

STATE OF NEW YORK

10992

IN ASSEMBLY

September 9, 2020

Introduced by COMMITTEE ON RULES -- (at request of M. of A. Zebrowski)
-- read once and referred to the Committee on Education

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to establishing school election wards in Rockland county union free and central school districts

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Section 1702 of the education law is amended by adding a new subdivision 4 to read as follows:

4. a. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a board of education of a union free school district contained entirely or partially within Rockland county may, by resolution and subject to a mandatory referendum, establish school election wards for purposes of electing individual trustees. There shall be at least three, but no more than nine, school election wards within a school district. One trustee shall be chosen from each ward by the qualified voters therein. Within such resolution, a board of education may require that a trustee elected to represent a ward shall be a resident of such ward. Such resolution shall also provide for the signature requirements for nominating petitions consistent with the applicable provisions of this chapter.

b. (i) A resolution by the board of education, which shall be passed no less than one hundred eighty days prior to a related referendum being placed before the qualified voters of the school district during the annual meeting and election, shall include an assessment and finding, which shall take into account any historic disenfranchisement or discrimination against any group of individuals within the school district based upon race, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation, including that no disenfranchisement or discrimination would result from the adoption of the proposed resolution. The board of education shall conduct no fewer than three public hearings on such resolution.

(ii) Such public hearings shall be conducted not less than thirty nor more than ninety days prior to a vote on the resolution by a majority of the qualified voters of the district. The district clerk shall give

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 notice of the public hearing by publishing a notice five times within
2 fifteen days preceding the hearing, on the district's website and in two
3 newspapers if there shall be two, or in one newspaper if there shall be
4 but one, having general circulation within such district. But if no
5 newspaper shall then have general circulation therein, said notice shall
6 be posted in at least twenty of the most public places in said district
7 fifteen days before the time of the first hearing.

8 (iii) Following such public hearings, a proposition for approval of
9 such resolution and the boundaries of proposed school election wards by
10 a majority of the qualified voters of such district shall be submitted
11 at the next succeeding annual meeting and election. The district clerk
12 shall give notice of such proposition by publishing notice prior to the
13 election, in the same manner and publication as the public hearings, set
14 forth in this section, specifying the time when and place or places
15 where such election will be held, the hours during which the polls will
16 remain open for the purpose of receiving ballots, and setting forth in
17 full the language of the proposition to be approved at such election. In
18 any event, there shall be at least one polling location for every
19 fifteen thousand eligible voters in the district and the hours of the
20 election shall commence no later than six o'clock in the morning and
21 shall end no earlier than nine o'clock in the evening.

22 (iv) At least fifteen days prior to conducting public hearings, the
23 board of education shall define and publish, by resolution, boundaries
24 of each of the proposed school election wards. Should such map be
25 altered as a result of the public hearings, the amended map shall be
26 published pursuant to this paragraph no later than fifteen days before
27 the election. Such wards shall be contiguous and each ward shall contain
28 as nearly as possible the same number of inhabitants. Each ward shall
29 also conform as closely as possible with the attendance zone of the
30 school district, conform as closely as possible with geographic and
31 other physical boundaries, and retain contiguous communities of inter-
32 est.

33 (v) A map of each ward and the boundaries thereof shall be created
34 with the original filed with the district clerk within ten days of the
35 resolution and copies thereof filed in the board of elections of the
36 county. Upon each issuance of a federal decennial census, the board of
37 education shall either: (A) make a written finding that, upon examina-
38 tion of the decennial census, the current school election wards contain
39 nearly as possible the same number of inhabitants and that no discrimi-
40 nation or disenfranchisement would result if the wards remained as
41 established; or (B) the school election wards shall be redefined by
42 resolution of the board of education, after a public hearing thereon,
43 and approval by the qualified voters of the school district. If the
44 qualified voters of the school district shall not approve of the resol-
45 ution, the board of education shall submit a second resolution for
46 approval by the qualified voters of the school district, after a public
47 hearing thereon, within ninety days. If the qualified voters of the
48 school district shall not approve of such resolution for a second time,
49 the board of education shall continue the membership and terms of the
50 current board until the next annual meeting and election at which time
51 the terms of all current trustees shall terminate. At the next annual
52 meeting and election, trustees shall be elected by a vote of the quali-
53 fied voters of the school district pursuant to article forty-three of
54 this title.

