



A Report on

**Unit 5
2025**

**by the McLean County Unit District No. 5
Citizens Advisory Council**

March 2006

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Unit 5 2025 Report

March 15, 2006

Explanation of Report

The Unit 5 2025 Committee of the Citizens Advisory Council was initially tasked with a wide-ranging study which covered areas such as long-range planning, community projections and the mission of Unit 5. In an effort to lay the foundation for what is assumed to be an ongoing committee within the CAC, this year's committee has researched some key components of future planning and attempted to provide a solid starting point for continued studies and recommendations from future committees. As such, this report attempts to provide some projected data and necessary recommendations based upon that information, as well as highlight the key areas that this committee feels must be considered immediately and in the near future.

The core areas of study for this report fall into the following topics:

- Transportation and Facilities
- Recruiting and Retaining Talented Teachers and Administrators
- Business and Curriculum Needs in the Present and Future
- Merger of Unit 5 and District 87
- Important Data

While these are the areas that this committee focused on, it is hoped that as this project continues the research and recommendations will deal with further studies of these topics as well as additional topics as the District and CAC see needed. Essentially, this committee sees this report as an introduction and the beginning of much more work into the changing needs and issues facing the education of the children of this community.

TOPIC: Transportation and Facilities in 2025

Committee was tasked to envision what to expect in 2025 in regards to busing and schools. This task was a difficult one to predict because of the continual rising cost of fuels and the expansion of subdivisions around the unit 5 area. Our committee decided to interview the Transportation Director, Bert Popejoy and Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Human Resources, John Pye for their insight into the future.

FINDINGS:

TRANSPORTATION

Unit 5 currently has 146 buses in their fleet. This includes 1 back-up vehicle for every 10.

Alternative fuels like Ethanol, which is a bio-fuel, were tried with little success. They were found to burn cleaner, but there was not a significant savings in the cost per gallon verse the miles per gallon.

A tiering program will decrease the number of buses used to transport students, but ultimately, the growth of the community will catch up with the district and we will have the same amount of buses that we have now.

There will be an increase in maintenance personnel to either accommodate for the increase of buses used, or to help maintain buses that are running more miles because of a tiering program

FACILITIES

Estimate are that within the next 5-10 years there will be a need for a new elementary school and a new junior high school due to the current growth rates.

Trying to keep the small town feel to our schools is becoming increasingly harder due to the fact that more families are moving into our area for economic reasons. Class sizes will grow until new facilities are built.

Expansion of existing facilities is already happening at Grove and possible other schools to follow. The cost of not only the construction, but to hire new teachers for those classes will add to the burden of funding the school district.

Portable units brought in to help with over crowding are only a temporary fix. Permanent structures are needed to deal with an ongoing problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

We recommend that as far as transportation is concerned, the district should look into other alternative fuels such as CNG (compressed natural gas), electric, hybrid and even

hydrogen fuel types to try to find a cheaper alternative to gas or diesel. There are many school districts across the country that have been successful with alternative fuels as far back as 1988. The use of these fuels could also impact the amount of maintenance needed for each vehicle as these fuels tend to burn cleaner, causing less build-up on the engines. Current buses owned by the district could be phased out over time and replaced with alternative fuel vehicles.

Implementing the full 3-tiered transportation system would also decrease the number of buses used and allow for more flexible scheduling of reserve buses for extra curricular activities. This would also help with fuel cost and maintenance as there would be less buses used on a daily basis.

Our recommendations for facilities are to build additional schools to accommodate the growing population. The number of schools and their size will have to be determined by the school board, the citizens and the school district. A forum should be used to gather input from all three parties so that all findings and concerns are aired and discussed. The community needs to understand that more schools will keep class sizes down and achievement scores high. Asking the community to support referendums for education or buildings will be easier if they know that is what we are working towards.

