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Big P and Little P Politics: Contemporary and Enduring Challenges for K-12 School Board Members

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Big P and Little P Politics:
Contemporary and Enduring Challenges for K-12 School Board Members

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Abstract
School board service has become more complex in the current era of heightened partisan polarization and the nationalization of education. This mixed-methods paper draws on interviews with and a statewide survey of board members in California, and the theory of emotional labor. We explore how members experience contemporary national issues ("Big P Politics"), and everyday challenges of managing local power dynamics with constituents, interest groups, and colleagues ("little p politics"). Although Big P Politics created challenges, these issues did not predict reelection intent. In contrast, little p politics generated some of the greatest struggles and were associated with lower rates of planning to pursue reelection. We find suggestive evidence this was due to the emotional toll of navigating little p politics.

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Introduction

As of the turn of the 20th century, U.S. school boards were designed to insulate K-12 schools from national, patronage, and partisan politics (Kirst, 2004; Manna & McGuinn, 2013; Tyack, 1974). Despite this intent, politics have always influenced the day-to-day work of school board members (SBMs). Across history, school boards have been sites of conflict and an arena in which broader social issues play out - be it struggles over school integration or the teaching of evolution (Frankenberg & Diem, 2015; Slack, 2007). Boards have also regularly contended with local politics, managing relations with constituents, interest groups, and other educational officials, building local coalitions to advance policies or local bonds, or arbitrating on labor disputes or contested expansion of school choice (Howell, 2005).

In recent years, however, the role of boards appears to have become increasingly politically complex, with national culture war issues playing out in local education policy arenas - including issues related to teaching race and racism, LGBTQ+ issues, and book bans (Brookings, 2021; Collins, 2023; Kogan, 2022; Polikoff et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2022; Walsh, 2024; White et al., 2023). Stark national political divides and rising partisan polarization have influenced local decisions and seeped into board meetings and elections (Fine et al., 2026; Gensterblum et al., 2026; Houston, 2024; Singer et al., 2023; Valant, 2020). This was particularly true during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic with highly contested decisions about mask mandates, vaccine requirements, and school reopenings (Hartney & Finger, 2021; Kitchens & Goldberg, 2024; Marsh et al., 2022). In even more recent years, SBMs have been navigating significant shifts in the federal government's role over K-12 education policy (Marsh et al., 2025; 2026).

Despite these trends, there has been limited research on the experiences of SBMs

navigating these contemporary national issues ("Big P Politics"), as well as the more everyday challenges of managing local power dynamics ("little p politics") in the current political moment of heightened polarization and a shifting federal role in education. Past studies have demonstrated the ways local educational politics have shifted alongside an influx of national issues and, correspondingly, more competitive, partisan board elections and increased campaign spending (Jacob, 2024; Reckhow et al., 2017). Others have examined the responses of parents, educators, and district leaders to the new political environment (Jochim et al., 2023; Polikoff et al., 2022; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2025; White et al., 2023; Woo et al., 2022). Yet there is relatively little research on SBMs' experiences in the current climate (for exceptions, see Knight-Abowitz, 2025; Sampson, 2024) and how these experiences shape their wellbeing and willingness to serve.

These new dynamics raise important questions about the retention of board members. Turnover on school boards is high, driven mostly by incumbents choosing not to run again (Kogan, Lavertu, & Peskowitz, 2025). Some turnover can renew a board in a positive direction, but frequent turnover can cost districts institutional knowledge and continuity (Alsbury, 2008; Hess, 1998). Given these potential consequences, there is a need to better understand not just how the current political environment affects SBMs' experiences and day-to-day practice, but also their wellbeing and willingness to serve. This sequential, mixed-methods paper (Creswell & Clark, 2017) seeks to address this gap by drawing on interviews and a statewide survey of SBMs in the diverse context of California to answer two research questions: 1) How are SBMs experiencing the current political climate, including Big P and little p politics? And 2) How do SBMs' perceived levels of political challenges relate to their reelection intentions?

In the end, we find that the Big P Politics of the present moment are indeed creating challenges for SBMs. Yet we also find evidence that it is the enduring little p politics that

generate some of the greatest struggles facing SBMs - suggesting that the "culture war" politics are either fading in importance or have been overly emphasized in the media. Members reporting higher levels of perceived little p political challenges are less likely to report that they plan to run for reelection, a pattern largely accounted for by the emotional toll of navigating these local dynamics. In contrast, Big P politics are not predictive of reelection intent–neither the level of culture war challenges nor navigating recent federal policy shifts. Members further perceive that they would benefit from greater support and training in navigating political dynamics.

Empirical and Conceptual Grounding

We draw on three bodies of literature to inform our analysis: empirical literature on (1) local education governance, (2) turnover of elected officials, and (3) conceptual literature on emotional labor.

Empirical Literature on Local Education Governance

Scholars have long observed the unique structure of K-12 education governance. Single-purpose institutions with non-partisan elections, often held off-cycle from other national or statewide races (Anzia, 2014; Schueler & Houston, 2026), school boards have historically reflected "educational exceptionalism"--a term coined to describe the politics of education as unique relative to other areas of public policy–and have been characterized by highly decentralized decision-making with higher levels of bipartisan cooperation relative to other domains (Henig, 2013; Shapiro, Kilibarda, Sinozich & McClellan, 2021). However, there are signs that educational exceptionalism has been eroding. This was already documented prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the No Child Left Behind era accompanied by greater involvement of higher levels of government and executives (e.g., mayors and governors) in educational issues, the nationalization of funding in some school board elections, and more

polarized public opinion on education topics (Henig, 2013; Houston, 2021; 2024; Reckhow, Henig, Jacobsen & Litt, 2016; Schueler & Bleiberg, 2022).

In the post-COVID-19 era, signs suggest that partisan politics may have seeped even more heavily into education policymaking (e.g., Collins, 2023; Hartney & Finger, 2021; Schueler, Miller & Reynolds, 2025; Singer et al., 2023; Valant, 2020). School boards increasingly came into the media spotlight as a local venue for national culture war issues related to identity politics (Collins, 2023; Fine et al., 2026; Polikoff et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2022; White et al., 2023; Valant et al., 2026), with board candidates getting more endorsements from new national groups (Perera et al., 2024). With the start of the second Trump presidential administration, local education leaders have had to contend with significant changes to the federal government's role in K-12 education, with a significantly weakened U.S. Department of Education, efforts to limit so-called Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, shifts in the use of the Office for Civil Rights, and increased immigration enforcement (Camp et al., 2026; Meyer et al., 2026). We identify these national, partisan political dynamics as Big P Politics.

While these contemporary challenges are unique, school boards have always been political institutions. Most observers agree that the design of the governance system merely shifted the political dynamics rather than insulated school boards from them (e.g., Hess, 2002). We conceive of school boards as dynamic institutions that mediate a complex set of actors, interests and contexts (Figure 1). Boards are composed of individuals whose identities, beliefs, and resources significantly shape the work and character of the collective. These public officials oversee the school system, hire, fire, and hold accountable the superintendent–or chief executive–of the district, approve budgets, negotiate contracts, are accountable to higher levels

of government and the local community, and represent and provide voice to multiple constituencies. They approve budgets with implications for contractors, employees of the district, homeowners, parents, and students (Blazar & Schueler, 2023). An ecosystem of local and broader historical, socio-political, economic, and institutional contexts further shape the functioning of boards (Sampson, 2024). All of this yields opportunities for political conflict and cooperation within the board as well as with local interest groups, or what we identify as little p politics.

We therefore seek to examine the extent to which SBMs express that Big P Politics versus little p politics present the greatest challenges for their work in the current moment of heightened polarization and a shifting federal role in education policy. The findings speak to the broader question of whether educational exceptionalism has vanished, eroded, or remains an enduring feature of educational governance and policymaking. The results also contribute to the field's understanding of how these complex political dynamics could affect board members and their motivation to serve.

Turnover of Elected Officials

Turnover is high among school board members in the United States. Studying elections from 2002 to 2017 across 16 states, Kogan, Lavertu and Peskowitz (2025) find that 53% of incumbent school board members are replaced in a typical election cycle. This is not because incumbents are disadvantaged at the ballot box; in fact, they win reelection more than 80% of the time when they run. These high rates of turnover are therefore largely due to incumbents voluntarily deciding to step down from their public office rather than to run for reelection. More specifically, only 59% of school board member incumbents run for reelection, on average, lower than the rates for state legislators (76%) and members of the U.S. House (90%) (Kogan, Lavertu

& Peskowitz, 2025). These numbers are similar for the context of the present study–in 2024, 56% of California school board races did not appear on the ballot because they were either uncontested or because no one was running for office (Lambert & Willis, 2024).

Not all turnover among school board members is undesirable. If members realize they are not in a position to meet the responsibilities of the job, they may accurately believe that they are not serving the best interests of their community. Members who feel uninterested in or unable to keep up with the time commitments and responsibilities of the role may struggle to effectively serve constituents. Stepping away can be a responsible decision. Furthermore, bringing in fresh voices and perspectives onto boards, especially if new members bring greater time, energy, and interests could help revitalize a board's work. Leadership stability among ineffective board members could entrench poor outcomes and/or inequality. That said, previous research does not always find a strong relationship between the academic performance of school districts and board member turnover, suggesting the electoral process is not consistently providing accountability for results (Kogan, Lavertu & Peskowitz, 2025; Payson, 2017).

There are a number of reasons why it may be undesirable to have higher levels of turnover among school board members. More frequent turnover could be disruptive for long-term planning and implementation and may rob districts of valuable institutional knowledge that long-time members may have accumulated over the course of their service. Turnover can create inefficiencies resulting from the need to more continually onboard new members. Indeed, previous research suggests that school districts with higher board turnover had weaker member knowledge of roles and responsibilities and constituent needs, and lower levels of effective conflict resolution skills (Alsbury, 2008). A larger literature on the broader effects of educational leadership instability, suggests it creates challenges for sustaining systemwide improvements

amidst regular "policy churn" (Hess, 1998). Research on other elected officials, such as state legislators, suggests term limits can be associated with leaders who are less self-sufficient and more reliant on staff and interest groups (Kousser, 2005).

The potential negative effects of board member turnover may be compounded by the also high rates of turnover among district superintendents. From 2019-20 to 2025-26, 69% of school districts in California experienced one or more superintendent transitions (the national average was 62%; White, 2025). Additionally, only 38% of superintendents new in 2020-21 were still in their positions in 2025-26 (the national average was 44%). These indicators of districtwide leadership turnover raise concerns about the stability of educational systems and their ability to sustain progress or implement policy with consistency over time (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Turnover of board members is also highest in lower achieving school districts, raising potential equity concerns about the unequal distribution of leadership instability (Kogan, Lavertu & Peskowitz 2025).

Furthermore, incumbents' decisions to eschew re-election could lead to even more uncontested races, which introduces numerous challenges. In some cases, when no one is willing to run, sitting members appoint officers. This prompts concerns about potential diminished accountability to the electorate and potential appointments of like-minded or status-quo-oriented members, potentially undermining the spirit of open, democratic elections, shifting accountability away from voters to networks, entrenching particular interests, and eroding trust in the process and institutions.

Research on why SBMs seek (or do not seek) reelection is limited, leaving considerable uncertainty about the factors that shape their intentions to remain in office. The broader literature on public officeholders commonly treats the decision to seek another term as a weighing of costs

and benefits of remaining in office against the alternatives of leaving or pursuing higher office (Black, 1972; Maestas et al., 2006; Moore & Hibbing 1998). This approach has been used to explain the choices of members of Congress, Canadian legislators, and Portuguese mayors (Hall & Van Houweling, 1995; Burzo et al., 2024; Castro & Martins, 2013). Decisions about continued service may also depend on officeholders' circumstances, including electoral security, local conditions, and gender and racial identities (Castro & Martins, 2013; Davidson, McGregor, & Siemiatycki, 2020; Håkansson, 2024; Maestas et al., 2006). Members of Congress are more likely to choose not to run again when they expect a particularly challenging race and a low chance of victory (Jacobson, 1989).

Political conflict can also raise the costs of remaining in office. Studies of legislators find that dissatisfaction with the conditions of service can prompt voluntary departures (Moore & Hibbing, 1998). Research on local officials similarly shows that hostility, and even the worry of it, reduces willingness to run for reelection (Bridging Divides Initiative & CivicPulse, 2025), while harassment and threats raise the personal costs of serving (Herrick & Thomas, 2024). These studies identify difficult experiences in office as potential reasons for leaving, alongside the electoral considerations and opportunities emphasized in research on political careers.

Two recent studies offer insight into SBMs' intentions to continue in political office. In a national survey of SBMs, roughly half of all respondents (52%) said they planned to seek another term, 27% were undecided, and 21% did not plan to run again (Valant, Perera, & Zerbino 2026). When asked for their reasons, 88% of those likely to seek another term cited believing they were making a positive impact. Among those unlikely to seek reelection, 34% cited time constraints as the reason. The most selected category was "Other" (39%), with write-in responses including age, health, and retirement. Respondents also voiced concern about divisive,

partisan politics in board elections and governance, although these concerns do not by themselves establish why members decide against seeking another term.

Bergstrand, Shelton, and Deen (2024) offer a related view from Texas, examining how board service shapes ambition for higher office. Among SBMs who reported that board service made them less likely to consider higher office, 35% cited a polarized or negative climate as the reason, and 15% cited demands from constituents or problematic people. Other members described how service increased their interest in higher office by providing opportunities to make a difference and represent others. Although the study examines ambition for higher office rather than reelection, it illustrates how experiences of board service can both encourage and discourage further political involvement. That said, there remains much to learn about the factors shaping SBM decisions about whether or not to pursue reelection.

