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Penridge enrollment may set another record

By: Charles W. Baum

When school bells ring for the opening day of school next Tuesday, the Penridge School District will likely set another record high.

"At this time of year the numbers are changing daily, but it looks like we'll be up just a bit," said Karen Curry, student accounting coordinator. "I'd really be surprised if we don't top last year's numbers and I think we'll end up close to 7,000 students."

Based on Aug. 23 projections, total enrollment is expected to increase slightly. Last year, Penridge ended the school year with about 6,950 students, a record number for the growing district that started last fall at 6,900. At last count, Penridge was expecting 6,933 students, although last-minute registrations continue this week.

Curry said new registrations have been steady all summer and never hit the usual mid-summer lull. Last year, she noted, the district enrolled 275 students in the last two weeks before school. Over the past week, the district has been averaging about 15 new students a day, and there were over 100 registration appointments set for this week and many other earlier inquiries from which the district hasn't heard back from people. "Of course, there will be some late withdrawals as well," she noted.

"Some people move in or out of the district and don't notify us until late," explained Assistant Superintendent Dr. Mel Sonier, noting that transfers, move-ins and withdrawals regularly occur in last August, changing the figures. "We've been encouraging folks to register since April," he said, noting late registrations can affect staffing and sections.

"Our elementary numbers have decreased, but we're feeling real pressure on the secondary level," said the administrator.

As of this week, the district count showed 3,506 elementary students, down from last year's 3,591. But secondary gained over a hundred, from 3,310 last year to 3,427 pupils in grades 7-12.

Current kindergarten levels showed a decrease from 408 last year to 381, and down considerably from 432 in 2000.

Sonier said he had 182 homeschoolers listed as of Aug. 16, down from 223 a year ago, which was a record high for Penridge.

Curry said the district currently has 21 students enrolled at the Souderton Charter School Collaborative and eight enrolled in cyber charter schools.

She added that even more registrations are expected in late fall with the completion of homes in several Hilltown developments now under construction. "We expect to see another influx of students in November and December as these homes become occupied."

"Elementary wise, we should be in good shape," said Sonier, noting that any late registrants where classes are at their maximum would be shifted to Guth Elementary in Perkasio.

"The real surge this year is at the high school, where we'll likely have over 2,200 students," he said. "That's our highest ever."

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And that does not come at a good time for the district which is about to embark on an unprecedented \$90 million renovation and expansion of the high school campus. There the freshman center will be expanded and remodeled to become the district's third middle school. Pennridge Upper High School will be expanded to handle 2,400 students under one roof, with the lower house (the original 1954 high school) to be demolished in 2005-06.

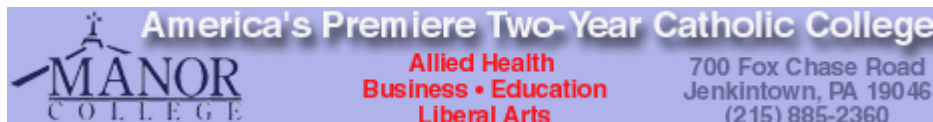
Final enrollment counts after the first few days of school determine where the district will add or subtract classroom teachers or aides, based on the district's class size guidelines.

Staff-wise, Sonier said the district is in good shape, with only two positions left to fill. New teacher inductions were held last week and workshops for all teachers are being held this week from Tuesday through Friday.

September enrollments over the past 15 years are as follows:

2002 (Mon.).....	6,933
2001.....	6,901
2000.....	6,859
1999.....	6,819
1998.....	6,774
1997.....	6,798
1996.....	6,642
1995.....	6,577
1994.....	6,250
1993.....	6,386
1992.....	6,225
1991.....	6,072
1990.....	5,879
1989.....	5,644
1988.....	5,425

The figures show 1,000 new students since 1990 and about 1,600 in the past 15 years.



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