

Celebrate *the* Principalship

Dear Mr. President

By Sarah McKibben

Assistant Principal Brian Cory held a national symposium at Tenaflly (NJ) High School to guide President Obama in his decision making on education.

Principal Leadership: What prompted you to initiate a national conversation on education?

Brian Cory: Plainly stated, students deserve better. School leaders have a paramount responsibility to foster conditions and opportunities for transformative conversations to emerge and change processes to begin. Education cannot afford to be designed and practiced in silos. We must elevate and extend our perspective and pedagogy with a focus on what education can become.

My principal, Dora P. Kontogiannis, has always been supportive of my efforts. The project exemplified teamwork—Dora and many other people contributed their talents, resources, and energy to see it through.

PL: How did you attract such prominent educators?

Cory: I created a list of a dozen or so educators whose work is carried with me each day. I reached out to each of them, hoping that two or three would respond. To my astonishment, they each confirmed. There was no funding for this project: each panelist paid his or her own way. I guess I sold them on an idea. In retrospect, though, they are not the ones who needed to be sold on anything. We need to sell the new story of education to others, and hopefully the panelists' collective message will be embraced.

PL: What was the response from local stakeholders?

Cory: When I confirmed the list of panelists for my superintendent and assistant superintendent, they said, "All of these folks are confirmed?" The audience represented more than 40 school communities and was composed of administrators, teachers, community leaders, students, and representatives from national education associations and state departments of education.

Photo courtesy of Brian Durkin



PL: What was the outcome of the event?

Cory: One of the results of the event is the Dear Mr. President Web site [www.librarymedia.net/dmp/home.html]. I believe the panelists would be willing to roll up their sleeves with President Obama and Secretary Duncan to reconvene and expand the conversation if given an occasion!

PL: If you could outline a single priority for education policy, what would it be?

Cory: I think it is time to eliminate special education as we now know it. While I believe there will always be a need for highly trained, certified professionals to serve individual students with specific abilities, current general approaches seem antiquated and inefficient. We need new mind-sets. We need new training. We need to equip all teachers with the ability to personalize the education of each and every student. Educators should not need an IEP or 504 plan to implement best and necessary practice. Policies and funds should be aimed at developing more-effective systems that do not require countless meetings, piles of paperwork, and cumbersome processes to get all students the support they deserve. **PL**

Brian Cory is an assistant principal at Tenaflly (NJ) High School, and is the 2010 New Jersey High School Assistant Principal of the Year.

Sarah McKibben (mckibbens@principals.org) is the editor of the NASSP newspaper, NewsLeader.

The panelists included Maurice Elias, Jenifer M. Fox, Andy Hargreaves, Gerry House, Heidi Hayes Jacobs, Robyn R. Jackson, Linda Lantieri, Deborah Meier, Stephanie Pace Marshall, Carol Ann Tomlinson, Grant Wiggins, Judy Willis, and Patricia Wolfe.