

West Contra Costa Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent

Friday Memo
December 21, 2018

Upcoming Events – Matthew Duffy

December 24 – January 4: Winter Recess
January 7: Classes Reconvene
January 8: Solutions Team, DeJean MS, 11:00 AM
January 9: Board of Education Meeting, DeJean MS. 6:00 PM
January 14: Kindergarten Registration Begins
January 15: DLCAP, Kennedy Library, 6:30 PM
January 15: Agenda Setting, Superintendent’s Office, 4:00 PM
January 18: End of Second Quarter
January 19: Board Retreat, Pinole MS Library, 12:00 – 4:00 PM
January 21: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, schools and office closed
January 22: Secondary Work Day, No school for middle and high schools
January 23: Board of Education Meeting, DeJean MS, 6:00 PM
January 31: 100th Day of Instruction

Board Subcommittee to Assess Contracts – Matt Duffy

President Panas and Board Member Lara will convene this ad hoc subcommittee to begin on Thursday, January 17, 3:00 – 5:00 PM at the Alvarado Adult Education Campus. The committee will be organized as a traditional Board Subcommittee with two Board leads setting the agenda and facilitating the meeting. Brown Act rules will apply.

Public Records Log – Marcus Walton

Included in this week’s memo is the log of public records requests received by the district. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Media Stories of Interest - Marcus Walton

The semester is coming to an end for the graduate students at Cal’s School of Journalism, which means a greater number of stories in the Richmond Confidential.

Dual Language - <https://richmondconfidential.org/2018/12/19/richmond-schools-slow-to-adopt-dual-language-immersion-programs-despite-recent-success/>

Trustee Area Maps - <https://richmondconfidential.org/2018/12/17/west-contra-costa-school-board-will-soon-release-its-trustee-area-map-after-a-year-of-controversy/>

Fuel Your School - <https://richmondstandard.com/chevron/2018/12/17/chevron-program-funds-1091-east-bay-classroom-projects-in-fall/>

Richmond Schools - <https://richmondconfidential.org/2018/12/15/were-school-shopping-for-mediocre-richmonds-students-and-parents-try-to-find-the-best-education-in-a-broken-system/>

Charter renewal - <https://richmondconfidential.org/2018/12/12/chart-of-benito-juarez-elementary-renewed-amidst-a-strange-scenario/>

Teacher Pay - <https://richmondconfidential.org/2018/12/14/richmond-teachers-struggle-to-afford-housing-on-poverty-level-salaries/>

Public Records Request Log 2018 - 2019
Week Ending December 14, 2018

	Date of Receipt	Requestor	Requested Records/Information	Current Status
56	3/22/18	Scott Rafferty	Communications regarding CVRA allegations	3/26/18 Email sent with DOCs & Links 3/27/18 Email sent with DOCs & Links Gathering/Reviewing Documents
1819-04	8/1/2018	Scott Rafferty	Communications, social media regarding trustee elections	8/6/2018 - Acknowledgement letter sent Reviewing Documents
1819-08	8/30/2018	Nicole Bates – LSC	Referral, Suspension, Expulsion, Transfer, Arrest data	8/30/2018 – Acknowledgement email sent
1819-09	10/8/2018	David Stephan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Invoices re: Amethod b. Number of teachers under various credentials c. UCP Complaints against Linda Delgado d. Form 700s submitted by Linda Delgado e. Purchase of 1400 Marina Way South 	11/28/2018 – PARTIAL FULFILLMENT Additional records anticipated no later than 12/14/2018
1819-17	11/20/2018	Matthew Dengel – CCC Public Defenders Office	Records regarding the release of student records to law enforcement	11/27/2018 – Acknowledgement letter sent
1819-19	12/3/2018	Sandra Sandford-Smith - Beeson, Tayer & Bodine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List of classified employees 2. Funding for classified positions 3. Documents related to layoffs for 2019-20 4. Documents related to recommended reductions provided at 11/28 Board meeting 5. Contracts for short-term or temp employees for services currently provided by regular classified employees 6. Contracts for short-term or temp employees for services regular classified employees are qualified to render 7. Documents that refer to attrition of classified employees for the 2019-20 school year 8. Budgets submitted from 2014-15 to 2018-19 9. Documents, worksheets, materials pertaining to 2019-20 budget 10. Documents, worksheets, materials pertaining to 2019-20 classified vacancies 	12/14/2018 – PARTIAL FULFILLMENT Additional records anticipated by Jan. 18, 2019
1819-20	11/13/2018	Todd Maddison - Transparent California	A copy of West Contra Costa Unified's Employee Compensation Report for the 2017 year	12/11/2018 – Acknowledgement letter sent
1819-21	11/14/2018	Ramon Castillon - Foundation for Fair Contracting	Certified Payroll Records for Wilson Temp Construction	Collecting Records

1819-22	11/14/2018	Ramon Castillon - Foundation for Fair Contracting	Certified Payroll Records for Wilson Temp Construction PG&E Conversion	Collecting Records
1819-23	11/14/2018	Ramon Castillon - Foundation for Fair Contracting	Richmond HS Theater Lighting and Sound	Collecting Records
1819-24	12/13/2018	Veronica Diaz - Teamsters	Administrator surveys regarding grad tutors	12/14/2018 – Acknowledgement letter sent

Richmond Confidential



Richmond schools slow to adopt Dual Language Immersion programs despite recent success

Meiying Wu on December 19, 2018

Why is it important to be bilingual?

For some people, being bilingual means having a better chance to find a job or a bridge to understand another culture.

For others, it means being able to succeed academically and socially in the U.S., where the domestic language is English, and at the same time being able to converse with their grandparents who only speak Spanish.

There is a bilingual education program called the Dual Language Immersion program that almost everyone in Richmond supports because it enables English learners to retain the Spanish language they first learned. And yet few people have mobilized to get it adopted in the majority of schools in a district in which about one third of students are English learners. Eight out of 12 elementary schools have not adopted the dual immersion program.

“Even though it started 14 years ago, in the past, there hasn’t really been a lot of attention or support given to the program,” said Bryan Brandow, a fourth and fifth-grade teacher at Washington Elementary School’s dual immersion program.

Matthew Duffy, who became the superintendent of the school district three years ago, said a decision to extend dual immersion to more schools must be made by the community, the principals and the district together. And there hasn’t been a comprehensive effort from the community to push for such an extension, he said.

The dual immersion program originated in the 1960s in Dade County schools in Florida, where Cuban immigrants supported both languages. The most important difference between other bilingual education programs is that English never replaces the minority language in the dual immersion program. Instead, English learners gradually spend increasingly more class time in English but always with some instruction in their original language.

Andrea Zavala Cruces, 14, is a seventh-grade student in the dual immersion program at the Fred T. Korematsu Middle School in Richmond. Growing up, Cruces spoke only Spanish with her parents so she was an English learner.

