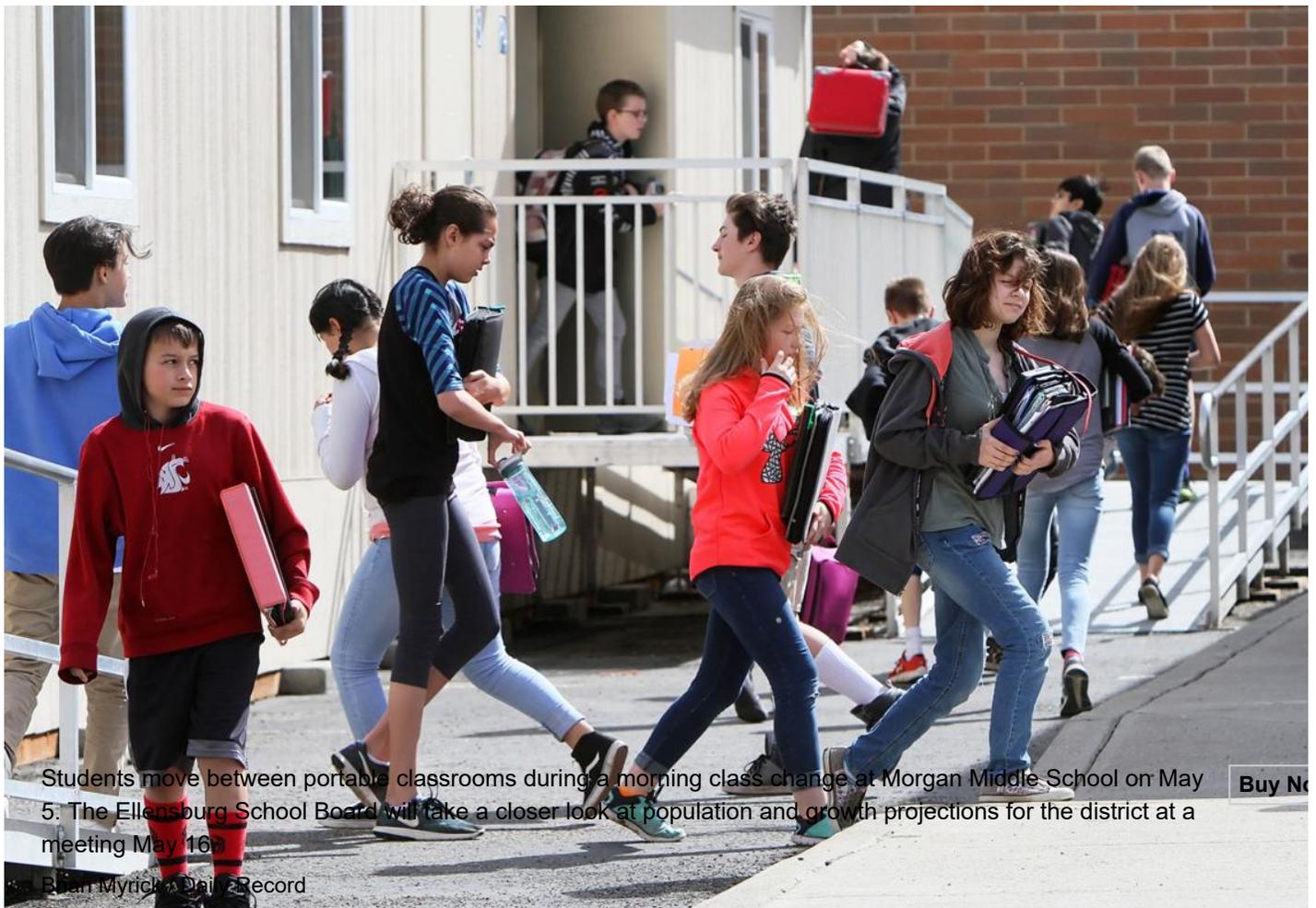


https://www.dailyrecordnews.com/news/how-many-kids-ellensburg-school-district-takes-a-hard-look/article_de914afd-7edb-5d27-8894-fe9d173c82a3.html

TOP STORY

How many kids? Ellensburg School District takes a hard look at enrollment projections

By JULIA MARTINEZ staff writer May 12, 2017



Students move between portable classrooms during a morning class change at Morgan Middle School on May 5. The Ellensburg School Board will take a closer look at population and growth projections for the district at a meeting May 16.

