

Orange mayor invites residents to apply for school board slots

By Halley Bondy
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The mayor of Orange has always appointed the members of the board of education. This year, however, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. wants to broaden his selection pool by inviting the public to apply for a trio of open board seats.

"We're trying to create a process that's different from arbitrarily picking an individual. That process may favor the politically connected," said Hawkins. "We are shifting gears by opening up to residents of Orange who feel that they would be a good candidate."

With the help of a selection committee he plans to create, Hawkins will review applications from residents to fill

the three board of education positions with three-year terms beginning May 16. From the pool of applicants, he will select people to replace outgoing board members Wynona Samuels, Sharon Davis and Walter Smith on the seven-member board.

Hawkins said board hopefuls must be Orange residents with high school diplomas. The selection committee will look for applicants who contribute a variety of skills and backgrounds to the board. It will accept applications until March 26,

"We're looking for balance and diversity. It can be someone who is highly educated in finance, or a parent," Hawkins said. "Just because someone

doesn't have a master's degree doesn't mean that they should not be on the board."

The unpaid board members help deliberate on the annual budget and operations within the 4,500-student district, one of the poorest performing in the state. Sitting board members reached yesterday deferred questions to superintendent Ronald Lee, who could not be reached for comment. Hawkins, who took office in 2008, appointed four of the current members without public input.

Town historian Karen Wells said yesterday she was encouraged by Hawkins' move to open the selection process.

"I think it's a good thing to open it

up to people who want to have a position on the board," Wells said. "But what I really think is that the board of education should be elected and make candidates put their qualifications out there."

Twenty N.J. school districts have boards appointed by mayors, the New Jersey School Boards Association said.

Applicants should send resumes and statements to Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, City Hall, 29 N. Day St., Orange, NJ 07050 or e-mail them to Hawkins' secretary at twhidbee@ci.orange.nj.us.

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