

# New equipment, top teachers don't assure success

By **MARTHA MENDOZA**

Sentinel staff writer

"Ay, yai, yaiii," sighs the teacher, sinking into her chair.

For the past hour, Susan Naranjo has motivated, directed, cajoled, teased and begged her 29 fourth graders to learn how to round off numbers.

Miles and Cerisa, the two English speakers in the class, are ready to move on to multiplication.

A handful of kids who recently immigrated from Mexico and are in their first or second year of school, don't get it at all.

Most of the students have some idea of what she is talking about, but are either too

tired, too shy, or too distracted to respond.

"They'll all understand it eventually," she says. "I just need to have different expectations for different children."

Ms. Naranjo is doing her best, but not getting the results she wants.

Ohlone Elementary is a magnet school that opened in the heart of a North Monterey County strawberry field three years ago as part of Pajaro Valley school district's efforts to desegregate. Hispanic students comprise 94 percent of the enrollment at Ohlone compared to 70 percent districtwide.

With a brand new \$3.6-million campus and an extra \$150,000 a year in state desegregation funds for environmental science education, administrators hoped to attract children from the whiter community of Aptos 10 miles away, and bring up the test scores of the minority students.

It's not working.

This year, only three white kids are choos-

ing to travel to Ohlone from out of the area. Even more discouraging, students score below national, state and even county averages on standardized tests.

"OK, so we haven't been entirely successful on the desegregation stuff," said Principal Ricardo Balderas.

A beautiful campus, up-to-date materials, extra funds and great teachers make this a wonderful school, but they haven't made this a desegregated school.

Balderas says give it time. The school is in its infancy, and it will take a while before test scores go up.

Paul Nava, who heads the district's migrant education program that serves 7,000 students (and most of those at Ohlone), said it's time to rethink the way classes are scheduled for students who go back to Mexico two to three months a year.

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**DESEGREGATION**



**FAILING  
OUR  
CHILDREN**

Third of a six-part series

# Magnet schools

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"If we know our kids are leaving the country for three months, I really feel we need to change how we teach them. We need to change the schedules of the schools so they aren't falling behind while they're gone."

School board member Jamie Marks says kids who come from Mexico and have not attended school need to go to a "Newcomers Program" before joining regular classes.

"I'm not satisfied with Ohlone at this point. I think that when we get kids in the system who have never had any formal education, we need to give them help. To dump them into a classroom without any assistance is ludicrous. They flounder. I've seen it happen," she said.

This month, the state Department of Education is expected to release scores from a science test given to fifth graders statewide, but administrators are not expecting anything special from Ohlone.

"It takes time for this stuff to sink in and show results," said Balderas.

Magnet schools first opened in the U.S. in the 1960s, in an effort to balance enrollment racially without forcing kids onto buses.

The idea was to create schools that would be models of excellence, with school-wide educational "themes" like math or science, highly trained teachers, superb equipment and clean campuses.

The schools would be set in predominantly minority neighborhoods, to provide extraordinary education to underprivileged kids. Experts believed white students would be attracted to these schools because the education would be so good.

Today there are about 2,500 magnet schools nationwide, and about 125,000 kids with their names on waiting lists, hoping to get in. Ohlone does not have a waiting list.

About 65 select magnet schools throughout the country receive about \$2 million each in annual federal grants. Although Ohlone could meet the guidelines, no one has applied.

"That's something no one has presented to me," said Principal Balderas.

Anthony Avina, superintendent of the Pajaro Valley district, said it's simply a matter of time.

"We're understaffed in this district, and one thing we don't have time to do is write grant applications," he said.

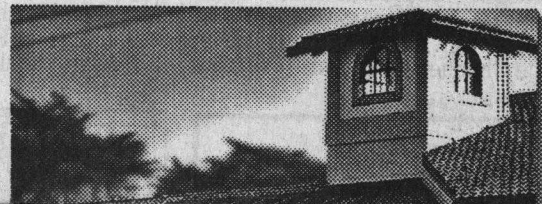
A small portion of Ohlone's desegregation funds have been used to buy materials or recruit students. But most of the money is being spent on salaries and benefits for two resource teachers, one for science and a second for computers, and two full-time classroom assistants.



