

Oct. 27, 2005

Representative Erik Simonson
P.O.Box 652
Duluth, MN 55801

Dear Representative Simonson:

Thank you for allowing me to attend your working session on Oct. 19 on the effect of Edison opening a High School and its impact on the other High Schools in the city. It was very informative and thanks for looking into this issue.

Being new to the group, I did not feel comfortable speaking up, but there were several issues which I think are germane to the discussion but which weren't brought up or else had questionable comments.

These are the five areas that I would like to bring to your attention:

1. The long-term decrease in the enrollment in the Duluth Public Schools.
2. The loss of students from Duluth Public Schools compared to other neighboring public schools from 1996-2015.
3. The loss of students from Duluth Public Schools compared to neighboring and private schools from 2014 to 2015.
4. The recent history of the number of school age children in Duluth has remained fairly constant.
5. What is the cause of the loss of students from the Duluth Public Schools?

I have compiled some relevant data that will help elucidate these topics and relate them to your overall discussion.

Again, thank you for your interest in school and education in Duluth. I am looking forward to participating in further discussions.

Sincerely,

Art Johnston
School Board member, Duluth Public Schools
37 N. 93rd Av. W.
Duluth, MN

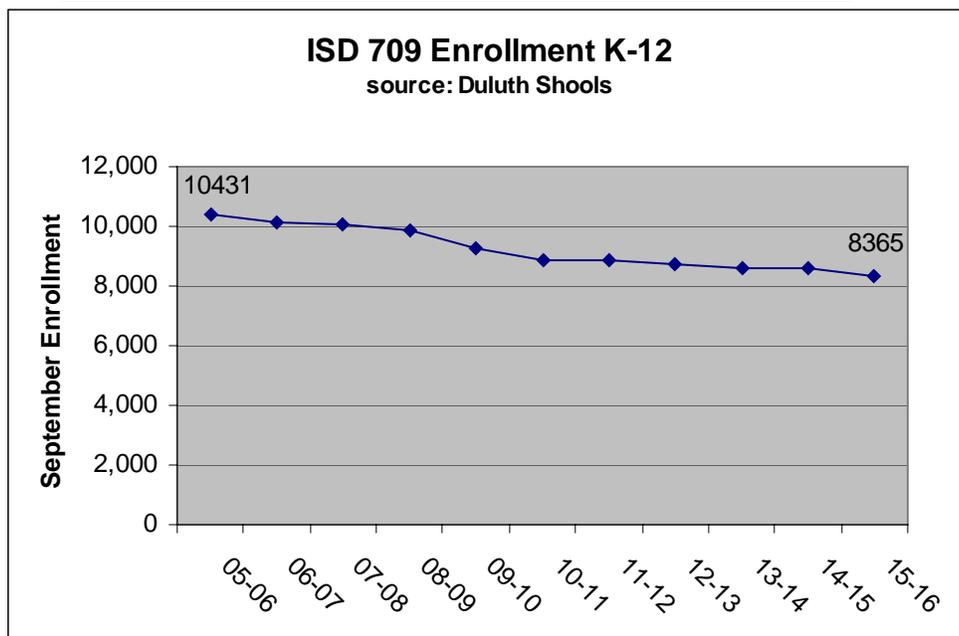
1. The long-term decrease in the enrollment in the Duluth Public Schools.

The student enrollment in the Duluth Public School has been decreasing for a long time. Back in the 1970's, we had about 25,000 students. We now have 8365. For the last ten years, we have lost over 2000 students. This last year alone, we have lost 228 students. There appears to be no let-up in the decline. See the attached table and graph.

While the impact of the not-yet-built Edison high school is a concern, it has not caused this constant, on-going decrease in the Duluth Public school enrollment.

The following table is the September enrollment for Duluth Public Schools for the last ten years.

Year	K-12 Enrollment	Change from previous year
2005	10431	
2006	10133	-287
2007	10083	-61
2008	9868	-215
2009	9260	-608
2010	8862	-398
2011	8885	+23
2012	8758	-127
2013	8583	-175
2014	8593	+10
2015	8365	-228

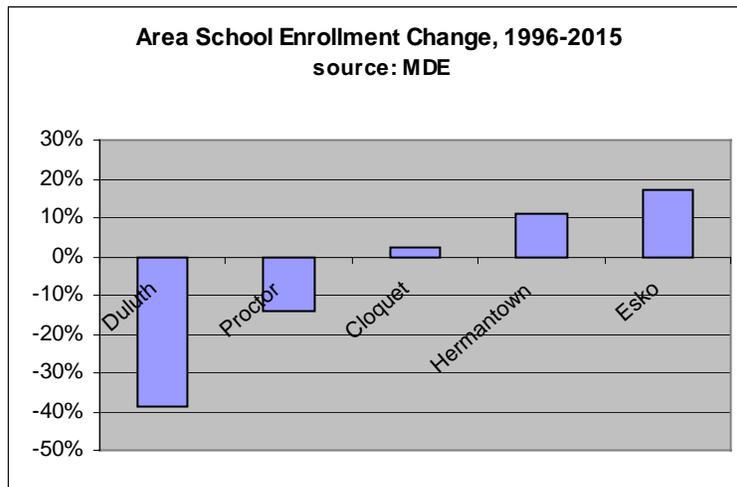


2. The loss of students from Duluth Public Schools compared to other neighboring public schools from 1996-2015.

In trying to find answers to why the Duluth Public Schools are losing enrollment in recent years, we can also look at the neighboring public schools in Hermantown, Proctor, Esko, and Cloquet. Is our entire local area in a decline? Or is just the Duluth Public Schools in a decline?

