

**Subject:** Hall Pass: Your Ticket to Understanding School Board Politics, Edition #99

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The debate over open enrollment in Missouri in schools

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Ballotpedia's Hall Pass

## February 28, 2024

Welcome to *Hall Pass*, a newsletter written to keep you plugged into the conversations driving school board politics and governance.

In today's edition, you'll find:

- On the issues: The debate over open enrollment in Missouri
- School board filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications
- Texas to hold primaries for State Board of Education on March 5
- Extracurricular: education news and numbers from around the web
- Candidate Connection survey

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## On the issues: The debate over open enrollment in Missouri

*In this section, we curate reporting, analysis, and commentary on the issues school board members deliberate when they set out to offer the best education possible in their district. Missed an issue? Click [here](#) to see the previous*

*education debates we've covered.*

[Open enrollment policies](#) allow students to transfer to other public schools within or outside of their home districts. [Missouri House Bill 1989](#), which crossed over to the Senate on Jan. 31, proposes a limited open enrollment policy allowing up to 3% of a district's students to transfer outside their districts each year.

Merlyn Johnson writes that open enrollment would remove resources from poorer schools, hurting disadvantaged students. Johnson says only wealthier school districts will have the ability to spend money to compete to attract students and the state money that would follow them.

Susan Pendergrass writes that many students are stuck in low-performing school districts and open enrollment would allow them to move to better schools. Pendergrass says data shows historically disadvantaged students are the most likely to take advantage of open enrollment policies to get a better education.

[Merlyn Johnson: Another open enrollment movement](#) | Merlyn Johnson, *The Cassville Democrat*

"It is likely that lower-income districts would lose students to higher-income districts because of their amenities, thereby losing crucial state funding and further struggling to provide competitive teacher salaries. Rural Southwest Missouri districts simply do not have the resources to build the facilities and build the buildings and provide the things that are newer and shinier when compared to higher income communities like Republic, Joplin, and Neosho. Many feel that financial inequality could lead to educational inequality for the students left behind. The haves will get more, the have-nots will get less. And, in general, all districts in Barry County are have-not districts. There is no way to make this process equitable. By the very nature of an open enrollment system, not every child will have the means to leave a school."

[Opinion: Open enrollment is a desperate measure for desperate times](#) | Susan Pendergrass, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"Not for the first time, some Missouri legislators are trying to give Missouri families what they want and deserve: school choice and not school assignment. ... [I]t still could provide a lifeline for Missouri families stuck in our lowest-performing districts or children who are struggling. ... So, who uses open enrollment? Early studies of Minnesota's program found that, not surprisingly, students were more likely to transfer from urban or low-income districts to suburban or higher-income districts. More recent studies of Michigan's and Wisconsin's programs have found that historically disadvantaged students, in this case low-income and African American students, were the most likely to request a transfer. So open enrollment wasn't skimming the white student cream off the top, but quite the opposite — providing an alternative for disadvantaged families stuck with no other options."

## In your district: reader replies on district successes

We recently asked readers the following question about successful innovations in their districts:

**What is an innovation in your district that you think other school boards should consider adopting?**

Thank you to all who responded. Today, we're sharing a handful of those responses. We'll return next month with another reader question. If you have ideas for a question you'd like to see us ask, reply to this email to let us know!

*A school board member from Washington wrote:*

We hold our monthly workshops in an "open forum" format, where we relax Robert's Rules and invite community members, students, staff, and guardians to participate in the discussions (as long as they stay on topic).

*A school board member from Wisconsin wrote:*

PLC [Professional learning communities] learning. Our teachers and administrators are being taught this learning at inservice days and morning prep meetings. Has helped us retain staff post Covid.

*A school board member from Washington wrote:*

Having Student Board Representatives join the board, elected by students, with full participation in public board meetings, including advisory votes.

