FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION®:
6 PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING STUDENT SUCCESS THE ONLY OPTION

PRESS KIT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION
ABOUT THE BOOK

• Anchored in the moral purpose of sustaining success for all students, this second edition of the bestseller demonstrates how to reshape school cultures to support continuous student success.

• Over 200,000 copies of the first edition have been sold.

• Awarded Book of the Year by the National Staff Development Council.

Five years later, the second edition of this award-winning book offers new success stories and more insightful examples of schools that have transformed themselves.

With contributions from Pedro A. Noguera, Andy Hargreaves, and Dean Fink, this book outlines the ‘Who, What, and How of becoming a high-performing school and learning community, shows how to avoid ten common routes to failure, provides countless resources, and includes many new case stories and examples of how schools are improving their performance through the tools in this book.

Not just for administrators, this book is a call to action for parents, communities, and government to take part in a movement for sustainable change in our schools.

AN EXCERPT FROM FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION:

What could be more compelling than undertaking a profession that literally places the future of children in your hands?

Educators don’t have the distractions of fame and fortune to cloud their thinking about why they are here! So there must be another reason—a more profound why that leads to all the hours of toil, the deep concerns for the success of young people, the countless evenings and weekends attending plays and ball games.

Reconnecting with this why is imperative to sustaining one’s passion and focus in light of the barrage of attacks that public education and all those involved with it regularly endure.

Standing up for why we are in this field is essential to our personal and professional well-being. Equally important, it is imperative for our very future—and that of our children. In this, failure is indeed not an option.

Ironically, the single most important element for success in any endeavor is often omitted from books such as this. While it is easy to focus on what others need to do, or on how to structure an organization, or on what policies need to be handed down to staff members, the real determinant of success will no doubt be you! You, the person reading this book. This book grapples—most notably in Chapter 2—with the thorny issue of introspection to ensure external results.

Make no mistake about it: Failure Is Not an Option® begins with you!
Alan M. Blankstein  
Founder/President, HOPE Foundation  
Best-Selling Author of Failure is Not an Option®

Alan Blankstein is Founder and President of the HOPE Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that supports educational leaders in creating school cultures where failure is not an option for any student. HOPE (Harnessing Optimism and Potential through Education), whose Honorary Chair is Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has a long track record of closing gaps and sustaining student success in school districts throughout America.

Growing up in Bronx NY, Alan was a “high risk” youth, experimenting with drugs and living in and out of foster homes run by the Jewish Child Care Agency. At the age of 15, he reunited with his grandmother, who had a profound influence on his life. She was a pillar of support who gave Alan the strength to “bet on himself.” Two weeks prior to high school graduation, Alan was kicked out of school. Directionless and with no high school diploma, Alan was befriended by a recruiter from a college program who saw his potential and helped set him on the right path for his future.

With the support of his mentor, Alan went on to earn a degree in music at the University of New York at Potsdam and an MBA from Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business. He started his career as a music teacher and later worked for several youth-serving organizations until he started the National Education Service – now Solution Tree – in 1987, where he stayed for twelve years.

In 1989, Alan founded the HOPE Foundation with a dream of formally helping other “high risk” students. He first launched a series of forums and video conferences on Shaping America’s Future and subsequently started a professional learning community movement within education circles. Now, the HOPE Foundation provides twenty conferences annually, as well as long-term support for thousands of educational leaders throughout North America via its leadership academies and intensive on-site school change efforts.

In 2005 Alan authored Failure is Not an Option®: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools, which was awarded “Book of the Year” by the National Staff Development Council. Now in its second edition, it has become the gold-standard of creating and sustaining learning communities and the best-selling book for Corwin.

An inspiring and visionary educator, Alan has delivered keynote presentations in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Canada, and for every major U.S. educational organization. He has published articles in Educational Leadership, The School Administrator, High School Magazine, The Principle Magazine, Reaching Today’s Youth, and Inside the Workshop. Alan is also a Senior Editor of the eight-volume series “The Soul of Educational Leadership.”

