

from the President's Pen



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“You can observe a lot by just watching,” Yogi Berra once pointed out. Since NASBE launched our State Board Insight database earlier this year, that’s just what we’ve been doing.

Each month, we study the agendas of every state board of education to see what pops up. How are boards spending their time? What issues appear regularly on many agendas?

Armed with that information, we can develop programs and services to help state boards. We noticed, for instance, that charter schools absorb boards’ time and energy. Since the start of 2017, 65 percent of state boards have discussed or acted upon charter school issues. Roughly a third of state boards on average are considering charter school items each month. Sometimes that share is higher or lower: More like half addressed the issue in January and just a quarter in March. But month after month, in state after state, charter decisions take up time.

In particular, decisions about individual schools seem to be some of the most contentious and time-consuming. In 15 states, the state board is the “court of last resort”—getting the last word on whether a school remains open and the conditions under which it may do so.

The January issue of the *Standard* was devoted to charter schools. That was the first association publication on the subject since 2004, but it won’t be the last.

And as is clear from examining board agendas, there are many other ways NASBE can help. In August, we launched a partnership with the National Association of Charter School

Authorizers to build the capacity of state boards to make sound charter decisions. Funded by the Walton Family Foundation, this initial grant will clarify the kinds of support that state boards need. Working collaboratively, we will create resources to address those needs: perhaps model authorizing policies, in-state training, best practices.

We identified a second need: to support boards as they search for new executive talent. Today, the average tenure of a chief state school officer is about two years. Consequently, at any given time one or more boards is likely to be searching for a new chief.

We noticed that boards had to put a fair bit of time and effort into finding chief replacements, so we recognized this as another area where we could make a difference. We are pleased to be leading the search for the Georgia State Board of Education’s chief turnaround officer and hope to be able to support other boards as they search for senior-level leaders.

One goal for NASBE’s searches will be to create a set of shared understandings before the candidate comes on board. We believe that if boards and state chiefs begin with the same goals in mind, they are more likely to build a productive working relationship. By getting everyone on the same page, perhaps we can lengthen the tenure of new chiefs.

State Board Insight is still in its first year. We will continue to use this valuable tool for signs of the critical needs that state boards face, and then we will determine how best to assist boards in addressing them. ■