

# Got Risk?

In today's environment of high-stakes academic achievement, starting a new school year thinking about taking risks and failing forward seems like a misnomer. But the paradox is reiterated again and again in the arguments represented in this issue of *Principal*. Consider these directives: Take risks, destigmatize risk, and create a culture of risk-taking. Unthink, unlearn, and unleash creativity. Embrace change. Be curious. And finally, re-orient the perception of failure from negative to positive.

Education leaders featured in this issue of *Principal* focus so heavily on the dependent concepts of risk-taking and embracing failure because it is paramount to the conditions necessary to break out of the tried and true—to truly become the kind of learning community that shapes students to fulfill their truest potential, embracing curiosity and creativity at all levels of learning.


A risk-taking environment is also crucial, it turns out, in cultivating teacher leaders to help shoulder the load of instructional leadership. According to the *Teacher Voice Report*, which was developed by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations and Teacher Voice and Aspirations International Center (TVAIC), Curiosity & Creativity is a key condition for school staff to have and sustain high aspirations, along with Leadership & Responsibility and Confidence to Take Action. These elements intertwine to create a supportive teaching environment. “The stakes are high, and teachers are afraid to fail if they try something new,” said Lisa Lande, TVAIC executive director. “Support must be provided for teachers to enjoy success *and* to learn from efforts that present continued opportunities for growth. We should expect students and teachers alike to explore their curiosities and exercise creativity in the learning environment. The rewards will be well worth the risk,” she said.

The promise of risk is also apparent in the sphere of connected leadership. Principals Ben Gilpin and Brad Gustafson similarly address risk-taking and teacher support in their article on cultivating a mindset of innovation (see page 30). Kick-

ing off Connect & Innovate, a yearlong series on technology and innovation, Gilpin and Gustafson write that principals should not only model digital leadership as an important first step, but they also should employ the FAIL acronym: first attempt in learning.

The concept of risk also tracks through this year's Champion Creatively Alive Children supplement—bundled along with this issue of the magazine—which for the fifth year has been developed with generous support from Crayola. In “Teaching by Design,” Cheri Sterman, director of education at Crayola, presents the Design Thinking process, which thrives on curiosity and “making

disposable mistakes.” “The iterative process used in art-infused education and Design Thinking enables teams to build on members' missteps and successes, because creative collaboration that improves the outcome is more important than getting it right the first time,” said Sterman.

So as you start your new school year, I hope that you'll take it the right way when I write that I hope this issue of *Principal* magazine supports you with your future risks and possible failures. The nation's students—and their creative spirits—are depending on it. 

—Kaylen Tucker, Ph.D.

Gail Connelly  
Executive Director,  
NAESP Foundation President

Ernest J. Mannino  
Deputy Executive Director,  
NAESP Foundation CEO

**PRINCIPAL**  
Kaylen Tucker, Ph.D.  
Editor-in-Chief  
[ktucker@naesp.org](mailto:ktucker@naesp.org)

Edwin Colbert  
Communications Assistant

## EDITORIAL ADVISORS

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Fox Associates Inc.  
800-345-8670, ext. 119  
Fax: 312-644-8718  
[adinfo.nep@foxrep.com](mailto:adinfo.nep@foxrep.com)

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**PRINCIPAL MAGAZINE IS A WINNER.** It has been recognized for its contribution to the field of association communications. Communications Concepts awarded the September/October 2014 issue of *Principal*, “Adapt to Change: Leadership Strategies,” with an APEX Grand Award for publication excellence! The issue highlights strategies for principals to effectively manage and communicate change at their schools.

Winning this award wouldn't have been possible without some well-written contributions from experienced educators, and continued support and feedback from our members and readers.

Read the entire issue on change-leadership strategies at <http://bit.ly/XPuuHI>.