

INTERIM EDUCATION COMMITTEE – SCHOOL BOARD COMPOSITION

The Nevada State Education has been the voice of Nevada educators for over 120 years with a mission to ensure a high-quality education for every Nevada student.

NSEA appreciates the opportunity to engage in a conversation about school board composition. We believe we can improve the professionalism, collaboration, accountability, and responsiveness of school boards, adding educator voice, while also preserving school boards as democratically elected bodies.

NSEA takes pride in promoting the democratic process. Democratic participation is the cornerstone of governance, and locally elected school boards represent the American institution that comes closest to the ideal of local self-governance. Local school boards are in place to ensure that schools in each community reflect the values of the people. School boards provide direction and oversight for the Superintendent who manage the day-to-day operations of the schools. They also provide direct accountability to the community.

Like any other institution, there are times when we do not live up to this ideal. This is true of school districts with elected school boards and those without. The difference is elected school boards provide the public with a direct line of accountability. Appointed school boards are shielded by an appointing authority who typically has significant other responsibilities in addition to appointment of school board members. It is extremely rare to see an elected official voted out of office over the actions or conduct of another official they have appointed. This is truer still when the appointment is made by another deliberative body.

Democracy can be messy. Money can have a substantial influence on elections, and sometimes campaigns are negative and turn off voters. Oftentimes, our preferred candidates do not win. In recent years, school boards have become a focal point for a political faction looking to score cheap points with campaigns fueled by disinformation related to “critical race theory”, masks and vaccines, and sex education. While these challenges are real, they are certainly not enough to abandon our system of democratic governance. Instead, Nevada has implemented reforms over the years to increase voter participation and make elections more democratic.

While democratically elected school boards bring the greatest levels of accountability and responsiveness to the communities they serve, we agree more should be done in the face of political attacks to increase levels of professionalism and collaboration at school boards while also bringing greater accountability and responsiveness to our communities. Meanwhile, NSEA has consistently advocated for the inclusion of educator voice in the decisions that impact us. As such, NSEA members from across the state believe that each local school board in Nevada should appoint an NSEA member representative to serve in an advisory capacity at all meetings.

Below is a list of other possible school board reforms we ask the committee to consider.

- The addition of advisory seats could bring more breadth and diversify of perspective to local school boards. In addition to an educator representative, consider other important education stakeholders like students and representatives of the PTA in addition to representatives of local governments.
- A statewide code of conduct for school board trustees, including a process for possible removal from office for transgressions, would set clear expectations along with new lines of accountability.
- Instituting a regular rotation of School Board President would lead to more collaboration between school board trustees and decrease factionalism on boards.
- Limiting Superintendent contracts to 2 years, timed to seating of new school board members after elections, would make Superintendents more accountable to the seated boards and lead to better working relationships.
- Compensation of trustees that better reflects responsibility would lead to more qualified and professional school board candidates.
- Elevating ballot placement of school board races on the ballot would lead to greater participation.
- Electing school board candidates through ranked choice voting would reward candidates who are more collaborative.
- Public financing of school board elections would help level the playing field, while increasing communications between candidate campaigns and the voting public.

NSEA stands ready to work with this committee on any of these important school board reforms. Thank you.