



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Susan Finazzo

### Building a Community, Supporting Biology, and Finding a Home

Welcome to the new academic year! I hope you had an enjoyable summer and are looking forward to attending the NABT Professional Development Conference in St. Louis this November. In anticipation of this upcoming event, I began to reflect on the importance of community and the role it plays both personally and professionally.

For years, a friend of mine tried to talk me into attending an NABT conference. I resisted because I felt a discipline-specific conference would be more interesting than one focused on biology education. When he asked again in 2001, I was still not very interested, but since I had never been to Montreal that sealed the deal.

I had an amazing experience at that conference and have attended every one since. I was excited by the research presentations, the pedagogical strategies—many of which were given by secondary school teachers—and generally excited by the exposure to areas beyond my discipline training. The use of highly engaging teaching strategies and the creativity in classroom pedagogy was humbling. I remember feeling instantly at home with the people I met. These were people who loved teaching, students, learning, and biology and above all were passionate about sharing with others. These were my kind of people; I knew that I had found my community and my professional home. Apparently, I am not alone because membership surveys consistently indicate that this sense of community is one of the main reasons members return to conference year after year.

The strength of our biology education community is found in the diversity of our voices and the unity of our shared purpose. NABT conferences involve educators from almost every instructional perspective. There is respect for what each of us contributes, and we all have something to contribute. In many ways our community is a microcosm for the greater educational system in which we function. So, even though we are NABT and share that sense of community, we still have our own special identity, such as the high school biology environment, two-year and four-year college sections, not to mention regional and statewide alliances. Understandably these divisions are necessary, but the greater unity of purpose demands that we occasionally set aside our individual distinctions to work together and speak with a unified voice for biology education.

Over the years, I have learned about the structure of education, the distinctions between service at various levels, and the shared pressures educators experience. Concerns such as the scarcity of financial resources, the demands of student assessment, and student academic preparedness are almost universal, yet other issues, such as local control of curriculum, were almost always issues reported by colleagues in the K-12. At our annual conference, we often focus on what we have in common, what we share.

As a two-year college instructor, I never paid much attention to what was happening at the school district or state level, because I had assumed education would be overseen by experts in education. That was a mistake. What happens in K-12 education affects us all. What students learn in middle and high school in particular becomes the foundational knowledge upon

which the college curriculum will build. Science must be presented as determined by the scientific community and supported by experimentation, analysis, evidence-based revision, and based on detectable and measurable data. All NABT members must understand the importance of presenting vetted, evidence-based knowledge in classroom. If learning at any level is muddled with misconceptions, then students first have to unlearn information before they can learn correct information later in their education. For several years, a few state legislatures have been trying to pass legislation that would allow teachers to present non-science topics as “viable alternative science” in the science classroom. There would be no oversight on what is actually taught in the science classroom as science. These legislative initiatives are continuing and spreading. NABT and other professional organizations have come out strongly against this legislation on behalf of our members, and at the request of our members. NABT gives educators a voice, but an organization is not the same as a voter; legislators listen to their constituents. Now, more than ever, it is critically important for all members to understand the implications and potential long-term impact of state legislation on all science education, but in particular for biology where attacks on evolution and climate change are growing in number and intensity.

Biology education is a continuum. Student understanding of the living world begins in the K-12 setting but continues in the post-secondary world and beyond. We must develop strong local communities of educators to span that continuum and provide watchful guidance. NABT is working to improve biology education, but making meaningful and sustainable progress will be difficult unless we recognize that we are connected and interdependent. Once we leave the conference and return to our families and jobs, many of us think that we leave the community behind, but we don't; the NABT community is always with you to lend support and encouragement. This year, let us make the NABT Professional Development Conference the beginning of a greater conversation. We are all educators, and anything that impacts one aspect of the educational enterprise impacts us all. Keep your eyes and ears open for legislation that impacts science teaching. If you are so inclined reach out to your fellow educators to discuss the situation. Better yet, consider ways to build biology educator communities across the continuum in your state; share your ideas with us. Let us work as a community to protect, support, and yes, even defend, high-quality biology education.

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