

National Association of State Boards of Education

→ State Education Elections in 2024 Yield Few Shifts

By Abigail Potts, Joseph Hedger, and Naomi Porter

While U.S. voters delivered a significant change in the 2024 federal elections, they opted for steady leadership at the state level. Republicans' control of the presidency, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House will propel an education platform characterized by less federal oversight and greater emphasis on parents' rights and workforce development. While the new Congress is nearly as closely divided as its predecessor, many education policies likely to be on the docket in 2025 enjoyed bipartisan support during the 118th Congress. Others face headwinds.

At the state level, however, little changed: No state board of education shifted in partisan control, and only five seats saw a shift in political party out of 27 races that were

contested in the general election. In Kansas, one Democratic seat flipped to Republican, and one Republican seat flipped to Democratic control. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, two Independents took seats currently held by Democrats, and in Colorado, a Republican will replace a Democratic incumbent, which will reduce the Democrats' majority on the nine-person board from six to five.

Voters in nine states, three territories, and the District of Columbia elected 64 state board candidates, 30 of whom were incumbents. Five other incumbents did not make it past their party's primaries, and five lost to newcomers in the general election. In Nebraska and Ohio, no incumbent ran for reelection. In seven of these jurisdictions—Alabama, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Texas, Utah, and the Virgin Islands—candidates run via partisan elections. Members in the other six—Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands—do

not list their political affiliations on the ballots.

Two incumbent chief state school officers will return to office, and two states will have newly elected leaders to helm their state agencies, with one partisan flip in North Carolina.

In eleven governors' races, three states had incumbents on the ballot. Governors in nine of these eleven appoint state board members, and four appoint chiefs.

GOVERNOR ELECTIONS

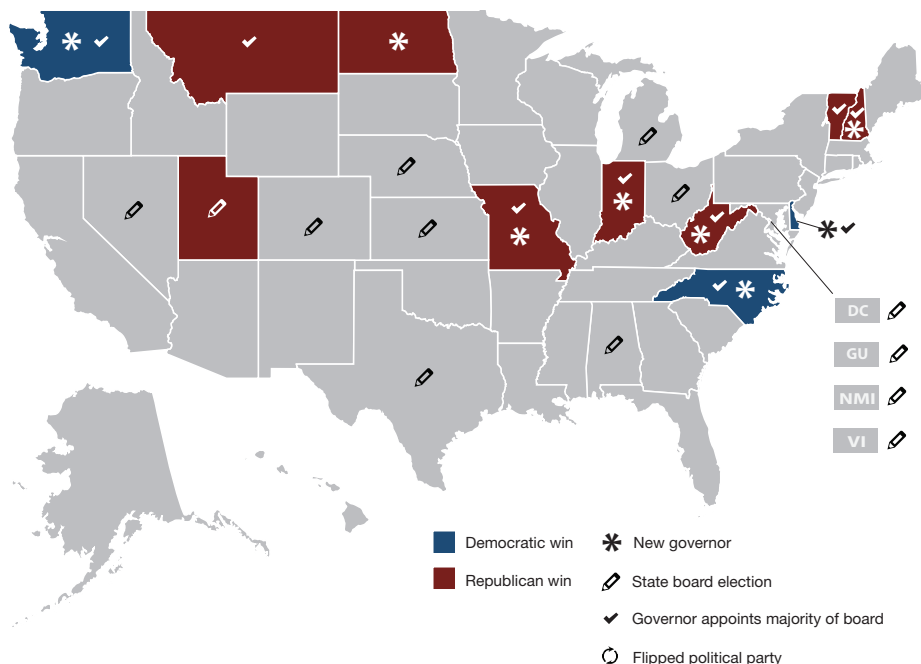
Voters in Montana, Utah, and Vermont returned Republican governors to office. Montana and Vermont's governors appoint state board members.

Delaware, North Carolina, and Washington elected new governors but continued under Democratic party control. In **Delaware**, Matt Meyers (D) won against Mike Ramone (R), the state house minority leader, in the general election after defeating Lieutenant Governor Bethany Hall-Long in the primary. Increasing public education funding was a key education issue in Meyers's campaign and will likely be high on the agenda as he assumes the office of term-limited Gov. John Carney. Meyers will also have an opportunity to appoint new members to the state board.

