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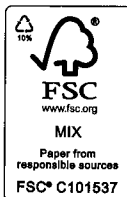
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Cover: Volunteers at Lansing, Michigan's Urban Farm Project. Photo courtesy Lansing Urban Farm Project.

Art credits: Lower Neponset River, Massachusetts; photo courtesy Mass Division of Ecological Restoration (20). Planting flowers in Baltimore's Locust Point neighborhood; photo courtesy Cheryl R. Duffey (30).



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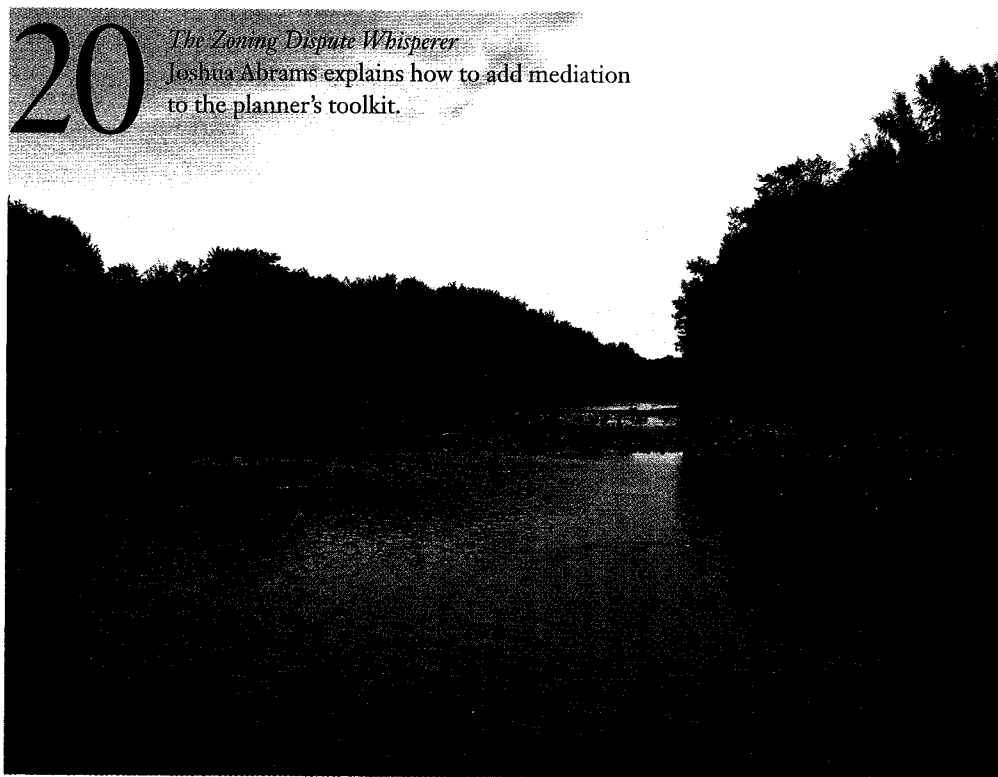
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Why Schools Need

Plan

By Kelley D. Carey, AICP

Public schools would be a lot better off if they hired city planners. Here are the pertinent skills that planners can offer:

Computer mapping.

Computer mapping for planning functions is unknown in many school districts, even in very large ones. For starters, planners can use computer mapping for transportation analysis, as there are programs available for designing bus routes and stops.

Software vendors see that planning is needed since they try to imitate planning skills by offering options that “automatically” design the “best” attendance plan. But where is public participation, and where are the cost comparisons for various construction options and student assignments? No software brings all that together. An urban planner understands how to do that analysis and how to involve the community in the process.

Demographics analysis. Any graduate planner understands the need to assess birth trends, land-use changes, utilities, transportation, and housing trends. School district personnel seldom connect those dots when making long-range plans to add classrooms, build or close or enlarge schools, design attendance plans, and project the possible impacts of alternatives.

If the planner in the facilities department can project enrollments, map kids and attendance zones, and show the schools on those maps, then the superintendent will be lean-

ing on that department for decisions about where to redistrict or where to build schools, or where they should be expanded or even closed.

