

Meeting Minutes

City Council/School Board Subcommittee

May 18, 2026

5:00 p.m.

ACPS Board Room

1340 Braddock Road

In-Person with Zoom Access

(Links to this meeting are posted on the [City and ACPS Websites](#))

City Council and School Board Member Attendees:

Mayor Alyia Gaskins

Councilman John Chapman

School Board Chair Michelle Rief

School Board Vice Chair Christopher Harris

ITEM #1: ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS AND STUDENT GENERATION

Enrollment Projections

Sophie Huemer, Director of Capital Programs, Planning, and Design for Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), presented the annual enrollment projections and student generation rate updates. They were joined by Michael D’Orazio and Carrie Beach from the City’s Department of Planning and Zoning.

Director Huemer began by reviewing key terminology related to enrollment projections. They explained that ACPS enrollment figures are based on the official September 30 enrollment count verified by the Virginia Department of Education. They also described the cohort survival rate methodology, which compares the number of students in one grade level to the number enrolled in the preceding grade the prior year. Because Alexandria has a highly transient population, projections are analyzed at a granular, school-by-school and grade-by-grade level.

Historical enrollment data showed steady growth in ACPS enrollment through the late 2010s until a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment has since rebounded to approximately pre-pandemic levels, though the most recent year reflected a modest decline. Director Huemer noted that similar enrollment decreases have been observed regionally, including in Fairfax, Montgomery, Loudoun, and Arlington counties.

The presentation then reviewed the ten-year enrollment projections. They projected enrollment to remain relatively stable at approximately 16,000 students over the next five years, followed by modest declines over the longer term. They emphasized the reliability of the forecasting model, noting that five-year projections historically have achieved 95–99% accuracy, while ten-year projections have achieved approximately 90–93% accuracy.

Several factors contributing to slower enrollment growth were discussed. These included declining birth rates among Alexandria residents, as reflected in Virginia Department of Health data, and a narrowing gap between incoming kindergarten classes and graduating senior classes. They also noted that recent year-over-year cohort survival rates have declined slightly, contributing to flatter projected enrollment trends.

Director Huemer stressed that the data does not indicate an “enrollment cliff” or dramatic future decline. Rather, projections show gradual stabilization and modest decreases. They also emphasized that despite stable enrollment levels, ACPS continues to face significant capacity and utilization challenges within school facilities.

Mayor Gaskins asked whether staff had analyzed which neighboring jurisdictions were experiencing the fastest enrollment declines. Director Huemer responded that this specific comparison had not been studied but offered to provide regional enrollment data from the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia.

Student Generation Rate

The committee then received an update on student generation rates, which are used both in small area planning and in evaluating the school impacts of proposed development projects.

Planning staff explained that student generation rates estimate the number of students produced by different housing types and are updated annually using a rolling three-year average. The rates are applied during development review to estimate the number of students new residential projects may generate.

Staff noted that the vast majority of ACPS students—approximately 88%—live in housing that is more than 30 years old, while only 12% reside in newer housing. Student generation rates for most housing types changed only slightly from the prior year.

Examples were provided to illustrate how the rates are used. For instance, a 12-unit townhouse development would be projected to generate slightly more than two students based on the current townhouse generation rate.

Additional data demonstrated that most ACPS students live in housing constructed during the 1960s and 1970s, while newer residential developments generally generate fewer students. Staff observed that this trend continues across both market-rate and affordable housing developments.

Planning staff stated that future work may include consolidating the City's two affordable housing categories into a single category for analysis purposes, given the similarities in recent affordable housing developments.

Committee Discussion

Chair Rief asked whether the recent dip in cohort survival rates would likely lead to lower enrollment projections in future years. Director Huemer explained that the recent decline contributed to the relatively flat enrollment projections over the next five years, though future trends will depend on additional years of data.

Committee members engaged in a broader discussion regarding how the enrollment and student generation data should inform policymaking, budgeting, and capital planning.

Director Huemer emphasized that enrollment projections represent only part of the overall picture and must be considered alongside school capacity and utilization data. They noted that long-range educational facilities planning will continue to rely heavily on these projections.

Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Superintendent of ACPS, highlighted that while overall enrollment may be stabilizing, ACPS is experiencing growth in specialized student populations, including English language learners and students requiring special education services. She explained that these populations require additional staffing, specialized instructional spaces, and support services, all of which increase operational and capital costs regardless of overall enrollment trends.

Planning staff discussed how student generation data helps evaluate both individual development proposals and long-term small area plans. They explained that the City and ACPS coordinate closely during planning processes to determine whether projected growth can be accommodated within existing school facilities or whether additional schools may eventually be needed.

