

## From the Frying Pan into the Fire! Does HISD Really have the remedy for What Ails North Forest ISD?

Written by Jeffrey Boney

Thursday, 17 November 2011 00:00

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The North Forest community is in an uproar about the recent decision of Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott ordering the Houston Independent School District to annex the 7,500-student North Forest ISD beginning July 1, 2012. North Forest ISD has been under the control and supervision of TEA officials for two years. Commissioner Scott first introduced the annexation proposal in July of this year, claiming that financial mismanagement and academic struggles warranted the decision. Kay Karr, who is currently serving as the appointed conservator by Commissioner Scott, will manage and oversee NFISD's impending closure and annexation to HISD.

North Forest ISD students, parents and community leaders had strongly condemned the initial proposal of Commissioner Scott to annex North Forest ISD. Community leaders and education advocates offered up several recommendations to remedy the North Forest ISD situation prior to Friday's decision to close and annex the school district.

North Forest ISD has had its share of challenges within the district; however, winning a lawsuit to regain control of the district isn't the only answer. Many in the community believe that all elected officials, community leaders and parents should have demanded more accountability of their elected board of trustees that represent the North Forest ISD and placed an emphasis on tutoring to improve the academic standing of the district. Others have expressed disappointment in the past leadership of the North Forest ISD board, for allowing greed and self-interest to dominate the board and lead to financial mismanagement issues, as well as removing competent leadership to lead the district. Many community leaders are still baffled by the North Forest ISD board's handling of Dr. Carrol Thomas, which many believe caused him to leave the district in 1996. Since leaving North Forest in 1996, Thomas has served as the Superintendent of Schools for the Beaumont Independent School District, where his work earned him the Texas Superintendent of the Year in 1999. Under Thomas' leadership at North Forest ISD, the district became the first and only school district to move from "Accredited Warned," the lowest level the State places on a district, to "Fully Accredited" in one year.

Condemnation of the annexation decision intensified on Sunday, November 13, when a large number of community representatives attended a press conference led by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee at Shadydale Elementary School, located in the district on Tidwell.

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Congresswoman Lee, along with Ivory Mayhorn, Albert Coleman, and other community leaders, students and parents met to address the TEA decision regarding North Forest ISD to officially revoke the district's accreditation and begin the annexation process.

Members of the North Forest ISD community have collected over 5,000 signatures on a petition opposing Commissioner Scott's decision to close the predominately black district, believing that the TEA is discriminating against North Forest, one of the last small, black school districts in the state of Texas. They are vowing to take every legal action necessary; including going as far as the Supreme Court, to fight what they believe is an unjust decision.

According to an HISD spokesperson, HISD has not developed a plan of action to deal with the order by the TEA to annex North Forest ISD as of yet; but, would be working on one now that the decision has been made. Community members are extremely concerned about HISD's approach to the annexation of North Forest ISD, assuming the decision is unable to be overturned; and, they do not want their students and community treated like the people they were forced to take.

Recently re-elected HISD Board President Paula Harris stated in a press release issued by HISD, "While HISD did not seek this annexation; we stand ready to welcome the entire North Forest community into the HISD family. We believe all children have the ability to excel in the classroom. We will hold ourselves accountable for making sure that happens." The community is hopeful that HISD will not only hold itself accountable, but change the outcomes of the black schools that have done poorly under the HISD board leadership over the past several years.

According to the Texas Education Agency's Performance Reporting, all but two out of eight of the black high schools in HISD are deemed "academically unacceptable" and, countless black middle schools and black elementary schools are also categorized that way. All of this has occurred in HISD, having had two community-elected African-American board presidents over the past three years.

With those results, there is reason for the community to be concerned. That concern is not simply centered around what the plans of the HISD are to handle the annexation of NFISD, but if the students of North Forest ISD will experience more of the same.

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The Houston Forward Times will be sure to keep the community up-to-date on the details of this important issue.{jcomments on}