



Enrollment growth creates crowding, many schools over capacity

In only five years, enrollment in Salem-Keizer Public Schools is predicted to grow by about 1,000 students. That's approximately the enrollment of two elementary schools or one middle school.

When considering past growth, this enrollment projection may seem conservative. In the last school year alone (2016-17), more than 500 new students enrolled in the district. In the five years since the 2012-13 school year, a total of around 2,000 new students have enrolled.

"In six of the last seven years, we have seen an increase in new students. The average has been about 350 per year," said David Hughes, manager of the facilities planning function for the school district. Enrollment growth is expected to continue for at least the next 20 years.

In fulfilling a state mandate to create a facility plan for the future, district staff reviewed population studies conducted by Portland State University's Population Research Center and worked with architectural consultants to assess the capacity of school buildings to accommodate the projected growth.

What they found was that many school buildings are already over capacity, and many others are rapidly approaching their limits. For example, five of the district's six traditional high schools are currently at or over capacity. McKay High School is a good illustration. McKay's capacity has been boosted over time from about 2,000 students to 2,458 by adding 16 portable classrooms. However, enrollment at McKay last school year was 2,455 students and is expected to climb to more than 2,700 in just three years.

By the year 2025, high schools alone are projected to be short of space for 1,300 students. This projected deficit increases to more than 2,200 students if aging portable classrooms are retired and not replaced.

While adding portable units helped provide classroom space for students at McKay and 35 other schools, it created another problem.

"Adding the portable units over the years has had the unintended consequence of overcrowding core spaces within many schools, like the libraries, cafeterias and gyms," said Michael Wolfe, Salem-Keizer's chief operations officer. "This problem is magnified at schools that don't have cafeterias. Nine of our elementary schools were not designed with identifiable cafeterias. Imagine what it's like to serve lunch in a building like Sumpter Elementary, which was built to educate around 400 students, but is actually accommodating 520 students with no cafeteria. Many schools are running four, five or more lunch periods just to feed the kids." said Wolfe.

The School Board is considering solutions to the problem of overcrowding and has received a set of recommendations from the Citizens Facilities Task Force. The Task Force reviewed the



needs of school and support department facilities and recommended a range of solutions to the problem of overcrowding, such as adding or enhancing classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, gyms, and auditoriums at the high schools. Under their recommendations, nearly every school in the district will benefit.

The Task Force also recommended the School Board address other facility needs of the district, such as space to expand Career-Technical/Vocational Education programs, increase seismic safety and more.

The School Board voted to present a general obligation bond measure to the community on the May 2018 ballot; however, the total amount of the bond and the exact cost are yet to be determined. The base package the Board is working with currently is around \$620 million and is estimated to increase property tax rates by about \$1.28 to \$1.34 per thousand of assessed property value.

More information about the status of the bond package and the district's facility needs can be found on the school district website at <http://www.salemkeizer.org/category/sitewide/school-board>.