Alan has served on the Harvard International Principals Center’s advisory board, the Board of Trustees for the Jewish Child Care Agency and the Forum on Race, Equity, and Human Understanding with the Monroe County Schools in Indiana. He has also been a Board member for the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Co-Chair of Indiana University’s Neal Marshall Black Culture Center’s Community Network, and an advisor to the Faculty and Staff for Student Excellence (FASE) mentoring program.
In 1989, The HOPE Foundation, a Bloomington, Indiana based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, began convening interdisciplinary forums involving W. Edwards Deming, Peter Senge, CEOs, governors and major educational leaders. These gatherings spawned seminal publications on “professional learning communities” published by the conveners.

For two decades, the HOPE Foundation has expanded the application of this concept into a district-wide approach, based on the award-winning publication, Failure Is Not an Option®

We are a leadership organization internationally recognized for re-culturing school communities and sustaining student success by collaborating with schools and districts on a long-term basis to build leadership capacity and ensure success.

Our success is rooted in our experienced team of professionals, our dedicated Board of Directors and Advisory Board, and the diverse and numerous organizations with whom we partner.

We have a proven track record of creating school and district-wide leadership teams that consistently close learning gaps among students while enhancing overall school, teacher and student achievement.

We build leadership communities within schools and school districts that increase student achievement and create schools where failure is not an option for any student.
The CLA is a three-year integrated program for school districts which builds the structures, processes, and protocols to inform instructional improvements and sustain a collaborative culture supporting an ongoing school improvement planning process. School leadership teams are empowered to further develop their own teacher and administrator leadership capacity to close implementation and achievement gaps within and between schools, most significantly through collaborative creation and implementation of School Improvement Plans in Title I schools.

The outcomes of this multi-year academy have consistently included:

— Dennis Van Roekel, President, National Education Association

“An overwhelming body of research shows that educational change and improvement must come from the inside. Here is a practical road map for improving the climate and culture of schools in ways that are meaningful and enduring. We must be open to new ideas, new strategies, and new opportunities. School transformation is something you do with educators, not to them. This book will show you how.”

— Dennis Van Roekel, President, National Education Association

“Educational books that engage both head and heart are rare. This is one of those exceptions: an authentic and powerful call to action, written in an accessible and utterly compelling way. It reminds us that school failure is not a given, that there are ways to make a difference for all young people in all settings, and that education is more than test scores or grades. Ultimately we are shaping individual futures and life chances. For that alone, this resource should be on every educator’s bookshelf.”

— Alma Harris, Professor, University of London

“In my 32 years of teaching, I’ve seen lots of good initiatives come and go. This is the first one that’s really made a difference for the kids.”

Denny Cook
Math Teacher
Alton High School

“Alan Blankstein’s book is grounded in moral purpose, offers hope through many real-life examples showing that that purpose can be realized, and inspires courage among educators to do all that is necessary to create schools in which both students and adults thrive.”

— Dennis Sparks, Thinking Partners
The HOPE Courageous Leadership Academy is based on the culmination of research, including Senge (1990); Kruse & Louis (1994); Newman and Wehlage (1995); Hord (1997); DuFour and Eaker (1998), and ISSLC standards (2000), encapsulated in Failure Is Not an Option®: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools:

- Common Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals
- Ensuring Achievement for All Students: Systems for Prevention and Intervention
- Collaborative Teaming Focused on Teaching and Learning
- Using Data to Guide Decision Making and Continuous Improvement
- Gaining Active Engagement from Family and Community
- Building Sustainable Leadership Capacity

These principles act as an organizing system for best-practices already underway and are not “taught” sequentially or in isolation. The structures and processes that are modeled in all of our work build the leadership capacity to implement the Six Principles as a system to develop, support and actualize their School Improvement Plans. The structures and processes are sustainable and often become the conduit for future district initiatives.