Ten years ago, Cruces’ mom, Erika Cruces Franco, decided to enroll her in the dual immersion program at Richmond’s Washington Elementary School, which was the first elementary school in the Contra Costa Unified School District to adopt the program.

Cruces said she recognized immediately the value of the program that allowed her daughter to be able to speak, listen and read in both English and Spanish. Some in her family said that was a bad idea, she recalled, and it was better for her daughter to attend an English school and learn Spanish at home from her mother.

Andrea Cruces said she is grateful that her mother didn't listen to that advice because she can see the difference between her Spanish-speaking ability and that of her cousins who went to schools with programs that only taught in English.

"Most of my cousins aren't fluent in Spanish, and that makes me really sad because I can easily connect with my great grandma, my grandparents, my uncles and my aunts that only speak Spanish. But my cousins, they don't even know how to say 'Good morning' in Spanish," she said.

The dual immersion program allows Spanish-speaking English learners and English speakers to take classes together and learn from each other. The program provides 90 percent of instructions in Spanish and 10 percent in English in kindergarten and first grade. And then each year, the program adds 10 percent additional instruction in English until half of the instruction is in Spanish and the other half in English in fifth grade. This continues into sixth grade and then students have the opportunity to enroll in a dual immersion in middle school, like the one at the Fred T. Korematsu Middle School.

Ilona Clark is a Richmond resident who enrolled both of her English-speaking children at the dual immersion program in Washington Elementary more than a decade ago. She said the program challenged her children to learn another language at a young age, and it turned out great.

"It's a practical skill. It's a win-win-win," Clark said.

While students from different backgrounds are celebrating a "win-win" at Washington Elementary, bilingual teachers have concerns at Lincoln Elementary School that lies in about 1.5 miles away, also in Richmond.

Lincoln Elementary uses another approach with English learners that is called the Transitional Bilingual Program.

The program provides mostly Spanish instruction in kindergarten, with a few English language development sessions. Starting with first grade, it provides English instruction in math and a few other subjects. In third grade, the program provides 60 percent of instruction in English. And by fourth grade, students are transitioned into English-only classes and no further instruction takes place in Spanish.

Currently, students in this transitional bilingual program don't have to pass a standardized English language exam to move to English-only classes in fourth grade.

Jesus Galindo, a bilingual teacher at the transitional bilingual program at Lincoln Elementary, said many teachers are concerned about the program's outcome because of the rapid transition to English and the lack of a language examination to ensure students have a solid enough foundation to succeed academically in English-only classes.

Studies have indicated that both English learners and English speakers in the dual immersion program increased their scores in reading and math in English in later grades. Students in the transitional bilingual program who moved to English-only classes in fourth grade did not improve their scores across grades, according to Athens Journal of Education's study, "Transitional Bilingual Education and Two-Way Immersion Programs: Comparison of Reading Outcomes for English Learners in the United States."

Lisa Jimenez, the executive director of the Multilingual and Multicultural Services in the school district, said her department supports the dual immersion program because, "many dual immersion students outperform their English-only peers," and that it offers unique opportunities for students to achieve high academic outcomes while becoming bilingual and biliterate in a global community.

Brandow, the teacher at Washington Elementary, said the appreciation for both languages in the dual immersion program creates opportunities for students to have a diverse social group. He told the story of a Spanish-speaking student living in North Richmond who became best friends with an English-speaking student living in the Iron Triangle, and said he believed that it wouldn't have been possible without the program.

When the reporter asked which program he would recommend for students, Brandow said, "That's not even a question. Definitely Dual Immersion."

And yet despite his and other educators' view of the dual immersion program being clearly superior for students, most elementary schools in the West Contra Costa Unified School District don't use the program. Instead, they still use the more transitional bilingual approach in which students move to English-only classes in fourth grade.

The Multilingual District Advisory Committee at the school district identified the weaknesses with the transitional bilingual approach several years ago. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the multilingual committee made the recommendation to, "expand the transitional program beyond third grade" because it diminishes the value of the home language.

But it wasn't until this year that Downer Elementary School in San Pablo took a step to transition its transitional bilingual program to dual immersion.

Marco Gonzales, the executive director of elementary schools at the school district, worked as Downer's principal for the past nine years until this June. Gonzales grew up in Richmond as an English speaker. He said his parents suffered from discrimination for speaking Spanish, so he was taught little Spanish as a child.

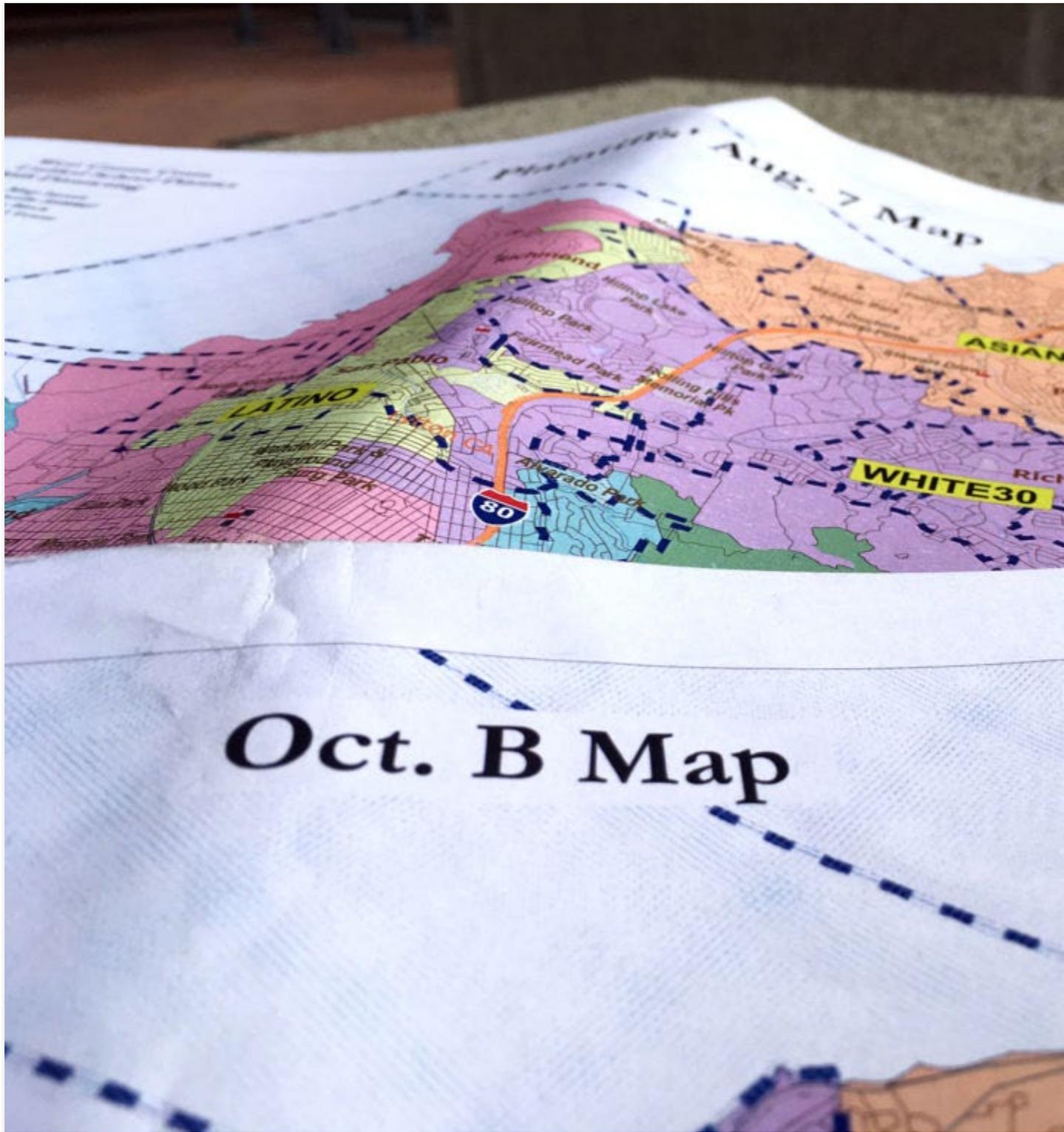
But he said he now wishes he had studied more Spanish so he was fully proficient. When he worked at Downer as the principal, he had the idea of transitioning its transitional bilingual program into a dual immersion approach. He said his personal experience influenced him about the importance of being bilingual.

