AESA STATE EXAMINER | SPECIAL EDITION
From the Statehouse to the Schoolhouse

The 2026 State Election Wave: What Changed in the Statehouses, and What It Means for K–12 Education and ESAs

Association of Educational Service Agencies | November 7, 2026

Preliminary results. This edition reflects unofficial returns and media race calls available through November 7, 2026. Some races are still being counted, close contests may go to recounts, and every state must still canvass and certify its results. Figures from different trackers were captured at different times and may not match exactly. Please confirm details with your secretary of state or state election office before acting on them. In this edition, "ESA" means educational service agency.

24 → 30	13	16 → 22	164
Democratic governors, counting leads in Kansas and Alaska	Legislative chambers moving to Democratic control (NCSL)	Democratic trifectas; Republican trifectas fall from 23 to 18	Statewide ballot measures in 40 states

Introduction and Pre-Election Landscape

On November 3, voters chose 36 governors, filled more than 6,100 legislative seats in 46 states, and decided more than 160 statewide ballot measures. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Republicans went into Election Day holding 26 governorships to 24 for Democrats, 57 legislative chambers to 39, and 23 trifectas to 16. Education was also on the ballot in a direct way. The Education Commission of the States counted eight elected state school chiefs, a record number of education-related ballot measures, and 21 states guaranteed to get a new governor, the most turnover in at least a decade.

The result was the largest single-election shift of state partisan power since 2010. For ESAs, this matters because governors and legislatures write the school funding formulas, appoint many state chiefs and board members, and set the rules for regional service delivery. Many of the people making those decisions in 2027 will be new to their roles. This makes education of incoming policymakers an important advocacy strategy.

Governors

Democrats flipped five Republican-held governorships, in Georgia, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio, and Texas, and Republicans flipped none. Two races were still uncalled at review: Kansas, where Democrat Cindy Holscher led Republican Ty Masterson 50.3% to 49.7% per NPR/AP returns, and Alaska, where Democrat Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins led with about 74% of votes counted under ranked-choice rules (CNN). If those leads hold, Democrats will hold 30 governorships to 20 for Republicans, their first majority since before 2010. Our election-night tracker, which uses the AP feed, showed the same pattern: 34 of 36 races called and a net Democratic gain of five.

