

Subject: Hall Pass: Your Ticket to Understanding School Board Politics, Edition #101

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The debate over sex education curriculum

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Ballotpedia's Hall Pass

March 13, 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 sex education curriculum
- Share candidate endorsements with us!
- School board filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications
- Alabama becomes 14th state with education savings account program
- Extracurricular: education news and numbers from around the web
- Candidate Connection survey

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On the issues: The debate over sex education curriculum

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.

Today, we're going to look at arguments about the sex education curriculum that [Fort Worth Independent School District](#) (FWISD) [adopted at the end of February](#). The FWISD said Choosing the Best curriculum aligns with state law and highlights abstinence in sexual health.

The Texas State Board of Education [updated](#) the state's sex education curriculum standards in 2022.

The FWISD is the seventh largest district in Texas, with around 75,000 students.

Nicole Russell writes that *Choosing the Best* curriculum offers a reasonably comprehensive and wise approach for Texas schools. Russell says teaching abstinence and self-restraint is important for students who otherwise hear messages of excess and immediate gratification. She says parents should generally have a more significant role in their child's sex education.

Maureen Downey writes that *Choosing the Best* curriculum teaches damaging attitudes about sex and calls it an abstinence-only program. Downey says abstinence-only programs don't delay sexual activity or reduce risky behaviors. She says the curriculum is especially damaging for victims of sexual assault or LGBTQ students.

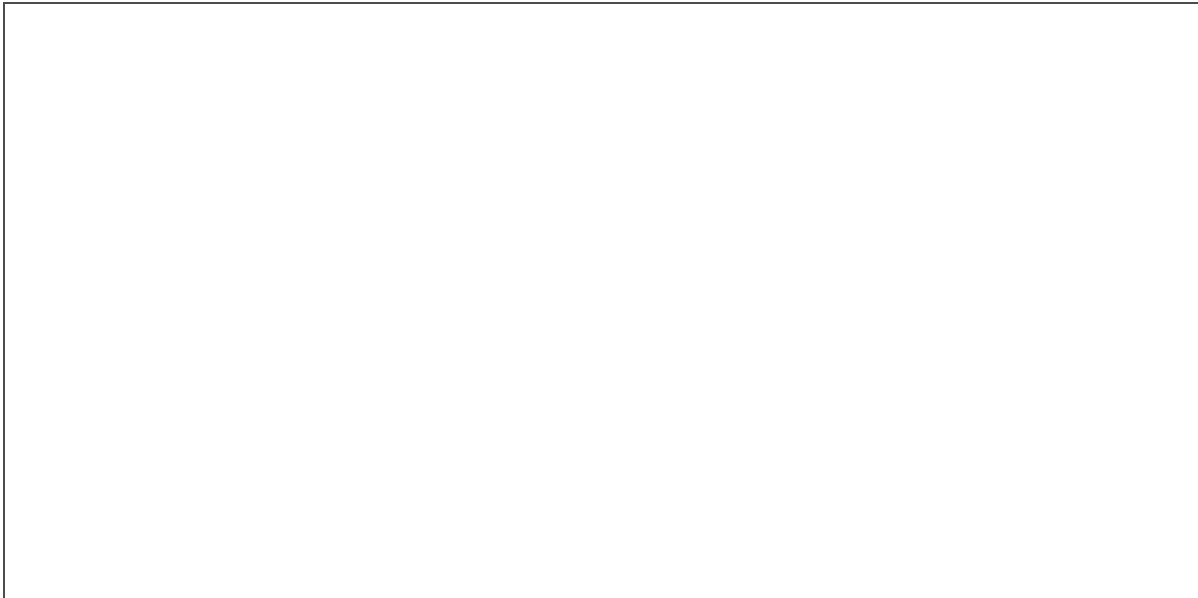
[FWISD has new abstinence-based sex ed. Parents should be teaching their kids, too | Opinion](#) | Nicole Russell, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

"In several sessions, the new curriculum teaches young people about teen pregnancy and STD risks and avoiding unhealthy relationships. For middle schoolers, it emphasizes 'the risks of sexual activity while also emphasizing the positive benefits of sexual delay.' In high school, kids learn about 'the negative emotional effects of casual sex and how sexual delay provides freedom: freedom from physical and emotional risks and the freedom to pursue dreams and personal goals.' This sounds not only fairly comprehensive, but also wise. ... Even still, it's actually surprising that choosing this curriculum would be controversial. It's painfully obvious that abstaining from sex is the only sure way not to worry about not getting pregnant — or contracting an STI that could have a range of mild to dire consequences. The difficulty is that it takes discipline and willpower and we live in a world of excess, not moderation, and certainly not abstinence.