CONCLUSION:

This topic should be looked at again next year and a committee should continue on where we left off. That committee should look into the cost effectiveness of the alternative fuels and also to see what types of funding can be used to help offset the cost of new facilities and operations. Local, state and federal agencies should be contacted to see what they can do for our district in the form of grants or program funding. When a community such as ours continues to grow at its current rate, there will always be some growing pains to be experienced. The community and the district need to have more open and frank discussions about what level of education we want for our children and how to achieve it.

TOPIC: Recruiting and Retaining Talented Teachers and Administrators

In order to reach our vision of Unit 5 being the premier school district in 2025 we must have talent and diverse teachers and administrators. In an effort to ensure that we took a look at the district's current hiring process and criteria. These policies are described in Mclean County Unit District No. 5 Board of Education Policy. In order to stay current in our needs evaluation, this committee has analyzed current data and projected needs in the fields of teaching and administration.

FINDINGS:

Unit 5 has what the community sees as a very talented and capable staff of teachers and administrators. Most would agree that the educators of Unit 5 are gifted and perform very well in terms of educating the children of the district. In terms of the talent level, the committee feels that Unit 5 can compete with any school district.

The area of research which raised flags was in terms of diversity of the educators within Unit 5. While the committee wishes to make it clear that this is not an attempt to discredit the accomplishments of the current staff, it is an area of concern as the district grows and further hiring/turnover occur. In terms of current numbers, the demographics of teachers and administrators are relatively limited in diversity. While there are many ways to evaluate actual diversity, this committee sees data such as the fact that only 1.8% of teachers and administrators are from minority populations and only 19.2% are male as areas where improvements can be made.

There is a growing shortage of diverse and highly qualified teachers. In today's society school districts must stay ahead of the competition to ensure hiring the most talented and diverse teachers and administrators. Our current policies seem more like general guidelines and compliance with federal, state, and equal opportunity laws. Future policies that are established need to be more detailed, pro-active, and include incentives. These efforts can attract teachers who meet high standards and reflect the diversity of the students that they will teach.

Unit 5's Current Hiring Process and Criteria as it Relates to Recruiting:

- The Superintendent is responsible for recruiting efforts for personnel in compliance with board policies.
- Their minority recruitment involves advertising in minority publications, participating in minority job fairs and recruiting at colleges and universities with significant minority enrollment.
- Applicants are initially screened by the school's principal.
- The district then hires the best qualified person consistent with budget, staffing requirements, equal opportunities and minority recruitment.
- All applicants must complete the district application, have current teaching certification, submit to criminal background investigation, pass a physical examination and tuberculosis test, and complete all required employment forms.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create incentives for the teachers and administrators such as: signing bonuses, housing incentives, loan forgiveness and tuition waivers.
- Look at alternative ways of recruiting minority teachers because current methods don't seem to be effective. Teacher statistics from the Unit 5 school report card show that the district has 98.2 % White, 1.2% Black, 0.4% Hispanic, 0.2% Asian, and 0% Native Americans. All of which are lower than the states average.
- Find other places than college to look for recruits. Look at individuals that start to teach mid-career. These individuals can bring a variety of experience to the classroom.
- Search outside of our community more for teachers. We get a lot of recruits from Illinois State and Illinois Wesleyan Universities. While they are highly qualified they all have similar educational studies and experiences which inhibits diversity.
- Look into programs such as "Troops to Teachers" and how such programs might assist with bringing in a more diverse staff. It is important to have teachers and administrators from all walks of life, as diversity goes beyond race, sex and other commonly held views. Unit 5 could benefit from having staff with background in the military for a number of reasons such as travel experience which provides different perspective, discipline which can be communicated to the students, and experience working under a wide variety of conditions.

CONCLUSION:

If Unit 5 is to see continued success as a district, steps must be taken to ensure that the staff is talented and diverse. This committee sees the current staff as incredibly gifted and changes to current policies/recruitment methods can only improve upon the current abilities and maintain the high standards that already exist. The methods of recruiting talented teachers and administrators must include some means to ensure that staff is diverse and representative of the community.

