

THE Leader


American Federation of
School Administrators
AFSA, AFL-CIO

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Indoor Air Quality Key to Safe Learning

The COVID-19 crisis has put a spotlight on decades of neglect and the growing deficiencies of school infrastructure, including heating, ventilation and air conditioning, also known as HVAC systems.

Most classrooms in the United States fail to meet minimum ventilation rates, and those inadequacies have an especially major impact on our ability to provide safe learning environments as the virus remains in our communities.

Proper air ventilation and filtration in schools—when combined with other



best practices like mask wearing, physical distancing, hand-washing and surface cleaning—are essential strategies to protect school staff and students from the coronavirus.

And in a post COVID-19 world, proper air ventilation not only will keep your school community healthier, it also will impact learning outcomes in a positive way.

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Addressing Racial Inequities

Long-woven racial inequities in our school culture, budgets and curriculum have created a two-tier system of learning

from district to district across this nation. It must be changed if we truly want to reach the goal of all students having equal access to a high-quality education.

Quite simply, the system of education needs to evolve; the changes we need in public education are universal. COVID-19 has illuminated systems of inequity like never before, according to American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA) Secretary-Treasurer Luran Waters-Cherry, who has had conversations with union leaders about how to best reopen our public schools.

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Windy City Principals Seek Bargaining Rights

Chicago school principals are on the verge of getting collective bargaining rights as the Illinois Legislature debates a bill that would open the door for the city's school leaders to have a larger voice in how to deliver a top-quality educational environment to help students thrive.

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School Leader Confirmed as DOE Deputy

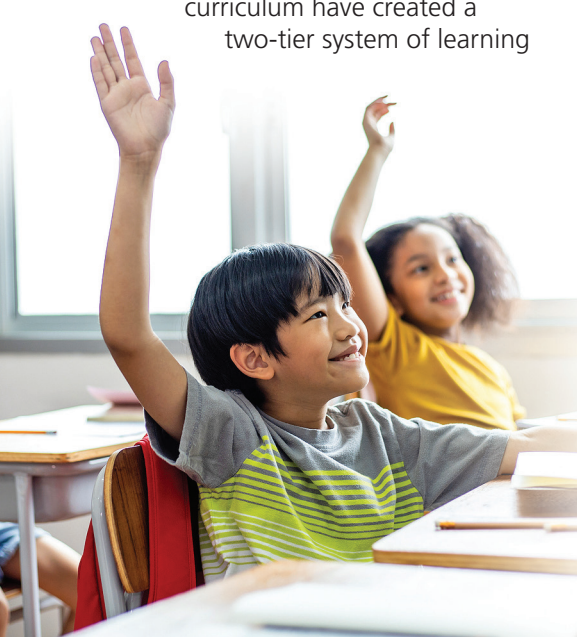
For the school leaders of San Diego, new U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten is not just an appointee of President Biden working to improve the nation's schools. She is one of them.

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Homework Gap Addressed

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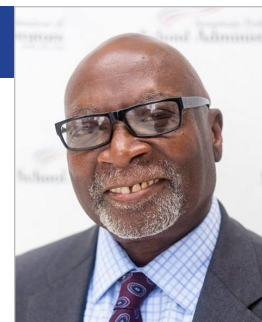
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*The Leader is a member of the
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Reopening Schools, Reimagining Schools

Let's reopen our schools. But let's also rethink how our schools operate.

I have long advocated for us to focus on reopening the nation's schools as quickly as we can safely do so. We must return to full-time, in-person learning in our classrooms. It is vital for our students, our families and our nation.

In fact, in most communities around the country, school principals, assistant principals and other school leaders have never left the school buildings that we must once again fill with students and educators, and create a learning environment for children to thrive.

Throughout the pandemic, school leaders have been at their posts, coordinating services for students, like making sure school meals were delivered, offering IT support, or ensuring homework packets were available.

We have worked tirelessly so that teachers can teach, and students can learn, remotely. Working with parents, we have provided tools and resources to meet the many challenges our students face learning under these difficult circumstances. It has not been easy, but we never left our jobs.

Close to one year ago, AFSA issued a comprehensive guide for reopening our schools safely. In that report, we stressed the importance of getting

students back into classrooms, writing: "To be fully engaged in learning, students require face-to-face interaction with their teachers. For us, distance learning serves an important purpose, but it does not equal in-person learning. It is insufficient to the demands of mind and heart. There is no place like school to ensure our students' academic, social and emotional progress."

The value and importance of in-person learning is even more apparent today, and as school leaders we must work with the entire community in partnership to get all students back into classrooms.

But as we prepare for a new day in American education, we cannot be satisfied with returning to the way things were before the pandemic. Our experience with remote learning highlighted the many inequities that have long existed among our students and the nation's schools, as we highlight in our page 1 story.

The lessons we've learned over the past year shed new light on reforms we must make to better serve all students, and provide the kind of education they need and deserve.

Stand With All Workers

Looking beyond our schools, we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

When it came to the well-being of workers, it used to be said that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” That hasn’t been true in decades. Lately, some boats rise high on a wave of prosperity, while others founder.

Since the 1970s, corporations, wealthy individuals and conservative lawmakers have done everything they can to destroy the American labor movement. And while they have not succeeded, they have made it very difficult to organize and increase union membership.

The impact is clearly seen in lower membership numbers in the private sector and tremendous income disparities. As union membership declined, income inequality increased.

For many school leaders, growing income inequality has not been as apparent because of our ability to bargain effectively. But just imagine if the labor movement had been given a fair chance in the 1970s, ’80s and ’90s. What would the average wage for American workers be today? How much would those gains have raised the paychecks we enjoy today?

The Union Advantage

Unions improve wages and benefits for all workers, not just union members. If unions had been able to drive real wages up, our base for bargaining would have started at a much higher level—and our incomes would reflect that today.

But the ramifications go further. Unions also reduce racial disparities in wages and raise women’s pay, helping to counteract the injustice that stems from occupational segregation, discrimination and the other longstanding workforce inequities of structural racism and sexism.

The bottom line is that the fall and rise of economic inequality since 1936 has closely tracked the growth and decline of the share of the American workforce that is unionized. As the collective strength of working people to negotiate for better pay and benefits has eroded, the gap between rich and poor has reached levels not experienced since the Great Depression.

Unions were instrumental in creating the American Dream, and the decline of private-sector union membership has made financial security and upward mobility less achievable. More and more workers now think good jobs and decent careers are beyond their reach.

Labor Reform: Pass the PRO Act

That is why the entire labor movement has been advocating for the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 842/S. 420). Labor’s top legislative priority will make it easier for people to organize unions by enacting critical changes to the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

Our basic labor law for nearly 90 years, the NLRA is supposed to protect the rights of workers to form a

union and bargain collectively. But today the act is broken. Employers violate the NLRA with impunity. An entire union-busting industry now works nonstop to block working people from exercising our rights.

According to the AFL-CIO, in more than 40% of all union organizing elections, employers are charged with breaking the law. They lie, and threaten, coerce and routinely fire union supporters. Workers are forced to attend mandatory meetings with one item on the agenda: union-bashing. The problem is that the penalties for employers that engage in illegal behavior are so inconsequential that they regularly flout the law.

The PRO Act is the solution. It would put real teeth into penalties for breaking the law and hold employers accountable. The PRO Act would make it possible for tens of millions of workers to exercise their right to join together, bargain with employers and have a say about their jobs.

