

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

LAUSD Redistricting

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Core Question

This brief explores the prevalence and political popularity of independent redistricting for school boards and community college boards, in the context of redistricting in Los Angeles.

Summary of Topline Findings

School board redistricting is complicated by open enrollment. Several cities are exploring the possibility of the creation of independent redistricting commissions for school boards. Given the considerations of the 2023 CLA report and recommendations of the 2021 LAUSD Redistricting Commission report, it appears that the organizational body and degree of independence from the City Council to redistrict LAUSD can be constructed by charter amendment in whichever way voters want and approve.

Background & Information

The LA City Charter gives the city government control of LAUSD elections, including redistricting. Otherwise, there is no other connection between the two.

Until 1999, the city council drew district lines both for the city council and the school board. In 1999, the new charter created two advisory commissions, one for the city council lines, and one for the school board lines.¹ Each commission was appointed differently, and each presented its plan for Council consideration.

The question before us is what to do about LAUSD redistricting if we adopt independent redistricting for LA city council. Apparently charter cities can require school districts in their borders to create an independent commission. See Table 1 below for what a number of cities do on this matter.

While SB-1018 created the legal pretext for school boards², community college boards, and special district boards to establish independent, hybrid, or advisory redistricting commissions, few school districts in California have pursued such configurations. Of the 7 cities in California with fully independent redistricting commissions, only one – Oakland – has the commission draw the boundaries of the school districts.

School board redistricting is complicated by open enrollment, a form of school choice that allows parents to send their children to schools outside of the district in which they reside. Open enrollment in California is permitted in schools identified by the state superintendent as

¹ https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/laac/0-0-0-3687#JD_Ch802.

² <https://openstates.org/ca/bills/20172018/SB1018/>

‘low-achieving’³, as well as for students who are identified as victims of bullying or harassment. School districts in California may also set their own open enrollment laws; Oakland is one such example. This can result in a mismatch between the residential and educational location of board members, as was the case in their most recent redistricting.⁴

Several cities are exploring the possibility of the creation of independent redistricting commissions for school boards, along with non-profit groups like the Dolores Huerta Foundation, which has sued the Panama-Buena Vista School District⁵, claiming the local board’s redistricting has suppressed voter turnout by Latinos. The foundation has also led marches in Fresno to demand independent and transparent redistricting methods in the school board. California assemblyman Isaac Bryan has entered bill AB 1248, which would require counties, cities, school districts and community college districts to set up their own independent commissions by March 1, 2030 to reflect updated demographics from the Census⁶. A report by California Common Cause found that ‘gerrymandering was often worse in school district and special district redistricting, where the FMA (Fair Maps Act) did not apply.’⁷ There are currently no constraints in California beyond federal standards for school redistricting.

Some counties and states have pursued regionalization of school districts to pre-empt governance and redistricting by local boards. In 2023, the state of Texas took over Houston’s public school district, with the Governor appointing new board members and a superintendent.⁸ The San Diego Board of Education took over the redistricting process for the San Dieguito Union High School District after allegations of gerrymandering.⁹ Takeovers in which a state appoints a new school board and approves redistricting are more common in majority black and Latino school districts.¹⁰

Table 1: CA Cities with IRC (Independent Redistricting Commissions) and ISBC (Independent School Board Redistricting Commissions)

City	IRC?	ISBRC?
Berkeley	Yes	No
Long Beach	Yes	No
Oakland	Yes	Yes
Roseville	Yes	No
Sacramento	Yes	No
San Diego	Yes	No
San Francisco	Yes	No

³ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pr/openenrollment.asp>

⁴ <https://oaklandside.org/2022/01/28/at-long-last-oaklands-redistricting-commission-has-decided-on-a-new-map/>

⁵ <https://edsources.org/2022/redistricting-gets-political-as-california-school-boards-draw-new-boundaries/668613>

⁶ <https://calmatters.org/politics/2023/02/california-elections-independent-local-redistricting/>

