

K-12 Governance Across Sectors

HOW TO USE OUR 50-STATE COMPARISON RESOURCE

K-12 governance structures shape not just who makes state policy decisions but also can inform strategies to accomplish education policy goals. Understanding these differences can help state leaders, peers and researchers navigate policy change more effectively.

Our K-12 Governance 50-State Comparison may help you:

- Identify who has the authority to make key K-12 policy decisions in your state.
- Understand whether education leadership roles are elected or appointed — and how that affects decision-making timelines and accountability.
- Compare your state's governance structure with others implementing similar reforms.
- Orient new leadership, staff or partners to how education decisions are made in your state.
- Evaluate how governance structure may influence adoption of new policy trends.
- Understand how leadership turnover may impact policy continuity.
- Identify governance models that may support cross-agency coordination.
- Provide context for interstate collaboration or regional initiatives.

Uses for State Policymakers and Staff

- Compare governance structures across states with similar or different education policy landscapes.
- Understand how to make changes to your state's governance structure to meet state or local education policy priorities.
- Assess feasibility of structural reforms (e.g., moving from elected to appointed leadership).
- Understand how governance structure may affect continuity across administrations.
- Determine which entities have authority to make state and local decisions.
- Clarify lines of authority between the SEA, state board and governor's office.
- Understand how governance affects implementation of cross-agency initiatives (e.g., workforce pathways or data systems).
- Compare governance models in states coordinating education across P-20W systems; including [Early Care and Education](#) and [Postsecondary](#).
- Identify who must approve or implement proposed policy changes.

Uses for Advocacy Organizations

- Determine the most effective decision-making body to engage on specific issues.
- Identify whether authority lies with the Legislature, state education agency or state board.
- Tailor advocacy strategies based on how leadership is selected or empowered.

Uses for Funders and Philanthropic Partners

- Understand governance conditions that may enable or constrain implementation.
- Compare structural differences across states pursuing similar investments.
- Assess sustainability of initiatives across political or leadership transitions.

Uses for District and Local Leaders

- Understand how state-level governance decisions affect local authority.
- Identify pathways for elevating local priorities to state decision-makers.
- Clarify roles of state boards, state education agencies and Legislatures in setting policy that impacts districts.

Uses for Journalists

- Understand how education policy decisions are made at the state and district level.
- Determine which entities have authority to make state and local decisions.
- Compare which states have appointed and/or elected education leadership positions and how that impacts different issue areas.
- Inform media coverage of leadership disputes or structural reform proposals.

Uses for Education Policy Researchers and Analysts

- Identify how different types of governance structures impact education policy issues across the spectrum.
- Inform legislative tracking of past and current versions of governance structure.
- Determine which entities have authority to make state and local decisions.