

School board hires attorney to oppose new voter plans

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Members of the Pennridge school board want a say in who can get elected to the Pennridge school board.

The board has hired an attorney to oppose plans for new voter districts in the educational system, which spans Bedminster, Dublin, Hilltown, Perkasio, Silverdale, Sellersville, East and West Rockhill townships.

On Nov. 28, Bucks County President Judge Wallace Bateman is scheduled to hear arguments in the case that is currently listed in court documents as a 'miscellaneous criminal hearing.' Despite the labeling, there are no criminal charges involved.

Hired by the school board, attorney Kevin Skjoldal, of the Harrisburg-based Eckert Seamans, will make arguments against new voter districts.

Members of the group Pennridge Citizens for Direct Representation had initiated the court action this summer, after collecting some 2,800 signatures from voters in the school district to change the way board members are elected.

The PCDR plan would slice up the voting map into three regions. Three members from each region would be elected to a nine-member school board. Currently, the district holds at-large elections, meaning all voters cast ballots for each seat on the board.

Supporters say it would allow for more direct representation in a school system that spans eight communities and nearly 100 square miles. Critics have said that they don't want a county judge deciding how the community votes.

Voter districts for school boards are common. Centennial, Council Rock, Central Bucks, Neshaminy, Palisades, Pennsbury and the Quakertown Area school districts each elect members via voting regions. New Hope-Solebury and Pennridge are the only regional school district in Bucks County with board members elected at-large and representing the entire community.

While school boards are nonpartisan, Democrats outnumber Republicans in only two voter precincts in the Pennridge School District, according to Bucks County Board of Elections statistics. And even in those districts, the advantage is slim.

In one Sellersville district, Democrats have an eight-person advantage among registered voters. In a second Sellersville voter district, Democrats lead by five

registered voters, county records show.

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