Leading Teaching

Strengthening teaching undoubtedly serves to enhance student learning—but that’s not the only benefit. Because of the symbiotic relationship between teachers and principals, elevating teaching—and teacher leaders—can also bolster principals in their leadership roles, thereby doubly extending the impact.

“No one works harder than principals. I can’t ask principals to put in more hours, but we can try to help them work smarter, more effectively, and more efficiently,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan explained in his recent discussion of the topic with NAESP Executive Director Gail Connelly. “If you have department chairs, teachers who can take on some of those administrative and leadership roles in partnership and in tandem with principals, then that principal’s job becomes more manageable.” Principals and teachers are, in fact—as the title of the lead article articulates: “Better Together.”

This issue of Principal magazine examines the principal’s role in supporting teachers and providing instructional leadership—with the goal of making the responsibility more manageable and effective, as Duncan stressed. For example, Sandra A. Trach and Elise Foster take on improving teaching through meaningful observations, enhanced coaching, and “multiplying” teacher talent by building on teachers’ innate genius. They provide strategies for using data and providing feedback to teachers in an environment where teachers feel safe to take risks.

Meredith Barnett wraps up the special focus on teaching in her exploration of innovations in professional development—such as Edcamps—that are shifting responsibilities from principals to teacher leaders. Such initiatives are “rooted in the value of teacher expertise,” and because they are more learner-focused, they build on the strengths of individual teachers, thereby revitalizing a school’s learning culture, writes Barnett.

I also want to point you to the second installment of the Strong Start series, which focuses on aligning learning for grades pre-K-3. In “Blended Learning for Early Learners,” Mary Evans, Jennifer Hawkins, and Patrice McCrary outline the blended learning program they use to personalize learning for their youngest students. And among the stellar department articles is a special focus on improving attendance rates—for both students and teachers—as well as a new department: Speaking Up. This updated department (formerly Speaking Out) will address policy issues that affect school leaders. In this installment, Connecticut principal Victoria A. Reed, who also serves as an NAESP Federal Relations Coordinator, makes the case for increased funding for professional development for principals.

Finally, I want to turn your attention to the 61 principals NAESP recently honored as National Distinguished Principals. An eight-page salute to these leaders is between pages 34 and 35. Please take the time to reach out to congratulate your state’s honorees.

—Kaylen Tucker