

Dividing Tustin

Residents and school board trustees debate new boundaries for the district's high schools.

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The Orange County Register

TUSTIN – About 250 residents packed an auditorium at Pioneer Middle School on Monday night as the Tustin Unified School District Board of Trustees planned to set new boundaries for Tustin and Foothill high schools in preparation for the September 2004 opening of Arnold O. Beckman High School.

Board members and residents debated for more than four hours what each considered the most important criteria in drawing the boundaries for the district's three high schools. The board members had not voted on the boundaries by 10:30 p.m. while the meeting continued.

Many parents in the crowd hoisted pink signs that expressed their desire to keep their children at their current schools.



STAYING PUT: Richard Galan, 8, shows his support for his neighborhood staying at Foothill High School during a school board meeting Monday. The Tustin Unified School District board is selecting new boundaries for district high schools.

Much of the discussion centered on whether residents in the neighborhoods bordered by 17th Street, Newport Avenue, and the Santa Ana (I-5) and Costa Mesa (55) freeways should continue attending Foothill or become part of Tustin High's attendance area.

Many residents in those neighborhoods argued that attending Foothill was a much safer alternative for their children because the school is within walking distance of their homes, and Tustin High is not. "Students should be able to go to the school that's closest to them," said parent Audrey Willis. "That makes the most sense."

Other residents said they were concerned that realigning boundaries simply on a geographical basis, and not including the more affluent neighborhoods in Tustin High's attendance area, would leave the school with a much higher concentration of low-income students and English learners than the other two schools.

"We should be fighting for three great schools in the district, and this is what the board should look to when they decided on the boundaries," said resident Jon Brewer. District policy allows students to transfer to any school in the district that has room for them.

"I don't think any decision we make will make everyone happy here tonight," said board member Ann Albertson, as other trustees sifted through 12 possible boundary maps.

Beckman, being built in western Irvine, will open to freshmen and sophomores next fall.