Praise for *Digital Leadership*

Digital Leadership is a great one-stop shopping place to learn about all the key ingredients you will need for success in the digital age. Sheninger connects the dots with his seven pillars, his listing of obstacles and ways to overcome them, and the integrated solution that brings it all together. Comprehensive, clear, practical—get it and use it today!

Michael Fullan, Author, *Motion Leadership*, Dean and Professor Emeritus Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Toronto, Canada

Digital Leadership is essential reading for any education leader trying to figure out how technology can strengthen schools—and what pitfalls to avoid. Eric Sheninger masterfully makes the connections as to how technology can strengthen schools, providing an essential guide for today’s leaders in education. This is a readable, practical book!

Cindy Johanson, Executive Director, Edutopia The George Lucas Educational Foundation San Rafael, CA

Eric recognizes that ongoing professional development is the key to helping staff meet the challenges of the future. He shares how to leverage technology to build a strong, school-based professional learning agenda when other resources are not meeting the needs of your faculty and students. His story and tools will be inspirational to others.

Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director Learning Forward Dallas, TX

Digital Leadership is a focused guide to using the many new channels of modern communication to engage families, tell your school’s story, inspire staff growth and connection, and bring new relevance to the classroom. If you’re feeling overwhelmed by all the options out there, this book will give you a head start on mastering your social media strategy.


This book is THE book on digital leadership. There is no one I can recommend more highly than the most connected educational leader today—Eric Sheninger—to help us navigate all of the changes taking place in classrooms, schools and districts. The book is perfect to help everyone initiate transformational change in a digital world. Whether you are a cutting-edge techie or a nervous newbie, this book is for you.

Todd Whitaker, Ph.D., Professor of Educational Leadership Indiana State University Terre Haute, IN
Eric has created a must-read book for principals seeking to bring their schools into the digital age. He has created the compelling case for the many ways digital tools can have a powerful, positive effect in our schools. From classroom practice to the way in which we create the digital footprint of our schools, Eric steps us through how school leaders can evolve to meet the challenges of our modern age.

Chris Lehmann, Founding Principal
Science Leadership Academy
Philadelphia, PA

Eric Sheninger’s new book is a red-hot, relevant guide to navigating the technology-driven, tectonic shifts taking place in education today. While education leaders of all stripes are groping for answers as the ground beneath them shifts, Digital Leadership provides a reliable, practical, and tested road map for leading in the digital age.

Errol St. Clair Smith, Executive Director
Academy of Education Arts and Sciences
Glendale, CA

There are books on technology that don’t show you how to change. There are books on how to change that have nothing to say about technology. Then there are curmudgeonly commentaries that are dismissive about change and technology in equal measure. Eric Sheninger’s book alters all that. Through personal testimony, practical examples, and a commitment to clear professional learning, Digital Leadership opens your mind and shows you the tools that will make you think again about what twenty-first-century learning can really look like. If your iPads are used as notebooks, your SMART Boards are glorified whiteboards, and your school has an electronic ban on access to everything, this book will make you look at technology and learning with totally different eyes.

Professor Andy Hargreaves, BA, PhD, Hon Doc (Uppsala), FRSA
Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education
Lynch School of Education, Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA

Digital Leadership is a must-read for every school leader. Filled with inspiring stories of transformation from real, practicing campus leaders, along with an appendix filled with resources anyone can take to campus and use today, Eric Sheninger’s work is certain to be one of the most valuable resources in your professional library.

Carrie Jackson, Principal
Timberview Middle School
Fort Worth, TX

Eric Sheninger’s book builds upon his impressive accomplishments as a digital leader. I have had a chance to learn from Eric through his involvement with Digital Learning Day, and I am thrilled that others can learn even more from him about leading schools to maximize the potential of digital learning and asking the tough questions to more effectively meet the needs of each student. Eric’s bold approach to
school reform and the thoughtful pillars he lays out in this book provide important guidance for other education leaders striving to implement digital learning.

Bob Wise, President
Alliance for Excellent Education
Former Governor of West Virginia

“Digital leadership” is more than a catchphrase—it’s how school principals must lead students, parents, and teachers—and no one is better equipped to describe this leadership approach than Eric Sheninger. Digital Leadership is a carefully crafted and highly readable book that simultaneously provides a view of digital leadership from 60,000 feet alongside a boots-on-the-ground realist’s view of modern schooling. From setting aside fears of technology to understanding the importance of communication, public relations, and even branding, Digital Leadership offers compelling recommendations not only focused on the need to change but also on best ways to sustain change.

