



HeNina Bunch

Principal, Princeton Elementary School
Suitland, Maryland

The stats:

Years principal: 7

Student body:

- Almost 400 students
- Transient population, 80 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch
- 1/3 are Hispanic, more than 1/2 are African American
- 75 English-language learners
- Community Referenced Instruction designated school. Some students may have multiple disabilities and severe cognitive disabilities.

A Maryland Principal on Why She Serves

HeNina Bunch decided she wanted to be an educator in fifth grade. She was going through a rough period in her life, living with her grandmother while her father was incarcerated, when her fifth-grade teacher took her under her wing and worked with her to overcome her shyness and make great strides in school. But Bunch didn't want to be a principal—she thought principals were too removed from students and learning—until she worked with a new principal who showed her how being a school leader could impact many more lives.

Bunch now leads Princeton Elementary School in Suitland, Maryland, near where she grew up in Prince George's County. The school received a new playground from Landscape Structures Inc. and NAESP, and then dozens of principal volunteers helped construct the playground and spruce up the schools' grounds as part of NAESP's Community Service Day on July 5, 2016.

Most memorable experience as a principal:

A while back I had a student who had a really tough situation at home. His mom was sheltering him and not allowing him to come to school. [School officials] worked with different social service agencies to help his dad attain custody. We were able to form allegiances with people who he needed, and we helped a child get out of a situation that was hindering his growth and killing his spirit. This was around December, then from January to the time he graduated to middle school, we saw a major transformation. I will never forget the work my team did to help this child beyond academics.

On how she knows she's made a difference:

Aside from data, it's being able to see when kids have those "aha" moments, and being able to see them start to make efforts.



On receiving a new playground:

I was so overjoyed, I could not wait to shout it at the top of my lungs to my team. During the community service day, I was able to rub elbows with colleagues from all over the country. I received contacts from people who are going to help us continue to add to the playground. For instance, someone is going to help us set up a rainforest garden.

The playground speaks volumes to what NAESP is about—it's about education, not just servicing the profession. **P**