Identity and Ideology in the School Boardroom*

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Abstract

School boards have statutory authority over most elementary and secondary education policies, but receive little attention compared to other actors in education systems. A fundamental challenge to understanding the importance of boards is the absence of data on the policy goals of board members—i.e., their ideologies—forcing researchers to conduct tests based on demographic and professional characteristics—i.e., identities—with which ideology is presumed to correlate. This paper uses new data on the viewpoints and policy actions of school board members, coupled with a regression discontinuity design that generates quasi-random variation in board composition, to establish two results. The first is that the priorities of board members have large causal effects across many domains. For example, the effect of electing an equity-focused board member on test scores for low-income students is roughly equivalent to assigning every such student a teacher who is 0.3 to 0.4 SDs higher in the distribution of teacher value-added. The second is that observing policy priorities is crucial. Identity turns out to be a poor proxy for ideology, with limited governance effects that are fully explained by differences in policy priorities. Our findings challenge the belief that school boards are unimportant, showing that who serves on the board and what they prioritize can have far-reaching consequences for students.

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1 Introduction

On paper, local boards of education are among the most important policy actors in the United States. School boards are the governing bodies with ultimate responsibility for policy choices in most school districts. Their typical purview includes—but is not limited to—hiring and firing top district management, negotiating with teachers' unions, and setting budgets. Collectively, these budgets are large: the US spent $813 billion on public schools in the 2020-21 school year, more than the federal government spent on Medicare or defense (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Congressional Budget Office, 2021).

Despite their statutory importance, school boards receive relatively little attention from researchers. This lack of interest is consistent with a view that local education governance in the U.S. is broken: voters don't hold board members accountable to students, board members lack relevant expertise, and boards are captured by organized interests (Chubb and Moe, 1988; Kogan, 2022). Large-scale education reforms, such as accountability systems and state takeovers, can be understood in part as attempts to mitigate the consequences of school boards' dysfunction (Land, 2002). In this view, while an individual board member might conceivably be able to affect district outcomes, including student academic performance, such impacts are likely to be idiosyncratic and small in magnitude. Whether this view is justified, however, is ultimately an empirical question.

A fundamental challenge in assessing the importance of school boards is the absence of data on the central causal mechanism: the goals and actions of members. This challenge extends beyond education, reflecting a broader difficulty with studying board governance. As Adams et al. (2010) observe concerning corporate boards, researchers are forced to study observable characteristics of boards or board members—i.e., their *identities*—that are "presumed to correlate" with differences in behavior. In the case of school boards, prior work has examined whether district-level outcomes differ when board members are teachers or Hispanic, with the motivation that these characteristics proxy for unobserved differences in policy views (e.g. Kogan et al. 2021; Shi and Singleton 2023). This research typically finds modest effects on some hypothesized outcomes and null effects on others. Yet without direct evidence on members' actions and policy priorities, i.e., their *ideologies*, it is unclear whether this is because shifts in the proxies do not change the distribution of board viewpoints; because shifts in viewpoints do not affect board actions; or because board actions do

not affect outcomes. Differentiating between these hypotheses is crucial for stakeholders choosing board members and for researchers studying board governance.

This paper uses new data on the viewpoints and policy actions of board members coupled with a regression discontinuity design that generates quasi-random variation in board composition to establish two results. The first is that school boards are, in fact, important policy actors. The priorities of board members shape district policy across many domains, with effect sizes similar to those of large shifts in better-studied inputs such as teacher or school quality. The second is that observing policy priorities is crucial. Identity turns out to be a poor proxy for ideology, with limited governance effects that are fully explained by differences in policy priorities.

Our analysis centers on school board elections in California. Our main dataset contains information on 22,426 candidates competing in 5,782 elections held in 761 districts between 1998 and 2022. We use large language models (LLMs) to create data on board members' policy priorities from the text of political platforms compiled by the League of Women Voters and data on members' actions from the text of board meeting minutes. Our coding of these new data sources focuses on topics that are the subject of previous research on school boards (equity, fiscal conservatism, and support for teachers), central to debates on education policy (capital investments, safety and health, dropout prevention, student enrollment, career and technical education, and educational achievement), core board responsibilities emphasized in the corporate board literature (executive accountability; here, the superintendent), or the frequent subject of candidate discussion (parent engagement and the presence of controversial views in the district's curricula, policies, and practices, which we term "agenda bias").

Benchmarking exercises show that machine codes are as accurate as human hand-codes and provide comprehensive coverage of board debate, but whether these texts actually capture the underlying mechanisms of governance is not obvious—platforms may reflect cheap talk, and minutes may record little of substance. Their substantive validation comes from estimating causal impacts of apparent shifts in board ideological composition on policy discussion and district outcomes, for which we link to public datasets describing financial, workforce, and student outcomes within school districts.

We obtain two main results.

We first show that identity is a weak predictor of policy priorities. We focus on identity groups

central to previous studies of school boards: gender, ethnicity (specifically Hispanicity, given the large Hispanic population in California), experience working as a teacher, and political affiliation. As expected, some policy priorities are correlated with sociodemographic characteristics. For example, 34% of Hispanic candidates prioritize trimming school budgets, compared to 44% of non-Hispanic candidates, and 41% of female candidates cite equity as a priority, compared to 27% of male candidates. However, these are extreme cases. Views on most issues are more balanced across most groups. Further, even on the most polarized topics, substantial within-group variation remains. A random forest model that includes all background variables correctly predicts whether a candidate will prioritize equity only 66% of the time, a modest improvement over the 55% rate that would be obtained from a coin flip with the correct mean. Predictive power is similarly weak for other priorities.

We then turn our attention to the close elections that are the focus of our causal analysis. We estimate regression discontinuity models that compare board composition in the years following close elections where a candidate with a given attribute either just beats or just loses to a candidate without that attribute. We focus our exposition on three leading examples—equity-focused candidates, fiscally conservative candidates, and Hispanic candidates—while also presenting aggregate analyses of the full set of identity and priority types.

The weak relationship between identity and ideology in the cross-sectional data carries over into close elections. Regression discontinuity results show that electing a candidate with a given policy priority substantially shifts the ideological composition of the board, but electing a candidate of a given identity background does not, even when the belief in question is "typical" of the identity. Electing a candidate who prioritizes equity raises the share of board members who prioritize equity by about 21 percentage points (95% CI=[0.154, 0.270]) from a base of 25%. Gains are similar when the ideology is fiscal conservatism. In contrast, electing a Hispanic rather than a non-Hispanic board member has little effect on the share of fiscally conservative board members, despite the fact that the Hispanic/non-Hispanic gap in preference for school spending is one of the biggest cross-group differences we observe. Looking across all identity types, we see that a) the effects of electing a candidate of a given type on board ideology are small, and b) this is because ideological differences between identity groups are simply not that big in the cross-section, not because marginal candidates from different identity groups are more similar to one another than average candidates.

Our second result is that electing board members with a given priority has large effects on related outcomes, while electing board members from specific identity groups does not.

To understand the effects of member attributes on outcomes, we first map each identity and priority to a relevant district outcome or set of outcomes. For example, for equity-focused candidates we take the test score performance of a district's low-income students and Hispanic students as the outcomes of interest, while for fiscally conservative candidates we take per-pupil spending. For identity groups, we consider hypotheses drawn from the school board literature on the relationship between identities and district outcomes, and augment them with additional hypotheses based on cross-group differences in policy views. We then take these outcomes as dependent variables in regression discontinuity specifications.

Focusing first on our leading examples, we find that electing an equity-prioritizing board member raises test scores for low-income students in the district by an average of 0.044 student-level standard deviations (henceforth SDs; 95% CI=[0.038, 0.057]) in the five years following the election. Electing a fiscally conservative candidate reduces per-pupil spending by $1,212 (13% of the baseline mean; 95% CI=[-1455, -1086]) over that same period. In contrast, electing a Hispanic board member raises per-pupil spending by only $124 (95% CI=[-42, 235]).

Pooling across all ideology types, we find that the average effect of electing a candidate with a given view is to raise the value of the associated outcomes by 0.16 SDs (95% CI=[0.14, 0.19]). In contrast, the average effect of electing a candidate of a given identity is much smaller: 0.06 SDs for identity-outcome hypotheses studied in previous literature and -0.01 SDs for other hypotheses generated on the basis of identity differences in policy beliefs. Moreover, the identity effects we observe are explained by ideological differences: holding ideology fixed eliminates identity effects. In contrast, holding identities fixed does not alter our estimates of ideology effects. In addition to establishing that boards are important actors across many domains, these findings confirm that priorities extracted from platforms capture meaningful policy commitments.

We next explore what board members are doing to obtain these results. Focusing first on policy channels, we find that board members advance their goals using the policy levers available to them under statute. For example, we show that equity-focused board members shift school-level funding to schools with more lower-income students and schools with more Hispanic students. Fiscally conservative board members realize cost savings almost entirely through reduced capital spending,

consistent with the budget authority available to them in California. Electing a fiscally conservative board member also dramatically raises the chances of superintendent turnover.

What is happening at board meetings that allows a single board member to effect a desired policy change? Existing literature highlights two possible channels: board members may change consensus views through debate or agenda setting, or they may cast pivotal votes on contentious topics (Black, 1948; Baron and Ferejohn, 1989; Kogan et al., 2021).

We show that board members effect change through both of these channels. We obtain this result using our data on meeting records, focusing again on our leading candidate types. We find evidence that equity-focused candidates cast pivotal votes on contested issues. When an equity-focused candidate wins a closely-contested election, the winner of that election casts an average of 0.18 (95% CI=[0.09, 0.27]) more pivotal votes on equity topics each year, and 1.28 (95% CI=[0.69, 1.86]) more pivotal votes across all topics. In other words, electing an equity-focused candidate nearly doubles the typical number of pivotal votes. We do not see much evidence that equity candidates change the type or quantity of votes held. In contrast, fiscally conservative candidates appear to effect change through agenda-setting. When a fiscally conservative candidate is narrowly elected, they are no more likely to cast pivotal votes on budget issues or other issues. Instead, what happens is that the board proposes and passes 16 fewer motions on budget topics (34% of baseline mean; 95% CI=[-21.12, -9.25]) and 51 fewer motions overall (34%; 95% CI=[-69.03, -33.61]). Hispanic board members do not shift board actions nearly as much, consistent with their limited effect on district outcomes. These results confirm that shifts in stated priorities of members correspond to changes in board behavior.

We make two main contributions to existing work. The first is to establish that school boards are important policy actors. Relatively modest shifts in school board composition—electing a single candidate with a given view—have effects similar to large shifts in education inputs such as teachers (e.g. Rivkin et al. 2005; Kane and Staiger 2008), school quality (e.g. Abdulkadiroğlu et al. 2011; Dobbie and Fryer 2011), or school funding (e.g. Jackson et al. 2016). For example, we find that the effect of electing an equity-focused board member on low-income students' test scores is roughly equivalent to assigning *every* such student a teacher who is 0.3 to 0.4 SDs higher in the distribution of teacher value-added, based on teacher effect estimates from Chetty et al. (2014), or sending *every* such student to a school that is about 0.2 SDs higher in the distribution of school-level value

added, based on estimates from Angrist et al. (2017). The decline in school spending associated with electing a fiscally conservative board member is similar in magnitude to the gains in per-student spending for beneficiaries of school finance reforms reported in Lafortune et al. (2018).

Our second contribution is to illustrate the importance of measuring policy priorities and actions, rather than taking board members' identities as proxies, when trying to assess the efficacy of boards. Concretely, had we taken Hispanicity as a proxy for distributional or fiscal preferences, as previous papers have done (Kogan et al., 2021; Fischer, 2023), our estimates would have been about 90% smaller. This point applies beyond school boards, to other settings where the difficulty of directly observing board behavior has likewise led researchers to focus on members' observable characteristics. As Adams et al. (2010) describe the issue in their 2010 review of the *corporate* boards literature, "outside of detailed field work, it is difficult to observe differences in behavior and harder still to quantify them in a way useful for statistical study." The identity characteristics we consider in our analysis—in particular gender and professional background—include those typically studied in the corporate boards literature (e.g., Matsa and Miller, 2013; Bertrand et al., 2019; Jäger et al., 2021) and in the broader literature on group decision-making (e.g., Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Bagues et al., 2017; Budde et al., 2024; Brito Rebolledo et al., 2024).

Finally, closest to our work is Stemper (2022a), which uses candidate platform data to study the effect of electing fiscally conservative "budget hawks" on district finances and student outcomes. We reproduce Stemper (2022a)'s findings using LLM text analysis. Our innovations are to bring together the analysis of many board priorities with the analysis of board identities, to show how the former can help explain the latter, and to explore the mechanisms through which boards shape policy outcomes. Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), Anglin et al. (2025), and Mellon (2025) also use school board meeting minutes as a source of data in the service of very different research questions.

2 Background and Data

2.1 Boards

The economic role of governing boards is to mitigate agency problems that plague organizations (Hermalin and Weisbach, 2001). Boards are composed of members, generally elected or appointed by the organization's stakeholders, who meet regularly to recruit, monitor, and, at times, replace the

management, and to make strategic decisions vital to the functioning of the organization. Across sectors, the existence and some of the characteristics of boards are often mandated by regulation, although organizations typically retain some flexibility on the design. Public and private corporations in most countries must have boards of directors. Most non-profit organizations similarly have boards of trustees. Boards are also common among local governments, such as cities, towns, and school districts. The latter are the focus of this paper.

2.1.1 School Boards

Functions Nearly all of the 14,000 school districts in the United States are governed by boards of education, commonly referred to as school boards. These governing bodies, generally composed of 3 to 11 members, are responsible for the functioning of each school district. School board responsibilities include drafting curricula, developing the district's strategies, managing the budget and allocating funds to schools, engaging with the community, and implementing federal and state programs as well as court orders (Hochschild, 2005; Maeroff, 2010; Shi and Singleton, 2023). A key responsibility of school boards is recruiting and evaluating district and school management (such as the superintendent, top administrators, and school principals). Boards in most states also collectively bargain with the local teachers' union over employment contracts, influencing terms of employment such as pay, hours, and working conditions.

Elections In approximately 95% of U.S. school districts, board members are elected through local elections.[1] While the timing of these elections varies across states, they tend to take place during general elections in November or during local elections in the spring or fall. Each member's term lasts 3 to 4 years. Terms generally do not expire at the same time, with many districts using a staggered election system to ensure continuity in the board's membership. Typically, about one-third of the board's seats are filled in each election.

Meetings Most school boards in the US operate through regular meetings, which occur at least once a month.[2] Due to so-called "sunshine laws," most states have rules requiring that school

[1] Exceptions include Hawaii's single statewide district, certain districts in Indiana, and city school systems like Chicago.

[2] See records of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), available at https://www.nsba.org.

boards be accessible to the public. The calendar and agenda of each meeting is thus made public in advance and meetings are open to the general public, who can participate in the discussion. The content of the meetings is also disclosed in the form of minutes, typically published on each district's website.

School Boards in California Boards in California share many features with boards across the country, but a few California-specific characteristics are important to highlight. Like most other school boards, elections are staggered and members are elected to four-year terms. Additionally, school boards in California must bargain with teachers' unions at least once every three years (Shi and Singleton, 2023). Since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, California school boards do not have the power to set local property tax rates, a common source of funds for school operations (Loeb, 2001). However, they retain the authority to initiate local bond measures to raise funds for capital projects, subject to voter approval, and can decide how to allocate additional state funds for these projects (Cellini et al., 2010; Biasi et al., 2025). In sum, California school boards have three main channels through which they can directly influence district policy: 1) choosing or otherwise influencing district leadership; 2) allocating funds from a fixed budget to different uses, including through negotiations with teachers' unions; and 3) raising additional funds for capital projects.

2.2 Data

2.2.1 School Board Elections

Our analysis combines data from several sources. Data on school board elections come from the California Elections Data Archive (CEDA) of California State University, Sacramento and cover the years 1998-2022. These records include the name of the school district, the type of election (at-large or by trustee area, full- or short-term), the date, the name of each candidate, the number of votes received, and each candidate's occupation.[3] We limit our sample to board elections for K-12 local education agencies (LEAs) and exclude elections of college boards, county boards of education, and the state board of education.

We predict candidate gender and race/ethnicity based on names as reported in election records.[4]

[3] Among all elections in our data 59% are at-large, accounting for 73% of all candidates. 96% of candidates in our data ran for a full-term position.

[4] For race/ethnicity, we use the Python package *ethnicolr*, which uses Census data to predict the probability that a

We additionally link each candidate to their political affiliation as reported in the L2 Historical Voter Record, a proprietary database containing the history of voter registrations for the near population of the US. We obtain gender predictions for 89% of candidates, race predictions for 86%, and political affiliations for 75%. Appendix C provides more detail on data construction.

Panel A of Table 1 describes the school board candidates in our data. In total, we observe 22,426 candidates running in 5,782 elections. 22% of the candidates are Hispanic, 45% are female, and 49% are registered Democrats (with the remaining 51% of politically affiliated candidates registered as either Republicans or independents). Teachers are the most common listed occupation, comprising 17% of all candidates.

2.2.2 Political Platforms

To describe candidates' policy viewpoints, we link their records to data from the now-defunct Voter's Edge website. Voter's Edge was a partnership between the League of Women Voters of California and Maplight, a non-profit organization that provided voters with an online guide to federal, state, and local races in California.[5] On the Voter's Edge website, each candidate had a page with their name, picture, the position they were running for, their occupation, any endorsements, and their political platform. Figure A1 shows the profile of a candidate running for a board member position in the San Leandro Unified School District, Area 2. We scrape the profiles for 10,069 school board candidates running in California races between 1998 and 2022. We link 37.8% of all candidates to a Voter's Edge profile (Table 1, panel A).[6]

2.2.3 District Outcomes

We quantify the effects of board elections on a range of outcomes measured at the district level. Our main analysis focuses on enrollment, funding, and achievement. Enrollment and finance data come from the Common Core of Data (CCD) for the academic years 1994-95 through 2021-2022 (from now

name belongs to a race/ethnicity group. We classify a candidate as Hispanic if the predicted probability exceeds 0.5. For gender, we use *gender_guesser*, which predicts each name's gender probability using a database of 40,000 name-gender pairs.

[5]The League of Women Voters of California is a non-partisan organization that promotes voters' rights; its website can be accessed at https://lwvc.org/. Maplight is a non-profit organization that provides campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics disclosure solutions to state and local governments. We accessed the Voter's Edge site at https://www.maplight.org/ between October 5, 2023 and December 15, 2023.

[6]Table B1 shows that election characteristics are broadly similar between candidates with and without a profile, with modest differences in candidate identities.

on, we reference academic years with the calendar year of the Spring semester and use calendar years for elections). The CCD reports counts of students in grades K-12 attending schools in each district, broken down by race and ethnicity. Additionally, it lists total expenditures; expenditure on instruction, teacher wages, and capital projects; total revenues; and revenues earmarked for specific programs such as bilingual education, compensatory and basic skills, gifted and talented students, vocational programs, and safety programs. Starting in 2019, the CCD reports funding information on charter schools separately from that of their main districts in California. Because the size of the charter sector is potentially affected by board elections, our main analysis focuses on school finance outcomes for the 2017-18 academic year and earlier, though as we discuss below our results are not sensitive to this restriction. We express all finance variables in 2019 U.S. dollars.

Our achievement data come from the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), which provides mean standardized scores in statewide Math and English assessments by district, grade, demographic group, and year. These data, described in Fahle et al. (2021), are available for the years 2009-2019. We report results in student-level standard deviation units (SDs), normalizing the state-level mean to zero. To obtain student level SDs, we divide district-level SDs by 2.86, the scaling factor from cross-district to cross-student SDs reported in Biasi et al. (2025).

Panel B of Table 1 describes funding and educational outcomes for school districts in our sample in the year before each election. Average spending is about $9,700 per pupil. Average test scores are 0.06 SDs below the state-level mean; mean scores for Hispanic students and low-income students are -0.17 and -0.15, respectively.[7]

We use three other datasets to measure priority-relevant district outcomes. The first is information on student suspensions from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) of the U.S. Department of Education, a measure of behavior available biannually for the years 2010-2020. The second includes teacher personnel information, such as turnover rates and salary schedules from the California Department of Education, available for the years 2013-2018. The third is data on district superintendents from Stemper and The Broad Center (2025). See Online Appendix C for further details related on the construction of district outcome data.

[7] As of 2024, California defines "economically disadvantaged" in Education Code §54026 as students counted under Title I of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, or, for some districts, students eligible for free meals or those living in households with income at or below the federal poverty guideline. Statutory and administrative criteria have changed over time. We use the term *low-income* throughout the draft.

2.2.4 School Board Meeting Minutes

We measure board actions using a new dataset compiled by manually collecting PDF files of meeting minutes for the years 2016 through 2023 from each district's website. In total, we collected information on 74,056 school board meetings from 573 school districts. School board meetings typically follow Robert's Rules of Order.[8] Minutes record start and end times, attendance, motions proposed, individual votes, and vote outcomes. Figure A2 shows an example of a minutes file. Online Appendix E describes how we parse the minutes files to recover both meeting-level data on motions proposed and passed and board-member level voting records.

Panel C of Table 1 reports descriptive statistics from meeting minutes data in the year prior to the election. On average, districts hold 22 meetings, with 5.25 members present per meeting, and propose 153 motions in each year, almost all of which are approved.

3 Measuring Board Members' Ideology and Actions

3.1 From Political Platforms to Priorities

We use candidates' political platforms to extract information on the policy items they care about the most. We refer to these as their priorities. Platforms vary greatly in detail. Table 2 provides some examples. Some platforms, such as the first one listed in Table 2, include a detailed description of the candidate's views. Others, such as the last one listed, include only a short list of items. The average candidate has a platform of 253 characters in length, with a standard deviation of 141.

To assign priorities from platforms, we feed the text of each platform into an LLM and pose a set of queries about twelve priorities, specified ex ante, which we identify as follows. We start with three policy types studied by existing research on school board decision-making: expanding equity in access to educational resources (*equity*), reducing school spending (which we label *fiscal conservatism*), and supporting teachers and teachers' unions (*teacher support*). We then add six additional topics that are the subject of debate in the economics literature and for which board decisions are important: investments in *school facilities*, declines in *enrollment* and competition for students, reduction in *dropout* rates, the health and safety of students in schools (*safety*), career and technical

[8] Robert's Rules of Order is a guide for conducting meetings and making group decisions. It is the most widely used manual among a wide range of organizations in the U.S. See The Robert's Rules Association (n.d.) for details.

education (*CTE*), and improvement in academic achievement (*test scores*). Because one of the school board's core responsibilities is to select the superintendent, we also consider each candidate's positions on superintendent hiring and monitoring (*superintendent accountability*). We complete the list with two priorities that are the subject of public debate and which candidates frequently mention: *community engagement* and the presence of undesirable views or biases in academic curricula, policies, and practices (*agenda bias*).

