Reinventing NAESP for Relevance:  
An Overview of Proposed Changes to the NAESP Bylaws

Why did the NAESP Board ask for a review of the NAESP Bylaws?

The NAESP Bylaws, as a whole, have been periodically reviewed since the establishment of NAESP. The current version has not been reviewed in its entirety for nearly ten years. In light of exponential change brought about by rapid technological advancements and globalization, complicated by the scarcity of resources as a result of the recent “Great Recession,” the NAESP Board of Directors decided the time had come for a comprehensive review and analysis of NAESP’s Bylaws. Drawing upon NAESP’s distinguished history, these efforts are intended to reinvent NAESP for relevancy and sustainability in service to a vibrant community of school leaders whose needs are constantly changing.

The Board considered recent research reports and studies, as well as books written about the future of membership associations and the vulnerability of organizations that rely significantly on membership dues to sustain resources and services. The Board also worked with Mary Byers, co-author of The Race for Relevance, and Elizabeth Bailey of 2B Communications, engaging them in a variety of critical discussions about a future trajectory for NAESP. It became clear that the structure and governance processes and procedures in place under the current bylaws hinder the Association’s need to be forward-thinking, nimble, and more flexible as it strives to be more relevant in the future.

The NAESP Board proceeded to charge staff with redesigning NAESP operations and programming. The Board also charged a member committee comprised of representatives from all nine NAESP zones, chaired by former NAESP President Barbara Chester, with leading a thorough examination of the NAESP Bylaws.

The NAESP Bylaws Review Committee set out to examine the bylaws in 6 major areas:

1. **Name:** Does the name National Association of Elementary School Principals accurately describe the primary membership of our Association, or is there a need for a different name?

2. **Board of Directors:** Is there an optimum size and composition for the NAESP Board of Directors? What should the criteria be for the composition of the NAESP Board—geographic representation or “competency-based” representation? Should at-large positions be continued as they are currently defined, or be redefined, and if there is a change, why?
3. **Elections:** Is there a different, more effective/efficient method for choosing Zone Directors and the officers of the Association? Should two candidates per position be required, or should a zone be able to identify a single candidate in the event that there are not two viable candidates?

4. **Delegate Assembly:** Is there a way to streamline the process and involve knowledgeable leaders in the meeting, while still maintaining appropriate state representation? Should there be a different composition or alternative to a Delegate Assembly? Should it be more of a “business meeting” model, as in many other state and national associations?

5. **Membership Dues:** Is there a need to differentiate or unbundle dues based on changing demographics or the varying needs of principals, assistant principals, retired members, aspiring principals, etc.? What about the differing needs of elementary-only state affiliates or umbrella association affiliates? Is there a need to modify dues on a state-by-state basis?

6. **Resolutions and Platform Development:** What are the major strengths and weaknesses of our current process for developing resolutions and the NAESP Platform? Is there a better way to represent NAESP’s position on key issues as an association on behalf of principals?

**Major Findings and Generally Recommended Changes**

**Name:**

The name, National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), continues to be the best representation of the membership. The Bylaws Review Committee acknowledged that NAESP serves a small number of middle-level principals, and even though some state affiliates include “middle” in their names, NAESP’s name should remain the same. NAESP maintains a strong national brand and the focus on elementary distinguishes it from other associations.

**Board of Directors:**

The idea of a competency-based Board of Directors was thoroughly discussed. Though it garnered support from a number of committee members, the committee ultimately felt the current geographic representation provided by the zone affiliation of the states provides camaraderie and is a networking mechanism worth retaining.

There was also significant thought given to reducing the number of Board members, while maintaining the geographic representation. The Board of Directors is charged with reviewing the zone configuration every five years, and it is up for review in
2013. Any changes to the zones will be left to the NAESP Board and may be included in the final proposed bylaws.

The proposed changes include adjusting the three-year cycle of leadership from President-elect, President, and Past President to a model providing more leadership development within a three-year cycle that includes a Vice President, President-elect, and President. The Committee believes this is a positive change because the President will have enjoyed two years in development—one year as a Vice President and one year as a President-elect—before assuming the Presidency. It also ensures that practicing principals hold each office and eliminates the dilemma when a Past President is promoted or retires following their year as President. The Bylaws Review Committee believes it is more likely a person would be able to complete the three-year cycle of leadership because their final year would be as President.

The committee decided to maintain the two Director-at-Large positions (Middle Level and Minority) on the Board of Directors, but provided the opportunity for the sitting Board of Directors to change the representation to meet the needs of the Association when a vacancy occurs.

