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No school board vote?

Incumbents want extra year while Assembly weighs reform

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The 1992 city school board elections could be canceled, if incumbents get their way.

The New York City School Boards Association — which represents 25 of the city's 32 school boards — is pushing the state Assembly to postpone the May 5 elections until May 1993.

Shelving the elections would allow the Assembly to look into a massive bill that seeks to change the way board members are elected, according to Dennis Coleman, president of the association.

Proposed election reforms are part of a 100-page bill forwarded by the Marchi Commission, a state committee headed by Sen. John J. Marchi, R-Ward Hill. Suggested changes include scrapping the current "proportional" counting in school board elections in favor of a "ward system" that would give geographic representation to the school boards.

Assembly Education Chairman Angelo Del Torro, D-Manhattan, introduced a bill to postpone elections in December. Marchi has yet to take a position on pushing back the school board elections.

In a memo sent to school board members, the association said a 1993 election would give the Legislature "the time necessary to deliberate, debate and enact the desired reforms."

Regardless of the School Board Association's hopes, candidates for school board seats citywide must pick up petitions tomorrow. The filing deadline for the petitions is Feb. 18.

"You can't cancel an election, not in the United States anyway," said Frank Sobrino, a spokesman for Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez. "The last group of board members were voted in for three-

year terms, not for four-year terms."

Fernandez is forging ahead with informational meetings for potential candidates.

"We have to move ahead. We can't afford a delay. The status of this bill isn't yet clear. We want the election to be held this May," Sobrino said.

The bill to delay elections will be taken up by committee sometime this week, according to Jocelyn Dax, Education Committee coordinator. The bill has the support of the city Board of Elections and Mayor David Dinkins, she said, adding that she believes the bill can become law within a month.

Michael Petrides, Staten Island representative to the city Board of Education and a member of the Marchi Commission, said postponing elections while the Legislature debates major reforms is sensible.

This year, the Staten Island Community School Board is not an official member of the city School Boards Association. The association failed to comply to the board's request of a summary detailing how each board's \$500 dues money was spent.

Still, some board members favor the proposal. Jerrv Cammarata, a board member, said putting the elections off a year would allow a "senior board to go out and do a national search for the school superintendent."

Board member Eleanor Conforti agreed, adding: "We're in the midst of appointing so many principals."

Lillian Popp, another board member, said the next board will probably be just as capable as this one is. "Superintendents have always been chosen by new boards. And having two years experience on the board doesn't necessarily make people experts."