Emotional Labor

The theory of emotional labor provides another important set of conceptual tools for our exploration of politics, helping us to identify potential effects and mechanisms by which politics affects intentions to run for re-election. Emotional labor refers to the effort one exerts in a job to manage emotions and perform in a job-appropriate way (Hochschild, 1983). Considered a prerequisite for public-facing professions, emotional labor arises when workers, as a part of their required duties, are placed in difficult situations and asked to manage the emotions of others and/or suppress their own true feelings and simply absorb the unpleasantness of it all. One example is the flight attendant who is asked to deliver “service with a smile” even when conditions are challenging to ensure a positive customer experience (Hochschild, 1983). In theory, emotional work can lead to exhaustion and burnout. Yet for individuals with more confidence in their ability to handle the emotional work, this sense of efficacy in theory might

mitigate the negative effects and lead to increased job satisfaction in meeting the emotional needs of others. Efficacy thus enables them to "view this emotional labor as a skill that can be effectively used at work rather than an act that makes them feel self-estranged" (Sloan, 2012, p. 277).

Though often applied to front-line workers in service-oriented jobs such as nurses, police officers (Martin, 1999), emergency service dispatchers (Guy et al., 2008; Shuler & Sypher, 2000), social workers (Hsieh & Guy, 2009) and educators (Silbaugh et al., 2023), this theory has more recently been applied to politicians (Flinders et al., 2018; Weinberg, 2021). In a study of elected officials in the United Kingdom, Weinberg (2021) argues that tasks associated with governing are "inherently emotional and emotionally labor intensive" (p. 432) as "Politicians must care about strangers as well as colleagues, or at least be seen to care, in order to solicit desired responses that facilitate cooperation or goal accomplishment" (p. 430). While emotion work can be correlated with occupational wellbeing, the direction of the relationship depends on the type of emotional labor performed. Politicians who enjoy working with people and feel competent at dealing with affective demands on their time and energy are more likely to find satisfaction, contentment, and optimism in performing emotion work. In contrast, those who are frequently required to suppress their own emotions, manage their public displays, or appear artificially pleasant are more likely to suffer symptoms of burnout such as exhaustion, stress, and generalized apathy.

We use these ideas as "sensitizing concepts" (Charmaz, 2014) to help us explore the connection between political tensions and intentions to seek re-election. Rather than "testing out" a theory per se, we draw on these concepts to help orient the inquiry and give a general sense of what to look for. This literature suggests that emotional labor of serving as a board member may

be particularly high in a context of strong political stressors. These stressors could arise from district-level politics that are either internal (little p interpersonal conflicts among board members, between boards and administrators, between constituents or stakeholder groups, union-district conflict) or national in scope (Big P culture war battles or recent, controversial federal decisions impacting K-12 schools). These professional stressors might lead to personal stressors–such as receiving threats of violence or harassment, or being the target of derogatory social media–which could further compound the effects. The effort and potential unease of attending to the needs and feelings of multiple constituencies as well as one's own feelings during these moments of political strain could generate significant stress that leads to burnout (negative wellbeing) and questions about whether to run for office again. Yet, it is also possible that board members with strong efficacy may be better able to manage the emotional stress, attain job satisfaction, and ultimately commit to remaining in the position. We explore these possible relationships, as depicted in our Conceptual Framework (Figure 1), in the survey component of the study. [Insert Figure 1]

Though the literature does not speak to the varying effects we might expect for the different types of political stressors, it does suggest that the stressors engaging higher levels of emotional labor may be most salient when trying to understand board member intentions to seek re-election. One can imagine all categories of political stressors could generate negative effects on a member's occupational wellbeing - whether it be the need to remain silent in board meetings while members of the community publicly chastise the board for decisions and policies with which they disagree, or maintaining composure while experiencing perceived unfair treatment from board colleagues, or sustaining a positive public image while being a target of misinformation or politically motivated attacks on social media. How these experiences

ultimately relate to SBMs' wellbeing and future plans, along with the potential mediating role of efficacy, are the questions we pursue in this paper.

Methods

This exploratory, sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017) paper relies on data from California—the largest education system in the U.S., serving roughly 12% of the nation's K-12 public school children—in a state that grants substantial authority to school boards under its Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and accountability framework[1] and that is marked by considerable geographic, political, and racial/ethnic diversity. Our data collection and analysis included, first, case studies of individual board members, then a statewide survey and finally follow-up interviews.

Case Studies

In 2023-24, we conducted a broader qualitative study of 10 SBMs that drew on critical ethnography (Castagno, 2012) and critical phenomenology (Guenther, 2019) to center individuals' perspectives and lived realities (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014). We purposely recruited 10 SBMs through direct outreach ("cold emails") and referrals from educators to capture a diversity of perspectives and local contexts. As illustrated in online Appendix Table A1, participating members came from districts varying in size, location, and urbanicity and differed in race/ethnicity, gender, age, and experience. Districts also varied in the structure of their board elections, with three running district-wide elections for at-large seats and seven being elected by trustee area (often called "ward-based elections" outside of California). We tried to

[1] The LCFF is a 2013 education reform in California that, in addition to allocating base funding for all districts, targets additional funds to districts serving high proportions of low-income students, homeless or foster youth, and English language learners. Replacing many "earmarked" categorical funding streams with new LCFF funds, the reform also provides local education agencies (LEAs) with greater local autonomy to use state funding to meet students' needs. LCFF also requires LEAs to include school communities in the development of their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) detailing how funds will be used to improve outcomes for all students and especially those targeted by the additional LCFF funds. LCAPs must be formally adopted by school boards.

engage across a political spectrum, though ended up with eight self-identified Democrats, one Republican, and one libertarian. Our goal was not to select a sample representative of all California boards, but to identify a diverse set of members whose experiences and perspectives could bring greater nuance to our understanding of local governance, and to build theory that we could more systematically examine via an eventual statewide survey.

Data collection included two 60–90 minute interviews with each SBM. We also asked SBMs to complete "audio diaries" using the secure messaging application Voxer approximately every two to three weeks to reflect on various themes and questions presented in prompts. We also gathered background information from websites and media and observed one board meeting for five members (due to anonymity concerns we did not observe in the two small rural districts). To analyze these data, we coded all transcripts and meeting notes using Dedoose, met regularly, and wrote memos summarizing findings and themes emerging across participants. We also shared in two webinars preliminary findings of the broader study with participants (who joined anonymously) to elicit feedback and ensure these results accurately reflected their experiences.

Statewide Survey

Survey Development. The statewide survey instrument was developed based on learnings and emerging themes from the case studies which suggested that SBMs were experiencing challenges related to areas ranging from navigating relationships, time required to serve, training and capacity, data use, shifting technologies, national and local policies and politics, and policy or structural constraints. The survey therefore asked about challenges in these areas, as well as their experiences with personal stressors, their political confidence and self-efficacy, the extent to which serving had impacted their emotional well-being and personal development, and importantly, whether they planned to pursue reelection or reappointment. We provide a copy of

the full instrument in Table A7. The timing of the survey administration–from May to July of 2025–meant that responses reflect member experiences during a period of significant political transition, as a new Presidential administration came into power and made several policy moves and statements with implications for local K-12 school systems.

Survey Sample. Our survey was distributed online to a near-census of the state's board members (n=4,587). This list was obtained from Ballotpedia and supplemented with our own manual online tracking of SBM email addresses. We ultimately received responses from 801 unique SBMs across 478 unique school districts, representing roughly half of all districts in California. This 17.5% response rate is higher than is typical for SBM surveys which tend not to exceed 10% (e.g., Bertrand et al., 2025; Hartney & Houston, 2025; Kitchens & Goldberg, 2024). We describe the overall survey sample (n=801) in Table 1. A large majority of respondents were current or former parents in the district where they were serving (84%) and a majority were women (60%). Consistent with other studies, the SBMs in our sample were disproportionately white (75%) and college educated (83%). In the first two tables, we show descriptive statistics for a subset of respondents we refer to as the analytic sample (n=451) who were not missing on any of the key constructs of interest explored in our quantitative analysis of the relationship between political challenges and re-election intentions. The analytic sample is generally representative of the full survey sample.

Unfortunately, we are not able to determine how representative our sample of SBMs is of the full universe of SBMs serving throughout the entire state because, as far as we know, there is no comprehensive source of data on the characteristics of all SBMs in California. That said, we can compare the set of school districts represented in our sample to the characteristics of the full set of districts across California, and do so in Table 2. The districts in our survey sample are not

perfectly representative of the state. They were somewhat larger (8,845 students on average) than California overall (6,051 students on average). Rural districts were underrepresented (23% in the sample versus 37% in the state) while suburban districts were overrepresented (43% versus 32%). Sample districts also had a somewhat lower share of students qualifying for subsidized lunch (55%) than California as a whole (58%). These differences were more pronounced for the analytic sample (e.g., only 15% rural versus 37% statewide), shown in Table 2.

Sample Weighting. Given the districts in our survey sample were not perfectly representative of the state, we generated a set of survey weights using a raking technique, which iteratively estimates weights across a set of specified variables known for the population as a whole, repeating the process for each variable until the sample matches the broader population as closely as possible on a set of specified dimensions (Bailey, 2024; Pasek et al., 2014). We generated weights based on the district's K-12 student enrollment, share of students qualifying for subsidized lunch, and whether the district was in an urban, rural, suburban, or town locale. As we show in Tables 1 and 2, the weights substantially improved the representativeness of the sample. In both tables we provide descriptive statistics for both the weighted and unweighted samples, overall and for the analytic sample respondents only.[2]

Outcome Measures. Our outcome is SBMs' stated intention about whether to seek reelection. Respondents were asked whether they planned to run for (or pursue reappointment to) the school board again and answered on a five-point scale: definitely not, probably not, maybe,

[2] Although we use district size in our raked weighting to make the sample of districts look more like the state as a whole, after that we do not weight our results by district size (i.e., number of students enrolled). As a result, typically our results represent the experiences for the average district or board rather than for the average student. We do this because our research questions are focused on the board member experience. That said, one implication is that, when survey responses vary significantly for members in large versus small districts, the experiences of the average board member may not reflect the experiences of the average student in the state. For example, the share of SBMs of color likely understates the share of students represented by SBMs of color because these members are more likely to be serving in large districts.

probably, or definitely. We use the full five-category response as our primary outcome for our ordered logistic regression estimates and in some cases collapse to a binary indicator, coded one for respondents who said they would probably or definitely run again and zero otherwise.

Predictors and Potential Mediators. Our primary predictors are composite measures of SBM reported challenges with little p and Big P politics. A second set of measures, informed by emotional labor theory as applied to political office (Flinders et al., 2018; Weinberg, 2021), captures the role-related experiences of board service: efficacy, political confidence, emotional toll, and personal development. We describe the construction process relevant for all composite variables first below and then describe the components of each composite variable, one by one.

Within each composite, items were recoded if needed so that higher values shared a common direction and then standardized to z-scores (with the exception of binary variables) using the mean and standard deviation of all nonmissing responses to that item in the full survey sample. Composite scores were calculated as the mean of the available standardized items and binary variables. We calculated composite scores for respondents who answered more than half of the component items (otherwise respondents were coded as missing on that composite variable). Final item retention decisions accounted for both fit with the construct definition and internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951).

The first composite captured little p politics, defined as the interpersonal relationships and power dynamics involved in the routine governance of a school district. Its six items–all shown in Table 3a–came from three survey questions, each with different response formats. Four items asked respondents to rate relationships between: constituents and district leaders, groups with different political views, the board and superintendent, and among board members, on a four-point scale from very negative to very positive. We reverse coded these so that higher

values indicated more negative relationships. Another item asked to what extent labor union issues created tension on the board, on a four-point scale from not at all to a large extent. The sixth item was a binary indicator of whether the respondent reported having experienced interpersonal conflict or significant disagreement with other board members in the past year. The composite had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .738$).

We represented Big P politics with two separate composites, both built from items asking about the extent to which a given issue created tension on the board, on the same four-point scale. We analyzed the domains separately because they captured substantively different sources of board tension: sociocultural conflicts and federal policy changes. The first Big P composite–"culture wars"–comprised eight items, including one on teaching about race, racism, or ethnic studies, three items concerning transgender students (sports participation, pronouns, and bath/locker room use), one on antisemitism, another on Islamophobia, one on religious values in schools, and finally one on perceived threats to traditional values. Again, this composite had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .886$).

The second Big P composite–"federal policy context"–comprised four items, including those on uncertainty about federal funding/oversight, changes in federal immigration policies, federal restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, and other federal policies/executive orders. The federal policy composite also had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .862$). We assigned the DEI item to the federal policy context rather than culture wars composite because its wording referenced federal restrictions specifically. Higher scores on all politics composites indicate greater tension.

Next we turn to describing the composites capturing potential mediators informed by emotional labor theory. The items contributing to each of these composites are provided in Table

3b. First is efficacy, comprised of an item measuring members' perceived influence over board decisions and an item capturing SBMs' perceived ability to improve student wellbeing (two items; $\alpha = .748$). Political confidence captured members' confidence in their ability to navigate conflict or political tensions, navigate social media interactions, and understand personnel and union contracts (three items; $\alpha = .702$). Higher scores indicate greater efficacy and greater confidence.

Two items were initially considered for a wellbeing composite: whether board service had negatively affected the respondent's emotional wellbeing and whether it had positively contributed to their personal development. Their internal consistency was low ($\alpha = .568$), and the two items describe distinct experiences rather than opposite ends of one construct, so we retained them as separate standardized single-item measures of emotional toll and personal development. Higher emotional-toll scores indicate greater perceived harm to emotional wellbeing, and higher personal-development scores indicate greater perceived personal growth. Finally, the personal stressors composite was calculated as the mean of two binary indicators: experiencing derogatory comments on social media and experiencing threats of violence or harassment to oneself or one's family. Higher scores indicate greater exposure to these stressors.