For each priority, we ask the LLM to rate each platform on a three-point scale indicating whether the priority is not relevant (1), somewhat relevant (2), or directly relevant (3). To help with accuracy, we provided the LLM with annotated examples illustrating the scoring rules. We code candidates as having a given priority if their platform receives a score of three. The full list of queries can be found in Online Appendix D.

3.2 Validating Priority Codes

We test the validity of our priority codes along two dimensions. The first is accuracy, defined as the extent to which our priority codes reliably capture human intuition about platform content. The second is completeness, defined as the degree to which our priority codes provide a reasonably full picture of candidates' stated priorities.

A first step in assessing accuracy is to ensure that the LLM codes seem intuitively reasonable. The right columns of Table 2 show the codes assigned to each platform. The first candidate mentions maintaining a balanced budget (which alludes to *fiscal conservatism*), a high-quality education (*test score*), and a highly qualified workforce (*teacher support*); he also stresses gains for all students (*equity*) and mentions building new schools (*facilities*) and the need to prepare for a declining enrollment (*enrollment*). The second candidate, with a much more concise platform, mentions the *safety* of students, serving parents (the *community*) as well as students, no social experimentation in the classroom (*agenda bias*), and a sound financial plan to cut wasteful spending (*fiscal conservatism*). The last candidate only lists three items, two of which ("parent involvement" and "school safety") connect directly to our priorities. To further illustrate how platform text translates into priorities, Appendix Figure A3 displays word clouds for the platforms of candidates who prioritize fiscal conservatism (panel (a)) and equity (panel (b)). Common terms for fiscal conservatism include "fiscal responsibility," "budget," and "accountability." Common terms for equity include "achievement

gap," "equity," and "access."

To systematically assess the accuracy of the LLM classification, we compare LLM decisions to those of multiple human raters. We asked two research assistants to answer each query for a random sample of 200 platforms and compute the correlation between their responses and those of the LLM as a measure of inter-rater reliability (IRR). Across all questions and platforms, the correlation between the responses of the two human raters is 0.77, a fairly high value for an IRR (Koo and Li, 2016). The correlations between the LLM responses with those of each human rater are 0.83 and 0.73, similar to the human-human IRR. Appendix Table B2 provides the details of this calculation. We conclude that machine-generated codes accurately capture the perceptions of human raters.

We assess completeness in two ways. First, we show that our approach allows us to categorize nearly all platforms (97.3% of our sample) by assigning them at least one priority. Furthermore, the median number of assigned priorities per platform is 3 (with a mean of 2.9), exactly equal to the number of priorities candidates are supposed to list. Second, we extract priorities directly from the text of each platform using both a Latent Dirichlet Allocation and an LLM. In both cases, the extracted priorities closely match those assigned by our primary method (see Appendix Tables B3 and B4 for details).

Although our priority codes closely approximate what a human reader would conclude from reading the platform text, candidates' true policy priorities may still differ from those they explicitly list. Some candidates may strategically emphasize certain issues or omit others, despite holding strong views. For many others, we have no priority information. This might raise concerns about statistical misclassification. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that, by construction, we are not asking the LLM to infer latent priorities. Under our definition, treatment is intentionally tied to what candidates *chose to highlight publicly* and not to their unobserved underlying beliefs. Discrepancies between stated and latent priorities therefore do not reflect misclassification.

Another question is how to treat candidates who do not submit a platform. In our main regression discontinuity analysis, we include these candidates and treat them as not having a priority of a given type. Another way to interpret the absence of a platform is as censoring: these candidates might have stated a given priority had they submitted a platform. To capture this alternate interpretation, we report results that restrict the sample to the set of elections where both marginal candidates report platforms. We prefer the former approach because it is more comprehensive and,

if anything, is likely to dilute true effects by weakening contrasts in stated priorities. In any case, results from the two approaches are very similar.

3.3 From Priorities and Identities to Outcomes

We use the priorities data to evaluate whether board members deliver on what they claim to prioritize. Doing so requires mapping priorities to one or more district-level outcome variables related to that priority. In some cases, the mapping is clear. For example, candidates who want to reduce spending succeed if district spending falls relative to the counterfactual. Other mappings are reasonably clear but potentially multi-dimensional. For example, candidates who want to promote educational equity presumably succeed if achievement for disadvantaged groups improves, but there is more than one plausible definition of "disadvantaged group." Finally, two priorities—community engagement and agenda bias—lack clear mappings to district outcome measures.

Our approach is to consider all relevant outcome measures, using multiple variables when there is ambiguity and excluding the two priorities for which there are no straightforward mappings from the outcome analysis. We thus assess the success of candidates with an equity priority using measures of achievement for both economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students. Similarly, we measure the success of candidates who support teachers using teacher exit rates (which we expect to decline) and the salaries of entering and experienced teachers (i.e., those with a BA and 60 semester units). Appendix Table B5 reports the full mapping between priorities and outcome variables.

For identity groups, we evaluate causal impacts of changes against expectations grounded in the school board literature. To this end, we begin by cataloging identities and outcomes—and the hypothesized relationships between them—that have been the focus of prior work on school boards. For example, Kogan et al. (2021) points out that non-white voters typically express more support for school spending than white voters while also representing different (and non-white) constituencies, so electing more Hispanics may change school finance decisions and educational outcomes for Hispanic students. Similarly, Shi and Singleton (2023) makes the point that teachers on school boards may try to shift policies in ways that help teachers.

We augment this list with new hypotheses that arise from the systematic differences in priorities across identity groups that we uncover with the platform data. The idea is to parallel the approach

to hypothesis generation taken by previous authors. For example, we see that Hispanics disproportionately prioritize CTE, which suggests that an additional Hispanic elected to the board may cause spending on CTE programs to increase. We detail the relationships between identities and priorities in Section 4. Appendix Table B6 provides a list of identity-related hypotheses we test.

3.4 Measuring Members' Actions from Meeting Minutes

To extract data on the topics, votes, and passage or failure of motions discussed in board meetings, we follow a similar approach to the one used to extract priorities from platforms. Specifically, we feed each set of meeting minutes through an LLM model and ask it to extract (i) a list of all motions and their outcomes, (ii) each board member's vote on each motion, and (iii) the topic of each motion. Two differences between the motions and the priorities are important to note. First, while we are able to capture the topic of a motion, we do not capture its stance. For example, meeting minutes typically make clear when a motion relates to a budget proposal, but do not always make clear whether that proposal raises or lowers spending relative to some alternative. Second, many motions are purely procedural. For example, 33% of all motions are raised to approve the minutes of the previous meeting or to adjourn. We exclude these from our analysis. Appendix E explains the minute classification process more in detail.

Appendix Table B7 shows three examples of our minutes data and illustrates our topic assignment process. Overall, our process appears both accurate and complete: human-machine measures of IRR are high and approximately equal to human-human IRR (Appendix Table B8), and 100% of non-procedural motions reference at least one of our twelve priorities.

4 Identity and Ideology Among Board Members

4.1 Can Group Identity Predict Ideology?

We begin our analysis by exploring the joint distribution of group identity and ideology on school boards. To describe how candidates' stated priorities vary across identity groups, Table 3 reports the share of candidates from each identity who have a platform (top rows) and who have different views (lower rows). Bolded entries are those where the difference in viewpoint shares across an identity group split (e.g., between Hispanic and non-Hispanic candidates, or between male and

female candidates) is statistically significant at the 5% level. The rightmost columns report out-of-sample prediction accuracy for a random forest that attempts to predict the characteristic listed in the row using the identity variables. This captures the degree to which identity variables jointly predict platform attributes.

A preliminary observation is that the probability that a candidate has a platform differs by identity. For example, non-Hispanic candidates are more likely to have platforms than Hispanic candidates, and female candidates are more likely to have platforms than male candidates. However, many candidates in each identity group have platforms, and, taken together, identity variables accurately predict whether a candidate will have a platform only 65% of the time, a modest improvement over the 53% rate that can be obtained with a random prediction with knowledge of the variable mean.[9]

Turning to the platform content, we find that candidates' identities and ideologies are correlated in expected ways. For example, candidates who are Hispanic, teachers, or Democrats are less likely to be fiscally conservative than their counterparts, while Hispanics, females, and Democrats are more likely to prioritize equity. Differences by gender and political affiliation are pronounced: women are 15 percentage points more likely than men to prioritize equity (55% of the average for men), while Democrats are 16 percentage points more likely to do so than Republicans (61% of the Republican average).

However, substantial ideological variation persists within identity groups. One way to see this is simply to note that, although some of the differences in Table 3 are statistically significant, many are relatively small. More systematically, the joint predictive power of all identity variables for viewpoints is weak. For example, the random forest model correctly predicts whether a candidate prioritizes fiscal conservatism 58% of the time, only a modest improvement over the 51% accuracy one could obtain through random guessing. For equity, random forest predictions are correct only 66% of the time, compared to 55% for random guessing. The observation that the correlation between identity and ideology is not that strong proves to be important for understanding the effect of election outcomes.

[9] Since 38% of candidates have a platform, the probability of correctly guessing whether any candidate has a platform or not based purely on chance is $0.38^2 + (1 - 0.38)^2 = 0.53$.

5 Identity, Ideology, and School District Outcomes

5.1 The Regression Discontinuity Design

We now ask how altering the composition of the board shapes outcomes for school districts. To estimate causal effects of board composition, we must address the potential endogeneity of elected members' characteristics. The selection of school board members is not random; it may reflect electorate preferences that also influence the outcome variable. For example, boards with more equity-focused members may represent districts with better outcomes for low-income students because non-board actors in the district prioritize equity in many ways, including but not limited to voting in school board elections.

To overcome this issue, we exploit quasi-experimental variation arising from close elections using a regression discontinuity (RD) framework. Continuing with the working example, suppose we are interested in the causal effect of electing an equity-focused candidate on some district outcome. We estimate the following model in the sample of elections where one of the two marginal candidates (i.e., the winner with the lowest vote share and the loser with the highest vote share) prioritizes equity and the other does not:

$$y_{i,k} = \beta_0 + \beta D_i + f(m_i) + \theta_{t(i)+k} + \varepsilon_{i,k} \tag{1}$$

$y_{i,k}$ is an outcome in the district where election i is held k years after the election takes place, with k ranging from 0 to 4. To increase precision, we generally specify the dependent variable $y_{i,k}$ as the difference from the year preceding the election.[10] The variable D_i equals one if the equity candidate wins election i; in cases where a candidate's platform information is missing, we set $D_i = 0$.[11] The running variable m_i is the vote share margin, defined as the difference between the vote share of the equity candidate and either (i) the closest losing candidate (if the equity candidate wins) or (ii) the closest winning candidate (if the equity candidate loses). We assume f to be piecewise linear, allowing its slope to differ on either side of the cutoff, and use a quadratic function in robustness

[10] As we show below, prior-year outcomes are balanced across the cutoff and we obtain similar results if we use them as controls rather than differencing them out.

[11] We show below that our findings are robust to restricting the sample to elections where we observe platforms for both marginal candidates.

checks. We control for outcome year fixed effects in the vector $\theta_{t(i)+k}$, where $t(i)$ denotes the year in which election i is held. We cluster standard errors at the election level. As in Shi and Singleton (2023), election i and the year relative to the election year k uniquely identify observations in the resulting dataset.

We estimate equation (1) on the subsample of close elections, selected using the mean-squared error optimal bandwidth of Calonico et al. (2020). Under the assumption that any unobservable determinants of outcomes are continuous around the cutoff, estimates of β correspond to the average treatment effect of electing a candidate with a given attribute on a given district-level outcome, among districts with close elections. This approach can be used to estimate the effects of electing members from any identity or ideology group by appropriately redefining D_i, m_i, and the estimation sample.

We estimate equation (1) for each identity and ideology type described above. To facilitate exposition, we focus in the main text on three leading examples: equity-focused candidates, fiscally conservative candidates, and Hispanic candidates.

In order to summarize impacts across multiple candidate attributes and outcomes, we also estimate "stacked" regression discontinuity specifications (Pop-Eleches and Urquiola, 2013). These models stack the individual estimation samples defined by attribute-outcome pairs into a single estimation sample. We then estimate equations of the form

$$y_{i,k,s} = \beta_0 + \beta D_{i,s} + f(m_{i,s}) + \theta_{t(i)+k} + \tau_s + \varepsilon_{i,k,s} \tag{2}$$

where s indexes stacks—unique candidate attribute and outcome variable combinations. We add fixed effects for each stack (τ_s). To combine multiple outcome types in stacked specifications, we standardize the dependent variables to have a standard deviation of one and a sign corresponding to the hypothesized effect direction, as reported in Tables B5 and B6.

Our design relies on close elections between candidates with differing policy priorities or identities. Fortunately, many school board elections fit this description. Columns 2-5 of Table 1 describe our sample of marginal elections, defined here as those where the gap between the winner's and loser's outcome is five points or fewer. As reported in column 2, there are 2,519 close elections, and attributes of the candidates, districts, and board meetings are similar to those for the full election

sample. Columns 3-5 describe close elections where the marginal candidates differ in terms of the listed priority or identity. Up to differences due to variation in choice of optimal bandwidth, these are the samples we use in the regression discontinuity analysis. There are 905 marginal elections where one candidate is equity-focused and the other is not. 69% of candidates in these elections have platforms, above the rate in the full sample. This is mechanical: the equity-focused candidate in each marginal pair by definition has a platform. Candidates in these elections are somewhat less likely to be Hispanic and more likely to be teachers or women, and the elections take place in districts that spend more and are slightly higher achieving than in the full sample. Fiscal conservative-marginal elections are also somewhat less likely to feature Hispanic candidates, and take place in higher-spending and higher-scoring districts. Hispanic-marginal elections are mechanically more likely to include Hispanic candidates but otherwise closely resemble the full sample of elections.

The design passes standard tests of RD validity. Table 4 reports results from four sets of tests: (i) McCrary tests for bunching on either side of the cutoff, (ii) tests for balance in lagged outcomes around the cutoff, and tests for balance in match rates to (iii) district outcomes and (iv) meeting minutes data around the cutoff. We conduct separate balance tests for each of our leading example specifications as well as for the stacked identity and ideology specifications. In total, the table contains the results for 24 tests of the null of no imbalance, of which three fail at the ten percent level. The finding that the RD is balanced is consistent with the idea that election outcomes are hard to manipulate (Lee, 2008).

5.2 Changes in Identity Group Representation and Boards' Ideological Composition

We first explore how electing candidates from different ideology and identity groups affects the distribution of priorities on the board. Figure 1 displays regression discontinuity results for our three leading examples. The left plot in each set of two panels is a standard regression discontinuity graph where the horizontal axis is the (relative) vote share of the reference-group candidate and the vertical axis is the mean share of board members for whom a view of the listed type is observed, relative to the share in the year before election. The right plot in each pair displays RD effects separately from three years before to four years after the election. Light gray diamonds are below-threshold mean values. Darker circles with confidence intervals are above-threshold means, computed here as the below-threshold value plus the estimated RD effect.

Our first finding is that marginally electing members with a specific priority substantially shifts the share of board members who hold that view. Panels (a) and (b) of Figure 1 show results for the elections on the equity margin. As expected, there is a discontinuous jump in the share of board members prioritizing equity when an equity candidate beats a non-equity candidate. The size of jump is 0.21, an 84% increase on the baseline share of 0.25. Effects of this approximate magnitude are what we expect to see given the distribution of board sizes in our data. At the average board size of 5.87, exchanging a member without a given viewpoint for a member with that viewpoint raises the share of members holding the view by $0.17 = 1/5.87$, economically similar to and not statistically different from the effect we observe. Panel (b) shows that gaps in the share of equity-focused board members open up precisely in the year the equity-focused candidate wins (i.e., there is no correlation between marginal wins and board composition in prior years) and stays open for four years, the length of a typical term. Panels (c) and (d) describe the effects of electing a fiscally conservative candidate. The picture is similar to what we found for equity, with an increase at the cutoff equal to 0.17 (85% of the baseline share of 0.20) that is sustained for four years.

Our second finding is that electing a candidate with a given identity does not shift a board's ideological composition much, even for priorities that are correlated with the identity in the cross-section. The bottom panels of Figure 1 show how electing a Hispanic candidate (relative to a non-Hispanic candidate) affects the share of fiscally conservative board members. Table 3 shows that Hispanic members are 10 percentage points less likely than non-Hispanic members to list fiscal conservatism as a priority. However, as reported in the bottom panels of Figure 1, electing a Hispanic candidate does not produce a statistically significant shift in the share of fiscally conservative board members.

Figure 2 summarizes these results across all of the priority and identity categories. In panel (a), the vertical axis shows the RD estimate of the effect of electing a candidate of a given type (defined by identity or viewpoint) on the share of board members with a given viewpoint. As described earlier, we consider two types of hypotheses about the relationship between identity and ideology: those posited in previous school board studies (denoted by squares) and those that we generate by looking at the joint distribution of identities and viewpoints (circles). Triangles denote effects of electing candidates with a given priority. The RD estimates from the previous figure for equity, fiscally conservative, and Hispanic candidates are labeled on the graph. The horizontal axis shows

the *predicted* effect of electing a candidate of type A relative to a candidate of type not-A based on cross-sectional differences in views. For example, non-Hispanic candidates are 10 percentage points more likely to report fiscal conservatism than Hispanic candidates. Given an average board size of 5.87 members, the predicted shift in the share of board members with fiscal conservatism would be $0.1/5.87 = 0.017$. Similarly, the predicted effect of electing a fiscally-conservative candidate relative to a non-fiscally-conservative candidate would be $1/5.87 = 0.17$. Points fall on the 45-degree dashed line if the observed effect on priorities is equal to the predicted effect based on cross-sectional viewpoint data. Comparing RD estimates with cross-sectional predictions allows us to understand whether the small RD estimates of ideological differences across identity groups are an artifact of close elections or emerge in the cross-section as well.

The first result to take from this panel is that the effects of electing a candidate with a given viewpoint on the distribution of viewpoints on the board are much larger than the effects of electing a candidate from a given identity. We see this because the triangles lie above all other points along the vertical axis on panel (a).

The second takeaway from panel (a) of Figure 2 is that the effects of identity on ideology that we observe in marginal elections are similar to those we see in the cross-section: all of the identity dots fall in the bottom left corner of the graph, along the 45-degree line. In short, cross-sectional differences in ideology by identity exist but are not that big, and when we look at how identity affects ideology in marginal elections, we find effects that exist but are not that big.[12]

Panel (b) of Figure 2 summarizes results from the attribute- and outcome-specific estimates in panel (a) using the stacked design, as in equation (2). Each bar displays the estimated coefficient from a specification that pools type-outcome combinations belonging to a given category. On average, electing a candidate with a given priority raises the share of board members who hold that priority by 0.17, while electing a candidate with a given identity shifts the board share with the associated viewpoint by only 0.01. This minimal impact of changes in identity on the overall board's ideological composition holds for both hypotheses from the existing literature and those newly-generated from the correlations between identities and priorities. This point follows directly from the observation in Section 4 that identities are not particularly strong predictors of priorities.

Appendix Figure A5 displays an alternate version of Figure 2 that restricts the sample to elec-

[12]Note that all the ideology points lie on the 45-degree line. This reflects the (intended) mechanical effect of swapping in a board member with a given priority for a board member without that priority, holding other board seats fixed.

tions where both marginal candidates report policy platforms. As in our main analysis, we find that electing a candidate with a given ideology has a large effect on board ideology while the effects of electing a candidate with a given identity are small.

5.3 District Outcomes

Next, we examine the effect of electing board members from different identity and ideology groups on district outcomes. Following the structure of Figure 1, Figure 3 displays standard RD plots on the left within each panel, with year-by-year RD estimates on the right. Again, we focus our discussion first on our leading examples and primary outcomes with which they are associated.

Electing an equity-focused candidate raises test scores of low-income students by 0.04 SDs over the following four years (Figure 3, panel (a)). The discontinuity is visually obvious and highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$).[13]

Panel (b) of Figure 3 shows how score gains evolve over time. As expected, scores are balanced in the pre-election period. Gains for low-income students then appear in the year following the election and persist for at least four years. Board members are typically elected in November and seated in December, near the beginning of the academic year at event time $k = 0$. Tests for that academic year are then administered the following spring. This means that test score gains first observed at event time $k = 1$ occur about 1.5 years after new members are seated on the board and may begin shaping policy.

Fiscally conservative candidates succeed in reducing district spending: electing a candidate with this priority reduces per-pupil district spending by $1,212 (13% of the below-threshold average spending level; Figure 3, panel (c)). This occurs via a reduction in the *growth* of district spending, rather than a reduction in spending levels (panel (d)). These effects appear in year 0, the school year the member is seated on the board.

The effects of electing equity-focused or fiscally conservative board members are large relative to other education interventions. The effect of electing an equity-focused board member on low-income students' test scores is similar to the effect of assigning every such student to a teacher who is 0.3-0.4 SDs higher in the distribution of teacher value-added (Chetty et al., 2014). The reduction

[13] An interesting feature of the RD plot is that the slope of the relationship between low-income test scores and the vote margin—the running variable— is negative. This suggests that equity-focused candidates tend to get higher vote shares in districts where scores for low-income students are declining relative to the year before the election. One possible interpretation is that voters react to increased challenges for low-income students by voting for equity candidates.

in spending from electing a fiscally conservative board member is similar in size to the increase in spending experienced by low-income districts following state-level school finance reforms (Lafortune et al., 2018).

These findings contrast with the effects of electing a Hispanic board member, which raises per-pupil spending by only $124 (1.8% of the below-threshold mean; Figure 3, panels (e) and (f)), roughly 10% as large in absolute value terms as the effect of electing a fiscal conservative. This is consistent with the fact that electing a Hispanic member does not on average change how fiscally conservative the school board is (Figure 1).

5.4 Aggregating Multiple Priorities and Identities

Our case studies—members with equity and fiscal conservatism priorities and Hispanic members—help build intuition on the channels through which ideology and identity affect outcomes. We now ask how our findings generalize to other priorities and identities. For ease of interpretation and comparison, we first normalize all outcome variables to have a standard deviation equal to one and a sign consistent with the hypothesized direction of the effect (see Appendix Tables B6 and B9 for hypothesized direction). We then consider three stacked specifications: one where each focal candidate attribute is an ideology and we consider the associated outcomes (see Appendix Table B5), one where each candidate attribute-outcome pair comes from an identity-related hypothesis tested in prior literature, and one where each attribute-outcome pair comes from a novel identity-related hypothesis.

We find that the effects on outcomes of changes in a board's ideological composition are larger than the effects of changes in identity group composition. The average standardized effect of electing a candidate with a given priority is to increase the level of the associated district outcome by 0.16 SDs (95% CI=[0.140, 0.191], 14 ideology-outcome pairs; Figure 4, right bar). In contrast, the average standardized effect from identity-outcome hypotheses tested in prior literature is 0.06 SDs (95% CI=[0.046, 0.060], 6 identity-outcome pairs, left bar) and the average standardized effect from novel identity-outcome hypotheses is negative at -0.01 (95% CI=[-0.012, -0.011], 24 identity-outcome pairs, middle bar). These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that ideology is a key factor driving outcomes and with our previous finding that the effects of shifts in identity on ideology are relatively small.

