

Mountain View VOICE

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The school board's decision NOT to close Castro Elementary School, at the heart of the low-income, Latino immigrant community in Mountain View, is due in part to PIA's work in organizing and assisting the Spanish-speaking Castro school parents in speaking out. PIA leaders and staff helped organize the vigils, the strong parent turnout at the school board meetings and helped parents express their needs and concerns at the public forums.

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Slater School to close in June 2006

BOARD DITCHES PROPOSAL TO CLOSE CASTRO, OPTS TO DELAY CLOSURE A YEAR

By Julie O'Shea

Explaining that they need an extra year to plan a smooth transition, Mountain View-Whisman school trustees voted

School's multipurpose room. The board's decision will ultimately shutter Slater and move PACT, the school's parent participation program, to Castro Elementary, where it will join the dual-language immersion program, another magnet program. "It is with a heavy heart that I do this," said Trustee RoseMary

Roquero, who was emotionally upset while casting her vote to close Slater, where she had gone to school. "I never wanted this to be a sluffest, but through this, I found the heart of the community. "Let's continue to fight," said Roquero. "Let's continue to make this the little district that could

and did." Earlier in the evening, the board voted 4-1 to delay closing an elementary campus for a year, reversing its decision from a meeting last month. Fiona Walter cast the lone "no" vote, explaining after the meeting that

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NORBERT VON DER GROEBEN

Marisa Roquero and Nick Perry took part in a 24-hour vigil on Monday at Graham Middle School to protest school closure.

SLATER

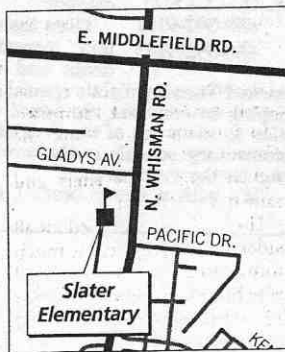
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she was still nervous about the district's dire financial situation.

District officials were hopeful that after closing a school, they would be able to lease out the property and generate \$400,000 in rental income a year. However, since the board delayed the vote until this week, district finance chief Rebecca Wright said she could no longer guarantee that she'd be able to secure a tenant in time for the beginning of school.

While this caused many trustees to rethink their position on the matter, Walter remained hopeful that the district would still be able to find a tenant and voted against delaying the school-closure decision for a year. She later voted in favor of closing Slater in a separate vote.

"It's bittersweet," Slater principal Nicki Smith told the board. "To be honest with you, we've been fighting long and hard not to close any school. I guess I'm delighted I have a reprieve, so to speak."



The school board had announced plans in January to close Slater. But after listening to weeks of pleas from Slater parents who didn't want to see their campus close, board President Ellen Wheeler abruptly suggested that trustees consider closing Castro — one of the district's lowest performing schools — instead.

A relieved looking Carla Tarazi, Castro's principal, greeted parents with hugs and smiles following the final vote Tuesday. "Can you believe it?" she said excitedly to

one father, who gave her a pat on the back.

"This represents lots and lots of hard work," Tarazi said.

Castro parents had spent the last two weeks holding vigils and coming in droves to school board forums to protest the plan that they said would be utterly devastating to their community.

With the vote finally cast, trustee Gloria Higgins said now is the time to start rebuilding the credibility of the district, which was marred with accusations of supplying false and misleading information during the two-month closure debate.

"We have a long way to go to rebuild that credibility, (and) that goes for the board as well as the district," Higgins said, adding that she'd like to start the healing process by adopting a transportation policy, amending the enrollment policy and fully hashing out the details on the impending Slater school closure. ▣

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