In **North Carolina**, candidates vied for the open gubernatorial seat left by term-limited Roy Cooper. In a contentious and competitive race, Josh Stein, the Democratic attorney general, beat Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, an ex officio member of the state board. State Senator Rachel Hunt will replace Robinson, the first time a Democrat has served in the role in over a decade.

In **Washington**, Jay Inslee did not run again after three terms. Attorney General Bob Ferguson (D) safely won the governor's race against Dave Reichert (R), despite early polls suggesting a tighter race. Washington voters have not elected a Republican governor since 1980.

Eight States Elect New Governors in 2024



Indiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and West Virginia elected new governors that kept Republicans in charge.

Indiana's U.S. Senator Mike Braun won easily against former state superintendent Jennifer McCormick, continuing a two-decade trend of Republican leadership. Braun takes over from term-limited Eric Holcomb and has included career readiness and teacher compensation on his education agenda.

In **Missouri**, Republican Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe will take over for term-limited Gov. Mike Parsons. The Missouri transition will undoubtedly be a smooth one. Parsons reflected on Kehoe's win: "I picked him six and a half years ago to be the lieutenant governor, and how much confidence I had in him, it's really good to me that he's going to take over where I leave off." Kehoe will appoint state board members; there is one teacher vacancy and two who are serving at the pleasure of the governor until a replacement is named.

In **New Hampshire**, Kelly Ayotte (R), a former one-term U.S. senator, will take over from Gov. Chris Sununu after a competitive race against Joyce Craig (D), the mayor of Manchester.

In **North Dakota**, Rep. Kelly Armstrong (R) beat Merrill Plepkorn (D) to replace Gov. Doug Burgum, who entered the crowded early field for the Republican presidential primary and was recently nominated to become the U.S. secretary of the interior.

In **West Virginia**, Attorney General Patrick Morrisey (R) won easily against Steve Williams (D) to take over from term-limited Gov. Jim Justice, who won the U.S. Senate seat previously held by Sen. Joe Manchin.

ELECTED CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Voters selected state education agency leaders in four states, returning two incumbents to office. **North Dakota** incumbent Kirsten Baesler will return for a fourth term, continuing as the country's longest-serving chief state school officer. Her opponent, former State Senator Jason Heitkamp, campaigned on issues of property tax relief, citing the state constitution obligation to have the state fund 100 percent of public education. Neither Heitkamp nor Baesler received the GOP endorsement, a marked change from Baesler's past elections. Instead, the Republican endorsement went to staunch conservative Jim Bartlett, who did not advance to the general election.

In **Washington**, voters returned Chris Reykdal, a former Democratic state representative, to a third term. Reykdal faced off against David Olson, a Navy veteran and local school board member who had a strong showing in more Republican-leaning jurisdictions. This nonpartisan race also spotlighted issues where the candidates shared common ground, including increased mental health support for students.

Voters selected two new chiefs. In **North Carolina**, current superintendent Catherine Truitt was defeated in the Republican primary by political outsider Michele Morrow, a homeschool advocate and nurse who campaigned on issues such as reducing the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and attracted national attention with controversial social media posts. Morrow faced Mo Greene, a former Guilford County superintendent, in a tight race that Greene won by just over 100,000 votes (around a 3 percentage point difference).

In **Montana**, current Republican Superintendent Elsie Arntzen chose to run for U.S. Congress, resulting in Susie Hedalen (R), Montana's state board vice chair, facing off against Shannon O'Brien (D), a former teacher and state senator. Hedalen previously served as deputy superintendent to Arntzen. She campaigned to open the educator pipeline, increase teacher compensation, and "get education back to basics, put parents and students first, and keep our schools safe." Among the challenges Hedalen will face is the recent audit of the Montana Office of Public Instruction, which reported \$67 million in improperly documented federal funds. Likewise, she is expected to weigh in on new charter school programs and parents' rights.

Over the past year, nearly 30 states appointed or elected new chief state school officers, with many states facing a rotating series of interim leaders before landing on a final candidate.

ELECTED STATE BOARDS

Alabama voters elected two incumbents and two newcomers to the four state board seats on the ballot. Incumbent Jackie Zeigler won uncontested primary and general races for her district. Newcomers Kelly Mooney and Allen Long won contested primary elections before advancing to uncontested general elections. Long ran on a school-choice platform, and Mooney, who prioritized a back-to-basics approach to curriculum, filled

the seat left open by Stephanie Bell, who did not run for reelection. Bell was first elected to the board in 1994, making her one of the longest-serving state board members in the country. Incumbent Tonya Smith Chestnut, the only Democrat to run, won her seat.

