

Washington State could close schools in the wake of dropping enrollment

Over 10,000 public school students in Washington State left the system during the Covid closures and homeschooling rates in the state nearly doubled.



The largest public school district in Washington state is exploring shuttering schools and laying off staff due to plummeting enrollment.

According to the Seattle Times, Seattle Public Schools officials are considering consolidating "into a system of well-resourced schools" to solve budget shortfalls as enrollment is tied to funding.

The district has lost over 3,500 students since the 2019-2020 school year "...driven by a declining birthrate and a loss of confidence in public schools" the Times reported. Declining enrollment began in the years prior to school closures in response to the coronavirus pandemic but increased exponentially as the schools remain shuttered while other districts across the country reopened and parents learned about the radical curriculum being taught in classrooms and grappled with safety concerns on campus.

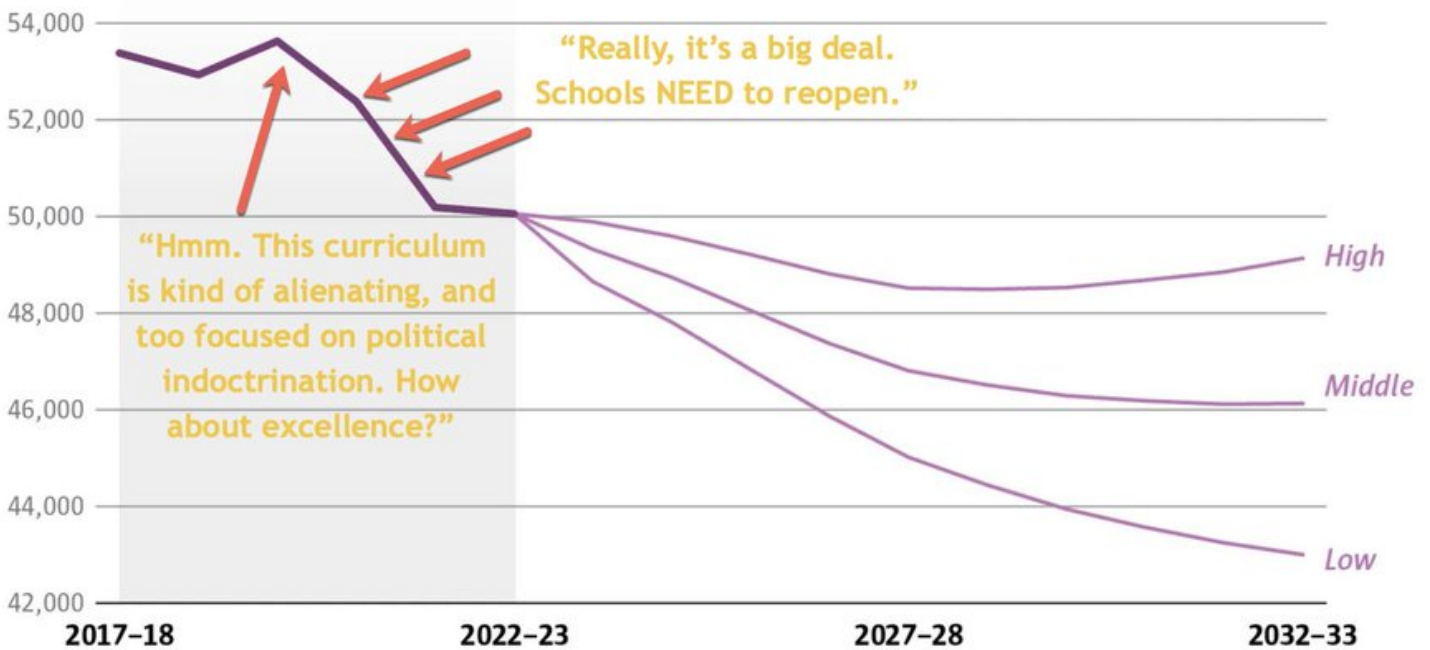
Did you know? The number of students enrolled at SPS determines our budget. Right now, we are seeing a decrease in enrollment, which means a decrease in our budget. SPS continues to work on making sure we have a balanced budget every year. According to the district, SPS could lose an additional 3,000 students by the 2025-2026 school year which would be a 12.5 percent drop in enrollment over six years.

Seattle Public Schools have seen at least a 10% drop in enrollment, and now have a dire forecast on enrollment in the next 5 years. SPS is looking at consolidating schools, shutting some down. If only someone had said something. The closures could begin in the 2024-25 school year and could result in \$28 million in savings for SPS. The outlet reported that the district is projecting a budget shortfall of about \$131 million in the 2023-24 school year and about \$92 million the following year and is looking to the state for funding on top of the cuts.

In nearby Bellevue, public school officials have begun the process of planning to consolidate schools because of declining enrollment and three elementary schools are potentially on the chopping block. Since 2019 the Bellevue School District lost almost 2,000 students and officials are projecting the trend of students leaving the district to continue.

We’ve been talking about plummeting enrollment in public schools for months. Now we’ve got new data. According to the AP, more than 10,600 students once enrolled in Washington State public schools are now unaccounted for or “missing”.

DISTRICTWIDE ENROLLMENT FORECASTS



Source: Seattle Public Schools

FIONA MARTIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

According to the Associated Press, over 10,000 public school students in Washington state left the system during the Covid closures and homeschooling

rates in the state nearly doubled and currently stand at approximately a 43 percent increase over the 2019-2020 school year. That number could end up being a best-case scenario as it was revealed in a 2021 presentation to a state Senate committee that the "November 2021 forecast is, on average, 50,334 students or 4.5 percent lower than the February forecast, and 42,036 students or 3.8 percent lower than the June forecast for the 2021-23 Biennium."

The decline in enrollment comes even as the state funneled record amounts of money into the public schools with much of the funding coming from increasing taxes on Washingtonians. Taxpayers pay over \$1 billion annually into Seattle Public Schools, for approximately 41,000 students, totaling approximately \$24,390 per pupil per year and yet the average grade remains below failing. Much of the money continues to go to administrative positions rather than the classroom.

Washington public schools, especially in Seattle also received millions in funding in Covid funding, but tracking of those funds has been almost non-existent <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/2/3/22916590/schools-federal-covid-relief-stimulus-spending-tracking> In response to "equity" concerns, Seattle Public School cut its tracks for gifted students. <https://reason.com/2020/03/26/seattles-school-system-has-begun-dismantling-its-gifted-programs/> Many families pulled their kids from the district after programs for special needs students were also cut.

Additionally, some parents have demanded increased security on campus following multiple incidents <https://thepostmillennial.com/teens-gunman-seattle-public-school> including a fatal shooting and violent homeless encampments on school grounds that school officials refused to clear. In response to the violent BLM/Antifa riots that rocked the city in 2020, the Seattle and Bellevue districts removed school resource officers from the Seattle Police Department from campus.