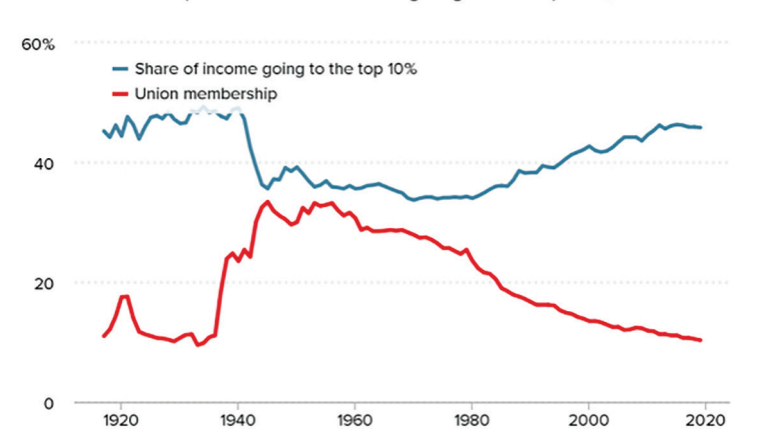
And while most AFSA locals don’t fall under the NLRA, a more labor-friendly economy will positively benefit those of us in the public sector as well.

After all, many school leaders still don’t have the right to collectively bargain. For example, today, our Chicago local is facing opposition from their school district on a bill currently in the legislature that would give them the right to unionize and bargain. The whole labor community is supporting them, and we need to offer similar strong support to our union brothers and sisters by working for the passage of the PRO Act.

Solidarity matters, and it’s a two-way street.

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the PRO Act—twice—but the Senate must now follow suit. Call your senators today at 866-832-1560 and tell them to pass the PRO Act. We and all American workers will benefit when they do. ■

Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917–2019



Source: Reproduced from Figure A in Heidi Shierholz, *Working People Have Been Thwarted in Their Efforts to Bargain for Better Wages by Attacks on Unions*, Economic Policy Institute, August 2019.

Economic Policy Institute

One Special Principal

Denise Lancaster, a member of the Howard County Administrators Association, AFSA Local 36, was named 2021 Howard County (Maryland) Principal of the Year and The Washington Post's 2021 Principal of the Year, chosen from 12 finalists from Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

"I really couldn't believe I was selected for either award. It was a huge surprise. I couldn't believe my staff nominated me," said Lancaster, who is principal at Deep Run Elementary School (DRES). "I do my job every day and believe I am doing what all principals are doing. Usually when I am in meetings with other principals and ideas are shared, I come away thinking I am not doing nearly enough for my school community."

In April, The Washington Post reported that "Lancaster and her staff delivered boxes of fresh produce to students' families in a mobile home park in Howard County in Maryland."

"Five years into her tenure at Deep Run Elementary, that kind of task feels natural to Lancaster. More than 50 percent of Deep Run's students live in poverty—and meeting their basic needs feels essential to her job."

'The Best of Everything'

"I have the best of everything as the principal in a school. I have the privilege to work with students, staff and families," Lancaster said. "I have met so many caring individuals in our community who want to support our school. I see the principalship as a public service career. I work with my staff to serve our entire school



DRES students congratulate Denise Lancaster on her award.

community. We see firsthand the difference we make, not only for children, but also for their families."

In her 24-year career with the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), Lancaster has worked at several schools as a speech-language pathologist, assistant principal and principal. According to the school district, she has distinguished herself through her outstanding leadership, mentorship, collaboration, responsiveness, compassion and creativity. "My road to the principalship was a little different, since I began my career as a speech-language pathologist in the schools," she added.

"We have to take a look at how we are communicating with our families to make sure all families have access to the many resources available to them—especially during the pandemic," she said. "We created videos in English and Spanish to help parents navigate technology so they could support their children at home. We also learned many of our parents prefer text messages, so we have adapted and send text messages with links to videos and other communications on our website."

A Nurturing Environment

In her message to parents on the school's website, Lancaster writes, "as a school we pride ourselves in providing a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment while encouraging our

students to reach their full academic potential. In addition to academic growth, we want to ensure our students grow in the arts and develop their artistic and musical talents. We also provide an environment where children can develop social and physical fitness skills. Deep Run provides an education where children continually learn and grow while experiencing the world around them."

In comments received by the school district describing Lancaster, one HCPSS principal wrote, "Mrs. Lancaster has earned the reputation of a leader who is patient, kind and successful because of her enthusiasm for helping people around her reach their full potential. She is a fierce advocate for all students, and leads with a purpose of equity and inclusion."

Lancaster "treats us [parents] as partners in the academic journey....She honors our role as advocates and seeks to empower us in that position," said one parent.

"Denise exemplifies what it means to be a truly incredible principal. Where others may just have a boss, we have a leader," according to one of her staff members. "A leader who cares about every one of her team members, a leader who makes our school community feel like a family, one who leads by example and does all she can to support all of her staff both personally and professionally." ■

'We Kept the Pulse of the Families'

When it came to keeping her students and school community engaged, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA), AFSA Local 1, member and Principal Erica Mattera of PS 11 in Staten Island, New York, did not let the lockdown tie her hands.

The school had a contest to name its mascot, an eagle (a first grader submitted the winning entry, Endurance). Student council meetings continued online. Curricula was tweaked and personalized. There was a virtual graduation. Mattera and her staff delivered pizzas with thoughtful notes to the homes of students in recognition of their birthdays and academic achievements.

"We've learned a lot during COVID—some of the pieces we learned on digital platforms are helping us educate better," she said. "It's not all going away tomorrow." Perhaps most importantly, she said, "We kept the pulse of the families."

Her work led Staten Island Borough President James S. Oddo to award Mattera the Patrick F. Daly Award, which honors the life work of Daly, a principal in Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York, who was shot to death while

searching for a student who had gone missing.

Mattera, like many school leaders around the city, tells of families that have struggled with COVID-19 deaths and poverty exacerbated by the lockdown's resulting wave of unemployment.

"When one family lost their home, we held a collection, and helped the family find an apartment," she said. "We delivered food, clothing and toys. We're a small school, without a lot of support personnel. But we really have tried to keep things as stable as possible for kids and their families."

Mattera is especially proud of a mural currently in the works. Students collaborated on the design, meant to demonstrate some of the school's core values, including friendship, acceptance, love, respect and strength. "These are the values that Mr. Daly



PS 11 Principal Erica Mattera

led with, and we vow to continue the mission," she said.

The principal also has a long-term vision meant to deepen the educations of her students and keep them connected to the community as well. She created a buddy system in which kindergarteners get together with fifth graders who serve as mentors. Then, with the help of New Dorp High School Principal Deirdre DeAngelis, kids who are in fifth grade meet students from the high school and begin forming connections there as well.

"We follow the PS 11 kids into middle school and then to high school, and we reach out to them in college," Mattera said. "It's our '360 Degrees Project,' ultimately to get our students who graduate from universities to come back and teach for me." ■



The mural by PS 11 students includes their eagle mascot and depictions of school values.



Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten

School Leader Confirmed as DOE Deputy

For the school leaders of San Diego, new U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten is not just an appointee of President Biden working to improve the nation's schools. She is one of them.

Marten served as superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District from 2013 until this spring. Before that, she was a principal, vice principal and literacy specialist over her 32-year career as an educator.

She was also a union member, part of the Administrators Association San Diego City Schools (AASD), AFSA Local 134 (prior to its affiliation with AFSA).

"Ms. Marten is a true advocate for public education and for students and families nationwide," said Donis Cornel, the executive director of AASD. "In her eight-year tenure as our superintendent, Ms. Marten has successfully led the second-largest school district in California through Vision 2020, a community-based school reform plan that engaged all parents, staff, students and community members [and] that resulted in a high level of confidence in our local school system.