Appendix Tables B10 through B13 report estimates for each regression that contributes to these averages (in raw rather than standardized units). There are several interesting results. For example, candidates who prioritize facilities raise capital spending; candidates who prioritize teacher support raise teacher entry salaries and reduce teacher exit; and candidates who prioritize superintendent accountability raise the probability of a change in superintendent relative to the base period. A notable null effect is that candidates who prioritize academic achievement do not affect test scores. On the identity side, we find that electing a teacher raises spending and teacher salaries and reduces teacher turnover, confirming results from Shi and Singleton (2023). Electing a Hispanic board member slightly raises test scores for low-income students; gains are roughly 10% as large as from electing a candidate who prioritizes equity.

5.5 Identity vs. Ideology in Determining District Outcomes

The evidence presented thus far shows that marginal changes in boards' ideological composition have large impacts on district outcomes, while marginal changes in the representation of identity groups have small impacts. However, these findings rely on analyses that consider one dimension of identity or ideology at a time and do not hold other attributes constant. The limitation of this is that, because identity and ideology are correlated, the univariate estimates of identity impacts include both direct effects of representation and effects that operate through changes in the board's ideological makeup. Similarly, univariate estimates of ideology impacts include both direct effects and effects that operate through changes in identity (though identity effects appear to be small).

In this section, we test whether and how much identity matters when ideology is held constant, and vice versa. To do this, we extend the analysis from section 5.4. Specifically, we estimate stacked specifications (equation (2)) that restrict the sample of elections used to test identity-related hypotheses to those where the outcome-relevant priority has the same value for both marginal candidates. For example, if the outcome in question is low-income test scores, and the identity type is Hispanic, this analysis would only consider elections where a) one marginal candidate is Hispanic and the other is not and also b) the two candidates share the same value of the equity priority variable. This allows us to focus on elections where the relevant identity is changing but the relevant ideology is not.

Similarly, for ideology-related hypotheses, we restrict the sample to include only elections where

the marginal candidates have similar identities, in an outcome-relevant sense. To operationalize this, we use the random forest predictions described in Section 4 to generate predicted ideologies using the full set of identities. We then restrict the sample to elections where the predicted values of the relevant ideology for the marginal candidates differ by less than 0.01. For example, if the ideology type we are considering is equity, our analysis would only consider elections where a) one marginal candidate lists an equity priority and the other does not, and b) the two candidates are similar in terms of the identity variables that predict an equity priority, such as Hispanicity, gender, and political affiliation (Table 3). Panel (b) of Figure 4 reports results from these exercises.

We find that, when we hold ideology fixed, the effect of identity on outcomes is small and negative across the board (left two bars). Notably, this holds for identity-outcome hypotheses tested in previous literature, for which we found a positive effect in specifications that did not hold ideology fixed. We also find that holding identity fixed alters our estimates of the effects of ideology on outcomes only minimally. As shown in the rightmost bar, estimated ideology effects are essentially unchanged. In short, these results suggest that differences in ideology explain the identity effects we find.

Appendix G considers an alternate approach. We estimate models that simultaneously hold fixed multiple identity or ideology variables, rather than just those closely corresponding to the focal type. Because holding fixed multiple variables at once dramatically raises the dimensionality of the control set, we impose the assumption that effects are separable across attributes, as in Barrios-Fernández et al. (2024). Though this exercise is quite different from our main approach—with the benefit of a more extensive control set at the cost of additional parametric restrictions—the conclusions are the same. We find strong evidence that ideology matters after conditioning on identity, but little evidence that identity matters when ideology is held fixed.

5.6 Robustness

Our findings are robust to alternate approaches to estimation and measurement. Appendix Tables B14 and B15 show that our case study and aggregate results are qualitatively unchanged and quantitatively very similar under different values of key tuning parameters and specification choices within the Calonico et al. (2020) framework, including the use of alternate control sets, higher-order polynomial terms, and uniform rather than triangular kernels, as well as to alternate approaches to

computing standard errors. We use an optimally chosen bandwidth under each of these modifications. Bandwidths used in these robustness tests vary substantially: for example, when we study the election of an equity candidate, we consider bandwidths ranging from 2.2 to 7.5. These tables also show that our findings are robust to using the levels of outcome variables rather than changes relative to the year before the election and to including harmonized spending data for school years after 2019, when the CCD starts to report funding information on charter schools separately from that of public school districts.[14] Finally, Appendix Figure A6 shows that our findings on ideology effects are robust to restricting the sample to elections where we observe platforms for both marginal candidates.

5.7 Policy Mechanisms

We have shown that board members succeed in shifting districts in the direction of their policy priorities. But what policy tools do they use to achieve these goals? Recall from section 2.1.1 that the policy levers available to board members consist primarily of budget allocation, capital spending, and superintendent accountability. Table 5 returns to our three leading examples to explore how electing different types of candidates shapes these intermediate outcomes.

We find that board members pull the levers available to them in ways that are consistent with our headline results, though the exact combination depends on the candidate type. For example, equity-focused board members increase funds for schools that enroll a higher share of disadvantaged students. We show this using school-level funding data from California's School Facility Program, which provides matching grants to individual schools for capital improvements. While a relatively small share of total spending, it is one of few funding sources for which data is systematically available at the school level (Fischer, 2023). When an equity candidate is elected, schools with a share of low-income students above the state median receive $851 more funding per pupil through the program (Table 5, panel A, column 1), while those with a share of low-income students below the median receive $40 less funding per pupil on average (column 2). Similarly, equity candidates tend to shift SFP funds towards schools with shares of Hispanic students above the median

[14] As an additional robustness test, we considered an alternate research design based on randomly assigned ballot order, as in Shi and Singleton (2023) and Fischer (2023). We find that ballot order has a weak first-stage effect on election outcomes in specifications focused on candidate ideology, and therefore cannot be used to test the hypotheses we explore in this paper. See Online Appendix H for details.

(column 3) and away from those with shares below the median (column 4).[15]

Equity candidates could also try to achieve their goal by inducing the board to select a new superintendent. Estimates in column 5 of Table 5 show that this is not the case. Electing an equity-focused board member has a small and statistically insignificant effect on the probability that a district reports having a different superintendent than the one we observe prior to the election.

In principle, one way for equity-focused candidates to achieve the test score gains we observe for low-income students (and, as we discuss below, for students overall) would be to shift the socio-demographic composition of schools towards higher-performing students. We test for this by predicting each district's average test scores using the observable characteristics of its students and using this prediction as the outcome variable.[16] We do not find any evidence for this mechanism (column 6).

Turning to fiscally conservative candidates, we find that they achieve overall spending reductions almost entirely through reduced capital expenditure. As reported in Panel B of Table 5, capital expenditures fall by $1,189 per pupil after the election of a fiscally conservative member. This category accounts for the overall decline in spending on average ($1,212, as reported in Figure 3, panel (c)). Expenditures on teacher salaries also decline when a fiscal conservative is elected, but only slightly (column 1). Our findings are consistent with the observation that school boards in California have limited power to set operational budgets, but can issue capital expenditure bonds and negotiate teacher contracts.

Fiscally conservative board members also exert substantial pressure on district leadership. Electing a fiscal conservative causes a 16 percentage point increase in the likelihood of a superintendent change in the four years following an election (41% of the below-threshold mean).

The large effects of electing a candidate with a given ideology again contrast with the small effects of electing a candidate from a given identity group. Panel C of Table 5 explores how electing a Hispanic candidate shifts intermediate fiscal policies. We find that electing a Hispanic board member slightly increases staff salaries and slightly reduces capital expenditure, while raising su-

[15]The effects we observe for heavily low-income and Hispanic schools are large relative to sample means. These means include many schools where SFP funding levels are zero. For context, note that the average SFP funding level for schools that do receive funding is roughly $5,000.

[16]We obtain our predictions by running a linear regression of test scores on district shares of black, Hispanic, Asian, free/reduced-price lunch, below poverty-line, special-education, English language learner students, and the log of total enrollment.

perintendent turnover. Though statistically significant, these effects are much smaller (in absolute value) than those we observe when electing fiscally conservative candidates. This is consistent with the observation that overall spending effects are much smaller for Hispanic candidates than for fiscally conservative candidates.

5.8 Other Outcomes and Policy Tradeoffs

Our analyses thus far have focused on whether candidates implement their stated priorities. We now ask: what are the tradeoffs? For example, equity-focused candidates may raise costs or increase achievement for low-income students at the expense of the district as a whole, while fiscally conservative candidates may cut spending at the expense of student outcomes. Continuing to focus on our three leading examples, Online Appendix F discusses the effects of electing equity-focused, fiscally conservative, and Hispanic candidates on leading non-focal outcomes.

The evidence on tradeoffs is mixed. For equity-focused candidates, we see little evidence of tradeoffs across student types. Electing an equity-focused candidate raises scores for high-income students by 0.022 SDs, about half the value we observe for low-income students.[17] Equity candidates also do not appear to raise per-pupil spending; if anything, they decrease it.

Turning to fiscally conservative candidates, we find that their election reduces student scores, as reported in Stemper (2022a). Our estimates of score declines are smaller on a per dollar basis than those found in the literature (see Jackson and Mackevicius, 2024, for a review). This is consistent with our previous finding (Table 5) that the budget cuts come primarily from reductions in construction spending, often ineffective at improving achievement (Biasi et al., 2025).[18]

6 Identity, Ideology, and School Boards' Actions

We have thus far shown that board members shape district outcomes and described the types of intermediate policy levers they pull to achieve these results. A remaining question is what exactly board members are doing in meetings to shift policy. This is important to explore because it is potentially surprising that electing a single board member can have such a large effect on policy.

[17] We also find evidence of gains for Hispanic students, a plausible alternate measure of student disadvantage.

[18] Biasi et al. (2025) show that school construction projects that involve schools' athletic facilities —among the most expensive ones— have no significant effects on test scores.

In this section, we use voting records from board meetings to examine the actions members take to shift district outcomes and to distinguish between different theories of change.

We consider two main theories about how individual members may succeed in shaping board governance, drawn from the economics and political science literature and summarized by Kogan et al. (2021) in the school board context. The first is that boards govern by consensus: even if their opinion is not in the majority, board members can shift policies by influencing the behavior of other members or by shifting the board's discussions. The second is that policies are made by the majority, and board members influence policy by casting pivotal votes.

These theories have implications for voting outcomes. If the majority-rule theory holds, we expect to see members who narrowly win cast pivotal votes on closely contested motions. If the consensus theory holds, we expect to see changes in meeting agendas and the quantity and content of board motions, but not necessarily contentious votes. To test the two theories, we estimate equation (1) using as outcomes records of the quantity and type of motion passed and of candidates' individual voting records. For concision, we focus on our leading examples: the effect of equity candidates and fiscally conservative candidates.

Our first finding is that equity-focused candidates do not observably shift meeting agendas, but do cast pivotal votes on contentious motions. As reported in Panel A of Table 6, we see no evidence that electing an equity-focused candidate leads a school board to propose or pass more motions (counted here at the annual level), either on equity (the focal topic of these candidates, column 1) or overall (column 2). We do see that boards become much more likely to pass non-unanimous motions, which are very rare at baseline. For example, when an equity-focused member is elected, the number of non-unanimous equity-related motions a board passes per year rises by 0.67, or 31% from a base of 2.14.

Results in Panel D confirm that equity-focused candidates often cast pivotal votes themselves. We measure pivotal votes by counting how many times the winner of the reference election votes with the winning side on a motion decided by one vote in each outcome year, and taking these counts as outcome measures in equation (1). We find that equity-focused board members cast 0.18 more pivotal votes per year on equity measures (159% of a baseline mean of 0.11) and 1.28 (100%) more pivotal votes overall than the candidates they defeat. We find similar results when we define an analogous outcome based on non-unanimous votes (including those decided by more than one

vote) in Panel E. Panels (a) and (b) of Figure 5 contrast the clear discontinuity in marginal votes cast on equity motions with the absence of a discontinuity in total equity motions passed.

In contrast, fiscally conservative candidates appear to shape outcomes by shifting board consensus rather than by casting pivotal votes. As reported in Panel A of Table 6, electing a fiscally conservative candidate reduces the number of budget motions proposed by 15.28 per year (34%) and the number of motions passed on any topic by 51.2 (33%). Effects on passed motions are almost identical. However, in contrast to what we saw for equity-focused candidates, the number of non-unanimous motions does not change at all: there are fewer votes taken, but votes do not become more contentious. Results in Panel D show that, when elected, fiscal conservatives are no more likely to cast pivotal votes on fiscal issues or overall than their electoral competition. Panels (c) and (d) of Figure 5 contrast the large reduction in total fiscal motions passed with the absence of an effect on pivotal votes cast.

The last two columns of Table 6 explore how electing a Hispanic candidate—the third of our three leading examples—shapes voting outcomes. We see some evidence that electing a Hispanic candidate leads to boards passing more equity measures. However, when Hispanic candidates win elections they are no more likely to cast pivotal votes on equity issues than the candidate they defeat. This is consistent with observation that Hispanic board members do not appear to shift district outcomes in a more equitable direction, while equity-focused members both affect equity-related outcomes and cast pivotal votes on equity motions. Though electing a Hispanic candidate does not affect the total number of budget motions proposed or passed, it does raise the likelihood that a board will pass a non-unanimous budget motion. Hispanic board members also appear to be more likely to cast pivotal votes on fiscal issues, although this effect is noisy. Our findings are consistent with the finding from Section 5.3 that electing Hispanic candidates has a small positive effect on per-student funding.

Stepping back, our analysis of meeting minutes provides support for both the consensus and majority-vote models of board governance, but suggests that which of these models is more important may be domain-specific. It also provides supporting evidence for our results on district outcomes by filling in the last link of the causal chain from the election to board actions to intermediate outcomes such as budget allocation or superintendent choice and then to end-line outcomes like district spending and student outcomes. Note that, while our measure of pivotal voting is ex-

haustive (whenever a candidate casts a pivotal vote, we see it), and our measures of the quantity and type of board motions capture important elements of the board agenda, it is possible that candidates also shape meeting agendas in ways beyond those we examine here, such as by changing the content of a motion within a topic category. This possibility is suggested by meaningful effects of equity-focused members on the number of "no" votes from both own and other members (Table B16), despite the absence of an effect on the number of equity motions proposed. Our claim is therefore not that the effects we document here are the *only* actions board members take that shift district policies, but rather that we provide proof of concept that board member actions are consistent with their stated policy priorities and observed district outcomes.

7 Conclusion

This study provides causal evidence that school board members are important policy actors whose choices have large effects on a wide variety of school district outcomes, including student achievement and school spending. The effects of electing a board member with a given policy goal on district outcomes related to that goal are large relative to those of other high-profile policy interventions, such as changes in teacher quality or changes in school quality. Board members implement policy changes both by shifting the board agenda and by casting pivotal votes on controversial issues; these actions shift intermediate outcomes like district spending and executive leadership in ways that are consistent with members' goals but circumscribed by the limits of board authority.

We further show that, to understand the importance of school boards for district outcomes, measuring the ideologies of board members is crucial. Socio-economic identity variables often used as proxies for policy aims prove to be weakly correlated with those aims. Accordingly, electing a board member with a given demographic, professional, or political background has limited effects on both the ideological mix of the board and on school district policies.

Our findings push back on claims that local school boards are not important determinants of student achievement. The idea that school boards lack the expertise or authority to improve student outcomes has a long history and substantial support. As Danzberger et al. (1987) put it nearly 40 years ago, "local school boards in most states have been ignored or cast in passive roles as inconsequential reactors rather than as partners in shaping educational improvement." More recently,

White et al. (2023) argue that "[m]ost school-board members are not equipped with the educational and experiential background to understand what it takes to improve academic achievement." Our finding that board members who prioritize educational equity succeed in raising scores for disadvantaged students suggests that board composition can indeed have important achievement effects, and it illuminates the high stakes of interventions that shape members' policy priorities, whether through candidate selection, election outcomes, or political pressure.

Finally, looking beyond school boards, our results suggest that researchers seeking to understand the effects of policies that shift the composition of governing bodies such as corporate boards, scientific panels, or city councils would benefit from gathering data on members' policy preferences. Predicted changes in preferences based on aggregate demographic shifts—the basis for much hypothesis generation in the literature on board governance—may be poor proxies for the actual ideological changes that take place.

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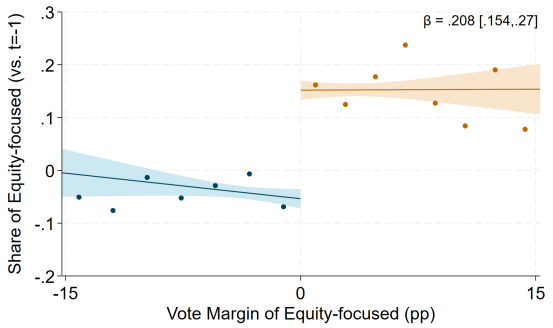
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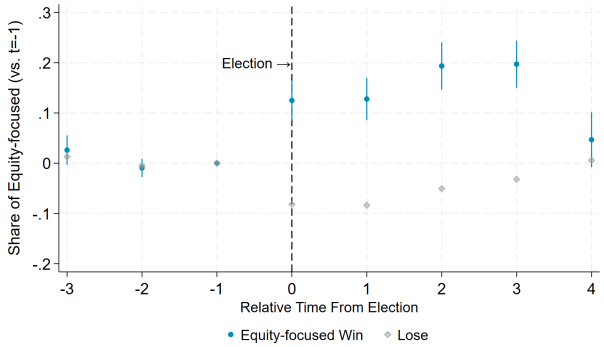
Figures

Figure 1: Elected Candidates' Attributes and the Ideological Composition of School Boards

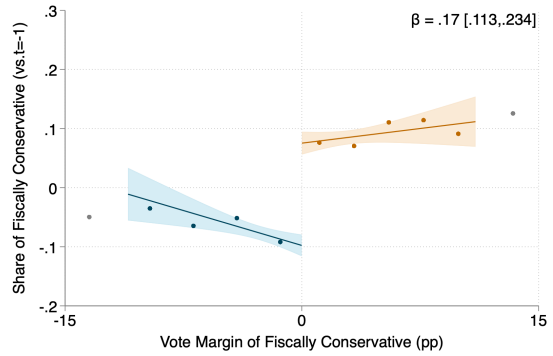
(a) Equity Candidate and Share w/Same Priority



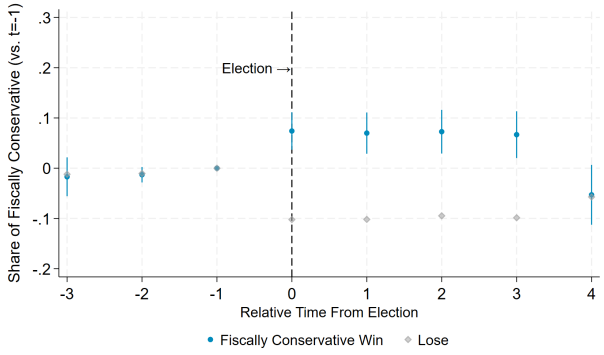
(b) Equity Candidate – Dynamic Effects



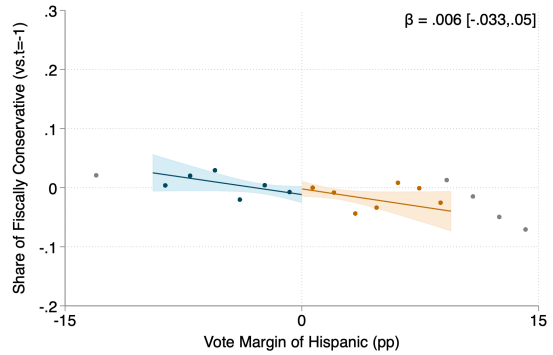
(c) Fiscally Cons. Candidate and Share w/Same Priority



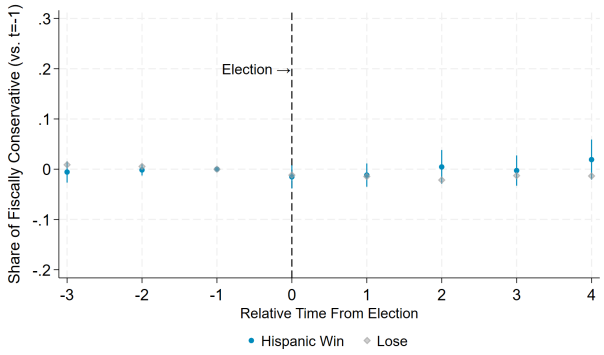
(d) Fiscally Cons. Candidate – Dynamic Effects



(e) Hispanic Candidate and Share Fiscally Cons.



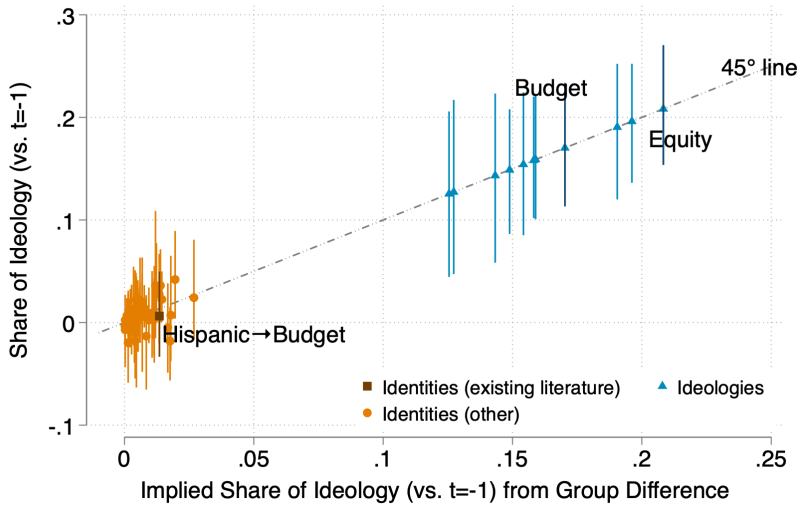
(f) Hispanic Candidate – Dynamic Effects



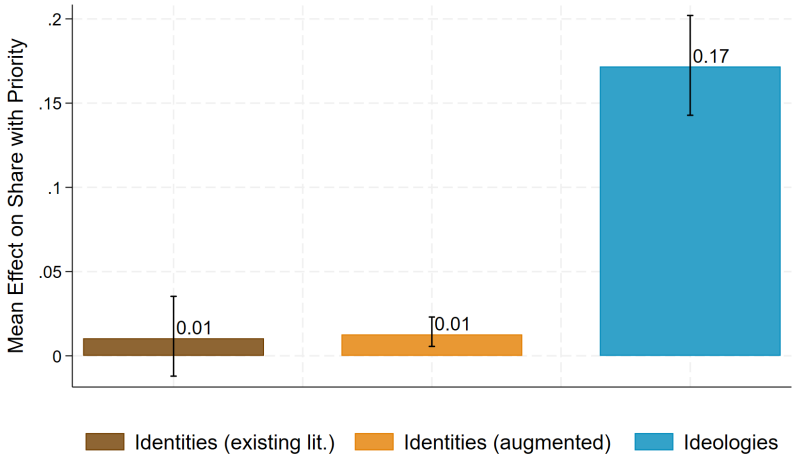
Notes: The left panels display regression discontinuity estimates of the effect of electing a candidate with a given characteristic on the share of board members with that characteristic in the five years following an election. We pool observations across years 0 to 4 since the election. Confidence intervals for the RD point estimates are taken from Calonico et al. (2020). We obtain 95% confidence bands for the local linear fits in the shaded region from separate linear regressions on the RD sample (Stata's lfitci), so the bands for the fitted lines and the intervals for the discontinuity need not coincide exactly at the threshold. The right panels report RD estimates in which the same model is estimated separately for each year relative to the election. "Lose" points are mean below-threshold values. "Win" points are equal to the below-threshold mean plus the RD estimate and include a 95% CI. All estimates are obtained using equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the corresponding focal characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. The dependent variable in all panels is expressed as the change relative to the year before the election. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). We use standard errors clustered at the election level in the left panels and robust standard errors in the right panels.

