February 25, 2011

TO: Members of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (County Committee)

FROM: Matthew F. Spies, Interim Secretary County Committee

SUBJECT: Cancellation of the March 2, 2011, Regular Meeting of the County Committee

The regular meeting of the County Committee scheduled for Wednesday, March 2, 2011, has been CANCELLED. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 6, 2011.

The following is an update of relevant information as of February 16, 2011:

Staff Activities

• On February 4, 2011, staff participated in a videoconference meeting of Secretaries to County Committees on School District Organization, with representatives from county offices of education around the state.

Newspaper Articles

• A January 13, 2011, article from the Pasadena Star News—“PUSD must change its elections to elect more Latinos.” (Attachment 1)

• A January 31, 2011, article from the Daily Breeze—“ECC board considers ending ‘at large’ trustee elections.” (Attachment 2)

• A January 31, 2011, article from The Loop21—“Is A Black Compton City Hall Denying Hispanic Voting Rights?” (Attachment 3)

• A February 3, 2011, article from The Associated Press—“Census estimates show big gains for US minorities.” (Attachment 4)

• A February 6, 2011, article from The Mercury News—“Contra Costa prepares to embark on redistricting journey.” (Attachment 5)
A February 11, 2011, article from the Contra Costa Times-“Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District board to stay at 7.” (Attachment 6)

- A February 16, 2011, article from the Pasadena Star News-“PUSD, City Council inch toward new school board election system.” (Attachment 7)

- A February 23, 2011, article from the Los Angeles Times - “Compton school board rejects parent trigger effort.” (Attachment 8)

Informational Correspondence

- January 31, 2011, Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Notice to Subject/Interested Agencies concerning the City of Santa Clarita Annexation No. 2010-08 (Soledad Commons). (Attachment 9)

- February 8, 2011, LAFCO Notice to Subject/Interested Agencies concerning the City of Santa Clarita Annexation No. 2010-10 (Copperstone). (Attachment 10)

School District Organization Proposals

Updated versions of the following two documents are provided for your information:

- “Summary of Los Angeles Unified School District Reorganization Proposals.” (Attachment 11)

- “Summary of Los Angeles County School District Reorganization Proposals (excluding those affecting the Los Angeles Unified School District).” (Attachment 12)

Please call me at (562) 922-6336 if you have any questions or concerns.

MFS/AD:mb
Attachments
Summary of Los Angeles Unified School District Reorganization Proposals

March 2011

The following is a summary of school district reorganization proposals affecting the Los Angeles Unified School District (USD) that were at various stages in the school district organization process as of February 16, 2011.

PROPOSAL TO TRANSFER CERTAIN TERRITORY FROM THE COMPTON USD TO THE LOS ANGELES USD

Status: Final petition submission pending.

Status Date: June 26, 2007

OTHER INQUIRIES REGARDING REORGANIZATION (within the last six months)

Formation Proposals/Last Activity Date

None

Transfer of Territory Proposals/Last Activity Date

None

* Indicates update from previous summary.
Summary of Los Angeles County School District Reorganization Proposals
(Excluding those affecting the Los Angeles Unified School District)

March 2011

The following is a summary of school district reorganization proposals (exclusive of those affecting the Los Angeles Unified School District [USD]) that were at various stages in the school district reorganization process as of February 16, 2011.

FORMATION—ALTADENA USD (CURRENTLY LIES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PASADENA USD)

On January 17, 2006, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) received a request for a petition from chief petitioners Ms. Maurice Morse, Ms. Shirlee Smith, and Mr. Bruce Wesson, three community members who are residents of the area known as Altadena. The chief petitioners want to form an Altadena USD from territory within the boundaries of the Pasadena USD. The petition request was returned to the chief petitioners on January 20, 2006, because it lacked an adequate description of the area pursuant to Education Code (EC) §35700.3.

On February 10, 2006, LACOE received a revised request for a petition. Staff reviewed the request and forwarded a draft petition to the Office of the Los Angeles County Counsel (County Counsel) on February 22, 2006, for a legal compliance review regarding format and content. We received notification on March 6, 2006, from County Counsel informing us that the draft petition was legally acceptable.

