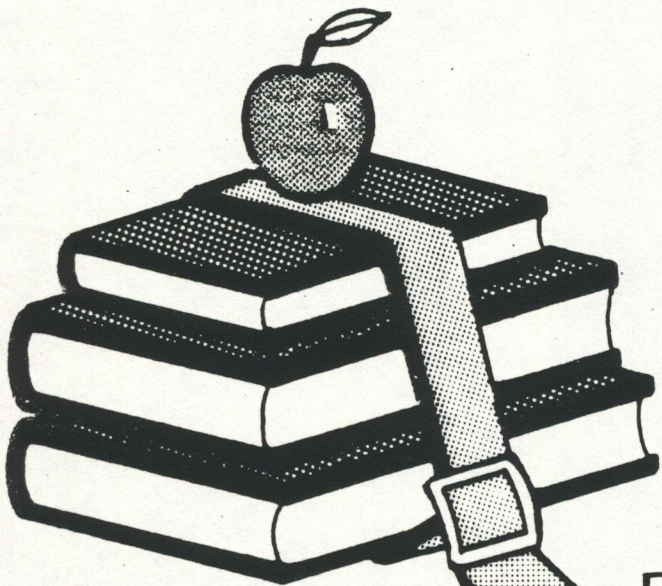




Topeka, Kansas, November 8, 1983

The Census: Enrollments level of



—Illustration/Charles Linn

1970:
24,683

Decline in
Topeka's
school
population
K-12

1983:
15,032

By DON SKINNER
Capital-Journal staff writer

For public school administrators, the middle years of the '70s were the worst.

As the tail end of the baby boom generation moved out of elementary school, administrators felt obligated to close schools that were only half-full.

Parents who saw their neighborhood schools slipping away felt

obligated to crowd into multipurpose rooms and object loudly.

From behind a Magi-not Line of enrollment charts and fertility tables, where the lines always went downhill, administrators patiently explained to fervid parents why it was not good educational business to maintain schools for which there were too few students.

Enrollment levels continued to drop as school systems entered the '80s.

But, "The enrollment drop this year has been the smallest for a number of years. We're starting to level off, and it's possible it could start to go up in three or four years.

In fact, in the last two years the kindergarten classes have been going up a little bit," Gary Watson, a research analyst for the State Department of Education, said.

Enrollment in public schools in Kansas declined 17.5 percent in the '70s. Public school enrollment statewide was 493,614 in 1970, but by 1980 it had dropped to 415,291 and in 1982 it had declined still further to 407,074.

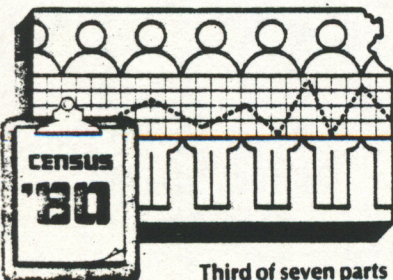
Topeka's Unified School District No. 501, which has closed 13 schools in the past seven years, lost 9,571 pupils by 1983, dropping from 24,603 to 15,032.

The largest annual loss in Topeka public schools was nearly 5 percent

in 1978, but that's been tapering off. The loss this fall is about 2 percent or 313 students, said Gerald Miller, chief of demographic services for the district.

Projections are that student populations may now begin to gradually increase, although not to the levels of the mid-'70s.

Miller said, "We see our enrollment as bottoming out in about two



Third of seven parts

Continued from page 1

years. We did have more kindergartners enroll this year than for several years previous, but not enough for a significant difference. It'd take quite an increase in births to start changing that around. The way births are, we won't see much elevation until midway in the 1990s."

But the loss of more than 9,000 students over the decade has left many schools with less than optimum enrollment levels. In response to that, the District Citizens Advisory Council, an advisory group to the school board, has recommended that 12 to 14 of the district's 26 elementary schools be closed based on declining enrollments, physical condition of the schools and energy consumption. Another consideration was that closing some schools would improve the racial balance in others.

