

Every Student Matters, Every Vote Counts

**A guide to how education policy
takes shape in Tennessee**



Every election shapes the future for Tennessee's students. The people elected to office decide how schools are funded, what opportunities students have, how teachers are supported, and who has a voice in education decisions. Understanding what each office controls helps advocates ask better questions, evaluate candidates, and cast an informed vote.

The elected policymaking bodies that can impact education include:

- United States Congress
- Governor of Tennessee
- Tennessee General Assembly
- Local District School Boards
- Local Municipal Councils/County Commissions

Learn more about their education duties and responsibilities below.

United States Congress		
Elected Official	US Senator	US Representative
Term	6 years	2 years
Why it Matters	• Appropriates funding to federal agencies that administer education programs, including the provision of Pell Grant awards to college students, Title I funding to states and schools, and IDEA grants • Provides oversight and enacts legislation that creates a framework for accountability provisions, and establishes and mandates civil rights and protections for students in public schools	
Key Questions to Ask	• With new changes in the United States Department of Education, how would you ensure that students’ civil rights are protected? • How would you provide oversight of proposed changes to state accountability systems? • With changes to the United States Department of Education, how will you ensure the adequacy of funds being appropriated to serve all students?	
Governor of Tennessee		
Elected Official	Governor	
Term	4 years, limited to two 4-year terms	
Why it Matters	• Sets policy and legislative priorities for the administration • Proposes funding priorities through annual budget • Appoints the Commissioner of Education and some members of the State Board of Education, Higher Education Commission (THEC), and public higher education governing boards	
Key Questions to Ask	• What types of education spending would you prioritize in your proposed budget? • What qualities will you look for when appointing education leaders?	

Tennessee General Assembly		
Elected Official	TN Senator	TN Representative
Term	4 years	2 years
Why it Matters	- Proposes, debates, and passes legislation, including education laws such as school funding structures like TISA and private school voucher spending, the makeup of the state financial aid portfolio and K–12 accountability measures - Oversees approval of the annual state budget - Appoints and/or confirms members of several state level education-related policymaking bodies	
Key Questions to Ask	- What education bills would you champion? - How will you ensure state funding reaches students with the greatest needs?	
Local School Boards		
Elected Official	County School Board	Municipal/Special School Board
Term	Varies by county	Varies by district
Why it Matters	Oversees the operation and management of the district including: - Hiring and evaluating the superintendent - Crafting and in certain cases approving the district budget - Making decisions regarding facilities, classroom resources, student discipline, and safety	
Key Questions to Ask	- How would you engage families? - What is your approach to student discipline? - How would you evaluate the superintendent?	

County Commissions and Municipal Councils		
Elected Official	County Commissioner	Municipal Council Member
Term	Varies by county	Varies by county
Why it Matters	• Funds local portion of the school district's budget • In certain cases, approves the school district's budget	
Key Questions to Ask	• What types of education spending would you prioritize in your proposed budget? • How would you monitor and evaluate district budgets?	

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Before casting your ballot, learn about the candidates running for office, ask how they will support Tennessee students, and make a plan to vote. Strong public schools depend on informed and engaged communities.

To stay engaged throughout this election season, visit: edtrusttn.org/every-student-matters-every-vote-counts.