



NKSD Shares Similar Demographics

North Kitsap schools have seen a decline in enrolled students since 2007, according to an enrollment and projection study by the district. (Harthorne Hagen Architects photo)

NORTH KITSAP

NKSD exploring ways to boost enrollment

In 2017-2018, 505 students were released to other school districts while 145 entered NKSD

By Ken Park

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Since 2007, the North Kitsap School District (NKSD) has seen a decline in student enrollment despite a growing population — and has impacted the school's ability to maintain funding.

In a previous interview with Superintendent Dr. Laurynn Evans, enrollment was identified as one of the key issues facing the district in terms of funding, along with the effects of the changes to state public education funding.

According to Jenn Markaryan, NKSD's community relations coordinator, one of the reasons for the decline in enrollment could be that there are fewer families with school-aged children in the district, which could be a result of a lack of affordable housing for young families.

“Over the past few years, since about 2010, we have noticed that our graduating classes are much larger than our incoming kindergarten classes. This is an indicator that there may be fewer families with younger school-aged children in our district,” Markaryan said.

“In listening to the work of the City of Poulsbo and Kitsap County agencies, it has been discussed that while the population is growing, it is also aging. Additionally, access to affordable housing is becoming a significant issue for young families.”

After experiencing a significant drop in enrollment in 2007, NKSD conducted an enrollment and projection study. The comprehensive study showed the enrollment history and projections from 2007 to the 2018-19 school year. According to the study, NKSD had its greatest enrollment decline between 2010 and 2014, with 6,422 students in 2010 to 5,730 in 2014 — a loss of 692 students.

Enrollment reports are collected in October of each school year and distributed during the first school board meeting in November. The report noted transfers in and out of the district and listed school districts from which the students transferred to and from.

During the 2016-17 school year, 555 students were released to other school districts while only 125 transferred into NKSD. In 2017-18, 505 students were released to other school districts while 145 entered NKSD.

The bright side to these reports and the study is that it showed enrollment levels beginning to level out for NKSD. In this coming school year, 5,784 students are projected to be enrolled.

“The enrollment trend is gradually starting to turn this coming year, where we will stabilize and then begin to see an uptick in enrollment,” Markaryan said.

Some other reasons for the enrollment decline may be linked to a Washington state law allowing for school choice, which mandates that a student does not have to attend the school in their district if they prefer to attend another school outside the district.

Some of the reasons a student may choose to attend a school outside their district include:

- The district is more accessible to a parent or guardian’s place of work or childcare options.
- The student’s parent or guardian is employed in that district.
- The district is more financially or academically accessible for the student’s needs.
- It allows for enrollment in online courses or school programs offered by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction providers.

In response to the initial decline in 2017, the Innovative Advisory Committee (IAC) group was formed to come up with solutions to the enrollment decline.

Alternative educational programs

The IAC found that one of the reasons students were transferring to other districts was that they were seeking alternative educational programs NKSD did not offer that other districts did.

The IAC came up with multiple ideas to bring alternative education options to NKSD, but none came to fruition until 2018 with the implementation of Choice Academy.

“Choice Academy is designed to meet the diverse needs of students that desire an alternative to typical comprehensive educational programs,” according to literature distributed to students and parents during the 2017-18 school year.

“Elementary through high school students enjoy rigorous integrated curriculum experiences through direct or blended online/classroom-based instruction and home-based instruction. Our goal is to meet each student where they are academically and help them be successful.”

Choice Academy offers three different education paths: parent assisted learning, credit recovery and intervention, and an onsite program.

When it opened next to Kingston High School in fall 2018, 18 students were registered for the program. Enrollment in the program more than doubled during the school year.

“Choice Academy offers a small-school environment with smaller class sizes,” said Penny Therrin, Choice Academy’s program administrator.

The onsite program is specifically designed for high school students, which is the age demographic that has seen the most transfers from NKSD. Students attend school at the academy campus all day — or part of the day — depending on the program they have developed.

“We are gradually introducing a more project-based/hands-on approach to instruction that incorporates STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education. It also provides students opportunities to select or combine instructional styles,” Therrien said.

Students can choose in-class instruction, online learning or a blend of both. They can also mix and match school settings by participating in both Choice Academy and PAL (Parent Assisted Learning), or attending Kingston High School or North Kitsap High School.

PAL is open to all grades and puts a heavy emphasis on having parents involved in their child’s education. This includes weekly meetings between staff, parents and students to keep track of academic progress and outline the year’s curriculum for the student.

The credit recovery and intervention program provides opportunities for students to recover their grades before it is too late for them to graduate on time.

While Choice Academy holds promise for district students, it is just one

year old — still too early to tell if it will help improve NKSD's enrollment numbers in the coming years.



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