

The Impact Of Unification On Pajaro Valley

Editor's Note: The following is the second of a six-part Sunday school series on growth and progress in public education in Santa Cruz County during the past decade.)

By Mel Baughman
Sentinel Staff Writer

Formation of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District surely must stand—in terms of its scope and impact upon thousands of youngsters—as the most dramatic development in the public schools system of Santa Cruz County during the past decade.

Now preparing for its fourth year of operation, the Pajaro Valley district continues to struggle with the awesome tasks of educating an enrollment that approaches 12,000 students, of overcoming problems of finances and facilities, of keeping pace with the ever-changing and complex needs of a diverse population, and of meeting massive needs of logistics, supply and services.

Authorized at the November 3, 1964, election, by a vote of 6885 yes to 5516 no, the Pajaro Valley Unified District was formed of the Watsonville Joint Union High School District and its component elementary districts that include Watsonville city, Aptos, Freedom, Corralitos, Salsipuedes, Aromas, and North Monterey County.

Unification became effective on July 1 1965, and some 10,994 students were enrolled at the end of September, including 8173 pupils in elementary grades and 2821 students at Watsonville High School.

By 1967-68, enrollment had increased to 11,625 students at the end of the first month. Some 8494 youngsters were in the elementary grades and 3131 in high school.

Some 12,045 students are expected to be enrolled in the term that begins next month, a significantly larger number

than was estimated for 1968-69 when a three-year projection in 1965 set this year's enrollment at 10,033 students.

Major growth has occurred in the Aptos section of the district, where enrollment increases averaged 16.5 per cent per year in the years just prior to unification. The Aptos growth continued and during much of last year double sessions were in effect at schools serving the area. This fall the new Valencia School on Huntington Drive will be ready for occupancy and eventually will become an intermediate school.

During the district's first three years, controversies surrounding finances and facilities plagued the system.

Officials continued to wrestle with problems of inadequate finances and overcrowded and makeshift classrooms.

To relieve congestion, another attempt will be made in November to get voter approval of some \$6 million in bonds, including \$2.2 million for the second phase of Aptos High School and \$3.9 million for elementary classrooms and auxiliary facilities.

Despite these anxieties and shortcomings, the district has worked to develop an educational program that will fit the needs of the youngsters it serves.

Attention is being given to the needs of the children with a bi-cultural background and who come from disadvantaged homes. Two years ago the schools launched instruction in English as a second language with one teacher. Last year the program was expanded to four teachers serving eight schools and this fall further expansion is planned.

A survey made last April showed there were 181 non-English speaking students and 1124 marginal-speaking youngsters in the district.

Emphasis also is being given to reading, termed by Gregory Woznick, assistant superintendent for instruction, as "the No. 1 business of the Pajaro Valley district in the primary grades." English as a second language also is stressed in the reading program to benefit some 12.5 per cent of the students in grades one, two, and three who have language handicaps.

Efforts are continuing to cut class sizes in the primary grades and to strengthen special library, psychological and health services.

During 1968-69, the district expects to receive some \$201,147

in federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As allocated, \$44,530 would go to the English as a second language program, \$19,187 to reading, \$89,430 to reducing class (including teacher aides), and \$48,000 to special services.

Special programs, such as Head Start, also are being conducted for youngsters of migrant farm workers and others from disadvantaged backgrounds in the elementary grades.

At the high school level significant strides are being made in development of interdisciplinary programs where instruction in various subjects is coordinated to a specific occupational field. Some 30 students began a health occupations course of study last fall at Watsonville High.

In the complex and often-misunderstood structure of modern education, especially in a large district, the sheer logistical problems of supplies and maintenance and other supporting services are immense.

A few statistics suggest their size in the Pajaro Valley district.

On July 1, 1966, one year after unification, the system was 78th in size among the 1240 active school districts in California. Of the state's 821 elementary districts, only 13 had a larger enrollment than Pajaro; of 132 high school districts, enrollment was higher in only 11; and 228 unified districts, only 50 exceeded Pajaro Valley enrollment. And of 59 junior college districts, only three were larger.

In other words, of 1240 districts in the state, only 77 are larger than the Pajaro Valley Unified School District.

The dimensions of the problem also are suggested by the geographical size of the district and its varied topography as it stretches from Aptos through southern Santa Cruz County into Monterey and San Benito Counties.

As a result, transportation of students is a major task, and, with 61 buses on the line, the district operates one of the largest school bus fleets in the state.

In 1966-67, the latest year for which data is prepared, the fleet transported daily an average of 6317 students for a total of 663,332 miles traveled or individual passenger rides totaling 2,261,486.

As the district prepares for its fourth year, Superintendent

James Runge declares that finances remain the system's major problem in meeting the educational needs of the Pajaro Valley.

Dr. Runge (who succeeded Glen Smith, the first superintendent, following Smith's resignation in mid-1966) recognizes that the schools are not reaching all of the youngsters.

At the same time, however, he points out that constant efforts to improve instruction are being made. He cited the trend toward individualized program, revised courses in English, math

and reading, coordinated, interdisciplinary classes in the social sciences and occupations, and closer cooperation among teachers and principals.

The superintendent concedes there is a need for expanded vocational programs to serve certain segments of the population.

But, said Dr. Runge, "We must still be concerned with the general education of our children so that they will be intelligent, participating citizens in a democratic society. I think we must resist the idea that the function of the school is solely

to develop employable skills.

"The modern world requires a diversity of interests and a broad understanding of philosophy, patterns of living and the nature of man. The schools exist to further our society. We are committed to a way of life, to assure that people can function as free people in a free society. The public schools must give them the needed attitudes, knowledge and skills."

(Next Sunday: The San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District.)

SAVINGS ACCOUNT

ACCOUNT

	DATE	WITHDRAWAL	DEPOSIT	INTEREST
1				
2	JUN-1-67		***100.00	
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12	JUN-1-68		100.00	
13	JUN-1-68		100.00	
14	JUN-1-68		100.00	
15	JUN-1-68		100.00	

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