School + State Finance Project

GUIDE TO YOUR LOCAL AND STATE LEADERS

Local and state officials play a significant role in shaping our communities, making a wide range of decisions that affect our daily lives.

Still, **voter turnout for local elections is frequently low**. Fewer voters can mean outcomes are less likely to reflect the priorities and interests of the entire community.

Our guide is intended to give an overview of:

- Elected positions at the local and state levels
- Participating at the local and state level
- Familiarizing yourself with candidates running for office
- Voter information resources

ELECTION CYCLE IN CONNECTICUT

Every year there is an election of some kind in Connecticut. The general election always happens the Tuesday following the first Monday in November. Local elections happen during odd-numbered years while state elections occur in even-numbered years.

Odd-Numbered Years	**Local Offices** (e.g. Mayor, Town Council, Board of Education, etc.)
Even-Numbered Years	**State Offices** (e.g. Governor, State Senator, State Representative, etc.)

Before the general elections, there is a **primary election**. These elections help to determine which candidates are on the ballot for state and national office. These elections are **closed elections**. Meaning you can only vote in the primaries for a party you are already registered with. Unaffiliated voters **cannot vote in a primary**.

Primary election dates can vary. For the most up to date information, check out the Office of the Secretary of the State's election calendars.

LOCAL LEADERS

Connecticut has 169 cities and towns, each with their own local government. The most common forms of local government include:

Selectman-Town Meeting: The First Selectman is elected by a town's voters and is responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the local government. Towns may have an open or representative town meeting that serves as the legislative body for the town. In an Open Town Meeting, all of the town's voters may vote on all matters. A Representative Town Meeting means residents elect Town Meeting Members who vote on their behalf.

Council-Manager: The town/city council consists of elected members who serve as the municipality's legislative body. A town or city manager is hired by the council to run the day-to-day operations of the local government.

Mayor-Council: The mayor is directly elected and recognized as the formal head of the local government. The powers of a mayor vary greatly depending on local laws. The town/city council are also elected officials who serve as the municipality's legislative body.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL LEADERS

For the following questions, you can find the information at the Office of the Secretary of the State's website.

What **form of government** does your town/city have?

_____

Who serves as your **town's legislative body**?

_____

Who administers the **day-to-day operations** of your town?

_____

When is the **next election** for your local leaders?

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Who is on the **ballot** for the next election?

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LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

Local boards of education derive their power and authority from the State of Connecticut. As agents of the State, local boards of education have a direct impact on the education of K-12 students in their district.

Local boards of education vary in size and members may be elected, appointed, or both. The **board of education** is responsible for setting the vision and direction of the school district through governance, policy, and financial oversight. Key responsibilities include:

- Appointing and evaluating the superintendent, who leads the school district's day-to-day operations.
- Establishing committees to focus on specific areas such as finance, policy, curriculum, and facilities.
- Reviewing and adopting the annual school budget before submitting it to the city council or other local governing body for approval.
- Setting district policies and priorities that guide decision-making and student outcomes.
- Providing oversight and accountability to ensure the district is meeting its educational goals and serving students effectively.

ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDEDNT

The superintendent is the **board's chief executive officer** and is responsible for the school system's day-to-day operations.

While responsibilities vary by district, key areas of leadership often include:

- Overseeing district personnel and administration.
- Hiring principals and senior leadership staff, including curriculum and instructional leaders.
- Managing district finances in partnership with the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or the district's financial team.
- Building relationships with families, staff, and the broader community.
- Leading policy implementation and district-wide initiatives.
- Representing the district at the local, state, and national levels.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

For the following questions, you can find this information on your school district's or township's website.

Who is your school district's **superintendent**?

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Who is your school district's **chief financial officer**?

_____

Who serves on your **board of education**? When do their terms expire?

_____

_____

_____

_____

When is your next local board of education **election**? (Board terms are typically staggered, meaning not all members are elected at the same time. This helps provide continuity and consistency in leadership over time.)

_____

Who is on the ballot for the next election?

_____

PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Local government and board of education meetings are generally open to the public. Meeting date, time, and location, as well as the agenda, can be found on your town/city's website.

When and where does your town/city legislative body meet?

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How can you view their meetings? *In-person, virtual, or hybrid?*

_____

When and where does your board of education meet?

_____

How can you view their meetings? *In-person, virtual, or hybrid?*

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Members of the public may participate during the public comment session. **Make sure to check your town's website for the public comment procedure.** *Do you have to register ahead of time? Is there a time limit for speaking?*

If you are unable to attend a meeting, you can check to see if recordings and meeting minutes are available on your town/city's website.

STATE LEADERS

The governor holds the highest office in state government. The lieutenant governor is the second highest government official in Connecticut. Both the governor and lieutenant governor serve four-year terms and there are no term limits in Connecticut. The governor and lieutenant governor are elected jointly.

Governor: As the head of the Executive Branch, the governor is responsible for administering and enforcing state laws. The governor proposes the state budget, which is then adjusted and approved by the General Assembly. The governor also has the authority to sign, veto, or take no action on bills that are passed by the General Assembly.

Lieutenant Governor: The lieutenant governor is the President of the Senate. In the event of the governor's death, resignation, or removal from office, the lieutenant governor would become the governor.

STATE LEADERS

The **Connecticut General Assembly (CGA)** is the Legislative Branch of the State of Connecticut. The CGA is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The CGA is responsible for passing laws concerning education, the environment, housing, public health, the collection and allocation of funds, and other matters.

