

Legislative Analysis



SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER

Mitchell Bean, Director
Phone: (517) 373-8080
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

House Bills 4506 and 4507 as passed by the House

Sponsor: Rep. Chris Ward

Committee: Education

First Analysis (9-19-07)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bills would amend the Revised School Code, and the Michigan Election Law, respectively, to require that school board elections be held in November.

FISCAL IMPACT: Current elections cost between \$25,000 to \$50,000 for a stand-alone elections and \$5,000 to \$10,000 when added on to an existing election. Restricting elections to the fall would create local savings. Local school districts may still incur costs for millage elections which are usually held in May.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Most Michigan primary and general elections are scheduled in August and November. Nearly all elected officials vie for their seats at that time—city council-members, township trustees, county commissioners, state representatives and senators, congressmen and U. S. senators, governors and presidents, attorney generals, secretaries of state, state school-board members, as well as judges at all levels of the judicial branch of government. In contrast, many school elections—both to propose millages and to elect school board officials—are scheduled in May.

Because many more candidates stand for election in August and November, voters have more information about the candidates and the issues that appear on those ballots, and as a result voter participation is higher than in May elections. For example, in Oakland County, voter turnout was 59 percent in the last November general election, but 9.87 percent in the recent school board election.

Despite the low turnout, May school board elections (like all elections) are costly to run. Recently, it cost \$20,000 to mount an election in Jackson County featuring one incumbent, while \$50,000 was spent in Oakland County for the election of four candidates.

To increase voter participation and reduce election costs, legislation has been proposed to hold the election of school board members in August and November.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILLS:

The bills would amend the Revised School Code, and the Michigan Election Law, respectively, to require that school board elections be held in November. A more detailed explanation of each bill follows.

House Bill 4507 would amend the Michigan Election Law (MCL 168.302 and 168.644g) to require that beginning January 1, 2008, a school district hold its regular election for the office of school board member, on one of the following dates:

- the odd-numbered year general election in November.
- the general November election (even-numbered years).
- the November regular election date in both even- and odd-numbered years.

House Bill 4506 would amend the Revised School Code (MCL 380.4, 380.5, and 380.614) to change the references to the Michigan Election Law that are found within the Code, so they refer to the new section of the law that would be created if House Bill 4507 were enacted into law. The bill would take effect January 1, 2008. House Bill 4506 is tie-barred to House Bill 4507, so it could not go into effect unless House Bill 4507 also is enacted into law.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

A similar bill, House Bill 4755, passed the House of Representatives during the last legislative session but died in the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Combining the election of school board members with the election of other office-holders will save schools money—thousands of dollars. What's more, it could significantly increase voter participation in school elections. For example, a recent Oakland County May school election drew fewer than 10 percent of the voters, while nearly 60 percent voted in the general election.

While this bill would require a school board member to stand for election in August and November instead of May, it would continue to allow school districts the ability to hold millage elections on any one of the four elections dates in the year—February, May, August, or November.

Against:

Unlike most units of local and state government whose fiscal year begins on October 1 (and ends on September 30), the fiscal year of school districts begins on July 1 (and ends on June 30). Most school districts conduct May elections so that new members can take office at the start of the July 1 fiscal year, giving themselves a few months to acquaint themselves with school district programs, policies, and procedures before the start of the academic school year beginning in September.

Against:

The length of the ballots in the August and November elections already overwhelms voters. To add more candidates will further overburden voters and make their decision-making more difficult. The likely result will be that low-tech information about all-

important school matters will be lost in the electioneering din of more partisan contests designed by media professionals to attract the voters' attention.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Education Association supports the bills. (5-22-07)

The Office of the Secretary of State supports the bills with changes. (5-22-07)

The Kalamazoo, Muskegon, Ottawa ISD opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Middle Cities Education Association opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Michigan Association of School Boards opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Wayne RESA opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Michigan Association of School Administrators opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals' Association opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

Oakland Public Schools opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Michigan Small & Rural Schools oppose the bills. (5-22-07)

The VanBuren & Allegan ISD opposes the bills. (5-22-07)

The Detroit Public Schools are neutral on the bills. (5-22-07)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault
Fiscal Analyst: Mary Ann Cleary
Bethany Wicksall

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.