For more than 20 years, NAESP has provided—and periodically updated—standards for principals. In 2001, the first edition of *Leading Learning Communities* was a response to what the Association recognized as a significant evolution in the role of principal as instructional leader. NAESP released the second edition of *Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* at its annual convention in Nashville, Tennessee, earlier this year. This updated edition updates and expands upon the 2001 standards to address the changing context and trends that principals have identified in the past seven years. The new publication features new strategies to help principals structure and support learning communities to develop the whole child, prepare students for a changing global economy and society, rethink the learning day by bridging school and community, and make decisions based on data.
Though principals are the architects of learning in their buildings, their ability to successfully lead schools to excellence requires shared leadership and accountability with education stakeholders. The following is an excerpt from Leading Learning Communities that focuses on 10 ways NAESP believes school districts, state and federal governments, and universities can share leadership and accountability with principals.

School districts can:

**Build principals’ capacity to provide instructional leadership.** Principals must have time and resources to develop the knowledge and skills they need to lead high-performance schools, as well as the resources to function effectively as instructional leaders in their buildings. Time for professional development can help equip school leaders with additional knowledge, and professional learning support directed at their instructional needs can enhance their knowledge and skills. At the same time, principals need professional development to help them understand how to lead, manage and support learning communities—such as interaction with peers at state and national conferences and technological resources to stay connected with their peers—to enable them to form networks with other schools and disseminate information within the school community. Such support should begin on the first day of the job, with a skilled mentor to guide a principal through a successful transition into his or her new position, and should continue with coaching throughout a principal’s tenure.

**Provide support, funding and flexibility for alternative leadership arrangements.** For principals to perform their instructional leadership functions effectively, they need to share the management functions of the school. In some places, schools and districts are creating new positions to take on some of those responsibilities. But assistant principals, lead teachers and guidance counselors can also lead functions that can enable principals to focus on instructional leadership. More research is needed in defining how these alternative management structures might work. And districts can model these arrangements by creating leadership teams in the central office that enable “chief academic officers” to focus on instructional leadership and “chief management officers” to focus on operations.

**Improve working conditions.** One of the most serious challenges facing the profession is a shortage of applicants. Fewer people are seeking to become principals, in part because many fear that principals are increasingly held accountable for school results without the authority and support they need to produce results. Principals need autonomy over budgets and hiring to create and maintain school programs that match school goals, and financial support from districts to serve their student populations effectively.

“**Evaluations of principals should consider a range of measures of their performance, not just standardized test scores.”**

**Improve salaries and pay structures.** School leaders deserve salaries commensurate with other professionals with similar responsibilities. And, like other professionals, they should earn financial rewards for effectiveness and should be able to advance in their careers. States and districts should establish incentives for principals to meet standards and should provide rewards, such as sabbaticals, advanced training and international exchanges, for successful leaders.

**Assess principals fairly.** Principals are—and should be—accountable for improving student achievement, but evaluations of principals should consider a range of measures of their performance, not just standardized test scores. Progress toward school performance targets and the standards included in

Leading Learning Communities should be measured as well. Principals do have expertise and skills that can be measured. However, these measurements can be highly subjective and easily misinterpreted. Attention must be paid to defining and disseminating what we know to be effective in the profession and championing the “whole school leader.”

**States can:**

**Refine and strengthen data collection.** Under the No Child Left Behind Act, districts can replace principals of schools in restructuring status. While principals are rightly accountable for their school’s performance, accountability should be more than an all-or-nothing proposition. Accountability should come with additional resources that enable schools to build the capacity needed to meet agreed-upon goals. These resources can be conditional; if the school does not improve, the state can step in and take over the management of the school.

An accurate grasp of the current situation in American public schools is possible only with the use of longitudinal data. Data that tracks students from elementary to college allows researchers to analyze trends in education, both good and bad. Only by increasing the type of data collected over time will policymakers ever have the accurate information they need to address educational issues in a timely fashion.

**Build learning opportunities and networks of principals.** To enable principals to build learning communities, and to end their traditional isolation, states and districts should create opportunities for principals to meet and collaborate with their peers in other schools and districts. These opportunities can include conferences, electronic networks and listservs, and coaching and mentoring.

**The federal government can:**

**Support a voluntary advanced certification system for principals.** Principals should be recognized and rewarded for their excellence in the profession and
commitment to their own growth and development. We have advocated for a comprehensive review process in which principals demonstrate their skills, expertise and the art of the profession.

A national certification process, similar to the one developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, would not only reward effective principals, but it would also set a target for improvement for all principals and provide a guide for professional

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Six Standards That Characterize Effective Leaders of Learning Communities

With the help of principals and other education leaders, and through extensive research on emerging knowledge and trends affecting education, NAESP has updated and expanded its standards for what principals should know and be able to do. Individually and collectively, these six standards define leadership for learning communities—places where adults and young people are continuously learning and striving toward improving their knowledge and skills.

Effective leaders of learning communities:

- Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center;
- Set high expectations 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 performance and development.
development. The certification system should include the Leading Learning Communities standards and other benchmarks as defined by practitioners and other leaders in the field. The federal government should fund it.

**Develop federal programs that strengthen principals’ ability to serve all students.** The No Child Left Behind Act placed too little emphasis on the critical role of principals in enhancing student achievement. While the law rightly focused on highly qualified teachers, it did little to create incentives or provide support for recruiting and retaining effective principals.

In addition, funding for the law has never matched authorized levels, leaving schools with too few resources to meet the challenging standards it sets. Nor has Congress ever come close to funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at the level originally authorized. By increasing funding for these and other programs, the federal government can help districts support principals through mentoring and other professional development efforts, while holding them accountable for results.

** Colleges and universities can:**

*Redesign principal and teacher preparation programs.* Principals and teacher preparation increasingly takes place in diverse settings—in universities, in district-run programs, in programs created by private organizations—and learning takes place in a variety of ways. Regardless of the setting or format, programs should be guided by the Leading Learning Communities standards. However principals get to their jobs, they will be leading learning communities.

Preparation programs have not kept pace with changes in schools, and too often do not adequately equip future principals with the knowledge and skills they need. And few programs are designed to prepare principals for the challenges they will face in the coming decade. Principals need programs that focus on instructional leadership; knowledge and use of technology; understanding of collaborative learning environments; collaborative and distributed leadership skills; cultural competence; ability to work with multiple data sources and accountability measures; and understanding of the complex needs of children—academic and social, physical and emotional—if they are to succeed in the 21st century.

Teacher and administrative preparation programs should also be redesigned to support building the capacity of everyone to work effectively in learning communities and align their efforts to schoolwide improvement goals. These programs should also address the skills that students need in the new century and the diversity of the student population. Teacher and administrator preparation programs should collect information from graduates and their supervisors to monitor their effectiveness in increasing student and adult learning.