

## Survey of Montclair Residents Shows Strong Support for Elected Board of Education, “Second Round” to Help Set Timing, BOE Model for Referendum

(August 14, 2020) A survey of Montclair residents indicates strong support for having the township moving from an appointed to an elected Board of Education, along with backing for an inventive, ward-based model of electing BOE members.

In the online poll by new citizen group Vote Montclair, more than three out of four respondents (77%) said they favored an elected BOE, with 13% saying they were unsure, and 9% saying they were in favor of retaining an appointed board.

The Township of Montclair is currently one of only 11 out of 565 municipalities in New Jersey where members of the local Board of Education are appointed by the mayor rather than elected by popular vote.

### **BOE Models at Issue**

The survey asked respondents to identify which type of elected BOE model they would favor. Respondents were asked to choose between a nine-member board with three groups of members elected “at large” each year — the standard in New Jersey — and a novel model in which two members would be elected from each of Montclair’s four wards, with a BOE president elected at-large. Among those who favored an elected board, 80% favored the ward-based model, while among those who favored retaining the appointed model 72% favored the ward-based approach.

Meanwhile, respondents suggested alternate models, notably a nine-member board with one member elected from each ward and five elected at-large.

As a result, Vote Montclair is holding a second, “runoff” survey aimed at further gauging voter support for different BOE models, as well as the timing of any drive to place the matter on the ballot. The new survey and other related material can be found at: <http://www.votemontclair.org/boe>

Currently, no New Jersey municipality has ward or district-based models for electing members of public school boards, and state law appears to prohibit mixing appointed and elected seats on local boards of elections, and mandate annual elections. There have been several unsuccessful referenda in recent decades to have Montclair convert from an appointed “Type 1” BOE model to an elected “Type 2” model, most recently in 2009. State law mandates that such votes can only be held once every five years.

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate the performance of Montclair’s public schools compared to their potential on a five-point scale, resulting in an average of 2.9 out of 5.0. Just over 75% of respondents said they have one or more children currently enrolled in the Montclair Public Schools, and an additional 16% had one or more children who previously attended.

### **Parallel Support for November Elections**

Meanwhile, a large majority favored having all elections for Township offices in November rather than May, to help raise what traditionally has been notably low voter turnout and engagement.

As with the appointed Board of Education, Montclair is among just a handful of New Jersey localities where quadrennial municipal elections are held “off-cycle” in May. Average turnout in the last three municipal elections in Montclair was just below 25%.

Support for moving Montclair's quadrennial municipal elections from May until November was strong among both supporters (89%) and opponents (69%) of converting to an elected BOE model.

The more than 330 respondents to the survey corresponds to roughly eight respondents for every 1,000 residents of Montclair. By comparison, the most recent Monmouth University presidential preference survey of New Jersey voters, rated A+ by the website FiveThirtyEight, surveyed 635 registered voters, corresponding to just 0.071 respondents per 1,000 New Jersey residents.

A copy of the Google form survey results follows this release.

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### **About Vote Montclair**

Vote Montclair is a non-partisan, local grassroots movement working to increase voter participation and engagement in the Township. It can be found online at

[www.votemontclair.org](http://www.votemontclair.org).

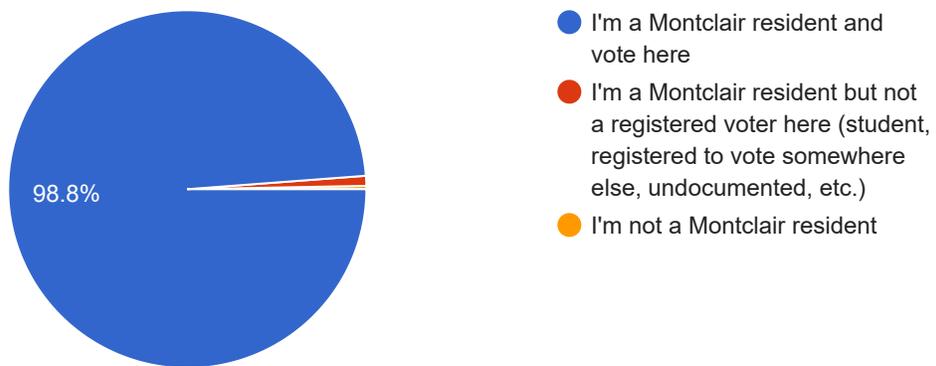
# Survey on introducing an elected Board of Education in Montclair

