



2020  
State of the Association



[ integrity ]

[ unity ]



The work to ensure every student has an opportunity to obtain a high-quality education is both humbling and energizing. For 80 years, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) has been dedicated to working “for the general advancement of education for the youth of the United States and its possessions,” which the founders of the organization set as a top priority. NSBA has been meeting this challenge, and we have reached historic heights as we lead the way to strengthen public education.

School board members formed the National Council of State School Boards Associations, as NSBA was first known, because they believed that a unified national organization of public education leaders was essential to foster a vibrant public education system to serve the nation and its citizenry. These visionary first leaders of the association recognized the vital role of teaching and learning and of creating opportunities for all children to have a sound base of knowledge and skills. They understood that education is the foundation for a democratic society, the driver of the economy, and the key to a fulfilling life.

# [ meeting the challenge ]

The founders also realized the importance of unity. They recognized the power of people united around a cause, and they saw the critical role of unity in their advocacy of strong school boards and local governance. They wanted all school board members to work together toward this end, and their wisdom was a key factor in establishing the association as a federation.

Since its creation, NSBA has worked tirelessly to serve as the “interstate exchange to promote the strengthening of the state associations” as envisioned by the founders. NSBA’s Annual Conference, Advocacy Institute, COSA School Law Practice Seminar, COSA School Law Seminar, CUBE Annual Conference, Equity Symposium, and Summer Leadership Seminar are dynamic platforms for exchanging ideas, expanding knowledge, and boosting professional skills. Resources—including our flagship magazine, *American School Board Journal*; legal guides; “Becoming a Better Board Member;” “Key Work of School Boards;” and reports by the Center for Public Education—promote thinking and planning, inspire and foster engagement, provide technical assistance, and stimulate advocacy.

Our amicus curiae efforts infuse a respected point of view into U.S. Supreme Court cases that impact public schools and schoolchildren, and they bring a national voice to key cases in appellate courts across the country. Our media efforts frame and shape dialogue and public opinion and promote activism on major topics, including educational equity, federal funding, infrastructure, nutrition, and school safety.

Our unified voice over many decades has made a significant impact on federal policymaking. Indeed, the focus of governance has shifted back to the local school districts with the enactment of the landmark law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). And, new federal laws have produced billions of dollars in funding for a range of educational needs, and a more measured set of regulations has provided some needed regulatory relief.

NSBA's mission is to work with and through the state school boards associations to enhance public education. We relish the challenge to foster a deeper understanding of the needs of schoolchildren and the importance of local governance. We believe in the power of public education as the only means to a robust democracy, a vibrant economy, and a fulfilling life. It is why we are invigorated by the opportunity to instill a more profound appreciation among federal policymakers, influential thinkers and voices, and the public for the work done every day in public schools. It is why NSBA continues to meet the challenge to fulfill its mission.





[ authentic ]

# MESSAGE FROM THOMAS J. GENTZEL

*Executive Director and CEO*

This is my final State of the Association message. It's been a privilege to see the goals and plans we put into place in 2012 come to fruition. NSBA's standing—and our ability to serve our members and advocate for school board leadership and public schools—has never been stronger.

While many goals have been realized, NSBA continues to evolve, always striving toward excellence. Our mission is to work with and through the state school boards associations to enhance public education. In the legislative, legal, and public arenas, NSBA shapes federal education policy, raises public awareness of critical issues, and champions the mission of public education to prepare our nation's youth for the future.

[ an amazing adventure ]

As the Washington, D.C., office for our members, we engage with state leaders on state and federal advocacy, educational equity, and effective school governance as well as on education research, school safety, and a host of other issues.

In 2019 alone, we:

- Led the charge against vouchers in three states;
- Commissioned NSBAC's public opinion poll, which was released at the 2020 Advocacy Institute;
- Were victorious on the citizenship question on the 2020 Census, with the U.S. Supreme Court adopting our view that it should not be included; and
- Completely redesigned and rebuilt NSBA's website.

As you read this report, you'll learn more about the specific initiatives and achievements of the past year. Not only is NSBA at the table, but we also are leading the conversation about public education and serving our state associations in their role as advocates for the nation's 90,000 school board members and 50.7 million public schoolchildren. The future, I know, is in good hands.



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# MESSAGE FROM ELIZABETH BRANHAM

*NSBA President 2019-2020*

Almost 20 years ago, I began my board service with Lexington School District Two, South Carolina. Much has changed since then in my local board and education community, and without a doubt, much has changed in public school districts and classrooms across the country.

Newer, faster technologies have allowed us to innovate and expand instructional services and programming in different, exciting ways. How we facilitate communication and collaboration with one another, with educators and administrators, with local businesses, and with our communities has been transformed.

