Why is the Los Angeles Unified School District Building Schools if Enrollment is Declining?

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ABSTRACT

Between 1980 and 2002, Kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) grew by over 208,000 students and only 34,500 seats were built as new permanent facilities. During this time frame, interim measures, like the use of portable classrooms, multi-track calendars, and the involuntary busing of students, were employed to accommodate the growing enrollment. By the mid 1990's, these measures had become insufficient to meet the continuing demand for additional classroom seats. With the voter approval in 1997 of a local bond for school construction, LAUSD began a capital master planning process that relied heavily on applied demographic analysis and the projections of future school enrollments to determine the need for new facilities. These applied demographic analyses show that the pace of building new schools will not offset these declines for many years, and that there will continue to be schools that are overcrowded despite the current trends of overall declining enrollment.

Due to the Los Angeles Unified School District's recent successes in getting voter approved local funding for school construction and modernization, a multi-year capital improvement program is underway. Following the passage of the first of three local bonds in 1997, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) began a wide-scale capital master planning process that was largely dependent on applied demographic analysis and the projections of future school enrollments to determine the specifics of need for additional school facilities.

Between 1980 and 2002, Kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment in LAUSD grew by over 208,000 students and, during that same time frame, only 34,500 seats were built as new permanent facilities. As an alternative to building new facilities, interim measures, such as use of portable classrooms, multi-track calendars, and the involuntary busing of students, are commonly employed by school districts to accommodate the growing enrollment and LAUSD was no exception. By the mid 1990's, these measures had become insufficient and unacceptable as long term solutions to meet the demand. The educational environment at many schools suffered as a result of the use of these measures. Based on a school enrollment population in 1997 of 681,500 students and the projected growth derived from the applied demographic analysis of changes in student enrollment, the District forecasted a shortage of 200,000 classroom seats based on a system of neighborhood schools that would operate on a traditional 2-semester calendar.

By 2002, enrollment in LAUSD grew by 65,000 to a peak of over 746,000. As of October of 2004, the District's enrollment had dropped to 742,000. Applied demographic analyses show that the pace of building new schools will not offset the expected enrollment declines for many years. There will continue to be overcrowded schools whose instructional environment suffers because of the long term use of one or more of the interim measures used to address overcrowding.

The primary mission for new construction program is to relieve overcrowding in the District's schools by providing the permanent school facilities that allow students to a neighborhood schools that operates on a traditional two-semester calendar. Within the capital master planning process, Master Planning and Demographics (MPD) defines the need for new schools based on instructional objectives that affect the capacity of schools and enrollment forecasts. This unit is staffed by urban planners, applied demographers, and cartographic/geographic information system (GIS) technicians. In additional to statistical analysis software, MPD utilizes a sophisticated GIS database to analyze classroom seat deficiencies for school facilities by the geographic boundary of the schools' attendance areas.

Capital Master Planning Program Evolution

- **April 1997, Proposition BB Passes**
  - Voters allocate $2.4 billion for the modernization of facilities and the addition of classroom space.

- **July 1997, School Planning Committee is convened**
  - Committee includes representatives from instruction, operations, and facilities
  - First task is to develop goals and guidelines for submittal to School Board
  - Commissions in-house study for long-range enrollment projections

- **December 1997, LAUSD School Board establishes District Facilities Goals and Guidelines :**
  - Students should attend a neighborhood school
  - Schools should provide space for growth
  - Reduce class size

- **January – May 1998, School Planning Committee develops Facilities Master Plan**
  - Determines planning capacities for existing schools
  - Establishes planning capacities for new schools
  - Reviews projected enrollment analyses
  - Identifies schools with space shortfalls
  - Develops plans for addressing shortfalls

- **June 1998, LAUSD School Board adopts Master Plan**
  - The District prepares a master plan of development which calls for 78,000 new classroom seats in the next six years.

- **November 1998, passage of Proposition 1A**

    - State voters approve a school bond with over $4 billion in new construction funding.

- **July 2000, School Board adopts the Priority Plan for School Construction**
    - The Board of Education adopts a list of priority efforts for new school construction.

- **December 2001, Strategic Execution Plan published**
    - This report establishes program budgets and schedules for 80 new schools and 79 additions.

- **November 2002, Local Measure K and State Proposition 47 pass**
    - Voters approve $3.35 billion in local funding and $13.05 billion in State funding for school construction.

- **March 2004, Local Measure R and State Proposition 55 pass**
    - Voters approve local bond Measure R which provides $3.87 billion for new school construction, modernization and repair. Statewide, Proposition 55 is approved, providing $12.3 billion of matching funds for projects throughout the state.

The results of the applied demographic analyses as well as the assumptions, variables, and baseline data are detailed in the poster that accompanies this submission.