

NASB News Update--April 2016

News from the Association, Nevada, and Across the Nation



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Supporting Success for All Students through Local School Board Leadership



A Message from NASB's President



As board members, we are all working more with advocacy organizations of one kind or another. Such groups as the ACLU, Educate Nevada Now, the Nevada Public Policy Research Institute, Power2Parent, Clark County Black Caucus, WAAKPUP, Hispanics in Politics, the Lincy Institute, Women's Law Center, Gender Justice Nevada, and Ed Trust-West are actively engaged, sometimes producing research, offering training, encouraging advocacy, and even filing lawsuits challenging school districts in one way or another.

Sometimes these organizations represent the viewpoints of underrepresented groups and individuals, critically monitoring and pushing for change in public policy. They serve an important function, and they have the power to alter the education landscape and press school districts for change that, in their view, supports increased student achievement.

On the other hand, school districts are charged with doing what is in the best interest of the more than 460,000 students they serve statewide, including the needs of our most underrepresented students as well.

Our local school boards must manage the needs of our State's diverse student population and the expectations of parents and the public, while also navigating the challenging world of collective bargaining, litigation, assessments, and fiscal accountability—tasks not taken lightly by school board members. Certainly improving our relationships with advocacy groups would be a benefit to facing our daunting challenges.

I know that sometimes we all say things that seem self-evident...but I also know that sometimes what we say that is self-evident is not what we do. So, I want to suggest for your consideration four ways that we might use to establish or create partnerships with the advocacy groups that come before the board.

Start Now—

Invite advocacy groups to the table early and often; and keep talking—even if you don't agree. Involving advocacy groups early in the process helps improve understanding and transparency. Don't wait until a plan is developed or a policy is finished before bringing in these groups to seek their input.

Process—

Set out the process—or "rules of engagement." Do this right up front. This speaks to the credibility of the district and the advocacy groups involved. What you do actually matters more than what you say. Having a process and sticking to it helps to develop credibility and trust.

Respect—

Respect each other—and the process. It matters as much "who" is in the room, as it does what is said in that room. Including the superintendent and board members as opposed to less senior staff sends signals to all involved about the level of seriousness of the occasion.

Transparency—

We should maintain transparency by sharing the vision and the challenges facing the school district. Creating clear and concise documentation, for instance, provides all stakeholders with a mutual foundation from which to work. Reducing jargon and making discussions more "community friendly" also helps. Proactive, honest dialogue is critical to developing trust and heading off a misunderstanding before it occurs.

You know me. I call it like I see it, and from my perspective, TRUST is the most essential element for any of our work with advocacy organizations as we work together to increase student achievement. Relationships and trust take time to develop, and only by working consistently on these relationships and understanding the "shoes" of each other's positions can authentic trust be developed.

In his book *The Speed of Trust*, author Stephen Covey identifies behaviors of high-trust leaders. Among these behaviors, Covey identifies straight talk, respect, confronting reality, and extending trust. Trust, Covey notes, is developed over time, through a relationship in spite of differences.

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I once heard a speaker say that “the human relationship is the best way to get to a solution, not when it’s just suits in the room. It’s the people side of it that’s ignored. Doing the breakfasts, the coffees—they help set a different context.” I am reminded of Senator Debbie Smith who always saw the people side of any political situation and tried to work toward solutions that actually helped as many people as possible.

To quote Lou Holtz—my favorite American football coach and commentator—“The man who complains about the way the ball bounces is likely the one who dropped it.”

That definitely applies to all of the work that we do as school board members, particularly as we try to work together with advocacy organizations.

As a final thought, I want to encourage all board members to attend the professional development that NASB has scheduled for Saturday morning, May 7, at the Hyatt Place Hotel in Reno. We will have a two-hour presentation from Erika Hoffman, Director of Federal and State Relations with the California School Boards Association. She will share important information about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in December 2015. We will also have a presentation from Dana Bennett, President of the Nevada Mining Association. A total of 1.5 CPO units will be available in the areas of Governance and Leadership.

With warm regards,

Joe Crim

Joe Crim, Jr.
NASB President



Early Learning Changes the Course

By Megan Meyer

Early education plays an important, very real role in the broader K-12 education system. Every year, nearly one million children enter kindergarten unprepared to succeed. Every year, about a million children fail to graduate with their peers from high school. We need children to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. The foundation for that begins the moment children are born. In fact, it begins before a baby is even born.

