

National Association of State Boards of Education

➔ The Impact of the 2018 Elections on State Boards of Education

By Kris Amundson, Abigail Potts, and Joseph Hedger

Perhaps the most important takeaway from the 2018 election is that in education, states are now more important than ever. No single story line dominates the national midterm elections. Two years ago, Americans put one party in charge of both houses of Congress and the White House; now the House flips to Democrats' control, and the Senate adds a few Republican seats to their majority. Although these outcomes have attracted the most commentary, election results at the state level will have the longest lasting impact.

The election of 20 new governors (with two races left to be called), 21 new elected

state board of education members, and two new elected state education chiefs is just the beginning of this makeover of the state landscape. New governors are expected to appoint dozens of new board members early in their terms. Over the next two years, significant shifts can be expected in the make-up of state boards and in the policies they will adopt as a result of the 2018 midterms.

Yet most of the 500-plus state board members across the country are continuing to serve terms that began months before the election. As the stable center of education governance, state boards will be key players in state education decisions. This report examines how leadership changes brought about by the 2018 elections will affect state boards, and it highlights several major policy challenges boards will face over the next two years.

ELECTED STATE BOARDS

Elections for state board of education members were held in eight states, the District of Columbia, and the territories of Guam and the Virgin Islands (table 1). Originally, 49 state board seats were up for election, but Northern Marianas Islands postponed their election due to Typhoon Yutu. In some states, board members were elected on a partisan ballot, and our analysis includes their party identification. The lack of party identification indicates those board members were elected on a nonpartisan ballot.

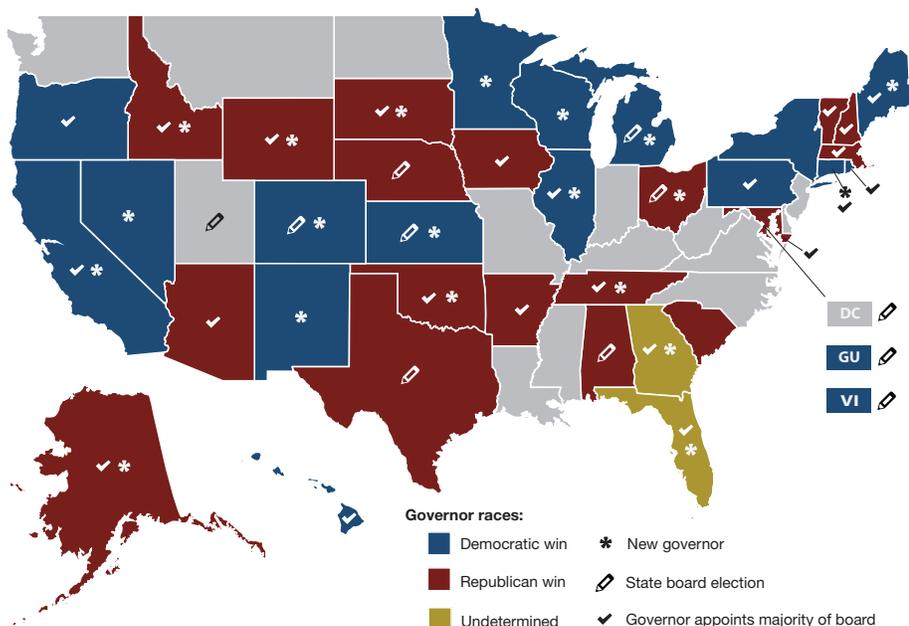
In Alabama, four of the board's eight seats were on the ballot. Voters chose two Republican newcomers—Tracie West in District 2 and Wayne Reynolds in District 8—and reelected incumbents Democrat Yvette Richardson from District 4 and Republican Cynthia Sanders McCarty in District 6.

In Colorado, two incumbents—board chair Angelika Schroeder, a Democrat, and Republican member Debora Scheffel—were reelected. The newly elected governor, Jared Polis, is a former member of the Colorado state board.

Kansas had five state board seats on the ballot. In District 1, incumbent Janet Waugh was reelected with 60 percent of the vote. In District 9, board president Jim Porter ran unopposed. Three newcomers—Michelle Dombrosky in District 3, Jean Clifford in District 5, and Ben Jones in District 7—were elected.

Michigan elected two state board members at large. With a highly competitive gubernatorial election this year, down-ballot races like the state board did not receive the level of public attention they might have in other years. The current board is evenly split, with four members representing each political party. One Republican incumbent, Eileen Weiser, did not seek reelection. A second Republican incumbent, Richard Zeile, was defeated. Democrats Judy Pritchett and Tiffany Tilley were elected, shifting control of the board.

