

Creating a Sustainable

D[★]51

A Summary of the Work Mesa County Valley School District 51 Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee



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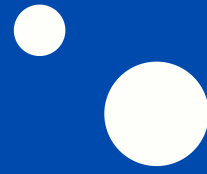
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Declining enrollment has had a negative impact on District 51 since 2019. As of the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, D51 has seen a decline of around 1,800 students. A district that used to have enrollment above 22,000 students is now close to dropping below 20,000 students. Low birth rates, affordability, and competition from options outside of the school district have contributed to the decline...a problem that is happening across the state of Colorado and nationally. This decline in student enrollment has a negative impact on D51's general fund budget and its ability to properly staff buildings to meet the goals set out in the district's Strategic Plan.

The D51 Board of Education charged the Superintendent with creating a committee to evaluate the issue and come up with recommendations to address the decline in enrollment. The committee met from April 2023 through September of 2023. The committee was made up of teachers, principals, family members, community stakeholders, and district staff. The committee created the following problem statement: "Current declining student enrollment negatively impacts D51 resources and infrastructure. The impact limits D51's ability to assemble the critical resources and infrastructure to adequately support & implement the strategic plan. We desire to reallocate resources to create safe, successful classrooms for students and staff."

The committee ultimately landed on five pathways that could help address the problem of declining enrollment, specifically at the elementary school level. The five pathways are School Closure/Consolidation, a Mill Levy, Promote & Increase Robust & Aligned Options, Subsidize & Provide Flexible Support Through Possible Increases In State Per Pupil Funding, and an Ongoing Evaluation of Central Office Staffing and Programs.

OUR CHARGE



Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee

On March 16, 2023 the District 51 Board of Education unanimously approved a resolution to charge the Superintendent to form a committee to address declining enrollment in District 51 at the elementary school level. The committee was to make a recommendation for addressing declining enrollment to the Superintendent, who would present those recommendations to the Board of Education by September 19, 2023. The committee was specifically charged to:

- Continue the work already started
- Review data already presented
- Acquire additional data, if necessary
- Study all options, including the benefits and ramifications of closing elementary schools
- Better educate the community on the issues surrounding the enrollment declines and the effects enrollment decline has on the District
- Develop recommendations to address declining student enrollment

The Superintendent and District 51 leaders facilitated the committee meetings. Committee members were invited to serve based on a variety of criteria. The committee was comprised of elementary teachers who also served on the Superintendent Teacher Advisory Group; elementary principals who also served on the Superintendent Principal Advisory Group; family members from the District Accountability Committee and District Special Education Advisory Committee; community members from D51 Strategic Plan Priority Area Action Teams; community members and district staff from the District Minority Advisory Committee; members



of entities in the community that the District collaborates with such as the City of Grand Junction, the City of Fruita, Mesa County, and Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce; District 51 Board of Education; members from the D51 Senior Leadership Team; and the D51 Department of Communications.

The committee met on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month in sessions lasting between 2 ½ hours and 4 hours from April 2023 through September 2023 to develop final recommendations for addressing declining enrollment. As a result of this process and the work of the committee, a comprehensive action report was formulated.

Early in the process, the committee developed the following problem statement to steer its work:



CURRENT DECLINING STUDENT ENROLLMENT NEGATIVELY IMPACTS D51 RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE. THE IMPACT LIMITS D51'S ABILITY TO ASSEMBLE THE CRITICAL RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO ADEQUATELY SUPPORT & IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIC PLAN. WE DESIRE TO REALLOCATE RESOURCES TO CREATE SAFE, SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOMS FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF.



STRATEGIC PLAN

The work of our committee was grounded in the principles of our three-year community-driven [Strategic Plan](#). Throughout this process, we emphasized the connection between the committee's efforts and the district's Strategic Plan. A Strategic Plan created through a collaborative effort that involved various stakeholders in our district and throughout our community. This plan forms the basis of our commitment to engage, equip, and empower each and every student, each and every day, while ensuring that every student reaches the promise of our D51 [Graduate Profile](#).

What school configurations and resources support ALL students progressing in these areas?



Fulfilling the commitments in the Strategic Plan is a process that involves all stakeholders within the district and the community. By working together as a D51 family and the Mesa County community to implement all components of the Strategic Plan, we can ensure that we have prepared and supported students, prepared and supported staff, and engaged and supportive community partners. Most importantly, we'll ensure that all students who graduate from the district embody our Graduate Profile and are academically, socially, and emotionally successful and ready for college, career, and life.

In order to meet the goals within our Strategic Plan, we have to resource our schools properly so that they can do the work necessary to see every D51 student succeed. As enrollment declines, funding is impacted negatively, and the ability to properly staff and resource schools becomes a larger challenge.



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS



STUDENT WELLNESS

Objective: Every District 51 student feels a sense of belonging and can access a variety of supports.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Objective: District 51 students will demonstrate high levels of academic growth and achievement.

ROBUST AND ALIGNED OPTIONS FOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Objective: District 51 students are equipped to pursue career, post-secondary, or military options upon graduation.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Objective: District 51 educators and leaders engage in personalized professional learning aligned to:

- Academic Standard mastery.
- Supporting the social and emotional needs of students.
- Responding to the needs of all groups of students.

DIVERSE AND GROWING PIPELINES

Objective: District 51 will grow a diverse and healthy pipeline of qualified leaders and educators that will support the strategic goals of the district.

STAFF WELLNESS

Objective: District 51 staff receive the mental health support they need to engage with students and families as healthy leaders.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE STRATEGIC GOALS

Objective: District 51 will identify and communicate strategic partnership with organizations and institutions in the community to support the advancement of the district's strategic goals and initiatives.

TRANSPARENT AND EFFECTIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Objective: District 51 leadership will allocate resources through a lens of fiscal responsibility and in alignment with the district strategic goals.

COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION WITH FAMILIES

Objective: District 51 will develop communication strategies to ensure opportunities for students and families are clear and available in multiple languages to meet the needs of everyone in the community.



OUR CHALLENGE

Declining enrollment is posing a significant challenge for school districts across the country. With factors such as declining birth rates, shifts in population, effects due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the availability of alternative educational options, school districts are grappling with the task of adapting to shrinking student populations. This decline in enrollment can have wide-ranging implications, impacting not only the financial stability of districts but also the allocation of effective resources, staffing levels, and the overall quality of education provided in schools. The Mesa County Valley School District 51 Board of Education has tasked the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee with addressing the causes behind declining enrollment and developing strategies to mitigate its effects. Successfully navigating the challenge of declining enrollment requires a proactive and adaptive approach while ensuring that District 51 continues to thrive and provide high-quality education despite demographic shifts.

