

LITTLETON PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEMOGRAPHICS STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SEPTEMBER 2006

A comprehensive enrollment and demographic analysis forms the basis for facility utilization and operating alternatives Littleton Public Schools might consider to address future strategic planning elements. Differences from the extensive effort completed in 2003 are identified and discussed in the following report.

Enrollment and Demographic Analysis

Strategic Resources West, Inc. analyzed fall 2003 through 2005 enrollment and updated demographic data and compared/contrasted these with prior historical data and results of the 2003 study. This information provides insights regarding why elementary school enrollment has declined and provides the basis for projecting future enrollment as well as determining operating and facility utilization actions that may be considered. Section I of the report presents details about enrollment and demographic findings. Key observations are (*differences from the prior study are in italicized font*).

Enrollment –

- Total and resident enrollment – no substantial difference in trends;
- Out-of-district enrollment – *has compensated for most of the loss in resident enrollment*;
- High school attrition – similar to many other areas;
- Kindergarten – decline attributable to fewer births;
- Smaller Kindergarten – has had negative effect upon enrollment in subsequent grades; and
- Smaller Kindergarten – partially explained by disproportionately large capture of private Kindergarten program providers.

Births –

- *Thought to have stabilized around 800 children in core area but has further declined to low 700's*;
- *Future changes are uncertain, at least in the near term*; and
- Little potential exists for substantial increase.

Age Characteristics –

- Relatively high median age consistent with stable population characteristics;
- Median age of females is high relative to prime childbearing age;
- Core area contains relatively few pre-school and elementary age children; and
- High age characteristics contribute to lower number of births.

Housing Characteristics –

- Turnover is relatively low;
- Home values are relatively low; and
- ***Home values are not well correlated with student generation prospects.***

Elementary Attendance Area	Total Yield: K-12	Average Price: 2000-06	Rank By:	
			Total Yield	Average Price
Ames	0.627	\$ 253,763	15	5
Centennial	0.240	211,460	1	1
East	0.439	233,136	11	2
Field	0.539	412,436	13	13
Franklin	0.509	309,409	12	12
Highland	0.426	290,639	9	9
Hopkins	0.423	236,093	8	3
Lenski	0.434	499,341	10	14
Moody	0.394	268,328	6	8
Peabody	0.384	259,733	5	7
Runyon	0.556	291,386	14	10
Sandburg	0.381	295,862	4	11
Twain	0.414	250,943	7	4
Whitman	0.281	258,574	2	6
Wilder	0.375	570,990	3	15

Non-Public Schools –

- Capture disproportionately high number of Kindergarten children;
- ***Capture relatively more elementary students than secondary but this mix has improved in recent years; and***
- ***Enrollment in Metro area non-public schools within or near the District boundary has declined over the last four years, which may explain some of the LPS increase in out-of-district students.***

Location / Proximity –

- Lack of “neighborhood” schools is correlated with a lower propensity to capture resident students.

Enrollment Forecasts and Capacity Comparison

Observations about demographic characteristics and other factors reviewed in Section I form the bases for the assumptions applied to estimate future enrollment. Key enrollment forecast assumptions are:

- *Births have resumed a decline since the prior study and may or may not return to the approximate 800 level previously assumed – the low 700's are now indicated;*
- *Out of district enrollment will continue at recent levels or higher as necessary to replace diminishing resident enrollment;*
- *However, this assumes the District will be successful in attracting these students;*
- Open enrollment among district schools will continue at recent levels;
- No new charter schools are anticipated;
- Curricular programs will not change substantially among existing schools;
- Changes are not anticipated at nearby non-public schools; and
- New public schools in adjacent districts are not anticipated near LPS.

Considering demographic and resident student enrollment changes that have occurred over the past three years, two forecast scenarios are provided, both of which again suggest continued and more severe enrollment declines (see Section II for detail). Should recent trends continue and Kindergarten enrollment stabilize at about 740 students, the District's resident student population could fall to about 11,650 pupils by 2010, down more than 1,500 students or 11.4 percent. However, if Kindergarten enrollment stabilizes in the neighborhood of the 775-student level, the moderate scenario forecasts suggest a loss of about 540 students or 4.1 percent. These scenarios display the relative importance of the area's demographic composition since it comprises about 83 percent of the current student population. This is particularly evident by the review of forecasts by grade, which indicates that the resident population attending LPS schools could stabilize in the range of 775 to 850 students per grade. Enrollment at this level, which is considerably less than believed in the prior study, would bring to bear more serious ramifications upon the District's financial position.

Enrollment forecasts are compared with capacities of existing facilities to calculate their utilization rates and whether any actions are necessary to accommodate the number of students served as well as the programs provided. Permanent facility capacities for LPS elementary schools, excluding the charter schools, total more than 6,600 students. Utilization rates vary substantially by school but generally range between 75 percent and 100 percent of available space. Among the existing elementary school facilities, it is apparent that an unequal distribution of students remains. This result suggests that opportunities may exist to more evenly distribute the student population, particularly when considering the expected continued enrollment decline and forecast overall utilization rate of less than 87 percent. Utilization rates at individual buildings vary considerably from the average, depending upon enrollment forecasts for individual attendance areas.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based upon the demographic observations, it is believed that LPS area births may continue to fluctuate and that Kindergarten enrollment will likely track similarly. While out-of-district students may be attracted to bolster enrollment, logistic and economic factors will prevent non-resident students from fully compensating for the changing demographic characteristics within the District and that continue to be slow to change. Consequently, adapting to the current resident demographic conditions and to the enrollment base

generated will address a substantial portion of District facility and related operating issues. *Developing a comprehensive strategy to address these circumstances remains strongly recommended and, in fact, is heightened by the recent increase in out-of-district enrollment necessary to stabilize the District's student population.*

The current overall utilization ratio approximates 88 percent; adjusting to exclude flexible program spaces, as in the prior study, results in a utilization ratio of a little more than 92 percent. This represents a substantial reduction from the 96 percent reported in the prior study. At that time, little concern existed regarding the amount of space provided by the District vis-à-vis the number of students served. However, it is apparent that the declining enrollment, particularly evident among resident elementary students, has had and will continue to have in the foreseeable future a substantial effect upon the District's elementary school utilization rate. Further, imbalances among attendance area student populations continue to affect utilization as well. These factors suggest that certain actions may be advantageous to assist with more evenly distributing the student population, particularly when considering the expected continued enrollment decline and forecast overall utilization rate of less than 90 percent. As would be expected, utilization rates at individual buildings vary considerably from the average, depending upon enrollment forecasts by area. Considering the changing demographics, particularly births, and the enrollment forecasts, underutilized schools should be closely monitored.