

Dear Parents & Caregivers,

We have weathered the recent blast of sub-zero temperatures for the time being. Please allow me to remind everyone that at the end of the month, there will be no classes on Friday, February 28, 2025. Enjoy a well-deserved three-day weekend! The month of February also begins to see a daily increase in sunlight, both in the morning and, more importantly, at the end of each day. It gets one thinking about spring!

MID-YEAR ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Annually, the district, working in conjunction with the Department of Public Instruction, takes two student counts. The first count is referred to as the third Friday count, and this took place on Friday, September 20, 2024. The district had a fall district membership count of 1,753 students at that time. The second Friday count occurred on January 10, 2025, and the most recent count showed a district membership count of 1,750. In some years, the district has experienced a much greater loss of membership count from September to January. Please see the eight-year trend comparing the third Friday membership counts with the second Friday membership counts.

Fall & Winter Student Membership Count Historical			
School Year	Fall Membership Count	Winter Membership Count	Gain/Loss
2024-25	1753	1750	-3
2023-24	1792	1777	-15
2022-23	1800	1803	+3
2021-22	1804	1774	-30
2020-21	1718	1709	-9
2019-20	1778	1756	-22
2018-19	1811	1786	-25
2017-18	1748	1716	-32

As you can see, after the most recent peak in 2021-22 with a count of 1,804, the district has experienced a decline in membership for the past three years. Typically, the district has nearly always experienced a decline in the membership count from fall to winter. In most years, the district begins to enroll new or returning students from the south in March, which typically leads to a relatively stable enrollment for the following fall count. Currently, the district is forecasting the reduction of three academic classes/sections as it preps for the 2025-26 school year. This reduction in enrollment will be factored into the budget forecast, which will be presented as part of the Monday, February 10, 2025, board meeting, which is scheduled to begin at 7:00 pm with an open session taking place around 7:30 pm in the new district office located at 1501 Brew Farm Road.

MASTER PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

For the past year, the district has been looking to develop options for the future of the district's buildings. A year ago, the district put out a survey, and the feedback from the survey indicated several things. One was that district residents did not support moving forward with a PK-1 building. However, there was feedback that the district should explore the construction of a new middle school in the future, and it should be on the 177-acre Brew Farm Campus. The thought is that Spring Hill and the current middle school buildings could be reformatted to an elementary & intermediate school serving grades 4K through sixth grade. There was also feedback on exploring moving to a three-track system with one elementary, middle, and high school. The latter could be the most likely pathway at this time, as the district needs to renew its four-year non-recurring referendum in April of 2026. This will be a topic that will be revisited later this spring as the district looks at budget forecasts for future years.

The district is looking to gather feedback in the form of a visioning session. The district has reserved two dates, with the first date being Wednesday, February 26, 2025, and a second follow-up session on Wednesday, March 5, 2025. Both sessions will occur at Wisconsin Dells High School in the HH Bennett Hall and begin at 6:00 pm. All sessions are slated to last 90 minutes. We know some of you attending may be coming directly from work, so we will offer some light snacks and refreshments. Our facilitator will be Steve Kieckhafer, who has guided the district through the design and construction of WDHS. He will present four-track and three-track school options based on the district's recent enrollment trends. I hope that you can attend one of these visioning sessions. Your feedback will determine what and when the district may be ready to explore any new building or extensive remodeling venture.

While earlier in this newsletter article, I mentioned some recent decline in enrollment, there is no doubt the new WDHS project has assisted with the district stabilizing its enrollment. Much of this is because of better balancing of the open enrollment deficit, and the ability to offer more project-based learning opportunities has led to greater student engagement in many cases. Additionally, many rural school districts continue to experience declining enrollment at a higher rate than our district.

Lastly, I invite you to check out an after-school activity, whether it be an athletic contest or a fine arts program. There is a lot of good work taking place by our students and staff. Please allow me to close out this newsletter by saying thank you for the opportunity to serve the children of our community! They are our highest priority, and it is our privilege to do so!

Have a great month!

Jerran Stark