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A Perfect Storm Ushers in New Opportunities for Collaboration

We are nearing the end of the first decade of the 21st century typified by last year's whirlwind of angst and hope. Angst about the continuing downward economic spiral and its undeniable effect on our schools and the students they serve. Hope as we welcome a new era of presidential leadership to harness the energy from a perfect education storm that has been brewing for the past decade. The connection between education and a strong economy is clear. Forces are converging toward ensuring that our nation's schools receive the resources needed to help all children reach their highest potential. This atmosphere inspires us to spread an undeniable truth—principals are key to effective public schools, and as such they have the power to change lives.

During the past few months, NAESP has asked principals to share their ideas about priorities for the Obama administration and the next U.S. Secretary of Education. They have determined that their success in leading schools depends on increased financial resources, greater authority over personnel decisions and expenditure of funds, and renewed federal dedication to educating the whole child—as opposed to focusing narrowly on standardized test scores. Additionally, principals want the next version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; currently No Child Left Behind) to be fully funded.

There are exciting times ahead and NAESP is committed to partnering with the Obama administration, Congress, and all key stakeholders to lead the movement for an improved public education agenda that meets the needs of all children. Here are important priorities that NAESP will be focusing on this year:

Principals as key learners and leaders. Researchers have found that instructional leadership is second only to classroom instruction in affecting student learning and that principals can make a genuine difference in the educational outcomes for children. Therefore, principals must be granted authority and autonomy so they can do what they do best: lead schools. As instructional leaders and committed learners, principals are both providers and consumers of professional development. NAESP's publication, *Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, presents a comprehensive framework that is ideal for use in such programs.

NAESP urges Congress to require that ongoing, high-quality professional development, supported by a dedicated funding stream, be provided for principals.

Early childhood education. High-quality, early childhood experiences provide the foundation for higher levels of student achievement, future success in school, and economic benefits to society. NAESP looks forward to working closely with the Obama administration and the 111th Congress to increase the opportunities for all young children to participate in excellent early childhood education programs that are school-connected and developmentally appropriate and include a variety of academic, social, emotional, and physical experiences.

Reauthorization of the ESEA to recognize the whole child. One of the most common concerns that principals cited for the new administration is the reauthorization of the ESEA. Principals want the next version of the ESEA to return the focus to teaching and learning, to provide for the use of multiple methods to gauge student and school success, and to address each child as a total person with unique needs and circumstances that go beyond academics.

Increased federal investment in education. Every day, children arrive at school in need of academic instruction and an array of services to help them more fully benefit from the curriculum. We must commit to supporting children and schools by providing the funds needed for the successful implementation of federal education laws. NAESP calls on Congress and the Obama administration to work together to make this crucial investment in our nation's future. Children can't wait until the recession abates and the deficit is reduced to receive the world-class education they need and deserve.

This perfect storm time is stirring abundant positive energy. NAESP is excited about the renewed opportunity to move toward ensuring that all children receive an education that will prepare them for bright futures. Throughout this year, we will focus on helping Congress and the new administration fully understand the crucial role of principals in leading our nation's schools. We are eager to work with policymakers to enact and implement sound federal education policies that will provide real help to schools and the children who attend.

National Association of Elementary School Principals

Serving All Elementary & Middle Level Principals