"Under the district leadership of Ms. Marten, our union felt respected, and our voices were heard by Ms. Marten in her role as superintendent," she added. "Her confirmation as deputy secretary of education is a win for all educators, support staff, students, parents, communities—and for public education in general." ■

A Focus on Mental Health in Buffalo HS

Do you know how to help students experiencing a panic attack?

Are you able to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis in a student and respond appropriately?

These were questions teachers and administrators at Burgard High School in Buffalo, New York, were asked as they started Project AWARE training in their school.

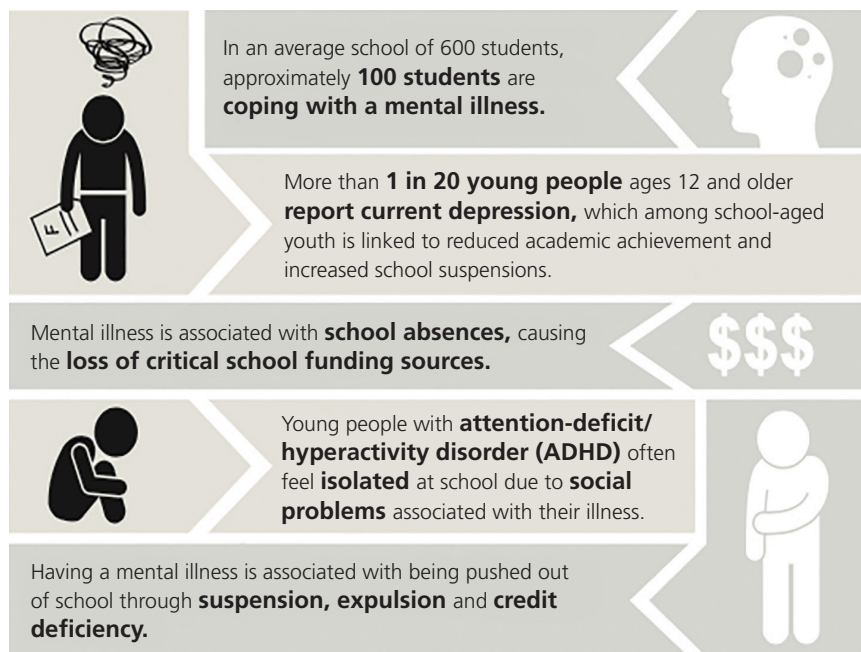


Principal Charlene Watson

The Project AWARE program, supported by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, seeks to build the capacity of educators and others to address the mental health needs of young people by improving awareness of mental health indicators, as well as providing training in how to properly identify and respond to mental health concerns.

Burgard Principal Charlene Watson and Buffalo Council of Supervisors & Administrators, AFSA Local 10, member Arlene Adams, project administrator, teamed with Project AWARE for training school staff and beginning the development of a school Wellness Center to continue mental health first aid training. The program will be enhanced by the addition of peer advocates and community partners.

"We know that our students have been extraordinarily stressed by all the challenges that have come with COVID-19," said Watson. "Recognizing and reacting correctly to a mental health episode can go a long way to being able to calm and help" a student in crisis. ■



Source: Florida Department of Education/David Wheeler, Ph.D.

Windy City Principals Seek Bargaining Rights

Chicago school principals are on the verge of getting collective bargaining rights as the Illinois Legislature debates a bill that would open the door for the city's school leaders to have a larger voice in how to deliver a top-quality educational environment to help students thrive.

In the 1980s, the Republican governor and state legislature in Illinois stripped school leaders of union rights by adding one word to the Illinois Education Labor Relations Act (IELRA). That word is "supervisor." IELRA gives education employees the right to form a union, but the act excludes "supervisors" from that right.

"Since we are supervisors, we lost the right to form a union," said Chicago

standard all have the rights given to most unions."

Illinois HB3496 would reverse the language in state labor law that prohibits managerial employees from collectively bargaining by amending the definition of a managerial employee to include only those district employees who have districtwide policymaking authority or play a significant role in the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements.

"If you can't make (school) district policy, then you should have the right to negotiate with those that do."

Principals & Administrators Association (CPAA), AFSA Local 2, President Troy LaRaviere. "States like New York and California, however, exclude only high-level 'policymakers and personnel who have a significant role in the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements.' Principals are supervisors, but they do not make district policy or negotiate contracts with teachers. In fact, school leaders often find out about policy changes through Twitter and Facebook, because district officials don't show enough respect even to inform principals, let alone involve them in policymaking. So, school leaders in states with the 'policymaker'

LaRaviere has been pushing this legislative change for years, and in 2020 got a bill introduced in the state legislature for the first time, only to see it die because of COVID-19. This year, the CPAA team has been very aggressive in the statehouse to help move the legislation, and has tapped others in the labor community to support the effort.

The bill already has passed the state House and is awaiting action in the state Senate.

"When a school district creates policy, they often don't see the unintended consequences that could result," said



CPAA President Troy LaRaviere

LaRaviere. "If we were at the table, we could make sure that the goals of the school board and school management are executed in a way that creates a positive learning environment by the people empowered to make sure it happens correctly."

The bosses at Chicago Public Schools oppose the bill. On May 19, the Illinois State Senate Executive Committee held a hearing on HB3496; Matt Lyons, the district's chief talent officer, claimed CPS principals have broad autonomy and authority within their schools, and questioned how the role could be defined as less than managerial. "Making principals part of labor while retaining their management responsibilities raises a lot of questions," Lyons testified.

"Principals don't have management responsibilities. They have supervisory responsibilities," said LaRaviere. "If you can't make (school) district policy, then you should have the right to negotiate with those that do."

During the Senate hearing, AFSA President Ernest Logan responded to Lyons and others challenging the changes in the law when he testified that principals do not lose their personal voice because they are a member of the union; he cited his work in New York City as an example. In fact, the collective voice makes the individual voice even stronger, he said. ■

MEMBER PROFILE

Rosemarie Sinclair

No matter what role Rosemarie Sinclair has embraced as an educator, she has always been an enthusiast. Even in her daily greetings to her colleagues and staff, there is a note of enthusiasm that can take their breath away.

In her current role as first vice president for the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA), AFSA Local 1, her attitude and temperament have been especially valuable because her portfolio is so challenging. She is responsible for special education, early childhood education, citywide alternate schools and programs, and school safety. She enjoys every bit of it, and embraces her role as a union leader as well.

"Our work is about everything!"

"The most gratifying thing about union work for me is that it's all about helping our members in every fashion possible," she says. "We help with training, guiding, professionally developing, paying for university careers and keeping everyone informed. Our work is about everything!"

Sinclair's natural buoyancy has been a tremendous asset during the global pandemic year. In the early stages, no place in the country was hit as hard as New York City. The town was flooded with fear and death, and the school system was forced to improvise. Sinclair served as CSA's point person. Working hand in hand with school safety and school facilities personnel, she dealt with the minutiae of personal protective equipment, school ventilation, random testing, and contact tracing and school closures. She tried to balance optimism with hands-on

attention to practical details and accountability measures.

"The pandemic has made things extremely busy," she says. "There are times when the Situation Room has to be better coordinated."

The Situation Room is where the Department of Education, the Department of Testing and Tracing, and the Department of Mental Health and Hygiene work together to support schools and centers by providing essential assistance needed for a potential case of COVID-19.

Born in Jamaica, West Indies, and raised in Brooklyn, where she has lived ever since, Sinclair was educated in the New York City public schools and received her bachelor's degree in accounting and business practice from Baruch College. Her late parents Donohue and Sybil Sinclair remain the greatest overall influences of her life. And her eldest sister Janasee, a retired principal, has been her greatest career inspiration, along with their sister Sharon, also an educator.

