



New Jersey School Boards Association

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No School Construction Referendums on Tuesday

TRENTON, March 4, 2011 —No school district will hold a construction vote next Tuesday, the next date for bond referendums, the New Jersey School Boards Association reported today. This represents the first time since New Jersey established a specific calendar for such elections that no school district will propose a construction bond referendum to its voters.

Since 2002, state law has required school boards to schedule special elections on one of five specific dates a year, and the second Tuesday in March is designated as one of those dates. (Prior to 2002, school boards could schedule a special election on any day of the year.)

Next Tuesday, March 8, is the only occurrence when no school-construction votes have been scheduled on any one of the specified five election dates. The previous low was at the March 2007 bond referendum date, when only one school district proposed a construction referendum to voters. The referendum date with the greatest activity was in September of 2005, when 38 boards placed questions on the ballot.

On an annual basis, school districts proposed the largest number of bond referendums (102) in 2002—for a total of \$2 billion in proposed school construction. (Seventy-one percent were approved.) In 2010, in comparison, a total of 34 questions were proposed, representing \$832 million in school construction borrowing. (Voters approved half of the 2010 referendums.)

The decline in the number of referendums reflects the struggling economy and may also indicate that many non-Abbott districts, which must present construction bond proposals to voters, have dealt with capacity issues for the time being as a result of enrollment leveling off. NJSBA has found that, while fewer bond issues have appeared on the ballot, those that have been presented to voters generally seek smaller bonds and deal with renovations such as roof repairs, solar energy and plumbing systems; health and safety repairs; and upgrades of academic facilities, such as science labs. Building expansions and new school construction have represented the minority of proposals in recent years.

April 27 Vote The next date on which a school board may schedule a bond referendum question this year is the Annual School Election on Wednesday, April 27, when voters in about 90 percent of school districts decide the annual operating budget for their school district.

Besides asking voters to decide an additional question for a school-construction, school boards may also place a question before voters to exceed state caps on the operating budget. These questions, typically referred to as “second ballot questions,” must state the exact programs or services that will be funded with the money that exceeds the caps on the year-to-year operating budget.

This year, with the state’s implementation of the new 2-percent tax levy cap for both school districts and municipalities, municipal governing bodies will also be able to put second ballot questions before voters on April 27. While the vast majority of school districts’ base budgets are put on the ballot for voter approval, municipalities have not had to deal with such ballot proposals in the past.

The New Jersey School Boards Association is a federation of 588 local boards of education and includes 44 charter school associate members. NJSBA advocates the interests of school districts, trains local school board members, and provides resources for the advancement of public education.

