

SCHOOL BOARD notes

Annual School Election 2010: Economy Limits Second Ballot Questions

The difficult economy continues to affect school budgets, as only six New Jersey school districts have proposed additional school-funding questions for the Annual School Election this month – the lowest number ever.

Up to three years ago, it would be common to see 60, 70, 80 or more of such second ballot questions asking voters to spend beyond state caps. Today, fewer of the questions are being proposed due to the poor economy, state restrictions, and school boards working to maintain control of taxes in a difficult year.

About 90 percent of New Jersey's school districts have school elections asking voters to approve a base budget, which must remain within a state-imposed 4-percent property tax cap. School boards can present one or more additional ballot

questions asking voters to fund specific projects or staffing positions, which gives voters the opportunity to approve spending that exceeds the cap – but which the community might find important.

A law enacted in 2008 requires a 60-percent supermajority of participating voters to approve a second ballot question. Last year, 11 school boards had second ballot questions, and all failed. Had the 60-percent rule not been in place, five of the 11 second questions would have passed. No other public question in New Jersey, not even a Constitutional amendment, requires approval of a supermajority of voters.

The six districts with general-fund second ballot questions this year include:

- Medford Lakes, Burlington County: To help offset pay-to-play sports fees;
- Brielle, Monmouth County: To retain

programs such as full-day kindergarten, technology instruction, enrichment and band;

- Boonton Township, in Morris County: For non-mandatory “courtesy” busing;
- Madison, in Morris County: Junior school sports and a visual and performing arts supervisor;
- Stanhope, Sussex County: Restore the technology program; and
- Sparta Township, Sussex County: One question to restore 10 teachers, another to restore co-curricular/athletics programs.

The combined cost of all six districts' additional ballot budget questions, if approved, would be \$2,075,048.

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Budget Watch: Consider Total Package – Not Just Salary Freeze

Gov. Christie's recent comment on school budgets – that voters should reject the proposals if the local teachers union has not agreed to a wage freeze – caused consternation and concern in the education community. Christie made the statement during a news conference on an unrelated subject on Monday in Princeton.

“Voters should consider all of the cost efficiencies made by school boards and, significantly, the education programs and services provided by proposed budgets,” said Marie S. Bilik, NJSBA executive director.

“NJSBA strongly supports the governor's call for a wage freeze. However, assessing proposed budgets on the basis of whether or not teachers agreed to a wage freeze is neither fair nor accurate.”

Bilik pointed to the wide range of cost efficiencies school boards have incorporated into this year's proposed budgets due to sharp cuts in state aid.

“NJSBA surveys indicate that over 90 percent of the proposed budgets reflect layoffs of staff, and two-thirds will cut extracurricular programs,” she explained.

“Substantial numbers are turning to subcontracting and other methods to preserve education programs. A large number also have received wage concessions from administrators and non-teaching staff.”

In addition, the governor's comments do not take into account a practical consideration: over one-third of the state's school districts are now in the process of negotiating contracts that cover the 2010-2011 school year. Therefore, voters in over 260 school districts won't know on April

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Governor Continues Incentives for Teacher Wage Freeze

Gov. Chris Christie announced on Tuesday that he would extend until June 30 the incentives to any school district in which the local teachers union agrees to a wage freeze.

The initial deadline was April 5 for school boards and unions to agree to a one-year wage freeze in order to receive an incentive, which would be generated by the savings the state receives through Social Security and Medicare payroll taxes as a result of the wage freezes. Districts could see more than 7 percent of the value of the wage freeze savings. The governor's office has said that a district that saves \$1 million as a result of keeping wages flat could receive about \$75,000 in extra aid.

At a news conference in Boonton Town last week, Christie said school staff members in 115 districts throughout the state

had voluntarily agreed to a wage freeze or wage reduction – although most of those concessions came from administrators and support staff. Teachers unions in approximately 16 districts have agreed to wage concessions, according to news reports.

Christie made his announcement in the Town of Boonton, one of the districts where administrators and teachers agreed to a one-year salary freeze, saving 25 jobs.

NJSBA Survey NJSBA has been disseminating a survey to all school districts over the past week to gauge how many school boards have asked staff to reopen contracts, and the outcome of any negotiations that have occurred.

The results from such surveys assist NJSBA as it advocates on behalf of school boards throughout the state. 🍏

Budget Watch continued

20 whether or not the board and the union achieved a wage freeze.

“The New Jersey School Boards Association urges citizens to vote on April 20, and to make informed decisions on proposed school budgets and the candidates seeking over 1,600 board of education positions statewide,” said Bilik.

Rejected Budgets Voters in 538 school districts will act on proposed school budgets on April 20. Rejected budgets undergo review by the municipal governing body, which can reduce the proposed tax levy.

To help school boards and municipalities that will undertake the budget review process this year, NJSBA and the state League of Municipalities will sponsor a teleconference, “Your School Budget Has Been Defeated: What’s Next?” on Thursday, April 22 from noon to 1 p.m. For information, visit www.njsba.org.

