State Boards Challenged to Develop Standards for Media Literacy

Students’ use of the Internet is not merely a technology issue for educators, but a reading comprehension issue, as well, according to Friday’s keynote speaker, Donald Leu, Director of the New Literacies Research Lab at the University of Connecticut, challenged state board members to develop standards for media literacy.

Reading, he claimed, is now moving from being majority narrative based to encompassing both narrative and information. Despite this shift, our students are struggling when it comes to comprehending information on the internet.

“Our kids are digitally savvy when it comes to gaming, texting, social networking, but when it comes to information they are digital dufuses,” he said.

In an experiment to prove this point, Leu had asked high-performing students to report whether information on a web site about the “endangered Pacific northwest tree

Choice, Quality, and Accountability Are Key Issues for Having Charters — or Not

Fred Meyer (NE), a state board member from a state with no charter law, Randy DeHoff (CO), a state board member from a leading charter school state, and Alex Medler, from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), came together on a breakout session panel to discuss some of the key questions facing state boards today around charter schools.

Randy DeHoff, who has been involved with charter schools since the early 1990s, said he has found three principle reasons for including char-
Community, higher education, and business partnerships are often touted as critical links to helping students graduate from high school and making sure that they are college- and career-ready when they do. Now NASBE’s study group on education and the army has found common ground for partnerships with the country’s single largest employer: the military.

The study group’s report, Common Ground: Education and the Military Meeting the Needs of Students, examines the desired outcomes shared among educators, the military, business and higher education and how to align these goals with shared best practices.

“We as a nation need to increase our high school graduation rates and to make this happen, we need the best ideas from education, the military and industry,” said NASBE Executive Director Brenda Welburn. “When educators join as equals with the military, it means each partner can aid the other in the interests of students. We must keep a collectively open mind to the possibilities that exist for students when they know that every door is open to them as they prepare for their futures.”

The group determined that educators can take adapt many of the practices the military applies to instruct secondary students enrolled in a cross-section of programs, including JROTC and the National Guard Youth Challenge and use them in non-military settings. That is, the application of basic practices that give students discipline, pride, and a sense of belonging can be harnessed for use in many school settings. In addition to partnerships, military education programs exhibit a host of best practices that can be used to inform civilian program, including:

- A holistic approach to a student’s education, including personalized learning plans, planning assistance, and consideration of non-academic goals and abilities;
- Integrated, relevant curricula and lessons aligned to desired outcomes; and
- Providing a safe, structured environment.

While much of the work of maintaining programs occurs at the local level, state boards of education can help facilitate partnerships and the use of these best practices through a range of policy decisions. The study group arrived at six recommendations for state boards including:

- Examination of their policies to ensure that none hinder student participation in programs that help students become productive and responsible citizens.
- Consideration of instituting cognitive and non-cognitive assessments, such as the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), as diagnostic tools to assist students as they plan for their transition from secondary education to postsecondary life.
- Leveraging their authority over state school counseling mandates, guidance counselor certification requirements and school counseling programs so counselors can better inform students and parents about education programs and strategies, including military-themed/generated programs, and help them create a postsecondary plan that examines all options: work, college, or the military.
Charter Schools

Fred Meyer said Nebraska had never had a grass roots movement to promote charter schools in his state, which he attributed in part to its longstanding option enrollment law. This measure gives students a chance to transfer to a different district once in their school career (the only other transfer allowed would be back to the original home district). In addition, he credited the state’s strong efforts in educator development with ensuring that teachers felt they could work together to fulfill their vision of the best educational environments within the current structure, rather than having to start a charter school.

Meyer also noted that, especially in tough fiscal times, he would be reluctant to add another layer of state bureaucracy for administering and ensuring quality for charters.

With 5,000 charter schools educating 1.6 million students, charters are not going away, Alex Medler said. Given this maturing of the movement, “quality has now become job one.” Medler recommended that states consider the principles and standards for authorizing charter schools that NACSA has developed, which not only help ensure quality, but can help depoliticize approval discussions.

Octopus Use a Reading Comprehension Issue

Lane Beattie, president and CEO of the Salt Lake Chamber, is being honored with NASBE’s Friend of Education Award. The national award is given annually to an individual or organization whose primary work may be outside the realm of education policy but whose contributions to education are significant and enduring.

Beattie, former president of the Utah State Senate and Chief Olympic Officer for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, formed a model partnership between the business community, the state Office of Education and the Utah System of Higher Education to encourage investment and innovation in education that will help students graduate college and enter the workforce better prepared for their professions. Further, the Chamber under his leadership spearheaded a campaign to protect education from budget cuts.

Beattie will receive his award at the annual conference’s closing President’s Luncheon.
Electronic social media can have its benefits and pitfalls, said state education attorneys Carol Greta (Iowa) and Jean Welch Hill (Utah) at yesterday’s breakout session on social networking. The panelists explained that the use of social networking sites, blogs, and texting can have legal ramifications when used for communication between educators and students. The attorneys stressed that it is vital for educators to understand what is considered to abuse when using social media.

Potential solutions to policymaking around this issue include defining what is acceptable use of social media, avoiding illegal activity, not disclosing confidential information, not harassing others or wasting work time, monitoring postings to your social networking site and the use of your information on other sites, and having clear progressive discipline policies established for employees.

Educators must also be aware of other improper uses of technology, including cyberbullying, and being able to determine whether instances of this occurring off-campus warrant disciplinary action. Legal issues regarding sexting and cell phone searches were also highlighted.

In addressing the issue of proper and improper use of social media, the attorneys told state board members they must review and develop policies that ensure effective anti-bullying programs. Such programs need to include research of the phenomenon, a definition of electronic harassment, clear consequences for violators, and acceptable use of cell phones at school. In addition to continual evaluation of a program’s effectiveness, a state’s policies should also require ongoing professional development for all faculty and staff and should provide for parent education in prevention, detection, and possible consequences regarding school discipline, civil litigation, and criminal prosecution.