

What is at stake in school board elections this year.

On Tuesday, November 7, 2023, voters in 499 school districts will elect school board members who will have enormous power to shape the priorities of our local public schools and influence the quality of education students in our communities receive.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has become a focal point for extremist politicians, including at the school district level. In some places extremists will be running for school board to promote a political agenda and impose their personal and religious beliefs on students, teachers, and district staff. Their goals will include enacting regressive book bans, censorship of classroom discussions about race and gender identity, and policies discriminating against individual students because they identify as LGBTQ+.

Our communities depend on school boards to use tax dollars wisely and to ensure that our local schools will provide students with opportunities that will allow them to thrive in school today and succeed in life after graduation. In districts that have elected a majority of extremists to their boards, we have seen tax dollars wasted on legal bills defending extremist policies instead of being invested in educating children and boards that have no concern for the quality of education students receive.

What are school boards and what power do they have?

Public schools are part of the state constitution. The school board is an elected body responsible for governing the school district. In this capacity, the board levies taxes and adopts an annual budget that is balanced and based on available funding from state and local sources, approves the hiring and compensation of personnel, approves curriculum and textbooks, appoints the superintendent, and enacts policy.

School board members should:

- Model responsible school governance and leadership.
- Support educational goals that will provide students with a quality education.
- Vote and act in the board meetings impartially for the good of the school district.
- Work for the best interests of all students and demonstrate a strong commitment to serving other people.
- Function as a “Team of 10,” working together with their superintendent to make decisions for the benefit of their students, schools and taxpayers.

School board members should NOT:

- Target students or intimidate staff.
- Be involved in the day-to-day operations of a district.
- Use their position on the school board to push a political agenda or impose their personal and religious beliefs on students and staff.
- Enact policies that are in violation of state or federal law, forcing the district to incur legal costs defending these actions.



How to talk about what is happening.

Extremists' goals

- Extremists are running for school boards in Pennsylvania. If elected, they will use their positions to push a political agenda and impose their personal and religious beliefs on students and staff.
- Extremists want to limit students' freedom to learn. They are pushing book bans and other policies to control the information students can access in public schools.
- Extremists disrespect educators and want to ban them from facilitating critical lessons and discussions with students about historical events and discrimination, as well as current political and cultural concerns.
- Extremists are targeting individual children and groups of students with discriminatory policies, making schools less safe and welcoming for some children.
- Extremists believe that they should decide what students learn in schools, not parents.
- Extremist school board members put the quality of our local public schools at risk.

Talking Points

- In our communities parents and educators continue to be partners, working together to ensure every student, no matter their race or background, has the opportunity to succeed.
- Pennsylvanians want thriving communities with good jobs and strong public schools, where all students have the resources and opportunities to succeed academically and in life after graduation.
- We want school boards to focus on ensuring that schools have the necessary resources and staff to provide students with safe, healthy environments and the individualized attention that they need.
- Students should have the freedom to learn and teachers should have the freedom to teach in their schools. Extremists should not be able to restrict the information students can access and discuss in schools.
- Schools work best when parents and teachers work together. Parents who do not approve of specific content already have a right to opt their own children out of specific lessons or restrict their own children's access to books that they find objectionable without restricting access for other students and families.

Questions for School Board Candidates

- What do you view as the role of the school board?
- What do you view as the district's greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What motivates you to want to become a school board member?
- What do you see as major issues facing the district?
- What do you view as the top needs of the district?
- What are your budget priorities?
- Please explain your position on school boards controlling the information all students can access in their schools and the information educators can teach and discuss in their classrooms.

