

## What is the LWV position on an appointed v elected Board of Education?

The League of Women Voters of the Montclair Area is in favor of an Appointed Board of Education (BOE) as the best avenue to continue the improvement in educational outcomes for all the children in Montclair. This would be improved by the formation by the Council of an advisory committee of 8 - 10 community members to identify and nominate BOE candidates for appointment by the mayor. The advisory committee would seek nominees who reflect the diversity and competencies needed for an effective school board, e.g., finance, parents/caregivers, educators, lawyers, construction and from all parts of Montclair. One of the many benefits of this committee, would be to provide greater transparency in the process of appointing BOE candidates. We recommend the formation of such a committee.

You might wonder why an organization which supports voting rights, born out of the suffragist movement, would be in favor of an appointed BOE. Here are some reasons:

1. Boards can be effective whether they are elected or appointed, but we believe appointed is what's best for our town, if we have an advisory committee. According to research, an appointed BOE offers a greater chance for a strong and effective school board that will narrow or eliminate the achievement/opportunity gap. (Please refer to [www.lwvmontclairarea.org](http://www.lwvmontclairarea.org) for more information.)
2. An advisory committee will ensure that the diversity of the town and people with different skills (education, finance, law, construction, etc.) are represented on the BOE. It will also ensure that the individuals share a common vision for the schools and have the ability to work well together.
3. In a November election, people vote for candidates at the top of the ballot, but many do not go to the bottom of the ballot where school board candidates are listed.
4. To run for an elected board, you only need 10 signatures on a petition. You may have single issue candidates whose concern may be slashing the budget, busing, charter schools, grouping, etc. With typical voter turnout at less than 10%, a single-issue candidate could win with very few votes.
5. An elected board runs the risk of BOE candidates being beholden to campaign contributions. In the May 2020 municipal election, the candidates spent between \$8,000 to over \$100,000 each to win a seat on the Council. Large amounts of money may come from outside sources to support a candidate. Money should not be the reason someone serves on the BOE.
6. Elected members often get locked into an issue during a campaign and may serve only their constituency without taking into account the broader school community.
7. An elected BOE may lose its non-partisan nature and become overtly political. With school board elections held every year in November, it may serve a BOE candidate from a financial, operational or name recognition stance to associate with the well-known and well-financed candidates at the top of the ticket. The election could become even more political with campaign money coming from outside sources.
8. The achievement/opportunity gap is a nationwide issue. Montclair made a significant step in addressing it with the Achievement Gap Task force in 2015. Montclair was a leader in integrating its schools and initiating many programs to help minority students reach higher goals. It continues to focus intensely on this issue today. Having an advisory committee to focus on nominating BOE candidates with this shared vision can return our town as an innovator in this area again.
9. An appointed BOE provides for a greater field of potential candidates who would agree to serve on the board if asked. Being on the BOE is an unpaid, volunteer position. Our survey of past board members showed that the majority would not have run for elected office because of the cost of running and the time it takes for campaigning and raising funds. As an illustration, many nearby townships have

few candidates running for the open BOE positions this November and as a result there is effectively no competition for these seats.

10. With an appointed BOE, the budget for capital expenditures is submitted by the Board of School Estimate to the Council for approval. Thus, the Council has the final decision. This is in contrast with individual voters who may want to deny capital school funding to keep their taxes down. With an elected board, the bond referendum goes to a public vote where 31% of the bond referendums were voted down in 2020. An appointed BOE can protect the school district from voters who may not have children in the schools and want to protect their individual tax bills from increasing.

11. There is no guarantee that elected school boards lead to lower budgets or better education of students.

12. There is no guarantee that an elected board would have handled COVID problems better. Elected and appointed school boards throughout the country are facing well-publicized public anger over COVID-related decisions.

13. The appointed board in Montclair has had successes. For example: there is active work being done towards narrowing the achievement/opportunity gap; additional busing to the South End; appointing a racially diverse board; two student representatives participate in BOE meetings; a new position of Equity Superintendent; instituted restorative justice, among other things.

14. There is no guarantee that an elected school board would have handled the superintendent turnover better. When seeking a new superintendent, recommendations of a national search committee are relied upon to provide the best candidates for Montclair. An interim superintendent may be hired until a better one is available. The interim superintendent can only serve 2 years. While there has been significant turnover of superintendents, the BOE has now hired a superintendent who is committed to the district, listens to parents, and worked tirelessly to try to open our schools. The BOE waited until they found the best one for Montclair and supports Dr. Ponds and his initiatives.

Whether the township votes for an appointed or elected school board, the League is dedicated to increasing civic engagement and educating voters. The missions of the League and Vote Montclair align on these goals and we both want the best education for the children of Montclair.