Survey Analysis. Analysis involved descriptive statistics, followed by an examination of the factors associated with SBMs' intent to seek reelection using regression techniques. We first present descriptive statistics on the prevalence of the political challenges and role-related experiences captured by survey items. We then estimate a baseline ordered logistic model containing only the little p and Big P politics composites for predictors, which allows us to compare associations with reelection intent directly. Subsequent models add potential mediators capturing elements of our conceptual framework (Figure 1) and factors that prior research

identifies as influencing reelection intent among elected officials, one at a time, to isolate the role of each potential mediator. We confirm that the patterns of results are robust to controlling for a set of district- and SBM-level covariates, including the percent of students eligible for subsidized meals in the SBM's district, binary indicators for whether the SBM identifies as a woman, as Black, or as Latino or Hispanic, whether the district is in an urban locale, and whether the SBM reported that they ran unopposed in their most recent election and whether they were elected or appointed on an at-large (vs. ward/trustee) basis.

Because our reelection intent measure is an ordered categorical outcome, we estimate ordered logistic regression models to examine its relationship with our primary predictors (Long & Freese, 2014). Brant tests indicated that the parallel regression assumption held for little p and the other predictors, with the exception of the culture wars composite and, in one specification, political confidence[3], so we report the ordered logistic estimates as our main results. Results are robust to re-estimation using linear ordinary least squares regression with the five-category outcome (Table A4) and logistic regression using a binary reelection indicator (Table A5).

Survey Follow-Up Interviews

To add further nuance, we conducted a follow-up round of interviews from October through December 2025 probing for more explicit connections between members' occupational wellbeing, efficacy, and intentions. At the end of the survey, individuals were asked if they wanted to participate in a voluntary follow-up interview that would include a $25 gift card for participation. A total of 31 individuals volunteered; from this group we selected a sample of 10

[3] Brant tests indicate no evidence of violations of the proportional odds assumption held for little p, federal policy context, personal stressors, efficacy, and both occupational wellbeing measures in every model, but not for the culture wars composite or, in one specification, political confidence (Table A6). For these two predictors, the separate binary logits show that the association is concentrated at the top of the scale, distinguishing members who would definitely seek reelection from those who probably would. Partial proportional odds models that relax the assumption for these variables (Williams, 2006) produced little p estimates nearly identical to those in Table 4.

to include in a "deep dive" about their intentions to seek re-election, purposefully including individuals reflecting a range of intentions and variation in gender, race/ethnicity, experience, and district type. The interview protocol probed on the motivation for their decisions, including the role of politics. In the process of analyzing all 31 interviews we noticed the topics of re-election, politics, and/or emotional labor surfaced, often unsolicited, in all of our interviews. As such, we draw on the full sample of interviews to help contextualize and understand modeling results.

Findings

We present our findings in two parts: first, describing how members experienced the current political climate–including Big P and little p politics–and second, examining how these experiences related to re-election intent.

How are SBMs experiencing the current political climate?

In this first section we examine SBM reports on both Big P and little p political challenges, both independently and relative to one another.

Many SBMs reported political challenges and a desire for more support to handle political conflict. The majority of SBMs from case studies and large shares of survey respondents reported politically related strains. All 10 case study participants cited some form of political challenge - ranging from facing negative attacks on social media, to confrontations from community in meetings, to internal battles with fellow colleagues, to pressures to address broader culture war issues. On surveys, between 43 and 58% (depending on calculations)[4] of

[4] For this question we were unable to distinguish between those who did not select any of the challenges included in a list of options (but did engage with the set of survey questions) from those who did not engage with this set of questions at all. Therefore, we provide the percentages based on two different denominators to show the range of potential responses. The first denominator was based on the average response rate across all questions on the survey. The second used the number of respondents who selected at least one challenge (conservatively guaranteeing that they interacted with the question).

SBMs agreed that in the past year, they had felt that being a school board member was more politically challenging than they had anticipated. Others reported experiencing direct personal stressors. About a third had experienced derogatory personal comments on social media (29-38%) and a smaller group experienced threats of violence or harassment (14-19%). Another indicator of political strain was the widespread desire for more support. Only 31% of survey respondents felt "very confident" in their ability to "Navigate conflict and/or political tensions within the community, district, and/or board" and 69% wanted support or training in this area. Similarly, only 25% of SBMs felt "very confident" navigating social media and 61% wanted more support in this area.

SBMs felt strains from the national political environment and Big P Politics. Case study SBMs acknowledged the broader trends of polarization and its influence on local behavior. One believed partisanship drove people to become more "adversarial" and lose sight of the district's core function to serve students. Another observed constituents coming to meetings with "an axe and an agenda." One SBM even noted the ways in which broader politics were seeping into classrooms: "A teacher who… flew a political flag in his classroom, for several years before this DEI push may now be questioned as to why that flag is in his classroom. A benign object now is a political object."

Several case study SBMs attributed these trends to external influences. One explained:

> The forced outing policies for transgender or LGBTQ students…Those are coming not from a grassroots effort. But it's very much a coordinated, well-funded effort by right-wing organizations that are pushing this agenda under the guise of parental rights.

Many SBMs identified COVID as the origins of these political shifts. "We lost control during COVID," admitted one. Another explained:

> [P]re COVID, the school board was just a rubber stamp…Their meetings were like two hours. Ours are like 10. … It's like night and day, I mean, the community participation was not a thing. … But now, I think because of the political element, there's now been a higher concentration and focus of local government and stuff on school boards.

During the pandemic, this SBM explained, parents realized the importance of school boards: "when, you know, it was school boards who voted to close schools … that was like the first wake-up for a wide range of people …how powerful it is. And then with this, like insurgence, of banning books, etc, etc, like, we are seeing very politicized school boards."

Survey results revealed the influence of national political issues, though with considerable variation (Figure 2). These issues fell into two broad categories: "culture war" issues and controversial recent decisions of the federal administration. SBMs were far more likely to cite as "sources of strain, tension, or conflict" federal policy decisions - including uncertainty about federal funding (66%); changes in federal immigration enforcement (52%), the influence of other federal policies/executive orders (47%), and federal policies banning diversity, equity, and inclusion policies (DEI) (40%). Far fewer reported culture war issues as a source of strain or conflict, such as teaching about race/racism (21%), transgender sports participation (18%), transgender bathrooms (18%), transgender pronouns (17%), and religion, including religious values and beliefs in school, anti-semitism and Islamophobia. [Insert Figure 2]

Similar patterns emerged when we asked SBMs the extent to which these sources of political conflict/strain impeded efforts to make progress on their school board's goals (Figure 4). Almost half of respondents cited uncertainty about federal funding as an impediment. Interestingly, tensions surrounding culture war issues like district-approved books, teaching about race/racism, and transgender issues were not seen as interfering with their ability to meet their goals.

Many SBMs reported challenges navigating little p politics - at times creating

greater challenges than high-profile Big P politics. Often unrelated to national politics, SBMs experienced local, interpersonal power grabs and conflicts. In case studies, a few SBMs mentioned existing or potential labor disputes - an age-old source of political conflict at the local level. Other members spoke about conflicts with fellow board members perceived to be seeking power. One SBM described the effects of a recent election, in which one member gained a majority and pursued a "personal agenda" driven by "retribution" to punish individuals who had "disrespected" the member. Another reported a divide on the board that was "not policy driven" and instigated by the board president, who "likes to stir the pot" for political gain. She explained:

> He likes to create division, … he wants to have this other person who's up for reelection feel that she has to curry favor with him. And he could make life easier for her if she went along with what his agenda is. … the hidden agenda is just to sow division, and maybe make himself feel more important.

In a few cases, SBMs were targets of local recall elections initiated by fellow members (i.e., personal stressors). One SBM described being "unjustly targeted by our recall as a way to humiliate or embarrass," and remembered sponsors spreading misinformation via social media and flyers, "saying terrible things about me and the others." Though these local power dynamics are not new to school boards, it is, of course, hard to disentangle them from the broader national political climate. For example, the increased use of social media spreading misinformation - a national trend - may have influenced the recall campaigns described by the two case study board members (Rogers, 2023). Similarly, the heightened adversarial dynamics observed at higher levels may have trickled down to the local level.

The pervasiveness of local political conflicts also came through in the survey results: about half of respondents reported having interpersonal conflict with other members in the past year (38-51%). Also, 34% of SBMs reported labor union issues were a "source of strain, tension, or conflict" and nearly one third cited tensions regarding labor union issues as an impediment to

board progress (30-31%).

How do board members' political challenges relate to their intent to serve?

Overall, members were divided on their intentions to seek re-election. Only half of SBMs (50%) said they would either "definitely" or "probably" run for re-election or pursue reappointment, while about one quarter (24%) said they would probably or definitely not and another quarter responded "maybe" (n=527).[5] We next turn to our efforts to understand how contentious political environments relate to these re-election intentions–several findings emerged from the survey analysis that were further supported by our qualitative evidence.

Little p politics mattered most for re-election intentions, whereas Big P political challenges were not predictive. In the first column of Table 4, we predict whether and how strongly an SBM intended to seek reelection based on the extent to which they reported experiencing challenges related to little p politics and Big P politics, separating out Big P politics into federal policy context and culture war issues. We find the extent of little p political challenges was a statistically significant predictor of reelection intentions. Specifically, every one-unit increase in the little p composite variable was associated with a 33% decrease in the odds of reporting an intention to pursue reelection (odds ratio = 0.667). Neither the extent of challenges related to the federal policy environment nor culture wars were statistically significant predictors of reelection intentions.

In post-survey interviews, board members consistently emphasized that local political dynamics - particularly the internal politics of a board that "gets along" - carried more weight in reelection decisions than national political dynamics. Interviewees who intended to seek

[5] The distribution of the outcome variable is nearly identical in the full sample (n=527 respondents with nonmissing reelection intent) and the analytic sample (n=451). In the full sample, 9% said definitely not, 14% probably not, 27% maybe, 29% probably, and 20% definitely; in the analytic sample, the corresponding shares are 9%, 15%, 26%, 28%, and 21%. Weighted shares are within one percentage point of these.

reelection emphasized the importance of serving on a board where collaboration and stability are maintained by all members, even when they disagree politically. One long-serving member from a politically purple district described this approach as key to her decision to remain on the board. She explained, "I try very, very hard to keep my politics to myself and be very respectful… People in this community have no idea where I am on the political spectrum, but they know my heart's in the right place." Nevertheless, several members noted that national culture-war issues increasingly intruded into local races, even when they do not reflect community priorities. And many SBMs expressed deep concerns about federal actions - particularly immigration enforcement. Yet these topics were not raised when SBMs discussed re-election intentions.

Emotional wellbeing appeared to help explain the relationship between local political challenges and re-election intention. Drawing on the theory of emotional labor we sought to further unpack why little p politics mattered for retention intentions. Its predictions are summarized in our conceptual framework (Figure 1). As we show in Table 4, we find limited evidence that the relationship between little p politics and reelection intent was significantly mediated by board members' personal stressors, political confidence, or self-efficacy. In the second, third and fourth columns, we show results for regressions where we add our composite measures of each of these three constructs one at a time. First, we add the personal stressor composite and observe that SBMs reporting greater personal stressors are less likely to run for reelection. Despite this relationship, the magnitude of the little p politics coefficient remains relatively similar to the coefficient from column (1), rounding to 0.7 in both cases. Similarly, greater political confidence and greater efficacy are both associated with a greater likelihood of intending to run for reelection. Controlling for political confidence leaves the little p estimate nearly unchanged (0.718). Controlling for efficacy modestly attenuates it (0.784) and makes it no

longer statistically significant, although statistical power is limited and the attenuation is much smaller than for emotional wellbeing (see below).

In contrast, the occupational well-being measures–particularly the extent to which board members reported their service negatively affected their emotional well-being–did appear to help explain the relationship between little p political challenges and reelection intent. As illustrated in Figure 3, the vast majority of SBMs in our survey sample (90%) said that being a board member had positively contributed to their personal development. Nevertheless, a non-trivial one quarter (25%) reported that board membership had negatively impacted their emotional well-being. When controlling for whether an SBM said that board service positively affected their personal development, the little p coefficient is slightly attenuated (0.815) and no longer statistically significant. However, when controlling for whether an SBM reported their emotional wellbeing was negatively impacted, the relationship between little p politics and intent to seek reelection is substantially reduced to near one (0.946) and not statistically significant, suggesting that once emotional toll is accounted for, these conflicts are no longer associated with lower odds of wanting to pursue reelection.. When controlling for both occupational well-being measures, the little p politics "effect" is just above one (1.019) and not significant. We next describe how the qualitative data further support this finding in two ways - illustrating the ways in which serving in this political environment created emotional strain and how that strain lessened motivation to serve again.

The emotional strain of serving in politically contentious environments. In interviews, SBMs provided many accounts of the emotional strain of serving in communities or on boards with high levels of political disagreement. Though many SBMs shared stories of personal triumph in their board work, such as creating programs and policies to improve

opportunities for students and families, many also spoke about the discomfort and anxiety caused by school board meetings and political conflict. “We had the full, packed room,” one SBM explained when recounting a particular meeting during COVID. “Screaming parents not following any way shape, or form… how a board meeting should go. Very, very emotional … It was so rough … and it was so political. It was insane. It was so stressful to go to meetings.” Another simply stated, “we’re used to people yelling at us.”

