

# Capitola Elementary gets the ax

## Soquel school board votes 3-1 for closing

By **DAVID SCHARFENBERG**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

✓ **Schools 1996-2018 3-18-04**  
SOQUEL — Despite a final burst of parent protest, the board of the cash-strapped Soquel school district voted 3-1 Wednesday night to close Capitola Elementary School this summer.

The long-expected move will strip Capitola of its only elementary school, forcing dozens of students to attend schools in nearby Soquel.

The vote also paves the way for New Brighton Middle School, which shares a campus with Capitola Elementary, to take over the entire complex in the fall.

New Brighton parents and teachers, who argue the middle school is overcrowded and needs full run of the campus, welcomed the decision.

Capitola Elementary parents, who packed the meeting, were resigned and disappointed.

"I'm not surprised," said parent Michael Avery. But, he said, "I suspect their decision is more divisive than they realize."

Capitola parents backed a plan that would have combined Capitola Elementary with New Brighton, creating a single K-8 academy.

District estimates show the merger would have saved about \$170,000 annually — just shy of the \$180,000 the district will net by closing the elementary outright.

But trustees rejected the K-8 plan Wednesday night, arguing the middle school's space needs are too pressing.

"We have a duty to improve our middle school," said trustee Jim Martin. "It's not a great place right now."

Trustee Lou Tuosto cast the lone dissenting vote,

See **SCHOOL** on **PAGE A8**

## School

Continued from Page A1

arguing for a gradual phasing out of Capitola Elementary rather than an immediate closing this summer.

Capitola Elementary has been on the chopping block before.

Last year, trustees were moving to shutter the school when the city of Capitola swooped in with \$160,000 to keep it open for a year.

But when talk of closing the elementary surfaced again in January, city officials said they couldn't afford another gift.

With no grant, schools Superintendent Kathleen Howard pro-

including Capitola Elementary, or combine Capitola with New Brighton and create a K-8 school.

Elementary parents quickly latched onto the K-8 plan. But New Brighton backers lobbied for full run of the campus — sparking a spirited debate online and in public meetings.

On Wednesday night, three Capitola City Council members, including Mayor Stephanie Harlan, showed up at the meeting and spoke in favor of the K-8 plan — to no avail.

In the end, the Soquel Union school district became the second in the county to approve school closings this year.

The neighboring Santa Cruz