TOPIC: Business and Curriculum Needs in the Present and Future

In order to analyze the effectiveness of current curriculum and make recommendations for current and future curriculum, the committee felt that it would be necessary to look at the current and future needs of the business and professional world. While the education process is important for a number of aspects, the reality is that the most essential part of any successful education program is to prepare students for their future and especially to prepare them to be successful in their future employment and professional endeavors. To that end, this committee researched the changing business environment and potential changes in curriculum which will assist the students of this district in excelling in the competitive environment of the business world.

FINDINGS:

According to research of experts Frank Levy of MIT and Richard Murnane of Harvard, certain skills will become increasingly important for success as the economy evolves. The skills which will become vitally important include the ability to recognize complex patterns and the ability to utilize complex communication methods. These skills are the type necessary to analyze business trends and opportunities, manage people and develop advertising and sales campaigns. It is in these areas that experts Levy and Murnane see the greatest growth and opportunity for success in the economy of the near future.

Business Week magazine recently included reports which analyzed the coming needs of the business world. In their report, the magazine stated that in coming years businesses will be looking for people who are flexible, creative and work well with others. Furthermore, the report indicated that the jobs which will pay well in the future will be those which are virtually impossible to reduce down to a recipe for success. These attractive jobs where opportunities will exist--such as management, teaching, and sales—require creativity, flexibility and lifelong learning. Furthermore, these jobs require an ability to interact with others face to face and in a variety of situations.

The sum of the research points to a necessity to ensure that the students of this district are given the opportunity to experience a variety of experiences and educational methods. In order to ensure the best chance of success, students must receive top level “traditional” education such as math, science and the humanities, but other areas should be taught as well to provide well-rounded education. Following are some methods that this committee feels may provide further opportunities to students which will equip them to succeed in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

International Baccalaureate Program

The International Baccalaureate Program is an exclusive international academic program that appeals to highly motivated students. Founded in 1968, the program is currently in 1,742 schools in 122 countries, serving more than 200,000 students aged 3 to 19 years. They can be offered as a continuum or individually. The idea is to ensure that schools are

offering college-bound students the best opportunities available. Several Illinois schools, including Lincoln Park High School in Chicago and Richwoods High School in Peoria, offer this program.

Designed as a comprehensive curriculum, the IB program incorporates special features into a primarily liberal arts curriculum. While attractive to gifted students, this is not limited to the academically gifted. The concept behind the program is to develop an “international open-mindedness.” All IB students learn a second language and the skills to live and work with others internationally — essential for life in the 21st century.

The Primary Years Program for pupils aged 3 to 12 focuses on the development of the whole child in the classroom and in the world outside. The Middle Years Program for pupils aged 11 to 16 provides a framework of academic challenge and life skills, achieved through embracing and transcending traditional school subjects. The Diploma Program for students aged 16 to 19 is a demanding two-year curriculum leading to final examinations and a qualification that is accepted by universities around the world.

Students in the IB program are typically segregated from the remainder of the school in most classes but participate in extra-curricular activities. The curriculum in this program represents the best from many different countries rather than the exported national system of any one. In addition to offering challenging curriculum, IB supports teachers with extensive training opportunities. In addition to taking a hefty class load--including literature, foreign language, science, math, arts and electives--students in the IB program are required to take courses in critical thinking. This class is intended to challenge students and develop a learning approach that unifies different subjects, which is important to the business community.

The program also has a community action component, which requires students to participate in events outside of the classroom, including theater productions, sports and community service activities. The idea is to educate the whole person.

DUAL LANGUAGE/FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Dual Language classes are designed for groups of children from two language backgrounds to learn from each other in an academically enriched setting. The program not only promotes high academic achievement in two languages, but also provides opportunities for multicultural awareness and sensitivity. Furthermore, studying a second language increases future employment opportunities, helps one understand other cultures, enhances cognitive skills, and gives a new perspective on one's own culture according to the schools that offer these programs, including those in Highland Park and Hoffman Estates.

The benefit of this program is that children can utilize their high ability to learn a second language at an early age, as they are learning other subjects.