Figure 2: Elected Candidates' Attributes and the Ideological Composition of School Boards: Summarizing RD Estimates Across Candidate Types

(a) Change in Share w/Priority: RD Estimates vs. Cross-Sectional Predictions



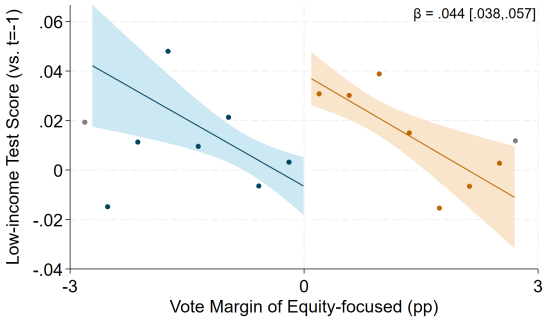
(b) Mean Change in Share w/Priority



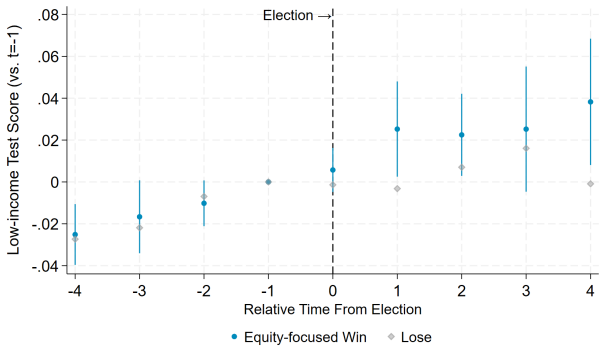
Notes: Panel (a) plots RD estimates of the effect of electing a candidate with a given characteristic (identity or ideology) on the subsequent share of board members with a given priority (y-axis) against the effect of the same characteristic that would be predicted given differences in priorities across identity groups in the raw data (x-axis). The predicted effect is calculated from the average difference in priorities between candidates with and without the focal characteristic. RD estimates are obtained using equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the corresponding focal characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. The dashed line is the 45-degree line. Panel (b) shows the mean of RD estimates by characteristic group, obtained using equation (2). *Identities (existing literature)* includes three identity-ideology pairs (Hispanic-Equity, Hispanic-Fiscal Conservatism, Teacher-Teacher Support). *Identities (augmented)* includes other identity-ideology pairs where viewpoint difference is significant by the identity group (Table B6). *Ideologies* includes the effects of electing a candidate with a given ideology on the share of that ideology in the board and considers all ideologies. In both panels, the dependent variable is the change in share relative to the year before the election; we pool observations over the four years following an election. In panel (b) we additionally multiply each outcome by the sign of the corresponding effect, so that all aggregated effects have a positive sign. All models control for year fixed effects; estimates in panel (b) additionally control for identities-ideologies pair fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level.

Figure 3: Elected Candidates' Attributes and School District Outcomes

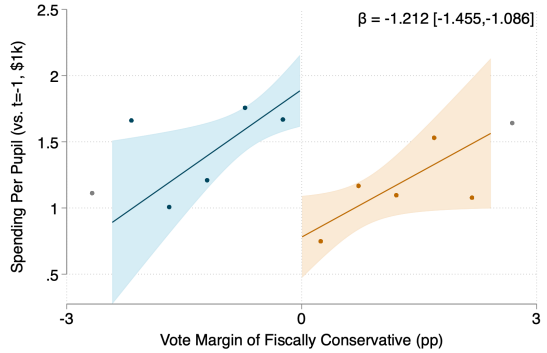
(a) Equity Candidates and Low-Income Test Scores



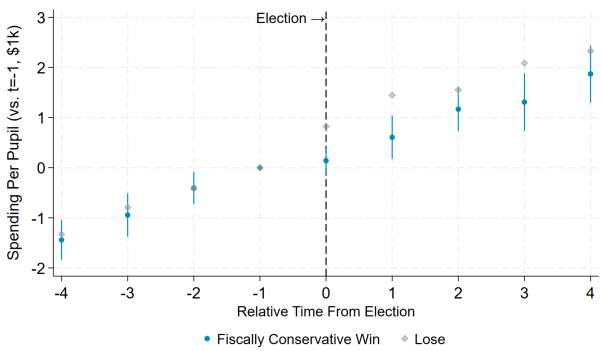
(b) Equity Candidates - Dynamic Effects



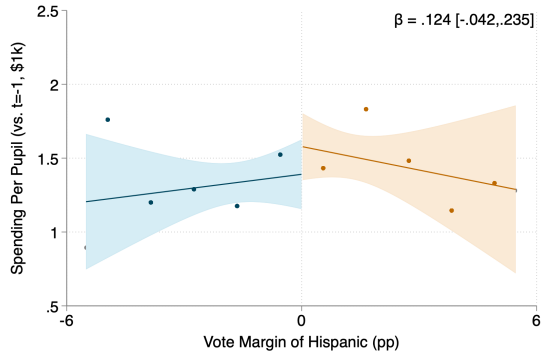
(c) Fiscally Cons. Candidates and Per-Pupil Spending



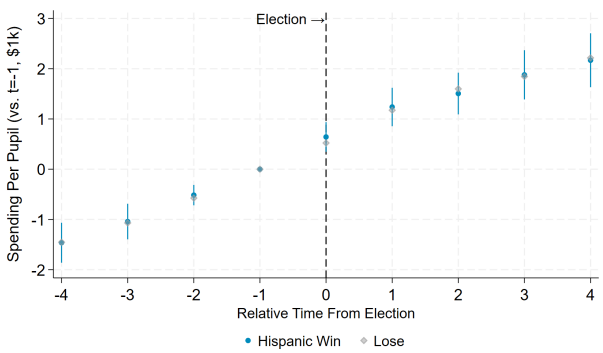
(d) Fiscally Cons. Candidates - Dynamic Effects



(e) Hispanic Candidates and Per-Pupil Spending



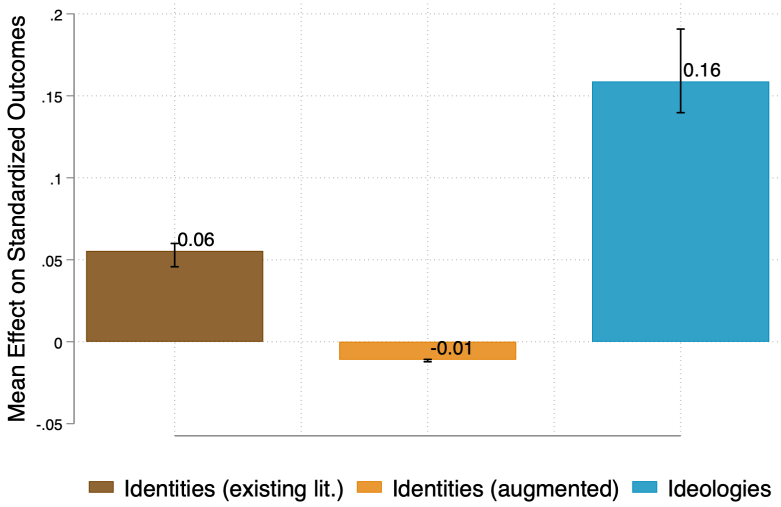
(f) Hispanic Candidates - Dynamic Effects



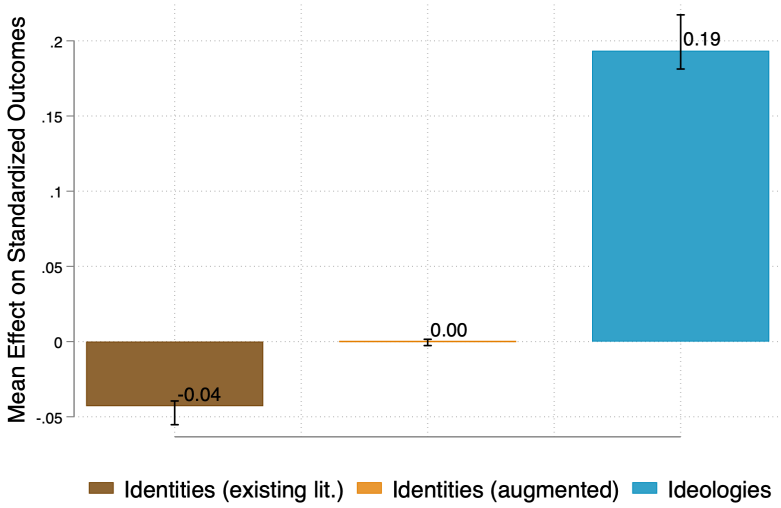
Notes: The left panels display RD estimates of the effect of electing a candidate with a given characteristic (fiscal conservatism, equity focus, or Hispanic identity) on district outcomes. We pool observations across years 0 to 4 since the election. Confidence intervals for the RD point estimates are taken from Calonico et al. (2020). We obtain 95% confidence bands for the local linear fits in the shaded region from separate linear regressions on the RD sample (Stata's lfitci), so the bands for the fitted lines and the intervals for the discontinuity need not coincide exactly at the threshold. The right panels report RD estimates in which the same model is estimated separately for each year relative to the election. "Lose" points are mean below-threshold values. "Win" points are equal to the below-threshold mean plus the RD estimate and include a 95% CI. All estimates are obtained using equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the corresponding focal characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. The dependent variables are standardized test scores for low-income students (panels (a) and (b)) and per-pupil spending (in $1,000, panels (c), (d), (e), and (f)). These outcomes are all expressed as the change relative to the year before the election. All models include year fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). We use standard errors clustered at the election level in the left panels and robust standard errors in the right panels.

Figure 4: Elected Candidates' Attributes and School District Outcomes: Summarizing RD Estimates Across Candidate Types

(a) Main Effects



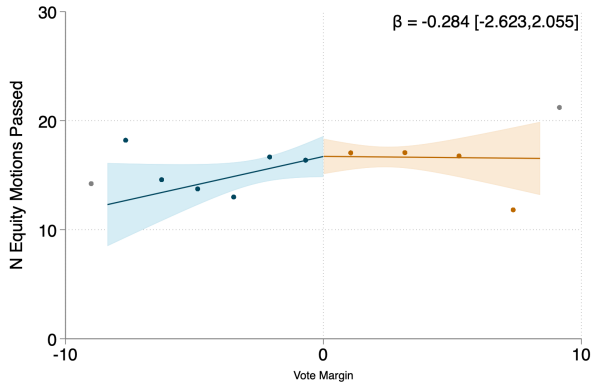
(b) Effects Holding Other Characteristics Constant



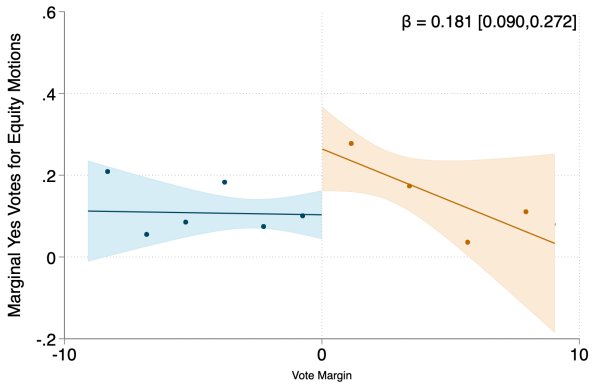
Notes: Mean RD estimates on district outcomes by characteristic group, obtained estimating equation (2) on a stacked dataset where each stack is constructed by considering a focal characteristic and its corresponding outcome, and where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the relevant characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. We include six characteristic–outcome pairs for the *Identities (existing literature)* category, 23 for the *Identities (augmented)* category, and 14 for the *Ideologies* category (see Table B6 and B5 for the full list of characteristics-outcome pairs). The dependent variable in each stack is standardized to have variance equal to one and expressed as the change relative to the year before the election; we pool observations over the four years following an election. For ease of interpretation, we multiply each outcome by the hypothesized direction of the effects based on the sign of raw difference in viewpoint by identity group in B6. All models control for year and stack fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. In panel (b), we restrict attention to races where the two marginal candidates have the same ideologies associated with a given identity (left and center bar) and to races where the two marginal candidates have similar predicted identities (i.e., with a difference smaller than one percentage point, right bar). We predict identities using the random forest shown in Table 3.

Figure 5: Candidates' Ideology and Board Actions

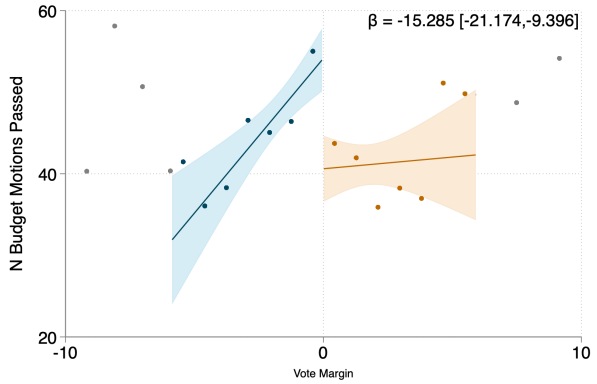
(a) Equity Members and # Passed Motions



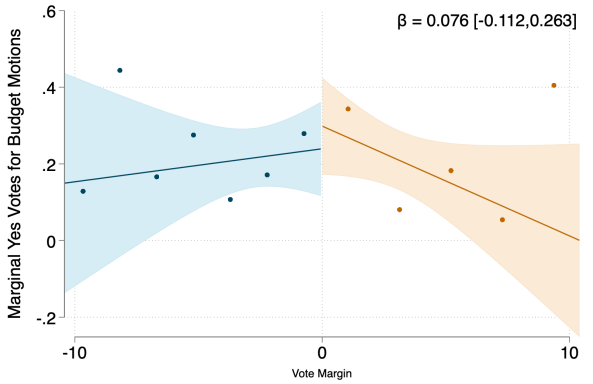
(b) Equity Members and Marginal Votes



(c) Fiscally Conservative Members and # Passed Motions



(d) Fiscally Conservative Members and Marginal Votes



Notes: The figures show RD estimates of equation (1), where D_i indicates the election of either an equity candidate (panels (a) and (b)) or a fiscally conservative candidate (panels (c) and (d)) and m_i is their respective vote margin. The outcome variables are the number of motions related to the focal priority passed by the board (panels (a) and (c)) and the candidates' marginal votes on the focal priority, i.e., yes votes that shift the majority (panels (b) and (d)). All models include year fixed effects. We pool observations over the four years following an election. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. Confidence intervals for the RD point estimates are taken from Calonico et al. (2020). We obtain 95% confidence bands for the local linear fits in the shaded region from separate linear regressions on the RD sample (Stata's lfitci), so the bands for the fitted lines and the intervals for the discontinuity need not coincide exactly at the threshold.

Tables

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	All Elections	Close Elections (< 5 pp)			
		Any	Equity	Fiscally Conservative	Hispanic
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Panel A: Candidate Characteristics					
Share Hispanic	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.16	0.44
Share Female	0.45	0.44	0.49	0.45	0.43
Share Teacher	0.17	0.18	0.23	0.21	0.16
Share Registered Democrat	0.49	0.50	0.56	0.52	0.52
Share Having a Platform	0.38	0.39	0.69	0.66	0.32
N Candidates	22,426	5,038	3,601	4,470	3,988
N Elections	5,782	2,519	905	1,090	1,004
Panel B: Educational Outcomes in the Year Before the Election					
Spending Per Pupil ($1k) (-2019)	9.72	9.51	10.93	10.07	9.75
N Districts x Years	3,301	1,821	569	801	721
Total Enrollment	11,926	11,797	17,740	16,518	16,454
Share White	0.35	0.36	0.34	0.38	0.23
Share Hispanic	0.45	0.45	0.41	0.38	0.59
N Districts x Years	3,654	1,973	706	910	813
Test Scores (2009-)	-0.06	-0.06	-0.01	-0.01	-0.11
Hispanic Test Scores (2009-)	-0.17	-0.17	-0.15	-0.15	-0.18
Low-income Test Scores (2009-)	-0.15	-0.15	-0.13	-0.12	-0.17
Share Low-income Students (2009-)	0.56	0.57	0.50	0.48	0.67
N Districts x Years	1,319	726	252	365	313
Panel C: Meeting Characteristics in the Year Before the Election					
Total Number of Meetings (2016-)	21.92	21.60	23.16	23.29	21.83
Present Members per Meeting (2016-)	5.25	5.08	5.21	5.21	5.33
Proposed Motions per Year (2016-)	153.31	152.47	158.43	154.18	157.71
Passed Motions per Year (2016-)	151.44	150.51	156.57	152.36	155.68
N Districts x Years	1,316	411	300	252	247

Notes: Summary statistics for school board elections and district characteristics. Columns show averages across all elections (column 1), close elections with a vote margin smaller than 5 percentage points (column 2), and close elections where a candidate with a given focal characteristic (fiscally conservative, equity-focused, or Hispanic) either won or lost narrowly (columns 3–5). Panel A reports candidate characteristics. Panel B summarizes educational outcomes in the year before the election, including per-pupil spending from the Common Core of Data (CCD) and average test scores from the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), disaggregated for Hispanic and *low-income* subgroups. While the statutory criteria have changed over time, California has used Title I status of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, free-or-reduced lunch eligibility, or poverty status following the federal guideline to define economically disadvantaged, or *low-income* students. Years of data availability are shown in parentheses. For data provided at the academic-year level, we report the spring semester of the corresponding year. If not indicated, variables span the entire analysis period (1998–2022). Spending is reported in thousands of 2019 U.S. dollars. Panel C reports average school board meeting characteristics in the year prior to the election.

Table 2: Examples of Platforms and Priorities

Example of Candidate Platform	Equity	Fiscal Conservatism	Agenda Bias	Community Engagement	CTE	Dropout	Enrollment	Facility Improv.	Safety	Sup Accountability/Hiring	Teacher Support	Test Scores
Maintain a balanced budget to meet the needs of providing a high-quality education for all students while maintaining a prudent reserve. **Maintain and support a highly-qualified workforce** to provide a rigorous academic program, top-notch extracurricular activities, up-to-date technology, and continuous improvement for all students. To develop a sustainability plan to ensure that we are providing **best possible education for all students** as our district reaches its capacity to **build new schools** and we possibly move to a **declining enrollment**. (2016, Rocklin Unified)	✓	✓					✓	✓			✓	✓
Safety of Students, Serve Parents and Students – **no social experimentation in the classroom**, **Sound Financial Plan** for the District –more dollars to the classroom and no wasteful spending (2008, Grossmont High)		✓	✓	✓					✓			
School Safety, Smaller Class Sizes, **Parent involvement** (2018, El Rancho)				✓					✓			

Notes: Examples of candidate platform statements and their corresponding priorities. Each row presents a platform portion, along with indicators for coded priorities. We highlight in bold language indicative of assigned priorities.

Table 3: Priorities by Demographic Group

	Hispanicity		Gender		Occupation		Political Affiliation		Prediction Accuracy	
	Hispanic (1)	Non- (2)	Female (3)	Male (4)	Teacher (5)	Non- (6)	Democrat (7)	Republican (8)	R-forest (9)	Mean Only (10)
N Candidates	6235	1165	3866	3440	6299	2168	1771	3661		
Have a Platform	**0.26**	**0.40**	**0.41**	**0.36**	**0.56**	**0.34**	**0.44**	**0.31**	0.65	0.53
Share with Priority Among Candidates with Valid Platform										
Equity	**0.37**	**0.34**	**0.41**	**0.27**	0.35	0.34	**0.42**	**0.26**	0.66	0.55
Fiscal Conservatism	**0.34**	**0.44**	0.43	0.43	**0.40**	**0.43**	**0.41**	**0.48**	0.58	0.51
Agenda Bias	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	**0.03**	**0.08**	0.96	0.92
Community Engagement	**0.46**	**0.42**	**0.48**	**0.38**	0.43	0.43	**0.45**	**0.40**	0.57	0.51
Career and Technical Education	**0.18**	**0.16**	0.16	0.15	**0.18**	**0.15**	0.16	0.15	0.84	0.73
Dropout	**0.15**	**0.10**	**0.11**	**0.09**	**0.12**	**0.10**	**0.13**	**0.08**	0.89	0.81
Enrollment	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.93	0.87
Facility Improvement	0.27	0.26	0.25	0.27	**0.24**	**0.27**	**0.25**	**0.28**	0.74	0.61
Safety	**0.40**	**0.32**	**0.36**	**0.30**	0.33	0.34	0.35	0.34	0.66	0.55
Superintendent Accountability	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.95	0.90
Teacher Support	0.22	0.24	0.25	0.23	**0.26**	**0.23**	**0.25**	**0.20**	0.76	0.64
Test Scores	**0.39**	**0.36**	**0.38**	**0.35**	0.37	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.64	0.54

Notes: Number of candidates, share of candidates with a valid platform, and share of candidates with each stated priority among those with a platform. Columns 1–2 compare Hispanic and non-Hispanic candidates; columns 3–4 compare female and male candidates; columns 5–6 compare teachers and non-teachers; and columns 7–8 compare Democrats and Republicans. Values in bold indicate that the difference in the share of candidates stating a given priority between identity groups (e.g., Hispanic vs. Non-Hispanic) is statistically significant at the 5% level. Column 9 shows the share of all candidates for whom we can accurately predict a priority using all the identity variables in a random forest classification with 1,000 iterations, calculated using out-of-bag errors. Column 10 shows the share of candidates for whom we accurately predict priorities using only the share of each priority in the sample, i.e., purely out of chance (for example, since 35% of candidates prioritize equity, the probability of correctly predicting a candidate's priority based purely on chance is $0.35^2 + 0.65^2 = 0.55$).

