

Our Members, Our Mission:
A Strategic Plan for the
National Association of State Boards of Education

Fall 2018

NASBE | National Association of
State Boards of Education

I. Letter from the Board Chair and CEO

Dear Members, Supporters, and Friends,

This year has been an important one for NASBE. It's been a year of celebration, as we mark the 60th anniversary of the only national organization giving voice to state boards of education. It's also been a year of transition, as we prepare to complete our respective tenures as NASBE's Board of Directors chair and president/chief executive officer. We are honored to have served you, and we are confident that our successors, incoming Board Chair Rachel Wise and incoming President/CEO Robert Hull, will continue leading NASBE toward our vision of equity and excellence for all students.

It has also been a year of reflection and planning for NASBE. Specifically, we engaged in a strategic planning process that will put NASBE on track to thrive for many more years to come. The landscape today is very different from even when Kris took the helm five years ago, with new realities such as the Every Student Succeeds Act and other major policy shifts bringing unprecedented change to our work. Some of these realities NASBE has been pleased to help bring about; others, like the budget crises now troubling many states, NASBE wishes our members did not have to face. What is certain, however, is that today's landscape finds states at a critical juncture, more in need than ever of *coherence* given all their responsibilities and their ambitious agendas. (It's not a coincidence that the title of our 2018 Annual Conference speaker Michael Fullan's latest book was *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*.) What's more, we believe that state boards of education are uniquely suited to play a central role, and we believe we can provide the guidance, action-oriented analysis, and partnership with a community of peers to assist them.

We are pleased to present you with this strategic plan, which outlines how we plan to empower state boards to fully embrace their role as citizen leaders, while continuing to offer NASBE's combined decades of expertise to meet boards' ongoing needs and ensuring the sustainability of the association for many years to come. This plan would not have been possible without the counsel of many respected partners, including the Alliance for Excellent Education, ASCD, the Aspen Institute, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Commission of the States, the Education Trust, Institute for Student Achievement, National Council of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, Partners for Each and Every Child, and Seek Common Ground. It especially would not have been possible without the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. We thank you, our staff, and the many NASBE members who provided input for this plan, and we look forward to your continued partnership in the years to come.

