

District gets bad grades

Ravenswood chief criticizes programs

By Sharman Stein
Times Tribune staff

EAST PALO ALTO — Federally funded programs in the Ravenswood City Elementary School District are not doing all they could to help underachievers, the superintendent reported Thursday night.

Superintendent Samuel Davis blamed poor management and confused goals for the programs' deficiencies.

In a separate study, Davis found the district's program for gifted students to be non-existent.

Trustees took no action on either report. They will come back for further discussion and action at a future school board meeting.

Ravenswood receives some \$2 million in federal and state "categorical aid" that is intended to help students who read, write and compute below grade level. The money is intended for services that the district cannot afford.

Davis contends that the federal programs may have been used for the general school population instead of only for those students requiring extra assistance.

He criticized the lack of coordination between different programs, teachers and administrators; unnecessary setbacks caused by missing equipment or personnel and goals that were unclear and difficult to evaluate.

He did have some praise, however, for the additional resources provided through the programs, students' growth, unique instructional activities and the experience gained by staff.

Educational specialists in charge of the "categorical" programs at each school agree partly with Davis' assessment, but they insist that the neediest students do receive "over and above" services.

They blame frequent changes in administrative direction for part of the problem. They agreed, however, that the schools need individual plans for the general school population. These school plans are now being written.

Many of Davis' suggestions to improve the "categorical" programs are things that the educational specialists have long requested, they said.

His suggestions include:

- Focusing only on identified students.
- Making objectives measurable.
- Closely monitoring programs.
- More coordination among projects at each school.

A report by the district's special projects manager states that 50 percent of the students are below the 50th percentile, with the percentage increasing as the students progress from grade to grade.

Seventy percent of the students

Please see DAVIS, B-6

DAVIS

Continued from B-1

in the district are behind their grade level in oral and/or written language. Some 50 percent of the students have scored below the 50th percentile in mathematics.

Educational Specialist Dorothy Montgomery "vehemently denied" that students at Costano School did not receive the additional help they required. They got the help they needed in laboratories and by working with aides, she said.

Shirlon Davis, formerly the educational specialist at Willow Oaks School, said the schools have lacked specific plans for the general population so that it was difficult to show exactly what special services the underachievers were receiving.

The only time the general population did benefit from the programs, she said, was when equipment like film projectors purchased with federal monies were used for the entire class.

The equipment should have been purchased with district funds, but the

district has for some time been unable to afford new equipment, she said.

Davis insisted that teachers were informed of the projects' goals. Special Projects Director Willie Richardson spoke to teachers and a special handbook was distributed, she said.

In the state program for gifted and talented students (GATE), the superintendent said students have never been adequately screened and there is no comprehensive plan.

There has been no coordinator, and teachers aren't trained to work with bright students, he said.

He also said teachers were reluctant to identify GATE students because it required extra work.

Some 70 students were identified as GATE students last year. The district received \$12,000.

Davis has proposed screening all students for inclusion in the program, and establishing a program where students would leave their classroom for part of the day to attend a special class.

He also intends to give teachers some training in working with gifted students. Trustees Thursday approved the hiring of a consultant to train teachers for this purpose.