Some expressed moral distress. One SBM struggled to make decisions she believed were educationally sound and just but conflicted with the viewpoints of vocal constituents with the power to re-elect her. She felt caught in the middle of being required to implement putatively liberal state-level policies that conflicted with the preferences of her conservative-leaning community:

> [O]ur conservative community does not always agree with what's happening in our state. And especially if our state is doing something that is very different from another state, then we get a lot of people upset and saying, “Well, if another state's doing it, why can't we?” People have a harder time believing that we have to follow local laws or state laws. And that we can't just make our own decisions in that realm.

Like many we interviewed, she found it frustrating to educate the public on what was and was not under the board’s authority and to feel blamed for things outside of her control.

Relatedly, all of the case study SBMs pointed to state law (“the Brown Act”) constraining their ability to respond to constituents directly in board meetings. Though many acknowledged the law’s intent of ensuring transparency, accountability and ethical behavior, they nonetheless wished for a better way to communicate their sentiments in public and interact with community members and their fellow members, particularly in moments of political conflict. Many commented on the “challenging,” “clunky,” “performative” nature of interactions at meetings, which could leave them feeling uncomfortable in front of constituents who did not understand

that this law prevented them from responding to comments or discussing unagendized topics. "There's so many times where I want to be able to say something," said one SBM. Others expanded on the resulting emotional labor in board meetings:

> …there's a human being right in front of me. And all I can really say, when they're saying this … really important issue to them, is like, "I hear you. Thank you for bringing that." And since we can't respond as individual board members immediately … it feels like we're not responding because we're not. And you want to, you know. So.. that I have found uncomfortable. … It's their school. … It feels really important, that response. And it can sometimes feel sort of dry.

Another noted that these dynamics can not only negatively impact their sense of wellbeing, but can often exacerbate local political tensions:

> The rules are so confined… We aren't allowed to talk about any issue that's not on the agenda, because it needs to be properly noticed. … there's a lot of people who come and yell at us and demand responses or answers immediately. It's like, well, we can't do that. … if it's like a political issue …you can take a point of personal privilege … There was a time once [when] I first got on the board around Pride time … where there were a lot of anti LGBTQ comments, and they're like, "We want a response now!" And I think one of our responses was "We don't respond to public comments for hate" … just a political … clap back … we could not engage in a conversation.

Other SBMs pointed to the emotional strain and frustration resulting from the law's provision that no more than two board members can speak about board matters privately, as it either forced uncomfortable public discussions on contentious topics or stopped conversations altogether - adding to the stress of little p politics. "We have disagreements and stuff with each other on policies," said one SBM, "and I think that it would be much, much easier for us to have certain conversations behind closed doors, and not in the open." Another admitted "you're anxious" and it "builds up and grows" because "you can't have honest conversations about personal feelings in public" or ever "call out" bad behavior in meetings. "[I]t gets so isolating," explained yet another SBM, "… people are politically … motivated not to talk about it … there is no venue for you … we don't voice our concerns publicly because we don't have an

opportunity to." In a post-survey interview, one SBM described the anxiety they feel serving at this time:

> …when you're on camera and you're in public view, you know you want to be able to articulate your thoughts well, but you know my anxiety and my nerves tend to get the best of me at times… and it makes it very hard, when you are talking about controversial topics within the district, because you want to make sure that you are doing what's in the best interest for students and articulating your thoughts the best, but it's hard when you don't know the procedural things.

Like others, this member described uncertainty about what was and was not allowable during live meetings under the Brown Act — what they called "procedural things." They believed this uncertainty compounded pre-existing "nerves," particularly when meetings turned to potentially contentious topics, making board service even more challenging.

At times, the political dynamics turned into personal stressors, such as virtual and in-person attacks, that appeared to exacerbate the emotional stress of serving and affect SBMs' daily lives. One SBM noted that after COVID he now stayed away from the most popular grocery store in town because "a lot of people who maybe didn't like me as much because of … our stance during … the pandemic or other things along those lines" made interactions "awkward." Another SBM targeted by a recall campaign described the emotional labor of doing daily chores while pretending everything was okay:

> That was embarrassing to wander around town. The church I grew up in … someone had papered all the cars there with recall notifications … And I know a lot of people there, I grew up with people there. … if the effort was to humiliate, that to some degree is pretty successful because I did not feel great walking around in public for a few months until they couldn't collect the signatures, and it never got to the ballot.

Emotional strain lessened SBMs' motivation to serve. Several case study SBMs speculated that the more contentious political environments and resulting emotional strain could dampen members' motivations to serve in this elected position, especially in smaller communities where things can "get personal," as one SBM explained:

> When we talk about things like the political tensions these days, how do you run in a small city… when you're intentionally running against someone now? And these are the same kids that have gone to school with you. … And in this sort of environment we're in, where it's more charged than it ever has been, I wonder what that will do to small town elections, where it is going to be a very heated and interesting dialogue that may migrate away from what's most valuable.

One case study SBM expressed feeling ostracized for holding different political viewpoints from the majority of the board, which contributed to his decision not to run for re-election.

In post-survey interviews, emotional well-being clearly emerged as a critical factor influencing members' motivation (or lack thereof) to seek reelection, especially amid the stress of public scrutiny and criticism, being targeted during contentious elections or meetings, and navigating conflictual relationships. One SBM from a small city who did not plan to run again noted how personal board elections had become, recalling:

> When I ran the first time…there weren't a lot of personal attacks. We're a relatively small town, and it was about the issues. This last cycle, it was deeply personal. There were a lot of personal attacks and misinformation. And honestly, like for me, I just feel like I'm not sure I want to put myself through that again.

Another SBM cited "fatigue" from ongoing labor negotiations, an "endless cycle of internal fighting with each other," and feeling "attacked by the very people who I'm trying to support" as factors contributing to their conflicted position about seeking reelection. Another who remained undecided about the future noted that the tension within the board–including a member "who feels that some of us are too old, have been around too long"-- was taking "some of the joy out of it, to know I'm sitting next to someone who's actively looking for someone to replace me."

Several interviewees also tied their re-election choices to the emotional strain resulting from personal stressors, including public and online hostility, hate mail, verbal attacks, and social media vitriol. Some experiencing online hostility worried for their family's safety, making them leery of seeking re-election. A member from a small rural district expressed deep concern

about her children's well-being and went on to express the way the local politics created emotional labor contributing to her decision to step down:

> I'm close to being done. I'm tired. It's so divisive. The politics are so divisive. And I have children in the school district, and it scares me because people are getting more and more retaliatory. So I feel like I am not always as vocal and as strong as I could be when I'm speaking to the public, because I'm worried about blowback on my kids, because everyone in the community has some sort of influence on the school system. You know, everybody's somebody's coach, or somebody's this, or somebody's that, and I am, I'm, I am tired of, you know, I can't go out and participate in, you know, No Kings rallies and things like this, not in my small area. Because if I do, then Moms for Liberty will, you know, say, How dare she, represent all of us, you know, and have those political views and whatnot, you know, and so I have to be very careful. I can't advocate at all. I have to be neutral.

Many interpreted these incidents as intimidation tactics intended to pressure them to step down.

Yet, for a few members, such experiences had the opposite effect, strengthening their resolve to seek reelection - suggesting they possessed the efficacy needed to withstand emotional strain. One member reported having a "thicker skin" and strategies to cope (e.g., not checking social media and deciding to "let things go and not take things personal"). Another exclaimed "I do not quit" and drew on their experience surviving cancer to withstand the personal attacks. Another SBM implied that the emotional strain may be activating their decision to run again:

> I think there are a lot of people who are fearful of running now for school boards because we're on the front lines of the culture wars. We are targeted and attacked, and good people don't want to run for these positions. And if everybody steps aside, we cede these very important seats to extremists. …I cannot, in good conscience… allow the seat to have somebody who's an extremist just step in unchallenged. But it is a daunting thing to think about, my family being attacked again.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper adds new insights into the lived experiences of school board members in the contemporary, politically complex, educational landscape, as well as the potential consequences of the challenges they face. Although Big P politics are creating strains, the enduring little p

politics are generating some of the greatest struggles for members. SBMs reporting higher levels of strain from labor union issues or power struggles with fellow board members and other stakeholders are less likely to report intentions to run for school board again, a relationship largely accounted for by the emotional toll of navigating their role in the face of these local political dynamics. Yet, the strains from culture war conflicts and changing federal policies were not predictive of reelection intent.

Although we find that heightened political conflict is a great source of strain - and cost (Rogers et al., 2024) - for local leaders, our findings also indicate that long-standing local politics endure and may be a greater source of strain for board members' daily work and longevity. Our results align with recent polling data that culture war issues have waned in perceived importance among voters who are more interested in local issues such as safety (Crampton & Fernandez, 2025). Relatedly, a recent Brookings report finds that media coverage of critical race theory conflicts in school board venues peaked in 2021 and declined to pre-Covid levels by 2024. That said, coverage of book bans and transgender issues peaked in 2023 and declined after but remained well above pre-pandemic levels as of 2024 (Valant et al., 2026). Our results are also consistent with previous work showing that in recent years political and cultural themes have tended to crowd out media coverage of other educational issues related to academic outcomes, teaching and learning, curriculum, and teachers (Weber et al., 2025). This may not be surprising given other research illustrating some of the economic incentives news outlets now have to emphasize culture war-related content (Noy & Rao, 2026).

Our findings emphasizing the salience of little p politics over nationalized issues further suggest that despite the increased polarization and nationalization of education politics, at least some degree of educational exceptionalism still remains (Henig, 2013). This is consistent with

prior evidence showing that, although the partisan makeup of communities was predictive of initial Covid school reopening decisions, it was not predictive of many other education policy decisions boards were making at the time (Schueler, Miller & Reynolds, 2025). Furthermore, surveys of a wide range of local officials suggest that, at the time of our survey administration, local governments continued to have fewer challenges navigating divisive issues than those holding state or federal offices (Carnegie Corporation, 2025). That said, Big P political challenges were not absent from board contexts and one way to read the evidence would be to conclude that Big P challenges are consequential but only when they impact little p local political relationships.

More broadly, the results point to potential implications for member retention and the health of local democracy, though future research is needed to determine whether intentions translate to actual behavior and whether these relationships are causal. With only half of SBMs reporting intentions to run for re-election - possibly driven by the emotional strain from local politics - it appears likely that many boards will continue to experience high turnover rates. Compounded by superintendent turnover, this churn could have significant institutional and democratic costs described earlier, including lost institutional knowledge and more uncontested races. Such possibilities require continued attention at the state and local levels, and perhaps some reimagining of how to structure the position and support individuals serving (see implications below).

Our study also adds to broader research and theory of emotional labor. Though most of this literature has focused on service workers, we join a small group of scholars in conceptualizing elected leaders as similarly vulnerable to the psychological toll of roles that demand management of both their own emotions and those of others, and routinely expose them

to emotionally challenging situations (Flinders et al., 2018; Weinberg, 2021). Unlike this prior work, our research documents the relevance for local officials, the possible consequences of that emotional labor, and the types of stressors and structural constraints that may be contributing to board members' emotional labor. Our data suggest that the proximity and personalization of stressors may matter, as conflict SBMs had with others seated on the board or constituents they knew (little p) generated significant discomfort for members, even more so than political stressors emanating from the federal government or broader culture war disagreements among social groups. Moreover, state policies intending to promote transparent, fair governance may inadvertently structure the position in ways that amplify its emotional demands.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Our findings suggest several implications for state and local policy. In theory, two recent state policy changes could help SBMs feel supported and perhaps more motivated to persist in their emotionally taxing positions, in the California context: a new law raising the cap on board compensation (AB 1390 in 2025) and a new requirement to obtain training around school finance laws (AB 640 in 2025). Yet it is not clear that these efforts will have a positive effect or that they will address deeper needs and problems surfaced in our research. For example, though more compensation might motivate some to persist, boards are responsible for raising their own compensation and voting to do so has led to some political pushback in communities struggling financially (Lambert, 2026). Moreover, technical training on school finance will not address the skill set needed to navigate political conflict and the emotional labor entailed. As such, additional actions could help.

First, policymakers and local leaders should consider ways to respond to the more than two-thirds of SBMs wanting more support or training on how to navigate conflict and/or political

tensions within their local context. At a state level, legislators should carefully balance the need to facilitate more support with the potential unintended consequence that adding more training requirements to the position could make it less attractive and disincentivize individuals from running for office. As such, state leaders might consider partnering with state and local associations and organizations to offer voluntary, nonpartisan support, including spaces for them to collectively reflect on the challenges and stressors and to work with others so they feel more connected and better able to cope with the emotional labor. Our research in fact indicates that informal networks among board members in neighboring districts have provided welcome refuge and support (Marsh et al., 2025) and that many are interested in joining local networks of other members in their areas (Marsh et al., 2026). In fact, research has identified peer support as helping frontline workers cope with the psychological pressures of their emotional labor (Guy et al., 2008). Locally-driven mentorship and regional peer networks are avenues to consider.

As for building capacity, recent work to support superintendents with political leadership may offer guidance on tools and approaches - including case studies and online simulations that could be easily adapted.[6] One of our research participants had in fact developed scenarios of conflict and found much success using them with the full board to practice how to respond. Given that many political conflicts affect both the superintendent and board, and the well-documented importance of the relationship between the two (Schwartz & Diliberti, 2022; Sutherland, 2023; White et al., 2023), it may be worth developing tools and training for joint use as a leadership team. That said, training on navigating conflict and performance challenges with the superintendent may also be helpful for board members.