Sincerely,

John Kelly, Chair, Board of Directors

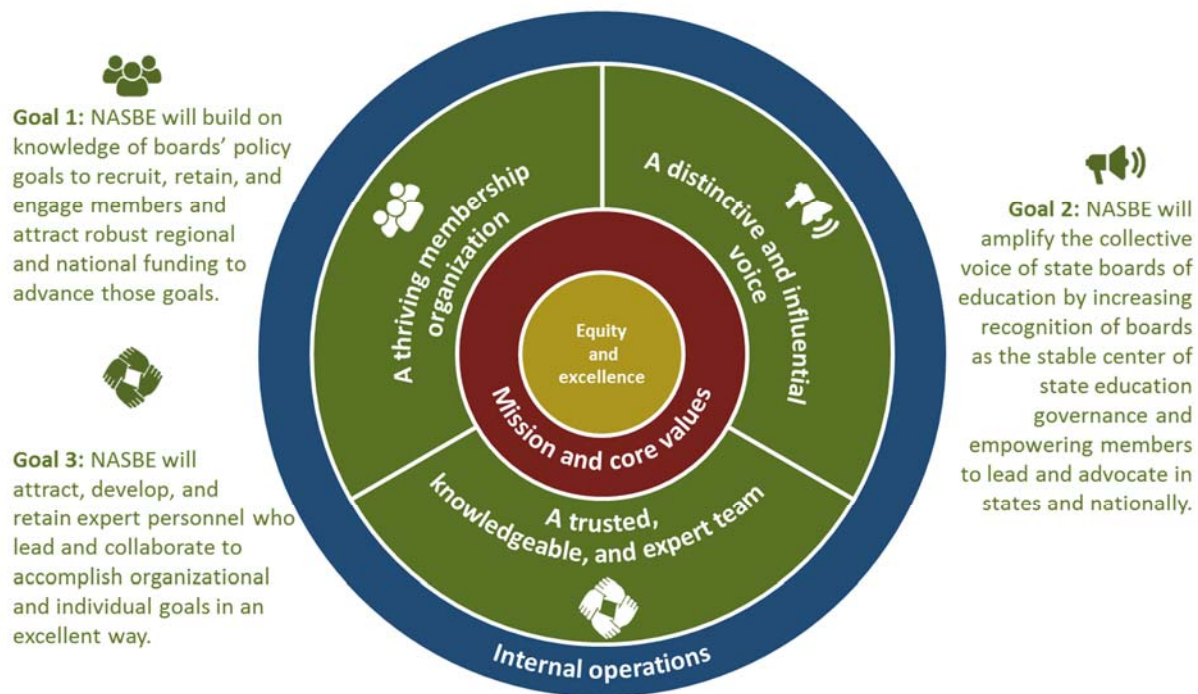
Kristen Amundson, President and CEO

October 2018

II. Executive Summary

The strategic plan of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is a living document that will guide the organization’s growth and services over the next three to five years. It is informed by interviews with staff, member boards, and stakeholders; a scan of the current education policy context; a review of the organization’s strengths and opportunities; and feedback from trusted external partners.

The plan sets forth three major goals, linked to NASBE’s mission statement and core values, with the organization’s premier core values of equity and excellence at the center. Each goal has a set of



strategies and metrics by which NASBE will measure its impact. NASBE will create a plan with activities to guide implementation of each goal, and the organization will review progress regularly to determine what to accelerate and what to refine.

NASBE looks forward to continued decades of service on behalf of the citizen leaders who serve on state boards of education across the United States. This plan is dedicated to them.

III. Introduction

For 60 years, NASBE has been a reliable source of information and action-oriented guidance for state boards of education. We continue to give state boards a voice at the federal level and remains the only national organization bringing board members together to share solutions and ideas in a nonpartisan setting.

Because the context in which state boards operate constantly changes, NASBE also adapts and grows to better serve member boards. That drive for continuous improvement led NASBE to develop a new strategic plan this year that builds on past successes and refines core services: less about the provision of lengthy policy papers and information about federal policies and more about analysis tailored to state boards' work, the creation of a community of citizen leaders to solve problems, and calls to action that are rooted in deep knowledge of state boards' roles and authority. *This is NASBE's ultimate value-added:* At a time when states are again asserting their authority for education policymaking, NASBE will be a steady strategic partner helping state boards seize the moment boldly and with a focus on all students so that boards remain in the driver's seat.

To that end, NASBE developed this strategic plan to do the following:

- Set actionable expectations about what NASBE will do and how we will approach our work, through new mission and core values statements and a theory of change;
- Explicate how NASBE will recruit, retain, and engage members in order to sustain and grow the organization;
- Detail how NASBE will enhance state boards' influence both in their states and nationally by helping member boards capitalize on their critical policymaking roles;
- Advance ways NASBE will become an even more collaborative and engaging place to work.

At its core, NASBE is a membership organization: We owe our existence to members, and we strive to assist them as they shape education policy in dozens of state contexts. NASBE both leads and is led by its members, bringing issues to their attention and shaping their knowledge and understanding of their role so they can act on those issues with the best interests of students and families in mind. The strategic plan explains how NASBE will undertake this work, driven by both the organization's past and present and guided toward the future.

IV. Mission, Core Values, and Theory of Change

A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, NASBE elevates state board members' voices in national and state policymaking, facilitates the exchange of informed ideas, and supports members in advancing equity and excellence in public education for students of all races, genders, and circumstances.

We have revised our mission and core values to better reflect our steadfast commitment to empowering members with the services and tools they need to create the conditions for all students in their states to achieve excellence across multiple domains.

NASBE Mission Statement

NASBE develops, supports, and empowers citizen leaders on state boards of education to strengthen public education systems so students of all backgrounds and circumstances are prepared to succeed in school, work, and life.

