

Reflections of a 21st Century Leader

Our thanks to NAESP Executive Director Gail Connelly for a decade of transformational leadership.



Throughout its 95-year history, NAESP has called upon its leaders to hold true to its mission, while astutely assessing and acting on the specific challenges and opportunities of their times. By any measure, the past decade has been a momentous period: Demographic tipping points are fundamentally altering society and the workplace, the digital revolution continues to accelerate, and repercussions are still being felt from a historic economic recession. And public school leaders, committed to educating every student, are experiencing unprecedented pressures on multiple fronts that make their jobs more demanding than ever before.

It goes without saying that any successful nonprofit leader must be

“I believe that principals make a tremendous difference in the lives of teachers and children, and I just as strongly believe that NAESP makes a difference in the lives of principals.”

—Gail Connelly

equipped with vision, integrity, and dedication. But as NAESP Executive Director Gail Connelly has so ably demonstrated in her 10 years at the helm of NAESP, maintaining the relevance and viability of a professional association in today’s challenging environment requires that more be brought to the table. Asked to reflect on the subject, Connelly articulated a few guiding principles that she has strived to model and implement during her tenure:

Share leadership, collaborate with others, and create a culture of inclusion. As Connelly explains, it was the shift to a shared leadership model with NAESP’s Board, together with the grass-roots engagement of members and the active support of NAESP state leaders and affiliates that

led to the creation of Vision 2021, which has become the seminal strategic framework for the Association. And as NAESP continues to expand its alliances and partnerships, she credits the commitment to seeking diverse opinions, and working through challenges and developing joint solutions, with increasing NAESP's overall influence and impact.

Actively listen to your members. Solicit their ideas and develop innovative, accessible solutions. As one example, after field data alerted NAESP that principals' careers were becoming dramatically briefer, the Association responded with increased focus on supporting new and aspiring principals. This included an array of strategies, from university partnerships to providing cutting-edge training, launching the National Panel of New Principals to gather and disseminate peer best practices, introducing NAESP Radio, and organizing Twitter

chats and webinars that fit seamlessly into a principal's day. Having an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and staying current on industry trends and issues through ongoing formal and self-study is essential for developing winning strategies in today's business environment.

Be fearless, and stay positive. Never waver in standing up for what is right for elementary and middle-level principals and their students. Keep testing and learning, and never doubt that a solution can be found. It was determination, savvy, and collective action that carried NAESP through recessionary times. Despite a scarcity of resources, NAESP stayed strong in advocating for principals and students, which brought us to the table to help craft the new Every Student Succeeds Act. This intensive effort resulted in recognition and support for principals to act as instructional leaders, and will enable them to focus on the things

that matter most in delivering a well-rounded, high-quality education for all children. Seeking and nurturing coalitions among mission-aligned organizations such as the Learning First Alliance and the Arts Education Partnership further strengthens NAESP's entire advocacy agenda, garnering up to 10 million supporters for shared positions and policies that are favorable to our nation's public schools, principals, and students.

Gail Connelly has clearly been the right person, in the right place, at the right time for NAESP. Having led the organization through a recession and turbulent times, today Connelly leaves an Association that is poised for sustainability and future success. Soon she will embark on a richly deserved new chapter with the knowledge that her friends and colleagues are forever grateful for all that she has done on behalf of America's children, and the principals and educators who serve them. 

TIMELINE



2007
Gail Connelly, former Florida educator, NAESP deputy executive director, and honorary National Distinguished Principal, is named NAESP's sixth executive director. The Board of Directors commits to a shared leadership model; leads the development of Vision 2021 Strategic Framework and Goals. NAESP launches the news aggregate *Before the Bell*.

2008
NAESP publishes research-based *Leading Learning Communities*—reinforcing the revolutionary concept of principal as instructional leader. Association issues the eighth *10-year Study of the K-8 Principal*, reporting that most principals work 56 hours a week, earn \$74,000 annually, have a master's degree—and 61% are women.

2009
Initiates the Power of the Principal campaign, including the television documentary *The Principal Story*, supported by The Wallace Foundation. Produces Principals' Perspective series of advertorials in *Education Week*. Advances Learning First Alliance position on the federal role in education that promotes multiple measures of accountability. *Principal* magazine wins prestigious EXCEL award for publication excellence, going on to win three more EXCEL awards and four APEX awards.

2010
For the first time in its 90-year history, NAESP introduces legislation to the U.S. Congress to support specific professional development for principals. Convenes a task force to study strategies to align early childhood learning with kindergarten and the primary grades.

2011
NAESP's advocacy team presses for reauthorization of ESEA on Capitol Hill, urging adequate professional development for all principals. Develops with NASSP *Rethinking Principal Evaluation: A New Paradigm Informed by Research and Practice*. Develops the Roadmap to Rigor professional learning workshop.

2012
NAESP sharpens focus on three priorities: serving early career principals, developing and sustaining high-touch membership strategies, and adopting and leveraging new technology to find, engage, and retain members. The Association's first-ever \$1 million protected reserve fund is established. Serves as Learning First Alliance Board chair, representing more than 10 million educators.

