My husband and I welcomed a new daughter, Sarah, in April. She is pure joy, but it also feels like we are running marathons to keep everything on track. We have joined the “it takes a village” club to help manage the chaos a family of four creates. With the changes ensuing from last November’s midterms, state boards of education will also need to engage—and listen to—a village to ward off chaos and ensure that the education policies they adopt create lasting benefits for all students.

Inclusion was a recurring theme of October’s Annual Conference in Denver, too. National Teacher of the Year Mandy Manning urged state boards to ensure that teachers, plural, have a seat at the policymaking table. State boards must make a point of understanding the challenges teachers face and where the system may be failing them, and one teacher voice alone will not be enough.

Another essential voice is that of students. Two student state board members, Maryland’s Bryce Awono and Guam’s Nikki Aubree San Agustin, attended our conference this year and generated much enthusiasm for involving students in state education policymaking. Both added valuable perspectives to our conversations.

According to a recent NASBE analysis, 20 states and territories have at least one student member on their boards. A few states, like Mississippi, are considering proposals to add student members, and in November, Utah’s state board named 15 members to its first student advisory council. Each model recognizes the value of student voices. Whether your board has a student member or not, setting a time on the agenda to hear from students is important for informing and grounding state board decisions. As Donna Johnson, this year’s Kysilko Award winner, put it, “Students cannot afford to wait until the adults get out of their own way to address the problems they face.”

Former NASBE President and CEO Kris Amundson has called state boards of education the stable center of education policymaking. The dramatic shifts in state houses and governorships across the country underscore this point. Although citizens voted in many new board members, or new governors will be appointing members to fill expiring terms, most members will be continuing terms—and work—begun months earlier. State boards can cement their legacies by scheduling early meetings with new governors and other new state leaders, telling them about the work that has been done and finding common ground on new initiatives.

Through NASBE’s new strategic plan, staff will be doing our part to elevate the voices of state board members. As part of the strategic planning process, we outlined core values that guide our work: prioritizing state leadership, building community, collaborating, elevating evidence, and empowering citizen leaders. Each of these values suggests that bringing more voices together and creating lasting channels for shared solutions can lead to better policymaking that strengthens public education systems and prepares students of all backgrounds and circumstances to be successful in school, work, and life. NASBE is here to support and empower state boards of education in their pursuit of this goal.