

School District of Jefferson Enrollment Study 2021-22

Executive Summary

Background

Over the past decade enrollment in the School District of Jefferson has dropped approximately 9%. Overall population in the District has also been declining, albeit at a slower rate.

The 2008 housing crash and following recession has put a significant strain on the housing market, with the number of new residential units developed dropping 86% in the past ten years in spite of recent demand. In interviews members of the private development community noted despite demand that they haven't pursued development in the District or nearby communities because profit margins are higher and more homes can be sold more quickly in nearby suburban communities near Madison and Milwaukee making investment less risky there.

The gradual decline in persons per housing unit and associated fall in birth rates in the District have exacerbated the strained housing market's impact on enrollment decline.

Meanwhile the existing population is aging, with the number of owner-occupied householders in the District over Age 65 increasing 14% since 2010. Housing supply has been further limited by a recent trend of senior homeowners choosing to remain in their homes.

Current Development

To fill the gap left by developers, the City of Jefferson has begun actively purchasing and developing land themselves to jumpstart residential development. Their first attempt at this has seen high demand and ground-breaking is expected shortly, though the size of the development is fairly modest featuring 25 single family home lots. A second such development is already in planning stages and the City expects to continue this process elsewhere in the absence of the development community's interest.

Leadership at both Jefferson County and the Thrive Economic Development Agency believe that some of the population growth seen in communities along the I-94 corridor, such as Lake Mills and Johnson Creek, will reach the Jefferson area in the coming decade. Some growth from Waukesha County could also eventually make its way to the Eastern side of the District. This possibility may be bolstered by the transition of many offices to work-from-home settings and the increased affordability of housing in Jefferson County relative to the Madison and Milwaukee metro areas.

Leadership at the Village of Sullivan does not expect notable growth in the coming years.

Due to County farmland preservation policies, significant growth is not anticipated in the rural portions of the District outside of small unincorporated communities such as Rome.

Enrollment Projections

Three scenarios of student projections were run for five year intervals through 2036.

The Low-Growth scenario presumes population growth does not reach the District. The decline in the age 0-4 population between 2015 and 2019 was used to calculate projected decline in the number of elementary students in 2026, with that cohort project to reach middle school by 2031, and high school by 2036.

The Moderate Growth scenario projected new development in the District going forward will grow at a rate matching Jefferson County's overall population growth rate of 1.5% from 2010 to 2020. The scale, type, and location of potential future residential development was mapped based on detailed analysis of adopted land use plans in the District. These sites were ranked based on how likely they were to develop, and the top ranked sites were projected to develop at a rate matching the County's 2010 to 2020 rate. Projected students from this new development were calculated based on ratios of existing students per housing unit in the District, customized by detailed housing type.

The High growth scenario followed the same methodology as the Moderate Growth Scenario, except projected development growth was metered by the State DOA's projected rate of growth in District municipalities. Due to the DOA substantially over-projecting population growth in the District in the recent past this is viewed as the least likely scenario.

In all three scenarios the DOA's projected decline in persons per household for District municipalities for each five-year interval was applied to the final enrollment projection.

In the Low-Growth scenario, net students from open-enrollment were projected to return to 0. In the Moderate scenario they were held steady at the level seen in in the 2021-22 school year. In the High scenario net open-enrollment was projected to continue increasing at the rate of increase seen over the past decade. Alternate versions of the Low and High Growth scenarios where open-enrollment is held steady at 2021 levels are also included for reference in the full study document.

Independently, a projected number of new students from anticipated turnover in the existing housing stock was calculated based on the increase in elderly homeowners seen over the past decade. This data was added to all three scenarios, though as an independent variable it could easily be removed to simulate what enrollment may look like if houses do not turnover as projected.

