

PRESS RELEASE

Voters Approve 90% of School Budget Proposals

TRENTON, April 18, 2011—Voters in the 70 school districts holding budget elections on Tuesday approved 90 percent of the proposals, according to the New Jersey School Boards Association.

“Local boards of education continue to be sensitive to their constituents’ financial situation. They consider two factors in proposing their annual budgets: adequate funding for school programs, and communities’ capacity to provide those resources,” said Raymond R. Wiss, NJSBA president. “The large percentage of budgets approved yesterday indicates that voters found that their local school boards did an effective job in balancing these priorities.”

On Tuesday, voters approved proposed budgets in 63 (or 90 percent) of the 70 New Jersey school districts that placed proposed 2012-2013 base budgets on the ballot, according to unofficial results compiled by the Association. (Three other school districts with April elections – South Orange/Maplewood, which has a board of school estimate approve its annual budget, and the state-operated districts of Newark and Paterson – do not place their proposed budgets on the ballot, and conduct only board-member elections.)

Last year, voters approved 79.7 percent of the 538 proposed school budgets on the ballot statewide.

For decades, New Jersey voters in more than 90 percent of school districts selected school board candidates and determined their school district’s budget each April. However, legislation enacted in January allowed communities to move their school elections from the third Tuesday in April to the General Election, which will be Nov. 6 this year. Adopting the change places school board candidates on the November ballot, but eliminates the requirement that a school board submit the proposed budget to the voters as long as it remains at or below the state's 2-percent levy cap.

In all, 468 (or over 85 percent) of the state's elected school boards will hold their elections in November, while 73 school districts held elections this month.

221 School Board Positions

Voters on Tuesday also chose candidates to fill 221 school-board seats in the 73 districts. A total of 318 candidates had filed to run for school board, 45 percent of whom were incumbents seeking re-election.

Second Questions

School boards in three districts presented a separate ballot question asking voters to approve spending outside of the base budget. Second questions must state the dollar amount and the program, staff or service to be funded if voters approve of the question.

Voters approved one of three second questions:

- Haddon Heights in Camden County requested \$207,799 for various sports, cheerleading, varsity, band/choir and enrichment programs, and lab computers. – **Approved**
- Hawthorne in Passaic County requested \$625,000 for hiring eight teachers and reinstating the education director. – **Rejected**
- Greenwich Township in Warren County requested \$156,958 for reinstating two technology teachers. – **Rejected**

One Construction Bond

The April school election also serves as one of five dates during the year when school boards may ask voters to approve construction proposals.

The East Rutherford Board of Education in Bergen County proposed a \$2.49 million referendum for roof and window replacement, renovations, and school electrical system upgrades. Voters in that community **approved** the construction proposal.

The next date that a school board can propose a school construction referendum is Sept. 25.

Rejected Budget Review

When voters reject a school district's proposed base budget, the municipal governing body reviews the proposal, and it can leave the budget intact or make

cuts. This year's deadline to make the decision is May 21.

A school board may appeal a municipality's cuts to the district's base budget if the cuts would undermine the district's financial stability or prevent the schools from meeting state standards. Such budget appeals are uncommon; there were none last year and one in 2010.

When voters reject a second ballot question that asks for funds outside of the district's base budget, there is no review by the municipality. The voters' word is final, and the program or service is lost for the year unless there is an outside donation.