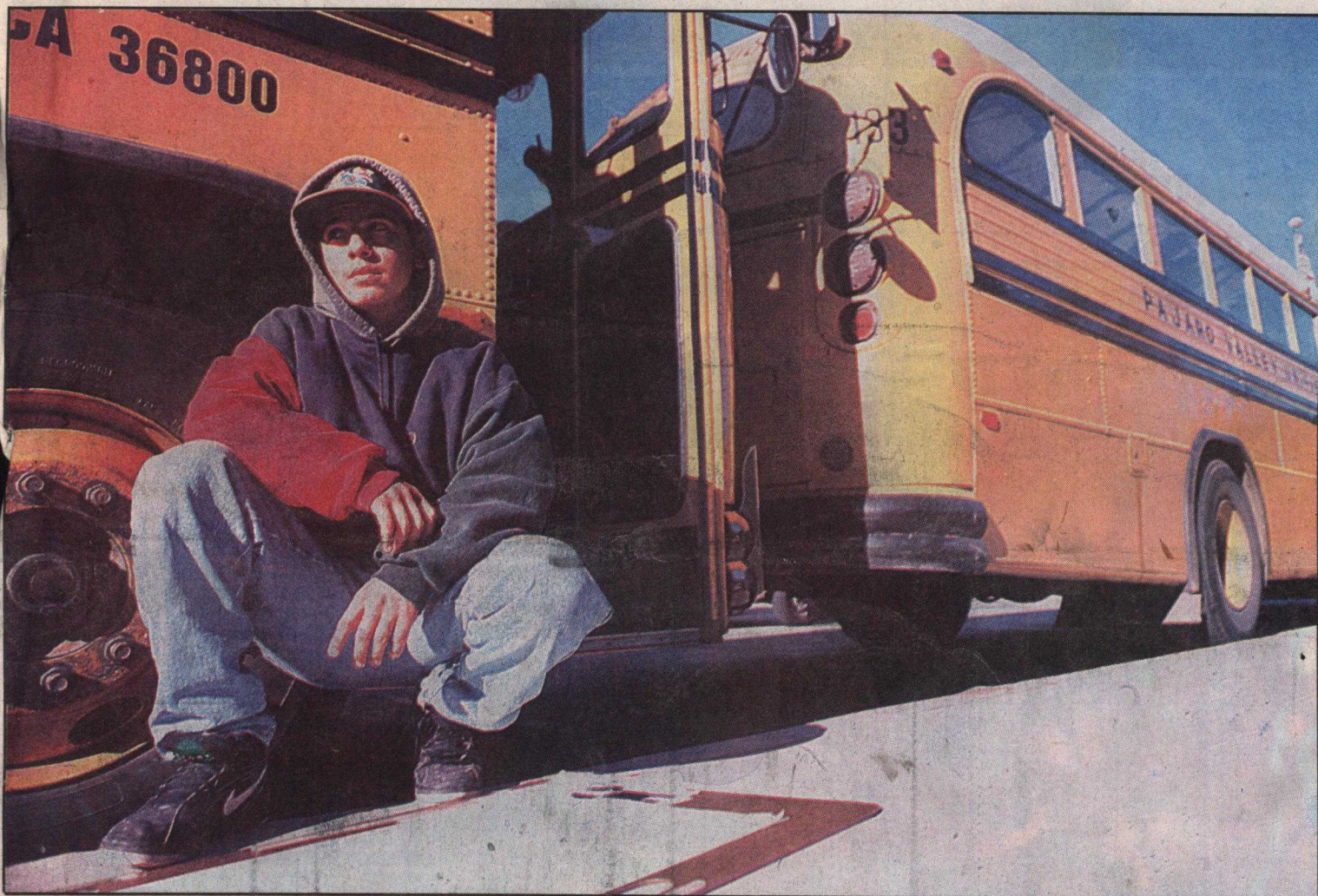


# FAILING OUR CHILDREN

First of a six-part series

## Together, not equal

Despite millions of dollars spent at Pajaro Valley schools, achievement lags, especially for Hispanic students



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Eloy Ramirez, an Aptos High freshman from Watsonville, waits for his daily trip home from the Mid-County campus via Pajaro Valley Unified School District bus.

### District examines desegregation

By MARTHA MENDO  
Sentinel staff writer

#### WATSONVILLE

THE MYTH is that Pajaro Valley schools are desegregated.

