When we were first approached about doing an issue of the Standard on green cleaning in schools, I wasn’t sure about devoting a whole edition to this topic. But after listening to staff discuss the implications of toxic environments on learning and on student and staff health, as well as seizing the instructional moment for environmental education for students, I was convinced that this was a topic worth exploring with our members.

This issue of the Standard examines the subject of school environment through the implementation of green cleaning school practices—practices that not only create a healthy and safe environment, but teaches students about the importance of protecting their surroundings. Equally as important, it teaches about the significance of long-term sustainability practices. Making schools healthier, safeguarding our water and air quality, and teaching about the environmental impact of the products we use every day encourages everyone in the school community to support healthy environments and to be conscious of the world they leave for those who will follow.

Throughout my tenure at NASBE, I have been particularly proud of our capacity to recognize and address a diversity of issues that impact the learning environment of students. Some of those issues may have appeared to be out of the purview of state boards, but giving voice to those issues have frequently made a huge difference in the lives of students. Green cleaning is one such issue. It speaks to the most basic right of students and school personnel to work and learn in a healthy environment.

Research shows matters of health, well-being, and school climate—both emotional and physical—have a direct impact on the academic success of students. As some of our authors write, implementing green cleaning practices in schools has improved attendance and increased the instructional time for students who are in school more. In light of the research and a better understanding of environmental impact, schools throughout the nation are moving to green cleaning to improve physical plants, save resources and create a healthier environment for students and school personnel. This is one of those issues where using existing resources in a smarter way can lead to very positive outcomes.

States policymakers have a role to play in encouraging effective policies and practices at the local level to support green cleaning. At its most basic level, green cleaning in schools removes chemically reactive and toxic cleaning products from school custodial practices that are harmful to the building inhabitants, especially children. At its highest level, it is one step towards taking responsibility for the world in which we live. States can set standards for green cleaning and they can recognize schools and districts that make an effort to use and promote green cleaning practices. State education agencies can promote green cleaning in their own facilities. Simply put, states can give voice to the issue.

As I conclude my last column for the State Education Standard before leaving the position of NASBE’s executive director, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the Standard’s editor, David Kysilko, for his tireless work on our journal. The Standard was David’s vision, and his commitment to the quality of each issue has made it one of the most respected education journals in the field. I also want to thank our supporters over the years who have made the Standard possible. Finally, a special thanks to the thousands of individuals who have and continue to serve this nation’s students on state boards of education across the country—it has been my honor to serve you.