

PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

DATA & ANALYSIS

DRAFT #1: JULY 2025



PROSPER 2050

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INTRODUCTION

The Public School Facilities Element is not a mandatory component of the Comprehensive Plan. However, it plays a critical role in ensuring that Polk County continues to provide high-quality public school facilities for both current and future populations. The data and analysis section of this Element is designed to support future County decisions and policy adjustments related to the effective management of these facilities. This analysis includes an inventory of the County's public schools, outlines level of service standards, presents current enrollment figures and future enrollment projections, and details planned improvements to the public school system through 2050. Additionally, it identifies potential opportunities for enhancing the County's school facilities and services.

INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

According to Policy 3.603-A2 of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan, the Level of Service (LOS) for Polk County Schools shall be 100% of the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH). An annual Utilization Analysis is conducted by the Polk County School Board Facilities Division to determine the operation and efficiency of each school as compared to the Department of Education's standards determined by the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH).

The Interlocal Agreement for Public School Facilities Planning reinforces the provisions outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. Section 4B, which outlines the standards for LOS and Long-Range Planning, states that to ensure the capacity of schools is sufficient to support student growth, the LOS standards of 100% of FISH capacity will be in effect for all schools.

EXISTING ENROLLMENT

In 2023-2024, the Polk County School District tracked permanent utilization for 128 schools, including 72 elementary schools, 24 middle schools, 17 high schools, and 15 other schools. These numbers include Exceptional Student Education (ESE) schools, technical, alternative, a combination of two or more elementary, middle and high school grades. **Table PSF-1** shows the number of schools in each category that are near capacity and over capacity, which is derived from the FISH. The numbers calculated for each school are based on permanent capacity and are used in the Polk County School District for concurrency review. Concurrency service areas (CSA) make it so that new housing development either needs to meet capacity within their CSA or an adjacent CSA.

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Table PSF - 1: Capacity by School Type

Type	Under Capacity	Near Capacity	Over Capacity	Total	Percentage Near & Over Capacity
Elementary Schools	26	12	34	72	64%
Middle Schools	10	9	5	24	58%
High Schools	9	1	7	17	47%
Other	9	3	3	15	40%
Total	54	25	49	128	58%

Source: Polk School Board, 2024

ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS

Student population projections were calculated using student generation rates provided by the Polk County Public Schools Capital Improvement Plan (FY24 – FY28) and Impact Fee Study. A single-family unit generates 0.144 pre-kindergarten through elementary students, 0.083 middle school students, and 0.117 high school students. For multifamily, the generation rates are 0.122 for pre-kindergarten through elementary, 0.061 for middle school, and 0.073 high school. For mobile homes, the rates are 0.052 for pre-kindergarten through elementary school, 0.030 for middle school, and 0.037 for high school.

Projected housing needs, based on 25-year population projections from the Polk County 2050 Population Projections and compiled in **Table HSGE-12**, indicate that the County is projected to have 302,258 dwelling units, indicating a need for 109,233 additional dwellings by 2050. Assuming that the single-family, multi-family, and mobile home units continue to constitute the same portions of the additional housing stock (based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2018-2022) as found in **Table HSGE-1**, 71,001 of these dwellings will be single-family, 9,831 will be multifamily and 28,401 will be mobile homes. The projected student station generation based on the projected dwelling units by type of housing is included in **Table PSF-2**. The total student generation represented in the table below are projected in addition to the existing enrollment.

Table PSF-2 Projected Additional Student Generation (2050)

Housing Type	Elementary	Middle	High	Totals
Single Family	10,224	5,893	8,307	24,424
Multi-Family	1,199	600	718	2,517
Mobile Home	1,477	852	1,051	3,380
Totals	12,900	7,345	10,076	30,321

Source: Polk County, 2024.

PUBLIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

The Capital Planning and Projects 5-Year Plan Annual Update (2024-2028) is referenced by the Department of Education, the State Legislature, the Governor’s Office, the Division of Community Planning (growth management), local governments, and others for understanding needs including funding and planning. It is the authoritative source for school facilities related information. Projects identified in the document include the Garner Elementary Master Plan, Southwest Middle School Master Plan, Bella Citta Middle School Expansion, South Pointe Elementary, McLaughlin High School Expansion, and Stephens Elementary Remodel.

