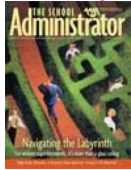


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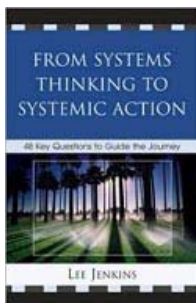
Book Review

From Systems Thinking to Systemic Action

48 Key Questions to Guide the Journey

by **Lee Jenkins**, Rowman & Littlefield Education, Lanham, Md., 2008, 214 pp. with index, \$27.95 softcover

Asking tough questions about the vexing challenges public schools face to improve student achievement is a strategy some use to criticize schools and their leaders. Simplistic solutions or erroneous policy directions often undermine continuous improvement efforts.



Lee Jenkins, in *From Systems Thinking to Systemic Action*, asks 48 tough questions that focus the whole system on improving student achievement. Using his experience as a teacher, school superintendent and systems consultant, Jenkins develops a strategy that will achieve systemic improvement.

Jenkins poses questions for systems improvement that connect significant elements of the school system with suggestions for leadership action. He affirms the value of collecting data to analyze systems issues and advocates applying that understanding to improvement actions ranging from people to facilities to finance to curriculum and ultimately to classroom practices.

Question 1 importantly asks whether “the superintendent and board accept the belief that 94 to 97 percent of the school district’s issues are systems problems.” Jenkins builds upon a central belief that the system must be guided by a clear aim. With that aim, an unflinching commitment to people-centered values can identify the fundamental systems changes essential to improving student performance.

This primer on the literature of systems thinking is combined with solid examples of school practices that can be monitored and assessed by data readily available in all school districts. Each question identifies a systems variable that can be analyzed over time to identify changes that will improve student performance.

The courageous school leader, board member or policy advocate will be well-served by examining each of these 48 systemic questions and developing strategies for applying them.

Reviewed by Brian L. Benzel, vice president for finance and administration, Whitworth University, Spokane, Wash.

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