

Clovis Unified revamping school board elections. Here's how that could affect students

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For the first time ever, Clovis residents will be hosting district-based elections instead of an at-large voting process when electing their next school board representatives.

Registered voters will only be able to vote for their specific district representative and not for candidates in other areas across the district in the 2024 election. That means there's a greater chance your area's school board representative could better reflect your family's needs and values because an elected board member from your area might know your neighborhood's concerns better than someone from other areas of the district.

The process to change voting logistics began years ago and concluded in the final months of 2023. The Bee spoke with James Kus, the Fresno County Clerk / Registrar of Voters, for further details about how this next election will look like.

Here's what we know:

WHAT ARE DISTRICT-BASED ELECTIONS?

The type of election Clovis Unified School District is having from this year on. Different from at-large elections – what the district used to have, and how Clovis City Council is elected – registered voters now only vote for one candidate to represent the specific area where they live and not for other candidates in other areas of the Clovis schools district.

WILL THIS AFFECT YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

Maybe. Advocates for district-based elections argued that having area-specific registered voters only vote for their one representative at the school board can increase diverse representation. How so? The Bee previously reported district-based elections are believed to diversify governing bodies, because diverse communities – that might be the majority within a specific district but not at-large

– could elect someone from their community to represent them and not have their collective vote absorbed by the larger school district population makeup.

Of the 42,802 students enrolled at Clovis Unified, 40% are Hispanic or Latino, 34% white and 16% Asian, according to data from the school district. Last summer, Clovis Unified spokesperson Kelly Avants said the district doesn't ask people to declare their race when running for school board, and therefore she couldn't answer specific questions about the race of current or previous board members.

Compared to neighboring school districts, Clovis Unified does not offer dual immersion programs for bilingual or multilingual students, or those wishing to learn another language. Language classes are only offered as electives to high school students. Few schools offer these classes to eighth graders, language options vary from school to school, and classes last for a scheduled limited time and are not a full-day experience – intertwined with teaching in English – as dual immersion programs are. A diverse board might potentially initiate the process to explore and establish different language curriculums in the district, for example.

WHAT SEATS ARE UP FOR ELECTION?

Areas 2, 4, 5 and 7 – represented by David DeFrank, Hugh Awtrey, Steven Fogg and Yolanda Moore – will be voting for board representatives this year.

Areas 1, 3 and 6 – represented by Clinton Olivier, Tiffany Stoker Madsen and Deena Combs-Flores respectively – will be electing their next board members in 2026 since Clovis Unified School District has scheduled staggered elections.

CAN ALL REGISTERED VOTERS IN THE DISTRICT STILL VOTE FOR ALL THE CANDIDATES?

No. Only registered voters in areas 2, 4, 5 and 7 will be voting for their specific area representative. They won't be voting for other areas' representatives, only theirs, and registered voters outside of these areas will not be voting for those seats.

WHAT ABOUT CLOVIS UNIFIED FAMILIES LIVING IN FRESNO?

School districts are a level of jurisdiction different – but overlapping in space – to cities, Fresno County Clerk/Registrar of Voters James Kus said.

“School districts are a different level of jurisdiction (than cities) and have very different maps,” Kus said.

For Clovis specifically, the school district encompasses the city of Clovis and parts of the city of Fresno. Because of this, Kus said some Fresno residents living in the Clovis Unified School District jurisdiction will be seeing candidates for the school board on their ballots.

WHEN ARE THE ELECTIONS AND DEADLINES TO REGISTER THIS YEAR?

There is no March primary vote for Clovis Unified board member seats. They’re only voted for once in the November general election. The registration deadline for the November election is 15 days before Election Day, on Oct. 21. Anyone registered by this date will receive a mailed ballot prior to Election Day, Kus said. Specifically in Fresno County, voters may register in-person at any open voting location through Election Day, too.

“This process requires some additional paperwork, compared to regular in-person voting, and the voter’s ballot will not be counted right away at the voting location,” Kus said. “Instead, the same-day registration ballot is processed by registration specialists at my downtown office to ensure that the voter is eligible to vote in the election and has not voted in another jurisdiction already.”

WHO ARE THE CANDIDATES RUNNING THIS YEAR?

To be determined. Those interested in running for school board representative – or any other local jurisdiction position up for election that is voted for in November – can file their candidate applications with Fresno County’s Clerk/Registrar of Voters office from July 15 until Aug. 9. Some campaign posters and messaging might be already happening, Kus said, because candidates can start fundraising if they have filed the necessary paperwork with California Fair Political Practices Commission (FCCP).

Once local, eligible candidates file their registration paperwork by the Aug. 9 deadline, Kus estimates his office should have an updated webpage with the individuals running for office across Fresno County jurisdictions sometime during the Aug. 10-11 weekend.

Read more at: <https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/education-lab/article284307238.html#storylink=cpy>