

Close one high school, panel asks

Advisory group reports to trustees

O.C. Register
By Ann Pepper
The Register
Sept. 10, 1987

HUNTINGTON BEACH — One of six high schools must close by 1990 to maintain the quality of education in the remaining five, a citizens' advisory committee told the school board Tuesday.

The closure topped a list of 23 wide-ranging proposals the Blue

Ribbon Committee offered the Huntington Beach Union High School District board at its first meeting of the new school year.

Established in March, the committee — which included teachers, administrators, staff and community members — spent five months exploring ways to maintain the quality of the district's educational programs in the face of declining enrollment and cutbacks in state funding.

These twin blows to the budget left the district with \$3.5 million less to spend during the next two years, and the committee was charged with finding ways to reduce costs.

"Closure was the recommendation we least wanted to make, but one that it became clear we had to make," said Kathy Bates, committee chairwoman. "Most of those on the subcommittee that examined the district's facilities asked to be on it because they were against closure. But the facts changed our minds."

The facts included a decrease in enrollment of 4,300 students in the decade between 1976, the year Ocean View High School opened, and 1986. Fountain Valley High School, which has the largest enrollment of the six comprehensive high schools, has about 3,100 students.

By the 1990-91 school year, district enrollment is projected to decrease to at least 13,700 — a drop of another 2,700 students in four years.

The committee did not pinpoint which of the six schools — Huntington Beach, Fountain Valley, Edison, Ocean View, Marina or Westminster — should be closed.

But it suggested the most likely for consideration include:

■ Huntington Beach High School. The oldest of the six, it is the most expensive to maintain. Its buildings could be converted for use as the district offices, the committee said.

■ Ocean View High School.

As the most central campus, its students could be more easily distributed among the remaining schools.

■ Edison High School. Already the least populated school, Edison's roll is declining faster than any of the others.

Closing a campus will save the district about \$2.6 million annually, the committee said.

But after praising the committee's effort, the principals of Huntington Beach, Ocean View and Edison all remained true to their schools.

The report was in Gary Ernst's in-basket on Tuesday, his first day as principal of

Huntington Beach High School. He said closing his school would be bad for the whole community.

"We are essentially the flagship here," he said. "Since 1906, we have had more graduates, more memories and more traditions than all the other schools put together. Closing would mean leaving Huntington Beach without a Huntington Beach High School."

Although two of the buildings are very old, many of them were added in 1972 and work is proceeding to deal with the problems of an aging campus, Ernst said.

Please see REPORT/6



REPORT: Huntington Beach citizens' advisory committee recommends closing a high school

FROM 1

"You can put me down as against closing Edison," Edison High School Principal Jack Kennedy said. "You don't close the best school in the state.

"But when you're a principal, you look at these things in a selfish way, and the committee looked at it in the way it should have. I'll need more time to study the report before I can comment fully," he said.

"I sure hope they don't close Ocean View," its principal, John Myers, said. "I think the Blue Ribbon Committee was

wise in recommending the concept — in naming three schools as possibilities (for closure) instead of just one.

"I've only had a chance to skim the report, but we had 2,550 students enrolled today, the same as last year," he said, indicating the need for a school at Ocean View's location.

But proposing that a school be closed was only the first item on the committee's list.

Few aspects of district life went untouched by the recommendations and several, such as one advising that vocational

education be expanded, contradict current district policy.

It was a difficult, often painful task, Bates said.

"As we studied the budget, it became clear there was no 'fat.' So none of these recommendations was easy to make and none was made lightly," she said.

The guiding principle for the committee was to keep cuts "as far away from the classroom as possible." But in some cases, the suggestions unavoidably involved curricula.

For example, the committee concluded that college-level classes should only be offered

when they attract a minimum of 20 students.

It also suggested that if recommended staff cuts are made, services should be cut instead of overburdening the remaining staff. To date, the district has attempted to maintain services although staffing has declined.

Principals' budgets, which have held steady since 1979, should be increased and used exclusively to improve student instruction, according to the report. Committee members also unanimously opposed the sale of any district property, at least for the present.

