

President's Perspective

By Nancy Davenport, NAESP President

Principals Are Much More Alike Than They Are Different



I have been traveling quite a bit since I began my journey as NAESP president in July, and there is one important thing

I have determined: We are much more alike than we are different. As I visit schools and hear the stories, successes, and challenges facing principals, it is very clear that our important role as school principals and assistant principals is uncannily similar. We work diligently each day to meet the needs of our students by providing them the best opportunities for learning in our schools.

As I write this column, I am looking out my hotel room window and can see a school below. It is early in the morning and the lights have systematically come on in the building. Adults have already entered the building while others are standing on duty to welcome and supervise the students when they arrive. As the students scurry off buses, get out of cars, or walk to school, I notice that

the rain adds another challenge to the start of the school day. Adults remind students to slow down as they enter the playground and two boys have to be separated due to an early-morning fuss. Now the bell has rung and the playground has cleared, except for one woman who carefully closes and locks the gate for safety. A child with his parent, obviously arriving late, is hurrying toward the gate to find it locked, so they head to an alternate entrance. Only a few minutes have passed and a group of students has come out onto the playground for a physical education class. They appear to be fifth graders who begin to dribble and pass basketballs to one another as part of a lesson, and then a game begins.

I am unable to see into the classrooms very well except for one set of windows facing me. Students are at their desks with notebooks open and it appears the teacher has quickly begun the first lesson of the day. Suddenly, another group of students, perhaps second or third graders, are lining up to get on a bus for what I imagine will be a field trip, perhaps to a museum. I was unable to identify the principal, unless she was the one who stood by the gate to welcome students and then carefully locked it before going inside.

Does this sound familiar? Could this have been your school this morning?

Guardians of Children's Dreams

What we must focus on each day are the children we serve. We must focus on the whole child by paying attention to academic, social, physical, emotional, and familial needs. As school principals, we are the guardians of our students' educations, along with their hopes and dreams. Parents and society have charged us with the responsibility of meeting their children's needs in school. During these challenging economic times, I believe children need the security and support of their principals and teachers more than ever.

You have the stories, expertise, and power to influence the future. At this important time in history, let us make sure we work in collaboration with our next U.S. president, Barack Obama, and with the legislators and policymakers to assure all children will have quality schools. We must let them know that principals are willing to be accountable for student achievement, but policy and laws must be pragmatic, fully funded, and child-focused. I challenge you to get involved and speak out about what is best for children and for education. You have the power to influence the future of education. Consequently, I hope you will never, ever forget the power of the principalship.

I wish you the very best in the new year! ■

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