In Highland Park, for example, the Dual Language kindergarten is taught 80 percent in the minority language (Spanish) and 20 percent in the majority language (English).

Spanish speaking children acquire much of their English from classroom peers, naturally. After second grade, instruction in English increases 10 percent each year until fifth grade, when the language usage reaches 50/50 parity. Students participating in the Dual Language Program are 50 percent language majority students with no prior second language experience and are accepted through first grade. The other 50 percent are language minority students, who are accepted through third grade.

In one Highland Park school, the program has grown from 56 students in 1996 to 325 students in 2002, with a waiting list.

A dual language program in Unit 5 also would help solve the problem of locating the ever-growing number of ESL classes throughout the district. While the dual language program is quite forward thinking and would be an asset to Unit 5, at the very least, opportunities should be investigated to offer foreign language at the primary school level.

Proponents of foreign language instruction say it helps children become better students and opens their eyes to international cultures and careers. As more and more non-English speaking people move to this country and businesses are becoming more globalized, this is becoming even more important. Recognizing the trend towards a dual language society, the U.S. Senate even made 2005 the Year of Foreign Language Study.

BUSINESS COOPERATIVES

For schools to provide businesses with the type of employees they need, the two institutions need to work together to educate today's children. Schools must link with the world outside of the classrooms through business/community partnerships, mentoring/tutoring opportunities, and service learning opportunities.

An example of this would be the CISCO computer networking program at Woodruff High School. The class is part of the school's Technology Pathway, to serve students seeking a career in computer technology. The idea is to provide students the ability to find gainful employment right out of high school as well as a foundation for college.

Charles Ruppman, chairman of the board of AFFINA, a telemarketing firm, is helping finance the project to increase the pool of trained computer employees in Peoria. He has contributed \$50,000 and many computers in his effort to assist the program and in turn improve the abilities of potential future employees. Such a program in Unit 5 could easily tap into local businesses who wish to see the benefits carried out in future employees as well.

CONCLUSION:

The recommendations listed in this report are only a brief introduction to many possibilities. While the committee feels that these are excellent starting points and successful programs, the general need is for the district to expand current curriculum to include courses and programs which will prepare students to succeed in an evolving business environment.

TOPIC: Merger of Unit 5 and District 87

Committee was tasked to research and advise regarding merging McLean County Unit District Number 5 and Bloomington District 87. Discussion of a merger has historically come and gone locally, yet always exists in the background as a possibility. In an effort to provide community insight, the Unit 5 2025 Committee of the CAC looked into various sources to provide some current input for the Board of Education. Sources for this report included current Board members and administrators as well as numerous case studies and expert opinions.

FINDINGS:

Current Data

- Current enrollment for Unit 5 is 11,780 students.
- Most recent data for District 87 (2004-2005) was 5,533 students.
- Combined total of the two districts: 17,313 students.

Future Projections

According to the most recent projections provided to the Citizens Advisory Council by Dr. Alan Chapman, Superintendent of Unit 5, Unit 5 is expected to see continued growth near current pace. According to the same presentation and discussions with educators within District 87, it is assumed based upon recent history that District 87 will see minor fluctuation in numbers with essentially a plateau near current levels.

Prevailing Research

There has been an increase in research looking at district size and the education process in recent times. While the research is still not sufficient to make claims of certainty, there seems to be a general belief that “large” districts tend to get off task and have greater difficulty in educating students. Since there is no definitive number as to where the benefits of district growth stop and the problems of being too large begin, this committee will only use the data as a general guidance, but important information nonetheless.

The current data as reported by groups such as the Education Intelligence Agency and the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution describe “mission drift” of large districts and trends to break up large districts in population centers. The report by the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution was written by Mike Antonucci and is perhaps the most cited research in the field. The concerns raised by Antonucci focus on the financial drift that large districts (typically those with more than 3000 employees) have--a shift of resources from classrooms and instruction to administration and infrastructure. Other studies found by the committee focus on performance of students within larger schools and larger districts. These core areas, finances and education results, will serve as the crux of the recommendations to follow.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Any recommendation focuses on the ability of the Board of Education to answer two key questions when considering a merger:

1. Will the merger allow the District to better educate the students of this community (i.e. magnet schools, smaller classes, better facilities, etc.)?
2. Will the merger either save money for the District or, if not, provide better educational opportunity for near the same cost?

