



Section 2c: Education and Youth Activities

Introduction

The vitality of a local educational system is perhaps one of the most effective bellwethers of a community's health. Enrollment figures are often used as growth indicators, while graduation rates, standardized test scores, and collegiate admissions speak to the overall quality of education available within a district. Further, a local school system is often a primary employer for a community; particularly in those cities such as Lathrop with a population of less than 5,000. In these cases, a school district is often one of the few assets available to draw professional-level employees to the area. In addition, community tax structures are tied directly to the local school district, and the success of municipal tax referenda is often tied to the community's support of the educational system. As such, a healthy relationship between educational institutions and the city is crucial to both the development and the quality of life within a community.

Youth development also takes place outside of the institutionalized education system. Equally important to the quality of life in a community is the prominence of youth programs and activities that support the growth and development of Lathrop's young people. A successful, diverse youth program offering activities from different genres will help foster a well-rounded, civically-minded population intent on shaping the future of their community.

This section of the Lathrop Comprehensive Plan will look at the issues impacting education and youth activities in Lathrop today, and offer a set of goals and objectives to achieve the community's vision for providing opportunities to Lathrop's youth.

Education and Youth Activities in Lathrop Today

The Lathrop R-2 School District is located in southeastern Clinton County, and encompasses 104 square miles, including the City of Lathrop (see Appendix B, Map 3). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 4,513 people live within the school district, a 15.1% increase from the 1990 U.S. Census count of 3,922. Mirroring this trend, student enrollment for the district has continued to climb during the past several years, and is projected to continue to do so through Fiscal Year 2010 (see Figure 2.11).

For FY2005, Lathrop R-2 had a graduation rate of 90.8%, outpacing the State of Missouri, which had a rate of 85.7% for the same time period. The district also exceeds the Missouri average for percentage of graduates entering post-

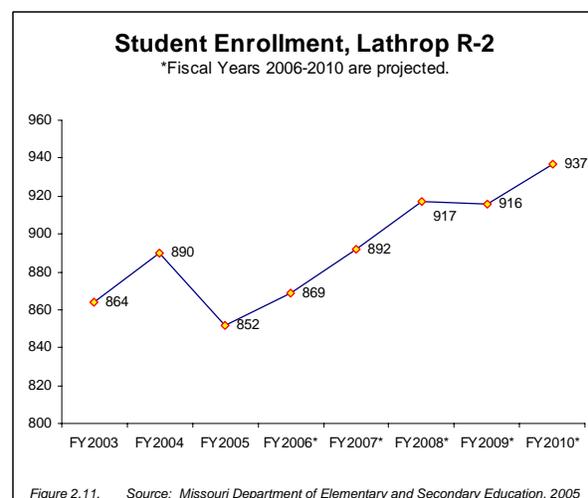


Figure 2.11. Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005

secondary college/university. In fact, nearly 62% of Lathrop R-2's graduating seniors enroll in either a 4- or 2-year college or university; with an additional 4.8% entering technical trade schools (see Figure 2.12).

Doubtlessly contributing to the success of Lathrop R-2 students is the quality of the teaching staff. In FY2005, 67 instructors were employed by the district, resulting in a lower student-to-teacher ratio than the State average (16:1 compared to 19:1). According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 99.1% of those teachers are categorized as "highly qualified". This fact likely

stems, in part, from the collective experience these instructors bring to the district. For FY2005, 26 (40%) of the instructors at Lathrop R-2 had more than 15 years of teaching experience; a considerable number given the perennially low pay and continuing education requirements required by the State (see Figure 2.13)

The Lathrop R-2 School District currently utilizes two buildings which house three schools; Lathrop Elementary and Lathrop Middle are in one building hosting grades kindergarten through 8th, and Lathrop High is in a separate building with grades 9th through 12th. Academic facilities for the district, however, will soon be expanding thanks to a successful school bond election held during April 2006. The bond will allow the district to construct a new, state-of-the-art high school, located at the intersection of State Route 116 and State Route A, on the north side of the City of Lathrop. The new school will feature

