Bill Thomas gives reply to auditors

William Thomas, who resigned as business manager of the Berkeley Unified School District eight months ago, today replied to charges against him raised in a report by Arthur Young and Company.

Thomas said he was not responsible for past budget overruns, since the school board never adopted a policy to control overspending by administrators, and "there are 280 separate budgets and I could not check all of them."

Thomas said also that the consulting firm's criticism of him for allegedly avoiding bidding process in the painting of LeConte School is also lacking facts.

Thomas said, "There were not enough district painters to do the work, and there was a painters' strike outside the district."

"The school board passed an emergency resolution approving the use of outside painters and they had to be paid on an hourly basis, with payments less than $5,000," Thomas said.

Under the emergency resolution, the district could hire outside workers for up to 90 days.

The consultants also criticized Thomas, without naming him, for "circumventing budget controls," and paying some employees out of funds allocated for program which did not involve those employes.

Thomas said, "The school district is required by law to pay its employes and if it didn't legal action would be brought by the Industrial Relations Board."

"They had to be paid and I had authority to transfer funds under $5,000 submitting it to the board for informational purposes. If the amount was more than $5,000, then board approval was needed," he said.

Regarding the past budget overruns, Thomas said "The district budget has been overspent for the past 15 years by certain administrators in the district and no action has ever been taken by the board or the superintendent.

"As a matter of fact, the superintendent's own budget was overspent by $68,000 last year, and how could I