55 (vi) After a school election ward system shall have been established,
56 the term of every existing trustee shall terminate on the thirtieth day

1 of June next succeeding the first annual meeting and election following
2 voter approval of the referendum, at which time the terms for each
3 electd school ward trustee shall commence.

4 c. The term of office of each trustee from a school election ward
5 shall be three, four, or five years, to be determined at the discretion
6 of the board of education by resolution prior to the referendum;
7 provided however that the resolution shall also designate that in the
8 first annual meeting and election after the adoption of a school
9 election ward system, the initial terms shall be divided into terms of
10 three, four, or five years so that as nearly as possible an equal number
11 of trustees shall be elected each year. In each election cycle thereaft-
12 er, the terms of office shall be uniform. In each school election ward,
13 the candidate receiving a plurality of votes in each school election
14 ward shall be declared elected to that position.

15 d. Whenever a vacancy shall occur or exist in the office of a ward
16 trustee of a board of education, such vacancy shall be filled pursuant
17 to this article and part one of article forty-three of this title.

18 e. Except as provided in this subdivision, all provisions of this
19 article, article forty-one, and article forty-three of this title or of
20 any other general law relating to or affecting the election of trustees
21 in a union free school district shall apply to school election wards
22 organized pursuant to this subdivision and to the election of trustees
23 by the qualified voters of a school district as established pursuant to
24 paragraph f and subparagraph (iv) of paragraph b of this subdivision.

25 f. A board of education of a union free school district which has
26 established school election wards pursuant to this subdivision may, by
27 resolution and subject to a mandatory referendum, abolish the school
28 election ward system and return to election of trustees by a vote of the
29 qualified voters of the school district. Adoption, assessment, public
30 hearing and notice, and voting requirements of such resolution and
31 referendum shall comply with the provisions of subparagraphs (i), (ii),
32 and (iii) of paragraph b of this subdivision.

33 g. For the purpose of this subdivision, "contiguous community of
34 interest" means a contiguous population which shares common social and
35 economic interests that should be included within a single district for
36 purposes of its effective and fair representation.

37 § 2. Section 1804 of the education law is amended by adding a new
38 subdivision 13 to read as follows:

39 13. a. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a
40 board of education of a central school district contained entirely or
41 partially within Rockland county may, by resolution and subject to a
42 mandatory referendum, establish school election wards for purposes of
43 electing individual school board members. There shall be five, seven or
44 nine school election wards within a school district. One member shall be
45 chosen from each ward by the qualified voters therein. Within such
46 resolution, a board of education may require that a member elected to
47 represent a ward shall be a resident of such ward. Such resolution shall
48 also provide for the signature requirements for nominating petitions
49 consistent with the applicable provisions of this chapter.

50 b. (i) A resolution by the board of education, which shall be passed
51 no less than one hundred eighty days prior to a related referendum being
52 placed before the qualified voters of the school district during the
53 annual meeting and election, shall include an assessment and finding,
54 which shall take into account any historic disenfranchisement or
55 discrimination against any group of individuals within the school
56 district based upon race, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic

1 status, or sexual orientation, including that no disenfranchisement or
2 discrimination would result from the adoption of the proposed resol-
3 ution. The board of education shall conduct no fewer than three public
4 hearings on such resolution.

5 (ii) Such public hearings shall be conducted not less than thirty nor
6 more than ninety days prior to a vote on the resolution by a majority of
7 the qualified voters of the district. The public hearings shall be held
8 at a school district building or other appropriate building, each within
9 a different proposed school election ward. If there is no school
10 district building or other appropriate building within three separate
11 proposed school election wards, a meeting shall be held at the school
12 building or other appropriate building closest in proximity to the
13 proposed school election ward or wards containing no school district
14 buildings or other appropriate buildings. The district clerk shall give
15 notice of the public hearing by publishing a notice five times within
16 fifteen days preceding the hearings, on the district's website and in
17 two newspapers if there shall be two, or in one newspaper if there shall
18 be but one, having general circulation within such district. But if no
19 newspaper shall then have general circulation therein, said notice shall
20 be posted in at least twenty of the most public places in said district
21 fifteen days before the time of the first hearing.

