



**“The National Voice for Education Leaders”**

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## **Memorandum**

To: Obama-Biden Transition Team

From: Jill S. Levy, President, AFSA

Re: Education Leadership

Date: December 11, 2008

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As President-Elect Obama continues his transition into the White House, including developing his education agenda, AFSA strongly urges the Transition Team to consider the ideas presented in the article below on education leadership as you assist the President-Elect in forming and shaping education policies.

AFSA believes that rigorous research-driven leadership development opportunities are absolutely essential in order to transform schools that are under-educating our children and not preparing them for the challenges they will meet in the future.

Through its history, AFSA has learned that a strong educational environment can only exist and thrive where there is strong leadership in our schools and school districts.

Our nation's children deserve to be educated by the very best teachers who are motivated and guided by exemplary leadership. Our nation's future depends upon it!

Thank you in advance for considering our position.



## Leadership Matters Most

As President-Elect Obama's cabinet takes shape, we are beginning to see the leadership style of our newly-elected President. A man who respects education, knowledge, and skill, and demonstrates a strong commitment to the nation, Barack Obama is assembling an extraordinary group of advisers who will listen, appropriately challenge one another's ideas and assist the new President in the formation and implementation of policy. With impending fiscal and international issues, his selection for Secretary of Education is of the utmost importance. I remain hopeful that he will select someone with a strong voice that is equal to other Cabinet members. Our children deserve no less.

Undoubtedly, the many powerful voices of contemporary educators will continue to pursue educational reform through and engage in a dialogue that includes familiar and valid terms such as "collaboration," "master" and "lead" teachers, "merit pay," "vouchers," "charters," "teacher professional development," "changing school leadership," "parental involvement" and "reconstitution," among many others. AFSA recognizes the importance of each of these terms and concepts – with the exception of "vouchers" – as long as they lead to the success of all schools and therefore all of our children.

Successful school principals understand that collaboration, peer assistance and teacher professional development are essential ingredients to successful teaching and learning. Most would speak to their desire to have smaller class sizes, fewer students in overcrowded urban schools and greater parental involvement in the teaching and learning process. As we watch President-Elect Obama form our nation's new leadership team, we marvel at his ability to choose the most-skilled, best-educated and most-intelligent individuals available to him. We trust that his choice of chief education administrator will be as impressive as his choices to date. That means he will seek an educational leader with the values we've outlined here. That individual will be the leader of all schools, the principal for the entire nation's children. Just as it is the school principal who is ultimately held responsible for the success or failure of a school's educational program, it will be the U.S. Secretary of Education who is held responsible for the educational agenda of our nation.

AFSA calls upon our government and citizens to value and elevate the stature of the next Secretary of Education. In so doing we are also calling upon them to more highly value, support and respect our schools' principals, assistant/vice principals and specialty supervisors by demanding for them professional salaries and dignified treatment, for, surely, they in their communities should be as recognized and highly valued as the Secretary of Education is on the national stage.

As President-Elect Obama selects the new Secretary and continues developing his education agenda AFSA calls for more professional development for our school leaders, and we call for universities and colleges to imbue potential teachers with greater knowledge of subject matter, child development, the neurology of learning and a commitment to teacher personal professional growth. We must redouble our efforts to examine our expectations for our school leaders and give them an education and training that is as rigorous as that which we give our lawyers and doctors. For school leaders hold in their hands the future of our young people, which is the very future of our nation.

Transforming schools is an exciting professional challenge. It requires that we eradicate indifference and rededicate ourselves to the mission of educating all children regardless of the circumstances of their birth or upbringing. To do this, we must prepare new school leadership, and also retrain experienced principals to successfully galvanize them to transform their schools to meet the needs of a globalized 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. We are optimistic that President-Elect Barack Obama understands that schools are not simply groups of "teachers in the classroom" but communities of school leaders, teachers, students and families, all of whom are often undervalued, particularly in urban settings, and all of whom crave meaningful and equal growth opportunities that will lead to a first-rate national education system that restores our nation's competitive position on the world stage.

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