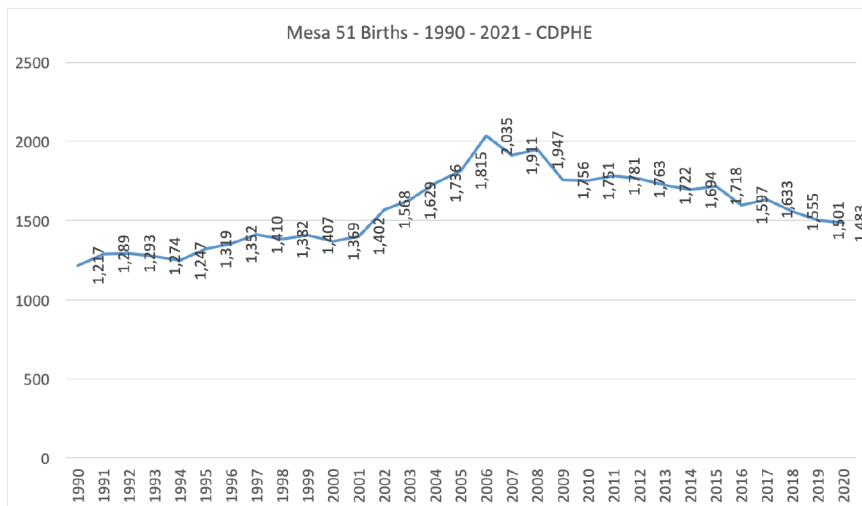


CHANGING DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

The number of elementary students living in Mesa County and attending Mesa County Valley School District 51 schools has steadily declined since our peak enrollment year in 2019, largely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, state- and nation-wide declining birth rates, and families leaving our county and state for a multitude of reasons, including affordability. Since 2019, the number of students enrolled in D51 has declined by close to 1,800 students. At the time of publishing this report, D51 had 20,352 Pre-K through 12th-grade students enrolled. In 2019, at the same point in the school year, D51 had 22,151 students enrolled. That is a 9.2% decline in students.

In an effort to gain a broader picture of our current situation, Shannon Bingham, District 51's contracted demographer, and Elizabeth Garner, Colorado's State Demographer, shared insights and data regarding the causes of declining enrollment and their predictions for future trends.

Shannon Bingham, District 51's contracted demographer, highlighted the declining birth rates and the above-average housing market costs in Colorado and Mesa County, which have contributed to declining school enrollment. Factors such as high costs of raising children and unaffordable traditional family housing contribute to this trend as more millennials and Gen Z families choose to have fewer children or not to have children at all. Post-pandemic online school competition further affects school enrollment, and high interest rates and higher housing prices impact "in-migration" of families. In order to address this, it is essential to support the housing needs of young families and create an environment conducive to attracting families with school-aged children if we are to get back to pre-pandemic student enrollment numbers.



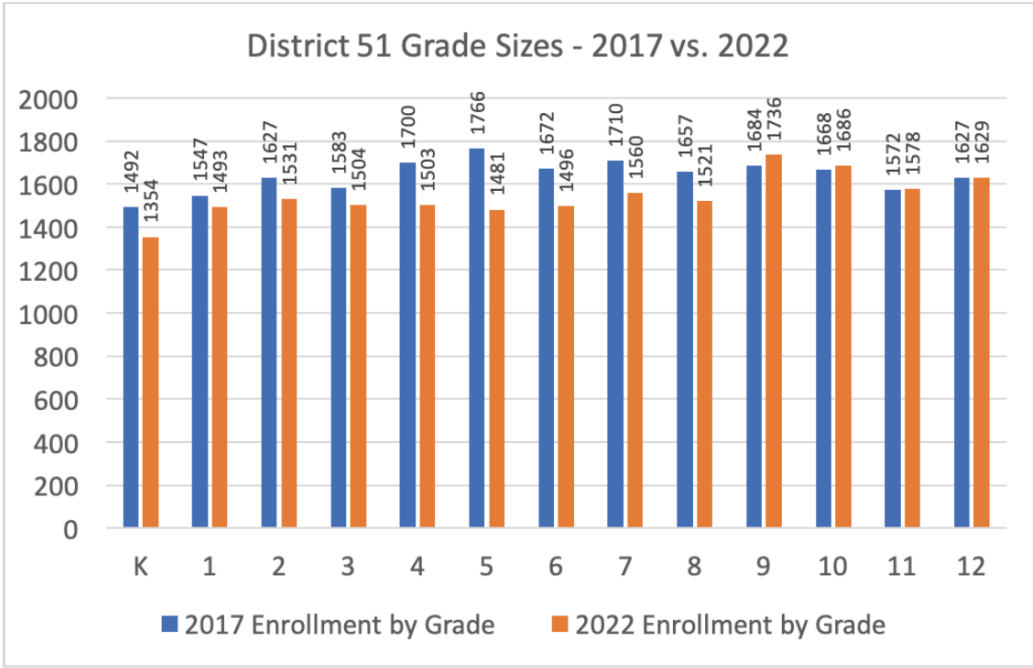
Mr. Bingham’s projections, which he originally presented publicly in January of 2023, showed a decline in D51 students over the next eight school years, ranging between a projected decline of 225 to 396 students a year. If Mr. Bingham’s projections are accurate, D51 enrollment would be down to around 18,500 students by the start of the 2030-31 school year. That would be a decline of over 16% from 2019 enrollment numbers, if that were to hold true. At the time of Mr. Bingham’s January 2023 presentation, he projected that the district would be down 317 students from the prior year and that D51’s enrollment would be around 20,552. As of September 15 of the current school year, D51 is down over 650 students, and enrollment is at 20,352. That is outpacing Mr. Bingham’s projected decline by more than double.

Total District Projections - Fall 23 - 1/13/23

Hist Enroll	Totals by School Type						
	(K-5)	(6-8)	(9-12)	(K-12)	ps	Tot w PS	Net Growth
2017	9715	5039	6551	21305	732	22037	
2018	9540	5171	6648	21359	805	22164	127
2019	9344	5151	6709	21204	836	22040	-124
2020	8948	4911	6507	20366	807	21173	-867
2021	8981	4812	6726	20519	809	21328	155
2022	8872	4547	6637	20056	813	20869	-459

<u>Enrollment Forecast</u>	(K-5)	(6-8)	(9-12)	(K-12)	ps	Tot w PS	Net Growth
2023	8771	4506	6462	19739	813	20552	-317
2024	8595	4469	6371	19436	813	20249	-303
2025	8401	4499	6165	19064	813	19877	-371
2026	8161	4559	5948	18668	813	19481	-396
2027	7950	4549	5934	18433	813	19246	-235
2028	7853	4407	5900	18160	813	18973	-273
2029	7730	4245	5960	17935	813	18748	-225
2030	7639	4080	5977	17695	813	18508	-239

