

**Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the  
Elementary and Secondary Education Act**

**Professional Development for Principals: Investing in Early Childhood  
Transition Systems to Improve School Outcomes**

**January 29, 2010  
Washington, DC**

On behalf of more than 60,000 elementary and middle level principals nationwide, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) would like to submit the following recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NAESP is the leading advocacy organization supporting elementary and principals and other education leaders in their commitment to provide successful educational outcomes for all children.

Research has proven that success in elementary and secondary education starts well before students enter kindergarten. Children from low-income families who are exposed to quality early learning experiences are half as likely to need special education services in later grades, and more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. Further, the odds of juvenile crime, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy are greatly reduced.

Elementary principals inherently know what the research now tells us - quality early childhood education programs ready children for a formal education and lay the foundation for learning in later years. Principals have a profound understanding of the developmental and academic consequences that occur when children are not fully prepared to begin kindergarten. Now more than ever, elementary principals are aware of their role in early childhood and actively engaged in communities and schools to help set the stage for academic success. Working in partnership with local early learning programs, families, and community partners, principals are creating innovative alignment systems to offer programs for low-income children to transition from early childhood education programs to learning in the school building. Quality early childhood learning experiences have become an integral part of a principal's vision to shape a school culture that fosters a shared responsibility for learning, and sets high expectations for every student. Appropriate early learning and developmental experiences are now included as a part of the instructional leadership goals to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of each child.

In 2005, NAESP issued a landmark publication, *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, to highlight the latest findings on the intersection between elementary principals and early learning. This body of work outlines the standards that principals must know and be able to do, and provides guidance for principals to design Pre-kindergarten through grade three systems that are aligned to support the work of quality early learning programs, and recognize the importance of creating appropriate early learning opportunities where there are gaps in local school systems.

The standards focus on helping principals rethink the connection between early childhood

centers and elementary schools. Principals must rely on six indicators of effective early learning systems, including:

- Support for an expanded continuum of learning for children age three to the primary grades;
- Engage families and the school learning community in understanding early learning development;
- Promote school environments that are developmentally and age appropriate and address individual ways of learning;
- Provide high-quality curriculum and instructional practices to support learning and development;
- Use multiple assessments that are developmentally appropriate to create experiences that strengthen student learning; and
- Employ a balance of leadership and management roles to incorporate early learning experiences as part of the school culture.

Building successful Pre-kindergarten through grade three transition systems are a critical investment to preserve the foundation of equity upon which ESEA was established. Children at-risk of falling behind their peers will have a chance to begin their primary education years on equal footing. However, current principal preparation programs and school systems lack sufficient professional learning opportunities and resources to help guide principals through the standards of leading early childhood communities, and developing the ability to align systems that will provide developmentally and age appropriate experiences in the school building.

Elementary principals must now expand their knowledge base in early childhood education to better understand learning activities and teaching practices, appropriate assessments and evaluating data to inform instruction, and forging new relationships within the community to build successful partnerships. Principals must learn how to best align systems that create a seamless continuum of learning that recognizes the social, emotional, and academic needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Federal policies must reflect and support the research and practice that has redefined what elementary principals must know and be able to do to lead early childhood learning communities. This calls for greater federal investment in professional development opportunities for principals to learn about the value of comprehensive systems that will support the work of early learning programs in their schools and communities, and provide them the tools and resources to drive instructional leadership.

NAESP firmly believes that new policies in ESEA should include the standards for principal professional development to create local Pre-kindergarten through grade three systems that are designed to meet the unique needs of children in the community. We encourage the Department to include program strategies that will support principals to lead early childhood learning communities, which include: working with families and early childhood providers directly to bridge the transition from early childhood programs to the primary grades; supporting the

creation of community-based coalitions; providing facilities and early learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate and informed by cultural differences, including those that promote health and safety; and leading instructional activities that promote the best practices in early childhood education.

The following outline provides specific programmatic recommendations that will strengthen ESEA to meet the professional development needs of elementary principals to improve student outcomes.

**LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATION**  
**TITLE II, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT**  
**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS**

(a) GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED

(1) GRANTS TO PARTNERSHIPS- The Secretary is authorized to carry out the purpose of this subsection by awarding grants, on a competitive basis, to partnerships consisting of-

- (A) A public or private entity that provides professional development for principals in designing aligned pre-kindergarten through grade three systems and implementing school-based early childhood programs; and
- (B) One or more public agencies (including local educational agencies, State educational agencies, State human services agencies, and State and local agencies administering programs under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 9858 et seq.), and Head Start agencies.