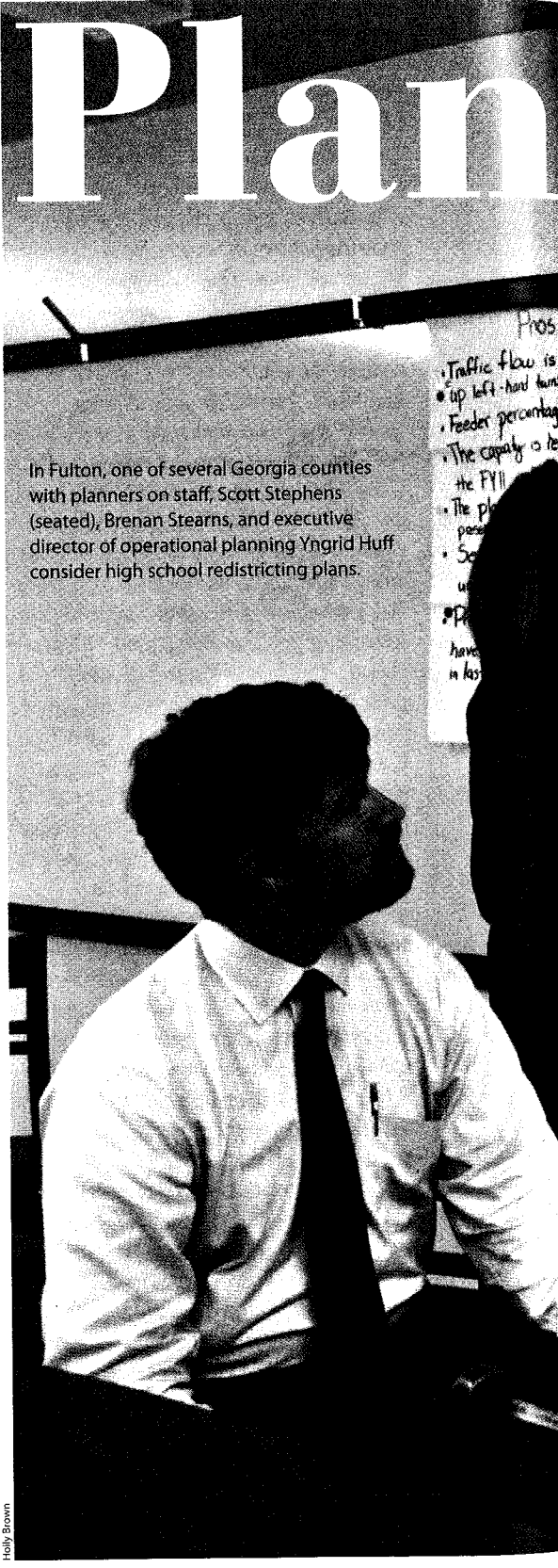
Five-year planning. Good demographics and facilities planning can support a rolling five-year capital plan, updated each year, that encompasses student projections by neighborhood and school; new construction, renovations, closures, and redistricting; public involvement; and programmatic changes. It is the school district equivalent of a five-year capital plan for a city, crossing disciplines and departments and requiring coordination and the ability to work with administrators and groups with different priorities.

Involving the public. In many school districts, public participation consists of holding some public encounter meetings that consulting “experts” morph into costly construction and redistricting programs. Broad discussions like this are construed as public signoff on final recommendations, which can be a planning farce.

Truly involving the public is something planners can do very well. They can apply interdisciplinary concepts for planning major construction and schools redistricting, engaging the public in developing and accessing alternative solutions.