It’s possible that Eric saved the best for last when he put into words the concept of the networked teacher and how students must be engaged in new and exciting ways, for, truly, school leadership has always been about helping teachers engage students.

Finally, don’t mistake this as a book on technology. From the first to the last page, Eric’s book is all about school leadership, one that I highly recommend to every school leader.

William Bushaw, Executive Director
PDK International
Arlington, VA

I loved this book! It is filled with many examples of how technology is impacting learning in classrooms across the country. Whether you are a technology guru or learning to embrace technology, every school administrator should read this book to learn ways to prepare their students to be successful in the twenty-first century. Leadership 3.0 is a mindset that every school administrator needs to embrace and lead with. I am going to request that my superintendent purchase it for my fellow administrators, along with the educators on our district technology team.

Jessica Johnson, Principal and District Assessment Coordinator
Dodgeland Elementary School
Juneau, WI

What a great read! Digital Leadership situates the trends in technology and education within a historical context and provides a blueprint to the reader for a navigable pathway for the future. And it manages to do so in a way that is empowering and energizing, while still addressing the very real fears and challenges facing any leader standing at this nexus of authentic educational reform. It is a very rare blend of philosophy, pedagogy, and practical, roll-up-your-sleeves how tos.

Natalie Bernasconi, La Paz Middle School NBCT Teacher
Technology Literacy Coach
I can’t wait to get real copies of this in the hands of teacher leaders and colleagues. I absolutely believe that this work has the potential for tremendous impact. We have waited too long for this book, and the time is ripe to move forward with the information it has to offer. I look forward to book studies and networking with my colleagues about how they have successfully employed these ideas and strategies.

David G. Daniels, Principal
Susquehanna Valley Senior High School
Conklin, NY

How do school leaders transform themselves from the leadership style of today to become digital leaders of tomorrow? Eric Sheninger’s Digital Leadership is an easy read for those who want to begin the transition to digital leadership but have been afraid to take the first step. More than merely a “how to” book, Digital Leadership is a clarion call to action that compels the reader to do something now to transform schools into “vibrant learning communities that are connected and allow social media to unleash creativity in learners.”

Digital Leadership addresses the growing disconnect between the world our students inhabit and the world in which they are educated. Replete with stories and concrete examples of “how to,” Digital Leadership is a must-read for any school leader who recognizes that we stand at a crossroads in education where innovative leaders who possess the courage, passion, knowledge, and skills believe that “technology is not just a shiny tool that can increase engagement but a conduit to endless possibilities that can enhance every facet of what we do in education.” A must-read.

JoAnn Bartoletti
Executive Director
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Reston, VA

To my amazing wife, Melissa. Your unwavering support, love, and understanding further ignite my passion for the work that I do. Thank you for letting me follow my passion.

Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times

- Eric Sheninger

Foreword by
• Yong Zhao
Contents

1. Foreword

2. Preface

3. Acknowledgments

4. About the Author

5. A Day in the Life of a Digital Leader

6. Chapter 1: The Evolving Educational Landscape
   1. Increased Online Access, Mobile Devices, and Connectivity
   2. Advancements in Educational Technology and Current Trends
   3. Summary

7. Chapter 2: Why Schools Must Change
   1. A School Leader’s Call to Arms
2. **The Time for Excuses Is Over**
3. **Model a Vision for Excellence, Innovation, and Creativity**
4. **Embrace Twenty-First-Century Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Instruction**
5. **Focus on Bold Ideas**
6. **Summary**

8. **Chapter 3: Keys to Leading Sustainable Change**
   1. **One Practitioner’s Journey**
   2. **The Six Secrets of Change**
   3. **Overcoming Potential Roadblocks to Change**
   4. **Summary**

9. **Chapter 4: Leading With Technology**
   1. **A Superintendent’s Journey**
   2. **Driving Change**
   3. **The Pillars of Digital Leadership**
   4. **Summary**

10. **Chapter 5: Communication**
    1. **The Time Is Now**
    2. **Principal Trailblazers**
    3. **A Multifaceted Approach to Engaging Stakeholders**
    4. **Summary**

11. **Chapter 6: Public Relations**
    1. **The Van Meter Story**
    2. **Social Media Tools for Public Relations**
    3. **Education Transformation: Telling the Story of Rural Areas**
    4. **Summary**

12. **Chapter 7: Branding**
    1. **The Business of Brand-ed: School Culture, Student Achievement, and Resourcing**
    2. **Summary**

