

## **Growth spurt may fill schools**

### **Enrollment boom forecast in N. Fulton**

Diane R. Stepp - Staff  
Sunday, November 14, 2004

With new Milton High nearing completion in Alpharetta, Fulton is turning its school building sights to the Southside for the next four years. But forecasters warned this past week that an influx of students would outstrip classroom capacity countywide even before those schools could be completed.

Overcrowding will return to north Fulton and enrollment pressures will continue to mount on the Southside with an anticipated 10,603 additional students by 2008, according to planning director Patrick Burke's latest forecast. Fulton's current enrollment of 75,533 is expected to reach 86,136.

Seeing the numbers, board President Katie Reeves said she feared a return to the student population crisis that gripped the Northside six years ago. In some cases, 3,000 students were housed in high schools built for 1,850, Burke said.

The picture does not appear that drastic this time around, but the projections point clearly to a space squeeze and the need for more schools beyond the current building program, which will be wrapped up in four years.

As enrollment begins to surge in south Fulton, six of the remaining seven school building projects are scheduled for that area, including an elementary school set for completion in 2007. Even so, by 2008 there are expected to be 1,567 more elementary students than classroom seats.

"We need two elementary schools," said board member Linda Bryant, who represents far south Fulton.

The picture is worse in north Fulton, where high school students are expected to outstrip capacity by 2,067 students. The area also will be short 1,240 elementary school seats and 621 seats in middle schools, compared with a shortage of 252 middle school seats in south Fulton.

With the replacement of Westlake High and addition of new South County High School, south Fulton is expected to have excess high school capacity, with 306 open seats by the end of the current building program.

In Sandy Springs, enrollment is also growing, largely in the high-density Northridge area and Roswell Road corridor, Burke said. A planned new elementary school will provide relief, with Burke's estimates showing elementary schools 90 students under capacity by 2008.

Gail Deans, the school board member representing Sandy Springs, took exception to Burke's figures. She said that a second elementary school is needed because most of the existing schools are older, and the smaller ones are less able to accommodate a high concentration of special programs, which require more space than traditional classrooms. That includes programs for students with limited English skills, special education and gifted and talented instruction.

Future growth hot spots in north Fulton will center in the northeast quadrant around Shakerag community, in the northwest near the White Columns and Triple Crown subdivisions, and around the Holcomb Bridge Road/Ga. 400 area, Burke said. Infill development will continue where land is scarce.

In south Fulton, the Sandtown, Palmetto and Fairburn areas are expected to see growth, as is the

Liberty Point Elementary area. New subdivisions are also springing up along the I-85 and I-285 corridors, Burke said.

Enrollment declines were noted in the East Point, College Park and Hapeville areas, a trend that Burke anticipates will eventually be reversed. He attributed some of the decline to the fifth runway construction at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

The forecast numbers will be further refined in anticipation of Superintendent Michael Vanairsdale's recommendations in early 2005 for a new five-year capital building program that would begin in 2008.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS IN FULTON  
 School/project..... Scheduled  
 ..... groundbreaking

NORTH AREA

Dolvin Academy Elem. addition.... 2004  
 Findley Oaks Elem. addition..... 2004  
 Milton High replacement..... 2003

SANDY SPRINGS

Elementary school..... 2005

SOUTH AREA

Woodland Middle replacement..... 2004  
 Creekside High addition..... 2004  
 Westlake High replacement..... 2005  
 New High School..... 2005  
 New Elementary.....2006  
 New Middle.....2006

HOW MANY STUDENTS?

Based on current construction plans, schools in north Fulton in 2008 will have 3,928 more students than they have room for, the largest share in high schools. South Fulton schools will have 1,819 more students than capacity in middle and elementary schools, though high schools will have extra space. Here's a look at current students, projections for 2008, projected school capacity:

.....2004.....2008.. Capacity..Over/under

NORTH

Elementary....19,913..20,590....19,350.... 1,240  
 Middle..... 9,732..10,596.... 9,975..... 621  
 High.....12,043..13,192....11,125.... 2,067

SANDY SPRINGS

Elementary.... 3,431.. 3,910.... 4,000..... -90  
 Middle..... 1,360.. 1,668.... 1,650.....18  
 High..... 3,051.. 3,098.... 2,750..... 348

SOUTH

Elementary....12,237..15,667....14,100.... 1,567  
 Middle..... 5,840.. 7,252.... 7,000..... 252  
 High..... 6,344.. 8,194.... 8,500.....-306

Overall growth: The Fulton County school system expects to add 10,603 students during the next four years, a 14 percent jump.

Source: Fulton County Schools