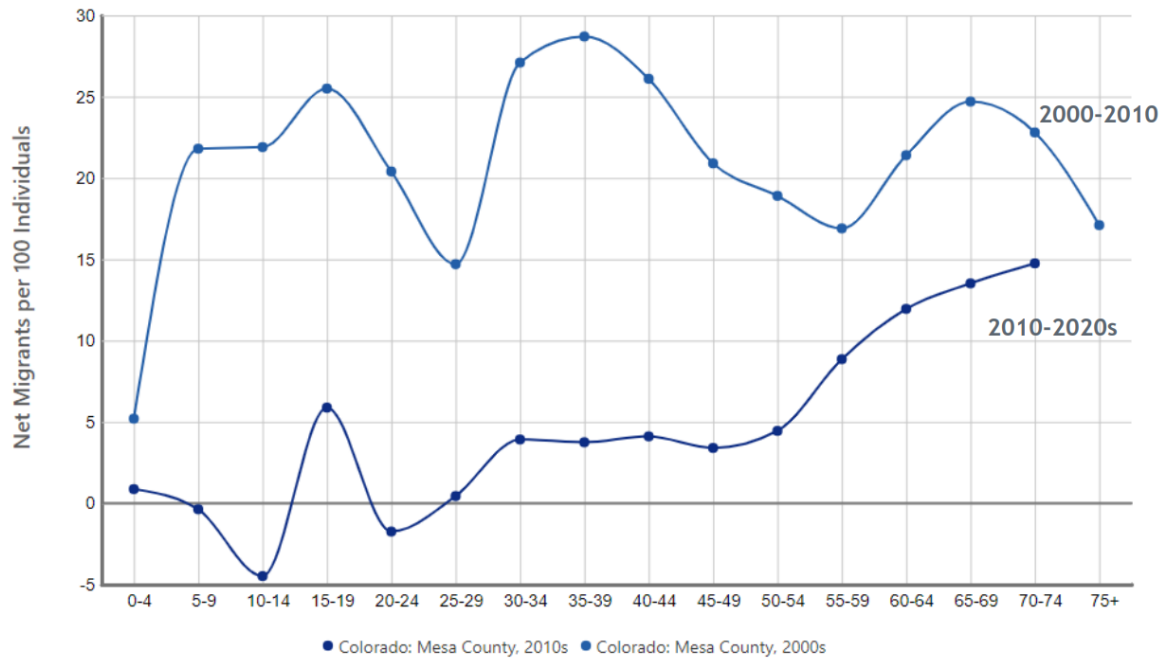
Mr. Bingham also presented a comparison of the size of grade level cohorts between 2017 and 2022. At that time, every grade level cohort from Kindergarten through 8th-grade was smaller in 2022 than it was in 2017. The impact of smaller cohorts of students moving through the district each year has meant an overall decline in enrollment over time. As of September 15, 2023, the Kindergarten cohort was at 1,265. That is down from 1,354 Kindergarteners in 2022, showing the continuing trend of smaller cohorts entering the district at the Kindergarten level. If Mr. Bingham’s projections are correct, D51 would have 11 historically large neighborhood elementary schools under 300 students by 2027, and 8 elementary schools will have significantly diminished utilization by 2030. Mr. Bingham’s full presentation can be seen [here](#).



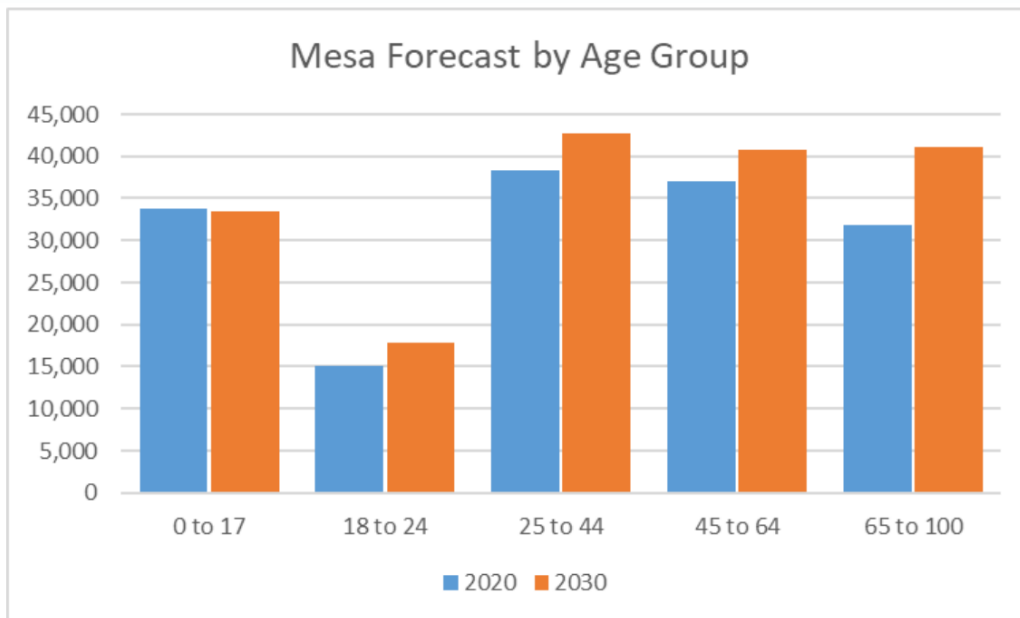
Ms. Garner, whose data looks at Mesa County as a whole, not just D51, discussed historical population changes in Mesa County, emphasizing how economic estimates, migration patterns, and an aging population are impacting the number of families with school-age children in Mesa County. For example, between 2010 and 2020, Mesa County saw slow population growth curves, with the largest number of individuals migrating to the Grand Valley in the 65+ age category. Our county has experienced a decline in population in the past due to the oil and gas industry's fluctuations, which have influenced job growth and “in-migration” of families, which has been coupled with declining birth rates since 2007.



Net Migration by Age Mesa County

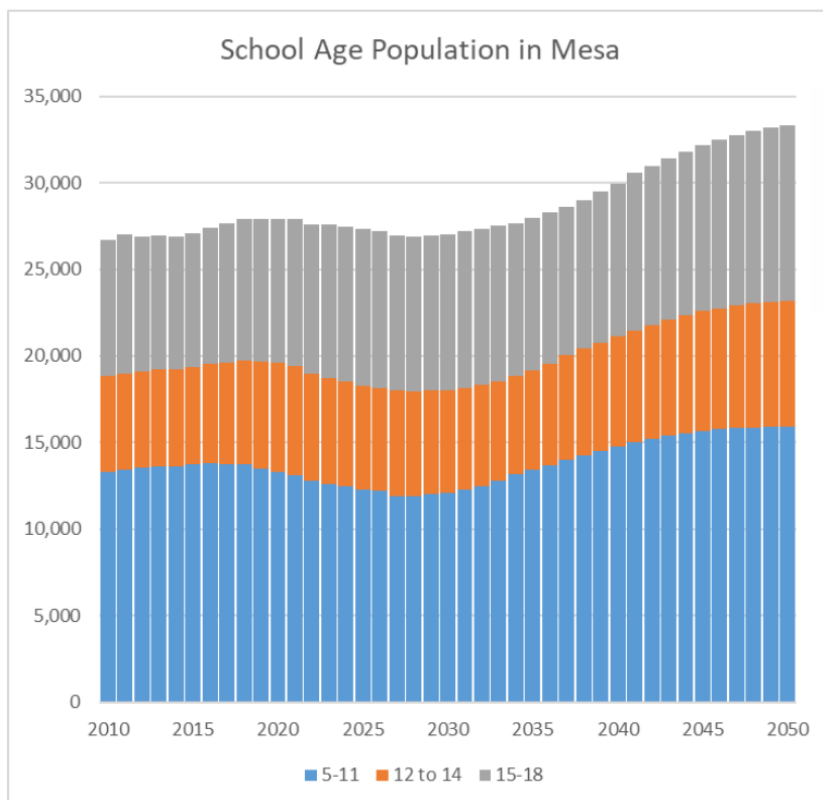


Ms. Garner, similar to Mr. Bingham, projects that the 0 to 17 age group will continue to decline in Mesa County through 2030, with the largest growth coming from the 65+ age group.



