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Beyond Qualified: Highly Effective Principals in Elementary and Middle Schools

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) believes policymakers need to move beyond discussions on qualifications and focus on effectiveness in the broadest sense. Now is the time for principals to step forward and define effectiveness in their profession, honoring the art of school leadership and embracing appropriate assessment measures.

Absolutely, principals must be well qualified to work in our nation's schools. They need research-based preparation, knowledge of leadership theories, mentors in their first years, and they must have completed a state-approved principal licensure program.

Yet all of those qualifications don't ensure that principals will be effective and that students will learn. Both leadership and learning are complex and multidimensional endeavors. Research and experience tell us that highly effective leaders foster powerful learning communities in which students can learn and grow to their highest potential.

Every day, principals in elementary and middle schools engage in effective leadership practices that defy traditional measurement. They believe in human potential; build consensus; support families in crises; and foster a love of learning. Effective principals develop sustainable systems with many faceted leadership tiers. They show how continual improvement is the hallmark of effective practice, and how principals create cultures where continual improvement is the norm.

As part of a larger effort to define and develop the profession, our membership has worked to define a preferred vision of the principalship, known as Vision 2021. This month, NAESP is releasing a revised and updated version of *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, a guidebook by principals and for principals. This important handbook helps principals structure efforts to ensure that all students and adults learn and perform at high levels.

Principals know that the learning child grows cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially in the critical elementary and middle school years. Effective school leaders foster a school culture and vision that embrace the learning child and the family. There is a critical path from principal to student and the principal engages all stakeholders in meeting each child's need.

Voluntary Advanced Certification System

For more than seven years NAESP has worked in coordination with the American Association of School Administrators and the National Association of Secondary School Principals to champion the development of a national voluntary advanced certification system for principals. We believe that principals should be recognized and rewarded for their excellence in the profession and commitment to their own growth and development. We have advocated for a comprehensive review process in which principals demonstrate their skills, expertise, and the art of the profession.

NAESP also believes the certification system should be inclusive of the standards outlined in *Leading Learning Communities*, which detail how effective leaders have a dynamic vision for the school community; embrace a diverse community; lead instruction geared toward individualized learning for every student; ensure that students are prepared with the skills and abilities they need for a global economy; use knowledge and data in a variety of ways; and engage parents and the community to support schools and student development.

We will continue to support and develop this important recognition initiative, ensuring that the qualities that truly make elementary and middle-level principals effective are understood and included.

Promoting Effectiveness in the Principalship

Albert Einstein once wrote that "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." Principals do have expertise and skills that can be measured. However, these measurements can be highly subjective and easily misinterpreted. Our role as a professional association is to define and disseminate what we know to be effective in the profession and champion the "whole school leader."

What can't be measured is the sum of the parts. The adaptability, entrepreneurship, resiliency, and creativity that principals bring to their schools every day is nearly impossible to quantify. Knowing and greeting each child by name every day is priceless.

At NAESP, we will continue to fight for the official validation of the profession, while also celebrating the intangible qualities of principals who deftly build the foundation for lifelong learning in our children.