Name: _____ Date: _____

Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Circle group

A school board or city council has an election. You might think every seat is on the ballot. But many groups use a different plan. It is called staggered terms. Only some members are up for election each time.

The United States Senate is one example. Each senator serves a six-year term. About one third of the seats are decided every two years. So the Senate never starts over with all new members.

Staggering has good points. First, it keeps experience in the room. Members who have served can explain old decisions. They can help new members learn. Second, it keeps the group steady. One election cannot replace everyone. Third, voters get regular chances to speak. An election comes every couple of years. So the group stays close to what people want.

There are costs too. Some people say change is slower. A new idea cannot take over the whole group at once. Others say new members must catch up on work already going. Groups weigh these trade-offs. The plan is written down early. Then everybody knows when each seat will be on the ballot.

Questions

1. How long is a senator's term?

_____

_____

2. About how many Senate seats are decided every two years?

_____

_____

3. What are staggered terms?

_____

_____

4. What is one good point of staggering?

_____

_____

5. Why might staggering make change slower?

_____

_____

6. Why is the plan written down early?

_____

_____

Words to know

staggered: spread out so things happen at different times
term: the length of time someone serves in a job
seat: one member's place on a board or council
experience: knowledge gained from doing something for a while
trade-offs: good and bad parts that must be weighed against each other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Triangle group

When a school board or city council holds an election, you might expect every seat to be on the ballot at once. Many groups choose a different plan called staggered terms, where only some members are up for election each time.

The United States Senate is a well-known example. Each senator serves a six-year term, and about one third of the seats are decided every two years. That means the Senate never starts over with a room full of brand-new members.

Staggering has several benefits. First, it keeps experience in the room. Members who have served for a while can explain how past decisions were made and help newcomers learn the work. Second, it keeps the group steady. A single election cannot replace everyone, so sudden changes are less likely. Third, it gives voters regular chances to speak. Because an election happens every couple of years instead of once in a long while, the group stays connected to what people want.

There are costs as well. Some people think staggering makes change slower, because a new idea cannot take over the whole group at once. Others point out that new members must catch up on projects already underway. Groups weigh these trade-offs when they write their rules. Whatever they choose, the plan is written down ahead of time so everybody knows when each seat will be on the ballot.

Questions

1. How long is a senator's term?

_____

_____

2. About what share of Senate seats is decided every two years?

_____

_____

3. What are staggered terms?

_____

_____

4. What is one benefit of staggering terms?

_____

_____

5. Why might staggering make change slower?

_____

_____

6. Why is the plan written down ahead of time?

_____

_____

Words to know

staggered: spread out so things happen at different times
term: the length of time someone serves in a job
seat: one member's place on a board or council
experience: knowledge gained from doing something for a while
trade-offs: good and bad parts that must be weighed against each other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Square group

When a school board or city council holds an election, one might expect every single seat to appear on the ballot at the same time. Many organizations, however, adopt a different arrangement known as staggered terms, in which only a portion of the members must face the voters on any given election day.

The United States Senate offers a familiar example. Each senator serves a six-year term, and roughly one third of the seats are decided every two years. As a result, the Senate never begins again with a chamber full of brand-new members.

Staggering produces several benefits. To begin with, it preserves experience. Members who have served for some time can explain how earlier decisions were reached and can help newcomers learn the work. In addition, it keeps the group steady, since a single election is unable to replace everyone, which makes sudden swings less likely. Finally, it gives voters regular opportunities to be heard. Because an election takes place every couple of years rather than once in a long while, the group remains connected to what people want.

There are drawbacks as well. Some observers believe staggering slows change, because a fresh idea cannot take over the entire group all at once. Others note that new members must catch up on projects that are already underway. Groups weigh these trade-offs when they write their rules, and whichever plan they choose, it is recorded ahead of time so that everyone knows when each seat will be on the ballot.

Questions

1. How many years does a senator's term last?

_____

_____

2. Roughly what share of Senate seats is decided every two years?

_____

_____

3. What do staggered terms mean for an election?

_____

_____

4. What is one benefit that staggering produces?

_____

_____

5. Why do some observers believe staggering slows change?

_____

_____

6. Why is the chosen plan recorded ahead of time?

_____

_____

Words to know

staggered: spread out so things happen at different times
term: the length of time someone serves in a job
seat: one member's place on a board or council
experience: knowledge gained from doing something for a while
trade-offs: good and bad parts that must be weighed against each other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Easier · 187 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4

1. Six years.
2. About one third.
3. Only some members are up for election each time.
4. It keeps experience, keeps the group steady, or gives voters regular chances to speak.
5. A new idea cannot take over the whole group at once.
6. So everybody knows when each seat will be on the ballot.

Triangle: Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

This passage · 233 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.8

1. Six years.
2. About one third.
3. A plan where only some members are up for election each time.
4. It keeps experience, keeps the group steady, or gives voters regular chances to speak.
5. A new idea cannot take over the whole group at once.
6. So everybody knows when each seat will be on the ballot.

Square: Why a Board Replaces Only Some Members at a Time

Harder · 253 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.1

1. Six years.
2. Roughly one third.
3. Only a portion of the members must face the voters each time.
4. It preserves experience, keeps the group steady, or gives voters regular opportunities to be heard.
5. A fresh idea cannot take over the entire group all at once.
6. So that everyone knows when each seat will be on the ballot.