School districts need trained planners

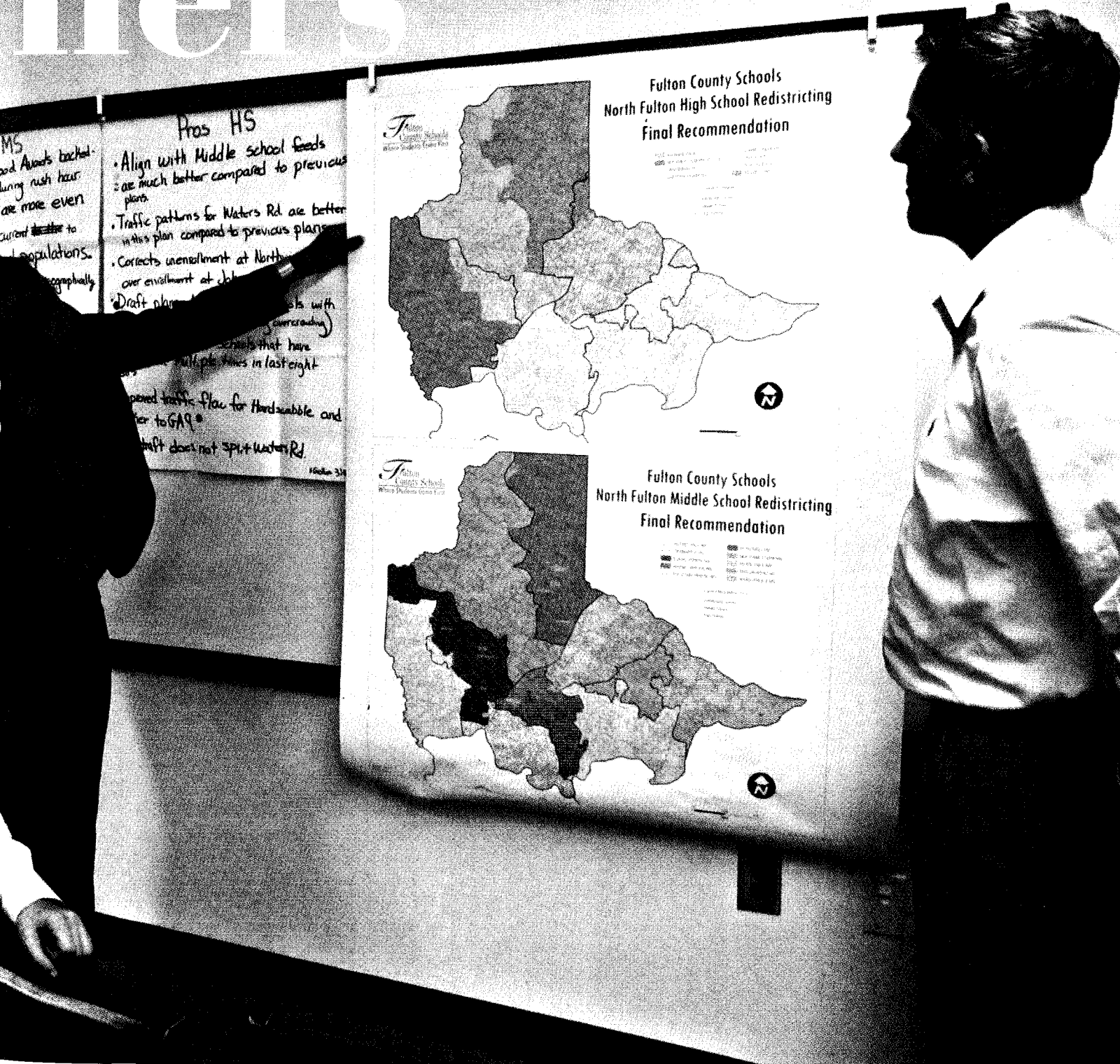
Tools used by city planners are applicable to school districts, whose construction programs and demographics analysis should be underpinned by clear planning processes. But usually they are not. Only in recent years



In Fulton, one of several Georgia counties with planners on staff, Scott Stephens (seated), Brenan Stearns, and executive director of operational planning Yngrid Huff consider high school redistricting plans.

It's time to bring urban planning skills to the public schools.