NASBE Core Values

We believe in equity and excellence:

We believe that students of all races, genders, and circumstances deserve the supports they need to thrive in school.

We believe all students can learn at high levels and must have the opportunity to do so through state policies that address their diverse learning needs.

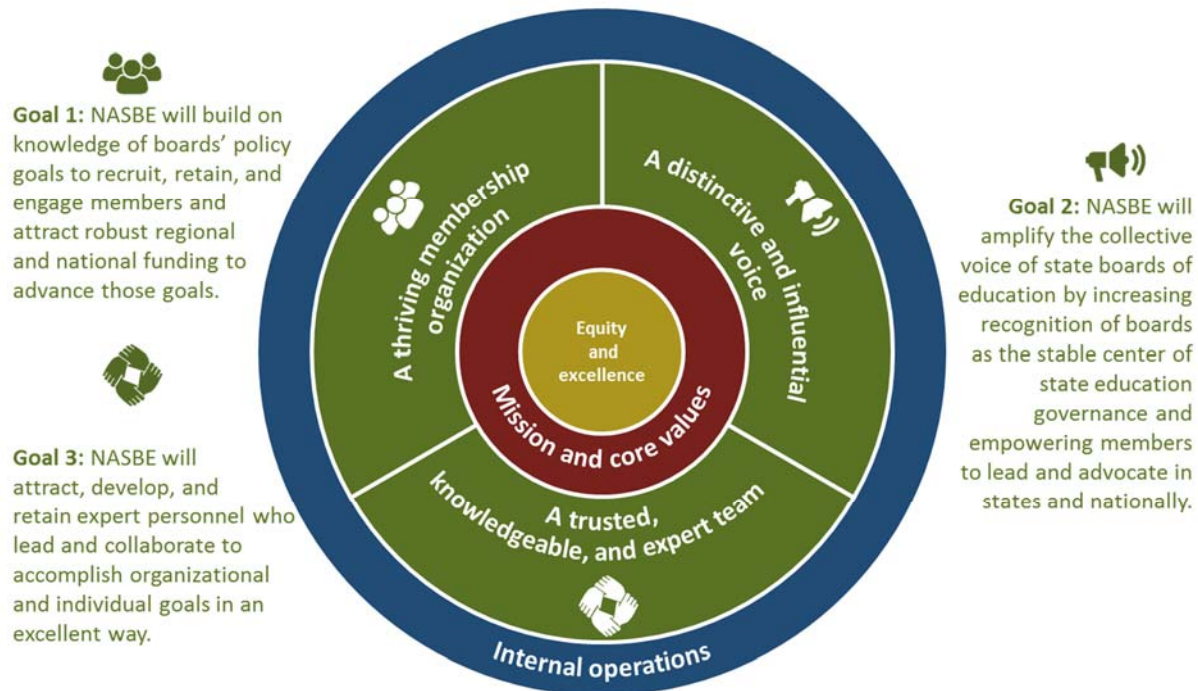
- **We prioritize state leadership of public education:** We believe that state boards of education, in partnership with chief state school officers, governors, and legislatures, are best positioned to craft, promote, and oversee state education policies.
- **We empower citizen leaders:** We build the capacity of state board members to question, convene, and act boldly with and for students, educators, and families.
- **We elevate evidence in policymaking:** We ground our resources, tools, and services in the strongest evidence available and help our members make informed decisions in the best interest of students.
- **We build community:** We facilitate productive dialogue and nonpartisan exchange among members with diverse perspectives, creating lasting channels for the sharing of evidence-based strategies and solutions.
- **We collaborate:** We promote respectful collaboration, both among our members and between our members and the broader education community.

NASBE's Theory of Change



V. Goals, Areas of Opportunity, and Strategies

NASBE used the landscape scan as the foundation for creating goals, areas of opportunity, and strategies that will enable us to fulfill our mission and core values. As demonstrated in the graphic below, each goal is unique, but each also has dependencies with the other two.



