NASBE

About NASBE and State Boards of Education

National Association of State Boards of Education
Dear New State Board Member,

Welcome to your new, challenging, and rewarding role as a key education policymaker in your state. In the midst of all the other new information and materials coming to your inbox, we hope you will have an opportunity to look through the documents in this packet. We have selected these to provide you with information, boardsmanship tips, and perspectives to assist you in your important new work.

NASBE’s mission is to help state boards of education and individual board members be as effective as possible in their efforts on behalf of the students in their state. Please don’t hesitate to call us or email us at boards@nasbe.org with any questions you might have. And don’t forget to check out all the resources we have available on our website at www.nasbe.org.

Thank you for your service to America’s school children,

Kristen Amundson
President and CEO
National Association of State Boards of Education
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MISSION
The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) strengthens state boards of education in their pursuit of high levels of academic achievement for all students. NASBE does this by supporting state boards of education in key areas in which they have policymaking authority: college, career, and civic readiness; effective teacher and leader preparation and support; safe and healthy schools; school climate, discipline, and equity; and education data privacy.

A nonprofit organization founded in 1958, NASBE works to bolster state leadership in education policymaking, advocate equality of access to educational opportunity, promote excellence in the education of all students, and ensure responsible lay governance of education.

KEY NASBE VALUES
» citizen voice, lay leadership, and volunteerism
» democratic process of checks and balances
» equity and equal opportunity for all students to receive a high-quality education
» partnerships and collaboration
» nonpartisan representation and discussion of issues

CHARACTERISTICS
NASBE leads public policy through funded research, task forces, and individual expertise. Serving as a rich source of information for its members, NASBE produces original, timely information on education's most pressing issues via Policy Updates, State Innovations, Education Leaders Reports, and the State Education Standard, a journal dedicated to presenting the best thinking by leading experts in K-12 education policy, research, and practice. State Board Insights is a searchable database of the issues and policies on the agendas of state boards of education each month. Through a series called Power of the Question, NASBE suggests key questions boards may ask before adopting policy.

To advance public education for all students, NASBE seeks out partnerships from all sectors of the education community at the federal, state, and local levels with government, association, nonprofit, for-profit, or educational organizations.

NASBE convenes education experts, state education policymakers, and national education officials to collaborate in study groups and regional meetings. Through the Government Affairs Committee (GAC), NASBE advocates for its membership’s goals and interests with Congress and federal executive agencies. The Public Education Positions (PEP) Committee recommends changes in NASBE policy positions on key education issues for adoption by the Delegate Assembly. NASBE meets with business, industry, national associations, and other state decision makers—including chief state school officers, state legislators, and governors—to give voice to state board needs and to influence education policymaking at the state and national levels.

WHO ARE NASBE MEMBERS?
State boards operate as lay bodies in state education policymaking, serving as an unbiased broker for education decision making, articulating the long-term vision and needs of public education, and making policy in the best interests of the public and the young people of America.
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES

While the scope of board responsibility varies from state to state, state boards share common areas of jurisdiction: statewide curriculum standards; high school graduation requirements; qualifications for professional education personnel; state accountability and assessment programs; standards for accreditation of local school districts and preparation programs for teachers and administrators; the administration of federal assistance programs; and the development of rules and regulations for the administration of state programs.

POWER OF STATE BOARDS

State boards of education are different in every state. Some are created by the state constitution, others by statute. Some members are elected and some appointed. But all boards and board members have three important areas in which they exercise power:

The Power of Policy. The state board is responsible for policies that promote educational quality throughout the state, defining the fundamental mission of the state’s education system and developing the system’s long-range goals. To meet these goals, the board enacts appropriate regulations, advocates for necessary legislation, develops an adequate education budget, supports local implementation efforts, oversees the state education agency, and regularly measures the performance of the system.

The Power of Convening. The state board considers input from a wide range of stakeholders when making policy: educators, the business community, elected officials, parents, and students. Frequently, state boards will bring together groups of stakeholders to solicit their input on issues to come before the board. At other times, the board may convene a group of experts on a particular issue. The state board serves as a bridge between educators and others involved in education policy.

The Power of the Question. Board members can and should ask questions about policies that come before the board. As the citizen voice in education, they should not hesitate to ask about the potential impact of any policy they are asked to adopt. Boards will find the power of the question particularly beneficial in areas where they lack direct policy authority but still seek a positive impact and influence. NASBE’s Power of the Question publications tee up questions that boards can ask on key issues. NASBE is a nonpartisan entity whose diverse members come from both political parties. NASBE’s members are state boards of education themselves. Any individual who sits on a state board has access to NASBE member services.

NASBE also has two affiliate associations. The National Council of State Board of Education Executives (NCSBEE) comprises those in charge of helping the state board accomplish its work effectively and efficiently. Their responsibilities vary from state to state, and they are members of NASBE and NCSBEE by virtue of their state boards being members of NASBE. The National Council of State Education Attorneys (NCOSEA) is composed of attorneys who work most usually for both the state education agency and the state board of education.
Control over education through citizen volunteer governing boards is an American tradition that dates to the early 19th century. The first citizen groups were organized on the state level to administer public schools, and these state boards of education soon became integral to the governance of education in America. State mandates provided not only for compulsory teaching but also for school building, supervision, school attendance, and certification of teachers. In the years after World War I, state board independence from direct political pressure and from the political rhythms of gubernatorial and legislative elections was firmly established. In state constitutions and state statutes, the missions of boards were articulated through clear and unequivocal duties and responsibilities.

Today, in 47 states and three territories, state boards provide citizen voice and leadership to state education policy decisions.

State boards are being increasingly given new responsibilities. In virtually every state, the state board of education (SBE) has these responsibilities:

- adopt content standards for subjects ranging from the arts to world languages;
- adopt the assessments that will be used to measure whether students have mastered required content and skills for their grade and course level;
- determine graduation requirements;
- establish guidelines for the teacher and principal pipeline; and
- develop a state system of accountability.

**KEY ROLES OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION**

SBE members come to the office in a variety of ways. Some states elect board members. In others, members are appointed by the governor, the legislature, or even local school boards. (A description of how each state board’s governance model is here: www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/Governance-matrix-February-2015.pdf.)

While each state board is unique, all advocate for a quality education for all children, serve as a liaison between educators and other stakeholders, seek consensus, and make policy.

**Advocate for Education.** The state board serves as the primary advocate for a quality education for all children and youth in the state. As such, the board seeks to promote excellence in the education of all students and advocates equality of access to educational opportunity. Because the actions of state legislatures and Congress can affect the quality of education, board members provide information about how best to meet the needs of students in their state. The board articulates the needs of the education system to the state’s public and private constituencies and helps ensure continued, broad citizen support for education.

**Consensus Builder.** The state board encourages communication and works for consensus among all those who seek to influence state education policies and helps formulate long-range policy goals and plans. Hearing from a wide range of diverse perspectives can help the state board craft policy that addresses the needs of all students. Although concurrence may not always be possible, a commitment to consensus building ensures that all citizens will be heard.

**Policymaker.** The state board is responsible for policies that promote educational quality throughout the state. In this capacity, the board defines the fundamental mission of the...
state’s education system and develops the system’s long-range goals. Policies should accomplish the following:

- clearly define the priorities and goals of the state’s education system;
- allow districts and schools the flexibility to respond to the unique needs of their students;
- define roles and responsibilities, spelling out who is responsible for what; and
- include measurable outcomes.

Once policies are developed, the board has a responsibility to evaluate and revise them. Successful boards have a regular schedule for policy review.