The truth is that after 15 years and more than \$20 million, the 17,000 public school children in Watsonville and Aptos are more segregated than ever.

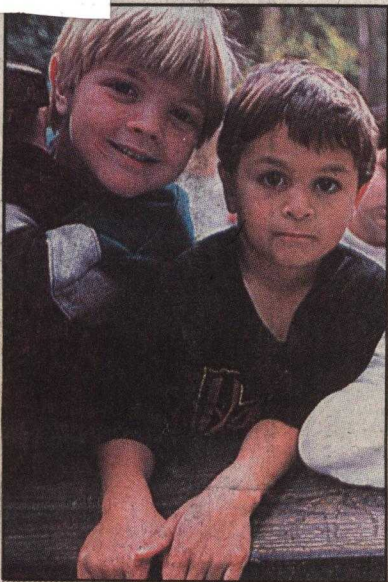
Separated by 10 miles of strawberry fields, a different language and a changing culture, the two communities have consistently resisted desegregation.

An eight-week Sentinel study has found:

- Two-thirds of Pajaro Valley's 24 schools are designated "racially isolated" by the district, with more than 80 percent Hispanic students;
- Hispanic students score lower on tests and drop out more often than their white peers;
- White students are equally underserved — their test scores are lower than white students in other parts of the state and county.
- Remedial classes are filled overwhelmingly with Hispanic students, while college preparatory classes are made up predominantly of white students.
- Of the 7,174 students who ride buses to school, a vast majority are Hispanic.
- Despite the extra money they get, the district's five "magnet" schools generally fail to attract students.

"We are doing an abysmal job. It's embarrassing, and it is not fair to the kids. There is no choice. We must do better," says Pajaro Valley school board president Jamie Marks.

Thirty years ago the Watsonville and Aptos communities voted to



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Kindergartners at Mar Vista school are taught mostly in English.

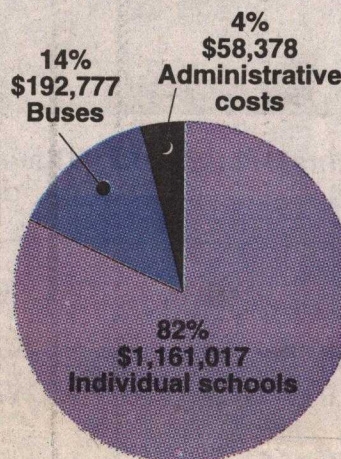
form the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, bringing together 20 schools from eight small districts in hopes of consolidating their resources. There were all-white schools in Aptos, and all-Hispanic schools in Watsonville, and many partially desegregated schools between the two.

Problems arose almost immediately after the merger. Some white parents did not want the children of Mexican farmworkers and fruit packers in classrooms with their kids. Teachers spoke English to students who couldn't understand them. There were no textbooks in Spanish, and no policy makers rep-

Please see STUDENT — A10

### DESEGREGATION MONEY

What Pajaro Valley gets



Each year, nine Pajaro Valley schools divide \$1.4 million in state desegregation funds. Last year all the money to individual schools paid for salaries of teachers and aides. The funds are divided according to a formula that district administrators say is based on outdated enrollment data from 1980 and is unfair today. A task force is working on new ways to divide the money.

#### How funds are divided

School	'93-'94 enrollment	Students bused for desegregation	'93-'94 allocation	Per pupil
Alianza Elementary	558	40	\$247,410	\$440
Mar Vista Elementary	460	68	\$199,531	\$434
Aptos High	1,692	900	\$173,904	\$103
Starlight Elementary	699	19	\$158,317	\$227
Ohlone Elementary	556	3	\$148,841	\$268
Valencia Elementary	615	198	\$92,637	\$151
Rio Del Mar Elementary	602	41	\$79,049	\$131
Aptos Jr. High	638	99	\$48,112	\$75
Linscott Elementary	124	30	\$13,216	\$110

Source: Pajaro Valley school district, 1993-94

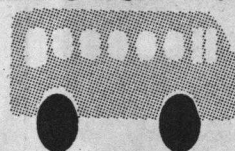
Chris Carothers/Sentinel

#### There's more inside

- History of education in Pajaro Valley ..... Page A11
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- Future clouded by Prop. 187 ..... Page A11



# DESEGREGATION



SPECIAL  
REPORT

# FAILING OUR CHILDREN

First of a six-part series



A student is caught up in artwork at Spreckels Elementary in San Diego, where enrollment is about 50 percent white and 50 percent minority. Spreckels students scored in the 85th percentile in math in national achievement tests a year ago. On the same test, scores of Pajaro Valley students were in the 30th percentile.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

## Student achievement lags

Continued from Page A1

resenting the growing Hispanic community.

