Plan Now for the 2011 NAESP Annual Convention

It’s time to mark April 7-10, 2011, on your calendar and reserve the time to attend the largest national gathering of elementary and middle-level school principals at NAESP’s annual convention in Tampa, Florida. While you’re at it, make sure your budget is set to cover this affordable and yet fulfilling professional development opportunity. It’s the premier event of the year for principals to network, expand their knowledge as school leaders, share best practices, and meet suppliers face-to-face.

Preliminary information has been posted online, but we suggest you check back periodically as the program evolves. We’ll notify you when registration opens in mid-August.

Get the Advice You Seek From the Principals Help Line

You spend hours each day offering advice and guidance to students, teachers, and staff—but where do you go when you have a question about your job? NAESP has the answer: the Principals Help Line, which is a confidential, online forum where members can ask questions to veteran principals about their most pressing issues and challenges.

Since 2004, NAESP has offered this service to members. Veteran principals respond one on one to your submitted questions via-e-mail within 48 hours. Five to seven volunteers monitor the Help Line each month, the majority of whom are NAESP trained mentors. National Distinguished Principals also serve as volunteers.

The Association understands the critical need for timely responses to principals in times of crisis, especially when they often work in isolation and do not have access to advice or support. It also realizes that anonymity of the questions and responses also provides a secure means of obtaining information and sharing difficult issues.

Topics range from funding, staffing, and evaluation to curriculum, programming, and parent issues. Make the Principals Help Line your resource for professional advice and answers to the difficult questions you have.

This is the printer-ready version of Communicator, an electronic newsletter of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

©2010 National Association of Elementary School Principals. All Rights Reserved.
Before the Bell Shifts to Twice Weekly

Is your e-mail account crowded with too much to read? Starting in August, Before the Bell will appear in your inbox first thing in the morning on Tuesdays and Fridays rather than every day. We know how busy principals are, so instead of frequency and quantity of news we will be focusing on delivering the top stories for pre-K-8 school leaders on a schedule that’s considerate of their time. You will also notice a new look and more navigational options that will make Before the Bell a quick and easy read.

Sections of the new Before the Bell will include: Curriculum, School Leadership, Federal Advocacy & Policy, In the States, and Association News. Each report will feature a top news story. To ensure that you receive these e-mails, add naesp@multibriefs.com to your e-mail address book. If your computer has a spam filter, please change the settings to allow e-mail from this address.

Be sure to check out the new Before the Bell so you can stay up to date on education news at the state and federal levels.

Educators Insurance Program Offers NAESP Members Added Benefit

As an NAESP member, you are eligible to buy insurance through Forrest T. Jones & Co. (FTJ), which offers group rates that might be more economical than buying an individual policy. NAESP-sponsored insurance products through FTJ’s Trust for Insuring Educators range from disability, life, and health insurance policies to identity theft, long-term care, and auto insurance plans.

Your NAESP membership already affords you $1 million in professional liability protection and up to $10,000 in job protection benefits through the Association’s Legal Benefits Program. All current Active and Emeritus members are entitled to this program, which safeguards you against unexpected expenses due to legal actions that may suddenly be directed against you. However, you can also choose to upgrade this plan to increase your liability to $2 million.
Arts Education Grant Deadline Fast Approaching

The deadline for Crayola’s mini-grant program to help bolster arts education is just weeks away! Application materials are due Aug. 15. The program is in collaboration with NAESP’s National Principals Resource Center and will provide educators the opportunity to explore new ways to “Champion Creatively-Alive Children.”

The grants, which include a $2,500 monetary award and $500 of Crayola products, are specifically aimed at helping NAESP members implement and document innovative arts-education projects to share best practices and innovative approaches to nurturing creatively alive children. Up to 20 elementary schools will be selected to receive a mini-grant to implement and document results of an innovative project.

Preference will be given to proposals that emphasize: collaboration and innovation—new ideas that aren’t currently common practice; and sustainability—ability to implement the project beyond mini-grant funding. Long-term projects are preferred over an event.

For more information, FAQs, and to download the application, go to www.naesp.org/crayola.aspx.

Need Guidance About RTI?

Apply now to participate in the RTI Action Network’s year of free mentoring through its Leadership Network, which supports district and building leaders in the effective implementation of response to intervention. The Leadership Network will support school leaders at any stage of RTI implementation. Members of the network receive mentoring from an experienced RTI implementer, free resources such as monthly tips and a monthly newsletter, involvement in an online community, and much more.
For the 2010-2011 school year, 250 slots are reserved for building and district leaders. Membership is limited and the application process closes July 30, 2010, so sign up today!

ED’s Perspective: Weaving a Seamless Continuum of Learning

By Gail Connelly, NAESP Executive Director

I’ve spent nearly three decades of my professional life working with principals on behalf of young children, but my personal life caught up to my career just two years ago when my first grandchild was born. He is thriving in part because he has a strong support system: two loving and devoted parents, attentive and nurturing grandparents, and a host of other doting family members and friends. He’s also enrolled in an excellent early childhood learning center—an essential component of his support system. As a result, he will be ready to thrive in the 21st century. But far too many of his peers won’t be so fortunate because they don’t have access to quality early childhood learning.

The research is irrefutable: Children who begin formal schooling behind their peers are likely to stay behind and are more at risk of dropping out of school. An unsettling reality of our education system is that traditional “learning transitions” are often separated by seams that can unravel, leaving unsupported children teetering between preschool and elementary grades, between elementary and middle school, between the middle grades and high school, and between high school and college or career.

