

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several hands of different skin tones reaching up to hold a white globe. The image is overlaid with a blue rectangular area at the top and a red rectangular area at the bottom. The text is placed within these colored areas.

Recruiting, Preparing and Building the Capacity of Effective Principals:

Eight Evidence-Based Recommendations for Federal Policymaking

Better schools and higher
levels of student achievement
require an investment in the
preparation of and support
for effective principals.

This document is intended to provide research-based recommendations to guide federal policymakers as they begin to address preparation, evaluation and support for principals by crafting legislation regarding principal effectiveness. Historically, principals have been overlooked in federal policy, despite 30 years of research that shows that school leadership is important to student achievement and to the improvement of schools.



As a nation, we must do a better job of recruiting talented individuals with strong leadership skills into high-quality principal preparation programs and build the professional capacity of principals to create the optimum conditions for teaching and learning in every school. Our nation's 95,000 public school principals influence 3 million teachers and 55 million students, pre-K through grade 12, and are pivotal to ensuring that all students achieve and thrive in safe and healthy school environments. All students are entitled to have a principal who has been fully prepared, supported and proven to be effective as an instructional leader.

Research over the past 30 years has proven two important conclusions:

Strong school leadership indirectly influences student achievement—second only to teaching among school influences on student success.

The impact of leadership is most significant in schools with the greatest needs.

While leading research substantiates that teachers have the greatest influence on student achievement, many studies validate the role of the principal. Principals are recognized for their ability to influence a variety of factors that indirectly affect student outcomes and directly influence schools, by recognizing and supporting teachers and creating high-functioning schools. The evidence about successful schools is clear: A great teacher makes a great classroom, but only a principal can lead a school's success and sustain long-term improvements.

In recent years, principals have been included in the national education reform agenda even though public discourse remains largely focused on improving the quality of the teaching force to increase student achievement. In several of the U.S. Department of Education signature initiatives, including Race to the Top, the School Improvement Grant program, and the ESEA "flexibility" waivers, the effectiveness of school principals is tied to student achievement outcomes, thus defining an "effective principal" as one "whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve acceptable rates (e.g., at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth."

Further, the various federal programs have prompted states to adopt principal evaluation systems based on effectiveness.

Research, including recent reports by the Wallace Foundation, indicate that recognition of principals has been long overlooked. Federal policies must acknowledge and support principals' ability to create the optimum conditions of teaching and learning in every school. While the reform agenda will continue to focus on whether a principal is "effective," school leaders must be evaluated on appropriate measures, based in part on how well they nurture, develop and retain effective teachers and teacher leaders, and meet performance goals aligned to the domains of leadership responsibility within a principal's sphere of influence. Narrow policies on evaluation that are limited to student growth and achievement omit consideration of contextual issues and how a principal meets the immediate needs of a school, the unique challenges of the learning community, and the level of authority afforded to an individual

principal to make improvements. **Federal policies must avoid overuse of standardized assessment scores as the sole or primary criterion to measure student performance; to rate, grade or rank principal, teacher, or school effectiveness; to allocate funds; or to take punitive measures against schools and/or school personnel.**

NAESP believes that education reform policies that address principal preparation, evaluation and school reform must be focused on building the capacity of principals to improve schools. Despite the good intentions behind No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waivers to states, principals believe that the current accountability systems continue to place too much emphasis on student test scores to gauge school, teacher and student performance. Standardized tests are blunt instruments that often are not implemented or utilized to get the insights and outcomes for which they were intended—to help educators comprehensively improve instruction and learning to understand the full portrait of a student's learning and development.



Eight Research-Based Federal Policy Recommendations

To address the longstanding issues created by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and more recent concerns raised by the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waivers, NAESP has developed the following policy platform around eight research-based recommendations as a means to provide quality preparation, capacity-building policies to empower competent instructional leadership, and create meaningful evaluation systems that will put principals on a continual path of professional growth and improvement.