Susan Naranjo's classroom at Ohlone Elementary is a teacher's paradise, with a telephone, television, computers, VCR, and a laser disk player. But Ohlone's test scores rank in only the 18th percentile nationally.

Bill Lovejoy/  
Sentinel photos

## Ohlone Elementary



## Students are different

Principal Balderas says this is the best elementary science program in the county, possibly in the state.

But science labs like this one are scattered at elementary schools throughout the United States, including one at Redwood Elementary, just 35 miles away in the San Lorenzo Valley district.

The science labs look the same, but the students are different. Redwood's enrollment is 89 percent white.

"Our children traditionally do not have these opportunities," says Balderas. "They deserve this chance to

the way down here, and it is a long drive, many get scared of all the brown faces. They hear too much Spanish. People segregate themselves."

He pauses, looking out the window at an orderly line of students filing past a beautifully tiled archway.

"If this school were in Aptos, people would be tearing down the doors to get in," he says.

## So many reasons

When Ms. Naranjo's class plays basketball, Cerisa is a blond streak. She dashes up and down the court at the center of action, her cheeks flushed. Cerisa is not

## Teachers' paradise?

Step past the construction paper ships sailing and through the door of Ms. Naranjo's *Salon 15* (Room 15) and discover the children of illiterate farm workers working on computers, debating whether Aztecs sinned when they sacrificed animals, and planning careers away from the strawberry fields where their parents work.

Equipment-wise, this is a teacher's paradise. Ms. Naranjo has a telephone, a television, a VCR, a laser disk player, computers, clean carpets, and a room full of motivated fourth graders.

"I'm going to college and then I'll be a ranger or a lifeguard," says 8-year-old Jose Leon.

Jose has a dazzling smile. His parents work in lush, green fields that surround the school, and he reads on a second-grade level. He wears a uniform with a starched and bleached shirt, and neatly pressed green pants.

His classmate Esmerelda is going to be a doctor.

"Just talk to me in English," she says. "I must learn more English so I can do good in *escuela* (school) and learn how to care for people."

Esmerelda's father lives in Mexico. Her mother cleans houses in Watsonville, and on weekends Esmerelda helps scrub floors of her richer neighbors, or takes care of her baby sister.

When Esmerelda knows an answer (which is often) she whispers it through the thick, dark hair that tumbles over her shoulders.

"I don't say it to class, because sometimes I am a little *timida* (shy)," she says.

All but four of the students in Ms. Naranjo's class were born in Mexico. Almost all are below the poverty level and qualify for free lunches. One girl does her homework on the floor. Many are the only ones in their families to speak English.

Jose and Esmerelda are smart kids, but neither could pass a test at their grade level.

"Those tests mean nothing, absolutely nothing," says Eugene Garcia, director of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs.

"We're using the wrong assessments. These kids don't speak English. They come to school and they don't know their alphabet, they don't know their numbers. They migrate back to Mexico for three months of the school year. Of course they're not going to pass one of those tests. It's what you see happening in that classroom that matters," he says.

Garcia was working on his doctorate degree in education at UC Santa Cruz when he became frustrated with "deplorable" statistics about Hispanic students in the United States.

Forty percent of these kids never graduate, 35 percent fail at least one grade, and most are behind their grade level by two to four years.

When it comes to studying and working in scientific fields, Hispanic students fare even worse. The American Association for the Advancement of Science reported in 1992 that the number of Hispanics receiving college degrees in the sciences has dropped significantly between 1977 and 1990. In addition, Hispanics



**Opened:** 1991

**Location:** 21 Bay Farms Road, Watsonville

**Magnet specialty:** marine science

**Teachers:** 25

**Enrollment:** 540

**Racial mix of students:** 93% Hispanic, 6% white, 1% other.

**Test scores:** Last year, on fifth grade achievement tests, English-speaking students ranked 38% nationally and Spanish-speaking students ranked 46%.

make up only 2 percent of the scientific workforce.

At Ohlone, teachers are trying to change that.

On Friday mornings, Ms. Naranjo's class walks in a line through the school's central plaza to the science lab. Inside, resource teacher Elsa Aguilera is one of the highest paid educators in the district, earning \$40,110 a year.

