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Back to School ... Redistricting, That Is

By Robert Witsky Mon, Jul 25 2011 at 8:33 AM

Categories: Edumication News

The Dallas Independent School District will begin holding hearings tonight during which the public will finally get a long, hard look at the draft maps on the table, courtesy San Antonio attorney Rolando Rios (who Carla Ranger initially didn’t want to hire) and the law firm of Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP (to whom Edwin Flores was initially opposed). Based on their report to the board last month, the attorneys found that total population grew from 1,006,872 in April 2000 to 1,020,846 by April 2010, an increase of around 1 percent. Says the report: “The ideal trustee district should now contain 113,427 persons (total population/9 districts).”

As it stands now, Nancy Bingham’s district is too big -- 12 percent and then some over what it oughta be. Meanwhile, Adam Medrano’s is too small by close to 16 percent. Hence, the need to redraw the boundaries. The draft plans are available here.

Meetings kick off this evening at 6, at both Bryan Adams and Francisco “Pancho” Medrano Middle School; three more follow; tomorrow; two more are on Monday; and the final one takes place August 4 at 3700 Rosa.

And in vaguely related news: DeSoto ISD trustees will vote today whether or not to...
keep Kathy Augustine as its new superintendent, following revelations that the former deputy superintendent in Atlanta knew or surely should have known about cheating there. If she’s out, does this mean DISD board president Lew Blackburn, once a contender for that gig, is back in the mix?

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**Comments**

Wylie H. 22 hours ago

I wish the DISD trustees would pay as much attention to running the school district as they do gerrymandering their own districts to protect themselves from removal.

StopDISD.org 20 hours ago in reply to Wylie H.

Wylie H. We totally agree with you DISD should focus on better education, better compensation for our teachers and preservation of historical schools.

This morning DISD stared demolishing the historical 102 year old O.M. Roberts elementary school even though $2.6 million dollars of taxpayer money were spent to renovate it and despite the many protests to save it. They are abolishing this school and a neighborhood - piece by piece, brick by brick - all decisions made by DISD. DISD's current actions only further serve to demonstrate how far removed DISD is with the wants and needs of its community members, taxpayers and voters.

**Common “Cents?”** 21 hours ago

Maybe this is a stupid question, but, why doesn’t the DISD maps mirror the City of Dallas Council District map?

Common “Cents?” 21 hours ago in reply to Common “Cents?”
... and YES, I understand that the Dallas City Council and DISD School Board are two separate entities.

Wylie H. 21 hours ago in reply to Common "Cents?"

One big reason is that the City of Dallas and DISD don’t share common boundaries. For example, part of Highland Park is in DISD, and part of the City of Dallas is in Richardson ISD; and so on...

Bill Betzen 20 hours ago in reply to Common "Cents?"

DISD and Dallas City Council Districts must each have different population numbers (% begin with: 66,560 for each one of 14 Districts, while the DISD target is 110,427 for each one of 5 districts.

Watching 17 hours ago in reply to Common "Cents?"

city council has 14 districts. DISD has 5. Can never be the same. DISD goes beyond Dallas city limits - particularly in the south.

Bill Betzen 20 hours ago

Dallas City Council Redistricting process is far superior to the one it appears DISD is stumbling into. The following is posted on my blog (http://dallasredistricting2011...) about the significant differences between the DISD redistricting process and the Dallas City Council redistricting process:

1) There is minimal, if any, opportunity for the public to actually work with the maps and submit alternatives in the DISD process.
2) Compactness is not given as a consideration, probably for many reasons not the least of which is that current DISD districts are not as gerrymandered as current Dallas City Council Districts. Compactness measurements are not ever mentioned on the DISD site.
3) Depending of which of the eventual 20+ maps being considered that the Council Redistricting Commission chooses, it is very possible, based on the four maps being considered by DISD, that the Dallas City Council will now surpass DISD in having the least gerrymandered districts.
4) If Dallas City Council succeeds in securing the least gerrymandered districts, and DISD remains gerrymandered, it will be interesting to observe if voter turnout generally improves more in City Council elections than in DISD Board elections in the years to come. (There may be people in Dallas dedicated to keeping voter turnout low and therefore keeping both these maps as gerrymandered as is possible, That is the battle that sometimes appears to be emerging.)

