

The development of quality education depends on the dedication of the principal.

Improving the Leadership of K-8 Principals—An NAESP Priority

by James L. Doud

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), founded in 1921, is a professional organization serving more than 22,000 elementary and middle school principals and other educators throughout the United States and overseas. As a national organization, it operates through a network of affiliated associations in every state and the District of Columbia. In addition, NAESP has members in 11 of Canada's 12 provinces and in many countries overseas. The Association believes that the progress and well-being of the child must be at the forefront of all elementary and middle school planning and operations. Further, NAESP members accept the challenge inherent in research findings that the development of quality education in each elementary and middle school depends on the expertise, dedication, and leadership of the principal.

In keeping with these two primary goals of the Association, the Board of Directors approved in January 1983, a Standards Project which had two major goals: 1) to identify the characteristics found in a quality elementary (K-8) school program, and 2) to identify the proficiencies which the elementary and middle school principal must have in order to establish, maintain or improve the quality of the school program.

What is the rationale for NAESP undertaking this Standards Project? What products have resulted from this effort? And where do we believe this project will take our association in the next few years? This article attempts to answer these and related questions.

Why A Standards Project?

Several factors external to the association contributed to the development of the NAESP Standards Project. Elementary teachers and principals have long recognized the crucial role which parents must play in the early education and preparation of their children for school. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that our association was the first to conduct and report a thorough study of the educational impact upon children of the changing status of the American family. (See *The National Elementary Principal*, May/

June 1976, July/August 1976, and October 1979 and *Principal*, September 1982.)

Confronted with a society in which there are two divorces for every three marriages, NAESP recognizes that principals must become increasingly aware of how such changes impact upon the child's education. Statistics also show that 48 percent of married women, 65 percent of divorcees with children under 6, and 85 percent of divorced men of school-aged children are employed outside the home (*Principal*, March 1985, p. 64). Table 1 indicates that the percent of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool programs has increased nearly 16 percent since 1970, while kindergarten enrollment has jumped 14 percent in this same time period (*Principal*, May 1985, p. 16).

TABLE 1
Per school Enrollment Rate by Age:
1970 to 1982

	3 and 4 years old	5 years old	Total
1970	20.5%	69.3%	37.5%
1972	24.4	76.1	41.6
1974	28.8	78.6	45.2
1976	31.3	81.4	49.2
1978	34.2	82.1	50.3
1980	36.7	84.7	52.5
1982	36.4	83.4	52.1

The project increase in some type of school program for children ages 3, 4, and 5 in the next five to seven years has clear implications for the need to focus attention on preparing principals for leadership in the area of early childhood education (see Table 2).

Elementary schools have long been vehicles for attempts by the educational community to react positively to societal changes. When comparing achievement levels of schools, homogeneity of neighborhood elementary schools emphasized the impact of economic deprivation and heightened the awareness of decision-makers that the quality of the leadership of the building principal was directly tied to the success of the individual school program. Such factors contributed to the initiation of busing plans to achieve racial and economic balance so that children might enjoy greater equity and equality in their educational opportunities. The fluctuations of birth rates within the past 15 years caused elementary schools to be the first to experience reduction of staff and closing of schools. Elementary schools were frequently reorganized using a variety of age groupings as a way to accomplish both school integration and reduction in force.

Within the Association, the need was recognized for development of position papers which would respond to two basic questions: 1) What does NAESP mean when we talk about quality elementary schools? and 2) What does NAESP believe to be the essential components of preparation and in-service education programs for elementary school principals? The strategic planning process for the Association called for answers to such questions so that we might focus our attention and resources on programs and activities that would have the greatest payoff for children and principals. The Standards Project seemed a fortuitous way to provide answers which help the Association move toward this objective.

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TABLE 2
Projected Trends in Preschool Enrollment by Age: 1985 to 1993
 (in thousands)

Year	Public Schools (Age)					Private Schools (Age)				
	Total	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	Total	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years
1985	3,865	352	728	2,490	295	2,339	721	1,069	508	41
1986	3,931	364	754	2,514	299	2,404	745	1,106	510	43
1987	4,007	376	779	2,550	302	2,468	770	1,142	512	44
1988	4,079	388	805	2,580	306	2,533	794	1,180	515	44
1989	4,152	399	830	2,614	309	2,599	816	1,217	522	44
1990	4,220	409	853	2,644	314	2,664	838	1,251	529	46
1991	4,279	419	875	2,667	318	2,719	857	1,283	533	46
1992	4,324	426	894	2,683	321	2,766	872	1,311	537	46
1993	4,358	432	910	2,693	323	2,803	884	1,335	538	46

What Products Have Resulted From the Standards Project?

