FINAL REMARKS

Good morning. It is my pleasure to join you as we prepare to wind down a wonderful conference. Thank you for attending – we once again enjoyed record attendance.

Our work as superintendents is about building systems for the future – and while our future is still being written, our mission as an association provides us with an opportunity to co-author it together. AASA’s mission advocates for equitable access for all students to the highest quality public education and develops and supports school system leaders.

Our efforts come at a pivotal time, one where nearly one in four are dissatisfied with K-12 education according to Gallup.

School system leader roles have become so much more in so many ways – more difficult, more politicized, and more scrutinized.

And yet, our work has become MORE important than ever before – and MORE rewarding when we focus on our mission and outcomes – instead of the headlines, social media, or noise.

We have heard much about the looming teacher shortage, but the staffing challenge is much larger.

The exodus of school district leaders during the pandemic has been unprecedented.

Research by the ILO Group found that superintendents are turning over more often, and women continue to be underrepresented. In fact, nearly half of our nation’s 500 largest districts had a superintendent change during the pandemic.
Education Resource Strategies found that that a quarter of superintendents left during the 20-21 and 21-22 school years. A study by RAND found that turnover was higher in urban districts – and in districts serving more students of color.

A February 2022 article by Education Week found that there is no year-over-year collection that tracks our nation’s superintendents, so benchmarking turnover is difficult. That article also cited a data figure from AASA that pegged the annual turnover at 14-16 percent.

In its 2020 Decennial Study, AASA found that more than a third of superintendents said they would retire in the next five years.

Let’s do a quick poll here – please raise your hand if you aware of a high superintendent turnover rate in your state.

GLADYS – LOOK AROUND THE ROOM AND REACT

Now raise your hand if many of these new superintendents from your states are with us at the NCE conference.

GLADYS – LOOK AGAIN – based on hands – we are doing well, or we have some work to do.

My challenge to you is to contact those not here and invite them to future events. This is important for them, their districts, and our profession.

I also asked AASA’s executive committee for their state’s data. We see Maine with an annual turnover of 18 percent to Oregon with nearly 65 percent over three years.

Let me bring this to my tri-county region in upstate New York – something I am most familiar with. Nine of my region’s 22
superintendents have left since the start of the pandemic. This will grow to 11 superintendents, or 50 percent, by June. Moreover, only four superintendents remain in the same job since 2015 – and one of these will soon retire.

While this data is by no means scientific in nature it suggests that we need to prepare, energize, and sustain the next generation of superintendents – those who will lead our districts and this association in the years ahead.

I am pleased to announce that “Leading in a New Era: New Challenges, New Approaches” will be my presidency’s theme starting in July. I will use my time as president to support your work – and to help lay the foundation for new and aspiring superintendents.

AASA has a long history of supporting sitting superintendents. This year, it is supporting 85 individuals in 3 Certification programs and 153 individuals in 6 Aspiring Superintendent Academies nationally. We also have a handful of states running the national certification program in partnership with AASA.

These numbers, combined with the turnover data, suggest that we need to do more as an Association and individuals.

Let’s hear from some of our colleagues on the four things can do to support new and aspiring leaders, based on what we know works.

CHRIS TO PLAY VIDEO

In summary, we need:

• to take new and aspiring leaders under our wings as a mentor.
• to tap future leaders by encouraging them to grow and to seek higher positions.
• to lead by example by modeling ethical and effective leadership for others, from our boards and staff to our families and elected officials.
• And finally, we need to focus on our mission and why we exist – grounding ourselves in our work on behalf of students.

And as our country grows more diverse, we also need to grow a more diverse workforce, particularly in leadership positions.

It is important to find this next generation because some may not realize that this is their path.

I am an example. If it wasn’t for those who encouraged me, I may be speaking at the American Dental Association Conference in Orlando later this year, instead of being here with you now.

Looking back 50 years later, I still remember how two teachers made feel as a fifth grader, when they asked their colleagues to give me more time. I had struggled because we often moved between Puerto Rico and New York.

I also remember when my superintendent tapped me, and two others from an organization of over 600 employees to join the leadership team more than 20 years ago. This created three future leaders within our organization, including two superintendents and a deputy superintendent.

Many of us started as teachers where we were able to see first-hand how much we changed the lives of others. We, too, as superintendents have this same power. I urge you to use it.

In closing, I want to thank each one of you for your leadership and
service. It is such an honor to represent such a wonderful group.

Sir Ken Robinson said that “imagination is the source of every form of human achievement.” As we look ahead to the future of the superintendency and our systems, we need to direct our attention towards creativity and collaboration.

He also said, “the real role of leadership is climate control”. I think you would all agree we are living in a time when this is so critical.

While much of what we do is rooted in the past, let’s use our learning about that history and those traditions – as well as our current practices – not as constraints – but as a foundation to create and nurture a culture where every child can succeed, not just some.

Please continue to be active in your statewide and national associations by engaging with others. The superintendency is known to be a lonely profession, but it is one where we can indeed create a climate of possibility for ourselves and others.

Our capacity to do so – and to recognize and seize the opportunities presented by today’s challenges – may be the difference between us, our districts, and public education succeeding and thriving for our students.

Throughout my time at AASA, I have experienced your humanity, generosity and commitment brought to life in countless ways. You have demonstrated to me time and again the importance of superintendency – and the value of this Association.

From my heart – I thank you for the privilege of serving as president-elect and in just a few months, your president. Thank you for attending and I look forward to seeing you again soon.