



Stand Up for Public Education™: A Campaign of the American Association of School Administrators

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Part I. Introduction

This report details the development, implementation and accomplishments of the American Association of School Administrators' Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign through July 2006.

AASA launched the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign in 2003 in response to a great many challenges that were facing superintendents.

The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), had been passed and was poised to have dramatic impact on schools and students. The law signaled a major change in what schools were being asked to deliver to society. Emphasis shifted from providing access to education for all children, to helping all children achieve at high levels of proficiency. Superintendents faced the challenge of implementing changes in their school systems to achieve that new goal. It was whispered that NCLB was really just a strategy to undermine public confidence in public schools to make way for vouchers and privatization.

Meanwhile, it seemed that ganging up on public schools and school administrators had become a public sport. School voucher initiatives were bandied about in the states, newspapers regularly printed stories critical of superintendent salaries, the policy research community had largely written off school districts as being part of the problem and not part of the solution, and everywhere states were cutting funding for schooling. In addition, public schools were taking in

an increasingly diverse, increasingly non-English speaking, and increasingly poor student body and yet were expected to improve achievement with greater challenges and fewer resources.

It was time to stand up for public education.

AASA launched the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign in February 2003, spurred by an AASA Executive Committee resolution to make standing up for public education the “overriding principle for the association.”

Part II. Setting the Stage for the Stand Up for Public Education™ Campaign

The No Child Left Behind World: A Paradigm Shift

From the inception of the common school, the mission of public education had been one of access. No longer was education limited to the elites, to the landowners, to the wealthy. All classes were brought into schooling in line with the mission of an educated citizenry as critical to a burgeoning democracy. Still it was not until 1954 that this mission took a great step forward, when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, made explicit that African Americans were entitled to equal educational opportunities. In the 50 years that followed, federal educational law and policy continued to focus on getting all children into school and expanding opportunities for poor students (under the original Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), girls (under Title IX of ESEA), and disabled students, Native American students, and non-English speaking students.

As the doors of public schooling were increasingly opened, the growing diversity of the student body meant additional challenges for schools. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Act—later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)—meant more integration of disabled children into regular classrooms. An increasing immigrant population required schools to address more issues around English language learners. And, throughout the 1990s, the growing gap between the nations’ poorest and richest children meant schools increasingly had to address the debilitating effects of poverty.

In 2002, when President George H. W. Bush signed No Child Left Behind into law, a paradigm shift in the mission of public schooling took place. The passage of NCLB, which called for high achievement for all children, or “universal proficiency,” signaled a new era. The school system, formerly focused on ensuring and expanding access for all students, would have to engage in major systemic change to reach the new goal of universal high achievement for all students.

Table I:
**Public Schooling in America:
 Some Milestones in the Journey to
 Universal Proficiency**

1837	1954	1965	1972	1974	2002
Education reformer Horace Mann — Goal of universal education through elementary grades.	U.S. Supreme Court <i>Brown</i> Decision— Goal of equal educational opportunity and access for African American students.	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)— Goal of equal access and treatment for poor students and minority students.	Title IX of ESEA— Goal of equal treatment for girls.	Education for All Handicapped Act— Goal of equal access and treatment for students with disabilities.	No Child Left Behind— Goal of universal proficiency.



Public Education: Everyone’s Favorite Punching Bag

In addition to requiring systemic change in schools, NCLB challenged schools in additional ways. Opponents of the legislation, including AASA, expressed serious concerns over the law, which moved the federal government into unprecedented territory in terms of the federal role. AASA opposed the passage of the law because of concerns over a lack of fairness in its system of labeling schools in need of improvement. The debate over the law was filled with discussions of choice and vouchers and private supplemental services, leaving many educators with the sense that the law was little more than a scheme to declare all schools a failure and make way for increased privatization. If schools were labeled as failures, it was feared, the public would lose confidence in the system of public schooling.

NCLB wasn’t the only challenge facing public education. Since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a federal report that called for national education reform, public education and its leaders often felt under attack. Critics blamed failing schools for a host of ills and maligned the entire public education system in the process. The school voucher movement, an effort to divert federal funds from public schools to private schools, gained strength. School superintendent salaries were frequently published and criticized in local papers. State legislatures lambasted “administrative bloat” in schools. The charter school movement, touting charter schools as a superior alternative to public schools, grew.

