

Albemarle convenes Redistricting Advisory Committee for urban ring elementary schools
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Albemarle County Public Schools has begun planning for a school redistricting that could affect hundreds of students in the county's urban ring around Charlottesville.

A 13-member Redistricting Advisory Committee will attempt to address overcrowding at Agnor-Hurt, Greer, and Woodbrook elementary schools, and consider middle school student assignments based upon changes to elementary boundaries. The county

School Board directed Superintendent Pam Moran to form the committee this summer.

Rosalyn Schmitt, assistant director of facilities planning for the county schools, said the new attendance zones should be designed to serve the school division adequately for at least five years.

Greer Elementary is facing the most urgent overcrowding issues among the county's elementary schools. Greer enrolled 626 students as of Sept. 6, and hosted 39 additional children in Pre-K classrooms. The school building has a functional capacity of 574 students, according to metrics used by division staff.

Greer recently had to remove its stage for performances to create additional classroom space. Art and music classes are now held in trailers next to the school. Schmitt said the insufficient space at Greer also has forced some families onto a waiting list for placement in public preschool programs.

"Greer is making it work, but there is not even a little bit of extra room," said Jennifer Schaeffer, one of

two Greer representatives on the Redistricting Advisory Committee.

While Agnor-Hurt's enrollment is slightly below its functional capacity this year, the school division has predicted it will add more than 60 students by 2022.

Schmitt said enrollment at Agnor-Hurt and Greer as of Sept. 6 was up from 2016, but about 20 students short of the division's projections for each school this year.

The School Board called for the current redistricting study in anticipation of a 16-classroom addition to Woodbrook Elementary, which will open for the 2018-2019 school year

Woodbrook's enrollment has held steady at slightly over 300 students for the last several years. The addition will enable Woodbrook to comfortably host 610 students, including up to 60 children in three Pre-K classrooms.

Schmitt said the school division will gather public input on the redistricting at a community meeting scheduled for the first week of November, and from surveys administered throughout the fall. Moran will share the committee's recommendation with the School Board before it votes on the new boundaries in January.

At the advisory committee's first meeting on Monday, Moran said Albemarle's process for school redistricting should reflect the democratic ideals enshrined in America's Constitution.

"Your job [for this committee] is not to represent your individual family," Moran said. "Your job is to represent those who are not able to be at the table with us."

Moran said the committee's redistricting decisions would be critical to ensuring that the county's children have equitable school facilities, transportation, and educational opportunities. "Every child deserves the very best that we have to offer as a school division," she said.

The committee on Monday reviewed year-by-year enrollment statistics for each neighborhood currently districted for three schools.

A presentation by Schmitt showed that much of Agnor-Hurt's growth over the last decade has come development along Rio Road East, including Belvedere subdivision and the Stanley Martin Homes at Stonewater. However, the number of students from the Dunlora subdivision has steadily declined from 58 in 2012 to 31 this year.

The Westgate Apartments and neighboring homes on Georgetown Road are sending 65 students to Greer this year, almost twice as many as in 2014. The construction of apartments at Colonnade Drive near U.S. 250 increased that area's presence at Greer from 5 students in 2010 to 64 students this year.

The Mallside Forest and Arden Place apartments near the Fashion Square mall are one of the largest sources of growth for Woodbrook. The school currently enrolls 108 students from those apartment complexes and nearby properties— 30 more than in 2014.

Moran has asked the committee to pursue greater demographic balance across the impacted elementary schools. Schmitt said division staff would do their best to help committee members understand how adding or removing a neighborhood from a district area would change the overall

demographics of a school.

Renee DeVall, transportation analyst for the county schools, said the new attendance areas should be contiguous whenever possible. She cautioned against bringing in students from an isolated “island” of residences to meet enrollment goals.

“You don’t want to drive students past their old bus stops and their old friends,” said DeVall. “When you are starting something new, you don’t want to see ‘the old’ standing there and waving at you.”

DeVall said the School Board would consider “grandfathering” current students and allowing them to stay at their assigned school. However, she said the families of these children would have to provide their own transportation to the school once the redistricting takes effect.

Agnor-Hurt, Greer and Woodbrook were included in two of the county’s most recent school redistricting studies.

In 2015, before plans to expand Woodbrook were finalized, a committee was unable to recommend a viable redistricting solution for the overcrowding at Greer. Two years earlier, 94 students enrolled at Agnor-Hurt were moved into the attendance zones for Broadus-Wood, Hollymead and Woodbrook.

Meetings of the Redistricting Advisory Committee are open to the public for observation. All committee meetings will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. in the media center at Agnor-Hurt Elementary. The next meeting is scheduled for Oct. 2.