

Tonya Matthews

General Public Representative



Tonya Matthews joined the National Assessment Governing Board in 2014 where she serves as a general public representative. Dr. Matthews is the CEO of the International African American Museum in Charleston, S.C. Dr. Matthews is a national thought leader in formal and informal STEM learning, equity and inclusion strategy, and future workforce development. Dr. Matthews' roles have ranged from museum director to education coach, and she is a recipient of the Whitaker Foundation Award for Engineering Excellence. Dr. Matthews serves as chair of the reporting and dissemination committee on the National Assessment Governing Board and previously served as vice chair of the Board.

Below she answers a few questions for parents and others considering nominating themselves or interested individuals to the Governing Board.


1. Why did you join the Governing Board?

I first became familiar with the Governing Board through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). I was invited to be on one of the panels helping review NAEP questions for the science framework. A couple of years later, a colleague asked, "Have you ever thought about joining the Governing Board itself?" Because I had a fascinating time working on the science framework, I was excited to engage and learn at a higher level.

2. Why is it important for parents to serve on the Governing Board?

I think our parent representatives remind us of the humanity of the work that we're supposed to be doing. There are a lot of technical aspects of this work – a lot of standards and statistics. The parent representative is one of those voices that





always reminds us that there are children in the classroom where we are putting these tests. The parent voice also helps us to look forward – they are with the students for the long haul.

A lot of our Board members are parents, regardless of the seat that they sit in. For the Board to specifically have a seat reserved for that voice recognizes the importance of parents in the conversation.

3. What is the most interesting thing you've learned about the Governing Board and NAEP that you didn't know before joining the Board?

The most interesting thing that I have learned was about the deliberateness with which the Board is constructed. I came onto the Board as a general representative. I am in the category of citizens who, for one reason or another, are actively engaged in education. [The Board includes teachers, principals, business leaders, curriculum specialists, and local and state policymakers and education leaders], then we have the scientists – the psychometricians and statisticians. It was interesting to watch how we could unify under a common goal even when we had decidedly unified strategies and approaches.

4. How has your Governing Board role evolved over time?

Even though you come to the Board in a particular role, you don't stay in one lane. You are expected and welcome to participate in all kinds of conversations.

I'm on the Reporting and Dissemination Committee – we are essentially the translators of NAEP. We're the ones who want to make sure the information gets out there clearly and concisely and in a useful fashion. I also spent some time as vice chair of the Governing Board. I was what I would have considered a young member of the Board when I was given opportunity to serve as vice chair. It gave me an interesting bird's eye view – it gave me perspective on what committees were doing and let me be a moderator of our discussions.

The last role I served in is on the nominating committee – the true unsung heroes of any Board because we are responsible for continuity. As our country and world has matured its conversations on diversity and inclusion, [the Governing Board's nominations committee has] delved into spaces of identity. [We're] thinking through ethnic identity and different spaces and thinking about being more deliberate about how broad the term "parent" is and how we can honor that. [We're] thinking about diversity in terms of people's background and what that means.

5. How has what you've learned from the Governing Board impacted your role outside the Board?

[My role on the Board] helps me put the work I'm doing in context as well as the lives of the students I serve in context. It has helped me think about strategy and helped



me ask better questions. And in my most recent work it's given me perspective. I was more focused on the technology and mathematics side, and now I'm in the history and civics and reading space. The museum I work at is now focused on that. What I bring to the table now is an understanding of the intersectionality of core subjects in a way I maybe wasn't as well attuned to [previously].

6. Your background is unique. It includes experience as a poet, museum director, education coach, mentor, and proponent of girls in STEM. How have these varied experiences informed your work on the Board?

General public representatives get teased as the “wild cards” on the Board and I probably epitomize that. One of most important perspectives I bring to Board is an understanding that our students are very unlikely to have a singular perspective or a singular experience. If I consider the diversity of my experiences, no one would have been able to predict that I would be in the roles I am now. No one would have told me that calculus would help me run a history museum. I think that having my own diversity of experiences [and a] “zig zag” career path is much more representative of the path that modern students take.

7. As a Governing Board member, what impact have you had on education in the United States?

Some of our impact is very tangible and measurable. We see that states and other education systems value the assessment we put out and do use NAEP as a bar for understanding how far our students can reach. There are also some intangible impacts I've [noticed] over the past three or four years as [the Governing Board has] gotten more creative with our releasing of the [NAEP] results. We give the results, but now we leave room for context. In those spaces, we're beginning to stimulate the conversation in a very different way.



Read Dr. Matthew's full professional bio [here](#).



**Join the National Assessment Governing Board.
[Learn more here.](#)**