Research has proven that education begins prenatally and grows by leaps and bounds from birth. Our expanded knowledge of human growth and

development in the earliest years has taught us that children are learning from the moment they are born. Brain growth, approaches to life and learning, and language skills are shaped by what does — or does not — happen in a child’s first days, months, and years. The speed at which babies’ brains grow and develop is astonishing. Equally astonishing is how quickly the achievement gap between low-income children and their more advantaged peers can grow.

Pervasive achievement gap

Across the U.S., and here in Illinois, a persistent and widening gap in academic achievement exists between low-income students and their more advantaged peers.

There is much discussion about addressing the achievement gap in third grade and beyond. In fact, the gap has been growing for years by that point. It is detectable by as early as nine months and measurable by 18 months. By age 4, the achievement gap has widened to an 18-month gap between an impoverished child and his more affluent peers; and that gap is still present at age 10 and continues through high school.



Many low-income students consistently underperform on school coursework and on standardized tests, graduate high school at lower rates, and are less likely to attend college. As a result, many are ill-prepared to meet the challenges of today’s workforce, which forces them into low-skilled, low-paying jobs that will not help them escape or avoid poverty.

Our nation’s public schools do not have the capacity or resources to remediate skills for the overwhelming number of children who are not academically or socially ready for school.

Children who enter the K-12 public school systems unprepared are often unable to take full advantage of what the classroom has to offer. These are the children who struggle to keep up academically in class, are frequently placed in special education programs, are labeled as having behavioral problems, or are held back one or more grade levels.

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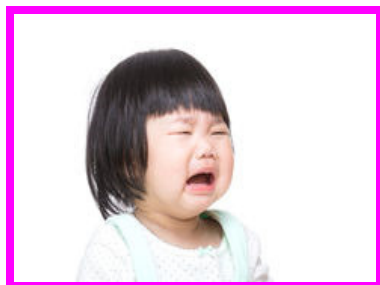
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Once established, gaps in school-readiness skills are difficult — and more costly — to remedy. A study of a 1998-99 kindergarten cohort found that the gaps in achievement for children who entered kindergarten with lower mean achievement scores in reading and math were wider still by the end of third grade.

The challenge is even greater for the growing number of young children from non-English-speaking homes. A Chicago study of low-income children entering public kindergarten found that twice as many children from non-English-speaking homes scored in the lowest ranges on standardized tests measuring language skills.

Evident before kindergarten

The brain does not suddenly switch on at kindergarten. Brain architecture develops in infancy and toddlerhood. Early experiences that are nurturing, active, and challenging actually thicken the cortex of an infant's brain, creating a brain with the more extensive and sophisticated neuron structures that determine intelligence and behavior.



While good experiences help the brain develop well, poor experiences can cause a genetically normal child to have a lower IQ. Children exposed to fewer colors, less touch, little interaction with adults, fewer sights and sounds, and less language actually have smaller brains. So much of the neural foundation for learning is in place by the age of five that waiting to intervene until kindergarten is too late, especially for children whose life circumstances put them at-risk for academic trouble later on. We can close the achievement gap by recognizing first and foremost that this gap is actually a gap in school-readiness skills — one that is rooted in experiences that take place long before a child enters kindergarten.

Not just hard skills

Young children need both cognitive and social skills to enter school with the confidence, motivation, persistence, and curiosity that will prepare them to be successful learners. In effect, the achievement gap reflects a gap in school-readiness skills.

The social and emotional skills (or so-called "soft" skills) a child acquires before age 5 — the capacity to control behavior or impulses, the ability to get along with other children or seek out and accept help — are just as important as academic skills in preparing for school. Yet one-third of low-income children demonstrate significant behavioral problems at transition to kindergarten.

Math skills at kindergarten entry — the ability to recognize numbers, problem solve, use reasoning skills, and apply knowledge — are increasingly seen as an even better predictor of later academic success than early reading ability. Yet there is a significant gap in achievement in math performance between low-income and higher-income children.

Early language and literacy development is a key component of school preparation, and differences in vocabulary growth between children in low-income families and high-income families begin to appear as early as 18 months. By age three, the average child in a low-income household knows fewer than half as many words as a child in a high-income household.

