By now, many principals have gotten the message that success means being both an informed instructional leader and a strong manager. The job truly requires it. But even as we help principals see what’s needed today, we can’t forget to keep an eye on the future, too.

What kind of message are we sharing with the thousands of folks in classrooms, administrative offices, and colleges who will be our principals five or 10 years from now? Are we doing all we can to help tomorrow’s principals be prepared to handle the job’s challenging roles?

Since 2001, when we published Leading Learning Communities, which spells out what principals should know and be able to do, we’ve worked hard to get the book’s guidelines into the hands, heads, and everyday practice of principals in schools across the country. Now we need to start passing on this information to those who will shape the future.

Too often, I hear principals say that much of what they got in administrative training programs has little relevance to the real challenges of the job. This makes it all the more necessary for today’s principals to accept an important role in ensuring the success of those who will lead our schools tomorrow.

Spreading the Word

We need to make the balance between instructional leadership and management skills part of the bedrock of college certification programs. You can help by urging the colleges and universities you attended or are associated with to make Leading Learning Communities required reading in their preparation programs for aspiring elementary and middle school principals. Let those who train administrators know about the many other resources that NAESP and our affiliated state associations have to offer.

At the national level, we’ve been working closely with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education—NCATE—to help develop strong principal certification programs that can also impact principal preparation programs, continuing education, and internship requirements.

Extending a Helping Hand

While we’re concerned with getting tomorrow’s principals off on the right foot, we haven’t forgotten the needs of today’s principals. That’s why we recently launched the Principals Help Line on our Web site, www.naesp.org. This new service allows our members to submit a situation or question and, within 48 hours, receive answers from not one but five veteran principals. What a great way to get answers to questions that may be difficult to pose in your district, or simply to get input and feedback on your ideas.

We hope and believe the Principals Help Line will build a strong and valuable support network.

Sharing the Wisdom

“...within today’s teaching force are some of tomorrow’s leaders. Now is the time to encourage these teachers and to help them cultivate the skills needed to become effective school leaders.”

Passing the Torch

It’s no secret that the principal’s job just keeps getting more complex and challenging. Good principals have to know how to analyze and use data, how to reach out to the community for support, and how to build bridges with government officials and community agencies—in addition to being knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, keeping teachers and parents focused on achievement, and displaying a first-rate ability to manage budgets, personnel, scheduling, and facilities.

Certainly, a principal’s long and difficult job description is more than enough to fill the school day—and frequently the night as well. But we need to squeeze one more item onto the list: helping aspiring principals see all the facets of the job and making sure they develop the leadership and management skills they need.

We’re pleased that some school districts, colleges, and states are creating innovative programs to identify and nurture potential principals, and that our standards have been part of these efforts. But it’s important for principals to recognize that within today’s teaching force are some of tomorrow’s leaders. Now is the time to encourage these teachers and to help them cultivate the skills needed to become effective school leaders. As a first step, you might share a copy of Leading Learning Communities with them.

POSTSCRIPT VINCENT L. FERRANDINO, NAESP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Sharing the wisdom. That’s the goal we have set for preparing tomorrow’s principals and for helping today’s principals succeed.
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