	0 to 17	18 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65+	Total
2020	33,730	15,055	38,265	37,059	31,845	155,954
2030	33,442	17,918	42,720	40,838	41,116	176,034
Change	-288	2,863	4,455	3,779	9,271	20,080

The state forecasts the decline in birthrates to bottom out in the near future and slow growth of school-aged children in Mesa County around 2029. Ms. Garner also highlighted the importance of attracting families for “in-migration” through job development, affordable housing, and other factors. Projections suggest that Mesa County could possibly return to the pre-pandemic number of school-aged children by 2035. Ms. Garner’s full presentation can be seen [here](#).



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

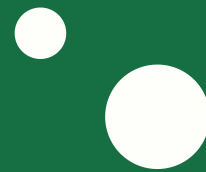
- Peak of 27,000 in 2020
- Return to 27,900 in 2025
- 5-11 peak 2016, return 2036
- 12-14 peak 2021, return 2039
- 15-18 peak 2025, return 2041

Declining Enrollment is Projected to Continue

- District 51 has 1,800 fewer students today than we had four years ago
- This has resulted in 17 of 24 elementary schools (not including charters and magnet schools) that now have fewer than 384 students enrolled. The significance of this number is explored below.
- The decline is projected to continue. D51’s demographer is projecting District 51 to lose another 2,000 students over the next seven years.



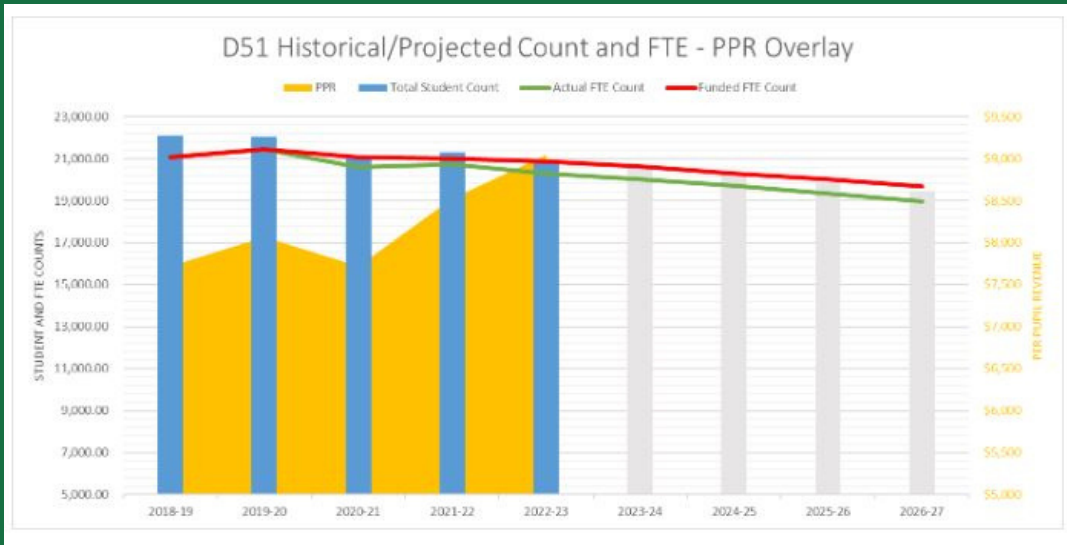
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS



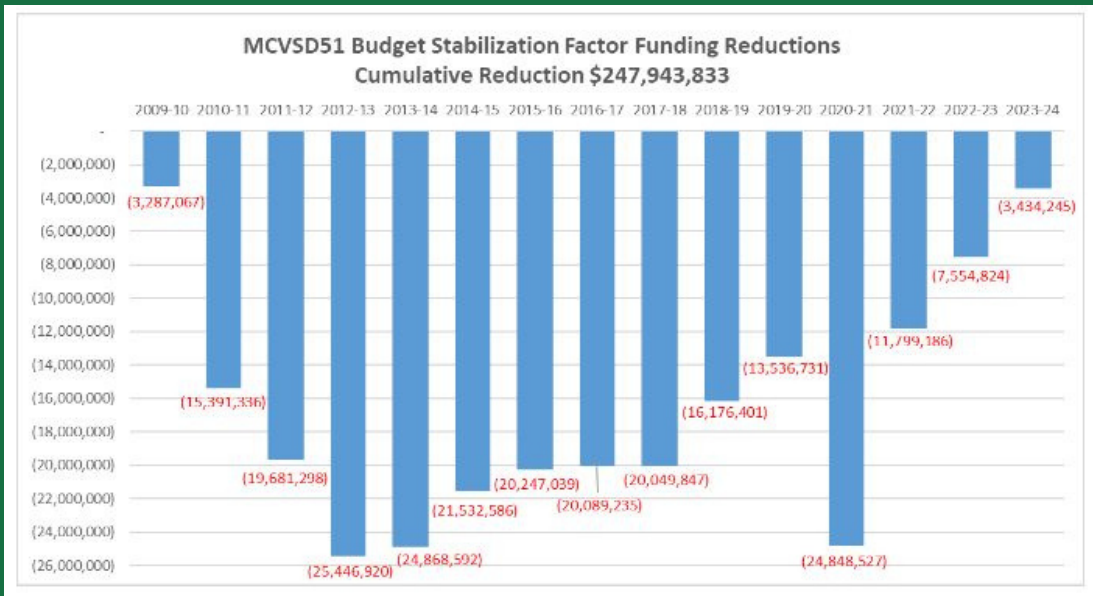
Declining enrollment also has large financial implications, and school districts like ours must closely examine these impacts and make adjustments to address the problem. Melanie Trujillo, D51 Chief Financial Officer, conducted a comprehensive review of the impact declining enrollment has had, and will have, on the district's finances and provided insights into the initiatives undertaken in recent years to counteract declining enrollment.

Declines to date have, and will continue, to impact funding. During the 2022-23 school year, Ms. Trujillo shared that 1,195 fewer students since the 2019-20 school year, producing a 5.4% decline in students. School districts are funded per student, so as enrollment declines, funding decreases. To soften the impact declining enrollment might have on a district's finances, the state of Colorado funds school districts based on a 5 year rolling average of student enrollment. Through averaging since 2019-20, D51 has only felt the impact of a 2.7% decline in enrollment, even though the actual decline in enrollment has been higher. Last year, for example, D51 received about \$5 million more in Per Pupil Revenue than actual student count because of five year funding averages. With our demographer projecting future annual student decreases ranging from 225 to 396 students per year through 2030, a projection of over 2,000 fewer students by 2030, the impact to the district's funding will be high. From our peak year of student enrollment (2019), the projected total decline would be 3,554 students, or over 16% of enrollment from 2019-20. D51 has one year of higher enrollment left after the 2023-24 school year in the rolling 5 year averaging funding calculation. Averaging has shielded D51 from the brunt of the funding reductions by drawing the reductions out over time. Some of the positive impacts of averaging will lessen once the two remaining high years drop off.

