

Date of Hearing & Bill Number: **March 18, 2026, HF4399**

To: **Members of the Education Policy Committee**

From: **Cathy Nathan, Chair of the Board of Rochester Public Schools**

Affiliation (ex. student, parent, advocacy organization): **Rochester Public Schools, ISD 535**

City of Residence: **Rochester**

See attached Resolution of the Board of Independent School District 535, which was adopted unanimously by the Board on March 3, 2026.

8. 1. Support of Repealing the Special Law Establishing the "Alley System" for School Board Elections in ISD #535

Background Information

Rochester Public Schools currently operates under a unique "alley system" established by Laws 1974, chapter 235, amending Laws 1969, chapter 193, section 3. This "alley system" requires candidates for at-large school board "positions" to file for a specific "position" number (1-7). The Minnesota Legislature would have to pass a bill to change the law to allow RPS to move from our current "alley system" to an alternative system of election for school board members.

Minnesota school districts use one of four systems to elect school board members:

- At-large standard. Approximately 95% of Minnesota's 337 school districts elect their members at-large, including St. Paul Public Schools. All candidates compete against all other candidates. There is a primary only if there are more than twice as many candidates as seats. A designated number of board members are elected in one election cycle, and a designated number of board members are elected in another election cycle.
- Geographic district seats (candidates run in the district where they live) or a combination of geographic district and at-large seats. 16 of Minnesota's school districts use geographic districts or a combination of district and at-large seats, including Minneapolis and Duluth.
- At-large by seat ("alley") system. An alley system allows candidates to challenge a single board member. Candidates select a seat but run at-large. Seats have no relationship to where the candidate lives. This system has been criticized for being susceptible to strategic gamesmanship, allowing candidates to withdraw and refile for different seats late in the filing period to effectively "select" their opponents, a practice that undermines the spirit of transparent and fair democratic elections. Only two school districts in Minnesota use this system – Rochester and Alexandria.

If the Minnesota Legislature were to change the law and allow RPS to discontinue use of the "alley system" and move to an "at-large standard" system, RPS School Board elections would have the following components:

- Elections would continue to be held during even numbered years.
- One election cycle would elect four school board members and the following cycle would elect three school board members.
- All candidates would appear on one list on the ballot and would not be designated by "Position" 1-7.
- Because the School Board took action on March 3, 2026 to eliminate the primary, all candidates who file for the office of school board member would progress to the general election.
- The ballot would direct voters to "Vote for 4" or "Vote for 3", depending on the election cycle.
- The candidate receiving the most votes in the general election would be the winning

candidate.

The number of candidates who filed for each position in the most recent School Board elections can be useful to give a sense of what elections could look like.

Election Year; Number of Seats Up for Election	RPS Candidate History in Previous Elections ("At-Large By Seat/Alley" System)	Number of Candidates on an "At-Large Standard" Ballot
2024 3 seats	Two candidates each for positions 1, 3 and 7.	No primary. Six candidates (general election)
2022 4 seats	Three candidates each for positions 2, 5 and 6 and two candidates for position 4.	Eleven candidates (primary) Eight candidates (general election)
2020 3 seats	Two candidates each for positions 1, 3 and 7.	No primary. Six candidates (general election)
2018 4 seats	Three candidates each for positions 2 and 6, and two candidates each for positions 4 and 5.	Ten candidates (primary) Eight candidates (general election)
2016 3 seats	Three candidates for position 3, and two candidates each for positions 1 and 7.	Seven candidates (primary) Six candidates (general election)
2014 4 seats	Four candidates for position 5, two candidates for position 6, and positions 2 and 4 were unopposed.	No primary. Eight candidates (general election)

With respect to the 2026 school board elections, the Minnesota Legislature would have until the end of the 2026 legislative session to take action, as deadlines for official notices and Board action to call a general election do not have to be completed until June 30 or later, and the filing period for candidates for the general election begins July 14.

Resolution

It is recommended that the Rochester School Board approve a resolution asking the Minnesota State Legislature to pass a law to allow Rochester Public Schools to move from our current "alley system" to an alternative system of election for school board members.

WHEREAS, the Board finds that the current at-large by seat “alley” system creates unnecessary voter confusion, as all board members represent the same constituents and hold identical responsibilities, yet appear on the ballot as distinct and separate contests; and

WHEREAS, the majority of districts in Minnesota utilize a traditional at-large standard system where voters select multiple candidates from a single pool, a format that is more intuitive and better reflects the collective nature of school board governance; and

WHEREAS, the repeal of this special law would return Rochester Public Schools to the general statutory framework governing school district elections in Minnesota, ensuring consistency and clarity for the electorate.

BE IT RESOLVED by the School Board of Independent School District No. 535 that the Board formally requests that the Minnesota State Legislature repeal its special laws establishing the numbered "alley system" specifically for ISD #535; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that upon repeal by the Minnesota State Legislature, the Board expresses its intent to conduct future elections under the general laws of the State of Minnesota, using an at-large standard system; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board supports that the Minnesota State Legislature set an effective date for this repeal of June 1, 2026, to allow the District sufficient time to meet deadlines for the 2026 General Election cycle; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if the Minnesota State Legislature takes action to repeal the alley system during this legislative session, but after the effective date requested, the District will implement the change in the election system beginning in elections held in 2027 or later; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if the Minnesota State Legislature does not take action in the 2026 legislative session to repeal the laws to abolish the alley system for ISD #535 elections, the Board will work with legislators to re-introduce the legislation in the 2027 legislative session; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board authorizes and charges its Legislative Committee to communicate the Board's support for repeal of the alley system as reflected in this resolution to Rochester's legislative delegation and to provide any testimony necessary to facilitate repeal of the alley system.

Supporting Links

[Minnesota Statute 205A](#)

[Minnesota Statute 645](#)

[Laws 1969, chapter 193, sections 2 and 3](#)

[Laws 1975, chapter 235](#)

[Laws 1980, chapter 371](#)

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