

National Association of State Boards of Education

The Impact of the 2016 Elections on State Boards of Education

By Kristen Amundson, Abigail Potts, and William Tucker

The election of 2016 is generally acknowledged to be a “change” election. Voters chose a new president and ended years of divided government by giving control of the House, the Senate, and the White House to Republicans. Did the “change” message affect the selection of new members of state boards of education (SBEs)?

NASBE examined the election results in the 11 states (plus Guam and the District of Columbia) that elect SBE members directly. We also reviewed the 12 states where the governor appoints the board that held gubernatorial elections this year. In general, our analysis suggests there will be significant changes in the composition of state boards come January, with half of the seats that were up for election changing hands and many new members being sworn in (see table).

The changes in state boards come at a critical time. States are required to submit their plans for implementing Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in March or July of 2017, with full implementation of these plans starting in the 2017–18 school year. Since ESSA delegates significant new responsibilities to states and to state boards, new members will face a steep learning curve as they take their seats at the board table next January.

STATES ELECTING STATE BOARD MEMBERS

Control of the Colorado state board hinges on the winner of the 6th Congressional District (parts of Arapahoe, Adams, and Douglas Counties). If challenger Rebecca McClellan’s lead over incumbent Republican Debora Scheffel holds, the state board of education

would shift from a 4-3 Republican majority to a Democratic majority.

A far bigger shift took place in Utah, where three incumbent board members lost on November 8. Two other incumbents had been defeated in primary elections. In the past, a selection committee narrowed a list of candidates for the state board of elections and submitted the list to the governor, who decided which candidates would appear on the ballot. When that method was deemed unconstitutional, the legislature adopted a plan for nonpartisan elections in 2016 and partisan elections in 2018. (It may be worth noting that Utah was also an outlier in the presidential race, with independent Evan McMullen drawing nearly 21 percent of the vote.)

In Michigan, Republicans won two seats to bring that state board to electoral parity. Members are elected at-large and serve eight-year terms. One incumbent (John Austin) lost to Tom McMillin, and the retirement of long-time board member Kathleen Straus left a vacancy that was filled by Nikki Snyder. This is the first time the board has been evenly divided between the two parties.

Although there were no other dramatic shifts in any other state, there will be significant turnover in elected SBE members come January. Across 11 states, Guam, and the District of Columbia, 58 SBE seats were on the ballot. Of those, 39 were incumbents running for reelection. In 28 races—with the Colorado race still too close to call—roughly half of those reelected are incumbents, and half are new. Two seats remain undecided.

STATES WHERE GOVERNORS APPOINT STATE BOARD

In states where governors appoint SBE members, 12 gubernatorial elections were

held this year. In five states, incumbents ran for election, and in four (Montana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington), they were successful. The North Carolina race, where Governor Pat McCrory (R) is running for reelection, is still too close to call.

Party shifts were seen in three states. In Missouri, Republican Eric Greitens replaced Democrat Jay Nixon, who was term limited. In New Hampshire, Republican Chris Sununu, son of former Governor John Sununu, becomes the first Republican elected to that office since 2002. (The current governor, Maggie Hassan (D), was elected to the U.S. Senate.) In Vermont, Republican Phil Scott replaces Peter Shumlin (D), who did not run for reelection.

In four states, retiring or term-limited governors were succeeded by members of their own party. In Delaware and West Virginia, Democratic governors replaced Democratic predecessors. In Indiana and North Dakota, Republicans will continue to occupy the governor’s office.

In some states, a party shift in the governor’s office could signal major changes on the state board. However, although the Missouri election represented a party shift and the governor appoints a new board member every year, the board composition must be bipartisan.

STATES WITH ELECTED AND APPOINTED BOARDS

Some states combine elected and appointed members. In Indiana, the superintendent of public instruction—who has served as board chair—is elected. This year, Democratic State Superintendent Glenda Ritz was defeated by Jennifer McCormick. The governor appoints eight members, and legislative leaders appoint two. Beginning in 2017, the superintendent will be a member of the board, but the board will elect its own chair.

Ohio has a mix of elected and appointed members. There was significant turnover among the 11 elected members, due in part to

term limits. However, the 8 members appointed by the governor are not likely to be affected until the next governor's race in 2018 because their terms have not yet expired.