If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, the committee recommends that the Board take the necessary steps to establish feasibility of a merger. If other concerns such as union issues, approval questions and the like can be positively dealt with, then a merger MAY make sense if the community at large wants it. This possibility, however, must also take into account the prevailing research regarding district size and ensure that the standard downfalls of large districts can be overcome.

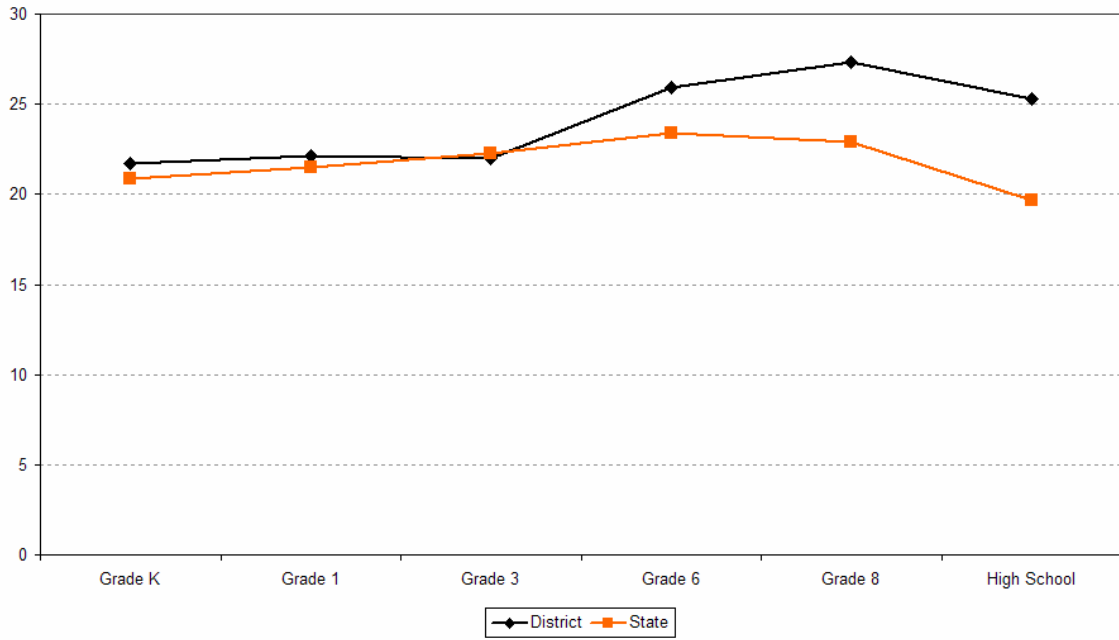
If the above questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, the committee feels that the Board should resist any discussion of merger. While there are some convenience issues which a merger may deal with, the larger questions above should be of primary importance. If the education of the children of this community cannot be improved or money cannot be saved by a merger, the committee feels that there is no reason to look any further into the possibility until the above questions CAN be answered in the affirmative.

Based upon the prevailing research and the current size of the districts/projected growth, the committee wishes to voice concern regarding any potential merger. A merger would place the district below the "large district" standard for most of the studies, but still create a much larger district with the potential to fall into issues related to large districts. In fact, if growth continues at current rates, the more logical step might be a split of Unit 5 into multiple districts as has been seen in many districts of larger numbers. While this is not the current recommendation of the committee, it is intended to point out that the solution to this question may be far from what is expected.