No matter what their individual mandates, state boards have always been regarded as critical to ensuring the prominence of education as a state function. The responsibilities of state boards reflect two deeply held American educational values: the lay governance of education and the separation of educational policymaking from partisan politics. While others in the policymaking process tend to reflect specific concerns and more political perspectives, the state board is intended to serve as an unbiased broker of education decision making, focusing on the big picture, articulating the long-term vision and needs of public education, and making policy based on the best interests of the public and the young people of America.

Kristen Amundson is NASBE’s president and CEO. This report is a revised edition of “State Boards: Critical Link to Quality Public Education,” Policy Update 15, no. 1 (January 2007).
When state board of education members are asked to reflect on their first few months in office, most describe the experience using the same words: It was like drinking from a fire hose. Although state board members typically come to the job with a wealth of experience in education, government, and business, service on their state board of education is unique. For the board to function well, new board members need help in becoming fully effective.

The board chair, the board executive/administrator, and the chief state school officer should work together to ensure that new board members have answers to these key questions.

1 WHAT ARE THE LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE BOARD’S AUTHORITY?
State boards of education are, first and foremost, legal bodies. Many are authorized by the state constitution; all operate within the framework of the state’s laws.

It is nearly impossible to promote and achieve an agenda for learning when a board does not know what policy levers it has at its disposal. This training must be done systematically and should be reevaluated and modified as needed.

All new state board of education members need a primer on the constitutional and/or statutory responsibilities of the board. The full board should devote some time to educating and reeducating itself on its roles, responsibilities, and authority at least once each year. Board members should ask these questions:

- What do the state constitution and state statutes say about the board’s authority?
- What responsibilities are given exclusively to the board?
- What responsibilities are given exclusively to the chief state school officer?
- What responsibilities are shared between the two?
- What authority does the legislature have over education policy?
- What authority does the governor have over education policy?
- How can the board use its authority to promote the twin goals of equity and excellence?

2 HOW DOES THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY CARRY OUT ITS RESPONSIBILITIES?
State education agencies (SEAs) have wide-ranging responsibilities. New board members need a basic understanding of how the department in their state operates. Prior to the first meeting, new members should ask the following:

- What are the key programs and responsibilities of the SEA? From special education to school lunch, what are the most important programs the SEA administers?
- Who does what? Who are the key SEA personnel? How is the SEA organized?
- Which federal programs operate in the state? How are federal programs supported (through grants or formula allocations)? What are the requirements for continued funding? When does the state board of education have a responsibility for oversight or signoff?
- What is the board’s plan for accountability? How does the state board of education determine whether students are meeting learning goals? How are schools and districts evaluated? What can the board do to assist schools and districts that are persistently low achieving?
- What is the budget? How does the SEA develop its budget, and how are the board’s priorities reflected in the SEA’s budget?
- What acronyms are regularly used? What are the most commonly used abbreviations and acronyms in the state?

3 HOW DO THE STATE BOARD AND THE STATE CHIEF WORK TOGETHER?
The relationship between the state board and the chief state school officer varies from state to state. Chiefs, like boards, may
be appointed or elected. However these policymakers attain their position, one thing is clear: For the education system to work well in the state, everyone has to work collaboratively.

That isn’t always easy. But when the board and the chief work at cross-purposes, little gets done. Here are some questions new board members should ask about their relationship with the chief state school officer:

- Does the board select and evaluate the state chief? Some boards choose the chief. Others submit names to the governor, who selects someone off the list. If the board hires and evaluates the chief, it must develop measurable goals for the chief to follow and annually evaluate progress toward achieving those goals.
- How can boards work best with elected chiefs or those appointed by the governor? It is essential that the chief and the board engage in an open, honest discussion of the board’s goals, the chief’s goals, issues of mutual concern, and operational style.
- Does the board clearly understand that the SEA staff reports to the chief? Board members have a critical policymaking role but not an operational role.
- How does a board member get state information? (Some boards prefer that all requests to the department be routed through the chief state school officer or a specific designee. This is generally the preferred approach so that staff members are clear about how to prioritize board requests along with their other responsibilities. In other states, board members are free to contact department staff directly. New board members should know and follow established practice.)

4 WHAT FORMAL PLANS DIRECT THE WORK OF THE STATE BOARD AND THE SEA?

Many states have developed a strategic plan to guide their work. Other states used the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to create a vision for education in their state. New board members should be aware of the plans that already exist. They should ask the following questions:

- Does the board or the SEA have a strategic plan? How was the plan developed? When was it last updated, and how were stakeholders involved in its development? What is the process for reporting progress to the board? Is there a state ESSA plan? Has the state filed its ESSA plan? How has the board been involved with the development of the plan? How will the board be involved with reviewing progress toward the goals set out in the plan? (See “Seven Questions State Boards Should Ask before State Plans for ESSA Are Submitted” for more information.)
- How does the board involve stakeholders—parents, teachers, students, citizens—in its planning?

5 HOW DOES THE BOARD OPERATE?

Every board has a unique set of operating procedures. Some are set out in writing; others are unstated assumptions. Even state board members who have served on their local school board will find that they need to learn more about how this board operates. Questions to ask:

- How is the agenda prepared? How do members get items added to the agenda? How far in advance do members receive meeting agendas?
- How can new members work on their priorities? New board members often have a set of issues they want to advance during their term. It is important for the board chair to help new members understand what is within the board’s authority to address. The chair can also school new members in the appropriate way to get their issues onto the board’s action plan for the coming year.
- Does the board have a set of principles for board conduct? What are the board’s principles of conduct in dealing with attendance, board/staff relations, and media relations and communications? Who speaks for the board? How does a member balance obligations to one region or constituency with responsibilities to all students?
- How are meetings run? Does the board operate under Robert’s Rules of Order? Are there written procedures that govern board meeting processes?

6 HOW CAN NEW MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORK OF THE BOARD FROM THE START?

Although the learning curve is steep, new members need to contribute to the work of their board right away. New members should ask the following questions:

- Who are board staff? Most states have an executive director or board administrator who handles board administrative responsibilities. Some states have additional staff. How should new board members seek staff support and help?
- When does the board meet? When does the board meet for regularly scheduled meetings? How frequently are special meetings called? How much notice do board members receive for these special meetings? Are there other meeting obligations for board members? How are board members reimbursed for expenses?
- Does the board use a committee structure? How does the board use committees? When do committees meet? Who makes assignments? How can members express their preference for work on a specific issue or committee?
- Where does a new member find board policies? Does the board maintain a policy manual governing both the operational policies of the board and the major education issues on which the board has adopted policies? Does the board have a mission statement and a strategic plan? Is there a formal review cycle for policies and the strategic plan?
- What is the role of the chair and committee chairs? Boards are made up of citizen volunteers, and they find different ways to share the workload. What information needs to go through the board chair? the committee chairs?
- How can new board members handle the workload? Do board members access meeting documents electronically or by paper? How can board members prioritize the huge amount of information that will arrive in their inbox every day? Do board members have separate official email accounts? Does the board provide technology to members? Who ensures that technology is working?
• How does the board provide initial and continuing professional learning? Ongoing professional learning is essential for all board members. How does the board ensure that new board members receive information on state and national issues? Does the board provide training on how to work with the media and how to use (or not use) social media? What opportunities are there for meeting and learning from other state board of education members?

• How does the board interact with NASBE? Some boards designate a specific individual to serve as the liaison to the association. That person is responsible for sharing information about NASBE activities as a regular part of the board meeting. If there is no designated liaison, this might be a good way for a new member to learn more about national issues.

State boards typically have long lists of responsibilities and short meeting times. The sooner new board members can be a full participant in the board’s work, the better. Providing answers to these questions will allow new members to join the board’s discussion and decision-making process with confidence and a sense of being part of a responsive, caring body.

