



Vincent L. Ferrandino,  
Executive Director, NAESP

## A Journey into the Leadership Future

When children are provided with all of the benefits that our school system has to offer, their educational journey to adolescence is an amazing process to witness. Children are well on their way to becoming lifelong learners when they receive a solid foundation in high-quality early childhood, elementary, and middle school education and when they are provided with access to after-school programs that are extensions of their learning day. These are the moments that make our job as educators so rewarding.

I've witnessed many of these education journeys, first as a principal, then a superintendent, and more recently as executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). My own journey as executive director of NAESP is ending as I prepare to move to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where I will be the Director of Policy and Planning for the country's Ministry of Education, overseeing major education reforms there. Gail Connelly, a well-respected, veteran member of the NAESP leadership team, will take the helm as interim executive director.

As I look back and reflect on my tenure here at NAESP, I can't help but smile at the amazing commitment I've seen from principals across the country. Time and time again, they demonstrate a collective spirit and desire to help children become successful. I've spoken and written often about the changing role of principals and how they are called on to do so much, yet often do not receive the recognition and compensation they so readily deserve. Their job description changes yearly—a notion unheard of in other professions—and they are asked to adjust and be flexible as more responsibilities are placed upon them. The federal requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have also increased their hours. A 2006 survey by the Northeast Regional Elementary School Principals' Council of nine Northeastern states found that more than 65 percent of administrators have added between five and 15 hours per month to their schedules as a result of NCLB mandates. The same survey found that 57 percent of them have no additional administrative support to help with these increasing

responsibilities. This region is not unlike so many others across the country. The shortage of principals is all too real in many school districts and the burgeoning paperwork and bureaucracy are contributing factors to this reality.

There is much discourse these days about how imperative it is that our schools evolve into more globally competitive centers of learning for children. But missing from these conversations is how principals can be the change leaders. Recognizing that their job responsibilities will continue to evolve, we must better prepare principals—and provide them with the necessary resources—to lead schools of the future.

NAESP is starting the types of conversations that will help principals become school leaders of the future. The association is engaged in a comprehensive, 18-month initiative called Vision 2021 aimed at exploring how the future is changing for pre-K-8 principals, and envisioning strategies, models, and relationships that will help NAESP align with the future. The association is embracing a grassroots approach by engaging NAESP members, nonmembers, NAESP staff, diverse stakeholder groups, and national thought leaders about the opportunities and uncertainties of the future.

NAESP is raising questions like "What will schools look like in 2021?" and "What will the job of a principal look like 15 years from now?" hoping that this type of self-reflection from principals will pave the way for a preferred future. While there is no crystal ball for us to peer into to see what form this change will take, we can be certain of the need to create a roadmap for implementing the types of change that will benefit our children and help them excel.

Although this is my last column as executive director, NAESP members and staff will never be far from my mind or my heart. I have enjoyed their resiliency, dedication, and commitment to ensuring that all children have access to a solid education. Even as my journey ends here, my advocacy of the great job that principals do will continue.



National Association of Elementary School Principals,  
1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 • 800-38-NAESP • <http://www.naesp.org>  
National Association of Secondary School Principals,  
1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1537 • 800-253-7746 • <http://www.principals.org>