These developments contributed to a misconception that the entire system of public education was rudderless and ailing. School leaders often faced funding cuts at the same time as mandates increased. Decreases in student test scores were frequently cited, often inaccurately, as evidence of a growing epidemic of failing schools. Yet, additional responsibilities were heaped upon local schools—to provide character education, to serve as community and health centers, to provide before- and after-school activities, and to serve an increasingly poor and disadvantaged population.

Part III. Core Beliefs and Goals of the Stand Up for Public Education™ Campaign

Core Beliefs

School superintendents across the country feel deeply that now, more than ever, public education is an institution that is vital to the continued success of American democracy and society. This deeply held belief continues to drive many educational leaders. Public education serves every child that walks through the school door, regardless of race and class, and produces citizens who are ready to succeed in life.

Further, AASA believes that to reach NCLB's goal of universal proficiency, schools must work—systemically—to ensure that children are ready for school, that schools are ready for children, and that children are ready for democracy. The growing diversity and changing demographics in the nation mean that more children are entering the classroom carrying the baggage of poverty. Schools and communities must work together to overcome those obstacles with comprehensive health and nutrition programs, early childhood education and ongoing family support. And schools must be ready for children—by transforming teaching and learning practices to better educate *each* child that comes to school. Yet, schools must not lose sight of the goal of preparing citizens for American democracy—to fulfill active and responsible roles in society.

Goals

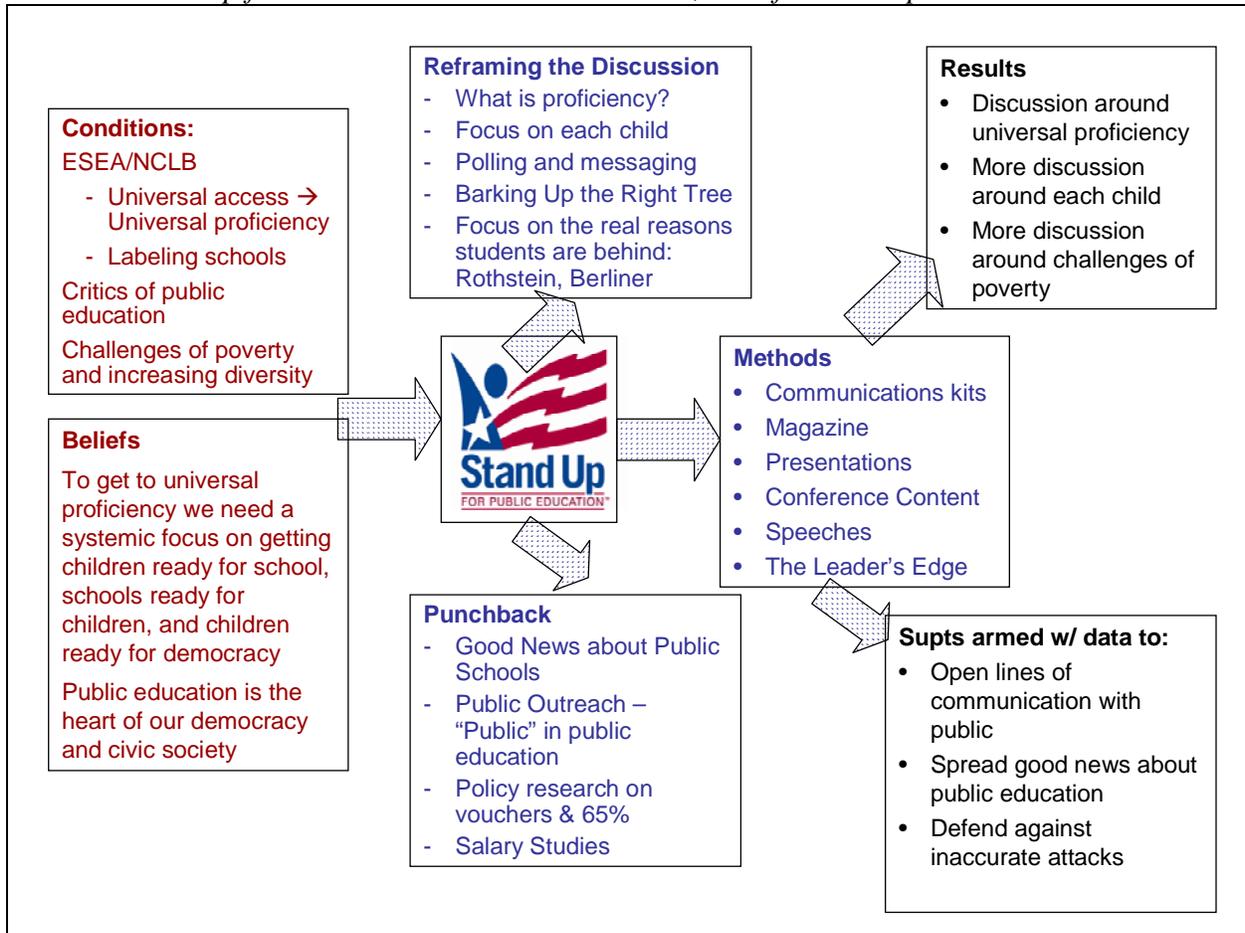
The Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign is based on these core beliefs. The campaign advocates a systemic focus, both locally and nationally, on three fundamental principles of public schooling. The goals of the campaign are to:

- ***Get children ready for school*** through comprehensive nutrition and health programs, early childhood education and ongoing support for their families;
- ***Get schools ready for children*** by transforming our schools' organization, teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies to educate each student who comes to us; and
- ***Get children ready for democracy*** by preparing them for active, responsible roles in society.

Part IV. Implementing the Stand Up for Public Education™ Campaign

Since launching the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign in February 2003, AASA has worked to achieve the goals of the campaign through two major initiatives: “Punchback” and “Reframing the Discussion.” Table 2 provides an overview of how the conditions and beliefs described above led to work in the areas of 1) reframing the discussion about proficiency and 2) punching back to misinformation about public education through various methods.

Table 2: Stand Up for Public Education™ Conditions, Beliefs and Outputs



“Punchback” Initiative

For schools to be ready for children, leadership must not only be in place but have both the formal and informal authority to lead systemic change. AASA began to explore ways to help school superintendents feel empowered to “punch back” when faced by critics of public education so the superintendents could more effectively lead systemic change. AASA implemented this “Punchback” initiative through research, partnerships, polling, publications, policy work and communicating about education data.

To respond to the frequently issued complaint that superintendents are paid too much, AASA conducted research comparing superintendent salaries to the salaries of other public officials and CEOs running corporations of a similar size and scope to a school district. This research revealed that superintendents made far less than their public sector and corporate counterparts. AASA published this information in an online newsletter created to educate administrators about the Stand Up campaign and related advocacy, *Stand Up for Public Education: The Leader's Edge*.

School districts have taken a beating over the presence of soft drink machines in school buildings. AASA worked with the bottling industry to develop useful guidelines for district contracts with soda bottlers, worked with Coca-Cola to help districts develop wellness plans as required by the School Nutrition Act, and partnered with the Active Living Leadership project to help school leaders address childhood obesity issues.

AASA also conducted polling to identify the public's primary sources of information about public schools. Poll questions explored how members of the public get their information about education, whether they are more likely to hear good news or bad news, and if they felt that public education was going in the wrong direction or the right direction.

After discovering that most of the public gets news about public schools from local newspapers and local television, AASA focused on empowering superintendents to be strategic in communicating the good news about public schools through those channels. AASA did this through, among other means, a targeted communications kit that included sample opinion/editorials for submission to local papers, and talking points for speaking with local media that highlighted the achievements of public education, both nationwide and in the local district.

AASA also responded to the many policy initiatives that sought to detract from public education. AASA had long been active in research and analysis opposing vouchers, and continued to develop information and analysis on that topic. When a national campaign, known as the "65 percent solution," proposed that states require school districts to spend 65 percent of their operating budgets on instruction – an arbitrary measure that showed no signs of improving outcomes for students – AASA was quick to respond with talking points and other information for superintendents to use in combating this misguided campaign.

The "Punchback" initiative was reflected in the content of the AASA National Conference in Education and it became the focus on a periodic column in AASA's magazine, *The School Administrator*. Topics included fighting claims of administrative bloat, responding to a "hired gun" working to defeat school bond issues, taming "talk-show dragons," and responding when schools are labeled in need of improvement by the No Child Left Behind act.

AASA has also worked to provide rich content in a variety of communication channels to offset frequently misused and incorrect education data and other misperceptions about public schooling.