334 responses

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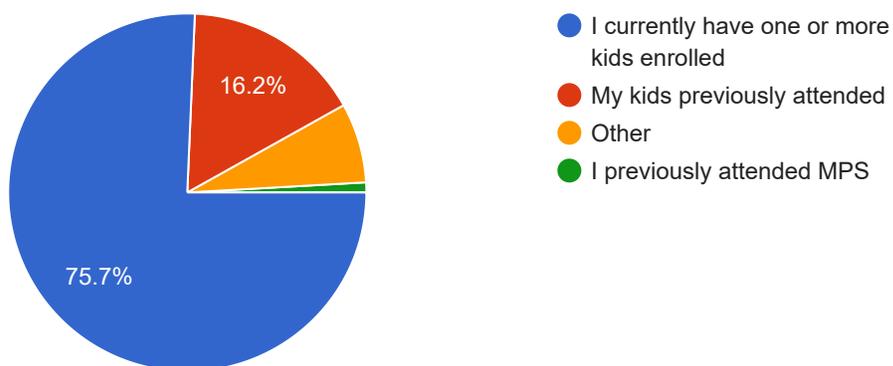
## Are you a Montclair voter or resident?

334 responses



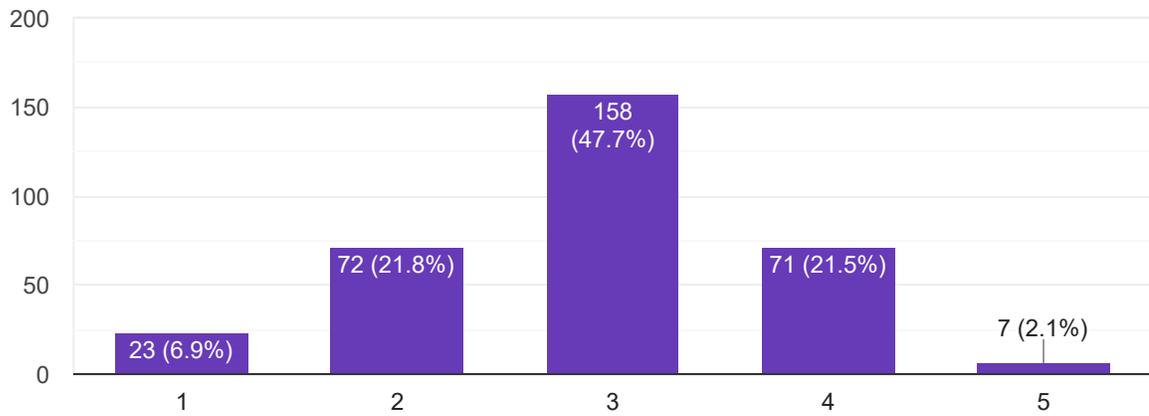
## Which best describes your relationship to Montclair Public Schools?

333 responses



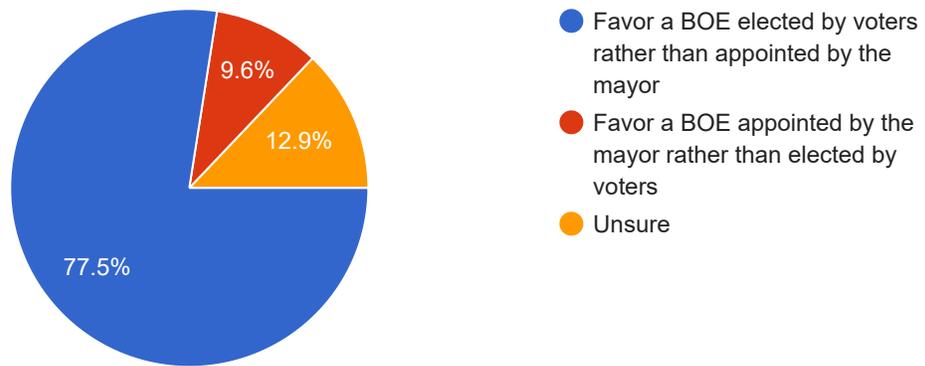
### How would you rate the performance of Montclair's public schools, compared to their potential?

331 responses



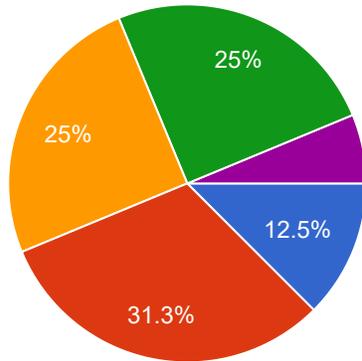
### How would you describe your current position on having members of the BOE elected rather than appointed by the mayor?