These children are vulnerable to academic failure because the gaps are too wide for them to bridge by themselves. Unfortunately, we know what happens to far too many of them. Up to 50 percent of children in some high schools drop out entirely. If we, as a community of educators, are serious about reducing that shocking statistic, we must provide the steady support children need when they’re toddlers, not when they’re teenagers and in trouble.
Establishing Partnerships

To achieve this important goal, elementary principals and early childhood educators can work together to weave a seamless continuum of learning so all children can learn—not just those who are lucky enough to be born with strong support systems. Early learning and elementary school partnerships must be at the heart of all school improvement equations. But clearly, principals must have more support, given the enormous responsibilities they shoulder and the growing complexities of the job ahead.

We’re calling on the federal government to help. We’re working with members of Congress to provide much-needed funding in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to improve the knowledge of elementary principals in all areas related to early childhood development and learning, from preschool through grade 3.

Our proposal supports principals with professional development opportunities and mentoring programs so that they can create high-quality early learning environments, collaborate with community-based early childhood education providers and families, and strengthen transitions from pre-K settings to elementary schools. But we know there’s more to do.

We recently established a task force of early childhood researchers, field experts, specialists, and practitioners and charged the group with a central imperative: Identify, update, and clarify best practices to help all educators meet the developmental and learning needs of our youngest children and to influence the development of early learning policies that clearly call for the alignment of resources and structures to accomplish our goals. Their work will build on NAESP’s landmark publication, Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities, which provides a framework for what principals must know and be able to do to design, implement, and sustain the learning continuum from early childhood education through grade 3. Please watch for periodic updates about this important task force in the coming months.

A Shining Example

Elementary principals, in particular, are profoundly committed to making a difference for very young children who, potentially, begin formal schooling with one—sometime
two—strikes against them. Here’s just one story I’ve heard recently from a principal who has made these children a focal point of her leadership:

Theresa Mattison is the principal of a pre-K-5 school in Detroit; her school is ranked one of Michigan’s Top Five Title 1 schools. Mattison expects all students to achieve to their highest potential, but she also pays very close attention to the factors that influence learning readiness. She knows that boys and girls and their families struggle with daunting circumstances they can’t control. That balancing act probably sounds very familiar to you.

And also, like many of you, she’s an optimistic realist. She sees her school as “a beacon of light” for her students and their families. One way her school shines is through her work with a host of local partners, including some early childhood centers, to make sure her boys and girls get basic needs met—whether those needs are physical, emotional, or social—so their bodies and their minds are ready to learn.

Mattison believes—as all of you do—that every boy and girl in America can and must learn to his or her highest potential. NAESP believes that elementary and middle-level principals have the leadership, commitment, and heart to be the “weavers” of the learning continuum so necessary for all children, especially when their academic success often hangs in the balance—at the very start of their learning journey.
Federal Report: State Leaders to Take on Capitol Hill and Advance Advocacy Campaign

By Kelly Pollitt, NAESP Executive Associate, Strategic Policy and Special Projects

During the past several months, both the House and Senate have been busy holding a number of hearings to consider key issues in federal elementary and secondary education policy—and principals have made significant contributions to the discussion and had a strong voice in the debate. Now that the hearings are complete, the education committees are drafting bills that will likely take into account recommendations that were provided during the hearing process. As the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) moves to the next stage, NAESP’s National Leaders Conference on July 14-16 in Washington, D.C., will provide an additional opportunity for principals to have their voices heard as lawmakers consider areas to address and provisions to include in renewal of the law.

National Leaders Conference

Attendees of the National Leaders Conference are representatives from your state affiliate, such as the executive director, president, president-elect, state representative, federal relations officer, and state editor. In addition to providing these state leaders with excellent opportunities to share ideas, learn about the local impact of current activity in the administration and Congress, and share policy recommendations for the reauthorization of ESEA, the conference will provide state affiliate leaders with the opportunity to increase their state associations’ capacity. The conference offers activities to help discover best leadership practices and recognize the states that are making marked advances in the field. Best practices from the field are critical to share with members of Congress as any reform policies are put into place.

State leaders will also be gathering during this conference to help advance NAESP’s 2010 advocacy campaign that centers on supporting principals through increased access to high-quality professional development opportunities and programs that will advance the profession. The advocacy agenda promotes key positions on policies that have been proposed to ensure that every principal has the tools and resources needed to be successful.
Policy Particulars

Highlights of this campaign and policy positions include:

- Opposition of any model of school improvement that requires the firing of the principal and/or teachers without regard to school circumstances, staff training and expertise, and time afforded in the school building to implement school reform efforts.
- Preserving the integrity of formula grants traditionally provided under the ESEA such as the Title I and Title II funds provided to school districts by need-based formulas. In shifting focus away from formula funding in favor of competitive funding, state and local administrators—especially those in rural areas—would not have the capacity to fairly compete for funds that they previously received through targeted formula grants.
- Supporting growth models in educator evaluations to more accurately capture student success academically and developmentally. Multiple measures of assessment and related data—both formative and summative—must be used in the local evaluation of teachers and principals. Student assessment data must be used among many other metrics—formative and summative—in any evaluation of principals.
- Strengthening access to professional development funds for principals based on standards of practice. Funding provided in Title II must offer high-quality, standards-based mentoring programs explicitly for principals.

NAESP has also made a strong push to include separate measures for professional development for principals in the area of early childhood education to help improve their knowledge and skills in creating high-quality early learning environments. The proposal provides a professional development program through which principals will be encouraged to support a continuum of learning through developmentally effective and appropriate curricula and teaching practices. Activities addressed by the proposal include how to establish partnerships with families and community-based early childhood education providers to better support learning at each stage, as well as provide effective transitions among settings from early learning to the elementary school years.
With several supporters in the House and Senate, there is a good chance that the proposal will be included in the full reauthorization effort. Learn more about the 2010 advocacy campaign.