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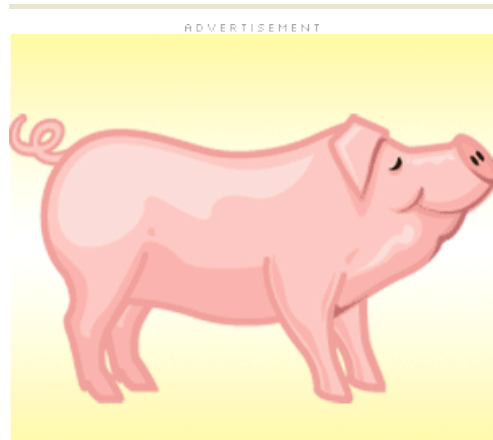
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U.Va. demographers predict surge in elementary school enrollment

STAFF REPORTS • MAY 8, 2009

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CHARLOTTESVILLE — Over the next five years, the number of students in Virginia public schools will increase by nearly 42,000 students – a gain of 3.5 percent – driven by high growth rates in the elementary grades.



Projections by the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, released today, show large post-2000 birth cohorts, now entering school in record numbers, causing the rapid growth. Births to Virginians have grown by nearly 10 percent in recent years, from 98,862 in 2000 to 108,417 in 2007, the latest available number.

Fall 2008 student enrollment stood at 1,205,169 statewide — about 3,000 higher than in the fall of 2007. According to the projections, K-12 enrollment will grow by nearly 4,000 this year, and by increasingly larger numbers through 2013. Elementary grades will experience much higher growth rates than grades in high school, which may actually experience losses.

Between 2008 and 2013, kindergarten enrollment is expected to increase by 10.3 percent (from 90,117 to 99,367); while 12th-grade enrollment is forecast to have the largest decline of any grade, falling 5.5 percent.

"Fluctuations in the school age population are common, and often cyclical," said Mike Spar, author of the report. "The coming large increases in the number of elementary school students will become large increases in the population of middle and high school students in the next 10 to 15 years. As they move through the grades, this large cohort of students will require administrators and local governments to address issues ranging from providing sufficient personnel and classroom space to transportation expenses and realignment/balancing of school districts."

While statewide enrollment is forecast to increase over the next five years, 60 percent of school divisions are predicted to lose enrollment in the next 12 months. The largest losses will be to urban school divisions in Hampton Roads, and to several other county and city divisions across the commonwealth. Staunton will see some smaller losses, according to the report.

In contrast, 53 school divisions, including Augusta County and Waynesboro, will see increasing enrollments in the next year. Loudoun and Prince William counties will account for the largest portion of this growth, with each division gaining more than 2,000 students between fall 2008 and 2009.



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The Demographics & Workforce Group at the Weldon Cooper Center produces annual school enrollment projections for the state and its school divisions. High school graduation projections are repeated every other year, alternating with a series of average daily membership projections.

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