By Brian Myrick / Daily Record

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The Community Capital Planning Committee has offered several recommendations to the Ellensburg School Board to deal with increasing enrollment, an issue that led to the committee forming in the first place.

U.S. Census Bureau figures show that Kittitas County is the 10th fastest growing county in the nation. With a 4.2 percent growth rate between 2015 and 2016, the county gained 1,809 people, raising the population to 44,866.

The committee adopted an official enrollment numbers forecast, along with set enrollment numbers that will trigger another meeting of the committee if needed. The recommendations will be formally presented to the school board at 5:30 p.m. on May 16 at the Valley View Elementary cafeteria.

Meg Ludlum, a former school board member, was active in the committee as an observer and calculated the adopted enrollment forecasts.

“I thought it was important that we have some forecast out there,” she said. “We knew that (elementary schools) were full, but we didn’t know if it was temporary or permanent.”

The forecast

The forecast uses an enrollment total of 3,300 students, slightly higher than current enrollment for April 2017 which held at 3,270. Enrollment fluctuates slightly throughout the year as students move out of or enter the district.

The lowest Ludlum forecast projects an enrollment of 3,995 by 2025 and 4,805 by 2040. The forecasts uses a 1 percent growth rate, about the overall rate of growth used by the state Office of Financial Management’s medium population forecast, up for revision in 2017.

The highest forecast, which uses the Office for Superintendent of Instruction’s 2015 kindergarten forecast and a 2 percent per year growth rate after, would see an enrollment of 4,430 in 2025. In 2040, enrollment could reach 6,340.

OSPI forecasts are typically short-term and used for allocating funds for districts. They are considered too short-term to use for facilities planning. OFM forecasts population every five years. Ludlum emphasized she is not a professional forecaster.

Ludlum filled in a vacancy on the school board from May 2014 through December 2015. During that time, the board was working on the Morgan Middle School bond. She was involved in drafting a forecast for middle school enrollment to decide how big the school should be; although she said now she's embarrassed she didn't take into account elementary school numbers.

"It really wasn't on our radar screen," she said, since the board was more focused on the immediate problem.

Those elementary numbers, she said, will ripple their way through the middle school and eventually the high school. During her time on the board, she and Farley Walker, former business manager for the district, put together a 40-year facilities plan. The plan, she said, didn't consider elementary school enrollment forecasts, something that she thought the board would have time to consider later. It turns out they didn't have time, she said.

"I'm not 100 percent sure what should be done or what will be done," she said about the upcoming plans. Ludlum will be running for a seat on the school board this November.

Current board member Jonathan Leonard said the forecasts help protect the community.

"It's for justification purposes," he said. "You want the community to buy in, but they have to know why."

Committee's recommendations

The CCPC adopted maximum elementary school capacity numbers during an April meeting, which set the overall capacity at 500 students for a new elementary school. The committee also adopted an optimal target for class sizes: 19 students per class in grades K-3 and 25 students for classes in 4-5.

Initiative 1351, a statewide class size reduction measure passed in 2014, recommends 17 students in K-3 and 25 students in 4-5. Overall, the elementary schools are 463 students over the adopted optimal target of 1,071. The current elementary enrollment in the district is 1,534. The optimal target would hold enrollment at 342 students at both Lincoln and Mount Stuart, and 387 students at Valley View, which offers more classroom space.

Leonard proposed adding a recommendation that would trigger another meeting of the CCPC if enrollment numbers surpassed adopted capacity numbers.

The committee would meet if K-3 classes exceed 22 students and grades 4-5 see classes of 27 students. For middle school, the enrollment would have to exceed 800 and in high school the enrollment would surpass 1,050.

Based on the capacity numbers, and Ludlum's lowest forecasts, there's a possibility that another committee meeting might be triggered by 2025 or even before.

"Before we're in a crisis, we have to look at what the possibilities are," he said. "We can't just go from crisis to crisis every two or three years."

The committee also adopted a recommendation of not using any more portable classrooms in the district. Leonard said it would take more planning if the school board agrees.

Growth in Kittitas County

This story is part of a continuing series on growth in Kittitas County. Over the next few weeks the Daily Record will be looking into:

- Population and growth trends
- Planning for growth
- The impact on schools and communities

Julia Martinez