

Written Public Comment
January 18, 2022

Scott Rafferty 1/28/22 3:53PM

Throughout our county, neighborhood elections have made governing bodies more accountable, brought democracy closer to the people, and identified natural leaders from minority and working-class communities that had never seen one of their own elected to office.

Shortly before the 2018 elections, my clients petitioned this Board to coordinate with other jurisdictions to create single-member constituencies and incorporate Dougherty Valley's emerging South Asian community into our local political life. No Asian or Latino had ever won an election to any office in San Ramon Valley. Now half San Ramon city council is now Asian, and a promising young Latina came close to winning a third seat.

Instead of embracing the opportunity to improve our democracy, the Board lectured its voters about the CVRA, repeatedly saying it was "Orwellian," "offensive," "sickening," "twisted," "stupid," and "written by idiots in Sacramento." President Mintz complained that his colleagues would be "punished for the color of their skin" unless each was guaranteed a separate area. So the Board ordered the demographer to do just that, no small feat when four incumbents lived within a 1.25 mile radius. President Mintz rejected collaboration, stating "they can't dictate to us."

It wasn't easy for the Asian community to be heard or feel respected. A critical meeting was held during the workday and then delayed two hours, during which Asian witnesses left. "Helen from Dougherty Valley" said Asians were corrupt, telling the Board: "White people, govern for the good of all of us." One recently appointed trustee said she "sympathized" with Helen's views and voted for Map 102.

Every constituent said Map 102 was gerrymandered. Even the incumbent who lived there called it a "puzzle piece." The deputy superintendent said a "tentacle" attached Dougherty Valley to the incumbent's West Danville home, and that Map 101 "maybe made more sense." But once the Board realized that it had to allow a majority Asian area to elect a trustee in 2020, the Board unanimously adopted 102 to make sure the voters didn't elect someone from Dougherty Valley. They promised to post alternative maps from the community, but then changed the hearing schedule so there was only 3 hours to prepare them.

It didn't work out as planned. The incumbent selected to defend the seat didn't even run for re-election. The voters retired the incumbent who said the CVRA was "written by idiots." I hope that the three remaining at-large trustees who will face the voters this fall no longer argue that they are being "punished for the color of their skin" or that they are entitled to draw lines to perpetuate themselves in office. Consider the model of Mt. Diablo trustees who sacrificed their own interests to ensure that the Latino immigrant community in Concord and Pacheco had a dedicated voice on its Board.

Map 102 does not comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Gerrymandering an incumbent and the high-propensity voters who in his community with just enough Asians to get to 50.1% Asian area is not effective as an Asian majority district. The record shows that the Board intended to fragment the Asian communities in Dougherty Valley and Camino Tessajara, denying Asian voters a compact district that respected their neighborhoods and communities of interest. Only with such a district can they identify their own natural leaders and promote them for elective office. That is what federal law requires to give Asian voters an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

Equal voting rights is the cornerstone of any government that represents all its people. President Mintz was wrong. The voters this fall will judge the incumbents who drew Map 102 not based on the color of their skin, but based on the content of their character. They will ask if these three trustees will continue to place their personal interests above compliance with the law and respect for the fundamental equality of all people,

Those who voted for that map should recuse, so that the County Committee on School District Reorganization can draw lines that empower our extraordinary immigrant community -- or appoint an independent commission to do so.

Scott Rafferty

Stephanie Lau 1/18/22 8:01PM

To whom it may concern,

My name is Stephanie and I am a senior at California High School. I, as well with many others, are very disappointed with the new COVID contract tracing policies, as emailed to students and parents just around ten minutes ago. The email stated that the school would only let us know the number of cases every day and will be stopping "collecting and distributing individual student and class contact tracing information".

I believe this is a very dangerous and irresponsible action to take right now, especially as the case numbers in the state are the highest they have been in a long time and we are experiencing a highly contagious variant. The contact tracing notifications were already disappointing to begin with as most of the time, only the students seated closest to the infected student got a notification. I believe that we, as students, should have the right to know more than "you may have been exposed if you were on campus today".

To me, this just shows how little effort the district is willing to put in for the well-being and health of their students, staff, and community. Please reconsider the new policies for the sake of the greater good of everyone. Thank you.

Stephanie Lau

Hela Khalil

1/18/22 9:52PM

Hello,

My name is Hela Khalil and I am a senior at California High School. I sent a letter over a week ago to the district and my school's administration expressing my frustrations with returning to school in person amidst the Omicron variant surge. I was assured that the school is actively pursuing health and safety precautions and that I should not worry.

I would like to reiterate that the situation we are in is a large health risk and a matter of public safety. I, and many others, who go to school each day do not feel safe. This is wrought by the lack of enforcement of mask-wearing and the discomfort we feel when we have to sit in classrooms for long periods of time with people who are inconsiderate of the health of others. In addition, the administration's decision to stop reporting individual exposure and contact tracing information is frightening. At this point, it seems this school administration is giving up. Giving up on serious risks that affect students, parents, and teachers.

While I am aware that pursuant to state law, we cannot return to remote school at this time, I am disappointed with the lax safety precautions carried out at Cal High. I, and many of my peers, would like to see stricter enforcement of mask-wearing indoors with potential consequences involved because there are many of us who must attend school and go home to immunocompromised or high-risk family members. It is simply unfair. I would also like to see teachers adhering to the masking guidelines as I see teachers being lax about wearing masks above both the mouth AND nose, which tends to promote improper mask behavior in classrooms. Lastly, I would like to see more consideration of the decision to stop reporting contract tracing information as it is a very useful resource for students to learn if they have been exposed and take the actions necessary thereafter. Thank you so much for your work, and I really appreciate you taking the time to read my email.

Thank you,
Hela Khalil