

National Association of State Boards of Education

## → Governors Draw Roadmap toward Common Ground on State Education

By Joseph Hedger

In 2019, governors across the nation expressed visions for the direction of education policy in their annual state of the state addresses. Many focused on bipartisan issues, with governors urging state policymakers to join forces across political and organizational lines to achieve common goals. As state boards of education typically represent many stakeholder groups and seek to elevate community voices, their governors' speeches represent an opportunity to reinforce ongoing efforts and add value to new initiatives.

Yet many state board members may not know the extent of the valuable position they are in when their goals align with their governors'. Or they may hesitate to cross partisan lines, believing there is little common

ground. But if they do not reach out, they risk remaining siloed in their work, working at cross-purposes with those who could be allies, and thus undermining their own efforts to achieve good outcomes for students.

### 2019 STATE OF THE STATES

Based on a scan of all "state of the state" addresses governors gave in 2019 (including DC's "state of the district"), almost all spoke on education concerns. School funding was the top topic, which 43 governors addressed (figure 1). Career and technical education figured in 32 speeches, in alignment with the 2018 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which refocused many education leaders on increasing access to high-quality courses and opportunities. Thirty governors discussed postsecondary funding or financial aid. Governors from 27 states said they want to expand preschool and other early childhood initiatives.

Increasing teacher pay was a theme of 23 governor speeches, including in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona, where the Red for Ed movement has seen public school teachers striking or taking other actions for higher pay and better conditions. Twenty governors brought up statewide broadband internet; 19 discussed wraparound services such as additional school psychologists, afterschool programs, or mental and behavioral health initiatives; and 19 discussed student safety in schools, a topic that also figured in the agendas of 30 state boards of education in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Although equity also falls within other listed themes, 16 governors intentionally addressed equitable access and opportunity for K-12 education in their speeches, and 16 covered resources and learning in STEM or computer science.

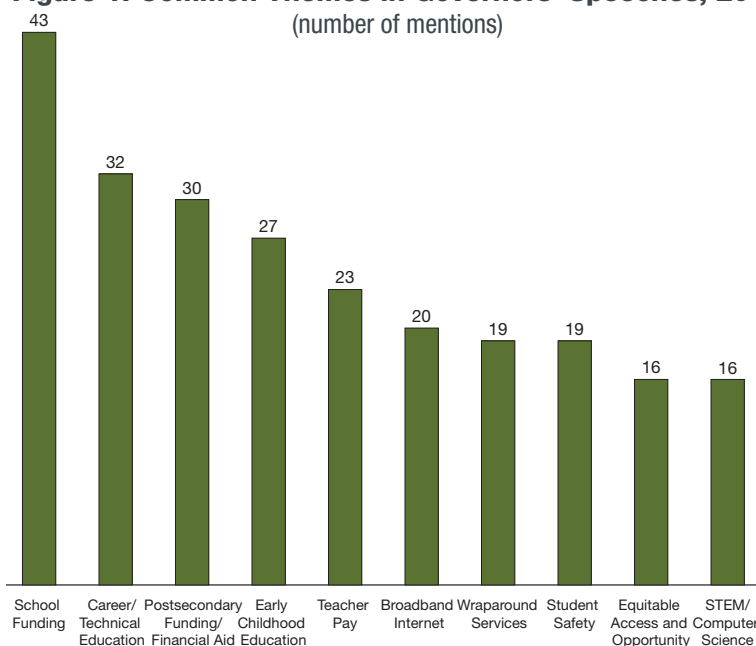
The prevalence of education in the agendas and budgets of governors in 2019 puts state boards of education across the country in an important position. They can leverage their governors' proposals in areas where they also have been focusing to advance their strategic goals, as Colorado, Iowa, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and Washington are doing. In these states, state boards are active drivers of initiatives that governors raised in their 2019 speeches.

### EARLY LEARNING

Colorado's new governor, Jared Polis, spotlighted early childhood education in his address. Himself a former member of the **Colorado State Board of Education**, Polis proposed tuition-free full-day kindergarten, and his budget request includes \$227 million for districts that choose to implement the program.<sup>2</sup> The Colorado board issued a **resolution** in support of Polis's proposal two days after his address.

The board's resolution said the governor's proposal aligned with work the state board had already been doing in early childhood literacy. In their support of Polis's proposal, board members cited foundational research on the importance of early learning, ways in which school districts have been focusing on

**Figure 1. Common Themes in Governors' Speeches, 2019**  
(number of mentions)



early learning, previously adopted academic standards in reading, and its [strategic plan for 2017–22](#), which “includes a core tenant to build a strong foundation to ensure that all students are reading by third grade.”<sup>3</sup>

“Full-day kindergarten will allow more students to receive instruction that will lay a foundation for reading competency,” said Dana Smith, chief communications officer at the Colorado Department of Education. Given the alignment of the department and board’s stated goals with those of the governor, more board-governor collaboration is expected, including ways to expand access to dual enrollment.

In his address, Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant referenced the state’s Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013, which set the State Early Childhood Advisory Council to work implementing high-quality standards for early education.<sup>4</sup> Consisting of stakeholders across Mississippi’s early childhood system, the council advises the governor on all issues pertaining to early childhood and established a strategic plan for the state’s early childhood system.