"We recognized that there were disparaged communities in Pajaro Valley that weren't getting an equal shot. We wanted to provide parity, an equal education," said Jess Tabasa, a middle school teacher who pushed the district to change.

The first federal desegregation funds arrived in 1969 — \$178,081 to "enhance educational opportunities for children from minority groups."

In 1980, the district adopted its first official desegregation plan — by one vote — after federal and state civil rights monitors threatened to withdraw funds if the

### Stuck in the system

It is not unusual for Pajaro Valley students to be taught in a bilingual classroom one year, an English-only class the next, and then back to a bilingual class. These programs have built-in "transitions" when, after a few months or a few years, Spanish-speaking students should shift to classes taught primarily in English. But many students never make the transition.

"I just seem to be stuck in these sheltered classes," says Saul Zamora, a junior at Aptos High. "There's nothing to make me stop taking them."

His teacher, George Palau, says the school system, and the community, make it easy for kids like Saul to never become proficient in

classrooms. Some of these teachers are not trained to work with bilingual students, yet their classrooms are filled with Spanish speakers. Others are simply apathetic.

The spiritless educators are driving down the system and hurting students, said Eugene Garcia, a program director at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., who studied Pajaro Valley schools for several years.

"We don't need people who aren't committed," he said. "If someone doesn't like their job, their pay, their class, please, get out! Change your job!"

But finding outstanding, qualified teachers is tough, says Pajaro Valley's personnel director Clem Donaldson, who joined the district this year. Statewide, there is one authorized bilingual teacher for ev-

### TEST SCORES

Pajaro Valley elementary schools with more middle-class students and fewer minorities report higher test scores than those with poorer students or a high minority enrollment.

The test scores listed on this chart are the percentile national ranking on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education.

Subsidized lunches, served free or sold at a reduced price, are available to students who can't afford them. A student from a household of four is eligible if the family income is under \$27,380. Median income for the county is about \$37,000. All of these figures are for 1993-94.

Elementary school	Test scores	Subsidized lunches	Minority enrollment
Valencia	59%	32%	37%
Bradley	57%	21%	20%
Rio Del Mar	54%	11%	22%
Mar Vista	48%	25%	26%
	46%	15%	34%

'We knew the (desegregation) plan wouldn't work but we were forced to vote for it because of the federal mandates'

— former school trustee  
Pat Martinelli

'The number one problem with educating our



The plan established ways to bus children away from neighborhood schools, based on the color of their skin.

School boundaries were rezoned to improve ethnic balances and diminish overcrowding. Language-enrichment "magnet" programs were established at two elementary schools to attract English speakers to Watsonville and Spanish speakers to Aptos.

Parents resisted. They didn't want their children forced onto school buses.

Former school board member Pat Martinelli, who cast the swing vote 15 years ago to approve the original plan, is repentant.

"We knew the plan wouldn't work, but we were forced to vote for it because of the federal mandates. It's hard to buck the political system, but in retrospect, I should have been stronger and said, 'No, this won't work, go ahead and take our money,'" she said.

Martinelli said she knew then that the ethnic groups in the district are never going to be in numerical balance, and that parents don't want their kids bused out of their neighborhood.

"I should have stuck to my value system," she said. "It was just some political thing."

How could things have gone so wrong?

"Oh my God, this is such a big issue. It's like an iceberg, and all the public sees is the tip," said Aptos High teacher Jess Borjon. "As an educator who has been around this issue for so many years, I think the number one problem with educating our students is that the people running the programs themselves do not agree on any one strategy. We're grasping at too many straws for solutions."

ish.

"We're providing these kids with kind of a refuge which doesn't help them much," said Palau.

The shifting educational philosophies stem from tremendous turnover in principals and administrators.

In 15 years Pajaro Valley has had three superintendents, and more than 20 new principals. This year, nine of the 23 schools got new principals, all of whom have changes they want to make.

In districts with more established guidelines, a new principal might not result in significant changes at a school. But Pajaro's administrators have few academic policies, leaving it up to individual schools.

"What we lack is focus, and we're trying to change that. We hope to begin to standardize and develop some consistent standards," said Pajaro Valley school superintendent Anthony Avina.

