

Principals' Voices Needed

STRATEGIES TO BUILD YOUR VOICE TO GET WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR STUDENTS AND YOUR SCHOOL.



“Of all the items in a principal’s professional toolkit that support success, we think the most important is voice—a voice that is authentic, insightful, considerate, and confident.”

These are the words of Russell Quaglia and Peter DeWitt, whose recent book, *Principal Voice: Listen, Learn,*

Lead, addresses the challenge of principals actually being heard, not just listened to. To have a real impact on student achievement, the authors say, principals’ voices must be informed and supported by the full range of stakeholders.

The theme of principals finding their own voice is a familiar one to members of NAESP. Over the years, we have fought for and traced the evolution of the principal’s role—from one frequently sidelined in policy to one at dead center in conversations about practices and processes that directly affect student achievement. The recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) features an unprecedented level of support for the role of

principals, evidenced by the more than six dozen times the term “principal” is mentioned in a meaningful way. The new law has opened up a range of new opportunities for school leaders to lend their voices to state, regional, and local education agencies in collaborative consultations to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

For the past two decades, we have had tangible evidence establishing the direct link between school leaders and student achievement. Now that principals are being given the opportunity and responsibility to play a more central and crucial role than ever before, it’s time to get busy developing that most important tool in your toolkit: your voice.

Understanding how to speak with your authentic leadership voice will be valuable as you begin to work collaboratively in the ESSA-mandated consultations designed to build the learning plans tailored to your school’s and students’ needs.

Some practical tips and advice compiled from NAESP, and Quaglia and DeWitt, include the following:

Build and Use Your Voice

- Understand the provisions of ESSA that resonate with you. For example, do you know that as states and districts look to implement ESSA, evidence-based strategies must be identified to support effective educators? Learn about your state’s ESSA implementation processes and find a place for yourself at the table.
- Become an educated consumer. Learn about and take advantage of resources from state education agencies and NAESP. Check out NAESP’s “Nuts and Bolts” of ESSA Series, which features webinars, articles, and related resources for principals. www.naesp.org/ESSA
- Recognize the expertise of stakeholders and learn from them. Teachers, students, parents, support staff, and others have points of view that can help illuminate a wide range of issues that will broaden a principal’s perspective in preparation for ESSA consultations and any school improvement plans.
- Advocate for sustained and tailored professional development for principals that will help deliver on the promise of a well-rounded education. In doing so, ensure access to aligned early learning, arts-integration, social-emotional learning, and other strategies that round out a comprehensive approach to a complete education.

Speak up and speak out, principals! Let your voices be heard as you seize this rare opportunity to engage in ESSA consultations in your state that will affect your district and your school.

If you’re tired of policy mandating practice, this may be the best opportunity you will ever have to turn that equation around. Use your voice to ensure that what you know works in practice is heeded in policy. Your students will be grateful for your courage and your confidence on their behalf. ■

In the coming months, look for voices of your school leadership colleagues to be increasingly showcased in this space. At NAESP, we are dedicated to ensuring you are listened to, heard, and impactful.