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Irvine resident Debra Morrisset

Busing Latinos draws protests

Parents voice objections at Tustin board meeting

By George Stewart

For Irvine World News

About 200 people jammed into the Tustin school district's board room Monday night, many of them to protest the school board's Sept. 29 decision to bus west Tustin and east Santa Ana students to Beckman High School in Irvine when it opens in the fall.

The area in question, called "the triangle," is bounded by the district's western border and the Costa Mesa and Santa Ana freeways, surrounding the Lyon Street area served by Lambert Elementary School. The majority of students in the high-density area are Latinos or from low-income families.

Board President Tammie Bullard and trustees Ann Albertson and Francine Scinto overruled the efforts of trustees Jon Abelove and Lynn Davis to keep the students at Foothill High School. Instead, the three voted to bus them to Beckman High over the objections of the Lyon Street families and the recommendations of the 13-member committee assigned to come up with alternatives for redrawing the boundaries for the district's three high schools.

Their vote also kept North Tustin neighborhoods intact by keeping them at Foothill High and not reassigning them to Tustin High. The majority of the board agreed the Lyon Street students were needed to fill out two classes at Beckman when it opens in September.

However, Latino families and parents from the Beckman area viewed the decision as a racist move to keep Foothill High socio-economically intact, while injecting the student populations at Tustin and Beckman high schools with up to 50 percent Latinos.

The attack on the board was led by west Irvine parents belonging to a group called SIMBY (Schools In My Back Yard).

SIMBY member Paul Madick threatened a lawsuit "... for what appears to be a racist decision by the board."

Irvine resident Debra Morrisset, with two children at Myford Elementary School, said the board's decision left her confused and frustrated.

"Forty percent of the students will be economically challenged at Beckman," Morrisset said. "Foothill should shoulder their fair share of economically disadvantaged students."

Lynn Collins of SIMBY called on the school board to reverse its decision and allow some of the Latino students to stay at Foothill High and bus a portion of them to Beckman.

Roseann Di Costanzo, saying the majority of the board only represents the Foothill area, wanted the board rearranged so that each high school would have a representative, a change Abelove said could be done by a petition to put it on the ballot.

Lyon Street parents were vocal, as well.

"The neighborhood concept doesn't seem to apply to our community," said Antonio Garcia. "When Beckman opens, nearly 50 percent will be bused in from other areas."

Garcia called for replacing the majority of the board at next year's election with members of the boundary committee who supported leaving the students in the Foothill area.

"We think now that this is all about money," said Norma Vasquez. "I'm a single mom, and I had to tell my kids that we don't have enough money to buy a home there (North Tustin) so my kids can go to Foothill."

Amin David, representing Los Amigos of Orange County, said his group will be forming a petition to go before the county Grand Jury and that LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) may be getting involved.

Bullard reminded the audience that homeowners of west Irvine and Tustin Ranch who pay Mello-Roos fees are not the only families allowed to go to Beckman, because half of the funding for the school came from taxes.

She said the SIMBY projections for racial populations at the schools are inaccurate because the number of students who will choose to stay at Foothill because they have siblings there and the number of students who will transfer into the district and within the district are unknown.

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