- 1 Acknowledge the Core Competencies of Effective Principals**
- 2 Develop Comprehensive, Fair and Objective Principal Evaluation Systems**
- 3 Develop Accountability Systems That Include Growth Models and Multiple Measures**
- 4 Hold Principal Preparation Programs to Common High Standards**
- 5 Insist on Standards-Based Certification, Induction and Mentoring**
- 6 Invest in Identifying and Retaining Effective Principals**
- 7 Dedicate Ongoing Professional Development That Strengthens Core Competencies**
- 8 Strengthen Elementary Principals' Knowledge of Early Childhood Education**

Acknowledge the Core Competencies of Effective Principals

Inherent in developing a local system of effective principal evaluation is the need to develop common understanding of what effective school leaders are and do. Below are some indicators of effective leadership, based in part on leadership standards, such as those in NAESP's landmark publication, *Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*:

Effective principals:

- ▶ Create and sustain a commonly accepted vision and mission for school and student performance;
 - ▶ Engage deeply with teachers on student performance data and instructional services quality;
 - ▶ Support teachers with professional development and provide sufficient collaborative time within and across grade levels;
 - ▶ Efficiently manage resources, such as human capital, time and funding;
 - ▶ Create physically, emotionally and cognitively safe learning environments for students and staff;
 - ▶ Develop strong and respectful relationships with parents, communities and local stakeholders with an interest in supporting high student academic achievement; and
 - ▶ Act in a professional and ethical manner.
- ▶ Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center;
 - ▶ Set high expectations and standards for the academic, social, emotional and physical development of all students;
 - ▶ Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon standards;
 - ▶ Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals;
 - ▶ Manage data and knowledge to inform decisions and measure progress of student, adult and school performance; and
 - ▶ Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student academic performance and successful development.

NAESP recommends that a definition of “core competencies of effective school leadership” be added to Title I or general provisions so that states and local school districts can have comparable performance goals and share data, and to ensure equitable distribution of an effective principal in every school. Any definition must include the following standards of instructional leadership:

2

Develop Comprehensive, Fair and Objective Principal Evaluation Systems



Recent changes to existing programs, such as School Improvement Grants, and the development of new federal initiatives like Race to the Top, call for the development of state and local principal evaluation systems. To meet program requirements, states and local districts have hastily devised principal and school leader evaluation plans that quantify “effectiveness” based in significant part on standardized test scores. As a result, many of these plans lack clear performance standards and research-based practices that accurately identify the true characteristics of a high-performing principal.

To date, the U.S. Department of Education has granted waivers to more than 30 states, releasing them from the accountability provisions of NCLB—otherwise known as ESEA “flexibility”—in exchange for state and local district agreement to implement the Administration’s reform agenda. The conditions of the waivers further compelled states to establish effectiveness of teachers and principals through new evaluation systems, and districts are moving rapidly to design and implement systems based on new parameters and measures.

The voice of principals is essential to the development, design and implementation of principal evaluation systems. Principals must be afforded opportunities to provide ongoing feedback as systems are developed and implemented.

Current federal regulations governing each school intervention model mandate the removal of the school principal at the outset of any School Improvement Grant program. NAESP recommends that a principal leadership review and evaluation be conducted as the first step of a school needs assessment within the School Improvement Grant program contained in Title I of the ESEA, leading to a comprehensive school improvement plan. Any effort to evaluate the effectiveness or performance of principals must be developed at the state and local level.

Use of Funds

- ▶ Support states and local educational agencies in developing fair, objective and comprehensive evaluation systems, based on the “core competencies of effective school leadership.”
- ▶ Give priority to state and local education agency principal evaluation systems that rely on highly trained mentors, coaches or veteran principals to give districts the capacity to evaluate principals—especially those principals who have a demonstrated track record of successful school reform and improvement efforts.
- ▶ Give priority or authority only to local educational agencies (LEAs), upon the completion of effective evaluation of principals, to determine if dismissal of the principal is warranted.

As stated in the 2012 publication, *Rethinking Principal Evaluation: A New Paradigm Informed by Research and Practice*, NAESP believes that performance evaluations, if meaningful and accurate, must serve as a tool for professional growth and spark professional reflection and learning. Recommended methodology for designing state and local principal evaluation systems focuses on building the capacity of principals. The outcomes of any evaluation must connect to a trajectory of growth and professional development opportunities on the core competencies of effective school leadership.

Recommended Language for an ‘Effective Principal Evaluation System’

Emerging research on effective principal evaluation systems suggests that no more than one-quarter of a principal’s evaluation should be based on student growth and achievement.

