

DOLORES HUERTA FOUNDATION

Inspiring and organizing communities to build volunteer organizations empowered to pursue social justice



March for Educational Justice in KHSD

On the evening of January 30th, a passionate group of concerned community members marched through the streets of Bakersfield demanding more resources and support for Kern High School District students. At a lively rally following the March for Educational Justice, parents, guardians, students, and teachers spoke about needing more counseling services, cultural celebrations, and diverse teachers to a crowd of fifty supporters in front of West High School where the final mandatory KHSD Board of Trustees community report back meeting was taking place, as required by a 2014 lawsuit settlement.

The demonstration was organized by the Kern Educational Justice Collaborative. The group formed in 2011 in response to a report by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights showing that Kern County had the highest suspension and expulsion rates in the state. KEJC members such as the Dolores Huerta Foundation and Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance were plaintiffs in the 2014 lawsuit which proved that KHSD disproportionately suspended and expelled brown and black students 3.5 times and 6 times respectively more than white students. In 2017, the KHSD settled the lawsuit and agreed to hire Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) consultants, train teachers and staff members in PBIS annually, observe Hispanic Heritage Month and Black History Month celebrations, and have community hearings at least twice a year for three years to report their progress. Foothill High School student Kialea Arias said, "A lot of students have issues at our schools. They're depressed. They don't have any-

one to talk to. They feel alone. We need more counselors and more people we can go to to talk to... We need to go to a place where it's an open and welcoming environment."

At the final mandatory community meeting, KHSD Trustee members and consultants presented their results from the last three years and it soon became evident that there are still many challenges ahead that KHSD needs to address before it becomes the model education institution it aspires to be. While KHSD has reduced their suspensions for defiance by 15% percent in the last two years, has begun offering staff professional development in PBIS or their subject area, and hired eight substance abuse counselors, there is still progress to be made in areas like teacher recruitment, continuation schools, and PBIS implementation. Since 2014, KHSD has been working on diversifying their staff but they are still having difficulties despite their recruiting efforts. KHSD has started advertising and social media campaigns and attended job fairs for educators of color to entice more diverse teachers to apply. KHSD attributes their lack of success to a national teacher shortage. Referencing national and statewide trends is a common refrain that the district relies on when it's not meeting its personal goals. KHSD claims that over 90% of students voluntarily enroll in their continuation schools. The main purpose of a continuation school is to give students the opportunity to make up credits, but only 51.3% of students who attended a KHSD continuation school in the last three years graduated. Dr. Jeffrey Sprague, one of the PBIS consultants, stated that it takes 4-5 years to start seeing sustained change on school campuses. KHSD is currently in its third year of implementing PBIS and has faithfully implemented Tier I and II but still needs to work on Tier III which includes long term individual counseling and treatment plans. Reports still show that black students are still facing difficulties at their schools. Black students are still 2.3 times more likely to be suspended than white students. According to the School Climate Surveys provided by the KHSD, black students have consistently said that they felt isolated, harassed, disrespected, mistreated and unsafe at school at higher rates than any other demographic in the last three years. Although there have been improvements many students still don't feel safe or welcome at school. We hope that the KHSD, parents, guardians, students, and community members stay engaged in the process of creating a positive school climate where all students feel supported and are given an equitable education. It's critical for every person to take ownership of their contribution to improving the school district. For KHSD, that means proactively building relationships and getting feedback from students, parents, guardians and teachers about how to shape its future. For community members, it means participating in public meetings. For members of the KEJC, it means uplifting and giving people a platform to speak when they feel like they deserve more from their educational institution.

Only ≈ 50%
of students in KHSD
continuation schools
graduate



KCCD Redistricting Creating More Equitable Districts

"I think you're really blessed to have had the work from the Dolores Huerta Foundation to go out and meet the community and give them these different voices and gather this testimony for you."