Kristen Amundson is NASBE’s president and CEO and can be reached at kristen.amundson@nasbe.org. An earlier version of this document was published in 1996.
Joining a state board of education involves commitment. Citizen volunteers routinely dedicate substantial time and energy to this demanding job. The vast majority report that they have taken on this challenge because they want to help all students succeed. When their talents and abilities are used maximally, they believe their service is well worth the personal cost.

New board members may worry that it will take them years to become truly effective. But effective board service is a skill, and like any skill, it can be learned, practiced, and improved.

Here are ways that a new member can make a difference from day one.

1. **FOCUS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**
   Does board service make a difference? Research shows it can. A recent study of local school board members found that some boards can help students beat the odds—that is, they help students perform better academically than one would expect, given their demographic and financial characteristics. Yet it is clear that such achievement is possible only when board members make it their top priority.

   Many other issues and considerations take up a board’s time. But the most successful board members do not allow themselves to be distracted by “bright, shiny objects.” Instead, they focus consistently on student achievement.

2. **DEVOTE THE TIME**
   Service on a state board of education is time intensive, and there are times when the demands on a member’s time are overwhelming. Agendas are long and complex.

   For example, a recent meeting in one state required the state board to consider and act on high school graduation requirements, subject regulations for mathematics and English language arts, a maintenance-of-effort (funding) waiver for one school district, regulations governing the qualifications for school superintendents and school administrators, science standards adoption, and the statewide school discipline plan.

   No single board member, especially not one who is combining board service with a demanding career, can be an expert on all those topics. One approach is for the board to divide the workload by assigning some topics to committees. The members of those committees can then serve as resources for the rest of the board.

   In addition to attending meetings, most state board members will also be asked to serve on board committees, visit schools to see how programs are working, and meet with many groups: legislators, business leaders, parents, and teachers. All of these add to the time commitment but also pay off in improved student achievement.

3. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**
   On occasion, board members express frustration when colleagues do not do their homework before meetings. This reflects poorly on the entire board and slows progress. When a board member is chronically unprepared, it is proper for the chair of the board to speak to that individual in private, letting them know the critical importance of meeting preparation. After all, the board is often under a microscope and must be cognizant of its public appearance.

   There is also a responsibility for staff members who prepare materials for the board. Members must receive relevant material in a workable time frame. The board should have an operating policy that guides staff on the materials that will be sent to members.

   Boards should use executive summaries, report logs, and other devices to give members a chance to read as much as they can to prepare for a given issue.

   The board member who has read and digested the information in the board agenda packet will be able to follow and participate in the discussion at the board table. For members who want to influence state education policy, the first step is to read the board materials.

4. **QUESTION**
   Some state boards are created in the state constitution; others were established by state statute. Members may be elected or appointed. But there is one thing they all have in common: the power of the question.

   A new board member may be concerned about asking a “dumb question.” But odds are that if one board member is wondering about something, others are as well. And as Albert Einstein once noted, “The important thing is not to stop questioning.”

   Even if a new board member decides not to ask at a first or second board meeting, he or she should definitely ask the question by the second or third time an issue arises.

   At a minimum, new board members should ask the following:

   - Does the state board have a strategic plan? How do members learn about progress toward meeting the goals set out in the plan?
• How does the board know if its policies are being implemented in schools and districts?

• What are the ground rules for determining what is board work and what are staff responsibilities?

• How do members place items on the board agenda?

• What can new board members do to help ensure a positive working relationship among all members?

5. MAKE DECISIONS

Effective boards make decisions. These decisions are sometimes controversial. Rather than deal with that controversy, boards may be tempted to put off a decision until the next meeting (or the meeting after that).

In nearly every case, however, postponing a decision will not make the problem go away. It is far better to take a vote and then develop a strategy for explaining why the vote was important and how the policy will be implemented.

For board members, however, the responsibility for a decision does not end when the vote is taken. A member who voted with the majority has a responsibility to see that the policy is carried out effectively. The member will work with the chief state school officer to ensure that timelines are established, benchmarks for achievement are clear, and a regular schedule for reporting on progress is developed.

And what if a member opposed the policy that eventually prevailed? Board members who take part in a democratic process have a responsibility to respect it once the vote is taken. Effective boards share common expectations of their colleagues that they observe during deliberation on the policy and in the representation of the board’s views once the policy is enacted. When it meets those expectations, the board is a better institution and the focus of policymaking remains squarely on producing results for students.

Kristen Amundson is NASBE’s president and CEO and can be reached at kristen.amundson@nasbe.org. This Boardsmanship Review is based on a 1997 NASBE publication, “Characteristics of Effective Board Members.”
What State Boards Should Know About Sunshine Laws

By Kristen Amundson

Citizens have a right to expect that the decisions that will affect their lives will be made at a time and place when the public can observe the proceedings. State open meetings laws, sometimes called “sunshine laws,” govern public access to governmental meetings.

Every state has some version of a sunshine law. In addition, most states have laws ensuring public access to governmental documents and records.

The Supreme Court of Oklahoma gave a clear statement of why open meetings are so important:

“If an informed citizenry is to meaningfully participate in government or at least understand why government acts affecting their daily lives are taken, the process of decision making as well as the end results must be conducted in full view of the governed.”

This primer on open meeting laws is not intended to replace the advice of the board attorney. But it will provide a new board member with a general overview of what is—and is not—permitted.

WHAT IS A MEETING?
Public officials are required to debate and vote on public issues in public. The open meeting laws of the state apply every time a board meets in a regular or special session.

But what about the other times when board business may be discussed? Many public officials are either unclear or too loose about what actually constitutes a meeting.

For example, what if a board gathers for breakfast before a regularly scheduled board meeting and talks about a proposed policy? In that case, most state laws would suggest that these board members were in a meeting. (In fact, in some states, even two board members meeting together and discussing board business would be considered a meeting.)

The key is to remember the goal of the open meeting law: The public has a right to know how decisions are made and, whenever possible, to participate in making those decisions.

TECHNOLOGY AND OPEN MEETINGS
Many open meeting laws were written before the advent of today’s technology. But that does not mean that technology can be used to evade open meeting laws. An email discussion of an upcoming board issue or a conference call scheduled for the specific purpose of strategizing about an upcoming vote could be considered subject to open meeting laws.

Some states have begun to incorporate technology into their open meeting laws. Board members may be allowed to participate and even vote on board matters via conference call. Missouri law specifically provides for meetings “by Internet chat, Internet message board, or other computer link,” provided the public is notified of how to access the meeting.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Even the most committed and involved citizen needs some advance notice of an upcoming meeting. State laws do not always spell out how much notice is required, but in general boards try to provide between 24 and 72 hours.

When notice had to be printed in a newspaper, it was more of a challenge for boards to meet this requirement. Today, social media can simplify the process of informing interested members of the public and the press. Unless state laws specify what the notice should contain, boards should provide at a minimum the date, time, and location of the meeting and the topic to be discussed.

CAN ANYTHING BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE?
In most states, boards can go into executive or “closed” session. Typically, the state laws governing meetings spell out what topics qualify for a closed session. These may include the following:

- discussion of the performance of a public official (for example, the evaluation of the state superintendent or commissioner);
- strategy sessions related to pending legislation;
- public safety and security;
- allegations of criminal misconduct against a specific individual.

Generally, the board needs to specify why it is going into a closed session. Following the closed session, the board needs to certify that...
The board attorney can be an invaluable partner when a board goes into a closed session. Some boards invite the attorney to be present to ensure that the board discussion remains within the limitations of open meeting law.