But taking a step to change the bilingual program at Downer wasn't easy. Gonzales said the biggest challenge was making parents aware of the benefits of the dual immersion program. Only one parent attended the first parent information night. Gonzales did not give up and hosted more parent meetings, and finally, more than 15 parents showed up and listened to his proposal about changing to the dual immersion program.

Gonzalez said Downer's transition didn't require additional funding or recruiting new teachers. And training teachers from the transitional bilingual program did not cost significantly more. The California Association for Bilingual Educators agreed to train the teachers.

Now more parents have learned about the dual language program and became interested in it. But as of now, no other schools have proposed to transition into the dual immersion program, according the Jimenez.

Richmond Confidential



West Contra Costa school board will soon release its trustee-area map after a year of controversy

Edward Booth on December 17, 2018

A lawsuit calling upon the West Contra Costa Unified School Board to change the way it is elected in order to better represent minority voters has dominated meetings for the past year.

Soon, the process will be over. A yet-to-be-finalized trustee-area map will be decided upon, splitting the school district into five voting areas for future elections.

Trustee-area voting will replace the current at-large system, where board members are determined by district-wide popular vote. Residents of each voting area will be responsible for electing one trustee to represent their interests on the school board.

Two of the established areas are expected to be minority districts: a majority Latino district in San Pablo and the other as-close-to-majority African American as possible in Richmond. After the districts have been decided, every school board seat will be opened for the 2020 election.

**West Contra Costa
Unified School District
2018 Districting**

Oct. B Map

Area 1 is Hercules & Pinole
 Areas 2 is Pt. Richmond, North Richmond, Hilltop,
 Country Club and Alvarado Park
 Area 3 is El Cerrito & and the parts of
 San Pablo & Richmond that are E of I-80
 Area 4 is San Pablo & Richmond
 Area 5 is South Richmond, Iron Triangle & Marina

Area 4: 50.8% Latino by Registration
 Area 5: 50.3% African-American by Registration
 Area 5: Trustees Cuevas and Phillips
 Area 3: Trustees Block, Kronenberg & Panas

National Demographics Corporation, Oct. 1, 2018

The Oct. B Map, selected by the school board on Nov. 14
 The journey toward the new voting system in the school district began in 2002, when the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 was enacted, making it easier for minority groups to prove at-large elections dilute their vote. Though most California elections have historically been held at-large, the voting rights act has caused a surge of lawsuits

in recent years, either threatened or real, prompting more than 100 school districts and cities to shift to trustee-area elections.

A group in Richmond, unaware of the voting rights act, began advocating in 2008 to change the way school board members were elected so members of minority groups had a stronger voice. That group, known as the Citizens for Positive Education, petitioned the county board to put a proposal to change to trustee-area elections onto an upcoming ballot.

The efforts of the citizens' group failed, however, and the issue only reemerged this year when a Walnut Creek lawyer teamed up in a lawsuit with Linda Ruiz-Lozito, who a decade earlier had been a member of the citizens' group.

In the decade since Ruiz-Lozito and the citizens' group tried to change the voting system, proponents of making the switch had won a string of victories statewide. Indeed, no school governing body has thus far managed to defend the status quo against a lawsuit alleging a violation of the voting rights act. In some areas, the governing body has conceded to an attorney's letter of demand by making a commitment to shift to trustee areas—while also reimbursing the plaintiff's attorney up to \$30,000 for demographic studies or other work involved in writing the demand letter.

In other areas, governing bodies have chosen to contest in court the allegations of racial polarization. When they've lost in court—and no one yet has won—they have paid the legal fees not only of their own attorneys but also of the opposition, which often adds up to millions of dollars.

Ruiz-Lozito, the plaintiff in the case against the West Contra Costa school district, has a long history as a district parent, resident, artist and education advocate. In 2008, she collected hundreds of signatures for trustee-areas as part of the citizens group. The group held small public meetings at the Round Table Pizza restaurant and the Easter Hill Church in Richmond.

Group members gathered more than 1,700 signatures and received a public hearing from the Contra Costa County Committee on School District Organization—a body made up of members of the Contra Costa County Board of Education. Almost 40 individuals spoke at the July 2, 2008 meeting, and perspectives during public comment were evenly split either for or against inserting the item on the ballot, according to the Contra Costa Times newspaper.

Proponents of the petition argued that trustee-area candidates would need less money to run in elections, that areas with historically less board representation could gain more, and that voters within each trustee-area would feel more motivated to be politically engaged by having their own representative, according to the Contra Costa Times.

Opponents at the meeting argued that area elections would destroy unity, be costly to implement and that an upcoming parcel tax was more important; they argued the insertion of trustee-areas on the ballot could potentially confuse voters.

Ruiz-Lozito said she was surprised by the amount of previously unseen resistance that materialized at the meeting. Several city officials, former city officials and even a representative from former California state Senator Lori Hancock's office arrived to either voice opposition or request that the item not be considered until after the parcel tax vote was settled.

None of them had appeared at meetings to talk about the issue earlier, said Ruiz-Lozito.

The 2008 attempt to establish trustee-areas as a ballot-item fizzled. After a 4-1 vote, county board members said they understood the intent of the petition, but they agreed with the concerns about voter confusion damaging the chances of passing the parcel tax.

Ruiz-Lozito said she had no knowledge of the state voting rights act at the time. There had been no lawsuit filed or threatened, and the voting rights act was not invoked by the group. If the act had been referenced, the district might have been forced to make the switch to trustee-areas almost a decade ago.

