

# Challenges

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## Expansion mixed with contraction

Change is afoot in Riverside's current roster of six elementary schools, middle school and junior high-high school.

At the end of this school year, the district will close the Hadden, Hale, Leroy and Madison Avenue elementary schools. Buckeye and Melridge elementary schools will remain open.

Two new elementary schools are under construction, one on the site of the Madison Avenue school in Painesville Township and the other on Concord-Hambden Road in Concord Township. They are set for opening in August 2019.

Construction of the two new schools is Phase I of the district's Facilities Plan. The \$38 million project was enabled by voter approval in 2016 of a 1.92-mill bond levy spread over 37 years.

"Passage of Issue 5 was a relief," Kalis said. "With the new buildings, we'll get enhanced learning opportunities and operational efficiencies."

In the 2019-20 school year, openings of the two new elementary schools in the Riverside district will be accompanied by implementation of free, all-day kindergarten. Previously, the district had offered half-day kindergarten and one full-day kindergarten that charged tuition.

Phase II of the plan calls for the building of a new school to replace the exist-

ing Riverside junior high and high school. Kalis said the school board plans to account for that project's estimated \$77 million price tag by asking voters to approve another long-term bond levy of 4 mills or slightly above that.

The timetable had not been set for putting the new bond measure on the ballot.

"I don't know when it will happen, but I'm optimistic we'll eventually have a state-of-the-art (grades) 6-through-12 facility," Kalis said.

Phase III of the plan will use money from current revenue streams to convert LaMuth Middle School into an elementary school.

Depending on the track of enrollment when Phase III is implemented, the dis-

trict would review its options with Buckeye and Melridge elementary schools. One or both could be closed.

## Uncertain outlook

As Perry superintendent, Thompson says he has "an empty space problem" at the district's campus in Perry Township.

"It's great for tutors to have their own classrooms, but it's not ideal from an administrative standpoint," Thompson said.

Projections had Perry's population growing steadily when the elementary, middle and high schools opened in 1994. The schools were built to accommodate increases in enrollment.

The district's finances also were on solid financial

ground thanks to the millions of property tax dollars collected from FirstEnergy's Perry Nuclear Power Plant.

Now, the outlook for Perry schools is tempered by a flattening of enrollment and the announcement by FirstEnergy Solutions it will de-commission the Perry plant in 2021.

Thompson said devaluation of the Perry plant's property value already is costing the district upwards of \$3 million of projected revenue every year.

"There is concern. There is planning," Thompson said of the district's reaction to the Perry Nuclear situation.

"We don't know what the new normal will be if the plant closes, but it will be

## REPORTS FROM OTHER DISTRICTS

Madison Local Schools  
2018-19 enrollment: 2,948  
2013-14 enrollment: 3,172  
Schools: 4

Chardon Local Schools  
2018-19 enrollment: 2,774  
2014-15 enrollment: 2,987  
Schools: 5

Reacting to steady declines in enrollment, the Chardon system now operates with two elementary schools instead of four. Hambden and Maple elementary schools were closed after the 2017-18 school year. Maple was re-opened as a special needs pre-school and office space for support staff.

West Geauga Local Schools  
2018-19 enrollment: 1,972  
2013-14 enrollment: 2,286  
Schools: 4

our job to use the resources we have to provide a quality education," Thompson said.

## At the crossroads

Hoyne's eyes were open when she signed on as Newbury's superintendent one month prior to the start of the 2018-19 school year.

While calling the district's finances "fairly healthy," she said steep declines in enrollment jeopardize the Geauga County district's ability to remain independent.

"For this to work, a lot of things have to fall into place," Hoyne said.

During the 10 years she spent as superintendent of Mentor schools before stepping aside in 2012, Hoyne watched declining enrollment in what then was Lake County's largest school district lead to school closings

Berkshire Local Schools  
2018-19 enrollment: 1,302  
2013-14 enrollment: 947  
Schools: 3

Enrollment shot up in 2015 when Berkshire public schools absorbed the Ledgemont Public Schools in a land transfer.

Kenston Local School District  
2018-19 enrollment: 2,799  
2013-14 enrollment: 3,057  
Schools: 4

Beachwood City Schools  
2018-19 enrollment: 1,542  
2013-14 enrollment: 1,484  
Schools: 5

South Euclid Lyndhurst City School District  
2018-19 enrollment: 3,368  
2013-14 enrollment: 3,583  
Schools: 6

and budget realignments.

In 2015, she was chairman of the state-appointed commission that oversaw the dissolution of the financially-strapped Ledgemont school district in Geauga County and its merger via land transfer with the Berkshire School District.

Hoyne said the Newbury School Board is reaching out into the community, apprising residents of the district's tenuous state and getting feedback on whether residents want the district to remain independent or seek a merger.

A part of that process, Hoyne said, involves the board weighing merger proposals from the Berkshire and West Geauga schools. An announcement on the fate of the Newbury district is expected before the end of the current school year.



DAVID S. GLASIER — THE NEWS-HERALD

In Painesville Township, the new Madison Avenue elementary school (right) rises adjacent to the existing school.