

New Plan For School To Begin

By Ruth Passen

The new year began with an unprecedented act of involvement by many parents, teachers and community leaders who have been active in trying to improve education at the Potrero Hill Middle School (PHMS).

Community efforts have already forced the Board of Education to include this facility in its 1986 budget as a Consent Decree school. With the infusion of new money mandated by this court action, additional qualified teachers will be hired.

And, in a breakthrough development Principal Dr. Sam Rodriguez invited a number of parents, community leaders, school staff and teachers, and a student representative to help interview and ultimately select teachers for specific new employment positions at the school.

With a budget of \$250,000, the Consent Decree program will be implemented in the Spring semester and will set up new teaching skills to aid improved learning and student achievement. Other needs to be met, demanded by Friends of Potrero Hill Middle School (FPHMS), include a nurse or full time health aide, curriculum materials, reduction of class sizes, a study hall, and a full maintenance crew.

Under the terms of a court-ordered agreement between the San Francisco Unified School District and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Consent Decree schools are mandated to operate with emphasis on desegregation in student enrollment, as well as a racially balanced faculty. Six schools were initially targeted for and received special funds enabling them to attract high caliber teachers to implement a better educational program. This year Potrero Hill and two other middle schools have become Consent Decree, and eventually all San Francisco schools will be so designated.

With a court mandate for integrated staff as well as a racially balanced school, the current racial balance of teachers at PHMS is deemed an unsatisfactory ratio. The school's interview board met 17 teacher applicants, four of whom were minority. The low turnout of minority applicants points up the need for the school board to double their efforts in seeking qualified non-white teachers, participants in the process pointed out.

Efforts to establish a well-balanced school community - both student and faculty - may be affected, however, by a San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) study, "Two Year Facilities Plan," and reports that the PHMS may possibly change into a high school in two or three years.

State bond issues approved by voters in both 1982 and 1984, grant \$34 million to the SFUSD towards school renovation, to convert aging facilities to present day usage, such as creation of handicapped access and replacement of wiring, heating and plumbing systems. As a result, those schools to be renovated will be shut down, and students moved around to other locations, as determined by the school board.

Reports as to whether or not the PHMS will become a high school in the future are either rejected or answered with an "its possible," depending on who is questioned. Middle School Principal Dr. Rodriguez says quite firmly, "No." Yet at a community meeting held at the Potrero Library January 29, School Board Commissioner Richard Cerbato said it was possible the Board could vote to change the school's status, but that it wouldn't happen for at least two years. In response to negative reactions to such a change, Cerbato said, "I urge you to be vigilant and attend school board meetings when such a vote may take place."

The school district report explains it is expected there will be an overall school enrollment increase of approximately 1.8 - 2 percent annually for the next five years; there is a need to accommodate students of schools that will be under reconstruction; and to improve the aging school facilities, some of which will be replaced in the next 10 to 15 years.

Mindful that Middle School enrollment will increase in the 1990s, there are recommendations for future consideration that middle schools should be established at the Mission Bay complex, Treasure Island Naval Station (currently there are many students bused to PHMS from that military base), and/or Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.

Other projected plans offered by the study include reclaiming the Patrick Henry School site on Vermont Street, currently leased to the Public Utilities Commission through 1987. That school may be designated a Newcomer Middle School, with a capacity of 450 students. Cerbato told the Jan. 29 library audience that the Pat-

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rick Henry facility may also be considered "for an International Academy Studies High School."

Also included in student changes are plans to relocate the Buena Vista Alternative School (2641 25th St.) to the Kate Kennedy campus (1670 Noe St.), while extending the Mission Education Center program at the 25th Street site.

The report projects that the greatest overall number of student enrollment in 1987 will be 60 percent at the elementary level. Figures for the study is predicated on data from the Dept. of Public Health, which supplies the school district with records of the number of births in the city. It is further estimated by the Health Department that births in San Francisco over the next decade will stabilize at an average of about 9,100 per year.