**OPEN MEETINGS AND THE PRESS**

Today, anyone with a smartphone and access to the Internet can “publish” a story about a public meeting. It is critical that board members treat each other and members of the public with respect at all times, and it is especially important when the board is discussing a controversial or challenging subject.

As a general rule, boards should follow these procedures when dealing with members of the press:

- Provide reporters with information on the issues to be discussed. In many cases, this may mean making the board packet available, except for items to be discussed in closed session.

- Establish clear policies about whether recording and broadcasting public meetings is allowed. Most boards allow the practice as long as the meeting is not disrupted.

- Determine the board’s practice for speaking with the press. Some boards prefer that only the board chair give the official position of the board.

**BOARD MEMBERS’ RESPONSIBILITY**

Consequences for violating open meeting laws can be serious. They can include criminal penalties, removal from office, noncriminal infractions, payment of attorney fees, and invalidation of official acts. The board attorney can and should inform board members about the current definition of what constitutes a meeting in their state.

*Kristen Amundson is NASBE’s president and CEO and can be reached at kristen.amundson@nasbe.org.*

**NOTES**


2. Missouri Revised Statutes § 610.020(1).
It is very material that order, decency, and regularity be preserved in a dignified public body.


Parliamentary procedures are the rules and precedents that regulate how a governing body conducts its business. As state boards have grown more diverse in their views and compositions, the significance of parliamentary procedures has taken on new meaning.

Proper parliamentary procedure can expedite the board’s business and makes the most of the limited time boards have together. All members of state boards of education should be familiar with their board’s parliamentary rules and how to appropriately use either these rules, or special rules the board has approved, or the parliamentary authority the board has adopted.

Effective boards and their members use parliamentary procedures to ensure that the rights of all participants are protected, that debate is balanced, and that the business of the board is conducted in a fair and orderly manner.

All board members need a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure. The rules are based on a regard for the rights and responsibilities of all members of the governing body. Put simply, these rules should ensure that the minority has the right to be heard and the majority has the right to decide. A member who is familiar with parliamentary procedure knows how to do the following:

- phrase and offer a motion;
- protect his or her right to be heard on an issue;
- rise to a point of order;
- evaluate the relevance of amendments;
- conduct an effective meeting; and
- differentiate the nature and use of committees.

Most state boards use *Robert’s Rules of Order, newly revised, 11th edition* as the basis for determining their procedures of operation. Boards that use *Robert’s Rules* as their guiding document should spell out in their bylaws or operating procedures the edition on which they will rely. A new board member’s orientation materials should include a guideline to parliamentary procedures. Topics that are most common and useful to state boards include the role of the chair, the importance of a quorum, the use of motions in board deliberations, and the use of the committee structure.

**THE ROLE OF THE CHAIR**

The chair is the presiding officer of the board. He or she must facilitate the work of the board and build consensus among the membership to achieve common goals. As *Robert’s Rules* notes, the chair should be familiar with parliamentary procedure but should also “bear in mind that no rules can take the place of tact and common sense on the part of the chairman” ($\S 47$). The chair maintains oversight over the meeting agenda, ensures that meetings start and end on time, and keeps the board moving toward established goals. On some boards, the chair has a vote on any motion. On other boards, the chair votes only in case of a tie. This should be spelled out in the bylaws of the board. Any ruling of the chair can be challenged, but appeals must be made immediately after the chair’s ruling.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A QUORUM**

A board cannot conduct its business unless a minimum number of voting members are present. The board’s bylaws should define a quorum, which may also be specified in state law or in state regulation. If they do not, a board quorum is typically a majority of all members.

The only official business a board can conduct without a quorum is to set the time to adjourn, recess, or take measures to obtain a quorum. If a meeting has a quorum at the beginning but members leave during the meeting, the continued presence of a quorum is presumed unless the chair or a member notices that a quorum is no longer present. If the chair notices the absence of a quorum, it is his or her duty to at least declare the fact before taking any vote or stating the question on any new motion. Any member noticing the apparent absence of a quorum can raise a point of order to that effect at any time as long as he or she does not interrupt a person who is speaking. A member must question the presence of a quorum at the time a vote on a motion is to be taken. A member may not at some later time question the validity of an action on the grounds that a quorum was not present when the vote was taken.
Hearings, programs, and presentations can proceed without the presence of a quorum. However, the absence of a sufficient number of members to constitute a quorum may be interpreted by the watching public as a lack of board interest and support for the specific program or presentation being made.

**THE USE OF MOTIONS IN BOARD DELIBERATIONS**

Robert's Rules of Order lists at least 87 kinds of motions, but many may never be used in a state board of education meeting. To promote democratic and effective meetings, members should familiarize themselves with the rules of the most common motions used:

- making a motion
- amending a motion
- referring to committee
- limiting or closing debate
- rising to a point of order
- appealing the ruling of the chair
- questions of privilege
- motion to reconsider
- point of inquiry
- recess and adjournment

In addition, members should know if a motion is amendable, debatable, or when a vote is required to pass the motion. A point of order, a point of information, and a point of personal privilege are always in order (table 1).

**AMENDING A MOTION**

On some boards (and in Jefferson’s Manual), it is assumed that a member who presents an amendment to a motion that is accepted by the body will then vote for the main motion. This is frequently not covered in formal bylaws, but board members should inquire about the custom and practice of their board.

**THE USE OF THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

When a board does not have sufficient information to make a judicious decision, when greater detail is necessary, or when it appears that the board could accomplish more through the work of a committee, a motion can be made to refer the issue to committee. The rules for committees are different from the rules that apply to the entire board:

- Members are not required to obtain the floor before making motions or speaking.
- Motions need not be seconded.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a question, and motions to close or limit debate generally are not allowed.
- Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- The chair can speak in discussion, make motions, and usually votes on all questions.

A motion to refer should not be a tool to avoid or bury an issue but rather a mechanism to support the board’s work. Committees work best when the policy questions are identified early in the committee’s study and deliberations, and they can be effectively used to inform the full board of the committee’s work.

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Table 1 Rules Used with Motions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th>May Interrupt Speaker</th>
<th>Second Required</th>
<th>Debatable</th>
<th>Privileged Motion</th>
<th>Subsidiary Motions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fix time to adjourn</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjourn</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recess</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Question of privilege</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of the day</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous question</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit/extend debate</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone indefinitely</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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The National Association of State Boards of Education represents America’s state and territorial boards of education. Our principal objectives are to strengthen state leadership in education policymaking, advocate equality of access to educational opportunity, promote excellence in the education of all students, and ensure responsible lay governance of education. Learn more at www.nasbe.org. This revised version is based on an earlier review NASBE published in 1997.
At every meeting, state board members vote on motions that affect the spending of tax dollars and people’s lives. They may decide whether an educator gets to retain his license. They may vote to open or close schools. Because state board members are also doctors, lawyers, business owners, and educators, they may also be asked to vote on a matter in which they could gain financially.

The public has a right to expect that all of these decisions are made impartially, based on what board members believe to be the best interest of the public. If it appears that the self-interest of board members influences their vote more than the public interest of citizens, citizens will no longer trust the board. Such decisions may reflect poorly on the board’s integrity and transparency, undermining public confidence in its ability to carry out its duties fairly.

In any of these cases, board members need to avoid any conflict of interest. Conflict of interest is defined as a situation that has the potential to undermine the impartiality of a person because of the possibility of a clash between the person’s self-interest and professional interest or public interest.

State board members are rightly subject to the same conflict of interest rules as other public officials. They should avoid both actual conflicts of interest and the appearance of such conflicts. Actual conflicts of interest are rare. They occur when private interests and official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust are inherently in conflict. For this reason, a member of a state board of education in most states cannot also serve as a member of the state legislature.