Johnny Franklin, who serves on the **Mississippi State Board of Education** and the council, describes the wide-ranging investment stakeholders have made in early childhood education in the state, from community colleges delivering professional development for early childhood teachers to the Department of Human Services providing vouchers for low-income families to participate in preschool. “You’ll find that everybody believes strongly that early childhood pays great dividends along the road,” Franklin said. One of these stakeholder investments is the Early Learning Collaborative (ELC) program, wherein the Mississippi State Board of Education approves proposals and funding for local education agencies to create pre-K programs that encourage early childhood care providers such as the local Head Start program and others to collaborate.

Kindergarten readiness assessments provide clues as to how well the local collaborative efforts are doing. Based on 2017–18 results, 76 percent of kindergarteners who had participated in ELC programs met the

end-of-year target score, compared with 67 percent of students coming from other public pre-K classrooms.<sup>5</sup> Franklin said the ELC program aligns with the state board’s strategic plan, which has as a goal that every child has access to a high-quality early childhood program.

## OUT-OF-CLASSROOM LEARNING

In New Hampshire, Gov. Chris Sununu used his 2019 inaugural to tout efforts to expand the number of out-of-classroom learning experiences that would satisfy a high school graduation requirement.<sup>6</sup> The New Hampshire legislature passed Senate Bill 435 in 2018, which established the Learn Everywhere initiative to create community-based afterschool environments that are approved by the **New Hampshire State Board of Education**. Examples include tutoring, performing arts opportunities, and afterschool jobs. According to state board chairman, Andrew Cline, the state board is currently working with stakeholders to develop draft rules that comprise valuable advice from many different perspectives.

The **Washington State Board of Education** is a stakeholder group in Career Connect Washington, a coalition that brings together business, labor, government, and education leaders to connect youth with high-demand, high-wage careers in the state. In his 2019 state of the state address, Gov. Jay Inslee touted that initiative, along with a budget to provide 100,000 students over the next 10 years with apprenticeships and paid internships.<sup>7</sup>

The Career Connect Washington regional grants program funded 12 communities across the state to create more than 29,000 learning experiences and 1,500 internship and apprenticeships by September 2019.<sup>8</sup> The program is part of the state’s response to a survey of state residents, conducted by Career Connect Washington on October 15, 2018, which said that 75 percent of the state’s residents agree that not enough is being done to expose students to different types of on-the-job learning opportunities, and 94 percent believe “real-world skills” are an important element of a student’s experience.

## SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

On April 23, 2018, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds issued Executive Order 2, creating the Children’s System State Board (CSSB), a group committed to ensuring children have medical and mental health care and education and overall well-being. Co-chaired by Jerry Foxhoven, director of the Iowa Department of Human Services, and Ryan Wise, director of the Iowa Department of Education, the CSSB was charged with creating a state plan and structure for a statewide children’s mental health system. Drawing on this work, Gov. Reynolds supported a bill that “creates a children’s system that will work in tandem with our adult system.”<sup>9</sup> The Iowa Senate voted to approve the plan on April 16, 2019.<sup>10</sup>

With governors’ education agendas on the table, state boards of education should follow the example of boards across the country and take advantage of the opportunity to collaborate on achieving results for all children in their states.

*Joseph Hedger is NASBE’s associate editor.*

## NOTES

1 Joseph Hedger, “State Boards Weigh Teacher Certification and Student Safety and Wellness in 2018,” *State Board Insight* (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 2019).

2 Blair Miller, “Gov. Polis Unveils First Budget Proposal, Outlining Full-Day Kindergarten Plan and Other Initiatives,” *Denver7* (January 17, 2019).

3 Colorado State Board of Education, “Resolution Supporting Educational Efforts to Ensure All Colorado Children Have a Strong Foundation in Kindergarten and Are Ready to Learn throughout Their School Years” (Denver, CO, 2019).

4 Geoff Pender, “Gov. Phil Bryant’s Final State of the State Address,” *Mississippi Clarion Ledger* (January 15, 2019).

5 Mississippi Department of Education, “Kindergarteners, Pre-K Students Make Significant Gains on Statewide Assessment” (Jackson, MS, 2018).

6 Chris Sununu, “2019 Inaugural Address” (Concord, NH: Office of Governor Christopher Sununu, January 3, 2019).

7 Washington Governor’s Office, “Inslee’s State of the State: Washington’s Unwritten Chapter,” Medium.com (January 15, 2019).

8 Washington STEM, “Career Connect Washington Expands Student Opportunity” (Seattle, WA, 2019).

9 Office of the Governor of Iowa Kim Reynolds, “Gov. Reynolds Delivers Condition of the State Address” (Des Moines, IA, January 15, 2019).

10 Rod Boshart, “Iowa Children’s Mental Health Plan Headed to Governor,” *The Gazette* (April 16, 2019).

# NASBE

POLICY UPDATES are published by the National Association of State Boards of Education, 333 John Carlyle Street, Suite 530, Alexandria, VA 22314 • 703.684.4000 • [www.nasbe.org](http://www.nasbe.org). Robert Hull, president and CEO. Valerie Norville, editorial director. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Opinions and views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of NASBE, its members, or its sponsors.

The National Association of State Boards of Education is the only national organization focused solely on the nation’s state boards of education. NASBE develops, supports, and empowers citizen leaders on state boards of education to strengthen public education systems so students of all backgrounds and circumstances are prepared to succeed in school, work, and life.