Before she became a teacher, she worked as a bookkeeper, considered teaching math and ended up being a science teacher. Then she earned a master's from Brooklyn College and rapidly rose through the ranks of assistant principal and principal to grants manager for the Department of Education.

As grants manager, she infused millions of dollars into her districts, an achievement of which she is particularly proud. She is also proud of being president of CSA's Black Caucus. She has won numerous awards and been named the school district's Principal of the Year.



Rosemarie Sinclair

As a teacher, Sinclair recalls, "My greatest challenge was striving to motivate students, especially the ones who came from situations where education wasn't embraced as a path to future fulfillment and success." She cherishes the role of motivator and has gladly played that role for women in her profession.

She notes that while the past school year has challenged everyone, for women it often has been overwhelming.

"I see that so directly in our administrators as well as our early childhood educators who have to make sure that their own children at home are covered," she says. "They're helping to run a building and suddenly their own child's school closes down. How do they navigate their own children in a blended learning situation when they, too, have to go to their schools or centers that are full of children, and look after them? It can be exasperating. If you're a single mom, it is particularly hard, even though it is hard on men, too."

Now, as she hopes for a full fall reopening for New York's public schools, she says, "There is always something to be concerned about, and we're still working every day to make things better. Our first responsibility at CSA has always been to keep the principals informed in a streamlined way, so they can inform families and communities about what's coming next. Even in September, ensuring safety will be a big challenge." ■

NAESP Elects Local 1 Member as Vice President

Liza Caraballo-Suarez, Ed.D., principal of Magnet School of Architecture, Engineering, and Design—PS 120 in Brooklyn, New York—and a member of the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA), AFSA Local 1, was recently elected vice president of the NAESP Board of Directors.



PS 120 Principal Liza Caraballo-Suarez, Ed.D.

Caraballo-Suarez will begin her one-year term as vice president on Aug. 1, and will become the president of the NAESP Board of Directors two years later—after she has served as both vice president and president-elect.

“As school leaders, we are responsible to be proactive and not wait for a moment that forces us to look at inequities,” said Caraballo-Suarez. “We should always be looking for the best strategies, resources, partnerships and opportunities to prepare our educational institutions for the unexpected, with a focus on equity and excellence.”

Caraballo-Suarez has served as a principal for the past 19 years. She’s been a member of NAESP for the past six years, and during her membership, she’s served on various NAESP committees like the NAESP National Task Force on Race and Equity and on the NAESP Board of Directors as director at large, minority, at the elementary level. Caraballo-Suarez also has held leadership positions with the New York City Elementary Principals Association.

“I have known Liza for a long time, and she is an outstanding leader and educator, but more importantly, she is a person of character and vision,” said AFSA President Ernest Logan. “Liza is a person who will collaborate with colleagues to support principals facing the challenges we have in our schools every day.” ■

ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES

(continued from page 1)

“The COVID pandemic has been blamed for exacerbating inequities in our schools and students falling through the cracks. There’s some truth to that, but the larger problem is our school system has long been underserving our students, particularly our Black and Brown children,” writes David C. Banks, president and CEO of the Eagle Academy Foundation, in an editorial in the New York Daily News.

A Need for Fresh Solutions

The AFSA leadership team and legislative staff have been echoing these same words on Capitol Hill and around the White House. “Our schools are broken, full of racial and economic inequities, and just going back to the way things were is not a solution,” said AFSA President Ernest Logan in letters and discussions with the Biden administration and congressional staff. “Unless we address the underlying issues, inequities will continue to haunt our nation.”

As schools across the nation deal with growing racial inequities, a debate is happening in communities on the best way to address putting all students first.

“Our schools are about to receive more money than ever before, thanks to the American Rescue Plan. We finally have the ability to do more than we’ve been able to do for decades,” said Banks. “We must not fall into the trap of doing more of the same. We have never had a better opportunity, nor a more pressing need, to reimagine our school system.”

As policymakers and educators struggle to define a new future, it is clear to many that playing the old game of just doing the best we can won’t work any longer.

Nivan Khosravi, an elementary school principal and member of the Denver School Leaders Association, AFSA Local 136, recently wrote in a Facebook post that “we (school leaders) want to collaborate with the district in order to change the status quo. Our work as school-based leaders is entirely in service of our children and school communities. We are here to change the system to be similarly students-first in its design and implementation.”

In his writing, Khosravi talks about the frustration educators feel for being honored for doing the best they can under the circumstances. He wants to see real change. He states, “to quote indigenous leader First Evening Star, I no longer want to be commended on my resiliency. I want to see the systems redesigned so there’s not a need for me to be resilient.”

The Impact of Racism

As school leaders look for ways to make systematic change, the issue of race needs to be placed front and center.

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ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES

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“Counteracting racism is an essential step in supporting students of color to access their full potential. To truly transform the current landscape, change is needed at the systemic level,” said Sarah Caverly, a principal researcher at the American Institute for Research (AIR), and David Osher, vice president of AIR. “Unless we fully recognize how the system—replete with institutionalized racism and privilege—is embedded within the solution, we will only be able to achieve minimal shifts for young people and their families.”

Caverly and Osher say that “racism persists in the everyday practices and policies of our organizations and institutions, including our education system.”

The AIR team offered examples of how racism is impacting our schools:

- Black students are less likely than white students to have **access to college-ready courses**, and even when Black students do have access to honors or Advanced Placement courses, they are vastly underrepresented.
- Research also shows **systemic bias in teacher expectations**, with non-Black teachers having lower expectations of Black students compared with Black teachers.
- Black students more frequently attend schools with **teachers who are less qualified**, have lower salaries and are new to the field.
- Black students **spend less time in the classroom** due to disparate exclusionary discipline consequences, which further hinders their access to quality education.

Tyrone C. Howard, a professor of education and director of the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools, the UCLA Black Male Institute and the UCLA Pritzker Center for

Strengthening Children and Families, and Jaleel R. Howard, a former middle-grades English language arts teacher in Houston, current doctoral student at UCLA and son of Tyrone, have asked why researchers to try “to demonstrate what is ‘wrong’ with Black boys or how consistently they fail?”

“We believe that those concerned about both Black male students and equity have to engage in a different set of questions and frame an analysis of Black boys’ experiences and outcomes in schools differently,” they write. “It’s important to use an equity-centered analysis when looking at how Black boys experience schools. Instead of asking what’s wrong with Black boys, an equity-centered analysis asks, what’s wrong with schools, and why are they not serving Black boys better?”

“All of these examples showcase why we need systematic change,” said Waters-Cherry. “As long as we continue with business as usual, we can’t expect any different outcomes. AFSA is trying to foster these discussions in our communities, and school leaders should look at their contract negotiations as a tool to make change.”

According to research from AIR, several state education agencies and school districts have begun shifting toward achieving equity for all students by including a whole-child approach.

“Moving toward the whole-child approach to teaching supports and nurtures all areas of a child’s development and learning—from social-emotional and cognitive skills, to literacy, math and science,” said Waters-Cherry. “The whole-child approach focuses on relationships that support academic, physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, versus teaching to a standardized test. Every child is unique. We need to find individual ways to support children from pre-K through 12th grade and help them grow.” ■



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Homework Gap Addressed

Home internet access is coming to more students and educators with the Federal Communications Commission approving an order that sets up a \$7 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund, authorized in the American Rescue Plan. This money will provide funds to schools to purchase home internet access services, hotspots and computers for unconnected students and educators.

The most recent studies indicate that more than 12 million students lack internet connections in their homes, a computer appropriate for remote learning, or both. The students most likely to reside on the wrong side of the so-called homework gap reside in rural and urban areas, are from low-income families, and are Black or Brown.