Michael MacNaughton and 1 more liked this
Redistricting:
Lost in the shuffle of back to school

By LASHONDA COOKS
The Dallas Examiner

For 157,000 Dallas ISD students, class is officially back in session. In the weeks before the school year’s return, many students and their parents spent time and money securing supplies, clothes, shoes and immunization shots to start the year off on the right foot. Amidst the scramble, most families left one important item off of their back-to-school lists: attending public hearings on school redistricting.

It’s easy to ignore. The process itself doesn’t have an immediate impact on students. Redistricting lines do not immediately change school feeder patterns or attendance zones. It solely determines the shape, size and boundaries of the nine trustee districts. But just as today’s kindergartner won’t realize the real benefits or consequences of scholastic achievement until years down the road, the involvement of parents and students in the redistricting process – or lack thereof – will come back to help or haunt students in future trustee elections.

“I feel that if the community was better informed, of not only the hearings but the impact that the map actually has within their schools and their child’s education, there’ll be more of an involvement in that process,” stated Ramero Luna from the League of United Latin American Citizens 102.

He pointed at the auditorium’s skimpy audience of less than 20 that night at the eighth public hearing and noted that initially none of the maps had district schools listed on them. Instead, areas were defined by street names.

“It will be difficult for them to understand where exactly their school falls into place, just by looking at the map. It’s really hard for me to understand what schools are going to be impacted and how that connects with a child’s
Dallas ISD, continued from Front Page

education,” he noted.

The website now holds maps that designate area schools.

Over the last couple of months, the district and its redistricting firms have hosted 10 public hearings, according to John Long IV, attorney at law at one of the two law firms selected for DISD’s redistricting – Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta, LLP – a total of 200 people attended the hearings. He says the numbers don’t surprise him and reflects the very little change occurring in most districts.

Long noted that in the Wilmer-Hutchins area, which school board president and District 5 Trustee Lew Blackburn and District 6 Trustee Carla Ranger share, the meetings were well attended because of concern about where the new schools will fall.

At a public hearing, former Wilmer-Hutchins ISD Board Member Donnie Fox summed up the area’s requests.

“We want just to have one board member who we can hold accountable for what’s going on in our area. As far as our schools,” he remarked.

Presently, Blackburn is trustee of the junior high school and Ranger is the trustee of Wilmer-Hutchins’ high school and elementary school. He pointed to the redistricting guidelines, which state that when possible geographic boundaries, communities of interest and neighborhood cohesion should be considered.

Fox also asked that all three of Wilmer-Hutchins’ schools be placed in Blackburn’s district. Blackburn served as the chief administrator for the Wilmer-Hutchins school district before it closed.

“Once the district was closed and merged in with the DISD district, Dr. Blackburn was still active in the community. Everyone trusts and believes that he’s going to do what’s best for the community and I stand for my community,” Fox emphasized.

Former District 3 LULAC Assistant Director Renato De Los Santos, had a similar request from West Dallas.

“The consistent thing that I hear from people is that they want to have one representative representing West Dallas. If at all possible,” he noted.

Santos chairs the STEM Committee at Pinkston High School.

Though redistricting itself doesn’t determine which school students attend, the future trustees elected based on newly sketched district lines, will. Trustees determine the fate of school closings, openings and renovations. They craft school policies for teachers, students, administrators and staff alike and are the final voices on the budget, determining what will and will not be funded. They also select and hire the district’s Superintendent of Schools.

In 2009, African American children composed only 26.4 percent of the district’s students. Having a voice or two or three on the board that looks out for the Black community’s interests is essential to ensuring that African American children in DISD are not afterthought. DISD currently has three African American trustees on the board: Blackburn, Ranger and District 9 Trustee Bernadette Nutall.

