



Q & A Information for Washington Township Schools Community – *Elementary Schools – Optimal Size*

Question: What does the MSDWT believe is the most advantageous student enrollment range for our elementary schools?

Answer: Due to several factors (discussed below) we believe that the most appropriate enrollment range for our elementary schools is 650-725 students.

Question: How did the MSDWT conclude that this range is appropriate?

Answer: There is some research that suggests that 400 – 800 students is an optimum range for an elementary. Research suggests that a definition of a *small* elementary school is a school of less than 350 students and medium size elementary schools as those enrolling 400-800 students.

In Washington Township, we know that we do not have the budgetary means or the number of buildings and property to sustain several small elementary schools (500 students or less).

Our district has operated under guidelines that provide acceptable ranges for student/teacher ratio in each classroom as well as a suggested number of sections per grade level in each building. We have maintained a goal of 4 to 5 sections per grade level per building. This number of sections allows for principals to effectively schedule the student and teacher day in a manner that allows for students to attend special classes weekly (music, art, PE, media center, and World Language), and teachers to maintain some consistency of collaborative meeting time with colleagues to plan and prepare instruction for our students.

Research also suggests that negative effects begin to surface when schools exceed 760 – 800 students. These negative effects may be seen in student behavior as well as decreased academic performance. The negative effects tend to occur more quickly and consistently when student populations are diverse and complex (large numbers of New English Learners, students with significant learning or emotional needs, students in families that often change residences). Over the past several years, the MSDWT student population has become more diverse and complex.

Factoring our current elementary building sites, our current budgetary constraints (even with a successful referendum), and considering the above variables, we believe that we can maximize our limited resources best by maintaining elementary schools with enrollments in the 650-725 range.

Question: Why is major renovation needed in our current buildings if the plan is to open an eighth elementary school to address the overcrowding issues?

Answer: All of our current elementary school buildings are in need of major renovation regardless of the fact that they are over capacity.

When our elementary schools were constructed, they were not designed to handle the kitchen, cafeteria, safety and security needs, and classroom capacity of a 650-725 student elementary school. Our schools now require instructional spaces to meet the needs of students with exceptional needs. Our classrooms, small group instructional spaces, physical education spaces, cafeterias, and stages require updated access for our students with physical challenges. Technology infrastructure requirements are much different than the requirements at the time of original construction. Heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical challenges require updated and more efficient systems in all of our district buildings.