

# Leading in an Era of Challenges and Inspiration

It's inspiring to see talented principals at work—their energy; team-building; dedication to producing academic, social, and emotional results for children; and sense of humor. As executive director of NAESP, I've had an opportunity to shine the spotlight on principals and it truly has been a rich and rewarding experience.

One of my consistent refrains in speeches and magazine columns, at conferences and staff meetings, has been that the world is changing, presenting opportunities and demands many of us never imagined in our professional careers. As this issue is published, I am making final preparations for an exceptional opportunity. In September, I will move to the United Arab Emirates to oversee major educational reforms as the full-time director of policy and planning at the country's Ministry of Education.

You can be sure that many of the lessons I've learned about school leadership in almost eight years at NAESP will translate into wisdom that I am confident will help students in schools across the United Arab Emirates. Our best American schools are models for a world eager to see more of its children learn at high levels, build creativity, use what they know to solve real problems, and aspire to lifelong learning. It is principals who know how to encourage and motivate the people around them who are the hallmarks of those schools.

## An Expanding Role

I've said it before and I'll keep saying it: Successful principals are those who know how to use their vision and direction to keep others going. Stories of resilient principals show us not only talented individuals, but people who give energy to and get energy from a strong team of teachers, staff members, and students. That energy reaches out beyond the campus to influence colleagues across the school district and community leaders.

During my tenure here, one clear message—and an obvious need—has been expanding our view of school leadership. In 2001, we published *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*, which recommended that we place student learning at the center of public education, find better ways to use data, and encourage adults to be lifelong learners and actively engaged



in the community. We also published guides for how schools should connect with early childhood and after-school programs. In both cases, we emphasized that principals need to be the leaders.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to chair the national Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Our report, *A New Day for Learning*, envisions a comprehensive, seamless

approach to learning that values the distinct experiences that families, schools, after-school programs, and communities provide for children.

If we're committed to helping all students reach proficiency in reading, math, and other subjects, everyone involved in child development—whether it is the educational, emotional, physical, or creative aspects—needs to tear down barriers we've imposed on ourselves and partner more effectively to create a first-rate new learning day for children.

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## Meaningful Results

During my time at NAESP, we've tried to increase the opportunities for principals to grow and affect student achievement. Our association has expanded its focus on international education.

We've been strong advocates for federal accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act, while also working to ensure that important practical advice from principals was shared. We've been

proponents of students receiving a strong start in their early years of schooling. We've focused on using technology and electronic options, like our Web site, online Principal's Academy, and Principals Help Line, to deliver information and services that can help principals work smarter and more effectively. We also created a formal mentoring program for principals, Peer Assisted Leadership Services (PALS), in which experienced principals guide a new generation of school leaders.

School success is group success and I'm grateful for all the outstanding people I've had the opportunity to work with and meet as NAESP executive director. In my new position, I intend to tap into what I've learned here and to keep in touch with many of you.

As a final note, let me pass along a favorite tip: When you meet someone in your community who is sour on the future or down about what the world may be coming to, invite him or her to observe or help in your best classrooms and watch what the experience will do. It's hard to beat a good, engaging school for creating real optimism and inspiration. I'm incredibly thankful for a job that provided countless moments like these. 

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