

## Preface

Rita Schweitz and Kim Martens

**B**oth of us have experienced the power of future search in our work with school districts, individual schools, and other organizations. We have seen how bringing the whole system into the room and providing an opportunity for meaningful conversation has produced results not previously believed possible. We have heard from our clients that the energy and actions following their future searches are still producing positive results years later.

The students in future searches are always memorable. Most begin unsure how they will relate to all of the adults in the room, especially educational and community leaders. Some are shy and some are cocky. As the meeting progresses, they find their voices. They speak out in the large group and add ideas in small groups. They are the reason for the future search. They are tomorrow's leaders taking a leadership role today.  
—Rita Schweitz

One memory that stands out is when a judge participating at a district future search in Canada stood up and passionately declared, "I think it shows that we care, we have hope, and we're not dictated by polls. We are dictated by *children* and by love. This is not a political agenda. We are people who care deeply about children. And I think that's important."  
—Kim Martens

We agreed to take the lead on this book because we knew that other Future Search Network members had had experiences similar to ours and would also contribute their stories. There were articles about school-district future searches in the Future Search Network's newsletter, *FutureSearching: Exploring Common Ground for Community Action*. Reports were on the future search listserv and website, [www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net). We also knew many of us would enlist school-district leaders to help tell these stories from their unique, insider points of view. Their words would express the reality of what it means to lead and live this change. What we hadn't imagined was how powerful these stories would be.

We are eager to share these stories with school administrators, school boards, parents, teachers, and government officials—everyone interested in making improvements in education. Future search is a method to find common ground and make wide-scale, positive change within the education system, even in difficult situations.

### HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

This book contains 16 compelling case studies arranged in five parts, with a concluding chapter. Together they illustrate how future search creates a lasting, whole-system change based on a radical principle: getting in the same room those who have authority, resources, information, expertise, and need. These cases document innovative initiatives in rural, suburban, and urban schools in both Canada and the United States on such key issues as districtwide strategic plans, racial divisions, curriculum reform, community partnerships, and district amalgamation. The original drafts of these cases contained more examples and details. Each part is based on an

underlying theme that runs through its cases. It was not easy settling on these themes because of the rich and detailed nature of the chapters. Many chapters could have fit into more than one part. To help you peruse the book, we have included table P.1, which lists themes and the chapters in which they are presented.

We hope that this organization will help you see the patterns and lessons illustrated in the case studies. Here's what you will find in each part:

**Part 1: Demographic Variety.** This part opens with a table that outlines the demographics of the 12 school districts discussed. The two future searches described later in the chapter involve school districts of vastly different sizes. The Lawrence Public School District in chapter 1 was interested in finding a strategic planning method to help it institutionalize its long-term goals. Lawrence has 10,000 students in 22 schools. The Toronto District School Board in chapter 2 wanted to explore how its seven merged school boards could come together on their most important task—educating their children. TDSB has 300,000 students in 558 schools.

**Part 2: Leadership Perspectives and Tools.** This part includes accounts of whole-district transformation in three districts, related from the leadership point of view. In chapter 3, Jim Parry, retired superintendent of Carson City, NV, schools, sponsored 14 future searches across the entire district to launch a districtwide strategic plan. In chapter 4, Jim Grieve, former superintendent of the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board in Ontario, describes how future search and the voice of community have changed the nature of his work, guided his actions, and redefined his role. In chapter 5, Director of Curriculum Sally Hilderbrand and former Superintendent Carole Spahr, of the Perkiomen Valley School District, PA, exemplify specific leadership roles that influenced strong, positive, and lasting change.

**Part 3: Growing Community Partnerships.** This part offers four examples of how future search can lead to strong community partnerships. In chapter 6, during a future search in North Platte, NE, the community agreed to focus on “schools as centers.” Future search participants mobilized the community, established the program, and received over \$1.5 million in federal and foundation grants. In chapter 7, Naperville, IL, stakeholders built community collaborations to support quality education and succeeded in passing a school referendum that had previously failed. Both the San Gabriel, CA, School District in chapter 8 and the Minneapolis, MN, School District in chapter 9 focused on health care with a belief that healthy students make good learners. These systems built coalitions with the local government, healthcare professionals, and local hospitals to increase health services to students and their families.