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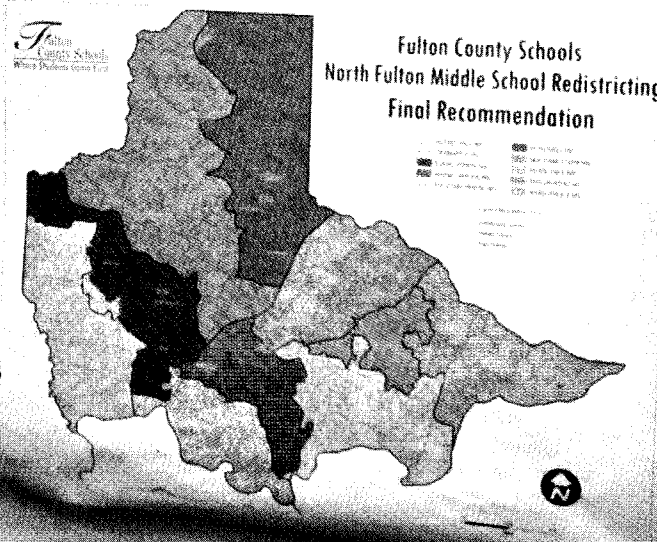
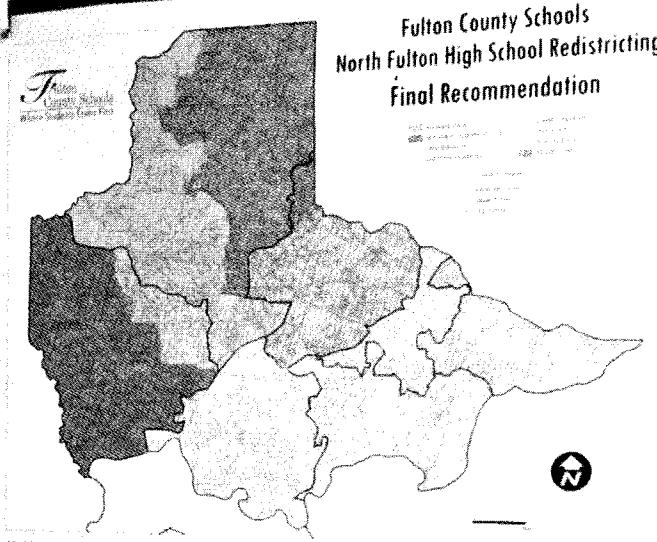


MS
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geographically

Pros HS

- Align with Middle school feeds
• are much better compared to previous plans
- Traffic patterns for Waters Rd are better in this plan compared to previous plans
- Corrects unenrollment at North over enrollment at Job
- Draft plan... (works with overcrowing)
- schools that have full p.c. times in last eight
- prepared traffic flow for Hardscrabble and per to GA9
- draft does not split Waters Rd

164th St



Improving Enrollment Planning for LA Schools

The Los Angeles Unified School District is the nation's second largest K-12 public school district, enrolling over 680,000 students. Like many other California districts, LAUSD is grappling with a severe budget crisis. LAUSD cut its budget by \$1.5 billion between 2008 and 2010 because of reduced state revenues—and a mandate to do more with less.

The dire funding situation gave the district a unique opportunity to increase operational efficiencies, replacing a time- and resource-intensive in-person enrollment forecasting process with an online tool that could change the way the district handles planning.

As the chief enrollment analysis coordinator for LAUSD's Master Planning and Demographics Unit, I know a key part of my job is to oversee strategic planning and operational improvements for the annual school-by-school student enrollment forecasting review process. This is a high-stakes activity, because the district's budget office uses each school's enrollment forecast as the basis for its resource allocation, including teachers, textbooks, supplies, custodians, nurses, administrators, and food service staff.

For almost 25 years, principals have participated in this review process. Known as "Roadshow," the annual in-person field review between principals and central administrators typically lasted six weeks, covered 700 schools across 708 square miles, and involved hundreds of paper-based data collection activities. Roadshow consumed 8,700 staff hours, 17,000 reimbursable travel miles, and 52,000 paper data collection forms each year, at a cost of over \$400,000.

When I joined LAUSD in 2005, I envisioned moving Roadshow online, which would save the district time and resources while still supporting the principals' participation and input. At that time there was little political will to make such a drastic technological change, but by 2009, LAUSD's severe budget cuts and staff layoffs meant that the in-person Roadshow was no longer an option.

In January 2010, we launched the Electronic School Forecasting System, known as E-CAST, which provided an online platform where principals could instantly see their school's data and respond to their proposed forecasts—anywhere and any time of the day.

