

## **High School Study Committee: Report of the Enrollment Subcommittee**

September 11, 2003

### **Executive Summary**

After decline throughout the 1980s, enrollment at Wayland High School increased steadily throughout the 1990s, a trend that will continue through the end of this decade. The school that saw enrollment figures under 600 as recently as 1994 will see between 1000 and 1100 students between 2007 and 2013. Assuming the current economic climate does not suppress in-migration or birth rates over an extended period, our expectation is that enrollment levels will stay at or near that level until about 2020. Numbers of students beyond that time period are subject to great uncertainty.

We can conjecture about likely peak levels in the years beyond, but we will do so with caveats and some trepidation, as the future contains many question marks we cannot hope to quantify accurately. We can expect to see future peak levels most likely around 1200 (but conceivably as high as 1300) students as the town approaches build-out capacity. Just how close to these levels we will get, and how long it will take to get there is highly uncertain. The only reason to even mention such long-term projections is to consider them in planning – we may or may not reach these levels, but to plan prudently we must consider that they are possible during the lifetime of any new or renovated structure.

### **Background**

To support generation of recommendations the HSSC will make regarding high school facility needs, the Enrollment Subcommittee was tasked with projecting school enrollment through 2013 and beyond, if possible.

The subcommittee reviewed recent studies conducted by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), by Lani Ravin, an independent consultant working with Dore & Whittier (her report is available at: <http://www.waylandschoolcommittee.org/whs/hsfs/N1.EnrollmentProjections.PDF>), and the Wayland School Committee. The committee compared and evaluated these studies (all of which had quite similar findings), and generated an analysis of our own (which generally confirmed the earlier results).

In the course of preparing this material, we reviewed:

- historic school enrollment and town population data from the Wayland School Committee
- information regarding home sales from Warren Information Services
- annual birth statistics from the Town Clerk's office
- demographic data from the US Census (1980, 1990 and 2000), Metropolitan Area Planning Counsel (MAPC) and MISER
- enrollment projection reports from Lani Ravin, NESDEC and the Wayland School Committee

### **Mid-Term Enrollment Projections:**

We can predict mid-term (10-15 year) enrollment levels with some degree of confidence. Once children have entered the school system at the Kindergarten level, experience has shown that we can accurately project their numbers as they progress through the school system. We can even predict their numbers at the Kindergarten level given the number of prior years' births, albeit with somewhat less accuracy. Historically, we have had about 35% more children enter the Kindergarten classrooms than are born into families living in Wayland, and these numbers continue to grow by another 15% through elementary school years, and then largely level off through the middle-school years and drop slightly for high school.

The exact progression of a class as it goes through the class years varies as housing turnover rates and family sizes fluctuate somewhat. But the degree of variation is limited, particularly for the very near-term. The closer we are in time to the projection period, the greater the confidence with which we can make projections.

The largest class sizes seen since 1980 are already in the school system. The 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes are all larger than we have seen in over 20 years. These are the classes soon to be entering the high school, and when they are all there together for the 2007-2008 class year, at about 1000 students we will see the largest total school enrollment since 1979-80. Unless economic conditions suppress in-migration and/or births over the coming decade, the class sizes will remain large (over 900, and some years exceeding 1000) until 2020 (the last year for which students entering the school system have already been born).

### **Longer-Term Enrollment Projections**

We are reluctant to provide long-term forecasts for enrollment numbers, as the further out we project, the greater the degree of uncertainty in our projections. There are many variables that are difficult to predict, for example:

- changes in life spans (which may affect housing turnover)
- changes in tax policies that may affect housing turnover (e.g., tax breaks for seniors that may reduce turnover among the older residents in town)
- changes in the economy (housing prices, unemployment, employment opportunities) that may affect demographic composition of new entrants to town
- any cultural or economic changes that may affect family sizes in the future

However, we believe it is important to do some rough projections as any school construction or renovation that may occur will be done with an expected lifetime exceeding 40 years. We do not seek to project enrollment 40 years hence; however, we can provide some guidance about what peak numbers might be expected.

There are a variety of methods by which we could do longer-term enrollment projections, but most involve extrapolating current trends into the future. These methods typically

involve “straight-lining” the future, such that we would project small constant growth over time until we reached the population capacity of the town. However, we do not expect such a profile; historically we have seen significant cyclicalities in enrollment figures; high school population has varied from 5% to nearly 10% of town population. The current cycle that will peak at least at 7%, possibly somewhat higher. As a rough-measure of future peak enrollment, we estimate we can expect 1200-1300 students at Wayland High School (based on a build-out population of the town between 16,000 and 17,000).

### **Conclusion**

The HSSC plans should be based on near- and mid-term enrollment of 1000-1100 students, and should account for future enrollment that would average about 1000 students, with peaks of around 1200 students.