13. **Chapter 8: Professional Growth and Development**
    1. **A Shift in Professional Learning**
    2. **The Rise of Social Media as a Tool for Growth and Professional Development**
    3. **The Professional Growth Period**
    4. **Summary**
14. Chapter 9: Increasing Student Engagement and Enhancing Learning
   1. School Should Reflect Real Life
   2. A Pedagogical Framework for Digital Tools
   3. Twenty-First-Century Learning at New Milford High School (NJ)
   4. A Global Context
   5. A Focus on Essential Skill Sets
   6. The Move to 1:1
   7. BYOD: An Idea Whose Time Has Come
   8. Blended Learning
   9. Digital Citizenship
   10. Summary

15. Chapter 10: Rethinking Learning Environments and Spaces
   1. Shift 1—Establishing a Better Vision
   2. Shift 2—Strengthening and Opening Up the Wireless Network
   3. Shift 3—A Choice to Teach and Learn a Different Way
   4. Shift 4—A New Building Construct
   5. Shift 5—Creating a Real-World Space
   6. Shift 6—Strategic Partnerships
   7. Designing Schools to Engage and Drive Learning
   8. Summary

16. Chapter 11: Discovering Opportunity
   1. Strategic Partnerships
   2. Leveraging Social Media
   3. Summary

17. Chapter 12: A Call to Action
   1. Technologically Advanced
   2. Digital Leadership
   3. Summary

18. Appendix A: The ISTE National Educational Technology Standards (NETS•A) for Administrators

19. Appendix B: Twitter Memo for Parents

20. Appendix C: Student Media Waiver

21. Appendix D: Professional Growth Period Model Developed at New Milford High School
Foreword

I deleted my Facebook account in June 2013, after having it for about two years and accumulating nearly 1,000 friends. Why? I hadn’t found a reason to use it. Finding reasons to use technology is one of the biggest challenges educators and education leaders face. Very few technologies are originally invented to serve an educational purpose. Quite often they are pushed into schools because, with hundreds of millions of potential users, the education sector represents a huge irresistible market. Technology then becomes a solution looking for a problem—in a subculture that frequently perceives the introduction of technology as a problem rather than a solution.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not a Luddite. To the contrary, I have always believed in the potential of technology for improving education. I began writing software to teach English in 1985 and have designed a variety of technological products to support learning. I have also helped teachers and school leaders adopt technology and conducted research on the diffusion of technological innovation in schools. If anything, I can be called a technophile.

What I’ve learned is that the great potential of technology to improve education is not automatically realized. In fact, it is quite often not realized at all. The history of educational technology is filled with examples of unfulfilled promises and wasted investments that the technophiles don’t want to talk about. From radio to TV, from multimedia to hypermedia, from films to the Internet, waves of modern information and communication technologies have promised to improve and transform education and have failed to do so. We can blame technology for its overhyped capacities, teachers for their unwillingness or inability to make good use of it, educational institutions for their stubborn resistance to change, or governments for their lack of sufficient investments. While the blame may appear justified, it doesn’t accomplish anything. The constructive response is not to point fingers but to learn from mistakes. One mistake has been an overzealous attitude toward technological innovation leading to the undervaluing of existing educational practices. Inspired by the great potential of technology, proponents wonder why everyone else doesn’t “see the light” as they do. But the reality is that most educators feel fine with their own practices and are
functioning satisfactorily in their work. The missing link is the thoughtful and meaningful application of technology to education. In other words, the potential of technology must be translated into meaningful solutions to educational problems. Only when such a translation occurs will the majority of educators find reasons to adopt it.

Eric Sheninger provides such a translation in this book. Drawing from his extensive experience as an education leader, Sheninger presents stories and examples of technology improving the effectiveness of schools. He frames technology as a solution to the “problem” of the school improvement mandate, from community building to communications, from professional growth to enhancing student learning, and from building a better brand to improving public engagement. The aim of technological innovation is not only to enhance existing practices, but also to transform them. Humans develop technology to expand human capacities and occasionally to replace human labor in simple tasks. ATMs have largely replaced bank tellers, for example, as robots have replaced many workers on the assembly line. As a result of technological advancement, most industries in our society have undergone dramatic transformations and seek more complex human skills, knowledge, and abilities, which requires our students to develop different skills than their predecessors—skills that differentiate them from machines. Schools must adapt to help our children acquire these skills and knowledge. Moreover, information and communication technologies have brought significant changes to the core business of schools. The teacher, for instance, has for a long time been the primary source of knowledge and agent of knowledge transmission for students. But that is no longer the case. Today’s students theoretically have access to any information they desire and any expert they seek. This makes it necessary for teachers to seriously reconsider their role and their relationship with technology. If students can Google anything, why do they need teachers?

