

By Gail Connelly, NAESP Executive Director



For many years, the quintessential symbols for schools have remained the same: the image of a one-room schoolhouse or a bright yellow school bus, the sound of a bell ringing in a new school day, and the smell of a new box of crayons. And while these symbols will probably always evoke some fond remembrance of schools and yesteryear, principals who work in 21st century schools with 21st century children know that the real images have changed dramatically.

Technology, brain research, and globalization have altered the way we both gather and disseminate information. Changes in societal norms and family and community structures have altered the ways we support students' physical and emotional health. State and federal economic concerns have caused a significant impact on the way we allocate scarce resources. And let's not forget mandated state testing, which has forced a broad level of standardization into our classrooms just when we have the science to

confirm what every parent, teacher, and principal already knows: Every child is different.

Because of these remarkable changes, today's principals have jobs that are more challenging than ever. And while there are many adversities, there are even more opportunities, represented through the countless children who walk through the doors of our schools every day. And because we work with young students who are just beginning the journey of formal schooling, K-8 principals must be certain to provide them with specialized pedagogy, tools, and resources befitting their various developmental stages.

NAESP's Role

Just as we know that students often learn best from other students, principals learn best from other principals. This simple insight is what the National Association of Elementary School Principals is all about: principals helping principals so, together, we can better support our students.

Since its founding in 1921, NAESP has existed, and indeed flourished, for this very reason. We are the nation's only professional organization committed solely to providing elementary and middle school principals with the information, tools, and resources necessary to become more effective leaders of learning communities that help our youngest learners to reach their highest potential.

During the past year, NAESP has developed exciting new resources, including a deliberate and focused

analysis of the future of education, to help us effectively support pre-K-8 principals now and anticipate their future needs. As a result, our board of directors, whose members all are practicing elementary or middle-level principals, has worked closely with NAESP staff to create both short- and long-term goals, including identifying new ways for us to collaborate with our state affiliates.

Also, we are working to better use technology and quality business practices to provide easily accessible professional development, research, networking, student services and awards, and advocacy.

We recently released two groundbreaking leadership publications, *Leading Learning Communities, What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do, Second Edition* and *Vision 2021: Transformations in Leading, Learning and Community*, which are a part of the more than 300 selections that can be purchased online through the National Principals Resource Center. And next year's convention in New Orleans in April will feature restructured and updated session strands that are aligned with the Leading Learning Communities standards.

Rest assured, however, that even as we become increasingly technology-oriented and business-focused, we remain a principal-led, member-driven organization that is dedicated to supporting principals.

As principals continue to accept new challenges, and even as the familiar symbology of schools recedes in our memories, you can count on NAESP to provide you with the most current and relevant resources to assure the best possible education and future for each one of your different students. ■

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