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The Los Angeles Schools Bond Measure -- Is It Needed?

By Patricia Hawke

On November 8th, the voters of who live in the Los Angeles schools district will be faced with their fourth proposition, called Measure Y. The \$3.985 bond measure, which will be paid by property taxes, is for more planned expansion within the Los Angeles schools, allowing them to add another 25 elementary schools to the current list of 160 schools that are scheduled to be constructed by year 2012. Some of the money also is slated for other needs, such as new school buses, repairs and charter schools.

The other three bond measures were passed for Los Angeles schools new construction and repairs that were long overdue. Classrooms were literally falling apart, and classes were excessively overcrowded with year-round schedules for many schools. The previously passed measures underwrote the current 160 schools on the list for construction.

Many people, however, are asking if this fourth measure is truly needed. According to the Los Angeles Daily News, the traditional Los Angeles schools are slowly but steadily losing students from their rolls. Since the 2002–2003 school year, the traditional Los Angeles schools have lost 4,471 students. According to Los Angeles schools officials, they expect another 4,304 to be dropped this year. There are several reasons for these drops in enrollment.

First, one in every 20 students is choosing to attend a charter or private school, rather than attend traditional Los Angeles schools. The 88 charter schools within the state now enroll about three percent (about 200,000) of the public school students. About 35,000 of these students attend charter schools within the Los Angeles schools. The number of charter schools within the state continues to increase, with another 20 new charter schools planned for this fall.

The California Charter Schools Association predicts that ten percent of public school students within the state will attend charter schools by the year 2014, with perhaps an even higher percentage in the Los Angeles schools area. They cite that the number of charter schools would need to triple in order to accommodate all of the students currently on waiting lists. With the smaller size and flexibility of charter schools, they can be created and implemented in a very short time, as compared to the large, traditional Los Angeles schools that take years to construct.

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The second reason for the drastic drop in enrollment at the Los Angeles schools is birth and lifestyle trends:

- Los Angeles County statistics have shown that hundreds of fewer babies are being born in the county each year. The trend is expected to continue through to the end of the decade.
- Upper income singles and couples with few children have replaced neighborhoods that were once inhabited by large immigrant families. With the rising housing prices in the Los Angeles schools area, most young families or families with many children can no longer afford to live there, opting to move to areas with lower costs of living.
- Additionally, according to researchers at the Public Policy Institute of California, another trend is smaller immigrant families. In their 2002 report, they show that after the first generation, immigrant families successively have smaller families.

Glenn Gritzner, special assistant to the Los Angeles schools, says that the Los Angeles schools have taken the changes in demographics into consideration, but they are not critical enough to change the school building plans. Gritzner states that, if school plans and trends/statistics remain on course through 2012, there still will be 200,000 Los Angeles schools students in portable classrooms and plenty of overcrowded Los Angeles schools remaining. Plus, trends are only current patterns that are subject to change. Measure Y definitely is warranted.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Los Angeles schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/california/los-angeles/index.html>

Los Angeles Schools Strongly Opposed To Takeover By Mayor Villaraigosa

By Patricia Hawke

There is currently legislation AB 1381 in the state legislature that, if passed, will give the okay to Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to take over a subset of the Los Angeles schools. Recently, the mayor's school reform team announced its latest round of changes to the bill in order to sidestep some possible problems to it passing.

Last month, according to the Los Angeles Times' August 8, 2006 article, Los Angeles Chief Legislative Analyst Gerry F. Miller made certain speculations about the bill. He believes, if the bill is passed, the following may occur:

- Some power could shift from the City Council to Villaraigosa;
- Additional costs may be incurred by the cities that are served by the Los Angeles schools; and ·

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These same cities, as well as the Council of Mayors, could incur certain legal liabilities.

Legal responsibilities and costs could shift with the power, since the bill gives responsibility for the subset of Los Angeles schools directly to Villaraigosa, who dominates the Council of Mayors with an 80 percent vote. The Council of Mayors consists of Villaraigosa, representatives from the County Board of Supervisors, and representatives of 27 other cities that are served by the Los Angeles schools.

The recently announced changes to the bill are to placate the officials and representatives of the 27 other cities concerning Miller's speculations, as well as protect the legislation from being defeated due to criticisms from opponents who are aligned with the Los Angeles schools officials, who are strongly opposed to the takeover.

The new language added to the bill does the following:

- Budget administration for the Los Angeles schools will remain with the City Councils of the cities served by the school district, as it currently stands. This eliminates the possibility of additional costs being incurred by any of the cities served.
- Responsibility for any lawsuits or legal issues will remain with the Los Angeles schools, even though Villaraigosa will be making most of the decisions. This ensures that the County of Los Angeles and the cities involved will be held blameless.
- The takeover of the Los Angeles schools subset is now likened to a school district authorizing a charter school. It is hoped by Villaraigosa's team that this language will sidestep the state constitution provision that requires public schools to be overseen by established school systems.

Kevin Reed, general counsel for the Los Angeles schools, was quite critical of the bill's new language, especially concerning legal responsibility. He also said the comparison of Villaraigosa's takeover to a charter school, which was developed by Villaraigosa's legal advisor Thomas Saenz, was erroneous. Charter schools submit to more oversight than will Villaraigosa, if the bill becomes law.

Reed also pointed out a conflict of interest for Saenz, who is also an appointed board member of the

County Office of Education. A spokesperson for the mayor said Saenz would resign, if the bill becomes law.

Villaraigosa has some backers for his bill, which will soon be reviewed by the legislature. The bill, however, has many questionable provisions in its language and many strongly opposed to it. Opposition comes not only from the Los Angeles schools officials, but also from many of the city representatives on the Council of Mayors, who already see Villaraigosa controlling too much of their concerns.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more information on Los Angeles schools visit

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