Yazmin Navarro (R) flipped a seat by beating incumbent Rhonda Solis (D) in the **Colorado State Board of Education** general election. Former teacher Sherri Wright (R) defeated Ellen Angeles (D), keeping the seat to which she was appointed when Stephen Varela resigned in October. (Varela was also appointed to fill a vacancy after Joyce Rankin, a Republican, resigned in January 2023.) Kathy Gebhardt (D) and Republican Kristi Burton Brown (R) also won. Neither seat changed political affiliation.

In the **District of Columbia**, three incumbents held onto their seats in the nonpartisan election: Jacque Patterson and Allister Chang ran unopposed in their respective races, and board president Eboni-Rose Thompson defeated two challengers. Newcomer T. Michelle Colson beat incumbent Frazier O'Leary, and newcomer LaJoy Johnson-Law won an uncontested race after board member Carlene Reid chose not to file for reelection.

In **Kansas**, partisan control of the state board remained the same, with Republicans holding a 7-to-3 majority. However, newcomers flipped the political parties in two districts. Former legislator Connie O'Brien (R) won the seat previously held by Ann Mah (D), who did not run for reelection, and Beryl New (D), a former educator, beat Bruce Shultz (R) for the seat previously held by Deena Horst (R). Newcomer Debbie Potter (R) also won. Democrats Melanie Haas and Betty Arnold, the only incumbents to run, beat Republican challengers. While the Republican majority does not change, the two new conservative board members shift the board politically further right on seats previously held by moderates.

Republican incumbents Tom McMillin and Nikki Snyder won new terms on the **Michigan State Board of Education** after facing off against six other candidates in the at-large election. The six Democrats currently on the eight-person board retain their majority.

Four of the eight seats on the **Nebraska State Board of Education** were up for election, with all four incumbents deciding not

to run again after the state board became the center of recent controversies and public attacks on members around topics like social and emotional learning, health education, and book bans. Jacquelyn Morrison left a vacancy when she resigned in October. Kristin Christensen, Maggie Douglas, Lisa Schonhoff, and Liz Renner won their respective elections. The nonpartisan board races also saw potentially impactful endorsements, with the Nebraska State Education Association recommending former teachers Christensen and Douglas and parent Liz Renner. The Nebraska Republican Party backed Schonhoff, a member of a conservative political action committee called Protect Nebraska Children, who will replace Patti Gubbels, a moderate Republican.

In **Nevada**, redistricting in 2021 caused a number of shifts that impacted election results for the 2024 nonpartisan election: Tim Hughes won an uncontested seat, and incumbent René Cantu, who changed residences to run, lost to former Clark County School Board member Danielle Ford. Tricia Braxton, a current diversity, equity, and inclusion chair at the University of Nevada Reno, defeated Timothy Underwood Jr., a Moms for Liberty advocate. Angela Orr won her seat in the general election after having been appointed by Gov. Joe Lombardo to the board following Katie Coombs resignation. Four of the seven voting members on the Nevada board are elected.

In **Ohio**, where 11 of the 19 state board members are elected by nonpartisan ballot, no incumbents ran for reelection in the six open seats. Newcomers Kristie Reighard and Karen Lloyd ran unopposed. Mary Binegar, Cathye Flory, Rhonda Johnson, and Jennie Kelley-Crosby won the races in their respective districts.

Voters kept the same parties in control of the eight open seats on the 15-member **Texas State Board of Education**. Democratic incumbents Marisa Perez-Diaz and Staci Childs ran unopposed in the general election in their districts. Newcomer Tiffany Clark (D) also ran unopposed after incumbent Aicha Davis (D) stepped down to run for and win a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. However, just before the elections, Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Republican Leslie Recine to fill the open seat until Clark officially begins in January 2025. Recine has since voted with the majority of Republicans in favor of the board decision to approve the Bluebonnet Learning instructional materials, which has

been a point of public controversy for its inclusion of Biblical excerpts, in an 8-7 vote. After Melissa Ortega (D) opted not to run for reelection in her district, newcomer Gustavo Reveles defeated Michael Stevens (R) in the general election. Republican incumbents Tom Maynard, Vice Chair Pam Little, and Board Chair Aaron Kinsey defeated Democratic challengers in their respective districts, and newcomer Brandon Hall won a seat in the general election after beating incumbent Patricia Hardy in the Republican primary. Republicans kept their 10-to-5 majority on the board.

