

# San Dieguito's 'school of choice' conducts lottery

■ Academy in Encinitas has 644 applicants, 410 slots

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ENCINITAS — For the fourth time since San Dieguito Academy became a "school of choice," officials have conducted a lottery to determine who will be admitted next school year.

On Tuesday, Principal Don Rizzi, under the watch of three parents, three school employees, a reporter and a video camera, drew 644 cards from a hopper.

Of those, 410 students in ninth through 12th grades will be granted admission to San Dieguito Union High School District's oldest campus.

The names of the other 234 students were placed on a waiting list in the order in which they were drawn.

Also, 115 applicants were granted automatic admission because their siblings attend the Academy on Santa Fe Drive in Encinitas.

After about 90 minutes, Rizzi drew the final card for slot No. 116 on the ninth-grade waiting list.

That student, Rizzi joked, is "a person I wouldn't want

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## ► LOTTERY

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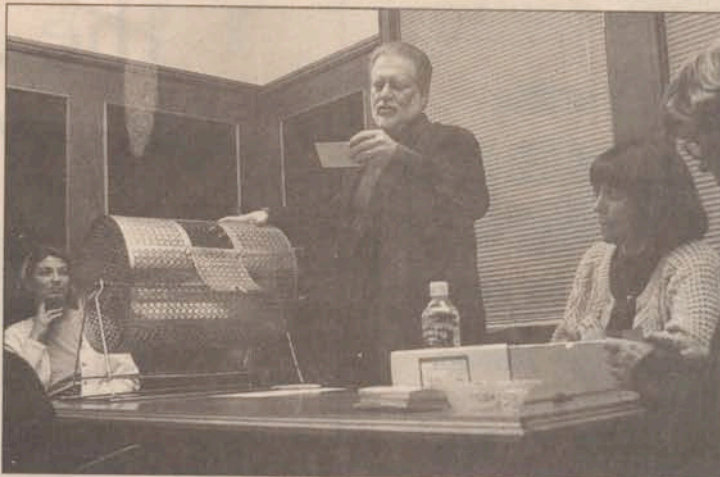
to take to Vegas with me."

Although the academy's sister high schools — La Costa Canyon and Torrey Pines — are facing record enrollments, Tuesday's lottery had 91 fewer names than in the prior year.

District officials have set a 1,675-student enrollment cap at the academy for the 2003-04 school year. That cap is roughly half the number of students attending the other two high schools.

Any high school student living in the San Dieguito district, which stretches from La Costa to Carmel Valley, can apply to the academy. Known for six decades as San Dieguito High School, the place was reinvented as a school of choice in 1996 and renamed as San Dieguito Academy.

In its first year, the academy attracted 1,100 students as a college-style high school. Officials envisioned the new program would attract students from across the district with its combination of a smaller enrollment, longer classes and



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Principal Don Rizzi reads the names of students chosen during a lottery Tuesday that determined which new students will attend San Dieguito Academy next year. Monitoring the drawing were, from left, parent Kathy Horine, data clerk Bridget Sabin and registrar Kay Moody.

All this has made the academy a popular choice, with more applicants than available space. Students at the academy this year apply to be automatically reinstated next year, and their siblings interested in attending the school are also automatically accepted.

On Friday the school will mail the results of the lottery

were accepted for admission:

■ Freshmen, 380 out of 496 applications.

■ Sophomores, five out of 67.

■ Juniors, five out of 49.

■ Seniors, 20 out of 32.

"We've tried to do it as fairly as we can over the years," registrar Kay Moody said.

But use of the lottery continues to produce controversy.

In 1999, a group of 10 parents unsuccessfully sued the school district over the use of a lottery to determine admissions, alleging the system was "arbitrary and capricious."

The group, called Friends of the Academy Initiating Reform, demanded that 128 students be admitted to the school.

Superior Court Judge David Moon ruled that district officials had acted lawfully and fairly.

More recently, some parents have renewed the argument that children who live near the school should be given first dibs.

Michelle Brown, 15, tends to agree. While the Academy has been good for the Cardiff sophomore — interested in studying foreign languages, flexible scheduling at the school has allowed her to study both Spanish and

Japanese — she considers herself lucky.

Two years ago, she was picked in the lottery, while one of her best friends was not.

"I feel totally bad for her,"

Michelle said Tuesday.

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