Exacerbated by poverty

The earliest relationships babies develop with caring adults shape brain development by helping young children learn to manage their behavior and emotions, which leads to the ability to focus their attention on the tasks of learning.

In developing secure relationships with adults, young children discover a sense of confidence, which enables them to explore and learn about the world around them. They are also developing synapses at an extraordinary rate — nearly 700 every second. Those new synapses can be strengthened with high-quality learning experiences, or they can wither and fade from adverse experiences such as food insecurity, lack of positive reinforcement, and toxic stress.



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For many low-income children, the complex process of healthy brain development is often compromised by the stress of living in poverty. Parents struggling to cope with severe financial instability, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of medical care, hunger, and other stressors may not be able to adequately respond to their babies' needs, making it more difficult to forge the strong bonds required to help their babies thrive later in life.

The overlay of poverty and this critical developmental phase means that our youngest children are most at risk during the period of the most substantial brain growth of their lives.

Early interventions change the course

Fortunately, a wide body of research demonstrates that interventions, particularly in the first years of life, do work. High-quality early education programs are proven to help children succeed in school, increase high-school graduation rates, and increase enrollment in a four-year college. They can reduce teen pregnancy rates, crime, and other social problems, and reduce long-term social costs for special education, child welfare, and public assistance.

With high-quality early childhood experiences, people are more likely to have a higher income as adults and more likely to own a home. In addition to the increased earnings capacity by those who receive quality early childhood education, research has suggested that society saves more than \$7 for every \$1 invested in preschool.

The returns on high-quality experiences in the first three years are significant. Children exhibit better social-emotional development and more positive approaches to learning than their peers. Their parents are more supportive of their children's development, more likely to enroll their children in formal preschool programs, and less likely to be depressed. Importantly, children who receive high-quality services for five years beginning at birth fare better than those who spend only two years before kindergarten in a high-quality preschool program.



In addition to center-based programs, research studies have shown that evidence-based home visiting programs increase children's literacy and high school graduation rates, as well as how much parents read to their children. In addition, such programs increase positive birth outcomes for children, improve the likelihood that families have access to a doctor, and decrease rates of child abuse and neglect. In home visiting programs, trained parent coaches provide child development and parenting information to help young parents create safe, stimulating home environments; model positive and language-rich relationships; and connect families to medical, dental, mental health, and other supports.



Health gap equally pervasive

Good health in early childhood is another essential component of school readiness, and a large body of evidence links learning to lifetime health. Young children's health needs are tightly coupled to developmental needs, because learning and health are mutually reinforcing. A healthy child is less likely to miss school and is better able to concentrate and process information in class. The skills the child acquires in school often pay off in mental and physical health benefits down the road.

While much attention and effort have been directed at addressing the widening achievement gap in the U.S., children growing up in poverty face an equally pervasive and related health gap. By and large, they have markedly worse health than their higher-income peers. In fact, children in poor families are almost five times more likely than their higher-income peers to be in "less than optimal health." This health gap appears early in life and grows larger over time, diminishing the potential for children in poverty to lead lives unfettered by illness or injury.

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Many children living in poverty receive fewer vaccinations and experience higher incidences of childhood injury, chronic disease, suppressed immune systems, and cognitive and behavioral challenges. Disparities in the development of chronic diseases are often already present by the time children are preschool age and persist throughout their lives.

Quality early learning builds critical social-emotional skills that are a foundation for learning and good health. Being able to focus, make decisions, think flexibly, and handle anxiety or frustration have been linked to positive health outcomes. It's been proven that children who participate in high-quality early learning are less likely to later engage in such unhealthy behaviors as overeating, smoking, or substance abuse. Children who receive high-quality early learning, care, and family support are more likely to have better physical, mental, and oral health, exercise regularly, and maintain a well-balanced diet. As adults, these children report better overall health and reduced risks of such things as heart disease and hypertension.



Early learning investment generates strong returns

The return on investment in early childhood education is real: for children, parents, school districts, communities, and the state. Nobel laureate and economist James Heckman started out looking for the return on investment in workforce development programs. Not finding the results he was looking for, he looked earlier — high school, middle school, elementary. He ended up at infants, finding a rate of return so high there wasn't a banking analogy that would do it justice. The message is clear: The highest returns come from investments in the earliest years, because skill begets skill.