Hispanic activists want more representation on the board. Citing DISD’s 67.6 percentage of Hispanic and the city’s 46 percent Hispanic population, several LULAC members asked that the trustee hireshoe reflect their district and city majority.

“It seems, just at first sight, that we make up such a significant part of the student population, yet the districts or opportunities for Hispanic-based districts are not as apparent.” Luna stated.

He noted that there are currently only two opportunities for Hispanic-based districts, Eric Cowan’s District 7 and Adam Medrano’s District 8, in most of the proposed maps. Bruce Farrott’s District 3, which is currently 45 percent Hispanic with a voting population of 39 percent and Nancy Bingham’s District 4, which is currently 59 percent Hispanic with a Hispanic voting population of 54 percent, seem to be the next probable opportunities for Hispanic representatives.

But Ranger’s District 6, which is currently 44.5 percent Hispanic with a voting population of 39 percent and Nutall’s District 9, with 38 percent Hispanic population with a voting population of 32 percent, may not be far behind.

The board is slated to vote today on a new redistricting map. The map they select will be etched into DISD until 2021. When the next round of redistricting occurs. The meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the Ada L. Williams Auditorium of the DISD Administrative Building, located 3700 Ross Ave.
The four precincts in question are in Ranger's area, and one includes Wilmer-Hutchins High School and Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School. The schools sit next to a boundary line shared with Blackburn's area, where most students who attend the two schools come from.

Redistricting is typically done every 10 years after a census is completed, and changes can be controversial. It commonly involves trustees jockeying to hold onto precincts they favor and schools they want in their areas.

Community members also typically get involved. For example, Dallas attorney Domingo Garcia submitted at least two maps for trustees to consider, but the district's attorneys said the proposed maps would negatively affect a black-majority voting district and weren't likely to pass Justice Department scrutiny.

Some observers say the fight over the Wilmer-Hutchins-area precincts is per-

See WILMER-HUTCHINS Page 6B
Wilmer-Hutchins precincts up in the air in DISD remap

Continued from Page 1B

sonal between Blackburn and Ranger. Some perceive that he wants the precincts because of a connection to the area dating to when he was an administra-
tor in the now-defunct Wilmer-Hutchins ISD. Some see Ranger as wanting to keep the precincts out of the hands of her main adversary on the board.

Both trustees say they want the precincts (3800, 3801, 3554 and 3556) because of the response they've received from Wilmer-Hutchins residents. Ranger said she's heard needs to add population.

"As we look at redistricting, there should be as little damage done to the district as possible," Ranger said at a meeting last week.

Blackburn said that people have told him they want the Wilmer-Hutchins area under one trustee. The area has three schools, with one in Blackburn's area.

"It is what the people are asking for," Blackburn said. "It's not about trying to get the schools."

At a workshop on Tuesday, trustees met and decided on several maps to consider at Thursday's school board meet-
ing.

The redistricting process must be completed 90 days before the district's election in May 2012. The maps that seem to have the greatest interest from trustees would move the Wilmer-Hutchins precincts to Blackburn's district.

Ranger wants to hold off on voting on a map and accuses Blackburn of rushing the process to ease community re-
sponse. "In the past where we've rushed to do things, we have not been effective," Ranger said.
Board votes to put W-H area in Blackburn's district

A fight over four precincts in southeast Dallas ended Thursday with the approval of a new voting map for the Dallas school district.

In an 8-1 vote, trustees approved a map that moves four sparsely populated precincts from trustee Carla Ranger's district to board President Lew Blackburn's district. Ranger abstained from the vote.

Blackburn and Ranger had haggled over the Wilmer-Hutchins area precincts during the redistricting process. One of the precincts is home to Wilmer-Hutchins High School and Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School, which sit close to a boundary separating the two trustees' districts. Most students who attend the schools come from Blackburn's area.

Ranger criticized Blackburn at Thursday's meeting for not talking to her about wanting the precincts. She accused him of using "deceptive practices" to "take the schools by force."