“Connecting our students and educators to the internet in their homes was a problem before the pandemic, during the pandemic and will continue to be a problem after the pandemic,” said AFSA President Ernest Logan. “Finally, with Congress’ inclusion of \$7.17 billion for the Emergency

Connectivity Fund in the recently passed American Rescue Plan Act, and the FCC’s order that establishes the mechanism for fairly, efficiently and equitably distributing these funds, the federal government is doing something about it.”

AFSA led the 65-strong educational group coalition that got this funding passed as part of the ARP, and the Education and Libraries Networks Coalition (EdLiNC) was very successful in its effort to seek appropriate implementation rules from the FCC.

“The school leaders that make up AFSA are proud of the vital role we played in

establishing this fund, and look forward to working with the FCC to ensure that students and educators most in need see the benefits of it as soon as possible,” said Logan.

The new FCC order:

- Mandates the opening as soon as practicable of an initial 45-day application window to allow schools and libraries to request funding to cover school requests for eligible equipment and services for purchases made prospectively between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.
- Allows for the opening of additional application windows, if any funding remains after satisfying requests made in the first window, for additional prospective purchases or for reimbursements of purchases made between March 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021.
- If demand exceeds available funding in any window, priority will be based on the E-Rate’s Category I funding levels that are based on a poverty measure.
- Defines eligible devices as laptop computers and tablet computers, but excludes desktop computers and mobile phones.
- Determines that the program only will provide support for up to \$400 for each computer and \$250 for each hotspot, but allows schools to buy more expensive devices so long as they use other funds to pay the balance.
- Sets limits of one fixed broadband connection (or modem) per location and one computer per student or staff member for which the program will pay.

FCC documents stress that, “before the pandemic, millions of students who



lacked home broadband connections and access to computers were caught in the 'Homework Gap.' The pandemic has only exacerbated the inequities between students who have a broadband connection and those who do not. The Order addresses those inequities by helping to provide all students, school staff, and library patrons with the basic tools they need to engage in online learning and in so many other vital aspects of our increasingly digital lives."

Logan said, "National leaders, like FCC Acting Chair Jessica Rosenworcel, U.S. Senator Edward Markey and U.S. Representative Grace Meng, understand how this issue is just the tip of the iceberg on equity for all students. For years, they have been advocating and fighting for them. Now, through the ECF, they are delivering real resources that our communities need to give students a better opportunity to meet their learning goals."

"FCC implementation of the Emergency Connectivity Fund Program is an important step towards ensuring the 'homework gap' does not grow into a more damaging learning and opportunity gap for our children, particularly those who live in communities of color, low-income households and rural areas," said Markey. "With the action by the FCC, schools and libraries can now deploy the more than \$7 billion in E-Rate funding that was included in the American Rescue Plan for K-12 distance learning.

"Even as we continue to safely reopen schools in the months ahead, distance learning is not going away, since many schools are using hybrid models, relying on part-time at-home learning, as well as the fact that students across the country are suffering from severe learning loss and may need to continue their home education through the summer months and during evenings," said Markey. "Even after the coronavirus pandemic finally ends, we cannot ignore the 21st century educational requirement that students need internet access to simply finish their homework." ■



How to Get Additional Funds to Help Your School District

As the Federal Communications Commission begins to implement its recent ECF order, public school districts should begin to prepare their applications now. The ECF funds will flow through the existing E-Rate program, and the funding process will operate similarly to the normal E-Rate funding process, with a few key differences:

- The FCC has waived the requirement to conduct a separate E-Rate RFP process, so school districts will only have to follow state, local and tribal procurement rules.
- Unlike the E-Rate, where school districts receive discounts on eligible services based on the percentage of students in the federal free and reduced price lunch program, school districts will receive 100% grants for ECF-eligible services and equipment.
- Unlike the E-Rate, school districts can receive funding through the ECF for home internet access monthly service costs, and for computers and hotspots.

With the first application window expected to open in the next few weeks, here are a few ways school districts can prepare for submitting applications:

- **Don't buy anything before July 1.** Remember, the first application window only allows schools to receive funding for purchases made between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.
- **Conduct a needs survey now.** School districts will need to know how many students and educators lack home internet access, an appropriate computer, or both, for the purpose of determining future purchases.
- **Figure out whether you already have used other COVID funds to buy ECF equipment/services.** The FCC's rules will not allow school districts to use federal funding twice for the same purchase.
- **Don't miss the first window.** There is a good chance that all \$7 billion will be awarded in the first application window, and thus there may not be an opportunity to receive any funding if you wait for a second window to open.
- **Keep an eye on the FCC's website (www.fcc.gov) for information on when the first application window will open.** ■

Indoor Air Quality Key to Safe Learning

(continued from page 1)

AFSA has partnered with SMART, the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers, which suggests that, as you examine indoor air quality (IAQ) within your school, you start with the following questions:

- Does your school HVAC system meet the basic standards?
- How often are the filters changed?
- How does the ventilation and airflow differ within the building—in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias and other settings?
- Who performs your school HVAC system assessments and what are their qualifications?
- When was the last time your HVAC system was tested?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “higher ventilation rates reduce the transmission and spread of infectious agents in buildings. This is the conclusion of a multidisciplinary expert panel after reviewing 40 studies conducted between 1960 and 2005.” The EPA states:

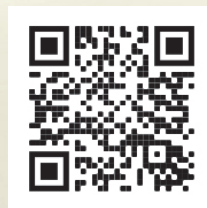
- Schools and similar high-density facilities should increase their ventilation rates during peak influenza season.
- A controlled study in office buildings found a link between short-term sick leave, often associated with respiratory illness, and low ventilation rates.
- Occupants of buildings with low ventilation rates and high occupant densities experienced far higher rates of respiratory illness than did occupants of similar buildings with higher ventilation rates.

Take Action

The recently passed American Rescue Plan Act provides schools with funding to help reopen safely, including updating ventilation systems.

Here are some short-term steps and resources school leaders can use to keep students and staff safe and enhance the learning environment:

- Ask your superintendent to conduct a ventilation assessment of all school buildings in your district. The National Energy Management Institute, a leading organization addressing indoor air quality issues in schools, provides sample assessment sheets on its website at www.nemionline.org. You also may connect to these sheets by scanning the QR code with your cell phone to connect.
- Bring HVAC experts into your schools to manage the process. There are a lot of people, companies and organizations that say they can do the work, but are not professionally trained or certified with industry standards. To find the right person in your community, scan the QR code or visit the contact page at: www.nemionline.org/contact.



According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “higher ventilation rates reduce the transmission and spread of infectious agents in buildings. This is the conclusion of a multidisciplinary expert panel after reviewing 40 studies conducted between 1960 and 2005.”

- Based on the results of the ventilation assessment, work with your superintendent to utilize federal ARPA funds to make ventilation updates in schools. For support in accessing and using federal funds, email: TakeAction@TheSchoolLeader.org.

In the long term, school leaders and districts should:

- Develop a proactive, comprehensive IAQ management plan to help implement Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considerations for schools to help prevent the spread of viruses and bacteria.
- Identify key IAQ considerations that address a range of critical areas related to controlling the spread of diseases in schools, including ventilation, filtration and air cleaning, cleaning/disinfection of high-contact surfaces, personal protective equipment, social distancing and managing special spaces (e.g., toilets, sick rooms, etc.).
- Implement practices, policies, standards and behaviors to meet specific school district needs. ■

The performance of adults, including teachers and school staff, also has been shown to improve with higher ventilation rates.