In **Utah**, a slate of newcomers showed up on the state board ballots. Newcomers Rod Hall, Amanda Bollinger, Cole Kelley, and Joann Brinton won their districts in the general election after defeating incumbent candidates in the Republican primaries. Newcomer Kris Kimball initially secured a nomination for her district at the Republican convention. However, incumbent Molly Hart gathered enough signatures to make it onto the ticket and defeated Kimball in the Republican primary. John Arthur, a former Utah teacher of the year and finalist for the National Teacher of the Year, challenged Hart for the seat in the general election, but narrowly lost. Incumbents Carol Barlow Lear, Matt Hymas, and Randy Boothe also won back their respective seats. Republicans kept their 13-to-2 majority on the board.

Only six candidates qualified for election to the six open at-large seats on the **Guam Education Board**. Five incumbents retained their positions, and newcomer Judith Guthertz will take a seat after Lourdes Benavente finishes her term. The governor appoints the other three members. Daniel Quitugua won a seat on the **Northern Mariana Islands Board of Education** during a special election in August. Anthony Barcinas ran unopposed, incumbent Maisie Tenorio kept her seat, and newcomer Aschumar Ogomoro-Ulundong replaced incumbent Gregory Borja.

In the **U.S. Virgin Islands** state board elections, incumbent Emmanuella Perez (D) and Mary Moorhead (I) won the two open seats in St. Croix after incumbent Gregory Borja (D) failed to win back his seat. Moorhead, while not running as an incumbent, will return to the seat she lost in 2020; board chair Kyza Callwood and Nandi Sekou were both reelected in the St. Thomas district. Abigail Hendriks Cagan (I) was elected as a write-in candidate for the at-large position.

BALLOT INITIATIVES

Education ballot initiatives covered career readiness, school board elections, childcare, school choice, funding, summative assessment, and higher education governance.

Three states had education-related governance or election issues on their statewide ballots:

- Florida voters rejected a ballot initiative to change the 2026 school board elections from nonpartisan to partisan.
- Indiana voters approved a measure that removes the superintendent of public instruction from the gubernatorial line of succession.
- Nevada voters rejected a constitutional change that would shift state university governance from the existing board of regents to the state legislature.

Voters in three states rejected ballot initiatives on school choice and private school scholarships:

- Colorado voters rejected a measure to provide that “each K-12 child has the right to school choice.”
- Kentucky voters rejected a proposal to allow the state to provide funding for non-public education.
- Nebraska voters repealed a 2023 law that enacted a tax credit for individuals who contribute scholarships for students to attend private schools.

In Massachusetts, voters backed removal of a requirement that students pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam in order to graduate high school. Gov. Maura Healy supported keeping the exit exam, but the teachers union opposed it.

Finally, Arkansas voters overwhelmingly approved lottery-funded scholarships for career education and trade schools. After receiving bipartisan support in the state legislature, the issue went to Arkansas voters to expand scholarships beyond two- and four-year college and universities, for which about 90 percent of voters agreed. The ballot measure reflects the wide-ranging, bipartisan support for career and technical education.

CONCLUSION

The voters have spoken; state leaders must now get to work. With elections in the rear-

view mirror and pressing education issues to address, state leaders who seek to make significant impacts will need to focus more on what unites them than on what divides them. Clues about potentially bipartisan education agendas emerged in state and federal campaigns alike, where candidates found common ground on advancing career and technical education, expanding postsecondary opportunities, addressing student mental health needs, and supporting educators. With a federal focus on less bureaucracy and a possibly greater focus on higher education than on preK-12, states will again have the privilege and responsibility for leading education policy change in 2025.