Ruiz-Lozito and the group's rationale for advocating for the switch to trustee-areas remained a live issue in the district. As one of her efforts to bring awareness to the benefits trustee-areas, Ruiz-Lozito wrote a letter to the Contra Costa Times, published April 23, 2008.

"Currently, there are five elected school board members who control this large district and the education of our students," Ruiz-Lozito wrote. "Three of the five school board members are from the same neighborhood. As a parent of two children in the school district, I do not feel this creates balanced representation for most of our schoolchildren."

Her concerns were echoed on January 22 this year in a demand letter, sent by the Walnut Creek-based attorney Scott Rafferty, which alleged violations of the voting rights act. Rafferty has sent numerous such demand letters across California in recent years, including to the cities of Antioch and Concord.

For a fee of \$30,000, and a commitment to move to trustee-area elections, the board could have elected to settle the case at that time.

In his letter, Rafferty wrote that three of the five school board members were white and from El Cerrito, an area representing less than 10 percent of a district in which 89 percent of students are minorities, according to the letter. He analyzed election patterns, claimed the district had a history of minority underrepresentation, and concluded that,

“there is a consistent pattern that most minority candidates receive strong support from those precincts with larger minority populations, but are unable to prevail at large.”

“In this case, districting is an effective and legally required remedy.”

With charts and graphs, Rafferty argued that there was racially profiled voting, which “occurs when some candidates preferred by one race or language group receive a higher level of support from that group than from the electorate at-large.”

Rafferty argued that trustee-areas would lead to greater accountability and community confidence, possibly stemming the growth of racially segregated charter schools. He also asserted that there was an economic benefit to district elections. Ballots would not have to be prepared in every voting area each time.

The school district’s communications director Marcus Walton has said at board meetings that no independent study of racial polarization in the district has ever been conducted. The voting rights act does not require such a study or determination of racial polarization.

Rafferty’s letter also illustrated how election systems have shifted in the state since 2008, when no other school districts in the county, and few in the state, had switched to trustee-areas.

“Except for Irvine, no city with a larger population elects its council at large,” Rafferty wrote. “Of the 29 school districts in California that are larger than WCCUSD, all but nine elect trustees by district,” he said, referring to the West Contra Costa school district.

He went on to say that, “At least 125 smaller school boards have been districted as a result” of voting rights lawsuits, “or by preemptive orders from the county board of education (or committee on school district organization).”

But however strong his legal arguments, Rafferty still needed a plaintiff. Ruiz-Lozito says she reached out to him because she was still concerned about the lack of representation from districts with more minority residents, and she informed him that she would be his plaintiff if he couldn’t find anyone else.

The board had 45 days to respond to Rafferty’s demand letter before he could file a lawsuit.

On March 7 of this year, 44 days after the letter, the board still hadn’t voted to establish intent to switch. The vote on making the switch was 1-4, with only board member Madeline Kronenberg voting in favor. According to the March 27 meeting minutes, “there were procedural questions and resulting confusion about the motion on the floor.” This resulted in the board failing to indicate it intended to switch to trustee-area elections. Instead, some members of the board suggested that it send the issue to the ballot for voters to decide.

But two weeks later, the board changed its mind, voting to reconsider its intent to transition to trustee area. The board went on to vote 4-1 indicating it would commit to making the transition happen.

But another vote was necessary before the board could withdraw the issue from the public vote that had earlier been planned. The board failed by a 2-3 vote to approve the waiver, effectively leaving the switch to trustee-areas up to the public vote. Board members Valerie Cuevas and Tom Panas voted for the waiver, while Kronenberg, Block and Phillips voted against.

Though the ballot vote ultimately didn't happen because the board was unable to meet certain required deadlines, school attorney Harold Freiman warned at the meeting if the ballot vote struck down trustee-areas, it could be taken as further evidence of racial polarization, and the district would then have been potentially open to more litigation.

But the fact that the issue appeared to be headed to the ballot box prompted Rafferty to file a lawsuit against the district on March 21. Ruiz-Lozito and Ayana Young, a black Hercules-based lawyer who ran for school board in 2014, were noted as plaintiffs. (Young would later drop out of the lawsuit and oppose maps proposed by Rafferty and Ruiz-Lozito.)

Rafferty claimed, among other things, that the former district superintendent Bruce Harter—who retired in 2016 as the second-longest serving superintendent in district history—should have known that racially polarized voting likely existed in the district, and should have known that the voting rights act required a transition to trustee-areas.

Harter also should have known, according to the lawsuit, that the California State Board of Education has always allowed governing bodies to bypass the ballot box in order to change to trustee-area voting districts, in effect undercutting the main argument that had been used to stop the momentum toward making the switch in 2008.

The district then held five public hearings and four informational sessions to gather input from the community on the mapping process. A map, ultimately, would need to be approved by the county education board before the issue could be decided by voters in November.

Drawing the map became a contentious, still-not-decided process that could reach into 2019.

The first five informational meetings drew fewer than ten people each, according to Walton, the school district's communication director. At these meetings, Cuevas and Panas were the only board members present.

On June 27, the board selected a map, with Cuevas and Panas voting against it.

One month later, on July 24, the map came for approval before the County Committee on School District Organization, which rejected the map after about 30 members of the public spoke against approval.

The lawsuit was partially settled on August 30. The settlement said that the three seats that were to be contested in the November at-large election would have two-year terms. The 2020 elections would also immediately set in place the staggering of board elections: two or three of the five seats would be contested in the 2020 election for four year terms, while the others would be for two-year terms.

On Sept. 26, the final details of the settlement were decided. The adopted map would have a majority Latino district and an as-close-to-majority-as-possible African American district. The largest minority population districts would have four-year terms and the remaining two areas would have two-year terms.

The district put together 10 guidelines, four required by law, to shape the creation of the new maps. These included a requirement that the trustee areas be as equal in population as possible. They also indicated the goal of minority districts, determined by voter registration numbers. At the same time, another legal condition requires that the boundaries can't be gerrymandered primarily on the basis of race.

Then the mapping process was repeated at three additional meetings at the end of October. As many as 55 people attended them, and every board member made at least one appearance.

At the conclusion of the latest process, at the Nov. 14 board meeting, the board voted to indicate a preference for a different map. Several people who commented during the public comment period had said they weren't happy with the process, but that they supported a map known as the Oct. B map because they said it seemed like the best among the selection.

The chosen map does not at present meet the minority district requirement, according to Ruiz-Lozito. If that requirement isn't met, the district could be open to further litigation.

Board members Stephanie Hernández-Jarvis and Consuelo Lara, who were elected in the November ballot, joined re-elected winner Cuevas on the new board on Dec. 5. All three newly elected board members are Latino.

The new board will redraw the map in 2021, using 2020 census data.