In looking back to 1970, all area schools lost some enrollment, but none of these schools lost the proportion of students like the Duluth schools have. And in the last twenty years, most of these other schools have had stable or increasing enrollment while the Duluth schools have had a steady, significant decline. Compared to the rest of the state of Minnesota, twenty years ago, Duluth public schools were the 9th largest in the state, but they are now the 22nd largest.

Here is a graph showing the enrollment change in our neighboring public schools:



It is interesting to note that Proctor shows the only decrease, besides Duluth; but that recent headlines in their newspaper that read: "Enrollment Hits 12-year High", indicates a steady increase in enrollment.

3. The loss of students from Duluth Public Schools compared to neighboring and private schools from 2014 to 2015.

As noted above, the Duluth Public Schools have lost 228 students this year compared to last year (Sept. 2014-15). How have the other neighboring schools fared this year? What's happened to the charter and private schools? Is this decline a trend in our area, or is Duluth unique in this decline? Here is a table for the neighboring schools, charter schools and private:

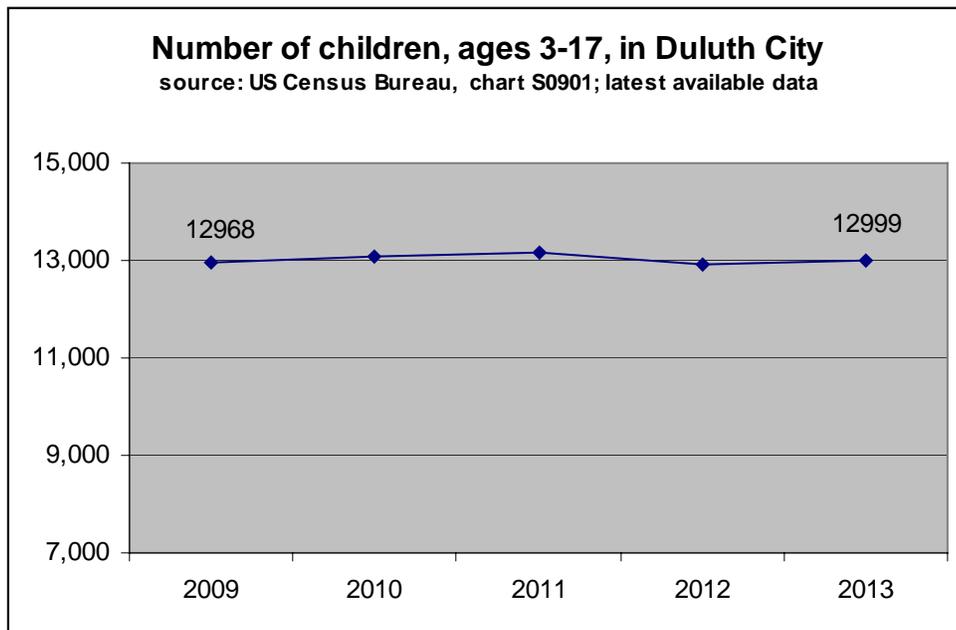
School	2014 K-12 Enrollment	2015 K-12 Enrollment	Change in one year
Duluth Public Schools	8593	8365	-228
Cloquet	2472	2503	+31
Hermantown	2060	2123	+63
Proctor	1793	1828	+35
Edison Charter Schools (K-8)	1333	1380	+47
Esko*	1201	1235	+34
Marshall (4-12)	446	446	0
Wrenshall	352	363	+11
North Shore Community School (K-6)	333	347	+14
Lakeview Christian Academy*	255	247	-8
Harbor City International	210	223	+13
St. James Catholic School (K-8)	159	157	-2

It is clear that not only have the Duluth Public Schools lost much more enrollment in the past decade compared to neighboring schools, but that that trend is continuing through the enrollment for this year.

4. **The recent history of the number of school age children in Duluth has reminded fairly constant.**

What is driving the decrease in student enrollment in the Duluth Public Schools? Is it because of a demographics shift where women are having fewer babies, and/or we have an aging population in Duluth? The census in Duluth has been steady since 1990 at about 87,000 residents.

Since 2009, there has been no reduction in the number of school age children living in the Duluth. A decrease in the number of school age children is not driving the decrease in Duluth Public School enrollment.



5. **What is the cause of the loss of students from the Duluth Public Schools?**

Whether or not Edison opens a new high school, the loss of students in Duluth Public Schools shows every indication of a continued decline.

The continued loss of student enrollment in the Duluth Public School is an area of grave concern. The loss of revenue caused by this decline can jeopardize the financial solvency of the Duluth Public Schools. Each lost student is a loss of about \$11,000 in state aid. The 228 drop of enrollment this year equates to a \$2.5 million revenue drop.

This loss is particularly concerning after the Duluth Public Schools have just finished investing \$315 million in new buildings. Debt payments alone are about \$23 million per year. With a declining enrollment, the debt payments don't go down, and the debt payments are increasingly, and negatively, impacting the money available for classrooms.

Reasons for the loss must be found so the decline can be stopped. Could the reasons for the declining enrollment be caused by Duluth's six-hour school day; large class sizes; low graduation rates and test scores (particularly in west Duluth); a large achievement gap; or bad public relationships?

It seems clear that this is not a regional or even a local issue, but the cause must be laid on the Duluth Public Schools. What are they doing wrong that has driven parents away? How can that be reversed?