



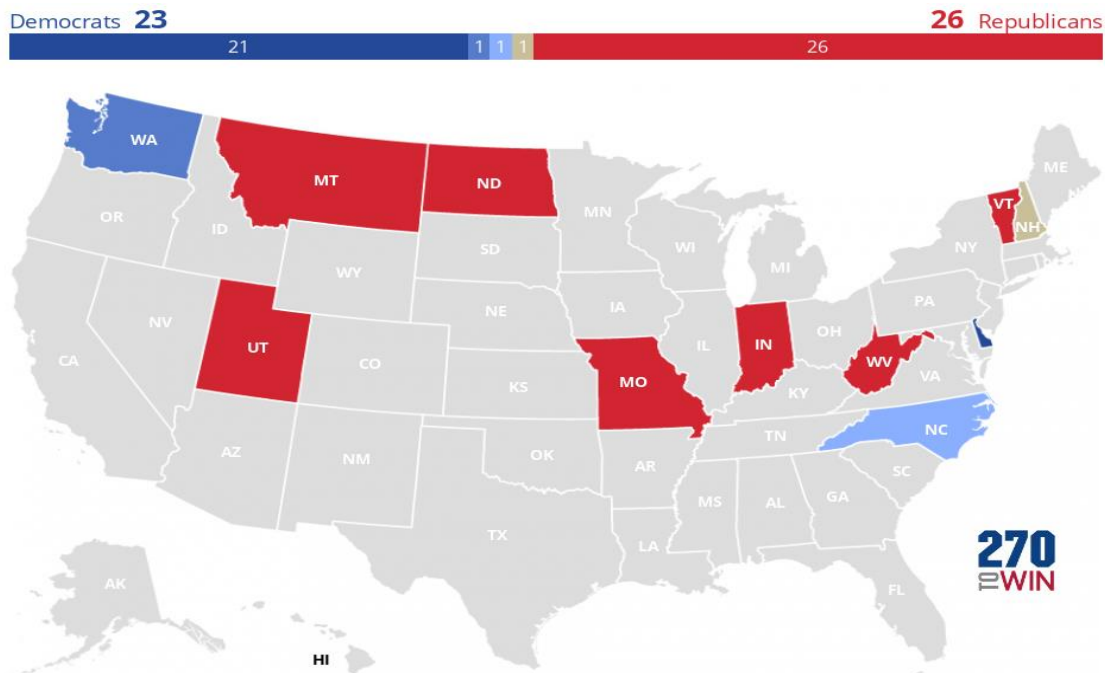
## Protecting and Advancing Education Priorities Through a Gubernatorial Transition

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Providing access to a high-quality education is a critical responsibility of governors and state legislatures and is enshrined in state constitutions. State education leadership and policy can support great teaching and learning in numerous important ways, spanning the spectrum from early learning through higher education. These include but are not limited to setting statewide expectations and requirements, incentivizing and removing barriers to innovation, providing funding and technical assistance to improve equity and capacity, building systems for research and development, and encouraging continuous improvement. While each state’s context and governance structures are different, every governor has a unique, leading role to play in improving education opportunities and outcomes in his/her state.

Governors in many states appoint new chief state school officers, state board of education members, and other state education leaders. Starting the day after the election, each new governor will embark on a transition process that, largely, starts with the election, leads to inauguration and extends through the first 100 days and beyond. This period presents significant opportunities for new governors to identify and advance their education policies and priorities. The purpose of this memo is to help education advocates plan for how they can advance their education priorities during this critical transition period that presents both opportunities and risks.

In 2024, 11 states will hold gubernatorial elections — eight currently held by Republicans and three by Democrats. Overall, there are 27 Republican governors and 23 Democratic governors (see chart below)



Source: <https://www.270towin.com/2024-governor-election/>

In terms of state legislatures, there are 99 state legislative chambers — 49 states have bicameral legislatures composed of two separate chambers, while Nebraska has a unicameral legislature. This year, there are elections in [85 of those chambers](#) — for 5,807 of the country's 7,386 state legislative seats — or 79% of all seats. Republicans hold a majority in 56 of the legislative chambers, while Democrats control 41 chambers — Alaska's House and Senate both have bipartisan coalitions in the majority. And Republicans control the governor's seat and legislature in 23 states, while Democrats hold both in 17 states, with 20 states under divided government — a governor of one party and the legislature controlled by the other.