Figure 1. 2018 Midterm Elections Results



Nebraska had four state board seats on the ballot, and the results will bring two new members to the board. Incumbent Maureen Nickels ran unopposed in District 6. Incumbent Patricia Timm won her District 5 seat with 63 percent of the vote. In District 7, the retirement of Molly O'Holleran left an open seat, for which Robin Stevens was unopposed. Incumbent Pat McPherson was defeated in District 8 by Deborah Neary.

Ohio's state board has a mix of elected and appointed board members. Ohio voters re-elected two incumbents, including Charlotte McGuire in District 3 and Sarah Fowler, who ran unopposed, in District 7. Charles Froehlich, who was appointed to fill an unexpired term in District 1, appears to have been defeated. However, the two leading candidates are in a race too close to call. Incumbent Pat Bruns was defeated by Jenny Kilgore in District 4. John Hagan was elected to the open seat in District 8.

Seven seats on the 15-member Texas State Board of Education were on the ballot. Three incumbent Democrats—Ruben Cortez in District 2, Marisa Perez-Diaz in District 3, and Lawrence Allen in District 4—were reelected along with incumbent Republican Patricia Hardy in District 11. In open seat races, Republicans Matt Robinson in District 7 and Pam Little in District 12 and Aicha Davis, a Democrat from District 13, were elected.

In 2016, Utah voters defeated five incumbents in primaries and in the general election. This year, four of the five incumbents who ran were reelected: Linda Hansen, District 3; Laura Belnap, District 5; Brittney Cummins, District 6; and Mark Huntsman, District 14. In District 1, Jennie Earl defeated incumbent Terryl Warner. Newcomers Scott Hansen, District 2, and Cindy Davis, District 9, will also join the Utah board.

In the District of Columbia, incumbent Ruth Wattenberg from Ward 3 was reelected. Three new members will join the board: Emily Gasoi will replace the retiring Laura Wilson Phelan in Ward 1, while Zachary Parker will succeed the retiring Mark Jones in Ward 5. Jessica Sutter defeated incumbent Joe Weedon in Ward 6.

Four incumbent board members in Guam were reelected. Lourdes Benavente, Mark Mendiola, James Lujan, and Maria Gutierrez will all continue as members of the Guam Education Board.

Virgin Islands voters reelected three incumbents: Democrats Terrence Joseph, St. Croix; Winona Hendricks, St. Croix; and Judy Gomez, St. Thomas/St. John. Newcomer Jeanette Smith Barry, St. Thomas/St. John, was also elected.

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNOR'S ELECTIONS

Thirty-six state governors and three territorial governors were on the ballot in 2018. Of that number, three (Minnesota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin) have no state boards of education. Although the race in Georgia has not been called, it will represent a change of governor, since Governor Nathan Deal was term limited. Florida is looking toward a recount; however, there will be a new governor regardless of the outcome.

Some of these shifts probably suggest significant changes in policy. In Illinois, for example, the election brought both a shift in political party and a shift in emphasis. Governor-Elect J. B. Pritzker has appointed former chair of the state board of education Jesse Ruiz as counsel to the education transition team. Co-chair of the committee, Barbara Bowman, is a nationally recognized expert in early childhood education, one of the expected areas of emphasis for the governor-elect. Immediate issues will be closing the state's K-12 education funding gap and addressing pension liabilities.

Not all political shifts are partisan. In California, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown was succeeded by Democrat Gavin Newsom. The state also elected a new state superintendent, although the election has not yet been called. At the same time, Michael Kirst, who served as president of the state board of education during all four of Gov. Brown's terms, announced he would not seek reappointment. After eight years of stable leadership, California will have a new team at the top.

California's governor appoints all the members of the state board of education. And while Newsom could theoretically seek to replace all 11 members, that is seen as unlikely. But since early education is a high priority for his administration, one of Newsom's first state board appointees could represent early childhood education. Current board vice president Ilene Straus is expected to succeed Kirst in chairing the board.

Twelve of the newly elected governors will appoint most or all of the members of the

state board. Given the staggered terms of many state boards, the impact of the governor's appointments may not be immediate. Table 2 outlines the time line for when each governor will likely have a state board made up of a majority of her or his appointees.

Although there is no state board in Wisconsin, it's worth noting that current state superintendent Tony Evers was elected as governor.

For more details on each state, see table 2.

