

By Gail Connelly, NAESP Executive Director



Reflecting upon the experiences the U.S. has shared this year, we look forward to the dawning of a new presidential administration and a new era for education. Exciting times are ahead and we, the NAESP community, have an excellent opportunity to secure positive changes for the benefit of our nation's children. We must stand up for what we want and advocate vigorously to make our vision a reality.

We know our 44th president will face a daunting array of challenges requiring immediate action. It is unlikely that education will be President-elect Barack Obama's highest priority once he is sworn in, but we hope he will proceed swiftly to work with Congress on legislation to advance his education platform (<http://change.gov/agenda/education>), including reforming No Child Left Behind; investing in early childhood education; and recruiting, preparing, retaining, and rewarding America's teachers.

NAESP will pursue an active role

in this process, offering information and recommendations reflecting the NAESP Platform and the prerogative of our 30,000 members.

Common Bonds

Principals have much in common with the leader of our country—both share the highest levels of public trust for the well-being and education of children. In the spirit of this common bond, we draw comparisons to encourage Obama to engage principals in determining his education priorities and gaining support for his initiatives.

Obama should know that exemplary principals exhibit knowledge and characteristics on par with what is needed for success in the highest office in the land. For example, a great principal is the leader of a community actively engaged in continuous learning and growth. A strong sense of mission is shared by all, and new ideas for accomplishing the mission are welcomed. High-quality principals also understand the political nature of the principalship and the need for well-honed marketing and communication skills.

An excellent principal is committed to research and informed decision-making. As stated in the second edition of NAESP's landmark publication, *Leading Learning*

Communities: Standards for What Principals Should

Know and Be Able To Do, "principals must be the lead learners in their schools, continuously reading, forecasting predictable scenarios, and analyzing data to assess gaps and possibilities for improvement." An excellent principal also advocates with policymakers at all

levels for a robust, dedicated stream of research funds.

Realizing the key role of students' families and the larger community in the success of a school, an exemplary principal reaches out to parents and guardians, government agencies, and civic groups.

Leading a vastly larger community, the U.S. president has opportunities every day to exhibit qualities and behaviors like those employed by the best principals. A president who is a great leader articulates a clear vision and is adept at bringing others on board who share that vision and are committed to implementing it. He or she encourages innovation and considers many viewpoints. Similarly, the best presidents surround themselves with a rich variety of experts and advisers and welcome their informed, honest input.

Just like effective principals, clearly, a successful president is skillful at navigating the political landscape, working effectively with stakeholders of every persuasion. An effective president also welcomes accountability and understands that success can be measured in more than one way.

NAESP wishes Obama every success as he tackles the challenges that await him, and we look forward to working closely with his administration. Throughout Obama's term, we will provide insight about the vital, unique role that principals fulfill in creating and maintaining successful schools and helping children thrive. Above all, we will advocate for what principals and their students need to make those goals a reality. Perhaps, more than anything, they need a president who measures up to our best principals. ■

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