

Early

from page A1

tions, which also includes new offerings for older preschoolers (ages 3-5). Somerville said it still would take up to three years to implement them.

Somerville also noted the input from September's Community Town Hall Meeting at Farmington High School, a meeting which launched the committee effort.

Bob Maxfield, superintendent of the district, said the study was begun in part to help reverse a decreasing elementary

school enrollment trend in recent years and to compete against similar programs being offered by businesses and private schools.

Maxfield said there even was talk about Fairview closing as a result of the enrollment drop. But because kindergarten numbers improved this year, he doesn't see that as a possibility.

"The biggest concern was, we felt we were losing kids to private schools and ... or to private centers now offering kinder-

garten," Maxfield said.

One recommendation the committee hopes is implemented in 1999-2000 is an expansion of Educare, a tuition-based full-day kindergarten program. The program combines a traditional half-day of instruction with a half-day of enrichment, the latter offered through the community education department.

Currently, Educare is based out of Alameda and Fairview early childhood centers, Forest and Hillside elementary schools,

but Somerville said "We do have plans to make the program available in more settings."

A survey of residents about their interest in Educare is now being conducted. Residents must return their surveys to the district by Jan. 22, 1999.

For Educare to be expanded, both Somerville and Maxfield said there would have to be tuition scholarships or some other financial mechanism put in place to help families who now cannot afford it.

Meanwhile, the expansion of other early childhood offerings also is called for in the package of recommendations. Those include:

■ Home-based visits.

■ Bringing infants or toddlers into the schools for special, interactive classes.

■ Piloting all-day programs for preschoolers.

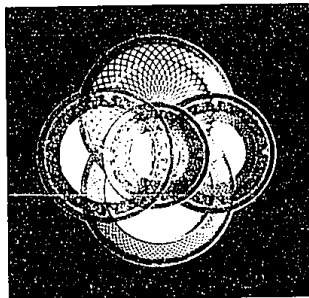
"We want to expand the variety of options that suit the lifestyles of families," Somerville explained.

SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

Another important recommendation is for wage increases for qualified community education teachers who instruct the preschoolers. Those teachers are paid on an hourly basis.

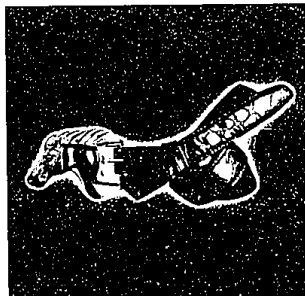
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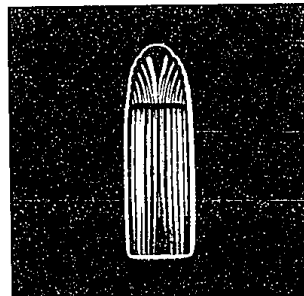
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