STATE EDUCATION CHIEFS

Seven state education chiefs were on the ballot, and incumbents in Georgia, Idaho, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming were reelected. In Arizona, incumbent superintendent Diane Douglas was defeated in the Republican primary by Frank Riggs. At the time of publication, the result of this general election race was too close to call.

The winner in California's state superintendent race has also not been determined. However, candidate Marshall Tuck has significant policy disagreements with the governor-elect, particularly on the issue of charter schools. In the past, when Gov. Brown, the state board, and the state superintendent worked closely on policy issues, Brown declined to fill the position of secretary of education. Should Tuck prevail over Tony Thurmond, who is more closely aligned with Newsom, some experts suggest that Newsom may reinstate the education secretary position.

STATEWIDE PREK-12 BALLOT INITIATIVES

Similar to past election years, education funding was a strong theme among the statewide ballot measures, with voters deciding a total of eight statewide funding proposals. In Colorado, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Utah, voters defeated initiatives that would have increased education funding by raising taxes on everything from property to medical marijuana. However, one state paved the way for voters to decide on tax revenue for education. Georgia voters passed an amendment allowing school districts within a county to call for a sales tax referendum.

In New Jersey, New Mexico, and Rhode Island, state education bond measures succeeded. Maryland voters narrowly passed a measure allocating increased gambling revenues to public education.

Education governance was on the ballot in South Carolina. A constitutional amendment changing the state superintendent of education from an elected position to one appointed by the governor was soundly defeated by voters (60 percent), despite support by the current and previous state superintendents.

In Arizona, expanding public school choice was the focus of Proposition 305. It would have allowed an increase in the number of Empowerment Scholarship Accounts, which are taxpayer-funded scholarships to be used for private-school tuition, home school expenses, or education-related therapies. The measure was overwhelmingly defeated, with 65 percent of voters in opposition.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR STATE BOARDS?

New state board members will not have the luxury of a long orientation before they face tough decisions. We expect several issues to take priority in 2019.

School Finance. School finance has been the topic most discussed by state boards of education in 2018, according to NASBE's State Board Insight database. There is a strong likelihood it will be in 2019 as well.

States are facing pressures on both the *adequacy* and *equity* of their funding formulas. Yet voters defeated ballot initiatives to raise state taxes. Although most state boards do not have direct funding responsibility, they need to be active participants in their state's school funding discussions. Many states will adopt their biennial budget in 2019, which means board members should begin conversations with governors and state legislators as soon as possible.

State ESSA Plans. New state chiefs are likely to want to make adjustments in their state ESSA plan. Boards should be brought in on those discussions as early as possible rather than acting as a rubber stamp at the end of the process. States that emphasized engagement in the development of the original ESSA plan—not only with the state board but also with stakeholders—developed plans that have the support to help guide policy even during a time of leadership transition.

Issues with Bipartisan Support. In many states, divided governance will be a reality. However, there are some issues that have

attracted broad support during the campaigns. Early childhood education (ECE) was championed by winning gubernatorial candidates in several states. The First Five Years Fund notes that 29 governors who will take office in January (including some incumbents who were reelected) made ECE a priority. From Alabama Governor Kay Ivey's "Strong Start, Strong Finish" initiative to Wisconsin Governor-Elect Tony Evers' promise to increase state funding for school districts that provide pre-K for four-year-olds, this is an issue that could bring diverse policymakers to the table.

Career readiness is a second issue that has attracted strong bipartisan support. In Rhode Island, reelected Governor Gina Raimondo established a Governor's Workforce Board to highlight the issue. Indiana worked with NASBE to develop a series of graduation pathways that include career readiness. State board members would be well advised to remind governors who want to be deemed the "workforce governor" that they need to be the "education governor" to achieve that goal!

State boards are the *stable center* of education policymaking. This will be especially important in the coming year as we live through a time of enormous change. By and large, state boards remain a place where people check their partisan hats at the door and settle in to do the hard work of creating policies that will benefit every child. Continuing that civil dialogue will benefit every student in every state.