Potential conflicts of interest are much more common. They are also the most misunderstood concept in public service ethics. The North Carolina Board of Ethics describes a potential conflict of interest this way:

“Potential” means “capable of being but not yet in existence”—possible. Thus, when a covered Public Official has a potential conflict of interest due to some financial, familial, or personal situation, that means that such Official must exercise appropriate caution (sometimes extreme caution) to ensure that the unrealized, possible conflict does not “ripen” into a forbidden actual conflict in violation of his or her public responsibility.

This is usually done by the Official removing himself or herself from the situation to an appropriate degree (commonly in the form of “recusing” himself or herself from a particular vote). Rather than a source of embarrassment or anger, an evaluation that an Official has a potential conflict of interest should be viewed as an ethical “red flag,” a warning that he or she must be careful when whatever is causing the potential conflict comes before the Official for public action [italics in original].

RECOGNIZING A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

If there is any question about whether a conflict of interest exists, a board member should disclose the details of the situation to the board. In any case, board members should disclose the following instances:

- a board member stands to benefit from any policy or decision if it is approved;
- a board member would receive goods, services, or payment as a state board member for upholding or approving a policy or procedure;
- a board member’s personal organization would receive goods, services, or payment for the state board member’s action in upholding or approving a policy of procedure; or
- a board member would benefit directly from an action, even though the benefit was not the intended consequence of the policy or procedure.

Examples of potential conflicts of interest and some ways board members could handle them are included in the table.

The NASBE Board of Directors has adopted conflict of interest policies and procedures to increase NASBE’s reliability and transparency. These policies are intended to limit decisions to those board members who are impartial toward a particular decision and prevent personal interests from interfering with state board members’ duties to their state. Many state boards of education have similar policies.

WHAT STATE BOARD MEMBERS SHOULD DO

So what should you do if you think you could have a conflict of interest?

Educate yourself. A copy of a state board of education’s conflict of interest policies should
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POTENTIAL CONFLICT</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The board must make a decision on whether to revoke the charter of a school</td>
<td>The board member should make public the potential conflict and then recuse himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owned by a board member’s spouse.</td>
<td>from consideration of the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school superintendent serves on a state board that is revising standards for</td>
<td>Since these regulations apply equally to all superintendents, it is likely that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>licensing administrators.</td>
<td>there is no conflict. Check with the board attorney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state board is considering whether to hire outside counsel. One board member is</td>
<td>The board should scrupulously follow the state’s procurement rules. The board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a partner in a firm under consideration.</td>
<td>member should not participate in any discussions nor vote on the issue. The board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>member should also not perform any of the legal work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state board is considering a new state summative evaluation. One of the vendors</td>
<td>The board member should not accept the gift and should report the offer to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offers a board member a vacation trip.</td>
<td>board attorney.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

be given to all board members at the beginning of their terms. If you have not received the policy, ask for a copy.

Consult the state board’s attorney. Laws governing conflict of interest vary from state to state, so the board attorney is the best source of information and advice on your individual situation.

Be transparent. Work with the board attorney to write a statement explaining your potential conflict of interest and why you did (or did not) determine that a conflict exists. Read this before the board takes up the issue, whether you plan to vote on it or not.

If a conflict exists, recuse yourself. If you and the board attorney conclude that a conflict of interest exists, you should neither discuss nor vote on the issue. You may want to leave the board table during the discussion and vote to make it clear to the public that you are not participating.

Be aware of the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Kristen Amundson is president and CEO of NASBE, and Eve Tilley-Coulson is a policy analyst.
As education policymaking moves back to states, it is critical that state boards of education and state legislatures work together collaboratively. The interests of students are usually best served when state legislatures and state boards of education view education policymaking as a shared responsibility. When the two bodies are feuding over turf, they are not devoting their time to addressing their state’s pressing needs.

In states where there is open dialogue about the expectations of the board, the state education agency, and other branches of government, legislatures have been inclined to strengthen or maintain the responsibilities of the state board. In states where the board operates in obscurity and fails to convey its goals and vision for education to the legislature and the governor on a regular basis, others have attempted to usurp the board’s authority. To create the climate of open dialogue with the legislature, state boards should do the following:

**BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.**

As Lyndon Johnson once observed, “The time to make friends is before you need them.” Creating a relationship based on mutual respect and open communication between the state board and the state legislature is a key board responsibility.

Ideally, board members will reach out to prospective legislators even before they are elected. These early conversations can help future lawmakers understand the key issues facing the state. If possible, members should set up school visits that will illustrate these issues vividly. Early conversations are also a good way to clarify the roles of legislators and state boards. These roles will differ from state to state, so a briefing by your board attorney might be helpful for new legislators.

Of course, some legislators may have campaigned against specific board policies or practices. In those cases, an open dialogue is even more critical. Boards should seek common ground wherever it can be found. It may be that the new legislator needs more information about what is actually in the policy or what the board is already doing to address constituent concerns. For example, knowing that the state’s curriculum standards in a particular subject area are already slated for review during the coming school year might prevent the introduction of a bill to mandate that outcome.

**LEARN THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.**

Remember that every bill goes through a long process before coming to a final vote. It is possible to influence the legislation at several points. Board members are likely to have the most impact before the bill is ever introduced. It is possible to talk with the potential sponsor of the bill, answer questions, and offer insights. It may also be possible to offer suggestions of what to include in the bill—and what to omit.

There are other points at which the board can influence the legislation: committee hearings, floor debate (either through amendments or by encouraging legislators to support or oppose the bill), and when the bill moves through the other house. If necessary, the board may be able to persuade the governor to amend or even veto a bill.

It is essential to know who the key players are. At a minimum, this will include the chair and ranking member of the relevant House and Senate committees as well as the chairs of the budget subcommittees that deal with education. Staffers on these committees are also critical allies. In addition, members of state boards should reach out to the legislator(s) who represent their districts.

**STAY IN TOUCH EVEN WHEN THE LEGISLATURE IS NOT IN SESSION.**

In some states, contact between the board and key members of the legislature is limited to the time when the legislature is in session. By that point, legislators are often too busy for substantive policy conversations. It is far better to establish a process for regular, ongoing communication with members of key legislative committees and their staffs to ensure legislators are aware of the board’s policy priorities.

Invite legislators and staff to your board’s work sessions or to informal meetings. The board in one state invited legislative leaders and key staff to join them for lunch before the board meeting began. Over time, these lunchtime conversations strengthened the relationship between the two bodies.

**CONSIDER CREATING A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE.**

Each year, thousands of bills addressing the needs of education (both real and perceived) are introduced in state legislatures. State board members, most of whom are volunteers, do not always have time to monitor all of the legislation introduced in a given session. Many elective state boards of education have legislative committees to ensure that the board’s concerns are accurately conveyed to the state’s lawmakers. These
### LEGISLATIVE DO’S AND DON’TS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate regularly. Don’t wait for legislators to contact the board. Promote transparency and openness in everything the board does.</td>
<td>Rely solely on the chief and department staff to convey the board’s agenda to the legislature. The board chair and/or legislative committee chair should be familiar to legislators. Individual board members should know the legislators who represent their district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid misunderstandings. Clearly convey the “why” for state board policies and the “how” legislators can help.</td>
<td>Depend on the relationship between one or two board members and a particular legislator to accomplish the board’s agenda. The lack of a board/legislature infrastructure will be felt when board members or legislators leave their positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie board legislative priorities to the board’s strategic plan. Communicate clearly what the board hopes to accomplish through these priorities.</td>
<td>Promote an individual or organizational position that is not consistent with the board’s goals and strategic plan. It will divide the board and reinforce the idea that the board is not supportive of its own agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid partisan politics when possible. A board is at its best when it is focused on children, teaching, and learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

committees can take on these tasks:

- recommend a legislative agenda to the full board;
- maintain oversight of legislative issues as they progress through the legislative process;
- convey board goals and visions to the legislature;
- work with the chief and the appropriate department staff to ensure the board’s goals are reflected accurately in legislative proposals;
- analyze new board initiatives for legislative implications.