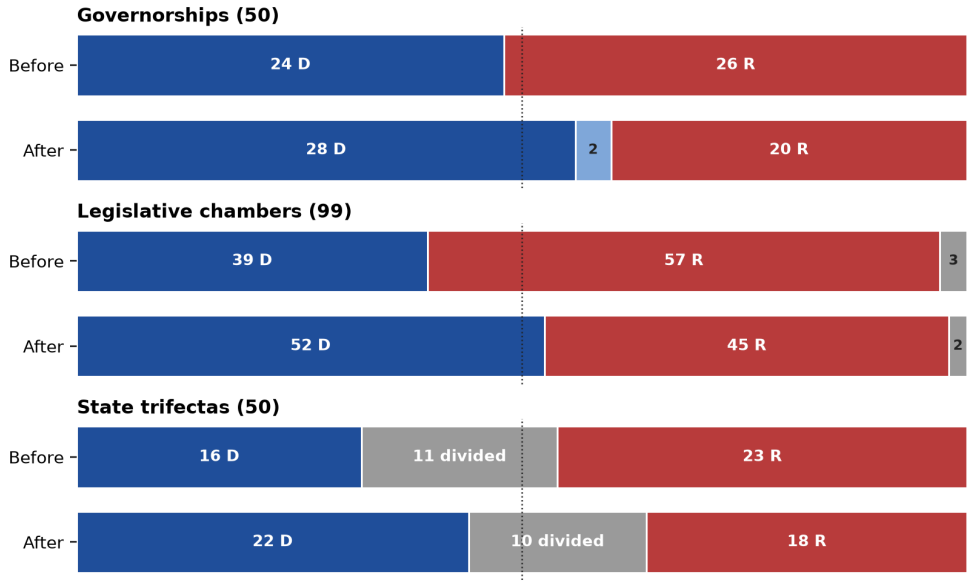


Figure 1. Partisan control before and after the 2026 election. Dotted line marks a majority. Governors: light blue = Kansas and Alaska, uncalled with Democrats leading. Chambers: gray = Alaska coalition and, before the election, the tied Minnesota House; NCSL counts 52 Democratic chambers (Republican and other values derived). Trifectas follow Axios; NCSL counts 23 D and 17 R because it classifies Nebraska's nonpartisan legislature differently.

State	Result (unofficial)	Why it matters for schools
Texas	Gina Hinojosa (D) defeats Gov. Greg Abbott, 52.8%–45.7%	First Democratic governor since the 1990s. She has called for repealing the state's new education savings account (voucher) program and will appoint a new education commissioner.
Georgia	Keisha Lance Bottoms (D), 54.3%	Campaigned on fully funding Georgia Pre-K and raising teacher pay; Democrats also won the state school superintendent race.
Ohio	Amy Acton (D), 52.3%	Ends the Republican trifecta; she is expected to name a new state superintendent. Democrats won four of five statewide executive offices.
Iowa	Rob Sand (D), 55.5%	Divided government; he is likely to replace the appointed education director and has criticized the state's private-school choice programs.
Nevada	Aaron Ford (D) defeats Gov. Joe Lombardo	Creates a Democratic trifecta; Ford is reviewing whether Nevada should stay in the federal scholarship tax credit.

Other Statewide Offices

The wave reached down the ballot. NCSL reports that secretary of state offices in Georgia, Indiana, and Ohio flipped to Democrats; in Ohio, Allison Russo won with 50.3%. In Texas, Democrats swept every statewide office, including the comptroller, the office that runs the state's new education savings account program. Of the eight elected state chiefs, four changed hands or were open seats with new winners:

State	Chief state school officer result	Note
Georgia	Lydia Powell (D) unseats Richard Woods (R), 54.6%–45.4%	First Democratic state superintendent since the 1990s
Arizona	Teresa Leyba Ruiz (D) over Kimberly Yee (R), AP call	Will oversee one of the largest universal education savings account programs
California	Richard Barrera wins; Sonja Shaw concedes	Office has a redefined role starting in 2027
Oklahoma / Wyoming	Robert Franklin (R) wins open seat	OK: third-grade retention rule starts 2027–28
	Steve Harshman (R) wins open seats	WY: debate over the new funding "silo" model
Idaho	Debbie Critchfield (R), 61.6%	Incumbent returned
South Carolina	Ellen Weaver (R)	Incumbent returned
N.D.	Levi Bachmeier	Incumbent returned

Appointed chiefs will change too. New governors in Texas, Iowa, Ohio, and possibly Nevada are expected to name new education leaders, and up to 16 states could have new K–12 leadership by January, according to Whiteboard Advisors.

State Legislatures

NCSL counts 13 chambers moving into Democratic control, raising the Democratic total from 39 to 52 and giving Democrats control of 25 legislatures to 21 for Republicans, with four divided. Republicans flipped no chambers. Changes confirmed or reported include both chambers in Arizona, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin; the Michigan, Minnesota (previously tied), North Carolina, and Texas Houses; and the Pennsylvania Senate. Democrats also won the Georgia House for the first time in 22 years. Control of the Alaska House and North Carolina Senate was still uncalled as of November 6; bipartisan coalitions say they will run both Alaska chambers.

Supermajorities shifted as well. Axios reported that Democrats broke 11 Republican supermajorities, including in the Iowa and Kansas Houses, and built veto-proof majorities in both Vermont chambers and the New Hampshire House. AP reports that in Iowa, Ohio, and North Carolina, Republicans will now need Democratic votes to override a governor's veto. Missouri and Utah Republicans kept their majorities but lost supermajority status. NCSL expects nearly half of all chambers to have new leaders next session.

