



JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

Marco Garcia holds up signs during parents' protest outside Mountain View school board meeting Tuesday.

Mtn. View district to shut Slater school

By Julie Patel and S.L. Wykes
Mercury News

Mountain View-Whisman's school board voted Tuesday night to shut down Slater Elementary — but not until after the 2005-06 school year, giving the school another year and adding another surprise to the district's on-again, off-again quest to close a campus.

More than 150 jittery parents, students and teachers packed Tuesday night's special meeting, hoping to convince the board that the plan to close one of the district's seven elementary schools is the wrong decision for the wrong reason.

"It's with a heavy heart I do this,"

MOUNTAIN VIEW

school board member Rosemary Roquero said through tears, lamenting how both her elementary and high school were closed when she was a student in Mountain View.

The board voted unanimously on a proposal to close Slater and move its popular parent-participation program to Castro, which would maintain the district's dual-immersion Spanish-English program. Castro's kindergarten through second-graders would stay at the school, but the third-through fifth-grades would eventually become a magnet program.

Slater's students will be relocated to the district's other schools.

But in a 4-1 vote — with Fiona Walter opposing — the board delayed the closing by a year.

"It's in the best interest of students and the staff and would allow for adequate preparation for a transition,"

Closing a school

After months of heated public discussion, the Mountain View-Whisman school board decided Tuesday night to close Slater Elementary School after the 2005-06 school year.



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ste Fran Kruss said. nce the debate over closing a ol dragged on for months, the dis- lost its opportunity to lease out shuttered campus, so closing a ol this summer wouldn't make fi- al sense, board members read.

r two months, the school board led the fate of Slater and Castro ols, two of the district's poorest orners. But the rancorous debate ed parents in an impassioned fight ve their children's schools. hrough this process I ended up

finding the spirit of the community of Mountain View," Roquero said. "Let's continue this process. Let's make this the little district that could and did."

With declining enrollment and financial woes, district officials said closing a school was necessary to save money.

A district task force narrowed the list in January to Slater and Castro. Parents and teachers held marches, wrote hundreds of letters, packed meetings and even endured rainy weather Monday and Tuesday for a 24-hour vigil as they waited for the board's final decision.

About two dozen parents clustered outside Graham Middle School, where the meeting was held, holding signs — "Show a Detailed Budget," "Voters Hold Your Trustees Accountable" and "Honk If You Care." Every time someone would honk, the crowd responded with a cheer.

At each meeting, parents have raised questions about just how much the district could save by closing a school — especially if it had to bus hundreds of kids to other schools. Already, one kindergarten bus route is 1 hour and 15 minutes long. The district would have moving costs as well, parents pointed out, and ongoing mainte-

nance costs at the closed school.

"We have a long way to go to rebuild credibility," board member Gloria Higgins said Tuesday night.

Slater parents agreed as they absorbed the news.

"Even though it's a gift to have another year, I'm sad my kids are losing their school," said parent LeeAnn Wilson. "It's new and fresh right now, and it hurts."

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