Preliminary estimates indicate that E-CAST required about 2,500 staff-hours to operate instead of the 8,700 needed for Roadshow. It also reduced local district directors' supervision time by 89 percent, eliminated reimbursable travel miles, and made data collection instantaneous and paperless. In all, the annual operating cost was about \$120,000, a savings of about 70 percent.

The key disadvantage of E-CAST for principals was the loss of Roadshow's one-on-one contact with central staff, but the district mitigated that effect by providing comprehensive online help, a companion 24/7 online training module, and a customer service hotline. In a survey, more than 70 percent of principals reported positive attitudes towards the new system.

Since then, the district's success with E-CAST has grown. In 2011, the offices of permits, special education, magnet schools, and public school choice programs began using the application. Alternate education programs and the budget office will be added in 2012. There are plans to add a capacity assessment module to E-CAST in 2013, which would display each school's floor plans, square footages, space utilization, and operating capacity data, thus providing information on the supply side of the equation to complement the enrollment forecast's demand side.

A long-range strategic planning group is mapping out a five-year vision for E-CAST. The team intends to make it a powerful one-stop shop for LAUSD's principals, administrators, planners, and programmatic staff, who need quick access to a complete picture of enrollment and spatial data for a host of operational activities, including budgeting, master scheduling, maintenance and operations, custodial scheduling, capital planning, and emergency evacuation planning.

Valerie Edwards

■ Edwards is the chief enrollment analysis coordinator for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

have graduate city planners been added to school district payrolls. It is time to change that. After all, planners are found in local, state, and federal agencies and the military.

Without planners, here is the result of business as usual in public schools:

Disjointed planning and parallel play. Who does planning within the typical school district? The answer, frankly, is that much of that planning is reactionary, framed by arising issues, and seldom long range.

Separate departments often focus on separate priorities: curriculum programs, student demographics (assignment to schools, drawing attendance boundaries, and student assignment concepts), bus transportation, and planning for closing, enlarging, and building schools. The different entities do not coordinate their efforts when considering impacts.

For example, new instructional programs may be adopted without regard to the impacts on existing school capacities and attendance zones. Years ago, computer labs became the fad, taking up perhaps 20 percent of all classroom space, which meant very expensive building expansion programs. Computers later went into the classroom—where they should have been all along.

Another example: Special education programs may assign students with disabilities to an old school because it has empty classrooms. The facilities department then renovates the building, when it should have been closed. A trained planner could have developed alternative plans to house those kids closer to their homes, to avoid concentrating kids with special needs simply because an old school is available.