The Courageous Leadership Academy (CLA) curriculum grows leadership capacity at all levels, starting by using a self-assessment at the district level and an audit of current learning structures and processes. These services are tailored to advance learning through job embedded activities that create a culture of trust (Bryk and Snider, 2002) and data informed collaboration (Schmoker; Kruse; Louis) focused on student learning.

In our PD sessions, we model activities for teams to practice and then implement in their own buildings. Powerful design structures like the School Leadership Team (SLT) Portfolio focus the work, provide a means for collecting evidence of progress and reflection, and maintain the pressure to follow through on the learning from the CLA.

All PD sessions end with strategies for spreading what was learned through the entire system and sharing of artifacts and evidence of the work they committed to in prior sessions.
WHERE HOPE HAS WORKED

FLAG: Indicates schools/districts where HOPE methods have worked.

SQUARE: Indicates where long term **Courageous Leadership Academies** have been in place.
In 2006-07, Wichita participated in their first cohort of a Courageous Leadership Academy in 44 of their 88 schools, and continued their training in the rest of the district in 2007-08. In 2006-07, Wichita met 36 of 42 AYP subgroup targets, narrowed the achievement gap between Caucasian and African-American students, and exceeded the state’s graduation target. In addition, in 2007 15 schools in the district achieved AYP that had not in 2006; 12 of those schools had participated in the HOPE Foundation’s Courageous Leadership Academy.

Payne Elementary was the lowest performing school in reading and math in 2007. After deploying CLA’s framework, teachers were able to work together to make data driven decisions in both subjects and collaborate on best practices for real results. Payne saw a gain of 10.8 points in reading and 14.3 point gain in math for the first year. Preliminary data for year two shows a 8.5 point gain in reading and a 17.6 point gain in math.

They are no longer the lowest performing school in the district and on the path for success for all of their students.

“In order to achieve excellence for all students, it is no longer an option for teachers to work in isolation; however, putting teachers together to collaborate is only the first step. To achieve the lift we are getting in Wichita, teachers have to collaborate about the right things. The HOPE Foundation has helped us to focus our work by providing our teams with the tools and processes necessary to bring our professional learning community to life.”

Greg Rasmussen
Assistant Superintendent of Wichita Public Schools
Mattoon, a district in central Illinois with six schools, fully participated in a CLA during the 2007-09 school years.

- At least 62.5 percent of students in every subgroup demonstrated proficiency as measured by the ISAT in 07-08, and their rate exceeded that of the state in closing achievement gaps.
- Middle school proficiency in math grew from 54 percent to 86 percent.
- Students in Mattoon exceeded the state average in Reading for grades 3 - 8.
- At Mattoon High School, one of the first faculty-driven efforts was to create a schedule to provide time for collaboration. This occurred in a non-negotiation year and was neither union-driven nor negotiation-leveraged. Professional development addressing reading across the curriculum was provided. Results are beginning to be recognized in improved ISAT scores.

“The piece that I find attractive is that it focuses squarely on teaching and learning, it is something you have to struggle with and that is where the growth is. It is not something you can buy at a bookstore or order online.”

Larry Lilly
Superintendent of Mattoon CUSD #2
Carolyn Powers, the Director of Elementary Administration, Fort Wayne Community Schools, Ft. Wayne, Indiana has been sending school leadership teams to the HOPE Foundation’s Courageous Leadership for School Success events for several years.

Her school leadership teams were so enthusiastic about the events, that she was able to pilot six elementary schools in Courageous Leadership Academies in the 2008-2009 school year.

FWCS Superintendent Wendy Robinson and the School Board were so impressed with the schools’ outcomes that they expanded the program to all 52 schools in the district for the 2009-2010 school year.

The CLA program is in its second year of implementation in Ft. Wayne. Before working with HOPE Carolyn worked with another popular professional learning community program, but she found “it didn’t go deep enough.”