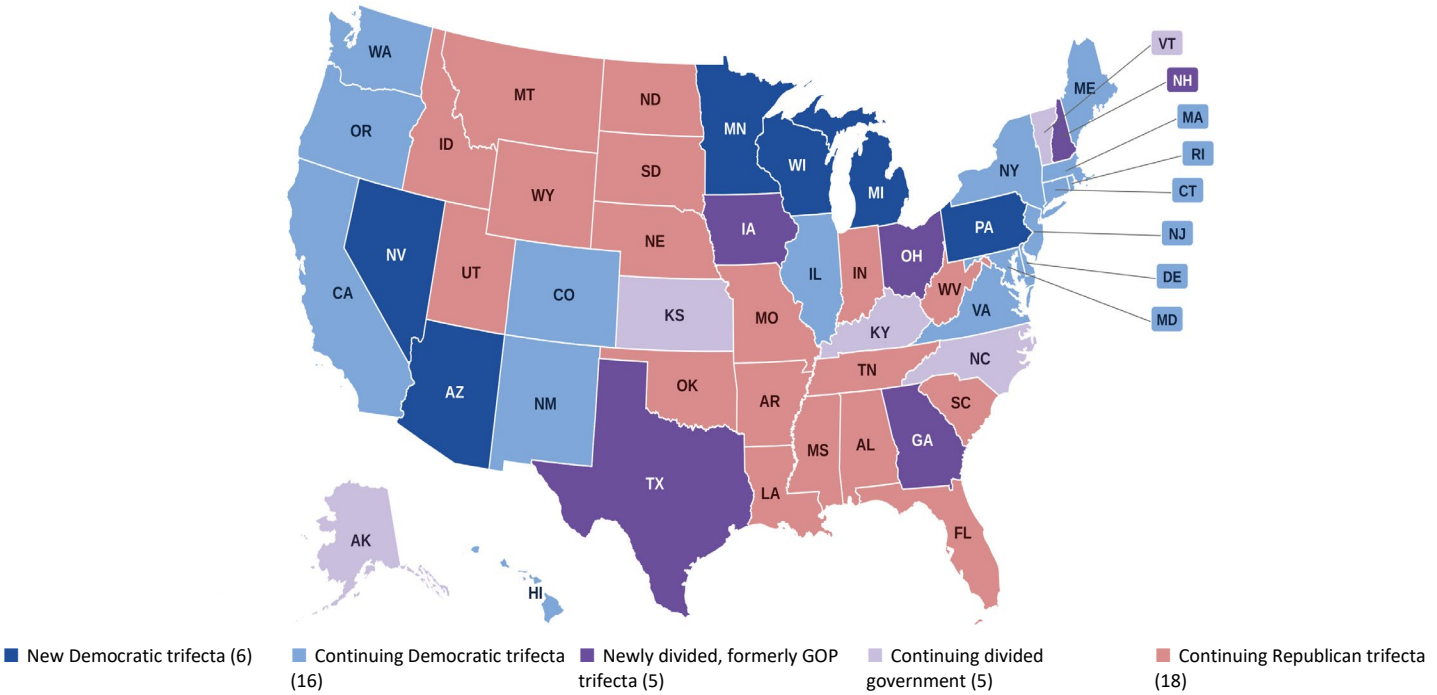


Figure 2. Party control of state government after the 2026 election (preliminary). Kansas stays divided if Holscher wins but becomes a Republican trifecta if Masterson wins; Alaska stays coalition-governed. Sources: NCSL, Ballotpedia, MultiState. Boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau via us-atlas. This map was A.I. generated from the referenced sources.