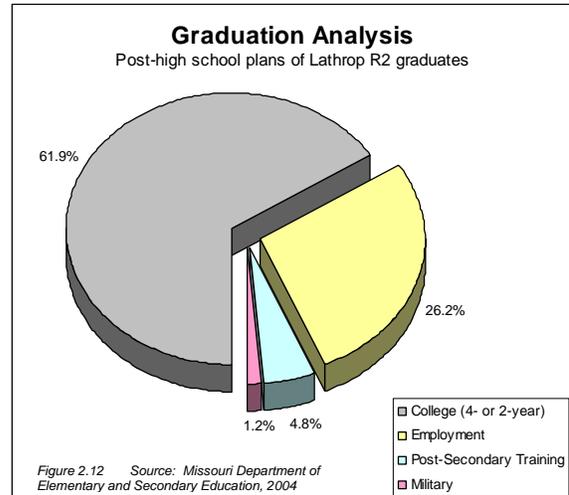


Figure 2.12 Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004

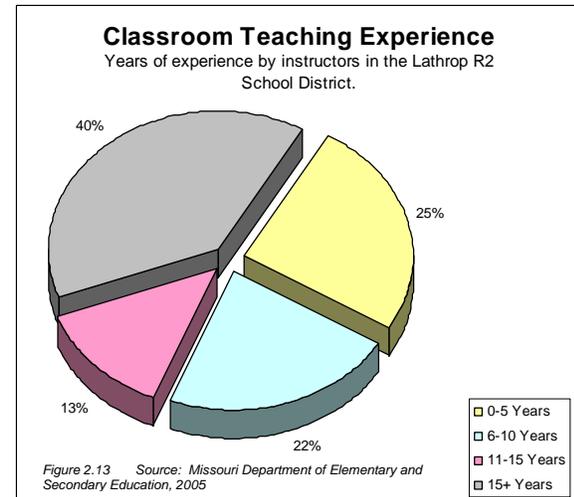


Figure 2.13 Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005

not only ample space for district growth, but also technology upgrades and a new practice football field. The construction of the new high school will facilitate a reorganization of the district's building assignments. The Lathrop Middle School will move into the current high school building, which, though constructed in 1936, is still structurally sound and features a modern gymnasium and newly renovated theater. In turn, the Lathrop Elementary School will take over their current building in its entirety. This reorganization will give the Lathrop R-2 School District the expandable space necessary to meet the needs of a growing population.

Youth opportunities in Lathrop are typical of most small, rural Missouri communities. Civic activities for youth are most plentiful during the elementary and middle school years, and continue through high school, primarily associated with school-based sports and academic associations. Both Boy

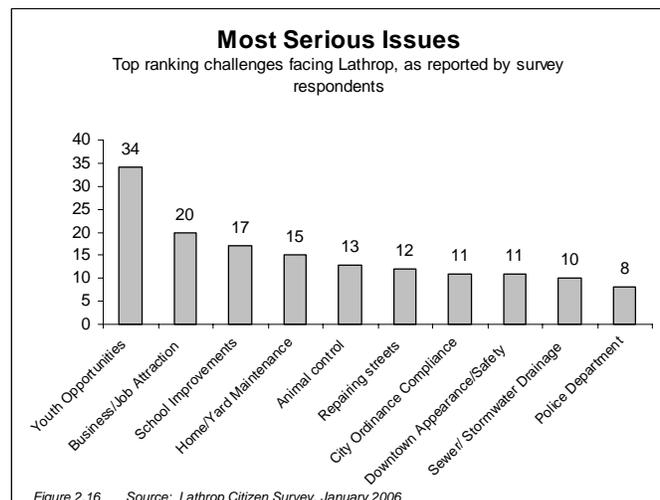
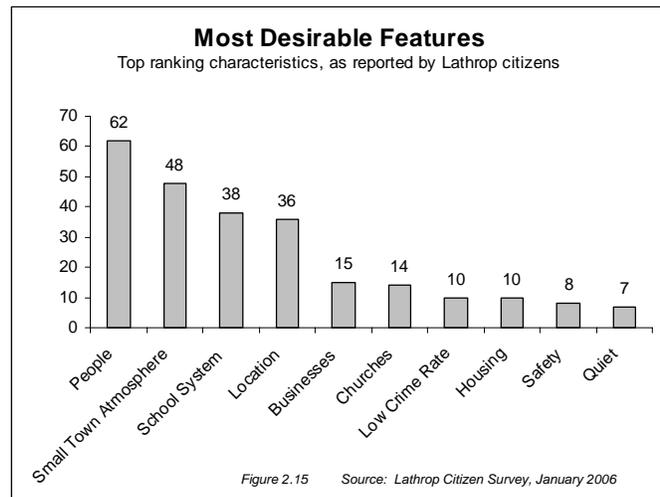
Scouts and Girl Scouts are available in Lathrop, which provide civic leadership and assists with the development of responsible, moral young persons. While active membership in the scouts may continue though high school, many cease membership during their middle school years. Also available for youth in Lathrop is the 4-H club, which, in their words, “is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills”. Similar to the Scouts, membership in 4-H often wanes during middle and high school. During the summer months, intramural sports are available for the youth of Lathrop interested in soccer or baseball. Soccer and little league baseball are available through the first two years of high school. Summer Vacation Bible School is also offered at many churches in the community.

The results from the Lathrop citizen survey completed during January 2006 illustrate public perceptions of education in Lathrop. When asked to express approval regarding the schools in Lathrop, an overwhelming majority of persons noted they were at least “somewhat satisfied” with each of the schools available in Lathrop. Even more significant, when asked the open-ended question “What do you feel are the three best qualities of Lathrop”, 38 responses were given for “school system” or some variety thereof, representing 12% of the total responses received. (see Figure 2.15). Finally, the citizen survey illustrates very clearly that the citizens of Lathrop are concerned about the

lack (perceived or otherwise) of opportunities available for the community’s youth. Again responding to an open-ended question, 34 persons mentioned the lack of youth opportunities as one of Lathrop’s most serious issues, representing 13% of the total responses received (see Figure 2.16).