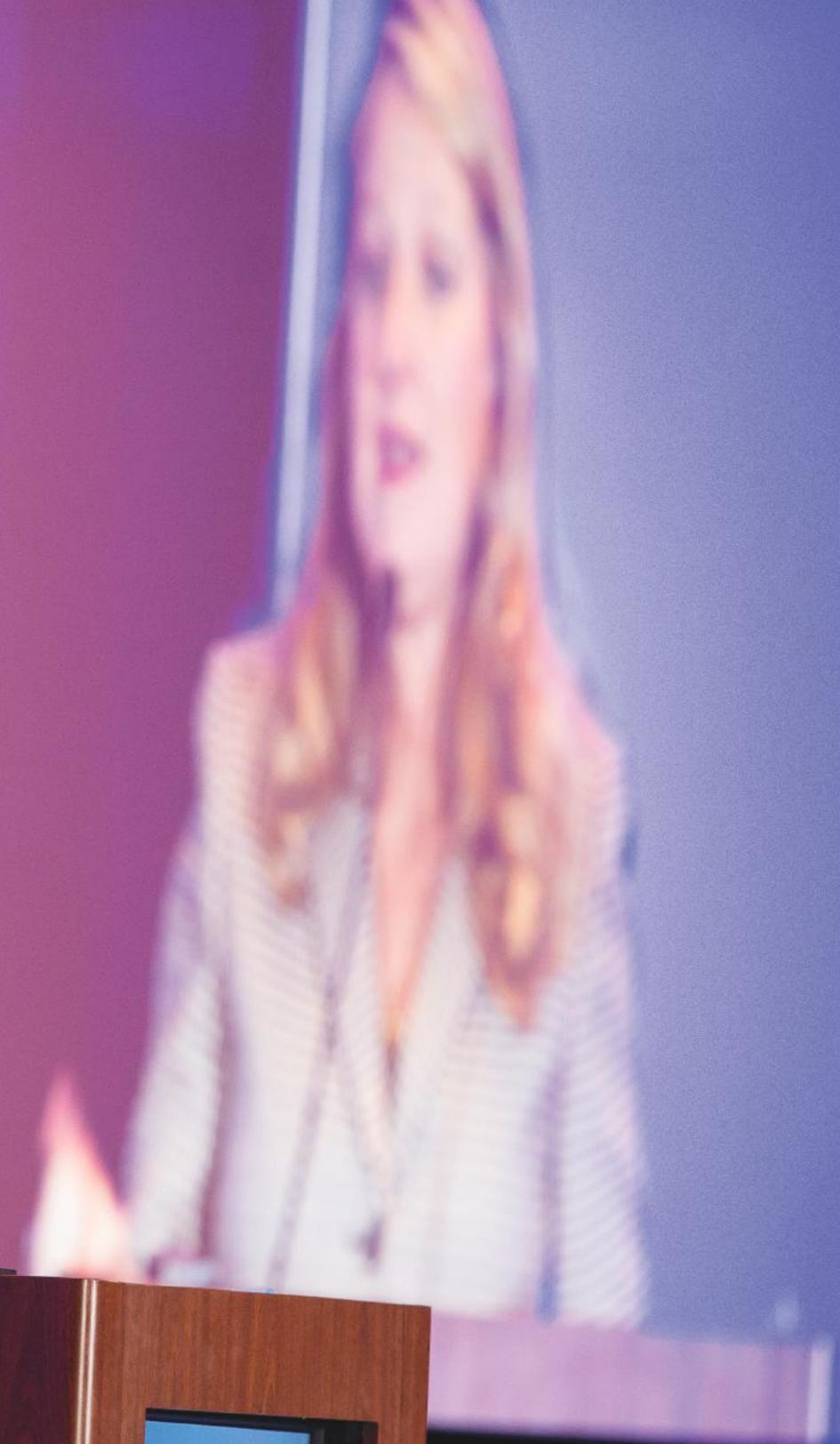
[ stronger together ]

Recognizing that we live in a changing world is nothing new. However, what needs to be recognized anew are the powerful changes that we can bring about, together as a federation of state school boards associations and as just one positive, outspoken advocate for local governance and the advancement of public education.

Over the years as I have served on NSBA's board and during this past year as its president, I have heard the roar of coalitions of school board members on Capitol Hill speaking out together on an issue. And I have witnessed the award-winning creativity and innovation that school boards associations foster and support in far too many districts and schools to mention.

Despite the hard work and many successes, we still have a lot of work ahead of us. Public education continues to be criticized, federal funding for crucial programs and services remains threatened, and local governance too often is undermined.

The good news is that each school boards association and every school board member has an important role in advancing teaching and learning, closing achievement and opportunity gaps, and identifying and wiping out inequities and injustices. Stronger together, may our collective work and commitment continue to make that mighty roar.



# MESSAGE FROM CHARLIE WILSON

*NSBA President 2020-2021*

In looking ahead to my service as NSBA's president, I cannot help but wonder what the future holds for public education in America. For school board members—and all who consider themselves public school advocates, for that matter—I believe the best days of public education are ahead of us.

That is not to say there have not been substantial victories over the years. Graduation rates have reached an all-time high, and significant strides are being made in preparing students for life, college, and career. Extraordinary teaching, learning, and leadership take place every day, and it is due, in large part, to enlightened and effective local governance of our public schools by locally elected school board members.

This notable progress, however, seems less impressive when I think about equity or, more specifically, our growth in advancing diversity, inclusion, and authenticity.

## [ the fight for equity in education ]

Those are not just buzz words. Diversity is so much more than acknowledging one's ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Bias is so much more than fleeting judgmental thoughts. Identifying where inequities exist is just the start.

We locally elected school board members must be committed to honoring and fighting for real diversity, true inclusion, and full authenticity. Furthermore, that commitment must be focused on self-awareness and attitude change, it must be about embracing differences without fear or judgment, and it also must involve sharing who we are so others can understand us better.

Locally elected school board members have the power to make a real impact in increasing equity in our schools, and NSBA is committed to leading the way. We all can learn from each other, and we all can improve.

In this coming year, I implore you to be part of that effort—the fight for equity in education—with the hope and the goal of closing the gaps and removing the barriers that get in the way of each and every child having a bright and successful future.



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**N**SBA continues to be the leading advocate for public education by working with and through our state association members to bring the perspective of school board members—who are responsible for the education of more than 50 million students who attend public schools—to federal policymakers, people who have an impact on federal policy including the media, and the public. Every day, we meet with policymakers in our nation’s capital, we work to form effective coalitions, we educate and mobilize grassroots supporters, and we frame and shape issues in the media. We do this because we believe the federal government must do its part to improve public education so that every student has an opportunity to get a high-quality education. Indeed, regardless of income, address, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or how they arrived, schoolchildren deserve the chance to learn so they can realize their dreams.

# [ federal advocacy ]

We prioritize or initiate federal policies that will support public schools and the education and well-being of every schoolchild, and that strengthen local governance.

During the past 12 months, we:

- Launched a much-needed campaign to modernize and secure full federal funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- Advocated for E-Rate, which helps connect schools and libraries to the internet;
- Pushed for more investment in resources to enhance student safety and health; and
- Battled against the U.S. Department of Education’s efforts to shift taxpayer funds to nonpublic schools.

Our campaign to strengthen IDEA got off to a strong start, and we built on the early momentum. We achieved a notable amount of support in favor of E-Rate, and we made progress on securing key investments in public education.

## **ADVOCATING FOR FEDERAL INVESTMENT**

NSBA has spent the past year fighting for increased public education investments. We are pleased that those efforts paid off with the bipartisan agreement reached by Congress and the administration in December to approve a budget deal that contains a \$1.3 billion increase for education. This increase in education funding is a necessary investment to help students who attend public schools be successful in their learning. The funding includes a \$450 million increase for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I to support public schools with large numbers of low-income families and a \$410 million increase for the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) State Grants program to assist students with disabilities. Due to the substantial number of public school students who are from low-income families, and with approximately 7 million students with disabilities, this increased funding and bipartisan compromise will support tens of millions of schoolchildren who need extra help. The agreement was student-centered and focused on the best way to help the largest number of students. It is a positive step forward in improving our public schools. NSBA will build on these efforts.

