

# New Mt. SAC board member may signal more changes as constituents narrow

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How will a third member from a smaller, neighborhood district, recently elected to the Mount San Antonio College Board of Trustees change the way the college operates?

That is a question the public, the faculty and the administration are asking as the slow march of election reform that began under threat of lawsuits in 2012 leaves its mark on the large, sprawling community college in Walnut.

Because trustees from a district may act differently than those elected at-large, some are worried the board will approve projects so provincially minded they are no college good.

“This is a concern common among faculty,” said Eric Kaljumagi, president of the Mt. SAC Faculty Association. “New trustees are under pressure to bring service to their specific areas.”

For example, newly elected trustee Jay Chen, who beat incumbent Fred Chyr on Tuesday in district 5 that includes Hacienda Heights, Bassett and parts of City of Industry and La Puente, wants to establish some satellite courses in unused classrooms in Hacienda Heights, and also suggests adding shuttle buses that transport low-to-moderate income students without access to a car from his district to the 420-acre campus in Walnut.

The issue of satellite classes, or what some call bringing the college to the students, has played often in the last three districted elections. Laura Santos, elected to the new district 3 representing parts of Bassett, La Puente and Baldwin Park two years ago, had talked about the idea as well.

Kaljumagi is concerned that students taking classes away from the campus will spread teachers and students away from campus services such as library services and counseling services.

Chen said he understands the concern but sees advantages to the new district elections.

“Different regions have different needs that weren’t being served based on the old system,” Chen said Monday. “Now, board members must pay closer attention to the needs in specific areas but without ignoring the fact that you are one district as a whole.”

The board responded to a challenge by residents under the California Voting Rights Act asking the college to break up the sprawling, 850,000-people district into seven smaller districts. The college moved to districts, with the two new district seats added in November 2013.

On Tuesday, Chen was the first to unseat an incumbent under the new district system.

By not running in the entire district, the separate wards has made it easier for candidates to challenge incumbents, Chen said. It has also created a majority minority board, with three members who are Latino and two Asian-American.

Chen officially joins Judy Chen Haggerty on the board next month. Santos, Robert Hidalgo and Manuel Baca remain on the board, along with David Hall and Rosanne Bader.

Ironically, Bader beat John Mendoza Tuesday, the man who led the charge to break the board into election districts.

Chen said the board can still work together, while responding to those who elected them. “We are not supposed to be figureheads who sit on the dais. We are supposed to be out in the community. When I am making decisions, I want them to know we do take into account the community.”