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# Foreword

**T**wenty-five years ago, two prominent reports urged policymakers to move toward educator professionalization (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). Students, these reports reasoned, “are better served by teachers who are prepared to make responsible decisions and then given the authority to do so” (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1992, p. 1359). By the mid-1990s, however, it was clear that state and national policy was heading in the opposite direction. Assessments were put in place to measure students’ progress toward meeting newly instituted performance standards aligned to curriculum standards. The rationale for the carefully aligned standards-based reforms was sound—no longer would schools suffer with conflicting, disorganized mandates for change. No longer would some schools set much lower standards than others.

But among the unintended, undesirable consequences that have arisen from these reforms has been a double whammy for educators—less discretion coupled with more responsibility. That is, the standards-based reform movement has resulted in a vicious and untoward blaming of teachers and principals for outcomes that they cannot fully control. Further, it has pushed those educators to maintain a laser-like focus on the measured outcomes and on the tests themselves—narrowing curriculum and teaching to the tests—all in order to achieve a set of goals that often feel only tangentially related to the reasons why they entered the profession.

While these trends show few signs of fading, educators can take heart in this new book from Carol Burris and Delia Garrity. Even during a time when policy has been dominated by standards and testing policies, they helped lead their district—Rockville Centre, in Long Island, New York—toward teaching and learning grounded in the development of teachers as knowledgeable, trusted professionals. The results of their efforts are well documented—a remarkable increase in both excellence and equity. Despite the cacophony of mandates and sanctions, they have focused on what really matters—providing all students with excellent and challenging

learning experiences that are deep, meaningful, preparatory, and not driven by testing.

Burris and Garrity note at the book's outset the ongoing adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) throughout the nation. In fact, they embrace these standards. Because they do so, the book serves as a crucial missing element to the CCSS, guiding policymakers on how to move from the standards toward practices shown to increase learning and thus move students closer to meeting those standards. Similarly, the details illustrated throughout the book provide educators with corresponding tools—ways to move forward in a standards-based policy context.

This book provides a pathway for the CCSS to be something more than the *same old same old* for educators. Maybe, if we are wise and careful this time, the path does not necessarily have to lead to the well worn and cruel “just do it, no excuses” condemnations. Perhaps teachers and principals can thrive as professionals, with students reaping the learning rewards.

Burris and Garrity, in this new book, explain what it will take to do it. They help unpack the standards and describe, through examples and lessons, how to give all students more enriched learning experiences that will better prepare them for the 21st century. They wisely caution that the old drill and skill practices that are often resorted to by pressured teachers with struggling students are not the most effective ways to improve learning. The authors share research on the effectiveness of an accelerated approach, and they give the reader strategies on implementation. Indeed, they provide throughout the book practical suggestions that teachers can use with their most vulnerable students to make sure that those students are included and not relegated to the sidelines of education. The spirit of their first book, *Detracking for Excellence and Equity*, can be found throughout this second work, especially in the chapter that focuses specifically on equity.

For the past eight years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to study Rockville Centre's reforms and to work with Carol Burris on that research. I have seen the dedication of Burris, Garrity, Superintendent William Johnson, and their instructional staff. I have seen that dedication pay off as the district's large achievement gap has narrowed tremendously, with overall achievement rising and Burris's high school gaining repeated recognition as one of the best in the nation. Challenging, engaging, supported learning is not a secret formula; the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2004), among many others, have explained these essential elements in detail. But what Burris, Garrity, and others in Rockville Centre have done is take that formula and make it part of their—and their students'—daily lives. This book explains how they did this and how others can do the same.

This is an overwhelming time for our nation's teachers, as they feel the brunt of national and state policies motivated by callous political agendas. Burriss and Garrity give teachers and school leaders practical, useful tools grounded in experience and in research. The tools are offered as a way for educators to implement change in a way that reminds us all of what reform should really be about, in the words of John Dewey (1879), "that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform" (p. 79). And a lot of what it takes is improving learning opportunities through improved, more equitable, and more supported schools.

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