### The Importance of Transition

Each new governor's transition period provides a critical window of opportunity to establish clear priorities and strong leadership teams that can advance areas of focus.

It is helpful to think of this transition period as composed of two overlapping phases: Phase 1: The first phase runs roughly from election to inauguration and involves, in part, a small transition team with multiple responsibilities, including conducting due diligence, engaging stakeholders, naming key personnel, and transforming campaign positions into actionable policy plans. Phase 2: The second phase runs roughly from inauguration through the proverbial "first 100 days" in office, which in most states will include each governor's first state-of-the-

state address, first budget proposals, first legislative sessions, and first legislative executive and regulatory actions.

### **Opportunities for Action in Gubernatorial Transition**

This section articulates five opportunities for action that each new governor and their teams, as well as education organizations and advocates, can consider — from election to inauguration and in the first 100 days — to advance policies and priorities in their state. Again, we want to highlight and acknowledge that context matters. In considering the opportunities articulated here, new governors and their teams will be informed by where the governor and state have clear authority, how state education governance is structured, the current status of state education policy and implementation, what is in demand among key stakeholders, and more.

1. **Establish education as a clear priority for state action.** There is limited room in each state on the decision agenda, including for education. Governors are, therefore, singularly positioned to make education a clear priority for the state government and the public. Advocates can ask for prioritization signals in the transition by, for example, recommending that the governor have a dedicated education transition team and focus some of the governor's visible time, statements, outreach, and appearances on education issues. As the formal administration begins, this prioritization of education can be further displayed through key speeches, legislative proposals, the state budget, and executive mechanisms (convenings, regulations, etc.).
2. **Set the education vision.** Governors can use their executive authority and the bully pulpit to set a vision for the state that will guide its overall education agenda. This vision may be developed from campaign commitments and/or the state context and can be informed by effective advocacy. To leverage this vision-setting power, a new governor's vision could include a focus on the outcomes the governor seeks for all students, the systems the governor wants for the state, and the areas of focus of the governor's administration. This vision can be clearly articulated through the bully pulpit, as well as through policy, budget, and other decisions. Importantly, new governors will decide not only which education policy priorities they want to add or change, but also which priorities and initiatives they want to continue from the prior administration, so this is an opportunity to advocate for or against those.
3. **Inform education leadership appointments.** In many states, as noted above, the governor plays a critical role in appointing other state education leaders — both within the governor's office, such as the education policy adviser or state secretary of education, and in state boards or state cabinet positions in charge of education and related agencies, such as the chief state school officer. These appointments — starting with the leader of the education transition — are crucial to success and can influence policy choices. They also require education leaders who share the new governor's vision, have the governor's trust, command the respect of key constituencies and the field, represent a diversity of experiences and expertise, and have the educational knowledge and leadership skills necessary to drive effective educational change and

implementation. These appointments will begin at the cabinet level and be followed by key deputies and assistants. This is an opportunity to recommend the right people for the right positions to define and advance a new governor's education vision and priorities that align with your own.

4. **Request the transition team engage with key education stakeholders to inform and potentially support the new governor's education agenda.** Early and ongoing stakeholder engagement is crucial to inform policy, promote buy-in, improve implementation, sustain attention and achieve key outcomes that emanate from a new governor's education agenda. Key voices from the field include teachers, school and district leaders, parents and families, students, and others who are on the ground and directly involved in education in the state, as well as representatives from civil rights, business, and other sectors that view education as a major priority. There is greater strength in numbers, so consider joining forces with aligned organizations to have more impact in your transition advocacy.
5. **Come prepared with relevant data and analysis to help the transition team understand the state context and the urgency of your requests.** In many cases, the gubernatorial transition period will be the first opportunity for a new governor to look "under the hood" and deeply examine the state education context, including key education and youth data, initiatives, structures, trends, and gaps. These factors will significantly influence state policy priorities and ensure a smoother transition. You can help new governors and their teams develop a deep understanding of the state education context by highlighting existing strengths, weaknesses, and important efforts that are already underway.

## **Conclusion**

Many organizations and leaders may be unaware of the extent to which gubernatorial transitions present multiple opportunities to elevate and advance their educational priorities. Given the many competing demands during the transition process, it is important to plan now so you are prepared to act quickly and intentionally in communicating and advocating for your priorities during this critical window.

## Sources

- [Presidential Transition Timeline and Guide](#) – 2023 Edition (Partnership for Public Service)
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