Teaching today's youth to reign in their desires and passions seems like a valuable tool for any part of life, including sex. ... But the importance of sex is also why sex education shouldn't just be left up to schools. Perhaps if schools knew parents were more involved in discussing this topic with their kids, there wouldn't be such controversy about what to teach and why."

[Opinion: Sex education should not spread shame and stigma](#) | Maureen Downey, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“Choosing The Best,’ a curriculum commonly used in Georgia, teaches that people who have sex before marriage – 95 percent of U.S. adults – are not ‘pure.’ Some activities suggest that sex before marriage renders people tainted, worthless, and unwanted. Imagine how these messages are received by students who have experienced sexual assault. Such damaging messages can prevent individuals from reporting abuse and have lasting consequences. Many abstinence-only programs reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and give females responsibility for male sexual feelings – potentially blaming sexual assault victims and excusing perpetrators. They do not even acknowledge that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth exist, let alone that they experience high levels of violence, trauma, and discrimination. ... An abundance of evidence supports parents’ and students’ calls to stop teaching abstinence-only sex ed. They often contain scientifically inaccurate information and undermine confidence in birth control and condoms. Fear tactics do not work. Abstinence-only programs do not delay initiation of sexual activity or reduce sexual risk behavior. In fact, they may discourage sexually active adolescents from using contraceptives, increasing their risk of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.”



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

In the next 30 days, Ballotpedia will cover school board elections in **five states**—Alaska, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. With the exception of Louisiana, where we are covering special elections on March 23, all of the elections will take place April 2.

Below, you'll find a sample of those elections. We'll return in a future edition with more information on April 2 elections.

Louisiana

A [special primary](#) for the District 8 seat on the [East Baton Rouge Parish School System](#) school board will be held March 23. A [special primary](#) will also be held on the same day for the District 7 seat on the [Caddo Parish Public Schools](#) school board.

If necessary, general elections will be held on April 27.

Alaska

Three seats on the [Anchorage School District](#) school board in Alaska are [up for general election](#) on April 2.

Missouri

We're covering elections in the following eight districts in Missouri on April 2:

- [Hickman Mills C-1 School District Board of Education](#)
- [North Kansas City Public Schools Board of Education](#)

- [Park Hill School District Board of Education At-large](#)
- [Platte County School District Board of Education](#)
- [St. Joseph School District school board, At-large](#)
- [Center School District Board of Education](#)
- [Grandview C-4 School District Board of EducationLiberty Schools Board of Education At-large](#)

Alabama becomes 14th state with education savings account (ESA) program

On March 7, Alabama Gov. [Kay Ivey](#) (R) signed [House Bill 129](#) into law, making the state the 14th with an [education savings account](#) (ESA) program.

ESAs allow families to receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized accounts for use on approved educational expenses. States set different rules for what counts as an approved educational expense. In general, families can use ESA money for private school tuition, tutoring, curriculum, and school supplies.

The Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education (CHOOSE) Act will [provide](#) families with up to \$7,000 per child for use at a participating private school beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Homeschooling families can receive up to \$2,000 per child—with a cap of \$4,000 for families with more than two homeschooling children—for educational expenses. Not all states with ESA programs include homeschoolers.

The state can allocate [no more than \\$100 million](#) to the program each year. The program is available to students from families making less than 300% of the federal poverty level until 2027. After that, the program will expand to include all eligible students, regardless of family income. The program prioritizes special-needs students.

In her 2024 state of the state address, Ivey [said](#) passing an ESA program was her top legislative agenda item. Ivey [said](#), “We want every Alabama student – whether they are at a public school, private school, magnet, charter or homeschool – the opportunity to receive a high quality education.”

The House voted [69-34](#) to pass the CHOOSE Act on Feb. 27, with [six Republicans](#) joining Democrats in opposition. Republicans have a [75-28 majority](#) in the House (with two vacancies). The Senate voted [23-9](#) to pass the bill. Republicans have a [27-8 majority](#) in the Senate. Alabama has [a Republican trifecta](#).