NAESP recommends that the following definition be included in Title II of ESEA or the Higher Education Act (HEA):

The term “effective principal evaluation system” means a state system of principal evaluation based on:

- “(A) Performance goals tied to the domains of effective principal practice that must include the following:
- professional growth and learning;
 - student growth and achievement, including student learning objectives;
 - school planning and progress;
 - school culture;
 - professional knowledge, skills and improvement in daily practice; and
 - stakeholder engagement and support.
- “(B) A rating system that is designed through collaboration between states, districts, principals and teachers and other stakeholders to ensure the evaluation system:
- is relevant, reliable, valid;
 - is comprehensive;
 - takes into account local contextual factors;
 - weighs performance components appropriately to the individual principal; and
 - leads to improved practice of the instructional leader.
- “(C) Building principal leadership capacity in each domain of effective principal practice described in this section by providing:
- comprehensive support structures and resources for professional development and reflective practice;
 - induction support for early career principals;
 - personalized professional growth plans; and
 - advanced certification for accomplished practice.
- “(D) Consideration of a principal’s experience and grade-level responsibilities;
- “(E) Multiple sets of performance data that inform the evaluation process in a timely manner; and
- “(F) Accurate, timely, and valid feedback to the principal to improve instructional leadership skills of the principal.

States Must Determine Effective Principal Evaluation Systems Through Collaboration

NAESP recommends that the following language be added to Title II of ESEA or HEA:

“Upon enactment, the governor of each state shall establish a state ‘principal evaluation advisory panel’ to review the state system of principal evaluation to ensure that it meets the requirements of an ‘effective system’ described in sec.___.

“(A) The ‘principal evaluation advisory panel’ shall be comprised of state and local stakeholders, including:

- the state superintendent of instruction;
- a representative of the state board of education;
- principals and assistant principals;
- teachers;
- parents; and
- other stakeholders where appropriate.

“(B) No less than one year after enactment, the ‘principal evaluation advisory panel’ shall provide recommendations to the Governor on changes to the state system that are needed to ensure an ‘effective system’ described in sec.___.

In general, under this subpart, a local educational agency shall submit an application to the State at such time, in such manner, and containing such information and assurances to implement a ‘local system of effective principal evaluation.’

Local System of Effective Principal Evaluation

“(A) The term ‘local system of effective principal evaluation’ means an assessment of principal performance that is developed, implemented and adopted by principals with input from teachers and other education stakeholders and is based on:

“(1) Evidence-based standards of leadership practice such as:

- “(a) creating and sustaining a commonly accepted vision and mission for school and student performance;
- “(b) engaging deeply with teachers on student performance data and instructional services quality;
- “(c) supporting teachers with professional development and providing sufficient collaborative time within and across grade levels;
- “(d) efficiently managing resources, such as human capital, time and funding;
- “(e) creating physically, emotionally and cognitively safe learning environments for students and staff;
- “(f) developing strong and respectful relationships with parents, communities and local stakeholders with an interest in supporting high student academic achievement; and
- “(g) acting in a professional and ethical manner.

3

Develop Accountability Systems That Include Growth Models and Multiple Measures

Principals know firsthand that states simply need more time and resources to develop and run systems necessary to effectively measure student growth. It is also clear that states must do a better job measuring the multiple ways in which educators impact student learning and/or the evidence of improved cognitive performance. At the school building level, differentiated accountability and sound teacher and principal evaluation systems cannot function properly without sufficient, accurate and timely data. Systems must also be able to support a variety of quantifiable measures of student performance that are not standardized test scores, which are nothing more than a snapshot of a student's abilities. While principals are left with the responsibility for implementing seismic shifts in school-based practices to achieve higher levels of student learning aligned to college- and career-ready standards, principals, in general, receive little to no reciprocal support from states and districts to improve their own practice to implement reforms. Congress, working with the Department of Education, must allow sufficient time for systems to be built and for educators to implement them.