This week the fourth graders are learning about the properties of water.

"What happens to the cold water? It contracts, right? Come here my little molecules, *me moleculas*, and let's model it," says Ms. Aguilera.

Cerisa, Rosa and Melisa gather into a small group hug and squeeze together, giggling.

Then they use Pyrex containers, corks, straws, dyes, heating pads, and a bilingual set of science materials to hypothesize, experiment and draw conclusions.

At the end of the lesson, they have watched items sink and float, dipped frigid blue fluid into tepid red water, and can explain that cold water is denser than warm water.

Time is running out, and the teachers are ready to wrap up their lesson.

"So where is it better to swim? In cold water or hot water?" asks Ms. Aguilera.

No one makes the connection between their Pyrex containers and a swimming pool, but they're all pretty sure they don't want to swim in hot water.

"Cold," a few children call out.

"No, no," she says. "Think about your corks!"

Something clicks for Cerisa.

"Warm," she says, quietly. "The molecules are further apart."

No one hears her. The bell rings. Ms. Aguilera is frustrated.

What did they just do for the past two hours? Don't they get it?

"OK, put it this way," she says. "Where would you rather swim? At *la playa* (the beach) in Pajaro (near-by), or in Hawaii, where the water is nice and warm."

"Hawaii!" is the unanimous answer.

"OK! That's right! Clean up!" says Ms. Aguilera.

"Ai, yai, yai," sighs Ms. Naranjo.

learn in the best classrooms."

Balderas, who is in his second year at Ohlone, is image oriented.

A strict disciplinarian, he has brought tidy green-and-black uniforms to the school and outlawed hats. Children do not run and yell in the halls. They don't walk on the grass. The floors and bathrooms are clean.

"I want people to feel comfortable and welcome here, but to know this is a place with rules that are followed," he says.

Balderas wears a green blazer, Ray Ban sunglasses, and sometimes carries a golf club.

"It's all part of my look," he said of the well-worn pitching wedge.

Ohlone's dried and dying playing field, once green and lush, is Balderas' nemesis. The district ran out of money when Ohlone was built in 1991, so sod was laid, but sprinklers were never installed.

"That's very frustrating," he says, shaking his golf club at the dusty stretch.

Balderas finds it less frustrating that Ohlone has been unable to attract white students.

He advertises in local newspapers, publishes brochures, and makes his pitch at meetings. But his heart isn't in it.

"If we did get more white students, where would we put them? We're already full," he says.

The answer, which Balderas doesn't want to hear, is that some of his Hispanic students probably would be sent somewhere else.

"Anyway," says Balderas, "white people just don't want to come to this school. When parents do come all



Ohlone principal Ricardo Balderas, shown here at a school assembly, is a strict disciplinarian who says his students deserve the best.

the center of action, her cheeks flushed. Cerisa is not a good basketball player. She has scored one basket this year, and none last year. But she is passionate about the game, cheering for a good play and dissolving in tears when the rules are broken.

"I like this school for so many reasons," she says, during a break. She pants and wipes tangled strands from her eyes.

"I think it's, what's the word for it? Oh yes, advantageous, to speak two languages. I like the science, I like the computers, I have friends here. Oh, and I really like basketball," she says.

Cerisa, the only white girl in her class, can't think of any ways she is different from the other students at Ohlone.

"We have the same interests, the same hobbies," she says. "Is that what you mean?"

The electric bell buzzes at 3:25 each afternoon in Room 15.

"Remember to do your homework tonight, read half an hour, get plenty of sleep, and come back tomorrow ready to learn," says Ms. Naranjo.

Students put up their chairs and head for the waiting school buses while Ms. Naranjo goes to the back of the classroom to mount drawings of a brussel sprout plant on a bulletin board.

A few girls linger behind.

"Maestra? (Teacher?)" says Rosa.

Ms. Naranjo turns and bends down for her final ritual of the day.

One by one, in a line, the students kiss their teacher softly on the cheek.

"Ay, yai, yaiii," says Ms. Naranjo, watching them go.

## 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

**SUNDAY:** 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.

**TODAY:** 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.