State boards have an obligation to promote sound relationships with the education community within the state. The most common connections between state boards and their education constituencies are hearings or board presentations, awards programs, annual assemblies, and coordinated lobbying activities on specific issues. While these are useful and valuable interactions, they do not create an infrastructure for establishing parallel goals or for creating enduring working relationships.

Boards that are serious about receiving meaningful input into their policymaking process must customize their interaction with constituencies in a way that recognizes and values their unique contributions to the education process. Further, board members must recognize that those who have a responsibility for executing the policies the board enacts have very different concerns than parents or those, such as business leaders and employers, who view themselves as consumers of the system. Because many of the groups often find themselves in adversarial positions, it is critical that the board positions itself in a way that facilitates open and honest discussions. The board can lay the groundwork for consensus development and broker positions that are acceptable to the various interests without compromising the integrity of the policy.

There are several groups that represent large, vested interests throughout the state. They include:

- Parents
- Students
- Teachers
- Principals
- Local School Board Members
- Local Superintendents
- Business Interests
- State Legislators
- Governors
- Post Secondary and Higher Education Interests

Public input in the deliberative policy and rule-making processes has gained immense importance as parents, business leaders, and other interested parties have expressed a desire to be more engaged in decisionmaking. Moreover, state board-approved policies have run into implementation roadblocks when factions of the community became aware of the potential impact of the policies after the fact. **Boards should have operational policies on how they interact with education constituencies on a continuous basis.** Public meetings and hearings are important tools for receiving input, but these activities generally focus on specific issues. Creating an environment of mutual understanding of responsibilities and concerns generally requires less formal, but more substantive interaction.

Because each of the organizations listed above views education through a different lens, it is important that the board demonstrates a sensitivity to each group’s role within the sphere of public education. For example, local
**school boards** have experiences and responsibilities that are most similar state boards. As the lay education policymakers at the state and local level, these two groups are the public’s voice on issues of quality and equity. The importance of strategic planning and mission-based policy development is common to both. To promote a unified approach to goal setting, the state board could host an annual session on strategic planning around state standards for local boards that would benefit both state and local board members. Such interaction stimulates a common comprehension of what state board members envision for all students, while allowing local board members to customize according to the mores of their communities.

Most boards honor their state **teachers** and **principals** of the year at an annual ceremony. Some boards have taken this a step further by utilizing the skills and experiences of these experts in their fields to help the board think about issues of professional development and teacher program approval. A few states have created teacher advisory boards or panels comprised of former teachers of the year, Milken award winners, or other professionals of distinction. 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 progressive board could invite key leaders of the **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.

**Parents** often feel undervalued by education policymakers, particularly at the state level. The board must be as sensitive to those who are active in parent-teacher associations and organizations as well as those who are less involved at the building level. 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 deliberation of issues. Frequently these students are elected through an elaborate process that involves hundreds of students across the state. Boards should consider including these student conventions on their agenda, or seek to have board representation at the meeting to further students’ understanding of the importance of the board and its work. Boards should also identify meaningful ways to foster relationships among students who are less likely to be active in school politics or student counsels. These students are sometimes less aware of the purposes behind state board actions and would benefit from some interaction with the board.

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. These individuals are often the targets of teachers, principals, board members, parents, and business leaders and run the gauntlet of trying to serve multiple masters. State boards can support the development of education leaders by working with their local superintendents to identify their needs, their frustrations, and their hopes while defining what the state board can do to support them.

Although this *Boardsmanship Review* has only touched on a few of the relationships between state boards and other groups, there are common ingredients for productive alliances with interest groups. The fundamental elements of good working connections include 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 for boards to remember is that the quality of their relationships with the community will ultimately be reflected in the quality of their policies.