

Setting a Foundation for STEM

The problem is clear: The U.S. is losing ground in the battle to improve students' content knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and business leaders lament graduates' lack of preparation to compete in a global economy. Despite a continued sense of urgency to better prepare students, much of the discourse on improving STEM education has focused on the latter end of a student's academic career, overlooking the opportunity to set an early foundation. This issue of *Principal* delves into how school leaders can prioritize STEM at the K-8 level, developing in our nation's children not only a sense of wonder, but a methodology for creative problem-solving that will benefit them throughout their academic careers. "To turn the tide, we must start with math and science in elementary school," argues Linda Rosen, chief executive officer of Change the Equation, in "STEM Gets a Boost from Business." She writes, "Business leaders, understanding this, are increasingly partnering with educators and one another to curtail the flow of talent away from STEM-related careers by investing in our nation's youngest learners." In addition to business partnerships, this issue's STEM-themed articles highlight innovative methods of developing math instruction and Next Generation Science Standards, as well a STEM-focused elementary school in Minnesota. Wherever your school lies on the STEM continuum, you can use these articles as conversation starters with staff or as resources for professional development.

As the Association continues to develop resources that benefit early career principals, the editors are proud to present "Navigating Your Way Through the Research Jungle," which is the second installment in the Charting Your Path series. In the article, authors Scott Bauer and David Brazer provide practical tips for finding, understanding, and most important, using research to improve schools.

In addition to the focus on STEM and the research needs of early career principals, this issue shines an important light on the special challenges of rural schools. In "Supporting Rural Teachers," Doris Terry Williams argues that "rural school leaders unquestionably recognize that their greatest challenge today is building, sustaining, and supporting a teacher corps so that schools can operate at high levels." Williams discusses the external factors that impact teacher effectiveness and provides rural-specific strategies to support them.

Finally, as this issue goes to press, the Association is in the midst of celebrating the 2012 class of National Distinguished Principals in a program that honors outstanding elementary and middle-level administrators from both public and private schools. This year's honorees, 60 principals from across the nation and from the United States Departments of Defense Office of Educational Activity and the United States Department of State Office of Overseas Schools, were recognized in Washington, D.C., October 18 to 19 for their exemplary achievements. The eight-page salute to these principals is between pages 20 and 21. Please take the time to reach out to congratulate your state's honoree.

Your comments are always welcome, so send us an email at publications@naesp.org to let us know what you think about this issue.

—Kaylen Tucker

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