While partisan control saw minimal changes, state education leadership will continue to face stiff scrutiny, judging by past trends. Politics rather than partisanship may be a larger influence on the 2025 education policy landscape, as elected leaders shift from campaigning to governing. When the new Congress and administration take office, state boards would be wise to pay close attention to possible shifts in political headwinds, as federal lawmakers consider education tax credits, parents' rights, school choice, and career readiness. The 2024 elections hinted that the bright partisan divides among constituent groups may be shifting, creating opportunities for new coalitions to change the political debate around education's more contentious topics. To help their states' education agendas succeed and persist in a shifting political landscape, state boards can wield their power to engage and listen to constituents and build new common ground among multiple stakeholders.

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Table 1. Results from SBE, Governor, and Chief Elections, 2024

State	Result	State	Result
Alabama (partisan ballot)	SBE: Jackie Zeigler, R (1)*; Kelly Mooney, R (3); Tonya Smith Chestnut, D* (5); Allen Long, R (7)	New Hampshire (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Kelly Ayotte, R
Colorado (partisan ballot)	SBE: Kathy Gebhardt, D (2); Sherri Wright, R (3)*; Kristi Burton Brown, R (4); Yazmin Navarro, R (8)	North Carolina (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Josh Stein, D CSSO: Mo Green, D
Delaware (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Matt Meyer, D	North Dakota (no SBE)	Gov: Kelly Armstrong, R CSSO: Kirsten Baesler*
District of Columbia (nonpartisan ballot)	SBE: Jacque Patterson (at-large)*; Allister Chang (2)*; T. Michelle Colson (4); Eboni-Rose Thompson (7)*; LaJoy Johnson-Law (8)	Northern Mariana Islands (nonpartisan ballot)	SBE: Daniel Quitugua (1); Anthony Barcinas (1); Aschumar Ogumoro-Uludong (3); Maisie Tenorio (3)*
Guam (6 elected at large; governor appoints 3)	SBE: Peter Ada*, Maria Gutierrez*, Ronald McNinch*, Mary Okada*, Angel Sablan*, Judith Guthertz	Ohio (11 elected by nonpartisan ballot; governor appoints 8)	SBE: Kristie Reighard (1); Mary Binegar (5); Cathye Flory (6); Rhonda Johnson (7); Karen Lloyd (8); Delores Ford (11)
Indiana (governor appoints 8; speaker of the House 1; president pro tempore 1; CSSO also serves)	Gov: Mike Braun, R	Texas (partisan ballot)	SBE: Gustavo Reveles, D (1); Marisa Perez-Diaz, D (3)*; Staci Childs, D (4)*; Tom Maynard, R (10)*; Brandon Hall, R (11); Pam Little, R (12)*; Tiffany Clark, D (13); Aaron Kinsey, R (15)*
Kansas (partisan ballot)	SBE: Melanie Haas, D (2)*; Connie O'Brien, R (4); Beryl New, D (6); Betty Arnold, D (8)*; Debby Potter, R (10)	U.S. Virgin Islands (partisan ballot)	SBE: Emmanuella Perez, D (St. Croix)*; Mary Moorhead, I (St. Croix); Kyza Callwood, D (St. Thomas)*; Nandi Sekou, D (St. Thomas)*; Abigail Hendriks Cagan, I (at-large)
Michigan (partisan ballot)	SBE: Tom McMillin, R*; Nikki Snyder, R*	Utah (partisan ballot)	Gov: Spencer Cox, R* SBE: Rod Hall, R (3); Carol Barlow Lear, D (6)*; Molly Hart, R (7)*; Amanda Bollinger, R (9); Matt Hymas, R (10)*; Cole Kelley, R (12); Randy Boothe, R (13)*; Joann Brinton, R (15)
Missouri (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Mike Kehoe, R	Vermont (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Phil Scott, R*
Montana (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Greg Gianforte, R* CSSO: Susie Hedalen, R	Washington (local school boards elect 5; governor appoints 7; student group selects 2; private schools elect 1)	Gov: Bob Ferguson, D CSSO: Chris Reykdal*
Nebraska (nonpartisan ballot)	SBE: Kristin Christensen (1); Maggie Douglas (2); Lisa Schonhoff (3); Liz Renner (4)	West Virginia (governor appoints SBE)	Gov: Patrick Morrisey, R
Nevada (4 elected by nonpartisan ballot; governor appoints 3)	SBE: Tricia Braxton (1); Angela Orr (2)*; Danielle Ford (3); Tim Hughes (4)*		

* incumbent

SBE = state board of education

CSSO = chief state school officer