

Scotch Plains school being

phased out

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SCOTCH PLAINS

Children romping in the halls of Shackamaxon School here laugh joyfully in a spirit of togetherness.

And it's no wonder. The 30-year-old neighborhood school in Martine Avenue functions both as a comfortable haven for youngsters just stepping out into a world largely unknown to them and as a social center for parents to acquaint themselves with community life.

But soon this contentment will be upended, or at least, displaced, after the school's doors are permanently closed in June, the result of an extended study determining the board of education no longer has the need to maintain its six schools.

"Enrollment has been decreasing from 250 to 300 students each year for the past several years, so we initiated a state-mandated study to develop a long-range facilities master plan," Dr. Robert J. Howlett, schools superintendent for Scotch Plains-Fanwood, said.

Based on population projections, Dr. Howlett

said the findings reviewed by the district staff and board-appointed district comprehensive planning committee indicated the need for the closing of Shackamaxon, the oldest operating school in the district, and the administration building on Plainfield Avenue. The latter is housed in the former Muir School, constructed in 1915, which presently houses administrative offices and student personnel services.

The decision was finalized sometime last spring. Dr. Howlett pointed out, to insure as little difficulty in the transition as possible.

Children at Shackamaxon will be sent to either Coles School in Kevin Road or to McGinn School in Roosevelt Avenue, located in sections of the district adjacent to the Shackamaxon area.

Administrative offices will move to the Evergreen School, Evergreen Avenue, built a few months after the first wing of Shackamaxon was erected in 1951. Pupil personnel services will relocate to the high school.

"The decision was done in a very positive way,"

Dr. Howlett praised the board in light of a desire to "maintain the local school concept." Size, he said, was the main criterion.

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and Shackamaxon's 334 students represented the smallest school population in the district.

The closing of "Shack," as students and teachers fondly refer to their "second-home," was not the first attempt by the board to reorganize to keep up with its steady enrollment decline. LaGrande School,

which had been Fanwood's only school, closed its doors in 1978.

Commenting on the latest closing, Elliot Solomon, Shackamaxon's principal, said, "We have a unique chemistry of staff,

administration and community, offering the best in public education.

"Our disappointment is tempered by the fact that our other schools have such high quality."

Mrs. Kathy Meyer, board president, complimented the district for arranging for the closing "in an orderly fashion."

But the children still express regrets, despite their contentions they will adjust to a new school.

"I'd rather have it stay open because I like the teachers and students," Emily Sung, a fifth grader, said.

Third-grader Vivek Mehra said sorrowfully, "I wish this school wouldn't close."

Teachers, especially veterans who have spent much of their careers at the neighborhood school, spoke of being uprooted from the community atmosphere. They will be re-

assigned based on seniority, to other schools in the district providing openings are available.

"I wish it wouldn't happen; we've been happy here," Mrs. Martha Dimmick, third grade teacher, noted. "It's harder to become acquainted with their needs if you don't know them (students) as well."



Fifth graders Mary Zeller, Emily Sung and Kim Wojciechowski, from left, chat as they walk through halls of Shackamaxon School.

THE DAILY JOURNAL WEDNESDAY EVENING FEBRUARY 25, 1981

