

Testimony before the
Senate Ethics and Elections Committee
SB 171 - Municipal Elections

by

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Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 171**.

I would like to highlight what I believe are the advantages of having school board elections in April.

1. New members have almost 3 months from the time of election to taking office to observe and begin to learn the nuances of school districts.
2. Sitting school board members are allowed to finish up the school year and celebrate the accomplishments of the students in their district. There is great pride as a school board member to recognize the accomplishments of the district students.
3. Budgeting processes are conducted during the summer and allow new members to participate in financial decisions they will be held accountable for.
4. An audit of the previous year's business is conducted early in the term cycle and gives new board members the opportunity to ask questions and better understand the accounting rules associated with school boards.
5. The focus of these elections does not get diluted by other elections. Voters can focus on the issues that are important to their local community and participate in the process more freely.
6. Strategic planning sessions are often held in the summer. This allows a new board member the opportunity to begin participating immediately.
7. The election cycle supports the operating cycle of a school district. A new year begins in the summer for planning and implementation of changes for the upcoming school year and the year winds down in May/June with graduation and summer break. The school board member term makes perfect sense in the "life cycle of a school district".

I also believe there would be some distinct disadvantages to the implementation of this change in the election cycle.

1. Major modifications to the operations of a district do not occur during the actual school year. By moving elections and the time of year a member will take office, you limit a new board member's ability to participate in important decisions for several months.

2. The accountability for decisions will also diminish if the current board did not have active participation in setting the direction of the district.
3. New members will be required to participate in evaluations and negotiations for items they are not fully informed of.
4. Requiring these elections to be partisan may also have the unintended consequence of restricting some candidates from being allowed to serve and run in this capacity.

I urge you to leave the status quo alone. There does not seem to be sufficient evidence of why a change is necessary. The tangible benefits of the change also do not appear to be significant enough to warrant the change. The disadvantages far outweigh any cost savings that may be gained by this change. I am sensitive to the costs associated with having the spring elections and low voter turnout. I would encourage the committee to investigate ways that these can be improved and enhanced without lumping these important local elections with the more contested federal and state level elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.