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Several hundred local elementary school children must now be relocated after their schools were slated for closure March 21.

Emerald

Board shutter two schools

■ Citing reduced state funding, the Eugene School Board shut two schools

By Aaron K. Breniman
Oregon Daily Emerald

Many felt that the decision to close Whiteaker and Bailey Hill elementary schools was inevitable, but six raised hands and a conference call from an absent board member made it official March 21. The Eugene School Board voted unanimously to approve the superintendent's recommendation to close Whiteaker and Bailey Hill elementary schools next fall.

"For the past ten years, we've been tightening our belts," board member Anette Spickard said. "The political and economic reality is not going to allow us to maintain what we would like to maintain — and it sucks, to put it briefly."

Superintendent George Russell said that closing the schools would reduce the fixed cost for operating the district.

"For the past ten years, this district has had to find ways to cut and slash programs as the resources dwindle," Russell said. "The total estimated cost for closing Whiteaker will bring the district approximately \$500,000 in savings." Russell admitted it may

not seem like much in a \$100 million budget, but he said every dollar counts when looking to maintain programs.

The board also urged concerned parents and community members to force the issue of education funding to be addressed by the Legislature.

"We need to get this story to legislators. Right now the feeling is that everyone is OK with the K-12 budget," board member Beth Gerot said. "We've all got to get this story out that this isn't just a Eugene issue."

Board members compared the problem with decreased funding and enrollment in Eugene to Portland and North Bend, where school boards have already had to close schools.

Bailey Hill students will be redistributed to Twin Oaks and McCornack elementary schools, with some students having the option to attend Crest Drive Elementary if space permits. Whiteaker students will be consolidated with the students at River Road Elementary, and those who wish to attend Patterson Elementary will be permitted to do so as space is available.

While many of the recent school board meetings have been heavily attended by community members voicing opinions on the school closures, only three of the more than 50 people in attendance spoke at the meeting.

Sharon Aly, a parent of a River Road Elementary student, attending her first board meeting, said that River Road Elementary will welcome the new students.

"We welcome the diversity that the Whiteaker kids will bring us," Aly said. "It will give our kids a chance to broaden their world by being exposed to different cultures."

However, Penny Healy feels that Whiteaker students will be shunned when they enter their new schools, where everyone will look at them as the "poor kids." Healy has been adamant in telling the board that closing a community school such as Whiteaker will have devastating effects on the children. She attended school board meetings as well as the forums held at Whiteaker and River Road elementary schools.

"Honestly, a lot of [Whiteaker] parents left those meetings feeling that they weren't wanted at River Road," Healy said.

Healy, the mother of a third-grade student and a 6-year-old, said she plans to move to Springfield in order for her children to attend Moffitt Elementary School, which she said has the "same feel as Whiteaker."

"My youngest doesn't even want to go to school anymore," Healy said. "She loved that school."

News brief

Arson suspected in house fire

The Eugene fire department responded early Tuesday morning to a fire alarm at the home of the men's basketball team head coach Ernie Kent. The house, at 3335 Park Hill, was unoccupied at the time of the fire and was in the process of being renovated.

Eugene Police Department spokeswoman Pam Alejandre said the fire department called police after responding to the alarm because

they suspected arson. Alejandre said there were several locations where a fire had been lit inside of the house, and there were no fires lit outside of the house.

"The fires had mostly burned themselves out by the time the fire department arrived at the scene," Alejandre said, adding there was no obvious evidence of a break-in. She said there is no indication of a motive for the fire at this time.

"From here, we'll process the evidence and determine the source of the fire," Alejandre said.


Kent was out of town on recruit-

ment business but released a statement through the University Athletic Department.

"It is very difficult to be on the road at a time like this and get a phone call in the middle of the night, because immediately you start to think about the safety of your family and your team," he said. "It is also very sad that someone has taken it upon themselves to do something like this because it is wrong, and whoever did this endangered the lives of others in that neighborhood."

Lindsay Buchele

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The week of April 9th, 2001

FUN stuff in the ODE Classifieds (Off The Mark, your daily horoscope and of course the crossword.)

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