

Your Question:

You asked about states that have moved from an elected superintendent to an appointed one and the list of states with elected chiefs.

Our Response:

State education governance operates under various models, all of which feature a Chief State School Officer (CSSO). CSSOs are the top education officials overseeing K-12 public education systems, setting policies, implementing laws, and managing education budgets. CSSO titles vary by state, with common terms including State Superintendent of Education, Commissioner of Education, Secretary of Education, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. Typically, the CSSO oversees the state's public education system and leads the state's department of education. The methods for selecting CSSOs vary across states.

ECS identified several states with recent reforms or ongoing debates about transitioning from elected to appointed systems and states where such efforts have failed. Regarding governance change, Indiana successfully transitioned to an appointed superintendent system in 2020. The debates in Indiana over [switching from elected to appointed](#) education leadership center on balancing educational goals, aligning leadership with state executive priorities, and maintaining public accountability. Ohio's 2022 [Senate Bill 178](#) to transfer education board powers to a cabinet-level administrator is currently under House review. Meanwhile, California and Oklahoma introduced legislation in 2023 that was not enacted. In addition, Alabama and South Carolina voters rejected measures to move to an appointed model. The first two sections below provide an outline of more detailed state examples of efforts to move to appointed CSSOs.

Education Commission of the States most recent [50-State Comparison: K-12 Governance](#) outlines the different ways states and the District of Columbia govern their K-12 education systems, including a section specific to Chief State School Officers (CSSOs). The majority of states [appoint](#) the CSSO, either through the state board of education, the governor, or other executive bodies. The last two sections provide a summary of the CSSO selection methods including a list of states with elected CSSOs.

State that Successfully Transitioned to an Appointed Chief State School Officer

Indiana

Indiana switched from a directly elected to gubernatorial appointed governance model through [2020 legislation](#). [House Bill 1005](#) amended the measure to take effect in 2021. Indiana's constitution does not specify how the superintendent is selected, leaving it to the state legislature's discretion. The change was fast-tracked after then-Superintendent Jennifer McCormick announced she wouldn't seek re-election.

States with Unsuccessful Attempts

Alabama

In 2019, the Alabama Legislature passed [Senate Bill 397](#), proposing a constitutional amendment to restructure the state's education governance. In March 2020, [Alabama voters rejected Amendment 1](#), which proposed replacing the elected State Board of Education with a governor-appointed commission and the State Superintendent with an appointed Secretary of Education.

California

In 2023, the Assembly Constitutional Amendment ([ACA-9](#)) proposed to change the role of California's Superintendent of Public Instruction from an elected to an appointed position. As of November 2024, the [bill died](#) with no further committee action.

Ohio

[Senate Bill 178](#), introduced by Senator Bill Reineke in 2022, [proposed shifting](#) many of the board's powers to a cabinet-level administrator within the governor's office. The newly created position would lead a renamed Department of Education and Workforce with a division focused on career and technical education. The bill passed the Ohio Senate in 2022 and was introduced to the Ohio House and referred to the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee the same year. It remains under committee consideration.

Oklahoma

Governor Kevin Stitt [proposed a public vote](#) to make Oklahoma's State Superintendent of Public Instruction an appointed position to align with the growing national trend. In 2019, [House Joint Resolution \(H.J.R. 1011\)](#) was introduced to make the Superintendent of Public Instruction an appointed office. It was introduced again in 2023 under [H.J.R. 1030](#) but it was not acted upon or approved before the legislature ended its session.

South Carolina

In 2018, [South Carolina voters rejected Amendment 1](#), a ballot measure proposed through [HJR 3146](#), which proposed shifting the position from being elected by voters to being appointed by the governor, with the consent of the state Senate.

A Breakdown of Chief State School Officer Selection Methods

- 21 are appointed by their state's board of education.
- 16 are appointed by the state governor.
- 12 are elected by the public.
- Massachusetts, appointed by the secretary of education from state board nominees.
- New York elects the CSSO through a majority vote of the regents.
- Oregon, the governor directly serves as the superintendent of education.

12 states with elected CSSOs

- Arizona
- California
- Georgia

- Idaho
- Montana
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- Washington
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

Additional Resources:

Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama analysis: outlines various state governance models for selecting boards of education and superintendents, analyzing their implications and providing context for Alabama’s current elected board system and recent reform debates.

Tennessee Municipal League analysis: Outlines the historical shift in Tennessee from electing school superintendents to appointing them. It details the arguments for and against both methods, the legislative efforts that led to the change and the impact of this transition on the state's education system

NASBE State Education Governance Matrix: Most recent (updated July 2024) and quick reference for state education governance structures and state board authorities.