

# School numbers vary greatly by district

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Enrollment numbers in school districts across northwest Kansas are all over the board. Some are up, some are down and some have stayed the same compared to last year.

On the far west side in Cheyenne County, St. Francis Superintendent Rob Schiltz said the district has stayed exactly the same. Last year, he said, the district had 296 students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. It's the same this year.

At the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, the district was down 10 kids, he added. Over the last five to 10 years, he said, he would say the district is significantly down.

Why the enrollment numbers are slipping, he said, he assumes it's the same as any other small rural community. There are fewer people on the farm, and as students grow up, they move away to get an education, then go to bigger cities to get jobs.

Over the past 10 years, said Schiltz, the enrollment numbers haven't always been down from year to year. There have been years when the student count stayed flat, like this year, and others when they have been up.

Staying flat on the numbers, he said, couldn't have happened in a better year, since no one knows what all will happen with the state part of the budget this year.

In Sherman County, Goodland School District Superintendent Shelly Angelos she said the numbers are up this year. Although there has been a steady decline in the past few years, she said, this year the count is up.

The district has 869 students enrolled, which was up seven from the previous year.

In Colby the Thomas County School District shows a drop in students compared to five and ten years ago. Jo DeYoung, business manager, said the unaudited numbers for this year are 960 students enrolled.

Five years ago there were 1,024, which is 64 more than this year. Ten years ago there were 1,094 students, 134 more than this year.

The Golden Plains School District is another that shows an increase compared to last year.

Superintendent Mary Ellen Welshon said this year, the district has 231 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, an increase of three. Compared to five years ago, though, the district is up 23 students.

The Golden Plains School District has shown a steady increase that goes back at least 10 years ago. During the 2000-01 school year, it had 182 students. This year, there are 49 more.

The Norton School District also saw an increase this year. Superintendent Greg Mann said the district is up 28 students compared to last year, 728 compared to 700.

Those numbers don't include the students at the learning center. With those, the district is up 23 students over last year.

The learning center, said Mann, is a completion program. It meets the same requirements as a general equivalency diploma program. It's downtown, said Mann, and is largely comput-



Before Christmas last year, the stores in downtown Oberlin opened for a late night ladies' shopping event. Becky Vollertsen (above left), Sherry Bergling, Judy Groneweg and Kurt Vollertsen talked over wine and cheese in Ward Drug Store. After the bell rang at the Oberlin Elementary School, Madeline Johnson and Brittani Farr (right) chatted in the hall. As with most schools in rural Kansas, the halls were much more crowded 10 to 20 years ago.

— Photos by Kimberly Davis  
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erized. The center has 43 students enrolled this year and 48 last year.

Without the learning center, the district is down, compared to numbers from 2001 to 2002, by two students.

Mann said the district's numbers have been steady lately, for which they are thankful.

Norton has jobs, he said. There is the state prison, a Kansas Department of Transportation district office, two large tool and die companies, an all-encompassing hospital, the Valley Hope headquarters and others.

There aren't many rural schools out here that can say that they aren't the largest employer in the county, he noted. The school district is like the third largest employer, said Mann.

"We have a great employment base here," he said.

At the Oberlin School District, the numbers



were down one from where they left off last year. There are 169 students at the high school and 202 at the grade school, a total of 371, including preschool and early childhood.

Five years ago, the district had 441 students. Since then the district has declined 70 students. Ten years ago there were 515 students, a decline of 144, or 28 percent.

Superintendent Duane Dorshorst said he would like to think that the numbers are evening out. Class sizes are in the 20-to-25-student range, with some classes in the grade school in one section.

Part of the decline over the past years could

be people leaving town for job opportunities, he said, but a lot of it is an aging community. Many community members have already put their kids through school.

Even with the smaller classes and shrinking enrollment, the Oberlin School District still offers a quality education, said Dorshorst. The district is always looking for new programs to help the kids prepare for the future, he said.

One way to do that this year was to go to an eight-period day, which allows the district to offer more variety, including classes in family and consumer science, vocational agriculture and industrial arts.