Fewer students in MCS middle schools

MCS enrollment has declined by 278 overall — 150 from grades 6-8

By Michelle Kinsey
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MUNCIE — Muncie Community Schools has seen a dramatic drop in its enrollment, with most of those students leaving the district at the middle school level.

According to a recent Average Daily Membership (ADM) report sent to the state, MCS has 5,822 students, down 278 from the official ADM report taken last spring. The state now requires an ADM count in the spring of each school year.

The biggest drops from spring to fall were at the middle schools — enrollment dropped 60 students in sixth grade and 64 students in seventh grade. The eighth grade numbers decreased by 26.

This year, Wilson Middle School students were moved to the Southside High School building after all of the high school students were moved into one building, Central High School.

Most of the other drops in enrollment at each grade level were in the 20-35 range.

There were two grades that saw an increase in students. There are 56 more fifth-graders and 18 more eleventh-grade students this school year.

Because students do not have to tell MCS why they are leaving a school or the district, it is difficult to pinpoint why numbers have decreased overall.

At the end of the last school year, there were several parents who expressed concern over the merger of the two high schools, indicating they would pull their children from the district. And discussions at recent board meetings have raised concerns about the impact of area charter and private schools, with board President Tony Costello even asking for MCS officials to look into enrollment numbers at those schools.

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BSU students learn to investigate arson

New class lets students get hands-on experience with fire scenes

By Rachel Pyle rpyle@muncie.gannett.com

Two dorm rooms caught on fire Tuesday, and one room sustained major damage. Investigators suspect arson, but the bands responsible remain unknown at this time.

In fact, the culprits won’t be known until the end of Ball State University’s current semester. The fires were set intentionally but it was all part of a new arson investigation class offered at the school.

John Pichtel, professor of natural resources and environmental management, teaches the course. He said he decided to set fire to the fake dorm rooms to give students a chance to look at a fire scene up close.

“There are hundreds of thousands of fires every year, and a large number of those are arson,” he said, adding that the exercise gives students the chance to investigate a fire, look for clues, and even present their findings in mock court of law. “In
Firefighters set to two mock dorm rooms at Ball State’s Heath Farm in order to set up a study site for the university’s new arson investigation class. The staged event also demonstrated the safety benefits of sprinklers in dorm rooms.

A Ball State University student investigates a mock arson at Ball State’s Heath Farm. A new Ball State class, headed by natural resources and environmental management professor John Pichtel, gives students the opportunity to participate in a realistic arson investigation.

Arson

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many of these cases, the arsonist may go free simply because of insufficient evidence.”

Nearly 30 students investigated the origin and cause of the dorm room fires. They spent a good portion of the afternoon collecting samples, preserving evidence and taking extensive documentation of the rooms.

Jessica Blessing, 21, was incident commander at the mock scene. She said the knowledge she gained from Tuesday’s investigation will be invaluable once she has graduated. She added that the class also allows her to learn about grim scenarios but that still remained engaging and fun.

“I’ve never had an arson class so it’s pretty fun,” she said, with a laugh.

David Blankenship, 21, was assigned the safety officer position for the activity. As a former volunteer firefighter, Blankenship said he has seen his share of fires, noting that safety is always the number one priority.

“I make sure everyone is doing what they’re supposed to be doing and they’re doing it safely,” he said. “That’s the biggest priority even if it is in a simulation.”

He added that interactive learning takes classes to the next level.

“Textbooks and lectures are one thing, but when you get to that hands-on stuff it’s always better,” he said. “You get to apply what you’ve learned.”

Over the next several weeks, Pichtel said, his class will examine the evidence they collected and hopefully find the culprit.

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