Two priorities cut across our goals and strategies:

NASBE's premier core values, **equity and excellence** will be integrated into everything we do. We will define equity and excellence and then use those definitions and associated measures to drive our services and activities. As a learning organization, we periodically will refine and reflect upon our definition and how we have integrated it into our work. Ensuring that our services and overall approach incorporate an equity and excellence lens helps NASBE and our member boards pursue the greater goal of ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed. With this constant focus and continuous reflection on whether we are living up to our equity definition, NASBE will be better equipped to uphold these core values and fulfill our mission.

Member service	Development of citizen leaders	National and state influence	Sustainable and effective operations
<p>NASBE must meet the needs of an expanded cohort of new board members starting in 2019. NASBE must ensure that incoming state board members experience value in exchange for their dues.</p>	<p>Those serving on our member boards are dedicated citizen leaders, often serving in a volunteer capacity. As board demographics change and transitions occur, NASBE's most valuable contribution remains to develop these citizen leaders.</p>	<p>NASBE has significant influence in Washington. Given the pressure state boards face to unite state policymakers around ambitious education agendas, NASBE could increase our impact by helping member boards assert their role as policy leaders.</p>	<p>Like all nonprofit organizations, NASBE must continue to ensure our financial sustainability by securing diverse sources of revenue. We also must continue to develop our expertise and collaborate with trusted partners to best serve member needs.</p>
<p>Pursuit of equity</p>			
<p>All of our stakeholders emphasize the importance of equity as one of NASBE's foremost values. However, NASBE must better articulate our approach to equity.</p>			

Each of our goals also needs tactical organizational steps to succeed. We will develop activities in a comprehensive plan that will guide the strategic plan's implementation over the next three to five years. NASBE will monitor and refine the implementation plan multiple times a year to make sure we are meeting internal and external milestones in order to achieve the strategic plan's goals and strategies.

Finally, it is important to remember that all aspects of this plan also apply to the work we will undertake with our valued affiliates, the National Council of State Boards of Education Executives (NCSBEE) and the National Council of State Education Attorneys (NCOSEA). We anticipate working with their members as closely as we work with our member boards.

VI. Goal 1: A Thriving Membership Organization

NASBE will build on knowledge of boards' policy goals to recruit, retain, and engage members and attract robust regional and national funding to advance those goals.

In Goal 1, NASBE fuses together two priorities that we previously perceived as distinct: a vigorous membership recruitment, retention, and engagement strategy, and the overall financial sustainability of the organization. We are housing them under one goal because we do not think we can have a healthy, sustainable organization without a robust membership strategy; the two go hand in hand.

Strategy 1: Assess SBE policy and knowledge priorities and use findings to define NASBE's value-added in efforts to recruit and retain member boards.

Strategy 2: Increase contacts with and among current board members to build a community of member boards regionally and nationally to increase member retention and engagement.

Strategy 3: Create a set of service offerings through fee-for-service activities and state-issued RFPs to better assist member boards and increase organizational sustainability.

Strategy 4: Raise funds from a diverse array of philanthropic and corporate sources based on NASBE's organizational priorities and member boards' needs regionally and nationally.

Goal 1 Implications for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Create a staff-driven definition of equity that NASBE integrates into internal and external work (note: applies to all three goals).
- Reflect the definition of equity in tools such as a member needs assessment and fee-for-service offerings, as well as grant applications and fundraising proposals.
- Aggressively pursue grant opportunities and fee-for-service activities that advance equity in states.

VII. Goal 2: A Distinctive and Influential Voice

NASBE will amplify the collective voice of state boards of education by increasing recognition of boards as the stable center of state education governance and empowering members to lead and advocate in states and nationally.

The landscape scan surfaced many strengths about NASBE's influence, namely, that our publications and other products (e.g., webinars, policy papers) are high-quality and that our representation of state boards' priorities at the federal level is strong. Members and stakeholders also urged us to lead board members and member boards by helping them better realize their policymaking roles and understand emerging issues, while using our nationally facing publications as a launching pad for work or technical assistance in individual states. This kind of engagement is essential if states are to retain their policymaking leadership. Goal 2 in our strategic plan attempts to address these areas.

