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from the President's Pen

When choosing real estate, it is said the three most important factors are location, location, location. The same is true of items on the meeting agendas of state boards of education. How, when, and where items appear speaks volumes about the intentions, beliefs, and values of a board.

A state board's agenda shapes the educational narrative in a state and is the single most important mechanism at members' disposal for meaningful action toward improving outcomes for students. It is a bully pulpit and the citizen's voice in education. Three levers of board authority—the power of policy, the power of the question, and the power of convening—converge here to demonstrate the power of collective voice and drive the work of the board.

State board chairs typically collaborate with the chief state school officer and executive staff to develop each meeting's agenda. Given the agenda's critical importance, they ought to devote a fair bit of time and effort to the task, with intentional focus on the desired outcomes for the meeting. To develop an effective, efficient agenda, board chairs must ensure that the state's values and priorities are reflected there. Strong agendas honor and elevate items of the greatest importance and impact while giving less time and prominence to items of lesser import or relegating them to the consent agenda.

All board members need to feel that their concerns on emerging issues are important to the work of the board. While the chair must put the board's long-term goals at the heart of the agenda, members should be able to rely upon an established process for raising issues, placing them on study session schedules or committee agendas, or addressing them in another agreed-upon fashion.

Often, agenda development follows

conventional practice developed over many years. Yet state boards over time have assumed new authorities, adopted new strategic plans, and established new priorities. Many boards have given little thought to realigning meeting agendas to reflect their current realities.

NASBE staff reviews state board agendas and minutes monthly in order to stay abreast of common issues and discern topics that are trending across the country, so we get a good sense of how agendas are constructed and delivered. From this national perspective, we can offer some best practices for building effective agendas:

- establish clear objectives for each meeting;
- show the correlation of each item to the board's strategic plan;
- provide members with quality resources and background on items in advance of the meeting;
- pace policy items across meetings to permit ample consideration before a required vote;
- relegate informational and routine matters to the consent agenda;
- allow time for members to question and discuss items;
- provide ample opportunities for public input into important items; and
- leave the meeting with established outcomes for the next meeting and a sense of next steps.

I challenge all state boards to stop and reflect on current practice. How are you spending your time together? Do your agendas truly reflect the board's intentions, beliefs, and values? Do they drive your work? Do they demonstrate what you wish to accomplish for the students and citizens of your state? ■