Great work takes place every day in public schools across the nation through extraordinary teaching, leadership, mentoring, and innovative learning. Still, we have more to do to ensure the success of all students. NSBA is committed to building on this momentum by fighting for public schools and championing issues that help children.

## **BEATING BACK PRIVATIZATION EFFORTS**

We will continue to be vigilant in our efforts to protect and fund public education because there is a never-ending battle against efforts to divert tax dollars from public



schools. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education and some members of Congress continue to vigorously advocate for “choice,” which is a veiled call for the privatization of local schools and public education. In reality, there is an abundance of choice within school districts. It includes concentrations in specific areas such as the arts as well as in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subject areas; advanced placement courses; magnet schools; charter schools authorized by local school boards; personalized learning; and other public specialty schools. We are making the case that privatization efforts harm millions of students by taking away resources they need to succeed in school and undermines public schools by shifting valuable resources away from them to private businesses.

An example of our efforts to stop the privatization of education is our partnership with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and other education groups. We helped stop the expansion of education savings accounts that offer tax advantages to pay for homeschooling and private school expenses. These provisions were not included in the Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement (SECURE) Act passed by the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year. We continue battling to keep those privatization efforts out of the U.S. Senate version of the legislation.

### **CHAMPIONING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: “IT’S TIME FOR A GREAT IDEA”**

Fighting to champion equity for the most vulnerable student populations is a key part of our mission. We are making steady progress in convincing members of Congress that it is time to modernize and fully fund IDEA. We launched a grassroots campaign to push the federal government to meet its unfulfilled promise during the 2019 Advocacy Institute. It featured a press event that included statements of support and encouragement for our campaign by several members of Congress. Through “It’s Time for a Great IDEA,” we are making the case in the halls of Congress that providing students with disabilities an excellent education is not only a legal requirement under IDEA, but it is the right and moral thing to do. The failure of Congress to meet its commitment not only hurts the 6.9 million students with disabilities, but also harms all the students who attend public schools. By demonstrating the success of IDEA to members of Congress, we were able to get them to understand what full funding could mean. Schools across the nation could increase resources for students with disabilities. They could expand opportunities for all students. This would mean resources to provide teachers with more robust professional learning. Students would have more and better access to high-speed broadband and adaptive technology important for personalized learning.

## **CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN EDUCATION**

Providing students with modern teaching practices such as personalized learning and other resources is vital to prepare students for success in a world that is increasingly rooted in information and technology. As public schools explore ways to improve and modernize instruction through methods such as personalized learning, students must have access to technology such as adaptive software and high-speed broadband. Schools have seen vast improvements in broadband connectivity thanks to programs such as the Schools and Libraries Program (E-Rate), run by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), that gives all schools and libraries a discount to connect to the internet. However, there is room for improvement to better help schools and students. Moreover, while most students are connected in school, many lack connectivity at home, creating a “homework gap” that leads to an unequal learning situation based on income and ZIP code.

The FCC proposed a rule that could impact the progress public schools have made connecting libraries to the internet. We worked collaboratively with the states to send a sign-on letter to the FCC regarding a recent Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to oppose the rule. It would lead to burdensome competition among other broadband access programs and would violate the intent of Congress to provide universal access to connectivity.

Enactment of the rule also would create uncertainty for school boards and districts across the nation during their annual budgeting process. The letter to the FCC called for a rejection of the rule and a request to focus on closing the digital divide in education. We secured the support of all 49 member state school boards associations to sign on to the letter, and at least eight states and NSBA submitted their own comments. Now, our focus switches to the U.S. Senate, where we are working with key members to prevent the FCC from implementing the rule. The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed legislation earlier this summer to halt the implementation of the proposed rule.

## **FIGHTING FOR MORE TEACHERS**

School board members recognize that their teachers are the backbone of successful public education. A great teacher can bring out the best in students and make a positive difference in their lives. However, a lack of certified teachers—especially in high-need subjects, in special education, for students of color, and in rural areas—is hurting students. There are several reasons for this problem. Teacher wages remain stagnant in many areas. Professional development and mentoring for teachers often are lacking. Teachers deal with many challenges, such as social and mental health



issues among students, that go beyond instruction. As a result, fewer people are becoming teachers.

We know how challenging it is for school boards to attract great teachers. We are in a leadership position in a coalition of education associations that is pushing Congress to strengthen educator preparation and encourage high-performing students to become teachers in the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

# [ enthusiasm ]

In addition, we are advocating for federal support that will allow school boards to build a stronger teacher pipeline. We are a leader in pushing for the inclusion of the bipartisan Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals (PREP) Act in the HEA rewrite. The PREP Act seeks to strengthen Title II and reduce educator shortages. It would provide incentives to attract high-performing students to education. This would help educator preparation programs deliver sophisticated training in high-need subject areas, including special education. The PREP Act also would promote partnerships with districts to provide targeted professional development and other supports to help teachers in high-need subject areas succeed in these challenging positions.

## **SUPPORTING SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS**

More than 30 million students participate in the National School Lunch Program, and many of them depend on the meals they receive in school for the bulk of their nutrition. As school board members know well, the loss of free and reduced-price meals for millions of students would lead to food insecurity and malnourishment, impacting student achievement. For these reasons, we have opposed the current plans by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to change eligibility guidelines for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). If enacted, nearly 1 million children would no longer be eligible for free school meals, based on the new rules limiting their family's SNAP participation. The impact would be high for households with incomes



near or below the federal poverty line, for single parents, and for families headed by persons of color.

Working with our members, we submitted a comprehensive set of comments to the USDA in a formal response to the proposed rule change. We are working with Congress to address nutrition issues. We helped inform witness testimony for a hearing—“Growing a Healthy Next Generation: Examining Federal Child Nutrition Programs”—held by the House Education and Labor Committee’s Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services. The witnesses highlighted the need for additional nutrition funding, increased program flexibility, and efforts to streamline burdensome paperwork. They also made a strong case for additional time to implement new regulations so schools and districts can comply.

