In the face of the stress and anxiety caused by COVID-19 and the adjustments to daily life that are required of each of us, there have been countless examples of people coming together, helping neighbors, and trying to find ways to make the unfamiliar part of a daily routine.

Lawyers are no different. I have been privileged to see the community of members of the National Council of State Education Attorneys (NCOSEA) come together to confront the challenges presented by the pandemic and the resulting social and legal changes. In the immediate aftermath of so many states and school districts closing schools, first temporarily and then for the remainder of the school year, there were many questions. Foremost was to ask how schools could ensure that students were receiving required services, in addition to the supports that many students and families rely upon, such as meals or special education services. With the uncertainty that COVID presented on so many fronts, there were many questions with no precedents. Others were time-sensitive: State officials needed to make sure that states provided uninterrupted services to the best of their abilities.

In late March and April, I saw the NCOSEA listserv light up with questions, information sharing, and offers to provide feedback. As we moved further into the pandemic’s timeline and as the CARES Act moved through Congress, our conversation only intensified. It eventually ended up where everyone seemed to end up during the pandemic: on Zoom, with NCOSEA collaborating with the National Association of Attorneys General to conduct two webinars with the largest turnout for NCOSEA programming in many years.

NCOSEA members were selfless, sharing template documents or guidance issued by their state education agencies (SEAs) as informational resources, with the only goal being to provide as much help to states and students as possible, and not for credit or professional acclaim. For example, guidance was shared on states’ responses to the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed rules regarding the distribution of CARES Act funding. Members dissected the unique considerations for accommodations of special education students during the pandemic. Now, as we move into the new school year, members are tackling the legal ramifications of potentially requiring face masks or face shields in schools.

While it took a global pandemic to muster the network to this degree, it was incredibly gratifying to see the way NCOSEA members responded to help not just their SEAs but each other. It shows on a larger scale what I have experienced on an individual basis as an NCOSEA member since I joined in 2014. As an attorney in a small state where SEA attorneys are few, I can personally attest that a resource like the NCOSEA listserv and the network of attorneys across the country it represents are invaluable.

I hope you have seen similar silver linings in your networks as well. Stay safe and healthy!