

Subject: Hall Pass: Your Ticket to Understanding School Board Politics, Edition #98

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The debate over AI in schools

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Ballotpedia's Hall Pass

February 21, 2024

Welcome to Hall Pass, a newsletter written to keep you plugged into the conversations driving school board politics and governance.

A note to readers: I'll be in Dallas this weekend for the [Consortium of State School Boards Associations](#)' (COSSBA) [annual conference](#). If you're attending the conference and would like to connect, reply to this email or send me a note at samuel.wonacott@ballotpedia.org. I'll have more to say about the conference in a future edition. I look forward to seeing you there!

In today's edition, you'll find:

- On the issues: The debate over AI in schools
- School board filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications
- San Francisco to vote on 8th-grade math ballot measure
- Extracurricular: education news and numbers from around the web
- Share candidate endorsements with us!
- Candidate Connection survey

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On the issues: The debate over AI in schools

In this section, we curate reporting, analysis, and commentary on the issues school board members deliberate when they set out to offer the best education possible in their district. Missed an issue? Click [here](#) to see the previous education debates we've covered.

How should schools respond to generative artificial intelligence (AI)? Should teachers allow students to use AI as a learning tool?

Julie Hessler writes that AI is a shortcut that causes academic disengagement among its users. Hessler says real learning only occurs when students read good books and wrestle with words to best express their ideas. She says schools should not allow AI usage because it replaces genuine thought and interaction with curricular materials.

Kevin Roose writes that most students are already using AI in their school work, so teachers should try to help students use the technology most effectively. Roose says efforts to ban AI or discourage its use have only caused teachers to fall behind students in understanding its applications instead of leading the way.

[A.I. in the Classroom: What Should Teachers Do?](#) | Julie Hessler, *The New York Times*

“Mr. Roose’s suggestion that educators embrace generative A.I. and view it as an ‘opportunity’ or ‘classroom collaborator,’ not as an ‘enemy,’ seems typical of a tech enthusiast. ... What I want, most of all, is for students to read books that help them appreciate the complexity of the past, to digest factual information and to think deeply about the subject. Struggling to find the words and structure to express one’s ideas is a catalyst for thought, as any writer knows. ... Shortcuts, whether traditional plagiarism or this new form of plagiarism, contribute to an atmosphere of intellectual disengagement.”

[How Schools Can Survive \(and Maybe Even Thrive\) With A.I. This Fall](#) | Kevin Roose, *The New York Times*

“[T]eachers should focus less on warning students about the shortcomings of generative A.I. than on figuring out what the technology does well. ... [C]lever students are figuring out how to get better results by giving the models more sophisticated prompts. As a result, students at many schools are racing ahead of their instructors when it comes to understanding what generative A.I. can do, if used correctly. ... But students need guidance when it comes to generative A.I., and schools that treat it as a passing fad — or an enemy to be vanquished — will miss an opportunity to help them.”



In your district: District successes

We hear a lot about what *isn't* working in education. Now we want to hear what is working.

Last week, we asked readers to describe an innovation in their districts—a unique policy or program, say—that other districts might want to consider. Thanks to everyone who has replied so far! We're keeping the survey open for one more week. Responses can be anonymous.

What is an innovation in your district that you think other school boards should consider adopting?

Click [here](#) to respond!

School board update: filing deadlines, election results, and recall certifications

In 2023, Ballotpedia covered elections for over 9,000 school board seats in more than 3,000 districts across 34 states. We're expanding our coverage each year with our eye on the more [13,000 districts](#) with elected school boards.

Upcoming school board elections

We're covering school board elections in a number of states over the next two weeks, including in North Carolina, California, Wisconsin, and Alabama. Additionally, we are covering recall elections against three board members in

California.