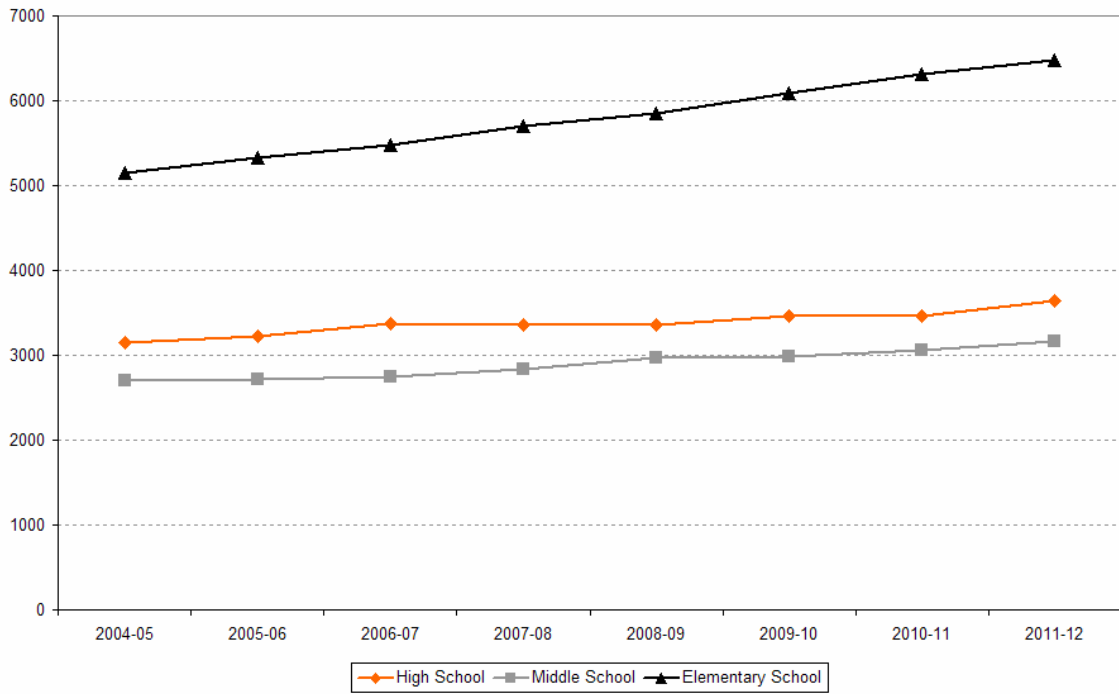
CONCLUSION:

The committee feels that a merger could only be pursued following research into the above issues of finances and educational opportunities. It is the belief of this group that a merger is not needed or recommended at this time, but the topic should be periodically evaluated in order to ascertain the current status and future growth of Unit 5. The committee recognizes that this is an issue which will always be discussed in local circles, but the facts displayed in the existing research seem to provide warning signals against a merger. If the Board chooses to take any action on a merger with District 87, the committee recommends that the initial work revolve solely around whether a merger would save money or improve the ability of the larger district to educate children. All things considered, it is also recommended that this issue be revisited by a similar committee on a regular basis in order to ensure that all factors are considered and the best options for the district are pursued.