So, teachers try to juggle shifting policies while facing classrooms of children with vastly different skills.

"Each year there's some new direction from above. This year I'm told to focus on writing. That's great. Meanwhile the curriculum department is worried that we aren't studying Ancient Greece. I have sixth graders coming into my class who don't know how to hold a pencil," said E.A. Hall Middle School teacher Torii Bottomley.

All students in Bottomley's class are pushed, hard.

"They surprise me. I have very high expectations, but they meet them," she said.

Not all teachers in the district are so committed.

There are the weary ones, discouraged by lower-than-average salaries, few supplies and crowded

help.

Pajaro Valley is competing for those bilingual teachers with districts like Salinas, where qualified bilingual teachers receive a \$4,000 annual bonus.

### A difficult task

Pajaro Valley is not alone in its struggle, and failure, to desegregate.

"None of the evidence I have seen has shown that Latino education has improved worth a damn in the past 20 years," said Josue Gonzalez, a founder of the bilingual education movement in his native state of Texas, and a Columbia University professor.

A 1992 report by the National School Boards Association said no progress has been made on the desegregation of black students in the last 20 years, and that segregation of Hispanics increased dramatically.

• In Kansas City, the most expensive desegregation program in the country (\$1.3 billion) was declared a failure last year by school officials. They said the original goals to achieve an ethnic balance and to bring test scores up to national norms were unrealistic.

• In San Jose, where Hispanic parents forced the schools to desegregate eight years ago, schools have brought Hispanic, Asian and white students to the same campuses, but have failed to close the achievement gap between white and minority students.

• In Nashville, black students fare much better since desegregation began in schools 36 years ago, but they are still more likely to be paddled and suspended, and less likely to get high test scores.

Anthony Avina nods grimly, his shoulders slumped, his jaw locked. Eighteen months ago he became

Starlight	34%	80%	86%
Calabasas	26%	55%	81%
Amesti	23%	63%	80%
Alianza	23%	85%	91%
Hyde	22%	77%	87%
Mac Quiddy	19%	83%	92%
Ohlone	18%	93%	94%
Mintie White	17%	80%	91%
Freedom	15%	85%	93%
Salsipuedes	14%	87%	86%
Hall	12%	80%	90%
Middle school			
Aptos Jr. High	59%	13%	22%
E.A. Hall	18%	37%	89%
Rolling Hills	15%	64%	85%
Pajaro	10%	88%	94%
High school			
Aptos	49%	6%	49%
Watsonville	33%	27%	83%
Renaissance	*	46%	77%

\* Renaissance students don't take this test

Chris Carothers/Sentinel

superintendent of a school district where the average student ranks only in the 31st percentile nationally on standardized tests, and Hispanic students fare even worse.

It is a district where at least 10 classes of Spanish-speaking students are taught by teachers who speak only English. A district where the November passage of Proposition 187, which bans public education for illegal immigrants,

has heightened debates of racism to screams and name-calling on some campuses.

"Yes, it's all true. So what is the question?" he said, exhaling deeply.

Avina was hired last year, after his predecessor, Merrill Grant, was tactfully "released from his duties" by the school board.

State officials said Grant had underestimated the district's expenses

students is that the people running the programs do not agree on any one strategy.'

— Jess Borjon,  
Aptos High teacher

'We need to put the money in the classroom, rather than shipping kids around the county on buses'

— Ed Murphy, serves  
on desegregation  
task force

es by about \$1 million, despite warnings from auditors. When Avina took over, the county Office of Education had taken control of the district's \$76 million budget and frozen spending. Test scores were abysmal. Community trust had eroded.

"This district has not only been tempting bankruptcy on the fiscal

Please see DISTRICT — A11

Kindergartners at Alianza Elementary School in Watsonville learn mostly in Spanish. Alianza is a magnet school, designed to draw affluent children who speak English, but enrollment of white students has dropped to nine percent. Still, Alianza students, like those at other magnet schools in the Pajaro Valley district, score above district averages on standardized tests.

Photos by Bill Lovejoy



## THE SERIES

"Desegregation: Failing our children" is an examination of efforts to integrate schools in the Pajaro Valley district, the largest in Santa Cruz County. It is the product of more than two months of research by education reporter Martha Mendoza under a fellowship from the Education Writers Association.

The Sentinel welcomes your comments at 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. Fax: 429-9620. Email: sentcity@cruzio.com

**TODAY:** Many students aren't achieving in Pajaro Valley schools despite millions in federal desegregation funds. Allegations of discrimination against Hispanic children are being investigated.

