

Papers ^{LATIMES} 9/13

Filed for Lopez Recall

Politics: Activists upset with the Santa Ana Unified trustee's stance on bilingual education turn in far more than the needed 8,624 signatures.

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Organizers of a campaign to oust Santa Ana school board member Nativio V. Lopez filed nearly 15,000 recall petition signatures with the Orange County registrar of voters by Thursday's deadline, taking one more step to a likely showdown early next year over bilingual education and other issues in the heavily Latino district.

Recall backers need 8,624 valid signatures of registered voters in the Santa Ana Unified School District, or 15% of the district's electorate, to force a special election. The registrar must validate the 14,826 signatures, a process that could take up to 30 days, officials said.

"We are feeling very confident," said Veronica Gonzalez, 23, a district parent and one of the 11 people who filed the original recall petition in March. "It was a lot of work and a lot of dedication."

If the petition qualifies, the board of trustees must set an election date for early 2003.

"It is more [signatures] than I expected, but I am not concerned," Lopez said.

"If there is an election, we are going to win."

Recall backers accuse Lopez of promoting bilingual education in the district in defiance of Proposition 227, passed in 1998, which required English-immersion instruction except in cases in which parents waived that requirement.

Lopez, leader of the immigrant advocacy group Hermandad Mexicana Nacional in Santa Ana, has steadfastly denied undermining the law, but defended parents' right to choose bilingual education in the district, where two-thirds of the 62,000 students primarily speak Spanish.

Lopez accused his critics of being on a political witch hunt.

The conflict has heated up in recent weeks with the approach of the deadline. Signature gatherers clashed with Lopez and his supporters in the city's parking lots and markets as both sides traded insults and vied for the attention of voters.