STATE REFERENDA ON EDUCATION

Election results for state referenda revealed voters' reactions to a range of education policy reforms, from raising the charter school cap in Massachusetts to increasing education funding in other states. In many cases, voters defeated these measures. Georgia's referendum to create an Opportunity School District, modeled on the Louisiana Recovery School District, would have placed consistently low-performing schools under state control. Supported by two-term Republican Governor Nathan Deal, the ballot measure was opposed by teacher unions and ultimately defeated by 60 percent of Georgian voters. Massachusetts' Question 2, which sought to expand the number of charter schools in the state, attracted national attention and more than \$33 million in campaign funding. Education Secretary John King, Governor Charlie Baker (R), and the Massachusetts Democrats for Education Reform lined up in support of the measure. The Massachusetts Teacher Association, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D), and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh all actively opposed it, as did 62 percent of state voters.

Ballot measures to increase funding for education were defeated in Oklahoma and Missouri. Oklahoma voters defeated a 1 percent sales tax increase, where a portion of the revenue would have funded teacher salary raises. Voters also defeated Missouri's proposed increase to the cigarette tax to fund early childhood education.

However, at least three states passed education measures. Maine narrowly approved a 3 percent increase in the state tax on household income above \$200,000 to increase education funding, with 50.4 percent in favor. By 65.7 percent, Oregon passed a measure requiring the state legislature to fund dropout prevention, and 66.6 percent of voters supported the creation of an outdoor education fund. California's Proposition 58, to expand flexibility around bilingual education programs for both English language learners and native English speakers, passed with 72.6 percent of the vote.

For state board members, this year's referendum results reveal that clear, consistent

messaging around state education priorities is necessary but not sufficient to garner voter support. Measures in 2016 succeeded when a broad range of stakeholders supported them. As new state board members take office in 2017, ESSA's stakeholder engagement requirements will be an important lever to support greater dialogue and deeper collaboration with diverse stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Because the election results are not yet known for every race, it is still early to make predictions about how the elections will affect state boards of education. Given the uncertain trajectory of federal rule making around ESSA and in other areas of education policy, it is unclear how state boards will respond and what new approaches they may take. With full implementation of ESSA scheduled for the beginning of the 2017–18 school year, however, it is clear that new members will make important changes right away. These changes will have a significant impact on the opportunities for all students to get an excellent education.

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Impact on Boards for States Holding SBE or Governor Elections, 2016

State	Election for Governor	State Board Election	Impact on SBE
Alabama (partisan ballot)		4 seats on the ballot. Stephanie Bell (R), Ella Bell (D), and Jeff Newman (R) were reelected. Jackie Zeigler (R) won an uncontested general election, defeating the incumbent in the primary.	No change in board composition.
Colorado (partisan ballot)		3 seats on the ballot. 2 Republican incumbents, Steve Durham and Joyce Rankin, were reelected. The third race, between incumbent Debora Scheffel (R) and Rebecca McClellan (D), has not been called.	Potential shift in the composition of the board.
Delaware (governor appoints SBE)	John Carney (D) replaced Jack Markell, who was term limited.		
District of Columbia (nonpartisan ballot)		5 seats on the ballot. Incumbents Jack Jacobson and Karen Williams were reelected. In Ward 4, Lanette Woodruff won an uncontested race. Ashley Carter defeated at-large incumbent Mary Lord. In Ward 8, Markus Batchelor defeated incumbent Tierra Jolly.	
Guam (nonpartisan ballot)		6 seats up for election. Incumbents Peter Alecxis Ada, Maria Gutierrez, Lourdes San Nicolas, and Lourdes Benavente were reelected. Kenneth Chargualaf, formerly appointed to a position on the board, was elected to a full term. James Lujan was also elected to a first term.	
Indiana (appointed, except state superintendent, who is elected on a partisan ballot)	Eric Holcomb (R), former lieutenant governor, was elected to a full term.	Superintendent Glenda Ritz (D) (also the board chair) was defeated by Jennifer McCormick (R).	
Kansas (partisan ballot)		5 seats on the ballot. 2 Republican incumbents ran unopposed, and 2 incumbents, Deena Horst (R) and Steve Roberts (R), were reelected. In District 4, Ann Mah (D) replaces Carolyn Wims-Campbell, who retired.	No change in board composition.
Louisiana (8 members by nonpartisan ballot, 3 by governor appointment)			All 8 elected members will run in 2019.
Michigan (partisan ballot)		Republicans gained 2 seats: Tom McMillin (R) and Nikki Snyder (R). Incumbent board chair John Austin (D) was defeated along with Ish Ahmed.	The board is now evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans for the first time.
Missouri (governor appoints SBE with consent of the Senate)	Eric Greitens (R) replaced Jay Nixon (D), who was term limited.		Although the governor's election represented a party shift and the governor appoints a new board member every year, the board composition must be bipartisan.
Montana (governor appoints SBE)	Steve Bullock (D) was reelected.		
Nebraska (nonpartisan ballot)		4 members on the ballot. 2 uncontested incumbents (Rachel Wise and John Witzel). Patricia A. Koch Johns was elected in District 1 (open seat). Lisa Fricke was elected in District 2, defeating incumbent Glen Flint, appointed to the board by former governor Dave Heineman.	No shift in overall direction of the board expected.
Nevada (7 appointed by governor, 4 elected members)		4 seats on the ballot. 2 incumbents reelected (Felicia Ortiz and Mark Newburn). In District 1 (open seat), Robert Blakely was elected. In District 2, David Carter defeated incumbent Pat Hickey.	No shift in overall direction of the board expected.