In some states, the state board’s policy agenda is presented through the state education agency or the governor’s office. Even in those cases, it makes sense for board members to have their own independent analysis of legislation being considered.

### INVOLVE EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS IN DEVELOPING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES.

The Every Student Succeeds Act mandates stakeholder involvement in the development of the comprehensive state plan, but there are many other ways that stakeholders can strengthen the board’s work. The more support the board can generate for its legislative priorities, the more likely it is that the legislature will act favorably upon them. The legislative committee should invite representatives of interest groups, parents, and community and business leaders to share their views and concerns about proposed legislative initiatives sponsored by the board. When possible, the board should incorporate these concerns into its legislative agenda. The more comprehensive and inclusive a proposal, the more support it engenders from a wide range of individuals.

### COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND CONCISELY.

Be sure legislators know exactly what you want them to do: “Support H.B. 1203 in committee,” or “Oppose S.B. 981 on the floor.” Since legislators are even more pressed for time than state board members, state board members must keep their comments brief and to the point. The legislator is more likely to read one-page letters or memos than lengthier documents.

### AVOID BURNING BRIDGES.

No board will win on every issue. So it will be important to keep the lines of communication open with the legislators who oppose board priorities as well as those who support them. An opponent on one issue may be a strong ally on the next. As one wise observer put it, “Be sure there are still some M&Ms in the jar” at the end of any particular legislative session. In other words, don’t burn bridges.

Given the nature of state governance and politics, boards will inevitably, from time to time, find themselves in conflict with some members of the state legislature. But following the recommendations presented here of maintaining communications with the legislature, developing and using a legislative committee, and involving a wide range of stakeholders in the policymaking process should help boards avoid such conflicts and maintain their focus on the improvement of education for all children in the state.

Kristen Amundson is president and CEO of NASBE. She was a member of the Virginia General Assembly for a decade.

Thanks to Lee Posey of the National Council of State Legislatures for help developing this brief.
Relationships among state boards of education and their governors vary across the states and across governance structures. Changes in those relationships can occur with new board members, new governors, and new issues. Some assume that gubernatorial appointments naturally promote a good working relationship between a board and the governor’s office. This governance structure, however, is not always a predictor of a productive relationship. Boards sometimes find themselves at odds with governors who mistakenly assume that their appointed board will always support their positions. In reality, any effective state board can create and sustain a good working relationship with the governor, whatever the method of board selection. Such a relationship requires planning and frequent communication, but the benefits are well worth the effort. It is the responsibility of the board to communicate with the governor on the board’s goals and to identify common interests that the two can agree on and promote. When a positive working relationship exists between the governor and the board, the board is neither a rubber stamp body for promoting a governor’s agenda nor an antagonistic institution challenging the governor on her or his goals for education.

In recent years, some governors have moved to bypass the roles and responsibilities of boards. Others have shown well-deserved confidence in the board by supporting an expansion of the institution’s functions. The trend to usurp board authority is usually grounded in one or more of the following factors:

- The governor has philosophical differences with the board.
- The governor believes the board is moving too slowly to promote change.
- The governor believes responsibility for education should directly rest with the governor. This belief has been voiced more frequently over the last 10 to 15 years and sometimes includes higher education as well as K–12. It is usually accompanied by proposals to replace the board-appointed or independently elected chief state school officer with a secretary of education appointed by the governor.
- The governor and his or her staff lack of a clear understanding of how the board operates and develops policy.
- The governor and his or her staff do not understand or value the importance of lay leadership.

Even when there is a positive relationship between a board and a governor, the governor, his or her education aides, and the appointment personnel rarely know the depth and breadth of board work. Most assume the responsibility and work load of the board begins and ends with the board meeting. Few are aware of the voluminous reading piles, the hours of hearings and deliberation, or the multitude of invitations and expectations to participate in local school activities that consume board members’ time. Most often state board work is done as voluntary service to the state. Few understand how vested and committed individuals become to the importance of lay leadership in education or to the goal of improving education for all students. Given this fact, at least two elements must be in place if a board wants a good working relationship with the governor. The board must:

- Ensure the governor understands and values the work of the board, and
- Provide a vehicle for having the governor’s views presented before the board constructively.

The Board’s Role in Building a Positive Relationship with the Governor

A good working relationship between the board and the governor is grounded in ongoing and frequent communication between the two entities. This can even begin prior to a governor taking office: one board recently met with the major
candidates for governor well before the election to hear their views on education issues and establish a relationship. After inauguration, the board should use an agreed upon strategy to:

- **Convey the board’s goals and accomplishments to the governor and his or her staff regularly.** A board that does an annual self-evaluation and planning retreat should inform the governor’s office of the results.

- **Develop a structured liaison relationship with the governor’s office.** The board chair or his or her designee should have regular meetings with the governor’s education aide to ensure that both understand where there is agreement and where there is a divergence of views on major education issues facing the state.

- **Ensure that there are “no surprises.”** The governor should not learn of new policies, fractious issues, or other board concerns from individuals outside the board. When someone else is interpreting the works of the board, there are bound to be misinterpretations.

- **Incorporate the governor’s priorities into the board’s priorities when possible.** Most boards and governors have similar goals for education. The challenge develops when the methods for achieving those goals differ. Boards and governors that have a constructive relationship look for common ground and find ways to support one another’s agendas.

### The Governor’s Role in Building a Positive Relationship with the Board

As chief executive officer, the governor is ultimately responsible for the programs and services that benefit the citizens of the state. However, the governor should recognize that no other body in the state spends as much time and effort solely on education policy as the state board of education. The governor should respect and value the work done by the board. The governor has a responsibility to:

- Communicate with the board;
- Make him or herself aware of the board’s goals and time lines for achieving those goals;
- Respect the statutory and/or constitutional responsibilities of the board; and
- Ensure there are “no surprises.”

For states with appointed boards, the appointment process is one of the most important decisions a governor can make for education in the state. The governor should consider the needs of the board as it currently exists. The governor’s education aide should talk to the board chair and the superintendent or commissioner about the current makeup of the board and what kinds of individuals would complement the body. When making appointments, a governor should:

- Carefully evaluate the current strengths and weaknesses on the state board of education and appoint individuals who will strengthen the board and broaden its vision;
- Ensure that parents, business, and community interests are adequately represented on the board;
- Include individuals from diverse racial and ethnic populations within the state to serve on the state board; and
- Be prepared to let the body govern.

### Conclusion

The nature of boards and governors dictate that there will always be creative differences on how to best solve the state’s pressing education problems. A mutual respect for both institutions can go a long way toward producing solutions. Changing governance structures, avoiding honest discussions, and working at odds will not. Putting aside distracting issues and the battle of ideas that rage about us, policymakers must step back, look at the whole picture, and work to establish steady, nonpartisan, representative leadership that earnestly tackles difficult education challenges.
State boards have an obligation to build relationships with education stakeholders and ensure their voices shape education policies. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are required to engage stakeholders in “timely and meaningful consultation.” While it is a federal requirement, building strong relationships with diverse stakeholders is also essential to fulfilling your role as the citizens’ voice in education. Board members can leverage ESSA to not only bolster relationships with current partners but to seek out new ones, particularly among those who feel disconnected or who have not been historically engaged in a public education dialogue.