## Share candidate endorsements with us!

As part of our goal to solve the [ballot information problem](#), Ballotpedia is gathering information about school board candidate endorsements. The ballot information gap widens the further down the ballot you go, and is worst for the more than 500,000 local offices nationwide, such as school boards or special districts. Endorsements can help voters know more about their candidates and what they stand for.

Do you know of an individual or group that has endorsed a candidate in your district? Click [here](#) to respond!

## School board update: filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications

*In 2023, Ballotpedia covered elections for over 9,000 school board seats in more than 3,000 districts across 34 states. We're expanding our coverage each year with our eye on the more [13,000 districts](#) with elected school boards.*

### Upcoming school board elections

We're covering school board elections in a number of states over the next two weeks, including in Alabama, California, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Additionally, we are covering recall elections against three board members in California.

Here's a sampling of our upcoming school board coverage:

#### California

On **March 5**, we will cover primaries for school board seats in the **Long Beach Unified School District and the Los Angeles Unified School District**. We will also cover recall elections in the following districts:

- [Orange Unified School District](#)

**Who faces recall?** Board members [Madison Klovstad Miner](#) and [Rick Ledesma](#).

**What's the story?** The recall effort started after the board voted 4-3 in a special meeting on Jan. 5, 2023, to fire the district's superintendent and place the district's assistant superintendent of education on paid leave pending a curriculum and academic audit. Ledesma and Miner voted in favor of the superintendent's firing along with John Ortega and Angie Schlueter-Rumsey. The board did not give a reason for the decision.

- [Woodland Joint Unified School District](#)

**Who faces recall?** Emily MacDonald, the Area Two representative on the seven-member Woodland Joint Unified School District board of trustees.

**What's the story?** Supporters of the recall began the effort after MacDonald read a statement following a unanimous vote to make June the district's LGBTQI+ Pride Month. MacDonald [said](#): "For a long period of American history, lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans have been

grouped together with transgender Americans, and while I share with everyone here enormous respect for the achievements and contributions of Americans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, this coalition forces acceptance of every aspect of transgenderism in order to be considered an ally of the others and that is wrong.” Recall supporters [said](#): “When Trustee MacDonald ran for school board, she did not disclose these controversial views on the LGBTQIA+ community as a candidate for office.”

## North Carolina

General elections are being held on March 5 for three seats on the **Durham Public Schools** school board. Durham Public Schools is the ninth-largest district in North Carolina by enrollment, with an estimated 33,400 students.

A special general election is also being held that day for the District 3 seat.

## Texas to hold primaries for State Board of Education on March 5

On March 5, voters in Texas will decide primaries for seven of the 15 seats on the [State Board of Education](#). The winners of the November general elections will take office before the board revises the state’s social studies curriculum standards in 2025.

The Board has 10 Republicans and five Democratic members. Democrats hold three of the seats up for election this year, while Republicans hold four.

In 2022, the State Board of Education held public hearings on [updating the state’s social studies curriculum](#) and aligning it with [Senate Bill 3](#), a law passed in 2021. SB 3 [prohibits](#) teaching what it defines as divisive concepts. Examples include ideas that “one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex” and that “an individual, by virtue of the individual’s race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.”

In September, the [board voted 8-7](#) to [delay](#) adopting new curriculum standards until 2025. One Republican joined Democrats in voting against the delay.

The hearings were divisive, with Board members, state lawmakers, and the public disagreeing over topics the curriculum should cover and the order in which students should cover different periods in history. The proposed standards incorporated more historical perspectives, like indigenous history. Some members of the public [worried the standards](#) didn’t receive enough public input

and said students should not learn about gay pride.

In November 2022, Republicans expanded their majority on the board, picking up [one seat](#). [According](#) to The Texas Tribune's Brian Lopez, "Usually, voters pay little attention to races for the body that sets the state's public school curriculum. But this year, how Texas schools operate has been a particularly hot topic. The pandemic's impacts on school closings and mask mandates — as well as a new law restricting how students should learn about America's history of racism — have made the state board races much more visible."