Here's a sampling of our upcoming school board coverage:

California

On March 5, we will cover primaries for school board seats in the Long Beach Unified School District and the Los Angeles Unified School District. Also on March 5, we will cover recall elections in the following districts:

[Orange Unified School District](#)

- **Who faces recall?** Board members [Madison Klovstad Miner](#) and [Rick Ledesma](#).
- **What's the story?** The recall effort started after the board voted 4-3 in a special meeting on Jan. 5, 2023, to fire the district's superintendent and place the district's assistant superintendent of education on paid leave pending a curriculum and academic audit. Ledesma and Miner voted in favor of the superintendent's firing along with John Ortega and Angie Schlueter-Rumsey. The board did not give a reason for the decision.

[Woodland Joint Unified School District](#)

- **Who faces recall?** Emily MacDonald, the Area Two representative on the seven-member Woodland Joint Unified School District board of trustees.
- **What's the story?** Supporters of the recall began the effort after MacDonald read a statement following a unanimous vote to make June the district's LGBTQI+ Pride Month. MacDonald [said](#): "For a long period of American history, lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans have been grouped together with transgender Americans, and while I share with everyone here enormous respect for the achievements and contributions of Americans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, this coalition forces acceptance of every aspect of transgenderism in order to be considered an ally of the others and that is wrong." Recall supporters [said](#): "When Trustee MacDonald ran for school board, she did not disclose these controversial views on the LGBTQIA+ community as a candidate for office."

North Carolina

General elections are being held on March 5 for three seats on the Durham Public Schools school board. Durham Public Schools is the ninth-largest district in North Carolina by enrollment, with an estimated 33,400 students. A special general election is also being held that day for the District 3 seat.

San Francisco to vote on 8th-grade math ballot measure

Last month, we previewed the [education-related statewide ballot measures](#) that voters will and could decide this year. Today, let's look at a local education measure on the ballot in the coming weeks in San Francisco, California.

A version of this story [appeared](#) last week in Ballotpedia's [Daily Brew](#) newsletter. Subscribe [here](#).

On March 5, San Francisco voters will decide [Proposition G](#), a measure that would make it the policy of San Francisco and San Francisco County to encourage the SFUSD to offer Algebra 1 to students by eighth grade. SFUSD students have taken Algebra I in 9th grade since 2015, when the district [implemented new math standards](#) with the stated intent of closing racial disparities and increasing Black and Hispanic success in math courses. According to the [U.S. Department of Education](#), 80% of eighth graders in the country had access to Algebra 1 during the 2015-2016 school year.

The SFUSD is the seventh-largest district in California, with [48,785 students](#) in the 2022-2023 school year. In the 2021-2022 school year, that number was [49,204](#).

Proposition G would not be binding on the SFUSD, which is governed independently of the city. A [seven-member elected board](#) governs the district.

Though the measure would not have any legal effect on the district, the board has already moved to roll back its algebra policy. On Feb. 13, the SFUSD board [voted 6-1](#) to fully re-institute algebra in 8th grade beginning in the 2026-27 school year. In the meantime, the district will run three [pilot programs](#) in select schools to collect data. Schools will either require algebra for all 8th-grade students, allow interested 8th-grade students to enroll in algebra, or provide algebra as an optional second math class open to all 8th graders.

According to a [presentation](#) the board shared before the vote: "Our approach to math has not led to improved outcomes in middle school and at all levels... SFUSD has not meaningfully increased participation of underrepresented students in high level mathematics in high school."

Supervisor Joel Engardio, who sponsored Proposition G, [said](#), "Parents don't trust the district's promise to bring back algebra over multiple years because they have seen school board plans go off the rails too often before. That's why Prop. G is necessary. Parents deserve to be heard. Kids in San Francisco deserve the same algebra taught in nearly every Bay Area city—and the school board needs to know our families won't settle for anything less."

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted 10-1 to place the measure on the ballot. Engardio [said](#), "In San Francisco, Algebra 1 is not offered until 9th grade. We stopped offering it in 8th grade because not every student was prepared for it. How is that a solution? We should do better to prepare all students for algebra — and not punish kids who can handle it earlier."

