DISTINGUISHED PRINCIPALS OFFER NINE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT WORK.
THE TERM “BEST PRACTICE” is commonly used to describe “what works” in a specific situation or environment. When principals face a thorny challenge, they turn to their colleagues in the principalship for ideas about which strategies, activities, and approaches have proved to be effective and efficient in addressing the issue. NAESP plays a crucial role, providing information, research, and networking opportunities—connecting what works with what principals need.

A successful practice that is supported by data is a research-based or scientifically based practice. Consequently, practices that are supported by research and evaluation carry something like the Good Housekeeping seal of approval. However, as information consumers, principals must always bear in mind that a practice that worked in a particular school’s climate might not yield the same results across educational environments. In adopting a best practice, principals should consider if the strategy or approach needs to be adapted to work in their school’s unique culture.

The 61 National Distinguished Principal honorees in the class of 2011 know how to run successful schools, so when they reveal their best practices on instructional leadership, the ideas likely are worth adapting or replicating. Here are nine best practices that produced impressive results.

STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHER EVALUATION
Jillian C. Nesgos
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School
Hyde Park, Massachusetts

Student needs are at the core of Boston Renaissance Charter Public School’s teacher performance evaluation system. The process features pre- and post-observation meetings between the teacher and me where we collaboratively evaluate student work samples. At the meeting before the observation, in addition to talking about the climate of the classroom, content of the lesson, and instructional methodology, teachers show and explain student work samples that prompted them to develop the lesson being observed. They describe areas of deficiencies and explain why they chose the lesson for the observation.

At the post-observation meeting, the teacher brings student work samples that demonstrate the variance of student proficiency in meeting the goal of the lesson. Teachers must prepare a written description of their analysis of the lesson and how they intend to conduct future lessons based on observation of student work samples. This evaluation process focuses on teacher growth and development and holds teachers accountable for development of effective and meaningful lessons. The teacher and I also develop a positive relationship by discussing student performance and collectively developing strategies for addressing improved performance.

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES
James Mulé
St. Amelia School
Tonawanda, New York

During the second semester, our students lead a conference with their parents or guardians to show the work that the teacher feels best represents what the child has learned during the school year. At the meeting, the child and parents work with the teacher to set goals for the remainder of the year. With the student in charge and the teacher acting as a facilitator, the authentic assessment gives students practice in self-evaluation and boosts accountability, self-confidence, and self-esteem; promotes high parent involvement; and results in realistic goals. Our students also strengthen...
their organization, leadership, and speaking skills. Based on feedback from teachers, parents, and students, we continue to refine the program.

ACADEMIC PARTNER
Christine M. Foxen Collier
Center for Inquiry Schools
Indianapolis, Indiana

Opening its doors to the Dyslexia Institute of Indiana (DII) paid huge dividends to the Center for Inquiry Schools. We allowed institute tutors to work within the school building with students whose parents contracted with DII for their services. DII staffers were so impressed with the K-8 school’s culture, mission, and staff that they offered to assist struggling readers during the day and to train our teachers in effective techniques for struggling readers. The school became a pilot site for the institute’s Ready, Set, Read! program, designed to provide multi-sensory, direct instruction within the school day. We agreed to find space for the classes and to work with DII staff to determine which students would benefit. DII provided the staff and delivered the program. Our students’ data helped to shape program development and were used to approach funders. Students who participated experienced an average 20 percent gain in academic skills.

AUTHENTIC LEARNING
Linda L. Bleile
Wiscasset Middle School
Wiscasset, Maine

Research shows that middle-level students are engaged by authentic learning, authentic products, and authentic audiences. When students are involved in their learning, when they can construct meaning from that learning, and when they find their learning to be relevant to their lives and the world around them, then they learn at high levels. Wiscasset Middle School’s foray into expeditionary learning verified this model as one of the most successful ways we can deliver our curriculum, support struggling learners, challenge all learners, and maintain high standards for all. We frequently refer to this approach as “messy learning” because we don’t always know in what direction it might take us. Because we see a decrease in undesirable behaviors and an increase in student attendance, engagement, and achievement, we are more than willing to revise daily lessons when students and teachers find themselves immersed in authentic research. For example, through our eighth-grade immersion expedition, students became involved in reseeding our local clam-flats where clams burrow. These clam-flats, within easy walking distance of our school, have been unusable for many years. Thanks to the research and efforts of our students, they should be once again viable as a local industry in a few years.

When our fifth-grade students studied lobstering, they not only went lobstering for a day with the local lobstermen, but they also built traps and wrote a nonfiction account of what is happening to the lobstering industry called Contemplate the Lobsters’ Fate. This published book, available at our local library, is an authentic product for an authentic audience. Such a powerful learning model ensures student success in using 21st century skills.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
Kyle Marie Langille
Bicentennial Elementary School
Nashua, New Hampshire

Bicentennial Elementary School partnered with New Hampshire Project Learning Tree to build an outdoor classroom and to incorporate the use of the outdoor classroom and the study of the environment surrounding the school into the curriculum. The Connecting School to People and Places program allowed us to strengthen our curriculum, emphasize social issues, and expand our commitment to community-based service projects. As the outdoor classroom project developed, students created conceptual designs, helped prepare the area, and planted vegetation. Now they maintain the site. With the recent addition of a pondless waterfall, the site meets the criteria as a natural wildlife area, offering a respite in an urban setting.