Based on theory and research showing that personal efficacy can mitigate burnout in jobs

[6] See https://scl.gse.harvard.edu/what-we-do/research-based-tools. See also Cheatham, Grant & Weiner, 2026.

that entail emotional labor, such as political office (e.g., Weinberg, 2021), training and tools should focus on *affective* capacities for navigating the emotional demands of contemporary public office. This could include skills related to emotional regulation (e.g., distress tolerance, nonreactivity), navigating others (e.g., having difficult conversations, perspective taking), and sustaining oneself (e.g., coping with public criticism, recovering from stressful confrontations and social media) (see for example, Gross, 2015; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Stone et al., 2010). However, guidance should focus not only on the individuals, but also the collective. Training should help all members establish healthy board conditions under which they can feel psychologically safe and thrive, such as setting up norms for disagreement and conflict management.

Second, state and local leaders might adopt communication efforts and tools to educate the public about the role of SBMs, the scope of their authority, and the limitations the Brown Act imposes on them. As our interviews surfaced, members experienced tremendous emotional strain interacting with constituents whose expectations did not always align with realities of the position. For example, greater awareness of members' inability to respond immediately to public comment could go a long way. There may also be opportunities to develop guidance on expectations regarding civility in public meetings and political violence, as well as strategies to lower the temperature when conflicts arise without limiting the right to dissent. Absent higher-level guidance, some local leaders appear to be creating such tools. One member in our study reported their district had created a pamphlet explaining "this is what a board meeting looks like" and that it was not an open meeting where parents "could just yell out anything they wanted" and that if their limited time to speak is not sufficient, "that's when you make an appointment, and you meet with the, you know, the administration out of the board meeting."

Finally, state leaders may want to consider the structural constraints of the Brown Act or similar laws in other states. Although this state law serves as a check on boards that are attempting to enact policies that may not represent their constituents' needs or values, and is intended to promote transparency, it may also limit members' ability to engage with each other and respond to their communities in ways that best reflect their needs (Marsh et al., 2025). As we show herein, these latter effects generate considerable emotional strain for many members. As we have suggested elsewhere (Marsh et al., 2025), it may be useful to provide additional clarification to boards and the public on exactly what the Act requires, as some members may be overinterpreting the law. Policymakers could consider developing guidelines that ensure the ability to maintain transparency in open meetings, while also allowing for meaningful dialogue among board members and with their communities, which has been shown to increase public trust in officials and the likelihood of future board meeting attendance (Collins, 2021). Given the advances in technology with live-streaming of meetings and direct engagement on social media, it may also be time to refine or revise these parameters.

Implications for Future Research

The limitations of our current study suggest several fruitful lines of inquiry for future research. First, to strengthen the connection between political conflict, emotional wellbeing, and turnover, future studies should use measures of actual behavior rather than self-reported, prospective, reelection intentions. Second, our work is associational and we cannot know for sure whether political conflict negatively affects emotional wellbeing and ultimately impacts re-election intent. Our research design cannot establish the temporal ordering of political tension, emotional toll, and intentions to remain. It could alternatively be that emotional challenges are causing greater local political conflict, rather than the other way around. Studies employing

experimental or quasi-experimental methods would help answer these questions more definitively. The analysis also does not directly assess electoral vulnerability, term limits, time demands, age and health, financial and career considerations, ambitions for higher office, years of service, and recalls, which also may shape decisions about continued service. Rigorous evaluations of programs designed to train board members in navigating political conflict would also make a welcome, policy-relevant contribution to the field.

Third, although the emotional labor literature treats efficacy as a buffer that can mitigate the negative effects of emotional labor, we tested efficacy as a pathway linking political stressors to reelection intent and found little evidence that efficacy explained the association between little p politics and likelihood to run again. This could reflect the wording of our survey items, which measure more general self-efficacy rather than the specific aspects of feeling competent to cope with the affective demands of the position. Future studies should explore other measures such as those used by Weinberg (2021). Also, this paper focused on political factors contributing to possible turnover, yet other factors came up in interviews, such as the extensive time commitment board service entails. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of what drives turnover, scholars might examine this and other predictors cited in the broader literature.

Finally, we suggest further research and conceptualizing around what it means to be a political leader and the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to succeed in this role. Other scholars have written about the importance of particular aspects of this leadership for board members, such as the need to establish their “moral purpose” (Campbell & Fullan, 2019) and adopt “courageousness” and “critical consciousness” (Joseph & Rahman, 2024). However, none of these fully address the emotional dimensions of the role. Comparable concerns regarding the needs and challenges facing superintendents during this particularly volatile time has led to

important development of resources to strengthen their political and civic leadership (e.g., Cheatham, Grant & Weiner, 2026). Given SBMs are public leaders charged with ensuring access to a high-quality education for every child in their district, they deserve support on navigating today's political environment to achieve that goal. Given the enduring nature of local politics, ongoing shifts in federal policy, and heightened partisan politics, it seems likely that elected board members will continue to face the emotional labor that comes with the position. Rather than try to find ways to eradicate the politics, leaders owe it to these elected officials to take actions that ensure they are capable of serving in the position.

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Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for School Board Members' Intentions to Run for Reelection

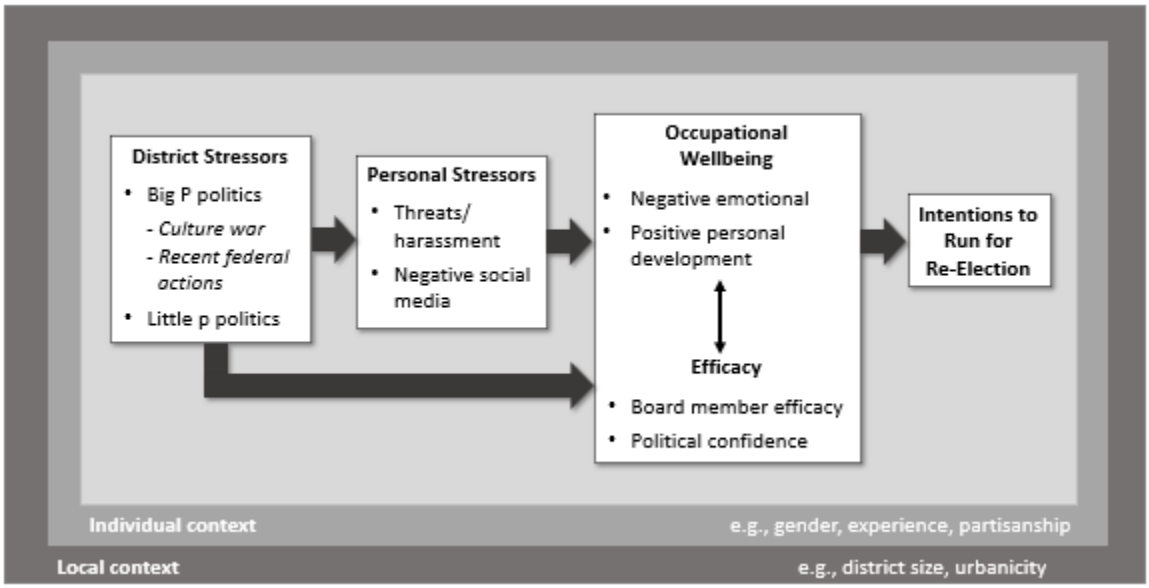
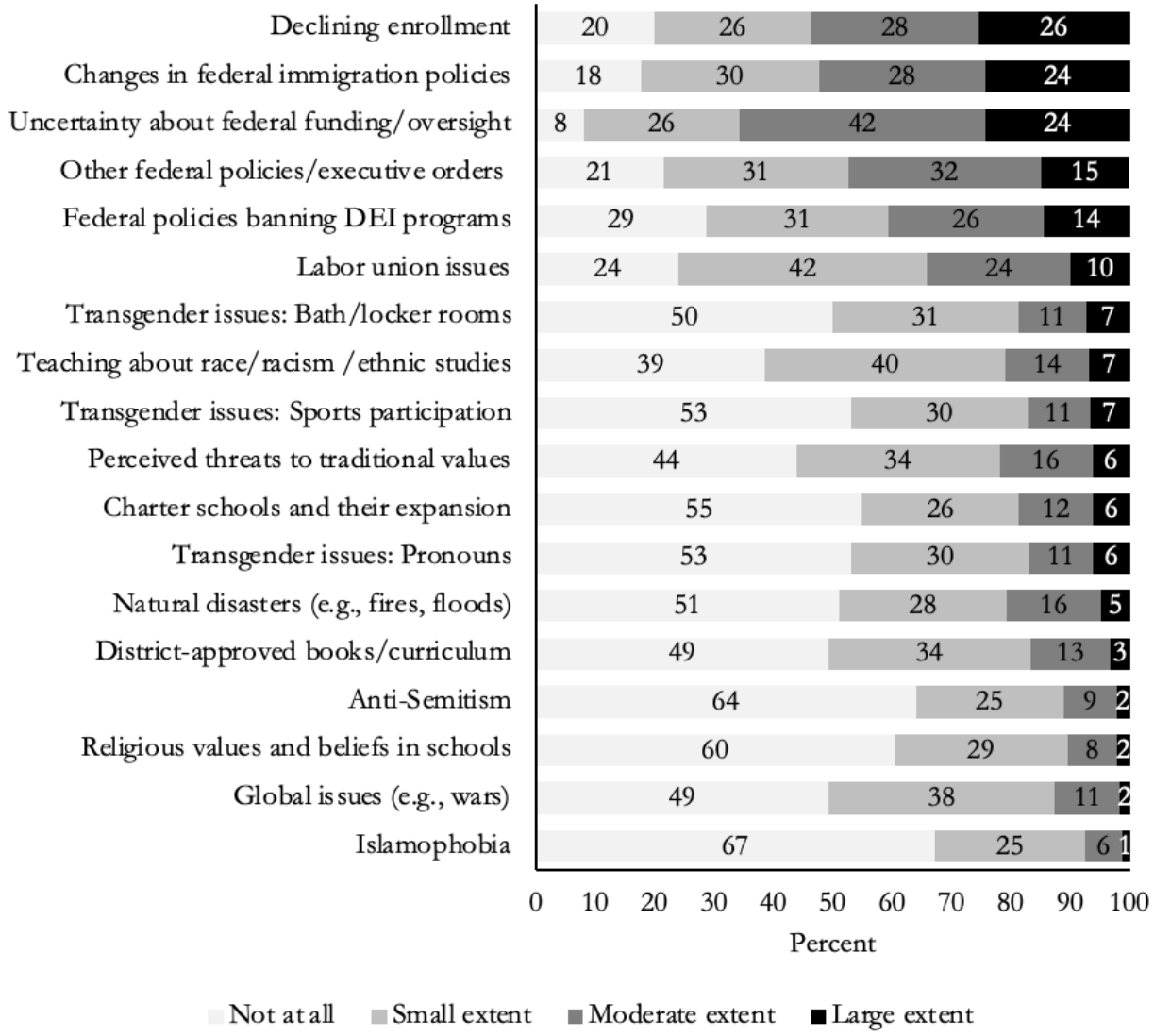


Figure 2

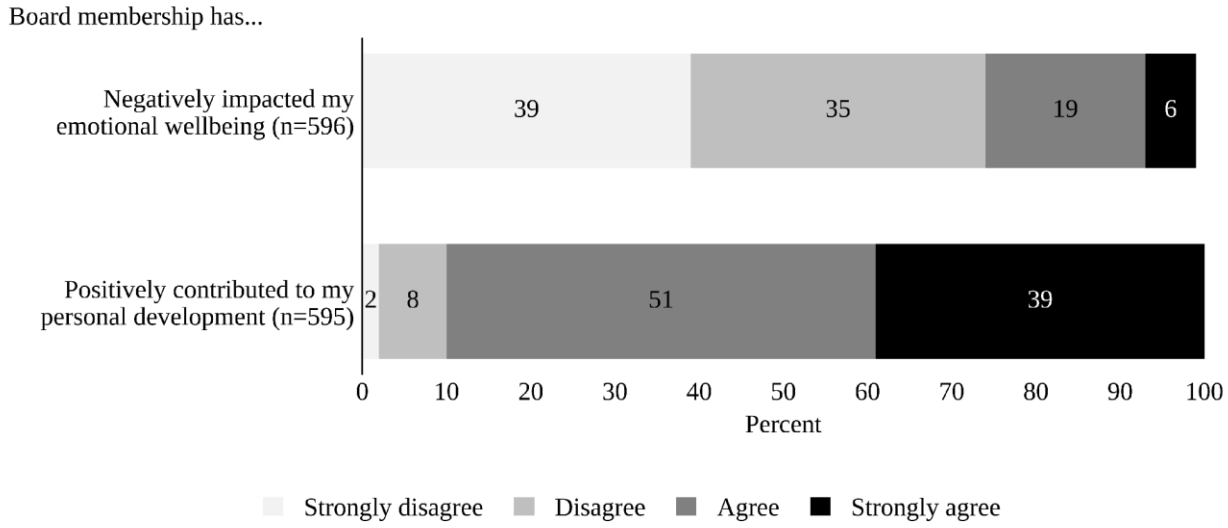
Extent to Which Issues Created Tension in Board Members' Districts



Note. Values are percentages of respondents. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Figure 3