**Part 4: Including Student Voices.** The chapters in this part illustrate how influential student voices become when they are invited to participate. In chapter 10, during the future search in Santa Monica, CA, a number of disenfranchised students spoke up for inclusion, equity, equality, and closing the achievement gap. In chapter 11, the Novato, CA, future search focused on creating and sustaining a safe, just, and respectful learning environment after racial incidents tore at the school community. In chapter 12, following the Lester B. Pearson School District future search, students formed a council that has become an official consultative group to the board while another group is busy helping create flexible timetabling for

the high school.

**Part 5: Beyond the District.** The concluding part of this book offers four examples of future search in nondistrict educational contexts with relevance to school districts. The North Montgomery County (PA) Technical Career Center in chapter 13 was on the brink of closing its doors when it held the system’s first future search, which transformed its program and image. Abiotechnical summit using future search principles and second future search charting a course for new growth further accelerated its progress. In Franklin County, OH, in chapter 14, three future searches over ten years led to a statewide policy on the access, quality, and affordability of child-care and early education that ultimately was written into law. The University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education in chapter 15 involved the whole faculty and its stakeholders in transforming its academic program. The faculty redesigned the curriculum and engaged in coordinated planning across all divisions of the organization. Lastly, in chapter 16, the Kansas State Department of Education’s future search allowed stakeholders to reenvision the leadership role of this agency and deepen the partnerships among levels of the education system in the state.

Following the case studies, the epilogue summarizes some of the key points from the chapters, answers practical questions about implementing a future search, and suggests some ideas to get you started.

**Table P.1: Themes and Chapters Table**

Inclusion, equity and equality	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 10: Santa Monica, California Chapter 11: Novato, California Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio
Schools as centers/hubs	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska
Engaging the front-line; supporting operational leaders	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec Chapter 15: University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education, California
Opportunities for people to choose leadership roles and responsibilities, take initiative, and take risks.	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 7: Naperville, Illinois Chapter 8: San Gabriel, California Chapter 13: North Montgomery Technical Career Center, Pennsylvania Chapter 16: Kansas State Department of Education
Creating processes or structures that respond to the	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania

changes; providing stability while allowing for flexibility.	Chapter 9: Minneapolis, Minnesota Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio
Descriptions of process champion, community coordinator, organizational weaver.	Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska Chapter 7: Naperville, Illinois Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio Chapter 15: University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education
Future search as part of a strategic planning process.	Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania Chapter 10: Santa Monica, California Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec Chapter 13: North Montgomery Technical Career Center, Pennsylvania Chapter 15: University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education Chapter 16: Kansas State Department of Education
Setting boundaries; establishing non-negotiable to facilitate appropriate contributions.	Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania Chapter 15: University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education Chapter 16: Kansas State Department of Education
Standardization and centralization to meet local needs	Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 10: Santa Monica, California
Providing for health and mental health needs of students so they will be able to learn.	Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska Chapter 8: San Gabriel, California Chapter 9: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Labor Management	Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 7: Naperville, Illinois Chapter 9: Minneapolis, Minnesota Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec
Synchronicity	Chapter 9: Minneapolis, Minnesota Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio
Social capital	Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska
Moving the system from fragmentation to coherence	Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania Chapter 10: Santa Monica, California Chapter 11: Novato, California Chapter 15: University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education
Trust building	Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 7: Naperville, Illinois

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Achievement	Chapter 10: Santa Monica, California Chapter 13: North Montgomery Technical Career Center, Pennsylvania
Sustaining momentum	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska Chapter 9: Minneapolis, Minnesota Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio Chapter 13: North Montgomery Technical Career Center, Pennsylvania Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania
Return on expectations	Chapter 1: Lawrence, Kansas Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 5: Perkiomen Valley, Pennsylvania
Bond issue/ procuring funds	Chapter 3: Carson City, Nevada Chapter 6: North Platte, Nebraska Chapter 7: Naperville, Illinois
Amalgamation/ mergers	Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 4: Ottawa-Carleton, Ontario Chapter 12: Montreal, Quebec
Establishing/ augmenting the professional learning community	Chapter 2: Toronto, Ontario Chapter 14: Franklin County, Ohio Chapter 16: Kansas State Department of Education

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—Rita Schweitz and Kim Martens