



Prioritizing Principal Wellness

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The principal's role has been expanding for years—first as practitioners took on more responsibility as instructional leaders, and more recently adding pandemic-related school management into the equation. Principals are pros at putting out a fire and moving on to the next, meeting challenge after challenge because that's what's expected. They care deeply about their students and their school communities, putting them above all else. But enough is enough, and we are asking principals to do too much with too little.

The inevitable result—principal burnout—is the culmination of years of increasing demands and responsibilities. Principals have hit a breaking point. Without a change, this has the makings of a profession that could face severe shortages due to principals throwing in the towel and calling it quits. The warning signs are evident, but what will we do to fix it?

A System of Support

At NAESP, we're focused on being part of the solution and are committed to a multiprong strategy to meet the issue head-on. Most immediately, we need to do more to support current principals in the field. It starts with advocacy that focuses not just on increased investment in schools, but investment *in principals*. This includes infrastructure and programs that support principals, such

as high-quality professional development, job-embedded coaching and mentoring opportunities, and additional resources to increase staffing and otherwise lighten the load.

But this is only one piece of the puzzle. NAESP is also committed to prioritizing an issue that doesn't get enough attention: educator well-being. We rightly devote significant resources to supporting students' emotional health, but it is past time that we devote more attention and resources to this critical issue.

We believe educator well-being starts with building the support system to offer shared leadership to ease the burden on school principals, compassion for the fact that strong leaders are allowed to have limits, and easily accessible mental health resources. The trickle-down effect of a school leader having such a mental health support system in place benefits every aspect of education.

NAESP's Advocacy Team is now identifying new funding and policy initiatives to help move the needle on this issue. Wellness has always been an area of focus, but the pandemic has accelerated our work to better target support for principals in the field. We have also been proactively looking for resources to help NAESP members on their wellness journey.

Ongoing efforts to address these challenges will center on this key question: What can be done to lighten the principal's burden and improve the supports that undergird the profession so that the principalship remains a top-flight, coveted position for decades to come? ●

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