Just as real as the ROI is the need. According to the Children's Defense Fund, in 2013, Nevada had approximately 186,000 children under the age of five, with about 22 percent living in families with incomes below the poverty level. They all, regardless of where they live or their family's economic status, deserve the strongest start possible.

The early education and elementary education communities have the same goal — prepare students for success in school, career, and life. By joining forces, we can effect change that has the power to alter the way we view the education continuum from birth to college.

[Megan Meyer is marketing and media manager for The Ounce of Prevention Fund. This article appeared in the March-April 2016 issue of The Illinois School Board Journal.]



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2016

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NASB Represented at National School Boards Association Delegate Assembly

More than 7,000 school board members, speakers, vendors, and exhibitors converged on the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center beginning on Friday, April 8, for the National School Boards Association (NSBA) 76th Annual Conference. The Conference officially opened on Saturday, April 9.

On Friday, the **NSBA Delegate Assembly** met to consider and establish the policies that govern NSBA and provide direction for the advocacy work of the organization. The Delegate Assembly dealt with both *Beliefs & Policies* and *Resolutions* on many significant and substantive issues that affect every dimension of school board governance. The Delegate Assembly featured Briefing Sessions intended to engage state leaders and delegates more fully in the Core Resolutions focusing on three major areas of concern to school boards across the country.

Each state association member of NSBA may select two voting members. Most states appointment one or more alternates as well. Frequently, the president of the state association is selected as a delegate. State association members are also entitled to additional voting delegates under a formula reflecting minority student enrollment.



Representing Nevada were Lou Basanez [Elko, Delegate], Dotty Merrill [NASB Executive Director], Stacie Wilke-McCulloch [Carson City, Delegate and Sergeants-at-Arms Committee], Dawn Miller [Storey, Alternate], and Joe Crim, Jr. [Pershing, Delegate].

In essence, the Delegate Assembly is NSBA's legislature. It adopts its own rules of procedure, appoints committees, and hears and acts upon their reports. The Delegate Assembly meets at least once a year, typically at the time of the annual Conference, and the President and Executive Director of NSBA serve as President and Secretary of the Assembly.

In addition to its other responsibilities, the Delegate Assembly is responsible for the election of NSBA's President, President Elect, Secretary-Treasurer, and 15 additional members of the NSBA Board of Directors.

These are three of the Resolutions adopted by the Delegate Assembly and their underlying Rationales:

- **EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) IMPLEMENTATION**

NSBA urges the Administration to implement ESSA in a transparent and collaborative manner that recognizes ESSA's limitation of executive overreach and reaffirms local school board governance. NSBA urges Congress to fully fund ESSA to support states in their implementation.

RATIONALE: The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the signing into law of ESSA in December 2015 reaffirms local and community leadership in public education. Accordingly, the rulemaking process and subsequent implementation of ESSA must stay true to the law's aim to properly calibrate the federal government's role in public education.

- **OPPOSITION TO UNLAWFUL EXPANSION OF EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY**

NSBA supports an appropriate federal role in education, but opposes the federal intrusion and expansion of executive authority in the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies in absence of authorizing legislation as an invalid exercise of delegated authority.

RATONALE: In recent years, the federal government has overstepped its role with detrimental consequences at the schoolhouse level resulting from a restrictive and flawed federal accountability system and requirements to reshape the education delivery system that too often were dysfunctional, imposed unnecessary financial and administrative burdens, and most importantly prevented local school officials from making the best on-the-ground decisions for their students.

- **MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM**

NSBA urges Congress to amend the Migrant Education Program (MEP) to make funding available to school districts to help them fulfill their legal obligation to educate children of migrant workers regardless of their immigration status or the availability of employment documentation. In order to give migrant children the opportunity to reach their full potential, NSBA also urges Congress to fully fund MEP.

RATIONALE: Although federal law requires school districts to educate students regardless of immigration status, MEP funding currently is available to school districts only to support the education of legal migrant workers or their children for whom the district is able to document their employment status.

When received, a complete listing of the NSBA *Beliefs & Policies* and *Resolutions* as adopted by the Delegate Assembly will be placed on the NASB website.