

School closure appeals to no one

Principals, students, parents oppose plan

By Ann Pepper *O.C. Register*
The Register *Sept. 17, 1987*

HUNTINGTON BEACH — Ocean View High School's principal is philosophical about a proposal to close one of the district's schools to save money.

"They've been talking about closing Ocean View since the day it opened," Principal John Myers said.

An apple in one hand, his briefcase in the other, Myers was heading for a meeting at the Huntington Beach Union High School District offices Monday when he took a moment to talk about the report.

A 27-member citizens committee was formed in March to recommend ways the school board could cut costs in the district as declining enrollment continues to shrink the amount of money the district receives from the state. The 23-point report, presented to the trustees Sept. 8, suggested closure of one of the district's six high schools.

Of the three high schools the Blue Ribbon Committee singled out for consideration to be closed, Ocean View is the newest and most centrally located, thus offering the easiest opportunity for student relocation; Edison is the least populated; and Huntington Beach is the oldest and most costly to maintain.

"It was a very professional report, especially considering many of its members are not in the school business. But that doesn't mean those are all the ideas there are. I'm against closing any school," Myers said.

Adding just one student per class would save the district \$1 million, whereas closing one school might mean crowding the others, he said. "And there is community identity with each of the schools."

A couple of student aides, who were chatting in Ocean View's central hallway, said they didn't like the suggestion at all.

"I love this school; I wouldn't want it to close," said Tom Howard, 17.

Maybe the same classes are offered at the other schools, but it's more comfortable here, he said.

"That's right. Everyone at Ocean View is not pressured to be the same," Jennifer Baxter, 17, said. "I'm going to graduate in June, but even after that, I would feel bad for the rest because this school is pretty cool."

At Edison High School, the marching band was lining up for a drill just as Ken Hermer, a 17-year-old junior, was hurrying into the administration building.

"I don't want it to close before I finish," Hermer said. "I want to finish high school here, where I started."

Edison is a good school, but Hermer has no emotional attachment to the place, he said. After he has left for college, he would not mind if the district has to close his high school.

But Laurel D'Angelo, a 16-year-old senior who plans to study political science after high school, felt differently.

Please see CLOSURE/8



CLOSURE: No one favors committee plan for high school

FROM 1

"I won't be affected directly, but I'd feel bad for those who would have to transfer. This is a good school and I think one reason for that is the chemistry among the teachers in the various departments. They like teaching here and they are motivated. The students benefit from that," she said.

Teachers are also important to Lisa Robson, 17, a senior at Huntington Beach High School who plans to study interior design.

"A lot of the teachers here are open-minded and talk to us a lot. It affects the whole mood of the campus," she said.

"It's the only campus I like," said her friend and classmate Nicole Derthick, 17.

"It's so pretty and unique. And it's been here a long time," she said.

Neither principal at the other schools named in the report — Jack Kennedy of Edison and Gary Ernst of Huntington Beach — support closing their schools. In fact, the idea of closing one of the six high schools apparently appeals to no one.

The proposal was a painful one to make, said Kathy Bates, who chaired the committee that produced the report. But it was made for the good of the district, and received almost unanimous endorsement, she said.

Huntington Beach City School District, one of the four elementary districts whose students graduate to the six high schools, has already gone through the process of cutting back because of declining enrollment.

"We're very glad it is behind us," said Diana Peters, superintendent of the eight-school district. Four of the district's schools were closed over the past several years — the last in 1986.

Closing a school is never easy, she said. No one likes it because it means layoffs and because parents want to hold onto their neighborhood schools, Peters said.

"But the willingness of our school board to make the hard decisions a few years back accounts for the nice situation we're in now. Our schools are big enough to support comprehensive programs and financially we were one of the few districts in the area that did not have to cut any programs this year," Peters said.

The presidents of the Parent-Teacher-Student associations at each of the three high-school cam-

puses expressed varying degrees of surprise and concern about the closure recommendation.

Edison is at the edge of the district boundary and moving its students to another campus would be difficult, said Kay Pugh, who is beginning her second year as president of its PTSA.

"But the PTSA realizes that this committee made the recommendations it did for the benefit of the whole district," she said.

If declining enrollment requires it, closing a school must be considered, Pugh said. But a community feels a real sense of loss when a school closes and we would hate to see it happen, she said.

"We had to pick ourselves up off the floor" when told Huntington Beach High was one of the schools named in the recommendation, said Helen Outcault, president of Huntington's PTSA.

"The only way to save enough money is to close a school? I just don't buy that," Outcault said. "But that's an initial reaction made with not a lot of information. We will have to study the report more."

Ocean View's PTSA members do not like the report's recommendations, but they understand the situation the district is in, said Irwin Kanode, the group's president.

"The PTSA wants to keep Ocean View open. It's centrally located and its students are able to walk to school," he said.

As for the district's teachers, they see closing a school as a long-shot proposition, said Jim Beirne, president of the District Educators Association.

"The board has yet to decide which of these recommendations it will accept and which it won't, so the reaction from the teachers has been pretty minimal," Beirne said.

Closing a school is just one recommendation of several and it is being looked at in the same way as the other recommendations, he said. Among the teachers, there has been no strong reaction as yet, he said.

The board of trustees will examine the report with members of the Blue Ribbon Committee at a special "information-only" session to be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 29, at the district offices, 10251 Yorktown Ave. in Huntington Beach.

The meeting is open to the public, but public comments will not be taken as yet, a district spokeswoman said.