

Leading America's Improvement and Innovation



Public education in the United States is facing a sea change. Initiated by President Barack Obama, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and countless education leaders throughout the nation, our schools are entering a new era, one of change and improvement, of continued accountability and responsibility.

At the heart of this change is a national commitment to innovation and to new ideas and solutions for our classrooms. Our nation's school principals are dedicated to boosting student learning, closing the achievement gap, and supporting all students to ensure that they realize their greatest potential. Principals also share a commitment to ensuring that resources are used effectively to guarantee better leadership, teaching, and learning in our classrooms.

Led by elementary and middle-level principals nationwide, NAESP is at the heart of this national movement to improve and innovate teaching and learning. Our elementary and middle schools are the initial learning portals for 21st century opportunities, ensuring that all students have the foundations necessary to succeed in their later years in school and in life. If we are to enhance student achievement, improve graduation rates, and broaden education opportunities for all, such efforts must start early in our nation's preschools and extend through the elementary and middle

grades, providing a vital foundation for life-long learning.

In a recent NAESP national survey of elementary and middle school principals, which was conducted during the Association's annual convention in New Orleans, K-8 school leaders were queried on the major issues being advocated through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and other federal education policy priorities.

Principals' perspectives about education policies give new insight to the essential elements of school improvement.

Real, lasting improvement requires strong, experienced educational leadership.

First, NAESP members responding to the NAESP survey support the notion of pay-for-performance as one of many levers for school improvement if it includes "multiple fair measures" of success. To move this idea into practice, policymakers must ensure that the entire staff of a school is recognized for their contributions to student improvement. In addition, the survey found that principals recognize that incentive pay is particularly important for teachers and principals who agree to work in hard-to-staff schools, with our students who are most at risk.

Second, a majority of our elementary and middle-level principal respondents support the concept of national education standards that identify what our nation's students should know and be able to do. Prin-

cipals believe that standards should be set by education practitioners, including principals.

Finally, principals are keeping a keen watch on the emerging issues that are most likely to affect schools and students in the coming years. Successful principals are already dealing with early childhood education and the academic and social preparations happening before students first arrive at elementary schools. And effective principals are working with policymakers, fellow educators, and community leaders on topics such as multiple performance measures, instructional leadership development, and an extended learning day to ensure that all students maximize their learning time. Effective learning is more than what is happening within the schoolhouse and during school hours—effective leaders are educating the whole child across the whole day.

As we look forward to an era of school improvement, education innovation, and enhanced student achievement, there is no more important voice than that of the principal. NAESP is committed to ensuring that voice is both amplified and heard in our nation's capitol and in state capitols across the country.

Real, lasting improvement requires strong, experienced educational leadership. There is no group more qualified to provide that leadership to our classrooms and our schools than the tens of thousands of elementary and middle-level principals around the nation. NAESP is proud to represent the principal's voice on behalf of our nation's school children. ■

Gail Connelly