



Middle

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS *Serving All Elementary and Middle Level Principals*

The online resource for principals with students aged 10 to 14

Matters

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Principals must unite and advocate for children, especially in times of economic uncertainty.

Mark Terry, NAESP's Board of Directors, Middle-level Foundation Member

Prin cipals unite! During a time of widespread economic uncertainty in our country and the onset of a new administration, it is more imperative than ever for principals to let our voices be heard in our state and federal legislatures. Just think of the possibilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), presently known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, is up for reauthorization and positive changes can be achieved with your help. NAESP expects to be included at the table when education issues arise, thanks to the leadership of our executive team and principals across the country.

If your state is like mine, or if your school district is like mine, you are experiencing major, even catastrophic shortfalls in funding. I cannot remember a time when so many districts were being forced to release teachers, increase class sizes, and cut programs. With the national economy in dire straits, we see the ramifications in the lives of our students. We see proud families being forced to ask for assistance, many for the very first time. We see them buckle under the pressure of family strife or concerns over how to provide for their children's needs. We also see folks moving out of our schools, causing enrollments to drop, while other schools see an influx of students, bringing pressure to provide resources that may not be available.

What's a principal to do? Unite! I recently had an opportunity to visit my state capitol with a group of dedicated principals to lobby our legislators for everything from better funding to encouraging full-day, voluntary pre-school services for our families. The Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, an NAESP affiliate, plays a vital legislative role in our state by taking the principals' message to lawmakers. As a result, over the last few years we have helped turn an almost anti-public school feeling in the state to a more positive tone. (I

would be remiss not to also give credit to parent and business groups that have joined hands with Texas educators, including Friends of Texas Public Schools, Raise Your Hand Texas, Texas Parent PAC, and corporations like the H-E-B grocery store.)

What about things on the national scene? Well, I am just as excited, if not more so, about what NAESP is accomplishing in Washington. Recently, NAESP's Federal Relations Coordinators and members of NAESP's Board of Directors visited Capitol Hill to express the needs of principals for funding and legislation. We were able to make connections with the key legislators and their aides who will play a major role in the reauthorization of ESEA. Mostly, though, I think we were there to share with our elected officials our hopes and dreams for the children of this great nation.

NAESP made sure that each of us was well prepared to address the issues and needs that you have expressed at our national conference, at state meetings, and at the summer leadership meeting. As a result, the tone was certainly different this year. Many of us had long, productive meetings with our congressional delegations and we look for great things to happen over the next two years.

You might be asking what principals like you can do. Well, unite! If you have never had the experience of developing a working relationship with your members of Congress or your state legislators, now's the time. You will be surprised how easy it is to make contact—and to make a difference.

It took me quite a while to work up the nerve to make my first call regarding a piece of legislation that was being considered. I thought I'd speak to the legislator, that he or she would pepper

me with questions, and that I would end up looking foolish. What actually occurred was that my call was answered by a young intern who only wanted the bill number and my yes or no on support. Only after I had been in contact several times and started to develop a relationship with the legislator's office staff did I have substantive discussions about impending laws and regulations. After consistent contacts, including visits to legislators' offices while on vacation, and invitations to visit my school, I now have a comfort level in making my voice heard. I have even received calls from congressional offices asking my opinion. Imagine that!

As a middle-level principal, you need to stand up and be counted. If you are a veteran principal, you have an obligation to our younger colleagues who are entering this great profession we have chosen. As a younger principal, you have an obligation to your students in recognizing that you must live with

decisions that are being made now for many years to come. Stand up, unite with NAESP and your state affiliate, and let your voice be heard!

If you have ideas to share, please e-mail them to me and I'll share some of the other things I do to make a difference in Washington. Also, to send an e-mail to Congress, track legislation, or do register for updates and alerts, visit the Leading Educators' Advocacy Dashboard (LEAD) at www.naesp.org.



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