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Table 1. Impact on Boards for States Holding SBE and Governor Elections, 2018

State	Result	Impact on SBE
Alabama (partisan ballot)	Governor: Kay Ivey (R)* SBE: Tracie West, R (2); Yvette Richardson, D (4)*; Cynthia Sanders McCarty, R (6)*; Wayne Reynolds, R (8)	Republicans remain the majority party. Reelected governor will continue to serve as board president. Four of eight voting seats were on the ballot. Two incumbents will return to the state board, including Cynthia McCarthy, who ran unopposed in District 6. Two new members were elected to open seats.
Colorado (partisan ballot)	Governor: Jared Polis (D) SBE: Angelika Schroeder, D (2)*; Debora Scheffel, R (4)*	Democrats remain the majority party. Two of seven voting seats were on the ballot. Both incumbents won reelection to the state board.
Kansas (partisan ballot)	Governor: Laura Kelly (D) SBE: Janet Waugh, D (1)*; Michelle Dombrosky, R (3); Jean Clifford, R (5); Ben Jones, R (7); Jim Porter, R (9)*	Republicans remain the majority party. Two incumbents will return to the SBE, including Jim Porter, who ran unopposed in District 9. Three new members were elected to open seats.
Michigan (partisan ballot)	Governor: Gretchen Whitmer (D) SBE: Tiffany Tilley (D), Judith Pritchett (D)	Partisan shift from an evenly split board to a Democratic majority. Two new Democratic candidates won, replacing two seats previously held by Republicans.
Nebraska (nonpartisan ballot)	Governor: Pete Ricketts (R)* SBE: Patricia Timm (5)*, Maureen Nickels (6)*, Robin Stevens (7), Deborah Neary (8)	Two incumbents won reelection. Two new members will join the board. New member, Robin Stevens, ran unopposed in District 7, the open seat previously held by Molly O'Holleran. In District 8, Deborah Neary defeated incumbent Patrick McPherson.
Ohio (11 elected by nonpartisan ballot; governor appoints 8)	Governor: Mike DeWine (R) SBE: Undecided (2); Charlotte McGuire (3)*; Jenny Kilgore (4); Sarah Fowler (7)*; John P. Hagan (8)	Two incumbents will return to the board, including Sarah Fowler who ran unopposed. Three new members will join the board. In District 2, the race remains too close to call between the leading two candidates (both new members). The newly elected governor may also add new appointed members to the board.
Texas (partisan ballot)	Governor: Greg Abbott (R)* SBE: Ruben Cortez Jr., D (2)*; Marisa Perez-Diaz, D (3)*; Lawrence Allen Jr., D (4)*; Matt Robinson, R (7); Patricia Hardy, R (11)*; Pam Little, R (12); Aicha Davis, D (13)	Republicans remain the majority party. Seven of 15 voting seats were on the ballot. All four incumbents running will return to the board, including Marisa Perez-Diaz and Lawrence Allen Jr. who ran unopposed. Three new members will fill open seats on the board.
Guam (6 elected at large; governor appoints 3)	Governor: Leon Guerrero (D) SBE: Lourdes Benavente*; Mark Mendiola*; James Lujan*; Maria Gutierrez*	All incumbents won reelection.
Virgin Islands (partisan ballot)	Governor: Albert Bryan (D) SBE: Terrence T. Joseph, D (St. Croix)*; Winona A. Hendricks, D (St. Croix)*; Judy M. Gomez, D (St. Thomas/John)*; Jeanette Smith Barry, D (St. Thomas/John)	Three incumbents won reelection, and one new member will join the board.

* indicates incumbent

SBE = state board of education

As noted in text, Utah and the District of Columbia had state board elections but no governor race.

