



SMETHPORT AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Administration Office

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Dear Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers,

As all of us who have been born and raised in this area are aware, school enrollments are continuing a steady decline that mirrors that of our overall population in the rural parts of Pennsylvania. Per the PA State Data Center, the population of individuals aged 0-19 is expected to drop by 7% over the next 20 years. This demographic picture is more dramatic for the rural counties. Per US Census data, McKean County's overall population is at a level not seen since the 1870's. Center for Rural PA data projects McKean County public school enrollment to decline another 19% between 2023 and 2033.

Smethport Area School District has seen an overall enrollment decline of 31% over the past 20 years. This is a regional issue as the exact same 31% student enrollment decline occurred in both Otto-Eldred SD and Kane Area SD over that same time period with Port Allegany SD dropping 27%. As we look closer at our own SASD data, this fall we currently enroll 57 Grade 12 students and 56 Grade 11 students. Only 33 students are enrolled in kindergarten and 36 students are currently in Grade 1. In areas of population decline, school cohorts fall as the student groups move through the system. The 36 students in Grade 1 now will most certainly fall to the low 30's by the time the cohort reaches high school.

The Smethport Area and Otto-Eldred School Districts adopted a resolution in October to establish a joint Cooperative Advisory Enrollment and Feasibility Committee in response to these regional demographic shifts and declining student enrollment. Composed of three appointed board members from each district alongside non-voting administrative officials, the committee is tasked with evaluating facility utilization, academic program alignment, shared staffing or transportation options, and potential grant opportunities.

The group will provide quarterly public progress updates and must deliver a final report with non-binding recommendations to both school boards within twelve months. Official policy changes or binding actions remain the responsibility of the individual boards of the Smethport Area SD and the Otto-Eldred SD respectively.

The driving rationale for opening discussions with our neighboring district is the importance of ***maintaining opportunities***. SASD will need regional partners to sustain some academic and extra-curricular programs over the next several years. To continue offering our elementary students the same opportunities in 5-10 years that current high school students experience will require good relationships with our neighboring districts.

Please reach out any time with questions. All meetings of the Cooperative Advisory Enrollment and Feasibility Committee will be open to the public. Once the meeting schedule is finalized, we will send it along to you.

Best regards,

Mr. Brice N. Benson

Mr. Brice N. Benson
Superintendent

Mr. Jeffrey S. Wagner
Business Manager

Mr. Douglas Dickerson
High School Principal

Ms. Kristin J. Zona
Elementary Principal

Mrs. Anna M. Stewart
Assistant Principal / Athletic Director

Mr. Kevin C. Kolivoski
Technology Coordinator