

Ocean View School District Enrollment, School Uses, and School Sizes

Introduction

The Board of Trustees of the Ocean View School District asked Superintendent Dr. Michael Conroy to convene a cross-section of District residents, community members, parents, and staff to review the District's long term decline in student enrollment and its impact on facility needs. Called the Superintendent's Schools Task Force, the group has met six times since it was formed in April. The Task Force will develop options for the Board of Trustees to consider as it determines how to manage declining and low school enrollment.

Task Force participants received a significant amount of information to educate its members on how enrollment impacts nearly all aspects of the District's instructional program, facilities, staffing, financing, and overall stability.

This report summarizes data presented to the Task Force participants so the Ocean View School District community may be informed on this important topic.

Enrollment Trends and Impacts

District enrollment has declined steadily for the past 40 years. Eight schools were closed by the District between 1982 and 1992 and one was closed in 2018. Between 2013 and 2023, District enrollment declined from 9,418 to 6,809. Enrollment is expected to decline again next year by 233 students for a new total of 6,581 students. This amounts to a decline of student enrollment of 2,837 since 2013.

The District has six elementary schools with enrollment in the 300 student range, three in the 500 range, and one in the low 600s. Sixty percent of the District's elementary schools have less than 400 students enrolled. The District has one middle school in the 400s, two middle schools in the 500s, and one middle school with an enrollment in the 700s. Seventy-five percent of the District's middle schools have less than 600 students.

According to the Orange County Register, the greatest plunge in student enrollment is in Los Angeles, Ventura, and Orange counties, where enrollments dropped by 15 percent since 2012. Demographers who calculated Ocean View's projections indicate the District's enrollment will decline 18 percent by 2030, for a projected total enrollment of 5,563 students. This represents a projected future decline of student enrollment of 1,018 since 2023.

These unprecedented enrollment declines have been experienced in nearly all school districts, private schools, and charter schools throughout the nation. Experts attribute the declines to reductions in international birth rates. Enrollment drops are compounded in California by increased family movement to other states, the state's high cost of homes, and a low turnover in the housing market.

Almost every function of a school district is impacted by declining enrollment because enrollment determines District, state, and federal funding; staffing needs, facility usage, and

how students are grouped in classes. In 2023, the Ocean View School District was staffed for over 900 students that are not enrolled. This helped mitigate the impact of these enrollment drops but cannot be sustained financially over time.

School Size and the Educational Experience

The total enrollment of a school influences students' educational experience. Larger elementary schools typically have fewer combination classes, which combine two grade levels with one teacher in a single classroom. Schools with lower enrollments frequently have multiple combination classes, and students may have combinations repeatedly throughout their enrollment in such schools. Combination classes are a byproduct of a school's small total enrollment. The District's excellent combination teachers make the configuration effective, but also acknowledge it isn't ideal for all students.

Newly Constructed Homes and Apartments Not Generating Many Students

Newly constructed family residences and housing developments within Ocean View District boundaries are only generating a small number of new District students. A recently constructed project with 483 units generated only 26 students, while another development of 510 units generated 21.

Legally Mandated Enrollment Options for Students

California has complex regulations governing enrollment options for students in districts. The regulations permit qualifying students to enroll in districts where they do not reside. The number of students entering the Ocean View School District under these regulations from other districts, and those leaving the District for others, has been equal over the years.

Concluding Comments

The relationship between staffing, educational experience, and school enrollment is clearly very complex. It is also counterintuitive. For example, some assume that a school with a low student enrollment has small class sizes. However, schools with lower enrollments typically have more classrooms with large sizes, despite their abundance of combination classes.

The Ocean View School District will periodically update you on its work on enrollment and school facility usage, including the outcome of the Task Force work on these topics.

Thank you for your ongoing support.