State board members are busy people who come to the table with diverse experience: Some are educators, and some are doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, activists, and stay-at-home parents. Only a handful of state boards of education have staffs large enough to help members stay on top of important issues or identify research on what works. Unsurprisingly, one of the things NASBE staff hears most is that members value connecting with one another to learn what their states have in common.

NASBE tries to be the connective tissue for its members. We are their policy shop. Our webinars inform members about education research or policy developments. Our publications highlight best practices. Our conferences help members connect and share experiences. And now NASBE has an interactive platform, State Board Insight, to take this knowledge sharing to a new level.

State Board Insight tracks and supports state policy leadership and innovation. Drawn from publicly reported state board meeting minutes and agendas, the database covers all state board information and action items related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Trend analyses by NASBE staff highlight compelling state stories and the critical role state boards play. Most important, however, is its potential to help state board members, researchers, journalists, educators, and community members uncover key insights.

For example, a state board member might decide to replicate Hawaii’s practice of highlighting an innovative school program or teaching strategy each month in its “Bright Spots” report. Or a state board that is struggling to connect with stakeholders might draw inspiration from the DC board’s use of interactive panels and discussions to engage stakeholders at its meetings. State Board Insight can make light work out of the task of identifying examples of different approaches.

As NASBE’s communications director, I get calls from reporters looking for data or trends in state education. Such inquiries may go something like this: “I’m working on a story about how states are supporting professional development to advance ESSA implementation. Are any state boards discussing this?” A quick search reveals that 17 states discussed teacher professional learning and practice under ESSA in 2016, and Alaska and Arkansas acted to better align teacher policies with ESSA requirements. A closer look at the data also shows that some states are engaging stakeholders on this issue, a potential lead for a reporter looking for that angle.

State Board Insight also helps NASBE respond more nimbly to state board needs. ESSA is a critical issue for state boards. Three in four respondents to NASBE’s member survey in the fall of 2016 listed ESSA as a top priority. But where are they bumping their heads?

Previously, NASBE developed resources based on what we thought members needed. Now we can concretely identify what issues are top of mind and align resources accordingly. We can facilitate connections and collaboration between states working on similar issues. Or we can suss out things no one is discussing but that we believe they may want to take up. The ability to offer such targeted support is a chief goal of NASBE, and it will be more important than ever as states navigate ESSA implementation.