Principals’ professional development needs have never been greater than they are today. Yet research indicates that not even 4 percent of Title II “allowable use” funding is spent on principal professional development. Given the myriad district, state, and federal initiatives, there is a widening chasm between the professional development needs of principals and the instructional tools and skills required to do the job well.

Principals are often called upon to provide professional development to staff on topics such as blended learning, teacher evaluation, special education, and new college- and career-readiness standards such as the Common Core. These responsibilities are in addition to the other important aspects of the job, such as parent and community engagement, school climate, student achievement, and budgeting scarce resources. Although it is imperative for school leaders to provide guidance and direction to staff, it is equally important for principals to be provided their own professional development to fulfill the role of instructional leader.

**What’s Needed**
Research suggests that for professional development to be effective, it should be job-embedded, provided in a small-group setting, or individualized. The one-size-fits-all approach is no longer relevant. Principals need opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues to solve problems in a professional learning community. Options for professional learning include participating in action research, shadowing other principals, and conducting literature reviews. But participation in these activities takes time and resources.

**District Support**
Principal professional development must be a priority for the district. The professional development needs of principals are varied, and the district approach to providing it should be collaborative and linked to professional growth goals. To accomplish this, principals and central office administrators should establish goals early in the school year, or even during the summer months. With a target in mind, principals and superintendents can plan professional development that meets the needs of both the district and the individual principal. The key is to create an open dialogue between principals and superintendents—forging a strong relationship built upon mutual respect and the needs of principals. The superintendent’s role is to ensure that allocated time for principal professional learning is not treated as an “extra,” but is embedded in the practices of the district. Collaboration with central office administrators is essential to ensuring that principals receive ongoing professional development during their careers.

**Impact**
The importance of professional development for principals cannot be understated. On any given day, principals make a multitude of decisions, from the simple—such as lunch and recess decisions—to the more complex, such as the purchase of instructional materials for reading. Each decision a principal makes has a direct impact on the teaching and learning that takes place within the school building. The increasingly complex decisions around instruction, college- and career-readiness standards, and school safety require thoughtful analysis supported by current best practices. Principals working collaboratively with colleagues will review data, share strategies, debate instructional approaches, develop solutions to a variety of school issues, and share results with staff members. Decisions need to be well articulated to be understood by different stakeholders: students, staff, parents, central office, and the larger school community. This can happen when principals are provided opportunities for professional learning.

The cycle of making decisions, analyzing results, refining decisions, and collecting data is critical to the
personal learning of all principals. Principals need opportunities to share insights, strategies, and outcomes with colleagues who will support the growth of both novice and veteran principals. The responsibility for providing the professional development rests with districts and state departments of education. Principals need to advocate for what they need to learn and grow as instructional leaders. When professional development is not available to principals, they will often take advantage of “piecemeal” opportunities, when and if they occur. This is less effective, does not build capacity within a district, and is not a strategic approach to providing principals with the knowledge, tools, and resources to support students and teachers.

Advocacy
NAESP has been a strong leader in advocating for more funding and time allocated to the professional development needs of principals, both at the state and district level. NAESP supports a proposal that Congress allocate no less than 10 percent of the total Title II funds for principal professional development under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The majority of Title II funding is allocated to teachers, with little remaining for principals.

Principals are eager to help students grow and learn, and staff should be supported in their efforts to improve the achievement of all students. The school environment should be welcoming to students and their families.

How is this achieved? It happens when principals receive the training and support to continue growth and develop as instructional leaders. It happens when professional development of principals is a priority at the national, state, and district levels. Isn’t it about time we begin realigning our priorities?

Victoria A. Reed is principal of Highland Elementary School in Wallingford, Connecticut. NAESP MEMBER

About the Panel
The National Panel of New Principals is the only initiative of its kind that is dedicated to principals in the first or second year of their principalship. By participating, new principals will contribute to a dynamic knowledge base about what it’s really like to be a new principal today. And they’ll gain insights into how their experience as a new principal compares to their peers throughout the nation.

Here’s How It Works
New principals can enroll directly online at newprincipal.org and can remain on the panel until the end of the second year of their principalship. Six times during the school year, participants are invited via email to answer a few brief online questions. The total time commitment per survey is less than 10 minutes.

What Participants Get
Each time a principal participates, he or she receives a $10 gift certificate to shop in the National Principal Resource Center or a special gift from one of our sponsors. Plus, we’ll send our panelists the Rise&Shine brief, summarizing their peers’ best thinking on the topic of each survey.

Who Qualifies
- Participants must be first- or second-year principals.
- NAESP members and non-members are welcome.

How New Principals Join the Panel
Go to newprincipal.org and fill out the brief enrollment form. It’s that easy! Enrollments are accepted year-round. Administrators are encouraged to share this opportunity with new principals to ensure that your district and state are well represented.

To enroll, visit newprincipal.org
Questions? Email us at npnp@naesp.org.