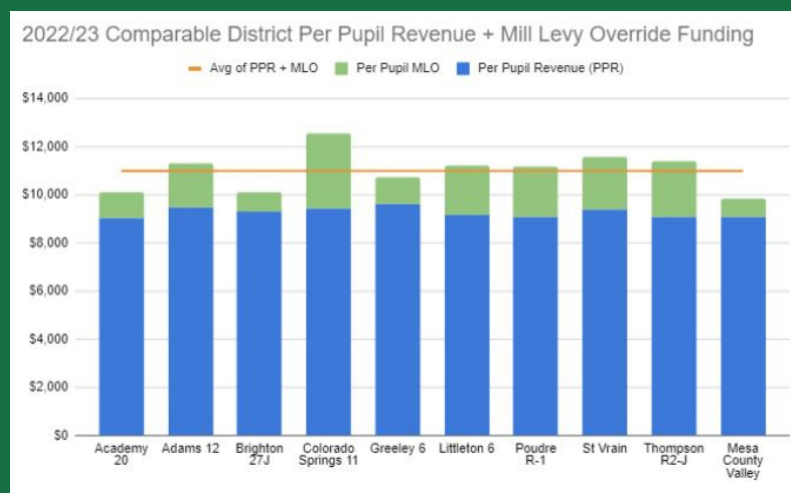




In addition to declining enrollment having a negative impact on D51's finances due to school districts being funded based on the number of students they enroll, out of the 178 school districts in Colorado, D51 receives one of the lowest amounts of per pupil funding in the state. The state of Colorado has not fully funded K-12 education, instead withholding funds, through the budget stabilization factor, that should have been earmarked for schools. Since 2009, the state of Colorado has withheld close to \$250 million from D51, alone. That is well over a year's worth of operating budget for the district. While recent decisions by the state to buy down the budget stabilization factor have helped, the state still is not fully funding K-12 education. This year, alone, they are withholding almost \$3.5 million from D51.



To make up for the lack of K-12 funding from the state, school districts can ask their local voters to approve Mill Levy Overrides, which provide funding in addition to the state's allocation through a local tax increase. When looking at comparable districts to D51, the district receives less funding through MLO's than other districts. The combination of lower per student funding from the state and less funding through MLO's leaves D51 as the lowest funded school district when lined up next to our comparable districts. In 2022, D51 received \$9,073 per student from the state. The average state funding per student our comparable districts receive is \$9,266. In 2022, D51 received \$768 per student from local Mill Levy Overrides. The average MLO funding per student our comparable districts receive is \$1,725. Those numbers combined means that D51 received \$1,150 less per student than the average of our comparable districts. If D51 received just the average PPR and MLO last year, that would have meant about \$24 million more in funding. In summary, D51 receives much less money per student than other districts, and declining enrollment is exacerbating the funding problem in D51.



Comparable Districts	Funded Pupil Count	Per Pupil Revenue (PPR)	Per Pupil MLO	PPR + MLO Total	MLO Revenue
Academy 20	25,644.40	\$9,057.32	\$1,043.12	\$10,100.44	\$26,750,160.06
Adams 12	36,272.80	\$9,487.74	\$1,798.29	\$11,286.03	\$65,228,872.88
Brighton 27J	22,202.00	\$9,320.01	\$768.93	\$10,088.94	\$17,071,878.89
Colorado Springs 11	24,007.80	\$9,435.22	\$3,131.20	\$12,566.42	\$75,173,153.71
Greeley 6	22,333.90	\$9,600.61	\$1,124.59	\$10,725.20	\$25,116,580.94
Littleton 6	13,947.50	\$9,152.44	\$2,065.84	\$11,218.28	\$28,813,294.46
Poudre R-1	29,642.30	\$9,065.97	\$2,104.24	\$11,170.21	\$62,374,531.00
St Vrain	31,270.70	\$9,399.09	\$2,154.63	\$11,553.72	\$67,376,649.97
Thompson R2-J	14,990.50	\$9,073.87	\$2,296.69	\$11,370.56	\$34,428,577.76
Mesa County Valley	20,854.20	\$9,073.14	\$768.56	\$9,841.70	\$16,027,607.16
Average	24,116.61	\$9,266.54	\$1,725.61	\$10,992.15	\$41,836,130.68


STAFFING IMPACTS

After hearing about the reasons behind declining enrollment from both the state and local levels, the committee had the opportunity to hear viewpoints from multiple elementary school principals on the impacts declining enrollment has had on staffing in their buildings. They shared the tough decisions they and their colleagues have to make when deciding where to cut staff when a school loses enrollment and what it is like to work in a school with stronger enrollment and more staffing and resources.

School staffing is tied to student enrollment. D51's staffing model allocates staffing, or FTE, based on enrollment counts by school. There is a unique staffing ratio of students to staff for each level (elementary, middle, & high). There is a budgetary component to the model where each FTE is assigned a "cost" in the model based on the number of days worked and average salary for the position. For example, an 8 hr/day Teacher = 1.0 FTE, an 8 hr/day Elementary Principal = 1.45 FTE, and an 8 hr/day Classroom Paraprofessional = 0.5 FTE. The model allows for some autonomy in staffing choices by school, within the minimum guidelines set. There are also factors to apply additional staff for high Free/Reduced lunch schools, small school size, and special programming (Challenge Program, International Baccalaureate Program, etc). The staffing model includes building based staff; such as principals, assistant principals, deans, teachers, counselors, secretaries, and classified support staff. The model does not include: Custodians, health assistants, special ed, nutrition svcs, gifted & talented, CLD, grant or PTO/PTA funded positions. Those are funded separately.

With the decline in enrollment in D51 since 2019, the impact to school staffing has been felt on many levels. During the years of declining enrollment, D51 reduced staffing at buildings based on the declining number of students, but at a certain point, it began to impact the school's ability to provide a high quality learning experience.





For example, middle schools had to move away from the “core model,” where teachers teach in grade level teams, to a model where teachers have to teach multiple subjects across multiple grade levels. This has an impact on teachers having to prepare for multiple subjects and grades while reducing the ability to plan as a grade level team. The reduction in staffing at the middle school level has also caused principals to make tough decisions on where to cut staff. This can often mean reducing positions like librarians from schools. The reduction in staff at a building also impacts a schools ability to provide a safe learning environment as there are less staff to monitor hallways and help with supervision duties.

D51 has utilized additional funding through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) dollars to subsidize unfunded positions at the middle school level to “bandage” the situation in order to not cut staff so deep at the middle school level that the schools can’t function at the level they are expected to. Unfortunately, ESSER funds are one-time dollars that must be spent by fall of 2024. With the upcoming impacts of the higher enrollment years in D51’s five-year averaging running out, and the loss of ESSER funding in less than a year, the staffing implications are poor, and getting worse as enrollment continues to decline.

For example, in the 2022-23 school year, D51 was overstaffed at the elementary level by 8.5 FTE, at the middle school level by 23.57 FTE, and at the high school level by 5.11 FTE, for a total of 37.18 FTE over. That left D51 overstaffed in schools by \$3.1 million at all levels as of October 2022. Without adjustments for the 2022-23 school year, based on projections, the amount of overstaffing would have been close to \$3.8 million over for all levels. The staffing overages would continue to compound rapidly if not addressed due to projections that enrollment will continue to decline.

Level	22-23 Staffing FTE Overages
Elementary	8.50
Middle	23.57
High	5.11
Total	37.18

At the elementary level, in particular, declines and adjustments have reduced the number of paraprofessionals and other support positions and has led to fewer rounds (classes per grade level) and unbalanced class sizes. Projections for the 2023-24 school year showed that most schools were to be over by 1 to 2 FTE for the 2023-24 school year.

Level	23-24 Projected Staffing FTE Overages
Elementary	8.30
Middle	22.80
High	14.39
Total	45.49

The continued decline in enrollment with no action has a compounding effect on staffing. Based on projected enrollments for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, applying staffing ratios by level, elementary schools would see a 10.9 FTE reduction in 2024-25, and a 12.1 FTE reduction in 2025-26.