22 (iii) Following such public hearings, a proposition for approval of
23 such resolution and the boundaries of proposed school election wards by
24 a majority of the qualified voters of such district shall be submitted
25 at the next succeeding annual meeting and election. The district clerk
26 shall give notice of such proposition by publishing notice prior to the
27 election, in the same manner and publication as the public hearing, set
28 forth in this section, specifying the time when and place or places
29 where such election will be held, the hours during which the polls will
30 remain open for the purpose of receiving ballots, and setting forth in
31 full the language of the proposition to be approved at such election. In
32 any event, there shall be at least one polling location for every
33 fifteen thousand eligible voters in the district and the hours of the
34 election shall commence no later than six o'clock in the morning and
35 shall end no earlier than nine o'clock in the evening.

36 (iv) At least fifteen days prior to conducting public hearings, the
37 board of education shall define and publish, by resolution, boundaries
38 of each of the school election wards. Should such map be altered as a
39 result of the public hearings, the amended map shall be published pursu-
40 ant to this paragraph no later than fifteen days before the election.
41 Such wards shall be contiguous and each ward shall contain as nearly as
42 possible the same number of inhabitants. Each ward shall also conform as
43 closely as possible with the attendance zone of the school district,
44 conform as closely as possible with geographic and other physical bound-
45 aries, and retain contiguous communities of interest.

46 (v) A map of each ward and the boundaries thereof shall be created
47 with the original filed with the district clerk within ten days of the
48 resolution and copies thereof filed in the board of elections of the
49 county. Upon each issuance of a federal decennial census, the board of
50 education shall either: (A) make a written finding that, upon examina-
51 tion of the decennial census, the current school election wards contain
52 nearly as possible the same number of inhabitants and that no discrimi-
53 nation or disenfranchisement would result if the wards remained as
54 established; or (B) the school election wards shall be redefined by
55 resolution of the board of education, after a public hearing thereon,
56 and approval by the qualified voters of the school district. If the

1 qualified voters of the school district shall not approve of the resolu-
2 tion, the board of education shall submit a second resolution for
3 approval by the qualified voters of the school district, after a public
4 hearing thereon, within ninety days. If the qualified voters of the
5 school district shall not approve of such resolution for a second time,
6 the board of education shall continue the membership and terms of the
7 current board until the next annual meeting and election at which time
8 the terms of all current members shall terminate. At the next annual
9 meeting and election, members shall be elected by a vote of the quali-
10 fied voters of the school district pursuant to article forty-three of
11 this title.

12 (vi) After a school election ward system shall have been established,
13 the term of every existing member shall terminate on the thirtieth day
14 of June next succeeding the first annual meeting and election following
15 voter approval of the referendum, at which time the terms for each
16 elected school ward member shall commence.

17 c. The term of office of each school board member from a school
18 election ward shall be three, four, or five years, to be determined at
19 the discretion of the board of education by resolution prior to the
20 referendum; provided however that the resolution shall also designate
21 that in the first annual meeting and election after the adoption of a
22 school election ward system, the initial terms shall be divided into
23 terms of three, four, or five years so that as nearly as possible an
24 equal number of trustees shall be elected each year. In each election
25 cycle thereafter, the terms of office shall be uniform. In each election
26 ward, the candidate receiving a plurality of votes in each election ward
27 shall be declared elected to that position.

28 d. Whenever a vacancy shall occur or exist in the office of a member
29 of a board of education, such vacancy shall be filled pursuant to this
30 article and part one of article forty-three of this title.

31 e. Except as provided in this subdivision, all provisions of this
32 article, article forty-one, and article forty-three of this title or of
33 any other general law relating to or affecting the election of school
34 board members in a central school district shall apply to school
35 election wards organized pursuant to this subdivision and to the
36 election of members by the qualified voters of a school district as
37 established pursuant to paragraph f and subparagraph (iv) of paragraph b
38 of this subdivision.

39 f. A board of education of a central school district which has estab-
40 lished school election wards pursuant to this subdivision may, by resolu-
41 tion and subject to a mandatory referendum, abolish the school election
42 ward system and return to election of trustees by a vote of the quali-
43 fied voters of the school district. Adoption, assessment, public hearing
44 and notice, and voting requirements of such resolution and referendum
45 shall comply with the provisions of subparagraphs (i), (ii), and (iii)
46 of paragraph b of this subdivision.

47 g. For the purpose of this subdivision, "contiguous community of
48 interest" means a contiguous population which shares common social and
49 economic interests that should be included within a single district for
50 purposes of its effective and fair representation.

51 § 3. This act shall take effect immediately.