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On the Agenda

State Boards Showcase Innovation

With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and schools have new opportunities to innovate. As NASBE's State Board Insights database attests, one of the most powerful ways state boards of education promote innovation is by sharing schools' successful strategies in their monthly meetings.

The Kansas State Board of Education, for example, often features schools' solutions to pressing problems at its meetings. Kansas State Board Secretary Peggy Hill credits board members' frequent school visits with seeding the monthly agendas. Members ask to add presentations to board agendas based on the innovations they observe while on the road.

"It's important as policymakers that we remain in touch with students, with schools, and with the teachers to see their successes and their struggles," said Kathy Busch, the Kansas state board's vice chair. Presentations in Kansas have inspired board members to support and promote initiatives such as Educators Rising, a group for high school students interested in teaching careers.

Kansas State Board Chairman Jim Porter said presentations on innovative practices help the board better understand how students can build the skills they need for individual success. Porter recalled a May 2017 presentation from students who participated in a tiny-house project. The students learned construction skills, used geometry during design, and practiced public speaking to raise funds for the project. "We want to expand opportunities and find creative ways to meet the academic requirements," Porter said. "This is a way of showcasing how to do that."

Sharing school successes can have

transformative benefits beyond the boardroom. Michigan's state board highlights examples that can spark partnerships and district-level learning.

"We do a lot of things on beating the odds," said Marilyn Schneider, Michigan's state board executive. "We're trying to show the people in Michigan how some schools have found ways to address their challenges." By providing air time for best-practice presentations, the state board fosters connections between districts while showcasing what schools can do within the state's initiative to make Michigan a top 10 state in education within 10 years, dubbed Top 10 in 10.

Board members can do more. Busch said the presentations members hear at Kansas board meetings help them make connections for their districts. When they visit a school with a particular challenge, for example, members can refer school officials to another school in a different region that has found solutions to similar struggles.

In another twist, board meetings in Oklahoma and Hawaii feature monthly reports specifically on innovation, organized by their state education agencies. Regular updates keep creativity foremost on the minds of board members. This sharing also increases stakeholder engagement, as it draws a parade of students, educators, and administrators to the boardroom each month.

How does your state board learn about innovation at schools across the state, and do you play a role in sharing them?

To learn more about the innovations presented to state boards at their meetings, visit stateboardinsight.nasbe.org and browse the Innovation category. ■