Table 4: Specification Checks for the Regression Discontinuity Design

	Case-Study Characteristics			Aggregates Across All Characteristics		
	Equity	Fiscally Conservative	Hispanic	Identity (Literature)	Identity (Other)	Ideology
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: McCrary Test						
p-val	0.719	0.445	0.146	0.028	0.032	0.607
N	557	692	616	1025	2257	3485
Panel B: Selection into Outcome Sample						
Estimate	0.048	0.009	0.019	0.037	-0.014	-0.021
	[-0.196, 0.292]	[-0.034, 0.052]	[-0.021, 0.059]	[-0.023, 0.098]	[-0.038, 0.010]	[-0.093, 0.050]
N	853	1856	1499		28525	
Panel C: Pre-Treatment Outcome Balance						
Estimate	-0.051	-0.005	0.000	0.023	0.000	-0.006
	[-0.218, 0.117]	[-0.019, 0.008]	[-0.012, 0.013]	[-0.024, 0.071]	[-0.024, 0.025]	[-0.109, 0.097]
N	329	1737	1858		17050	
Panel D: Selection into Minutes Sample						
Estimate	0.111	0.097	-0.046	0.054	0.001	0.040
	[-0.036, 0.258]	[-0.227, 0.420]	[-0.196, 0.104]	[0.036, 0.071]	[-0.313, 0.315]	[-0.049, 0.130]
N	1144	176	1116		8180	

Notes: Results of RD specification tests. Each column reports results for a (set of) candidate types. Columns 1-3 correspond to candidate characteristics: Equity (column 1), fiscal conservatism (column 2), and Hispanic ethnicity (column 3). Columns 4-6 consider aggregated identity characteristics tested in the literature (see Table B6, column 4), other identity characteristics (column 5), and ideology characteristics (column 6). Panel A shows p-values from a McCrary test for discontinuities in the density function of each characteristic around the electoral cutoff. Panel B tests for selection into the outcome sample by showing estimates and confidence intervals of the parameter β in equation (1) obtained using an indicator for an observation having non-missing outcomes (per-pupil spending for fiscal conservatism and Hispanic and low-income test scores for equity) as the dependent variable. Panel C tests for balance in pre-treatment outcomes by estimating the same equation using the pooled changes in the outcome between each of the three pre-election years ($t-2$, $t-3$, $t-4$) and the baseline year ($t-1$). Panel D tests for selection into the minutes data by estimating the same equation using an indicator for having non-missing minutes records as the outcome variable. In panels B, C, and D we show estimates and confidence intervals (in brackets) use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020), we control for year fixed effects, and we cluster standard errors at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table 5: Elected Candidate Attributes and Intermediate Policy Outcomes

Panel A: Equity Candidates

	SFP Funds to Schools with					
	High Low-Income Share	Low Low-Income Share	High Hispanic Share	Low Hispanic Share	Super Turnover	Predicted Test Scores
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Estimate	850.597	-39.536	792.539	-50.892	-0.014	0.001
	[797.813, 1022.128]	[-258.034, 95.635]	[743.785, 1017.593]	[-302.149, 122.989]	[-0.035, 0.018]	[-0.000, 0.003]
N	1,571	2,169	1,478	2,056	2,300	477
Mean Dep. Var.	120.548	145.185	109.248	181.962	0.411	0.025

Panel B: Fiscally Conservative Candidates

	Spending By Sub-Category					
	Teacher Salaries	Staff Salaries	Total Capital	Construction	Super Turnover	Predicted Test Scores
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Estimate	-0.032	-0.001	-1.189	-1.169	0.160	0.003
	[-0.071, -0.009]	[-0.015, 0.017]	[-1.315, -1.140]	[-1.288, -1.122]	[0.140, 0.196]	[0.001, 0.004]
N	1,625	2,162	924	924	1,625	717
Mean Dep. Var.	3.251	1.580	1.087	0.997	0.393	-0.033

Panel C: Hispanic Candidates

	Spending By Sub-Category					
	Teacher Salaries	Staff Salaries	Total Capital	Construction	Super Turnover	Predicted Test Scores
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Estimate	0.015	0.069	-0.125	-0.155	0.056	0.001
	[-0.019, 0.062]	[0.044, 0.107]	[-0.228, -0.068]	[-0.254, -0.101]	[0.026, 0.078]	[-0.000, 0.002]
N	2,069	1,864	1,348	1,348	2,485	666
Mean Dep. Var.	3.051	1.541	0.992	0.873	0.401	-0.135

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of an equity (panel A), a fiscally conservative (panel B), or a Hispanic (panel C) candidate. In panel A, the dependent variable is the amount of School Facility Program (SFP) funds received by schools with a low-income student share above and below the median (columns 1-2), and schools with a share of Hispanic students above and below the median (columns 3-4). In panels B and C, the dependent variable is spending per pupil on teacher salaries (column 1), staff salaries (column 2), capital investments (column 3), and school construction (column 4), all measured in thousands of 2019 U.S. dollars. In all panels, the dependent variable in column (5) is an indicator for superintendent turnover relative to the baseline year, and in column (6) is test scores as predicted using district student body composition. We obtain our predictions by estimating a linear regression of test scores on district shares of black, Hispanic, Asian, free/reduced-price lunch, below poverty-line, special-education, English language learner students, and the log of total enrollment. We pool observations over the five years following an election. Dependent variables are expressed as the change relative to the year before the election, except for superintendent turnover. All models control for year fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020), and we cluster standard errors at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

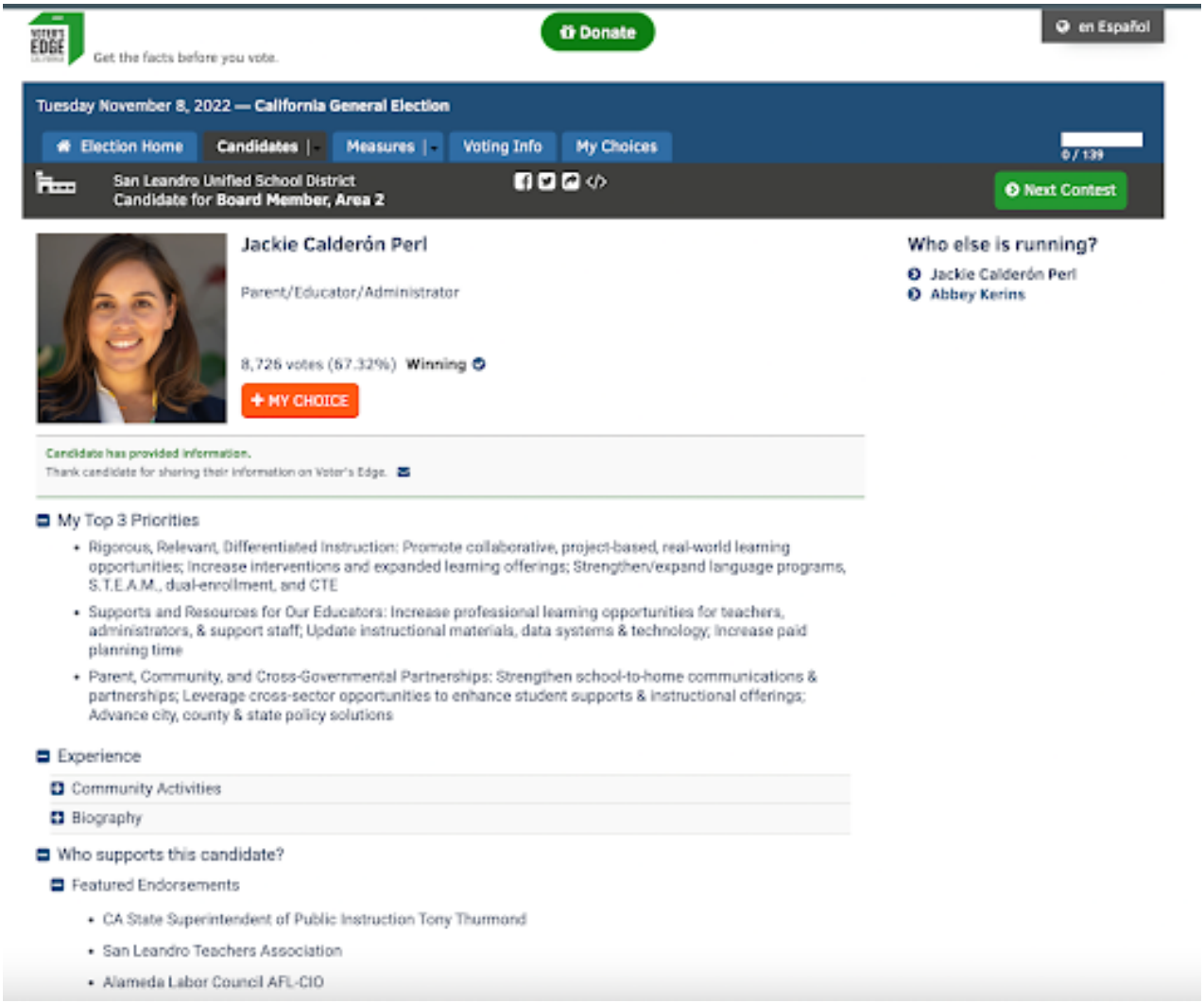
Table 6: Elected Candidate Attributes and School Board Actions

	Equity		Fiscal		Hispanic	
	Focal	All	Focal	All	Equity	Fiscal
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Proposed Motions						
Estimate	-0.284	-5.424	-15.285	-51.162	3.839	0.543
	[-2.623, 2.055]	[-21.929, 11.082]	[-21.174, -9.396]	[-68.850, -33.473]	[1.439, 6.240]	[-3.817, 4.903]
Mean Dep. Var.	15.346	154.376	45.057	157.286	17.296	43.990
N	786	819	548	555	635	610
Panel B: Passed Motions						
Estimate	-0.393	-6.004	-15.184	-51.317	3.527	0.184
	[-2.678, 1.893]	[-22.594, 10.586]	[-21.119, -9.248]	[-69.027, -33.607]	[1.152, 5.902]	[-4.076, 4.444]
Mean Dep. Var.	15.028	152.645	44.565	155.140	16.910	43.510
N	784	816	552	552	645	631
Panel C: Non-Unanimous Motions						
Estimate	0.672	3.021	-0.103	-1.456	1.484	2.007
	[0.134, 1.209]	[0.247, 5.795]	[-1.059, 0.852]	[-4.364, 1.451]	[0.791, 2.177]	[0.786, 3.227]
Mean Dep. Var.	2.164	15.260	3.650	14.203	2.157	4.521
N	827	971	905	876	645	679
Panel D: Pivotal Votes (One-Vote margins)						
Estimate	0.181	1.283	0.076	0.166	-0.011	0.101
	[0.090, 0.272]	[0.698, 1.868]	[-0.112, 0.263]	[-0.640, 0.972]	[-0.072, 0.049]	[-0.039, 0.240]
Mean Dep. Var.	0.114	1.287	0.219	1.265	0.124	0.230
N	819	739	786	823	679	738
Panel E: Pivotal Votes in Non-Unanimous Case						
Estimate	0.494	3.957	0.609	0.951	0.180	0.595
	[0.186, 0.803]	[1.454, 6.459]	[-0.008, 1.226]	[-1.612, 3.513]	[-0.256, 0.617]	[-0.287, 1.477]
Mean Dep. Var.	0.834	11.198	1.770	10.178	1.191	2.554
N	735	732	924	949	645	692

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of an equity candidate (columns 1 and 2), a fiscally conservative candidate (columns 3 and 4), or a Hispanic candidate (columns 5 and 6). In panel A, the dependent variable is the number of proposed motions on each candidate's focal issue (e.g., equity for equity candidates; columns 1 and 3), on all issues (columns 2 and 4), on equity motions (column 5), and on budget motions (column 6). In panel B, the dependent variable is the number of passed motions on the same issues. In panel C, the dependent variable is the number of non-unanimous motions, i.e., those passed with at least one negative vote. In panel D, the dependent variable counts the number of yes votes cast by each member on motions on each issue that pass with a margin of only one vote. In panel E, the dependent variable counts the number of yes votes cast by each member on motions on each issue that pass with at least one negative vote. We pool observations over the four years following each election. All models control for year fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020), and we cluster standard errors at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

A Additional Figures

Figure A1: Example of a Candidate Profile on Voter's Edge



Notes: Example of a candidate profile from the Voter's Edge website.

Figure A2: Examples of School Board Meeting Minutes

(a) Date and List of Present Members — Dublin Unified School District, 2021

MINUTES
DUBLIN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
Meeting Held via Zoom Video Conference / Live streaming
Tuesday, February 9, 2021, and Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Members present
Dan Cherrier, Megan Rouse, Gabrielle Blackman, Kristin Pelham, Catherine Kuo, Katherine Cheng, Michael Riley.

(b) Example of Meeting Discussion — Dublin Unified School District, 2021

Action: 3. FACILITIES - Facilities Solutions - Short and Long Term Solutions to the Challenges Faced in the Dublin Unified School District Building Program
President Cherrier noted the lateness of the hour, and noted that the remainder of the agenda would take a few hours to complete. He proposed that the Board plan to continue the meeting at a yet-to-be determined date at time, in order to complete all agenda items. He proposed that, prior to recessing the meeting, that the Board receive staff's presentation on Item G-3, ask clarifying questions, and hear the public comment from those wishing to speak who are not able to return at the continuation of the meeting. By general consensus, it was agreed by all to take this approach, and to plan the continuation of the meeting for Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 6:30 PM.

Interim Superintendent Moirao, along with Chris Hobbs, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Business Services and Thomas Moore, Assistant Superintendent of Facilities, Construction, and Planning presented information on the budget shortfall on the District's facilities projects. The presentation included various options for moving forward, as well as the current state of progress on the projects at Murray Elementary, Emerald High School, and Dublin Elementary. Also included was staff's recommendation to fund the shortfall at Murray with $15M with accumulated interest and additional developer fees; to fund the Dublin Elementary project for $43M, including $10M from Measure J; and to fund the shortfall at EHS Phase 1 from Measure J for $103M. Staff addressed clarifying questions from the Board, then took public comment from those speakers who were not able to return to make comment at the continuation of the meeting tomorrow.

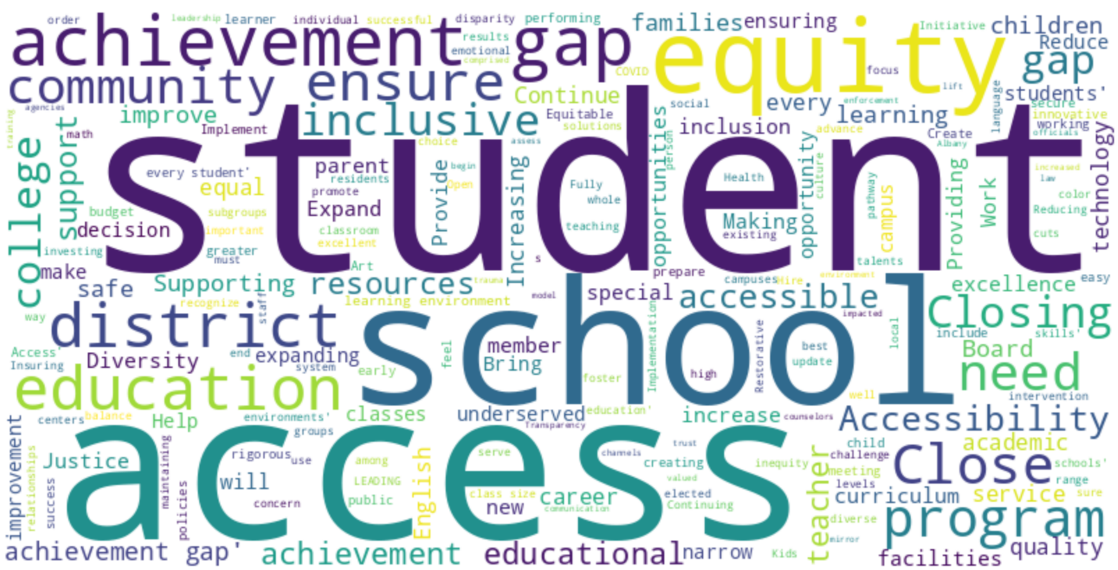
(c) Example of a Motion — Antioch Unified School District, 2016

Motion: Approve tentative settlement agreement of Special Education matter - Case No. 2016070742, Case No. 2016070703, Case No. 2016070134, Case No. 2016070060, and Case No. 2016070266. **Action:** Approve. **Moved by:** Mr. Walter Ruehlig, **seconded by:** Mr. Alonzo Terry. **Vote:** Motion carried by 3-2 vote. **Yes:** Mr. Alonzo Terry, Mr. Walter Ruehlig, Ms. Diane Gibson-Gray. **No:** Mr. Fernando Navarro, Ms. Debra Vinson.

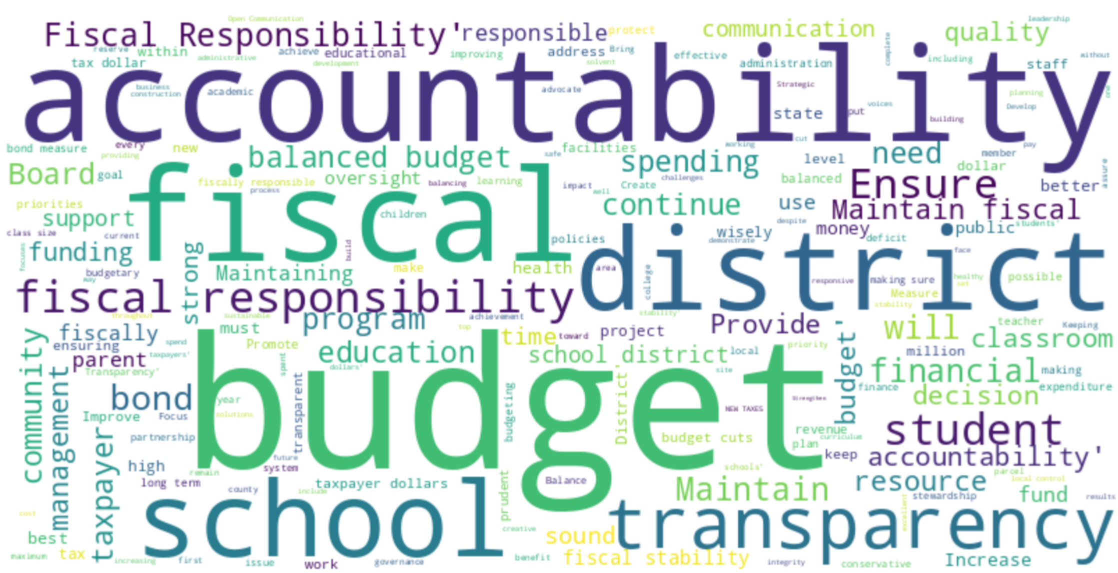
Notes: Excerpts from school board meeting minutes.

Figure A3: Word Clouds from Platforms of Equity and Fiscally Conservative Candidates

(a) Equity Candidates



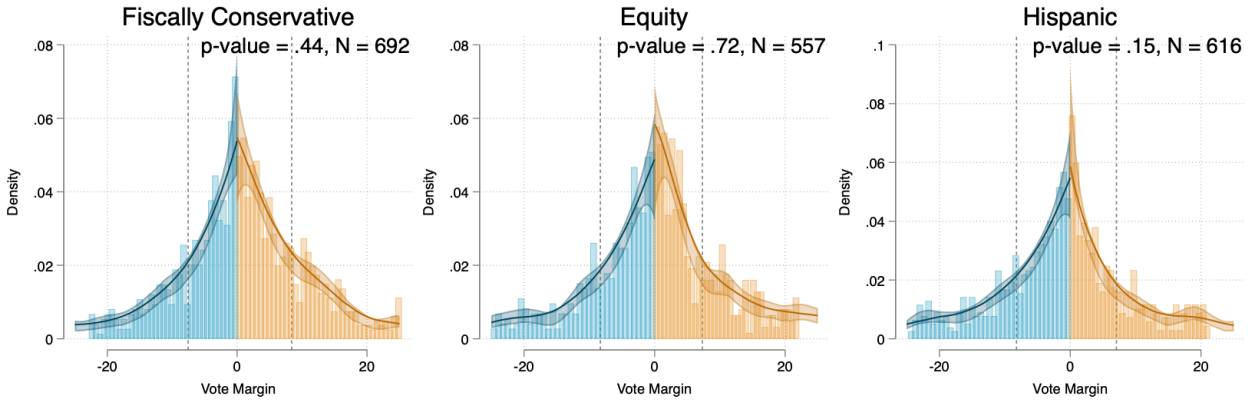
(b) Fiscally Conservative Candidates



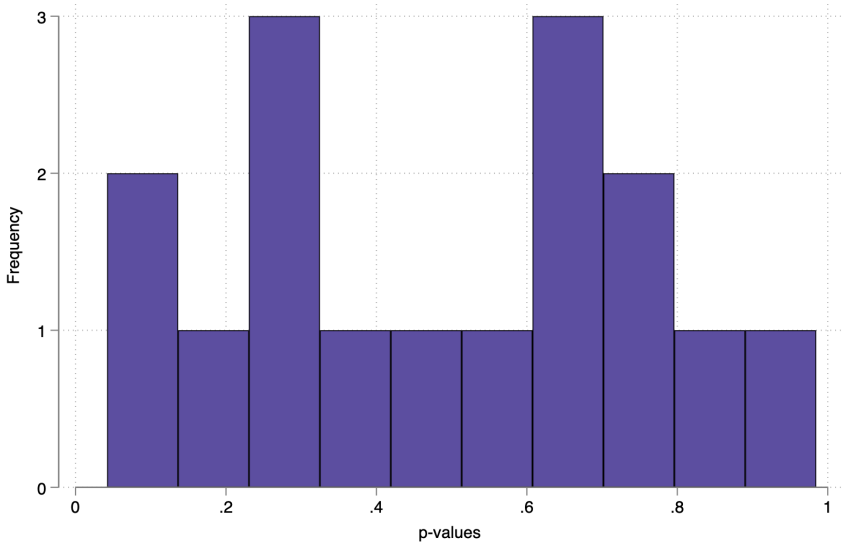
Notes: Word clouds constructed using the text of the platforms of equity (panel (a)) and fiscally conservative candidates (panel (b)) as coded by our assignment process. Larger words denote higher frequency across statements linked to the corresponding theme. The visualizations are based on a 10% sample of school board candidates' platforms.