We participated in a roundtable discussion with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to discuss needed regulatory reforms to school meal programs related to the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. The HHFKA expanded federal regulation beyond school meal programs to school district operations throughout the campus and the school day. We were represented at the roundtable by school board members from Maryland, South Dakota, and Tennessee. The board members emphasized the importance of including school boards in efforts to reform the current regulations given their role in implementation.

### **IMPACTING FEDERAL POLICY THROUGH GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM**

The National School Boards Action Center’s (NSBAC) mission is to advocate at the federal and national levels for the advancement of public education, local school board leadership, and excellence and equity in our nation’s public schools through energetic and purposeful grassroots advocacy. NSBAC is committed to supporting advocacy work by the state school boards associations.

Among the highlights of the past year was the launch and continued implementation of the “It’s Time for a Great IDEA” campaign. Our campaign advocates for modernizing and securing full federal funding for the landmark law that provides federal support to educate millions of students with disabilities. In addition to a kick-off press event in the Rayburn House Office Building, NSBAC coordinated an extensive text messaging campaign that facilitated communications between local school board members and their members of Congress.

## **INFORMING POLICYMAKERS AND THE PUBLIC THROUGH THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Our Center for Public Education (CPE) enjoys a reputation as a reliable national resource for credible and practical information about issues and trends impacting public education and students. It posted a strong year of providing nonpartisan and objective information to school board members, educators, parents, education and public policy scholars, the media, and policymakers. The reports, built on a foundation of facts, enriched the dialogue about some of the most pressing issues in education.

This past year, CPE has released two major publications: “Middle Skills ABC: A Career-Focused Educational Path to Good Jobs” and “Career and Technical Education (CTE) at the Secondary Level: Access & Attainment at a Glance.” Further, CPE also produced nine lengthy posts to its blog, two IDEA fact sheets, six articles for *American School Board Journal (ASBJ)*, and one *ASBJ* data report.

CPE also provided valuable analysis of major third-party data such as the annual public release of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Our research arm also provided our staff with information to advocate on key issues such as student safety, broadband access, the opioid crisis, and personalized learning. It also should be noted that one of the blogs this year focused on the life and contributions of former CPE Director Patte Barth. Barth, who passed away almost a year ago, was instrumental in building CPE into the respected entity that it is today.





**M**ore decisions that impact school boards and students are made than ever before by the U.S. Supreme Court and appellate courts throughout the country. As education issues—and issues that impact public education—have become more complex, the myriad of federal laws, regulations, and school district policies related to educating schoolchildren are more often challenged in the courts.

Our legal advocacy brings the local school board perspective to key cases that impact local governance and the ability of school boards to effectively educate schoolchildren. Indeed, working with our state school boards associations and our Council of School Attorneys (COSA), we advocate in the U.S. Supreme Court and appellate courts across the country through our nationally recognized amicus curiae (friend of the court) initiative. While our legal views are highly regarded and regularly cited by the Supreme Court, our powerful voice extends beyond the courtroom to the court of public opinion, the halls of Congress, and federal regulators.

# [ legal advocacy ]

Our unique position in the world of public education is as a representative of elected officials whose sole interest is the education of children. This position has allowed us to articulate perspectives and offer views that influence the national discourse, impact policy, and provide weight to judicial consideration. This past year, we exercised our legal voice in cases addressing the 2020 decennial census, education of undocumented students, expansion of school “choice” programs, employment discrimination, and IDEA. We filed briefs offering facts and perspective to help the court reach sound decisions as described in the following examples.

To help ensure an accurate census count and thereby protect federal funding streams to help all children, we successfully urged the Supreme Court to review the U.S. Department of Commerce’s decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 decennial census. We asked it to find that the agency failed to follow proper administrative procedures. The Supreme Court followed NSBA’s legal argument to hold that the decision was made without proper explanation. As a result of the Supreme Court’s deci-

sion in *Department of Commerce v. New York*, there will be no citizenship question on the 2020 census questionnaire.

We filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court in *Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California*, a case regarding educating and supporting undocumented youth and immigrant families. We argued that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program did not adequately take into account the considerable interests at stake. The brief explained that ending the program without proper process would adversely impact the lives of thousands of students, families, and school communities. A ruling on this case is expected in June 2020.

In addition, we submitted comments to the Department of Homeland Security urging the agency not to expand the definition of "public charge" used by immigration officials to consider whether noncitizens may adjust their status and remain in the U.S. We warned that immigrant families would forgo enrolling for needed public benefits out of fear of losing eligibility to adjust their immigration status. The final rules will not permit officials to consider school-based Medicaid and certain other benefits for children as evidence that a student has become a public charge.

We led a coalition that included the Montana School Boards Association and more than a dozen national education organizations in an amicus brief urging the court not to require states to expand "school choice" programs to fund religious instruction. The brief, filed in the case of *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, explained that voucher and tax credit programs drain scarce public resources from public schools without any demonstrable benefit to students. Forced expansion of these programs is not required but is instead a departure from long-standing federal constitutional jurisprudence. A decision on this case is expected in June 2020.

Similarly, in *Carson v. Makin*, we and our member state associations in the 1st U.S. Circuit filed an amicus brief with that Court of Appeals. The brief urged the court to uphold its own precedent finding it permissible under the First Amendment for Maine to exclude sectarian schools from its tuition payment program. A decision is expected this year.

*Kisor v. Wilkie* is an important case regarding the authority of federal agencies to issue binding "guidance" letters. We filed an amicus brief asking the Supreme Court to reconsider its precedent directing courts to defer to agencies' nonregulatory interpretations of their ambiguous regulations, or "guidance" letters. We explained that by issuing such letters, agencies could exclude stakeholders from the regular rulemaking process and bypass concerns of local entities like school districts. The court, while

deciding not to overrule its precedent outright, placed notable limits on the instances in which courts can defer to such “guidance.”

In an amicus brief filed with the Supreme Court in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, and *Altitude Express v. Zarda*, we explained that the plain text of the federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex protects people from employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In the face of a critical shortage of qualified teachers across the country, we noted, schools must be able to recruit and retain qualified teachers from the broadest talent pool. Laws should favor employee retention by limiting discrimination or harassment based on characteristics divorced from merit. A decision is expected in June 2020.

We were diligent on cases that offered the opportunity to support sound educator decision-making in special education. Along with our members, we filed several amicus briefs in federal courts of appeals urging the courts to recognize that IDEA provides flexibility and deference to the sound decisions of educators.