On March 7, 2006, staff forwarded the draft petition to the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (Registrar-Recorder) for verification that the description of the proposed boundaries of the Altadena USD was sufficiently clear (so that registered voters residing within the proposed petition area could be identified with specificity). The Registrar-Recorder confirmed that the description was sufficient on March 10, 2006.

The petition was mailed to the chief petitioners on March 14, 2006, for circulation within the petition area. The Registrar-Recorder estimated the chief petitioners will need to collect approximately 7,000 valid signatures in order to meet the criteria set forth in EC §35700(a).

On September 23, 2010, chief petitioners delivered signed petitions to LACOE. Staff submitted the petitions to the Registrar-Recorder on September 27, 2010, for signature verification. On October 22, 2010, the Registrar-Recorder notified staff that there were insufficient valid signatures (less than the required 25 percent of the registered voters within the petition area). Staff notified the chief petitioners of the insufficiency, and at Mr. Wesson’s request, returned the petitions to the Registrar-Recorder for a signature audit. Staff also advised the chief petitioner regarding the collection of additional signatures. Upon notification by the Registrar-Recorder of a sufficient number of valid signatures, staff will present the petition to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (County Committee) at the next regular meeting.

* Indicates update from previous summary.
On January 4, 2011, staff conferred with a representative from the Registrar-Recorder’s office, who informed us that no audit of petition signatures had been done yet, and they clarified the cost of signature verification. On February 15, 2011, the Registrar-Recorder informed staff that the signature audit had still not been done.

*Status: Petition insufficient; chief petitioners may gather additional signatures.*

**Status Date:** February 15, 2011

**FORMATION—WISEBURN USD (CURRENTLY LIES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CENTINELA VALLEY UNION HIGH SD)**

On May 16, 2001, LACOE received a request from the Citizens for a Wiseburn Unified School District organization to prepare a petition (25 percent of the registered voters) proposing to form a Wiseburn USD from existing territory of the Wiseburn SD. The proposed formation territory currently lies within the boundaries of the Centinela Valley Union High SD. The petition was provided to the chief petitioners on June 20, 2001.

On November 9, 2001, the chief petitioners submitted a signed petition to the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools (County Superintendent) to determine if the petition was sufficient and signed as required by law pursuant to EC §35700(a). In accordance with EC §35704, the County Superintendent found the petition to be sufficient and signed as required by law on December 4, 2001. On December 5, 2001, the petition was presented to the County Committee at its regular meeting and transmitted to the State Board of Education (SBE). Pursuant to EC §35705, a public hearing was conducted within the Wiseburn SD and Centinela Valley Union High SD on January 23, 2002, at Richard Henry Dana Middle School in the Wiseburn SD.

At its regular meeting on March 6, 2002, the County Committee was presented with a preliminary feasibility report concerning this proposal. The final feasibility report was presented to the County Committee at its regular meeting on May 1, 2002. At that meeting, the County Committee recommended approval and took action to recommend approval of the proposal to the SBE to form a Wiseburn USD from the existing boundaries of the Wiseburn SD within the Centinela Valley Union High SD. The County Committee further recommended that the election area be the entire Centinela Valley Union High SD.

The County Committee’s plans and recommendations were transmitted to the SBE and the California Department of Education (CDE) on June 18, 2002. On June 19, 2003, the CDE requested additional statistical information from the impacted districts and notified LACOE staff that the petition would be heard in November 2003.

On September 2, 2003, the CDE notified LACOE that the petition hearing before the SBE would be delayed until January 7-8, 2004. The CDE cited budget constraints and staff cutbacks as reasons for the hearing delay. On December 1, 2003, the CDE notified LACOE of a second delay for the petition hearing before the SBE, postponing it until March 10-11, 2004. The CDE cited current state fiscal circumstances as the reason for the further delay. On January 21, 2004, the CDE notified LACOE of a third delay for the petition hearing before the SBE, postponing it

On April 27, 2004, LACOE received a copy of the CDE’s final feasibility study. On April 29, 2004, LACOE received notice from the CDE that the petition hearing had been delayed indefinitely at the request of the Wiseburn SD. Subsequently, the Wiseburn SD requested that the SBE hear the petition, along with its request for two waivers. A hearing was scheduled for July 7, 2004. On July 7, 2004, staff was notified by the CDE that Centinela Valley Union High SD requested a delay in review by the SBE. Wiseburn SD agreed to withdraw its petition for consideration before the SBE to accommodate additional review requested by Centinela Valley Union High SD. Subsequent to granting this delay, legal counsel to Wiseburn SD and Centinela Valley Union High SD presented additional information (at the CDE’s request) regarding the legality of Wiseburn SD residents maintaining responsibility to pay Centinela Valley Union High SD tax obligations following any unification of a Wiseburn USD.

