

Earthquake - Watsonville

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Section

# Santa Cruz/Monterey

## Watsonville High landmark to be closed

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When Watsonville High students return from spring vacation on Monday morning, they'll find the historic main building closed.

After a day plagued by earthquakes, the school board voted unanimously Wednesday night to order the immediate evacuation of the building, named 1917 after its year of completion, because of concerns it could not withstand another severe temblor.

While engineers investigate whether the

school's most treasured landmark can be saved, and at what cost, the district hopes to move students by the end of the month into portable classrooms being set up on a soccer field and a parking lot.

On Monday, however, classes will be held in the library, in the back of other classrooms and possibly in the cafeteria.

Portable administrative offices eventually will be set up on a volleyball court, although finding temporary space for staff computers and telephone equipment may be difficult.

Trustees of the Pajaro Valley Unified

School District already had ordered a gradual withdrawal from the building last week after learning that the strength of the exterior cement is substantially below modern building standards. Insurance broker Ed Banks informed the board this week that the district's insurance company, Industrial Indemnity, would represent the district against liability claims over the building but would not guarantee payment of those claims.

The building showed minimal damage during the series of aftershocks centered a few miles southeast of Watsonville on

Wednesday morning. Less than 20 pounds of plaster fell from the ceilings of the 12 classrooms and the administrative offices in the two-story structure.

On Wednesday night, the board voted unanimously to bar students from entering the building when they return. But faculty and staff will be allowed limited access to the building for the purpose of retrieving equipment, textbooks and school records.

"We can't let people back in the building," board chairman Manuel Osorio said

as trustees discussed the evacuation.

Tests are still being conducted on the interior structure of the building, and the board will not receive an estimate on the cost of rehabilitation until May 2, district finance director Bob Peterson told trustees this week.

"This is a special building; it's a building you cannot replace," Principal Tony Calvo said after the board ordered the gradual evacuation last week. "Many people who have graduated from Watsonville High School since 1917 still drop by to see their old classrooms."