

ED's Perspective

By Gail Connelly, NAESP Executive Director



We are nearing the end of the first decade of the 21st century, typified by last year's whirlwind of angst and hope. Angst about the continuing downward spiral of our economic footing and the undeniable effect on our schools and the students they serve. Hope as we welcome a new era of presidential leadership to harness the energy from a perfect education storm that has been brewing for the past decade. Forces are converging toward ensuring that our nation's schools receive the resources needed to help all children reach their highest potential. It is up to us to leverage this inspirational atmosphere to spread an undeniable truth—that principals are key to effective public schools and, as such, have the power to change lives.

President Barack Obama has repeatedly made clear that securing the economic and democratic future of our nation depends on educating all children to be highly adaptive learners in a rapidly changing world. It is imperative for the new administration to recognize the critical leader-

ship role of principals in developing and sustaining dynamic learning communities where every child's potential is nourished and all children flourish. Principals are key to any educational transformation effort in our nation's schools.

During the past months, we have asked you to share your ideas about priorities for the Obama administration, the next secretary of education and, by extension, the U.S. Department of Education. Thank you for letting us know what has worked, what has not, and what you need to lead effectively. Your collective views bring new energy and vigor to the swirling winds of education transformation. There are exciting times ahead and NAESP is committed to partnering with key stakeholders to lead the movement for an improved public education agenda that meets the needs of all children. Here are important priorities that NAESP will be focusing on this year.

Principals as key learners and leaders. Researchers have found that instructional leadership is second only to classroom instruction in affecting student learning and that principals can make a genuine difference in the educational outcomes for U.S. schoolchildren. Therefore, principals must be granted authority and autonomy so they can do what they do best: lead schools. We will push for educational admin-

istration preservice programs and in-service professional development to be aligned with NAESP's *Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. Further, the Association will advocate for principals to be afforded ample opportunity and

funding for their own ongoing professional development and that of their teachers.

Early childhood education.

Quality early childhood experiences provide the foundation for higher levels of student achievement, future success in school, and economic benefits to society. NAESP looks forward to working closely with the Obama administration and the 111th Congress to increase the opportunities for all young children to participate in excellent early childhood education programs that are school-connected, developmentally appropriate, and include a variety of academic, social, emotional, and physical experiences.

Reauthorization of ESEA to recognize the whole child. One of the most common concerns that principals cited for the new administration is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, including fully funding the federal law, returning the focus to teaching and learning, using multiple methods to gauge student and school success, and addressing each child as a total person with unique needs and circumstances that go beyond academics.

This perfect storm is stirring abundant positive energy. Your NAESP Board of Directors, staff, and leaders are excited about the renewed opportunity to impact educational policy toward providing all children with the world-class education they need and deserve. Throughout the year, NAESP will focus on the crucial role of principals in leading U.S. schools. We will keep principals in the eye of the educational maelstrom until the perfect storm yields ideally to an unprecedented period of renewal and hope for our nation's schools and children. ■

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