The task of the Standards Project was an enormous one, and the Standards Committee quickly decided that the top priority for its initial efforts should be given to the development of standards for quality elementary schools. This decision was reinforced by the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education which focused nearly all of its recommendations upon secondary schools while ignoring the crucial importance of the elementary school years.

In October 1984, NAESP released *Standards for Quality Elementary Schools: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade*. The *Standards* were developed with input from parents, teachers, principals, other school administrators, and a carefully selected panel of experts in elementary school education. This publication has rapidly gained attention and reputation as a comprehensive description of the common characteristics found in all quality elementary schools. These commonalities are defined as 21 specific "standards" which all quality schools should meet, and 167 "quality indicators" which help identify the extent to which each standard is met within the school. The standards and quality indicators are based on current research on effective schools and effective teaching and on the practical knowledge and experience of principals working with elementary students and teachers. Two instruments are included in the appendix of the *Standards*. The first is a checklist designed to help the principal, staff and/or community to assess the extent to which each of the quality indicators and standards are being met within the school. The second instrument provides a useful guide for development of a plan of action for school improvement.

Two particularly salient points are made by the *Standards*: 1) the elementary school experience is crucial for providing the basic foundation essential to success in later school years; and 2) the building level principal is the key figure in providing leadership for the development and management of a quality school program. In addition to defining the conditions which exist in a quality elementary school, the *Standards* also clearly imply the skills which a principal should have in order to sustain and improve the school program. Therefore, they provide the basis for the efforts of Phase II of the Standards Project—the identification of proficiencies (defined as the practical application of skills) which are required of principals in quality elementary schools.

The proficiencies are being developed by a subcommit-

tee of the original Standards Committee with additional insight provided by professional colleagues, professors of elementary school administration, and a panel of prominent educators associated with the preparation and inservice education of elementary school principals. The initial plan was to group the proficiencies under the seven categories found in the *Standards* document: Organization, Leadership, Curriculum, Instruction, Training and Development, School Climate, and Evaluation and Assessment. When it became evident that many of the proficiencies overlapped, they were regrouped into four major strands: Background/General Knowledge, Leadership Proficiencies, Supervisory Proficiencies, and Administrative Proficiencies. Each strand will contain a number of recommended proficiencies stated as desirable outcomes of preparation and inservice education programs. A report tentatively titled "Proficiency Standards for Elementary School Principals: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade" is expected to be released early in 1986.

Where is NAESP Headed in the Next Few Years?

Since the release of the *Standards* report last October, NAESP has been involved in actively promoting its use. One primary focus for such efforts has been the wide distribution to key individuals such as governors, legislators, chief state school officers, superintendents, school board members, and regional accreditation associations. These efforts have achieved greatly increased recognition for the importance of both the elementary school years and the role of the principal, and are expected to provide even higher visibility as state affiliates initiate further actions designed to promote use of the *Standards* within their states.

Similar efforts will be made by NAESP to promote awareness of the *Proficiency Standards* upon their release early in 1986. We believe that the identification of proficiencies will be helpful to persons specializing in the preparation of elementary school principals as well as those whose primary focus is the continuing inservice education of principals. The professional development activities of the national association will place special focus on the proficiencies which have been identified through the Standards Project.

NAESP will launch cooperative efforts with state and local affiliates to utilize the proficiencies as a primary resource for planning of professional development activities. We hope that the involvement of professors of elementary school administration in the development of these profi-

iciencies will strengthen the "communication bridge" necessary to improve both preservice and in-service education programs for elementary and middle school principals. Such cooperative efforts should help minimize discrepancies between current preparation programs and actual practice in quality elementary schools. NAESP plans to identify "specialists" who will develop the content modules for each proficiency area to be used in professional development programs. NAESP recognizes the value of more supervised practicum experiences as a part of principal preparation programs, and will join with higher education in seeking necessary funding to support such experiences.

The need for the association emphasis on professional development programs described above is further justified by data reported in "Polling the Principals" in the March 1985, issue of *Principal*. It is possible that we will experience as much as a 50 percent turnover in the principalship within the next decade. More than 40 percent of the elementary and intermediate level principals are 50 or more years of age (see Table 3) and many will have the option to retire at age 55 if they have at least 30 years of service. In addition to the obvious "aging" of the principalship, another 15 percent to 16 percent of elementary and intermediate level principals indicate dissatisfaction with or CON consideration of other career alternatives besides the principalship (see Table 4).

TABLE 3
WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CAREER PLANS?