State	Election for Governor	State Board Election	Impact on SBE
New Hampshire (governor appoints SBE)	Chris Sununu (R)		Sununu, son of former governor John Sununu, is the state's first Republican governor since 2002.
North Carolina (governor appoints SBE)	Race between incumbent Pat McCrory (R) and Roy Cooper (D) still too close to call.	Mark Johnson (R) defeated incumbent state education chief June Atkinson (D).	Pending outcome of the governor race, North Carolina could see major changes.
North Dakota (governor appoints SBE, elected state chief also serves on the board)	Doug Burgum (R) replaced John Dalrymple (R), who did not run for reelection.	Incumbent Kristen Baesler defeated Joe Chiang for superintendent of public instruction.	
Ohio (11 elected in nonpartisan elections, 8 appointed by the governor)		7 seats on the ballot. Lisa Woods defeated incumbent Roslyn Painter-Goff in District 5. In District 8, incumbent Nancy Hollister, originally appointed by the governor to fill a vacant seat, was elected to a full term. Incumbent Stephanie Dodd was unopposed in District 9. New members filling open seats include Linda Haycock, Antoinette Miranda, Nick Owens, Meryl Johnson. Incumbents Michael Collins, Mary Rose Oakar, and Ann Jacobs were term limited. Incumbent Ron Rudduck did not seek reelection.	No shift in overall direction of the board expected.
Oregon (governor appoints SBE)	Kate Brown (D) elected after serving a year following the resignation of John Kitzhaber (D).		
Texas (nonpartisan ballot)		8 seats on the ballot. 6 incumbents were reelected. Georgina Perez was elected in the 1st District. Kevin Ellis won the 9th District seat.	
Utah (nonpartisan ballot)	Gary Herbert (R) was reelected.	8 seats on the ballot. All 3 incumbents lost. In the 4th District, Jennifer Graviet defeated incumbent Dave Thomas. In the 12th District, Alisa Ellis defeated incumbent Dixie Allen. In the 13th District, Scott Nelson defeated incumbent Stan Lockhart. Other newly elected members: Carol Barlow-Lear, Janet Cannon, Kathleen Riebe, Lisa Cummins, and Michelle Boulter.	Two other incumbents lost in primaries. A previous selection method (with a committee submitting a list of names to the governor, who decided on the candidates to appear on the ballot) was declared unconstitutional. This year's elections were nonpartisan, but in 2018, elections for the SBE will be partisan.
Vermont (governor appoints SBE with consent of the Senate)	Phil Scott (R) replaced Peter Shumlin (D), who did not run for reelection.		Change in party, with moderate Republican governor being the only party member in statewide office.
Washington	Jay Inslee (D) was reelected.	1 seat (District 4) on the ballot. Chris Reykdahl is leading in the race for commissioner of education to replace Randy Dorn, who retired.	This SBE seat is filled via an election of local school board members. That election is ongoing.
West Virginia (governor appoints SBE)	Jim Justice (D) replaced Earl Ray Tomblin (D), who was term limited.		Election does not represent a party shift.