In *C.D. v. Natick Pub. Sch. Dist.* (in the 1st Circuit) and *N.M. v. Harrison Sch. Dist.* (in the 10th Circuit), our briefs asked the courts to uphold educators’ placement decisions for students with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment.” And, in *D.S. v. Trumbull Bd. of Educ.* (in the 2nd Circuit) and *M.S. and S.S. v. Hillsborough Township Sch. Dist.* (in the 3rd Circuit), we urged the courts to hold that an independent educational valuation at public expense is available only after a student’s parents have participated in good faith in IDEA’s collaborative process. The latter was decided in our favor in January 2020.

## **PROVIDING TIMELY LEGAL TOOLS**

A goal of our legal advocacy work includes providing school attorneys and their school boards with the information they need to navigate the complex legal issues of the day. During the past 12 months, we published or updated the following legal guides:

- “Data Security for Schools: A Legal and Policy Guide for School Boards” discusses the importance of data security in school districts and its intersection with data privacy and data governance. It describes legal requirements and best practices for school districts in the event of a data security breach. This legal guide was updated in September 2019.
- “Drugs, Substance Abuse, and Public Schools: A Legal Guide for School Leaders Amidst Evolving Social Norms” was published in January 2019. It is a resource to



help board members identify appropriate responses to the presence and use of both authorized medications and illicit drugs in schools.

- We also have developed a new immigration guide, “Navigating the Latest Federal Immigration Actions: What the Census and Public Charge Rule Mean for Schools and Students.” The guide updates schools on the status of the 2020 census and the public charge regulation that was recently disseminated by the federal government. It was introduced at the Advocacy Institute in February.

### **ENHANCING SCHOOL LAW THROUGH THE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ATTORNEYS (COSA)**

COSA supports school attorneys in their representation of school boards and in their legal advocacy on behalf of public education. To that end, COSA creates opportunities for professional development and provides technical information and practical assistance to attorneys.

COSA also regularly presents school law updates at state school boards association conferences as well as at Advocacy Institute, Equity Symposium, and CUBE Annual Conference. Among the federal officials who presented at COSA’s Annual Law Seminar in 2019 were Michael Hawes, director of student privacy policy, U.S. Department of Education; and Tom Wheeler, former acting assistant attorney general, Civil Rights Division, at the Department of Justice (and a past COSA Chair).

It was a strong year for COSA in providing attorneys practicing school law with valuable resources, including:

- *Inquiry & Analysis*, a newsletter published 10 times per year that includes in-depth discussions of legal issues being addressed by COSA attorneys.
- *Legal Clips*, COSA’s definitive compilation and analytical summary of key court cases, “hot button” legal issues, and news stories. *Legal Clips* is available as a member benefit for state association executive directors and National Connection participants.
- The Spring 2019 School Law Seminar, held in conjunction with NSBA’s Annual Conference in Philadelphia. It included programming on such issues as arming school staff, student records privacy, educational technology, employee discipline, suicide prevention and response, culture wars in schools, teacher strikes and walkouts, Office of Civil Rights investigations, and the discipline of students with disabilities.

- The Fall 2019 School Law Practice Seminar, held in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It had a robust lineup of presentations on topics such as school safety and crisis management, cannabidiol (CBD) and medical cannabis, serving transgender students, immunizations, service animals in schools, immigration, equity, employee mental health, collective bargaining, and employees' rights and responsibilities on social media.

# [ inspire ]

School law webinars offered invaluable professional development opportunities and Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits for school lawyers. These programs are presented by school law practitioners for school law practitioners and target their professional needs. Webinars offered this year examined legal issues surrounding construction contracts for schools, the school building as a public forum, school sponsorship, the Office of Civil Rights' current enforcement approach, employment issues for volunteers and coaches, mental health support for students, student trauma and Section 504, CBD and medical marijuana, school board governance, religion and public schools, and students' rights.



**A** dedication to member service and a commitment to promoting educational equity have been core elements of our culture. Over many years, we have developed meaningful programs that have served our members well, and this year was no exception. We launched the NSBA Center for Safe Schools, established the State Association Data ad hoc committee, and worked with our members to help with their equity work.

We have increased our work with our members in their states. We have collaborated to hold equity summits and speak about equity. We briefed them on key legal cases and issues, and we provided essential insights into congressional and administrative actions at their conferences. We facilitated professional development sessions. It was our pleasure to present the Leading Edge Award to the Alabama Association of School Boards and the Georgia School Boards Association for their development of innovative projects that promote and advance public education.

# [ equity & member services ]

We had our most successful Equity Symposium and CUBE Annual Conference since launching those events. Attendees gained extraordinary insights from exceptional speakers into a range of issues impacting students and public education. They shared experiences and best practices, dove into the difficult challenges facing public schools, and were inspired.

In our drive to enhance educational equity, we provided our members with toolkits and content that they could provide to their members. These tools included articles, white papers, and webinars on the role of the school board in setting the vision for practicing equity in their districts. We also added new communications channels that enable our equity councils to share information and highlight the good work that is taking place in public schools across the country.

## **LAUNCHING THE NSBA CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS**

To continue our commitment to address critical issues facing public education and in response to our members' requests, we founded the NSBA Center for Safe Schools



(the Center) in May 2019. The Center is an initiative to help support a safe and secure environment for all students, staff, and community members. As our schools and communities face an ever-growing number of threats, it is essential to recognize that comprehensive school safety goes far beyond just physical security.

We have used the Center to promote and develop collaborative relationships and open communication with state school boards associations, educators, communities, law enforcement, emergency responders, and other entities concerned with school safety. The Center provides a national forum by which school district leaders and staff, students, parents, and communities can educate, engage, and be empowered to ensure that schools are a safe place in which to learn and grow.

The Center offers critical resources in the form of daily news briefings, articles, quarterly newsletters, webinars, and publications, divided into four key areas:

- Infrastructure
- Crisis and Emergency Management
- Whole Child Health
- Cybersecurity

The Center has worked to develop meaningful relationships with external organizations and experts in the field of school safety to create high-quality content and resources for our members and subscribers. So far, the Center has brought on Aetna Health Care as a sponsor; DARE America, the Attachment and Trauma Network, Mental Health America, the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools, and Soteryx (a crisis and threat assessment and prevention company) as in-kind collaborators; and a number of individual school safety experts as collaborators and contractors. The Center is continuing to work to find additional relationships to increase the scope of its support.

