



# **GUIDE TO YOUR STATE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

Edtech Advocacy Toolkit

**DECEMBER 2019**

## Purpose of the Guide

This document was developed to assist education advocacy organizations maximize their impact by developing and cultivating relationships with key state leaders — state board of education, state education agency, governor’s office and state legislature. Although state leadership structures vary from state to state, as shown by [this analysis from the Education Commission of the States \(ECS\)](#), there are some commonalities. The roles of state leaders, as well as tips on how to engage them, are explained below.

## State Board of Education

### KEY FUNCTIONS

The size and composition of your state’s board will vary. They are as small as seven members and as large as 21 (e.g. [Pennsylvania](#)). Many have student members, who may serve shorter terms and may not have voting rights. The board chair (i.e. president) typically wields the most power, including setting the monthly agenda, leading meetings and governing the board.

While boards do not typically commit funding, they serve as an influential policymaking body. State boards of education are charged with a variety of key functions, including:

- Adopting statewide education standards, including ISTE Standards (e.g. [Connecticut](#))
- Establishing graduation requirements
- Determining qualifications for administrators, teachers and other education personnel
- Establishing state accountability goals
- Approving preparation programs for teachers and administrators
- Establishing and approving state assessment programs
- Establishing standards for accreditation of local school districts
- Implementing federal education laws and regulations (e.g. [ESSA](#))
- Administering federal assistance programs

### ADVOCACY TIPS

Board meeting agendas and minutes are public. Stay abreast of ongoing discussions on key issues such as standards adoption, state edtech plan development, assessments and teacher credentialing. Boards may also have both standing and advisory committees that align to your policy priorities. Engage with committee members whose backgrounds and professional experiences demonstrate most interest in edtech and its implications for teaching and learning.

## State Education Agency

### KEY FUNCTIONS

The state education agency — often referred to as the state department of education — is responsible for various functions that vary significantly from state to state. Generally, the state education agency is responsible for the following:

- Overseeing publicly-funded schools, including traditional school districts, charter schools, pre-schools, vocational schools and state schools (e.g. Governor’s School)
- Overseeing (in most states) state colleges/universities, public libraries and education for incarcerated youth
- Offering services and advisory counsel to local and regional educational agencies
- Evaluating and continuously improving educational programs
- Providing in-service professional development on best practices for educators

### STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

The state superintendent of public instruction (called “commissioner” or “director” in some states) is the chief education officer for the state. In most states, this position is appointed by the governor, the state board of education or the state legislature. In other states, the state superintendent is elected directly by voters.

In many states, the state superintendent is a member of the state board of education, often serving as the chair, executive director and/or secretary. In some states, the state superintendent is an advisory (i.e. non-voting) member of the board. ECS maintains [a list](#) of the state superintendent’s role within the state board.

Responsibilities of the state superintendent include leading the state education agency, directing the implementation of education policies to improve school performance and providing guidance and counsel to school districts. Visit the Council of Chief State School Officers ([CCSSO](#)) website to learn about who your state superintendent is.

### STATE EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR

Although the role has a variety of names across states, the state’s education technology director is an important advisor to the state superintendent and state education agency. Education technology directors oversee number of state programs and initiatives involving broadband connectivity, hardware and software, STEM, online and blended learning and data privacy and management. You can learn more about your education technology director’s specific roles on through the State Educational Technology Directors Association ([SETDA](#)).

### ADVOCACY TIPS

Engage with members of the state education agency to learn about the implementation of policies regarding key issues such as standards adoption, state edtech plan development, assessments and teacher credentialing. State education agencies, through their websites, may

also request public comments on many of these items. Advocates may also request that the state education agency publish guidance informing local school boards and education agencies regarding best practices for leveraging edtech for teaching and learning. For example, see the [Digital Learning Guidelines](#) published by the Wyoming Department of Education.

## Governor's Office

### KEY FUNCTIONS

The governor is the head of the state government's executive branch. In some states, the governor is assisted and counseled by a cabinet-level secretary of education, the state superintendent and one or more education policy advisors. The governors' responsibilities concerning education include setting education policy priorities for the state, introducing or vetoing education legislation and recommending annual budgets.

### ADVOCACY TIPS

Good legislation and policy directives often begin from the **governor's education policy advisors**. Engage with the advisors to learn more about your state's current edtech policy priorities. Advocates may represent the voices of state educators by requesting adjustments to those priorities and the state budget in advance of each legislative session.

## State Legislature

### KEY FUNCTIONS

The legislature's responsibilities and the legislative process can vary from state to state. However, all have the primary responsibility to pass laws, including annual budgets, which must pass both chambers (i.e. House and Senate) of the state legislature (aside from Nebraska, which has a unicameral legislature) prior to the governor's approval. In many states, the legislative branch also acts in an oversight capacity for functions of the executive branch.

The state's House and Senate each have an education committee, an appropriations committee and ad hoc committees that advise legislative deliberations. Committee chairs, members and staffers are important stakeholders in the process.

