

President's Perspective

By Nancy M. Davenport, NAESP President

An Open Letter to President Obama



Dear President Obama:

As you approach your 100th day in the Oval Office, you have been busily working on a multitude of issues, such as the economy, national security, health care, and global leadership. Although you have been faced with unprecedented challenges in the history of the U.S., Americans are energized and optimistic about the future of our country and your leadership.

NAESP believes education should be a high priority during your presidency. As you begin your journey, please remember to include principals in any decisions to change federal policy and develop programs to improve education, such as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Standardized testing must not be the sole focus for measuring student success and the quality of school programs. The economic and democratic future of our nation will depend on educating all children to be productive citizens with the 21st century skills necessary to be successful in a diverse and competitive world.

Principals are practitioners who possess the experiences, knowledge, and stories that will bring an important insight and perspective to discussions and decisions about what is best for education and children. Principals do not shy away from being accountable for the success of students and their schools. However, we respectfully ask that the federal role in education be pragmatic, that legislative mandates be fully funded, and that all educational policies be child-focused.

NAESP has ardently supported voluntary, universal preschool education for young children and we applaud your plans to address this important issue. NAESP's publication, *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, is designed as a practical guide, with standards for developing quality early childhood learning communities.

NAESP also applauds your commitment to K-12 education by supporting high-quality education for all children, no matter their socioeconomic level, race, gender, or zip code. Your plans to recruit, prepare, retain, and reward teachers will be key to the future of our children's success since we know the importance of having qualified and dedicated teachers in classrooms. It will be equally important to do the same for principals, as research clearly tells us that quality schools are led by highly effective principals.

Since we know there is evidence from research that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction among the factors that contribute to student achievement, it is only logical to conclude that effective leadership and quality teaching go hand in hand. In the second edition of *Leading Learning Communi-*

ties: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do, NAESP asserts principals must be the lead learners in schools, continuously analyzing data and planning for improvement.

Your commitment to ensure that all children have access to quality schools with strong literacy, math, science, and social science curricula is critically important. It is also essential that we integrate the arts throughout the curricula, based on compelling research that shows a positive correlation for overall increased student achievement. We must focus on the social, emotional, and physical well-being of children while recognizing each child is an individual with great potential. By providing students with quality after-school learning, which includes enrichment and remediation opportunities, students will gain critical time to learn. In another NAESP publication, *Leading After-School Learning Communities*, there are many great ideas and important standards for increasing learning opportunities for students.

Principals can be your lead change agents for making a significant difference in schools by building and sustaining supportive learning communities while placing children at the center of teaching and learning. NAESP members are committed to being champions for all children. Partnering with your administration is of utmost importance in creating sound federal education policies and effective programs that address the development of the whole child and provide adequate resources to enhance school leadership. With a seriousness of purpose, let us work collaboratively to assure that every child in America has a great education. ■

Yes, we can!

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