

Sentinel - 4-14-83

Educators rap graduation requirements

By JOHN McNICHOLAS

Sentinel Staff Writer

APTOS — Educators from several surrounding counties gathered at Aptos High School Wednesday and gave overwhelmingly negative comment to State Board of Education members at a public hearing on the board's proposed high school graduation requirements.

Criticism ranged from mild suggestions about changing course content to charges the inflexible requirements were elitist, and would cater only to a minority of college-bound students. Other critics said the requirements would increase truancy and the dropout rate.

While those who spoke — teachers, school superintendents, local board members and students — endorsed higher standards and tougher requirements, they said the state board's guidelines follow closely the University of California's entrance requirements, and only 10 to 15 percent of all students in the state go on to UC.

Only two of some 40 speakers at the six-hour hearing completely endorsed the guidelines. One was an Aptos High School social studies teacher, Kenneth Call, who said the framework was a "refreshing alternative to alternative education." The other was Richard W. Moll, dean of admissions at UCSC.

Ann Leavenworth, one of the two state board members at the hearing, said only 15 percent of California's high school students are building a solid academic background; the rest are choosing from a "smorgasboard" of courses, with few or no academic courses in their final year.

Requirements in California are far behind most in the nation, she said, and many in other countries as well. Requirements must be stiffened for the students, she said, and also for "political reasons" to give the legislature an idea of what money is needed and where it will go.

But one educator after another testified such a "smorgasboard" is needed to fulfill the needs of a broad range of students.

Santa Cruz City Schools Board member Nancy Matlock said she feared education was moving from a structure based on equal opportunity to one based on a scarcity in which "education is a scarce resource and we need to allocate it wisely.

"I fear with these requirements, (education) will be allocated to those who are brightest, who are college-bound and who represent a very narrow, elitist segment of our society."

Matlock and others expressed the fear, despite Leavenworth's assurances to the con-

trary, that the requirements would become mandates rather than suggestions.

The board's model requires four years of English, three years of social studies, two years of foreign language, two years of algebra and a year of geometry, one year of visual or performing arts and one semester of computer literacy and the now-required two years of physical education.

They also include suggested course content and sequence, which raised questions of local control of such matters by parents, boards and teachers.

The Santa Cruz school board has come out against the proposal, but voted to add to Santa Cruz requirements if funding comes for them from the state.

Current Santa Cruz district requirements are three years of English, three of social studies, including courses in U.S. history and government, one year of math and science, two years of P.E., one-and-one-half years of fine or applied arts, a semester of community and personal health and 97½ units of electives.

The board has voted to add one year each of math and science if funding is available.

The state requirements call for one more year of English, two of foreign language, a semester less of arts, a semester of computer literacy and one year more of math and science than are now required here.

Superintendent of Schools Dale Kinsley said this morning he doesn't "approve at all of the state's proposal as a model for all students. It's much too narrow and inflexible, and would do enormous damage to the concept of a comprehensive high school with wide range of students planning to go on to careers in industry and business as well as to higher education.

"This program would virtually wipe out electives, and leave just five courses out of four years for the student to choose.

"I'm also concerned about the effect they would have on local decisions about curriculum and course content. It is inappropriate for the state to mandate this, and take those decisions away from the schools, teachers and parents," he said.

"The third thing with imposing these standards is dealing financially with staff and the programs in schools right now, and this (model) doesn't do any of that. We must address those needs, and adding courses isn't going to do it."

Kinsley said the district here is working to improve standards in classroom instruction and teacher training, and said "proficiency levels are more important than the adding of new courses."

Kinsley said the board supports a bill now in the legislature, carried by Senator Gary Hart for State Superintendent of Instruction Bill Honig, which mandates requirements — but not course content — and ties the improvements to funding from the state.

State board member Leavenworth said Wednesday in all nine public hearings on the requirements, the comments have been similar to those heard here: almost exclusively negative. Despite this, she said the board will issue some guidelines June, although they may differ from the draft now under discussion.

"We've had a lot of very good suggestions which we will take into consideration when we write our final draft," she said.

"We knew there would be opposition; there is always opposition. . . but the public feels the standards now are inadequate.

"Those who come to object at a public hearing are not the total public."

She said a coalition of 14 public groups, including the League of Women Voters and statewide PTA groups and others, had lobbied for the changes, and support from the California Business Roundtable assured her and the board they did indeed have a constituency.