Restoration School districts that believe they cannot provide a thorough and efficient education with the funds authorized by the municipality may apply to the state Department of Education for restoration of funds. During a hearing before the Senate Revenue and Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, Commissioner of Education Bret Schundler stated that the education department would give full consideration, as specified by statute, to school district applications.

Such applications, however, have been rare in recent years. No districts applied in 2008; only two filed appeals last year. The situation resulted from the high level of voter approval of budgets in recent years – for example, 73.3 percent last year – as well as an active role by the executive county superintendents in expediting the agreements between school boards and municipalities.

State Revenues Down Any hope that state revenues may increase and result in an increase in state aid for 2010-2011 were

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NJSBA Delegate Assembly Handbook Mailing

The deadline to pre-register for the May 15 NJSBA Delegate Assembly is April 21.

The NJSBA Delegate Assembly Handbook, which includes all resolutions, information about officer elections, and other materials relevant to the meeting, will be mailed to each delegate, alternate or other board member who has registered by April 21 to represent the board as a delegate to the meeting. The handbook will be mailed on April 23.

If a district does not register a delegate by April 21, the delegate handbook will be mailed to the school business administrator. It is the responsibility of the school business administrator to distribute it to the person who will represent the district at the meeting.

Delegates may register by sending an e-mail to callcenter@njsba.org or by going online to the NJSBA Web site at www.njsba.org and selecting the “Delegate Assembly” link under the “About NJSBA” tab, and then clicking on “Online Registration.” For information, call Barbara Deveney at (888) 886-5722, ext. 5256.

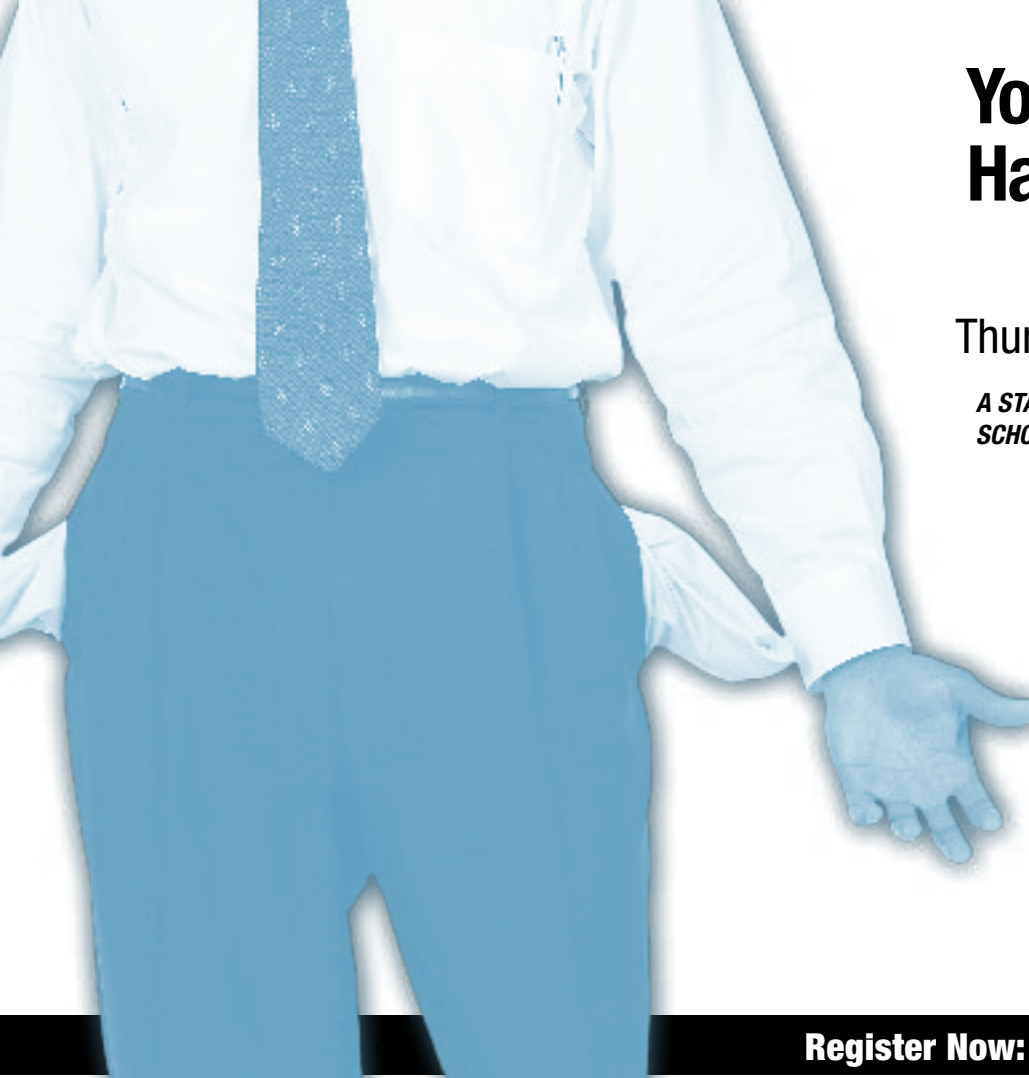
Innovations in Special Education Judging

Judging for the Innovations in Special Education awards, which recognizes creative and exemplary programs for special education students, took place on April 12. The award program is organized by NJSBA and ASAH (formerly the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped), which represents private special education schools.