The NSBA Center for Safe Schools already is recognized as a key member in the field of school safety. It has:

- Hosted with Melissa Sadin, an expert on developmental trauma in schools, a webinar, “Trauma-Informed Schools Are Safe Schools”;
- Participated in the National School Safety Foundational Elements Roundtable of the Federal School Safety Clearinghouse hosted by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health & Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice;



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- Hosted with DARE America a webinar, “Prevention 101: The Science Behind Health Decision Making for Students”;
- Participated in planning for the Ohio School Board Association’s Mental Health and Social-Emotional Learning Summit;
- Presented at the Maryland Association of Boards of Education Annual Conference on Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma-informed schools;
- Created and distributed a quarterly newsletter on bullying prevention;
- Presented at the Ohio School Boards Association Diversity and Equity Committee Meeting and served as a content expert for inclusion and diversity; and
- Hosted with the Partner Alliance for Safe Schools (PASS) a webinar, “PASS K-12 Safety and Security Guidelines: A Roadmap to Implementing a Layered and Tiered Approach.”

### **ENHANCING LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

Building from initiatives such as the NSBA Center for Safe Schools, we began developing a broader set of equity-related content in 2019. We engaged Public Policy Fellows through the Leadership for Educational Equity to help us produce a white paper on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); develop policy briefs on IDEA, trauma-informed schools, and school discipline; and publish a series of equity columns in *American School Board Journal (ASBJ)* on topics including “equity fatigue,” student-based budgeting, and paid internships.

In addition, our Equity and Member Services department initiated a series of policy briefs and toolkits to provide practical and relevant resources for implementing equity-driven initiatives. Starting with our “Equity 101” set of policy briefs, we will expand into a more in-depth equity policy toolkit, produce additional policy briefs and white papers, and introduce a series of webinars and trainings on implicit bias in 2020.

### **PROMOTING BUYBOARD**

We developed a more robust marketing effort to increase the visibility of the Buy-Board joint purchasing program. A new marketing toolkit was created for the sponsoring states to promote the program to their members. The Georgia School Boards Association, the Kansas Association of School Boards, and the Indiana School Boards Association joined as new sponsoring states to promote and grow the program.

## BUILDING BETTER CONNECTIONS

Facilitating communications—creating easy-to-use platforms that enable the sharing of information—is important to us. We continued to enhance and create new resources that will be useful to our members and program participants. This year, we transitioned the Council of School Attorneys (COSA) Resource Database from the main NSBA.org website to the COSA Online Community, which has grown to become a full microsite.

As part of the launch of the NSBA Center for Safe Schools, we created a robust website to promote and develop collaborative relationships and open communication with state school boards associations, communities, educators, law enforcement, emergency responders, and other entities concerned with school safety.

To help build a stronger community, we created Facebook Group pages for the Council of Urban Boards of Education and the National Hispanic Council. Pages are in the works for the National American Indian and Alaska Native Council and the National Black Council.

National Connection (NatCon) is the leading national executive information and networking program for school board leaders and senior school district staff. Through NatCon, we provide content that is relevant and easy to access. School leaders, led by school board members, can enhance their leadership, gain insights into education trends, get a better perspective on the work of Congress and the administration, and gain insights into legal cases across the country. More than 15,000 public education leaders across 1,300 districts have access to a wealth of resources to drive educational equity and excellence.

Over the past year, the NatCon program welcomed 18 new districts. Part of the increase over the prior year was due to a stronger presence at various events. In 2019, the program was represented at events in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin, as well as at the AASA (The School Superintendents Association) Annual Conference. We added COSA's *Legal Clips* to the resources—such as National Connection Daily and our Federal Insider podcast—that are available to NatCon participants.



It was another successful year for working with the media to convey the point of view of school board members on key issues including the decennial census, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, IDEA, school board diversity, student safety, and the workforce. We also provided our perspective to policymakers, opinion leaders, public education supporters, and the public using our social and digital media properties, including NSBA.org, ASBJ, ASBJ Brief as well as NSBA's Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts.

Our perspective on issues impacting public education was included in articles that appeared in:

- Newspapers across the country through the Associated Press and individual placements;
- Prominent national media outlets including *Financial Times*, National Public Radio, *U.S News & World Report*, and the *Wall Street Journal*;
- Leading organizations covering federal policymaking and politics including *Politico* and *The Hill*; and
- Top education publications and websites such as *Education Week* and *The 74*.

## [ public advocacy & communications ]

Overall, we increased our presence in the media by 5 percent, shaping and framing coverage in 652 stories—up from 282 the previous year. We continue to reach hundreds of thousands of people who care about and influence public education through our social media platforms. During the past 12 months, we earned 123,100 impressions, a rate of approximately 2,200 per day, on Twitter. Our Twitter engagement increased substantially by almost 45 percent from the previous year.

### **RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE SKILLS GAP AND PROMOTING OUR LIFEREADY INITIATIVE**

To address the growing workforce crisis, we formed the Commission to Close the Skills Gap, which included more than 10 leading industry groups. The commission released “A Report of the Commission to Close the Skills Gap,” unveiled at our An-

nual Conference, and we distributed it widely—with far-reaching results in broadcast and trade media, as well as through our partners including the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). It also was supported by an opinion piece jointly signed by SHRM’s CEO Johnny Taylor and NSBA’s Tom Gentzel, which SHRM distributed across its national and international networks. That article also ran in the October issue of *ASBJ*. That initiative has evolved into an ongoing coalition with business organizations to ensure all students are “LifeReady” when they graduate high school.

### **SHARING INFORMATION WITH OUR MEMBERS**

To keep our members updated on all our federal and legal advocacy work, business development and financial health, and marketing initiatives, we continue to provide timely reports. We do this through Friday emails to the state association executive directors, First Mondays Calls, the monthly online Leaning Forward Report, Conference of State Association Legislative Staff calls and emails, *ASBJ Brief*, Federal Insider podcast, Board Highlights, and various special reports and updates.

### **STRENGTHENING OUR DIGITAL PRESENCE**

The NSBA website was rebuilt on a more sophisticated platform and was redesigned to operate more smoothly and quickly, especially on mobile devices. The new digital platform enables us to:

- Strengthen communication with our members;
- Boost our reach;
- Enhance our advocacy efforts;
- Improve the user experience and engagement with visitors; and
- Generate and support more business opportunities.