**Elections:**

The number of people actively participating in NAESP elections in the last several years has averaged six to seven percent of the eligible voters. There have been recent instances where less than 30 people selected a Zone Director. The guidelines for campaigning for NAESP office were tightly restricted several years ago, virtually eliminating active campaigning. In addition, current state leaders have reported that fewer members have engaged in the election process, and members often seek them out for advice on selecting a candidate.

The proposed changes offer a different process for selecting Zone Directors and the new position of Vice President, as outlined below:

1. Zone Directors would be selected by a “committee” of the NAESP State Representatives in that specific zone, facilitated and coordinated by the sitting Zone Director. This committee would receive the completed official NAESP nomination packets of the prospective candidates in the zone from the sitting Zone Director, review those packets, and select the new Zone Director. The current Zone Director would inform the NAESP President and the Board of Directors of the selection. In other words, the new Zone Director would be selected by a process determined by the zone “committee” of NAESP State Representatives.
2. Candidates interested in being considered for Vice President would submit an official NAESP prospective candidate data packet to the sitting NAESP President for sharing with the full Board of Directors. The Board of Directors would then select at least two candidates to present to the State Representatives. The selected candidates would have the opportunity to speak at the winter/spring National Leaders Conference. Each NAESP State Representative and each current NAESP Board Member would then “vote” for a candidate and select the Vice President, who would subsequently fill the role of Vice President, and then move to President-elect and President sequentially during the three-year term of office. The election of the Vice President would take place immediately following the winter/spring National Leaders Conference.

There was much discussion about how to handle the voting of the NAESP State Representatives. Should it be a “one state, one vote” model, or should it instead be tied to the number of members in each state, similar to the delegate allocation currently in place? There was some support for the “one state, one vote” system, but there was also a desire to be fair to those states with high numbers of members. The current proposal is modeled after the Electoral College and provides what the committee sees as a fair distribution of votes to each NAESP State Representative based on NAESP membership.

a) 0 TO 99 REGULAR MEMBERS: ONE VOTE
b) 100 TO 199 REGULAR MEMBERS: TWO VOTES;
c) 200 TO 299 REGULAR MEMBERS: THREE VOTES;
d) 300 TO 399 REGULAR MEMBERS: FOUR VOTES;
e) 400 TO 699 REGULAR MEMBERS: SIX VOTES;
f) 700 TO 999 REGULAR MEMBERS: EIGHT VOTES; and
g) 1000 REGULAR MEMBERS AND UP: TEN VOTES.

This process places the selection of leaders in the hands of knowledgeable NAESP State Representatives (weighted votes) and the Board of Directors (single vote for each member).

Delegate Assembly:

The Committee felt strongly that the practice of convening a highly structured Delegate Assembly with credentialed delegates was too formal and inhibited the flexibility needed for the organization to act in a timely way. The proposed changes eliminate the Delegate Assembly and provide instead for a representative assembly called a General Assembly.
The General Assembly would be held at least once per year at a time determined by the Board, likely in conjunction with a conference for NAESP state leaders, and be open to anyone that wishes to attend. The changes proposed empower the NAESP State Representative position, and provide an expectation of active participation and engagement at both the state and national levels. It also streamlines any credentials process and defines for the NAESP Board of Directors what is expected at the General Assembly. The purpose of the General Assembly would be twofold: first, there would be an opportunity for an open forum on emerging policy and leadership issues important to the Association; and second, there would a business session that would include an annual report from the President on the state of the Association and an opportunity to hear from candidates for the position of Vice President.

NAESP State Representatives and the NAESP Board of Directors would have voting rights and be responsible for selecting the Vice President, as previously indicated. The NAESP President would also have responsibility for reporting any other items deemed appropriate by the NAESP Board of Directors. The proposed bylaws give the Board of Directors the authority and responsibility to revise the NAESP Bylaws as needed and require any revisions be reported to the General Assembly.

**Membership Dues:**

The Committee believes the Association must be afforded the flexibility to revise and differentiate membership categories; the opportunity to work with states on membership packages; and the freedom to unbundle and bundle resources in creative ways to build and maintain a strong membership network. The proposed changes create a new standing Membership Committee to provide recommendations on membership issues to the NAESP Board of Directors. The NAESP Board of Directors is therefore given the authority to set dues, and determine regular and special membership categories.

**Resolutions and Platform Development:**

The committee was appreciative of the proactive approach taken by the current NAESP policy and advocacy team with regard to policy and the development of legislation. The current Resolutions Committee process was observed to be an important component for encouraging member involvement in the development of the NAESP Platform, yet the process for approving the proposed resolutions was seen as inflexible and untimely. The Resolutions Committee was retained as a standing committee for providing grassroots input and advice to the Board. The process for developing new resolutions or revising current resolutions will essentially remain the same. However, the final report of the Resolutions Committee will be submitted to the NAESP Board of Directors for review and approval, and then made available to the full membership.