed vision daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Collectively, as an organization, the mission involves understanding the present condition and establishing action steps, working to meet the vision.

The mission ensures that educators' work and daily actions lead their students to greater success based on specific plans. When mission statements are action driven, individuals in teams and departments can adapt the mission statements to their own personal mission statements. This allows educators to establish a healthy pace between urgency and the consistent and sustainable actions necessary to meet the goal. The mission is an ongoing process that represents consistency and tenacity. Establishing both short-term and longer-term goals enables educators to acknowledge small and significant victories and makes it more likely they will achieve the school's vision. The mission gives causality to progress so that progress toward the vision is not a coincidence but by design. Examples of short- and longer-term goals might be the following:

> ***Long-term goal***: Students entering the ninth grade who have been identified and have demonstrated low proficiency in reading, writing, and math will increase their reading and math by receiving academic and social-emotional support and timely intervention.

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Short-term goal: Students identified as having low proficiency will have individualized plans of action, and each PLC will discuss on a weekly (or biweekly) basis how these students are being supported to meet their academic goals.

Celebrate signs of progress. Some ideas might include communicating with families, awarding tickets to school events (football games, field trips, etc.), celebrating teachers' actions, and providing students with vouchers to purchase school items. Create a committee to consider other ideas and celebrate progress toward the expressed goals.

Keep in mind that the mission statement should facilitate the articulation of action steps that align with your vision statement.

MISSION CHECKLIST

- ✓ *How do I identify the most vulnerable students?*
- ✓ *How do I plan to meet and support the nature of their vulnerability?*
- ✓ *How can I assist in providing more significant equity through academic support or tier 1-2-3 intervention?*
- ✓ *How do I establish individualized formative feedback for my students?*
- ✓ *How do I set up my school (or class) to provide support for students?*
- ✓ *Which students are getting failing grades or not keeping up?*
- ✓ *How can I leverage school resources to meet the needs of my students?*
- ✓ *What partnerships or collaborations should I establish to help me keep growing professionally?*
- ✓ *What can I do to identify students' interests and potential, including English language learners, students with special needs, students from low-SES families, and low-performing students?*
- ✓ *What will I do in September to involve my students' families?*

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As you consider what your school's mission statement should be, consider mission statements posted online.

EXAMPLES OF MISSION STATEMENTS

Frost Elementary School: Cumberland, Maryland

Frost Elementary School's staff, parents, and community are dedicated to the intellectual, personal, social, and physical growth of students. Our highly qualified staff recognizes the value of professional development in order to rigorously challenge students. Our teaching practices are both reflective and responsive to the needs of our students. Through diversified experiences, our students discover their potential, achieve readiness for college and careers, and succeed in a safe and caring environment.

James Blair Middle School * Williamsburg James City County Public Schools: Williamsburg, Virginia

WJCC is committed to providing an excellent education, in partnership with families and community, so that each and every student is prepared for lifelong learning, independent thinking, and responsible citizenship.

Waipahu High School: Waipahu, Hawaii

Waipahu High School prepares students for success in the 21st century by engaging them in rigorous and relevant learning opportunities that promote academic, physical, and emotional growth.

Premier High School: Phoenix, Arizona

Premier High School is a caring learning community that takes pride in reengaging over-aged and under-credited students with a history of dropping out of school. Using an accelerated credit recovery model, we shape and mold our students through persistence, trust, support, and encouragement. Our focus is to prepare each student with academic and marketable skills that are necessary to pursue a career or to continue higher education upon graduation and make a positive difference in the world.

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These mission statements come from the same schools we used for sampling the vision statement. Notice a pattern? The mission provides, in most cases, actionable proposals to achieve success. Notice in particular the details in the mission statements from Frost Elementary School and Premier High School. How effective are these mission statements in conveying the goals of their schools?

ACTIVITY

Compare and contrast these four mission statements by applying the questions in the Mission Checklist. Jot down your notes here.

ACTIVITY

Use the questions in the Mission Checklist to create a new mission statement or to rethink your existing mission statements better to meet the needs of students in high-poverty schools. What long-term and short-term action steps need to be taken to realize your school's vision?

Action Plan: Bringing Together Vision and Mission

Vision, mission, and action plans are translated into solid initiatives and actions. But without a vision, mission, and specific plan of action, an idea is just an idea. In 2021, when I was honored as Principal of the Year for the Broward County Public Schools, a long-time friend reminded me that the award acknowledged the collective work of teachers,

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guidance counselors, office staff, facility service, security, parents, and community actors. The alignment of my own personal vision and aspirations for my school through efficient organizational rhythm with the vision and mission of every member of our staff led to our collective success as an organization. Education is a team sport!

The communal vision we established as an organization was that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or ELL classifications, can achieve their maximum potential. This was expressed, accepted, believed, and enacted in everything we did at the school: teaching assignments, professional learning communities, the school's campus appearance, communication plan, curricular development, and leadership team that involved a cross-section of everyone in the school. Each team (teachers, guidance, support, administration) accepted their collective vision and mission and collaborated to identify areas of intervention, who intervened, how they intervened, and what resources were needed for the intervention. All our efforts were strategically aligned to progress toward the vision and mission of the school. As a result, our students enjoyed significant academic and social-emotional success, and the school's organizational rhythm became stronger, which created a family-like work environment, which translated into minimal teacher turnover and greater school cohesion.

Key Chapter Takeaways

- Help individuals in your school find their why so that they can articulate their personal vision and mission in alignment with the school's vision and mission.
- Alignment, organizational rhythm, and collective teamwork are needed to realize a vision. Create the conditions for educators and staff to build strong interactive relationships with each other.
- Leaders play an active role in meeting students' academic and social-emotional needs.
- Schools are most effective when educators work as teams, collaborate, and join forces to multiply their effect on students' achievement. When working in communities of high poverty, teachers who join forces are more able to meet students' needs.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. If your school or district has a vision statement and a mission statement, how closely are these statements aligned with the work and goals of the teachers and departments within the school? Are the individuals in the staff familiar with these statements? How are these statements communicated and how often?
2. What is your personal vision, mission, and action plan? How does it align to the schools? What goals have you set for yourself? How do your goals align with the goals of the teams, grades, and departments in your school?
3. What long-term goals and short-term goals have you and your team established? How do the short-term goals align with the long-term goals?
4. What can you do to support deeper alignment and organizational rhythm between the different teams in your school?

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