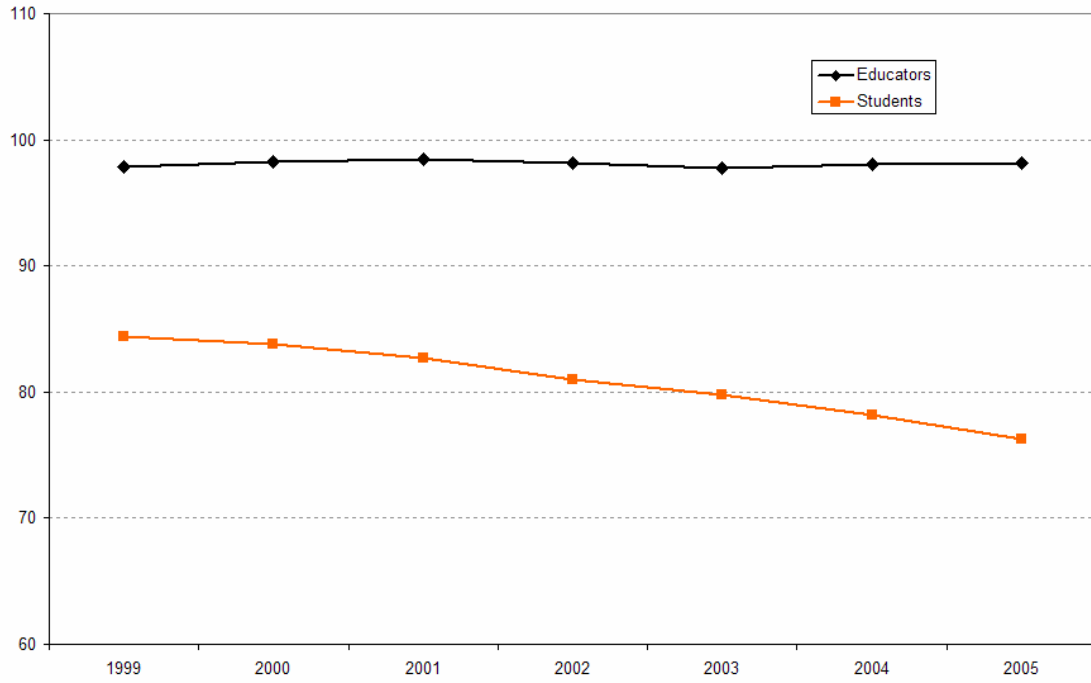
Classroom size
2005 District Report Card



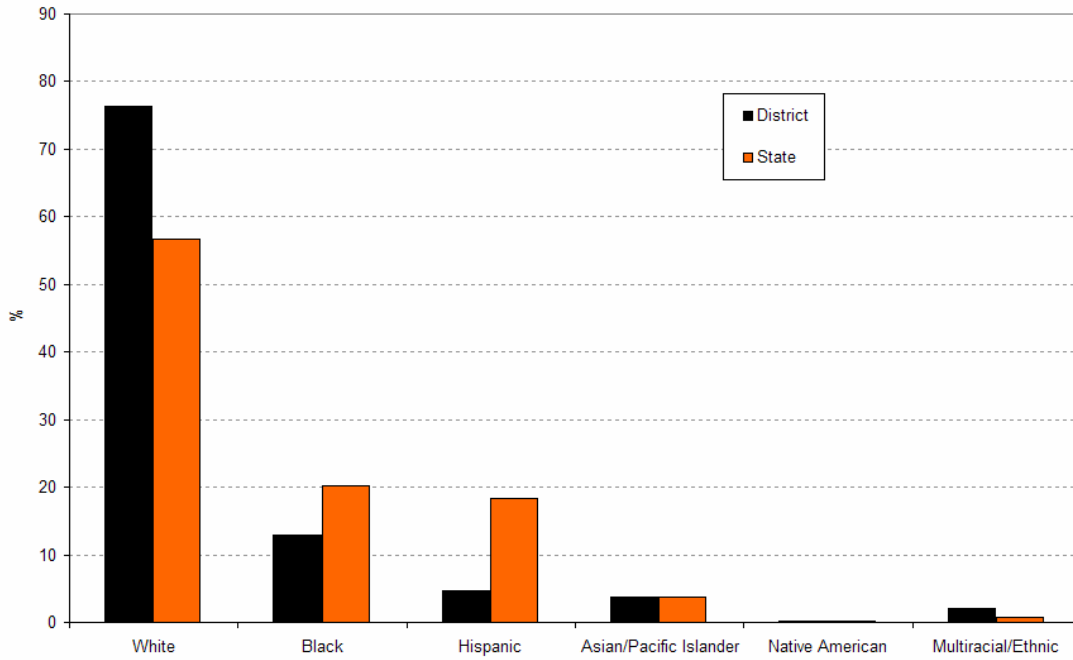
Projected enrollment



District Demographics-% White



Racial/Ethnic Background
2005 District Report Card



McLean County Population

McLean County Economic Development Council

