

# Study shows SV high school may be feasible

By KATHERINE EDWARDS  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Scotts Valley will have enough students and state money to support a local high school in a couple of years. But the financial cost to the Santa Cruz schools — which those students would otherwise attend — will be "considerable."

A report on the feasibility of the Scotts Valley elementary school district "unifying," or adding grades 9-12, was submitted last week to the county Board of Education, sitting as the Committee on School District Organization.

The 70-page report contained no recommendations, only statistical information requested by the Scotts Valley school board on behalf of a community group that has advocated a local high school.

"There's nothing that's new or surprising, but it does show the numbers warrant building a high school over here," said Peggie Lopez, Scotts Valley city councilwoman and a member of the Committee for a High School in Scotts Valley.

An estimated 525 Scotts Valley students attended high school in the Santa Cruz City Schools District last year, primarily at Soquel and Harbor high schools. Those students made up about 13 percent of Santa Cruz's high school enrollment.

Scotts Valley residents have talked about building a high school for years, saying it would provide continuous local education for their children and reduce transportation time, expense, and congestion on Highway 17.

The feasibility study prepared by consultant Donn Wallace addresses nine criteria the state Department of Education evaluates in deciding whether to allow districts to unify.

Its major findings, not surprisingly, show that a unified Scotts Valley district would get much more money from the state —

## 'Unified' district would open in '94

SANTA CRUZ — The feasibility study projects the earliest a unified Scotts Valley school district would take effect is July 1, 1994. Its findings are based on enrollment and revenue figures from 1990-91, the most complete that were available.

The study covered nine criteria the state looks at in deciding whether a district can unify. Some of the major findings are summarized below.

### District size:

The state requires that a unified district have 1,501 students at the time it takes effect.

• The study estimates that in 1994 Scotts Valley students will make up 14 percent of the population in Santa Cruz city high schools, or 577 students. Combined with the projected number of elementary students, about 1,740, the new district should be well over the required number of students, and is expecting to keep growing.

about 40 percent more than last year — improve its educational offerings, and support the community's identity.

Santa Cruz, on the other hand, would lose students and state money, which may result in a cutback in teachers, classrooms, staff and special course offerings, according to the study.

Santa Cruz Superintendent David Sklarz said his school board would accept the study Wednesday, and is planning to meet with the Scotts Valley board to "start a dialogue over what's in the best interest of the students."

"Some pieces (of the report) say there are some positive things to be gained, but we're going to lose revenue and lose students, and

### Community identity:

• Scotts Valley, an incorporated city, is surrounded by hills and mountains that isolate the town both from Santa Clara County and the rest of Santa Cruz.

• Transportation links are limited, and some students from the northern end of the elementary school district travel 20 miles or more on congested Highway 17 to attend Soquel High.

• In 1990, 78 percent of Scotts Valley residents voted for an advisory measure to build a local high school.

### Property and facilities:

• Scotts Valley's unification would not involve transferring buildings, but would change the territory of both districts.

• If the unified district is approved, the portion of Santa Cruz district that overlaps Scotts Valley — about 6,500 parcels — would be ceded to the new district. Property tax

that always diminishes the options you have for students," Sklarz said.

With its enrollment declining,

revenues would be renegotiated.

### State costs:

• Last year, the state's per-pupil cost for elementary districts is \$2,820; for high school districts is \$3,484; and for unified districts is \$3,339.

If Scotts Valley unifies, its total revenue limit for would increase by \$2.3 million, or \$519 per elementary student plus the \$3,339 the district would receive for its high school students (using 1991 figures). The state revenue limit for Santa Cruz would drop \$1.6 million, or 5 percent of its total 1990-91 income. Those figures will change depending on what year the unification is approved.

### Educational programs:

• Scotts Valley has the option of starting one class of ninth graders in 1994, and gradually adding a new freshman class each year. If grades 9-12 were started at once, enrollment at Harbor and Soquel

high schools could drop 20 to 30 percent.

• The loss of attendance money in Santa Cruz city schools is expected to be greater than the cost of educating those students. Excess classrooms, school staff, and teachers, as well as the number of advanced and elective classes, "may have to be curtailed." (The report notes that employees who are affected should be given the option of transferring to the new district.)

### School housing costs:

• The Scotts Valley unified district is not expected to have a high school "on line" when unification could be approved. Until a high school could be built, students would be expected to attend Santa Cruz high schools. The Scotts Valley district would pay a "tuition" to Santa Cruz to house their students.

Katherine Edwards

control, which would allow the school to "tailor" its offerings to the needs of families and local businesses.

Even the Scotts Valley school board, which has been cautious in taking a stand on the issue, set unification as one of its goals.

"You could say the board's position is they want to see a high school of some form in Scotts Valley," said Superintendent Andre LaCouture.

But Lopez said the possibility of Scotts Valley unifying should not turn into an "us-vs.-them-type situation."

"We don't want to negatively impact the education of other kids that are left there," she said.

One option the Scotts Valley district has is to start its high school in 1994 with just a freshman class. That would leave the 10th-12th graders at the schools they were familiar with, and the new unified district would pay Santa Cruz "tuition" to house those students.

Sklarz pointed out, however, that attendance dollars for students from a unified district are less than those for students in high school districts.

He also noted that the enrollment numbers projected in the report for both districts for the next five years, are simply educated guesses.

Santa Cruz has said it is not in a position to build a fourth high school within its own high school district, an option some Scotts Val-

ley parents had pressed for earlier.

But with the feasibility study done, Lopez said, more parents now want a high school with local