On August 31, 2004, staff received notice that Ms. Karen Steentoft, Chief Counsel for the SBE, recommended that certain waivers submitted with the Wiseburn USD petition could be determined by the SBE at the time of the hearing. Subsequently, the CDE rescheduled the petition to be heard before the SBE on September 9, 2004.

On September 9, 2004, staff attended the SBE hearing. CDE staff recommended that the SBE adopt the proposal approving the petition to form a Wiseburn USD and to set the election area as the area of the Wiseburn SD only on the condition that the property owners within the Wiseburn SD retain current levels of responsibility for repayment of existing bonded indebtedness of the Centinela Valley Union High SD upon successful formation of a Wiseburn USD. The SBE voted unanimously to approve the proposal and established that territory within the Wiseburn SD be the area of election. Statutory requirements provide that, following approval by the SBE, an election shall be called on the next available regular election date (March 8, 2005) in the territory determined by the SBE.

On October 19, 2004, at the direction of the SBE, the County Superintendent forwarded an order for special election to the Registrar-Recorder’s office, to be held in conjunction with the March 8, 2005, regular election. A ballot measure to approve or disapprove the formation of a Wiseburn USD and to elect a governing board will be placed before the electorate. The election will be held within the boundaries of the proposed Wiseburn USD. Should the electorate approve the proposal, the new district could become effective July 1, 2006.

On November 1, 2004, staff received a copy of a lawsuit filed by the Centinela Valley Union High SD against the SBE, seeking to vacate approval of Wiseburn SD’s petition to unify based on lack of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) regulations. On November 18, 2004, staff received a copy of a second lawsuit filed in this matter, citing flaws in the legality of the SBE’s decisions and naming additional parties, including the County Committee as defendants. The Centinela Valley Union High SD, Wiseburn SD, and SBE began negotiations to delay the election in order to revisit the issues underlying the petition and subsequent lawsuits. The SBE requested that the County Superintendent delay the election to allow for this negotiation process to run its course. Staff consulted with County Counsel and was advised that neither the County Superintendent nor the SBE could order a delay of the election.

* Indicates update from previous summary.
On Friday, December 10, 2004, in the case of Centinela Valley Union High SD (Petitioners) vs. the SBE, the Los Angeles Superior Court issued a preliminary injunction barring the conduct of the election regarding the formation of the Wiseburn USD on March 8, 2005. The Petitioners also contacted the court and requested that the Motion for Preliminary Injunction (Injunction) scheduled for December 13, 2004, vs. the County Committee and County Superintendent, be taken off the calendar. The Petitioners will consult with the court’s clerk to re-schedule. This was done because the Petitioners received the Injunction that day. A hearing on the motion was scheduled for March 30, 2005. Staff received notice from County Counsel that both the County Committee and the County Superintendent were dropped as parties to the lawsuit in which they were named.

On January 6, 2005, County Counsel met with the County Committee in closed session to discuss the lawsuit. Later at the same meeting, Dr. Don Brann, then Superintendent of Wiseburn SD, appeared before the County Committee to inform them that the SBE would withdraw its approval of the petition, pending a negotiation with petitioners and attorneys for Centinela Valley Union High SD. On January 13, 2005, the CDE withdrew its approval of the Wiseburn USD petition and its request that an election be ordered. Staff at the CDE has informed us that they intend to redo the review process related to CEQA and to return the petition to the SBE for action (not to the County Committee).

On March 13, 2007, the California Department of General Services issued a Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), under CEQA. The CDE held a CEQA scoping hearing on March 28, 2007, within the Wiseburn SD. Staff attended this meeting. A comment period was set by the SBE for March 13, 2007, to April 12, 2007. On April 24, 2007, staff was notified by the SBE that the CEQA comment period had been extended to May 15, 2007, due to a request made at the scoping hearing.