**MONDAY:** Two elementary schools — Alianza and Mar Vista — champion different philosophies for teaching children who speak Spanish, and experts disagree over which method is best.

**TUESDAY:** Hispanic pupils struggle to learn at Ohlone Elementary, a magnet school with great teachers and plenty of supplies that draws few white students.

**WEDNESDAY:** UC Santa Cruz hopes to rescue Starlight Elementary, a magnet school envisioned as a high-tech center before being hampered by poor planning and teacher turnover.

**THURSDAY:** Despite enrollment that is 50 percent white and 50 percent Hispanic, Aptos High is not fully integrated for the students who attend classes there.

**FRIDAY:** At a San Diego elementary school where enrollment is ethnically balanced, students earn respectable test scores, but desegregation remains a goal instead of reality.



# District hurt by turnover

Continued from Page A10

side, but on the instructional side as well," said Avina.

Avina doesn't like to sit still, and he doesn't like to talk about the steady stream of problems running through his district.

"I think we need to get beyond the stage of noting the challenges we face, and see them as opportunities," he said. "The fundamental question is how do we teach our kids to their maximum potential, because at this point we're not."

Since taking over, Avina has worked with the school board to bring the budget, now at \$75 million, under control.

Avina also has tackled academics, supporting a language arts program that includes a "writing rubric." This chart, distributed to all teachers this year, evaluates student's writing on a scale of 1 to 6, breaking down student skills by the quality of ideas and prose as well as grammar and spelling.

"It's going to take five years, but you will see this stuff work," said Avina.

## The formula for funding is outdated

The school board recently reconvened a task force to reshuffle the \$1.4 million a year in state desegregation funds spent on teachers and aides.

Nine schools divide these funds based on a formula developed in the 1970s, now outdated because of differences in enrollment. Plans to change have everyone at those schools holding their breath, some in anticipation, others in fear.

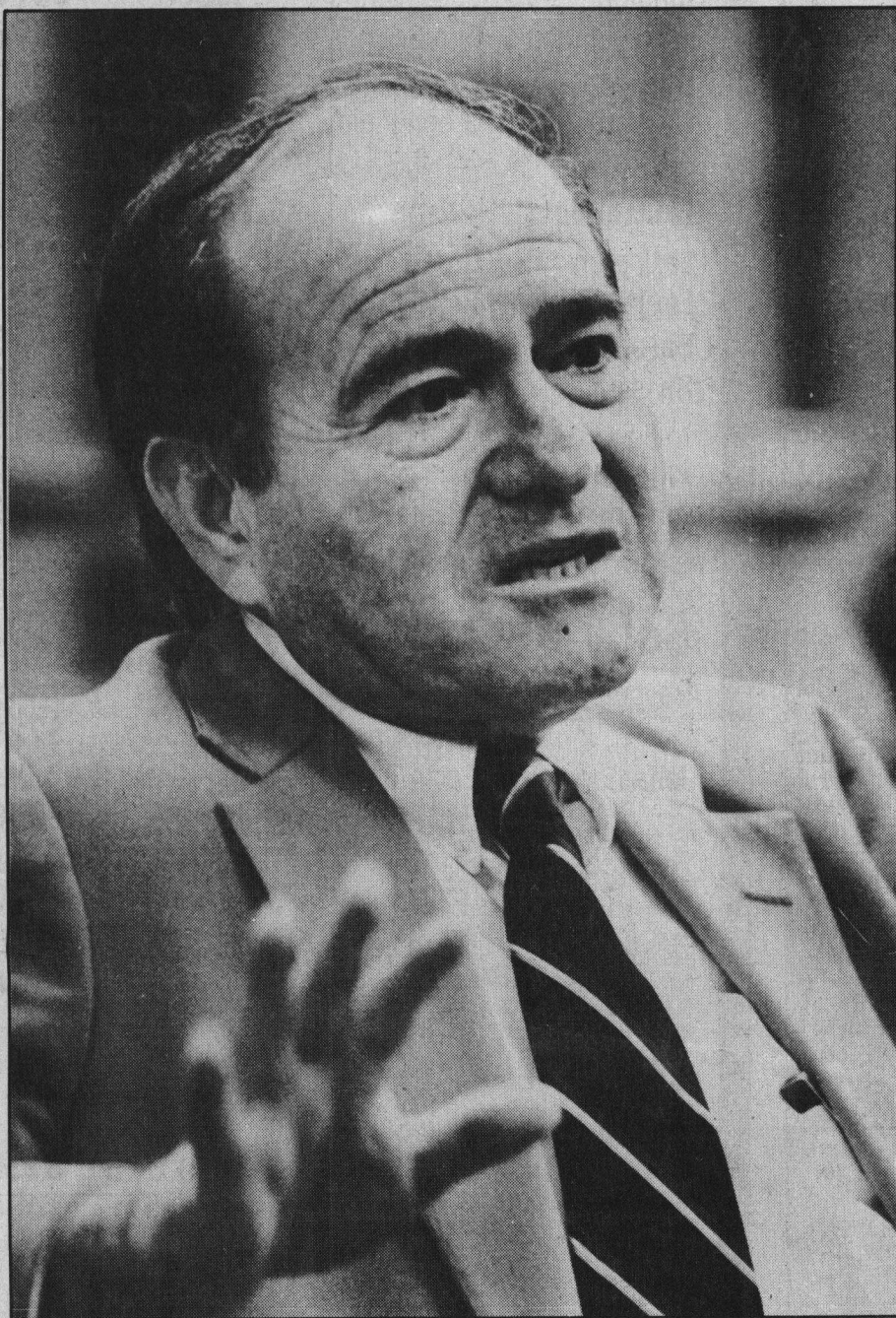
"Mar Vista Elementary School had 70 kids bused in last year. I had 900," said Ron Severson, principal of Aptos High School. "Mar Vista got \$200,000. I got \$175,000. It's definitely a point of frustration."

