February 24, 2014

The Honorable Jared Polis
1433 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC  20515

Dear Congressman Polis:

On behalf of the nation’s 95,000 elementary, middle, and high school principals, assistant principals and other school leaders, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) are writing in support of your newly introduced Great Teaching and Leading for Great Schools Act.

As the leading organizations representing the nation’s principals working in prekindergarten through 12th grade, we know that the quality of school leadership has a significant impact on student learning and teacher retention. School leaders are a vital component of successful school environments and the Great Teaching and Leading for Great Schools Act recognizes the importance of helping teachers and principals improve on a continuous basis. Providing personalized professional development for all principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders that supports collaboration and best practices within school districts and schools to improve instruction and learning is critical for the overall success of all students.

The Great Teaching and Leading for Great Schools Act provides a new definition of professional development in the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act that is based on research and best practices that focuses on continuous professional learning. It also encourages professional learning strategies that involve the use of technology, peer networks and time for school leaders and teachers to engage in collaborative team-based learning multiple times per week. Furthermore, the bill advances evidence-based professional learning strategies for principals to provide useful feedback, engage the community and partners and foster professional learning communities.

Most importantly, NAESP and NASSP strongly support the language in this bill on the development and implementation of evaluation systems for principals that connect to a system of support and development. In 2012, NAESP and NASSP released a report, Rethinking Principal Evaluation, which combined leading research on principal evaluation and the practitioner perspective to provide states and districts with guidance on establishing effective principal evaluation systems. Many of the report’s recommendations are included in the bill, such as requiring principal evaluation systems to take into account
multiple measures of student performance, including student academic growth, support for effective teachers, other “critical leadership factors”, such as graduation outcomes for secondary school principals, and social and emotional development for elementary school principals—and other factors aligned to the domains of effective principal practice.

The bill is also consistent with principals’ beliefs that any evaluation must be measured by observations of the principal and other relevant data. These leadership practices include: creating a school culture of high student achievement; managing the school’s organization and resources to achieve school improvement goals; engaging families, community and other stakeholders; cultivating a positive environment for learning and teaching; managing staff talent and development; and maintaining focus on personal leadership, professional knowledge, skills, and improvement.

Thank you again for demonstrating your support for meaningfully addressing the needs of school leaders by introducing the Great Teaching and Leading for Great Schools Act. Extraordinary demands have been placed on today’s principals and assistant principals, and with these demands, robust support mechanisms are needed.

Sincerely,

Gail Connelly
Executive Director
NAESP

JoAnn Bartoletti
Executive Director
NASSP