

Viewpoints

Iowa's Largest School District Tackles Declining Enrollment



The Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) District has created a committee to address the ongoing challenge of declining enrollment. Aptly named “Reimagining Education, Reinvigorating Schools Facility Planning Committee,” the Committee’s purpose is to explore sustainable solutions regarding declining enrollment and subsequent reduction in funding. With students leaving year after year, the district is focused on finding a financially viable path forward.

The Committee is made up of a group of more than 40 individuals who are tasked with creating a report and submitting recommendations to the Board. These recommendations may include school closures, consolidating programs, reorganizing facilities or grades structures, and the redrawing of district boundary lines. Among the ideas under consideration is the relocation of sixth-grade students to elementary schools, a reorganization model already being tested at one of the district’s school sites.

DMPS is not alone in confronting enrollment declines. Nationwide, districts are grappling with the impact of declining birth rates, open enrollment, a surge in charter school attendance, and an increased interest in private education options. The committee's findings are expected to be presented in January 2025, positioning DMPS as a leader for other districts facing similar challenges.

In a climate of decreased funding due to reduced enrollment, districts across the country must adapt to continue meeting the educational needs of their communities. DMPS's proactive stance may serve as a blueprint for others navigating these difficult decisions.

As Des Moines Public Schools continues to lose hundreds of students each year, the state's largest school district is trying to chart a path forward to a more financially sustainable future.

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