

Principal Leadership in Education

By: Dr. Elaine Sullivan, Principal, Hernando High School, Brooksville, Florida

It is with pride and excitement that I am honored in being named the National Association of Secondary School Principals National Principal of the Year Award. I have committed my life to being a principal, and I have consciously pushed to learn and to adapt in efforts to excel. In this column, I will briefly share some of my strong personal beliefs about leadership. I believe that leadership is a State of Being. It is who you are! I believe that an effective leader is consumed with her or his job. Leaders are passionate about the job and believe that the job is fun. Dynamic leaders develop a community of leaders. Leadership is who you are -- what you believe, not just the specific actions you perform.

A strong leader increases the strength and capacity of her or his community of learners by getting people engaged in conversations. I believe that these conversations develop relationships which draw people into caring, committing and then in doing. I commend the State of Florida for urging all stake holders to become involved in these conversations.

I also believe in the power of positive thought. I try to instill a positive mental attitude in every interaction. I make every effort to develop the positive mental attitude philosophy in others. I tell my students "you can choose to be happy or miserable, and who wants to be miserable or to be around a miserable person."

The bottom line is that principals, teachers, students, and parents need to focus on the bottom line of producing and of learning. Students need to be re-engaged with the learning process. Today's students also choose to learn differently. These students are at home with technology and through television, Nintendo, and commercials, and now computers have made them at home in an image based and fragmented, rapid paced learning environment. Students bring new meaning to relevance! Additionally, the latest research on the brain and learning brings other dimensions to the learning environment. I have pushed to bring all of these critical elements into my school. I believe that these factors do make a difference. The student has to be an active learner and the knowledge presented has to be more than content and theory.

As part of my development I became involved in my local, state and national organizations. I encourage each educator and stakeholder to step forward and ask "what can I do?" It will take all of us being actively involved beyond the bounds of our school to address the issues of education. It is critical that principals become spokesmen, that we lobby, and that we tend to telling our story.

Dominic M. Calabro, President and Chief Executive Officer, Florida TaxWatch, and President of the Florida Education Foundation asked Dr. Elaine Sullivan, the National Teacher of the Year to write this Ideas in Action as a part of the ongoing effort to bring to the forefront new and creative ideas in education. This Ideas in Action comes from the "front- lines" of education and demonstrates that everyone in the state of Florida must take a more active role in the education of our future leaders and workforce.

For education to meet the needs of the future, it is imperative that parents be invited back into the process. Business partnerships are important and need to be fostered. Schools will become stronger as they forge strong relationships with parents and business. My school has become one where collaboration is the norm.

I see our future as bright with promise. Florida is in the forefront of sound educational reform. I am delighted to be a part of these exciting times of progress in Florida's education. This award is a celebration of our commitment to learning and leading. Let us honor education in our hearts each and everyday. We are all a part of the learning process that is life, and as we learn from others, we then pass on the learning to continue and strengthen the cycle. As we part, know that you gotta believe that we can and do make a difference -- one student, one parent, and one school at a time. Join me in believing.

About the Author

Dr. Elaine Sullivan is the Principal of Hernando High School, Brooksville, Florida. She recently was named the 1998 National Association of Secondary School Principals National Principal of the Year. Dr. Sullivan received her bachelor's degree from Florida State University, her master's degree in guidance counseling from the University of South Florida and her doctorate in educational leadership from the University of South Florida. As a principal, she has received many awards including the Commissioner of Education Principal Leadership Award and Florida State Teacher of the Year.

Dr. Neil S. Crispo, Senior Vice President, Research and Operations
Daniel E. Sprague, Publications Director and Research Analyst
Joseph P. Lacher, Chairman; Dominic M. Calabro, President and Publisher
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P.O. Box 10209

Tallahassee, FL 32302