	2024-25		2025-26	
	Proj. Enrollment Change	Staffing FTE	Proj. Enrollment Change	Staffing FTE
Elementary, K-5	(157.6)	(10.9)	(173.7)	(12.1)
Middle, 6-8	(31.0)	(1.9)	25.1	1.5
High, 9-12	(84.8)	(4.9)	(191.9)	(11.2)
Total	(273.3)	(17.8)	(340.4)	(21.7)

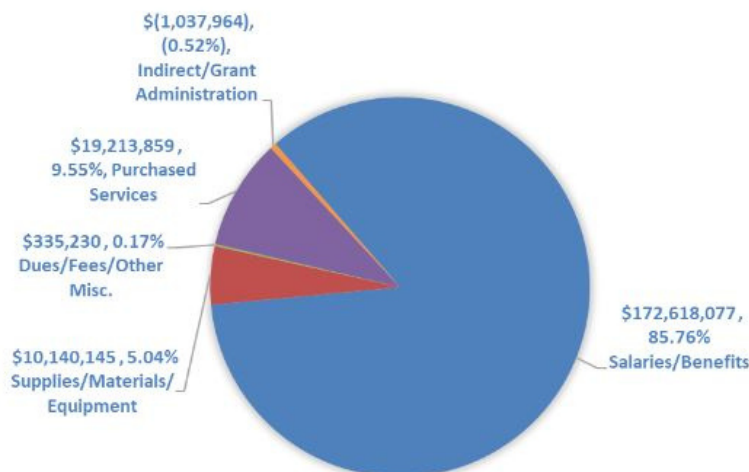


The impacts on staffing reductions at the elementary level have been felt over the last few years, and will continue to be felt in the coming years with enrollment projected to continue to decline. The impact enrollment decline has on elementary schools varies depending on where the declines are happening. Some schools lose more FTE than others, while some schools might gain FTE if they see an increase in the number of students in their school.

School		2019-20 Projected	2020-21 Projected	2021-22 Projected	2022-23 Projected	2023-24 Projected	2024-25 Projected	2025-26 Projected
A	FTE	(0.01)	(2.40)	(2.69)	(0.25)	1.51		
B	FTE	(3.59)	(0.31)	(1.71)	(2.22)	0.09		
C	FTE	(0.47)	(0.17)	(0.49)	0.17	(0.16)		
D	FTE	0.17	0.36	(0.41)	0.43	0.93		
E	FTE	(1.27)	0.00	(0.89)	(1.90)	1.33		
F	FTE	(1.14)	(0.06)	(0.72)	0.25	1.64		
G	FTE	(0.75)	(4.59)	(3.14)	(0.45)	(1.23)		
H	FTE	(1.12)	(1.08)	(6.67)	(3.70)	(1.86)		
I	FTE	5.41	(16.05)	(2.91)	(1.41)	0.79		
J	FTE	NA	20.16	1.99	1.03	(0.33)		
K	FTE	3.99	0.47	(4.28)	(0.56)	(1.96)		
L	FTE	(1.21)	(0.04)	0.45	(0.68)	(1.05)		
M	FTE	(1.35)	0.18	(1.86)	(1.72)	(1.27)		
N	FTE	(3.59)	(0.59)	(3.75)	(1.90)	(1.60)		
O	FTE	(0.02)	(1.37)	(2.60)	(0.38)	(1.45)		
P	FTE	0.15	1.01	(1.54)	0.26	(2.13)		
Q	FTE	(0.21)	(2.65)	(1.03)	(0.96)	(1.00)		
R	FTE	2.61	1.10	(0.88)	(0.64)	(1.81)		
S	FTE	1.26	2.15	(0.01)	(1.46)	0.29		
T	FTE	(0.07)	(0.52)	(1.77)	(2.51)	(0.29)		
U	FTE	0.15	0.64	0.90	(0.31)	1.30		
V	FTE	0.97	0.37	(1.72)	(2.70)	0.45		
W	FTE	4.10	4.05	0.42	1.53	(0.38)		
X	FTE	(1.46)	(0.15)	(3.18)	0.70	0.35		
		2.55	0.51	(38.49)	(19.38)	(7.84)	(10.90)	(12.10)

Lastly, D51 is in the people business, so a majority of the general fund expenditures in D51 are spent on staff. About 86% of D51's general fund expenditures are spent on staff. Over the years, even before the pandemic and enrollment declines, when the district faced reductions in general fund dollars, D51 has worked to make sure those impacts weren't felt at the school building level. As enrollment continues to decline, that is no longer an option, financially.

2022-23 GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES BY TYPE



EQUIPPED & EMPOWERED SCHOOLS

As the committee delved into the causes of declining enrollment at both the state and local levels and gained insights from various elementary school principals, who shared firsthand experiences of how declining enrollment has impacted staff allocation in their schools, discussions of challenging decisions regarding staff reductions and the advantages of working in schools with stronger enrollment remained a top focus. The committee was committed to creating safe and successful classrooms for students and staff, and the idea of "Equipped and Empowered Schools" was created. Schools under this model offer better staffing and resources, ultimately having a positive impact on student academic success, safety, and teacher collaboration.

EQUIPPED & EMPOWERED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS HAVE...



STRONG TEAMS


- 3-4 Teachers per grade level team allows for strong Professional Learning Communities
- More staff to spread out and reduce essential duties
- More Specials/Enrichments (ex. STEM, library, fine arts)

STUDENT SUPPORTS

- Increased student support roles (Assistant Principals, Counselors, Interventionists, Community Liaisons, Behavior Specialists, etc.)
- More intervention and enrichment opportunities
- Consistent resources across schools regardless of school size and location

QUALITY FACILITIES

- Students access quality and well maintained learning environments and facilities
- Fiscally responsible maintenance of D51 facilities
- Align actions with goals of D51 Facility Master Plan



Based on enrollment projections for the upcoming school year, it was determined that 18 out of 25 elementary schools fall below the desired minimum enrollment threshold of an equipped and empowered elementary school. Principals expressed that an enrollment closer to 400 students is considered ideal, as it allows for better student support, adequate resources, and appropriate staffing.

The principals emphasized the importance of consistent staffing to ensure hiring and retention success and to best support our students. The committee also discussed the need to improve staffing in our schools throughout the district. Effectively staffing schools is a challenge, and has been over the last few years, due to limited resources, with declining enrollment compounding that issue. In order to consistently staff all of our schools as an “Equipped and Empowered Elementary School,” regardless of student enrollment size, change has to happen as staffing the current 25 elementary schools at an Equipped and Empowered level would require additional funding.

A REVIEW OF EDEC EFFORTS

Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee Meeting Recaps

Within this section of the report, you will find summaries of the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee Meetings. As part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining open and transparent communication with our community, following each meeting, we provided concise meeting recaps to our families, staff, and broader community.

Click on the links below to read the meeting recap from each Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee meeting.