Vision, Goals, and Action Plans

The vision and goals for education and youth activities were developed by a civic committee, comprised of Lathrop citizens with first-hand knowledge of the status of youth education in the city. Committee



members were tasked with developing an overarching vision for the future of youth development within the city and devising a set of goals to support that vision.

VISION FOR EDUCATION AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN LATHROP

To promote a standard of community excellence in youth development, the City of Lathrop will support education and youth activities by assisting with the means and support to continue improving programs through positive morals and values for community youth.

Goal 1: Establish an education advisory group

A permanent committee, with members named to rotating terms by the Lathrop Board of Aldermen, will help to ensure education issues in the community are routinely examined and, when necessary, brought to the attention of the city for potential action.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) Identify representatives from the board of aldermen, local businesses, clergy, parents, senior citizens, and adult and youth representatives from youth organizations and the R-2 school district. Committee should be comprised of persons with a vested interest in positively promoting the development of youth in the community. Committee size should remain small enough to effectively hold meetings and make decisions.
- 2) Education advisory group should hold monthly meetings. Routine meeting dates and times will help to institutionalize group meetings and ensure educational issues are continually examined at the committee level. Committee meetings should conform to traditional gathering guidelines (i.e. *Roberts Rules of Order*) and comply with the Missouri Sunshine Law.
- 3) The chair or duly recognized representative of the education advisory group will meet at least quarterly with the community education facilitator (established in Goal 2 below).
- 4) The advisory group, with guidance from the board of aldermen, should prepare press releases and communicate group meetings and activities through the local media, as appropriate.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) Formally institutionalize the education advisory group as a permanent municipal fixture by city ordinance.

Goal 2: Establish a facilitator to promote the community youth groups

A permanent community education facilitator position will serve as a liaison between community youth organizations, the school district, the education advisory group, and the Lathrop Board of Aldermen. This action will help to ensure all education and youth needs are addressed by the appropriate organization and that community resources can be utilized and shared with maximum efficiency.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) Facilitator should be a youth education advocate, with the time and knowledge necessary to communicate with a wide range of youth organizations. Position should be staffed by a community volunteer with a rotating term.
- 2) Facilitator should meet quarterly with all community youth organizations, the Lathrop R-2 school district, the education advisory group, and the Lathrop City Board of Aldermen. These meetings will help to ensure common youth education and development goals and objectives are met. In addition, the facilitator should attend the monthly meetings of the education advisory group.
- 3) Facilitator, with guidance from the Board of Aldermen, should prepare and distribute press releases concerning youth opportunities in Lathrop and the R-2 school district.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The Lathrop Board of Aldermen should formalize the community education facilitator position as a permanent municipal fixture by city ordinance.

Goal 3: Provide the necessary resources to support youth activities.

Support from the City of Lathrop, financial and otherwise, is vital to the establishment of new youth programs and the expansion of existing opportunities. In addition, a mutually beneficial relationship can greatly enhance future bond issues put forth by both the city and the school district.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The City of Lathrop should provide meeting space and facilities for the education advisory group and for youth activities, as recommended by the advisory group and the community education facilitator.
- 2) The City of Lathrop, to the extent possible, should financially support both new and established youth programs, activities, and organizations. This support can consist of donated materials, labor, or direct financial contributions.



Lathrop High School, constructed in 1936

- 3) For youth activities taking place on public grounds, the City of Lathrop should provide the appropriate law, fire, and EMS personnel to ensure public health and welfare.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The City of Lathrop should incorporate an annual line item in the municipal budget specifically reserved for youth activities and programs.

Goal 4: Incorporate and teach positive morals and values in education and youth activities.

Promoting and incorporating civic responsibility, social morality, and positive personal values will help to ensure the Lathrop youth of today will develop into productive, upstanding members of the community tomorrow.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The City of Lathrop should strive to provide a safe and positive atmosphere for the youth of the community. This includes promoting a healthy relationship between city staff and youth organizations, and inviting youth participation, where appropriate, in other municipal programs.
- 2) The City of Lathrop should actively partner with youth organizations to undertake community service projects. Completing such projects instills a sense of pride and ownership in the community, and helps improve municipal amenities.
- 3) All city employees should be encouraged to act as a role model for the youth of the community. Public conduct is vitally important in shaping the views and opinions of young people regarding a representative government, including both elected and non-elected officials.



Lathrop Football Field and Track

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The city should develop a code of conduct for all city employees and board members, in an effort to promote a positive city image and set good examples for the city's youth.
- 2) City should develop a revolving list of community service projects (park clean-up, downtown beautification, home winterization, etc.). Projects should be assigned on a regular basis to community youth organizations, and should be completed with the support and assistance of the City.