Strategy 1: Continually shape NASBE products, convenings, and publications to ensure that they identify and elevate tools for state boards that distill and recommend potential SBE actions based on board priorities.

Strategy 2: Enhance member boards' understanding of their critical role in policymaking and equip them with resources to raise their public profiles among themselves, their constituents, other policymakers, advocates, and the news media.

Strategy 3: Expand members' capacity to represent SBE interests in federal advocacy and policymaking.

Strategy 4: Increase member boards' effectiveness by strengthening their relationships with other state-level policymakers through NASBE training and partnerships with other state-facing national organizations.

Goal 2 Implications for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Model diversity, equity, and inclusion values by elevating diverse board members in thought leadership opportunities.
- All member products, convenings, trainings, and publications include a specific tie-in to equity.
- Pursue partnerships with state-facing organizations that have an equity focus or equity expertise.

VIII. Goal 3: A Trusted, Knowledgeable, and Expert Team

NASBE will attract, develop, and retain expert personnel who lead and collaborate to accomplish organizational and individual goals in an excellent way.

All organizations are defined by their people, and NASBE is fortunate to have a talented and experienced team of full-time staff and occasional collaborators. NASBE staff embraced the strategic planning process and contributed to the plan, especially in creating a vision for a stronger organization. Goal 3 in the strategic plan outlines how staff and leadership will work together to build an entity that can fulfill the vision of Goals 1 and 2: a thriving membership organization with a distinctive, influential voice. We will pay particular attention to our talent pipeline—both leadership opportunities for those who work here and employment opportunities for those who want to work here—and ensure we have a team that reflects diversity of thought, background, and circumstance.

Strategy 1: Determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities (k/s/a) necessary to achieve strategic plan goals and provide opportunities for staff to build and expand those k/s/a through training, feedback, and other means.

Strategy 2: Design a professional learning agenda for staff that strengthens NASBE's culture of member service and supports staff in applying an equity and excellence lens to their work.

Strategy 3: Distribute leadership and responsibility for goals and strategies among staff according to their roles, strengths, and identified growth areas.

Strategy 4: Engage staff meaningfully in major organizational decision making.

Goal 3 Implications for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Maintain a diverse staff in terms of age, race, gender, background, experience.
- Ensure NASBE's own Board of Directors is a diverse representation of SBE members.
- Make pathways for advancement more transparent and inclusive by defining clear expectations for promotion.
- Model equity values by supporting diverse staff to secure thought leadership opportunities.

IX. Conclusion

This strategic plan comes at an opportune moment for state boards of education and for NASBE as an organization. States are reasserting their policymaking authority, and state boards are increasingly focused on education agendas that prioritize equity. As the only membership organization for state boards of education, NASBE has the responsibility to elevate the voice of state boards, ensuring that state boards are represented in the national discourse about our public schools. NASBE also must equip state boards with the tools, resources, and strategic advice they need to ensure equity and excellence for all students.

That remains our mission: *to develop, support, and empower citizen leaders on state boards of education to strengthen public education systems so students of all backgrounds and circumstances are prepared to succeed in school, work, and life.* We will accomplish this mission by expanding and growing our membership; ensuring that our activities and services advance member boards' policy priorities and reflect our core values as an organization; and cultivating a dynamic, diverse team that thrives in a collaborative, engaging environment.

Above all, we will apply a lens of equity and excellence to everything we do so that our focus and that of our member boards remains fixed on ensuring that all students get the resources they need to succeed.

We are excited about the journey ahead and invite you to join us.

X. Appendix: Process

The seven-month process to develop the plan kicked off with a detailed scan of the landscape in which NASBE operates today, including an assessment of its current strengths and areas for growth. Conducted by Education First, the landscape scan investigated such questions as, *What are the policy trends that will influence the work of state board members in the years to come? What is NASBE's primary role in this landscape? To what extent is NASBE meeting the needs of its members?* NASBE staff then completed a series of group and individual activities to generate key elements of the plan. The process concluded with the plan's ratification by NASBE's Board of Directors in September.