Figure A4: Distribution of Candidates' Vote Margins

(a) Case-Study Characteristics



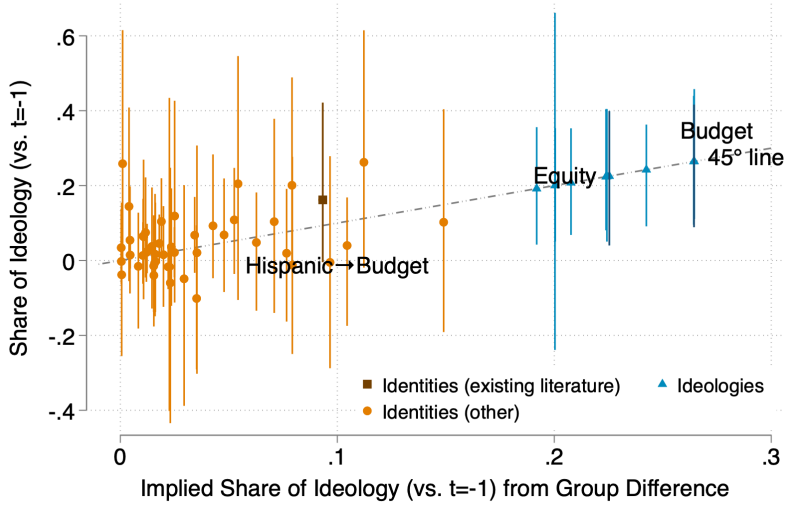
(b) All Ideology and Identity Characteristics – P-Values



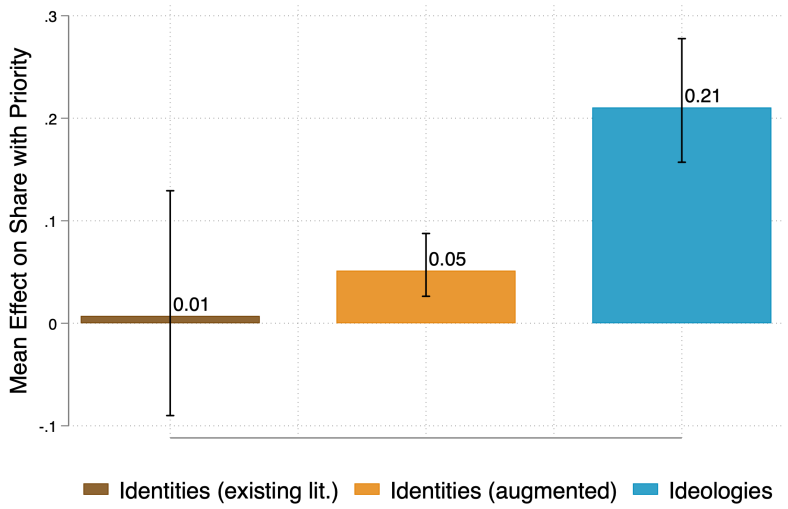
Notes: Panel (a) shows the distribution of vote margins around the electoral cutoff for fiscally conservative, equity, and Hispanic candidates. The vote margin is defined as the difference between the vote share of the least popular winning candidate and the most popular losing candidate, and it is positive when the focal candidate is the least popular winner and negative when they are the most popular loser. Shaded regions denote confidence intervals for a McCrary test of discontinuity of the density function around the cutoff, for which p-values are reported. The dotted lines mark the optimal bandwidth used for the same test. Panel (b) summarizes the distribution of p-values from McCrary tests for all ideology and identity characteristics used in the analysis.

Figure A5: Elected Candidates' Attributes and the Ideological Composition of School Boards: Only Elections with Platforms for Winners and Losers

(a) Change in Share w/Priority: RD Estimates vs. Cross-Sectional Predictions

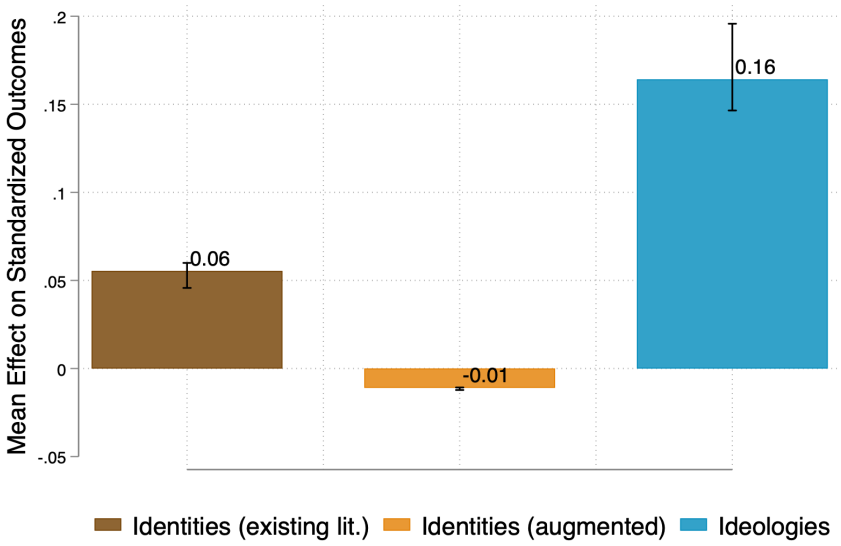


(b) Mean Change in Share w/Priority



Notes: This figure replicates Figure 1 but restricts the sample to elections where platform data is available for both marginal candidates. Panel (a) plots RD estimates of the effect of electing a candidate with a given characteristic (identity or ideology) on the subsequent share of board members with a given priority (y-axis) against the effect of the same characteristic that would be predicted given differences in priorities across identity groups in the raw data (x-axis). The predicted effect is calculated from the average difference in priorities between candidates with and without the focal characteristic. RD estimates are obtained using equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the corresponding focal characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. The dashed line is the 45-degree line. Panel (b) shows the mean of RD estimates by characteristic group, obtained using equation (2). *Identities (existing literature)* includes three identity-ideology pairs (Hispanic-Equity, Hispanic-Fiscal Conservatism, Teacher-Teacher Support). *Identities (augmented)* includes other identity-ideology pairs where viewpoint difference is significant by the identity group (Table B6). *Ideologies* includes the effects of electing a candidate with a given ideology on the share of that ideology in the board and considers all ideologies. In both panels, the dependent variable is the change in share relative to the year before the election; we pool observations over the four years following an election. In panel (b) we additionally multiply each outcome by the sign of the corresponding effect, so that all aggregated effects have a positive sign. All models control for year fixed effects; estimates in panel (b) additionally control for identities-ideologies pair fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level.

Figure A6: Elected Candidates' Attributes and School Districts' Outcomes: Aggregate Effects of Ideology in Elections where Both Winners and Losers Have Platforms



Notes: This replicates Figure 4, but restricts the sample used for estimates of ideology effects (rightmost column) to elections where platform data is available for both marginal candidates. Left two bars are identical to Figure 4. Estimates are obtained using equation (2) on a stacked dataset where each stack is constructed by considering a focal characteristic and its corresponding outcome, and where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the relevant characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. We include 14 characteristic–outcome pairs for *Ideologies* category (see Table B5 for the full list of characteristics-outcome pairs). The dependent variable in each stack is standardized to have variance equal to one and expressed as the change relative to the year before the election; we pool observations over the four years following an election. For ease of interpretation, we multiply each outcome by the hypothesized direction of the effects (see B5 for the full list). All models control for year and stack fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level.

B Additional Tables

Table B1: Candidates, Elections, and Districts With and Without Platforms

	Without Platform (1)	With Platform (2)
Panel A: Candidate Characteristics		
Female	**0.42**	**0.47**
Hispanic	**0.26**	**0.16**
Teacher	**0.12**	**0.26**
Democrat	**0.45**	**0.56**
Panel B: Election Characteristics		
N Candidates/election	**4.81**	**4.69**
N Positions/election	**2.27**	**2.24**
Vote Margin (ΔVote Share, Least Popular Winner vs. Most Popular Loser)	7.95	8.06
Panel C: District Characteristics		
Enrollment	**10232**	**17645**
Share White	**0.34**	**0.37**
Share Hispanic	**0.49**	**0.39**
Share Black	**0.05**	**0.05**
Share Asian	**0.07**	**0.14**
Spending Per Pupil ($1k)	**9.11**	**9.89**
Total N Candidates	13959	8467

Notes: Candidate, election, and district characteristics, with no platform (column 1) and with at least one candidate platform (column 2). Panel A summarizes candidates' demographic characteristics; Panel B summarizes characteristics of elections in which the candidates ran; and Panel C summarizes characteristics of districts whose elections candidates ran in. Values in bold indicate that the difference between candidates with and without a stated platform is statistically significant at the 5% level.

Table B2: Inter-Rater Reliability Across Human Graders and LLMs - Candidate Platforms

Priority	RA 1 - GPT	RA 2 - GPT	RA 1 - RA 2	RA 1 - Claude	RA 2 - Claude	GPT - Claude
Equity	0.77	0.62	0.60	0.74	0.67	0.74
Fiscal Conservatism	0.92	0.79	0.83	0.90	0.80	0.94
Agenda Bias	0.62	0.58	0.61	0.69	0.56	0.65
Community Engagement	0.87	0.66	0.65	0.84	0.66	0.89
Career and Technical Education	0.88	0.79	0.82	0.84	0.80	0.91
Dropout	0.69	0.43	0.53	0.39	0.24	0.56
Enrollment	0.85	0.75	0.82	0.72	0.66	0.88
Facility Improvement	0.63	0.40	0.45	0.69	0.46	0.81
Safety	0.96	0.81	0.81	0.92	0.85	0.92
Superintendent Accountability	0.37	0.37	1.00	0.31	0.31	0.64
Teacher Support	0.59	0.45	0.47	0.46	0.35	0.54
Test Scores	0.71	0.65	0.67	0.57	0.46	0.66
Overall	0.83	0.73	0.77	0.76	0.69	0.80

Notes: Pearson correlations between ratings assigned by two research assistants and two large-language models (LLMs) for a random sample of 200 school board candidate platforms from our full sample. GPT refers to OpenAI's GPT-4.0 model. Claude refers to Anthropic's 3.5 Sonnet model.

Table B3: Priorities Identified Via Latent Dirichlet Allocation Algorithm

Top Words (1)	Topic (2)	Mapped Priorities (3)
community, class, health, safe, board, learning, increase, support, mental, environment	Supportive learning environment and academic rigor	Equity, Test Scores
safety, success, needs, ensure, increase, improve, academic, retention, safe, meet	Safety, student needs, and success outcomes	Safety, Dropout
communication, fiscal, teachers, sure, children, special, plan, accountability, transparency, community	Parent-teacher communication and fiscal transparency	Community Engagement, Fiscal Conservatism
fiscal, parents, responsibility, fiscal responsibility, community, education, making, decision, teacher, decision making	Financial responsibility and parental involvement	Fiscal Conservatism, Community Engagement
financial, college, career, budget, funding, programs, funds, resources, college career, continue	College and career readiness	CTE, Test Scores
teachers, staff, support, high, administrators, quality, retain, teachers staff, community, best	Teacher retention and professional development	Teacher Support
community, teachers, parents, educational, build, administration, stakeholders, needs, ensure, programs	Community collaboration and school success	Community Engagement
budget, programs, achievement, technology, gap, access, social, achievement gap, education, balanced	Equity in programs, tech access, and achievement gaps	Equity, Facility Improvement
education, academic, quality, achievement, improve, excellence, learning, quality education, continue, focus	Raising academic standards and student opportunity	Test Scores, Equity
accountability, best, test, scores, ensure, test scores, board, educational, music, high	Testing, evaluation, and accountability systems	Test Scores

Notes: Set of priorities identified via a Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling of school board candidate platforms. Column (1) shows the highest-probability words within each topic, as produced by the LDA model. Column (2) shows a list of researcher-labeled topics based on the content of the top associated terms. Column (3) contains subsets of the 12 priorities used in our analysis that authors find being mapped to topics identified based on top words from the LDA model. Before implementing the LDA model, we converted all text to lower case, removed standard stop-words, and performed lemmatization. The model uses 10 topics with a symmetric Dirichlet prior (alpha=auto) and 1,000 training iterations.

Table B4: Priorities Identified by a Large-Language Model

Top Words (1)	Topic (2)	Mapped Priorities (3)
academic achievement, test scores, standards, rigor, excellence, core subjects, learning outcomes, proficiency, performance	Academic Achievement & Standards	Test Scores
teacher pay, attract, retain, quality teaching, professional development, staffing, support teachers, qualified, educator pipeline	Teacher Quality & Pay	Teacher Support
class size, instructional materials, resources, reduce ratio, classroom support, supplies, staffing levels	Class Size & Instructional Resources	Teacher Support, Facility Improvement
fiscal responsibility, transparency, budget, oversight, bond spending, financial planning, efficient use	Fiscal Accountability & Efficiency	Fiscal Conservatism
mental health, social emotional, well-being, counselors, SEL, whole child, behavior, trauma-informed	Social-Emotional & Mental Health Supports	Safety
college readiness, career pathways, vocational, CTE, dual enrollment, workforce skills, future preparation	College & Career Readiness	CTE, Dropout
early childhood, kindergarten readiness, reading by 3rd grade, literacy, foundational skills, preschool, early education	Early Childhood & Foundational Learning	N/A
safe schools, discipline, security, bullying, campus safety, violence prevention, emergency response	School Safety & Discipline	Safety
parental involvement, community input, communication, stakeholder voice, family engagement, board access, outreach	Parent & Community Engagement	Community Engagement
equity, underserved, marginalized, close gaps, inclusive, justice, opportunity for all, underrepresented	Equity in Access & Outcomes	Equity

Notes: Notes: Set of priorities identified by a Large Language Model (LLM, ChatGPT 4o, used on June 16, 2025) given the following prompt: *"I want you to imagine a mindset of an established economist who has expertise in economics of education. Based on the sample priorities I uploaded and frequent topics studied in prior economics of education literature, pick 10 topics you think important to study. After picking these 10 priorities, we will investigate the effect of electing a member with each priority on relevant educational outcomes. So the choice doesn't necessarily have to based on only the frequency of words, as you would do in LDA. Give me 10 topics, and associated keywords."* Column (1) and (2) show the highest-probability words within each topic, and list of topics as produced by the LLM. Column (3) contains subsets of the 12 priorities used in our analysis that authors find being mapped to topics identified by the LLM.

Table B5: Mapping Between Priorities and Outcomes

Priority	Outcomes (Expected Direction)
Equity	Low-Income & Hispanic test scores (↑)
Fiscal conservatism	Spending per pupil (↓); Bond amount issued per pupil (↓)
Agenda bias	N/A
Community Engagement	N/A
CTE	Revenues for CTE programs per pupil (↑)
Dropout	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Enrollment	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Facility Improvement	Capital spending per pupil (↑)
Safety	Share students suspended (↑)
Superintendent Accountability and Hiring	Superintendent turnover (↑)
Teacher support	Teacher exit rates (↓) Salaries of novice & experienced teachers (↑)
Test Scores	Achievement (↑)

Notes: Full list of priorities and associated outcomes, with expected direction of effects. All these combinations are included in the "Ideologies" category in Figure 4.

Table B6: Mapping Between Identities and Outcomes

Identity	Study	Priorities	Outcomes (Expected Direction)
Panel A: Prior Literature			
Hispanic	Kogan et al. (2021), Fischer (2023)	-	Hispanic test scores (↑), Spending per pupil (↑), Bond amount issued per pupil (↑)
Teacher	Shi and Singleton (2023)	-	Teacher exit rates (↓), Salaries of novice (↑) & experienced teachers (↑)
Panel B: Augmented Based on Difference in Viewpoints			
Hispanic	-	CTE	Revenues for CTE programs per pupil (↑)
Hispanic	-	Dropout	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Hispanic	-	Safety	Share students suspended (↑)
Hispanic	-	Test Scores	Test scores (↑)
Female	-	Equity	Low-Income & Hispanic test scores (↑)
Female	-	Dropout	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Female	-	Safety	Share students suspended (↑)
Female	-	Test Scores	Test scores (↓)
Teacher	-	Fiscal Conservatism	Spending per pupil (↑); Bond amount issued per pupil (↑)
Teacher	-	CTE	Revenues for CTE programs per pupil (↑)
Teacher	-	Dropout	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Teacher	-	Facility Improvement	Capital spending per pupil (↓)
Democrat	-	Equity	Low-Income & Hispanic test scores (↑)
Democrat	-	Fiscal Conservatism	Spending per pupil (↑); Bond amount issued per pupil (↑)
Democrat	-	Dropout	log(Enrollment) (↑)
Democrat	-	Facility Improvement	Capital spending per pupil (↓)
Democrat	-	Teacher support	Teacher exit rates (↓); Salaries of novice & experienced teachers (↑)

Notes: Panel A reports 6 unique identity-outcome pairs tested in prior studies. This set of pairs is included in the "Identities (existing literature)" category in Figure 4 and Table G2. Panel B presents 24 additional pairs of identities and outcomes through priorities; a pair is added when the raw differences in candidate viewpoints across identity groups in Table B9 is statistically significant at 5 percent level. This set of pairs is included in the "Identities (augmented)" category in Figure 4 and Table G2. Outcomes associated with each priority are mapped according to Table B5. Expected direction is based on the sign of difference in Table B9.

Table B7: Examples of Meeting Minutes and Motion Topics

Example of Meeting Motions	Equity	Fiscal Conservatism	Agenda Bias	Community Engagement	CTE	Dropout	Enrollment	Facility Improv.	Safety	Sup Accountability/Hiring	Teacher Support	Test Scores
Barbara Patterson, Deputy Superintendent, Business & Operations, requested approval of the Retiree Benefits Actuarial Study. Superintendent Stock stated that Rocklin Unified School District is one of the few public entities that has nearly funded this liability and commended the Board for their foresight and fiscal discipline to address this issue. (2017, Rocklin Unified, Passed Unanimously)		✓									✓	
Approve tentative settlement agreement of Special Education matter - Case No. 2016070742, Case No. 2016070703, Case No. 2016070134, Case No. 2016070060, and Case No. 2016070266. (2016, Antioch Unified, Passed by 3 vs. 2)	✓	✓										
...in Closed Session, the Board discussed the expulsion of student No. 06-2019/2020. The student shall be expelled from the El Rancho Unified School District and shall have successful participation in an alternative education program... (2018, El Rancho, Passed Unanimously)									✓			

Notes: Examples of portions of meeting minutes referring to motions and associated topic keywords. Each row presents a minute portion, along with indicators for coded topics.

Table B8: Inter-Rater Reliability Across Human Graders and LLMs - Meetings Minutes

	RA1 - RA2	RA1 - RA3	RA2 - RA3	RA1 - LLM	RA2 - LLM	RA3 - LLM
Panel A: General Information						
Date	0.93	0.97	1.00	0.99	0.97	0.99
Cancelled	0.97	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00
Regular	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.97	0.97	0.93
Runtime	0.95	1.00	0.95	0.99	0.99	0.97
Present	0.90	0.93	0.90	0.94	0.96	0.96
Absent	0.95	0.97	0.95	0.96	0.97	0.97
Comments	0.72	0.70	0.93	0.90	0.73	0.67
Document Quality	0.95	0.85	0.80	0.99	0.99	0.80
Dissent	0.97	0.60	0.55	1.00	0.97	0.57
Panel B: Motions						
Total Number Voted on	0.68	0.68	0.60	0.69	0.66	0.54
Description	0.95	0.93	0.88	0.99	0.90	0.97
Member Proposed	1.00	0.93	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.96
Member Seconded	1.00	0.97	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.97
Passed	1.00	0.95	0.97	1.00	0.99	0.97
Unanimous	0.93	0.95	0.95	1.00	0.96	0.96
Votes	0.93	0.95	0.95	1.00	0.94	0.94
Keywords	0.50	0.95	0.70	0.89	0.64	0.96
Panel C: Members						
Member	0.82	0.88	0.75	0.94	0.90	0.86
Present	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Role	0.88	1.00	0.97	1.00	0.91	1.00
Keywords	0.60	0.88	0.62	0.86	0.54	0.94

Notes: Pearson correlations between ratings assigned by three research assistants and a large-language model (LLM, Claude Anthropic's 3.5 Sonnet model) for a random sample of 200 school board meeting minutes from our full sample.

