

from the President's Pen

Sixty Years of State Board Leadership

The start of a new year is a great time for looking back. In 1958, Elvis made headlines by joining the Army. The Hula Hoop craze swept the country. And Jack Kilby, newly hired at Texas Instruments, figured out a way to miniaturize and connect the parts of a transistor circuit. He called it the “microchip.”

That same year, eight members of state boards of education met at the annual conference of the National School Boards Association. (Even then, some of the best discussions took place outside the formal meetings!)

They talked about the differences between state and local boards and determined that their interests would be better served if they established a new, independent organization. They called it the Associated State Boards of Education.

A few years later, the new organization—now named the National Association of State Boards of Education—established its first headquarters in Colorado, perhaps because Anna Petteys from that state was the first president. (Rumor has it that the first office was a repurposed closet.) Except for one half-time staff member, all the association’s responsibilities were carried out by board members.

2018 marks NASBE’s 60th year. For our Annual Conference, we will gather again in Colorado—this time in a space much larger than a closet!

Although many things about NASBE have changed during the past 60 years, there are constants:

NASBE’s only mission is to serve the needs of its members. There is a wonderful old photograph of eight NASBE members sitting around a table planning an upcoming conference. Their goal was

to ensure that the sessions would address the top concerns of state board members. While our research methods are different today—we rely more on surveys and other electronic communications—our goal is the same.

NASBE has always led on issues that affect students. When many schools were struggling with an appropriate response to educating students with AIDS in the 1980s, NASBE held a national summit on HIV prevention and education. The organization also published “Someone at School Has AIDS,” offering boards advice on how to set responsible policies. NASBE continues to help boards as they deal with challenging issues.

State governance will be even more important in the coming years. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has triggered a tectonic shift in education governance. Instead of focusing on whether state policies comply with federal regulations, state boards need to ensure that they are meeting the needs of students in their state. NASBE’s role is to support boards and share stories of successes across the country.

Issues come and go. But NASBE’s core values remain unchanged. From that first meeting in 1958, a commitment to state leadership in education policy and high-quality education for each student has animated state board members. At the center of what NASBE stands for are the twin goals of equity and excellence. Those will continue to shape our work for the next 60 years.

The start of a new year is also a good time for looking forward, and that is exactly what NASBE plans to do. Join us as we chart the course. ■



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