(2) DURATION - The Secretary shall award grants under this subsection for periods of no less than 5 years.

(3) DEFINITIONS-

(A) NATIONAL LEADING EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITIES STANDARDS

- (i) Principals support an expanded continuum of learning that includes children from age three through entry into the elementary grades.
- (ii) Principals must be engaged in the school community and partner with early learning programs, and work with families to set a shared vision for understanding early childhood development and strengthening learning throughout the school;
- (iii) Principals must support high-quality curriculum and developmentally-appropriate instructional practices;

(iv) Principals must provide safe and supportive early learning environments that focus on the needs of the whole child, including the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical and nutritional well-being of children;

(v) Principals must provide multiple measures of developmentally appropriate assessment that will inform and strengthen early learning experiences before entering school and once enrolled in school.

(B) SYSTEM ALIGNMENT-For purposes of this section, 'system alignment' means activities targeted to pre-kindergarten through third grade including-

(i) Establishing partnerships with local public and private pre-kindergarten programs to form transition planning teams involving elementary level principals and teachers, early childhood program personnel and staff, families, agency workers and community leaders;

(ii) Streamlining the core elements of early childhood teaching and learning experiences to school-based learning;

(iii) Integrating early learning and K-3 curriculum and standards;

(iv) Collaborating with community-based organizations to provide information to families about school-based early learning opportunities for children; and

(v) Providing transition services to children and their families.

#### (5) USE OF FUNDS

(A) IN GENERAL- Each partnership receiving a grant under this subsection shall use the grant funds to carry out professional development and mentoring programs to build capacity of principals in meeting national standards for leading early learning communities defined in section (3)(A) and integrating pre-kindergarten education programs in elementary schools through third grade, focusing on high-need communities.

#### (B) ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES

Such activities may include:

(i) principal participation in professional development programs that specialize in training and mentoring principals in the early childhood program standards;

(ii) providing professional development for principals to create aligned systems to transition children from early childhood learning programs to school-based learning;

- (iii) professional development and support which may include mentoring programs for principals to work with parents, early childhood educators, and teachers to provide developmentally-appropriate early learning and school-readiness services;
- (iv) professional development for principals to learn about working with teachers and early childhood educators in order to work with children who have limited English proficiency, and children with special needs;
- (v) professional development for principals to learn about the use of multiple measures in early childhood learning, including portfolio collections, formative assessment and related developmental data, and the selection and use of the latest screening and diagnostic assessments to identify school-readiness issues and improve teaching and learning; and
- (vi) participation in induction and mentoring for principals during their first five years in the field, including standards-based mentoring programs offered by qualified providers.

#### (6) APPLICATIONS

(A) APPLICATIONS REQUIRED- Any partnership that desires to receive a grant under this subsection shall submit an application to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(B) CONTENTS REQUIRED-Each application submitted to Secretary shall include-

- (i) a description of the professional development or mentoring programs to inform principals about how to design pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment and programs that are based on the standards described in section (4)(A);
- (ii) a description of the professional learning for principals that will encourage them to-
  - (a) provide safe and supportive and engaging learning environments in school-based facilities that are adequately staffed;
  - (b) acknowledge and support families through outreach and awareness of the benefits of early learning programs;
  - (c) address the needs of the whole child as described in (4)(A)(iv);
  - (d) align and collaborate with community-based

organizations to implement programs;

(e) implement collaborative planning that includes principal and teacher visits to pre-kindergarten classrooms and other means to support interactions between teachers and children;

(g) use data and early screening processes according to (5)(B)(v);

(h) focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness;

(i) design a system alignment that captures the core elements of teaching and learning for successful school transitions;

(j) use the latest materials, practices, and implement curricula that-

(i) ties literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, and other skills to experiences that are developmentally appropriate in early learning settings;

(ii) is aligned with State academic content standards and the standards and goals of the school year curriculum of the local educational agency serving students;

(iii) includes developmentally-appropriate assessments to understand the child's physical, social, emotional, intellectual and general disposition for learning;

(iv) disaggregates data by subgroup populations;  
and

(v) fosters young children's eagerness to learn.