Table B9: Elected Candidates' Ideology and School Boards' Ideological Composition: All Priorities

	Fiscal Conservatism	Equity	Agenda Bias	Facility Improvement	Community Engagement	Safety
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Estimate	0.170	0.208	0.143	0.190	0.196	0.159
	[0.113, 0.230]	[0.154, 0.270]	[0.058, 0.220]	[0.120, 0.250]	[0.136, 0.250]	[0.101, 0.220]
Bandwidth	11.035	15.304	9.320	8.831	10.657	13.707
N	3246	2988	414	2216	3436	3114

	Teacher Support	Dropout	Enrollment	CTE	Test Scores	Superintendent Accountability
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Estimate	0.158	0.125	0.127	0.149	0.154	0.307
	[0.102, 0.220]	[0.045, 0.210]	[0.047, 0.220]	[0.086, 0.210]	[0.085, 0.220]	[0.168, 0.480]
Bandwidth	13.722	13.166	7.420	13.104	8.691	7.629
N	2496	1236	580	1670	2822	442

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the ideology characteristic indicated in the column header. The dependent variable is the change in share of members on the board with the same ideology relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B10: Elected Candidates' Identity and School Districts' Financial and Student Outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Spending Per Pupil		Revenue Per Pupil	log(Enrollment)	Test Scores			% Suspended
	Total	Capital	CTE		Low-Income	Hispanic	All	
Panel A: Hispanic								
Estimate	0.124	-0.125	-0.444	0.034	0.004	0.006	0.004	-0.005
	[-0.042, 0.235]	[-0.228, -0.068]	[-0.977, -0.065]	[0.029, 0.043]	[0.000, 0.010]	[0.002, 0.010]	[0.000, 0.009]	[-0.019, 0.007]
Bandwidth	5.547	3.605	8.627	3.419	9.293	6.986	8.081	12.915
N	1717	1348	2135	1673	687	583	656	604
Mean Dep. Var.	9.422	0.992	7.545	8.728	-0.189	-0.182	-0.136	0.034
Panel B: Female								
Estimate	-0.206	-0.018	-0.312	0.010	0.011	-0.003	-0.001	-0.005
	[-0.344, -0.120]	[-0.092, 0.033]	[-0.520, -0.200]	[0.007, 0.012]	[0.007, 0.017]	[-0.011, 0.002]	[-0.007, 0.003]	[-0.015, 0.009]
Bandwidth	3.307	4.638	3.378	4.294	7.632	6.727	7.481	8.934
N	2399	3005	2436	3705	1066	928	1142	874
Mean Dep. Var.	9.475	1.114	7.620	8.505	-0.171	-0.156	-0.057	0.031
Panel C: Teacher								
Estimate	0.268	0.116	-0.385	0.014	-0.003	-0.000	0.000	0.026
	[0.186, 0.335]	[0.064, 0.171]	[-0.626, -0.238]	[0.011, 0.018]	[-0.009, 0.003]	[-0.005, 0.003]	[-0.003, 0.004]	[0.015, 0.043]
Bandwidth	5.512	7.577	5.096	1.849	9.955	6.457	7.972	5.830
N	2481	2830	2403	1497	892	678	862	548
Mean Dep. Var.	9.489	1.002	7.494	8.907	-0.164	-0.151	-0.061	0.034
Panel D: Democrat								
Estimate	0.009	0.099	-0.160	0.012	-0.003	-0.004	0.011	0.005
	[-0.104, 0.187]	[0.035, 0.201]	[-0.416, 0.198]	[0.008, 0.018]	[-0.009, 0.002]	[-0.010, 0.001]	[0.004, 0.020]	[-0.008, 0.021]
Bandwidth	4.780	5.990	4.882	1.814	12.282	9.656	7.261	8.912
N	1387	1651	1404	914	691	552	574	476
Mean Dep. Var.	9.390	0.845	7.540	8.381	-0.174	-0.159	-0.074	0.032

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the identity characteristic indicated in the panel label. The dependent variable is total spending per pupil (column 1), spending per pupil on capital projects (column 2), revenues per pupil for CTE programs (column 3), log enrollment (column 4), test scores for low-income students (column 5), test scores for Hispanic students (column 6), test scores for all students (column 7), and the share of suspended students (column 8). All variables are measured as changes relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B11: Elected Candidates' Identity and School Districts' Staffing Outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Teachers		Superintendent
	Exit Rate	BA60 Salary	Entry Salary	Turnover
Panel A: Hispanic				
Estimate	0.037	0.039	0.014	0.018
	[-0.012, 0.106]	[0.019, 0.064]	[-0.004, 0.044]	[-0.004, 0.041]
Bandwidth	11.040	7.204	5.378	10.968
N	417	1266	1497	2209
Mean Dep. Var.	0.106	10.990	10.586	0.198
Panel B: Female				
Estimate	0.033	0.013	-0.049	0.000
	[0.009, 0.061]	[0.005, 0.025]	[-0.059, -0.046]	[-0.016, 0.018]
Bandwidth	12.752	5.563	2.680	9.486
N	781	2126	1573	3583
Mean Dep. Var.	0.105	11.000	10.568	0.196
Panel C: Teacher				
Estimate	-0.016	-0.013	0.013	-0.010
	[-0.024, -0.008]	[-0.018, -0.009]	[0.003, 0.024]	[-0.029, 0.010]
Bandwidth	9.070	3.079	8.008	10.599
N	505	1190	2544	2886
Mean Dep. Var.	0.094	10.999	10.593	0.190
Panel D: Democrat				
Estimate	-0.007	-0.017	0.004	-0.041
	[-0.037, 0.020]	[-0.026, -0.002]	[-0.010, 0.024]	[-0.064, -0.013]
Bandwidth	13.938	7.722	7.271	8.147
N	436	1205	1566	1822
Mean Dep. Var.	0.104	11.021	10.589	0.210

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the identity characteristic indicated in the panel label. The dependent variable is the share of teachers who leave the district (column 1), the scheduled salary for a teacher with a BA and 60 semester units (column 2), the scheduled teacher entry salary (column 3), and an indicator for superintendent turnover (column 4). *BA60 Salary* and *Entry Salary* are from J90 data and are calculated by fixing the composition of teachers across steps to the year before the election. Thus, coefficients capture the change in the wage schedule net of changes in teacher composition across steps. Both salary variables are reported in thousands of 2019 dollars. All variables are measured as changes relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B12: Elected Candidates' Ideology and School District Outcomes

Priority:	(1) Fiscal Conservatism	(2) Facility	(3) CTE	(4) Enrollment	(5) Dropout	(6) Equity	(7)	(8) Test scores	(9) Safety
Outcome:	Spending p.p.	Cap Spending p.p.	CTE rev. p.p.	log(Enrl)	log(Enrl)	Low-Income test	Hispanic test	Test scores	% Suspended
Estimate	-1.212	0.456	0.044	0.043	0.034	0.044	0.024	-0.006	0.019
	[-1.455, -1.086]	[0.373, 0.598]	[-0.260, 0.588]	[0.039, 0.042]	[0.031, 0.044]	[0.038, 0.057]	[0.021, 0.031]	[-0.010, 0.000]	[0.002, 0.044]
Bandwidth	2.420	2.786	8.584	0.705	3.289	2.764	5.390	4.961	5.209
N	1018	905	901	161	574	242	380	549	332
Mean Dep. Var.	9.622	1.280	10.091	8.761	9.451	-0.153	-0.120	-0.049	0.027

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the priority indicated in the first row label. The dependent variable is total spending per pupil (column 1), spending on capital projects per pupil (column 2), revenues per pupil on CTE (column 3), log enrollment (columns 4 and 5), test scores for low-income students (column 6), test scores for Hispanic students (column 7), test scores for all students (column 8), and the share of suspended students (column 9). All variables are measured as changes relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B13: Effects of Board Member's Ideology on Staffing Outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Priority:	Teacher Support			Superintendent Accountability
Outcome:	Exit rate	BA60 Salary	Entry Salary	Superintendent Turnover
Estimate	-0.042	-0.002	0.079	0.133
	[-0.058, -0.035]	[-0.020, 0.009]	[0.069, 0.099]	[0.111, 0.178]
Bandwidth	2.977	6.558	3.103	5.927
N	131	1063	880	298
Mean Dep. Var.	0.101	11.034	10.602	0.198

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the priority indicated in the first row label. The dependent variable is the share of teachers who leave the district (column 1), the scheduled salary for a teacher with a BA and 60 semester units (column 2), the scheduled teacher entry salary (column 3), and an indicator for superintendent turnover (column 4). *BA60 Salary* and *Entry Salary* are from J90 data and are calculated by fixing the composition of teachers across steps to the year before the election. Thus, coefficients capture the change in the wage schedule net of changes in teacher composition across steps. Both salary variables are reported in thousands of 2019 dollars. All variables are measured as changes relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B14: Robustness Checks – Case Studies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
		RD Tuning Parameters					
	Main	Quadratic polynomial	Uniform kernel	N Neighbors 4	N Neighbors 5	Dep. var. in levels	With post-2019 spending
Panel A: Effect of Equity-Focused on Low-Income Test Scores							
Estimate	0.044	0.043	0.050	0.025	0.023	0.043	
	[0.038, 0.057]	[0.035, 0.054]	[0.042, 0.062]	[0.013, 0.044]	[0.009, 0.044]	[0.037, 0.056]	
Bandwidth	2.764	6.895	2.043	5.930	6.419	2.790	
N	242	426	178	399	407	246	
Mean Dep. Var.	-0.153	-0.145	-0.146	-0.147	-0.147	-0.155	
Panel B: Effect of Fiscally Conservative on Spending Per Pupil							
Estimate	-1.212	-1.194	-1.411	-1.159	-0.799	-1.069	-1.057
	[-1.455, -1.086]	[-1.424, -1.045]	[-1.652, -1.282]	[-1.436, -1.021]	[-1.365, -0.423]	[-1.310, -0.944]	[-1.367, -0.874]
Bandwidth	2.420	5.787	1.817	2.750	5.776	2.618	2.683
N	1018	1965	816	1119	1965	1071	1288
Mean Dep. Var.	9.622	9.434	9.477	9.593	9.434	9.672	10.829
Panel C: Effect of Hispanic on Spending Per Pupil							
Estimate	0.124	-0.038	0.140	0.166	0.175	0.057	0.092
	[-0.042, 0.235]	[-0.210, 0.083]	[0.030, 0.296]	[-0.027, 0.397]	[-0.164, 0.591]	[-0.031, 0.158]	[-0.072, 0.268]
Bandwidth	5.547	6.625	5.850	10.085	11.286	8.677	7.945
N	1717	1891	1772	2303	2445	2140	2435
Mean Dep. Var.	9.422	9.314	9.387	9.257	9.158	9.172	10.212

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the characteristic and the outcome indicated in the panel label. Column 1 presents the main specification, with the dependent variable measured as changes relative to the year before the election and a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Columns 2–5 vary the default RD tuning parameters from Calonico et al. (2020): column 2 controls for a local quadratic polynomial rather than a linear function of the running variable; column 3 uses a triangular kernel; and columns 4–5 increase the number of neighbors used to calculate clustered standard errors from 3 to 4 and 5, respectively. Column 6 reports results using outcome levels rather than changes, controlling for the level of per-pupil spending in the year before the election. Column 7 extends the sample to include fiscal years after 2019, when the CCD starts to report funding information on charter schools separately from that of their main districts in California (section 2.2.3). 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B15: Robustness Checks – Aggregated Effects

		RD Tuning Parameters				
	Main	Quadratic polynomial	Uniform kernel	N Neighbors 4	5	Dep. var. in levels
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Effect of Identities (Existing Literature)						
Estimate	0.055	0.035	0.067	0.069	0.079	0.077
	[0.046, 0.060]	[0.031, 0.045]	[0.058, 0.074]	[0.063, 0.080]	[0.068, 0.095]	[0.036, 0.123]
Bandwidth	2.922	5.495	8.272	2.702	5.348	9.559
N	5657	8098	10214	5324	8331	10999
Panel B: Effect of Identities (Other)						
Estimate	-0.011	-0.004	-0.006	0.001	-0.006	0.001
	[-0.012, -0.011]	[-0.007, -0.003]	[-0.006, -0.005]	[0.000, 0.001]	[-0.007, -0.005]	[-0.002, 0.003]
Bandwidth	0.959	1.774	3.340	1.131	2.143	4.794
N	10039	16017	27744	11806	19658	35060
Panel C: Effect of Ideologies						
Estimate	0.159	0.070	0.167	0.165	0.159	0.159
	[0.140, 0.191]	[0.060, 0.085]	[0.146, 0.196]	[0.145, 0.202]	[0.140, 0.192]	[0.135, 0.200]
Bandwidth	3.193	2.827	5.588	2.067	2.974	2.957
N	8830	7177	12671	6249	8170	8160

Notes: Robustness checks of the effects of electing a board member with characteristics in each category used in Figure 4. To obtain each estimate, we first stack datasets, each containing a focal characteristic and its corresponding outcome; we include six characteristic–outcome pairs for the "Identities (existing literature)" category, 23 for "Identities (other)," and 14 for "Ideologies." See Tables B6 and B5 for full lists of characteristic–outcome pairs. Aggregated effects are then estimated by applying RD regressions on the stacked dataset using equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of a candidate with the relevant characteristic and their vote margin, respectively. Dependent variables are constructed by standardizing outcomes within each year and calculating the change in these outcomes relative to the year prior to the election. We assign outcomes a sign consistent with the hypothesized directions of the effects based on the sign of raw differences in viewpoint by identity group in Table B9. Column 1 presents the main specification, with the dependent variable measured as changes relative to the year before the election and a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Columns 2–5 vary the default RD tuning parameters from Calonico et al. (2020): column 2 controls for a local quadratic polynomial rather than a linear function of the running variable; column 3 uses a triangular kernel; and columns 4–5 increase the number of neighbors used to calculate clustered standard errors from 3 to 4 and 5, respectively. Column 6 reports results using outcome levels rather than changes, controlling for the level of per-pupil spending in the year before the election (we exclude superintendent turnover effects from this specification since this variable is by definition a change). 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table B16: Minutes Analysis: Member Votes

	Equity		Fiscal		Hispanic	
	Focal	All	Focal	All	Equity	Fiscal
Panel A: Yes votes, own						
Estimate	0.136	-5.824	-13.785	-75.616	1.774	-1.170
	[-1.644, 1.916]	[-24.493, 12.844]	[-18.525, -9.045]	[-98.143, -53.089]	[-0.534, 4.081]	[-4.813, 2.472]
Mean Dep. Var.	11.212	188.779	33.997	187.662	13.317	34.103
N	782	816	528	511	666	796
Panel B: No votes, own						
Estimate	0.245	0.615	-0.027	-0.818	0.468	0.219
	[0.058, 0.431]	[-0.785, 2.015]	[-0.294, 0.239]	[-2.165, 0.529]	[0.285, 0.652]	[-0.149, 0.588]
Mean Dep. Var.	0.469	4.824	0.727	4.696	0.283	0.769
N	751	962	968	940	722	672
Panel C: Yes votes, others						
Estimate	-2.036	17.806	-63.729	-241.360	15.472	0.597
	[-12.524, 8.453]	[-60.802, 96.413]	[-90.462, -36.996]	[-353.914, -128.807]	[4.607, 26.336]	[-21.753, 22.948]
Mean Dep. Var.	63.452	998.923	180.326	1042.316	71.519	185.082
N	790	1,031	620	741	692	683
Panel D: No votes, others						
Estimate	1.179	8.907	0.383	-2.564	1.285	1.573
	[0.358, 2.000]	[3.624, 14.189]	[-1.151, 1.917]	[-8.376, 3.249]	[0.306, 2.263]	[0.327, 2.819]
Mean Dep. Var.	2.342	24.071	4.101	24.297	2.822	4.960
N	870	798	792	986	635	700

Notes: RD estimates of the effects of electing an equity candidate (columns 1 and 2), a fiscally conservative candidate (columns 3 and 4), or a Hispanic candidate (columns 5 and 6) on votes cast in by the elected members and by others. In panel A, the dependent variable is the number of yes votes cast by the focal member; in panel B, it is the number of no votes cast by the focal member; in panel C, it is the number of yes votes cast by other members; and in panel D, it is the number of no votes cast by other members. The sample is restricted to motions on each candidate's focal issue (e.g., equity for equity candidates; columns 1 and 3), on all issues (columns 2 and 4), on equity motions (column 5), and on budget motions (column 6). We pool observations over the four years following each election. All models control for year fixed effects. We use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020), and standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

C Data Cleaning Procedure

C.1 School Board Elections

- We use data on school board elections in elementary, high, and unified school districts. Starting from 6,312 elections, we drop 393 county- or state-level board elections because they span multiple districts. In the next step, we exclude 88 uncontested elections and 49 elections that lack a declared winner, resulting in a runoff. This leaves us with 5,782 elections.

C.2 Merging Election Records with L2 Voter Data

- To identify candidates' political orientation, we link election records with L2 Historical Voter records (available starting from the year 2000). These voter records contain individuals' full names, home addresses, ages, and political party affiliations. We employ a fuzzy matching algorithm based on names, constrained within district-year combinations.[A-1] Since California Education Code §35107 requires school board candidates to reside within their district, restricting matches to within-district improves our match accuracy.

- With this matching process, we uniquely identify 71.8% of candidates in our election records within the L2 voter registration database. An additional 3.4% of candidates match multiple L2 entries but with consistent political affiliations, yielding a total of 75.2% usable matches for our analyses of political affiliation.

C.3 District Level Education Outcomes

- For variables related to district finances, we restrict our analysis to the 2017–18 academic year and earlier to minimize inconsistencies arising from changes in how the CCD reports financial data. Starting in 2018–19, the CCD began reporting district-level outcomes for charter schools separately. As a result, the number of school districts in California jumps from 1,165 to 2,198 in the raw CCD data.

  - Prior to 2018–19, only funding for charter schools that was funneled through their geographic school districts is reflected in the districts' finance variables. Direct funding to charter schools' independent accounts in the county treasury is excluded. Due to this accounting practice, financial variables are not comparable across years even if we aggregate financial variables at the geographic school district level post-2018-19. Including post-2018–19 data would lead to a discontinuous increase in reported spending and revenue—on average, a 15% rise in real terms among geographic school districts where at least one charter school district branches out—due to the inclusion of direct charter funding only after this reporting change.

- Although we also obtain enrollment data from the CCD, enrollment counts are more comparable across years. Before 2018–19, students enrolled in charter schools were included in the enrollment figures of their geographic districts. After 2018–19, we manually reintegrate charter school enrollment into geographic district totals to maintain comparability.

- For student outcome data (SEDA, CRDC), we use versions reported at the geographic district level, which include charter schools.

[A-1] For elections in odd-numbered years, we use L2 records from the preceding year.

- Teacher outcome data from CDE exclude charter schools. We use this data as reported, since local school districts have no staffing authority over charter schools.
  - See Shi and Singleton (2023) for additional documentation and discussion of these data sources.
- Superintendent data come from Stemper and The Broad Center (2025). This dataset updates Stemper (2022b) through the 2024-25 school year. The approach follows that described in Stemper (2022b).

D Mapping Political Platform to Priorities: Full Question List

We use eleven questions to identify twelve priorities. We now define each priority and specify the question used to identify it. Each question is designed to have a common opening and closing, main question, and some examples to facilitate the LLM's rating.

Common opening: Here are the top three priorities claimed by a candidate running for a school district board member election. [INSERT QUESTION HERE]

Common closing: Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Provide the rating first, then briefly explain how you decided on the rating. Now, here's the statement you need to rate:

1. *Equity/Equal Distribution of Resources*: Is equal distribution of resources for all students of various socioeconomic statuses one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about equity, inclusion, or diversity: Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Increase student achievement through expanded in-class supports and afterschool programs., Eliminate district bureaucracy and implement spending transparency, Streamline parent & teacher resources and communication." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about equity, inclusion or diversity. Ex 1) "Priority to special needs students, Strong community involvement, Efficient uses of resources." Ex 2) "School safety, Fiscal Conservatism across the school district, Raising school performance in lower income communities" Ex 3) "Devoting time, and resources to equity begins in our schools. We must have open conversations with district personnel and parents regarding equity for all. Continuing to close the achievement gap for African Americans and low-income children., Establishing policies and protocols to make sure students and staff come back to a safe place during Covid-19 era., Fiscal solvency and transparency to make sure money is spent appropriately."
2. *Fiscal Conservatism*: Is the candidate committed to minimizing school district spending and opposed to increasing the educational budget if it requires raising the tax rate? Rate the candidate's commitment on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means 'not committed to minimizing spending and likely supports increasing the budget,' 2 means 'somewhat committed,' and 3

means 'strongly committed.' Rate as 0 if it is hard to decide because it is not the main priority. Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here is an example of candidates rated as 0. Ex) "Teach to the "whole child," not just "to the test"; Technology and Fine Arts; Restore community confidence in public schools." Meanwhile, this candidate is rated as 1. Ex) "Facilities. We need to build new facilities and renovate existing facilities. Most schools were built in the 1950s and 60s and need modernizing. There are more than 1 billion in identified needs and no money; There is a shortage of Science, Math, and Special Education teachers. We need to raise salaries to be competitive with Silicon Valley and the shortage of supply." Finally, this candidate is rated as 3. Ex) "Will oppose new taxes and bonds; ensure that local students receive the classes they need to graduate from El Camino College; support Wiseburn School District Unification."

3. *Agenda Bias (Curriculum / Free Speech / Ideology)*: Is ensuring that academic instruction is free from what the candidate perceives as external agendas or ideologies one of the main priorities? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant," 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant," and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant."

4. *Community/Parental Engagement*: Is communicating with parents or the community and encouraging them to get involved with the issues in the school district one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about the engagement of parents or the community. Ex 1) "Focus on student achievement and every child's growth through core programs, data analysis, differentiation, and targeted instruction., Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and staff who can achieve this goal, and supporting their professional development., Provide a safe environment well-equipped for learning." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about engagement of parents or community. Ex 1) "Student Achievement - Focusing not only on improving test scores but also ensuring a quality education that is reflective of our diverse community., Community Involvement - Preparing our students for future success through the involvement of parents and the community. Ensuring lines of communication between the district, the school board, and the community are consistently available., Labor Relations - Providing all district staff with fair wages and benefits. Empowering our labor partners with the necessary support to better our students' education." Ex 2) "Improve community engagement and communication, Invest and develop technology infrastructure, Ensure campus safety for all children."

5. *Career and Technical Education*: Is vocational or career technical education one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about vocational or career technical education. Ex 1) "Fiscal Responsibility, Bring back the Open Door Policy, Student, teacher, and community advocacy." Ex 2) "Ensure a physically and emotionally safe learning environment

for all students, Encourage and develop family, school, and community partnerships, Identify needs and manage resources effectively and efficiently". Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about vocational or career technical education. Ex 1) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs, Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries, College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education" Ex 2) "Expanding Career Technical Education, arts, and exploratory electives that meet the A-G requirements, Increase mental health support for students, Increasing SBUSD early literacy rates."

6. *Dropout*: Is reducing dropout rate one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about dropout/completion. Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about dropout/completion. Ex 1) "Safe, secure, drug-free schools and reduced dropout rate', 'Wise use of taxpayer dollars', 'Reduction of overcrowding." Ex 2) "'Increase students test scores', 'Decrease student drop out rate', 'Create, Enforce & Implement policies that will bring about a sense of community in our school."

7. *Enrollment*: Is enrollment decline or enrollment growth one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about enrollment: Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Increase student achievement through expanded in-class supports and afterschool programs., Eliminate district bureaucracy and implement spending transparency, Streamline parent & teacher resources and communication." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about enrollment. Ex 1) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs,Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries,College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education" Ex 2) "Successful construction of facilities to accommodate future enrollment growth - we must live up to past practice with on-time on-budget projects adhering to the Facilities Master Plan as presented to our community, Critical budget decisions as more students enter our schools - given that we are locally funded, increased enrollment means tighter budgets while still continuing to provide a world-class education for all of our students,Support for struggling students and mental health services - academic success for all our students must be the goal; ongoing mental health services play a critical role in this success".

8. *Facilities Improvement*: Is modernizing/upgrading/expanding physical facilities of schools one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is

somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about improving facilities. Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about improving facilities. Ex 1) "'Seeking additional sources of funding', 'Upgrading classroom facilities', 'Recruitment and retention of high quality staff" Ex 2) "Before leaving Grade 3, all children will be successful readers.', 'Ensure safe and clean school facilities that instill pride.', 'Promote a school culture in which learners and teachers can thrive."

9. *Safety*: Is the health and safety of students and staff members one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about students'/staff's health and safety. Ex 1) "Fiscal Responsibility, Bring back the Open Door Policy, Student, teacher, and community advocacy." Ex 2) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs,Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries, College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about students'/staff's health and safety. Ex 1) "Maintaining a safe environment for students and staff,Having students read by third grade,Continue to upgrade the schools and facilities" Ex 2) "As your school board member, I will promote skills and values that will help students prepare for success in their futures, whether through college or career.,As your school board member, I will promote sound educational policies. This means having safe, healthy classrooms., My goal for the future is to work with students, teachers, staff, and parents to help create a solid educational foundation that offers students choices."