IAQ and Learning

EPA details how improved air quality improves academic performance:

- Studies demonstrate a connection between improvements in indoor air quality—either from increased outdoor air ventilation rates or from the removal of pollution sources—and improved performance of children and adults.
- Controlled studies show that children perform schoolwork with greater speed as ventilation rates increase.

- The performance of adults, including teachers and school staff, also has been shown to improve with higher ventilation rates.
- Children in classrooms with higher outdoor air ventilation rates tend to achieve higher scores on standardized tests in math and reading than children in poorly ventilated classrooms.

Watch an on-demand webinar on addressing IAQ issues in your school by scanning the QR code. ■



A photograph of a man and a child kayaking on a calm lake. The man is in the foreground, wearing a blue jacket and a cap, paddling a red kayak. The child is in the background, also in a red kayak. The water is dark green, and the background is filled with lush green trees under a bright sky.

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Biden Budget Focuses on Education, Families

During the election season AFSA made it clear, as your union, representing your interests in the education community, we support and endorse candidates who will help our profession and focus resources on the children we serve every day.

We understand clearly that it is your decision on how to prioritize issues, and which candidate to vote for based on your overall values and belief system. We will continue to showcase how the candidates we supported are standing up for education and children.

There is an old saying: show us where you spend your money, and it shows what you really value. President Biden has shown all of us in the education community how much he values our work.

The Biden administration's budget and the American Families Plan together make a historic investment in education. The proposed FY22 budget

would increase the U.S. Department of Education's programs by more than 40%, seeking to more than double funding for Title I—already the federal government's largest program to assist disadvantaged K–12 students. Additionally, it would move the federal government closer to paying its pledged 40% share of special education costs by increasing funding for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programs by \$2.5 billion. Finally, it would provide \$1 billion for school mental health resources—so critical to address the challenges students and educators have faced during this brutal COVID-19 era.

Biden's proposed \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan seeks to

revolutionize our current education system by guaranteeing 17 years of free schooling, including two years of free universal pre-K and two years of free community college. This plan also includes a \$1.6 billion investment in professional development for America's educators, providing funding for more than 100,000 educators to obtain additional certifications in high-demand areas like special education and bilingual education, and certifications that improve teacher performance. To pay for this bill, Biden's plan proposes to increase the top tax rate on the wealthiest Americans—people making more than \$400,000—from 37% to 39.6%, and end capital income tax breaks and loopholes for the nation's highest earners.

While debate is just getting started on the Biden budget and his American Families Plan, be assured that AFSA already is deeply engaged in transforming these proposals into enacted legislation. ■

COVID-19 Moves AFSA Convention to Summer 2022

AFSA's Triennial Convention that was scheduled for this summer in Puerto Rico has been postponed because of COVID-19. The convention will be rescheduled for the summer of 2022.

"The AFSA General Executive Board waited a long time to make this decision hoping that the COVID-19 situation would change. Delaying this convention was not taken lightly," said AFSA President Ernest Logan. "We looked at many options, but in the end, we understood that convention business is better conducted in person, allowing for the free exchange among delegates—and anything else is a disservice to our membership."

According to the board resolution, "travel restrictions and risks caused by the COVID pandemic have made meeting

together for AFSA's Triennial Convention this summer impractical and unwise."

Board minutes indicate a convention call to all AFSA locals and state councils shall be made on or before March 1, 2022, setting forth the number of delegates and procedures for selecting them, and requesting suggestions and recommendations for the convention. It also states that the terms of the current officers and general vice presidents are hereby extended until the election is completed at the summer 2022 convention.

The AFL-CIO also has postponed its Constitutional Convention; it now will be held in Philadelphia by the end of June 2022. ■

AFSA Makes Push With Lawmakers for Mental Health

COVID-19 and remote learning have taken a significant toll on our schools. Recent stories in major media outlets have focused attention on the mental health challenges students and educators have been contending with over the past year.

These significant mental health issues only have exacerbated a longstanding problem within schools—the severe shortage of school-based mental health professionals (psychologists, counselors and social workers)—and the lack of other specialized instructional support personnel.

Recognizing deep needs in this area, AFSA has been lobbying Congress to increase funding in Fiscal Year 2022 for the Safe Schools National Activities Program, to ensure the necessary mental health resources are available to all children across the nation as they head back to school.

The legislative team also is pushing for more funding for IDEA Part D Personnel Development Grants. This program is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, leaders, early interventionists, administrators, school-employed mental health professionals and specialized instructional support personnel.

As a recent letter to Congress that AFSA endorsed argued, “Given the critical impact of COVID-19 on students, especially students from vulnerable populations, such as students with disabilities, students of color, and LGBTQ students—in terms of both academics and social/emotional/mental well-being—and the well-documented shortages of such professionals, a targeted and significantly increased federal investment in each of these three programs is vital.” ■



Universal School Meals Would Enhance Learning

Hungry students have a difficult time learning. AFSA is supporting the Universal School Meals Program Act to help students overcome that obstacle.

The USDA estimates that 12 million children in the United States live in food insecure homes. Since COVID-19 started, schools across the nation have played an important role in combating the spike in child hunger caused by the pandemic. Through a combination of federal waivers, many schools for the first time were able to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of their family's income.

The Universal School Meals Program Act would provide free breakfast, lunch and dinner to every student—without demanding they prove they are poor enough to deserve help getting three meals a day.

According to Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), and Reps. Gwen Moore (D-Wis.) and Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), the bill's sponsors, not all eligible students participate in the program due to a variety of reasons, including burdensome application paperwork and stigma. “It is time to build off of the success of the universal meals structure in place during this pandemic and eliminate the stigma some children fear of being labeled ‘poor’ by their classmates once and for all. Every child deserves to eat,” the sponsors declared in a statement upon introduction.

Multiple studies show that students with access to free breakfast have improved attendance rates and perform better in school. Moreover, universal school meals have been shown to increase overall school participation rates. ■





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Developing Strong School Principals Brings Gains for Students, Teachers

School principals who are effective leaders in their daily work positively impact student learning and attendance, as well as increase teacher satisfaction and retention even more than previously reported, according to a new study by The Wallace Foundation.

“How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research,” draws on 20 years of research and 219 studies to make its findings. Additionally, the synthesis identifies four behaviors of principals linked to positive school outcomes, suggests continued reorientation of the work of principals toward educational equity, and offers an emerging vision of how the four behaviors can be carried out with an equity focus.

“For those of us who have worked in schools, these findings are no surprise,” said American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA) President Ernest Logan. “Strong leaders motivate the whole school community, and the natural impact is success.

“What this study shows is America needs to empower and invest in principals to better prepare and support them,” said Logan. “AFSA has long advocated for larger investment in

“Strong leaders motivate the whole school community, and the natural impact is success.”

“The results of this new study are striking, suggesting that the link between leadership and learning is even stronger than we had previously known,” said Will Miller, president of The Wallace Foundation. “Of course, an effective principal’s ability to create better outcomes for students happens primarily through working with teachers, so rather than thinking in terms of either/or, the evidence suggests we need a balance of investments in developing great principals and great teachers.”

school leader recruitment and training, understanding it will have a very large payoff on our schools’ learning environment.”

The Wallace research synthesis addressed three questions:

- How much do principals contribute to student achievement and other school outcomes?
- How do principals matter? What are effective leaders’ skills, behaviors and characteristics?



- Who are public school principals in the United States, and how have their characteristics changed over the past two decades?

To gauge the impact of principals on student learning, the researchers examined six rigorous studies that followed the same schools and principals over multiple years by using district and state longitudinal data available only in the last decade or so. The studies permit plausibly causal inferences about principal impacts; in analyzing the six together, the authors were able to make more precise estimates than previously possible of the impact of effective principals.

