

Slow and Steady Wins the Race



One of my all-time favorite fables is *The Tortoise and the Hare*. The first time I read it, I had little faith in the tortoise's slow-moving gait versus the lightning speed of the hare. Yet, while the hare wastes precious time, the tortoise surprises us all by not underestimating his ability to win and is ultimately victorious in the race.

Every day in our nation's schools, children struggle with the pace of classroom instruction. Some are like the tortoise—they keep trying to grasp the lessons and they refuse to give up. But many others become frustrated and fall behind in their academic “race.” They begin to lose confidence because they can't keep up with their peers.

This issue of *Principal* offers some ways that principals can support their teachers and parents to help struggling students maintain a pace that will help them achieve academic success. With the increase in brain-based research, and the realization that children learn at different levels and in different ways, educators are identifying and incorporating new intervention methods into the curriculum to help struggling learners. The authors in this issue address some of those methods.

Mel Levine, a noted pediatrician and author, and Mary-Dean Barringer, a special education teacher and chief executive officer of All Kinds of Minds, discuss how brain differences affect learning and offer some classroom remedies that do not call for special education. Professor Mary K. Lose proposes that educators reject the term “slow learner” altogether and use evidence-based response-to-intervention approaches. Also included in this issue are strategies that principals can use to help their staffs teach slow learners; an example of a successful math lab that uses nontraditional intervention methods; and suggestions for principals in supporting parents of struggling learners at home.

In this issue, we also introduce a new column, “Voices from the Board,” which will feature both NAESP Foundation Directors—Deborah Harvest, principal of the Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. Academy in New Jersey, and Mark Terry, principal of Eubanks Intermediate School in Texas. Deborah launches this new column with a description of how her urban school supported its struggling learners and helped them believe that they could achieve. This year, 93 percent of her school's fourth-grade, general education students met state standards in reading and 100 percent met state standards in mathematics.

I still enjoy reading *The Tortoise and the Hare* (even though the ending is no surprise) because it demonstrates the true spirit of a “can do” attitude and how we can all overcome challenges. The moral of the story should not be lost on us. We must never count any students out of the academic race and we must do our best to help them cross the finish line with their heads held high and their confidence intact.

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