

# Fourth District Legislative Advocacy Communicator



FOURTH DISTRICT PTA ADVOCACY TEAM

OCTOBER 2011

## Big Changes are Coming for Next Year's State Elections

Two changes that may have a major impact on the future of California will go into effect next year.

One involves **Redistricting**, a process done every 10 years to re-align the state's legislative districts. This time the new lines were drawn by a citizens committee, not the state legislators. The other change is the **Top Two Candidates Open Primary**, which sets up a different method of selecting candidates for the general election.

Governance reformers hope that these changes will result in a legislature that is more centric and pragmatic. Critics fear that the reforms will create new problems.

### Redistricting

In previous years, state legislators created districts that grouped voters to assure the election of either a Democrat or a Republican. Once the primary election was over, the result of the general election was practically assured. Good governance groups say this leads to a polarized legislature, with lawmakers who represent the liberal and conservative extremes, and that this has been a major factor in creating a state government that is dysfunctional and unable to resolve the challenges facing our state.

In 2008, voters passed Prop. 11, which gave the job of redrawing state legislative districts and board of equalization districts to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission. Redrawing congressional districts was added to the Commission's job by Prop. 20 in 2010.

The 14-member Commission consists of five Democrats, five Republicans and four Independents. A committee of the State's Auditor Office oversaw the selection process and chose the first eight commission members, who in turn chose the last six. State legislative leaders had an opportunity to eliminate candidates from the process.

The Citizens Commission began its work in January and held 70 meetings and 34 public hearings all over the state before presenting its final maps on August 15. One commissioner voted against all four maps. Another commissioner voted against the congressional maps only.

The commission's official website, [wedrawthelines.ca.gov](http://wedrawthelines.ca.gov), has the new maps and a report explaining how and why the lines for each district were drawn. There is also a link to a site with side-by-side comparisons of old

## Calendar of Events

### Council Legislative/Advocacy Chair Meeting

Tuesday, October 11, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Fourth District PTA Office

1520 Brookhollow Drive, Unit 40, Santa Ana 92705

★ **All council legislative/advocacy chairs should attend, president should attend if council has no chair.**

### Advocacy Roundtable

Friday, December 9, 10:30 a.m. to noon

Capistrano Unified School District Education Center

33122 Valle Road, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675

Speakers: **Don Wagner**, Assembly Member, 70<sup>th</sup> District, and **Rick Simpson**, Deputy Chief of Staff to Assembly Speaker John Pérez

★ **All PTA members are welcome.**

and new districts. Another website, [redistrictingpartners.com](http://redistrictingpartners.com), has maps with demographic information and locations of current officeholders' residences.

A consortium of business, good government and non-profit organizations issued a statement praising the work of the commission. The group includes the League of Women Voters, AARP, Common Cause, California Forward and the California Chamber of Commerce.

"The voters put their trust in an independent citizens commission to conduct redistricting in an open, inclusive process, and the commission has more than fulfilled that trust," stated California League of Women Voters President Jennifer A. Waggoner.

As allowed by law, the new state senate districts are being challenged by a lawsuit filed in the State Supreme Court and by a referendum filed with the California Secretary of State. The suit contends that the new senate districts do not follow the guidelines laid out by Prop. 11 and are therefore unconstitutional.

To qualify for the ballot, the referendum backers must collect 504,760 signatures by November 14. The issue then would be placed on the June 5, 2012, ballot and voters could accept or reject the maps.

Both the lawsuit and the referendum were initiated by a group called Fairness & Accountability in Redistricting

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**Redistricting...** (continued from page 1)

(FAIR). According to the *Sacramento Bee*, FAIR is funded by the California Republican Party and individual Republican state senators, including Mimi Walters, from the 33rd District in Orange County.

A referendum also has been launched to challenge the new state congressional districts. This effort is led by Republican political strategist Carlos Rodriguez, who says the new districts unnecessarily fragment many communities of interest and may violate federal laws designed to protect the voting clout of minority groups. This referendum must collect the same number of signatures.

If the lawsuit or either of the referendums is successful, the California Supreme Court will appoint “masters” to fix the maps. Rather than completely redrawing the districts, these masters would change only the lines that need to be adjusted to meet constitutional guidelines.

The Citizen’s Redistricting Commission issued a statement saying that its members are confident that its final district maps will withstand any and all legal challenges. “The commission followed the U.S. and California constitutions in drawing the district maps in an open and transparent process,” the statement read.

**Top Two Candidates Open Primary**

Voters will discover a very different ballot during the June 5, 2012 Primary Election.

Instead of voting for someone to represent their political party in the General Election, they will have a ballot with the names of all of the candidates running in the primary, regardless of their party preference. The top two overall vote-getters will move on to the General Election.

Political parties can no longer formally nominate candidates for voter-nominated offices, so a candidate who finishes in the top two at the primary election is not the official nominee of any party for the office. It will become possible to have a general election between two candidates from the same party.

This new method of selecting candidates was put in place by California voters when they approved Prop. 14 in June, 2010. The new system will be used in primary elections for state constitutional, U.S. Congressional, and state legislative offices, but not for U.S. President or the parties’ county central committee offices.

Proponents of the top-two primary say it will give voters more choice, create more competition, elect more moderate legislators and guard against spoiler candidates (candidates running for a party nomination who have been set up by the opposing party).

Critics say it will reduce voters' choices because in the general election, when more people vote, there will only be two candidates, no matter how many parties put up candidates in the primary. They also contend that liberal districts are liable to nominate two Democrats, and conservative districts are likely to nominate two Republicans, so third party and independent candidates have less of a chance of appearing on the November ballot.

The actual outcome of this new primary election method remains to be seen.

**Advocacy Speakers Bureau**

An effective PTA advocate should be well-informed about the legislative process, school finance, public education issues, and more. Much of this is complex information, and for most of us learning what we need to know is an ongoing process.

If you are a unit or council legislative or advocacy chair, it may be difficult for you to share information that you know your fellow members should have.

The Fourth District PTA Advocacy Team is here to help. In addition to programs, online information, and publications that you can share (like this newsletter), the A-Team has a Speakers Bureau that can send a knowledgeable PTA advocate to your unit or council for a brief presentation on one of several topics. These include:

- PTA and advocacy
- Education funding in California
- Elections and PTA
- How to be an effective local advocate
- How to be an informed parent
- Other topics of your choice

For more information, contact Shereen Walter, Speaker’s Bureau Chair, at:

speakers@fourthdistrictpta.org

Or call the Fourth District PTA office at:

(714) 241-0495.

**Fourth District PTA****Advocacy Resource Notebooks**

These new notebooks are packed with the latest information about advocacy, school finance, the legislative process, elections, federal education issues, online resources and much more!

**Now on sale for \$10 at the  
Fourth District PTA Office**