

WEST ADA RECORDS FIRST ENROLLMENT DROP IN DECADES

Sami Edge • 10/13/2020

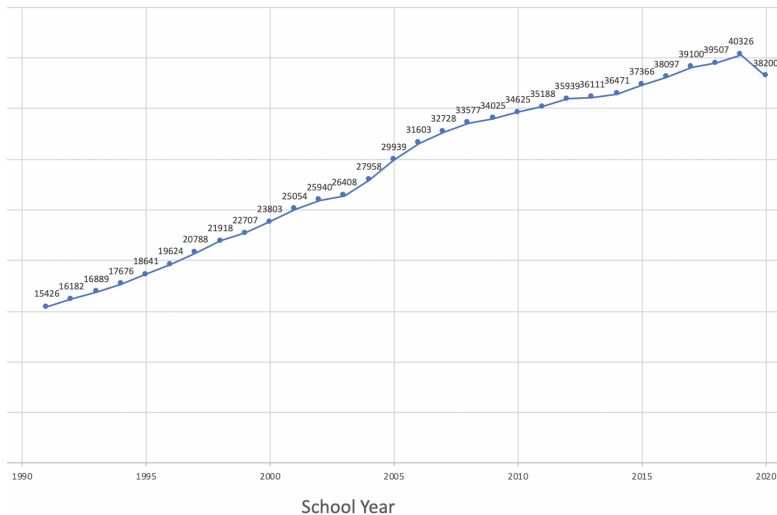


Idaho's largest school district is reporting an enrollment loss for the first time in recent memory.

West Ada has seen a steady climb in enrollment since at least 1991, according to historical data collected by Idaho Education News. Even as charter schools opened and expanded within the district's territory, breakneck growth in the Meridian area meant West Ada added students every year.

Until now. West Ada's enrollment is down 2,200 students this fall — about 5.4 percent from last year — because of COVID-19.

West Ada Historical Fall Enrollment



“We know with COVID-19 there are parents who are simply not comfortable sending their students back to school,” district spokeswoman Char Jackson said.

Exiting families gave the district various reasons for leaving, Jackson said, including moving to homeschooling or independent online programs in lieu of West Ada's brick-and-mortar or online options.

West Ada is not alone. Neighboring Boise, the state's second-largest district, was also down about

5 percent (or 1,500 students) (<https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/September%202020%20Monthly%20Enr>) at the end of September. Other brick-and-mortar districts and public charters are reporting declines from 4 to 9 percent

(<https://www.idahoednews.org/news/districts-report-enrollment-drops-to-start-the-year/>).

Student loss in Ada and Canyon counties likely isn't because of any exodus of families from the area. While estimates of population change over the past six months are hard to come by, Southwest Idaho groups say the demand for housing remains on the rise.

New residential building permits in Ada and Canyon counties are keeping pace with the growth rate the state had seen pre-pandemic, said Amy Luft, communication coordinator with the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho.

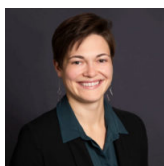
"It's still a very hot market," she said.

New charter school growth can't account for the magnitude of the decline in Boise or West Ada either. One new charter, Doral Academy (<https://www.idahoednews.org/news/five-new-charter-will-open-for-business-this-fall/>), opened its doors in Meridian this year but anticipated bringing on only about 200 students. A few other charters in Meridian and Garden City were also expected to expand by adding new grade levels this year.

West Ada planned for a flat budget this year, Jackson said. The drop in enrollment will likely impact district finances — but the extent of that hit is still being calculated. The district hopes to use federal CARES Act funding to help offset losses.

Districts across the state will report their enrollment to the State Board of Education this week. Keep checking EdNews for updates on a comprehensive fall 2020 enrollment report.

Idaho EdNews data analyst Randy Schrader contributed to this report.



ABOUT SAMI EDGE

Reporter Sami Edge, a University of Oregon graduate, joined Idaho Education News in 2019. She is a 2019 Education Writers Association fellow reporting on Latino student outcomes in Idaho. She also is a 2019 American

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