

McKee principal favors move to Willowbrook

By STUART SCHUB

The principal of McKee High School said last night he favors moving the St. George vocational school to the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, during a meeting of the High School Task Force.

Dr. James Canfield, principal of the school, said Staten Island "could have the best vocational school in the United States" if the move could be arranged with the state. He said no discussions on the proposal have taken place.

Proposals for providing space for the expansion of McKee were just one of the topics touched upon during the meeting in Susan Wagner High School. Several of the 25 persons attending the session spoke on plans to achieve a better racial balance in Staten Island high schools.

Rezoning as a possible solution to reduce racial imbalance was among the more disliked options considered. On the need to find more room for programs and students at McKee, Canfield said the school's students have been "treated like second class citizens" for 40 years because of overcrowding and a lack of proper facilities in the present building.

He said reasons for his choice of the developmental center included its central location on the Island, the number of buildings and the expense of its grounds. The state plans to reduce the center's population to 250 residents by 1981.

"Other options for the school," Canfield said, are expansion of the present building or a takeover of the present New Dorp High School building after the school moves to its new location in September 1981.

He said Community Board 1 said it would not allow the McKee's expansion into an adjoining park and that "all we could provide is our current program" in the New Dorp facility.

As the hearing shifted to the topic of achieving racial balance in the high schools more closely matching the racial balance of the Island, Gloria March, president of the Parent-Teacher Association of Totten Intermediate School, said rezoning may have the effect of setting "school against school."

Mrs. March said area parents who want their children to attend Tottenville High School might put their children in private schools instead of having them attend classes in other communities.

Curtis High School is currently 54 percent white, while New Dorp and Tottenville High Schools are more than 90 percent white. At Susan Wagner and Port Richmond High Schools the percentage of non-white and white students is similar to the Island's makeup, 16 percent non-white.

The U.S. Office of Civil Rights is currently looking into the racial makeup of Island schools.

Mario DeLauro, vice president of New Dorp Central Civic Association, said he was worried that the extra students rezoning would bring might force community school children off buses and that "magnet" programs, designed to attract non-minority students, might have the same effect on school programs.

Curtis High School will experience an increase in non-minority students in its incoming freshman class, said Mitchell Shulich, principal of the school, "and that is a very good sign."

Schulich said magnet programs, such as a scholarship program and a School for International Studies at the school, as well as "plugging up the escape routes" for community residents, were instrumental in the increase.

"Variances are not being given," he said. "It's going to be very difficult for a person not to go to Curtis if he lives in that zone."

Schulich said between 50 and 60 non-minority students are enrolling each year. "That's all Curtis needs to change the trend."

He said that racially intergraded classes were good for education and that a viable Curtis High School was needed for an upgraded North Shore and a stable Staten Island.

Herbert Balish, principal of Port Richmond High School and chairman of the task force, said that increasing demands will be made on Staten Island high schools as the Island's population increases. He said that New Dorp High School will increase by 700 students to 3,500.

Formed in May of last year, the High School Task Force consists of principals, teachers, Parent-Teacher Association representatives and United Federation of Teachers representatives. Balish blamed the small turnout at the meeting on a "lack of advertising." He said the task force would turn its recommendations over to Charles Schonhaut, Staten Island High School superintendent, sometime in July for public hearings in September.

Balish called the meeting an "exciting exchange of ideas."

An informal meeting of the task force will be conducted Tuesday in Port Richmond High School at 3 p.m.

The Staten Island High School Parent-Teacher Association President's Council, the Staten Island Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Community Board 2 and the Parent-Teacher Association of McKee High School were represented at the meeting.

Abraham Baumel, principal of New Dorp High School, Dr. Samuel Altman, principal of Susan E. Wagner High School, and Joseph Fisler, acting principal of Tottenville High School, were not present at the meeting.