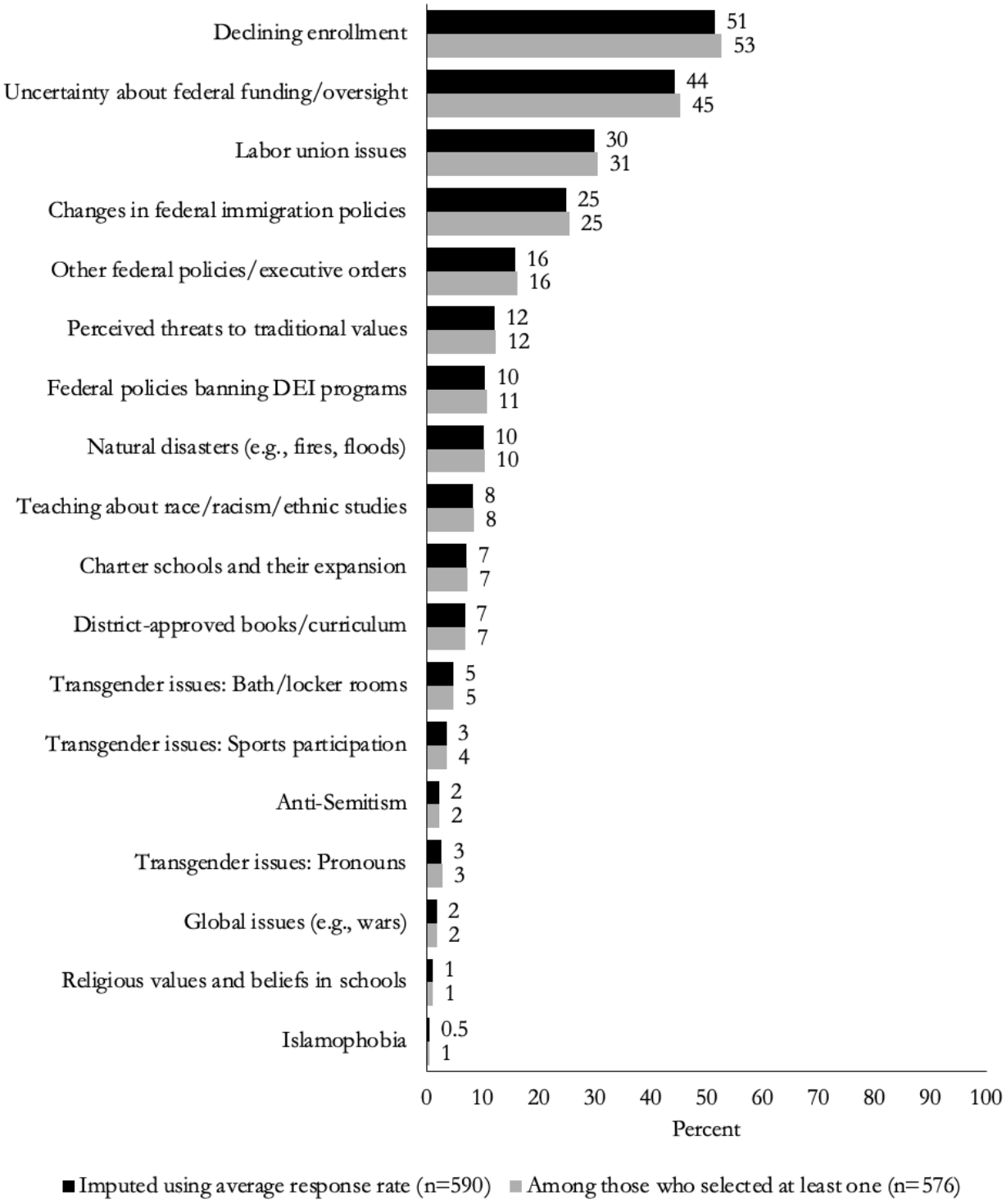
Board Members' Views on How Serving Has Affected Their Emotional Wellbeing and Personal Development



Note. Values are percentages of respondents (n = 596 for emotional wellbeing; n = 595 for personal development). Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Figure 4

Factors That Impeded Efforts to Make Progress on the Board's Goals



Note. Values are percentages of respondents. Black bars are imputed using the average response rate (n = 590); gray bars are among respondents who selected at least one factor (n = 576).

Table 1
Characteristics of School Board Members in the Analytic and Full Survey Samples

	Analytic sample						Full survey sample					
	Unweighted			Weighted			Unweighted			Weighted		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Percent of Survey Answered	451	100	1	451	100	1	801	85	33	801	85	33
Age	426	57	12	426	58	12	498	58	12	498	58	13
Woman	444	60	49	444	59	49	518	60	49	518	59	49
Current District Parent	445	40	49	445	40	49	519	39	49	519	39	49
Ever District Parent	445	86	35	445	86	35	519	84	37	519	83	37
Latino	434	19	39	434	18	38	506	18	39	506	17	37
Asian	412	6	23	412	5	21	483	6	23	483	5	21
Black	412	4	20	412	4	19	483	4	20	483	3	18
White	412	75	43	412	77	42	483	75	43	483	78	41
Other Race	412	15	36	412	14	35	483	15	35	483	14	35
Democrat	450	64	48	450	60	49	527	66	47	527	62	49
Education Occupation	396	24	43	396	24	43	463	24	43	463	24	43
College or Graduate Degree	445	83	38	445	80	40	519	83	38	519	80	40
Appointed	451	1	11	451	1	11	528	11	31	528	13	34
At-large Elected	451	34	47	451	37	48	527	35	48	527	39	49
Ran Unopposed	451	39	49	451	43	50	473	39	49	473	44	50
Number of Respondents	451			451			801			801		

Note. These data are reported at the respondent level. Weighted estimates apply survey raking weights designed to improve the alignment of participating districts with the statewide distribution of California school districts. Sample sizes vary across characteristics because respondents did not answer every survey item. Information on whether respondents ran unopposed was supplemented, where available, with records from the California Elections Data Archive.

Table 2

Characteristics of School Districts in the Analytic, Survey, and Statewide Samples

	Analytic sample		Survey sample		Statewide sample
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	
Number of Students	9,794	7,123	8,845	5,917	6,051
Percent African American	3	3	3	2	2
Percent Asian	9	7	8	6	6
Percent Hispanic	46	46	47	47	48
Percent White	32	34	32	34	34
Percent Free or Reduced Lunch	53	55	55	59	58
City	23	19	20	15	15
Rural	15	25	23	35	37
Suburban	47	38	43	32	32
Town	14	18	15	18	17
Per Pupil Expenditures	20,793	21,284	21,457	22,603	22,563
Percentage Proficient in ELA	52	49	50	47	47
Percentage Proficient in Math	40	38	38	35	36
Number of School Districts	323	323	478	478	937

Note. All district characteristics reflect the 2024–25 school year except per-pupil expenditures, which are from 2023–24. District characteristics are drawn from California Department of Education (CDE) administrative data. The statewide comparison includes 937 elementary, high school, and unified school districts, excluding county offices of education and other non-district entities. The survey includes respondents from 478 districts, representing approximately 51% of California school districts. Survey estimates are weighted to account for differences between participating districts and districts statewide.

Table 3a

Descriptive Statistics for Little p and Big P Politics Items, Full Survey Sample

Survey item	Mean	SD	n	Min	Max
Little p politics					
District conditions					
Relations: constituents and district leaders	3.14	0.63	669	1	4
Relations: groups with different political views	2.70	0.67	656	1	4
Relations: board and superintendent	3.59	0.63	670	1	4
Relations: among board members	3.27	0.76	669	1	4
Source of tension					
Labor union issues	2.27	0.91	667	1	4
Past year					
Conflict or disagreement with other board members	0.36	0.48	642	0	1
Big P politics: Culture wars					
Source of tension					
Teaching about race/racism/ethnic studies	1.96	0.89	662	1	4
Transgender issues: Sports participation	1.75	0.92	664	1	4
Transgender issues: Pronouns	1.76	0.91	658	1	4
Transgender issues: Bath/locker rooms	1.82	0.93	661	1	4
Anti-Semitism	1.59	0.79	662	1	4
Islamophobia	1.48	0.70	657	1	4
Religious values and beliefs in schools	1.57	0.77	660	1	4
Perceived threats to traditional values	1.88	0.91	660	1	4
Big P politics: Federal policy context					
Source of tension					
Uncertainty about federal funding/oversight	2.85	0.88	665	1	4
Changes in federal immigration policies	2.68	1.03	664	1	4
Federal policies banning DEI programs	2.36	1.02	659	1	4
Other federal policies/executive orders	2.48	0.97	659	1	4

Note. Full survey sample, N = 801 school board members. Means and SDs use original, unreversed responses and are unweighted; n denotes nonmissing responses. Relationship items range from 1 (very negative) to 4 (very positive), and tension items from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a large extent). The conflict item is 0/1, so its mean is a proportion.

Table 3b

Descriptive Statistics for Personal Stressor, Efficacy, Confidence, and Wellbeing Items, Full Survey Sample

Survey item	Mean	SD	n	Min	Max
Efficacy					
Agree					
My perspectives shape board decisions	3.28	0.70	596	1	4
I can make a real difference for students	3.29	0.72	597	1	4
Political confidence					
How confident					
Navigate conflict and political tensions	3.11	0.75	544	1	4
Navigate social media interactions	2.91	0.85	542	1	4
Understand personnel and union contracts	3.37	0.66	546	1	4
Occupational wellbeing *(items modeled separately)*					
Agree					
Service hurt my emotional wellbeing	1.99	0.92	596	1	4
Service helped my personal development	3.28	0.70	595	1	4
Personal stressors					
Past year					
Derogatory comments on social media	0.29	0.46	642	0	1
Threats of violence or harassment	0.14	0.35	642	0	1

Note. Full survey sample, N = 801 school board members. Means and SDs use original, unreversed responses and are unweighted; n denotes nonmissing responses. Agreement items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and confidence items from 1 (not at all confident) to 4 (very confident). Personal stressor items are 0/1, so their means are proportions.

Table 4

Odds Ratios from Ordered Logistic Regressions Predicting Intention to Seek Reelection

	Model							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Little p	0.667**	0.713*	0.718*	0.784	0.894	0.815	0.946	1.019
	(0.114)	(0.127)	(0.123)	(0.143)	(0.169)	(0.143)	(0.170)	(0.186)
Big P: Federal policy context	1.042	1.053	1.046	1.012	1.031	1.001	1.053	1.024
	(0.124)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.120)	(0.123)	(0.119)	(0.122)	(0.119)
Big P: Culture wars	1.063	1.104	1.062	1.091	1.139	1.053	1.098	1.082
	(0.146)	(0.156)	(0.142)	(0.148)	(0.154)	(0.146)	(0.153)	(0.150)
Personal stressors		0.622*			0.538**			
		(0.163)			(0.146)			
Political confidence			1.274*		1.203			
			(0.162)		(0.156)			
Efficacy				1.345**	1.321**			
				(0.161)	(0.163)			
Occupational wellbeing: Positive personal development						1.526***		1.323**
						(0.168)		(0.150)
Occupational wellbeing: Negative emotional wellbeing							0.579***	0.631***
							(0.0601)	(0.0679)

Note. Weighted ordered logistic regression estimates reported as odds ratios, with robust standard errors in parentheses. N = 451 school board members in the analytic sample. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Patterns of results are robust to controlling for the percent of students eligible for subsidized meals in the SBM's school district, as well as binary indicators for whether the SBM identifies as a woman, as Black, or as Latino or Hispanic, whether the district is in an urban locale, and whether the SBM reported that they ran unopposed in their most recent election and whether they were elected or appointed on an at-large (vs. ward/trustee) basis.

ONLINE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Tables A1–A7

Table A1

Characteristics of Case Study Participants and Their Districts

Board member	District Urbanicity	District Enrollment	% Non-White Enrollment	% Economically Disadvantaged Enrollment	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Years Served	Community Political Leaning
1	Midsize City	>20,000	70-90%	20-50%	F	Asian	<35	New	Solid Dem
2	Small City	>20,000	70-90%	20-50%	M	White	35-50	Exp	Dem Leaning
3	Large Suburban	2,000-5,000	70-90%	<20%	M	Asian	35-50	Exp	Strong Dem
4	Large Suburban	5,000-10,000	70-90%	<20%	M	Multiracial	<35	Exp	Strong Dem
5	Large Suburban	10,000-20,000	>90%	>80%	F	Hispanic	>50	Exp	Solid Dem
6	Large Suburban	5,000-10,000	>90%	>80%	M	Hispanic	35-50	Exp	Strong Dem
7	Midsize City	10,000-20,000	70-90%	20-50%	F	Black	35-50	Exp	Strong Dem
8	Rural	<2,000	50-70%	20-50%	F	White	35-50	New	Rep Leaning
9	Large Suburban	2,000-5,000	50-70%	<20%	M	Hispanic	>50	Exp	Strong Dem
10	Rural	<2,000	50-70%	50-80%	F	White	>50	Vet	Strong Rep

Note. Years Served: New = 1 year or less; Experienced = 1-5; Veteran = >5. Ranges are used to protect anonymity. Source: https://www.ed-data.org/ 2022-23. Political leaning was determined based on data from the winning margin for the most recently available presidential election (NYTimes, n.d.). Strong Dem/Strong Rep= margin of >30%, Solid Dem/Solid Rep= margin of 15%-29%, Dem/Rep Leaning= margin of 1%-14%.

Table A2

Characteristics of Follow-Up Interview Participants and Their Districts

Characteristic	Participants (n)
Region	Bay Area (10), Central Coast (2), Central Valley (2), Inland Empire (2), Northern (4), Southern (11)
District Size	1,000-5,000 students (11), 5,001-10,000 (8), 10,001-20,000 (9), 20,001-40,000 (3)
Urbanicity	City (11), Rural (3), Suburban (12), Town (5)
Service	1 year or less (5), 2-5 years (10), 6-10 years (7), 11-20 years (7), More than 20 years (2)
Partisanship	Democrat (15), Republican (6), Independent/No preference (10)
Gender	Man (12), Woman (19)
Race/Ethnicity	Asian (5), Black, Hispanic, or Latino (6), White (20)

Note. N = 31 follow-up interview participants. Counts of participants are in parentheses.