On July 7, 2008, staff received a copy of the draft EIR from Terry A. Hayes Associates LLC, on behalf of the CDE. A comment period for the draft EIR was opened from July 7, 2008, to August 21, 2008. A public hearing was held on July 22, 2008. Staff will keep the County Committee apprised of any additional developments.

On April 15, 2009, staff provided follow-up information to the CDE regarding the financial status of the Centinela Valley Union High SD.

On October 22, 2009, the CDE notified LACOE that the petition hearing before the SBE would not be heard until January 7-8, 2010. On December 8, 2009, the CDE notified LACOE that the petition hearing before the SBE would not be heard until March 11, 2010. On January 6, 2010, the CDE notified LACOE that the petition would not be heard until July 2010.

On March 25, 2010, the CDE notified LACOE that the petition would be heard at the May 12-13, 2010, meeting of the SBE. On April 30, 2010, the CDE issued its feasibility study of the Wiseburn unification petition. On May 3, 2010, the Wiseburn SD requested that the SBE remove the item from the May 2010 agenda. Presently, there is no date set for this petition to be reviewed by the SBE.

* Indicates update from previous summary.
On July 23, 2010, Superintendents from the Wiseburn, Hawthorne, Lennox, and Lawndale SDs submitted a request to the County Superintendent to meet and discuss a local solution to the school district organization issues within the area. That meeting took place on August 19, 2010, with representatives from the districts in attendance with the County Superintendent and LACOE staff.

On September 16, 2010, LACOE was notified of a change in the chief petitioner for this petition. Mr. Daniel Juarez was replaced by Ms. Shavonda Webber Christmas as the chief petitioner for this petition.

On October 5, 2010, the Superintendent for the Wiseburn SD contacted LACOE to request additional assistance to facilitate a meeting among all of the impacted school districts (the Centinela Valley Union High SD, Hawthorne SD, Lawndale SD, Lennox SD, and Wiseburn SD). Discussions are underway to plan that meeting. A second joint meeting, at which all five districts were in attendance, was held on December 9, 2010. At that meeting, district representatives discussed the history of school district organization efforts within the region and agreed to meet again at a later time for further discussion.

On January 11, 2011, staff was notified that a third meeting will be held at the Hawthorne SD on February 17, 2011, at 5:00 p.m. On February 4, 2011, staff was notified that this meeting was postponed until sometime in March 2011.

*Status: Petition on hold; third joint meeting pending for March 2011.

Status Date: February 4, 2011

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS WITHIN THE POMONA USD

On August 18, 2010, LACOE received a request for a petition pursuant to EC §5019 to increase the number of trustees from five to seven and to establish trustee areas within the Pomona USD. The request was submitted by chief petitioner Mr. John Mendoza. The petition was forwarded to County Counsel to determine its legal compliance regarding format and content. On August 27, 2010, County Counsel deemed the petition sufficient. Staff returned the petition to the chief petitioner on August 30, 2010, for circulation.

Please note that this is a separate petition, distinct from the other petitions requested by Mr. Mendoza, and requests some of the same changes within the Pomona USD (the addition of two governing board members and the creation of trustee areas). It was submitted under EC §5019(c) and requires valid signatures from 500 registered voters within the petition area. If valid and certified by the County Committee, this petition would trigger a feasibility study and ultimately a vote by the County Committee.

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: August 30, 2010

* Indicates update from previous summary.
PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS WITHIN THE POMONA USD

On July 13, 2009, LACOE received a request for a petition pursuant to EC §5019 to increase the number of trustees from five to seven and to establish trustee areas within the Pomona USD. The request was submitted by chief petitioner Mr. Mendoza. The petition was forwarded to County Counsel to determine its legal compliance regarding format and content. On August 7, 2009, County Counsel deemed the petition sufficient. Staff returned the petition to the chief petitioner on August 11, 2009, for circulation.

Please note that this is a separate petition, distinct from the other petitions requested by Mr. Mendoza, and requests some of the same changes within the Pomona USD (the addition of two governing board members and the creation of trustee areas). It was submitted under EC §5019(c) and requires valid signatures from 500 registered voters within the petition area. If valid and certified by the County Committee, this petition would trigger a feasibility study and ultimately a vote by the County Committee.