The six studies estimating principals’ effects showed that their contributions to student achievement were nearly as large as the average effects of teachers identified in similar studies—but larger in scope, because effects are averaged over an entire school rather than a classroom.

The researchers emphasized that principal and teacher effects on student learning cannot be separated, as part of the impact of an effective principal

is to make it more likely a student will have an effective teacher.

In addition, effective principals yield benefits for student attendance, a reduction in exclusionary discipline, and increased teacher satisfaction and retention, particularly for high-performing teachers.

According to The Wallace Foundation, this study updates a groundbreaking 2004 review of the literature on school leadership by Kenneth Leithwood. The authors of the new report are Jason A. Grissom, the Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor of Public Policy and Education at Vanderbilt University; Anna J. Egalite, an associate professor at North Carolina State University; and Constance A. Lindsay, an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“Our findings on the importance of principals’ effects suggest the need for renewed attention to strategies for cultivating, selecting, preparing and supporting a high-quality principal workforce. The payoffs to successful strategies appear very large for student learning and for other important outcomes, such as student attendance and teacher turnover,” said Grissom.

“Given not just the magnitude but the scope of principal effects, which are felt across a potentially large student body and faculty in a school,” he said, “it is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership.”

“The payoffs to successful strategies appear very large for student learning and for other important outcomes, such as student attendance and teacher turnover.”

For insights into the practices of effective principals, the research team drew on studies undertaken since 2000. The 219 studies the authors ultimately examined in depth were culled from more than 4,800 they had identified in a systematic review of the literature. Based on the weight of evidence, the researchers identified four key behaviors of effective principals:

- Focusing on high-leverage engagement around instruction, which includes teacher evaluation, feedback and coaching, and establishing a data-driven instructional program.
- Establishing a productive school climate, in which all individuals in the school can spend their time engaging in or supporting effective instruction.
- Facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities.
- Using personnel and resource management processes strategically, including intangible resources like time and social capital; strategic teacher hiring is key.

To carry out those behaviors, the study says, principals need three types of skills—people skills, instructional skills and organizational skills.

“The education field has tended in recent years to focus on developing principals’ instructional skills as the key to increasing student learning, but this synthesis suggests that effective principals actually use a much broader toolbox,” said Egalite.

The report describes the composition of the current principal workforce and how it has changed. Over the past two decades, the researchers found, principals have become markedly more female, with women representing 54% of all principals in 2016, compared with just 25% in 1988. Principals’ level of experience has fallen on average, especially in high-need schools.

The report shows growing racial and ethnic gaps between principals and the students they serve. “We have a school leadership corps that is nearly 80 percent white and a student body that is only 53 percent white,” observed Lindsay. “The context of school leadership has changed significantly, and to address these patterns, schools and districts should reconsider their human resources policies and practices.”

To meet the needs of growing numbers of marginalized students, the report calls for principals to develop an “equity lens,” defined as ensuring fair, just and nondiscriminatory treatment of all students, the removal of barriers, the provision of resources and supports, and the creation of opportunities with the goal of promoting equitable outcomes. ■



Assistant Principals Have Much to Offer in Advancing Equity and Improving Schools

The role of assistant principal is growing, both in number and potential impact. Assistant principals could play a greater role in promoting racial and gender equity in school leadership, according to a report, “The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership,” released by The Wallace Foundation during National Assistant Principals Week held in April.

“Our findings shed light on the role of the assistant principal, including its potential for creating equity in school leadership and more equitable outcomes for students.”

The report sheds light on the varied functions of assistant principals across the country, and suggests ways to better prepare and support them.

Among the key findings:

- From 1990 to 2016, the number of assistant principals in the United States grew by 83%, to almost 80,600.
- The assistant principal role is an increasingly common steppingstone to becoming a principal.
- Assistant principals’ functions vary, but generally include a mix of instructional leadership, management and student discipline.
- Across six states, 24% of assistant principals were people of color; the assistant principal role could promote greater diversity in the

principalship if potential racial and gender barriers to advancement were identified and addressed.

- Principals in numerous studies suggested that experience as an assistant principal provided important preparation for the job of principal.
- Being adept at certain aspects of the assistant principal’s job could help improve school climate and equitable student outcomes.
- Collaboration between principals and assistant principals could reduce principal burnout and provide necessary experience for those who aspire to become principals.

“This research synthesis is essential to our understanding of a role that often is overlooked,” said Jody Spiro,

director of education leadership at The Wallace Foundation. “We hope this report encourages school districts and policymakers to rethink the position as a lever for improving equity and strengthening principal pipelines, in ways that ultimately benefit students.”

Key recommendations for policymakers and practitioners include:

- Conduct equity audits to help identify and remove barriers to leadership for educators of color and women.
- Develop standards for assistant principals consistent with a job that can lead to the principalship.
- Examine evaluations, mentoring and professional development to ensure they are suitable for the assistant principal role.
- Instruct principals on effectively mentoring the assistant principals under their guidance.

“Despite the rapid growth in numbers of assistant principals, the role has received limited attention from policymakers and researchers,” said Ellen Goldring, the Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor of Education and Leadership at Vanderbilt University and the report’s lead author. “Our findings shed light on the role of the assistant principal, including its potential for creating equity in school leadership and more equitable outcomes for students.”

Methodologies of the studies examined by the researchers varied widely and used either qualitative or quantitative methods, or both (“mixed method” studies). Quantitative studies are well-suited to answer “what” questions, such as: What is the relationship between experience as an

assistant principal and future principal effectiveness? Qualitative methods enabled study participants to share their experiences and perceptions of the role.

The 79 studies included assistant principals who worked predominantly in public elementary, middle and high schools, and were largely conducted in Southern states, including Florida and Texas. Most of the qualitative studies were conducted in urban locales, whereas most quantitative studies included all types of locales.

"The assistant principal role varies greatly from district to district and even between schools in the same district. However, there is suggestive evidence that when assistant principals take on strategic leadership tasks, they can play important roles in improving outcomes for students, teachers and schools," said Mollie Rubin, research assistant professor at Vanderbilt.

"Examining who is receiving mentoring and being encouraged to pursue leadership roles, and ensuring that assistant principals have equitable experiences while in their roles, could help diversify the principalship and contribute to more equitable outcomes for educators and students," added Mariesa Herrmann, senior researcher with Mathematica Policy Research. ■

How Assistant Principals Are Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

"The pandemic has exposed a lot of challenges in our schools that can now be addressed because they've been so opened up for everybody to see," said Dr. Ellen Goldring, the Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor of Education and Leadership at Vanderbilt University, during an April webinar on the role of assistant principals, co-hosted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and AFSA.

Participants engaged in intriguing discussions regarding challenges assistant principals have faced during COVID-19, considering the unique challenges of the 2020–2021 school year as school leaders step up to support their staff and students' academic, social, emotional and mental health needs.

"We need to address those [social and emotional needs] before we can even get into the academics; if they don't have the fundamental basic Maslow needs [met], we cannot move to the next level," said Joseph Napolitano, assistant principal of The Westerleigh School in Staten Island, New York.

"Every day I'm thinking what I can do to demonstrate to our staff self-care, and how important that is," said Debra Paradowski, the associate principal of Arrowhead Union High School in Hartland, Wisconsin. "If we are not at our best, we are not going to be at our best for our kids."

Panelists also delved into how they see the future of the role of assistant principal, considering its position within the school setting.

"Now we truly are an AP of everything—we are the physicians doing the COVID testing, we are the attorneys doing the legal, we are the forensic accountants doing the financials, and we also are the data analysts reviewing all the data," Napolitano noted.