Ballot Measures

Ballotpedia identified 164 statewide measures certified in 40 states. Education Week followed 32 school-funding questions in 20 states. The overall message was mixed. Voters added school revenue in several states, adopted new tax limits in others, and rejected some of the most aggressive tax cuts. An NCSL analysis noted, voters rebuked the party in power "but not necessarily conservative types of policy decisions". ***This is an important distinction for education advocates to understand.***

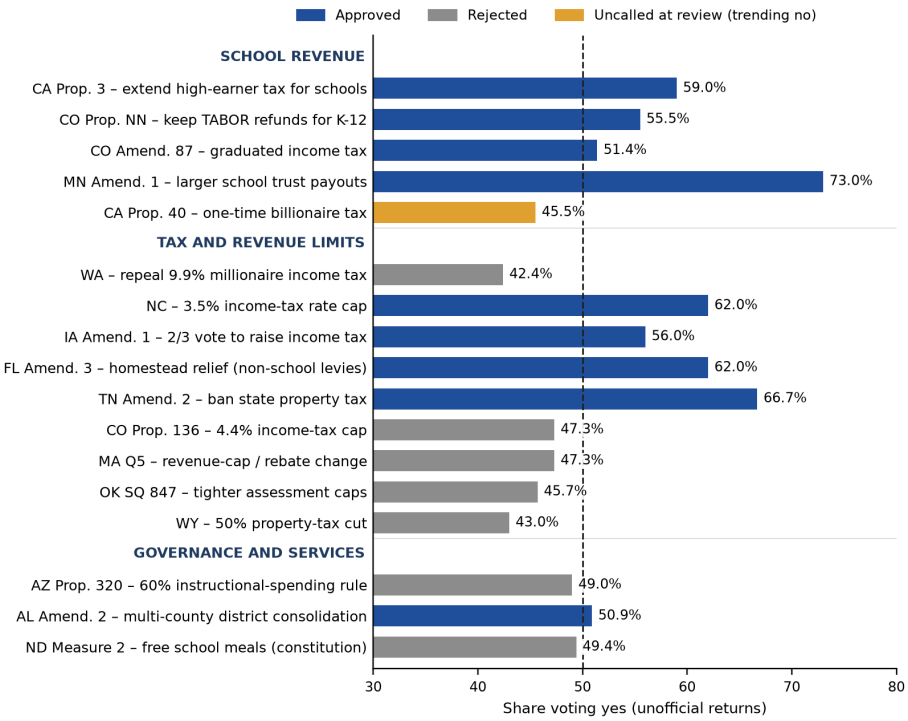


Figure 3. Selected school-finance, tax, and governance measures, share voting yes. Florida Amendment 3 needed 60%. North Dakota Measure 2 support is reported between 44% and 49% depending on source and timing. Sources: AP, Education Week, Colorado Sun, CalMatters/KPBS, KSTP, Iowa Public Radio, WBUR, Alabama Reporter. Graphic is AI generated drawing from the reference resources.

- **New school revenue:** California made its high-earner income tax permanent (Prop. 3, 59%), Colorado approved a graduated income tax worth about $2 billion a year plus Proposition NN, which sends TABOR refunds to K–12, and Minnesota increased payouts from its permanent school fund.
- **New limits on future revenue:** North Carolina capped its income-tax rate at 3.5%, Iowa now requires a two-thirds legislative vote to raise income taxes, and Tennessee banned a state property tax. These rules will shape school budgets for years.
- **Governance and culture issues:** Alabama approved a process for county school systems to merge (50.9%). Arizona rejected a mandate to spend 60% of budgets on narrowly defined instruction, and North Dakota rejected constitutional free meals. Sex-based school sports measures passed in Arizona, Colorado, Nebraska, and Washington (AP; SAN).
- **Local levies:** According to the Education Week analysis, results were uneven. Wisconsin passed 45 of 79 operating referenda. Virginia localities approved a new school-construction sales tax in 15 of 47 votes. Only 5 of 39 new school-district income taxes passed in Ohio, while 51 of 63 renewals succeeded.

