

Laurel School Case Heard

By MEL BAUGHMAN
Sentinel Staff Writer

A 90-minute discussion of the pros and cons of the proposed closing of Laurel Elementary School was conducted Monday night in an extraordinary atmosphere of courtesy and compassion by the Santa Cruz City Board of Education and a delegation of mothers who are upset over the threatened loss of their neighborhood school.

Opening the discussion, Board President Harold R. Shores, replying to a question by Mrs. Ida Johnson, assured the delegation of mothers that their voice would be heard in the process of making the ultimate decision on closing of the school.

"We are very interested in the concerns of the parents," Shores declared as he pointed out that the board intends no immediate action and that further detailed study of all aspects of the issue will be made before

the board makes up its mind.

A petition, signed by 69 residents in the Laurel School attendance area, was presented to Superintendent Carl E. Wilsey on Monday protesting the proposed closing and requesting a voice in the decision-making process.

Reviewing the many facets of the issue, Dr. Wilsey explained that the school does not meet the structural standards for earthquake safety set forth in state law, the Field Act passed after the 1933 earthquake in Long Beach; that the school's enrollment has been steadily declining in recent years; that the costs of operation are increasing; and that the present number of minority students enrolled there violate state guidelines for racial balance.

He assured the group that while no decision has yet been made on closing the school, neither has it been decided to convert the facility to an

administrative center, although such use has been recommended by the citizens committee on facilities and in the 1970 Swanson report prepared by the Field Service Center of the University of California and the local firm of Armstrong and Associates.

Dr. Wilsey pledged the board and administration will "grapple with the problem in a fair and reasonable way." He also noted, "If the school were full, it would be reasonable to assume it would continue." But, he said, if enrollment continues to decline, the school probably will close.

If the school is closed, youngsters would attend Bay View Elementary School next year, a proposal that also generated criticism because of Bay View's proximity to heavily-traveled Mission Street.

Dr. Wilsey commented that Bay View's enrollment has de-

(Continued on Page 2)

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(Continued from Page 1)
 declined also in recent years and that the 8.5-acre campus offers space on which to erect seven new portable classrooms that would be required to house the expanded enrollment if the 170 youngster now at Laurel were transferred.

The 170 figure, he said, rep-

resents an increase in enrollment from last fall's 153 youngsters. The rise, he added, is not typical and cited real estate and commercial trends in the area that suggest that fewer school age children will live in the Laurel attendance area in the future.

Dr. Wilsey also noted that

the schools lack funds to convert Laurel to an administrative center even if the 41-year-old plant was shuttered.

Members of the audience leveled further criticism of the racial guidelines of the state that dictate that enrollment of minority students in any given school may not deviate from the district-wide average by more than 15 per cent.

Said Mrs. Charlene Lowery, "This racial balance thing is a farce. Minorities are now trying to preserve their cultural heritage in their children."

Of the school's enrollment now, 43 per cent of the students are from minority groups, said William Lorimer, director of elementary education, and 57 per cent are "Anglos".

Urging the board to find an alternative to the school's closing, Mrs. Johnson noted not only the progress youngsters are making in their course work in programs of compensatory education financed with federal money but also the increased interest and parent participation in school affairs.

"We're just getting started," she said. "It would be a catastrophe to move the kids."

The long discussion ended with a commitment by Dr. Wilsey to continue his study of the problem with members of his staff, with representatives of the State Department of Education, and with the mothers.

He indicated that a second general meeting would be held at a later time.

More Criticism Of Sheriff's Aide Who Was Grand Juror

(Continued from Page 1)
 and that he never sat on any criminal indictments by the jury.

This includes the Frazier case, Keller said. "I disqualified myself on that indictment, and subsequent meetings since."

Keller said his only contact with the jury's law enforcement committee — which generally praised the sheriff's office and said the office needs more men — was on Nov. 10 when he supplied the law enforcement committee of the jury with some statistics.

This was backed by John S. DuFour, chairman of the committee. "If you think our committee, after 10 months of work, was influenced by Mr. Keller, who at this time knew nothing about county law enforcement

agencies, then I feel it is my job to convince you that this was not the case," DuFour said in a letter to Sanson.

DuFour asked for a public meeting with supervisors because the public "has the right to hear both sides of any disagreement, which will vitally affect their community."

Keller said he talked with Sheriff James and Superior Court Judge Charles Franich about his post on the jury in October of 1970.

Judge Franich, acting in the absence of Grand Jury Judge Gilbert Perry, told Keller it was up to him to decide "if I could in good conscience remain on the jury," Keller declared. "I told him I felt I was the same person as I was before I went to work for the county, and taking county employment did not make me a second-class citizen."

The full board of supervisors and other top officials were called

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