

Albert Lea Area Schools
Albert Lea Minnesota
SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
5:00 p.m. February 3, 2025
Brookside Education Center

Members Present: Dave Klatt, Mary Jo Dorman, Gary Schindler, Davy Villarreal, and Neal Skaar

Board members absent: Angie Hoffman and Kim Nelson

Administrator Present: Interim Superintendent Krenz

Community/Staff Attendance: 17 members present.

Motion by Schindler/Villarreal to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 5-0

Paul Durbahn, Executive Director of Finance, Operations, and Safety, gave an enrollment update.

Projected Declining Enrollment

Paul Durbahn provided an overview of the district's projected declining enrollment. He reported that based on current trends, average daily membership is expected to decrease from 3,148 in the 2023-24 school year to 2,904 in 2027-28. He explained that the decline has been most significant at the elementary level, with some schools experiencing uneven enrollment distribution. Kindergarten enrollment is projected to drop below 200 students by 2027-28 due to declining birth rates in Freeborn County.

Demographic Changes

Durbahn presented data on changes in student demographics over the past decade. The white student population has decreased by 16.5%, while Hispanic or Latino and Asian student populations have increased by 5% and 9%, respectively. The English language learner population has grown by 3.7%, and 60.9% of students now qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Special education enrollment has remained steady, and 29 students were identified as homeless in 2024. He noted a correlation between these demographic shifts and the county's rising population of foreign-born residents.

Student Migration Trends

Durbahn reviewed student migration patterns within the district. He reported that enrollment increases are seen in sixth, eighth, and ninth grades, primarily from families moving into the district. However, there has been a notable decrease in students before their 11th-grade year, often due to transfers to online or alternative schools. Approximately 470 students open enroll out of the district, while 143 open enroll in. Charter schools account for 22 average daily membership and non-public schools for 172. The district is working to understand the reasons behind student transfers and open enrollment trends to develop future strategies.

Financial and Strategic Planning

The board discussed the financial impact of declining enrollment, noting that lower enrollment leads to decreased funding. The district will continue to review enrollment projections and implement strategies to address shifting demographics and student migration patterns. Additional support measures, including success coaches, have been introduced to meet the diverse needs of students.

Chair Klatt led the discussion on the superintendent interview process. A detailed discussion will take place after the survey is completed. He suggested including both a community group and an education group in the final interview process. Additionally, he proposed that 2-3 board members conduct a hometown visit for candidates between the first and second interview rounds.

Adjourned at: 6:01 pm

Chair

Clerk