So, What Does this All Mean?: Implications for K–12 Education and ESAs

1. Budgets will be tight, even where new leaders want to spend more.

States enter 2027 in what NASBO calls a "generally stable but more constrained" fiscal environment, with revenue growth of about 2–3%. As pointed out in previous State Examiner editions, most governors proposed flat general-fund budgets for FY 2027, and nearly half of states were making some cuts. New governors also inherit federal Medicaid and SNAP cost shifts thanks to the Congressionally passed “One Big Beautiful Bill”. ESAs should expect K–12 to compete with health and human services. Leaders should make the case early and in terms of cost savings. ***Be one of the first to meet with incoming policymakers.***

2. Divided government means more vetoes and more negotiation.

Georgia, Iowa, Ohio, Texas, and New Hampshire move from one-party control to divided government. In those states, expect fewer sweeping bills and more deals made through the budget. ***Practical, bipartisan ESA proposals, such as shared services, workforce pipelines, and rural support, are well suited to this environment.*** Work to find consensus based proposals in which each side can claim victory.

3. School choice moves from expansion to accountability.

New Democratic governors inherit established education savings account and voucher programs in Georgia, Iowa, Texas, and Ohio. Arizona Democrats now have the votes to try to cap their universal program. The near-term debate will likely center on funding, eligibility, oversight, and reporting. Separately, 32 states have opted into the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit, which starts January 1, 2027. States must file an advance election by January 1 and a list of scholarship-granting organizations by February 15. Outgoing governors can lock in 2027 participation, and governors-elect in Colorado and Nevada have signaled skepticism. Whatever a state decides, ***ESAs can position themselves as partners for any public-school tutoring and services the EFTC credit may fund. AESA can assist.***

4. Leadership turnover resets relationships.

New governors, state chiefs, and legislative leaders mean many new people to brief. ECS found that at least 28 education committee chairs would not return in 2027. This is a key moment to introduce ESAs as the state's regional delivery system. That means agencies such as Texas ESCs, Pennsylvania intermediate units, Iowa AEAs, Wisconsin CESAs, Michigan ISDs, Georgia RESAs, and Ohio ESCs. In Pennsylvania, a unified government may end the run of late budgets that has strained intermediate units and districts.

5. Ballot results create implementation work for ESAs.

Alabama's consolidation amendment, Colorado's new revenue, North Carolina's levy limits, and New Hampshire's local caps on school property taxes all need rules and analysis. Check the initiatives passed in your respective states. ***ESAs can offer feasibility studies, fiscal modeling, and shared-service designs that turn these measures into workable plans.***

6. The federal picture changes, too.

Democrats will control both houses of Congress and their appropriations committees in January. Congress still has to act on FY 2027 funding by December 11, a decision that affects Title I and IDEA. ***Keep an eye on both the lame-duck spending deal and early-2027 oversight of Education Department interagency agreements.***

Watch List: Lame Duck and Early 2027

- Final calls and certification in Kansas and Alaska (governor), the Alaska House, and the North Carolina Senate, plus any recounts.
- Federal tax credit opt-in decisions by January 1 and SGO lists by February 15, especially where the governor is changing.

- Nominations for state chiefs in Texas, Iowa, Ohio, and Nevada, and new state board appointments.
- FY 2027–28 budget proposals, including how states handle Medicaid and SNAP cost shifts and new tax limits.
- Proposals on education savings account and voucher accountability in Arizona, Texas, Georgia, Iowa, and Ohio, and implementation of Alabama's school consolidation process are leading examples.

Bottom Line

Voters changed who holds power in many statehouses, but they did not clearly endorse a single policy agenda. They approved new school revenue in some states and new tax limits in others. For ESAs, the opportunity is real but narrow. Budgets are tight, government is divided in several key states, and hundreds of new decision-makers are coming in. ***ESAs that brief these new leaders early, bring nonpartisan and cost-effective proposals, and show what regional services deliver will be best positioned for the 2027 sessions.***

For state-specific details, please check your secretary of state's official results, your state ESA association, and resources such as the ECS Statewide Elections Dashboard, NCSL, and the NGA elections page.

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