Each stage of planning involved extensive stakeholder engagement. Individuals from 10 **NASBE member boards** and 13 **partner organizations** participated in hour-long interviews to inform the landscape scan. To round out member input, NASBE also held two focus groups at its New Member Institute and revisited the findings from its fall 2016 survey of state board members. **NASBE staff** provided significant input at multiple stages of planning, beginning with two staff focus groups to inform the landscape scan, and later through two half-day working sessions to brainstorm NASBE's new mission statement, core values, goals, and strategies. **NASBE leadership** met weekly with Education First during the landscape scan and while the plan took shape to review progress, discuss findings, and refine the plan's contents. **NASBE's Board of Directors** provided valuable feedback at three meetings of a subcommittee for strategic planning and four meetings of the full Board of Directors.

XI. Appendix: History of NASBE

In many ways, the history of state boards of education is the history of public education in the United States. The founders of this country understood that a democracy required educated citizens.

As early as the 1600s, states and localities created schools to educate their children, and local school boards were tasked with establishing and maintaining them. In the early 1800s, New York, Virginia, and Massachusetts all established boards that were the earliest precursors of state boards of education. These boards helped establish a culture of citizen leadership of public schools that continues into the 21st century.

By the mid-20th century, most states had established state boards. In more than half the states, the board was created by the state constitution, enshrining the importance of its role. But board members, who often served without salary, needed support and training so they could effectively represent the citizen's voice in education.

In 1958, a small group of state board members formed the Associated State Boards of Education. In 1963, the group changed its name to the National Association of State Boards of Education. They adopted a constitution and bylaws and charged annual dues of \$100 per state. The first headquarters office was in Denver, Colorado.

The creation of a new organization for state boards of education came in the context of big challenges facing states, from *Brown v. Board of Education* to the launch of Sputnik. In these early years, NASBE functioned as a clearinghouse where states could share information about research and best practices. But as the federal government expanded its influence (although not necessarily its financial support), NASBE responded. By 1975, the organization had moved to Washington, DC. The next decades saw NASBE taking on challenging issues in education—from establishing HIV/AIDS policies in schools to promoting early childhood education.

The federal influence over education policy reached its apex with the passage of the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was known as No Child Left Behind, and the stimulus package adopted during the 2009 recession. NASBE worked to influence federal policy even as it supported changes in the law that would return more authority to the states. And NASBE supported states as they led on policy issues ranging from accountability and assessments to improving science education.

State boards play a primary role in developing a state accountability system. In 45 states, the state board adopts the learning standards on which the state's summative assessment should be aligned. Nearly all state boards have primary responsibility for setting the quality standards for teachers and school leaders.

In 2015, Congress passed another reauthorization of ESEA, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Today, the balance between state authority and federal regulation is being restored. States have primary responsibility to do the following:

- Ensure equity and excellence;
- Establish high expectations;
- Promote meaningful accountability;

- Support state and local leadership and capacity building; and
- Promote aligned, coherent systems for children from birth through higher education.

As NASBE enters its seventh decade, the need for citizen leadership and nonpartisan, evidence-based policymaking is greater than ever. As NASBE President and CEO Kris Amundson observes, “That is what NASBE has advocated since its founding and the reason I believe the future for this organization is bright.”

XII. Appendix: Current Context

The seven-month process to develop the strategic plan kicked off with a detailed scan of the landscape in which NASBE operates today. The landscape scan synthesized important learnings from recent state and national policy trends that inspired NASBE to reconsider how it is supporting members to be effective in their unique role in state policymaking. The scan also highlighted NASBE's areas of strength and surfaced a variety of potential opportunities for growth over the coming years.

Policy Landscape

The passage of ESSA in 2015 reflects a general shift in balance back to state authority over education. Stakeholders agree that oversight of development and implementation of a state agenda for educating all students to high levels will be one of state boards' key roles moving forward. However, many interviewees emphasized that beyond traditional oversight, state policymakers should take on ambitious education agendas with equity-focused student outcomes that merit the continued state control of education policymaking. In this landscape, state boards of education—which in many places are the most stable among a state's rotating cast of education policymakers—have a primary role to play in steering any statewide education agenda to fruition. At NASBE, this understanding must inform its services and tools for and on behalf of members. The risk of not equipping boards to seize this moment is that the education policy pendulum will swing back toward greater federal control, depriving state boards of their full ability to shape and guide their states' education agendas.