A redefinition of the role of teachers and schools has not yet emerged on a large scale. Sheninger pushes educators and education leaders to begin this work. More important, he uses meaningful examples to illustrate how we can begin the redefining journey. I am grateful that Sheninger took the time to play with different technologies, to redefine his role as an educator and education leader, and to reflect on his experiences and put together such an excellent book. Digital Leadership provides a framework for leading educational transformation with technology. Had I read this book earlier, I might have found my reason to stay with Facebook. Oh, well. I’m glad I am still on Twitter.

Yong Zhao
University of Oregon
Yong Zhao is presidential chair and professor at the College of Education, University of Oregon. He is author of World Class Learners: Educating Creative and
Preface

Advances in technology have led to changes in the way people communicate, collaborate, solve problems, create projects, and consume content. These changes have shifted how key stakeholders in education (parents, students, community members) prefer to receive information and communicate with schools. The increasing dominance technology plays in our lives can easily be experienced through behavioral observations of professionals, businesses, parents, children, and even grandparents. The number of adult Internet users with profiles on social network sites has more than quadrupled over a four-year span—from 8% in 2005 to 35% now—according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project’s December 2008 tracking survey (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009). Have school structures and procedures taken these shifts into account? More important, do leaders know how to adapt to these shifts and thus lead meaningful, sustainable change in their schools?

Audience

The primary audience for the book are school leaders (supervisors, assistant principals, principals, directors of curriculum, and superintendents). Professors of higher education can also integrate this book in their preparation programs, as many people would agree that exposure to this style of leadership is desperately needed. Even though the book will be directed at school leaders because they have the decision-making power to implement schoolwide and districtwide changes, teachers can easily incorporate the principles at the classroom level to improve their communication with their students, colleagues, parents, and community members.

The Call

Leaders today must establish a vision and implement a strategic process that creates a teaching and learning culture that provides students with essential skill sets—creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, technological proficiency, and global awareness—commonly referred to as twenty-first-century skills, although it has become obsolete as we are now well into the twenty-first century. These skills and processes should be at the heart of every decision a leader makes and are key to providing students with the tools to succeed in jobs that have not yet been created. Consistent innovation, effective integration of
technology, meaningful professional development, connecting beyond the walls of a brick-and-mortar building, and an open mind are all mandatory duties of a leader in the digital age.

The call to prepare students for the unknown jobs of tomorrow is made more difficult as mounting challenges such as budget cuts, Common Core Standards, value-added evaluation of staff using standardized test scores, and what seems like a relentless attack on the profession of education have taken their toll on staff morale. Quality leadership therefore becomes imperative in order to cultivate a school culture whose primary focus is on the learning and achievement of each and every student while anticipating needed changes in a society that is evolving at a dizzying pace.

It can also be argued that these changes have created a new type of learner that schools are entrusted with educating, as well as key stakeholders with shifting needs in terms of how they prefer to communicate with schools. In this digital age, we are experiencing amazing advances in educational technology that have the potential to enhance the teaching and learning process, as well as establish powerful connections with our communities and among an array of stakeholders. These advances have also unlocked the creative potential of many students, teachers, and administrators.

The challenge for school leaders is to acknowledge these societal changes and embrace them. If schools continue to follow an outdated educational model focusing on preparation for an industrialized workforce, they run the risk of becoming irrelevant to our students and communities. As Kelly, McCain, and Jukes (2009) point out, there is a fundamental disconnect between students and the schools they attend.

Why are schools not meeting the diverse learning needs of digital learners? Do school leaders leverage available technology and social media to do what they do better? Are our decisions and behaviors taking into account future shifts and changes? Why are so many slow or fearful to change? If these pressing questions are not squarely addressed by leaders, our system of education will continue to devolve into irrelevancy and inadequacy.