"Reframing the Discussion" Initiative

The other initiative of the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign has focused on reframing the discussions about public education. AASA has worked through this initiative to refocus discussions as follows:

- From a focus on universal access, or ensuring that all children have access to schools, to universal proficiency, or ensuring high achievement for all children. This paradigm shift needed to be acknowledged and understood by policy makers, educators, and the general public if schools were to retain support from the public.
- From a definition of proficiency that is focused on arbitrary concepts of “grade-level” and test cut scores to a definition that includes growth, gain and progress. AASA analyzed the definitions of proficiency embodied in state plans to implement NCLB and found they revealed little about what proficiency really meant. Over time, the U.S. Department of Education shifted from talking about proficiency to talking about “grade-level achievement”—and the education community used the definition of Adequate Yearly Progress in NCLB to start talking about what growth or progress would really look like.
- From a focus on the achievement of “all children” to that of “each child.” The challenge for educators is to implement laws written for all children while trying to teach—and reach—each child. NCLB, while forcing schools to look at subgroups, falls short of addressing the individual needs of each child.
- From labeling schools as failures to uncovering the real reasons students might be behind. This meant thinking about the root causes, including poverty, race, and class (the arguments made by authors Richard Rothstein and David Berliner). AASA encouraged its members to help reframe discussions around why a school might not have made AYP under NCLB to why an individual group of children might not be achieving. Was it linked to poverty? Language acquisition? Special-education policies? Labeling alone does not produce change. But identifying the root challenges can empower educators to improve outcomes in partnership with the larger community.
- From an analytical focus to a systemic focus on getting children ready for school, schools ready for children, and children ready for democracy The AASA Center for System Leadership was launched in 2005 to develop and support school system leaders so that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to produce systemic change. One aspect of that systemic change is thinking about the fundamental principles of public schooling: children must be ready for school, schools must be ready for the children that walk through the door, and students must graduate ready to be citizens of a democracy. By reframing the discussion to include the whole system, AASA and its members are better equipped to face the challenges of providing the highest quality public education.
- From a focus on raising test scores to a focus on fostering creativity and citizenship (the arguments made by authors Daniel Pink and Richard Florida).
- AASA has worked to address the issues of:
 - **Getting children ready for school** by providing analysis and information about pre-K, comprehensive nutrition and health programs, and highlighting successful efforts to provide support for families and communities through programs like the

AASA Civic Star Award, which honors school-community programs that advance student learning.

- **Getting schools ready for children** by redesigning and transforming schools' organization and teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies through the work of the AASA Center for System Leadership and other AASA programs such as indoor air quality initiatives.
- **Getting students ready for democracy** - AASA has maintained a focus on the importance of education as a cornerstone of democracy through conference content, magazine articles, and forums with John Goodlad, a leading author on the role of schooling in a democracy. AASA polling also revealed key ideas about education and democracy—such as the fact that a vast majority of the public see “producing better citizens” as a more important goal than improving student achievement.

For a more detailed list of Stand Up for Public Education™ activities, please see the Appendix.

Part V. Results

AASA members have embraced the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign. They now cite it as a top member benefit, and encourage the association to do more. Hundreds of members have seen staff presentations with the Stand Up message and all members have received polling data and toolkits. Anecdotal evidence reveals creative and enthusiastic use of the Stand Up message in local communities. The Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign has gone on to inspire bumper stickers and other merchandise and serve as a theme for AASA meetings and conferences as well as meetings held by AASA's state affiliates.

The Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign was recognized by the American Society of Association Executives & the Center for Association Leadership with an Associations Advance America Award in the category of citizenship and advancing democracy in 2006.

Over the past three years, the Stand Up campaign's goals of shifting the dialogue have certainly been realized. “Universal proficiency” is now part of the national discussion about No Child Left Behind. After AASA polling revealed conflicting public opinion about what the term meant, the U.S. Department of Education even shifted to the use of the term “grade-level” instead of proficiency. AASA's focus on “each” child has been picked up by many other associations and others in the education policy community.

AASA continues to monitor the media, other education policy groups, and state and national government to assess the nature of the dialogue around public education and continues to have influencing that dialogue as a primary program goal.

What lies ahead for Stand Up for Public Education™? The theme continues with the 2007 National Conference on Education™ hosted by AASA with the evocative phrase: “Stand Up. Show Up. Step Up. Speak Up.” AASA is working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on its parallel campaign, entitled “Stand Up.” AASA is collaborating with Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning on the rollout of its groundbreaking research proving the

role of the superintendent in improving student achievement, and conducting its own research and analysis on the state of the superintendency. And AASA members will receive another Stand Up for Public Education™ back-to-school toolkit in August 2006.

