

Foreword

Having introduced Ian and Ted to Frank several years ago as part of a bond planning process, I read the draft of this book with some sense of responsibility. Given that their collaboration contributed greatly to the success of that bond program, which ultimately produced two high schools of real interest instructionally and architecturally, I opened the draft with a sense of anticipation. I was greatly encouraged by what I read.

I have deep concerns for the future of public education. These concerns have grown as I have served as superintendent in several very different school districts over the last decade. I led one suburban district near Austin with about 9,800 students as it grew from one to two high schools; then another near Houston with about 28,000 students as it grew from two to four high schools. Today, I'm superintendent of the Dallas ISD with 30 high schools and 158,000 students of enormous diversity and with worrisome graduation rates. Working for these school districts has provided me with a wide range of perspectives of how high schools operate.

The evolution of my concerns for education makes this book particularly relevant to me. It has become clear that our high schools are not working as well as they once did. On average, our nation's high schools graduate fewer than 70% of their students, and unfortunately, students in urban districts like mine fare much worse. Even the students who do graduate often need remedial work to succeed, whether in college or in the workplace. In Texas, the largest cities are growing in population while their central school districts have shrinking enrollments. Parents and students are choosing other education options. The likelihood is that this will only get worse in the future as change in the world accelerates. The future of public schools, particularly the future of our high schools, is by no means assured. Educators desperately need leadership to address the pressing challenges they face today.

That is the reason this book is so timely and encouraging. Not only have the authors outlined powerful forces that are combining to profoundly challenge education, they also take the bold step of pointing

educators toward possible solutions. The ultimate contribution of this book may not be in the details of its thoughtful proposals, but in the declaration Frank, Ted, and Ian set out in its title—*No More Cookie-Cutter High Schools*—that there are many different ways to create high schools that work. No single design or strategy will meet the needs of all students in the future.

Whether operating an existing school or planning a new one, we need to start with a singular focus on the needs of students to be served and only then devise the instructional methods, the programs, and the facilities they will require for success. The effectiveness of a school needs to be measured not in terms of the range of programs and facilities offered, but in terms of the success realized by each individual student. This requires diverse types of schooling for our increasingly diverse clientele.

Inherent in the concept of having different types of schools is the idea that students and parents must be able to choose the school best suited to their interests and needs. Where you go to school should not be based simply on where you live. This further implies that, over time, the types of schools will evolve—they will change and grow. High schools in this context cannot be the static institutions that they have been generation after generation.

In January of 2008, the Dallas ISD announced plans to make our high schools feel smaller, more personal, and more connected to work and careers. The plan calls for them to do the following:

- Create “career academies” that integrate core and career studies to make schools more relevant and engaging for students.
- Allow students to apply to any high school in the district offering programs of interest to them.
- Require students to take more college-level courses.
- Break large campuses into smaller units to make big, crowded schools feel more personal.

All of that is very much in the spirit of this book. I hope that after you’ve read it, you will be less certain about what constitutes a high school and more inclined to seek new ways to make high schools work in the 21st century.

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