The Best Start

We don’t expect world-class athletes to compete without having had months of preparation. Therefore, why should we expect our nation’s children to begin their educational experience without the constructive, high-quality “training” they need to become successful? All children deserve the same opportunities to start school ready to learn.

NAESP’s 2005 book, *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, provides a synthesis of key findings on early childhood education and outlines the role principals play in leading and advocating for early learning opportunities. Since the release of the book, the conversations about providing students with high-quality early childhood education have steadily increased; and more states have placed the issue at the top of the agenda. According to Pre-K Now, between 2005 and 2008 state funding “for high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten increased by nearly $2 billion nationally.” Yet there are still millions of children who don’t get the start they deserve. State-funded pre-K programs currently serve less than 20 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds and 10 states have no state-funded pre-K program at all.

This month’s issue of *Principal* adds to the conversation about how principals can ensure that high-quality early childhood education is provided in the schools they lead. It includes articles on ways to improve early childhood literacy outcomes, the value of play interventions to enhance learning for young students with developmental delays, steps to take when starting a preschool program, and an examination of children’s readiness for formal education. In addition, you’ll find a special section on schoolwide support for students with autism spectrum disorders and our annual principals’ salary survey, which looks at the trends in salaries for principals compared with those of other administrators and classroom teachers.

This issue also brings our editorial year to a close. Vanessa, Kaylen, Jennifer, and I hope that you have an enjoyable and relaxing summer.