Ruiz-Lozito's said her feelings on the process have been mixed, but she said she'd been inspired by the enthusiasm of the parents, particularly those on the West Contra Costa Parents Council, a predominantly Latino group.

"The parents have so much heart and soul," she said.

Chevron program funds 1,091 East Bay classroom projects in fall

December 17, 2018



The Chevron Fuel Your School program visited Stege Elementary in October to encourage teachers in West County and beyond to make funding requests for classroom projects, particularly in STEM subjects, via [DonorsChoose.org](#).

When it comes to funding classroom projects, local schools are continuing to get a lot of mileage out of the [Chevron Fuel Your School](#) program.

In Contra Costa and Alameda counties, 1,091 classroom projects, about half focused on the subjects of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), were funded this fall through the program, the company announced today.

Fuel Your School runs through the month of October. Every time consumers filled up with 8 or more gallons at participating Chevron or Texaco stations, Chevron donates \$1, totaling \$1 million. That money then goes to fund requests by teachers on DonorsChoose.org for classroom tools and materials.

In Richmond, 25 schools received Fuel Your School program funding, averaging just over \$39,000 per school and impacting 3,033 students. Eleven projects funded within the city of Richmond involved STEM subjects, such as Stege Elementary, where a fifth-grade teacher had a BrickLAB STEM Foundations set to help students learn through building, and where a middle-school teacher received all the laboratory equipment necessary for an Anatomy of an Earthworm hands-on learning course.

RELATED: [Chevron Fuel Your School program visits Stege Elementary](#)

In terms of the West Contra Costa Unified School District, 44 schools received funding, impacting 4,802 students and launching 15 STEM projects.

Since Chevron launched Fuel Your School in 2010, the program has generated \$8.88 million for schools in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The program also exists in 16 other communities in the U.S., generating in total \$5.74 million this fall for classroom projects, benefitting nearly 790,700 students.

“We are proud to support our passionate local teachers, especially in their efforts to educate and inspire young people in STEM subjects,” said Lily Rahnema, community engagement manager with Chevron Richmond.

Matt Duffy, superintendent for WCCUSD, says the donations are very helpful to educators working on tight budgets.

“These donations, especially when budgets are tight, have helped our hard-working and dedicated educators provide compelling classroom instruction, which is critical for us to keep our students focused and engaged,” Duffy said during a Fuel Your School event in Richmond earlier this month.

Richmond Confidential

‘We’re school shopping for mediocre:’ Richmond’s students and parents try to navigate a ‘broken’ education system

Seventeen-year-old Phillip Poe starts his days early. He gets up at 5:45 a.m. so that he can catch a ride to BART with a family member. Then he takes a train to catch a bus, arriving at school just before 8 a.m.

His days end late, too. He often doesn’t return until 10 p.m., sometimes taking a long bus ride home after evening varsity basketball practice. After finishing homework, he gets to bed by midnight, catching less than six hours of sleep before doing the same routine all over again the next day.

Poe’s long days stem from his long commute. He’s a senior at Pinole Valley High School but lives about seven miles away, in central Richmond. He and his mom, Tishana Poe, recently moved in with extended family in the city after the landlord of their San Pablo apartment unexpectedly raised the rent this summer.

Phillip Poe has now joined thousands of other Richmond students who commute out of their neighborhood for school. With test scores stagnant and a reputation for violence marring the attractiveness of many of Richmond’s traditional district schools, students and their families look elsewhere. Many consider other schools with better reputations within the district, including Pinole Valley High or El Cerrito High School. In recent years, these schools had [better](#) scores on Smart Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) tests, used to measure English and Math progress, than Richmond schools like Richmond High and John F. Kennedy High.

A 2015-2016 [study](#) conducted by the West Contra Costa Unified School District considering schools’ population noted that nearly one fifth of the students going to El Cerrito High School were from outside the school’s boundary. In contrast, more than 40 percent of high school students whose local district school was Kennedy High, in central Richmond, chose to go to another high school. For the 2018-2019 school year, according to data emailed to *Richmond Confidential* from district transfer office, more than 1,500 students, or just under five percent of the district total, requested to go to a different district school from the one closest to them.

Others go outside of the district entirely, including to Oakland and Orinda. The transfer office said that for the 2018-2019 school year, 1,500 students—comprising another 5 percent—requested to leave the district, choosing instead to go to a school in another district.

Reflecting a national trend, charter schools have proliferated in the city over the last decade, offering other options. There are now 14 operating in and around Richmond, a

city of just over 100,000. By comparison, nearby Berkeley, with approximately 120,000 people, has just one charter school. Charters in West Contra Costa serve about 15 percent of the district's nearly 35,000 students.

In many ways, Poe's story is unique. He was already enrolled at Pinole before he and his mother moved to Richmond, so he didn't have to apply for a transfer out of the city or consider other options like charter schools. But in other ways the family's story mirrors dozens of others told to *Richmond Confidential*, which spoke to over a dozen students and parents about how they choose the school that was right for them. Many shared stories of being scarred by Richmond's traditional district schools. They spoke of bullying, overcrowded classrooms, chronically absent teachers and unresponsive administrations.

How families deal with these issues vary. Some parents are fighting to better Richmond's traditional district schools, and others are getting their kids out of the district system. All, driven by desperation, reflect a highly informed citizenry painfully aware of the failings of the local schools, an awareness that forces pro-active decision making.

Poe likes Richmond. Many of his family members have lived there at different times, and he's proud that one of his uncles is part of a rap group that focuses, in part, on daily life in the city. He also knows a lot of fellow teenagers in the city through basketball.

But when Poe moved to Richmond, he was clear that he didn't want to go to one of its high schools. "If I went there, I know I'd be in the wrong crowd," he says. "I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing."

Poe and his mom decided he should stay at Pinole Valley High, not only because they think that academics and extra-curricular activities are better there, but because they're both weary of Richmond's high schools' reputation for violence and gang affiliations. It's a reputation that some, like school board member Tom Panas, say is unfair and outdated but that has nonetheless persisted. "It's like a cloud just hangs over that school," he says, referring to Richmond High.

But there's a fresh memory that keeps the reputation alive. At a 2009 Richmond High homecoming dance, a female student [was gangraped](#). Police weren't called to the scene for two hours, [according to news reports](#). This seemed to prove, for many, what they had always believed: that schools like Richmond High are not safe for students.

In a written statement, Matthew Duffy, the superintendent for the school district, argued that the environment at the school has improved in recent years. He told *Richmond Confidential*, "we work hard to make sure all of our schools are safe. At Richmond High we have added Assistant Principals to make sure the school runs smoothly. In recent years, suspensions and referrals have decreased dramatically at Richmond High and extracurricular activities have dramatically increased."

Still, violence across district schools remains a key concern for parents.

Yolanda Lopez is a member of the West Contra Costa Parents' Council, a self-organized advocacy and support group that includes parents from both traditional district and charter schools. She says she realized that her son was being bullied in kindergarten at his local district school when they were watching a movie together. As one character was being pulled and choked on the screen, her son told her, "that's what the kids did to me yesterday," she says. By the time her son got to first grade, Lopez says, half of the students in her son's class bullied him.

