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from the President's Pen

Want to Be a Great State Board Member?

What a delight it was to interview three rock-star state board chairs for this edition of the *Standard*! Their passion for excellence in education is infectious, their focus on creating the conditions for student success is inspiring, and their respect for, and trust in, the intentions of fellow board members and policymakers is admirable. They have navigated issues both challenging and not so challenging and sought consensus with care. They truly value their board's collective voice and a commitment to journeying together, even when it is difficult to achieve.

I am writing this a few weeks after the November 2022 elections. In campaigns across the country, candidates from all sides often demonized and vilified their opponents—the antithesis of the “we’re all in this together” mentality necessary to build common vision and purpose. Negative campaigning is common, I know, but sad nonetheless.

NASBE from time to time has been asked to quietly advise boards who struggled to achieve a unified vision. While the challenges vary, the approach that works best assumes good intent, facilitates respectful dialogue and empathic listening to people with varying perspectives, and embraces civility. Different perspectives inform policy design and implementation, and impactful ideas are shaped from the input and embraced.

It is also better to be kind. In R. J. Palacio's young-adult novel *Wonder* about a visibly disabled student, the student's teacher, Mr. Browne, says, “When given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind.” It is a great rule for

effective living—and effective boardsmanship. We teach our children that meanness is unacceptable. And yet it seems that more and more adults feel they have permission to be mean, insulting, and to attribute malicious intentions to others. In our hearts, however, we know better.

Most of our elected officials end up in collective decision-making bodies: Congress, state legislatures, city and county councils, boards of education. For most of these bodies, split votes are actually relatively rare. And they all function best when their members develop policy in an inclusive manner. Collective voice does not mean there are no disagreements—and sometimes even deep disappointments at certain outcomes. But for the most part, progress is thereby made.

Congratulations to new state board members—those who are newly elected, newly appointed, or replacing retiring members! People in your state, on your boards, and at NASBE value your commitment and your perspective. As you join the policymaking table, take a moment to look into the eyes of each person around the table and remind yourself that you are surrounded by good people who want what is best for children. Approach your work at that table with positive intent and assume others will do the same.

Make no mistake, we are stronger when we work together and seek common ground. State boards share a desire for great education opportunities that create the conditions for children to learn, grow, and be prepared for success in life. If we always start from there, and keep an eye on that objective, our children, our communities, and our country will be served well. ■