Table 2. Impact on Boards for States Holding Governor Elections, 2018

State	Result	Impact on SBE
Alaska (governor appoints SBE)	Mike Dunleavy (R)	Moderate: New governor; partisan shift from Independent to Republican. Transitions on the SBE will be gradual as only two members have terms that expire in 2019.
Arizona (governor appoints SBE)	Doug Ducey (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. The newly elected chief will join the state board, replacing the incumbent who lost in the Republican primary. Transitions on the SBE will be gradual as only two members have terms that expire in 2019.
Arkansas (governor appoints SBE)	Asa Hutchinson (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. SBE Chair Jay Barth's term expires in 2019.
California (governor appoints SBE)	Gavin Newsom (D)	Moderate: New governor; same party but different education agenda. The SBE chair announced retirement in 2018 after serving all four terms of the prior governor. Three board members' terms expire in 2019, in addition to members whose term expires in 2018. Voters elected a new state superintendent. However, significant changes in state education leadership will influence the board's work.
Connecticut (governor appoints SBE)	Ned Lamont (D)	Moderate: New governor; same party. Six of the 11 members have terms that expire in 2019, which could result in significant changes to board membership. However, the SBE's work is guided by a strategic plan that has wide support throughout the state, providing consistency even as members change.
Florida (governor appoints SBE)	Ron DeSantis (R)/ Andrew Gillum (D)	Minimal: New governor; open seat race may head to recount. The majority of Florida's current SBE member terms do not expire until 2020, providing a steadying role as the governor transitions.
Georgia (governor appoints SBE)	Brian Kemp (R)/Stacey Abrams (D)	Moderate: New governor; open seat race still too close to call. Georgia board members serve seven-year terms, often spanning governor transitions to provide a steadying influence on education policy.
Hawaii (governor appoints SBE)	David Ige (D)*	Minimal: Reelected governor can replace up to three new members who have terms expiring in 2019.
Idaho (governor appoints 7; chief also serves)	Brad Little (R)	Minimal: New governor; same party. Transitions on the SBE will be gradual as only two members have terms that expire in 2019. Incumbent chief, who also serves on the board, was reelected.
Illinois (governor appoints SBE)	JB Pritzker (D)	Significant: New governor; partisan shift. Five of nine SBE members have terms that expire in 2019, including the board chair.
Iowa (governor appoints SBE)	Kim Reynolds (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor made several new or reappointments to the state board during his term. Board members serve six-year terms, providing consistency in membership through the governor's second term.
Maine (governor appoints SBE)	Janet Mills (D)	Moderate: New governor; partisan shift from Republican to Democrat. Over half the board's appointments run until 2021 or beyond, several years into the new governor's first term. Two members have terms that expire in 2019, and there is one currently vacant seat.
Maryland (governor appoints SBE)	Larry Hogan (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. Seven SBE members have terms that expire in 2020 or later, including the current president.
Massachusetts (governor appoints 6; 4 voting ex officio members, 1 student)	Charlie Baker (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor made several appointments or reappointments to the board in his first term. These members will continue to serve five-year terms.
Minnesota	Tim Walz (D)	None. Minnesota does not have an SBE.

Nevada (4 are elected; governor appoints 3 voting members and 4 nonvoting members)	Steven Sisolak (D)	Moderate: New governor; partisan shift from Republican to Democratic. The current SBE president, Elaine Wynn, is appointed with a term expiring in January 2019. The remaining appointed members represent designated constituencies such as a senate appointment, local board appointment, etc.
New Hampshire (governor and executive council appoints SBE)	Chris Sununu (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor with minimal board membership change expected, as only one member's term expires in 2019.
New Mexico	Michelle Lujan Grisham (D)	None. New Mexico does not have an SBE. Changes to the education policy agenda are anticipated given the partisan shift in the newly elected governor.
New York (legislature appoints board)	Andrew Cuomo (D)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. A majority of members currently serve terms that expire in 2020 or later.
Oklahoma (governor appoints SBE)	Kevin Stitt (R)	Moderate: New governor, same party. The reelected state superintendent serves as board chair. However, Oklahoma's governor has the ability to appoint new board members at will, which could result in board membership changes.
Oregon (governor appoints SBE)	Kate Brown (D)*	Minimal: Reelected governor with all current board members serving terms expiring in 2020 or later.
Pennsylvania (governor appoints 17, general assembly appoints 4)	Tom Wolf (D)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. A significant portion of board members' terms expire 2020 or later. There are at least four current vacancies and several members serving terms until a successor qualifies. The board's education agenda is unlikely to change.
Rhode Island (governor appoints SBE)	Gina Raimondo (D)*	Minimal: Reelected governor has the opportunity to make several new board appointments in 2019, but the board's education agenda is likely to remain unchanged.
South Carolina (legislature appoints 16, governor appoints 1)	Henry McMaster (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor appoints one member; the state legislature will have a number of new appointments to make in 2019.
South Dakota (governor appoints SBE)	Kristi Noem (R)	Minimal: New governor, same party. One board term expires at the end of 2018 and two more board terms expire at the end of 2019.
Tennessee (governor appoints SBE)	Bill Lee (R)	Minimal: New governor, same party. The new governor has an opportunity to appoint two or board members in 2019, and one seat, District 8, is currently vacant. However, Tennessee has a well-supported education agenda that has endured partisan governor shifts in the past.
Vermont (governor appoints SBE)	Phil Scott (R)*	Minimal: Reelected governor. Two members have terms that expire in 2019.
Wisconsin	Tony Evers (D)	None. Wisconsin does not have an SBE. The newly elected governor, who formerly served as chief, will continue to advance the state's education equity agenda.
Wyoming (governor appoints SBE)	Mark Gordon (R)	Moderate: New governor, same party. Reelected chief, who ran unopposed, will continue to serve on the state board. Three members have terms that expire in 2019.

* indicates incumbent

SBE = state board of education

Note: Table analysis is based on term appointments. Board members may leave office for a variety of reasons prior to their term ending, creating additional seats for governor appointments.