For her, HOPE provided a deeper, integrated, research based approach that enables teachers to work together collaboratively.

Teachers now have assigned roles, prepare their SMART Goals every day and have their own professional growth plan for three years.

The instructional learning walks, brainstorming sessions and evaluations of effective protocols are helping principals and teachers change how they lead learning every day and know what to look for when learning isn’t happening.

After the first year in Ft. Wayne’s six selected elementary schools, early reporting SMART Goal results are showing great progress.

Shambaugh Elementary had dramatic gains in reading in Kindergarten, up 54.5 percent from its beginning benchmark assessment of 42.5 percent. Grades 1-5 increased reading scores by an average of 15 percent.
Experts offer teachers practical ways to leave no child behind

By NATHANIEL WEST
Staff Writer

MATTOON — The “Three Rs” gave way Tuesday to the “Three Ps” — People, Products and Processes — one of many acronyms offered to teachers at this week’s eye-opening HOPE Summit at Williams Elementary School.

“I’m giving you a process,” author and keynote speaker Alan M. Blankstein told the sprawling cafeteria full of educators Tuesday. “And once we get excited about it and commit to it, then we’ve got some strong values to drive our schools.”

Concluding today, the summit also features Stephen Peters, well-known author of the book “Inspired to Learn: Why We Must Give Children Hope.”

Both experts expounded on the theme implied in the title of the controversial No Child Left Behind Act — that all students are capable of learning, and schools must develop “cultures” to capitalize on this.

The HOPE Summit, attended by hundreds of area educators, is designed to create “professional learning communities” in schools to ensure truly that no student is left behind, according to HOPE Foundation literature.

“There aren’t any throwaway kids,” said
Hailed as a visionary educator, Blankstein was an "at risk" youth. Photo by Jeffrey Hammond

Alan Blankstein
Man with a Mission

The music is blaring, the drums are pounding, and Alan Blankstein is dancing. "I'm far better known for dancing at Bloomington's Lotus World Music and Arts Festival than anything else," says the one-time music teacher. But thousands of teachers and school administrators around the U.S. and abroad would dispute that claim. They know him as an inspiring and visionary educator, author of the book Failure Is Not an Option, and founder and president of the HOPE Foundation (Harnessing Optimism and Potential through Education).

Bounced around in his childhood, living at one point in a group home in New York City, Blankstein was classified as an "at risk" youth until a teacher who spotted his potential helped set him on the right path. After earning a teaching degree in New York and an MBA at IU, he founded the National Educational Service, a publishing company, in Bloomington. Eventually, though, Blankstein asked himself, "What can I do to help the 'underdog' get a crack at things?" By 1998, he had his answer: sell NES to focus full-time on the nonprofit HOPE Foundation that he had created nine years before.

The mission of HOPE is to support educational leaders and train them to create school cultures where failure is not an option.

Blankstein believes that if even a single pupil isn't succeeding, the solution is not to banish the offending child but to view him or her as a warning—"the canary in the coal mine." And the way to reach students is by working through their teachers. The HOPE program is built around the idea of a "learning community" that Blankstein helped popularize. It incorporates six basic principles that foster cohesion among educators. The result have been measurable and "amazing," Blankstein said.

HOPE has offices in Toronto and South Africa as well as in Bloomington. About 35 people work here, helping to organize about 20 conferences a year for from 400 to 2000 participants. And there are about another 20 out in the field helping the leaders do the leading," as Blankstein explained, engaged in long-term projects with individual schools and school districts. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is the honorary chair of HOPE, and the organization has been asked to start a program in South Africa that could eventually impact all of its 26,000 schools.

"Though Blankstein spends many days jet-setting across the globe, he finds the time to kick up his heels. 'You can't get too serious,' he said. 'Or else you can't get to sleep at night.'"

—Danielle Wilkes, Dale Burg