

Bailey Hill, Whiteaker suggested for closure

Community members voiced concerns about the recommendation to close the two elementary schools

By Lindsay Buchele
Oregon Daily Emerald

Superintendent George Russell recommended Wednesday that the District 4J School Board close Bailey Hill Elementary School and Whiteaker Elementary School.

The board and the public had the opportunity to hear and discuss Russell's suggestions on the much-debated closures for the first time Wednesday.

Russell based his suggestions on a list of six schools recommended by the School Closure, Consolidation and Replacement Committee.

District 4J officials said closures are necessary due to a planned \$3.4 million budget cut for the 2001-2002 school year. Parents and community members were appointed to the school closure committee to investigate which schools could be closed.

Other recommendations Russell made included cutting administrative staff at Silver Lea and keeping Coburg, Santa Clara and Willaken-

zie Elementary schools open for the 2001-2001 school year.

"No community wants to see its school closed," Russell said. "But we can't keep schools open just because they are a neighborhood school."

Russell developed criteria for keeping a school open, including a necessary enrollment of between 250 and 500 students. He also said the quality of the programs offered at the school and the condition of the facilities need to be considered in the big picture of school closures.

The school board decided last night that it will make a point of visiting all six schools originally targeted for closure by the committee, not just the two schools suggested by the superintendent, in order to get a true feel for each school and make a more educated decision.

"In order for the board to make a decision, we must have all the information available," board member Chris Pryor said. "If we don't visit a school, we can't do anything to it."

Some Eugene residents who spoke before the board said a small, neighborhood school is more important than a large school.

"Bailey Hill has a solid enrollment that has been increasing," said

Diane Shultz, co-president of the Bailey Hill Parent Teacher Organization. "We're considered a true neighborhood school, with almost 100 of our students living within walking distance."

Bailey Hill's enrollment is currently 234 students, slightly less than the suggested 250 to stay open.

Community member Mac McFadden disagreed with the closing of Whiteaker Elementary, and asked the board to consider a more "controversial closure."

"I think the board should consider closing Silver Lea," McFadden said. "It's not an old building, and it's not small, but it's also not a neighborhood school. It would also send the message that the board will close schools that cause the least pain and have the least negative effects on the community."

Whiteaker parent Majeska Seese-Green said she wonders if Whiteaker is being targeted for "racist and class-prejudiced reasons."

"I think the closure is about broader community issues," Seese-Green said.

This is one reason why Whiteaker Elementary is holding a meeting March 8 to discuss these issues with school board members, she said.



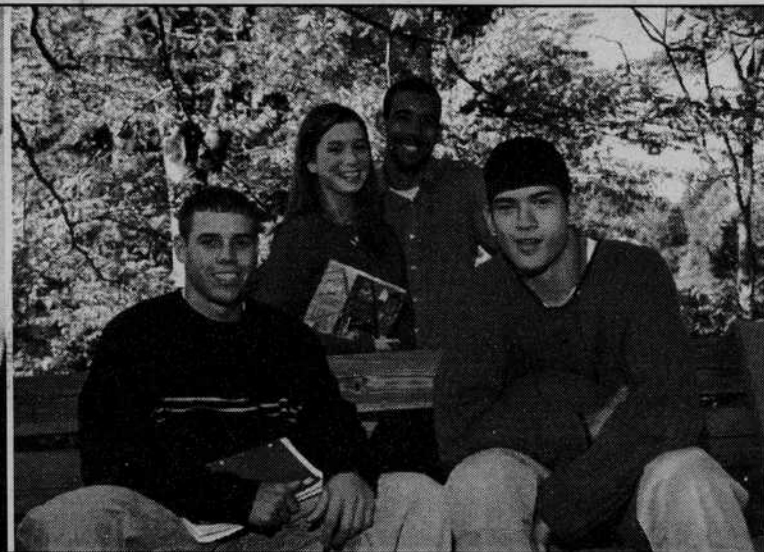
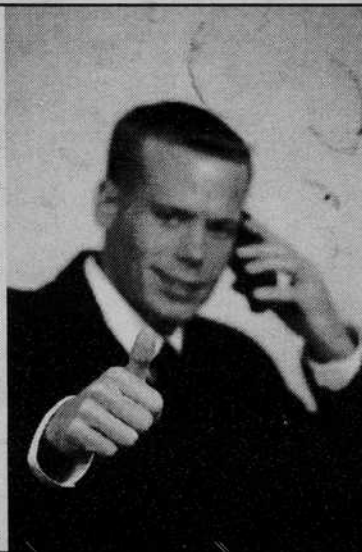
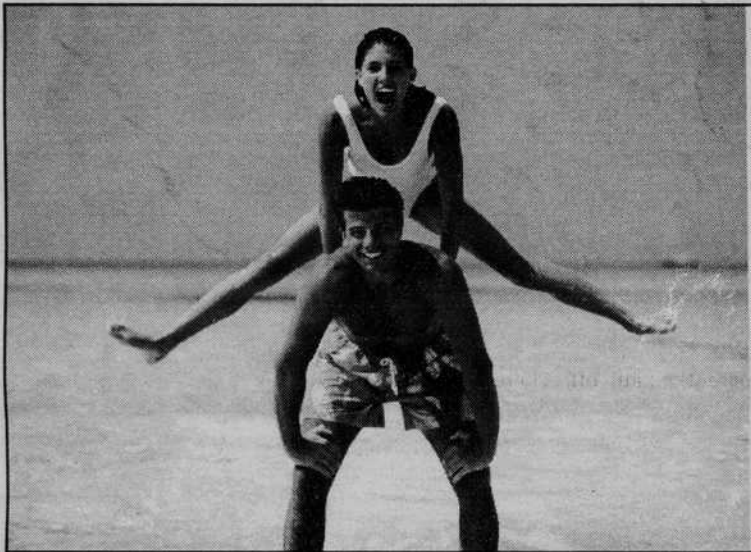
Laura Smit Emerald
Children wait for a bus ride home after classes end at Whiteaker Elementary School, which was recommended for closure at the end of the school year.

Joan Obie, a Bailey Hill Elementary parent, said the board has targeted two schools with a high ratio of low-income students.

"If you consolidate these schools, you're making teachers deal with full classes where the majority of

the students are special-needs kids," Obie said.

A public hearing is scheduled for March 12 at the 4J Education Center, 200 N. Monroe St. The board hopes to make a final decision March 21.



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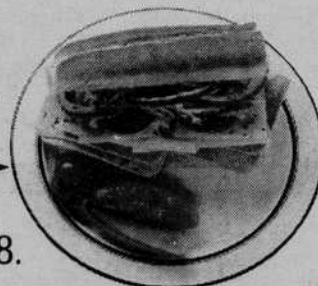
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