But Mar Vista Elementary in Aptos is the only magnet school in the district meeting its quota of minority children, and maintaining a short waiting list, according to principal Jim La Torre. Mar Vista teachers say their desegregation program would suffer, and others say it wouldn't work at all, without the extra money.

As in past years, the desegregation task force — about a dozen parents, teachers, community members and administrators — is dealing with competing agendas: Is it more important to have white students and Hispanic students sitting together in the same classroom, or to have all students improving academically?

So far, the focus has been on ethnic balance, a nebulous goal at best when only 27 percent of the students in Pajaro are white. Administrators have reinforced this goal with inch-thick reports that mention racial breakdowns at each school, but don't include test scores.

Ideas for change include funding schools based on the number of Hispan-



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Pajaro Valley school superintendent Anthony Avina, after putting the district's finances in order, is tackling academics. He says it will take five years to see results.

ic students already there, or total school population.

"I think we need to put the money in the classroom, rather than shipping kids around the county on buses," said community member Ed Murphy during a recent meeting.

Task force members were supposed to give the school board a list of recommendations in early December but postponed that presentation because they haven't reached a consensus.

Past plans, based on achieving ethnic

balances, have led to a situation where schools have some racial mixing, but low academic achievement.

"There's nothing magic about taking these kids from one geographical location to another and putting them next to each other. If that's all you're doing, you're missing the boat," said Garcia, at the U.S. Department of Education.

This year, Avina is leaning toward a focus on academic achievement and hopes the task force can help.

"I think the focus on ethnic balances

is ineffective. With the large percentage of Hispanic children in this district, I don't think we need to embrace the strategies that might be appropriate in other areas," he said.

Beatriz Arias, a professor at the Center for Bilingual Education in Arizona, has researched desegregation for years.

"What we really want is the improved educational achievement of the children. Whether they sit next to a child of another race or not is secondary," she said.

## What federal law now requires

Ethnic balances may be secondary, but they cannot be ignored without putting the Pajaro Valley School District in legal jeopardy.

"Separate education facilities are inherently unequal," declared the U.S. Supreme Court 40 years ago.

"To separate them (minority students) from others ... solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone," wrote Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Twenty years later, Edward Steinman successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court that achieving an ethnic balance at a school was not enough to make it legally desegregated. In addition, he said, children who do not speak English when they start school must receive a "meaningful" education, probably by being taught in their native language.

At that time, this does not mean students should not learn English, Justice William O. Douglas stressed.

"Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful," he wrote.

Steinman, who is now a professor at Santa Clara University, is disappointed in lack of reaction to the 1974 decision.

"It's getting too late in this century for all these excuses," he said at a conference last month commemorating the Supreme Court decision.

Edward De Avila, a senior consultant for the National Institute for Education, agreed.

"It is both stunning and surprising that we are facing almost the same issues today as we were 20 years ago," he said.