

Leading Learning Communities

In the past year as executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, it has been rewarding to work together with hundreds of principals and members as we imagine the preferred future of the principalship, redefine new professional standards, and develop an ambitious strategic plan for the Association.

During NAESP's 2008 convention in Nashville, Tennessee, we are releasing the recently revised *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principal Should Know and Be Able to Do*. A complimentary copy will be sent to every member in the fall as a benefit of NAESP membership. Following is a preview of the introduction to this important body of knowledge. Special thanks to all of the principals who contributed to this dynamic publication, working toward advancing the profession, enhancing the quality of pre-K-8 education, and preparing all children for success in an increasingly complex world.

Leading Learning Communities 2008: An Excerpt

Like so much else in society, the job of the principal is changing rapidly. Changes within schools and in the world are transforming what it means to lead schools and what school leaders need to know and be able to do to succeed. For all students to reach high levels of learning, principals simply cannot operate the way they have in the past.

Over the past year, NAESP began looking ahead to 2021, the year the Association will celebrate its centennial, to find trends that will affect principals by that time. A partner organization, the Institute for Alternative Futures, helped us identify the most prominent themes, and with subsequent research we focused on three main trends: changes in the nature of leadership, changes in society, and changes in education.

Leadership. The increasingly complex challenges principals will face to ensure that every student learns at high levels will mean that the traditional notion of leadership—the top-down, autonomous leader—will be outmoded. As collaborative leaders, principals will have to keep their eyes on the big picture and make sure that everyone within the organization does what needs to be done to attain excellence. In that respect, the leader will be the catalyst of change within an organization.




Effective leaders distribute leadership by systematically providing opportunities for a wide range of people to come up with ideas and carry them out in order to fulfill the school's vision. They bring together skilled people to contribute their knowledge and ideas. Leaders support them so that they can take risks. And only when people take risks can truly creative ideas emerge.

Society. The student population will continue to become increasingly diverse, in large part because of immigration, which has brought a veritable United Nations into many classrooms. A third of all counties in the U.S., and several states, are now “majority-minority,” meaning that members of minority groups represent a majority of the population, and that number is expected to grow. At the same time, the number of children from low-income homes and the number of children with disabilities are also rising and will likely continue to do so. All of these changes will pose challenges for schools, because the student populations that will grow most rapidly are those that schools have underserved in the past.

Technology will also change schools, as it has much of daily life. “Hyperlinked” learning through multimedia and learning technologies will transform both the way students and adults learn and what they learn. Technology will expand resources for teachers’ professional development and make school management more efficient by enabling leaders to use data to inform practice.

The increasingly “flat” world that the journalist Thomas L. Friedman described will redefine what students need to know and be able to do. Schools will become learning portals to the global workplace, enabling young people to think critically and work in teams. And the global marketplace will make available many more resources for schools than ever before.

Education. Schools will continue to be accountable for improving student achievement, although the measures of achievement are likely to become more sophisticated and capture a broader range of outcomes for youths. Schools will need to demonstrate their effectiveness to parents and the community and develop plans to enable every student to succeed. To meet their goals, principals and students will draw increasingly on learning resources outside of schools.

At the same time, parents increasingly will want more opportunities to choose schools and, in response, schools will develop more diverse options for parents and children—including virtual learning environments that do not exist in physical buildings. And this diversity in learning options will extend to preparation programs for principals. Traditional, university-based programs will give way to learning in schools and learning online. 

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