Democratic lawmakers opposed the bill, saying it would drain resources from public schools. State Sen. [Bobby Singleton](#) (D) [said](#), “This is the new segregation. We’re just paying for it this time. Paying for it on the backs of poor children.”

ESAs are one of several programs allowing eligible students to use taxpayer money for educational expenses outside the public school system. Other programs include [vouchers](#) and [tax-credit scholarships](#). Over the last few years, ESAs have become the most popular of these programs.

In 2023, five states enacted new ESA programs and two expanded existing ones—the most in any year. Except for North Carolina, which has a Democratic governor and a Republican-controlled legislature, all the states that created or expanded an ESA program last year had Republican trifectas.

- Arkansas: Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R) [signed](#) the Arkansas LEARNS Act on March 9, creating, among other things, [Education Freedom Accounts](#).
- Utah: Gov. Spencer Cox (R) [signed](#) HB 215 in January, creating, among other things, the [Utah Fits All Scholarship](#).
- Iowa: Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) in January [signed](#) a bill creating the Education Savings Account program.
- Montana: Gov. Greg Gianforte (R) signed [House Bill 393](#) on May 18, creating the Special Needs Equal Opportunity Education Savings Account Program.
- South Carolina: Gov. Henry McMaster (R) [signed](#) the Education Scholarship Trust Fund Act into law May 5.
- Florida: On March 27, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) [expanded](#) the state’s Family Empowerment Scholarship program to provide all K-12 students with around \$7,500 for educational expenses.
- North Carolina: On Sept. 22, Gov. Roy Cooper (D) [allowed](#) the state’s \$30 billion budget to become law without his signature. Included in the budget was [an expansion of the state’s Opportunity Scholarship program](#), providing taxpayer funding for eligible students to use at participating private schools.

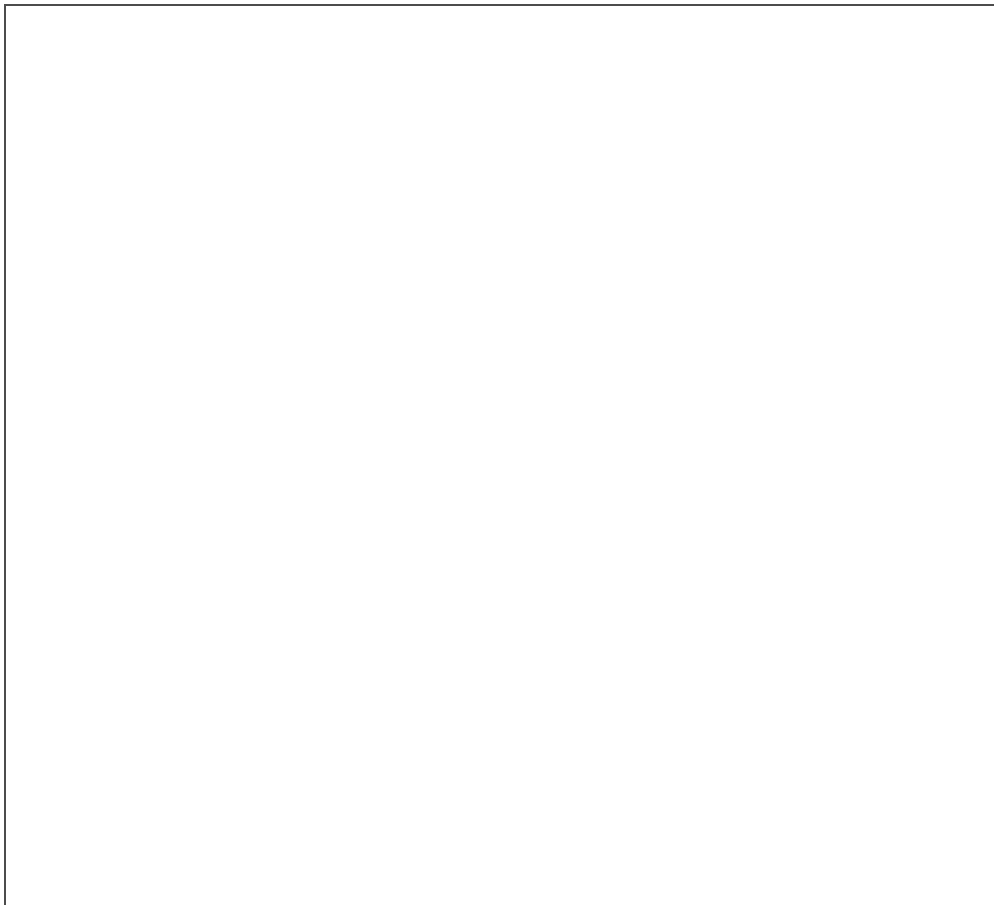
ESA programs cover all or most students in Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, Utah, and West Virginia.