TRIBUTES FROM THE FIELD



ALAN MICHELSON

NAESP Past President, 2006-2007

Gail may not have been expecting the question I asked her over dinner in Alexandria, that night in 2006.

I had known her since 2002 when as a key staffer, she helped mentor me through my rookie days as an NAESP board member. Now I was in the middle of my term as NAESP president and we were losing our executive director. I always remember bolstering my request that she consider the position by saying, "Your Association needs you." She stepped up with energy and purpose, and the rest is history.



MARY KAY SOMMERS, ED.D.

NAESP Past President, World Education Forum, Secretary/Treasurer

Gail's vision of a collaborative leadership model was an emerging idea, especially at the national organizational level, when we hired her as executive director. As NAESP president at the time, Gail and I chatted almost daily so she could bring such a model to our leadership, and along the way we developed an enduring personal friendship. She has been willing to ask the tough questions, and has been relentless as a voice for the profession through ever-present challenges. As a result, our organization continues to evolve in new directions that will help to create a "preferred future" for NAESP, principals, children, and education.

STEVEN D. GEIS, ED.D.
NAESP President, Principal at North Trail Elementary, Farmington, MN

Gail's charismatic personality made me feel like a long-lost friend the very first time we met. I was attending my first NAESP annual conference, and she inspired me to learn more about NAESP. I can attest to her energy in leaving no stone unturned to ensure clarity and transparency in all her dealings. As NAESP president, my travels take me across the country. And wherever I go, I see how highly regarded, valued, and appreciated she is, and the stellar reputation she has built. So along with my own, I bring her the well wishes of every state I have visited.



2013

Establishes National Outstanding Assistant Principal of the Year Program; Takes the lead in addressing gun violence, school safety, and mental health issues. Collaborates with University of Pennsylvania to develop state-of-the-art leadership simulations for principals. Develops *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*, funded by VINCI Education. Expands the National Mentor Certification Training Program.

2014

W.K. Kellogg Foundation awards \$1 million grant to support pre-K-3 training and development for principals over three-year period. NAESP launches new, signature program, the National Panel of New Principals, enrolling nearly 1,000 new principals from every state. NAESP renews its commitment to the Arts Education Partnership. Overhauls NAESP's Bylaws for relevancy. Celebrates the 30th anniversary of the National Distinguished Principals Program.

2015

Years of efforts by NAESP's advocacy team result in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law by President Obama, which includes significant provisions for principal recognition and support. Develops through NPBEA the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation funds afterschool and summer learning initiatives.

2016

NAESP is acknowledged as a national expert on ESSA implementation, provides guidance to U.S. Department of Education, launches a yearlong program of comprehensive education, training, and consultation to states, district officials, and NAESP members throughout the country.

2017

NAESP rolls out the ESSA Toolkit—a complete, interactive guide to ESSA implementation and advocacy for principals. Association gathers and analyzes research for the ninth edition of the *10-year Study of the K-8 Principal*, to be issued in 2018.

Farewell

I'd like to recognize the contributions of thousands of volunteer leaders and all those who have filled staff positions with NAESP over the years. All have served the organization staunchly through thick and thin, and many have made highly significant contributions that are reflected in the current well-being of the organization. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each and every one and my very best wishes for the future.
 —Gail Connelly



DEBORAH B. REEVE, ED.D.
Executive Director and CEO,
National Art Education Association

Gail has given me a gift of friendship and collegiality that has continued for almost 30 years.



KAYLEN TUCKER, PH.D.
NAESP Associate Executive Director,
Communications

Gail is a champion for developing women leaders, urging me personally to “know my worth” and to talk about my accomplishments.



L. EARL FRANKS, ED.D., CAE
Executive Director, Council for Leaders
in Alabama Schools, and incoming
NAESP Executive Director

Gail Connelly established an extremely high bar of leadership during her tenure as NAESP executive director; she exemplifies a servant’s heart and sincere passion for the organization and its mission. I sincerely thank her for her service and leadership.



DEB DELISLE
CEO and Executive Director, ASCD,
former U.S. Department of Education
Assistant Secretary of Elementary
and Secondary Education

So often we look upon leaders as people who develop rules and policies, but Gail is a leader’s leader.



ERNIE MANNINO, H.ED.
Deputy Executive Director, CEO,
NAESP Foundation

Without fail, when faced with a challenging situation Gail is determined to find a win-win solution.



KELLY POLLITT
NAESP Chief Strategist,
Policy & Alliances

Gail is leaving an amazing legacy by leading NAESP’s agenda to help principals address the aspects of student education that matter most to them, and reconnect with their passion.



DAN DOMENECH, PH.D.
Executive Director, AASA, The School
Superintendents Association

Our associations have cooperated on many activities, and Gail has become a loyal and supportive friend who will be missed.



JOANN BARTOLETTI
Executive Director, National
Association of Secondary
School Principals

I met Gail when I became executive director of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association 25 years ago, and we have been professional colleagues and friends ever since.



RUSSELL QUAGLIA, ED.D.
Chief Executive, Quaglia Institute
for School Voice & Aspirations

I go to so many meetings and frankly dread them—but a meeting with Gail is completely different.

Leave your own tribute to Gail Connelly
at www.naesp.org/Connelly