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SLC school official mistakenly exaggerates enrollment dips at elementaries facing possible closure

The district incorrectly reported enrollment changes for some of its schools, including four being studied for closure.



(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) Bennion Elementary School in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, July 25, 2023. Last week, a Salt Lake City School District official incorrectly told school board members that Bennion had lost nearly 11% of its students in a year; its enrollment actually dropped by one student.

By Michael Lee | Oct. 25, 2023, 10:19 a.m. | Updated: 4:00 p.m.

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A Salt Lake City School District official gave school board members incorrect enrollment data last week, wrongly inflating the loss of students at some elementary schools facing possible closure.

For example, Chief Information Officer Sam Quantz — comparing early October enrollment to the same time last year — said Bennion Elementary had lost 10.9% of its students.



Bennion actually lost less than 1% — a single student.

Salt Lake City parent Jenny Makosky, whose three kids attend Hawthorne Elementary, pointed out to The Salt Lake Tribune discrepancies she saw in its coverage. Hawthorne also is being studied for possible closure.



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Following The Tribune's follow-up inquiry to the district on Friday, spokesperson Yándary Chatwin confirmed Tuesday that numbers announced by Quantz had been inaccurate.

Chatwin attributed the mistakes to Quantz accidentally including pre-K students from the 2022-23 school year when he calculated the percentage of enrollment changes between Oct. 1, 2022, and Oct. 1, 2023.

According to corrected calculations from Chatwin, Mary W. Jackson Elementary lost 10.6% of its students — not the 13.1% stated by Quantz at the Oct. 17 board meeting. Newman Elementary lost 10.8% (not 16.1%) and Riley lost 9% (not 13.4%).

Those three schools, with Bennion, Hawthorne, Emerson and Wasatch elementaries, are being considered for possible closure. One of the factors the district used to narrow down its list of 27 elementary schools, [and is using to further study the current list](#), is enrollment data.

Quantz also said Meadowlark Elementary — which is not on the list — gained 6% students, when the correct gain was 10.6%. Additionally, incorrect numbers were reported for Dilworth Elementary, which dropped 9.2% (not 16.2%).



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And for Beacon Heights, the district reported incorrect numbers *twice* — Quantz said its enrollment dropped 14%, then the district corrected that to 10.1%, but the correct figure (pointed out again by Makosky) is 6.3%.

An apology to parents

Chatwin noted that some of the numbers discussed at the board meeting were accurate.

“We do not have pre-K at all of our elementary schools, so the numbers were correct for the schools without pre-K,” Chatwin wrote in an email. For instance, Quantz reported that Hawthorne saw a 12.4% loss of students, which was correct.

Chatwin provided a corrected PowerPoint presentation to The Salt Lake Tribune on Tuesday. It showed significant growth at Parkview and Washington elementaries, which saw 13.9% and 30.2% increases in enrollment, and removed Liberty Elementary School from the presentation.

The earlier version did not mention Parkview and Washington, but Quantz had incorrectly said at the meeting that other schools saw increases between only 1% to 2%, or drops. He said Liberty was down 18.6%, but the correct drop was 3.6%.



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Chatwin also said the district would make corrections on its “website, in a message to parents and in the minutes” for the Oct. 17 board meeting.

In a letter emailed to families later Tuesday, the district noted the error that led to the incorrect data presented to board members, the corrections, and provided a link to the new PowerPoint.

“We apologize for any confusion this error may have caused,” the message said.

‘Lost a lot of trust’

Makosky said the fact that the percentage losses were incorrectly reported during a public board meeting concerned her.

The district has already “lost a lot of trust” from parents in the school closure process, Makosky said, with what many parents feel has been a lack of transparency from the beginning.



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“Every time they make a mistake like this and they don’t own up to it, it just makes people trust the process even less, and feel like they had made the decision years ago which schools they were going to close,” she said before the district issued its corrections Tuesday.

Many of the schools where enrollment numbers were incorrectly reported are located on the city’s west side, she pointed out, including Riley, Mary W. Jackson and Newman.

West-side schools “historically have felt ignored and felt left out of the district ... and may not have parents who have as much time to pay attention to all of these things,” she said. “And that bothers me a lot.”

Makosky said she worried that the errors, if not caught and corrected, could have potentially harmed schools’ chances of staying open. As the school closure process continues, she said, she is “anxious to see” whether the district will present a “cohesive” and “high-level plan” or multiple plans that will give the community a better idea of what will happen to children affected by closures.

The district has “left so much uncertainty in this process,” she said, “that it has created an undue amount of stress on our teachers and students and our caregivers.”



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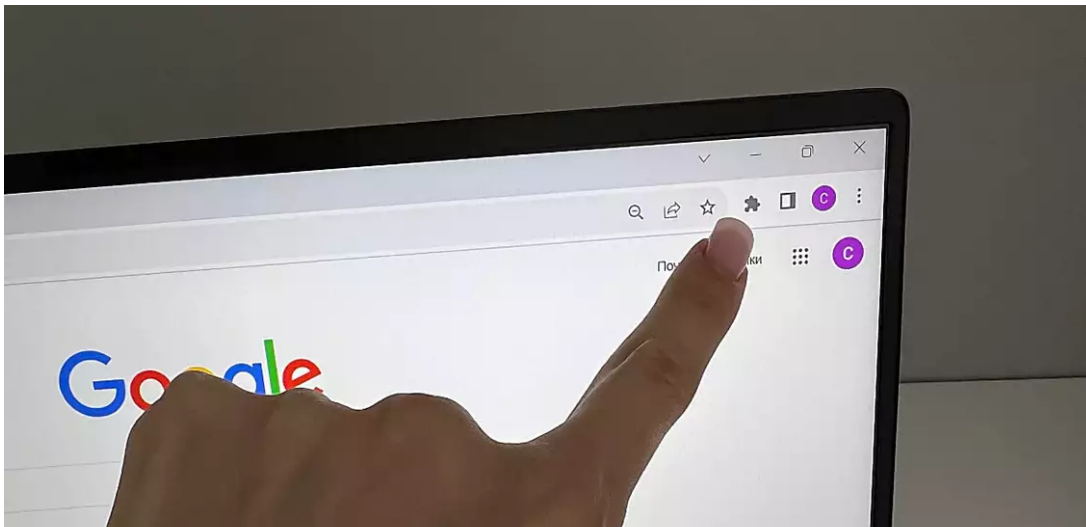
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