Pictured here, left to right, are judges Dr. Dorothy K. Van Horn, first vice president of ASAH and director of the Brookfield Schools in southern New Jersey; Charlene Zoerb, NJSBA field service representative; Elaine Lerner, coordinator of the Office of Special Education Programs at the New Jersey Department of Education; and Donna Kaye, NJSBA senior counsel.

The winning programs will be honored at a special event held in conjunction with Special Education Week in May.



Your School Budget Has Been Defeated: *What's Next?*

Thursday, April 22 • 12 – 1 p.m.

A STATEWIDE, INTERACTIVE CONFERENCE CALL FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND MUNICIPALITIES

In the wake of a defeated school budget, there is limited time to act and a lot you need to know. There is also help available.

Join representatives from the NJ School Boards Association and the NJ State League of Municipalities as they discuss the impact of a defeated budget; what you can and cannot do; the questions you should be asking; how the budget process has been modified; and the technical steps and process that follows.

This program is a must if your school budget is defeated at the polls on April 20.

To participate you only need a phone.

Register Now: www.njsba.org/defeatedbudget

Budget Watch continued

diminished following updates by the state Treasurer and the Office of Legislative Services to the Assembly Budget and Senate Revenue and Appropriations Committees last week. State revenues through June 2011 will be \$250 million below previous projections.

Public Budget Hearing On Monday, April 19, the Assembly Budget Committee will hear public testimony on the proposed state budget, including state aid to education. The meeting will take place at the State House Complex in Trenton, starting at 1:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.njleg.state.nj.us.

For updates on the state budget, visit www.njsba.org and select the “2010 School Budget Resources” page. 🍏

NJSBA Expresses Condolences on Death of Bob Franks



Marie S. Bilik, NJSBA executive director, issued the following statement after this weekend’s announcement of the death of former New Jersey

Congressman Robert Franks.

“The New Jersey School Boards Association extends its condolences to the family of former Congressman Robert Franks.

“During his public service as a state legislator and a Member of Congress, Bob Franks demonstrated a sensitivity to the concerns of local school districts, whether

by appearing at NJSBA programs or meeting with board members at the annual federal relations network conference in Washington. He conveyed an appreciation for the value of local governance of public education.”

Franks, 58, died on Friday at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in Manhattan after a battle with cancer.

A resident of Berkeley Heights, Franks spent 14 years as a member of the state Legislature and later represented the state’s 7th Congressional district from 1992 through 2000. He is a former chairman of the state Republican Party and was a candidate for U.S. Senate in 2000. 🍏



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tion is also one of the dates throughout the year when school boards can propose referendum questions on construction projects. On April 20, voters in seven New Jersey school districts will act on \$69.9 million in proposed school construction.

Bond referendums are proposed in Springfield Township in Burlington County; Lawnside in Camden County; Bloomfield in Essex County; North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional and Tewksbury Township, both in Hunterdon County; Brick Township in Ocean County; and Union Township in Union County.

Of the total amount that is being requested on April 20, nearly \$24 million would qualify for state funds, either through one-time school-construction grants, annual “debt service aid” payments to school districts, or rebates through the state’s Clean Energy program.

C A L E N D A R

May 4

- ▶ Burlington County School Boards Association (SBA), Burlington County Institute of Technology atrium, Westampton Campus, Westampton, 6:30 p.m.

May 5

- ▶ Learn@Lunch: “The Digital Divide,” online, www.njsba.org/learnatlunch, scroll down to May 5 to select the link to register for the program, 12 – 12:45 p.m.
- ▶ NJSBA Executive Committee meeting, NJSBA Offices, Ewing, 6 p.m.

- ▶ Essex County SBA, Spring Meeting, East Orange Campus High School, East Orange, 6:30 p.m.
- ▶ Camden County SBA, Eighth Grade Dialogue, Clementon School District, Clementon, 6:30 p.m.

May 6

- ▶ Bergen County SBA, Spring Meeting, River Dell High School cafeteria, Oradell, 6:30 p.m.

▶ Denotes pre-registration required

The remaining dates for school bond elections this year are Sept. 28 and Dec. 14.

Non-Monetary Questions School boards may also present voters with non-monetary questions in the Annual School Election. Voters in three school districts

will decide whether to reduce the size of their school board from nine members to seven members. The three districts are Weymouth Township in Atlantic County; Woodlynne in Camden County; and High Bridge in Hunterdon County. 🍏