

Kieleidoscope

January 21, 2015

The Department of Public Instruction collects enrollment data from all school districts twice a year. This data is used as part of the school funding formula to determine revenue limits and state aid. School Districts across the state of Wisconsin are experiencing a trend of declining enrollment. This is a highly talked about subject, especially when discussing state funding.

Two years ago, the UW-Madison Applied Population Laboratory completed a statewide enrollment projection. An article by researcher Sarah Kemp in the *Wisconsin School News Journal* stated that, over the past five years, total statewide student enrollment declined by 0.43 percent. The state's enrollment change has affected rural, urban and suburban districts differently. Sixty-five percent of urban districts and fifty-three percent of suburban districts noted increases in enrollment while only 26.5 percent of rural districts experienced increases across the state.

Predictions from the study indicated a 3-5 percent decline in the next five years with a more dramatic decline of 8-10 percent at lower elementary grades in rural districts. One of the factors outlined in the study was fewer children per household in the rural areas. Also mentioned was the tendency of the population in rural areas being older than in other parts of the state. (*Wisconsin School News, January 2016. A Perfect Storm: Declining Enrollment, increasing student poverty and rising operation costs are putting pressures on rural schools*).

The Kiel Area School District is one of the 73.5 percent of rural districts that are experiencing declining enrollment. In the past ten years third Friday enrollment counts have been declining; dropping from 1455 in 2006/2007 to 1298 students in 2015/2016. Each year, staffing is determined by enrollment and that unfortunately leads to good teachers and administrators being laid off.

In June of 2012, the District participated in an enrollment study prepared by the UW Madison Applied Population Laboratory which did indicate that we would experience an enrollment decline. This decline was predicted in the survey and was a piece of data used when determining the decision regarding Meeme LEADS. The report's five-year trend for Kiel noted a slight increase at the high school with a continued decline at elementary. We are in the fifth year of the study and I can confirm the predictions from 2012 were correct.

We are noticing this trend as the gap between the number of students graduating and the number of students entering four-year old kindergarten is widening. In June of 2016, 121 students will graduate from Kiel High School while only 59 four year olds will move to kindergarten.

The Kiel Area School District is continually seeking creative ways to improve our great school district as the needs continue to grow. We have more families on free and reduced lunch, we have greater accountability from the state and we are experiencing an increased need for mental health services for our students and their families. My point is not to bring doom and gloom but to provide information that is important for the community to understand.

The Kiel Area School District has so much to be proud of including, a progressive comprehensive 4K-12 program, supportive and competent staff, great students, and supportive families and community members.

Regardless of the changing needs we will continue to maintain these positive attributes of our school district. We must think of innovative ways to increase our enrollment through business partnerships, marketing and strong advocacy for public schools while serving the current population of students who we are entrusted to educate. Kiel is no different than any other part of the state when it comes to challenges in enrollment. It means we need to work smarter and harder to balance the budget while sustaining our quality school district.