Deseg consultant may be hired

By MIKE DUNNE
Advocate staff writer

The School Board will consider hiring a Virginia university professor and consultant to help finish a new desegregation plan that will be tied to a tax for new school buildings and renovation of existing facilities.

The board and invited community leaders will meet informally with David J. Armor before Thursday's board meeting.

Board President Bob Meador said he expects his fellow board members to hire Armor.

"I want it to be in an open board meeting," Meador said.

He said he has invited about 50 people to talk with Armor "and ask questions they want to ask."

Meador expects Armor's services to cost $15,000 to $20,000.

Armor, a former member of the school board in Los Angeles, has written extensively on desegregation and is currently a desegregation consultant in Topeka, Kan., Stockton, Calif., and Savannah, Ga., and DeKalb County, Ga.

Meador said many board members see only one solution to the desegregation plan currently in effect.

The board's staff has devised a new student assignment plan that calls for closing several schools and building some new facilities in the middle of the parish. That would allow for a racially balanced school district that would lessen bus rides and allow more students to attend schools within walking distance of their homes.

The proposal links desegregation with a tax plan to build the new facilities and repair current schools. Price tags have been thrown around ranging from $100 million to $400 million.

"It has to be tied together. There are a lot of things that have to be done as far as capital improvements to implement the plan," Meador said.

"The important thing is to get the student assignment plan approved by Justice Department and NAACP," he said.

Meador said a key to getting approval of the plan is to have an expert in on the process. That's why the board needs Armor, he said.

"People want a unitary system and neighborhood schools and student assignment plan that keeps them close to their homes," Meador said.

Any possibility of passing a tax plan has to be tied to reducing busing, Meador said.

Plaintiffs are trying to desegregate schools in Hartford, Conn. and 21 towns that surround that city.

Armor testified that the academic performance of children in Hartford is influenced by factors such as low family income, single-parent households and low levels of education among parents, according to a report in the Hartford Courant.

If poverty is the overriding element, a court-ordered desegregation plan would not improve performance, Armor said.

Armor also testified that any busing plan would probably result in white flight and he generally opposes mandatory desegregation plans.
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Armor also has a consulting business and is currently consulting on school desegregation and choice issues Kansas, California and Georgia. He is also conducting a national study of magnet schools for the American Institutes for Research. That project is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

Armor has been a professor at Rutgers, UCLA and Harvard, a high-level official for three years in the U.S. Department of Defense, a senior social scientist for the Rand Corporation and a consultant to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, where he co-chaired a national study of school desegregation.

Former President Ronald Reagan appointed Armor to the National Council on Education Research, where he served for three years.

He was also served as a school board member for the Los Angeles Board of Education, a school system with 650,000 students. He was one of seven elected members representing a district of 700,000 persons.