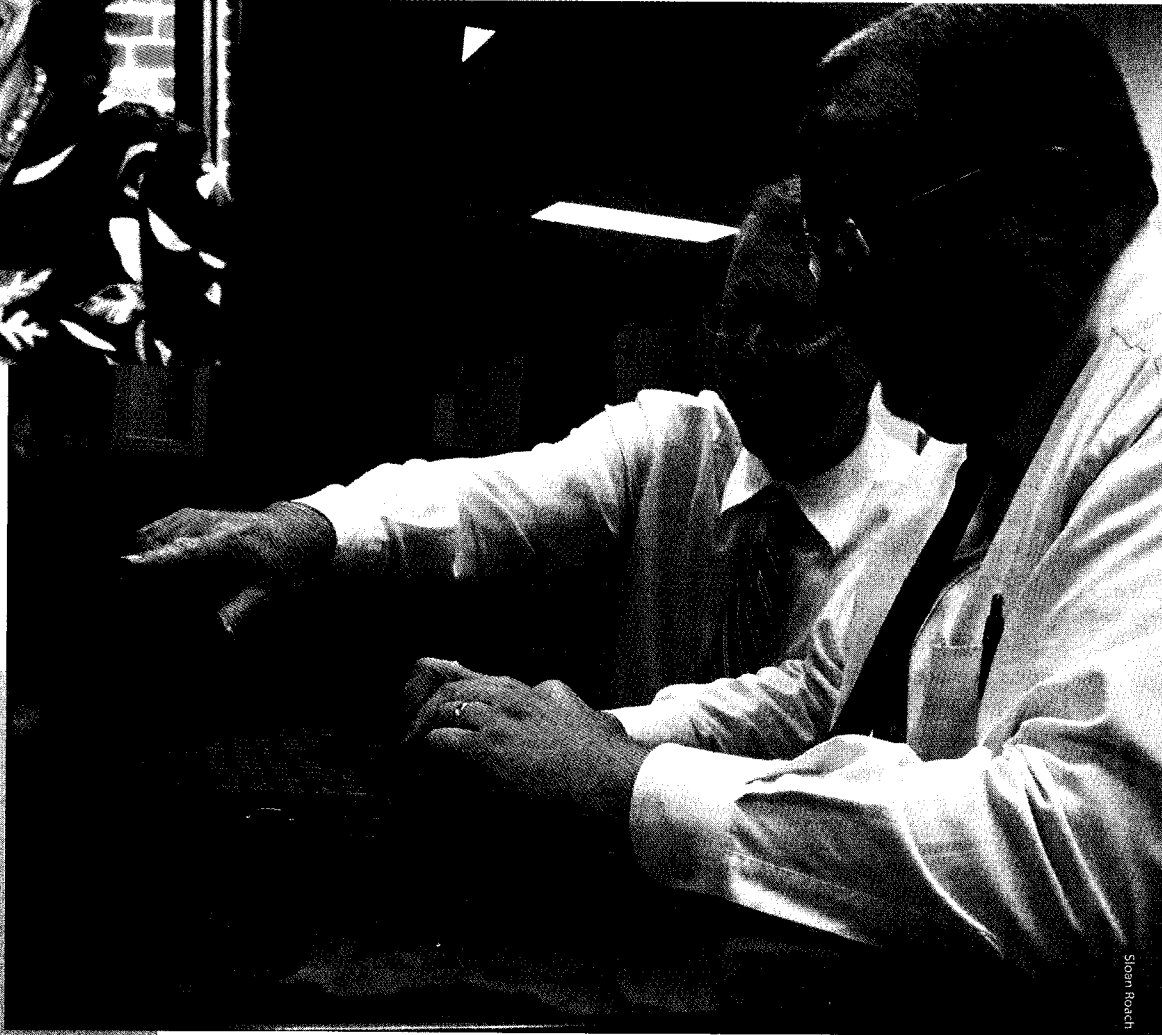
Controversial school attendance plans. Nothing is more contentious in school districts than redrawing attendance boundaries. The tools used are primitive by city planning standards, often including paper maps, estimated student numbers, and poor enrollment projections.

Long-range planning would call for new classrooms well before a yard full of portables brought down public wrath. Instead, in many cases the student assignment plan evolving over the years is a tangled mess of different grade structures and student transfer schemes that are costly and confusing. Coordination with local government agencies for community demographics, roads, utilities, land-use changes, and so on is simply overlooked because most school districts internalize their planning.

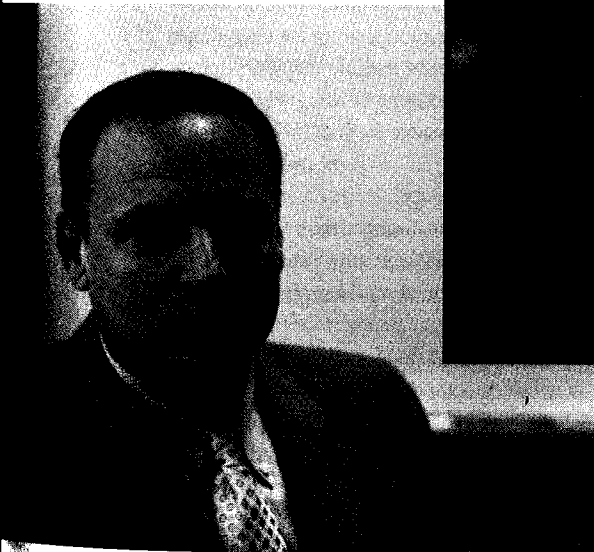


Courtesy Cynthia Richardson

Cynthia Richardson is the director of planning for Chesterfield County Public Schools in Virginia and has been an educational facility planner for 20 years. Christopher Corallo (bottom left), also a planner, is the executive director of organizational development, quality, and innovation for Henrico County Public Schools, also in Virginia. Planners David Barber (below, foreground) and Greg Stanfield work for Georgia's Gwinnett County Public Schools, a fast-growing district that has added 40 new schools in just eight years.



