

CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC SCHOOLS

5.1 Student Generation Forecasts

At buildout, the northwest Cary area might generate up to:

- 1,800 - 3,700 elementary school students
- 750 - 1,500 middle school students
- 700 - 1,400 high school students

These projections are based on the likely range of housing and population at buildout of the northwest area, using the same students-per-dwelling-unit multipliers as used by the Wake County Public School System for single family and multifamily housing. The low end of the student ranges assumes that each of the residential and mixed-use areas shown on *Map 1: Future Land Use* builds out at the low end of its density range.

The high end of the student ranges assumes (a) that each of the very low and low-density residential areas shown on *Map 1: Future Land Use* builds out at densities comparable with typical very low and low density projects in Cary over the last five years; (b) that each of the medium-density residential areas shown on *Map 1* (including medium density housing components of the mixed-use areas) builds out at densities slightly greater than typical medium density projects in Cary over the last five years; (c) that each of the high-density residential areas shown on *Map 1* (including high density housing components of the mixed-use areas) builds out at densities approximately 50% greater than typical high density projects in Cary over the last five years.

Using the Wake County Public School System's model school sizes, the student population range given above would generate enough students to fill:

- 2.7 to 5.6 elementary schools
- 0.7 to 1.5 middle schools
- 0.4 to 0.9 high school

(These figures are based on WCPSS' model school sizes of 669 students per elementary school, 1,008 students per middle school, and 1,600 students per high school.)

Note: Just because 20-30 years from now the northwest area may generate enough students to fill, say, 5 elementary schools, does not necessarily mean that 5 *new* elementary schools will need to be provided in the northwest Cary area. This is because schools in Cary that today are at or over capacity may well be under-capacity 20-30 years hence, and thus be available to provide some of the capacity needed for the northwest area.

As neighborhoods age, the student population ages with them, leaving neighborhood schools that were once over-capacity with too few students. This phenomenon most especially affects elementary schools, which typically are sized for a smaller number of students. Under-enrollment in elementary schools is already occurring or is forecast for Cary Elementary and Briarcliff Elementary, which serve relatively older Cary neighborhoods.

5.2 School Facility Recommendations

Town of Cary Planning staff and representatives from the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) met twice during the northwest Cary planning process to jointly agree on school facility needs and recommendations for the northwest area.

The Wake County Public School System has identified the following school facility needs:

- A high school is needed in the northwest Cary/southwest Morrisville area by 2006;

- A 2nd high school may be needed in western Wake County (west Cary or west Apex) sometime between 2010 and 2020;
- A middle school is needed in the northwest Cary/southwest Morrisville area by 2008;
- 4 elementary schools are needed in western Wake County (Morrisville, Cary, Apex, Holly Springs, Fuquay Varina) by 2008, in addition to elementary school sites already acquired as of July 2002. (i.e., 4 new school sites are needed in addition to the elementary school site in Carpenter Village PUD and the site immediately east of Cary Park PUD, on the “Hawes Tract” currently owned by the Town of Cary.)

Wake County Public Schools also operates under the following parameters when planning for and siting school facilities:

- WCPSS typically plans for a new school when there is sufficient enrollment to fill most of the school facility. That is, a school is not provided if enrollment projections indicate the school would be significantly below capacity upon opening.
- Schools must be sited where there is available public water and sewer utilities, and adequate roadway access.
- It is preferable to site a school near a public park.
- In order to reduce busing distances, schools should be sited so that they are centrally located within their attendance zones. In the northwest Cary area, this means that schools shouldn’t be placed too close to the Wake County line. Specifically, WCPSS prefers that schools be sited east of Green Level to Durham Road and south of Kit Creek at Alston Avenue.
- Multi-school campuses are acceptable (i.e., where an elementary, middle, and/or high school are all located on the same campus), however in general middle and high schools should not be sited too close to one another (e.g., high schools should probably be separated by at least 1-2 miles).
- The school site must be affordable to WCPSS, with per acre costs falling within a range acceptable to WCPSS.
- When possible, schools should be sited to serve a socio-economically diverse population.

The above parameters, together with the WCPSS-identified needs listed above and the findings in Section 5.1 above, lead to the public school recommendations shown on *Map 2: Multi-Use Paths, Parks, and Schools*. Map 2 indicates the search area where WCPSS desires to procure one high school site and one middle school site, and possibly additional elementary school site(s).

This plan recommends that the following school facilities be sited within the search area shown on Map 2:

- 1 high school by 2006 (at 65-70 acres each)¹
- 1 middle school by 2008 (at 30-35 acres each)
- 2 to 5 elementary schools (at about 20 acres each), including: the new elementary school site in Carpenter Village PUD, the new school site immediately east of Cary Park PUD (on the “Hawes Tract,” currently owned by the Town of Cary). In addition, one of the 4 elementary school sites that WCPSS needs in western Wake County by 2008 is recommended by this plan to be located within or near the search area shown on Map 2.

While there is consensus and a high degree of certainty over the need for a high school and a middle school, the precise number of elementary schools that may be needed at buildout 20-30 years from now cannot be determined with greater accuracy at this point, since (a) it is impossible to predict where final buildout will occur within the range of elementary school population given in Section 5.1, and (b) it is unfeasible to predict

¹ This plan does not recommend that the 2nd high school that WCPSS feels may be needed in western Wake County around 2010-2020 should be sited in the northwest Cary area. Since high schools require 65-70 acres, it is felt inadvisable to consume that much additional prime land for a 2nd high school – land that could otherwise be used for economic development and tax base in the northwest area. Further, it is unlikely that another new high school could be sited within the northwest area and still meet the WCPSS spacing requirements between high schools. However, a 2nd high school could be sited immediately south of the northwest area, and still be convenient to all of west Cary.

with any accuracy the number of existing elementary schools that will be under-enrolled 20-30 years from now, and the capacity that they will have to serve needs in the northwest area.

5.3 Implementation Strategies

In order to achieve the school facilities recommended in Section 5.2, above, three strategies are recommended:

1. Amend Cary's development ordinances to require that each new Planned Unit Development and development plan (site and subdivision) of sufficient size reserve land for a public school site, with right of first refusal to purchase the site going to WCPSS and/or Town of Cary for a specific period of time from the date of approval of the PUD or development plan.
2. Amend Cary's development ordinances and/or development submission policies to require that rezoning and PUD applicants as well as applicants for new development plans be required to meet with WCPSS and Town of Cary staff jointly as part of the application process.
3. Evaluate creating a Town of Cary policy/program to assist WCPSS with site acquisition costs in areas where land costs exceed WCPSS' per-acre site acquisition budget, in order to locate schools appropriately within the northwest area.
4. Evaluate the option of "land-banking" public school sites in advance of need, either through financial assistance and/or joint acquisition with WCPSS, or through Town of Cary-managed land acquisition.