Committee members discussed the importance of communicating to the public that school budget pressures are not driven solely by enrollment numbers. Staff noted that flat enrollment does not eliminate rising costs associated with employee compensation, health insurance, utilities, and specialized student services.

Councilman Chapman reflected that the discussion underscored the need to focus not only on overall enrollment totals but also on demographic shifts, service requirements, and the evolving use of school facilities. Staff further noted that ACPS facilities continue to experience heavy use both by students and the broader community.

Dr. Kay-Wyatt suggested that a future meeting could include a more in-depth discussion of the instructional and operational impacts associated with serving specialized student populations.

ITEM #2: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The Sub-Committee received a presentation on youth employment, including updates on the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the new ALEX Fellowship pilot program, and ACT for Alexandria's Youth Employment and Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiative.

Lesa Gilbert, Director of the Center for Economic Support Services with the Department of Community and Human Services, introduced the presentation. She was joined by Kat Ashmore, Director of the Workforce Development Center; Brandi Yee, Chief Program Officer at Act for Alexandria; Heather Peeler, President and CEO of ACT for Alexandria; Deputy City Manager Alethea Predeoux; and Deputy Human Resources Director Erica Willis.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

Ms. Gilbert provided an overview of the Summer Youth Employment Program, describing it as a significant City investment and the City's premier workforce development initiative for youth. The program is funded through City general funds as well as contributions from community partners and private donors.

The program serves youth ages 14 to 21 and provides six weeks of paid employment experience combined with workforce readiness training. Participants earn Virginia's minimum wage and may earn up to approximately \$2,300 during the summer. The program is funded to serve approximately 170 youth annually, though partnerships and supplemental funding have allowed participation to expand beyond that number.

Youth are divided into two age-based cohorts. Participants ages 14 and 15 spend the first several weeks receiving soft skills and workplace readiness training before participating in supervised work experiences, often within City departments. Older participants receive one week of intensive workforce preparation followed by five weeks of direct employment with participating employers.

Staff explained that participants must attend a City high school, meet income eligibility requirements, and be authorized to work in the United States.

Program application data showed growing demand for the initiative. In 2025, 606 youth applied compared with 579 the previous year. Staff reported that 196 youth would be served in the upcoming summer program, an increase from 171 participants the previous year. The increase was attributed to expanded partnerships and outside funding support.

Staff also highlighted the broad range of participating industries and employers, including businesses in health services, technology, construction, nonprofit services, and hospitality. The City continues efforts to recruit additional employer partners and sponsors.

Kat Ashmore reviewed participant outcomes from the prior year using survey data collected through the program's career readiness platform. She reported that participants demonstrated increased confidence, stronger workplace skills, improved communication abilities, greater commitment to educational goals, and better awareness of career pathways. Many participants

also identified supervisors as trusted adults, and a majority of business partners indicated they would recommend or rehire youth participants.

The presentation also highlighted the annual youth job fair, which serves applicants who are not placed in SYEP positions. Staff described ongoing monthly transferable skills workshops that teach resume writing, interview preparation, and professional communication skills.

Additional program enhancements included career exploration field trips, laptop distribution through Comcast's Project UP initiative, enhanced advisor training, and the launch of an alumni engagement effort. Staff also announced that a former SYEP participant would return this year as a youth advisor to help support the program and strengthen youth leadership opportunities.

Committee Discussion on SYEP

School Board Member Harris shared that he had personally participated in the Summer Youth Employment Program as a youth and credited the program with helping him transition into full-time employment. He asked whether participants in the younger cohort could return in later years to participate in the older cohort. Staff confirmed that returning participation is encouraged and noted that 74 youth from the prior year would be returning this summer.

Mr. Harris also asked whether the City tracks long-term employment outcomes for participants. Staff explained that they hope to expand data collection and eventually track post-program outcomes, including graduation and employment trends, through future partnerships with ACPS and additional grant funding.

Committee members discussed the importance of employer recruitment and ensuring that work experiences expose youth to a broad range of industries and career opportunities. Staff noted that placements range from City recreation centers and nonprofits to legal, healthcare, and hospitality professions.

Mayor Gaskins commended staff for strengthening the program through deeper engagement with youth participants and employers. She highlighted efforts to improve career matching, tailor employer preparation for hosting younger workers, and increase private-sector partnerships to expand program capacity. She also noted the City's efforts to create sponsorship opportunities for organizations that may not be able to host youth directly but still wish to financially support the program.

Mr. Chapman reflected on his own experiences participating in City youth employment programs and emphasized the value of increasing placements within City government itself. He encouraged continued expansion of internal opportunities across City departments and regional collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions and businesses to broaden employment opportunities for young people.

Sub-committee members also discussed the importance of employer engagement regionally and the need to strengthen partnerships with businesses, utilities, and public agencies across Northern Virginia.

