

Westlake school boundary shrinks

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SANTA CRUZ — New kindergarteners from several Westlake Elementary School neighborhoods will be sent to other schools, City Schools trustees decided on a 5-1 vote Tuesday night.

The board decided to change the school boundaries despite pleas from parents in the affected neighborhoods.

The change only affects future students who don't have an older sibling

at the school already. Children now at Westlake, and future kindergarteners whose brothers and sisters already go there, will be allowed to continue at the school.

Besides the boundary changes, the board agreed to eject 11 students from other districts who are attending the school through legal inter-district transfer. They also agreed to send away 25 students who were discovered using phony addresses to attend Westlake illegally.

All the changes were made to relieve current overcrowding at the

school and to prevent even more severe overcrowding expected in the coming years.

During testimony in several meetings on the proposed boundary change, a number of Westside-area parents said they had moved into the neighborhood because of the school's high academic reputation. Many referred to high test scores logged by students at the school. Several trustees defended both Natural Bridges and Bay View, and said they would send their children to any of the district's six elementary schools.

Officials took exception to the implied and outright insults to the other schools.

Parents from the affected neighborhoods complained about the proposal at three board meetings before Tuesday's decision. Many said they were extremely worried about having their children cross Highway 1. Others said the district was being unfair in changing school boundaries before ejecting all non-resident students.

At least 33 students from other
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elementary schools in City Schools District are attending Westlake through open enrollment. But staff members and trustees decided that it would have been less fair to eject those students who had already attended the school for several years.

Some parents questioned how the district chose which neighborhoods to draw out of the Westlake area, which includes many wealthy neighborhoods. They accused the district of singling out relatively affordable neighborhoods to send to Bay View

and Natural Bridges.

But trustees and district staff said the areas were picked out by an impartial firm which last year studied the district and made a lengthy report on how the district should plan for growth over the next 10 years.

District planners divide the district into small attendance areas.

Two of these areas will now be in the Natural Bridges area. Involved in that change are Western Drive between Beachview and Western Court (address numbers 216 to 620),

and all of Wavecrest and Alamo avenues; Flower, Yosemite and Echo streets; Mountain Way and Western Court.

Eight kindergarteners from those neighborhoods will attend Natural Bridges in September.

Two other areas will now be in the Bay View attendance area. Those areas are bordered by Escalona Drive to the north, King Street to the south, Walnut Street to the east and Bay Street to the west.

Ten students are affected by that change. All told, the changes will

reduce Westlake's September enrollment by more than 50 students.

Before voting for the change, board members urged parents to lobby the city and the state Department of Transportation for stop signs, crossing guards and other traffic-safety features along Western Drive and Highway 1.

Trustee Paul Thiltgen cast the lone vote against the boundary change, saying he preferred to try to keep together "neighborhood schools."