Table A3a

Descriptive Statistics for Little p and Big P Politics Items, Analytic Sample

Survey item	Mean	SD	n	Min	Max
Little p politics					
District conditions					
Relations: constituents and district leaders	3.14	0.66	451	1	4
Relations: groups with different political views	2.68	0.71	446	1	4
Relations: board and superintendent	3.59	0.63	451	1	4
Relations: among board members	3.23	0.78	451	1	4
Source of tension					
Labor union issues	2.34	0.91	450	1	4
Past year					
Conflict or disagreement with other board members	0.37	0.48	451	0	1
Big P politics: Culture wars					
Source of tension					
Teaching about race/racism/ethnic studies	1.99	0.89	450	1	4
Transgender issues: Sports participation	1.77	0.90	451	1	4
Transgender issues: Pronouns	1.79	0.91	449	1	4
Transgender issues: Bath/locker rooms	1.84	0.92	450	1	4
Anti-Semitism	1.64	0.82	451	1	4
Islamophobia	1.50	0.71	448	1	4
Religious values and beliefs in schools	1.58	0.79	450	1	4
Perceived threats to traditional values	1.88	0.91	451	1	4
Big P politics: Federal policy context					
Source of tension					
Uncertainty about federal funding/oversight	2.86	0.91	450	1	4
Changes in federal immigration policies	2.69	1.02	451	1	4
Federal policies banning DEI programs	2.36	1.03	451	1	4
Other federal policies/executive orders	2.49	0.99	451	1	4

Note. Analytic sample, N = 451 school board members with nonmissing data on the outcome and all model variables. Means and SDs use original, unreversed responses and are unweighted; n denotes nonmissing responses. Relationship items range from 1 (very negative) to 4 (very positive), and tension items from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a large extent). The conflict item is 0/1, so its mean is a proportion.

Table A3b

Descriptive Statistics for Personal Stressor, Efficacy, Confidence, and Wellbeing Items, Analytic Sample

Survey item	Mean	SD	n	Min	Max
Efficacy					
Agree					
My perspectives shape board decisions	3.29	0.71	451	1	4
I can make a real difference for students	3.31	0.70	451	1	4
Political confidence					
How confident					
Navigate conflict and political tensions	3.12	0.76	450	1	4
Navigate social media interactions	2.95	0.85	449	1	4
Understand personnel and union contracts	3.39	0.65	451	1	4
Occupational wellbeing (items modeled separately)					
Agree					
Service hurt my emotional wellbeing	2.02	0.94	451	1	4
Service helped my personal development	3.29	0.67	451	1	4
Personal stressors					
Past year					
Derogatory comments on social media	0.32	0.47	451	0	1
Threats of violence or harassment	0.14	0.35	451	0	1

Note. Analytic sample, N = 451 school board members with nonmissing data on the outcome and all model variables. Means and SDs use original, unreversed responses and are unweighted; n denotes nonmissing responses. Agreement items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and confidence items from 1 (not at all confident) to 4 (very confident). Personal stressor items are 0/1, so their means are proportions.

Table A4

Robustness Check: Ordinary Least Squares Estimates Predicting Intention to Seek Reelection

	Model							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Little p	-0.261**	-0.219*	-0.211*	-0.157	-0.0771	-0.119	-0.0110	0.0365
	(0.111)	(0.115)	(0.112)	(0.118)	(0.123)	(0.114)	(0.111)	(0.113)
Big P: Federal policy context	0.0289	0.0379	0.0280	0.0132	0.0245	0.00892	0.0462	0.0310
	(0.0807)	(0.0805)	(0.0802)	(0.0796)	(0.0791)	(0.0796)	(0.0777)	(0.0778)
Big P: Culture wars	0.0333	0.0525	0.0256	0.0429	0.0607	0.0273	0.0520	0.0453
	(0.0888)	(0.0899)	(0.0863)	(0.0867)	(0.0859)	(0.0863)	(0.0845)	(0.0839)
Personal stressors		-0.308*			-0.380**			
		(0.184)			(0.184)			
Political confidence			0.144*		0.101			
			(0.0851)		(0.0867)			
Efficacy				0.182**	0.172**			
				(0.0790)	(0.0818)			
Positive personal development						0.272***		0.169**
						(0.0720)		(0.0753)
Negative emotional wellbeing							-0.358***	-0.300***
							(0.0658)	(0.0693)
Constant	3.395***	3.454***	3.386***	3.384***	3.452***	3.387***	3.373***	3.372***
	(0.0635)	(0.0780)	(0.0630)	(0.0629)	(0.0758)	(0.0625)	(0.0611)	(0.0609)
Observations	451	451	451	451	451	451	451	451
R-squared	0.016	0.022	0.024	0.030	0.042	0.053	0.081	0.094

Note. Weighted ordinary least squares coefficients for the five-category reelection intent outcome, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Models (1)-(8) use the same specifications as Table 4. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A5

Robustness Check: Logistic Regression Estimates Predicting Intention to Seek Reelection

	Model							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Little p	-0.489***	-0.415**	-0.433**	-0.311*	-0.183	-0.309*	-0.182	-0.116
	(0.176)	(0.182)	(0.180)	(0.188)	(0.197)	(0.186)	(0.192)	(0.197)
Big P: Federal policy context	0.0141	0.0317	0.0132	-0.0151	0.00494	-0.0130	0.0352	0.0139
	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.123)	(0.122)	(0.124)	(0.124)
Big P: Culture wars	-0.116	-0.0819	-0.126	-0.104	-0.0643	-0.129	-0.0991	-0.110
	(0.146)	(0.147)	(0.144)	(0.144)	(0.145)	(0.148)	(0.149)	(0.150)
Personal stressors		-0.588*			-0.728**			
		(0.322)			(0.335)			
Political confidence			0.165		0.0794			
			(0.136)		(0.141)			
Efficacy				0.333**	0.350**			
				(0.132)	(0.141)			
Positive personal development						0.374***		0.250**
						(0.122)		(0.126)
Negative emotional wellbeing							-0.457***	-0.375***
							(0.117)	(0.121)
Constant	0.0159	0.128	0.00653	-0.00665	0.127	0.00213	-0.0155	-0.0179
	(0.103)	(0.124)	(0.103)	(0.104)	(0.123)	(0.105)	(0.105)	(0.105)
Observations	451	451	451	451	451	451	451	451

Note. Weighted logistic regression coefficients (log odds) for a binary indicator of intending to seek reelection, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Models (1)-(8) use the same specifications as Table 4. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A6

Brant Tests of the Parallel Regression Assumption for the Ordered Logistic Regressions in Table 4

	Unweighted			Weighted		
	χ^2	df	p	χ^2	df	p
Panel A. Global test (all predictors)						
(1) Little p and Big P	17.37	9	.043	16.75	9	.053
(2) + Personal stressors	20.59	12	.057	20.75	12	.054
(3) + Political confidence	28.75	12	.004	23.07	12	.027
(4) + Efficacy	19.91	12	.069	19.18	12	.084
(5) + Stressors, confidence, and efficacy	34.84	18	.010	30.01	18	.037
(6) + Positive personal development	21.47	12	.044	19.02	12	.088
(7) + Negative emotional wellbeing	23.51	12	.024	21.41	12	.045
(8) + Both wellbeing measures	24.99	15	.050	22.40	15	.098
Panel B. Tests for each predictor						
Little p (Model 1)	1.20	3	.753	1.64	3	.649
Big P: Federal policy context (Model 1)	1.95	3	.583	2.00	3	.572
Big P: Culture wars (Model 1)	11.84	3	.008	10.40	3	.015
Personal stressors (Model 2)	3.69	3	.298	3.70	3	.295
Political confidence (Model 3)	11.05	3	.011	9.08	3	.028
Efficacy (Model 4)	2.72	3	.438	3.54	3	.315
Positive personal development (Model 6)	4.22	3	.239	2.60	3	.457
Negative emotional wellbeing (Model 7)	6.10	3	.107	3.74	3	.291

Note. N = 451 school board members in the analytic sample. Each test asks whether a predictor's coefficient is the same in the four cumulative binary logits implied by the ordered logit (intent above each of the four lowest response categories). A significant test indicates that the parallel regression (proportional odds) assumption does not hold for that predictor. Unweighted tests are Brant (1990) tests computed with brant (Long & Freese, 2014). Because brant does not accept sampling weights, weighted tests are Wald tests of the same hypothesis from the four binary logits estimated with the survey weights and a robust covariance matrix across equations (suest). Global tests have 3 df per predictor. Panel B reports each predictor's test from the Table 4 model in which it first enters. Tests are identical whether the ordered logit is reported as coefficients or odds ratios.

Table A7

Survey Instrument for the Getting Down to Facts III Statewide Survey of California School Board Members

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
Section A. Role of School Board and School Board Member					
1	Thinking about your role as a school board member, please indicate how important each of these is for the work of a school board.	Not at all important; Not very important; Somewhat important; Very important; Among the most important aspects of my role as a board member	Matrix; one response per row.		q4_*
	a. Ensuring responsible use of public funds				q4_7
	b. Monitoring student learning outcomes				q4_9
	c. Celebrating leaders, educators and staff (e.g., attending events, visiting schools)				q4_3
	d. Insulating the district from outside politics				q4_4
	e. Centering the voices of marginalized students				q4_5
	f. Advancing goals related to educational justice				q4_2
	g. Ensuring compliance with state law and federal laws and policies				q4_6
	h. Hiring and evaluating the superintendent				q4_8
	i. Working to set district goals and policies				q4_1
2	On average, approximately how much time do you spend per month on board-related activities?	Drop-down menu (options not shown in the printed instrument)	The analysis file records responses in bands from 1–5 hours to 40+ hours.		hrs_month_cat
3	When your board is setting district priorities each year, how important are the following in setting those priorities?	Not at all important; Not very important; Somewhat important; Very important; Among the most important things the school board uses to set priorities	Matrix; one response per row		q6_*
	a. Your district's student test scores				q6_1
	b. Your district's student behavior data				q6_2
	c. Your district's California School Dashboard results				q6_3
	d. Your district's LCAP process				q6_4

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	e. Feedback from teachers and/or principals in your district				q6_5
	f. Feedback from parents and/or parent groups in your district				q6_6
	g. Other				q6_7
4	In just a few phrases or bullets, what were the top priorities for your district in the 2024-2025 academic year?	Open-ended text			—
Section B. Political Climate					
5	How would you characterize the following conditions within your district community?	Very negative; Negative; Positive; Very positive	Matrix; one response per row		q8_*
	a. Relationships between constituents and school district leaders			Little p (reverse coded)	q8_1
	b. Relationships between groups with different political affiliations			Little p (reverse coded)	q8_2
	c. Relationships between the school board and superintendent			Little p (reverse coded)	q8_3
	d. Relationships between school board members			Little p (reverse coded)	q8_4
	e. Financial status of the district				q8_5
	f. Academic performance of students in the district				q8_6
	g. Socioemotional wellbeing of students in the district				q8_7
6	To what extent are the following a source of strain, tension, or conflict in your district and/or community?	Not at All; A Small Extent; A Moderate Extent; A Large Extent	Matrix; one response per row	Figure 2 (all sub-items)	q9_*
	a. Declining enrollment				q9_1
	b. Charter schools and their expansion				q9_2
	c. Labor union issues			Little p	q9_3
	d. Natural disasters (e.g., fires, floods)				q9_4
	e. District-approved books/curriculum				q9_5

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	f. Teaching about race/racism and/or ethnic studies			Big P: Culture wars	q9_6
	g. Transgender issues: Sports participation			Big P: Culture wars	q9_7
	h. Transgender issues: Pronouns			Big P: Culture wars	q9_8
	i. Transgender issues: Bathroom or locker room use			Big P: Culture wars	q9_9
	j. Anti-Semitism			Big P: Culture wars	q9_10
	k. Islamophobia			Big P: Culture wars	q9_11
	l. The inclusion of religious values and beliefs in schools			Big P: Culture wars	q9_12
	m. Perceived threats to traditional values			Big P: Culture wars	q9_13
	n. Global issues (e.g., wars)				q9_14
	o. Uncertainty about federal funding and oversight			Big P: Federal policy context	q9_15
	p. Changes in federal immigration enforcement policies			Big P: Federal policy context	q9_16
	q. Federal policies banning DEI policies or programs			Big P: Federal policy context	q9_17
	r. Influence of other federal policies/executive orders			Big P: Federal policy context	q9_18
7	In the past year, which of the following, if any, impeded efforts to make progress on your school board's goals? Select up to three that most apply. Tensions around...	Same 18 issues as Item 6, in the same order	Check boxes; up to three	Figure 4	q10_1–q10_18
8	In the past year as a board member, have you:	Check box for each statement (selected or not selected)	Check boxes		q11_*
	a. felt political pressure to not run again (e.g., been the target of a recall campaign)				q11_1
	b. felt that being a school board member is more politically challenging than you had anticipated				q11_4
	c. had interpersonal conflict and/or significant disagreement with other board members			Little p	q11_3

