

## All Systems Go

*School leaders work collaboratively to build teams, improve schools.*

In schools and districts across the country today, superintendents and principals of all grade levels form the core of an “uber team” that advances instructional leadership, nurtures a culture of learning, supports teachers and staff development, allocates scarce resources effectively, and seeks parent or guardian engagement. Building and nurturing such a team is no simple matter.

“To team successfully,” say university professor and former superintendent Mary Lynne Derrington and elementary principal Cathie West in their book *Leadership Teaming: The Superintendent-Principal Relationship*, “principals must

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understand the superintendent’s mission, the forces at play in the district environment, the dynamic role of the administrative team, and their part in the leadership mix ... [S]uperintendents must craft a team that is cohesive while incorporating the individual missions, varied talents, and unique perspectives of every principal. For both superintendents and principals, teamwork requires an understanding of how successful teams function, respect for the unique contributions of individual team members, and willingness to embrace the challenges associated with effective teaming.”

Author and organizational change guru Peter M. Senge, founder of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, in his best-selling book *The Fifth Discipline*, looks at the issue this way:

“I see systems thinking as a way of seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots.”



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Not every business theory and practice can—or should—be translated to the education sector, but a systems approach to improvement, driven by high-performing, interdependent relationships, is surely one that’s worth our closer examination.

For these reasons and others related to sound association and financial management, the governing bodies of AASA and NAESP have unanimously authorized our two organizations to “team up” and explore ways we can consolidate some operations and resources when AASA moves into space at NAESP’s headquarters. Each organization will maintain its identity, membership, and current governing structure, so this is not a “merger.” However, the two organizations will greatly benefit from the efficiency of a back-office operation serving both groups.

This summer will provide the first opportunity to test the power of this collaborative effort as both groups will hold their advocacy conferences at the same time and in the same hotel. With the pending reauthorization of ESEA and congressional review of the education budget, the collective voices of some 75,000 administrators will be heard on Capitol Hill for the first time. This strength is vital at a time when public education is under attack. Professionals who best understand the intricacies of running school districts and schools can step forward together to offer wisdom and voice their opinions.

Our new team offers a holistic view of public education and the capability to create true school transformation, without getting mired in a “reform” agenda that today is simply the reheating of yesterday’s plate. That’s what experience with, and first-hand knowledge of, teaching and learning can accomplish. It’s a systems view.

Just as we believe that superintendents and principals can form powerful teams in service to children in their own communities and still maintain their own individual leadership roles, we are confident that AASA and NAESP can achieve a “functional collaboration,” leverage a common advocacy agenda, and sustain our distinct missions, governance entities, and independence. We’re taking a systems approach, and we are very excited about the prospects.