[Meeting Recap #1](#)

[Meeting Recap #2](#)

[Meeting Recap #3](#)

[Meeting Recap #4](#)

[Meeting Recap #5 & 6](#)

[Meeting Recap #7](#)

[Meeting Recap #8 & 9](#)

PATHWAYS TO ADDRESS DECLINING ENROLLMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The committee spent time weighing the pros and cons of different pathways to address declining enrollment at the elementary school level. The collective agreement of the committee centered on prioritizing solutions that will bolster student support, enhance school staffing, tackle financial obstacles, and improve the overall quality of education in District 51.

Through many meetings, the committee discussed a multitude of potential solutions, ultimately landing on five pathways to address declining enrollment. While other options were discussed, these five pathways garnered a majority of support from the committee. The committee members agreed that no one pathway will help solve the problems with declining enrollment, and that all five pathways must be pursued in order to better equip and empower our schools to reach the goals set out in our district's Strategic Plan.

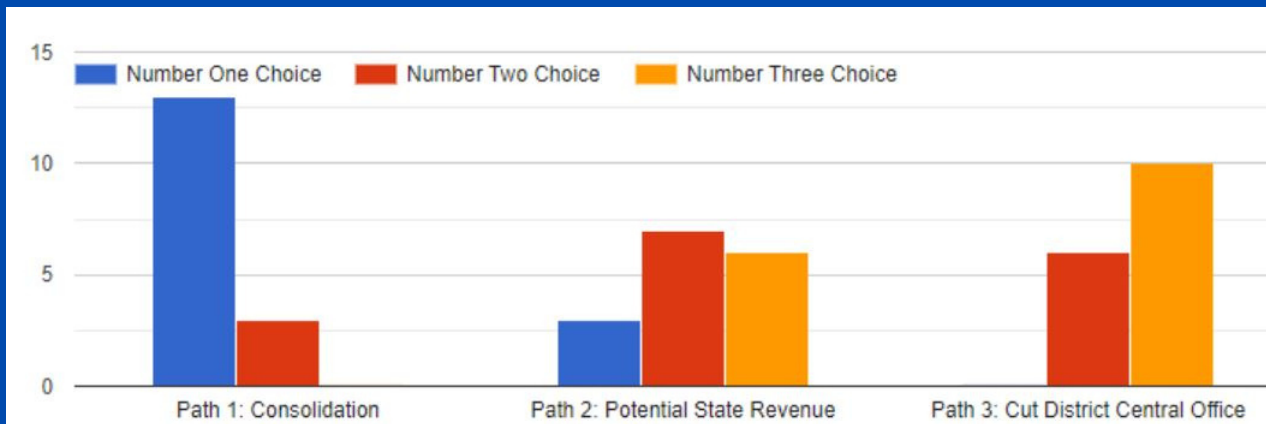
PATHWAYS TO ADDRESS DECLINING ENROLLMENT



- 1 SCHOOL CLOSURE/CONSOLIDATION**
School closure/consolidation was the most supported pathway, with over 80% of voting members ranking it as the most viable option.
- 2 MILL LEVY**
The committee heavily supported the district, exploring the potential for additional mill levy overrides to help address funding shortages.
- 3 PROMOTE AND INCREASE ROBUST & ALIGNED OPTIONS**
The committee supported exploring ways to highlight the different options the district offers while exploring new options to attract and retain families in D51.
- 4 SUBSIDIZE & PROVIDE FLEXIBLE SUPPORT THROUGH POSSIBLE INCREASES IN STATE PER PUPIL FUNDING**
The committee determined the need to possibly use potential future increases in funding from the state to subsidize unfunded positions in the short term.
- 5 ONGOING EVALUATION OF CENTRAL OFFICE STAFFING AND PROGRAMS**
The committee recommended the district continue to evaluate central office staffing and programs to identify the level of return on investment and additional savings where possible.



PATHWAY ONE SCHOOL CLOSURE/ CONSOLIDATION



This path proposes closing and/or consolidating schools to distribute resources more effectively. However, various factors, such as per-pupil funding formulas, the level of local financial support, and the impact on instructional resources need to be carefully considered.

While this model includes fiscal savings, one of its primary goals is a better utilization of district resources through the redistribution of students and school staff to other schools that have capacity. This approach allows the remaining schools to become fully staffed in ways that better support student success. When looking at comparable districts in Colorado, District 51 is not as well funded. Our comparable districts tend to have higher annual revenue through state per-pupil funding, higher local contributions through mill levy overrides, and, in many cases, fewer schools relative to student enrollment numbers. D51 is distributing less funding amongst more schools, many with underutilized and poorly conditioned buildings, which leads to less staffing in the building and the building being under-resourced.

The Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee has determined that closure/consolidation, in conjunction with additional pathways, could serve as a viable approach to addressing the issue of declining enrollment at the elementary school level.

Some of the positive impacts that closures/consolidations could have on the district, that the committee identified, included more equitable resource allocations, a large number of schools could be equipped through the staffing model for years to come, long term system improvements, it keeps the number of teachers at schools higher so more resources are available, better staffed schools, a more efficient use of resources, quality over quantity in schools, and it helps to equip and empower schools.

The committee also recognized that the closure or consolidation of a school building is not an easy task and must be handled with care. While there are many reasons why the closure of a school can have a positive impact on the district's finances and ability to staff schools properly, there are also many downsides to the closure or consolidation of a school, and those should be recognized. Some of the negative impacts that school closures can have, that the committee identified, were the impact on social connections, a possible negative community impact and resentment, a possible loss of community support from important stakeholders, the negative impact it could have on staff, and questions around the need to also adjust boundaries at the same time.

The committee also weighed in on strategies and guiding principles that the district should consider during the transition of a school closing. Four stakeholder groups were identified, and committee members were asked to share ways to best support students, staff, families, and the community surrounding the school if a closure were to happen. A list of those guiding principles can be found [here](#).

There was also a fair amount of discussion about possibly combining a bond with the closure process to reframe closures as "rebuilding" D51. Looking at a bond, with the community's help, could build a new elementary school that the consolidated schools move into, which could address declining enrollment and aging facilities at the same time. This could possibly lessen the harm of a closure.

Committee members went through an extensive process and established a set of criteria that could be applied to all elementary schools in order to identify the most appropriate candidates for potential closure/consolidation. The committee was committed to identifying criteria for closure that incorporated accurate data that should be applied through a reliable and defensible process.

The committee suggests that, if the Board of Education chooses to proceed with school consolidation or closure, they utilize the criteria established by the EDEC committee to assess which schools are eligible for consolidation. The original list of potential criteria was discussed over multiple meetings, with committee feedback gathered through multiple surveys. Ultimately, the committee recommends the following six criteria be used through a weighted system to determine candidates for possible closure/consolidation. While some of the original criteria that were explored did not make it on the final list, the committee expressed that the outcomes related to those criteria are still important. Reasons for why certain criteria did not make the final list revolved around reliability of the data gathered to measure those criteria, and whether or not they were as important to the topic of school closure/consolidation as other criteria.

Final Recommended School Closure/Consolidation Criteria:

- *Building Adequacy* - Average Weight = 45.3
- *Transportation/Proximity* - Average Weight = 20.6
- *Low Enrollment* - Average Weight = 11.6
- *Logic of Future Boundaries* - Average Weight = 8.7
- *School Performance* - Average Weight = 7.6
- *Geographic Future Growth* - Average Weight = 6.4

It should be noted that, with regards to closures/consolidations, the committee was tasked with identifying the pros & cons of consolidation/closure, identify the rationale for consolidation/closure as a viable pathway to address declining enrollment, create a finalized criteria to be applied when identifying candidates for closure/consolidation, and to give recommendations for guiding principles for the naming of schools and a community engagement process/transition plan for closures/consolidations. The committee was not tasked with identifying which schools to close. If this pathway is to be further explored, work would need to be done by district staff to identify reliable data sources for each criteria, a method for applying those data and criteria through a weighted system, and developing a plan and process for better supporting schools through the closure process. All of this would need to be done before any schools would be recommended for closure/consolidation to the Board of Education.

