

Reform Fresno Unified has an uphill battle

Tuesday, January 10 2012, 12:39 PM

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- A reform movement is underway to divide Fresno Unified into two separate districts. The group made its intentions public in Downtown Fresno.

Reform Fresno Unified member Tony Pings started off the Downtown Fresno press conference by saying, "We don't have the wrong superintendent in the right district... we have the wrong district."

An architect, a grant writer, and a musician are just a few of the folks who comprise Reform Fresno Unified. Their push to split the district rose out of startling drop out and truancy statistics, among the worst in the country.

Another member of the group, Javier Guzman said, "This is an open invitation to the community to please come together and join us and find a dramatic solution. We have to stop the bleeding... we have to stop it now."

Tony Pings said, "What you find if you look at districts throughout the country is that smaller districts are able to listen to their people and by that involvement they're actually able to meet the needs."

It's complicated to divide a school district. Several criteria need to be met in order for the state to even consider it.

The first step in the process is to get ten percent of all the voters in the Fresno Unified School District to sign a petition, a very costly and time-consuming process.

In addition, the plan must be equal in every respect. Equal distribution of property, equal division of property values, and similar racial and ethnic distribution.

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Larry Powell said, "We called the state department to ask how often does the dividing of a large district occur. The answer is it has not occurred in California, so the answer is zero."

Larry Powell welcomes any action that would get dialogue flowing among schools, teachers, parents and administrators. Although he's not sure dividing the district is the answer. Fresno Unified responded by saying, "This is not in the best interest of our students both educationally and fiscally. The dropout issue in Fresno Unified is serious and we have substantial efforts in place to address it, and more needs to be done."

Reform Fresno Unified says it's on a fact-finding mission right now, and would welcome any and all community input.

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