

PLANNING COMMISSION SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

POLICY RESEARCH

Topic: Long Range Student Population Forecasting

Summary of Planning Commission Schools Committee Discussion

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) produces two projection sets each school year to forecast student membership. One projection set is produced in the fall for a five year horizon and the fifth year of this set is used for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The second set is a six month projection produced in the spring which is used to determine the enrollment for the upcoming school year. Projections within the five year horizon are accurate; however, the accuracy of student projections diminish beyond the five year horizon.

Methodologies used for student membership projections.

- Total student membership is compared to historical membership patterns.
- Births by elementary school boundary are compared to the kindergarten class five years later.
- Kindergarten class membership is compared to the previous school year's 12th grade class.
- Cohort progression – Each grade level cohort of students is compared to the previous year to understand the difference over time.
- Analysis of population and housing forecasts, housing trends and new housing construction.

Factors impacting the predictability of student projections.

- Students attending school within a different boundary from which they reside. This may occur for program access.
- Replacement of existing housing stock with larger homes.
- Lifecycle of existing housing, changing demographics, economic conditions, and multiple occupancy of dwelling units.
- Mixed use development creates uncertainties for projecting student enrollment.
- FCPS estimates of student yields resulting from planned new housing are based on countywide averages. Student membership projections for the CIP utilize a different methodology, based on localized analysis of demographics, housing types and school trends, resulting in more accurate projections.

Planning Commission Recommendation

- Seek resources to produce long-range forecasts.
- ~~Reconsider Countywide averages used for proffer equation formulas.~~
- Develop comprehensive system for two-way communication such as a dashboard between County and FCPS summarizing future growth in each district.