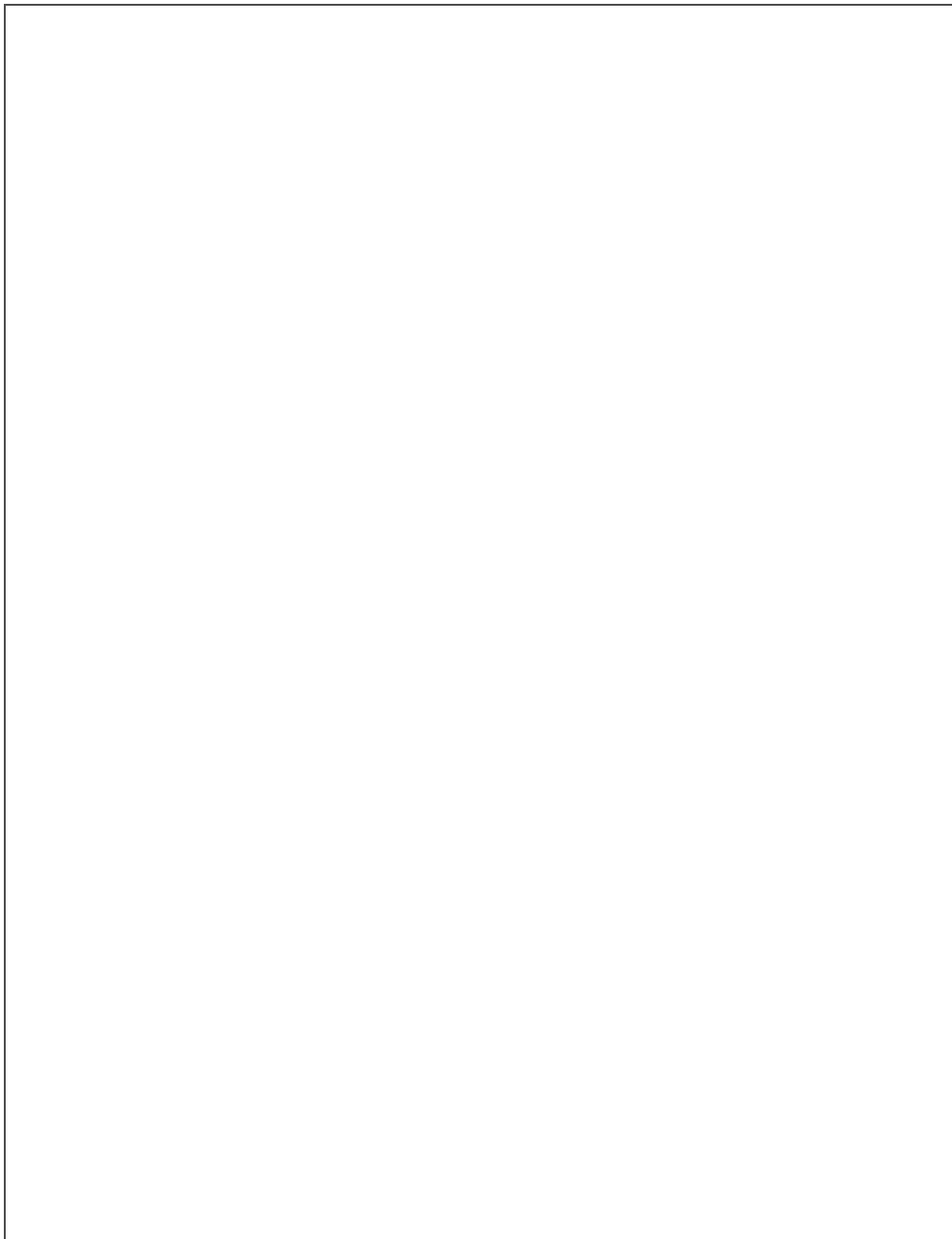
Supervisor Shamann Walton voted against the proposition, [saying](#), "I don't like misleading the voters in making them think that we're putting something on the ballot that has any teeth or that actually does anything, because this measure does not do anything."

The San Francisco Democratic, Republican, and Green parties [support](#) Proposition G.

We covered the debate over middle school algebra in the SFUSD in the [April 12, 2023](#), edition of *Hall Pass*. We also covered the debate over *tracking*—in which higher-performing students are grouped into separate, more challenging classes—in the [Aug. 3, 2022](#), edition.