The Kern Community College District held its third public meeting regarding the public redistricting process on February 13th. In a crowded meeting room at the Weill Institute in downtown Bakersfield, community members gathered at a Kern Community College District (KCCD) Board of Trustees meeting to discuss issues such as student trustee voting privileges, HR hostile workplace accusations, and census outreach campaigns. However, the most pressing issue was about the creation of new district boundaries which will affect KCCD students for the next decade. The multi-campus Kern Community College District serves an area of approximately 24,800 square miles in parts of Kern, Tulare, Inyo, Mono and San Bernardino counties. Geographically it is one of the largest community college districts in the United States. KCCD serves a population base of approximately 1.28 million with an estimated enrollment of 45,000 students, and an annual budget and reserves of approximately \$253 million. In addition to the three main campuses, Bakersfield College, Porterville and Cerro Coso, KCCD has 56 additional satellite campuses, adult learning centers and high school dual enrollment sites.

California Assembly Bill No. 849 known as the Fair Maps Act was signed into law last October (the Dolores Huerta Foundation was an early supporter of the bill). The Fair Maps Act strengthens the criteria for local redistricting and prioritizes keeping neighborhoods and communities intact. It brings new voices into the redistricting process by requiring robust public engagement. It also improves redistricting transparency by requiring local governments to upload information to a dedicated web page and publish draft maps online before meetings and to adopt logical redistricting deadlines. While AB 849 does not mandate Community College Districts to follow the new law, AB 849 sets a new standard for redistricting best practices. The Dolores Huerta Foundation (DHF) submitted a letter to the KCCD Board during the January 16th meeting asking the board to adopt the criteria outlined in AB 849. The board agreed to some of DHF's requests. They have created a dedicated web page about the redistricting process, provided materials in Spanish and provided shapefiles on the KCCD website published by the the KCCD demographer. Unfortunately, the board refuses to change their meeting time from 11 am to after 6 pm which would make it more accessible to the community and allow for more robust participation and public input at KCCD redistricting hearings.

Redistricting is the process of redrawing district lines. The process occurs every decade the year after the census data has been released. Districts conducting redistricting processes outside of this set time are often doing so in violation of state or federal law. Due to the KCCD's violation of the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) the board was sent a letter from an attorney in July of 2019 the board decided to participate in a public redistricting process in 2020. The CVRA states that a district conducting at large elections resulting in racially polarized voting are in violation of state law. The KCCD Board currently has seven trustees and five districts. This means that two districts, Districts 1 and 3, have two representatives making them at-large and District is racially polarized. The purpose of the redistricting process is to move from five districts to seven for the board to be in compliance with the law.

DHF is working to educate the community about the redistricting process and has hosted 5 community meetings in Arvin, Lamont, Greenfield, an online zoom meeting at Bakersfield College and has spoken with over 100 residents in the district. The goals of the community meetings are to educate the community about the redistricting process, to show the proposed map plans and to collect Community of Interest (COI) forms demonstrating concerns of community stakeholders. Several concerns surfaced in these meetings: lack of representation in KCCD's outlying areas, inadequate child care services, student inability to transfer to a four year university in under three years, and students being forced to change career paths due to classroom overcrowding. The greatest concern expressed was that most students had to commute to a satellite campus outside of their area.

KCCD demographer, Paul Mitchell representing Redistricting Partners, presented four plans for the board and the community to consider: "Plans A, B, C and D". Of the four plans, Plan D is the only plan that DHF will consider for adoption at this point for the following reasons: Plan D was developed on a clean slate and did not take current districts into account. It keeps Arvin, Lamont, and Weedpatch in one district, East Bakersfield is kept intact, Earlimart to Buttonwillow are kept together and it creates three majority minority Latino districts. Board President John Corkins stated that the Board may choose to hold off on adopting a plan until after the 2020 Census data has been released. "We need that census number to give us the indication of where the final districts will be and not have to go back through the process twice," Corkins said. "You say it's a re-tweaking, but I suspect it could be more than a re-tweaking, and now we're redrawing districts two different times. "The district is currently amending the draft maps and scheduling a fourth public hearing. The trustees are scheduled to vote on a final map in the fifth and final meeting scheduled for **March 12, 2020** at Bakersfield College. Check for time and location details at <https://www.kccd.edu/board-trustees/kern-community-college-district-upcoming>

It is vital that community members get involved and make their voices heard:

- Attend the KCCD public hearing.
- Complete a Communities of Interest Form at the following link: <http://tiny.cc/3q2akz>
- Host a meeting with friends or community members to get informed about this important process.
- Contact DHF GIS Analyst Sophia Garcia at sgarcia@doloreshuerta.org (661) 322-3033
- Publicize KCCD meetings to your networks to ensure robust community input.

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