

Fish fry to benefit tiny Duette sch



STAFF PHOTOS / ELAINE SKYLA

Shannon Sly, 11, watches her classmates Weston Mendieta, 7, left, and Kendall Legg, 6, practice Wednesday for today's talent show at Duette Elem

The one-room school is down to five students

By JENNY LEE ALLEN

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DUETTE — Some years, about three dozen children would gather in this small schoolhouse, 25 miles from stoplights, malls and convenience stores, to learn how to read and write.

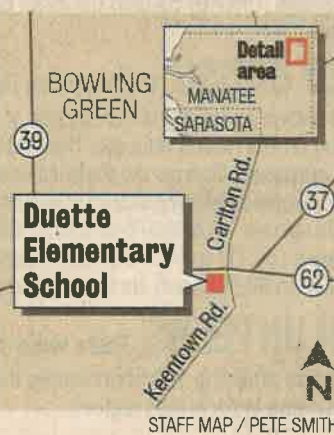
Today, enrollment at Florida's only functioning one-room

schoolhouse is at an all-time low. Twelve kids started at Duette Elementary School in August; now, just two boys and three girls remain.

Some children left because they needed special services offered at a different school. One mom found a new job and had to enroll her child in another school.

Veteran teacher Donna King said she is concerned, but not worried, that the declining enrollment could harm the school's chances for survival. "It just changes every year," King said, adding that the Manatee County School Board has committed to keeping Duette open next year.

"I take it one day at a time. If there's one child here and the School Board wants me here, I will teach that child."



STAFF MAP / PETE SMITH

Today, hundreds of people are expected to show their support for the 1930 school in the northeast corner of Manatee County by attending the annual Fish Fry & Talent Show. The fish fry features old favorites like grits and hush puppies.

"It's like taking a step back



Kendall shows a puppet she made to Weston Mendieta. Children are three-fifths of the school's stu

in time. It's just fun," King said. Earlier this week, a mom scrubbed down a behemoth of a fish fryer, where hot slabs of mullet will sizzle, as children

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