Senate: There are 36 members in the Connecticut Senate. Senators are elected in even-numbered years from the districts where they live. Senators serve for two-year terms and there are no term limits. The lieutenant governor is the President of the Senate and presides over deliberations. The lieutenant governor may only cast a vote in the event of a tie.

House of Representatives: There are 151 members in the Connecticut House of Representatives. Representatives are elected in even-numbered years from the districts where they live. Representatives serve for two-year terms and there are no term limits. Members of the House elect a Speaker who presides over deliberations.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STATE LEADERS

For the following questions, you can find your representatives and their information at the Connecticut General Assembly's website.

Who is the **Governor**?

_____

Who is the **Lieutenant Governor**?

_____

Who is your **State Senator**?

_____

Who is your **State Representative**?

_____

What **committee(s)** does your Senator and Representative serve on?

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_____

When is the next statewide **election**?

_____

PARTICIPATION AT THE STATE LEVEL

There are a number of ways to make your voice heard at the state level. Before voting on legislative matters, legislative committees hold public hearings to listen to input and testimony from the public.

Currently, these committees hold **hybrid public hearings** during the legislative session to receive testimony from the public. To learn when they meet, visit the Connecticut General Assembly's website.

1. To participate in a hearing, first you will need to **register**. Use the calendar, bulletin, and public hearing agenda on the CGA's website to find deadlines and instructions on registration.
2. During hearings you can testify either **in-person or on Zoom.**
3. When it's your turn, you will have **three minutes** to testify.

If public speaking isn't your thing, you can also **submit written testimony** through the committee webpage.

Need help writing your testimony?
Reach out to us at info@schoolstatefinance.org

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT A CANDIDATE?

There are a number of ways to learn more about candidates and where they stand on issues that are important to you and your community.

- Attend a public meeting such as a candidate debate, forum, or town hall.
- Email questions to candidates.
- Check out a candidate's website and social media accounts.
- Read through campaign materials.
- Follow the local and state news.
- Research a candidate's voting history (if they have been elected before)
- Consult nonpartisan resources online.
- Talk to your family, friends, and neighbors.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

To get you started, we've generated some sample questions to ask candidates about their stances on education. You can use the same format to ask about other issues that are also important to you.

- What do you think are the most significant issues affecting public education?
- What are your top priorities for education?
- How will you support equitable funding for all students?
- How will you advocate at the state level to advance equitable funding for all students?
- How will you involve the community in decision-making?

CANDIDATE GUIDE

Make a list of issues that are important to you. After doing some research, fill in each's candidate's position on the issue.

Race for: _____

Issue	Candidate A: _____	Candidate B: _____	Candidate C: _____

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Absentee Voting:
Voting without going to a polling place in person, typically by mail or through another approved method.

Accountability:
The process of holding individuals, organizations, or government officials responsible for their actions and decisions.

Activism:
Actions taken to create social, political, or community change, often by raising awareness, organizing others, or advocating for solutions.

Advocacy:
Speaking up for a cause, issue, or change in your school, community, or government.

Ballot:
A list of candidates, questions, or proposed laws that voters use to make their choices in an election.

Budget:
A plan that outlines how money will be raised, spent, and allocated to meet community or government needs.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Candidate:
A person seeking to be elected to a government position or public office.

Civic Duty:
Responsibilities that help support a healthy community and democracy, such as voting, serving on a jury, or following laws.

Civic Engagement:
Being involved in your community and participating in activities that help improve society or influence decisions.

Civic Rights:
The rights and protections people have as members of a community or country, such as the right to vote, speak freely, and participate in government.

Constituent:
A person who lives, works, or pays taxes in the area represented by an elected official.

Constituency:
The group of people represented by an elected official.

District (or Ward):
A specific geographic area represented by an elected official.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Early Voting:
The opportunity to vote in person before Election Day during a designated voting period.

Election:
The process by which people vote to choose leaders or decide on laws, policies, or public questions.

Incumbent:
The person who currently holds a political office and may be running for re-election.

Legislation:
Laws that are proposed, debated, and passed by elected officials.

Platform:
A set of beliefs, goals, and policy priorities that guide a candidate or political party.

Political Party:
An organized group of people who share similar beliefs about government and work to elect candidates who support those ideas.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Policy:
A plan, rule, or course of action created by government or organizations to address issues or guide decisions.

Polling Place:
The location where people go to vote in person on Election Day or during early voting.

Public Comment:
Time during a meeting when community members can share opinions or concerns with decision-makers.

Public Meeting:
A meeting that is open to community members where government officials discuss issues, make decisions, and/or gather public input.

Referendum:
A vote by the public on a specific law or policy proposal.

Vote:
To make a choice in an election or decision-making process.

Voter Registration:
The process of signing up and confirming eligibility to vote in elections.

RESOURCES

For more information on voting, check out the **Office of the Secretary of the State's website**. Here you can find the most up-to-date information on items such as:

- **Registering to Vote:** voterregistration.ct.gov
- **Voter Registration Lookup:** portaldir.ct.gov/sots/LookUp.aspx
- **Early Voting:** portal.ct.gov/sots/election-services/early-voting/early-voting
- **Absentee Voting:** https://portal.ct.gov/sots/election-services/voter-information/absentee-voting

For additional voting tools and information on your voting rights, visit some of the sites below:

- **League of Women Voters:** www.lwv.org
- **Rock the Vote:** www.rockthevote.org
- **Vote.org**: www.vote.org
- **Vote411**: www.vote411.org