

## from the President's Pen

Putting out a magazine takes a lot of lead time. We started planning this issue at the beginning of 2016. Our decision wasn't affected by the political campaign, since it was made well before the first votes were cast in primaries and caucuses. Instead, it was the result of our reading of state board of education (SBE) agendas, a regular practice at NASBE.

Again and again, we saw issues related to school choice appearing on board agendas. In 24 states, the SBE authorizes charter schools, and in 5 of those states, the board is the only authorizer. Like other public schools, charters must be held accountable to their communities. When charters are proposed for revocation, it is often the SBE that makes the final call.

Our goal with this issue was not to provide all the *answers* on choice. But we hope that readers will at least develop a set of *questions* to be answered before they make decisions on issues before their boards.

Following the election, however, the topic seems prescient. In the wake of the president-elect's proposal to promote school choice, some readers may look to these pages for the "official" NASBE response. It isn't there. Our approach to choice, both in these pages and in our public statements, is grounded in some realities and in our overall philosophy.

Over its nearly 60 years, NASBE has held as its central tenet that education governance is primarily a state and local matter. That philosophy has underpinned NASBE's dealings with every secretary of education since Shirley Hufstедler, who was the first to serve in that role.

It is why we support the Every Student Succeeds Act, which the *Wall Street*

*Journal* calls "the biggest devolution of federal authority in a quarter century." It is also why we opposed the Obama administration's "supplement not supplant" rules, which we saw as unnecessarily restricting state authority. Simply put, we think that education leaders in states and localities, who are closest to students, are best equipped to make education policy decisions for them.

We also will temper our response to any new federal focus on school choice with this reality: Less than 9 percent of the \$600 billion spent on U.S. education comes from the federal government. Most of that 9 percent is specifically designated for students with disabilities and students in low-income communities, and ESSA has already authorized a \$300 million charter school program. Under existing budget caps, it will be very hard (though not impossible) for Congress to redirect additional funding to the ESSA charter school program or another new initiative. An increase would likely require a change in the Budget Control Act's spending caps and a new congressional appropriation.

Regardless, state and local governments will still bear primary responsibility for funding public schools and ensuring charters effectively serve all students, especially historically underserved subgroups. In many cases, their budgets are stretched thin, which suggests that even with some additional federal money on the table, it is unlikely that many states will add any new program.

NASBE's positions on choice will undoubtedly be reviewed and discussed by our members this year. But I fully expect that our foundational belief in the primacy of state governance will remain unchanged. ■



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