Through the partnership, we helped to organize the cleanup of a 215-acre city park and formed a green team to audit school resource use and suggest changes. The partnership also provided the impetus for a much needed district curriculum alignment with state science standards. In addi-
tion to adjusting themes and strengthening content, teachers now focus on teaching students through inquiry learning, investigations, and observation skills. The partnership has increased our commitment to science and strengthened students’ inquiry skills and overall science understanding, resulting in a 32 percent increase in science proficiency on the New England Common Assessment Program. Next steps include full implementation of science probes, science notebooks, and more formative, authentic assessments.

**SUMMER MOBILE LIBRARY**
Regina R. Stewman
Sonora Elementary School
Springdale, Arkansas

When the tie-dye mobile van comes around their neighborhoods twice a week in the summer, students from Robert E. Lee Elementary School flock to it. Previously, the school opened up its library to students and their families to provide access to books during the summer months, but students living on the extreme end of the large attendance zone did not have access to the public or school library, and they often did not have books in their homes. Seventy percent of Lee’s students are linguistically diverse and 85 percent live in poverty. As a result, I decided to take the books to the students, at first in my own vehicle. Soon the community became involved, with the local library supplying a van and a collision shop donating paint and labor to give the van a tie-dye style that matches the school’s T-shirts. Other businesses donated money for gas and tires, and an education professor at Harding University gave $5,000 in books so the school could expand its selection. I also secured several grants for the program, which offers more than good literature to kids. Teachers, administrators, and community members operating the van also deliver snacks, identify students who can be enrolled in pre-K and thus be set up for success in kindergarten, and develop strong relationships with families in the community. I am currently principal at Sonora Elementary, where I plan to begin a similar program, but I continue to support the Lee Mobile Library through book donations.

**POINTS FOR PARENTS**
Linda C. Wood
Harrowgate Elementary School
Chester, Virginia

Traditionally, Harrowgate Elementary School struggled to get parents to take an active role in our Title I school where 61 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and the remainder of families function just above the poverty line. We sought to change that long-standing pattern by establishing a program that recognizes parents for their involvement in the school. The Parent Partners program rewards parents with points for each activity in which they take part. We track the accumulating points, and then parents and their children are recognized at the quarterly grade-level awards ceremonies as Honor Roll Parents. Points are awarded for activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences, joining the PTA, volunteering during the school day, attending workshops, signing and returning graded papers, and participating in schoolwide events. We also offer 40 yearly educational workshops that provide parents with materials they can use at home.
For example, at the workshop on transitioning to middle school, parents receive a calculator their child will need in sixth-grade math.

In the first four years of the program, we purchased materials with funds from a local private foundation grant. Now, the school system assists in funding efforts with safety net funds. Parents responded to these new opportunities, making high parent involvement an embedded part of our culture. For the first time in our 50-year history, the PTA realized 100 percent membership! Parents who had been difficult to attract in previous years say that they value the public recognition of their efforts and the benefit of the materials that they receive when they come to Harrowgate.

MORRE SUPPORT FOR RELUCTANT READERS
Lawrence P. DiPalma
Prendergast Elementary School
Ansonia, Connecticut

Teachers on our Building Data Team developed the concept of targeting students for extra support and attention through our MORRE (Monitoring Our Reluctant Readers Effectively) system. As teachers became more data savvy and collaboratively examined student work, they noticed that many of our reluctant readers needed more academic support, behavioral support, and progress monitoring in order to learn and achieve high academic and behavioral standards. All of these students were already receiving sufficient support: MORRE goes beyond scientific research-based intervention. MORRE students get more attention, academic support, behavioral support, encouragement, parent outreach, and close monitoring at staff meetings. Staff set up a MORRE data wall in the conference room with an index card for each MORRE student with the following information: name of student, a picture, teacher information, and benchmark and other assessment data. Staff placed a material overlay over the data when meetings were not in progress to protect confidentiality. Teachers set SMART goals for each student in the targeted MORRE group. The results of this extra attention are remarkable. Only 2 percent of identified MORRE students scored proficient on the 2010 Connecticut Mastery Test. In 2011, 60 percent scored proficient or above on
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the test. While no MORRE students scored proficient or higher on the fall DRA2, 68 percent met that benchmark in the spring.

DAILY INTERVENTION BLOCK
Christopher A. Daniels
Chouteau Elementary School
Kansas City, Missouri

When the upbeat music comes over the speakers at Chouteau Elementary and students begin to move systematically to predetermined locations at 8:55 a.m., the scene resembles a well-choreographed dance number. For the next 30 minutes, students work on skills or lessons specifically designed to build on areas of need. For example, kindergarten students work with third-grade, English-language learners on letter sounds or number identification. Groups of students needing enrichment receive higher level instruction focused on more complex problem-solving strategies or word derivations. Each student who needs remediation receives an instructor and no more than three other students to break down the walls of the traditional classroom and make learning as intimate as possible. All students work on research-based interventions designed to support a specific skill deficit or enrich a potential strength.

Every five weeks, the data team reviews each child’s data and uses the results to determine need for further remediation, on target grade-level instruction, or enrichment practices. Students who are involved in the process for two consecutive school years perform on grade level in both state reading and math assessments. These students’ achievement growth is among the highest in our school district’s 21 elementary sites. The daily intervention block has also brought some unforeseen results. Student attendance is now above 95 percent, a remarkable figure for a school with a 32 percent mobility rate and an 80 percent low-income population. Also, all staff in the building pitch in during this 30-minute block of time. Custodians, instructional assistants, and art, music, physical education, health, and speech teachers all are engaged in daily academic instruction with students whom they would not normally see in that setting. Our staff has become much more student-focused and relationships are being forged that go beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom.