

Speakers object to school closing

200 JAM AUDITORIUM;
EMOTIONS RUN HIGH

By Julie Patel
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As Mountain View-Whisman board members prepare to vote later this month on proposals to shutter a school, parents, teachers and students at Castro Elementary — which is on the chopping block — defended their school's academic progress Thursday night and challenged the need to close a school in the first place.

"Please don't close Castro. It is the heart and soul of the community," said Anita Brown, a teacher at Monta Loma Elementary.

Nearly 200 people crammed into a small auditorium at Castro — at one point erupting into shouts when a board member wouldn't let them translate what they said into Spanish themselves.

Slater Elementary still will also be considered for closing. District Superintendent Eleanor Yick will provide details of proposals to close each school, as well as possible variations, before the board votes March 22.

Parents and teachers describe Castro as a community center. They said it would be hard for parents — many who don't have cars — to stay involved in their children's school or pick up sick children if the schools are out of their neighborhood.

Parents, teachers and two members of the task force that narrowed the list of schools to close to Slater and Castro challenged the board on whether

In Mountain View, two schools, Castro and Slater, are being considered for closing. The board is to make a decision March 22.

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PENINSULA INTERFAITH ACTION
1336 ARROYO AVENUE TEL: 650-592-9181
SAN CARLOS, CA 94070-3913 FAX: 650-592-9183

closing a school is needed.

Castro teacher and task-force member Gloria Valdez urged the board to rethink the idea. "Since the savings is questionable, should we close a school?"

Another Castro teacher, Linda Yung, described the community of parents, teachers and students as a family. She said parents "can tell I care about their children." As Yung retold the story of how she connected with one parent in particular without speaking the same language, she showed board members what she did by walking closer to them, making eye contact and even touching the arm of one board member. As Yung spoke, a noisy, energetic room mellowed to near silence. When she was done, people rose to their feet and clapped.

Board member Ellen Wheeler then asked people to stand behind the podium. "There's a reason for the rules. I appreciate people acting politely," she said.

The next speaker, parent Miguel Luna, said, "We ask that you also respect us," garnering exclamations of agreement.

A few minutes later, Wheeler wouldn't allow Luna to translate his comments into Spanish himself and asked instead that he use a translator hired by the district. That's when the confrontation escalated into more shouts with one parent complaining the translation provided wasn't accurate.

About 20 parents stood up agreeing, which led the board to call a five-minute break to get the meeting back in order.

After the recess, Robin Iwai, a Huff Elementary parent and Castro volunteer, showered the board with accolades and said they should close a school even though it's difficult.

"Our children will continue to get a first rate education at any of our schools," she said.

Castro parents and others will meet Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at 160 N. Rengstorff Ave. to lay out their main issues and possibly draw up a proposal for board members. The district will hold a second forum on school closing proposals Wednesday at Castro, 505 Escuela Ave.

Contact Julie Patel at
jpatel@mercurynews.com or
(650) 688-7550.

Leaders from Peninsula Interfaith Action's local organizing committees at St. Athanasius and St. Joseph churches in Mountain View are holding community meetings to help organize parents to speak out on behalf of their children. The meeting mentioned at the end of this article was sponsored by PIA.