

Pajaro Valley schools seeing unexpected enrollment drop

By SUSANNA HECKMAN
STAFF WRITER

n Pajaro Valley Unified School District officials are reporting an above-normal drop in enrollment since the Oct. 17 earthquake, and they're hoping the students come back before they lose as much as \$800,000 in state funds.

Bob Peterson, assistant superintendent of business for the district, said yesterday that the schools normally lose about 200 students out of 16,000 in the first five months of the school year.

The district assumes many of that number are children of migrant workers who go to Mexico during winter months and return in the spring, and makes budget estimates accordingly.

But this year, Peterson said, between Oct. 15 and Nov. 15, the district lost 455 students, 271 more than expected.

The state gives the district

\$2,900 per student each year, Peterson said, which means the district stands to lose between \$500,000 and \$800,000, depending on how many students return between now and April, when the district reports to the state.

Salsipuedes and Freedom el-

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ementary schools each lost more than 50 students in late October and early November. Hall District Elementary lost 32 students, Mintie White Elementary 31, and MacQuiddy Elementary 29.

In fact, most of the drop came in the elementary schools, which puzzles Peterson and other officials. Some of the middle schools and high schools have actually lost fewer than normal.

And officials have no definite explanation yet about why the earthquake should cause a drop

in elementary school figures.

"The state will want to know where those students are," Peterson said. "We'll be getting data from the principals."

There are several ways the district could handle the problem, Peterson said. It could ask the State Department of Education to maintain funding levels in spite of the drop, or it could ask the state legislature for earthquake relief money to fill in the gap.

A third option is laying off teachers, a move that is not likely to be popular at a time when the teachers' union and the district are at an impasse in a contract dispute relating to staffing levels.

School board trustees were scheduled to discuss the drop at last night's board meeting, but they had to put it off along with other agenda items when they still hadn't taken it up by 11:30 p.m.