PATHWAY TWO

MILL LEVY

Exploring a mill levy override to address declining enrollment is a forward-thinking approach that can benefit the district and our students. As our district faces the issue of declining enrollment, we face budgetary constraints that can hinder our ability to maintain the quality of education and resources we can provide for our students. A mill levy can serve as a crucial additional funding source, allowing the district to bridge the financial gap created by declining student numbers. This revenue can be allocated towards things that ultimately improve the overall educational experience for students, like retaining experienced teachers. Moreover, investing in K-12 education through a local mill levy demonstrates the community's commitment to the future of its youth, which can help attract families to the area, potentially reversing the enrollment decline in the long run. Therefore, exploring a mill levy can be a proactive strategy to ensure that students continue to receive a high-quality education in the face of demographic challenges.

The committee identified reasons why a mill levy override would play an important role in addressing declining enrollment, including the community showing buy-in/support and shared commitment to K-12 education, the additional funds could help to adequately staff schools through the Equipped and Empowered model, helps to address the resource gap between D51 and other districts, and it frees up general fund dollars for educational uses. Committee members did mention that if schools are closed, it will likely be hard to get a mill passed.

The committee recommended that, if the district is to go for a mill levy override, D51 should form a committee to begin exploring a future mill levy override, ask for a reasonable amount of money to increase the chance of passing, have a clear plan for the additional funding that is linked to the Strategic Plan, should ask to continue what is already in place through prior mill levy overrides, including the 2017 mill levy override that sunsets in 2027, and use this as an opportunity to show the public how much per-pupil funding other districts receive compared to D51, and how we are lacking.

PATHWAY THREE

PROMOTE AND INCREASE ROBUST & ALIGNED OPTIONS

The committee also recommends that the district continue to promote the robust school options that it already has, and explore additional options based on family desire. This can potentially attract families to D51, increasing student enrollment, and retain current D51 families who might be looking for other options outside of what the district currently offers. Committee members expressed that promoting and increasing robust and aligned options in D51 allows students to have many competitive options like most urban school districts, creates better equipped and empowered students, attracts families back to the district with robust choices, keeps students in D51 schools, and can allow the district to be more competitive with out-of-district charter and private schools.

The committee suggests that the district spend time determining why people leave and go to charters and address those reasons, look at matriculation data and how programs can have a better aligned pathway from elementary through high school, and ensure that the options support the Strategic Plan. The committee recognized that increasing the number of options might cost more money, but also might bring in more kids, which equals more per pupil revenue. The committee also recommended strengthening partnerships with outside entities, like CMU Tech, to help fund and promote these additional robust options.

Within our three-year Strategic Plan, a key Priority Area involves the exploration of comprehensive and coordinated learning options, or "Robust & Aligned Options." The recommendation is to task the Robust and Aligned Options Strategic Plan Implementation Team, with the task of gathering the data necessary to determine why some families may not be choosing D51, and gather data from families on which options families are looking for that D51 doesn't currently offer. A plan would then be developed to address the findings, along with strategies for better promotion of the options D51 currently has to offer.

PATHWAY FOUR

SUBSIDIZE & PROVIDE FLEXIBLE SUPPORT THROUGH POSSIBLE INCREASES IN STATE PER PUPIL FUNDING

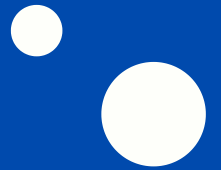
The committee also recommends that the district explore the possibility of utilizing a portion of any additional state funding it receives to subsidize staffing for a period of time to provide flexible support during enrollment declines. Increases in state funding are unpredictable and vary from year to year. Some years the state has reduced funding to schools. The committee recommended that this pathway would only be used as a temporary solution to equip schools experiencing declining enrollment with adequate staff for a period of time. This can provide stop gaps, if needed, to buy time for a short term. The committee also felt it was important for the community to understand how utilizing this practice of subsidizing unfunded staff positions during times of declining enrollment will impact increases to staff pay and the ability to hire as those dollars being utilized for subsidizing staff could have been spent on teacher and staff pay. While D51 has been able to increase starting teacher pay, the district still lags behind its comparable districts. The committee also pointed out that this pathway is not sustainable for the long term.

As part of our Strategic Plan Focus Area of Engaged and Supportive Community Partners, D51 has a team that focuses on Transparent & Effect Resource Allocation in our district. Through this proposed pathway, this team would work to explore the possibility of allocating additional state funding to our schools to ensure adequate staffing levels, address short-term needs, and carefully assess the impact on staff salaries and hiring within the district. Subsidizing and providing flexible support through possible increases in per-pupil funding ensures that our schools have the necessary staffing levels to maintain a high-quality educational environment when faced with changes in demographics.

Striking a balance between funding unfunded positions while effectively allocating resources to recruit and retain staff will be crucial for the successful implementation of this pathway. Ultimately, this approach can allow the district to adapt to a challenging environment while safeguarding the quality of education we provide our students.

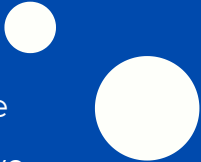
PATHWAY FIVE

ONGOING EVALUATION OF CENTRAL OFFICE STAFFING AND PROGRAMS



Having a process in place to consistently assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff and programs at the Central Administration level is an important component of a successful organization. D51 has worked over the past few years to make adjustments at the central office level that have yielded cost savings to the general fund budget and have led to better service to schools. By not backfilling some open positions, combining positions in areas that make sense, and restructuring some departments, D51 has found ways to save money and work to keep central office staffing from being “top heavy.”

The committee recommends that this practice continue for not only analyzing spending at the central office level on staffing, but also analyzing spending on district and school programs. This should be done through a program evaluation to see what the return on investment is, and could involve utilizing an outside entity to conduct the study. Any savings from an ongoing evaluation of central office staffing and programs could be used to address the financial impacts of declining enrollment within the district and reduced pressure on the general fund. The committee mentioned that many in the public believe that this is a viable option, and by doing this it would be a



show of “good faith” to the community, which might help with passing a future mill levy override. The committee mentioned that this is a best practice that is within our control, is tied to the Strategic Plan, and could have a positive impact on students and schools. The committee also mentioned that, while this is a viable option to help address the impacts of declining enrollment, that it will most likely yield little cost savings, isn’t a long term solution, it doesn’t directly address declining enrollment, it would not improve district performance or functionality of the reduction in central office supports ends up putting more work on the schools, and that past reductions have highly impacted non-school support staff already.

As part of our Strategic Plan Focus Area of Engaged and Supportive Community Partners, D51 has a team that focuses on Transparent & Effective Resource Allocation in our district. Through this proposed pathway, this team would work to explore a process for conducting an evaluation of current programs in D51, their return on investment, and propose ways that D51 can continue to evaluate staffing at the central office level to see if savings can be realized without sacrificing service.