Table PSF-3, outlines planned new construction and expansion of schools in Polk County to accommodate growing student populations through 2028 and provide sufficient capacity while construction of new facilities continues. The initiatives span across multiple years, beginning in 2023 with the addition of new student stations at several elementary and middle schools, such as Elbert Elementary and Southwest Middle School. Subsequent years will see the development of new schools such as the New Northeast Elementary and Middle Schools, as well as expansions at existing schools like Bella Citta Middle School and Wahneta Elementary. These projects are designed to enhance the educational infrastructure, ensuring that Polk County Schools can meet the needs of an expanding student body over the coming years. By the year 2031, Polk County is planned to have 6.5 additional schools (Elementary: 3.5; Middle: 2; High: 1), with a capacity of 8,788 student stations.

Table PSF - 3 Additional New Schools or Increased Capacity through 20 28

Site Location	Planned Use	Year
Elbert Elementary	Elementary School	Year 1
Southwest Middle School	Middle School	Year 1
Bella Citta Middle School	Middle School Expansion	Year 1
South Pointe Elementary School	Elementary School	Year 1
Alta Vista	Elementary School	Years 2 & 3
Wahneta Elementary	Elementary School	Years 2 & 3
New Northeast Elementary School	Elementary School	Years 4 & 5
New Northeast Middle School	Middle School	Years 4 & 5
Lake Alfred Elementary	Elementary School	Years 4 & 5
Lena Vista Elementary	Elementary School	Years 4 & 5
Jere Stambaugh Middle School	Middle School	Year 5

Source: Polk County Schools, 2024.

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2023-2024 (Year 1)

- Elbert Elementary: Added 137 additional student stations. New capacity is 900 student stations.
- Southwest Middle School: Added 297 additional student stations. New capacity is 1,350 student stations.
- Bella Citta Middle School (Expansion): Added 500 student stations.
- South Pointe Elementary School: Adding 996 student stations.

2024-2025 (Year 2)

- Alta Vista: Adding 136 additional student stations. New capacity is 850 student stations (Planning to begin).
- Wahneta Elementary: Adding 125 student stations. New capacity is 560 student stations (Planning to begin).

2025-2026 (Year 3)

- Alta Vista: Adding 136 additional student stations. New capacity is 850 student stations.
- Wahneta Elementary: Adding 125 student stations. New capacity is 560 student stations.

2026-2027 (Year 4)

- New Northeast Elementary School: (22 A, 996 capacity) (Planning)
- New Northeast Middle School: (23 DD, 1,500 capacity) (Planning)
- Lake Alfred Elementary: Adding 352 student stations. New capacity is 900 student stations (Planning).
- Lena Vista Elementary: Adding 284 student stations. New capacity is 996 student stations (Planning).

2027-2028 (Year 5)

- New Northeast Elementary School: (22 A, 996 capacity)
- New Northeast Middle School: (23 DD, 1,500 capacity)
- Lake Alfred Elementary: Adding 352 student stations. New capacity is 900 student stations.
- Lena Vista Elementary: Adding 284 student stations. New capacity is 996 student stations.
- Jere Stambaugh Middle School: Adding 310 student stations (Planning). New capacity is 1,500 student stations.

Within the five-year annual update, Polk County Public Schools provides a map of additional capacity needs over the next 10 years, highlighting how the County has divided the region into four distinct areas: Northwest, Northeast, Central, and Southern. These boundaries allow for a more targeted approach to addressing the varying demands for school capacity in each area. The most

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recent map shows the new elementary schools and various additions needed in the Northeast, Northwest, and Central areas, as well as a middle school and high school in the Northeast Area. By dividing the County into these areas, Polk County Public Schools can prioritize and allocate resources efficiently, ensuring that each region's specific needs are met in a timely and effective manner. The map shows where new schools and expansions will occur as well as how the County plans to balance student distribution across these zones, aiming for a sustainable approach to educational capacity management over the next decade.

The Polk County School Board has proactively acquired land for future school sites in response to proposed developments across the County. Their Facilities Planning and Operations Department has provided support as the County and its municipalities continue to grow. The presence of a school board planner who monitors enrollment, school capacity, and proposed developments has been instrumental in successfully delivering new facilities throughout the County.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

With the high volume of growth expected in Polk County over the next 25 years, continuous coordination will be essential. The volume of existing schools near or over capacity is nearly 58% for all schools. The additional anticipated growth will only increase the demand for schools. While the school district currently uses portables to facilitate extra temporary capacity, the interlocal agreement states that relocatable schools (i.e. portables) shall be phased out. This will need to be balanced with the cost of new facilities and operations. Sharing resources will become of high importance as the demand for school facilities increases with additional population.