Students interviewed describe similar problems. "I've been bullied by the same kids since third grade," says 18-year-old Nyree McDaniels. "Teachers saw this and didn't do anything about it."

McDaniels says she's also "been bullied by teachers." Her experience, she says, "was so bad that one of my really good teachers paid for me to go to a private school." McDaniels has since left Richmond's school system and is taking GED classes instead.

Addressing these allegations in a written response to *Richmond Confidential*, Duffy said that he is, "very sorry to hear this," and that he, "would love to talk to this student to learn more."

The struggle to find a safe and appropriate school is particularly acute for parents of children with special needs. Shakira Reynolds says she has moved her eldest son, who has autism, to a new school every single year. He has been subjected to physical violence from other students in his classes for children with severe handicaps.

The boys' struggles have prompted Reynolds and her husband to make a tough decision. They'll move to North Carolina, which has more dedicated funding and programs for children with autism, before their children reach high school. They lived there before, when their eldest son was born, but moved to Richmond because much of Reynolds' immediate and extended family lives in the city.

"Moving back to North Carolina means leaving everybody. My siblings, everybody is here," Reynolds says. "But we're going back for the boys. My children cannot be guinea pigs."

As he did in response to 18-year-old McDaniels' case, Duffy wrote to *Richmond Confidential* that he is, "very sorry to hear this," and that he would like to learn more, adding, "I don't believe this is a common issue for all Special Education students."

Other parents express different complaints. Several Latinx parents interviewed by *Richmond Confidential* say that children of Spanish speakers are treated differently, either as a result of not receiving language support or because they are perceived less favorably by administrators.

A mother, who goes by the name Luz and asked not to have her last name used because she is active within the school district, says that her son fell behind in reading

twice while he was at Highland Elementary School. He repeated second grade, but she says was not given extra support to catch up. By fifth grade, he was still reading at a second-grade level.

“I decided to move him to a charter school. He hates it, and he hates himself for being behind,” she says.

Her son recently told her that he’s so miserable, he’s considering cutting himself and that he’d prefer to go to work with his dad than go to school, she says.

“A 13-year-old, saying he’s going to cut himself,” sighs Luz. “Imagine that.”

Asked to respond to the comments from Luz and the Latinx community, Duffy noted in an email that, “three Latinas were recently elected to the school Board.” He added that, “the district is deeply invested in supporting the Latino community as it is with all communities.”

Panas, who’s been a member of the district school board for two years, readily admits that teacher retention is poor, that the achievement gap between white students and students of color is too large and that there aren’t enough auxiliary staff like counselors and nurses to support students. Fixing the problems, though, remains difficult with limited funding, he says.

“We have to have a balanced budget,” he says. “If we add one thing, we have to cut something else. It’s a simple issue of funding.”

Richmond and the school district are not alone in struggling to make ends meet.

“The biggest issue with education in California is that it’s underfunded,” says Rigel Spencer Massaro, a lawyer specializing in education at the nonprofit law firm Public Advocates in Sacramento.

Massaro and other education advocates say that one of the biggest causes for underfunding is Proposition 13. Passed in 1978, the law limits property taxes to no more than 2% of a property’s value, based on a 1976 assessment, unless the property is sold. That means that big companies with long-term properties, such as The Walt Disney Company and Chevron Corporation, haven’t experienced significant property tax increases for decades. This has severely limited the state’s revenue generation, thereby starving public services like education.

“Prop 13 drastically cut the money available for schools in the state, which went from being one of the top spenders in the country to one of the lowest spenders in the country,” says Jesse Rothstein, professor of public policy and economics at the University of California, Berkeley’s Goldman School of Public Policy and director of the California Policy Lab.

“And it’s been *the* issue ever since,” he says.

The result is that California ranks 46th out of the 50 states in the amount of school funding per student.

This lack of funding affects nearly all aspects of education. California provides fewer general physical health and mental health services than almost any other state, according to the education website *EdSource*. The state ranks 39th of the 50 states for the number of school nurses per student, and last for the number of school counselors per student.

EdSource also notes that since 2015, 80 percent of the state’s school districts have, “reported acute shortages of teachers, especially in special education, mathematics and science, with growing shortages of bilingual teachers as well.”

A study done by Jesse Levin and other researchers at the American Institutes for Research for *EdSource* estimates that the state needs nearly \$92 billion to meet its educational needs. Doing so would require that state to increase spending by nearly 40 percent over what was spent in 2016-2017.

Some cities and school districts have taken matters into their own hands, instituting fundraising mechanisms like parcel taxes, property taxes and bonds to raise money that can be spent locally. But, “those are easier to pass in high-income places where people have more money,” says Rothstein, noting that cities like Richmond—historically low-income, with a relatively low tax base—are least likely to do this. And given that the city remains largely low-income, even when taxes are instituted, the revenue generated remains low.

Even in higher-income areas, these measures, “just give little extra bits around what is fundamentally a stingy system,” Rothstein says.

In the early 2000s, voters had allowed the West Contra Costa school district to use bonds to fund renovations for schools. But voters rejected a bond measure in 2014 amid claims of corruption and poor fiscal management.

In 2013, Governor Jerry Brown tried to make a dent in the well-known funding crisis by implementing the Local Control Funding Formula. The funding model gives schools a set amount of money per student, with additional funds for each student who has extra needs, such as those from low-income families and English learners.

Districts with over 55 percent of students from low-income families receive an extra boost. The formula is meant to give more control to schools and districts over how to spend money and provide additional funds to schools in cities like Richmond with a large majority of high-needs students.

With the local funding formula, school funding statewide is now just above what it was before the 2008 recession. But Rothstein says it's far from enough.

"It's extra money on what remains a very low base," he says. Until the deeper problems created by Proposition 13 are addressed, Rothstein says, programs like the local funding formula will only be able to provide, "small fixes."

There are efforts to amend Prop 13 in the 2020 election to make commercial properties pay updated tax rates. The group Evolve, which advocates for this change, estimates that the updated tax rates could increase funding for schools by \$4.5 billion, still far short of what is needed.

Without a serious change in overall school funding, Panas, the Richmond school board member, doesn't see the district's coffers growing larger anytime soon, limiting the district's ability to change things.

"We already know through 2023 what will come in from the state in terms of state grants. There's no significant prospect for money on the horizon," he says.

In fact, more cuts are on the way. Earlier this year, the school board voted to increase salaries for the district's teachers in an attempt to increase retention and performance, catapulting them from being some of lowest paid in the county, [to the highest](#). But since the district is mandated by the state to have a balanced budget, other programs will have to take cuts to pay for the teachers' raise. The school board anticipates the need to cut \$12 million from programs in the 2019-2020 budget, and an additional \$4 million in the next year.

