EDUCATION

Fairfax County residents are offered a full and varied range of educational opportunities through the county's public school system and the presence of both a community college and a four-year university.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is the major provider of education in the county. This system, which has been nationally recognized for excellence and is one of the largest school system in the nation, has a wide range of educational facilities that accommodate instructional programs for county students from kindergarten through grade 12. In addition to accommodating educational programs, school facilities are used to meet the recreational and cultural needs of the county through programming by the Department of Recreation and Community Services. Generally, separate facilities are provided to serve three levels of education:

- Elementary _____ kindergarten to grade 6
- Intermediate _____ grades 7 and 8
- High _____ grades 9 through 12

Additionally, FCPS has an extensive adult education program, and many specialized educational programs. Special education programs serve mentally and physically handicapped students, ranging in age from 2 to 22. The Family and Early Childhood Education Program (FECEP), formerly known as Head Start, is a preschool program operated primarily in elementary schools for children ages 4 and 5.

The fundamental element in capital facility planning for public schools is determining future memberships, a complex procedure which continues to be refined. The school system employs a combination of two statistical methodologies, a modified cohort-survival model and the cohort-component model, for projecting student populations. The cohort-survival model is based on expected birth and migration rates and the cohort-component model modifies survival ratio projections to account for special events that effect projections, such as students generated by new housing. The latter model employs housing student-generation yields using a computer-assisted geographic planning model, which aggregates estimates to attendance area level. These estimates are then incorporated into the cohort-survival generated attendance area estimates. These models are only effective with current data. Therefore, thorough knowledge of housing starts and use of appropriate dwelling-unit multipliers are essential. In addition to obtaining current housing start information, FCPS staff conduct both windshield surveys, to determine construction progress, and mail-out surveys, to determine current household composition. Enrollment is frequently projected to within a 1% level of accuracy.

Planning for schools is particularly difficult in areas with transient populations, such as Northern Virginia. This problem is compounded in Fairfax County by rapid housing development, and a multitude of variables which alter enrollment levels, such as transfers to and from private schools, in and out migration rates, and changing family compositions in existing housing stock.

FCPS strives for precise facility planning, in order to mitigate costs associated with over-estimates and yet ensure adequate physical space for students and programs. The need for new facilities and additions is determined by comparing available capacity in an area and the projected

students for that area. Capacity is an estimate of the number of student spaces available within an educational facility which takes into account the following factors: educational specifications for elementary, intermediate and high schools; program requirements; and appropriate student-teacher ratios. For example, program requirements can alter space allocations within a building if they utilize additional space, such as the addition of a room for computer training. Changes in student-teacher ratios can alter the number of classrooms required for a given number of students by modifying how they are organized into classes and scheduled into rooms.

Student membership forecasts, coupled with capacity estimates and facility standards, provide the framework for capital facility planning. Locational criteria assist in site planning, identification and selection.

The next 20 years will prove a significant challenge in maintaining and improving the county's high standards for educational facilities. In addition to keeping pace with technological advances and demographic fluctuations, FCPS must acquire schools sites in an ever-tightening real estate market. Land acquisition and construction of schools will compete with other community facilities for available land and funding resources. While providing for new facilities is expected to be a major focus for FCPS, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the rehabilitation of existing facilities will compete for limited facility funding. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure that projects cost-effectively meet FCPS requirements.

The Constitution of Virginia delegates the supervision of public schools to the school board of each locality. Virginia school boards are not county agencies. The Virginia Supreme Court consistently has acknowledged that the power to select school sites and to determine the manner in which school properties shall be used is essential to the school board's supervisory role.

Pursuant to Virginia Code annotated Section 15.2-2232 when a proposed public school facility is not featured in the Comprehensive Plan, the School Board must submit the proposed facility to the Planning Commission for a determination of whether the general, or approximate location, character, and extent of the proposed facility is substantially in accord with the Comprehensive Plan. The text, objectives, and policies appearing in this portion of the Policy Plan are planning guidelines and are not intended to negate the School Board's constitutionally vested authority for school site selection, school design, or the most appropriate method to house and accommodate Fairfax County public school students. On the other hand, to the extent that the text, objectives, and policies of this section reflect land use rather than programmatic concerns, they will be implemented by the Planning Commission, as required by Virginia Code, Section 15.2-2232.

