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Enrollment up at rescued Pittsburgh Woolslair school



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The second-grade classroom at Pittsburgh Woolslair PreK-5 was filled Thursday with children eager to hear American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten read them a story.

Having an adult read a story is an ordinary event in many schools, but the extraordinary part of this story is that Woolslair could have closed last fall. Instead, it has new life with a partial magnet program for STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts and math — after parents and staff fought to save the Bloomfield school.

At the end of last school year, Woolslair had 104 students, but now it has about 170 present, with 184 enrolled in K-5, said principal Lisa Gallagher. It also has about a dozen pre-kindergarten students.

Although it's too early for an official count and the numbers could change, much of the growth is in the STEAM magnet, which opened this fall for K-2 students from throughout the city. Other grades also are being offered STEAM classes, and the magnet will expand to additional grades in the years ahead.

Ms. Gallagher said she is "ecstatic," adding, "This is what the community wanted, teachers and parents wanted."

The school board voted in 2013 to start the process to close the school in fall 2014, but a new board rescinded that action. Parents and staff got busy, took a survey and found a demand for a STEAM program. As a result, the district approved not only the magnet but also using STEAM to enhance Pittsburgh Lincoln PreK-5 and Schiller 6-8 on the North Side this fall. It also is developing a program for Perry High School on the North Side.

Pittsburgh superintendent Linda Lane, who enjoyed a STEAM lesson at Woolslair the first week of school, said it is too early to know whether the students who chose Woolslair came from other district schools or are increasing district enrollment. However, she said, "The early signs are positive."

Parent Valerie Allman, who played a key role in helping to save the school and whose son is in fourth grade at Woolslair, told Ms. Weingarten, "I think when it comes down to it, it was people who understood how important having a good, solid public education system in our community is."

Ms. Weingarten also visited Pittsburgh Westinghouse 6-12 in Homewood, where a public safety program will be added to its career and technical education offerings next fall. The union's Innovation Fund awarded the district \$150,000 to help promote CTE programs.

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