

CONSOLIDATED ELECTIONS: Questions and Answers

(The majority of the information below has been taken from a compilation of materials provided by the Michigan Department of State, dated January 25, 2005)

What is “Consolidated Elections”?

“Consolidated Elections” is a term used to describe a series of nine-bill package signed into law on January 8, 2004. The nine-bill package was augmented by fifteen “trailer bills” which were signed into law on July 23, 2004. The law went into effect on January 1, 2005. Major changes included the following:

- The conduct of all federal, state, county, city, township, village and school elections will be restricted to four dates each year as follows:
 - Fourth Tuesday in February
 - First Tuesday after the first Monday in May, August & November

EXCEPTIONS:

- Cities that currently conduct a September Primary may continue to do so;
- Villages that wish to fill their elective offices in September in odd-numbered years;
- Special Election called under the State Constitution by the Governor and the State Legislature; and
- School Districts, Intermediate School Districts and Community College Districts that wish to present a millage proposal, bond proposal or a proposal to borrow funds on a date other than one of the four “fixed” election dates. (A petition signed by the district’s voters must be filed to request the conduct of such an election on a date other than the four “fixed” election dates.)
- All local school district elections, intermediate school district elections and community college district elections will be administered by Michigan’s county, city and township clerks. School board secretaries and school district personnel will no longer be burdened with a role in administering school elections.
- All regular village elections must be conducted as nonpartisan elections on the even-year November general election date or on the first Tuesday after the second Monday in September in odd-numbered years. Village primaries are abolished.

Why were the changes necessary?

Voter convenience and participation are at the heart of these changes. Members of the public were unhappy with the sheer frequency of elections and the resulting confusion of having different polling places for different types of elections. Their desire was to know in advance when elections would be held in Michigan. Establishing four election dates allows clerks and the media to better publicize elections, which will help drive participation.

The Legislature also provided schools with the opportunity to hold their elections in conjunction with other municipalities in an effort to gain efficiencies and cost savings. In addition, the 2000 presidential election raised new levels of public awareness over the mechanics of the election process. This, in turn, has accelerated the public demand for improvements in the election system and driven heightened performance expectations for those who administer the system.

In response to these new demands and expectations, a broad initiative has been launched to streamline and modernize Michigan’s elections system, promote uniformity in the administration of the system and ensure that all voters throughout the state enjoy the same protections and safeguards for all elections. “Consolidated Elections” moves Michigan closer to the realization of these goals by standardizing when elections can be held and placing the administration of all elections conducted in the state in the hands of those most capable of supervising the elections process—Michigan’s county, city and township clerks.

How will voters be affected by the changes?

“Consolidated Elections” holds a number of significant benefits and advantages for Michigan’s voters:

- As all elections will now be held on standardized dates each year, it will be easy for voters to anticipate when elections will be conducted. “Surprise” special elections held on irregular dates have been eliminated.
- Most voters will be able to vote in the same polling place regardless of the type of election being conducted. The need for separate school election precincts and polling places has been greatly reduced.
- Now that all of Michigan’s elections will be administered by Michigan’s county, city and township clerks, information on upcoming elections will be easier to access. This will reduce voter confusion.
- With fewer officials responsible for conducting elections, voters will enjoy greater uniformity in the procedures employed to administer the elections. These include the procedures associated with the distribution of absentee ballot applications, the issuance of absentee ballots and the management of the polls.

How are the costs associated with the conduct of school elections handled?

Local school district, intermediate school districts and community college districts are required to reimburse any expenses incurred by a county, city or township when conducting a regular or special election on behalf of the district. If a regular or special school election is held in conjunction with another election conducted by the county or local jurisdictions involved, the local school district, intermediate school district or community college district is responsible for any added costs attributable to the conduct of the district’s regular or special election. If a regular or special school election is not held in conjunction with another election conducted by the county or local jurisdictions involved, the district is responsible for 100% of the costs.

Why are a number of school districts stating that the “Consolidated Elections” law will increase their election related expenses?

The legislation was crafted to extend school districts the opportunity to greatly reduce – and in some cases fully eliminate - their election-related costs. The decision to take advantage of this opportunity was left with the school boards throughout the state as the law permitted each school district to choose when it wishes to conduct its elections.

Under the election date choices extended under the legislation, school districts could conduct their regular elections on the odd-year November election date; the odd-year May election date; annually on the May election date; or annually on the November election date.

A school district could have reduced its election-related expenses by 50% simply by choosing to conduct biennial elections as opposed to annual elections. In instances where a school district contains a city that elects its officers on the odd-year November election date, the school district could have realized a much greater savings by holding its elections on the same date.

With this knowledge, school districts selected their regular election schedule. Those voicing concerns about election-related expenses should have given greater consideration to the opportunities the law offers for reducing these expenses.

How did school districts choose their election schedule?

The law stipulates that a school board had to hold at least one public hearing to consider the election date options. Boards had four months to decide (September through December 2004). The decision had to be finalized through adoption of a resolution no later than December 31, 2004.

The four-month time frame extended school boards an ample amount of time to consider all of the available date options and weigh the cost factors involved.

Are there any opportunities for school districts to act now to reduce their election related costs?

Yes. A local school district, intermediate school district or community college district that adopted a resolution to elect its board members at the odd-year May election; annually on the May election date; or annually on the November election date may choose to elect its board positions at the odd-year November general election through the adoption of a second resolution. The resolution may be adopted anytime.

What election dates were selected by the Clinton County School Districts?

Bath Community School District	May Annual
DeWitt Public School District	May Annual
Fowler Public School District	May Annual
Ovid-Elsie Area School District	May Annual
Pewamo-Westphalia Community School District	May Annual
St. Johns Public School District	May Annual

What election dates were selected by other School District, which fall within the Clinton County Boundaries?

Carson-City Crystal School District	May Annual
East Lansing School District	May Annual
Fulton Public School District	May Annual
Grand Ledge Public School District	May Annual
Haslett Public School District	May Annual
Lansing School District	November Odd-Year
Laingsburg School District	May Annual
Portland Public School District	May Annual
Waverly Community School District	May Annual

What about Community College Districts?

- Lansing Community College has selected the November odd-year election date, however, there is a section of law that requires a Community College to hold their election at the same time as the majority of its' constituent school districts, therefore, until the law is changed, Lansing Community College will hold their elections in May at the same time as the majority of their constituent school districts.
- Montcalm Community College has selected the May odd-year election date, except in the case of a vacancy the position would be filled on the even-year May election date.