



## Large class sizes negatively affect students, teachers

**SAMANTHA POWERS & EVELYN GRIFFIN**

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Over the last five years, AISD enrollment has dropped by over 8,000 students due to availability of other educational options such as charter schools and private schools. Hoping to slow this exodus that accelerated during the pandemic, AISD opened up transfers for high schools. This gives students and families more choice over their school.

AISD projected McCallum's enrollment at 1,930, which ended up being an overestimation. Principal Nicole Griffith suspects that this had something to do with the overlap between students in the Fine Arts Academy and students just hoping to get out of their zone.

"There are some students who only apply for the Fine Arts Academy because they want to come to McCallum," Griffith said. "It's not about the Fine Arts Academy; it's about McCallum. And they don't have to do that if it's just open."

Though enrollment is under the projection, it's still over the main building's capacity of about 1,600 students. Griffith says that due to overflow, McCallum's portable buildings have achieved a basically permanent status in order to accommodate the extra 230 students on campus.

Assistant principal Andy Baxa predicts that an AISD grant for a renovation will be coming soon, but knows the bureaucratic process at the central office is slow-moving. He thinks it will take between five to 10 years before progress is made.

"The rumor is the 2022 bond will probably see significant campus improvements, if not a new campus, in the works for McCallum," Baxa said. "We'll see how long it takes for those funds to

actually become available and for the construction to actually take place."

At 1,829 students in the school, class sizes sit at about 35 students each. The administration sized senior AP and Honors classes the largest.

"It does feel crowded to people, especially in upper-level courses," Griffith said. "And the reason it might feel that way in upper-level courses is because we strategically make sure that our freshman courses and especially our EOC-tested subjects are on the smaller side."

Baxa says that students taking courses that are tested for graduation requirements are the highest priority for small class sizes.

"If they don't pass those five EOC tests, they don't graduate from high school," Baxa said. "So we need to focus a little bit more on those tested subjects just to allow them to be able to achieve the level that they want to be able to achieve."

AP English 4 teacher Amy Smith says that increased class size could negatively impact many students' learning.

"I'm doing the best I can with the numbers that I have," she said. "Do I think that they're

getting some good feedback? Yes. Is it as much as I would like it to be and what I've given kids in the past? No."

Senior Miles Bourgeois, an AP student in one of Smith's classes, is unhappy with its size.

"Not being able to have many one-on-one interactions with my teacher has hampered my learning because if I want individual attention from my teacher I have to go to office hours, which I can't always go to," he said.

Smith also laments the effect that large class sizes have on her ability to interact with her students individually, especially when it comes to editing her seniors' college essays.

"Normally, I would sit side by side with a kid at a table and for each kid, I would talk with them

about their [essay]," Smith said. "But that's not a possibility with 35 kids in a room that is really crowded and has this air-conditioning that sounds like I'm in the cockpit of an airplane."

Another of the administration's priorities is making time for a 23-minute advisory period that includes study time and SEL lessons. For this to fit, passing periods were shortened from seven minutes to six.

"We had to have room in there for the FTI advisory class," Griffith said. "And it can be hard to get from fine arts all the way to the portables, and I highly recommend that people use the outside corridor. It is a lot faster."

Following Griffith's advice, freshman Ella Piston makes use of the outdoor corridors when moving between classes.

"I think they should definitely tell students about the other ways to access the classes, due to outside passages or stuff like that," Piston said, "because a lot of kids just don't think about those."

Piston prefers the outdoor hallways to the alternative, which has resulted in injury on multiple occasions.

"I've gotten hit in the rib like three times by people in the crowded hallways," Piston said. "Yeah, that's not very fun. But I mean, of course, it's due to the capacity of people, but everyone is just so tight together. There's no room. And it takes forever to get anywhere."

A concern among teachers and students is how to maintain a safe distance in crowded classrooms. Smith finds it impossible to socially distance her students.

"That's not happening," she said. "Look at these rooms. Look at these desks."

Griffith feels confident that high mask usage and vaccination levels are protecting students' safety.

"Overall, I think mask wearing is going really well," Griffith said. "It's easy to focus on those kids, those students who are struggling to put that mask over their nose, but the vast majority of our students, first of all, are vaccinated and, second of all, have their masks on."



THEN AND NOW: A side-by-side comparison shows snapshots from the first week of school in 2020 and 2021. Photos by Dave Winter.



## Hallways? More like hellways.

COMMENTARY BY

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Walking in the hallways has always been hard, but with the influx of kids who have never been at the school before, it's hell. On top of crowding, there's an increased fear of contracting COVID. The hallways have suddenly become a cesspool of waddling, herd-walking and horseplaying, all combined with the ever-charming non-maskers. It's upsetting. Students are underprepared and it is affecting everyone.