ALEX Fellowship Pilot Program

Deputy City Manager Alethea Predeoux and Deputy Human Resources Director Erica Willis then presented the City's new ALEX Fellowship pilot program, which stands for "Advancing Leaders through Education and Experience."

The week-long summer fellowship is designed for rising high school juniors and seniors attending school in Alexandria. The pilot program aims to introduce students to careers in local government while developing leadership skills, civic engagement, and workforce pathways in public service.

Five students will participate in the inaugural cohort and will be paired with senior City leaders across departments. In addition to shadowing and workplace experiences, fellows will participate in leadership seminars, networking opportunities, and the development of individualized career and leadership plans.

Mayor Gaskins asked whether the fellowship included income eligibility requirements similar to SYEP. Staff responded that the fellowship is not income-restricted. She also encouraged staff to identify replicable elements of the curriculum and orientation that could potentially be incorporated into other City internship and youth engagement programs.

Mr. Chapman expressed support for the fellowship program and suggested exploring grant opportunities and partnerships with regional and national local government organizations to help expand similar initiatives in the future. He emphasized the value of exposing youth to careers in local government and public administration.

ACT for Alexandria Youth Employment and CTE Initiative

Brandi Yee and Heather Peeler of ACT for Alexandria then presented updates on the Alexandria Youth Employment and Career and Technical Education (CTE) Initiative.

Ms. Yee explained that ACT for Alexandria convened a working group in 2024 composed of more than 50 representatives from City government, ACPS, nonprofits, employers, higher education institutions, and funders. The group's goal is to strengthen workforce development and career readiness systems for Alexandria youth.

The initiative has focused on enhancing collaboration across sectors, reducing barriers to youth employment, and aligning workforce opportunities with regional economic needs. Staff described a learning process that included reviewing successful workforce development models from other communities, including YouthForce NOLA in New Orleans.

As part of the initiative, ACT for Alexandria partnered with consultants and nearly 200 stakeholders to map Alexandria's existing youth employment ecosystem. The resulting analysis identified strengths and gaps in career exploration, career preparedness, and career launch opportunities.

Key findings included that many youth and families are unaware of existing workforce programs, that paid work-based learning opportunities remain limited, and that coordination among organizations remains a challenge despite strong interest in collaboration.

Sub-committee members discussed the importance of coordination, employer engagement, and sustainable funding to strengthen the youth employment ecosystem. Staff emphasized that while Alexandria has many strong programs, greater alignment and communication are needed to maximize opportunities for youth.

The initiative's recommendations included creating stronger employer engagement tools, expanding paid work-based learning opportunities connected to high-demand careers, and identifying a long-term organizational structure to sustain the effort.

Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt highlighted the strong alignment between the initiative and ACPS academy programs and emphasized the importance of connecting year-round educational pathways with summer employment opportunities.

Mr. Chapman encouraged continued coordination between City and school staff and emphasized the importance of engaging federal agencies, regional employers, and utility companies in future workforce partnerships. He also suggested exploring whether future franchise or licensing agreements with utilities and service providers could incorporate youth workforce development commitments.

OTHER UPDATES

- The School Board Governance Committee drafted a memo regarding the November 2024 resolution on adjusting the School Board election cycle. The memo recommends that City Council and the School Board establish a subcommittee with two members from each body to discuss the resolution and develop recommendations for both bodies to consider. Mayor Gaskins noted that both the City Council and School Board have heard community interest in broader election reform discussions and committed to bringing the proposed subcommittee discussion to Council's next legislative meeting.
- The School Board is continuing its budget process, including a second work session and an add/delete session prior to adoption in June. Board members noted the challenge of balancing competitive compensation with program reductions.
- The Board also raised concerns about continued funding for a partnership program with Communities of Northern Virginia that provides wraparound services for students. Members requested City consideration of additional support using contingency reserve

funds. Mayor Gaskins acknowledged that multiple youth-serving programs have experienced reductions and emphasized the need for further discussion on how limited contingency funding could best support critical services.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS AND WORK PLAN

- Members discussed narrowing future agendas to fewer topics per meeting to allow for more focused discussion and avoid running over time.
- Councilmember Chapman suggested using smaller pre-meetings or 2x2 discussions to address preliminary questions before full joint meetings.
- Mayor Gaskins emphasized maintaining consistency in the work plan and grouping related topics together, such as pairing shared facilities discussions with long-term planning and city growth.
- Staff clarified that the transportation discussion previously postponed from April would focus on accessibility and transportation services for residents with disabilities, including coordination with DCHS and the T&ES accessibility program.
- Members also discussed reviewing the annual meeting calendar and scheduling conflicts for future meetings.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.