⁷ <https://www.commoncause.org/california/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2023/01/CCC-FMA-Report.pdf>

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<https://abcnews.go.com/US/texas-announces-takeover-houstons-school-district-sparking-concerns/story?id=9790650>

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<https://edsources.org/updates/county-takes-over-redistricting-map-for-san-dieguito-school-board>

¹⁰

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/6/12/21105215/when-states-take-over-school-districts-they-say-it-s-about-academic-s-this-political-scientist-says-i>

Table 2. How Some California Jurisdictions Redistrict their School System

Jurisdiction	School Redistricting
Los Angeles	City charter creates an advisory commission to recommend districts for LAUSD but the City Council has final authority. Commission of 15 members: 1 appointed by each Board member, 4 by Mayor, and 4 by Council President. The Mayor and Council President must select someone outside City limits each.
San Diego	SD Board of Education forms a committee to redistrict - the Redistricting Engagement Committee - that proposes a plan for Board approval.
Fresno	Board of Trustees is responsible for redrawing trustee areas. Under the state Education Code, community college districts such as West Hills and State Center that are multi-county must have their trustee boundary lines reviewed and approved by the Fresno County Committee on School District Organization.
Sacramento	Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) completed the process to transition from at-large to by-trustee area elections following voter approval in November 2006. SCUSD has seven trustee areas.
Long Beach	School board sends proposal to City Council for approval.
Oakland	<p>The Oakland Redistricting Commission adopts new district maps for the city council and school's districts.</p> <p>Oakland's City Council and school board share the same seven district boundaries, but the relationship between OUSD school board directors and their constituents is a bit more complicated than the City Council's. OUSD directors, like councilmembers, are elected by the residents of their districts—but because OUSD has open enrollment and students aren't limited to their neighborhood schools, families living in one district may have children who attend schools in another.</p>
Pasadena Unified School District	Because city charters, with voter approval, can establish how school board members are elected, Pasadena established an independent redistricting commission for the Pasadena School District in the Pasadena City Charter.

Redistricting LAUSD

The LAUSD Board of Education Redistricting Commission was established through the adoption of the City Charter Section 802¹¹ in 1999, with the stated purpose of advising the City Council on the drawing of LAUSD district boundaries.

¹¹ https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/los_angeles/latest/lac/0-0-0-3687#JD_Ch802.

The Redistricting Commission additionally recommends the City Council submit a charter amendment to the voters of LA and LAUSD for an independent redistricting commission starting on 2031 as well as expanding the number of LAUSD districts (pg. 9).

Currently, the City Council exercises plenty of control over how and when the Board of Education redistricts. For example, under Article 4 Section 2.21 we see that:

1. If the City Council decides to consider redistricting the Council or the Board of Education districts, or both, sooner than the next decennial Census, it shall appoint a Redistricting Commission or Commissions for that purpose and shall adopt an ordinance establishing a date by which the relevant Redistricting Commission will be required to submit its redistricting proposal.

Additionally, the Council retains power to remove and replace LAUSD commissioners during the process if they are dissatisfied with their actions.¹²

Take-Away for LAUSD

It appears, but nonetheless unclear if, a charter amendment is how the LAUSD can attain an independent redistricting commission with sole authority to approve new maps. Given the considerations of the 2023 CLA report and recommendations of the 2021 LAUSD Redistricting Commission report, it appears that the organizational body and degree of independence from the City Council to redistrict LAUSD can be constructed by charter amendment in whichever way voters want and approve. Currently, commissioner appointing power is shared by Board members, Mayor, and Council President. To satisfy FAIR MAPS' definition of "independent commission," LAUSD redistricting reforms must be proposed that remove appointing power from the Mayor and Council President.

¹² LA City Governance Reform. Central City Association of Los Angeles. March 2023.
http://www.ccala.org/clientuploads/policy/2023/CCA_Report_LA_City_Governance_Reform_FINAL.pdf?t=1679941757