



By Nicole Newman, Ed.D., SSDA Board President

As we move further into the new year, I hope that 2026 is off to a strong and steady start for you and your communities. The early weeks of the year often bring both momentum and challenge, and across our small and rural school districts, I continue to be inspired by the thoughtful leadership, strong governance, and unwavering commitment to students and communities that define our work. It is this collective leadership and shared purpose that make opportunities to come together, learn from one another, and reflect on our work especially meaningful.

One such opportunity is the [2026 SSDA Annual State Conference](#), taking place March 7–10 at the Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel. This year's theme, *Leading Smalls, Thinking Big*, speaks directly to the reality of small district leadership, where vision, adaptability, and collaboration are essential. We are excited to welcome an outstanding group of [keynote speakers](#), including **Stacie Chana, Ed.D., Terrence Davis, and Roni Habib**, who will bring thoughtful perspectives on leadership, innovation, and student-centered systems that resonate deeply with the work happening in our districts every day.

I am also honored to moderate this year's **AI Fireside Chat**, which will explore the evolving role of artificial intelligence in education. The conversation will include Josh Newman, former California State Senator; Amy Alzina, Ed.D., Superintendent & Principal of Cold Spring School District; Christian Jackson, CEO of Edapt; and Robert Bauer, Ph.D., Board Member from Portola Valley School District. This dialogue is designed to support both superintendents and board members as they consider how emerging technologies intersect with policy, instruction, and community trust in small school districts.

Beyond the conference, SSDA remains focused on providing practical, high-impact supports that respond to the real needs of our members. Our [Board Policy Program](#) is a member-focused service created for small and rural districts, providing customized, clearly written, and legally compliant board policies maintained in partnership with the law firm Kingsley Bogard. Finalized policies are hosted on SSDA's website with a dedicated, shareable link, promoting transparency, accessibility, and effective governance.

SSDA is also continuing to support districts in long-term facilities planning, including work connected to [Proposition 2 Five-Year Facilities Master Planning with Edapt](#). This planning process is an important tool for aligning instructional vision, community priorities, and responsible stewardship of facilities, particularly in small districts where capacity and resources are often limited. SSDA will host an informational session on Proposition 2 during one of our February Superintendent Roundtables, providing an overview of the Facilities Master Planning process and available supports.



Additional information on both the Board Policy Program and Facilities Master Planning will also be shared during sessions at our Annual Conference, giving members opportunities to learn more and access these services.

Thank you for your continued leadership, engagement, and partnership with SSDA. I am grateful for the work you do on behalf of students and communities, and I look forward to connecting with many of you in the months ahead. I hope to see you in Sacramento this March!