

# Layers of Leadership

**Principals have shuffled priorities to accommodate new responsibilities**



**W**ITH THREE SCHOOL years affected by the pandemic, we now have a clearer view of the impact on student development and achievement, as well as on educators and the principal profession. This is in part thanks to the *Leaders We Need Now* research series (LWNN), commissioned by NAESP and the NAESP Foundation to find out

about the changes elementary principals have experienced in their roles since the emergence of the pandemic in 2020, a year that also ushered in a national reckoning with race and social injustice.

The study found that principals' priorities shifted as they took on new responsibilities, contributing to a "layering effect" that is impacting the principal role. The feature articles in this issue of *Principal* address those new layers of principal leadership reflected in the LWNN study, drilling down on deprioritized areas and the "decision fatigue" that has accompanied crisis management and addressing students' social and emotional well-being.

For example, principals reported placing Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL) priorities such as Equity and Cultural Responsiveness on the back burner. Cornelius Minor, educator and author of *We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be*, argues that "culturally sustainable pedagogy isn't an additional thing we do; it's part of our everyday." See "Equity at a Crossroads" for more everyday choices educators can make to ensure equity (page 22).

With equity and cultural responsiveness lingering on the back burner, principals identified communications and crisis management as new areas of responsibility not adequately addressed in the PSEL standards. Principals have excelled at using social media and communications for their own professional growth and to engage their school communities, as we have often reported in the pages of this magazine. But what in the past felt like an optional skill to master is now expected, and it is complicated by a politicized environment. Read "Taking Social Media by Storm" by Devery Rodgers for promising practices that principals have used during the pandemic to connect with their school communities (page 28).

*Principal* concludes the school year—hopefully the last directly marked by COVID-19—by bringing attention to leadership teams. Schools have navigated the unknown only with increased levels of collaboration and distributed leadership. We shine a light on the role of the assistant principal and congratulate the 2022 class of National Outstanding Assistant Principals on page 34.

—Kaylen Tucker, Ph.D.



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