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As you can see, this year's APFO open/closed school chart, has changed the status of five schools regarding projected enrollment and the capacity number of Ducketts Lane Elementary School, with no physical change there. I understand that program changes opened homerooms at Ducketts, and I know others will be addressing concerns there. So, I will focus on what I have learned regarding the five schools opening to development that were closed - Cradlerock ES, Elkridge ES, Veterans ES, Fulton ES and Patapsco MS. These schools are in areas set to receive increased housing in coming years, and so there is a concern as to how new housing figures into these projections.

I have learned that these schools had previous over-projections that were corrected and/or had housing projects that were delayed, which changed the figures for certain years.

I sat on the APFO task force, and attended all the meetings, and heard many presentations on these issues. We were told that many things cause changes to projected enrollment including possible redistricting, cohort rates (classes moving up), birth rates, housing changes, etc. Statistical models are done, and much work goes into these calculations, which I surely appreciate; however, I am concerned about how current the development data is that is used for the most recent year's **projected enrollment calculations**, and the longer-term projections as well. We were told that the development figures included in the calculations each year, include projects approved **through the previous January**. Feasibility studies come out in the summer, and those are used to form APFO test projections, and the capital budget for schools. By the time the open/closed chart is completed, the approved development data that adds students to the projections is 18 months old. The next feasibility study that starts the process for next year will be done soon, and so it seems we should be using the development data in that study, which is only 5 months old for this year's chart. I want to be clear, I am criticizing the structure of the model used, and not the hard, well-intentioned work of those trying to achieve the best accuracy in these studies. They are tasked with this way of planning and I am suggesting more recent data be used.

Current and projected fiscal budgets are used in these projections. Current program information is used. Current enrollment and ratios are used. Possible redistricting movements, that may or may not occur, are used. Why not the most recent development data too? If not, then predictions of student enrollment are coming out lower, and the schools are crowded NOW. The changes aren't from a revolving door of ins and outs. The areas mentioned are set for plenty of growth, but the schools open with THIS chart.

The recent increase in maximum average class size also will lead to faster-paced residential land development, because it increases the capacity number of the schools, even though there is not more room. When class size is increased, you can fit more kids into the same space. That lowers the capacity percentage, and will bring in more kids even sooner, yet, again, the space for common area needs is not increased.

Also, the number of students predicted as coming from developments often seems underestimated. This should be analyzed for accuracy and adjusted as necessary in the future. Possibly shorter-term averages like 2 or 3 year averages should be used instead of 5. Lastly, I truly wish capacity increases were at least partially dependent upon actual physical increases in space.

It cannot be news to you that residential development in Howard County far outpaces the infrastructure necessary to keep up with it. Also not news is the school system's pattern of under-projecting future enrollment. At this rate, seven of our 12 high schools will be enrolled at over 115% capacity by the year 2020. Two Elkridge area schools, Duckett's Lane ES and Thomas Viaduct MS, have grown in enrollment faster than HCPSS ever predicted. Also not news is that the development numbers used to make these school enrollment projections are 18 months old. Which is why it is a mystery to me that these APFO charts are routinely accepted and approved when the data in them is so suspect.

How many allocations for Howard Square, Oxford Square, Blue Stream, and other high density residential developments were approved in the last 18 months? What can possibly justify an enrollment decrease at Elkridge Elementary when 84 townhomes will be built in the EES attendance area?

Allow me now to turn to Duckett's Lane Elementary. When it opened in 2013, including a Regional Early Childhood Center, the capacity was 601 students. One year later, in a study re-assigning capacities of all elementary schools, HCPSS raised the capacity to 669 with no physical space added to the school. A year later they closed the RECC, citing space needs for K-5. Now, apparently under the radar and hoping no one would notice, HCPSS has raised the capacity of DLES again to 770, citing the closing of the RECC as justification for finding enough space for an extra 100 students.

As a former RECC parent, I can tell you that does not free up enough space for an extra 100 students in an already overcrowded school.

But let's consider what HCPSS considers overcrowded. Any enrollment between 90-110% and HCPSS doesn't blink an eye. So if you approve 770 as Duckett's new capacity, consider that it is perfectly acceptable for the number to reach 847 students. A school does not close to development, though, until 115% capacity, which would mean 932 students. In a school built for 601 when it opened its doors 3 years ago.

I hear the solution is that Duckett's is receiving a modular building that will hold 5 classrooms. On a 9 acre parcel, the only place to put that modular building is on the field. No problem, since parents are already telling me that their children are having PE and recess in the bus loop and 3 classes of PE totaling 65 students in the gym at once.

The HCPSS MO of increasing capacities at schools with enrollment issues has to stop. Two years ago, in a re-assignment of middle school capacities, the same was done to Elkridge Landing MS and Mayfield Woods MS – increased capacities of over 100 students with no added physical space.

You can stop them by not accepting this APFO chart as a matter of course, but insisting that it run the numbers again with current residential construction data. We have long had a problem with overcrowded schools in the "smart growth" areas like Elkridge and the Rt. 1 corridor, and randomly increasing capacities and basing projections on outdated data only makes the problem worse. Please don't let another generation of students suffer overcrowded buses, classrooms and hallways because of it.