



New Jersey School Boards Association

Livingston Board of Education



Considerations for Changing the Membership Size of a Board of Education

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Presented by: Charlene Peterson, NJSBA Field Services



Board Configurations

# Board Seats	# Districts (580 total)	% of Total
3	2	
5	93	16%
7	91	16%
9 +	394	68%

Elections Held since 2008 to Modify Board Size	# Elections
↓ from 9 to 7 members	16
↓ from 9 to 5 members	2
↓ from 7 to 5 members	1
↑ from 5 to 7 Members	1 Plumsted in 2008

Of 93 districts with a 5-member Board, only 3 have 5,000+ students:

- West Orange
- Livingston
- Ridgewood

Of 67 districts with 5,000+ students in addition to 3 with 5-member boards:

- 7 have 7-member Boards (Brick, Camden, East Orange, Jackson, Montclair, Scotch Plains, & Union City)
- 57 have 9-member Boards

Essex County has highest % of 5-member Boards – 43% (9 of 21)



Statute re: Board Size

18A:12-12. Increase or reduction in membership; resolution; submission of question

If the board of any district shall determine by resolution that it is for the best interest of the schools that the membership of the board shall be increased from whatever number of members then composes it to five, seven or nine members, or reduced from said number to seven, five or three members, the question of such increase or reduction shall be submitted to the voters of the district at the next annual school election and the question shall be stated in the notice of the election.

L.1967, c.271.

18A:12-13. Membership increase

18A:12-13. If at the election the question of increasing the membership of the board shall be adopted, the membership of the board shall be increased accordingly as of the organization meeting next following the next annual school election and the additional members shall be elected at such annual school election, for terms as follows:

- a. If the increase is from three to five, two for three years and one for two years;
- b. If the increase is from three to seven, two for three years, one for two years and one for one year;
- c. If the increase is from five to seven, one for three years and one for a term of either one or two years, whichever is necessary to cause the terms of two members to expire at each of the next two annual school elections;
- d. If the increase is from any other number to nine, for such terms not over three years, as will as soon as possible constitute a board of nine, with three-year terms expiring, three each year.

Each year thereafter successors to the members whose terms expire shall be elected for three years.

L. 1967, c. 271; amended by L. 1987, c. 289, s. 3.



Impact to Board Member Terms

Scenario:

Resolution to increase Board size from 5 to 7 or 9 board members passes at the 2021 election. Impact to 2022, 2023, & 2024 ballots.

- = current Livingston Board terms
- = adding 2 more seats to make 7
- = adding 2 more seats to 7 to make 9
- = 3 seats with same 3-year term
2 current Board member seats + 1 new one
No difference if go to 7 or 9 members.
- = 2 seats with same 3-year term for 7
1 current seat + 1 new one for 7 members.
Would add a 3rd seat to this grouping if go to 9.
- = 2 current Board seats. Would not change
with 7 members. 1 More added if go to 9 seats.

Expiration of Current 5-Member Board Seats	2022 Election	2023 Election	2024 Election
2022	X		
2022	X		
New 3-year seat	X		
New 1-year seat	X	X Now a 3-yr seat	
New 1-year seat (9 Members)	X	X Now a 3-yr seat	
New 2-year seat (9 members)	X		X Now a 3-yr seat
2023		X	
2024 (current 2021 seat)			X
2024 (current 2021 seat)			X



Pros and Cons of 5 vs 7/9-Member Board

5-Member Board	7/9-Member Board
Pros:	Cons:
Member communication and cohesion easier	Groups/cliques may form
Each member's participation counts	Some members may be less committed with more people to do the work
Easier to manage time and schedules	Special meetings may be difficult to schedule and meetings may take longer
Cons:	Pros:
Heavier workload - may create burnout	Can spread the workload
Less diversified	Greater opportunity for diversity
Key expertise may be missing	Broader range of skill sets
Potential for less analysis and discussion due to fewer perspectives	Less potential for "group think"



Committee of Whole vs Standing Committee

Committee of the Whole

- Common understanding of issues by all members
- Everyone gets same information at same time
- Increased transparency
- Opportunity for increased stakeholder input
- Work is focused on the needs of the full Board.

Standing Committee

- Thorough research and consideration of information
- More time at regular meetings for other Board business
- Build ownerships and accountability among the members
- Builds a more cohesive board-administrative working relationship.
- Allows more work to be done.



Questions to Consider

- Is the current size allowing the Board to fulfill its governance responsibilities effectively?
- Do we have the capacity to get the work done?
- Are we representative of our community?
- Are we having the in-depth discussions needed for the number of decisions that come before us?
- Do we have enough differences of opinion to be asking the right questions?
- Is there enough interest in the community to fill the additional board seats?

One size does not fit all. What is your Board's sweet spot? Consider the current structure – what is working and what is impeding furthering your governance work.