Steen Roach



Poor enrollment projections. I have reviewed massive redistricting and construction programs founded on straight-line projections of historical enrollment data for the whole district—not even for individual school zones. But even in a growing district there will be declining schools, along with various distributions of births and migration and cohort survival from grade to grade.

Cohort survival calculations are often reduced to an absurd simplicity: Divide last

year's number of fifth graders at School A by their fourth grade enrollment the year before. Use that ratio to project next year's fifth grade.

Rolling up student numbers like this often results in wasteful hiring and wasteful construction, with schools built in the wrong locations for long-term needs. In contrast, computer mapping might have shown that a quarter of the kids attending the school are attending out of their zone, distorting the

need for classrooms. Projecting kids by mapping them by home addresses, instead of just counting kids coming to a school, can show a much different need for classrooms. Computer mapping can lead to reliable alternative plans for construction and redistricting that are driven by where the kids live.

Likewise, the school district's transportation department uses mapping software to plan bus routes and create maps locating students by home addresses. But that data is

often not used for enrollment projections to plan for redistricting and construction. A graduate city planner would feel right at home in pulling this analysis together.

Long-range capital planning. Many states require a five-year capital plan for school districts while providing little planning support or review, treating this plan largely as a local political matter. The plan report can be a page of enrollment projections, followed by a thick notebook detailing all the school construction programs.

Such planning is seldom driven by computer-mapped projections of enrollments, land uses, or examination of alternatives that take curriculum, transportation, and facilities into account. A trained planner would promote the need to bring these factors—and staff—together to consider alternative futures. That exercise is seldom done.

Planning processes. Educators are experts in education. Planning to them is about planning a school layout or curriculum. They are not trained in long-range planning processes or real public involvement. They tend to make decisions and then present them to the public.

Not surprisingly, the lack of defined planning processes leads to public outrage over repeated redistricting and sometimes to enormous waste resulting from renovating schools that should be replaced, building schools in wrong places for the long term, and failing to meaningfully involve the public.

In my view, most school districts have not developed the planning capacity found in local government. There is little documentation of any planning process, and plans presented to the public often have the board votes to be adopted, so that public involvement can be a sham.

From decades of work with school districts nationwide, I conclude that most planning is driven by the latest ideas in educational programs, which are forced into the existing setup of school buildings and attendance plans. Such a disjointed system could be avoided.

Comprehensive long-range planning for programs, demographics, and facilities is badly needed in public school districts. It crosses traditional territorial boundaries of school district curriculum, bus transportation, special education, buildings planning, and planning for assignment of students to schools. Planning must use all the tools in the planner's bag and project long-term

consequences from short-range visions.

A planner's place in the school district

Will school districts come searching for city planning graduates to hire? No. Instead, planners must make the case that they are needed.

Here are departments where trained city planners can already be found in some school districts:

Transportation. Planners are trained in computer mapping, which means they would be able to custom-build programs for redistricting or redrawing attendance boundaries. Any planning graduate would know that "automatic" planning software for those functions might just be baloney.

Travel time to school is only one factor in routing buses and redistricting schools. So the school district's transportation director may immediately see the value of having a trained planner manage the computer mapping for transportation and to coordinate his department with the facilities and student assignment offices.

Clearly, having that departmental capability gives the transportation director a better seat at the superintendent's table. It also gives the planner a place to start within the district. That role can easily expand, with the potential for using traditional city planning tools in order to cross departmental lines and provide planning support that is data driven and process oriented.

Facilities construction and administration. The school district facilities director, or director of operations, manages the operations of buildings—including school construction and renovations, modifications, and expansions of existing schools. As such, the person in this position engages architects, engineers, and construction consultants and monitors their work and the resulting construction contracts. Planning is obviously needed in all these activities.

Because most school districts do not have a planning department, educators often turn to the facilities director for advice on where to build, enlarge, and close schools. That is a disaster in most cases. The director is trained in maintenance and construction, not urban demographics and facilities planning.

