

# Overcrowding = classroom needs

By DARLENE SCHOTTLE

As hard as it is to believe, the leisurely days of summer are drawing to a close as schools across the country are opening their doors for the first day of school.

## Guest Opinion

Students in Flathead County will return to classes on Aug. 29, and this year's group of kindergarten students will be the graduating class of 2025! They are the youngest members of what will be the largest school population ever enrolled in Kalispell Public Schools.

In 2004, when the community supported a bond that created Kalispell Middle School to serve sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students, we also intended to provide space for growth in our K-5 buildings.

In 2007, the Legislature supported funding for school districts that provided full-day kindergarten as a way to give earlier access to education for all children. With the addition of seven new kindergarten classes, our elementary

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sites were once again at a level of maximum enrollment.

Since that date we have continued to grow at almost 2 percent per year, filling every corner and cubicle of our elementary schools with teachers and students.

When visitors come to our schools they see small groups of students receiving reading instruction in hallways, stages turned into classrooms, and teachers sharing learning spaces with large numbers of students.

Although our community can be proud of continuing increases we have seen in student achievement, we are challenged to find classroom spaces that allow for the best teaching environment.

Some families find themselves in the unfortunate situation of busing their

## About the author

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children out of local neighborhoods due to overflowing enrollment in their nearby school. This frequently happens to families new to our community who register for school during the summer months.

With overcrowding issues becoming so pressing, we are placing a request for an elementary bond in the hands of our voters on Aug. 29. We are asking for approval of a 10-year bond that will build four new classrooms at Edgerton Elementary and four new classrooms and a common use area at Peterson Elementary.

Also, we hope to move the elementary central kitchen to a new building located in front of Kalispell Middle School. The cost of the bond will be \$10 per year for 10 years if you own a home with \$100,000 assessed value.

The additional classrooms will impact class sizes and space at all of our elementary schools and will allow families to attend neighborhood schools without being bused across town.

Providing healthy, nutritious meals is an important component of student health, and enhances a student's ability to learn.

Our staff currently serves in excess of 1,500 meals a day at elementary sites from a kitchen in the basement of Flathead High School that was built in 1935.

Our schools soon will be filled with eager faces ready to learn and make connections with friends, academics, and activities. These students are the health-care providers, teachers, technicians, Little League coaches and business owners of the future.

We need to come together to provide a strong foundation for their education. We are appreciative of community support on so many levels, and hope the Kalispell community will continue to be informed and supportive of local educational programs.