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	d. experienced threats of personal violence or harassment to you or your family members			Personal stressors	q11_5
	e. felt that the electoral process is more challenging than you had anticipated				q11_2
	f. been notified of threats or harassment against the superintendent or other district leaders				q11_7
	g. experienced derogatory personal comments on social media			Personal stressors	q11_6
Section C. Board Meetings and Other Places for Meaningful Dialogue With Communities					
9	In the past year, has your board engaged with your constituents (e.g., parents, community members, district staff, organizational partners) in any of the following contexts? If so, how useful have they been for informing and/or influencing board decision-making?	Yes or No. If yes: Not Useful; Somewhat Useful; Useful; Very Useful	Matrix; usefulness rated only for contexts marked Yes		q121_*, q122_*
	a. Traditional school board meeting				q121_1, q122_1
	b. Board study sessions				q121_2, q122_2
	c. Board committee meetings (excluding closed sessions)				q121_3, q122_3
	d. LCAP development meetings				q121_4, q122_4
	e. Ad hoc community town halls/forums				q121_5, q122_5
	f. School-sponsored events (e.g., athletic events, cultural celebrations, etc.)				q121_6, q122_6
	g. Individual communication (e.g., emails, phone calls, meetings, running into someone at the grocery store)				q121_7, q122_7
	h. Group specific meetings (e.g., student listening circles, teacher empathy interviews, parent focus groups)				q121_8, q122_8
10	To what extent do you believe the families who participate in board-sponsored events are representative of families attending schools in the district?	Not at all representative; Not very representative; Somewhat representative; Quite representative; Very representative	Single choice		q13
11	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree	Matrix; one response per row		q141_*
	a. Community engagement has improved the work of our board				q141_1
	b. People who do not live in our community have an outsized influence on board decisions				q141_2

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	c. District engagement activities tend to be dominated by a few individuals or groups				q141_3
	d. Having student board members is an effective way to include the voices and perspectives of students on educational decision-making				q141_4
	e. Decisions are best made locally with limited state-level directives or mandates				q141_5
	f. More state-level guidance would be helpful to accomplish our work				q141_6
	g. State-level policies constrain our ability to be responsive to community needs				q141_7
	h. Our board struggles to obtain input from underrepresented or marginalized groups within our district community				q141_8
	i. Our board struggles to take action in response to community input				q141_9
12	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree	Matrix; one response per row		q151_*
	a. Our board effectively uses time in board meetings				q151_1
	b. Our board meeting agendas and discussions align with our district's vision and goals				q151_2
	c. Fellow board members respectfully listen to my opinions				q151_3
	d. Our board leverages the knowledge/expertise of each board member to advance district priorities				q151_4
	e. My perspectives help shape our school board's decisions			Efficacy	q151_5
	f. As a board member I can make a real difference in the wellbeing of students in our district			Efficacy	q151_6
	g. Sometimes I wonder if my work on the board matters much for what goes on in schools				q151_7
	h. Being a board member has negatively impacted my emotional wellbeing			Negative emotional wellbeing; Figure 3	q151_8

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	i. Being a board member has positively contributed to my personal development			Positive personal development; Figure 3	q151_9
Section D. Training and Preparation					
13	How confident do you feel in your ability to do the following as a board member?	Not at all confident; Not very confident; Somewhat confident; Very Confident	Matrix; one response per row		q161_*
	a. Establish strategic plans and set district goals				q161_1
	b. Build an effective relationship with the superintendent				q161_2
	c. Evaluate the superintendent				q161_3
	d. Identify which policies will promote student learning				q161_4
	e. Navigate state-level rules tied to open meetings and board member interactions (e.g., the Brown Act)				q161_5
	f. Understand and pass the yearly budget +LCAP				q161_6
	g. Run school board meetings (e.g., Robert's Rules of Order)				q161_7
	h. Engage with the community to address district goals				q161_8
	i. Interpret and use data to inform decisions				q161_9
	j. Interpret and use data to advance equity				q161_10
	k. Evaluate the effectiveness of district programs and services				q161_11
	l. Evaluate the effectiveness of classroom curricula				q161_12
	m. Understand issues related to personnel and union contracts			Political confidence	q161_13
	n. Navigate social media interactions			Political confidence	q161_14
	o. Navigate conflict and/or political tensions within the community, district, and/or board			Political confidence	q161_15
14	Have you received support or training to do the following tasks during your tenure so far as a board member?	No, I have not and would not want more; No, I have not and would want more; Yes, I have and would want more; Yes, I have and would not want more	Matrix; one response per row		q17_*
	a. Establish strategic plans and set district goals				q17_1

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	b. Build an effective relationship with the superintendent				q17_2
	c. Hire and evaluate the superintendent				q17_3
	d. Identify which policies will promote student learning				q17_4
	e. Navigate state-level rules tied to open meetings and board member interactions (e.g., the Brown Act)				q17_5
	f. Navigate legal guidance related to changes in state and federal policy changes				q17_6
	g. Understand and pass the yearly budget +LCAP				q17_7
	h. Run school board meetings (e.g., Robert's Rules of Order)				q17_8
	i. Engage with the community to address district goals				q17_9
	j. Interpret and use data to inform decisions				q17_10
	k. Interpret and use data to advance equity				q17_11
	l. Evaluate the effectiveness of district programs and services				q17_12
	m. Evaluate the effectiveness of classroom curricula				q17_13
	n. Understand issues related to personnel and union contracts				q17_14
	o. Navigate social media interactions				q17_15
	p. Navigate conflict and/or political tensions within the community, district, and/or board				q17_16
15	Have you received training and support from the following sources, and if so, how useful has it been?	Yes or No. If yes: Not Useful; Somewhat Useful; Useful; Very Useful	Matrix; usefulness rated only for sources marked Yes		q181_*, q182_*
	a. County office of education				q181_1, q182_1
	b. California School Boards Association				q181_2, q182_2
	c. National School Boards Association or similar national organization (e.g., Council of the Great City Schools, Leadership for Educational Equity, etc.)				q181_3, q182_3
	d. Other state, regional and local school board associations				q181_4, q182_4
	e. School District/Superintendent				q181_5, q182_5
	f. External Mentor				q181_6, q182_6

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
16	If the following opportunities were made available to you, how likely are you to participate?	Extremely Unlikely; Somewhat Unlikely; Somewhat Likely; Extremely Likely	Matrix; one response per row		q19_*
	a. Meet with a mentor who has experience serving on a school board				q19_1
	b. Participate with a network of other current board members in your local geographic area				q19_2
	c. Participate with a network of other current board members outside of your geographic area				q19_3
	d. Participate with a network of other current board members from districts similar to yours				q19_4
17	OPTIONAL: Are there any ideas you have for how to better support you or improve your ability to fulfill your duties as a board member (e.g., topics in which you would like to receive more information, support and/or training; ways to receive this support)?	Open-ended text	Optional		—
Section E. Conflicts and Tensions					
	Please read the following hypothetical scenario and answer subsequent questions.		Each respondent saw one of the two scenario versions (inferred: no respondent in the data answered both; 257 answered Version 1 and 271 answered Version 2).		
	Scenario Version 1: In response to community demands stemming from the Summer 2020 movement for racial justice, the school board in District Y eliminated its School Resource Officer (SRO) program. A recent rise in gun violence at several district-sponsored events has sparked calls from local community leaders to reinstate the SRO program to address the safety concerns of district parents and families. However, students of color within the district are staunchly opposed to SROs returning to their schools, citing past experiences with racial profiling and the use of excessive force. The final vote on				

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
	reinstating the SRO program will occur at this week's board meeting where close to 50 community members have already signed up for public comment concerning this agenda item.				
18	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding this scenario?	Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Undecided/Need more information; Agree; Strongly Agree	Version 1 only. Matrix; one response per row		q23_*
	a. The school board should respond to the community leaders' concerns by reinstating the SRO program.				q23_1
	b. The school board has a responsibility to prioritize the voices and experiences of the students in the district by keeping the SRO program out of schools.				q23_2
	c. My school board has policies in place that would allow us to successfully navigate this conflict.				q23_3
19	How confident are you as an individual board member and as a board with the following statements based on the scenario?	Not at all confident; Slightly confident; Moderately confident; Very confident	Version 1 only. Matrix; one response per row		q24_*
	a. As an individual board member: my ability to successfully address this conflict.				q24_1
	b. As a school board: our ability to work together to successfully address this conflict.				q24_2
	Scenario Version 2: In response to student demands several years ago, the school board in District Y eliminated its School Resource Officer (SRO) program. A recent rise in gun violence at several district-sponsored events has sparked calls from parents and families to reinstate the SRO program to address concerns about safety. However, students within the district remain staunchly opposed to SROs returning to their schools, citing past negative experiences with SROs focusing mostly on dress code violations, cell phone use, and stopping students from vaping instead of making school feel safer. The final vote on reinstating the SRO program will occur at this week's board meeting where close to 50 community members have already signed up for public comment concerning this agenda item.				

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
20	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding this scenario?	Strongly Disagree; Somewhat Disagree; Undecided/Need more information; Somewhat Agree; Strongly Agree	Version 2 only. Matrix; one response per row		q27_*
	a. The school board should respond to the community leaders' concerns by reinstating the SRO program.				q27_1
	b. The school board has a responsibility to prioritize the voices and experiences of the students in the district by keeping the SRO program out of schools.				q27_2
	c. My school board has policies in place that would allow us to successfully navigate this conflict.				q27_3
21	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding this scenario?	Strongly Disagree; Somewhat Disagree; Somewhat Agree; Strongly Agree	Version 2 only. Matrix; one response per row		q28_*
	a. As an individual board member, I feel confident in my ability to successfully address this conflict.				q28_1
	b. As a school board, I feel confident in our ability to work together to successfully address this conflict.				q28_2
Section F. Future Intentions					
22	Do you intend on seeking reelection or reappointment for another term on the school board?	No, definitely not; No, probably not; Maybe; Yes, probably; Yes, definitely	Single choice	Outcome (Table 4)	seek_reelect
23	Do you intend to run for some public office (other than school board) in the future?	No, definitely not; No, probably not; Maybe; Yes, probably; Yes, definitely	Single choice		run_for_office
24	As part of this project, we will be interviewing a group of school board members to learn more about the topics covered in this survey. ... If you are interested in participating in an interview, please provide your email address.	Open-ended text (email address)	Optional; used to recruit follow-up interview participants	Table A2 sample	—
Section G. Demographics and Background					
25	Excluding this year, approximately how many years have you served as a board member?	Drop-down menu (options not shown in the printed instrument)	The analysis file records responses as <1, 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and >20 years.		years_sb_service_cat
26	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?	Democrat; Republican; Independent; Another party (please specify); No preference	Single choice		party_id_cat
27	Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?	Democratic Party; Republican Party	Display logic not printed; presumably		—

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
			shown to those not choosing Democrat or Republican in Item 26 (inferred from wording)		
28	Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?	Very strong Republican; Strong Republican; Not very strong Republican	Display logic not printed; presumably shown to Republicans in Item 26 (inferred from wording)		—
29	Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?	Very strong Democrat; Strong Democrat; Not very strong Democrat	Display logic not printed; presumably shown to Democrats in Item 26 (inferred from wording)		—
30	Are board members in your district elected/appointed at-large (the whole school district) or by trustee area (an election district within the overall school district)?	Elected/appointed at-large; Elected/appointed by trustee area; A combination of both	Single choice	Covariate (at-large)	atlarge
31	For the term you're currently serving, were you elected or appointed to your position on the school board?	I was elected to my position; I was appointed to my position	Single choice		appointed
32	In your most recent election, did you run against someone or were you the only candidate for your seat on the board?	Ran against other candidates; Ran unopposed	Single choice	Covariate (ran unopposed)	unopposed
33	If you were elected to your current term, approximately how much money did you (or your campaign committee) spend on your most recent school board election?	Less than $100; $100-$499; $500-$999; $1,000-$4,999; $5,000-$9,999; $10,000-$24,999; $25,000-$49,999; $50,000-$99,999; $100,000-$499,999; $500,000 or more; I don't know	Single choice. Wording limits the item to elected members; display logic not printed		elect_spending_cat9
34	Are you a student board member?	Yes; No	Single choice		studentsb_self
35	Do you have a student on your school board?	Yes; No	Single choice		studentsb_onboard
36	What is your occupation?	Business; Education; Government/Public sector work (e.g., police dept., fire dept., municipal agency); Homemaker/Volunteer; Law; Medicine/Health; Nonprofit; Agriculture, fishing, and forestry; Trades (e.g., plumber, electrician,	Single choice		occupation_cat

No.	Question wording	Response options	Format and display logic	Use in this paper	Variable
		contractor); Retail; Food Service/Restaurant; Retired; If other, please specify; Decline to respond			
37	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Grade school; High school; Some college; Associates degree; Four-year college degree (e.g., B.A. or B.S.); Some graduate school; Masters degree or professional degree; Doctorate; Decline to respond	Single choice		education_cat
38	What best describes your gender identity?	Man; Woman; Nonbinary; Decline to respond	Single choice	Covariate (woman)	woman
39	Do you identify as Latino or of Hispanic origin?	Yes; No; Decline to respond	Single choice	Covariate (Latino)	latino
40	What best describes your racial identity?	White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; Multiracial; Other (please specify); Decline to respond	Single choice	Covariate (Black)	race_cat, r_black
41	In what year were you born?	Open-ended text (year)			year_born
42	Are you a current or former parent/grandparent/caregiver of children in the school district?	I have never had a child/grandchild enrolled in the school district; Current parent/grandparent/caregiver; Former parent/grandparent/caregiver; Decline to respond	Single choice		current_parent, ever_parent
43	What is your annual household income?	Less than $10,000; $10,000 to $14,999; $15,000 to $24,999; $25,000 to $34,999; $35,000 to $49,999; $50,000 to $74,999; $75,000 to $99,999; $100,000 to $149,999; $150,000 to $199,999; $200,000 or more; Decline to respond	Single choice		income_cat
44	If you prefer that we use a different email address to contact you in the future (e.g., to share the survey results), please include that information here.	Open-ended text (email address)	Optional		—

Note. Items are listed in the order and wording of the fielded Qualtrics instrument (June 3, 2025 version). The introduction and consent text are omitted. Lettered rows are sub-items of the numbered question above them. The printed instrument does not show display logic, so logic marked

as inferred comes from question wording or from response patterns in the data. Use in this paper names the composite, figure, or model in which an item appears. Variable gives the item's name in the analysis file; — = not in the analysis file.