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from the President's Pen

Looking in the Mirror

State boards of education spend a great deal of time discussing evaluation processes and accountability systems. Based on their respective areas of authority, state board agendas are peppered with lengthy, substantive discussions on teacher evaluation, student performance, program analysis, as well as state chief and state education agency evaluation, which all lead to discussions about accountability based on the results of such data. All important topics, for sure.

However, most board agendas are eerily silent when it comes to the single most important area of evaluation and accountability within the purview of all state boards of education: self-evaluation. As the single-most powerful education policy group within each state and territory, state boards of education owe it to themselves, their fellow state policy leaders, and, most important, their families and students, to engage in a regular, thorough evaluation of their effectiveness as education policy leaders.

I recently had the privilege to lead a state board through an examination of their effectiveness, and it was powerful for both the board and for me as the leader of NASBE. The NASBE model of board effectiveness self-evaluation looks at four broad areas: 1) mission and goals, 2) state board agenda, 3) board operations, and 4) stakeholder engagement, each of which has a strong emphasis on equity and excellence. These areas are assessed through a state-specific survey of individual members and, when coupled with hard data on student achievement and program effectiveness, should lead to in-depth discussions that renew the board's focus on priorities, align direction

with those priorities, and increase efficiency and effectiveness. It also permits boards to highlight their accomplishments and recollect milestones of achievement. It is not only about growing as an effective board but also about taking time to stop and enjoy progress.

While the self-evaluation process may seem daunting given the limited time boards have to meet, it is well worth the investment, as it streamlines discussions moving forward and aids in prioritizing agenda items. Hence, greater effectiveness leads to enhanced efficiencies.

Once a board completes a self-evaluation, it is important to share those results with constituents and colleagues in the spirit of public transparency and to gain the support and trust of those the board serves. State boards are the citizen leaders in the education policy landscape and must be willing and eager to assess their own performance and effectiveness before prescribing such measures for teachers, schools, districts, and state agencies.

The relentless pursuit of equity and excellence begins at the board table—not at the schoolhouse door. State boards must heed the words of the great musical philosopher, Michael Jackson, and start with the man in the mirror. “I’m starting with the man in the mirror... And no message could have been any clearer. If you want to make the world a better place, Take a look at yourself, and then make a change.”

Just as self-reflection is key to personal growth, board self-evaluation is the first and most crucial step in the collective journey of equity and excellence for *all* students. ■