

## **Voters Decide Seven Ballot Questions**

Voters in seven of the 501 school districts holding elections across the state yesterday also faced ballot questions related to their schools.

Four of those questions –including three related to additional school spending – were defeated, while three won voter approval.

While school boards no longer have to submit their entire budgets for voter approval when they hold elections in November, boards may place a budget question on the election ballot seeking voter approval to spend above the state's 2 percent tax levy cap. Two districts, Ridgefield and Dunellen, asked voters to approve additional spending to increase school security, and one, Haddon Heights, asked voters for funding for a number of student activities. All three questions failed.

All three would have resulted in a permanent increase in their districts' tax levies, something that must be stated on the ballot question.

Also falling to defeat was one question that would change the makeup of a school board. In Pleasantville, a municipal question that proposed changing the board of education, from an elected board to an appointed one, was defeated by voters.

Three other proposals were approved, however.

Westfield voters gave a thumbs up to a construction proposal intended to make the district eligible for state aid. The \$6.6 million construction proposal for school roof repair supersedes a referendum approved last year, the difference being that Westfield is now eligible for state debt service aid that was not available last year.

And in two districts, voters approved changes to the makeup of their school boards. Voters in Maurice River agreed to reduce the number of members on their school board, and voters in Orange approved a proposal to change the appointed board to an elected one.

Below is a summary of the seven ballot questions in the November 2013 general election affecting local school districts:

### ***3 Budget Questions***

- **Ridgefield** (Bergen County) - **Defeated** - \$140,000 to expand school security operations by hiring additional security personnel (resulting in a permanent increase in tax levy.)
- **Dunellen** (Middlesex County) - **Defeated** - \$100,000 for security personnel to be used exclusively for the hiring of two district security officers and related expenses (resulting in a permanent increase in tax levy.)
- **Haddon Heights** (Camden County) – **Defeated** - \$175,516 to fund a number of student activities and related equipment purchases, including winter cheerleading, junior high co-ed track, varsity club, the Scribe newspaper, band instruments and supplies, and computer equipment (resulting in a permanent increase in tax levy.)

Decisions made by the voters are final; there is no appeal process to the state.

### ***One Construction Proposal***

- **Westfield** (Union County) – **Approved** - \$6,684,000 bond issue referendum for replacement or restoration of roofs on seven schools and two other district buildings. The ballot question supersedes a \$13.6 million ballot question approved by voters last year, part of which has already been used for roof construction. The new proposal makes the district eligible for \$2.7 million in state debt service aid that was not available last year.

### ***Three Questions on Board Composition***

- **Maurice River Township** (Cumberland County) – **Approved** - A proposed change from nine to seven board members.
- **Orange** (Essex County) – **Approved** – A non-binding proposal to change the board of education from an appointed board to an elected one.
- **Pleasantville** (Atlantic County) **Defeated** - A question on the municipal ballot proposed to change the board of education from an elected board, to an

appointed one.

In addition to the ballot questions, voters elected school board members to a total of 1,501 open seats in 501 districts. A total of 1,853 candidates were on ballots across the state.

Another 40 districts will hold school board elections in April.