Student Growth Projections

	2021 Enrollment	2026 Projected Enrollment	2031 Projected Enrollment	2036 Projected Enrollment	Raw Change	Percent Change
	Low Growth Scenario					
East Elementary PK-2	153	143	143	142	-11	-7%
East Elementary 3-5	157	147	146	145	-12	-7%
<i>East Total</i>	310	290	289	287	-23	-7%
Sullivan Elementary PK-2	115	92	92	92	-23	-20%
Sullivan Elementary 3-5	67	54	54	55	-12	-19%
<i>Sullivan Total</i>	182	146	147	147	-35	-19%
West Elementary PK-2	145	129	128	128	-17	-12%
West Elementary 3-5	129	115	114	114	-15	-12%
<i>West Total</i>	274	244	243	241	-33	-12%
Middle School	395	379	343	342	-53	-13%
High School	598	578	577	527	-71	-12%
Total	1,759	1,637	1,598	1,545	-214	-12%
	Moderate Growth Scenario					
East Elementary PK-2	153	152	155	157	4	2%
East Elementary 3-5	157	156	158	160	3	2%
<i>East Total</i>	310	309	313	316	6	2%
Sullivan Elementary PK-2	115	115	117	119	4	4%
Sullivan Elementary 3-5	67	68	69	71	4	6%
<i>Sullivan Total</i>	182	183	187	190	8	4%
West Elementary PK-2	145	146	147	150	5	3%
West Elementary 3-5	129	130	132	133	4	3%
<i>West Total</i>	274	276	279	283	9	3%
Middle School	395	396	402	407	12	3%
High School	598	600	608	617	19	3%
Total	1,759	1,764	1,788	1,814	55	3%
	High Growth Scenario					
East Elementary PK-2	153	167	181	191	38	25%
East Elementary 3-5	157	172	185	195	38	24%
<i>East Total</i>	310	339	366	386	76	25%
Sullivan Elementary PK-2	115	130	140	149	34	30%
Sullivan Elementary 3-5	67	79	87	94	27	41%
<i>Sullivan Total</i>	182	208	227	243	61	34%
West Elementary PK-2	145	157	166	172	27	19%
West Elementary 3-5	129	144	152	159	30	23%
<i>West Total</i>	274	301	317	331	57	21%
Middle School	395	428	456	477	82	21%
High School	598	640	674	700	102	17%
Total	1,759	1,916	2,040	2,137	378	21%

Note: Sum of Individual cells may not match sub-totals exactly due to rounding.

Summary

Under the Low Growth scenario, enrollment would be projected to continue declining, though buffeted somewhat by turnover in the existing housing stock. The East Attendance Area is expected to see the smallest decline due to the higher population under age 5 estimated to currently reside there.

Under the Moderate Growth scenario, only modest gains would be expected in the student population over the next fifteen years, and by 2036 enrollment would still be below 2011 District enrollment.

Under the High Growth scenario, total enrollment would grow by approximately 375 students by 2036, though much of that would come from an increase in net projected Open Enrollment with about 90 students projected to come from new development in the District. The East Attendance Area would see slightly faster growth than the rest of the District given the larger portion of potential nearer-term residential development planned there.

Several trends and local efforts point to at least a small potential reversal of the overall population loss seen in the District over the past decade. Yet modest population growth may still not be enough to reverse the recent loss of enrollment seen in the school system due to long-term declines in birth rates and persons per household - though it could stymie the rate of decline.

Five important metrics the District should monitor going forward:

1. The rate, scope, and location of new residential development in the District.
 - a. And if the City of Jefferson, Jefferson County, or other local governments adopt new policies that could initiate additional or denser growth
2. If birth rates decline even more sharply in the wake of the pandemic.
3. 2020 block level data on population under Age 5 in the District.
 - a. And subsequent estimates from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey
4. 2020 block level data on number of owner-occupied households with householder Age 65+.
 - a. And subsequent estimates from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey
5. If or how the statewide trend of students transitioning to home-schooling, charter, or private schools continues or plays out in the District.

Factors Dampening Enrollment:

- Limited Housing Supply due to lack of construction since 2010
- Limited Housing Supply due to seniors choosing to "Age-in-Place"
- Long-term Decline in Persons Per Household and Birth Rates
- Possible sharper Decline in Birth Rates after pandemic
- Attrition to home-schooling, charter, and private schools

Factors Increasing or that could Increase Enrollment:

- Growth on I-94 corridor reaching Jefferson Area
- Growth from Waukesha County reaching Sullivan Area
- City of Jefferson facilitating residential development by working as own developer
- City of Jefferson Zoning Code changes to allow for more dense residential development
- City of Jefferson long-range Comprehensive Plan residential growth plans
- Potential County or State policy changes that could facilitate more development (i.e., TIF, Zoning)
- Net Gains in Open Enrollment