333 responses



### Which would you say is the biggest reason you favor an appointed Board of Education rather than one that is elected?

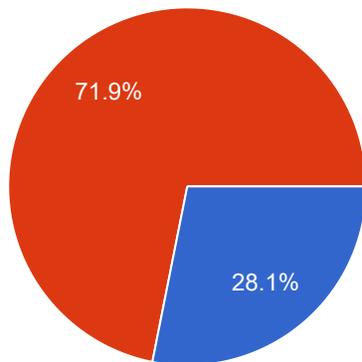
32 responses



- An appointed BOE is more likely than an elected board to...
- An appointed board is better for keeping the environment arou...
- An appointed board reduces the influence of interests from out...
- An appointed board is better for ensuring diversity and inclusi...
- I don't believe an elected board would be any better or worse...

### If Montclair were to switch to an elected BOE, which model do you think would best suit the township?

32 responses

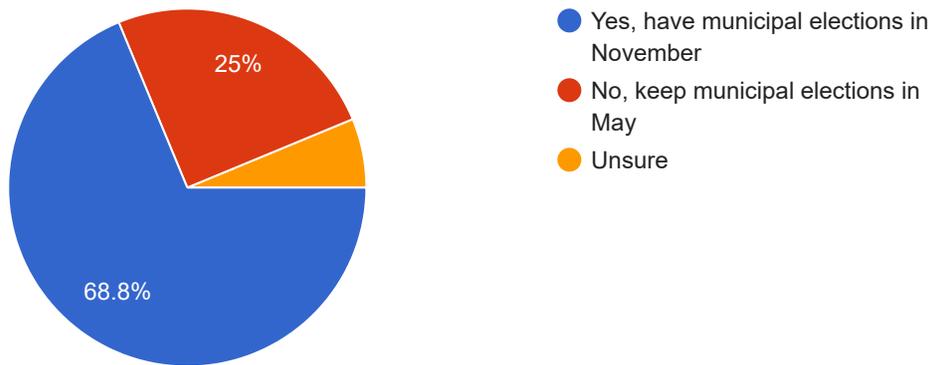


- A nine-member board with all members elected "at large"
- A nine-member board with two members elected from each ward, and a board president elected at-large



There is a movement in Montclair to join the 97% of other New Jersey municipalities that hold their local elections in November, to align with state and federal elections and increase voter turnout and engagement, and save the township the cost of holding a separate election. Do you agree that Montclair should hold its local elections in November?

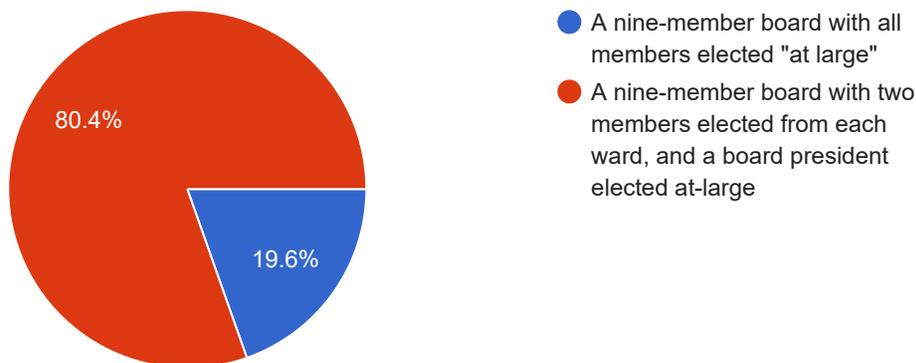
32 responses



### Selecting an elected BOE model

If Montclair were to switch to an elected BOE, which of these models do you think would best suit the township?

301 responses



If you have suggestions for an alternative or refinements to the models listed above, what are they?

31 responses

Only wanted to add that the model of electing per ward/district was instituted in Framingham MA 3 or so years ago. I recognize that it is a different state but to my knowledge there was no legal challenge. Might be worth looking into how it has or has not worked for them. Full disclosure that my experience with an elected board in Framingham is why I am on the fence but I feel it improved when it went to the members per district so I would want that here too.

Four elected members representing each of the four wards, an elected at-large president, and four members appointed by the full Council.

Five at large and plus one from each ward.

1 per ward. The rest at large

I'm glad you mentioned elected AND appointed is not allowed, because that would have been my suggestion, as I believe there are pros and cons for both models. I also like that it would be by ward, however, I live in the third ward, which covers some of the south end (where I live) and also the estate section. So I'm not sure it would ensure a diversity in the election?

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