

# DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS & SCHOOL PLANNING

Demographics play a key role in the development of city and community plans, and should be equally as important when school districts devise Facility Master Plans and prepare to engage in future school site selection. Understanding the implications of using sound data can save both construction and operating expenses. A few key questions must be considered when entering into the planning stages, including:

- Is our neighborhood or community going to generate more students?
- If so, how many schools will we need?
- Where should they be located?
- How do we demonstrate the need to elected officials? To voters?

For example, one school district built schools during rapid growth, based upon the number of students it was accommodating at the peak of growth. Now, this same district is experiencing substantial excess capacity and considerable busing costs because the schools are concentrated in one side of the district. Further, parents in the newer areas with no schools are unhappy about not having neighborhood schools and the distance their children are bused. A thorough analysis and understanding of demographic cycles prior to initiating the building process could have helped avoid the costly results of short-term planning.

To get a clear picture and be able to adequately answer these questions, it is imperative to conduct a thorough demographic analysis. Reviewing this information can offer valuable insight regarding your community's population composition and how it may affect demand for school services and facilities. It begins with a review of recent and long-term population characteristics and trends including total population, age characteristics, birth rates and housing data including mix of housing type and future development.

Utilizing a few different data sources to improve data reliability is key. Keep in mind that detailed Census data about age cohorts and selected household information is based upon a relatively small sample size, usually ten percent or less. Thus, using more reliable local information is encouraged, such as housing counts from the County Assessor's Office and births from the appropriate state agency. Information available from local planning departments typically provides important and accurate sources of data including historical records about building permits and certificates of occupancy, and the community's master plan containing a wealth of facts about future housing by location and density. These figures can be applied to estimate the number of housing units the community will have when it is built out.

When you work toward finalizing your long-term Facility Master Plan, your best strategy is to monitor changes in demographics and housing plans. Contracting with an outside resource to do this for you helps maintain objectivity and gives you a true sense of the current situation. This allows you to understand the effects that all these factors can have on the continued relevance of previous estimates, and keeps you better informed and ready to make the right decisions that best serve your community.

