



Jim Gensheimer — Mercury News

Pete Shanks looks over his crumpled house off San Jose-Soquel Road, about five miles from the quake's epicenter

Mountain schools to reopen

Summit area parents accept risks to keep children nearby

By Barry Witt
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Trying to preserve their independence in the face of geological dangers, school trustees in the Santa Cruz Mountains summit area decided Wednesday to keep their children on the hill despite the schools' severe shaking in last week's earthquake.

A group of about 250 parents attending an emergency meeting of the Loma Prieta Joint Union School District trustees were nearly unanimous in opposing any plan that would ship the district's 600 kindergartners through eighth-graders to schools in Los Gatos.

The trustees voted that, pending approval by county fire marshals, they would reopen portions of the Loma Prieta Elementary and C.T. English Middle schools Nov. 2, more than two weeks after they were shut down by the earthquake. Classes have already resumed in all other mountain regions affected by the quake, from Los Gatos to Watsonville.

In the summit area, where some estimates put the number of uninhabitable homes at 30 percent, parents said Wednesday that their two schools are no more

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dangerous for children than their own homes.

The parents said they would accept the risk of reopening the schools rather than delay the children's education or accede to the wishes of state officials, who have said they want the students to attend school away from the fault lines.

"I want my children up on the mountain," Luke Rizzuto, a general contractor, told the trustees. "It's better to have them close, where you can walk over and get them (if another earthquake hits). This is the safest place."

The district, acting on the recommendation of a state structural engineer and a private geologist, agreed to close most of Loma Prieta School. A teacher had to

escape that school through a window after the quake, and the floor of one room was displaced by three inches.

Only a kindergarten room will stay open at the school, which was used this year despite the objections of state officials, after fault traces were discovered directly beneath it in January.

At C.T. English school, south of Summit Road, the home economics classroom will be closed because the quake opened a long crack inside. The remaining 13 classrooms will be used for sixth- through eighth-graders on full-day schedules and first- through fifth-graders on half-day schedules.

The rubber floor covering the gymnasium, which until Wednesday was used as a Red Cross shelter, has a crack in it spread-

ing nearly wall to wall, but engineers have said the building is safe.

The windows of an adjacent multipurpose room have been taped to keep them from breaking, and the south wall is being shored up with wooden beams. Several cracks have opened in the soil surrounding the building.

"No structure is going to collapse on anyone," Superintendent Kenneth Simpkins said after consulting with state engineers. But he warned that the situation may change because the geology of the area remains fluid. "Every shock makes a difference," Simpkins said.

Parents expressed hope that school could resume soon to add structure to their children's days once again.

"They need some normalcy back in their lives," said Michele Witten. "My (8-year-old) son has done his homework from last week 10 times. He just keeps taking it out."

Mercury News Staff Writer Paul Rogers contributed to this report.