To be included in the list of

recommendations, each proposal had to receive the approval of the majority of the committee. Almost all of the 23 listed received unanimous or nearly unanimous endorsement.

The recommendation to close a school was approved with only a single negative vote.

"But we want to stress that these are only recommendations," Bates said. "The final decision on which proposals, if any of them, are adopted will be up to the Board of Trustees."

The board has several months to review the committee's report before the preliminary budget for 1988-89 is due.

"We worked very hard on this report," Bates said. "The volunteers on the committee spent many hours of their summer on it. Attendance was good at the meetings and discussions were serious. And although our task was unpleasant, I feel proud of the work we did."

The committee delivered responsible and responsive recommendations, board President Bonnie Castrey said.

"Its members worked diligently; now (the board) will have to study the report in detail," she said.

Public hearings on the recommendations are to be scheduled.

Closing high school key to committee's proposals

Huntington's advisory group suggests 22 fiscal options

By Ann Pepper
The Register

*J.C. Register
Sept. 10, 1987*

HUNTINGTON BEACH — The Blue Ribbon Committee recommendation that one of the six local high schools be closed is the key to many of the other 22 which follow it.

They include, along with estimated minimum savings when available:

- Move Wintersburg High School, the district's continuation school and the adjacent

technical complex, the adult school and the district office to the closed comprehensive high school; move the Guidance Center to at least two comprehensive school sites; and lease the Wintersburg complex at the corner of Golden West Street and Warner Avenue for no more than 20 years. Savings \$390,000 annually.

- Investigate the potential savings from unifying the Huntington Beach Union High School District and its four elementary feeder districts — Ocean View, Huntington Beach City, Westminster and Fountain Valley — into one K-12 district.

- Review leases on all district property and renegotiate them, raising fees when feasible.

- Convert the Huntington Beach High School auditorium

to a district facility and rent it more frequently at a higher rate. This could add as much as \$79,600 annually to the district's purse.

- Consider changing school-attendance boundaries to even out enrollment thus eliminating the need for portable classrooms at the crowded campuses. Savings: \$180,000 annually for maintenance and utilities and a one-time benefit of about \$360,000 from the sale of the portables.

- Explore setting up magnet vocational facilities at two school sites.

- Combine the director of guidance and director of special education into one position and move the responsibility for Coastline Regional Occupational Programs (CROP) work experience and gifted programs

to the director of curriculum. Savings: \$67,400 annually.

- Eliminate the vacation buy-out for administrators within five years and limit the accumulation of vacation days to one year's allotment.

- Reduce the number of released periods granted annually. Savings: \$8,000 per period.

- Streamline adult education and alternative education. Savings: \$30,000 annually.

- Increase the teaching load of the facilitators — teachers who instruct other teachers on matters such as curriculum. The maximum savings could be \$51,345 annually.

- Reduce administrative staffing and services as student population declines.

- Reduce classified staffing as student population declines.

- Pursue the work-crew ap-

proach to site maintenance.

- Eliminate public-safety officers. Savings: \$500,000 annually.

- Adapt the hours of employees at the district's maintenance yards to coincide with the non-use hours of equipment to be serviced.

- Restructure the work-experience program. Savings: \$206,000 annually.

- Offer college-level classes only when there is a minimum enrollment of 20 students. Savings: \$8,000 per class.

- Accelerate installation of energy-saving devices.

- Eliminate all home-school transportation other than for special-education students. Savings: \$42,000 annually.

- Reduce the number of

classrooms leased outside the district. Savings: \$2,500 per classroom.

- Study the feasibility of a student-parking fee. Earnings: \$60,000 annually.

The committee also discussed, but voted down, proposals to:

- Eliminate site-level word processing and duplicating.

- Purchase automatic attendance callers.

- Increase class size.

- Close the Westminster High School farm.

- Close the district's swimming pools.

Copies of the detailed report are available for review at each of the school sites and at the district office, 10251 Yorktown Ave., Huntington Beach.