

# Worry over parolees at polls

## Levittown schools cancel activities over voter policy

BY JOIE TYRRELL

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Levittown school officials canceled evening activities Thursday at 10 of the district's 11 school buildings, including eight that served as polling places, citing a state-driven change in elections policy that lets parolees come onto school grounds in the early evening to vote.

A notice on the school system's website said the events were canceled after the district

received "a number of inquiries from concerned parents" about a new state corrections regulation that allows paroled sex offenders to cast their ballots after 7 p.m. at schools.

The district canceled activities scheduled after 7 p.m. Thursday even in schools where there was no polling, with one exception — Levittown Memorial Education Center, a former high school building that hosts administrative offices and the Gerald R. Claps Career and Technical Center.

The notice told parents that Nassau County's Board of Elections regulates voting procedures as well as access to the district's buildings and that the district was required to follow

the regulations.

A call to Nassau election officials was not returned Thursday. Levittown district officials declined to comment further.

In April, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo signed an executive order to allow up to about 35,000 parolees, including sex offenders, to vote. The order authorized individual, conditional pardons that parolees could bring to their local election boards to re-register to vote.

New York had been one of 22 states where felons lost voting rights during their imprisonment and for a certain period afterward, according to a report in November by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Earlier this month, the state

Department of Corrections issued a "special condition" that a paroled sex offender can enter a school to vote but only if he or she receives written permission from his or her parole officer and the district's school superintendent before an election day. The parolee also must give information to their parole officer, before election day, of travel plans to and from a polling place at a school.

Sex offenders on parole also cannot enter schools to vote until 7 p.m. and cannot "remain or loiter" on school grounds after they have voted, the agency's rule said.

As of Thursday, about 29,000 voter pardons had been issued statewide to parolees, includ-

ing about 2,300 who were sex offenders, the corrections department said.

School districts cannot appeal being designated as a polling place. An action plan to enhance security created by the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association, released last month, asked for changes in election law that would let school districts appeal the designation — a right held by some other public buildings, such as firehouses.

"When school building[s] are used as polling locations, they are open to the public and schools are unable to track or control the access to their facilities," read the association's Blueprint for Action.

# NY: No fed funds for guns in schools

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND

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New York public schools are banned from using federal funds to purchase firearms or to train school staff in the use of such weapons, the state education commissioner announced Thursday.

Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, in a memo issued to all district superintendents and charter school leaders, also barred the spending of state funds for the same purposes or for storing weapons on campuses.

"There is no place in our schools for weapons, no matter the intentions," Elia declared in her directive issued to local officials on Wednesday and released publicly a day later. "We simply cannot afford to use federal education dollars that are intended for teaching and learning to pay for weapons that will compromise our schools and communities."

Last month, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced through aides that she was weighing the question of whether to allow states to draw on federal funds to buy guns. DeVos later backed off that position, saying the issue would be left to Congress, the states and localities.

The debate arose last month

after a small rural school district in Oklahoma, and the state of Texas, asked the department to clarify what the funds can be used for. In Texas, school employees can volunteer to carry weapons on campuses after undergoing training.

Such inquiries often revolve around the use of federal money distributed under the Title IV program, which deals with school safety and prevention of drug use.

DeVos' press secretary, Liz Hill, responded to Elia's directive, saying, "As the secretary has said all along, this is a state and local decision."

On Long Island, districts have taken a variety of approaches to upgrade security following mass school shootings this year in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas.

The Hauppauge and Miller Place systems have spent local funds to hire armed security guards — actions allowed under the commissioner's new guidelines. Meanwhile, dozens of other local districts have used state funds to purchase security equipment such as surveillance cameras, monitoring screens and automatic door locks, or to reinforce school entryways and windows against intruders.

"I think the state Education



State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, shown in 2016, issued the statewide order on Wednesday.

Department has the authority to decide how federal funds would be distributed," said David Flatley, superintendent of Carle Place schools and immediate past president of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents. "It's not preventing a local school district from deciding to arm their security guards. It's simply telling them that if they

want to do that, they'll not be allowed to use Title IV funds for that purpose."

Despite the emphasis on guns, locks and other hardware, many educators contend that schools' best defense is to address students' emotional problems and combat bullying and other behavioral troubles. New York State took a step this year in that direction by

mandating that mental-health instruction be included in school curricula.

"I do think that focusing on mental health is important," said Jay Worona, deputy executive director and general counsel for the New York State School Boards Association. The organization recently sponsored seminars on the subject.