NAESP offers the following recommendations to strengthen the nation's accountability system and build the capacity of principals:

- ▶ Continue to set high expectations for schools and school leaders and support state and local accountability systems as well as curriculum and instruction that can best meet the needs of students in the local school context.
 - ▶ Federal policy must encourage and support state and local assessments that include growth models and multiple measures of student performance (formative, interim and summative) to accurately gauge social and emotional development, language fluency and comprehension, creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- ▶ Insist that assessment data be used to inform instruction in fair, flexible and authentic ways as it reflects students' progress toward academic proficiency.
 - ▶ As new assessment systems aligned to college- and career-ready standards move forward in states and districts, principals need professional development and time to understand how schools must shift instruction and practice to meet new goals.
 - ▶ Measure student achievement in multiple ways to accurately capture students' proficiency in core academic content areas but also in their emotional and social development; language fluency and comprehension; and creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Assessment using a single metric produces a one-dimensional view of the child, the teacher, the principal and the school.
 - ▶ Measuring these factors and the many others that contribute to improved student outcomes must provide a complete picture, not an up or down, pass-fail, standardized test score designed at the federal level and that has no regard for the multitude of ways students progress.
 - ▶ Include the expertise of principals working every day in schools in the development of accountability mechanisms.



4

Hold Principal Preparation Programs to Common High Standards

To meet the standard of effectiveness, principals and assistant principals must have demonstrated success in being a classroom teacher and in leading adults, have an advanced degree, and express a passion for and commitment to shared leadership. Aspiring principals who have not had significant experience serving as an assistant principal must receive training during a year-long pre-service residency that includes coaching from an effective principal; hands-on instructional leadership experience; and a curriculum that focuses on effective instructional practices, recruiting and supporting effective staff and leadership



teams; developing a school vision and continuous improvement plan; addressing the needs of specific student populations, managing school organizations; and engaging community members and parents.

NAESP acknowledges that other pathways to certification exist and believes that any alternative path to principal certification must include a school-based residency/internship under the guidance of an effective mentor principal and in-depth study of effective school leadership.

5

Insist on Standards-Based Certification, Induction and Mentoring

Districts and preparation programs, including higher education partners, provide opportunities for additional internships, peer coaching, job shadowing, networking and mentorships for assistant and aspiring principals. Well-prepared assistant principals are essential to achieving the mission of the school.

All principals, especially early career principals facing their most challenging years in the profession, must be provided access to standards-based mentoring programs. This peer-to-peer interaction improves a broad range of leadership characteristics, including:

- ▶ Nurturing teacher and staff development to strengthen classroom instruction;
- ▶ Building and sustaining a culture of learning among adults and children;
- ▶ Strengthening communications and relationships with parents, caregivers and community stakeholders;
- ▶ Facilitating the sharing of knowledge, insight and best practices; and
- ▶ Building relationships and communicating effectively with state and district officials.

Use of funds for Title II of ESEA at the local level:

- ▶ Require professional development and mentoring on “core competencies of effective school leadership” as part of any school improvement plan.
- ▶ As a part of the LEA plan, provide a description of how the LEA will integrate professional development and standards-based mentoring programs on the “core competencies of effective school leadership” with other professional development provided by the LEA.
- ▶ Include in school-wide and targeted assistance programs professional development and mentoring on “core competencies of effective school leadership.”

6

Invest in Identifying and Retaining Effective Principals

We must reinforce our support for principals as a key factor in school improvement plans. Research demonstrates the particular value of a highly effective principal in schools with students of low income, who are minority or English-language learners and who are low-achieving. As part of school improvement and school turnaround efforts, we must focus on ensuring effective principals in such schools. Some specific recommendations for preparing, training, supporting and retaining effective principals in these schools include:

- ▶ Increase investments in high-quality professional development for all educators, including school leaders, under Title II of ESEA.
- ▶ Focus on school improvement that builds incentives for principals to influence the school's conditions, including improving teacher quality, providing job-embedded professional development, mentoring, coaching and time for collaboration.
- ▶ Offer stipends for accomplished principals and those who take on master or mentor principal roles in high-need schools.

NAESP recommends that a new subpart be added to Title II, Part A of ESEA to provide dedicated funding for mentoring of school principals, especially for novice principals in the first three years of service. Mentoring programs are the most effective method of delivering job-embedded, ongoing and sustained professional development for principals.



Use of Funds

Funds would be used to develop and implement standards-based mentor training programs and curriculum for principals to be able to:

- ▶ Develop and implement data-driven school improvement plans;
- ▶ Use student assessment data for making instructional decisions;
- ▶ Build relationships within the learning community;
- ▶ Design collaborative professional development plans; and
- ▶ Staff recruitment, hiring and dismissal.

Program funds would also be used for stipends for qualified mentoring coaches and research, evaluation and reporting on authorized activities.

