

# A New Direction: Every Student Succeeds

“We’re losing traction on the basics of instruction,” believes Fairfax County, Virginia, elementary principal Amy Goodloe, who recently met at NAESP with several of her colleagues to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities principals currently face. She’s not alone in this perception. Jerenze Campbell, reporting from his viewpoint as a principal coach in Maryland’s Prince George’s County Public Schools, describes the constant barrage of new initiatives—and the endless meetings and trainings that come along with them—that have resulted in less time to focus on students and classroom instruction. Schools are in desperate need of “the gift of time,” he says. The time-deprived culture that educators Goodloe and Campbell describe is one of the unintended consequences of the high-stakes and punitive overreliance on testing that characterizes the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). However, the right federal education law—one that honors principals’ voices and reorients a vision of education that is truly student-centered—can have a tremendous impact in shifting the pendulum back toward teaching and learning that is relevant for today’s students. With the recently signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), principals have the opportunity to be the leveling force in scaling back the steady stream of new standards and initiatives to rightly focus on a more holistic approach to student success.

I spoke with the principals assembled by NAESP about their hopes for the implications for the new law, and the conversation touched on topics as wide-ranging as funding equity, fair pay for teachers, and supports for English-language learners, as well as the concept of more uninterrupted time to focus on instruction that Campbell, who is a former principal, asserts is currently missing from most school days. Here are the common threads that emerged: There are no blanket solutions, and as such, principals and other front-line educators must lead the charge to determine how best to meet each student’s unique needs. ESSA promises to right the path, leading our schools in a new direction. Principals must seize the opportunity to guide the direction toward a well-rounded and complete education that our nation’s students need and deserve.

## A New Role for Principals

Over the past eight years, NAESP has been leading the charge on Capitol Hill on behalf of pre-K-8 principals, advocating for the conditions that have proved to provide the type of robust educational systems that help children thrive. We’re pleased that the resulting bill features the common sense provisions principals agree with and for which NAESP has been advocating. These include bolster-

ing the role of principals with an unprecedented level of federal recognition and professional support. Matching principals’ new responsibilities, such as aligning pre-K through grade 3 learning and new teacher evaluations systems, with proper levels of support “would be a dream,” says principal-in-residence Susan Holiday, also from Prince George’s County, Maryland.

ESSA rightly provides separate programming and funding for states to better support principal recruitment, preparation, and on-going professional learning. This is a critical time for the principalship, and we must ensure a robust pipeline of principals who are sufficiently supported to lead schools to success.

## The New Reality

At long last principals have reason to be cautiously optimistic about the future of public education because ESSA dramatically shifts authority from the federal government back to states and districts. The new law is poised to roll back the tsunami of school reforms that NCLB unleashed on schools, educators, students, and their families. The successful implementation of ESSA, however, will depend on renewed vigor from the nation’s principals to ensure that states and districts fulfill their obligations. It is incumbent on principals to understand and operate the new levers allowed under ESSA to be their own advocates for supporting school leadership and providing the students they serve the well-rounded education they deserve.

This means principals will need to embrace the changes to come and be proactive about ensuring that principal leadership is recognized as a key lever for school reform. To actualize the vision for a well-rounded and complete education that ESSA allows, NAESP is developing a taskforce to both understand the full implications of the new law, as well as strategize transition and leverage points for principal

The ESSA Implementation and Next Generation Principal Leadership taskforce will work over the coming months to fully analyze the new law to develop clear guidance—by principals and for principals—that will help them transition to a new era of education reform that is consistent with the principals’ vision of a 21st century education.

NAESP stands ready to push for effective implementation of ESSA and to champion the interests of principals as they navigate the new waters of state and local control in education—all focused on helping every student succeed. **P**

