

A Head Start on Student Support

Professional leadership initiatives can shore up early learning

By L. Earl Franks, Ed.D., CAE



Access to high-quality preschool is an important wraparound service that ensures students come to elementary school ready to thrive. And while investment in early learning has gained momentum, a critical component has been missing: professional learning opportunities to build the capacity of early childhood leaders. Here are a

few ways NAESP is working to fill that void:

Early Learning Leadership Standards

NAESP's longstanding support for pre-K leadership includes the 2014 publication of its research-based competency guide, *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*. With more than 3,500 copies in circulation in 40 states, this foundational resource is used by countless school and district leaders, state agencies, institutions of higher learning, and other pre-K-3 stakeholders.

NAESP is collaborating with the National P-3 Center at the University of Colorado Denver to refresh the publication with the latest research and best practices. The updated guide will be a resource for supporters of quality teaching and learning for early learners, including child care providers, directors of preschool programs, coaches and mentors, professional developers, teachers and school leaders, school board members, and policymakers. This guide can also be used to support the preservice professional learning of teachers and principals. The updated publication is scheduled to be released at the NAESP Pre-K-8 Principals Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, July 12-14.

Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy

For the past several years, NAESP has partnered with state departments of education to train education leaders in the necessary competencies to oversee early childhood education through its Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy®. The award-winning program is the first national, evidence-based, blended learning program to provide principals and program directors serving pre-K-3 students with next-generation professional learning and support.

The program is already showing success in bridging the gap between early childhood programs and

early elementary schooling. Results from an implementation study conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board indicate that 90 percent of respondents say the academy helped them to “better meet the needs of vulnerable children.” Participants also reported growth in pre-K-3 leadership competencies such as ensuring developmentally appropriate teaching and using multiple measures of assessment to guide growth in student learning.

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Early Learning Partnership

Because smooth transitions help children keep their “head start” in learning, NAESP—along with AASA, the School Superintendents Association—recently formalized a partnership with the Office of Head Start in support of our earliest learners. The agreement is meant to improve the transition of Head Start children as they enter elementary school and to identify helpful practices and offer guidelines to support collaborative relationships.

The partnership will include participation in the Head Start public schools demonstration project, which brings together leaders from public schools and Head Start programs. The findings will inform national policy, technical implementation, and professional development. The partnership also involves participation in Bring a Principal to Head Start Month each October, sharing national Head Start data, and disseminating resources that support collaboration between local elementary schools and Head Start programs.

We hope that school principals—aided by these initiatives and the continual engagement and shared responsibility with stakeholder groups they can produce—can take the lead in delivering effective, developmentally appropriate learning for all children. 

L. Earl Franks, Ed.D., CAE, is executive director of NAESP.

 Connect with him on Twitter at @efranksnaesp.