Part VII. Conclusion

Standing up for public education has truly infiltrated nearly every aspect of the work of AASA. It has proved to be a powerful idea that inspires and empowers superintendents and other education partners. Faced with a challenging paradigm shift, superintendents now have tools, resources, and empowerment to reach out to their community partners in a new way.

APPENDIX

AASA Programs and Products Related to the Stand Up for Public Education™ Campaign

A. Program and Resource Development Programs

- **Active Living Leadership** - AASA is working with local school district leaders to encourage action for active living and healthy eating, through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In this initiative, AASA will create and share resources and success stories with school districts across the country, and encourage AASA state affiliates to champion this cause at a state level. We will encourage the interest, commitment and purposeful action of superintendents to improve local district policy and practice through local collaborations aimed at reducing childhood obesity, and getting children ready for school.
- **Asthma Wellness** - AASA is continuing to work with school leaders to keep children with asthma in school through a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Through this project, AASA shares resources and tools with school district leaders and their staff to assist in the development and implementation of asthma management programs that will get children ready for school and schools ready for children.
- **Clearing the Air: Leadership for Health School Environments** - AASA is continuing its work over the last ten years to raise school leaders' awareness of the importance of healthy school environments, with funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. AASA will provide technical assistance, training and outreach to assist school leaders in creating schools where children can be healthy and thrive academically, with a special emphasis on urban and rural schools.
- **Ready Leadership: Youth Development Advocacy** - In partnership with the Public Education Network and the Forum for Youth Investment, AASA is helping school superintendents establish community partnerships with local education funds, governors and other city officials. The goal of this program is to strategize ways to strengthen state and local action resulting in improved programs and policies to ensure that children are ready for college, work and life. This project blurs the lines between community and education and between education, prevention and youth development.

Awards

- **Civic Star Awards** - This program, co-sponsored by Sodexo, recognizes school districts that have formed partnerships with their communities to develop and implement innovative programs that advance learning in public schools.
- **National Superintendent of the Year** - Co-sponsored by ARAMARK, this award recognizes 50 state superintendents and one national superintendent that have exhibited outstanding leadership in public education.



B. Center for System Leadership Programs

The AASA Center for System Leadership is Standing Up for Public Education by establishing learning communities that foster, develop and support superintendents of schools and other school system leaders who will lead the transformation of public education systems.

Programs and Services

Through partnerships with AASA state affiliates and established national and regional networks, the Center addresses the leadership needs of school leaders.

- Opportunities for superintendents to influence the design of educational products and services
- Communities providing peer support and guidance for systems thinking leaders
- Process improvement and innovation projects
- Research on topics of value to superintendents
- Customized program evaluation and support services
- Leading Learning – A special seminar series for 1st-time Superintendents in the second year of their terms

Advocating for the Profession

Through the Institute for Professional Advocacy, the Center will advocate within the education community for the systemic transformation of public education.

Within the education community, the Institute will:

- Clearly define the characteristics of a systems approach to change.
- Strongly present the benefits of adopting a systems approach with special emphasis on the outcomes that will accrue from using a systems approach.
- Be the source of standards by which local education systems can transform themselves and be recognized as benchmark systems.
- Urge universities that prepare school system leaders to build upon their programs so that they include the knowledge and skills that are needed to lead systemic change.

In the national community at large, the Institute will:

- Specify the conditions that need to be in place for a systems approach to the transformation of public education to be successful.

- Be connected to national networks that include leaders of other community systems (mayors, school boards, the press, business representatives and others). It will promote sustained efforts that build trust with these leaders.
- Address school governance issues, especially the role of the board of education and the role of the superintendent. These roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood for the transformation of the school system to be successful.

C. Public Policy and Government Relations Programs

AASA's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill are at the heart of the Stand Up for Public Education™ campaign. AASA continues to fight for increased resources for education as well as for policies that support the beliefs and values at the core of the campaign.

AASA provides leadership to the Committee for Education Funding.

