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## School enrollment steadily climbs

### Growth focused on lower grades this year

BY KRISTINA PETERSON  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Preliminary attendance figures in Palo Alto show slow, steady growth in student enrollment this year, district officials said Wednesday.

Based on the number of students in Palo Alto classrooms on the 11th

day of school — the standard day for measuring enrollment — data shows moderate growth at all levels of the district's schools, Assistant Superintendent Scott Laurence said.

Enrollment data is often used in discussions about whether to open new schools in Palo Alto, where a

steadily rising number of students over the past several years has put the district under continual pressure to find more room.

Though the exact enrollment numbers for this year are not finalized, Laurence said Wednesday that the district's elementary schools

have roughly 115 more students this year than the previous year, middle schools are up by about 90 students, while high schools have only about 15 more students.

Laurence cautioned that attendance trends must be analyzed over several years. High school enrollment is likely to increase next year, based on the number of current eighth-graders, he said.

In total, the district has around 11,050 students, he said.

"It looks like we're still facing steady growth," Board President Camille Townsend said.

Laurence said the district's total attendance is edging toward the highest of three enrollment scenarios envisioned by demographic research firm Lapkoff & Gobalet

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### MENLO WOOD PILES CHARRED

Firefighters fought a two-alarm fire Wednesday afternoon at a storage yard on Hamilton Avenue in Menlo Park. See LOCAL, Page 2



Victor Maccharoli / Daily News

## Plaza plan gets less criticism

### Fewer concerns voiced over Alma Plaza project

BY KRISTINA PETERSON  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

The tide may have turned for Alma Plaza.

Developers of Palo Alto's most controversial project faced a gentler round of questioning from the city's Planning and Transportation Commission on Wednesday night than in any of their previous encounters.

At the second of two public hearings on Alma Plaza's site plan since the city council approved the project in May, developer John McNellis and his team of architects and designers presented a new plan addressing many of the planning commission's previous concerns.

"This is a better plan from a retail standpoint," McNellis said.

Plans for the 4.2-acre plaza in Midtown Palo Alto now show two larger retail buildings instead of three smaller buildings.

Architect Ken Hayes said the consolidation of two buildings creates "more useable retail area for tenants" and better shopping options for locals.

The plaza's former two parks have also been rearranged to form one larger park of 8,900 square feet, including a lawn, plane tree grove and playground area.

Landscape architect Paul Lettieri of the Guzzardo Partnership said the new open space plan creates "a larger, more cohesive and vibrant park."

At the request of commissioners, the project

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## Fire displaces 3 families

### Home to be reviewed by building department

BY MELANIE CARROLL  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Three East Palo Alto families living in a rented Beech Street home were displaced Wednesday morning after a fire broke out in a bedroom, sending flames into the attic area and causing about \$250,000 worth of damage, according to fire officials.

Menlo Park Fire Protection District Chief

Harold Schapelhouman said no one was injured in the two-alarm blaze that brought 32 firefighters from Woodside, Menlo Park and Redwood City fire departments to the 2,200-square-foot, four-bedroom modular home. The first crew arrived 10:50 a.m., two minutes after the blaze was reported.

The fire broke out around a bed. Anything from appliances to an electrical malfunction

could have caused the fire, Schapelhouman said. Three investigators remained on the scene after the fire.

"Thank God no one was hurt," said homeowner and landlord Maria Sanchez of Palo Alto. Sanchez said she had insurance for the house on the 1000 block of Beech Street.

Three children and two adults were at

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