### **COVERING INNOVATION, TRENDS, AND CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERS**

As the leading source of information on K-12 public education leadership, *ASBJ* devoted its energies to a series of articles on such topics as offering diverse literature to spark student interest in reading; the legacy of *Brown* and segregation; empathy as a tool for achievement; the impact of artificial intelligence on education; the growth of esports; the impact of gentrification on school districts; districts dealing with the aftermath of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids on their students and families; preparing for climate change; and districts working with their communities to ensure a full count in the 2020 decennial census.

The October 2019 mega-issue of *ASBJ* was mailed to a bonus circulation of every superintendent and board president in the country. It offered a multimedia approach to showing the trends in career and technical education. The story was enhanced through videos, photos, and graphics to give readers a full and deep experience of the people, places, and programs highlighted in print. It can be found at [www.nsba.org/ASBJ/2019/Multimedia](http://www.nsba.org/ASBJ/2019/Multimedia).

# [ community ]

*ASBJ*'s 2018 multimedia article, "What Lies Beneath," which focused on implicit bias training in schools, earned a Gold Excel Award in 2019 from the Association of Media and Publishing.

The monthly e-newsletter, *ASBJ Brief*, designed to help readers navigate their role as school leaders in today's education world, is now in its second full year of publication.

## **BOLSTERING AND EXTENDING OUR MARKETING CAPABILITIES**

With our investment in new technology, we employed more advanced strategies in our marketing efforts. We made better use of analytics and expanded our marketing toolbox, which helped increase attendance across all of our signature events and supported the launch of several key initiatives. Through a carefully choreographed digital program, we maintained a consistent stream of marketing activities. However, we did not rely solely on technology to help us achieve our business objectives. We continued to have a presence at numerous state association shows and national conferences, including the annual conventions of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, and the Association of School Business Officials International.



**W**e are marshaling NSBA's resources to enhance member services, bolster our reputation, increase the effectiveness of our advocacy efforts, promote our culture and vision, and align our work with the strategic plan. To do so, we made strategic investments in technology to further enhance member services, increase our efficiency, and reduce costs; and in training to promote maximum performance and retain staff.

We strive to deliver sustainable products and services to our members to enhance their professional development, grow their association, and add value to the work they do for their members so they can be the best school board members possible. To accomplish these important responsibilities, we need to ensure that our association is financially secure. Therefore, we launched Elevated Solutions, a consulting service that will help school districts save money, and we retained a consulting team to help us identify promising revenue opportunities.

# [ operations ]

## **LAUNCHING A SECOND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

Elevated Solutions is a new service that can provide local school districts with an audit of their operational practices to allow them to operate more efficiently and effectively. At the heart of this program is the desire to help districts shift dollars from the administrative aspects of running a district to the direct educational dollars that drive student achievement. It also is an opportunity to share revenue with our member state associations.

## **BUILDING UP OUR TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS**

We continued to upgrade our technology, given its importance in communicating with and serving our members. Also, we acquired tools that enabled us to increase our effectiveness in our advocacy efforts and facilitate relationships with potential financial supporters.

Among our key accomplishments this year was the transition to a new association management system that enables us to cut costs, build internal capacity, and better serve those who interact with our association. Our new Microsoft Dynamics platform is fully integrated across all of our other software and will allow our work to be more focused on member needs.

We also moved the NSBA website to a Microsoft-compatible platform, which allows us to develop and implement more sophisticated marketing campaigns.

### **STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE NEXT 80 YEARS**

To diligently pursue our mission to serve our members, we have made significant and steady progress building a solid financial foundation during the past seven years, and we stayed on course during the past 12 months. As we strengthen our financial health to meet our members' needs today and for the future, and to protect our position as the leading advocate for public education, we are undertaking a national revenue generation project. The project is aimed at enabling NSBA to anticipate and adapt to the forces that impact associations, and to enhance the products and services valued by our members, program participants, and sponsors. The strategic priority spans three areas:

- Enhancing and optimizing NSBA's current offerings, which includes improving existing programs, products, and services, with a specific focus on state association member benefits and our value proposition;
- Exploring the viability of other traditional nonprofit revenue sources that NSBA currently does not offer; and
- Identifying "blue ocean" types of opportunities for new programs, products, and services in the K-12 space that do not compete with NSBA's members.

### **INCREASING CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS**

We understand that local school districts need reliable and helpful products and services to support their work. We pride ourselves on the opportunities we've been able to offer to a range of organizations to demonstrate the value they can provide to public school leaders. Indeed, we continued our trend of growing corporate sponsorships by offering opportunities for them to support our events and publications. Many organizations that serve public education rose to the challenge to support NSBA.



Our 80th year will see a change in leadership at the top, as our Executive Director and CEO Tom Gentzel retires, and a new leader takes the helm.

We accomplished several important objectives during the last 12 months, including launching our IDEA campaign and the NSBA Center for Safe Schools initiative, making an impact in the decennial census case, transitioning our website to a more sophisticated platform, and continuing to fill to capacity our business development efforts.

The coming year will be a pivotal time for public education, with many key issues requiring congressional action. And, there is a national election that will be a factor as Congress and the administration try to form and agree on policies on immigration and investments in public education—including for students who need extra support, recruiting and retaining teachers, closing the digital divide in education, and making sure students and schools are safe and secure.

## [ a look ahead ]

In an election that is arguably the most important one in many years for people who support public education, we are waging our own campaign for public schools and students. Our campaign, “Champion Our Children,” which we kicked off at the Advocacy Institute, will serve as the focal point for our federal advocacy work.

First and foremost, we will call for increases in federal funding—more than \$3 billion in increased investments—to improve learning, support school infrastructure, and better protect students. We also will continue our campaign to advocate to modernize and secure full federal funding for IDEA. And, we will continue fighting against federal government efforts to divert to private enterprises education funds meant for public schools. Given the rapid rise of health concerns with vaping, we will track issues related to tobacco and vaping. Other top priorities include pressing for legislation that:

- Enables states to create a true pipeline of high-quality teachers;
- Provides free and reduced-price meals for our neediest children; and
- Protects the E-Rate program.

Election years offer unique opportunities, and we will take advantage of this one to help push public education to the top of the federal agenda and to support our vision. For example, we will strive to inject into the presidential debates questions designed to draw the candidates' attention to public education. Through NSBAC, we will bring the voice of school board members to the Democratic National Convention and the Republican National Convention. We will create a new website that incorporates more enhanced organizing and mobilization technology to facilitate more grassroots activation.