No final decision has been made on how the cuts will be made. But cutting funding from the dual immersion program, grad tutor program and special education programs, among others, were discussed at a [recent school board meeting](#).

Duffy, the superintendent, said in an email to *Richmond Confidential* that the increase in teacher compensation is an attempt to, "recruit and retain the best" teachers, and that the district has, "stepped up training efforts for our teachers and leaders." Duffy also noted that the district is, "working with unions to improve absenteeism" and is also trying to raise more funds by, "working to increase enrollment, increase attendance, partner with philanthropy, seek grants and reduce expenditures."

Duffy worried in his email that this story had, "no positives about our schools," saying, "there are many beautiful things happening all over Richmond. There are many good schools. We are opening new schools such as Mandarin Dual Immersion, expanding current Spanish Dual Immersion, opening K-8 schools, increasing elementary sports and music, supporting our teachers with more professional development and leadership training and spreading the word!"

Charter schools offer an alternative for parents and teachers who remain concerned about Richmond's district schools. Charters are schools that receive public money but are privately run, controlling day-to-day operations with limited oversight from the district. Their unique position—independently operating but still open to all of a district's students—is attractive to many residents of districts like West Contra Costa, where beleaguered families want other options besides their district schools but want their children to stay close by and can't necessarily afford private school.

Individual charters also often have a specific specialty, be it bilingual education or music, making them more appealing than catch-all traditional district schools. Many charters promise to turn graduates into high-achieving college-goers.

“Our mission is to send 100% of our students to and through college,” [reads](#) the top of the website of the Leadership Public Schools' Richmond campus, one of the oldest and best performing charter schools in the district. Making Waves, one of the city's first charter schools, “commits to rigorously and holistically preparing students to gain acceptance to and graduate from college to ultimately become valuable contributors to the workforce and their communities,” [its website](#) says.

[Across the school district](#), charter schools did perform better than traditional district schools on the 2018 Smart Balance English and Math tests.

Thirty-four percent of students in district-run schools met or exceeded an acceptable score for the English language exam. That's a lower proportion than at charter schools in the district where 46 percent of students met or exceeded the acceptable score.

But both the district schools and charter schools performed below the average statewide, where 50 percent of students passed the English exam.

A comparison of math scores on the same assessment was similar. 23 percent of students in district schools met or exceeded an acceptable score for math, a lower proportion than the 31 percent at charter schools. Both performed below California-wide statistics, where 39 percent of students passed math.

Asked for his response, Duffy, the superintendent, said that, “not all charters outperform our schools,” noting that the district has, “taken on new curriculum, assessments and teaching modules to improve our performance.”

Proponents of charter schools often say that their schools offer families a choice. But Janelle Scott, a professor at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Education, says that the idea of choice is, in reality, quite a limited one.

“Many families don't have information about charter schools, so they don't have options,” says Scott.

She also notes that the charter “schools still hold enormous power to choose students.” Not only do charter schools set their own priorities, she says, but they often look for high performing students who won’t cost a lot of money to teach and will improve their test results and overall profile.

Scott says that English learners and those enrolled in special education are not as likely to be chosen because they’re the most expensive, and hardest, to teach.

In district schools, 34 percent of students are considered English learners, compared to just 30 percent in charter schools. Twelve percent of all students in district schools have special education needs, compared to only 8 percent in charter schools. Reynolds, the mother of the child with autism, says that charter schools weren’t even a consideration for her family, as they “don’t support kids like mine.” Reynolds also says that charters weren’t an option for her, as she doesn’t see charters as the solution to the problems facing the public education system.

Critics of charter schools also point out that their proliferation actually means less money for traditional district schools, thereby worsening the underlying problem of underfunding. The school district’s funds are set based on the number of students they serve, so as more schools open up, the same amount of money needs to be shared between a greater number of institutions. Demetrio Gonzalez, head of Richmond’s teachers’ union, explains it simply, saying, “As district schools lose more students, they lose more funding.”

Gonzalez says that he would “never blame a parent” for taking a child out of a traditional district school, but notes, “a lot of families are only thinking about their own child and not the effect on the school when they leave it.

“It’s a vicious cycle, because as it becomes more challenging, you have more people who want to leave.”

Gonzalez also notes that charter schools have become popular in Richmond because there’s been too little money for local schools in the first place, with the city’s mostly low-income population unable to raise extra funds to fill the gap that Prop 13 created. “You don’t see charter schools opening in Walnut Creek,” he says. “You see them in Oakland, in Richmond.”

And while charter schools promise a better experience, their students and parents also complain. They chafe in the unbendingly strict environments with limited transparency into school functioning and finances.

Mariella Cuellar is a mother of two daughters. She’s moved both girls from traditional district schools to charter schools.

She says she thought charter schools were going to be the solution, but after moving her daughters to two different charter schools, she realizes that she's put them through too much transition.

"And as I learn more about both district and charter schools, I see it's all a broken system," she says.

Parents are organizing to help one another negotiate the complex web of school options within Richmond. The West Contra Costa Parents' Council was started in 2015 in order to, "learn how the district works, how they make policies, how resources are used and how to navigate the system," says Ada Bustamante, a leader of the group and mother of four children.

They share information on their Facebook page and among informal social networks, "since the community doesn't know what's happening," Bustamante says. The group meets to discuss strategies for individual students who are struggling and to advocate for larger systemic change, both within individual schools and across the district.

Members are regular fixtures at school board meetings, and one sits on the Local Control and Accountability Plan, an advisory group which sets goals for the district.

"We have to use our powers as mothers," says Luz, who's part of the parents' council. "These are our kids, and we are their voices."

Public Advocates' Massaro welcomes parent advocacy and says it produces results.

"If families are engaged, student retention increases, teacher retention increases," she says.

But she's skeptical about the district's interest in changing.

"I've found reluctance around genuine parent engagement. The community is pushing for a better school climate, for restorative justice, even though the district should be carrying the torch on this," Massaro says.

Richmond mothers agree with that assessment. Teresa Jenkins, a mother of six, says that the school board, "asks for input but doesn't listen to it." Patronila Fernandes, a mother of two, says that she doesn't feel welcome in her child's school because of her advocacy work.

Even as they have become better informed, some parents say they are also increasingly fatigued.

"Parents shouldn't have to school shop around," says Reynolds, the mother of two boys with autism. "We're school shopping for mediocre. All schools should be required to have the same basic level of quality."

Luz says every spring and summer are anxious times.

“It’s this constant challenge: ‘Where is my son going to go to next year?’ It’s really hard.”

Deciding where to go to school is just the start for most families. Like the Poes, families must then scramble to figure out how to get their children to schools that, with notorious Bay Area traffic and a weak public transportation system, are sometimes several hours away in a district that doesn’t have a school bus system.

“The concept of a neighborhood school, one you can just walk to, doesn’t exist anymore,” says Maddie Orenstein, former teacher and counselor at the Richmond campus of Leadership Public Schools, a charter school.

