

December 4, 2012

Citizens of Oyster River,

As Superintendent, I have held a series of community forums with the intent of collecting questions of interest to you. Starting in December of 2012, I will be publishing the answers to your questions and addressing timely topics on a weekly basis on the ORCSD web page. In addition, I will be distributing this information to others that are willing to publish on their websites.

Enrollment and Building Capacity Will Guide Decision Making

The Long Range Planning Committee projects that enrollment will decline over the next decade. This will have major implications on all aspects of the ORCSD. The question asked at a Public Forum was, "Are surrounding communities seeing similar declines in enrollment? Is this happening throughout New Hampshire?"

According to Mark Joyce, Chief Executive Officer of the New Hampshire School Administration Association (NHSAA), enrollment declines are occurring throughout the State of New Hampshire. The exceptions are NH cities where rental housing is available and, as a result, enrollment is stable or increasing.

Locally, Lisa Allison, the Chair of the Long Range Planning Committee states one factor that clearly contributes to enrollment decline in the District is the decline in the birthrate. Ten years ago there were 130 births in ORCSD; this year only 70. Birth rate decline of this magnitude will result in enrollment decline over time. It is important to note that the projected decrease in student enrollment over the next ten years will likely be around 400 students. The elementary schools are experiencing a modest decline now but will likely begin seeing a more profound decline beginning in 2015-16. The Long Range Planning Committee report will be posted on the District website.

Over the next two years the District will assess the impact and develop options, including how students are distributed between Mast Way and Moharimet Schools and whether the way the two schools are currently configured makes sense in the face of the declining enrollment. Options will also be considered for the middle and high schools. No decisions have been made as discussions are just beginning.

In addition to understanding enrollment trends, it is important to know how the capacity of each building will be impacted. In order to better inform the Board and the public, administration entered into an agreement to complete a capacity study. The District contracted with New Hampshire School Administrative Association to determine the student capacity of our buildings based upon the programming needs of our students, local policy and state guidelines. The capacity study was completed at the end of October and was shared with the School Board in November. The Capacity Study will be posted on the District website.

We are fortunate, in Oyster River, to have so many volunteers making up the Long Range Planning Committee's (LRPC). Their projected enrollment figures have given us valuable information to work with. We also use projections generated by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) and, this year, from NHSAA.

Enrollment projections and building capacity data, as well as community input, will inform the Board and guide them in upcoming months and years to make the best decisions possible for ORCSD students.

Tuition Students - Important to Both Programming and Taxpayers

Participants in the Community Forums wanted to know what is the tuition paid by students outside the district? Will these relationships ease the tax burden?

Tuition students can help ORCSD in two fundamental ways:

1. Assist in keeping the programs at our high school that have contributed to the District's excellent reputation; and
2. Assist in helping the District contain escalating costs.

In order to keep the quality program options we have for our students, we need a 'critical mass' of students. The cornerstone of our high school is to offer as many choices as possible in order to meet the needs of all our students. Should student enrollment decline precipitously, individual courses could face elimination if enrollment declines to levels below District policy guidelines. ORHS relies on student choice to engage students in learning in areas they wish to pursue. Tuition students help mitigate the loss of enrollment and assist in maintaining student choice.

Tuition students also assist the taxpayers of ORCSD. Currently the District projects that we will receive over \$800,000 in revenue due to tuition students. Without this revenue, there are only two solutions. ORCSD would be forced to cut programming and staff, or ask the taxpayers to make up for the loss of \$800,000. Neither option is appealing.

Currently ORCSD is in discussions with Newmarket, responding to a Request for Proposal (RFP) to Barrington, and responding to inquiries from Deerfield. As ORCSD has more information, we will be sharing our findings with the ORCSD community.

By encouraging the growth of tuition students we are working to maintain programming as well as being fiscally responsible.