We will continue the well-regarded work of CPE to provide needed objective research and reports containing valuable insights into learning and teaching concepts, issues, and trends. And, we will generate awareness of CPE's work so it can be used to inform federal policy-making by identifying key problems and shining a light on potential solutions.

To carry out our LifeReady initiative, "LifeReady Students. Building Schools. Advancing Success," we will focus on creating business partnerships with local school districts to raise awareness of the need to ensure that high school graduates are ready for work, college, and life.

The next 12 months will be another busy time in the media. We will be working through the media to frame and shape key issues that impact public education and students. Also, we will continue providing thought leadership on educational equity and tackling the choice issue by telling the story of public schools across the nation that are bringing real choice to their students.

The April 2020 issue of *ASBJ* will recognize the 2020 Magna Award winners. The recognition program continues to honor school districts' efforts to address equity and remove barriers to achievement for underserved students.



[ vision ]



The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is the leading advocate for public education. For 80 years, we have been leading the effort to support and enhance public education. We are succeeding in creating the best possible environment in which students can realize their dreams.

NSBA is a federation of 49 state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands, representing their more than 90,000 school board officials. These local officials govern more than 13,600 local school districts serving more than 50 million public school students. Working with and through our state associations, and serving as their Washington, D.C., office, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board governance.

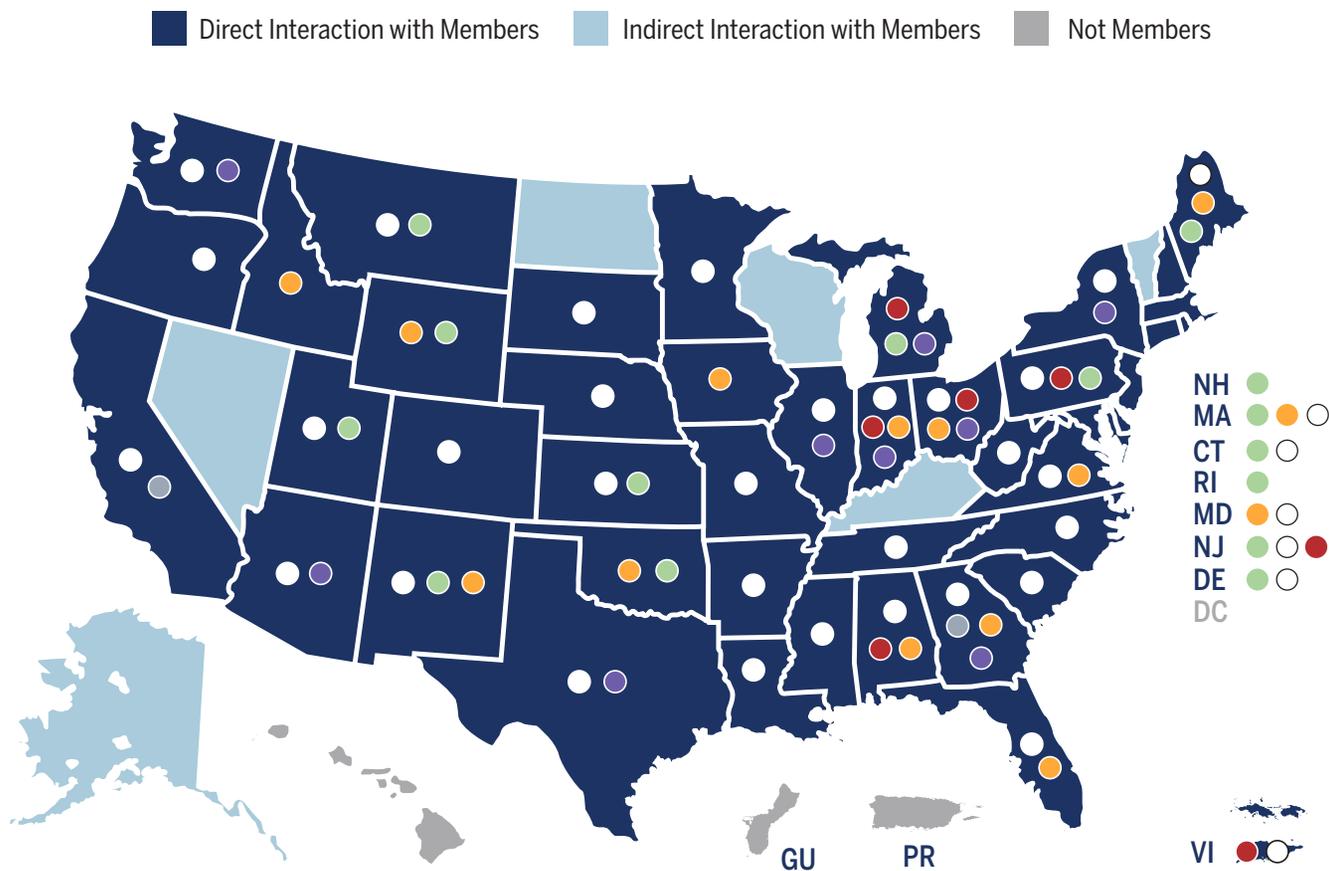
We believe public education is America's most vital institution. It is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people, and all children deserve equal access to an education that allows them to reach their potential.

In pursuit of these beliefs, NSBA and our members will continue to lead the national conversation about public education, advocate for public policies that ensure all students everywhere have access to a great public education where they live, create a better understanding of the importance of school boards and the benefits of local governance, and enhance the effectiveness of school boards.

NSBA and our members utilize our resources including the Council of School Attorneys (COSA), the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the National Black Council of School Board Members (NBC), the National Hispanic Council of School Board Members (NHC), the National American Indian and Alaska Native Council of School Board Members (AIAN), the Conference of State Association Legislative Staff (CSALS), the Federal Relations Network (FRN), the National School Boards Action Center (NSBAC), the Center for Public Education (CPE), National Connection, and a robust and continuous media program to fulfill our mission.

NSBA is a not-for-profit organization. The public policy agenda is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly made up of local school board members who represent their state associations of school boards. The Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director and CEO and by professional staff. NSBA is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area.

# 2019 Member Engagement



# 2019-2020 NSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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[ achievement ]

[ future ]