7

Dedicate Ongoing Professional Development That Strengthens Core Competencies

Current social, economic and political realities require principals to accomplish ever-greater academic goals with ever-shrinking resources, prepare young people with higher order thinking skills befitting a global society, analyze and use increasingly complex data and incorporate rapidly changing technology in instruction and learning. To meet these demands—and many others—principals require high-quality, forward-looking professional development.

Policy recommendations include:

- ▶ Require state and district professional development programs to build capacity of principals, aligned to core competencies of effective school leadership. No less than 10 percent of Title II funds should be directed to professional development activities for principals. (Only 3 percent are currently allocated to principals; the bulk of the remainder is allocated to teachers.)
- ▶ Provide a range of learning opportunities for principals that extend and build upon their formal academic preparation.
- ▶ Enable principals to master emerging school improvement strategies and support their knowledge of rapidly changing skills and technologies, including professionally delivered events outside of their schools and site-specific, job-embedded learning and online training.



8

Strengthen Elementary Principals' Knowledge of Early Childhood Education

High-quality early childhood education is not just an ideal; it's an essential investment. Missed opportunities at ages two, three and four can put children behind when they start school and leave barriers to achievement that can last through high school. Beyond school, strong early learning leads to better-educated and more employable individuals, less remediation throughout the education system and lower criminal justice costs, benefitting all of society. Disadvantaged children stand to gain the most from early childhood education because we know early intervention helps close achievement gaps.

NAESP continues to support the bipartisan Continuum of Learning Act, legislation that would strengthen the connections between early childhood programs, school districts and elementary schools by making changes to Titles I and II of ESEA. Among other provisions, the Act requires districts to report for the first time on how Title I funds are being used for children prior to school entry. This change in reporting will ultimately give the local early childhood community needed information to understand where the most vulnerable children are being served, and to work with schools and school districts to combine funding to increase the availability of high quality care. The Act also encourages states to take a leadership role in promoting the use of Title I dollars for early childhood programming, in coordination with the local early childhood community.

NAESP recommends that a new subpart be added to Title II, Part A of ESEA to provide dedicated funding to improve the knowledge of elementary school principals in areas related to early childhood development and pre-K through grade 3 alignment.



Use of Funds

Funds would be used to provide professional development activities for elementary school principals in early childhood education and development that include activities to help:

- ▶ Acquire principal competencies in early childhood education and development in order to support increased school readiness for students;
- ▶ Gain a knowledge base and capacity to provide appropriate early childhood settings in the school building in grades pre-K through 3; and
- ▶ Work collaboratively with early childhood education providers, services providers and families in creating a continuum of high quality learning for children in the community coming into school settings and through the early elementary years.



About the National Association of Elementary School Principals

Established in 1921, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) represents the nation's elementary and middle school principals in the United States, Canada and overseas. NAESP believes that principals are primary catalysts for creating lasting foundations for learning, and leads in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle-level principals and other education leaders in their commitment to all children. In addition to advocating for sound policies in pre-K-3 alignment, principal preparation and evaluation, and building the capacity of new principals, the Association provides a variety of online and on-site professional development programs.

NAESP Vision

NAESP is committed to meeting the demands of today and ensuring excellence in the future for principals and children. Our vision focuses on the core work of principals and of NAESP as:

- **Leading education on behalf of children;**
- **Learning for continuous professional development; and**
- **Fostering community in and around schools, across the country and around the world.**

NAESP'S Characteristics of Effective Principals

NAESP has created two seminal publications that define professional standards for principals. These two volumes—*Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* and *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* constitute a research-based body of knowledge that defines characteristics of effective principals, summarized below:

Effective Principals, K-Grade 8

Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do

- * Place a high value on student and adult learning
- * Set high expectations for the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of all students
- * Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of standards
- * Create a culture of continuous learning tied to student learning
- * Manage data to inform decisions and measure performance
- * Actively engage the community in shared responsibility

Effective Principals PreK-Grade 6

Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do

- * Place a high value on high-quality early childhood programs, principles and practices
- * Work with families and the community to support early learning opportunities
- * Provide appropriate learning environments for young children
- * Ensure high-quality curriculum and instructional practices that foster learning and development
- * Use multiple assessments to strengthen student learning
- * Support high-quality universal early childhood education programs

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