"Planning ahead, I believe in healing circles, I believe in listening circles," said Andrea Thompson, assistant principal at Mary Harris "Mother" Jones Elementary School in Adelphi, Maryland. "When teachers return to the building, school administrators [should] give these adults a chance to talk about their experiences. Otherwise, you know, it's going to come out some other way."

As Goldring noted, this conversation highlighted the importance of flexibility and autonomy to let the professionals make decisions and implement what is best for their communities, while having the resources to do so.

To watch the webinar, scan the QR code. ■



Educating the Whole Child

As we begin the process of reopening schools, a 2018 study titled “Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success” can offer a road map on how to work with your school’s educator team to redesign your learning community.

The report describes how state and district policymakers, school leaders and teachers can support students’ healthy growth and development, and help children overcome toxic stress and trauma, including stereotype threats—the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about racial, ethnic, gender or cultural group—that undermine achievement by reducing academic focus.

Stereotype threats can create high cognitive load and reduce academic focus and performance.

“Human relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, one of the authors of the report and Learning Policy Institute president and CEO. “When you ask students what motivated them to keep learning when something hard was happening in their life or to power through a difficult assignment, they’ll talk about a person, not the curriculum. This is something we’ve always known intuitively, but there is also a large body of research on learning and development that points to the power of relationships and a positive school climate in supporting students’ learning.”

Hammond stressed that during the No Child Left Behind era, “there was an intense focus on raising test scores to avoid punitive consequences for students, teachers and schools. The result was too often a ‘drill and kill,’ ‘test and punish,’ ‘no excuses’ environment in which many children experienced a narrow curriculum and a hostile climate that discouraged them and pushed many out of school.”

In fact, the authors reported that one national study of 6th to 12th graders found that:

- Only 29% thought their school provided a caring, encouraging environment.
- Fewer than half surveyed reported they had developed social competencies such as empathy, decision-making and conflict resolution skills.
- Some 30% of high school students engaged in multiple high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, sex, violence and attempted suicide.

The study highlights six key findings from the science of learning and development and, based on those findings, includes policy recommendations for practice and policy. Key findings are:

1. Development is malleable, and the brain’s capacity develops most fully when children and youth feel emotionally and physically safe and connected, and when they are interacting with others.
2. Development is variable and unique; as a result, not all students can learn well with one sequence or rigid pacing guide.
3. Human relationships are the essential ingredient for healthy development and learning.
4. Adversity affects learning—and schools should assist children in handling adversity, rather than use punitive discipline tactics.
5. Learning is social and emotional as well as academic: Emotions affect learning. In addition, students’ abilities to manage their feelings and behavior, along with their ability to interact positively with peers and adults to resolve conflicts and to work in teams, all contribute to effective learning and lifelong behaviors.
6. Children actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships and social contexts, and this process works best when students engage in active, hands-on learning, and when they can connect new knowledge to personally relevant topics and lived experiences.

Human relationships are the essential ingredient for healthy development and learning.

The report outlined strategies school leaders can use to create productive school environments:

- Build positive classroom and school environments.
- Shape positive student behaviors.
- Use educative and restorative approaches to discipline.
- Provide supports for student motivation and learning.
- Create multitiered systems of support to address student needs.

The report also recommended the following strategies for policymakers:

- Develop and assess positive learning environments.
- Use school climate data to diagnose school needs.
- Help schools improve climate and culture.
- Reduce rates of exclusionary discipline.
- Provide a multitiered system of student support.
- Invest in educator preparation and development.

To read the full report, scan this QR code with your mobile phone. ■



Lower Rates of Oral Reading Fluency Across Nation

Amid the disruption of schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the oral reading fluency for students in early grades is estimated to be about 30% lower than in typical years, and students from lower-achieving schools may be falling even further behind, according to recent research by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).



"This new research provides clear and concerning evidence of learning loss in terms of the development of essential reading skills among young students," said Heather J. Hough, executive director of PACE and one of the principal authors of the research brief. "And the losses may be greater than we estimate, particularly for students in lower-achieving schools, raising gravely concerning issues of educational equity."

Oral reading fluency—the ability to read aloud quickly and accurately—is an important skill for developing readers that is highly predictive of comprehension and other important measures of student reading ability.

The research brief, "Changing Patterns of Growth in Oral Reading Fluency During the COVID-19 Pandemic," details concerning changes in oral reading fluency related to disruptions in schooling during spring and fall 2020 using data from nearly 250,000 scores for students in Grades 1–3 collected in more than 100 school districts spread across 22 states.

The study reports that growth in oral reading fluency among students flattened and remained stalled, with students in Grades 2 and 3 most affected.

Last fall, those students tested demonstrated gains in oral reading fluency, but those gains were not sufficient to make up losses from Spring 2020. The accumulated learning loss for second and third graders represents 26% of expected yearly gains for second grade students and 33% for third grade students. These findings may underestimate the impact on oral reading fluency, as many students were not assessed in Spring 2020 and may not have been provided with or been engaged in learning opportunities.

The research also shows a more robust growth in oral reading fluency in higher-achieving school districts than in lower-achieving school districts, indicating that students in lower-achieving schools may be falling further behind during the pandemic.

"These gaps in growth in oral reading fluency between high- and low-achieving districts are likely a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and illustrate the unequal effects of COVID," said Benjamin W. Domingue, an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University and lead author of the report. "If left unchecked, they may result in a widening of preexisting achievement gaps."

The research brief urges policymakers and educators to pay close attention to the impact of the pandemic on the development of reading skills for young students. The brief recommends that substantial resources be allocated to support literacy development in the early grades, especially within historically low-achieving districts, which often serve a disproportionate number of low-income students.

"The development of reading skills is fundamental to academic development and success, and these findings should be met with urgent concern about the impact of the pandemic on development of young students, especially those from low-income backgrounds," Hough concludes.

"These findings are worrisome, but they do not need to be catastrophic. As the gains in learning made in the fall demonstrate, educators are finding ways to successfully teach and assess oral reading fluency even during the continued disruption of the pandemic," said Hough. "We can build on those practices. It is essential that educators and policymakers take action to accelerate learning for those students who have fallen behind, and ensure that schools have the resources and support they need to enact effective practices at scale." ■

Meet With Your Lawmakers in Person

Sharing your story directly with your elected officials is an important way to make your voice heard and to get needed resources.

It doesn't matter if you are in Washington, D.C., or your hometown, or whether Congress is in session, your members of Congress have offices in both places and take meetings every day.

Here is an easy, five-step plan to tell your story and lobby Congress:

Step 1: Identify your members of Congress.

Remember, each citizen in the 50 states is represented by one representative and two senators (there is different representation for those living in Washington, D.C., and territories). To find your members of Congress, go to House.gov and Senate.gov.

Step 2: Schedule a meeting.

Once you are at the correct website, look for information on how to schedule a meeting with the lawmaker. Most members of Congress split their time between their home districts and Washington, D.C., and take meetings

in either office. You also can email the AFSA legislative team for help at TakeAction@TheSchoolLeader.org.

Step 3: Do some research, practice and prepare for your meeting.

Don't just walk in without a plan. Make sure you know the issues and have a specific ask. Once again, you can email the AFSA legislative team for help at TakeAction@TheSchoolLeader.org. They can provide research and have a practice session with you.

Step 4: Attend the meeting.

Use your research and your skills as an educator to enlighten your member of Congress and their staff on the issues you are addressing. They may not agree with you on everything, but they will appreciate your information and willingness to engage—and they may turn to you as a trusted resource down the line.

Step 5: Follow up with the office.

Write a note thanking the official and/or staff members for meeting with you, and reach out to the AFSA staff to provide a feedback report. Try to continue and deepen the relationship by sending periodic emails and, when schools reopen in person, inviting them for a visit. ■



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