



NEWS RELEASE

Respond to:
P.O. Box 185
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0185

(609) 292-8700 or Toll Free Within NJ 1-888-313-ELEC (3532)

CONTACT: JOSEPH W. DONOHUE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Spending on local school elections more than doubled during the past decade even as fundraising for other types of elections lagged or even declined, according to a new analysis by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.

Spending on local school campaigns during the past decade totaled \$9.6 million - up 125 percent from the \$4.3 million spent during the 1990s, according to White Paper Number 21, School Elections Campaign Financing: An Update.

On average, nearly \$1 million was spent per year from 2000 through 2009. This compares to an average of \$427,123 from 1990 through 1999.

By comparison, spending was up just 10 percent for state Assembly candidates during the decade and down more than 70 percent for both state parties during the same period.

“While overall spending on school elections remains relatively small compared to other types of campaigns, the rate of growth remained steady during the last decade,” said Joe Donohue, ELEC’s Deputy Director and author of the study.

“Clearly, plenty is at stake in local school districts, particularly in a period of budget shortfalls and demands for reform. It shouldn’t be too surprising that these elections are drawing increased interest,” said Donohue.

Even though spending was up compared to the earlier decade, the pace did slow slightly from the 159 percent increase in the 1990s.

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During the past two decades, the least overall spending took place in 1992- just \$175,912. The most occurred in 2009, when \$1,365,683 was pumped into local school elections.

One reason spending on local school elections has continued relatively unabated may be because few school districts have adopted pay-to-play laws, which have greatly reduced the amount of funds being generated from public contractors for other types of campaigns. **The contractor loophole appears to have been closed by recently adopted Department of Education regulations forbidding school board members from awarding contracts to firms that made recent political donations**

Another factor is a major increase in local school election spending by the New Jersey Education Association. The school employees union spent \$3.7 million during the decade through its NJEA School Elections Committee. That is more than triple the estimated \$1.1 million spent by the union on local school elections during the 1990s.

It is also about 36 percent of the \$10.2 million total spent on school elections between 2000 and 2010. Numbers for 2010 are preliminary because the union's local political committee has not yet submitted its final report.

The NJEA School Elections Committee is separate from the NJEA PAC, which contributes primarily to state elections.

A comparison of spending from both decades found that direct mail remains, by far, the largest outlay during school elections, followed by outdoor communications and election-day activities.

The latest ELEC research report is an update to White Paper Number 15, School Board Campaign Financing. Both are available by contacting ELEC at 609-292-8700, or on its website at <http://www.elec.state.nj.us/aboutelec/whitepapers.htm>.

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