

Editor's Note

Valerie Norville
Editorial Director

In flipping through the pages of an issue boldly themed “The Future of Schools,” the reader may wonder whether NASBE and its assembled authors have attempted to predict that future. We don’t. Instead, the authors invite you to imagine a range of possible futures that state policymakers who ask important “what if” questions can help to shape.

Some of these futures have been inspired by the Every Student Succeeds Act. States now have greater latitude in designing systems for teacher evaluation and in addressing low-performing schools. In his piece on teacher evaluation, Matthew Steinberg walks you through key questions policymakers and administrators will have to weigh as they build multiple-measure evaluations. Dan Aladjem reviews the literature on the effect of federal funding for school improvement and concludes that there are some general principles to guide states as they address turnaround but no surefire recipe for success.

Other “what-if” questions deal with standards, which fall squarely in the court of most state boards of education. We don’t need a crystal ball to project that many more states will soon be adopting computer science standards to address the shortfall between industry workforce needs and students with the skills to take those high-paying jobs. So what will it mean for your state’s students if your board decides to be an early adopter? Gene Bottoms and Kirsten Sundell of the Southern Regional Education Board review what states have been doing to prepare qualified teachers and to lay the groundwork for state standards.

What if your board is concerned about whether its students are ready to be engaged citizens? Does it want to adopt

or revise its civic education standards? Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg addresses what some states have already done to craft standards that go beyond learning about the branches of government and toward building skills in civic participation.

What about standards for social and emotional learning? This hot topic inspired a good bit of discussion this year, with some states considering adding it to the mix of potential measures of school quality. Samuel H. Rikoon, Meghan W. Brenneman, and Kevin T. Petway II from the Educational Testing Service make the case for focusing on SEL and assessing it, even if it seems premature to include it on the state’s dashboard.

What if your state is excited about the potential of new technology to broaden the scope and reach of instruction? Amelia Vance looks at the early promise of virtual learning.

What if your state wants to move the needle on improving outcomes for students with disabilities? iNACOL’s Maria Worthen describes how a personalized learning approach can help these students in particular, even as it helps all students.

Underpinning all of these what-if questions is our shared desire to ensure that all students have the opportunities to enter their futures with confidence. Can they all advocate for themselves and their communities, or are only the privileged few able to do so? Do they all have opportunities to prepare for good careers? Can they acquire the social skills and emotional intelligence to navigate life? Schools cannot bring about all these good things by themselves. Yet some are trying. This issue is about nothing if not engaging the imagination of students, parents, teachers, administrators, legislators—and yes, state boards of education. What if? ■

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