

communicator

The Monthly Newsletter of the National Association of Elementary School Principals

in side

2 ED's Perspective:
A Perfect Storm

3 Give advice to our
Mentor Center
principal

5 Take a peek into the
Principals' Office

6 Member-Get-a-
Member Campaign

Special Insert:

Proposed NAESP
Bylaws Amendments

2009 Summer
Institute

Desires and Expectations for the New Education Secretary

With the election of a new U.S. president comes a host of appointed leaders to run the numerous federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education. This time of transition typically fuels stakeholders to make known their wants and needs, with the hope that their voices will be heard and concerns addressed. For the past few months, the National Association of Elementary School Principals has called on principals to share their wishes for the Department of Education,

and the Association has committed to forging a working relationship with Arne Duncan as he embarks on his new role as education secretary. Principals, as with all other educators nationwide, have high expectations for the new administration in the Education Department—and

anticipate that their priorities will be addressed as a new vision for education is implemented.

Principals' Wish List

Via surveys and discussion forums, principals have let NAESP know their wish lists for the next

U.S. education secretary, which have ranged from garnering community support for public schools to actively listening to current educators and considering their input as valuable and worthwhile. For example,

Katie Mathews wrote, "My greatest wish is that this person can inspire the public to value education and stand behind educators." Tammy Condren added that she would like to see an education secretary who is "willing to listen to those of us who are in the public school build-



Principals and NAESP hope to work hand in hand with the new U.S. Department of Education.

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continued on page 7

New Education Secretary continued from page 1

ings day in and day out, 'living' the legislative actions passed forth by Congress."

Mary Kay Sommers specified that the voices of principals should be heard clearly by the U.S. Department of Education. "As leaders in schools where the action of education happens every day, it is imperative that the leadership role of principals not just be valued but sought in the changes that are needed to achieve our preferred future for all children in this nation," she wrote. In alignment with Sommers' thoughts was Connie Goodman, who said: "Our next secretary should work closely with the principal organizations and share a common vision."

Visibility was another attribute principals called for in describing the ideal secretary of education. "Traveling to school districts throughout every state is necessary to realize the discrepancies in funding and resources," Jacque Price submitted. Wrote Kathleen A. Miller: "I want to see a leader who is visible in different schools across the country so that she/he can truly be informed about what we need to do to improve public education and how."

All in all, what was made most clear by the principals who offered their thoughts was that children's needs should come first. "The philosophy of the Dept. of Education needs to be one that builds up our schools and increases our capacities to address the needs of the children in our care," wrote Dean M. Warrenfeltz. "We need an educational leader

who will aggressively push to make our children's needs number one," concurred Miller.

NAESP's Wish List

NAESP well understands the complexities of the principal's job and has pledged its willingness to work hand in hand with Education Department officials to help attend to pre-K-8 principals' needs. Establishing a strong rapport with the new education administration is of great importance to the Association, especially given the long-term relationship that has existed with the Education Department. Specifically, NAESP desires to continue the key endeavors that were developed through close collaboration with the Department of Education, such as the National Distinguished Principals program, the President's Education Awards Program, the Blue Ribbon Schools (No Child Left Behind) program, and the Principal-in-Residence program.

The National Distinguished Principals program was developed through a joint effort with Education Secretary Terrel Bell in 1983 to recognize outstanding public and private school principals from across the country and around the world in overseas schools affiliated with the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of State American Overseas Schools.

Sponsored by the Department of Education, NAESP, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAESP), the President's Education Awards Program was developed to help principals recognize and honor students who have achieved high academic goals

through hard work and dedication to learning. NAESP and NASSP have co-managed this program since 1983 and the Association hopes the program will continue under the Obama administration.

The Blue Ribbon Schools program was co-developed by NAESP in collaboration with Bell in 1983. The criteria for the first ever nationwide school recognition program were based on NAESP's *Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools*. Program criteria have since changed, which has caused some concern for the Association because during the past few years many deserving schools that can show remarkable growth are eliminated from consideration due to reliance on NCLB requirements. NAESP is hopeful, however, that it can work with Duncan and his staff to change the criteria and be involved in the continuation and evolution of this important program.

During the Clinton administration, a Principal-in-Residence program was instituted in the Department of Education to provide a true practitioner voice as education initiatives were crafted and implemented. NAESP has requested that this important position be reinstated at the department and is able and willing to provide a list of qualified candidates to consider for this position.

Principals have made apparent their readiness to offer insight to the new education administration, and NAESP is eager to work with the U.S. Department of Education in the development of new initiatives to help schoolchildren flourish.

—Vanessa St. Gerard

Fast Facts About Education Secretary Arne Duncan

- 1987: Graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard University; Major: Sociology
- 1992: Hired to direct the Ariel Education Initiative, which seeks to create outstanding educational opportunities for inner-city children on Chicago's South Side
- 1998: Hired to run Chicago's magnet schools program
- 2001: Became chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools, the third largest public school system in the U.S.
- 2009: Confirmed as Secretary of Education by the 111th Congress