

Failed bond linked to falling enrollment

By Keagen Head

Since 2014, Durant's student body has dropped a staggering 49 students K-12. The student body has fallen from 668 students to 619 students, a loss of more than seven percent.

Not to mention, a recent survey conducted by *The Wildcat Chronicles* showed that 81% of seniors at Durant preferred to move away from Durant in their adult lives.

One could argue many reasons that contribute to these numbers, but there's one that stands out — a failed bond referendum in 2018.

In September of that year, more than 60 percent of the community rejected a bond project that included a new gym, new STEM classrooms, an update to our auditorium, and a new secure entrance to the build-

ing.

The school's superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett thinks that if we were to pass a future bond or at least invest in our community, it would help to stem the declining population of students.

"Your young people are your future in your community," said Mr. Burnett. "They're going to eventually be the ones who have families and kids that continue what we do here in Durant."

Some say that the taxation the bond would cause on our community members is the reason for the rejection; however, the plan would have raised our community's tax rate from \$10.65 to \$14.30 (per \$1,000 of assessed value) according to the *Advocate News*, which is still tied for the least amount among other local schools.

Other towns, including Wilton, have updated and renovated their schools. This support from their community has increased their enrollment, Mr. Burnett believes.

For example, the Wilton Development Corporation is a group of community members and business leaders that focuses on attracting local business into Wilton, according to Mr. Burnett. This increases job opportunities and creates a larger economy through the town, which can trigger a snowball effect that supports a school district.

"When you bring in more jobs, that brings in more people to work in the jobs, which means they need a place to live, which means their kids need a place to go to school," said Mr. Burnett.

On Senior night of the 2019 Durant football season against Pekin, Coach Joel

Diederichs made sure to keep our team in the game. Even though we had a very slim chance of still making it to the state playoffs if we won the game, he reminded us to never give up and play hard no matter the circumstances.

This attitude exemplifies what our school district and our student body needs from the Durant community. We need support through thick and thin.

As Crosby, Stills, and Nash once sang in the 70s, "Teach your parents well... and feed them on your dreams."

It is our job as students to teach you, our parents, about our concerns. So don't give up on us. We believe that there is value in this school and this community, but we must invest before we profit.

Backpack Program helps to feed students of Durant



Photo by Timothy Junis

These are typical meal items sent home with a student over the weekend as part of the school's Backpack Program.

By Timothy Junis

According to a 2014 study by Iowa State University, almost 30% of Cedar County students were eligible for free or reduced lunches.

And in a classroom of twenty students under 18 years of age, about two of them would be living in poverty.

As a result, the Durant school district should be commended for bringing the wonderful Backpack Program to our students. This program helps supplement a half-dozen students' nutritional needs over

the weekends and breaks, said Student Services Coordinator Mrs. Jenny Dittmer.

"This is a great program that the school has," she said, "We're able to support students not only while they're here at school, but also on the weekends when they aren't at school."

On Fridays, the students receive a bag of food that contains three meals. All of the food items in the bag are non-perishable and don't need to be refrigerated.

Teachers at Durant are supposed to look for behavior signals and signs to determine if students could be referred to Mrs.

Dittmer and the program. Some signals include asking classmates for food they don't want, regularly asking their teacher or other school staff for food, and extreme hunger in the mornings.

All of these signals must be seen on a regular basis for the child to be referred. Mrs. Dittmer then contacts the parents for permission to be part of the program.

January 20 will mark the beginning of the program's fourth semester. Last year, it had 12 students K-12. This year it has only six, but it is not due to less funding or a lack of trying Mrs. Dittmer has reached out to many families about this program but has received few responses.

Still, Mrs. Dittmer is very discreet with this program. She doesn't want other kids knowing about the students in need. A way to do this is to put the bag of food in the child's backpack while all the students are away from sight.

Mrs. Dittmer gets boxes of the bags from River Bend Foodbank in Davenport. Each bag of food costs \$4. She picks them up in bulk so that she has a stockpile of them. The foodbank only provides the bags for the students. The food must be purchased from the foodbank.

"This is a great program that the school has. We're able to support students not only while they're here at school, but also on the weekends when they aren't at school."

Mrs. Jenny Dittmer

The Backpack Program is 100% funded by donations, grants, and fundrais-

ers. Mrs. Mary Feuerbach, the FCCLA coordinator, said her group has fundraisers and food drives for this program and many others.

This year the program implemented a new program for the holiday season. Families were asked if they would be interested in receiving a holiday food basket.

This included a ham or turkey, then multiple sides. The program did this because the students in need wouldn't receive extra food from the Backpack Program over the long break.

Currently, over the summer there is no program affiliated with the school. However, the community has food programs in place for struggling families.

Mrs. Dittmer enjoys knowing that she is helping these students. Although she hasn't received any personal thanks from students, she sees the kids' eyes light up when she walks down with the bags.

They see her and know that she is bringing them the food they need. She knows that it is making a difference.

"I see the need with the students," she said.

The Chronicle Poll

What is your 2020 New Year's resolution?



Ethan Johns
"To get a girlfriend."



Mrs. Feuerbach
"To eat healthier."



Brooklyn Bullard
"Learn how to do a front flip."



Hannah Peel
"To grow."

The Wildcat Chronicles

Durant High School
408 7th Street
Durant, Iowa 52747
(563) 785-4431
wildcat.chronicles@durant.k12.ia.us

Editor: Rylee Page
News editor: Danielle Paulsen
Features editor: Gabrielle Olsen
Sports editors: Logan and Lucas Callison

Business Manager: Justine Badtram
Reporters and photographers: Nicole Brown, Ally Happ, Keagen Head, Timothy Junis, Koby Paulsen, and Kiley Stineman

The Wildcat Chronicles journalism staff feels a school newspaper is uniquely qualified to inform, entertain, and represent our peers. We strive to present accurate stories and thought-provoking commentary and are responsible for the content of each issue.

Shaffer Automotive's Shop Student of the Month



806 4th St.
Durant, IA 52747
(563) 785-6688

Senior Trace Seligman prefers the classes offered by our ACE program, taught by Mr. Tim Rouse, over those that have a typical classroom setting. Having taken every class Mr. Rouse offers, Trace plans on going to a trade school for carpentry once he graduates.



Seligman



Sunset View
Pet Hospital
627 W 5th Street, Wilton, IA
563-732-2118
sunsetviewpets@netwtc.net



The Creamery Restaurant
Come in for the food,
Stay for the memories!
501 5th St., Durant, Iowa 52747
(563) 785-4950



303 5th Street
Durant, IA 52747
563-785-4466
www.ronalpenford.net