On July 14, 2010, the chief petitioner submitted signed petitions in this matter. On July 15, 2010, the chief petitioner submitted additional signed petitions. The petitions were forwarded to the Registrar-Recorder on July 23, 2010, for signature verification.

On August 12, 2010, the Registrar-Recorder completed its review of the petitions submitted. The chief petitioner submitted 733 signatures. Of that group, 680 signatures were found to be sufficient (complete and signed by registered voters). However, under EC §5019(c)(1), a petition seeking to change the trustee areas of a school district must be signed within 180 days of submission to the County Committee. Staff examined the petitions submitted and found that only 84 signatures submitted were signed within the mandated timeline. Thus, the petition is not sufficient and will not move forward. On August 16, 2010, the chief petitioner was notified of the petition insufficiency.

Status: Petition insufficient; action ended.

Status Date: August 16, 2010

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS, AND THE REQUIREMENT OF TRUSTEE AREA VOTING WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT (CCD)

On February 26, 2010, LACOE received a request for a petition pursuant to EC §5019(a) and (c) to increase the number of trustees from five to seven, to establish trustee areas, and to require trustee area voting, within the Mount San Antonio CCD. The request was submitted by chief petitioner Mr. Mendoza. The petition was forwarded to County Counsel to determine its legal compliance regarding format and content. On March 12, 2010, County Counsel notified staff that the petition was sufficient. On March 12, 2010, the petition was forwarded to the chief petitioner for circulation.

* Indicates update from previous summary.
Please note that this is a new, additional petition, separate from other petitions requested by Mr. Mendoza, although it requests the same changes within the Mount San Antonio CCD (the addition of two governing board members and the creation of trustee areas with trustee area voting).

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: April 19, 2010

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS WITHIN THE POMONA USD

On July 13, 2009, LACOE received a request for a petition pursuant to EC §5019 and §5020 to increase the number of trustees from five to seven and to establish trustee areas within the Pomona USD. The request was submitted by chief petitioner Mr. Mendoza. The petition was forwarded to County Counsel to determine its legal compliance regarding format and content. On August 7, 2009, County Counsel deemed the petition sufficient. Staff returned the petition to the chief petitioner on August 11, 2009, for circulation.

Please note that this is a separate petition, distinct from the other petitions requested by Mr. Mendoza, and requests some of the same changes within the Pomona USD (the addition of two governing board members and the creation of trustee areas). It was submitted under EC §5019 and §5020 and requires valid signatures from ten percent of the registered voters within the petition area (approximately 7,000 signatures in the case of the Pomona USD). If valid and certified by the County Committee, this petition would trigger a ballot initiative (as opposed to a reference report and vote by the County Committee).

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: August 20, 2009

FORMATION—MALIBU USD (CURRENTLY LIES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SANTA MONICA-MALIBU USD)

Status: Petition currently in circulation.

Status Date: February 21, 2008

FORMATION—ALTADENA USD (CURRENTLY LIES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PASADENA USD)

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: May 11, 2007

* Indicates update from previous summary.
FORMATION—LA MIRADA USD (CURRENTLY LIES WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NORWALK – LA MIRADA USD)

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: March 20, 2007

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS, AND THE REQUIREMENT OF TRUSTEE AREA VOTING WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO CCD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: January 17, 2007

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN WITHIN THE POMONA USD, RETAINING THE AT-LARGE VOTING METHOD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: January 17, 2007

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS, AND THE REQUIREMENT OF TRUSTEE AREA VOTING WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO CCD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: October 2, 2006

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS WITHIN THE POMONA USD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: April 11, 2006

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUSTEE AREAS, AND THE REQUIREMENT OF TRUSTEE AREA VOTING WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO CCD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: April 11, 2006

* Indicates update from previous summary.
PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO CCD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: July 21, 2003

PROPOSED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN WITHIN THE POMONA USD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: June 16, 2003

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TRUSTEES FROM FIVE TO SEVEN, TO ESTABLISH TRUSTEE AREAS, AND TO REQUIRE THAT EACH GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER RESIDE IN AND BE ELECTED BY THE REGISTERED VOTERS OF EACH PARTICULAR TRUSTEE AREA WITHIN THE MOUNT SAN ANTONIO CCD

Status: Petition in circulation.

