

# Projections warn of decrease in CVS student population

By Thomas Franz 

C&G Newspapers

 November 11, 2015

CLINTON TOWNSHIP— Projections presented to the Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education on Nov. 2 from a Michigan State University professor show that the district will likely see decreased enrollment over the next five years.

Dr. Frederick Ignatovich, of MSU and Stanfred Consultants, presented his findings to the board, and concluded that a most likely scenario is that student population in grades K-12 will fall by 4.6 percent through 2020-21.

Ignatovich previously presented projections to the board during the 2012-13 school year. Those projections for the K-12 population were off by 17 students three years out.

Ignatovich based his projections on several factors, including the number of births in Macomb County, building permits within the district boundaries, and the impact of school of choice policies and public school academies.

“You’re in for some degree of decline, and there’s good reason for this,” Ignatovich said. “The births coming in are much less than the graduating class. The benefit of supplementing enrollment in the grades has diminished because housing is down, and other options are available.

“Growth you used to have when there weren’t as many options and when there were more housing developments is not likely to happen.”

Ignatovich also broke down his projections into optimistic, most likely and low forecasts for K-5, middle school and high school.

His most likely projection shows a 5.4 percent decrease in K-5, a 6.6 percent decrease in middle school, and a 2.2 percent decrease in high school over the next five years.

“What has happened at K-5 is that the decline has already been underway for a while. This typically happens as the births decrease; it first affects the elementary then works its way up,” Ignatovich said.

A long-range forecast to 2025-26 shows a most likely scenario for enrollment to drop 10.4 percent for middle school and 11.5 percent for high school.

Scott Sederlund, the district’s finance director, said the board takes Ignatovich’s projections into consideration for future planning purposes.

“When you’re looking at enrollment, obviously it has dollars attached to it, so when you have 80 percent of your budget as basically what’s driven off your enrollment, we use it quite a bit,” Sederlund said.

During the presentation, Ignatovich broke down each area of data and how it will influence enrollment.

For births, Ignatovich provided data that showed that the number of births in Michigan has gradually decreased since 1955 to present day, and it’s currently bottoming out. In Macomb County, the number of births has rebounded slightly over the past two or three years.

Statewide, Ignatovich said, the lower number of births is due primarily to the increased number of younger people moving out of state.

“The younger people took with them the potential to have children even at a reduced rate, and had them somewhere else,” Ignatovich said. “Births are the big engine that drives the number of students. We don’t clone students, we don’t produce them, we don’t manufacture them.”

Ignatovich also presented a ratio that compared the number of births countywide to how many of them show up as kindergarten students in Chippewa Valley schools in five years.

In 2001-02, that ratio was 10.37 percent. It peaked in 2007-08 at 11.84 during a growth period for the district, but has fallen to 10.89 presently.

“What is happening over the last six years is you’ve been getting a smaller piece of the pie. What’s happened in particular is the growth of charter schools,” Ignatovich said. “There’s been a decrease in nonpublic schools, but an increase in competition between K-12 public school systems.”

For building permits, Ignatovich showed that while Clinton Township is essentially built out, there remains some potential for growth in the northern half of Macomb Township.

“You can’t count on a lot of new homes coming out of Clinton Township,” Ignatovich said. “Chippewa Valley schools will no longer benefit from great appreciation from people moving in. The economy in the area will not support it. The economy of Michigan won’t support it, and the demographics won’t support it.”

To show the impact of public school academies on the district, Ignatovich presented data showing that enrollment in Macomb ISD public school academies increased 158.4 percent since 2002, from 2,162 students to 5,586.

In that same time, enrollment in Macomb ISD K-12 public school districts decreased 4.3 percent, or 130,523 students to 124,905.

Currently, however, Ignatovich said there are no new potential openings for public school academies within the district area.

In terms of traffic of students leaving the district boundaries to study in other districts, or students from the outside coming in, Ignatovich’s data showed that Chippewa Valley schools gained a net enrollment increase of about 600 students in 2014.

The number of nonresident students attending Chippewa schools has increased from 92 in 2002 to 1,468 in 2014, while the number of CVS students attending elsewhere has increased from 304 in 2002 to 823 in 2014.

“(In 2006) you became well aware of what was starting was the decline of your student base, and to help offset this was the possibility of taking nonresident students,” Ignatovich said.

Despite the gloomy outlook, Ignatovich said the district is still doing relatively well compared to other state districts.

“You’re still in a pretty fortunate position relatively speaking. There are school districts in Michigan that will dissolve, and there are districts under financial stress so much that the state has stepped in to run,” Ignatovich said. “You’re nowhere near close to that, but you have to deal with the reality of this problem.”

Sederlund added that the projections will aid the district in future budgeting and policymaking.

“Having people like Dr. Ignatovich and others project these things who have the expertise of this helps tremendously,” Sederlund said. “We use the projections when we’re long-range planning, looking at building utilization and budgets. It’s so unpredictable that we use people like him to make it more predictable.”