

Private school leases Watkins Elementary

By Tom Sheehan
Dispatch School Reporter

One of the 13 Columbus schools closed in June is being leased to a private school. And school officials said interest has been shown in renting three other schools. Watkins Elementary School, 1486 Watkins Rd., has been leased to the Columbus Laboratory School. The elementary school, which opened in 1980 in the basement of the Second Baptist Church, 186 N. 17th St., needs the room to meet expanding enrollment.

The Board of Education authorized the lease, which calls for rent of \$33,333 over the next 16 months, earlier this week. Utility and other operational costs will be paid by the private school.

Assistant Superintendent Frank Maraffa said three other schools, shut down in June as a money-saving move because of declining enrollment, have been looked at by prospective tenants.

THE SCHOOLS are Garfield, Northgate and Walden elementaries.

Garfield, 835 Mt. Vernon Ave., has come the closest to being leased, but Maraffa said he has been unable to complete an arrangement.

An effort by some Far North Side residents to have Northgate, 6655 Sharon Woods Blvd., rented to the Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County as a branch library fell through because the library Board of Trustees decided it wasn't a good idea, Maraffa said.

Some private schools are looking at the possibility of leasing Walden, he said.

Of the 13 schools closed in June, three were reopened as district alternative schools.

NO ONE HAS SHOWN interest in renting the remaining schools closed in June: Beamont, Chicago, Forno, Kenwood and Lindbergh elementaries and Central High School.

The school board has closed 62 schools in the past 10 years.

Central High group gains court victory

U.S. District Judge Robert M. Duncan ruled Wednesday that a group seeking the reopening of Central High School can be a part of the Columbus Public Schools' desegregation case.

In a one-page order, Duncan said intervention in the case as a party plaintiff is permissible under guidelines of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

The Association for the Defense of Central High School and 525 co-plaintiffs asked Duncan in July for permission to intervene in the desegregation case.

The plaintiffs claim that the closing of Central will adversely affect the district's desegregation plan because it was a naturally integrated school.

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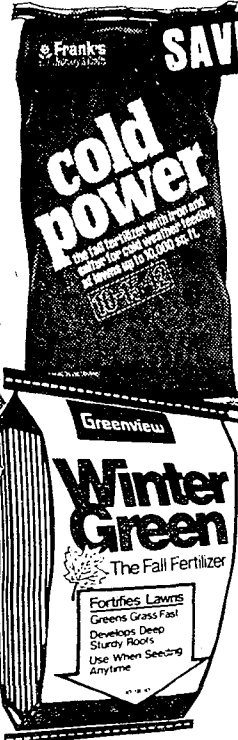
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