Status Date: August 20, 2001

OTHER INQUIRIES REGARDING REORGANIZATION (within the last six months)

Unification Proposals/Last Activity Date

- None

Transfer of Territory Proposals/Last Activity Date

- Hermosa Beach City SD to Manhattan Beach USD or Redondo Beach USD/January 12, 2011

Formation Proposals/Last Activity Date

- None

Trustee Areas and Governing Board Size/Last Activity Date

- None

* Indicates update from previous summary.
PASADENA STAR NEWS

PUSD, City Council inch toward new school board election system

By Brian Charles, Staff Writer
Posted: 02/16/2011 06:42:44 PM PST

PASADENA - The plan to push geographic-based voting districts as a means to elect members to the Pasadena Unified School District board cleared a hurdle Tuesday, but not without opposition from the public.

In a joint meeting between the Pasadena City Council and the PUSD board, both governing bodies unanimously approved the formation of a community task force to draft changes to the city charter that would clear the way for geographic-based voting districts and draw the actual district lines.

The process to convert to geographic voting district or trustee areas, which also includes a special election, could cost the district as much as $525,000, according to John Pappalardo, PUSD chief financial officer.

But with lawsuits being filed across California against school boards forcing the adoption of trustee area elections, the half-million dollar process may prove to be a cost savings, said Renatta Cooper, PUSD board member.

"Whatever we spend on the study group and the election it will be cost effective," she said. "Any lawsuit we will be exposed to we will be solely responsible for, not Altadena, Pasadena or Sierra Madre."

The study group, to be formed in April, will include members from across the PUSD, which spans two cities and one unincorporated area. Three residents will picked by the Pasadena City Council, three picked by the PUSD board, two appointed by County Supervisor Michael Antonovich and one by the Sierra Madre City Council.

Final approval of any change to the format for electing school board members would be voted on by residents in Pasadena, Altadena and Sierra Madre in June 2012, according to the schedule laid out by school officials Tuesday night.

While Pasadena Unified officials bent to threats of a lawsuit, opponents of the plan sounded off about their rights as parents and residents.

"With open enrollment you maybe disenfranchising voters whose children go to school outside of their voting district," said Mike Costello, a parent of a PUSD student. "The cost of disenfranchising voters outweighs any benefit."

Cooper reminded the audience that "school board members still serve the district as a whole."

She also reminded residents, board and city council members what was at stake.

"All the education publications and all of our professional groups are telling us that we need to adopt district elections or face a lawsuit," she said.
Calls for geographic voter districts began last summer after a San Francisco-based law firm set its sights on Pasadena.

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights successfully sued the Merced School District for not having a proportionate number of Latinos on the school board, forcing the school system to draw voter districts based on both geography and ethnicity. Under the provisions of California Voters Rights Act, minorities are entitled to voting districts that allow them proportionate representation in elected bodies.

The Lawyers Committee visited Pasadena in 2010 as a guest of the League of United Latin American Citizens and told the group that the PUSD was vulnerable to a lawsuit based on disproportionate Latino representation, said Ramon Miramontes, PUSD board and LULAC member.

While Latinos make up 46 percent of the Pasadena residents, Miramontes is the lone Latino serving on the school board.

PUSD board members, most of whom are opposed to geographic voting district, have pushed for studying and holding a vote on area-based voting districts to provide cover from a lawsuit. The theory goes that if the district does its due diligence it will be protected, Cooper said.

If voters reject geographic voter districts for school board and a person living in the PUSD boundary could still sue the PUSD under the provisions of California’s voters right law.

And if the plaintiff wins, a judge may impose trustee area elections, Pappalardo added.

But that scenario is the reason why PUSD should act not, he said.

“If we have a plan in place, at least we have some say in how the voter districts are drawn”, he added.

Pasadena Educational Foundation member Jon Fuhrman also opposed geographic voting regions, but offered another alternative.

“I thing instant runoff elections get you there faster than district elections,” he said.

Fuhrman’s proposal, also known as ranked choice voting, allows voters to pick a primary, secondary, and in some cases tertiary candidate choices. Secondary and third votes are counted if no candidate garnered a majority of the votes.

