

Enrollment Study Helps Planning for the Future

Earlier this year, we embarked on an enrollment study to help us plan for the future of Lakota Schools. With 25 new housing developments planned for our townships, it is essential that we have tools to help us predict future enrollment. In addition, we must assess our buildings, both structurally and their student capacity.

At the March 11 board of education meeting, Jerome McKibben, from McKibben Demographic Research presented the findings of the enrollment study. Using the 2010 census results, along with current enrollment, Butler County building permits and other data, the results are presented by planning blocks, which are what we use to determine attendance boundaries. This allows us to evaluate each of our 23 buildings individually, as well as the district as a whole.

The demographer tracked the ages of children in West Chester and Liberty townships compared to enrollment in Lakota Schools through 2018. Using this data, he is able to predict future enrollment for the next 10 years. Currently, there has been a balance of families moving into the district, compared to empty nesters and people without children who are staying, to hold our enrollment steady over the last several years. While people continue to move into the area, they tend to be in their late-thirties to mid-forties. Younger age groups, who are starting their families, make up a much smaller percentage of new residents. This means we are dependent upon new home construction to bring in new families because the number of people selling their existing homes is small.

While enrollment has increased, the number of new students by grade level is not evenly distributed across our schools. Some schools are nearing capacity, while others have more room. This is something that we are constantly evaluating, as it is a challenge for our staff and our facilities.

Contrary to the previous study, completed in 2013, which predicted a decline, Lakota Schools has seen an increase in enrollment. In fact, every grade, with the exception of eleven and twelve, increased this year. The demographer attributes this to the building of apartments and the surge in the housing market.

Along with this new enrollment projection, a study of our facilities has also been underway. In January, a facilities committee was established to evaluate our buildings, looking at current conditions, as well as projecting into the future. We do have some concerns with the age of a few of our buildings, as well as the space available for both our current and future students. As buildings age, it is common practice to initiate a master facilities study. Our operations department is working with the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission. This State office assists schools and other government agencies with capital projects.

This process does not happen overnight and may take up to one year to develop plan options. As we continue to grow as a district, it is important to look to the future in order to continue

providing the personalized, future ready education for our kids as we prepare them for graduation, all while remaining fiscally responsible.

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