

# ENROLLMENT: A TALE OF TWO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**Situation 1:** School District A was experiencing declining enrollment because of maturing demographics and a complete build-out of housing within the district's boundaries. With new home construction nonexistent and an aging population, the district's spaces were not being filled and were running at inefficient levels. To compound the problem, some schools were built too close together, perhaps due in part to an overreaction to the rapid growth experienced many years earlier. The over building in certain areas resulted in:

- 1) spaces too close in proximity and not enough facilities elsewhere;
- 2) much larger than necessary transportation costs; and
- 3) students lost to an adjacent district because its schools were closer to the home district's student population.

**Situation 2:** A fast growing school district was constantly challenged to provide space for the rapid influx of students. Enrollment was increasing at 10 percent to more than 16 percent annually with absolute growth in the number of students increasing every year. With this kind of growth, standard projection models could not accurately forecast enrollment for the next year's staffing and budget. Further, commonly applied models, regression analyses or other approaches don't provide insights into the number and type of schools ultimately required.

Although it may not be apparent from the outset, both school districts have a lot in common. ***First it's important to make an accurate estimate of the ultimate number of students that will need to be served*** – not in five years – not in ten years, but after about 40 to 50 years, when demographics have leveled out and the time frame is consistent with the typical purported life expectancy of a school facility. Any deviation from that needed capacity can be served by utilizing interim measures to ensure that overbuilding does not take place within the district. A thorough analysis of the correct data will provide the basis for this determination.

***Second, how do school districts accurately predict enrollment for the next budget year in a rapid and accelerating growth environment?*** Standard cohort models likely won't make the grade in this situation. This is when considerable additional work is necessary to make realistic anticipations. Many factors have to be determined, such as:

- Where is growth most likely to occur? Will it shift to other areas?
- Which areas will grow first? Last? (Look at likely infrastructure availability for one indicator.)
- How many students can be expected from different types and/or prices of housing?
- Will kids generate at the same pace as housing construction? Lead? Or lag behind?
- Will students enroll equally at all grade levels or be concentrated in a few?

The answers to these and other pertinent questions can be addressed with proper planning and forecasting models. Strategic Resources West employs the appropriate technological tools and approaches to accurately project enrollment, focusing on the specific needs of each district regardless of the challenge.