Arizona [enacted](#) the country's first ESA program in 2011.

Lawmakers [expanded](#) the program in July 2022 to cover all students. In October 2022, the West Virginia Supreme Court [allowed](#) the state's ESA program, first enacted in 2021, to go into effect.

Critics of ESAs argue they [remove funding from public schools](#), leaving students and teachers with fewer resources, and [lack accountability](#). Supporters argue ESAs [provide families with more options](#) for finding the best education for their children and [put pressure](#) on public schools to improve.



Lawmakers in [Wyoming](#), [Tennessee](#), and [South Carolina](#) are currently debating bills related to new or expanded ESA programs.

Outside of education savings accounts, 20 states have voucher programs and 25 states have tax-credit scholarship programs.

Click [here](#) to learn more about ESA, voucher, and tax-credit scholarship programs.

Extracurricular: education news 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!

- [Many migrant students need mental health support. Here's why this program is a go-to for schools.](#) | *Chalkbeat*
- [Why you should stop texting your kids at school](#) | *The Associated Press*
- [School board recall activist to challenge Dean Preston for supervisor](#) | *The*

San Francisco Standard

- [Can arts education help children heal from trauma?](#) | *EdSource*
- [Proposed sweeping changes to Colorado charter schools could divide Democrats](#) | *Colorado Politics*
- [Chicago is One Step Closer to Hybrid Elected School Board as Illinois House Approves Plan](#) | *WTTW*
- [New Mexico ranks last when it comes to education. Will a mandatory 180 days in the classroom help?](#) | *Associated Press*
- [This Tech Evangelist Has Big Dreams for AI Tutors. Are They Too Big?](#) | *The Wall Street Journal*
- [Biden Calls for Teacher Pay Raises, Expanded Pre-K in State of the Union](#) | *Education Week*

Take our Candidate Connection survey to reach voters in your district



Today, we're looking at responses from two candidates running in [April 2 elections](#) for [Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education](#) in Oklahoma:

- In District 2, [Calvin Moniz](#) and [Kandee Washington](#) are running in the special general election. The winner will serve out the remainder of Judith Barba Perez's unexpired term. Perez [resigned](#) in January because her family was moving away from Tulsa.
- In District 5, incumbent [John T. Croisant](#) and [Teresa Pena](#) are running in the general election.

Moniz and Croisant were the only candidates in their respective races to complete the survey.

Tulsa Public Schools is the second-largest district in Oklahoma, with an estimated enrollment of 35,600 students.

Here's how Moniz answered the question, "What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?"



"Moniz advocates for local control, upholding the



principles of liberty, and equality. He strongly believes that ensuring equal access to quality public education is crucial for our community to effectively address Tulsa's future needs.”

Click [here](#) to read the rest of Moniz’s responses.

Here’s how Croisant answered the question, “What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?”



“I am passionate about supporting public education. Politics needs to be left out of the discussion about public schools and they should be funded fully.

Oklahoma has neglected to keep up with funding education for decades since the passage of HB 1017 and lags behind other states in the US due to this lack of investment. We have caught up to the regional average for teacher pay, but lag behind in the number of teachers and staff in our buildings, leaving our students in over packed classrooms. If Oklahoma invests in public education, our 700,000 public school students will all benefit.”

Click [here](#) to read the rest of Croisant’s responses.

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!

In the 2022 election cycle, 6,087 candidates completed the survey.

The survey contains more than 30 questions, and you can choose the ones you feel will best represent your views to voters. If you complete the survey, a box with your answers will display on your Ballotpedia profile. Your responses will also appear in our [sample ballot](#).

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