The new students can't be blamed for their gap in knowledge, but everyone can be blamed for their lack of proper hallway procedure and choices that impede our ability to get to our classes. It's difficult to not feel some type of anger when it comes to being late to classes because people won't move or are leisurely walking with large groups of people. It seems like students are forgetting that there are people walking in both directions in the hallway, and when people walk in large groups, they usually take up three-fourths of the hallway. This leaves only a sliver of space for the people walking in the other direction.

Another issue in the hallways is the lack of masks or enforced mask wearing. Too many times we are walking throughout the school, and encounter a large group of students, not wearing their masks. It's troubling seeing that we are all stuck in a tight space, and these people are selfishly deciding to expose everyone else. It makes us especially worried with events like football games taking place at 100 percent capacity. It is truly sad to see these people not take COVID precautions seriously.

We are already at risk being in a cramped hallway, but it becomes even more dangerous when students choose not to wear their masks. The administrators are doing their best to enforce the mandatory mask rule, but there are just too many kids not taking it seriously and deciding to wear their masks incorrectly, whether it be under the nose, on their chin, or just not at all.

On top of all this, certain areas (i.e. where the breezeway connects to the main hallway and the math hallway) always seem to be in a traffic jam. Students are packed shoulder to shoulder and everyone is moving so slowly, plus only half the people are wearing masks. We think this should be more of a concern, seeing as we're in the middle of a pandemic. There seems to be little to no communication to fix these overcrowding problems, and it's very stressful when it comes to being safe at school and making it to class on time (don't even get us started on the shorter passing period).

There is a clear issue that needs to be addressed, both the lack of masks and the horrible hallway situation. There needs to be a harsher consequence for those who choose to endanger others by not wearing their masks properly, and there needs to be some sort of instruction when it comes to walking in the hallways. This is an everybody issue, and we urge people to take into consideration others when walking through the school and choosing to block the paths of others or expose them to a deadly virus.

## In Sanabria's AP Macroeconomics class, space is a scarce resource

COMMENTARY BY

**ELISHA SCOTT**  
managing editor

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average classroom size for high school teachers in a departmentalized instruction in the U.S. is 23.3 students. The average for Texas is 22.7. My macroeconomics class has 35 people in it. That's more than 12 students over the Texas average. I was absent the first day of the class and

when I came to school on Thursday, Aug. 19, there were no desks left in the classroom. My teacher, Michael Sanabria, was forced to move the computer on his desk over so that I could sit on the side of his desk for class. And this situation had become permanent up until last week when another student dropped the class and his desk became available. Every other time a student dropped the class, there was already another new student who needed a desk.

Ironically, Mr. Sanabria's first economics lesson was already structured around scarcity: a situation in which a society doesn't have enough desks for all of its people, and we had to decide how the society determines who gets the desks and who has to sit on the floor. The final decision was that the smartest way to decide was to have the people of the society—us—blindly bid on the

desks for optimal satisfaction by all parties.

We are not, however, living in this imaginary society. We're in our senior year economics class, in which we sit for 90 minutes straight. With 35 kids in one room plus the flat screen monitor, Mr. Sanabria's desk, and the other decorations and supplies he has in his classroom, we're in incredibly close quarters. We have to squeeze between desks, almost hitting already seated students with our backpacks just trying to get to the back of the classroom.

We're not comfortable, and it's hard to focus in conditions like that.

And all other arguments aside, let's not forget that we are attending school in the middle of a global pandemic. We might be lucky enough to have a mask mandate but without proper social distancing, a mask isn't nearly as effective. As the CDC states, "A mask is NOT a substitute for social distancing. Masks should still be worn in addition to staying at least six feet apart, especially when indoors around people who don't live in your household." And it's not like classes have always been like this. The class of '22 (who make up a majority of the population of my classes) is still relatively the same size as it has been for the past three years. In fact, our class population has dropped 31 students since our freshman year. So how is it that just this year, the year when

spreading students out as much as possible is so vital, we have this issue? It's like we went in the opposite direction of social distancing.

Despite the senior class staying relatively the same size, the school population has skyrocketed since the arrival of the sophomore class of '24. In fact, the school itself is over capacity, creating a necessity for small portable buildings to become permanent fixtures. The estimated capacity for McCallum shown on the AISD website is 1,596 students. The current student population is around 1,829. This means that the overflow of students is designated for smaller classrooms in portables with minimal infrastructure.

In reality, there are two separate issues. One is the overall overcrowding of the school due to the number of underclassmen who have enrolled. The other is the issue of upper-level classes being overcrowded because the school has to accept larger class sizes somewhere in the master schedule in order to put the over-sized student population in classroom seats each period.

It all creates one umbrella effect: the overcrowding that everyone is feeling.

Hallways move at a snail's pace, sometimes stalling out completely, and classes are packed to the brim, oftentimes reaching their capacity limit and still growing. This isn't comfortable and this isn't safe.

1,829

student population

1,596

main building capacity



Illustration by Kai Kirkham.



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