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from the President's Pen

The Pursuit of Goals for Education

The dog chasing a car is the classic metaphor for a futile attempt to reach one's goals. It assumes the car will always outpace the dog, who at some point stops the pursuit and turns around to find the next car to chase. It seems this is the case with many pursuits in improving state education systems. State education policymakers fix on a desired goal, chase it, tire of the effort or realize its futility, and then they cast their gaze about for that next car.

Why is this the case? What is it about our goal setting that often leaves us coming up short and abandoning one pursuit in favor of another? Now is the perfect time for members of state boards of education to be asking these essential questions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly wreaked havoc on all aspects of our collective lives, it also left in its wake a unique opportunity for states to conduct a serious review of their education systems and set realistic and attainable goals for the next decade. With unprecedented need has come unprecedented funding, data, and a widespread desire for real change.

Conventional wisdom has many state boards asking, "Where do we see education moving as we exit the pandemic?" During this critical time, boards must reframe the question, asking, "Where can we, the state board of education, *take* education as we exit the global pandemic?" It is not about what you are recovering from but what you are recovering to.

A reframed mind-set should accompany this reframed question, one that acknowledges four components: knowledge, experience, resources, and political

will. Let's begin with knowledge. A tremendous amount of research and evidence reveals exactly how children learn, how they best interact and adapt, what acceleration models work, and, most important, what does not. This evidence should form the basis of all board goal setting.

Second, boards have experience from the pandemic on which to draw. The data generated from pre- and mid-pandemic learning illuminate the most glaring needs of students, families, and schools. When paired with the knowledge of how children learn, these experiences can be the catalyst for powerful, results-driven action.

Third, states have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to operationalize lasting actions because of the federal investment in recovery. In a year in which states are receiving the equivalent of seven times previous annual federal funding in a single year, there is real opportunity for success. But the real power lies in component 4—political will. Knowledge, experience, and resources are lifeless and ineffective without it. State boards must embrace the challenge, establish aggressive agendas, and then stay the course in relentless pursuit of their goals.

I often say that in education we can't seem to get traction, but we can sure get whiplash. Will this time be different? Will we continue to chase one car, only to turn around and pursue the next? Or will be this be our legacy moment, in which we do the right thing and finally catch the dreams we have long chased? For the sake of our children and our nation's future, I hope we do. ■