

## Enrollment slide back in picture at WP Schools

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Thursday, 27 October 2011 17:44 - Last Updated Thursday, 27 October 2011 17:46

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By Tina Kitt

The Wauneta Breeze

Fewer kids than ever are walking the halls of the Wauneta-Palisade Schools attendance centers in Wauneta and Palisade — almost half as many as there were 15 years ago.

After a break in the trend last year, the decade-long enrollment slide is back in the picture for the 2011-12 school year.

As of last week, K-12 enrollment at WP totalled 176 compared to last year's 191. With the two pre-kindergarten classes added in enrollment reaches 208, compared with last year's Pre-K through 12th grade total of 215.

This drop puts enrollment at WP at it's lowest point ever since the two school districts merged in 1991, marking a 47 percent plummet from the 1996-97 school year when the high watermark for students at WP was set at 336.

When final approval to merge the two school districts was given 20 years ago, in November 1991, Wauneta had a K-12 enrollment of 224 and Palisade's K-12 enrollment totalled 94, combining for 318 students.

"Declining enrollment is a continuing issue, not only for our school district but for most other districts in our area," noted Dr. Stan Sibley, WP Superintendent. "The implications are wide-ranging," he added, noting that state-aid, academic offerings and optimizing an economy of scale are all negatively affected by lower enrollments.

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### Year-by-year numbers

K-12 enrollment at WP over the past 20 years shows the continuing slide:

- 2011-12 — 176 students (new low)
- 2010-11 — 191 students
- 2009-10 — 186 students (previous low)
- 2008-09 — 192 students
- 2007-08 — 201 students
- 2006-07 — 223 students
- 2005-06 — 237 students
- 2004-05 — 250 students

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- 2003-04 — 275 students
  
- 2002-03 — 277 students
  
- 2001-02 — 291 students
  
- 2000-01 — 309 students
  
- 1999-2000 — 317 students
  
- 1998-99 — 313 students
  
- 1997-98 — 313 students
  
- 1996-97 — 336 students (WP high)
  
- 1995-96 — 335 students
  
- 1994-95 — 331 students
  
- 1993-94 — 313 students
  
- 1992-93 — 311 students (WP 1st year)

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### Elementary numbers a bright spot

While enrollment at the high school and junior high level continues to contract, numbers among Wauneta-Palisade's elementary grades offer an optimistic view for the future of the the district.

High school enrollment this year stands at 52 after the loss of some students in recent weeks — earlier this fall there were nearly 60 enrolled in high school. Last year at this time there were 54 students enrolled at WP high school.

The district lost 21 students to graduation this past spring while this year's senior class now numbers 11.

It will be awhile before high school numbers recover, with only nine students in this year's eighth grade class, 14 in seventh grade and 12 in the sixth grade.

This year's fifth grade class, however, has 18 students and the first grade class totals 21. Other elementary class sizes include 13 kindergartners; 12 in second and third grades; and 13 in fourth grade.

At the pre-kindergarten level there are 17 youngsters enrolled in the Pre-K 4-year-old section and 15 in the Pre-K 3-year-old group.

Low numbers at the high school level have impacted sports in recent years with both the boys and girls now competing in Class D2 after several years at Class D1. School officials are currently weighing the possibility of the Bronco football team competing as a 6-man team for the next two years.

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