**DIFFERENT FOLKS, DIFFERENT STROKES**

If you are serious about folding meaningful input into your board’s policymaking, you must tailor interactions with your constituencies in a way that recognizes and values their unique contributions to the education process. Those charged with implementing the policies that your board enacts have very different concerns from those the policies affect—parents, business leaders, and employers, who view themselves as consumers of the system. Because of the diverse, divergent perspectives of stakeholders, boards must position themselves in a way that facilitates open, honest discussions. Your board can then lay the groundwork for pragmatic consensus building and broker positions that are acceptable to various interests without compromising the integrity of the policy.

Successful engagement creates a sense of buy-in and shared ownership of the state’s vision and strategic plan for education. Board-approved policies have run into implementation roadblocks when factions of the community are not involved at the outset and learned about policies’ impacts only after the fact.

Ask about whether your board has operational policies on how they will engage education constituencies continually. Public meetings and hearings are important tools for receiving input, but they generally focus on specific issues and require stakeholders to monitor state notices. Creating an environment of mutual understanding of responsibilities and concerns requires more substantive, sustained interaction in a less formal setting. A progressive board understands that meaningful engagement also means that its members are visiting school communities regularly and listening to their concerns and ideas to improve education.

Consider the full range of stakeholders throughout the state with vested interests in the education system:

- parents
- students
- teachers
- school leaders
- community-based organizations
- local school boards
- district superintendents
- early childhood educators
- charter school leaders
- civil rights organizations
- governors
- legislators
- postsecondary administrators
- businesses
- philanthropic and grant-making organizations

Your board should demonstrate an understanding of each group’s unique role within the sphere of public education. Local school boards have experiences and responsibilities that are most similar to those of state boards. As the lay education policymakers at the state and local level, these two groups are the public’s voice on issues of excellence and equity. Both develop strategic plans and mission-based policy. To promote a unified approach to goal setting, your state board could host an annual session on strategic planning for local boards that would benefit both. Such sessions can help local boards understand what you envision for all students while allowing them to customize according to community mores.

Most state boards honor their state teachers and principals of the year at an annual ceremony. Some boards have taken this a step further, using these experts’ skills and experiences to help the board think through issues of professional learning and teacher preparation programs. A few states have created teacher advisory boards or panels comprising former teachers of the year or other distinguished professionals. These panels serve as resources to state boards when they deliberate on teacher-related issues.

Most state boards have time allotted for study sessions to increase their understanding of an issue. A board could invite key leaders of
the education or business community to hear speakers on an issue that the board expects to include on a future policy agenda. By allowing these leaders to learn more about an issue of importance to the state board, raise questions with experts, and have a common understanding of the data, the board is building support before the issue is translated into policy recommendations.

The turnover in superintendents across the nation is reaching critical levels. While many spend less than three years in their posts, they are often the point people for making change happen. They also try to serve multiple masters: teachers, principals, board members, parents, and business leaders. Your board can help education leaders in the state: Work with local superintendents to identify their needs, their frustrations, and their hopes. At the same time, define what the state board can do to support them.

ENGAGING PARENTS AND STUDENTS
Parents often feel that education policymakers undervalue their opinions, particularly at the state level. Your board must be sensitive to those who are active in parent-teacher organizations as well as to those who are less involved in their schools. Identifying and recognizing other established groups that include large numbers of parents, such as civic and church groups, can reinforce the board’s commitment to inclusiveness and encourage all parents to take a more active role in schools.

Several state boards have student members who make significant contributions to the board’s deliberations. Frequently, these students are elected through an elaborate process that involves hundreds of students across the state. You should consider including these student conventions on the board agenda or seek to have board representation at the meeting to further students’ understanding of the importance of the board and its work. Your board should also identify meaningful ways to foster relationships with students who are not active in school politics or student councils. These students are sometimes less aware of the purposes behind state board actions and would benefit from interaction with the board.

Although this Boardsmanship Review has touched on only a few of the relationships between state boards and other groups, productive relationships share common ingredients. The fundamental elements of good working partnerships are ongoing evaluations of those important relationships at the state and local level, a process for meaningful interactions, and a demonstration that the board is listening. What is most important to remember is that the quality of your policies will come to reflect the quality of your relationships with the community.

Abigail Potts is NASBE’s director of college, career, and civic readiness. Please contact her at abigail.potts@nasbe.org for questions about stakeholder engagement. This Review is based on an earlier version, “Building Strong Relations in the Education Community,” published in 1998.
Working with the Media

By Renée Rybak Lang and Michael Spaeth

Regardless of whether you are an appointed or elected member of your state board, your role as a state policymaker opens you up to scrutiny from parents, community leaders, and the news media.

Working with the media and communicating with the public through the media are essential to a board member’s role as a public official. Reporters depend on board members to be authoritative sources of information about state education matters, and they pay close attention to board proceedings. In turn, board members can work with the media to help communicate important decisions to stakeholders and build public trust. This Boardsmanship Review outlines ways state board members can effectively interact with the media.

TYPES OF NEWS MEDIA

Although a growing number of people, and particularly young people, get their news from social media and other nontraditional online media sources such as blogs, most still depend on traditional media sources for their news: newspapers, magazines, television, and radio.

A reporter’s job is to report news and information accurately and quickly. Reporters are often assigned “beats,” or issues to cover, including politics and education. But as data from the Pew Research Center suggests, newsrooms are increasingly short-staffed. The number of full-time reporters covering state legislatures for daily newspapers declined by 35 percent between 2003 and 2014, and less than one-third of the 801 daily newspapers in the United States send a reporter to cover state capital news. Likewise, just 14 percent of TV stations have an assigned state reporter, and only 124 reporters cover state houses on radio.

One-third of education beat reporters say their newsroom has shrunk in recent years, according to the Education Writers Association. Because of this, reporters covering the state board of education may be working on multiple beats at once, and they are likely to be younger and less experienced.

This inexperience can be both a challenge and an opportunity for state board members. In responding to press inquiries on board decisions, board members can educate reporters new to the beat on the intricacies of education policy-making while answering their specific questions.

State boards should also consider getting to know the editorial boards and writers from their state’s newspaper of record. Newspaper editorials can both affect and reflect public perceptions of an issue. It is in the state board’s best interest to develop a rapport with editorial writers before they weigh in on education matters.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PRESS INTERVIEWS

Speaking to reporters can be nerve-wracking, especially if you’ve never done a press interview before. They will ask difficult questions and sometimes ones meant to throw you off guard. Remember though, they are only doing their jobs. For any press interview, it is important to stay calm and follow these 10 tips:

1. Ask yourself, “Am I the appropriate spokesperson?” Many boards choose to have only one member serve as spokesperson or have rules on member interactions with the media (box 2). Before agreeing to an interview, be clear about what your board’s policy is on talking with the press. In cases when you are contacted by reporters but are not the appropriate person to answer their questions, refer them to the appropriate spokesperson or suggest someone else with more expertise on an issue. Reporters will appreciate the tip.

2. Be responsive. Reporters operate on deadlines, so timeliness is of the utmost importance. Reporters remember who is responsive and who is not, so when they call, always ask...
when their deadline is and meet or beat it.

3. Prepare, prepare, prepare. A successful interview depends on how well you know the issue being covered. Before agreeing to be interviewed, ask the reporter what they want to speak with you about. Read up on the issue and outline the key points, messages, and facts that you want to make sure you cover during the interview—regardless of what questions you are asked. Try to anticipate their questions. If you are doing a phone interview, write out important data points you may be asked about and have your talking points handy to help you stay on message. If time allows, review your notes and practice with a colleague or communications staff member beforehand.

