The horrific school shootings of 2018 sparked urgent new rounds of questioning, across the country and also in meetings of state boards of education. What can we do to keep students safe? How are such tragedies to be prevented? What role do schools play in helping students deal with challenging circumstances and trauma?

Of necessity, the answers will be multifaceted. The supporting policies for student safety and wellness that animated many members’ discussions throughout the year have touched on the interplay between various aspects: students’ physical, mental, social, and emotional health, their sense of well-being, the quality of the school plant and school climate, and their physical security while at school. The issue at hand covers much of this ground.

It begins with a voice of hard-earned experience. Longtime educator and state board member Jane Goff recounts how she and her colleagues in Jefferson County, Colorado, struggled together to respond to the aftermath of the Columbine High School shootings. As she puts it, “Deep listening and unshakeable patience are essential items in a leader’s emotional first-aid kit.”

Several articles address the impediments to learning that come from inattention to student health and wellness. To set the context for these articles, authors from the nonprofit research group Child Trends share findings from their study of what state board members and other stakeholders and policymakers rank as highest priorities for advancing child health and wellness. Mental health is high on the list.

Harvard researcher Stephanie Jones and colleagues offer guidance to state boards that are aiming to build up social and emotional learning (SEL) skills statewide. “Just as with math or literacy, simple skills act as building blocks for more complex skills, and skills that emerge early provide a foundation for skills that mature in later years,” she writes. “As a result, some SEL skills are more salient than others during particular developmental stages.”

Sharon A. Hoover delves into the alarming prevalence of childhood traumas and their classroom impact. She references state policy efforts and resources to support trauma-informed schools. State education agencies and state boards are at work on many aspects of student wellness, and Megan Blanco gives us a sampling of those efforts.

Amid the surge toward integrating SEL into classrooms, public health expert Susan Goekler and colleagues urge state boards not to overlook the role that health education can play. Strong, comprehensive, and well-taught curriculum provides a natural home for fostering healthy students, they write.

In the category of “things you may not have considered yet,” we include two pieces: Architect Brian Minnich urges state and district education leaders to consider how school building and campus design can advance student safety. Erika Etland and Joseph Allen reprise their Schools for Health report on how poor building quality exacerbates student and staff illnesses. They write, “Ensuring healthy indoor environments is not just jargon but a strategy to help students reach their full learning potential.”

In an interview, Montgomery County Chief of Police Tom Manger speaks about the role of school resource officers (SROs) and what state boards should know about SRO programs in their state. Also, National Council of State Board Education Executives’ John-Paul Hayworth writes an inaugural column on combating youth suicides.