"There has been no conversation to this date from the trustee," said Ranger, who represents District 6.

Blackburn and Ranger have said they want the precincts (3800, 3801, 3554, 3556) because of the response they've received from Wilmer-Hutchins residents.

Ranger has said constituents wanted the precincts to remain in her area. Blackburn has said people have told him they want the Wilmer-Hutchins area consolidated under one trustee. The area has three schools, with one in Blackburn's area.

Several community members asked trustees at the meeting to postpone selecting a map. The one approved was a version of an earlier map, but many people had not seen the revisions.

Several speakers accused Blackburn of abusing his leadership by disregarding Ranger's concerns.

"When you stifle the voice of District 6 — Carla Ranger — you take away my voice," said Joyce Foreman, a District 6 resident.

But speaker Claudia Fowler supported the board voting Thursday. She told trustees before the vote that she and others want the Wilmer-Hutchins area under one trustee — Blackburn.

The board had to redraw boundaries using 2010 census data to account for an imbalance in population between trustee districts. The redistricting process is typically done every 10 years after a census. The map will be sent to the Justice Department for approval.
The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Friday, August 26, 2011

**Board Resignation**

Board of Trustees  
Dallas ISD

Dear Trustees:

Via this email, I am today submitting my resignation as District 6 Trustee effective on the earliest date of Board acceptance.

It is my hope that the Board will appoint a replacement until the next regularly scheduled election date.

Immediate acceptance and appointment of a new Trustee prior to the September Board briefing would be appreciated.

Thank you.

Carla Ranger  
District 6 Trustee  
Posted by Carla Ranger - District 6 Trustee - Dallas ISD at 3:59 PM

Labels: Dallas ISD, DISD

Wednesday, August 24, 2011

**Trustee Blackburn plots to take 8 schools and facilities from District 6 by force**

The Board workshop on last Thursday, August 18 ended on a totally mishandled note when Board President Lew Blackburn instructed police officers to evict community leader Rev. Holsey Hickman from the meeting primarily because Rev. Hickman was accusing the Board President of unfair conduct of the meeting.

Unfair conduct of the meeting continued last night at another Board redistricting workshop when a meeting that was posted as a general discussion of redistricting maps and plans was instead turned into a discussion of only the map that the Board President favored.
That might be called "unfairly stacking the deck."

At the beginning of the meeting Board President Blackburn instructed Trustees to decide on one map to vote on at the Thursday Board meeting. Of course, that map was being set up to be the map based on his plan.

The problem with that is the meeting was announced as an open discussion of any map. That was changed by the Board President to a discussion of one map - the one that allows him to take by force eight schools and facilities from District 6 without ever asking or disclosing the dirty plan.

The meeting agenda posting said we would discuss any maps or plans. However, the Board President stated the Board would discuss one map and make a decision last night.

Of course, that would be a clear violation of the Texas Open Meetings Act. The decision would already be made before the official board meeting on Thursday.

District 6 schools and facilities Trustee Blackburn wants to take by force include:

- Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School located in the city of Dallas
- Wilmer-Hutchins High School located in the city of Dallas
- Nolan Estes Plaza
- Clinton P. Russell Elementary
- Boude Storey Middle School
- John Leslie Patton Academic Center
- Elementary DAEP
- Barbara Mann High School

The Board President wants to rush the vote through on Thursday in order to complete the dirty deed.

Trustee Blackburn has unethically interfered in District 6 for some time in his effort to take Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School and Wilmer-Hutchins High School.

Neither the public nor Trustees will have any adequate opportunity to understand, or provide input on newly created maps which will not be seen by Trustees or the public until the Thursday Board meeting.

This very important redistricting process is being hijacked by the Board President Lew Blackburn's agenda to rip off schools from District 6.

There is no need to rush.

The Board attorneys have already confirmed that the redistricting vote can be held at the September Board meeting with no problem.

The public has seen only sample, illustrative maps - not the new maps now being presented by different Trustees for Board action.
Citizens and voters are being denied the right to see and comment on any new maps the Board will consider before a final decision is made.

