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By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader

The major concern throughout USD No. 480 is where to put the growing number of students. And from last year, that number has grown substantially.

From Sept. 22, 2008, to Aug. 27, the elementary head count has increased by 43, intermediate by 72 and high school students have increased by 26. But these numbers may continue to grow, according to deputy superintendent Lance Stout.

“I have data from last year which is Sept. 22,” Stout said. “Why this date is so important, this is what the funding date is for Kansas, so we always want to look at that date and compare it.”

The largest class last year was by far the kindergarten class. Last year, the district received half-time funding for this class. This year, those students have moved on to a full-time status – meaning more funding for them.

“For kindergarten students, we get half time funding for those,”

Stout explained. “We had a huge kindergarten class last year, and they have pretty much all come back this year. So now, they will get a full time FTE.”

Although funding may increase, and the district will know more of what those increases may be toward the end of September, the issue of overcrowding remains.

“It is adding to our ongoing concern,” Stout said of the growing numbers. “Where are we going to put these kids?”

Due to the large kindergarten class remaining intact and coming back for the 2009-10 school year as first graders, teachers were shifted around a bit throughout the district.

“We wanted to make sure they stayed in tact, sometimes they don’t, sometimes they will leave,” Stout said. “We have lost a few of them, but we are still up there. We had to transfer, right before school started, three teachers from second and third grade ranks in the district to first grade to accommodate that large class.”

Although shuffling teachers did help matters, there are still more children than recommended by the Board of Education in each first grade class.

“We are still running over the board recommended cap,” Stout said.

“The board recommended cap is 19, and we are running at 21 in the first grade classroom. That is kind of where we are at where enrollment is concerned.”

With the numbers possibly still growing, by Sept. 21, the district will know what they will be receiving regarding state funding. Until then, they can only speculate, Stout said.

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