There are four contested primaries—three Republican and one Democratic—on March 5 in Districts 10, 11, and 12. Republican incumbents hold all three seats.

District 10 is currently represented by [Tom Maynard](#) (R), who is running in the Republican primary alongside [Mary Bone](#) and [Daniel Caldwell](#). Bone and Caldwell completed Ballotpedia's Candidate Connection survey. Caldwell is also on the ballot as a Republican, and he is [running](#) in the Green Party and Libertarian Party conventions on March 23. Caldwell and [Raquel Saenz Ortiz](#) are running in the Democratic primary. Ortiz also completed Ballotpedia's Candidate Connection survey.

Maynard [says](#) he "believes in accountability, transparency, local control and in a parent's right to direct the education of their child." Bone, a member of the Round Rock Independent School District, [says](#) her three key campaign messages are "ending woke culture," "improving student achievement and fiscal responsibility" and "parental rights." Caldwell [says](#), "The existing curriculum standards for Texas public schools are misguided, outdated, and poorly written. I advocate for redirecting the emphasis on career-readiness, inclusion of technology, and application of critical thinking, decision-making, and goal setting skills." Ortiz [says](#) she is "particularly passionate about equity in education. I recognize that Black and Latino students pass the STAAR test at lower rates than their white and Asian counterparts."

District 11 is represented by [Patricia Hardy](#) (R). Hardy and [Brandon Hall](#) are running in the Republican primary. Hardy's website [says](#), "We must guide our young people so they understand and value our American heritage. DEI has no place in our schools. We all deserve a public education system that provides excellence." Hall says "Our schools need to get back to the foundational principles of education, rooted in conservative values, to reclaim academic rigor and integrity and to provide students with a strong launching pad for their futures."

District 12 is represented by [Pam Little](#) (R), who is running in the Republican primary against [Chad Green](#), [Jamie Kohlmann](#), and [Matt Rostami](#). Kohlmann and Rostami completed Ballotpedia's Candidate Connection survey.

Little [said](#) she has "fought to improve Texas education while simultaneously fighting back against the activists who want to turn our schools into a breeding

ground for wokeism.” Green, a member of the McKinney Independent School District, [said](#) he is “committed to addressing critical issues in education, including concerns over the curriculum, parental rights, and the explicit materials in school libraries.” Kohlmann [said](#) she is, “passionate about education freedom, strong curriculum standards, and ensuring all Texas students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.” Rostami [listed](#) his three key campaign messages as “Pro America Curriculum,” “Financial Literacy,” and “Promoting Traditional Family Values.”


Democratic and Republican primaries for the other districts are uncontested.

While locally elected boards govern nearly all of the nation’s more than [13,000 K-12 public schools](#), state boards of education—which range from seven to 21 members (not including non-voting members)—play an influential role in setting public education priorities and establishing standards and accountability in the states.

Every state but Minnesota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin has a state board of education. In 35 states, the governor appoints some or all of the members, usually with Senate approval. In 13 states, voters elect all or most members. [According](#) to Education Week’s Madeline Will, “State boards of education are often tasked with establishing high school graduation requirements, implementing federal education laws, establishing standards for accreditation of school districts and teacher-preparation programs, and setting statewide curriculum standards, along with other education policymaking.” Depending on the state, the board of education is established in the constitution or through statute.

In [17 states](#), the state board of education also appoints the superintendent of schools.

On March 5, voters in Alabama will also decide primaries for [four of the nine seats](#) on the State Board of Education. Overall this year, nine states will hold elections for state board of education. In six of the nine states holding such elections this year, including Alabama, candidates will run in partisan elections.

 A map showing State board of education elections in 2024

## Extracurricular: education news and numbers from around the web

This section contains links to recent education-related articles from around the internet. If you know of a story we should be reading, reply to this email to share it with us!

