

On the Agenda

In 2017, nine in ten state boards explored ways to give all students a well-rounded education. Their efforts spanned extracurricular options, innovative instructional strategies, and unique curricular offerings from state history to financial literacy.

Whether they considered advanced electives or extracurriculars, boards often took time to discuss related issues of access and equity. Frequently, board members involved stakeholders in their deliberations. In four states, student representatives shaped state board conversations, raising issues such as unequal access to advanced learning opportunities and setting the stage for deeper board discussions. For example, Connecticut student advisors in June encouraged their board to expand access to extracurricular options to combat what they called the “experience gap.”

Financial literacy, computer science education, and technology-related extracurriculars came up frequently in 2017. Financial literacy initiatives appeared on the agendas of one in seven state boards last year, while more than a third of all state boards considered courses and extracurricular opportunities in computer science and technology.

Other boards approached academic enrichment and electives in highly individual ways. In Tennessee, the board approved a permanent state history elective course in August 2017, with an expedited timeline so schools could begin offering it in January 2018. In Arkansas, the board was updated in July 2017 on the Arkansas Declaration of Learning program, which supports teachers and school librarians over the course of a year as they develop curricula and civic engagement projects for their students that are inspired by historic objects, works of art, and oral histories. Teachers gain access to these resources through partner organizations such as the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies and the

Clinton Foundation. In one Declaration of Learning project, students created a 100-foot mural to raise awareness of the impact of rising sea levels on the U.S. Marshall Islands.

Extracurricular offerings often come with a hefty price tag for districts and schools. To avoid passing all costs for extracurriculars off to families through fees and thus creating barriers to access for students from low-income families, states look for other ways to fund these programs. The federal government’s 21st Century Community Learning Center program supports enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours for students attending high-poverty schools. In Nebraska, a new two-year opportunity grant program is providing supplemental funding through competitive grant awards. The Nebraska State Board of Education voted to approve grant funding recommendations in May and later approved a position statement in support of community-school partnerships that advance extracurricular learning.

State boards can help elevate and advance enrichment opportunities for all students through action, advocacy, and efforts to involve stakeholders in supporting engaging electives and extracurriculars. To find more examples of diverse state board initiatives, browse the Academic Enrichment category on State Board Insight. How is your state board emphasizing equitable access to enriching opportunities? ■

Nebraska’s Two-Year Opportunity

Grant: <https://www.education.ne.gov/elo/two-year-opportunity-grant/>

Arkansas’ Declaration of Learning

Program: <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-and-instruction/library-media-services>

State Board Insight:

<https://stateboardinsight.nasbe.org/>



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