

Protest at Freedom School

Teacher transfer decried

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About a dozen parents showed up at Freedom Elementary School this morning to protest the transfer of one of the school's teachers.

Parents, standing in front of the administration office, carried signs pleading that the school keep the teacher. But the teacher is scheduled to be transferred to H.A. Hyde Elementary School on Monday, leaving Freedom School with 17 teachers.

Freedom School Principal Kathy McGrath said the school will lose a teacher because it had a lower enrollment than was anticipated before the start of the school year. Freedom School expected 559 students, but so far only 539 students have enrolled.

District policy directs any school with an average class size of under 31 to "dismantle" as many classes as necessary to bring average class size to 32 in kindergarten through the third grade and to 34 in the fourth grade through high school. Teachers whose classes are eliminated can be transferred to other schools where overcrowding is a problem. Students whose classes are eliminated would then be integrated into other classes at their school.

At Hyde School, officials ex-



Mike McCollum

Maria Carbrea protests the teacher transfer.

pected 689 students, but so far the school has 743 students, said Juanita Hernandez, school principal. She said Hyde has several classes with two grade

levels in one classroom.

McGrath said a fourth-grade class at Freedom School will be dismantled, and students from that class will be put into sev-

eral classes, including two-grade combination classes. About 72 students will have to be moved to different classrooms.

McGrath said it is "very painful" having to eliminate a class, but district policy has to be followed.

"It's ugly to have to dismantle a class," she said.

But parents fear that losing a teacher signals more bad times for a school they say gets little support from the district.

"It's one teacher now, but maybe another one tomorrow," said Quirino Vasquez, who has two children at the school.

In the last five years, Freedom School has had five different principals. In early February, a 14-year-old girl was murdered in the school's playground. Her seminude body was discovered in the early morning by a couple taking a walk through the playground.

Parents said that for years, the playground had been a nighttime gathering place for partying teenagers because there was no lighting. After the murder, the district installed lights in the playground.

McGrath agrees that the school has had an image problem, but added, "we can't control the past." She said she wanted to "break the mold of the past." She said she hopes to increase parent participation and focus on the school's positive assets.

Earlier this year, Freedom School became one of 45 schools nationwide to participate in Stanford University's Accelerated School Project, a program designed to help at-risk students.