Location

Objective 6: **Acquire sites for future building through negotiation, dedication, or condemnation, which best provide efficiently located schools.**

Policy a. Place schools on parcels meeting the optimum number of general locational criteria. Sites should be evaluated by the following factors:

- Safe and convenient accessibility to pedestrian and road networks.
- Acreage to accommodate expansion, when the school is originally sized below the maximum efficiency standard for that type of school.

- Compatibility with adjoining planned and existing development and with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Aesthetically pleasing physical qualities with appropriate engineering features (e.g. soils, topography).
- Proximity to other public facilities, such as Police and Fire and Rescue services.
- Proximity of schools to commercial areas should be avoided, if possible.

Policy b. Locate school sites, when situated in areas conducive to pedestrian traffic, to take advantage of maximum walking distances of one mile for elementary schools and one and a half miles for intermediate and high schools.

Policy c. Locate intermediate and high schools, and when possible, elementary schools, where they can be served by public water and sewer. When elementary schools must be located in nonsewered areas in order to serve their target student population, well and septic can be utilized if no other alternative is available.

Policy d. Purchase school sites, when land dedications cannot be obtained, as far in advance of construction as possible, to ensure availability of both the preferred location and the necessary site features. Implement a land acquisition plan through the Capital Improvement Program.

Policy e. Encourage site dedications which provide sufficient usable acreage to meet locational criteria.

Policy f. Coordinate the acquisition and design of the site's active recreation areas with the Fairfax County Park Authority as required to meet recreational standards and where feasible. This will ensure maximum opportunities for colocation and efficient use of recreational facilities.

Policy g. Encourage as part of the development and redevelopment process, commitments for school renewals and additions.

Objective 7: Distribute administration and maintenance facilities to conveniently serve the areas they support.

Policy a. Locate Area Administration buildings in the school areas they are intended to serve.

Policy b. Locate maintenance and operation facilities to afford greater convenience and reduction of travel time.

Character and Extent

Objective 8: Locate schools on sites which meet or exceed minimum state size standards.

Policy a. Ensure that minimum site size conforms to the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance F.A.R. requirements. This may require acquisition of acreage in addition to the state minimum requirements.

Objective 9: Design schools to allow for maximum site utilization while providing optimum service to, and compatibility with, the local community.

Policy a. Design schools to maximize a site's utility, while providing for safety and aesthetics. Provide for possible future expansion and allow for efficient flow of traffic. Provide adequate stacking space and circulation for school buses, and offstreet parking, as required. The impact of school traffic on local road networks should, to the extent possible, be minimized.

Policy b. Design and construct schools with appreciation for, and attention to, environmentally sensitive lands.

Policy c. Locate elementary, intermediate and high schools in relation to residential areas, the road network and traffic patterns to optimize the resulting safety and convenience for students, residents, and commuters. When possible, elementary schools should be located in, or on the periphery of, residential areas to ensure proximity and convenience for students and the local community.

Policy d. Provide for compatibility between schools and adjacent properties with appropriate screening and fencing, in accordance with the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance. When designing and constructing schools, preserve as much mature natural vegetation as possible.

Other

Objective 10: Encourage full utilization of existing school facilities, whenever possible and reasonable, to support educational and community objectives.

Policy a. Build additions, when appropriate, to minimize the need for new facilities. Analyze carefully the costs and benefits associated with construction of an addition as compared to a new facility.

Policy b. Consider the expansion of existing school facilities identified on the Comprehensive Plan map, a feature shown of the Comprehensive Plan provided the proposed expansion has received prior approval by a public bond referendum, is included in the county's currently adopted Capital Improvement Program, and does not significantly impact on the character of the existing facility and its compatibility with the surrounding area.

Policy c. Provide temporary facilities as required to respond to short term student population accommodation needs.

Policy d. Promote equity between older and newer schools through the Renewal Program. Apply the same educational specifications used as a guide in the construction of new schools for planning the renewal of old ones. Consider expected future utilization rates when proposing renewal projects.

Policy e. Continue the practice of serving local communities, for scouts, senior citizen programs and other neighborhood based activities, through the use of school facilities. Provide access to school grounds for community use of recreational facilities. Cooperate in the use of schools for the School Age Children child care program.

Policy f. Continue the practice of allowing the Park Authority to utilize sites before school construction begins.

Policy g. Provide space for other public service needs, when possible and reasonable, in underutilized schools.