Adoption of a Trustee Area Election Plan for the ABC Unified School District

Dr. Mary Sieu, Superintendent
ABC Unified School District
California Voting Rights Act Forum
Cerritos Sheraton Hotel
March 2, 2015
In June 2011, the District received a letter from a law office claiming that the District’s at-large election system resulted in minority vote dilution and prevented minority voters from electing candidates of their choice. They demanded that the District change from at-large to trustee-area elections or face expensive and lengthy litigation.

In Sept. 2011, the Board hired an outside demographer to evaluate the Board Election system to assess its potential liability.
Why Move from At-Large to Trustee Area Elections?

- In Jan. 2012, the Board concluded that based on the demographer’s findings, the voting was not polarized along ethnic or racial lines.
- In April 2013, the Board was sued by plaintiffs and later joined by MALDEF for violating the California Voting Rights Act.
- In Nov. 2013, in order to avoid an expensive and lengthy lawsuit, the Board entered into a Settlement Agreement with the plaintiffs to transition to elections by trustee areas.
Creating Trustee Areas

- The Census 2010 population data was used in districting.
- New trustee areas had roughly equal in total population:
  - Law allows some leeway: less than 10% total deviation.
- ABC USD’s Census 2010 population was 105,922, and each trustee area contained one-seventh of this total (about 15,132 residents).
Traditional Districting Criteria

- Geography (e.g., municipal boundaries)
- “Communities of interest” may be:
  - Geographic communities (e.g., places/cities, attendance areas, historic downtown, etc.)
  - Socioeconomic groups (e.g., retirees, renters, farm workers, Federal Voting Rights Act protected groups, etc.)
Further Criteria Emphasized

- Respect boundaries of existing political subdivisions (e.g., cities, voting precincts, etc.)
- Respect existing census geography (e.g., Census blocks)
- Avoid head-to-head contests between incumbents
- Hired Demographer, Dr. Jeanne Gobalet to create draft trustee area maps
Further Consideration

The new system is to be *phased in*: current trustees must be allowed to serve out their terms of office after the change to the new election system.

Unfortunately, we were not able to preserve all the incumbents under the new Trustee Area Election Plan.

Depending on which plan was selected by the Board at least one trustee area would not elect a trustee until the District’s 2017 election.
Plan A

ABC Unified School District
Plan A
Plan B

ABC Unified School District
Plan B
Provided opportunities for public input on the Proposed Trustee Area Plans A, B, & C

- March 20 – Carmenita Middle School - Cerritos
- March 26 – Ross Middle School – Artesia
- March 28 – Fedde Middle School – Hawaiian Gardens
- March 28 – Fedde Middle School – Hawaiian Gardens
As a result of the public meetings and Board meetings:

- Modification of Plan A (A.I) made by demographer in response to ideas aired during the meeting.
- Modification of Plan C (C.I, C.II) made at the request of Board members:
  - The modifications address many of the concerns that emerged during the entire districting process. Input from the Board and public has guided their development.
  - Earlier maps were not final and were subject to change, as stated at the public meetings.
As a result of the April 30 Board meeting:

- The Board chose two plans to be considered for adoption on May 6:
  - Plan A.I
  - Plan C.II

- If Plan C.II was adopted, the Board would have to decide whether Trustee Area 1 or Trustee Area 6 would be up for election in November 2015 (the one not chosen would be up for election in November 2017).
After hearing from the public, including one of the plaintiffs, the Board approved Map C.II on a 4-3 vote.

The Board also unanimously approved Trustee Area 1 to be up for election in November 2015.
At its meeting on May 20, 2014, the Board held a public hearing, and then approved a resolution authorizing the submission of a waiver request to the State Board of Education (SBE).

The waiver request sought the waiver of the election requirement to change election methodologies based on the settlement agreement and the cost of an election.

Based on the settlement agreement, the Board also asked the SBE to waive the provision of the Code requiring the County Committee to randomly select areas that would be up for election in 2015.
- Prior to the public hearing the positions of all bargaining units, councils, and committees were requested to provide their input on the waiver request.
- Those groups that responded indicated they supported the waiver request.
- The public hearing was held and the Board subsequently approved the waiver request.
- Administration then submitted the waiver request to the SBE in electronic format as required.
The State Board of Education unanimously approved the District’s waiver request as part of its September 3, 2014 consent agenda.

As a result, the requirement for an election on the change in election methodology has been waived.

Similarly, the provisions of Education Code section 5021(a) requiring that the County Committee determine by lot which vacant trustee areas will be up for election at the Board’s November 2015 election are waived.
On Jan. 7, 2015, the Los Angeles County Committee on School Organization (County Committee) heard and approved the Petition to establish Trustee Areas and Trustee Area Voting in ABCUSD.

The approved Trustee Area Map was sent electronically from LACOE to the L.A. County Registrar’s Office for use in the Nov. 2015 Board Election.
In conclusion

The District believes that the trustee areas and election plan are a fair and equitable resolution not only to the lawsuit, but to the challenge of having to develop trustee areas consistent with the best interests of the District’s residents.
Contact Information:

- **Dr. Mary Sieu, Superintendent**
  - Mary.sieu@abcusd.us

- **Warren Kinsler, aalrr**
  - wkinsler@aalrr.com

- **Dr. Jeanne Gobalet**
  - gobalet@demographers.com

- **Dr. Allison Deegan**
  - deegan_allison@lacoe.edu