The legislative process flowchart shown in the appendix shows the process by which legislation is introduced, debated, modified, reconciled and enacted in state government. Although there are differences between states, the process shown is representative of most legislatures.

### ADVOCACY TIPS

When a bill of interest is introduced, it is ideal to track it through one of many services that are available. Tracking legislation will allow you to see its movement through both chambers, changes to the language and hearings and votes on the bill among other activities.

You can use “Find Legislation” search bar on ISTE’s [advocacy page](#) to look up legislation. The [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) (NCSL) also maintains a free comprehensive searchable database of education legislation. It includes full text versions and history of all enacted legislation going back to 2008.

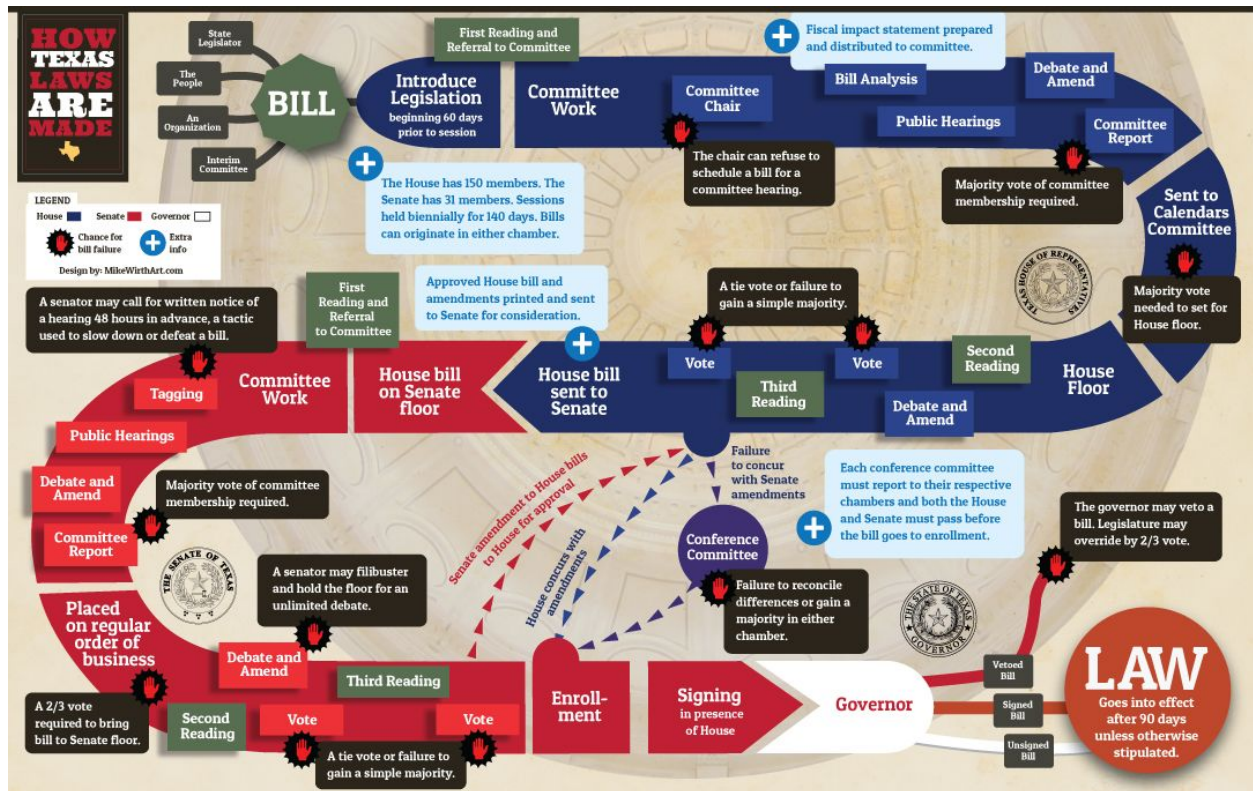
One of the most influential figures in the legislative process is the bill’s sponsor(s). The sponsor(s) champions the bill through both chambers and is regularly consulted for leadership and authority on the bill’s provisions. Take the time to introduce yourself and make your opinions known, ideally when the bill has been filed or as soon as possible after the bill is introduced. Most sponsors will appreciate your active engagement, subject matter knowledge and interest.

Committee hearings and floor debate on the bill are important events for understanding the key factors that legislators weigh as they consider the passage of each bill. These are also opportunities to identify and engage legislators aside from the sponsor with whom you should share your perspectives.

### Summary of State Advocacy Strategies

1. Cultivate relationships with key state leaders and become recognized as a valued thought leader on edtech policy.
2. Attend state board meetings and committee hearings that address key policy issues.
3. Serve on one or more committees, typically composed of subject matter experts (e.g. industry, education and community leaders), who advise the state board or education agency on edtech policy.
4. Leverage social media, email, your organization’s website and other platforms to make your voice heard. Refer to resources on [ISTE’s advocacy toolkit](#) to help this process.

## Appendix: State Legislative Flowchart



Open source retrieved 2/28/2018 from <http://www.texascooppower.com>, Texas Co-Op Power, 2013.