The AASA Public Policy department produces a monthly electronic newsletter, *Stand Up for Public Education: The Leader's Edge*. This newsletter is AASA's advocacy showpiece and includes sections on:

- Federal policy advocacy (View from the Hill)
- AASA's analysis of topics related to Stand Up and, often, to NCLB (Hot Topics: AASA's Perspective)
- Punching back to critics of public education (Facing the Challengers)
- When available, the latest polling and messaging data (The Public Speaks)
- Coverage of public education in the media (Public Education in the Headlines)
- This newsletter was introduced as a member benefit in 2004 and has become a major source of exclusive, cutting-edge content for members. As an example the Facing the Challengers section has included such stories as:
 - Vouchers
 - Earnings of superintendents compared to executives
 - The real story about student achievement
 - How the law can undermine public education
 - How to deal with being labeled as not making AYP
 - Basher backers – funders of the critics of public education
 - A truth toolkit revealing misinformation distributed by the U.S. Department of Education
 - How education is discussed in the media

AASA also produces a daily news headline service for members, which includes the following sections:

- NCLB Stories, focusing on issues related to No Child Left Behind
- Hot Topics, spotlighting top education news stories
- Leadership Matters, highlighting the ways school system leadership is making a difference
- Superintendents in the News

AASA also conducts polling on messages and policy concepts related to Stand Up, which has produced reams of exclusive content for use by members and staff.

AASA public policy has also produced cutting-edge research on the implementation of No Child Left Behind within a Stand Up for Public Education™ framework. AASA analysis produced exclusive information about the implementation of NCLB and the state accountability plans states were using to put the goals of the law into action. That information has been presented to countless superintendents in presentations and provided in PowerPoint and many other forms to members for their use. AASA public policy also provides analysis on voucher movements across the nation,. Finally, AASA public policy has conducted research inspired by the generational theories of Bill Strauss on the unique generation of children in school today, to combat irrational fears on the part of the public that “kids today” are more likely to behave badly, when in fact the opposite is true.

The AASA Public Policy department hosted the first AASA advocacy meeting in over ten years in spring of 2006, entitled “Stand Up for Public Education: Advocating for Each Child.” This meeting brought school superintendents to Washington to advocate for more funding and other policy solutions directly to their representatives in Congress.

Finally, public policy staff conduct dozens of presentations to groups of school leaders around the country featuring AASA polling, messages, and information relating to Stand Up for Public Education™.

Communications programs:

Publications:

- *The School Administrator* special issue on democracy, May 2004
- Columns by Paul Houston and AASA Presidents John Lawrence, Don Kussmaul, and David Gee for *School Administrator*
- *School Administrator* columns on the “Punchback” initiative. Topics include:
 - Teacher and administrator salaries
 - The 80/20 rule
 - Questioning the time and expense of teacher in-service
 - Are there too many administrators?
 - Talking about what goes on in schools
 - Could administrative money be better spent?
 - Administrative bloat
 - Taming talk-show dragons
- Stand Up for Public Education™ communications kits for AASA members in 2004 and 2005 included:
 - “What’s Great about Public Schools” – description of both improved academic achievement and the great generation of kids in school today
 - Sample opinion-editorial/letter to the editor describing why the whole community needs to work together to stand up for public education
 - Collaboration with Learning First Alliance on parallel work on standing up for public education

Marketing Stand Up for Public Education™

AASA has been able to market Stand Up through a variety of merchandise, including:

- Shirts
- Bumper stickers
- Cloisonné lapel pins
- Note pads
- Mouse pads

Several stories have emanated from the use of these items. The favorite and largest example is the superintendent from Indiana who purchased 1000 bumper stickers to use on each of her district's buses.

The lapel pin has all but replaced the use of an AASA pin for AASA identification at association meetings. Superintendents use the pin as a gift to their board members and community friends of the schools. Some wear the pin to community events and local business meetings.

In addition, a different version of the campaign message was created for the AASA Women's Conferences from 2003-2005 with an icon of a woman with arms raised. In the 25th Anniversary year, a small statuette was created symbolizing many women standing up for public education.

At least six of AASA's state affiliates have asked for permission to use the Stand Up theme, and the permission was granted to each to use the theme and logo. Iowa, for example, has asked to use the theme and logo for the last three years for their annual statewide meeting.

Meetings and Conferences:

- National Conference on Education 2004 – General session speakers and program offerings
- National Conference on Education 2005, 2006, 2007
- AASA Summer Institute 2004 - Standing Up for Public Education
 - Member of the National Coalition for Public Education
- Work for increasing funding and greater equity
 - Member of the Committee for Education Funding

Other Activities

- John Goodlad Forums*
- Dissemination of NFL curriculum supporting diversity and multiculturalism
scholastic.com/oneworld
- Zoomerang poll to members to obtain information about school safety procedures, to combat critics who claim that schools are ignoring or slacking off on safety in these tough budget times