Digital leadership consists of a dynamic combination of mindset, behaviors, and skills that are employed to change and enhance school culture through the use of technology. In the early 2000s, the term Web 2.0 was coined. Wikipedia defines Web 2.0 as a perceived second generation of web development and design, that facilitates communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies. (“Web 2.0,” 2013)

According to Bryan Alexander, the Director of Research for the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education and a frequent commentator on technology trends in education, Web 2.0, a term which was popularized by Tim O’Reilly in late 2004, refers to those Web technologies that allow users to easily produce “digital content
that can be copied, moved, altered, remixed, and linked, based on the needs, interests, and abilities of users” (Alexander, 2008, p. 151). Digital leaders embrace Web 2.0 technology as a means to enhance leadership and professional practice. As leaders began to evolve and take advantage of Web 2.0 tools, they began to embrace change, demonstrate transparency, increase engagement, employ collaboration, focus heavily on sharing, initiate global dialogue, and build community. Leaders quickly found the value in a plethora of Web 2.0 tools, commonly known as social media, to enhance traditional aspects of leadership (i.e., management, instruction, and communication) while forging new pathways to initiate change leading to transformation. Many would argue that this leadership style is still prevalent today.

The Web, like leadership, continues to evolve, however, and the way it is accessed evolves as well. This has led to Web 3.0, a term originated by John Markoff of The New York Times and defined as a supposed third generation of Internet-based services that collectively comprise what might be called “the intelligent Web”—such as those using semantic webs, microformats, natural language search, data-mining, machine learning, recommendation agents, and artificial intelligence technologies—which emphasize machine-facilitated understanding of information in order to provide a more productive and intuitive user experience. (as cited in Spivack, n.d.)

Digital leadership takes into account recent changes such as ubiquitous connectivity, open-source technology, mobile devices, and personalization. It represents a dramatic shift from how schools have been run and structured for over a century, as what started out as a personal use of technology has become systemic to every facet of leadership. Bret Simmons (2010) sums up the evolution of the Web nicely:

- Web 1.0 is informational,
- Web 2.0 is relational,
- Web 3.0 is anticipatory.

Digital leadership can thus be defined as establishing direction, influencing others, initiating sustainable change through the access to information, and establishing relationships in order to anticipate changes pivotal to school success in the future. Leaders must learn to better anticipate the learning needs of students and staff, their desire for information from stakeholders, and the necessary elements of school culture that address both the Common Core Standards and essential skill sets. They must also be “change savvy” (Herold & Fedor, 2008), which involves

- careful entry into the new setting;
- listening to and learning from those who have been there or been at it longer;
- engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving;
• carefully, rather than rashly, diagnosing the situation;
• forthrightly addressing people’s concerns;
• being enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere about the change circumstances;
• obtaining support for what needs to be fixed or improved; and
• developing a credible plan for making a fix or improvement.

Central Purpose and Focus of This Book

*Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* presents a framework for leaders to harness the power of digital technologies in order to create school cultures that are transparent, relevant, meaningful, engaging, and inspiring. In order to set the stage for increasing achievement and to establish a greater sense of community pride for the work being done in our schools, we must begin to change the way we lead. To do this, leaders must understand the origins of fear and misconceptions that often surround the use of technology such as social media and mobile devices. Once the fears and misconceptions are placed on the table, leaders can begin to establish a vision for the effective use of technology to improve numerous facets of leadership.

The challenge for school leaders is why, how, and where to begin. Digital leadership is not about flashy tools, but a strategic mindset that leverages available resources to improve what we do while anticipating the changes needed to cultivate a school culture focused on engagement and achievement. This book will present a new construct of leadership that grows out of the leader’s symbiotic relationship with technology.

This book provides leaders with the concrete evidence used to transform the teaching and learning culture in New Milford High School in a relatively short period of time. It tells the story of how I radically changed my beliefs on how a school should be structured and function, with the end result being sustainable change in programs, instruction, behaviors, and leadership involving technology. It examines how shifting a leadership style from one of mandates, directives, and buy-in to one grounded in empowerment, support, and embracement is the key to sustainable change.

The Pillars of Digital Leadership

*Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* outlines what I refer to as the “Pillars of Digital Leadership.” These are the specific areas embedded in the culture of all schools that can be improved or enhanced through the use of available technology, especially social media. They are

- **Communication**: Leaders can now provide stakeholders with relevant information in real time through a variety of devices. No longer do static, one-
way methods such as newsletters and websites suffice. Discussion will focus on types of information that can be communicated through various free social media tools and simple implementation strategies.

- **Public relations:** If we don’t tell our story, someone else will, and more often than not, another’s version will not be the one we want told. Leaders need to become storytellers-in-chief. This section will focus on how leaders can form the foundation of a positive public relations platform using free social media tools. By doing so, they create the means by which they share all of the positives associated with their schools and create a much-needed level of transparency in an age of negative rhetoric toward education.

