

Fort worth School Board Politics: The Role of Community Organizing and Single-Member Districts in Diverse Representation

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Abstract

Until 1978, the Fort Worth Independent School District Board of Education Trustees was overwhelmingly white and male. School boards hold significant power in decisions that affect policy, hiring trends, and, more broadly, the well-being of children and their families. This paper is the first step in historicizing the process of representation through single-member districts. Racially minoritized communities must have access to decision-making positions first, and this is that story. The 1978 FWISD Board of Trustees election resulted in the most diverse school board in Fort Worth history, as Maudrie Walton became its first Black woman, Carlos Puente its first Mexican American man, and three white women joined them. This paper will trace the trajectory that enabled the Firsts of this race. Maudrie Walton and Carlos Puente worked in interracial coalitions and towards integration in schools and politics. Their separate activist networks overlapped as the candidates came together for the sake of Fort Worth ISD students. This paper argues that the advent of single-member districts and a longer history of community-building combined to create an opportunity for diverse representation for Fort Worth students.

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