NASBE's Strengths

Member boards and partner organizations cheered NASBE on a number of counts. NASBE will continue to build on these strengths going forward:

- Members praise NASBE for the quality of its convenings. Members especially appreciate the opportunity to exchange ideas with role-alike peers in other states.
- Among its partners in Washington, DC, NASBE has an influential presence and strong credibility. These partners look to NASBE for strategic advice, observe how NASBE works well with peer organizations, and trust NASBE to deliver on its commitments.
- Members and partners agree that NASBE is nonpartisan and brings together diverse groups with many divergent opinions around important issues.

Opportunities for Growth

Though the most recent reemphasis on state and local authority over education is significant, this is not the first time in NASBE's 60-year history of serving state boards that NASBE has been faced with the task of adapting to changing times. NASBE remains as committed as ever to accommodating its members' emerging needs while continuing to uphold a set of enduring values for long-term success. With this commitment in mind, NASBE sees several opportunities to build upon its longtime record of member service, national and state influence, sustainable and effective operations, and pursuit of equity:

- **Member service:** Even normal turnover of state board members requires NASBE to be strategic about engagement of individual member boards, and these are not "normal" times. As a result of the 2018 gubernatorial elections, NASBE needs to be prepared to meet the needs of an expanded cohort of new board members starting in 2019. Incoming state board members want to know the value they receive in exchange for their dues. Thus NASBE must continue to educate member boards about its value proposition. NASBE must ensure that it offers the right mix of products and services so that different member boards with different

needs are equally likely to see NASBE's offerings as relevant and use them. Currently, NASBE's membership-wide products (such as publications, webinars, and national convenings) deliver quality insights on a breadth of topics of interest. But some members are interested in more depth on their particular issues closer to home, for example, through in-state or area (regional) convenings and technical assistance. Given limited staff resources, NASBE must continue to strike the right balance between its relative investments in membership-wide products and individualized member services to maximize its member engagement over time.

- **Development of citizen leaders:** The characteristics of state school board members have changed over the past 60 years. On average, they are trending younger and more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender (50 percent are women); they tend to be more active politically; and they tend to have shorter tenures on state boards. But one trait remains the same: Those serving on NASBE member boards are dedicated citizen leaders, often serving in a volunteer capacity, and they hold their board service to be of utmost importance. NASBE's most valuable contribution remains to develop these citizen leaders to serve with integrity, be steeped in cutting-edge policy knowledge, and be fully versed in the power of their roles to question and convene. No other national organization fulfills this responsibility of building on the rich history of citizen leaders who deftly steer state education policy in the best interests of students and families.
- **National and state influence:** NASBE has significant influence in Washington, DC, but could increase its impact by more consistently elevating interested state board members as advocates on the national stage. Given the pressure state boards face to unite state policymakers around ambitious education agendas, NASBE also could increase its state impact by helping member boards assert their role as policy leaders and use NASBE's relationships with other state-facing organizations to work with partners including governors, legislatures, and chief state school officers to provide expertise and resources.
- **Sustainable and effective operations:** Like all nonprofit organizations, NASBE must continue to ensure its financial sustainability by securing diverse sources of revenue. NASBE must develop staff expertise in the areas of greatest need to its members that also align with the organization's mission. NASBE wants to raise the profile of its staff experts and increase staff collaboration around organization-wide goals. NASBE also will work with trusted partners when its member boards need expertise beyond what it provides.
- **Pursuit of equity:** All of the stakeholders interviewed emphasized the importance of equity as one of NASBE's foremost values. However, awareness of NASBE's approach to equity varies, revealing the need for NASBE to articulate its definition of equity for students and NASBE internally as well.