Frank Ybarra, director of personnel services for the Topeka district, noted that the number of classroom teachers has fallen from 922 in 1970 to 635 this fall, although total numbers of certified personnel still are close to the 1970 level of 1,171 because of special programs which have been virtually unaffected by declines in student numbers.

Private secondary schools drew few students from public schools in Kansas during the decade. In 1970 there were 8,520 students in private schools across the state, compared to 7,021 a decade later. "Many of the new ones are so small, in some cases two to four students, it doesn't make much of a total count," Watson said.

In higher education in Kansas, urban universities such as Washburn University and Wichita State University seem to have the best grip on students for the next decade.

Kansas State University's fall enrollment dropped 1,029 from a year ago, to 18,470. The University of Kansas' Lawrence campus rose by 149 students to 22,520, but when off-campus enrollment is added, KU de-

clined by 281.

Because of economic factors, Topeka area students who might have traveled to Kansas State University or the University of Kansas are finding it more practical to attend school close to home, said WU President John L. Green Jr.

Green expects WU, now with 7,150 students (the figure includes anyone taking at least one class), to grow to 10,000 by 1990.

"Urban universities are the growth area in higher education," Green said noting that while most Kansas Board of Regents institutions have had student declines, WU and Wichita State have continued to grow. Like Washburn, Wichita State, which gained 55 students this year, traditionally has had a heavy part-time student population.

An urban university can be more flexible, he said. "We're getting ready to offer a bachelor's degree in public administration in a city where students can see government at work. And a bachelor's in public relations where we have business and industry to look at."

Tom Rawson, director of planning and budgets for the Board of Regents, said most state-run schools will experience a general student decline through the mid-'90s. However, regents institutions gained overall during the decade, going from about 62,000 in 1970 to a high-water mark of 81,105 in the fall semester of 1980, before dipping to about 76,000 this fall. The actual enrollment this fall is 79,147, but that includes categories not reported in 1970.

Besides Wichita, the only regents schools to report growth this fall were the KU Medical Center, which gained 53; the K-State College of Veterinary Medicine, which grew by two students; and Kansas Technical Institute, which gained 82.

Numbers of high school graduates will be down through 1987-88, and that decline will be followed by a slight one-to-two-year "bump" and another decline through the mid-1990s, said David Monical, principal analyst with the Legislative Research Division. The division put together a computer model on projected college enrollments for the Legislative Education Planning Committee.

But it's difficult to predict college enrollments, he said, because changing economic conditions cause many stu-

dents to proceed at a slower rate or graduates to come back for retraining.

In 1981, for the first time, more women than men were enrolled in college. Twice as many women as men over the age of 35 are going to school.

John Lloyd, executive director of the Kansas-National Education Association, the bargaining unit for 74 percent of Kansas teachers, predicts substantive changes in education in the next decade, including an improvement in teachers' pay, but also more stringent standards for teachers as well as students.

"One will be a restructuring of the reward system for teachers. In addition, the method in which one becomes a teacher will change. You'll not see another time when you go through college and are simply granted a certificate. Teachers will be monitored by a team in the classroom before they're allowed permanent certification."

Lloyd said the report issued last spring by the National Commission on Excellence in Education titled "A Nation at Risk," which declared the U.S. public education system had become mediocre, should be warning enough that public schools need drastic alterations.

"The reward system has got to be reformed. And we have to have a quality in-service (post-graduate training) program. No longer can we put a teacher out in the field and every so often ask him to take another course to keep current. They need to be constantly retrained.

"And we need more stringent requirements on students before they can graduate, including an occasional big, bold, flat F."

"And we'll see most of these changes in Kansas in the next three years."

He predicted public pressure will make educational reform a priority issue with the Kansas Legislature, which last year rejected a proposal by Gov. John Carlin for a revamp of the state's educational system.

The baby boom bulge

Kansas population by age, 1980

