

Action Alert

April 24, 2009

Restore Majority Rule in School Budget Second Questions!

In 2007, the State Legislature enacted legislation that significantly tightened the school budget process, including the process for seeking voter approval of expenditures beyond the local base budget. P.L. 2007, C. 62 (18A:7F-39) established a 4% tax levy cap, detailed the rules for potential waiver requests in the school budget process and established rules for second questions to the voters. Specifically, the law requires a 60% supermajority of voters to approve second ballot questions from 2007-8 budget year through the 2011-12 budget year. Chapter 62 also eliminates the process where the local municipal governing board could review a defeated second question and restore all or part of that funding. Now, if a second question is defeated by 41% of the voters, that decision is final.

Last year, this legislation had a significant chilling effect on the willingness and ability of local school districts to seek support from local voters to continue to provide programs and services to students. In 2007-8, the first year of the statute, only 28 school districts put out a total of 33 second questions compared to 2006-7, when 65 districts proposed 87 additional spending questions with a 45.9 % success rate. In prior years, districts presented the following numbers of second questions to voters.

Year	# of Questions	Year	# of Questions
2009	11	2002	99
2008	33	2001	91
2007	72	2000	100
2005	73	1999	92
2004	75	1998	104
2003	89	1997	176

Source: NJ School Boards Association News, 4/2008

Due to the supermajority requirement, only 4 of the 33 (12%) passed. If a simple majority had been required, 15 of the 33 (45%) would have passed. Significantly, the proposals presented to the voters in the 28 districts included such key items as certified staff positions (classroom teachers, art/music teachers), teaching aides, counseling services, security guards, school resource officers, nurses, librarians, enrichment programs, summer school programs, athletic programs, computers/technology, full day kindergarten or preschool, and busing services. All of these programs, services and staff directly serve our students and the educational mission of the districts.

ACTION NEEDED!

In response to the inherent unfairness and negative impact of Chapter 62, the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association has joined with the NJEA, NJ School Boards Association, the NJ Association of School Business Officials, the NJ Association of School Administrators and the NJ PTA to seek legislation eliminating the supermajority rule.

Legislation has been introduced by Assemblywoman Joan Voss (D-38) and Senator Jim Whelan (D-2) to do just that! NJPSA needs your help to reach out to legislators statewide to build support for the passage of this bill.

Please call or write your local legislators TODAY to urge their support of S-2655 (Whelan), A-2686!



Talking Points

1. In New Jersey, school budgets are the only budgets that local taxpayers vote upon. Local municipalities and other branches of government do not have to sell their operating budgets to citizens, nor does the State. Since schools are already under a greater burden to operate and be transparent with the voters, the election process must at least be a fair and equitable one.
2. All elections in New Jersey are won by a simple majority of the voters, except second questions on the school budget. Majority rule is a basic principle of our democracy - board members, legislators, and other lawmakers are elected by a 51% standard.
3. Second questions ARE NOT frivolous requests for additional money by local school boards. In fact, second questions to the voter are a method of last resort where boards of education must try to retain critical staff, equipment, programs and security measures to meet student needs. In the current economic crisis facing our state, it is more important than ever to give schools a fair chance to retain teachers and other critical staff, to continue high quality programs and to provide equipment/technology our children need to develop 21st Century learning skills. Our collective future relies upon the success of our educational system.

Contact the NJPSA Government Relations Department to share any legislative responses.

Thank You for your advocacy on behalf of our students!