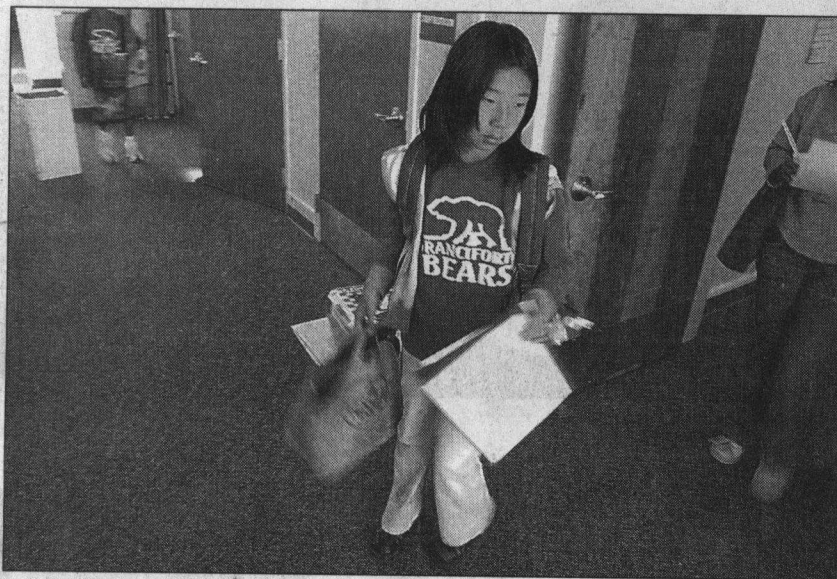


## SCHOOL'S OUT



# Students say one last goodbye

*Branciforte School 6-12-04*

By **DAVID SCHARFENBERG**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

They sat on the front steps Friday morning, about 20 pupils in all, smiling and posing for photographs — saying goodbye to their school, forever.

After 89 years of service Branciforte Elementary School closed its doors for the last time Friday afternoon, the casualty of a brutal schools budget crisis.

**SANTA CRUZ**

Teachers packed boxes, pupils waved to friends and everyone did their best to fight back tears.

"It's very emotional," said principal Betsy Hamilton. "This has been a very special learning community."

Hamilton had been bracing for the moment since January, when the school board voted 5-2 to shut Branciforte and Natural Bridges elementary schools.

The decision angered parents, and many are still searching for answers.

"It's just really sad," said Natural Bridges parent Danna Meek. "I think we're still looking for the right reason."

At Branciforte, which served large numbers of low-income Latinos who walked to school, parents and staff wor-

**'Everybody's going to lose a lot of friends and some of them (will lose) their best friends.'**

JESSICA ZACARIAS, BRANCIFORTE  
ELEMENTARY FIFTH-GRADER

ried aloud about how families will get their children to new schools this fall.

Veronica Montesinos, mother of a second-grader, said she's particularly concerned about walking her child long distances through the rain.

But students were concerned about another impact of the reassignments.

"Everybody's going to lose a lot of friends and some of them (will lose) their best friends," said fifth-grader Jessica Zacarias.

Most of the Branciforte students are off to DeLaveaga and Gault elementary schools next year, while Natural Bridges pupils will shift to Westlake and Bay View elementaries.

The school board is expected to lease the Natural Bridges site to Pacific Col-



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos  
**ABOVE:** A father heads home with his son from Branciforte Elementary School for the last time Friday. The school will be shuttered this summer.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Branciforte Elementary student Anna Tea leaves her last class at the school.

legiate School, a seventh-through 12th-grade charter school geared toward high-achieving students.

Across town, the school district will consolidate four alternative education programs on the Branciforte campus.

But before Branciforte parents, students and staff hand over the keys, they'll host a final tribute, including a pair of documentaries and several

speakers, noon-1 p.m. Monday at the school. And they'll leave the old building reluctantly.

"My daughter said, 'I'm not leaving here, I'm going to stay here until I die,' and I guess I feel the same way," said parent Emily Levy.

Contact David Scharfenberg at  
[dscharfenberg@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:dscharfenberg@santacruzsentinel.com).