4. Check out the interviewer. It’s important to research reporters who will be interviewing you. What have they written about recently? Do their stories tend to have a particular angle or point of view? How long have they covered education? Knowing these details can help build rapport with a journalist.

5. Be concise. It’s easy to get tripped up by an interview question and say more than you mean to. Before you give a response, ask yourself: “What is the essential information?” Keep your answers short and relevant. Do not use jargon, acronyms, or wonky terms. If you want to drive home a point or key message, use jargon, acronyms, or wonky terms. If you mean to. Before you give a response, ask yourself: “What is the essential information?” Keep your answers short and relevant.

6. Accuracy and honesty are critical. Never under any circumstances lie to a reporter. Relationships with the press are built on trust, and every effort should be made to ensure your words are accurate and truthful. If you are caught in a lie, that will be the news. Avoid responding to questions with “no comment,” as it can sound like you have something to hide. Instead, if you don’t know an answer to a question, say “I don’t know.” Refer them to another expert, or tell them that you’d like to double check the information before being quoted on it.

7. There is no such thing as “off the record.” It is always safest to assume that whatever you say during an interview with a reporter will be used in her story and attributed—even if your interview is “on background.” It is easy for a reporter to misread her notes or decide that something you said is too good not to include. If you are being interviewed in person at your office, clear your desk of any sensitive information. For TV or radio, always assume your microphone is “hot” to avoid stray comments.

8. Watch out for leading questions and hypotheticals. “Wouldn’t you say that…” Reporters often try to put words in people’s mouths to get them to share insider information. Or they may have already written the story and are trying to set up a quote they need to fill a gap. Avoid the temptation to fill the silence or speak out of turn. Stick to the facts and your talking points.

9. Keep your cool. Sometimes the excitement of an interview brings about unplanned emotions. You may get frustrated by a question. Take a deep breath and try to stay calm. Be mindful of how fast you are talking and your tone. If you are conducting an interview in person, be aware of your posture and facial expressions.

10. Repeat your main points. At the end of every interview, slowly go through your two or three most important points. You want to make sure the reporter has recorded or written—and understands—the most salient facts. You might say, “I just want to make sure you got these three essential points…” And always make sure the reporter has a phone number where you can be reached for additional information on deadline.

CONCLUSION

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) prioritizes ongoing stakeholder engagement throughout the state planning process and implementation. The news media are not specifically called out in ESSA, but journalists have the power to influence your most important stakeholders. Having a strong relationship with the media can increase public awareness of and support for your board’s policymaking.

Renée Rybak Lang is NASBE’s communications director, and Michael Spaeth is communications associate.
STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AT A GLANCE

- Governor appoints board
- Other appointing authority
- Elected board

Governor appoints chief

Board appoints chief

Elected chief

- = partisan ballot
- = nonpartisan ballot

NASBE
National Association of State Boards of Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>SELECTION OF STATE BOARD MEMBERS</th>
<th>SELECTION OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER</th>
<th>SELECTION OF STATE BOARD CHAIR/PRESIDENT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF VOTING STATE BOARD MEMBERS</th>
<th>LENGTH OF TERM FOR STATE BOARD MEMBERS</th>
<th>STATE BOARD ESTABLISHED IN STATUTE OR CONSTITUTION</th>
<th>AUTHORITY FOR TEACHER LICENSURE</th>
<th>AUTHORITY FOR STANDARDS ADOPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>Governor is president of SBE</td>
<td>8 plus governor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>Governor appoints; legislature confirms</td>
<td>SBE appoints with approval by governor</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Governor appoints with consent of Senate, except CSSO</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11 voting members including a student member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Governor appoints with advice and consent of General Assembly</td>
<td>SBE makes recommendation to governor</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>11 voting members; commissioner of Dept. of Higher Education serves ex-officio</td>
<td>11 voting members are appointed to 4 year terms; student members are appointed to 1 year terms</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
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<td>SBE elects</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Governor appoints, with consent of Senate</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>PSC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9 board members, a student council representative, and a military liaison</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Governor appoints 7 with consent of Senate; CSSO also serves</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Governor appoints with consent of Senate</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Governor appoints 8; speaker of the House 1; president pro tempore 1; CSSO also serves</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>CSSO serves as chair</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SEA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects (2 year term)</td>
<td>9 and 1 nonvoting student member also appointed and serving a 1 year term</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>Independent Board</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11 plus 1 additional member, the president of the Council on Postsecondary Education, who serves as nonvoting member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>8 elected by nonpartisan ballot; governor appoints 3</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9 plus 2 nonvoting student members</td>
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<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Governor appoints, with advice and consent of Senate</td>
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<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Governor appoints 6; 4 voting ex-officio members, 1 student</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>CSSO</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>None</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>CSSO</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Governor appoints 5; legislature appoints 4</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Governor appoints with consent of Senate</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
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<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Montana</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
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<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>4 are elected; governor appoints 3, 2 of whom the legislature nominates</td>
<td>Governor appoints from 3 nominees SBE provides</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>7 voting members, plus 4 nonvoting members the governor appoints</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>Governor and executive council appoints</td>
<td>Governor appoints after consulting SBE, confirmed by council</td>
<td>Named by governor for 1 year term</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Governor appoints, with advice and</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>AUTHORITY FOR STANDARDS ADOPTION</td>
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<td>None</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>New York</td>
<td>Legislature appoints</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Governor appoints and legislature confirms 11, 2 voting ex-officio members: state treasurer and lt. governor</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms 6; CSSO also serves</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate confirms</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Governor appoints with consent of the Senate</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Governor appoints; General Assembly confirms</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects (4 year term)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5 year term, except student member, who serves 1 year</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>Governor appoints (2 year term)</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>Independent Board</td>
<td>SEA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Governor appoints 9 voting members and 2 nonvoting members with consent of Senate</td>
<td>Governor appoints from 3 nominees SBE provides</td>
<td>SBE elects (2 year term)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Governor appoints; General Assembly confirms</td>
<td>Governor appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Local school board members elect 5; governor appoints and Senate confirms 7; private schools elect 1; CSSO also serves</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects 14, plus 2 nonvoting student members</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>CSSO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>9 appointed by the governor and 3 nonvoting ex-officio members</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>CSSO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>Governor appoints; Senate approves</td>
<td>Partisan ballot</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>Standards Board</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE</td>
<td>SELECTION OF STATE BOARD MEMBERS</td>
<td>SELECTION OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER</td>
<td>SELECTION OF STATE BOARD CHAIR/PRESIDENT</td>
<td>NUMBER OF VOTING STATE BOARD MEMBERS</td>
<td>LENGTH OF TERM FOR STATE BOARD MEMBERS</td>
<td>STATE BOARD ESTABLISHED IN STATUTE OR CONSTITUTION</td>
<td>AUTHORITY FOR TEACHER LICENSURE</td>
<td>AUTHORITY FOR STANDARDS ADOPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>Nonpartisan ballot</td>
<td>Mayor appoints chancellor and CSSO</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>CSSO</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>6 elected at large; governor appoints 3; 1 voting student</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3 years for appointed, 2 for elected</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Marianas</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>SBE appoints</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Islands</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Governor nominates; Senate approves</td>
<td>SBE elects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>SBE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SBE = state board of education; SEA = state education agency; CSSO = chief state school officer; PSC = professional standards commission
The National Association of State Boards of Education is a nonprofit, private association that represents state and territorial boards of education. Our principal objectives are to strengthen state leadership in education policymaking; promote excellence in the education of all students; advocate equality of access to educational opportunity; and assure responsible lay governance of public education.