

# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

### DIVISIONWIDE ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

#### WE ARE NEARING THE MIDDLE OF PERIOD OF RAPID GROWTH, NOT THE END

Current ACPS projections and city forecasts indicate that ACPS is now not quite to the middle of a period of rapid growth expected to last another 10 to 15 years. While growth may be decelerating based on 2014 enrollment data, which confirms a significant slowing in growth of kindergarten enrollment, students are staying in Alexandria schools longer. This means that total enrollment is expected to continue to increase rapidly, even if kindergarten enrollment begins to decline, as today's much larger elementary school classes move up through the grades.

#### INCREMENTAL MEASURES ARE NO LONGER SUFFICIENT

While the educational adequacy assessment shows a number of improvements needed in the city's schools, the immediate crisis about to face the schools is number of classrooms and support space capacity to meet growing enrollment. The runup from the 2006 K-12 enrollment of 10,246 to 13,847 in 2014 added about 3,600 K-12 students to ACPS schools, a 35% increase in eight years.

ACPS has increased class size caps by two students at each grade in 2013, built a number of additional classrooms at some schools, and rebuilt one school for more capacity to address this increase. Eight more classrooms are to be added in the summer of 2015, and Patrick Henry School is proposed to be reconstructed as a preK-8 school beginning in 2017.

However, the next increments of growth are coming up against harder limits. Many current classrooms, particularly at older schools, are substantially undersized on the basis of target floor area per student for the current allowable class size, and many elementary schools are now or will soon be against an absolute number-of-classroom limit at this current class size cap. There are few places left to reassign students as schools reach this absolute capacity based on current class size caps. As enrollment continues to increase by an estimated 400 to 500 students per year through 2024, approximately 20 additional classrooms and their related support spaces and facilities will be needed *each year*, with a slowly declining annual need thereafter to 2030 or beyond. This is equivalent to one new full-sized elementary school every two to three years.

Current mid-range projections show an increase to 17,419 students by 2024, an additional 3,572 students over today's enrollment. The long-term forecast through 2040, based on overall population growth at about 1% per year, a decline in the City's birth rate over time, and a substantial increase in the share of population over 65 years of age, shows an estimated peak enrollment of just over 18,000 in 2031, a total increase of almost 4,300 students over today's enrollment and almost 7,900 more than the recent low enrollment in 2006.

#### CURRENT CLASSROOMS ARE UNDERSIZED, AND LACK SUPPORT SPACES

The current crisis is new classrooms, and expansion of cafeterias, extended learning areas, specialized classrooms for art, science and music, and other spaces to support the additional students in them. Existing schools will not only need expansion to provide additional classrooms to meet their projected enrollment, but will also need to accommodate resizing and redesign of existing undersized classrooms for current educational needs. If schools are simply remodeled within their current floor area, their capacity will be reduced as spaces are reconfigured to meet current educational specifications, so both remodeling or reconstruction and expansion are needed at most schools if new schools are not added.

#### MANY SCHOOLS EXCEED THE MAXIMUM DESIRABLE ENROLLMENT FOR THEIR GRADE LEVEL

ACPS will have difficulty enlarging some schools just to accept their current enrollment under up-to-date educational specifications. In addition, some schools already exceed the maximum desirable size for their type. 7 out of the division's 13 elementary schools are expected to exceed 700 students by 2020.

Because some schools are now larger than the desirable maximum size for their type, additional schools at additional school sites will also be required to meet enrollment projections. Depending on where these sites can be found and where additional capacity can be developed on existing school sites, enrollment boundaries will need to be modified so population in those enrollment areas matches student generation.

#### WHEN WILL THIS ENROLLMENT GROWTH END?

Enrollment growth is expected to continue, though with declining percentage rates of growth, until at least 2025 or 2030.

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A significant growth component could be added if there is a substantial shift from private to public schools. If Alexandria’s public school participation rate approaches that of Arlington or Fairfax County, up to about 1,500 additional students (confirm) could be added to the current forecast peak enrollment.

Universal Pre-K would exacerbate the capacity problem in elementary schools, but provide value to the community. It is also likely to increase the kindergarten capture rate and therefore the peak enrollment ultimately achieved. Decide whether universal Pre-K is an ultimate objective, and if so, incorporate that capacity in the enrollment forecast.

#### WHAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FIRST?

There is a significant long-term problem particularly in our oldest schools in the size of classrooms and flexibility of spaces to accommodate current and future educational specifications. A phased program of renovation or replacement is appropriate regardless of current capacity issues. However, these oldest schools typically have the most constrained sites, so expansion potential with renovation is minimal. Simply renovating these schools to provide modern facilities will reduce their student capacity unless floor area is substantially increased at the same time.

Capacity is currently a big problem primarily in elementary grades. As the recent enrollment boom in elementary schools proceeds through the grades, middle schools will be next (starting now), followed by high school. Enrollment in elementary schools should see the first decline. Assuming the current high rate of cohort survival throughout the grades continues, the middle and high school decline will come much later.

Capacity shortfalls are currently greatest in the west and central area elementary schools. New development is not expected to change this situation in the short to mid term (2024).

A decline in the levels of kindergarten capture and cohort survival that resulted from the local housing market bubble and produced the enrollment decline from 2000 to 2006 was an unusual condition that is unlikely to recur in the next 15 years while the current high elementary enrollment proceeds through the grades.

#### CAPACITY STRATEGIES

- **Remodel/Replace Patrick Henry School** as a K-8 school to provide space to accommodate substantial increases in middle-school enrollment in the next 5 years.

- **Construct one new 600-700-student elementary or K-8 school** in the West End to accommodate further increases in elementary school enrollment, relieve over-capacity elementary schools in the west end and central portion of the city, and provide swing space for renovation of existing elementary schools over time.
- **Consider construction of additional capacity for upper grades** to relieve anticipated increases in enrollment in secondary schools.
- **Anticipate providing additional elementary or K-8 school space opportunistically** with temporary classroom facilities on existing school sites or a temporary elementary school in leased space expected to be needed for 10 to 15 years to accommodate a peak enrollment of up to 18,000 students from 2025 to 2035.
- **Decide which elementary schools should be substantially expanded permanently** based on site capacity, maximum and minimum desirable school capacity, location and need. Program these expansions over time to add 600 to 1200 students total capacity by 2024.
- **Review boundaries as facilities are modified.**

#### EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

During this expansion program, **program the renovation and replacement** as appropriate of existing elementary schools, beginning with (1) those with highest priority for addressing existing deficiencies identified in this plan and (2) those that can provide the greatest additional capacity through renovation or reconstruction to the maximum appropriate size for an elementary school.