- **Branding:** Businesses have long understood the value of brand and its impact on current and potential consumers. Leaders can leverage social media tools to create a positive brand presence that emphasizes the positive aspects of school culture, increases community pride, and helps to attract/retain families when looking for a place to send their children to school.

- **Student engagement/learning:** We cannot expect to see increases in achievement if students are not learning. Students who are not engaged are not likely to be learning. Leaders need to understand that schools should reflect real life and allow students to apply what they have learned through the use of the tools they are using outside of school. Pulling from real-world examples at New Milford High School and other innovative schools across the world, a blueprint is provided for effective technology integration ideas and strategies that are cost-effective and focus on enhancing essential skill sets—communication, collaboration, creativity, media literacy, global connectedness, critical thinking, and problem solving.

- **Professional growth/development:** With the rise of social media, schools no longer have to be silos of information and leaders do not have to feel like they are on isolated islands that lack support and feedback. This section discusses how leaders can form their own Personal Learning Network (PLN) to meet their diverse learning needs; acquire resources; access knowledge; receive feedback; connect with experts in the field of education as well as practitioners; and discuss proven strategies to improve teaching, learning, and leadership. Readers will learn how to develop their own PLN for free and access this newly acquired, priceless resource anywhere at any time. Digital leadership ensures that leaders are accessing the latest trends, research, and ideas in the field.

- **Reenvisioning learning spaces and environments:** Once leaders understand the pillars and how to use them to initiate sustainable change, the next step is to begin to transform learning spaces and environments that support essential skill sets and are aligned with the real world. Leaders must begin to establish a vision and strategic plan to create an entire school building dedicated to learning in an ever so more digital world. In order to do so, leaders must be
knowledgeable of the characteristics and dynamics that embody innovative learning spaces and environments.

- **Opportunity:** It is important for leaders to consistently seek out ways to improve existing programs, resources, and professional development. This section highlights how to leverage connections made through technology and increase opportunities to make improvements across multiple areas of school culture. Leaders will see how the other six pillars connect and work together to bring about unprecedented opportunities impossible otherwise, such as acquiring donations or resources worth thousands of dollars, authentic learning experiences for students, and the formation of innovative conferences.

Leaders need to be the catalysts for change in each of these pillars. Each is critical in its own right to transforming and sustaining a positive school culture. This book breaks down each pillar, uses research to emphasize its importance and value, and provides an overview of specific tools and strategies that can be used regardless of budget obstacles. I use not only my experiences and successes in each of these areas, but also those of other innovative leaders from across the country whom I have met through social media. These practitioner vignettes offer powerful voices that establish a context for each pillar and illustrate the why and how so that readers will be able to implement the strategies in their own contexts. The Appendix contains useful reproducibles that leaders can begin to use immediately to enhance their professional practice. By addressing each of these pillars, leaders can begin changing and transforming their respective schools into ones that prepare learners with essential digital-age skills while engaging a variety of stakeholders.

After reading this book, you will be able to

- Identify obstacles to change and specific solutions to overcome them in order to transform schools in the digital age
- Use digital tools and leadership practices to enhance school culture and improve stakeholder relations
- Leverage the real-time Web to grow professionally like never before
- Utilize practical strategies from practicing school leaders that will provide a context for digital leadership in action

**Acknowledgments**

Like many pieces of writing, *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* has been a labor of love for Eric. For him, social media were a catalyst for conversation that not only provided him with ideas and inspiration, but also connected him with some of the most amazing educational leaders in the world: leaders such as David Britten, Dwight Carter, John Carver, Spike Cook, George Couros, Peter
DeWitt, Robert Dillon, Lyn Hilt, Patrick Larkin, Joe Mazza, and Pam Moran. Each of them models the essence of digital leadership and continuously provide Eric with the support and guidance to lead change and grow professionally. One could not forget business maven Trish Rubin, who taught Eric about the importance of branding in education. Her insight and continuous mentoring have given Eric a fresh look at what education can and should be.

As much as digital influences and influencers played a role in the development of this book, the traditional elements have been just as important. Almost every idea and strategy laid out in the book originated and/or evolved at New Milford High School (NMHS). Eric will forever be indebted to the NMHS community—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders—for their support, confidence, feedback, and inspiration. His family has also been instrumental with their patience and advice on how to craft a manuscript that not only makes sense, but also has value to an array of educators.

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End of this sample Kindle book.
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