Horror stories abound about facilities directors selecting school sites that are totally unsuitable to handle growth or that create nightmares for designing an attendance zone. Attendance zones are often planned in the spring before a new school

opens. A planner would gasp at that idea, for how was the school site picked without a projected attendance plan?

A trained planner considers keeping neighborhoods intact. That means avoiding repeated redistricting of kids where there is dramatic growth or decline in enrollment. Planners would project the five-year enrollments by school and grade, using computer mapping and projections software.

Planners could also factor in land-use changes so that zones do not have to be redrawn each year, and they could cross disciplines to factor in travel burden, the condition of buildings, and the need to make the best use of schools. The next step would be to project enrollments, mapping students by home addresses as a basis for trending growth and decline around the district.

In a school district, the planner must work to become the "go-to person" for planning, bringing together data from mapped bus routes and existing buildings and attendance zones to develop alternative plans for construction, enlargement, and closure of schools; for reorganization of grade structures; and for finding places for special programs such as magnet and charter schools.

That work naturally should coordinate with local public works and planning departments in information sharing for long-range planning. It should include mapping demographics and facilities, working with the curriculum department to find the best places for special programs to be housed, preparing for and leading public involvement in the process of determining where to build and to redistrict schools, assuring equity in facilities and travel times, and keeping neighborhoods together.

In sum, the office of the facilities or operations director can be the best place for a planner to provide computer mapping and demographics studies and to fill the need for expertise in five-year comprehensive planning.

Once a trained planner is in place, people will quickly recognize the value of planning activities and training.

In fact, we are now seeing more graduate city planners working in school districts. Patrick Burke, the director of operations for Fulton County schools (surrounding Atlanta), explains why his district employs full-time planning staff. "Good planning leads to good execution," he says. "Planners understand the linkages between community, housing, and public infrastructure, including

human services such as education." Burke and his staff recently completed a plan for \$1 billion in school construction.

Planners work in other Georgia districts, including Gwinnett, Cobb, Cherokee, Atlanta City, DeKalb, and Forsyth. And planners are working in the school districts in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Orange County, Florida, and in Virginia at Henrico, Prince George, and Chesterfield.

What next?

At this point, educators are not taught about urban planning, and planning schools do not teach public school district planning. It is past the time to change that situation. Planners need to be trained to make their place within public education.

City planning schools also should establish ties to school districts, just as they do outreach when placing students in conventional city planning positions. By setting up service workshops and internship programs, and by approaching school board members, superintendents, and their associates, planning schools can raise a suitable profile in public school districts. A course in school district planning, including demographics and facilities planning in the context of educational programs, would have broad application.

As Burke noted, "It is amazing that planning programs miss this opportunity to train and to market to these areas of public service."

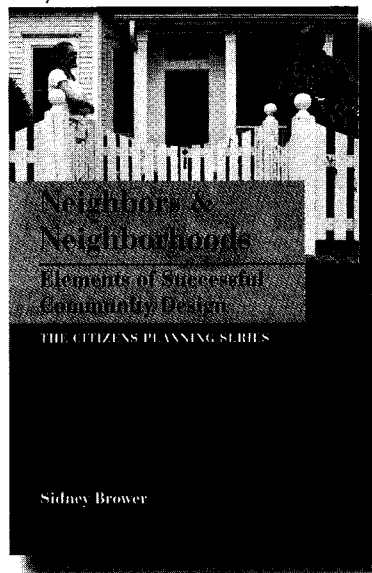
Graduate planners can also approach school officials directly to explain their training and how it fits district objectives. School systems have annual budgets, just as cities do. But superintendents and department heads can often find funding for planning assistance and add it to budgets later. They just need help in understanding how planners will make their jobs easier in specific ways.

Schools educate our children to become contributing members of society. City planning education and career opportunities must encompass public schools planning, just like other public activities and development efforts.

■ Kelley D. Carey is a charter member of AICP, a professional engineer, and a licensed attorney with graduate degrees in planning, engineering, and law. For more than 35 years, he has consulted with school districts and the U. S. Department of Justice on school planning issues. His book, *School District Master Planning—A Practical Guide to Demographics and Facilities Planning*, was published this year. Contact him at careyhhi@juno.com.

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