This is very bad faith and might be a violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Posted by Carla Ranger - District 6 Trustee - Dallas ISD at 6:43 AM
Labels: 2011 Redistricting, Dallas ISD, DISD

Tuesday, August 23, 2011
Opening Day at Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary and Wilmer-Hutchins High School

Yesterday was a great day at Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary and Wilmer-Hutchins High School.

I arrived before 8:00 A.M. and was able to greet and observe students, parents, teachers and staff on the first day at their brand new school.

All were excited and eager to begin the new school year. I visited with parents and students from the Dallas area and the adjacent cities of Wilmer and Hutchins.

It was fun visiting with the kindergarten class below:

Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School class
A day after losing a contentious battle over a redistricting decision, trustee Carla Ranger resigned from the Dallas school board.

Ranger sent her resignation letter to the district by email and posted it on her blog on Friday afternoon. She wrote that it would be effective as soon as it is accepted by the board.

Ranger could not be reached for comment and offered no explanation for the resignation in her letter. She has presided over District 6 in southwest Dallas since June 2006.

Board President Lew Blackburn said he was shocked at the resignation and was waiting for a call back from Ranger on the issue. He said that he has not received a written resignation signed by Ranger, which under policy is a requirement to resign the position.

"If she chooses to resign, we will accept the resignation and move on," Blackburn said. "It just caught me by surprise."

Ranger leaves the board as trustees are in the process of hiring a new superintendent. Blackburn wants to have a search firm hired next month.

The board would need to fill the seat in a special election, which could occur as early as November, according to Dallas ISD's legal office.

"On Thursday, trustees voted 8-1 to approve a new voting map that included moving four of Ranger's precincts to Blackburn's district. Ranger, who abstained from the vote, staunchly opposed the move and accused Blackburn of using "deceptive practices" to take the precincts in the Wilmer-Hutchins area."

Blackburn and Ranger had haggled over the precincts (3300, 3801, 3554, 3556) during the redistricting process. One of the precincts is home...
Board president

Continued from Page 1B

says written resignation required

to Wilmer-Hutchins High School and Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School, which sit close to a boundary separating the two trustees' districts.

Most students who attend the schools come from Blackburn's area, which includes Kennedy-Curry Middle School, another Wilmer-Hutchins-area school.

Blackburn and Ranger had said they both wanted the precincts because of response they'd received from constituents. Ranger had argued that people in her district wanted the precincts to remain in her area. Blackburn had said that he'd heard from people who wanted the area consolidated under one trustee.

Some trustees said they didn't know if the approval of the map was the reason Ranger resigned. They voiced shock at the resignation, but didn't seem surprised that Ranger didn't personally share the information with them. She has been dubbed the "Lone Ranger" on the board for her propensity for not reaching out to other trustees. The situation has limited her ability to garner support for her issues.

"I'm dumbfounded, I guess," Trustee Bruce Parrott said. "I'm sorry that she's made that decision. But when you find yourself not being effective, sometimes that's one of the choices you can make."

It's not like she's picked up the phone to call me and reached out."

Joyce Foreman, a Ranger supporter, also was surprised by the resignation.

"I'm shocked, and I believe the people of District 6 will be shocked," she said. "I'm sorry that she made that decision."

The board had to redraw boundaries after the 2010 census was completed to account for an imbalance in population between trustee districts. The redistricting process is typically done every 10 years. The map will be sent to the Justice Department for approval.

The new voting map is being praised by some residents.

They say it will bring the Wilmer-Hutchins community together by placing all three of its schools under one trustee, Blackburn.

Some community members said they wanted the precincts in Blackburn's district because he has a connection to the area as a former human resources director in the now-defunct Wilmer-Hutchins ISD.

"We had been asking for us to be under one trustee," said Claudia Fowler, who has a daughter at Wilmer-Hutchins High School. "We wanted to be as a whole, as one complete community, with our community schools under one trustee."