

Cabrillo Watsonville campus has potential, problems

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Cabrillo College's Watsonville Center has the potential to attract hundreds more students, according to an assessment report. There's just one problem with the present satellite campus — there's no more room to put them.

After five years at La Manzana center, the Watsonville Center is bursting at the seams. It currently has 1,100 students, about 400 of which are full-time, said Center

director Rachel Calero. Since it opened, the Center's enrollment has increased 61 percent.

There are four full-time office workers at the Center, Calero said, but it is getting more and more difficult to keep up with the work as the Center's enrollment keeps growing, she said.

The Center has five classrooms, including a computer lab. Some relief is provided by holding classes at various locations in Watsonville, including evening classes at

Watsonville High.

The assessment report, prepared by MRA International of Sacramento, said South County is the fastest growing area in Santa Cruz County. To keep up with the anticipated growth in the Watsonville area, the Center needs a facility with 18 classrooms, said Michael Rao, one of the MRA consultants.

To qualify for state funding for a new facility, the Center must have at least 500 full-time students en-

rolled to be considered a permanent campus. But the Center is caught in a dilemma. It must attract the additional full-time students to a campus that many students find unattractive, the report said.

For example, the Center's five classrooms have no windows, parking is a major problem, and student services, such as academic counseling and a financial-aid officer, are limited.

"It's totally Catch-22," Rao said.

"In a way, it's the product of our success," Calero said.

The present rented facility cannot be expanded. Cabrillo officials have been shopping for a larger building in the downtown Watsonville area for some time, Calero said, but rents are very high. Even if an affordable site were found, the additional cost of bringing that building up to state health and safety standards would most likely put that facility out of reach.

But the Watsonville Redevelop-

ment Agency may come to Cabrillo's rescue. Cabrillo has been working with city officials to find a new Center site in the downtown area. Watsonville sees a new, larger site for the Center as a vital component of downtown's rejuvenation effort, and city officials are willing to pitch in \$2 million, according to Rao and Calero.

Additional money may come from the state. Although the Center doesn't qualify as a permanent

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site, it could qualify for state money earmarked for renovating existing school facilities. That money could be used to bring buildings up to health and safety standards, Calero said. Cabrillo officials expect to find a new site in the next three to four years.

Plans for the Center are part of the Cabrillo Master Plan, which was also prepared by Rao. The Master Plan is an ambitious facilities blueprint that takes the college into the year 2006. The plan, which was adopted by the governing board earlier this year, includes building a 41,000 square-foot satellite campus in Watsonville by the year 2000. That facility would house about 2,000 students.

The Center's assessment report, which is still in draft form, was prepared by Rao after several months of meetings with Cabrillo officials, several conferences with Watsonville business leaders and city officials, and conducting a survey of high school students and community members in South County. Rao also examined the physical makeup of the Center and the surrounding areas.

The report found that the Center's enrollment is 65 percent Latino, most of which are part-time students. About 30 percent are first-time college students and fewer than half of those are enrolled in both the Center and the Aptos main campus. Students list parking and a lack of student services as major problems with the Center.

The survey of 450 Watsonville and Renaissance high school found that 83 percent of the students planned to attend college or some other post-high school training. But 73 percent said they would not attend the Center.

"They want to get away from home," Rao said. They may also want more of a campus life, Rao said — something the Center does not offer.

Older students and students recently arrived in the United States are more likely to attend the Center, the report said.

In other board action, Manuel Osorio, dean of student services, said that as of July 10 the number of registered students is 31.5 percent higher than it was at the same time last year, and 63.2 percent up from 1990.

As of July 10, 6,648 students had registered for classes. Many of these students have registered by mail or taken advantage of priority registration, signing up for classes near the end of each semester. Eighty-eight percent of these students are continuing students, Os-