

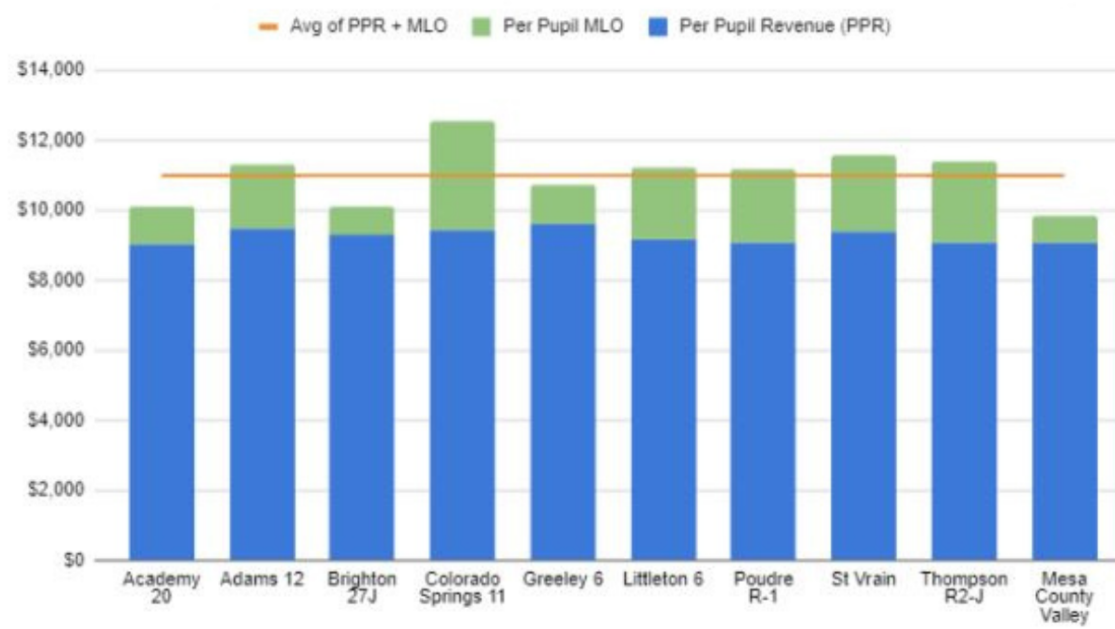
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS DECLINING ENROLLMENT COMMITTEE

Update 5.31.23

The work of the Elementary Declining Enrollment Committee continues throughout the summer. Recently, the committee held its fourth meeting, where we delved into crucial topics related to addressing declining enrollment and enhancing the resources and quality of education in our elementary schools.

To begin the meeting, Dr. Hill opened by giving an overview of our per pupil revenue (PPR) we receive from the state and the mill levy dollars we receive locally. We compared our district's funding to similar districts in the state, all of which receive more money per student than D51. This analysis helped us understand the financial landscape we are working within and provided context for our discussions. See below for a graph of this data.

2022/23 Comparable District Per Pupil Revenue + Mill Levy Override Funding



A significant highlight of the prior meeting was the introduction of the Equipped and Empowered Elementary Schools model, an educational model that ensures all elementary schools would be staffed/resourced at the appropriate level so that our students receive a high-quality education to prepare them for future success. Under our existing staffing model, we determined that an ideally Equipped and Empowered Elementary School would have approximately 426 students, taking into account exceptions for smaller school buildings. This student count allows for sufficient systemic staffing equivalents (SSE), enabling the allocation of adequate resources and staff to support the schools...something that a majority of our elementary schools don't currently have.

Paul Jebe elaborated on the rationale behind arriving at the number 426, explaining how this size allows a school to be considered an Equipped and Empowered Elementary School. Insights from elementary principals, including those on the committee, played a crucial role in establishing the necessary staffing minimums for effective student support. The committee recognized the importance of these considerations in our pursuit of providing high-quality education, and in order to meet the goals set out in the D51 Strategic Plan.

We then turned our attention to the key facts related to our problem statement and the broader concerns we face. The Mill Levy dollars approved by voters in 2017 will soon sunset in 2027, the impending end of ESSER (COVID) funds after next year, and the projected funding cliff based on a five-year average student count that is declining were among the financial challenges highlighted. Additionally, the expected decrease in student enrollment from kindergarten to 12th grade and the lack of sufficient resources and services in elementary schools emphasized the need for action.

The committee acknowledged that the initial financial problem has evolved into a more comprehensive concern of improving school staffing and resources while addressing the financial issue. We discussed whether it is feasible to simultaneously resolve the financial problem and establish Equipped and Empowered (E2) schools district-wide. Evaluating the pros and cons of our potential pathways, we further discussed each one and ranked them based on effectiveness and viability. Over 80% of the voting members ranked "Pathway #1: Consolidating Schools" as the #1 option, less than 20% of the voting members ranked "Pathway #2: Leverage Potential Annual Increases in State Revenue" as the #1 option, and none of the members ranked "Pathway #3: Cut Non-School Site/ District Level Support Roles" as the #1 option. Pathway #1 was ranked as the #2 option by less than 20% of the voting members, and no voting members ranked it #3. Pathway #2 was ranked as the #2 option by less than 50% of the voting members, and less than 40% of the voting members ranked it #3. Pathway #3 was ranked as the #2 option by less than 40% of the voting members, and over 60% of the voting members ranked it #3.

The committee then discussed some of the options that were generated in the previous meeting under Pathway #4. These included asking the community for additional mill levy funds, moving to a 4-day school week, and eliminating transportation as a district. After discussing these member-generated items, voting members were asked to vote whether these items should be further studied by the district or not. 75% of the voting members strongly supported the further study of additional mill levy funds, while only 6% of the voting members strongly supported the further study of a 4-day school week or eliminating transportation as a district.

"Pathway #1: Consolidating Schools" was the most supported pathway by the committee of Pathways #1 through #3, and we will further explore this pathway in future meetings. However, it became evident through conversation and comments that D51 may need to consider further exploring multiple strategies, including "Pathway #4: Additional Mill Levy Funds," and D51 may need to use some potential future funds from "Pathway #2: Leverage Potential Annual Increases in State Revenue" to achieve our primary goal of supporting students, adequately staffing schools, and providing necessary resources for teachers. The committee acknowledged the uncertainty of "Pathway #2: Leverage Potential Annual Increases in State Revenue" as we aren't sure how much, if any, additional funding we will receive from the state in future years, and "Pathway #4: Additional Mill Levy Funds" as it would require voter approval for a tax increase.

After table group conversations wrapped up, the committee engaged in an exercise reviewing research-based consolidation criteria and evaluating their objectivity and appropriateness within our D51/Grand Valley context. This process enabled us to identify potential unintended consequences associated with specific criteria. Committee members then individually examined each criterion, delving deeper into their implications and benefits, which were posted separately on the wall. The subsequent collaborative discussion allowed for a better understanding of the potential effects of each criterion. In the final round, committee members each voted on individual potential criteria indicating criteria were "Most Viable; I Support This," "This Could Work, But Presents Challenges," or "Absolutely Unviable And Should Be Eliminated." The results of this exercise will be further discussed at our next committee meeting.

As we adjourned the meeting, we collectively agreed that our focus should be on finding solutions that support students, improve school staffing, address financial challenges, and enhance the quality of education in elementary schools. The commitment to this focus will guide us as we move forward with developing comprehensive criteria and strategies to continue addressing the issue of elementary declining enrollment in District 51. An update will be given to the Board of Education at their next Board Work Session, and the committee will meet again in June to continue the work.

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