Apart from Proposition G, San Francisco voters will decide on six other ballot measures on [March 5](#), including one bond measure, one charter amendment, and four ordinances.

From 2010 through 2022, San Francisco voters decided on 151 local ballot measures — an average of 14 per year, including odd and even-numbered election years. Voters approved 103 (68.21%) and defeated 48 (31.79%).



Extracurricular: education news from around the web

This section contains links to recent education-related articles from around the internet. If you know of a story we should be reading, reply to this email to share it with us!

- [Most Superintendents Try to Avoid Politics. This Group Encourages Them to Lean In](#) | *Education Week*
- [Embattled Utah school board member Natalie Cline met privately with GOP House leader](#) | *The Salt Lake Tribune*

- [Philadelphia Hopes Year-Round Schooling Can Catch Kids Up to Grade Level](#) | *The 74*
- [Florida is one of 18 states to allow corporal punishment in schools. Will it change?](#) | *Orlando Sentinel*
- [Cassidy report eyes potential child literacy legislation](#) | *Politico Pro*
- [Schools face big challenges accommodating migrants who've crossed the border](#) | *NPR*
- [How lockerless schools are shaping building design](#) | *K-12Dive*
- [How technology is reinventing education](#) | *Stanford Report*
- [Mass. commissioner of K-12 education to step down in March](#) | *WBUR*
- [The chronic absenteeism puzzle](#) | *The Hechinger Report*

Numbers of the week

- **Twenty-five** states have [enacted legislation](#) barring K-12 transgender students from playing on teams that reflect their gender identity.
- **Seven** states have passed laws requiring districts to provide [additional support](#) for students who struggle with math.
- In Washington on Feb. 13, voters [passed](#) **33%** of school bond measures in districts across the state.

Share candidate endorsements with us!

As part of our goal to solve the [ballot information problem](#), Ballotpedia is gathering information about school board candidate endorsements. The ballot information gap widens the further down the ballot you go, and is worst for the more than 500,000 local offices nationwide, such as school boards or special districts. Endorsements can help voters know more about their candidates and what they stand for.

Do you know of an individual or group that has endorsed a candidate in your district?

Click [here](#) to respond!

Take our Candidate Connection survey to reach voters in your district

Today, we're looking at responses from [Tracy McMillan](#) and [John Gadd](#), two of the four candidates running in the primary for [Alpine School District District 5](#) in Utah on June 25. McMillan and Gadd are the only candidates who have

completed the survey. Incumbent [Mark Clement](#) and [Alicia Alba](#) are also running in the election.

The [Alpine School District District](#) is the largest district in Utah, with an estimated enrollment of 83,500 students. The district is located south of Salt Lake City.

Here's how McMillan answered the question, **"What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?"**



"I am passionate about making sure that schools are funded in a way that provides the best opportunities for student growth and development, and that teachers are fairly and competitively compensated. I am also passionate about making sure that the public funds applied for education are used appropriately and that there is accountability to the taxpayers. I believe that there should be equal opportunities for students to succeed, whether that is in special education, advanced learning, athletics, art, etc. Access to special programs should be open to all."

Click [here](#) to read the rest of McMillan's responses.

Here's how Gadd answered the question, **"What areas of public policy are you personally passionate about?"**



"- My top priority is to stop Alpine School Board from raising our taxes
- We can avoid our taxes being raised if the board would cut wasteful spending from its billion-dollar annual budget
- The board should free up money in the budget to prioritize what matters most - great teaching!"

Click [here](#) to read the rest of Gadd's responses.

If you're a school board candidate or incumbent, click [here](#) to take the survey. If you're not running for school board, but there is an election in your community this year, [share the link](#) with the candidates and urge them to take the survey!

In the 2022 election cycle, **6,087** candidates completed the survey. The survey contains more than 30 questions, and you can choose the ones you

feel will best represent your views to voters. If you complete the survey, a box with your answers will display on your Ballotpedia profile. Your responses will also appear in our [sample ballot](#).

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