	Total	Elem.	Inter- mediate	Senior High
Educational administration my career	81.6	82.1	84.7	83.9
Undecided; considering other career opportunities	15.9	15.9	14.8	13.5
Educational administration not my career9	.4	.6	2.1
No response	1.6	1.55

TABLE 4
WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

	Total	Elem.	Inter- mediate	Senior High
Less than 304	.7	.6	...
30 to 34	5.3	7.4	1.7	2.1
35 to 39	18.9	16.6	17.6	20.7
40 to 44	16.4	14.4	16.5	20.7
45 to 49	19.8	19.9	22.7	18.7
50 to 54	20.3	20.7	26.7	18.1
55 to 59	12.8	14.2	9.7	14.5
60 or more	4.9	5.5	4.0	5.2
No response	1.0	.7	.6	...
Mean	46	47	47	47

Such data justify the need for preparation programs which focus upon the instructional and leadership proficiencies demanded in the operation of quality elementary schools. School boards and principals must recognize the dual obligation to maintain the highest possible proficiency levels. This can be accomplished only through a yearly program of total staff development efforts provided by the

school district which are supplemented by professional (personal) development—including membership at local, state, and national principals associations. To assist such efforts, NAESP will focus efforts to help state legislatures and local boards of education recognize the crucial importance of committing greater allocations of time and financial support to annual staff development programs aimed specifically at the individual school level.

The data about the American family presented earlier in this article also justify the greatly increased effort of NAESP to support the development of sound pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs. We are gearing up for increased legislative lobbying and advocacy for the early (K-8) learning years, including such areas as parenting education, inclusion of 4-year-old programs in the public schools, full-day kindergartens, and smaller class size. Through a new NAESP publication titled **Research Roundup** principals are provided with research and background information necessary to support appropriate program decisions. To more effectively impact state and federal legislation NAESP initiated a process to translate the association platform (governance resolutions adopted by the Delegate Assembly) into an "action agenda." This provides a legislative action plan which enables both state and national associations to work cooperatively toward similar goals—thus unifying and multiplying the impact of our efforts.

All of these actions were reflected in the five-year Strategic Long-Range Plan adopted by NAESP in 1981-82. Initial discussion leading to the next five-year plan began with the 1985 summer board meeting, and will eventually provide the framework for governance and program direction for the years 1987-1992. None of our program directions are cast in concrete—but all are part of a comprehensive plan which assures that we continue to focus upon priorities that yield visible, tangible results.

Has such planning paid off? The evidence is clearly "yes." Organization of an NAESP Foundation has resulted in expanded professional development opportunities for our membership. The NAESP National Fellows program includes two one-week summer workshops—one at the University of Houston and the other at the Florida Institute of Technology. Plans currently being developed would enable NAESP to offer a Scholars Program which would provide an opportunity for distinguished educational researchers and practicing school principals to share ideas and information for the improvement of education. Planning for the convention now utilizes the seven categories from the **Standards for Quality Elementary Schools** as a primary consideration for the selection of sectional programs. Our first preconvention workshop at Denver was such a success that we hope to offer at least two such workshops at the 1986 convention in Las Vegas. The addition of publications such as **Research Roundup**, **Here's How**, and **Streamlined Seminar** to the always popular *Principal* magazine provide the building principal with ideas and information for personal growth as well as practical suggestions for improved instructional leadership. At the 1985 convention in Denver NAESP organized our first overseas affiliate (Germany) and formed an Organization of Professors of Elementary School Administration to help build channels of communication and cooperation with these colleagues. I believe that these professional development efforts are primarily responsible for membership growth which exceeded 1,000 principals in 1985-86.

Strategic long-range planning has resulted in other benefits for the Association. Careful control of spending, wise investments of available assets, and securing of Industrial Revenue Bonds has enabled NAESP to purchase our first headquarters building which is now under construction in Alexandria, Va. Improvements have been made in legal assistance and other related benefits each year since 1981. Expanded legislative lobbying and consistent testimony on behalf of children has helped NAESP build a reputation as a professional association that advocates more than selfish interests. The initiation of the National Distinguished Principals Program in the fall of 1984 generated a

great deal of press coverage and contributed to heightened awareness and image of the principalship. The mood of the NAESP membership has become so positive that when confronted with a Board of Directors' recommendation for a \$25 dues increase, the Delegate Assembly at the Denver convention unanimously approved the recommendation.

One indicator of quality is that individuals involved are never satisfied; that things can be improved. Elementary and middle school principals have become aware that NAESP is involved in planning and program activities designed to increase their leadership skills and effectiveness as building administrators. The success of NAESP in these efforts will benefit both children and principals.