“Just getting kids to school is really hard,” she says.

The long commute puts stress on everyone in Phillip Poe’s family. They chat each evening to figure out who will help him get to school in the morning and then back home again in the evening.

Recently, his mom has hit some bad luck, which has, strangely, translated into a bit of good luck for her son. In September, she woke up with a numb shoulder. Her doctor diagnosed her with a pinched nerve, likely caused by repetitive motion at work, and she’s had to take time off from her job at a food server at UC Berkeley.

In between negotiating workers’ compensation and attending a slew of doctors’ appointments, Tishana Poe now drives her son to school in the morning, then goes back again to pick him up after classes end. She takes him home for a few hours to do homework before going off again to Pinole for an evening basketball practice.

She uses the few hours of her son’s practice to drop off some deliveries for the DoorDash, the food delivery app, which is her only source of income at the moment.

“It’s nice to have the extra cash, but it’s not enough to make rent,” she says. “But I figure if I’m out here, I might as well make the extra gas money, rather than just wasting gas.”

Phillip Poe isn’t sure what he’ll do after he graduates. His ideas range from playing professional sports to studying sound engineering or astrology, an idea his mom supports, noting that his great grandfather practiced astrology.

For now, though, he and his mother are just trying to figure out how to get him to school and make sure he sleeps enough to keep up his grades, so that he can graduate.

Richmond Confidential



Charter renewed amid school board shift

Edward Booth on December 12, 2018

The charter of Benito Juarez Elementary was renewed by default last Wednesday because of a strange scenario in which incoming board members were unable to vote and one longstanding school board member stepped away from the dais, leaving the decision without enough votes to legally stand.

California charter schools must have their charter reapproved every five years, and Benito Juarez's renewal was in question because its parent organization, Amethod Public Schools, recently came close to having its charter for John Henry High School revoked by the West Contra Costa Unified School Board.

The unusual voting situation unfolded at the meeting because of a state law requiring new member terms to start the first Friday of December, which this year was Dec. 7. This left the board with only three votes, meaning that any action by the board would require a unanimous decision.

As a result, new board members Stephanie Hernández-Jarvis and Consuelo Lara, and returning board president Valerie Cuevas, were ceremonially sworn onto the board, but they didn't officially take up their new positions.

This previously unknown rule severely impacted the meeting: recently elected board members, aside from Cuevas, were unable to vote. Board member Madeline Kronenberg was present, unlike member Elizabeth Block, but she abstained from voting because both she and the public had no expectation that she'd be voting on the charter renewal.

Every item requiring action was pushed to the Dec. 12 meeting, except for the vote on the charter renewal. This was because of an earlier agreement with Amethod that the issue be decided on by Dec. 5, the date of the meeting.

The school board staff-suggested action was approval of the charter, but with seven conditions that would have had to been carried out by Amethod. They included a description of new charter school requirements, a written program for meeting the needs of its underachieving English-learning students, a report on attracting student populations reflective of the district (the school is almost entirely Latino), documentation on why certain comparison schools were used in their presentation, a signed and dated copy of their corporate bylaws, and copies of all financial reports and information included in their staff report.

The seventh condition was an agreement addressing the district's safety concerns related to John Henry High School.

In October, John Henry underwent a board hearing on whether the school's charter should be revoked, which would have effectively caused it to shut down. This was largely because of an alleged mandated reporting violation by Evelia Villa, wife of Amethod CEO Jorge Lopez and currently the Amethod superintendent of Richmond schools. After a student complained of abuse at home, Villa allegedly asked them to

take their shirt off to check for bruises. She also allegedly cited this incident while encouraging other teachers to investigate claims before reporting during an Amethod professional development event held prior to the 2017-2018 school year.

After hundreds of Amethod shirt-clad students and staff poured into the hearing, and Amethod staff presented findings which indicated that the alleged violation had occurred in 2012, three years before John Henry had come into existence, the charter was not revoked. The district placed the school in good standing on Oct. 31.

Board member Mister Phillips made a motion to accept Benito Juarez's charter unconditionally, without any of the staff recommendations. He argued the school had been performing well and that the board had unfairly targeted Amethod.

"Every time this school comes before us we seem to put one more hurdle in front of them for them to jump," Phillips said at the meeting. "And when they jump it we put another one in front of them."

"They are doing a good job. They are doing a good job relative to most schools."

Cuevas followed by moving that the board vote on renewing the charter with all conditions, which was followed by a substitute motion by board member Tom Panas to accept the renewal with only the first six conditions.

At this point, Lopez shook his head at Phillips, according to Cuevas.

Phillips checked publically with school attorney Edward Sklar to make sure the legal result of a failed vote was an automatic charter renewal, then walked away from the dais.

He was counted as absent, and a motion to approve the charter with six of seven conditions failed 2-0-3. Cuevas and Panas voted to approve the motion, Kronenberg abstained and Phillips and Block were counted as absent.

Phillips took his seat again to vote on his motion, to approve the charter unconditionally, which failed 2-1-2, with Cuevas voting against and Panas and Phillips voting to approve.

Phillips said he left the room because he thought the test score comparisons made during a presentation at the meeting by district staff between Benito Juarez and other charter schools within the district were illegal—comparisons should have instead been made to the district public schools, Phillips said, which students are required by law to attend.

Phillips said he believed the comparison with other charter schools, which generally perform better than public schools, were likely done to make Benito Juarez look worse. This, in turn, would provide justification for approving the recommended staff conditions attached to the charter renewal.

He also said he believed that if he'd stayed and voted against Panas's item, Panas and Cuevas would have had a quorum—meaning they'd have a 2-1 majority on the sitting board—and it would have passed. By leaving, he argued, two votes would not have been enough to pass a motion.

According to Cuevas and Panas, the board would have needed three yes votes regardless; it made no difference whether Phillips abstained or voted against the motion.

Cuevas was critical of Phillip's approach.

"When I took an oath to office, there's an expectation that we take votes," Cuevas said. "So many people wanted a seat and they would've taken a vote tonight."

Cuevas said that the entire board has an oversight responsibility that goes beyond just school performance. She said she wanted to pass the renewal, but with at least some of the conditions.

"I do think some of these are warranted," Cuevas said. "You get your renewal. I have a hard time voting yes on the renewal without the conditions that are being put forth."

When pressed by Cuevas about perceived disagreement with the staff conditions, Lopez said he agreed with Phillips' opinion about the oversight of his school.

Shortly after Amethod's representatives left the room, United Teachers of Richmond president Demetrio Gonzalez criticized Phillips for his actions. He called Phillips' move of walking away from the vote "political theatre at its worst" and argued that Phillips should be equally hard on charter schools as he is with district schools. Gonzales also said he hoped the new trustees didn't take Phillip's actions as representative of the district.

"I've missed five board meetings in five years, and I've never seen anyone step out because they're not getting their way," Gonzalez said.