

Equal educational op

By MARGARET RAY-SPANG

"Equal educational opportunities" is the word in District 15 as the opening of the school year approaches. Not that the schools have ever deliberately discriminated against any child, but federal and state guidelines together with a whole new climate against "racism" and for civil rights are having their effect on the local schools.

School board policy now states "Equal educational opportunity and treatment shall be provided to all persons. No student legally enrolled in the district shall, on the basis of age, handicap, national origin, race, religion, sex, or marital status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity administered or authorized by the district.

Despite this statement there have been doubts and misunderstandings and lack of communication between the school district and the Mexican-American community. Some three years ago the issue was raised and in response, the district launched in-service classes for teachers and staff in cultural awareness, began sending communications to the homes of Mexican-American children in Spanish, beefed up library materials in the Spanish language and made an effort to involve Mexican-American families in school activities and to employ more teachers, aides and counselors to work with these minority children.

Even as late as last spring there were still complaints that the Chicano children were being unjustly disciplined and the organization of Concilio de Padres followed with charges brought to the attention of the State Department of Education and civil rights groups.

While defending its record of performance, the school board decided to call on the state department to make a study of the junior high and high schools and promised that it would follow its recommendations.

The report which resulted came as a bit of a shock to the administration and the board since much that has been accomplished has not been documented and so the district was not given credit. The district has, however, promised full compliance and has organized an Equal Educational Opportunities Commission of 12 members to help it keep on top of the matter. This commission will hold its first meeting on Aug. 30 and will then develop goals for the coming school year.

If a person or persons, or the parent or guardian of a person, claims that the school district has denied him/her equal rights or equal opportunities due to race, religion, sex or age, there is a grievance procedure which can be followed:

Step 1 - The aggrieved, if a student or parent or guardian of a student, shall make known his/her complaint to the building principal either verbally or in writing. If the aggrieved is an employe or an applicant for employment, the complaint shall be filed in writing with the administrator or supervisor identified by the aggrieved. The principal shall respond in writing within a period of five days following receipt of the grievance.

Step 2 - If the grievance is not settled in Step 1 and the aggrieved wishes to appeal the grievance to Step 2, he or she may appeal the grievance in writing to the superintendent within ten days after receipt of the principal's written answer. Appeals to the superintendent or his appointed representative shall be heard by the superintendent within ten days of his receipt of the appeal. Written notice of the time and place of the hearing shall be given, not less than five days prior to the hearing, to the parties in interest if requested by the aggrieved party. The superintendent shall give a written answer no later than five days after the day of the hearing.

Step 3 - A grievance not settled at Step 2 may be appealed to the board of directors by letter, directed to the chairman of the board, within five days after receipt of the superintendent's written answer. The board of directors will, at the next scheduled meeting, not more than 15 days following an appeal, conduct a hearing in executive session and render a decision within ten days thereafter.

Under Affirmative Action guidelines District 15 policy provides for:

(1) Equal employment opportunity and treatment shall be provided in hiring, retention, transfer, promotion and training of all employees regardless of age, handicap, national origin, race, religion or sex. Equal opportunity in hiring and advancement considerations will be based on positive organization needs and individuals' qualifications for and/or performance of specific duties.

(2) Continuous effort will be devoted to the improvement of human relation-