- [Superintendents know AI is important, so why aren't more addressing it?](#) | *K-12 Dive*
- [Could pickleball become a major school sport one day? In Escambia, all signs point to yes](#) | *Pensacola News Journal*
- [Chicago school board votes to remove uniformed police officers from schools](#) | *Fox News*
- [Low-Performing Schools Are Left to Languish by Districts and States, Watchdog Finds](#) | *Education Week*
- [Evidence-Based Instruction Shines in Meeting on Early Learning](#) | *National Conference of State Legislatures*
- [Ohio's new AI toolkit seeks to guide K-12 policy](#) | *Statescoop*
- [Whether to test private school students is key difference in dueling voucher proposals in Tennessee](#) | *Chalkbeat Tennessee*
- [Controversies within the science of reading](#) | *The Hechinger Report*
- [Gas, Food, Lodging for Homeless Students in Jeopardy as Funding](#)



## Take our Candidate Connection survey to reach voters in your district

Today, we're featuring survey responses from two candidates running for seats on the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education on March 5. John Aaron Brasfield is one of seven candidates running in the primary for District 1, while Raquel Villalta is one of five running in the primary for District 3.

Brasfield was the only candidate to complete the survey in his race. Andreas Farmakalidis is, along with Villalta, one of the five candidates running in the race for District 1. He completed the survey, which we featured in the [Jan. 31](#) edition of this newsletter. Click [here](#) to see his answers.

The [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) is the largest school district in the U.S., with an estimated enrollment of 435,958.

Here's how Brasfield answered the question, **"What are the main points you want voters to remember about your goals for your time in office?"**



- "John Aaron Brasfield prioritizes safety with zero tolerance for bullying. He believes a nurturing environment fosters better learning. With comprehensive anti-bullying measures and a culture of respect, he ensures every student feels safe, valued, and empowered to succeed. By creating a positive atmosphere, John cultivates an environment where students can focus on their studies and reach their full potential.
- John Aaron Brasfield is dedicated to elevating district-wide language communication, reading proficiency, and comprehension. Through tailored programs, curriculum enhancements, and ongoing professional development, he aims to equip educators with the expertise to nurture students' language skills. By fostering a culture that prioritizes reading, comprehension, and effective communication, John is committed to providing students with the essential tools for academic achievement and lifelong success.
- John Aaron Brasfield is deeply committed to elevating math comprehension and setting high standards for optimal growth in science, engineering, and coding across the district. Through targeted initiatives, curriculum enhancements, and strategic partnerships, he aims to equip educators with the resources and support needed to foster student

success in these critical areas. By promoting hands-on learning experiences, interdisciplinary connections, and a growth mindset, John seeks to inspire a new generation of problem-solvers, innovators, and lifelong learners.”

Click [here](#) to read the rest of Brasfield’s answers.

Here’s how Villalta answered the question, **“What are the main points you want voters to remember about your goals for your time in office?”**



- “Restore Academic Excellence: Our public schools are failing our children. 70% of our students are not performing at grade level in math, and about 54% of students are not reading at grade level. Despite our \$18 billion budget, we continue to see a steep decline in reading and math scores.
- Parental Rights- LAUSD has passed a curriculum that sows seeds of confusion in our children. Schools are being used for indoctrination rather than education. We need to retain parental rights to decide when and how children should be introduced to complex social issues and protect the innocence of the children.
- School Safety-Due to political decisions, LAUSD defunded school police, resulting in their removal from secondary school campuses. Consequently, we're witnessing a concerning rise in crimes, including incidents involving knives, battery, and drugs within our schools. It's important that we reinstate our school police to ensure the safety of our children and staff members.”

Click [here](#) to read the rest of Villalta’s answers.

If you're a school board candidate or incumbent, click [here](#) to take the survey. If you're not running for school board, but there is an election in your community this year, [share the link](#) with the candidates and urge them to take the survey!

The survey is easy to complete, and you can choose the questions you feel will best represent your views to voters. If you complete the survey, your answers will display on your Ballotpedia profile. Your responses will also appear in our [sample ballot](#).

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