Adding the idea of ranked choice, a voting method common in the Bay Area, muddles the issue, said Terry Tornak, Pasadena City Councilman.

“If you tossed in the issue of instant runoff voting, you've diverted the focus,” he said.

Tornak advised narrowing the focus to changing the city charter in a way to avoid a law suit.

However, both the City Council and PUSD board agreed to at least study ranked choice voting.
POLITICS

Is A Black Compton City Hall Denying Hispanic Voting Rights?

Compton is majority Latino, but is politically black-ruled.

By: Nadra Kareem Nittle | TheLoop21
Mon, 01/31/2011 - 4:56pm

(Credit: City of Compton)

If anyone knows the reality of voter discrimination, it’s African Americans. Yet, in a now majority Hispanic Compton, Calif. blacks still rule city hall, leading to a lawsuit accusing the city of violating the California Voting Rights act.

In the popular imagination, Compton, is an African-American town. It’s home to everyone from DJ Quik to the Williams sisters to Anthony Anderson and Niecy Nash. But Compton is no longer a “chocolate city.”

Over the past two decades, the Latino population has grown so much that Hispanics now comprise two-thirds of Compton’s population. There’s just one problem: Latinos have absolutely no political representation in city hall, which blacks continue to dominate.

During the past decade, six Latino candidates have run for Compton City Council. None have won. Since 2000, no Latino candidates in Compton have even made it from a primary to a general election, according to the L.A. Times. For a mostly Latino city, those numbers are horrendous. So, what gives? Although Latinos make up most of Compton’s 94,000 population, they compose just 43 percent of eligible voters because many either aren’t citizens or old enough to vote.

Changing the way elections take place in Compton may end the Latino blackout in city politics there. At present, Compton’s city government includes a mayor and four council members who represent distinct districts of the city. Rather than holding council elections by district, however, the city allows residents from throughout Compton to vote council members from all over into office. If that changed and residents voted to elect council members for their home districts only, a Latino might have a fighting chance on the ballot. That’s because Latino voters would comprise the majority of at least one city district, according to data provided in the lawsuit. This is a prospect that doesn’t exactly please Compton blacks desperate to hold on to political clout.

“African Americans are not just going to give [Latinos] the seats. They’ve got to go out and campaign, and come out to vote,” Royce Esters, a black Compton resident and businessman told the L.A. Times.

Esters has a point about getting out the vote. Consider that in Compton’s last primary, held in 2009, just 7 percent of those eligible in Compton voted. That indicates that blacks and Latinos, alike, need to mobilize voters. Moreover, with such a low voter turnout overall, a Latino candidate who managed to galvanize just 10 percent of residents there could end up in city hall. On the other hand, it’s common knowledge that
those who feel disenfranchised may not exercise their right to vote because they feel their interests will go unheard no matter what happens at the ballot box. Given this, it’s imperative that candidates in Compton get residents to feel invested enough in their community to make it to the polls.

The fight for political representation in Compton is more complicated than voter turnout, however.

It largely mirrors African Americans’ fight for representation in Compton, and other cities nationwide, in the civil rights movement and beyond. Esters and black activist Benjamin L. Holifield, who has lived in Compton for more than 40 years, both remember when Compton was mostly white, and whites shut blacks out of city government.

Unlike Esters, Holifield favors changing how elections are held to allow for more Latino representation in city government.

“I’m an advocate for everybody having a chance to run and win, regardless of who they are,” he told NPR.

Holifield’s right. Given Compton’s large Latino population, it’s an injustice that Latinos have no representation on the city council. If by-district elections would make it possible for Latinos to play a part in running the city, then African Americans should support every effort to bring such elections about. Blacks struggled for years for fair representation in city, state and national government and continue to do so. Therefore, it’s not only insensitive but also hypocritical for African Americans to place obstacles in the way of a minority group trying to gain its fair share in the political realm.

In Compton, blacks finally assumed power after much mobilizing and whites fled the city. But black flight — which is indeed occurring — shouldn’t be the catalyst that leads to Latinos gaining political power there. Instead, African Americans should be remembered for leading the effort to help Latinos win representation. As the city’s largest ethnic group, Latinos need a voice in city hall.