

Legislative Analysis



SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

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

House Bill 6232 as introduced (Enrolled Version)
Sponsor: Rep. Andy Neumann
Committee: Ethics and Elections

Revised First Analysis (6-30-10)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would allow school districts, including community college districts, to change their board member elections to the date of the general November election (defined in law as the November election in even-numbered years), if they now hold their school board elections at the time of the odd-year November election.

FISCAL IMPACT: In general, current school board elections cost between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for a stand-alone election. Moving school board elections to November would create savings to school districts by eliminating or reducing those costs. When a school board election is added to a November election, the other relevant local units may incur the minimal costs of adding school board elections to the local ballot. Allowing Alpena Community College to switch the date of its elections for members of its board of trustees would save the college several thousand dollars per election. Reportedly, during over the course of the last five elections, the college has spent more than \$75,000, with the cost of an individual election ranging between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Under the consolidated election, the college's costs are expected to be less than \$1,000.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

For the past six years, school districts have been encouraged by policymakers in the legislature to reduce the overall number of their elections, and also to schedule school elections at the same time as other local elections. These policies to consolidate local elections have been advanced in order to ensure greater participation and higher turnout by registered voters, and also to cut costs by spreading costs among governmental units.

To that end, Section 642(8) of the Michigan Election Law says that, with certain specified exceptions, as of September 1, 2004, a school district must hold its regular school board elections at the odd-year general November election. If as of that date, a school district held its regular election at another date, then the board could choose to switch its regular election date to any of the following by adopting a resolution: (a) the odd-year May regular election date (the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May); (b) the November regular election date in both even and odd years (the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November); and (c) the May regular election date in both even and odd years. Under the Election Law, the term "school district" includes community college districts.

While the statute allows school districts to switch their elections from even to odd-numbered years, it does not explicitly allow districts to switch elections from odd to even-numbered years.

At least one community college board of trustees—Alpena Community College—has since 1979 held its board of trustees election during odd-numbered years. At that time, trustees are elected to serve staggered six year terms. The cost of elections—over \$75,000 since 2001, according to press reports—has been borne by the community college budget alone, since all other local school elections in the community have been consolidated, and are now held in even-numbered years.

Legislation has been introduced to allow school districts, including community colleges, to switch their elections from odd to even-numbered years.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 6232 would amend Section 642a of the Michigan Election Law to allow a school board to change the date of a district's election of school board members to the date of the ***general November election***, if they now hold their school board elections at the time of the *odd-year* November general election. Under the Election Law, the term "general November election" means the election held on the November regular election date ***in an even numbered year***.

Under the Election Law, the term "school board" means the governing body of a school district, *including the board of trustees of a community college*. The term "school board member" applies to school district board members and to *members of a community college board of trustees*.

Specifically, the bill says that after December 31, 2009, a school district's school board that holds its regular election for the office of school board member at the odd-year general election may change its regular election to the general November election by adopting a resolution in compliance with Section 642. (*See Note below.)

Under the bill, if a school board (or community college board) adopted that resolution, then after December 31 of the year in which the resolution was adopted, the school district or community college district would hold its regular election at the general November election.

[*Note: Section 168.642 of the Michigan Election Law (which sets the dates for city and village regular elections; regular election primaries; and the dates for school district regular elections) requires that before adopting a resolution to set election dates, local officials hold at least one public hearing; that the notices of all public hearings be designed to reach the largest number of the jurisdiction's qualified electors in a timely fashion; that the notices state the issue in detail; that the council or school board votes on the resolution and, on a record roll call vote, a majority adopt the resolution; and that the resolution be filed with the secretary of state.]

MCL 168.642a

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This bill will provide school boards, including boards of community colleges, with an additional option for consolidating elections, and thus reduce their costs.

To mount an election districts must pay for a host of election-related services, such as the printing of ballots, the mailing of absentee ballots both locally and overseas, voting equipment repair, software programs that tabulate votes, rent for polling places, and modest stipends paid to poll-workers. In its previous five elections, for example, elections for Alpena Community College trustee have cost the school over \$75,000.

This legislation allows local officials to switch the school elections now held in odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, where the costs of elections can be shared. They note that by reducing the cost of school elections in the community, more money can be directed to the education of students.

POSITIONS:

The Secretary of State supports the bill. (6-23-10)

The Michigan Community College Association supports the bill. (6-23-10)

The Michigan Association of County Clerks supports the bill. (6-23-10)

The Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks supports the bill. (6-23-10)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault
Fiscal Analyst: Mark Wolf
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.