10. *Superintendent Accountability and Hiring*: Is strengthening or addressing the superintendent's role (e.g., hiring, holding accountable, retaining, or collaborating with the superintendent) one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means "none of the priorities are related to the superintendent," 2 means "at least one of the priorities focuses on hiring or holding a superintendent accountable," 3 means "at least one of the priorities focuses on retaining or collaborating with an existing superintendent," and 4 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat related to the superintendent, but does not clearly fall under category 2 or 3." Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority separately Here are examples of candidates rated 1 (no superintendent focus): Ex 1) "Fiscal responsibility, bring back the open-door policy, student-teacher-community advocacy." Here are examples of candidates rated 2 (hiring or accountability focus):Ex 1) "Leadership – recruiting the best superintendent and principals for our schools; improve academic programs; build community trust." Here are examples of candidates rated 3 (retention or collaboration focus): Ex 2) "Continue working with our superintendent to build on recent progress. Here are examples of candidates rated 4 (somewhat related but unclear focus): Ex 1) "Improve district leadership, strengthen communication, and ensure effective decision-making."[A-2]

[A-2]For this question, we generated a binary variable equal to 1 if the candidate prioritized superintendent accountability

11. *Teacher Support and Union Relationships*: Considering the candidate's stance on policies endorsed/opposed by teachers' unions, teachers' involvement in educational policy-making, and teachers' collective bargaining rights, how would you rate their overall friendliness towards teachers' unions? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means "not friendly," 2 means "somewhat friendly," and 3 means "very friendly.

12. *Test Scores*: Is raising overall standardized-test performance one of the candidate's main priorities? (Standardized tests include state proficiency exams, district benchmark assessments, SBAC/PARCC, SAT/ACT, etc.). Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant" (mentions "academic achievement" or "ranking" but not tests explicitly), and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant" (explicit goal to raise test scores, proficiency %, or named exam results). Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority separately. Here are examples of candidates rated 1 (no direct reference to standardized tests): Ex 1) "Fiscal responsibility, bring back the open-door policy, student-teacher-community advocacy." Ex 2) "Ensure a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all students, encourage family-school partnerships, manage resources effectively." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated 3 (explicitly about test performance): Ex 1) "New High School • Better Test Scores • A United PVUSD." Ex 2) "Parents–Teachers–Board of Education all working TOGETHER to continually improve test scores. Important exclusions: Do not upgrade to 3 for language about closing achievement gaps between groups. Graduation rate, college enrollment, CTE pathways, or generic "academic excellence" count only as 2 unless tied to specific standardized tests.

E Constructing Structured Data from School Board Meeting Minutes

To transform unstructured school board meeting minutes into structured data suitable for quantitative analysis, we use large language models (LLMs) to extract consistent information across thousands of heterogeneous PDF files. The processing script is implemented in Python and leverages Anthropic's Claude 3.5 Sonnet model through their official API.

To begin with, each PDF is passed through a preprocessing step that ensures consistent encoding and trims excessively long documents to a maximum of 75 pages. All PDFs are base64-encoded and then submitted in parallel to three LLM prompts, each targeting a distinct information domain:

- General Meeting Information: Extracts the meeting date, whether it was a regular or special meeting, whether it was cancelled, start and end times (to calculate runtime), attendance (present and absent members), and counts of public comments made by parents, teachers, and other community members.

- Motion-Level Data: Identifies each motion proposed during the meeting, including consent agenda items, and records for each: the proposer, the seconder, whether the motion passed, whether the vote was unanimous, individual votes (yes, no, or abstain), a one-line description, and a set of keywords indicating the motion's substantive focus (e.g., equity, budget spending). These keywords are drawn from the same controlled vocabulary used to classify candidate policy platforms in our main analysis, allowing us to link board actions to stated priorities.

(rating = 2) or hiring a new superintendent (rating = 4), and 0 otherwise.

- Member-Level Contributions: Extracts data on each board member's role (e.g., President, Clerk, Superintendent), presence or absence, and substantive contributions during the meeting. Based on comments from each member during a meeting (excluding proposing or seconding a motion since that is already considered in the motion-level data construction), we assign a set of keywords to a corresponding to policy domains such as academic achievement, curriculum bias, or parental engagement. These keywords—again drawn from our main platform classification scheme—capture the thematic content of each member's statements or interventions. This component also includes two metadata scores: a document quality score (0–10) and a dissent score (0–10), reflecting the clarity of the minutes and the level of disagreement among board members, respectively.

To improve the precision of extraction, all prompts were designed to strictly enforce minified JSON formatting with no free-text explanation. The model was instructed to only extract information explicitly present in the document, to use null for missing values, and to return text in standardized formats (e.g., 24-hour times, ASCII characters only, and uniform handling of quotation marks and dashes). Each document was processed with temperature set to 0 to encourage deterministic behavior. API responses were cached when possible to reduce costs and latency.

After LLM responses are returned, we run a postprocessing script that parses the raw JSON responses, cleans and standardizes field values, and merges the outputs from the three prompts into a unified record per meeting. The full annotated script used for this processing is available upon request.

F Tradeoffs and non-focal outcomes

This Appendix examines how our three leading candidate types affect important but non-focal outcomes. The goal is to document the presence or absence of tradeoffs between focal outcomes and these other outcomes. We focus on total spending, district average test scores, and test scores for low-income students and Hispanic students. Table F1 presents estimates of equation (1) for the outcome listed in the rows and the candidate type listed in the columns.

Focus first on equity. We see that electing an equity candidate raises average scores in the district by 0.027 standard deviations. This indicates that equity candidates improve academic performance overall rather than engaging in zero-sum trades between low-income students and other students. We also see that electing an equity candidate substantially *reduces* spending. As we show below, in contrast to our other results, the magnitude of the negative effect of equity candidates is sensitive to alternate specification choices, so we interpret this finding cautiously. Nevertheless, none of the specifications we estimate suggest that electing equity candidates raises spending, so the *absence* of spending gains does appear to be a robust finding.

Next, turn to fiscal conservatism. Electing a fiscally conservative candidate reduces average district scores by 0.005 SDs (95% CI=[-0.0012, 0.000]). Reductions are similar for low-income students and somewhat larger for Hispanic students. Scaling by the spending reduction, we find that a $1,000 decline in per-pupil spending reduces scores by 0.005 SDs, smaller than Jackson and Mackevicius (2024)'s estimate of 0.036 SDs.

Finally, consider Hispanic candidates. Hispanic candidates slightly raise spending. We see no effect of electing a Hispanic candidate on overall scores or low-income scores. We see moderate increases in scores for Hispanic students (0.006 SDs, 95% CI=[0.002, 0.010]). This finding echoes Fischer (2023).

Table F2 considers the robustness of the equity and fiscal conservatism spending effects. Columns 1-5 vary the control set and tuning parameters in RD estimation, as in Appendix Table B14. Both

results are robust to these changes. Columns 7 and 8 consider two additional checks. Column 7 considers only district-year observations where we also observe test scores—i.e., the data we use to estimate the focal-outcome specifications for equity candidates. Here we see the equity coefficient on spending fall by about half, to -0.768 (95% CI=[-1.406, -0.322]). We can still rule out null effects, but not relatively small effects. In contrast, the fiscal conservative effect becomes more negative (-1.868, 95% CI=[-2.388, -1.581]). Column 8 excludes observations where there are very large changes in per-pupil construction expenditures, defined here as more than $6,000. There are 30 such cases in the equity sample and 54 in the fiscal conservatism sample. Again, the equity effect falls towards zero while the fiscal conservative effect is unchanged. We conclude that evidence for a *reduction* in spending from electing an equity candidate is somewhat uncertain, but that we can rule out that equity candidates *raise* spending.

Table F1: Effects of Candidate Characteristics on Non-Focal Outcomes

	Equity (1)	Fiscal Conservatism (2)	Hispanic (3)
Panel A: Effect on Total Spending p.p.			
Estimate	-1.210	-1.212	0.124
	[-1.585, -0.997]	[-1.455, -1.086]	[-0.042, 0.235]
N	691	1,018	1,717
Panel B: Effect on Test Scores			
Estimate	0.027	-0.005	0.004
	[0.023, 0.034]	[-0.012, -0.000]	[0.000, 0.009]
N	359	741	652
Panel C: Effect on Low-Income Test Scores			
Estimate	0.044	-0.004	0.004
	[0.038, 0.057]	[-0.012, 0.002]	[0.000, 0.010]
N	242	713	687
Panel D: Effect on High-Income Test Scores			
Estimate	0.022	0.015	-0.005
	[0.015, 0.035]	[0.008, 0.023]	[-0.024, 0.008]
N	391	827	537
Panel E: Effect on Hispanic Test Scores			
Estimate	0.024	-0.006	0.006
	[0.021, 0.031]	[-0.014, -0.001]	[0.002, 0.010]
N	380	643	583
Panel F: Effect on White Test Scores			
Estimate	-0.008	-0.006	-0.003
	[-0.017, -0.001]	[-0.015, -0.001]	[-0.014, 0.004]
N	457	655	462

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of an equity-focused (column 1), fiscally conservative (column 2), or Hispanic candidate (column 3). The dependent variable is total spending per pupil (panel A), test scores (panel B), test scores for low-income students (panel C), test scores for high-income students (panel D) , test scores for Hispanic students (panel E), and test scores for White students (panel F). All variables are measured as changes relative to the year before the election. We pool observations across the five years following each election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors are clustered at the election level. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

Table F2: Robustness: Effects of Board Members' Ideology on Spending Per Pupil

			RD Tuning Parameters				Sample Restriction	
	Main	Dep. var.	Quadratic	Uniform	N Neighbors		w/low-income	Excl. Construction
		in levels	polynomial	kernel	4	5	Test Scores	Outliers
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Effect of Equity-Focused								
Estimate	-1.210	-1.227	-1.208	-1.094	-0.656	-1.169	-0.768	-0.511
	[-1.585, -0.997]	[-1.527, -1.014]	[-1.549, -1.024]	[-2.007, -0.587]	[-1.824, 0.226]	[-1.600, -0.939]	[-1.406, -0.322]	[-0.825, -0.327]
Bandwidth	2.137	7.321	1.976	3.756	6.580	2.602	7.843	4.245
N	691	1459	646	1088	1389	815	351	1156
Mean Dep. Var.	10.577	9.871	10.784	10.091	9.889	10.190	11.437	9.723
Panel B: Effect of Fiscal Conservative								
Estimate	-1.212	-1.194	-1.411	-1.159	-0.799	-1.069	-1.868	-0.969
	[-1.455, -1.086]	[-1.424, -1.045]	[-1.652, -1.282]	[-1.436, -1.021]	[-1.365, -0.423]	[-1.310, -0.944]	[-2.388, -1.581]	[-1.181, -0.851]
Bandwidth	2.420	5.787	1.817	2.750	5.776	2.618	3.793	2.963
N	1018	1965	816	1119	1965	1071	415	1177
Mean Dep. Var.	9.622	9.434	9.477	9.593	9.434	9.672	10.557	9.420

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β in equation (1), where D_i and m_i indicate the election of an equity-focused (panel A) or fiscally conservative candidate (panel B) on spending per pupil. Column 1 presents the main specification, with the dependent variable measured as changes relative to the year before the election and a triangular kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Column 2 reports results using outcome levels rather than changes, controlling for the level of per-pupil spending in the year before the election. Columns 3-6 alter the default tuning parameters from Calonico et al. (2020): column 3 controls for a local quadratic polynomial rather than a linear function of the running variable; column 4 uses a triangular kernel; and columns 5-6 increase the number of neighbors used to calculate clustered standard errors from 3 to 4 and 5, respectively. Column 7 restricts the sample to districts included in the low-income test score analysis, and column 8 excludes observations where the change in per-pupil construction spending exceeds $6,000. 95% confidence intervals are shown in brackets.

G Priorities vs. identities

We extend the univariate RD model in equation (1) to allow for the simultaneous effects of multiple candidate attributes. We exploit close elections where candidates differ along one dimension, but agree on others. Suppose we are interested in attributes j and l. We estimate the following model across the full sample of elections:

$$\begin{aligned} y_{i,k} &= [\beta_0^j + \beta^j D_i^j + \gamma_0^j m_i^j + \gamma^j D_i^j m_i^j] \times S_i^j \mathbf{1}(|m_i^j| \leq BW_j) \\ &+ [\beta_0^l + \beta^l D_i^l + \gamma_0^l m_i^l + \gamma^l D_i^l m_i^l] \times S_i^l \mathbf{1}(|m_i^l| \leq BW_l) \\ &+ \theta_0 \times S_i^l \mathbf{1}(|m_i^l| \leq BW_l) \times S_i^j \mathbf{1}(|m_i^j| \leq BW_j) \\ &+ \theta_{t(i)+k} + \varepsilon_{i,k}, \end{aligned} \tag{G.1}$$

where D_i^n and m_i^n are defined relative to attribute $n \in \{j, l\}$, S_i^n equals one if the winner and the closest losing candidate differ with respect to characteristic n, and BW_n is the chosen bandwidth for characteristic n. Intuitively, this model estimates regression discontinuity specifications for each candidate attribute simultaneously, imposing the assumption that effects are separable across attributes. The parameters of interest are β^j and β^l, capturing the effects of electing a candidate with characteristic j, conditional on l, and vice versa. These parameters are estimated off of the subsamples of elections where the winner and the closest losing candidate differ with respect to the characteristic, and where the vote margin falls within the mean-squared error optimal bandwidth of Calonico et al. (2020). The inclusion of the term $S_i^l \mathbf{1}(|m_i^l| \leq BW_l) \times S_i^j \mathbf{1}(|m_i^j| \leq BW_j)$ allows for different intercepts across elections based on whether the vote margin falls within the bandwidth for characteristic j, for characteristic l, for both, or for neither. This framework can be extended to accommodate more than two characteristics.

Table G1 presents estimates of equation (G.1) that consider four dimensions of identity (gender, ethnicity, occupation, and political affiliation) jointly with the priority relevant for our two leading outcomes: school spending and test scores for low-income students. Our estimates confirm that ideology plays a stronger role in determining district outcomes than identity across most domains. For example, even conditioning on the four dimensions of identity, electing a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism reduces spending per pupil by \$1,376 (column 1). Similarly, electing a candidate who prioritizes equity increases low-income students' test scores by 0.046 SDs (column 2). A joint test of the hypothesis that the ideology variables tested in Table G1 are equal to zero rejects the null at conventional levels ($p = 0.001$)

Meanwhile, the effects of identity are all close to zero and statistically insignificant. Notably, this includes effects of candidate-outcome pairs that were significant in the baseline regression discontinuity specification. For example, in our standard RD specification we found that electing a Hispanic candidate raises school spending by \$124 per pupil. In specifications that account for candidates' fiscally conservative views, the effect of electing a Hispanic candidate becomes negative and statistically insignificant. A test of the null that the identity variables tested in Table G1 are jointly zero fails to reject the null ($p = 0.674$).

In Table G2, we expand the analyses in Table G1 and consider all attributes at once. Specifically, we estimate equation (G.1) for different sets of identity and ideology variables and for different outcomes. In each panel, the first row (*Examined in Prior Studies*) refers to specifications that consider the effects of identity traits examined in the literature on their associated outcomes (described in the top panel of Appendix Table B6), accounting for the ideologies associated with those outcomes (Appendix Table B5). For example, we consider the effect of electing a Hispanic candidate on spending, while accounting for fiscal conservatism. In the second row (*Augmented using Ideological Differences*), we identify identity-ideology pairs for which we observe systematic differ-

ences across identity groups (described in the bottom panel of Appendix Table B5) and consider the identity-outcome pairs associated with each ideology. For example, we see that Hispanic candidates are more likely to prioritize Career and Technical Education (CTE). We therefore test whether a Hispanic candidate raises more revenue for CTE-related programs. In the third row (*All Identities and Ideologies*) we consider all identity and ideology traits. Panel A shows p-values of chi-squared tests of the joint significance of identity (column 1) and ideology variables (column 2). For reference, panel B shows the same p-values when we estimate identities and ideologies in separate regressions.

Two main findings emerge from this table. The first is that identity effects tend to be jointly zero: none of the p-values shown in column 1 is below 0.05. This is true whether we test only identity-outcome hypotheses considered in prior studies (first row), the augmented set of hypotheses based on cross-group ideological differences (second row) or all identities considered at once. None of the tests has a p-value below 0.05. The second is that we consistently reject the null that ideology effects are jointly zero: p-values in column 2 range are all smaller than 0.001.

Table G1: Identity vs. Ideology: Multivariate Regression-Discontinuity Estimates with Case-study Candidate Characteristics

	(1) Spending per pupil ($1,000)	(2) Low-income Test Scores
Fiscal Conservatism	-1.376	
	(0.450)	
Equity		0.0463
		(0.014)
Hispanic	-0.0355	0.0123
	(0.257)	(0.009)
Female	-0.159	0.00878
	(0.233)	(0.008)
Teacher	0.319	0.000159
	(0.242)	(0.008)
Democrat	0.0638	-0.00612
	(0.395)	(0.009)
N	6381	2107
R2	0.131	0.0730
Joint Tests Results		
H_0: Identities jointly zero		$\chi^2(7) = 4.881,\ p = 0.674$
H_0: Ideologies jointly zero		$\chi^2(1) = 10.082,\ p = 0.001$

Notes: Estimates of the parameters β^j in equation (G.1), where D_i^j and m_i^j indicate the election of a candidate with characteristic j and their vote margin, respectively, and we consider all the characteristics included in each column at once. We pool observations across the five years following each election. The dependent variable is the change in spending per pupil (column 1) and in low-income test scores (column 2) in each year following the election relative to the year before the election. All specifications control for year fixed effects. Local linear regressions use a uniform kernel with MSE-optimal bandwidths from Calonico et al. (2020). Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the election level. At the bottom of the table we report results from chi-squared tests of the null hypothesis that either all identity variables (Female, Teacher, Democrat, Hispanic) or all ideology variables (Fiscal Conservatism and Equity) are jointly zero across the two specifications.

Table G2: Identity vs. Ideology: Multivariate Regression-Discontinuity Estimates with All Candidate Characteristics

	H_0: Identities jointly zero (p-value) (1)	**H_0: Ideologies jointly zero** (p-value) (2)
Panel A: Identity and Ideology Variables Tested Simultaneously		
Examined in Prior Studies	0.735	0.000
Augmented Using Ideological Differences	0.671	0.000
All Identities and Ideologies	0.352	0.000
Panel B: Identity and Ideology Variables Tested Separately		
Examined in Prior Studies	0.736	0.000
Augmented Using Ideological Differences	0.615	0.000
All Identities and Ideologies	0.241	0.000

Notes: P-values of chi-squared tests of joint significance of identity and ideology characteristics using the multi-outcome regression discontinuity (RD) framework in equation (G.1). Each row in each panel corresponds to different cells of identities, priorities, and outcomes. *Examined in Prior Studies* refers to specifications that consider the effects of identity traits examined in the literature on their associated outcomes (described in the top panel of Appendix Table B6), accounting for the ideologies associated with those outcomes (Appendix Table B5). *Augmented using Ideological Differences* uses identity-ideology pairs for which we observe systematic differences across identity groups (described in the bottom panel of Appendix Table B5) and consider the identity-outcome pairs associated with each ideology. *All Identities and Ideologies* refers to all identity and ideology traits. Panel A shows tests of the joint significance of identity (column 1) and ideology variables (column 2) estimated in the same regression. For reference, panel B shows the same p-values when we estimate identities and ideologies in separate regressions. All models include year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the election level.

H Randomized Ballot Order

We estimate the following first-stage regression following Shi and Singleton (2023), to assess the feasibility of using randomized ballot order as an instrument:

$$X_i = \alpha Z_i + W_i\gamma + \theta_{d(i)} + \eta_{t(i)} + \epsilon_i, \tag{H.2}$$

where Z_i is an indicator for whether a candidate with the focal characteristic appears first on the ballot in election i. The outcome X_i is either the total number of winners with that characteristic or the share of winners with that characteristic in the election.

The vector W_i includes controls for the number of open seats, the share of candidates with the focal characteristic, their interaction, indicators for cases where the share equals zero or one, and fixed effects for the number of candidates. We also include district fixed effects ($\theta_{d(i)}$) and election year fixed effects ($\eta_{t(i)}$).

We additionally consider a re-centered instrument following Borusyak and Hull (2023), defined as the indicator for a candidates with the focal characteristics appearing first on the ballot minus

the share of candidates with the focal characteristic. We include the same set of fixed effects and covariates, except for the share of candidates with the focal characteristics.

Table H1 shows that randomized ballot order has limited predictive power for electoral outcomes related to candidates' ideological positions. The corresponding first-stage F-statistics range from about 2 to 4.[A-3] We take this as evidence that the randomized ballot order design cannot be used to test the ideology-related hypotheses that are central to this paper.

Consistent with Shi and Singleton (2023) and Fischer (2023), randomized ballot order does predict electoral outcomes by identity type. A Hispanic candidate being randomly assigned at the top of the ballot increases the total number of Hispanic members by 15.4 percentage points, and the share of Hispanics among winners by 8.1 percentage points. A teacher being randomly placed at the top of the ballot raises the total number of teacher board members by 9.6 percentage points.

[A-3] The results presented here include all candidates, assigning zeros to those without valid platforms. Our findings are very similar when the sample is restricted to candidates with valid platforms, with F-statistics for ideological characteristics ranging from 0.3 to 4.

Table H1: First-Stage Estimates from Randomized Ballot-Order Instrument

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Equity		Fiscally Conservative		Hispanic		Teacher	
	Total	Share	Total	Share	Total	Share	Total	Share
Panel A: Baseline IV								
Equity Top of Ballot	0.049	0.036						
	(0.029)	(0.019)						
Fis. Conservative Top of Ballot			0.047	0.023				
			(0.025)	(0.016)				
Hispanic Top of Ballot					0.154	0.081		
					(0.026)	(0.018)		
Educator Top of Ballot							0.096	0.052
							(0.021)	(0.014)
N	5611	5611	5611	5611	5593	5593	5611	5611
First-stage F-stat	2.843	3.770	3.465	2.150	36.387	21.556	20.770	13.736
Panel B: Recentered IV								
Equity Top of Ballot-Share	0.048	0.039						
	(0.029)	(0.019)						
Fis. Conservative Top of Ballot-Share			0.046	0.027				
			(0.025)	(0.016)				
Hispanic Top of Ballot-Share					0.154	0.069		
					(0.026)	(0.018)		
Educator Top of Ballot-Share							0.096	0.049
							(0.021)	(0.015)
N	5611	5611	5611	5611	5593	5593	5611	5611
First-stage F-stat	2.807	4.079	3.407	2.675	36.366	14.704	20.749	10.542

Notes: This table reports first-stage estimates from randomized ballot order strategy following Shi and Singleton (2023) applied to our case study characteristics. Estimates of the parameters α^j in equation (H.2), with the total number or share of winners with that characteristic as dependent variables. Panel A uses the indicator for appearing at the top of the ballot as the instrumental variable; Panel B re-centers this instrument by subtracting the share of candidates with the focal characteristic from the indicator. All specifications include fixed effects for district, election year, and the number of candidates. Specifications in Panel A further control for the share of candidates with the focal characteristic, the number of open seats, their interaction, and indicators for cases where the share equals zero or one. Specifications in Panel B include the same controls, excluding the share of candidates with the focal characteristics.