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**PRINCIPAL**

Leon E. Greene  
Editor  
[lgreene@naesp.org](mailto:lgreene@naesp.org)  
Vanessa St. Gerard  
Managing Editor  
[vstgerard@naesp.org](mailto:vstgerard@naesp.org)  
Jennifer Apperson  
Production Assistant  
[japperson@naesp.org](mailto:japperson@naesp.org)

**EDITORIAL ADVISORS**

Jan Borelli  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
[janborelli@cox.net](mailto:janborelli@cox.net)  
Frank Buck  
Talladega, Alabama  
[buck@mail.talladega-cs.net](mailto:buck@mail.talladega-cs.net)  
Jeanette Gilliland  
Phillipsburg, New Jersey  
[jgilliland@pburghk12.nj.us](mailto:jgilliland@pburghk12.nj.us)  
Olaf Jorgenson  
Kamuela, Hawaii  
[ojorgenson@hpa.edu](mailto:ojorgenson@hpa.edu)  
Rita R. Martinez  
Phoenix, Arizona  
[rmartinez@harr.cartwright.k12.az.us](mailto:rmartinez@harr.cartwright.k12.az.us)  
Scott A. Miller  
Horicon, Wisconsin  
[smiller3@horicon.k12.wi.us](mailto:smiller3@horicon.k12.wi.us)  
Christopher J. Peal  
Walled Lake, Michigan  
[pealc@walledlake.k12.mi.us](mailto:pealc@walledlake.k12.mi.us)  
Katherine Ralston  
Mt. Solon, Virginia  
[kralston@augusta.k12.va.us](mailto:kralston@augusta.k12.va.us)  
Patricia Reynolds  
Zion, Illinois  
[preynolds@zion.k12.il.us](mailto:preynolds@zion.k12.il.us)  
Teresa Tulipana  
Kansas City, Missouri  
[tulipanat@parkhill.k12.mo.us](mailto:tulipanat@parkhill.k12.mo.us)

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# Old Principals Never Die



As retirement looms for many veteran principals, we're reminded of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's farewell words in closing his long and distinguished military career: "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away."

But for those veterans who see their careers winding down, we would like to paraphrase MacArthur's farewell: Old principals never die; they live on in the hearts and memories of the students, teachers, parents, and communities they have served so long and so well. And they live on in a new generation of principals they have helped guide through a thicket of responsibilities that can seem overwhelming to novices.

Statistics compiled from a 2003–2004 survey by the National Center for Education Statistics, reported in this issue, reveal that the typical elementary school principal had served as an educator for 22 years: eight as a teacher and 14 as a principal. The survey also showed that 56 percent of the nation's 61,000 elementary school principals were 50 or older, including 28 percent who were 55 or older. That's a lot of veterans.

Several veteran principals, some active and some retired, share their experiences and reflections in this issue. For Allan Vann, who ended a 33-year professional career, the last 17 as a principal, six years ago, early retirement offered a welcome alternative to the increasing stress he was undergoing. Based on his experience, he provides four key questions to consider when contemplating retirement.

Paul Young, who retired recently after 19 years as a principal, reflects on some things he had to learn the hard way in the hope that younger principals—and perhaps some veterans—can benefit from his experience.

Mike Connolly isn't ready to retire and shares three pieces of advice he learned through trial and error that can help get new principals off on the right foot.

Myra Bugbee is a veteran who firmly believes in mentoring as a responsibility of experienced principals. "Although every principal's experiences are unique and every school is different," she says, "we can help newcomers learn to make decisions courageously, based on their core values and the best data available."

Veteran principals can also reach beyond our shores to assist principals in other nations. Robert Krajewski, a former principal, describes his 20-year effort to provide leadership training to principals in a remote Chinese province.

As veteran principals return to their schools for another critical year of leadership, they should keep in mind Vince Ferrandino's message: "Before they retire—and even after—our most experienced principals can help the next generation of school leaders understand how foreseeing the need for change, introducing change, implementing change, and learning from change are essential elements of their job descriptions."



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