



Julie L. Hackett, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

(781) 861-2580, ext. 68040
jhackett@lexingtonma.org
Fax: (781) 861-2560

October 9, 2024

Dear Massachusetts School Building Authority:

As the designated MSBA point of contact on the Lexington High School building project, I am writing on behalf of the Enrollment Advisory Group, the School Building Committee, and Town of Lexington leadership to express our serious concerns about Lexington High School's current approved design enrollment of 2,395 students. The recent approval of zoning bylaw changes intended to encourage the construction of multifamily housing in Lexington significantly exceeds the Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA communities, further exacerbating the uncertainty surrounding the impacts of the zoning bylaw changes on future school enrollment.

The MSBA issued Lexington's final student design enrollment of 2,395 before Town Meeting Members voted on the zoning bylaw changes. Since we last spoke with you on this topic, the [Town of Lexington voted well ahead of schedule](#), hoping to leverage the MBTA Communities Act to resolve an ongoing housing shortage. The MSBA could not have anticipated that the Town would rezone 228.2 acres, yielding an as-of-right multi-family unit capacity of 12,546 units when built to the maximum density allowed.¹ This vote exceeded the roughly 80 acres with a capacity for 1,231 units needed to comply with the MBTA Communities Act that was the basis for projecting enrollment. In addition, other communities' slow adoption of this act has led to the unanticipated rapid arrival of housing development projects in Lexington. Currently, 971 housing units have entered the formal review process² with over 300 more poised to enter shortly.

Background Information

Lexington has a long history of closely monitoring school enrollment to aid in master planning, budget development, and other important processes. An Enrollment Working Group was chartered in 2014 by the former LPS School Superintendent to develop five-year enrollment forecasts for the elementary grades (K-5), the middle school grades (6-8), and the high school grades (9-12). In 2016, the group was reconstituted as an advisory group that assisted school department staff. Details on the methodologies used by the EAG can be found [here](#).

¹ Lexington – District Compliance Determination for MBTA Communities under Section 3A of the Zoning Act (Section 3A), Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities, July 29, 2024.

² Future Development Projects - Lexington Planning Department memo to the Select Board, October 2, 2024.

On September 29, 2022, we met with MSBA staff to discuss the insufficient design enrollment for the LHS building project. On October 20, 2022, we provided the MSBA with additional materials to justify an enrollment increase. We again met with MSBA staff on December 9, 2022, to review enrollment projections and methodologies for the Lexington High School building project. Following is a summary of how we arrived at a design enrollment of 2,395 students.

- Lexington originally requested a design enrollment of 2,900 students.
- The MSBA initially gave Lexington a design enrollment of 2,120 students.
- The Town of Lexington disputed the MSBA’s design enrollment due to specialized programs and anticipated MBTA zoning bylaw changes.
- The [MSBA increased the design enrollment by 275 students](#) (an additional 50 for out-of-district enrollment and 225 students to address new housing developments and the potential zoning changes accommodating transit-oriented development).
- As noted in [this signed agreement](#), we finally agreed to a design enrollment of 2,395 students.

October 1 LPS Enrollment Update

LPS continues to produce yearly revised enrollment projections, incorporating newly available enrollment data. These data inform decisions about budget, academic offerings, student and family services, facilities, transportation, staffing, and other decisions concerning resource allocation. In support of that planning, this report provides a preliminary analysis of LPS enrollment, incorporating newly available data from as of October 1, 2024. Some highlights from this [initial analysis](#) include:

- While total (PK–12) enrollment (6,772 as of October 1) is down modestly (-33 students compared to the previous year), important variations by grade span must be noted and accounted for in our planning.
- There was a large decline in K- 5 elementary enrollment (-128 students), at 2,546 as of October 1, 2024. The decline is largely due to a larger 5th-grade cohort (545 as of October 1, 2023) progressing onto the middle school level this year, replaced with an especially small kindergarten cohort (306 as of October 1, 2024).
- Preliminary October 1 middle school enrollment for FY25 is flat and at the same level as 2023-2024 (1,737).
- Preliminary high school enrollment for FY25 is 2,419, a substantial increase from 2023-2024 (+101 students). High school enrollment remains well over the building's planned operating capacity for large core spaces, such as the cafeteria and other spaces (with spaces designed for a capacity of 1,850). Current high school enrollment would need to decline by nearly 600 students for the core spaces to be within the planned operating capacity.

Over the next few weeks, LPS will review October 1 enrollment data and produce revised enrollment projections (e.g., [Annual Review of Student Enrollment & Projections: 2023-24](#)). When these official numbers become available, a final annual enrollment analysis with our official October 1 enrollment numbers and new projections will be published.

Considerations & Requests

1. We know of no other high school in Massachusetts that has opened its doors with student enrollment exceeding the MSBA's design enrollment. **We respectfully request a meeting** with MSBA officials to discuss a potential increase in Lexington's design enrollment to account for the Town's aggressive MBTA zoning bylaw changes.
2. Lexington High School enrollment substantially increased this past year by +101 students. With a total enrollment of 2,419, we currently exceed our design enrollment of 2,395 by 24 students. The current enrollment pressure is likely to worsen, as the Town's zoning bylaw changes are **4.5 times higher** than those of other municipalities complying with the Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA communities.
3. The MSBA increased Lexington's design enrollment by 225 students in anticipation of our participation in the Multi-Family Zoning for MBTA communities. Given that Lexington exceeds this requirement by more than four times—and given the fact that a 225-student adjustment has already been applied—it seems reasonable to use a multiplier of three to arrive at a new design enrollment of **+675 students, bringing our total design enrollment to 3,070 students.**
4. As noted in our Educational Plan, the community continues to express concern about the inadequacy of our design enrollment of 2,395 students. To allay concerns, our preliminary massing concepts include 20,000 GSF for adding the Central Office in the high school, which we understand is ineligible for reimbursement. Given the pressures of student enrollment that we continue to face, we fully anticipate that we may never utilize this Central Office designated space for its intended purpose. We have intentionally developed program adjacencies next to student spaces to easily convert this square footage to 12 additional classrooms if necessary, which could accommodate an additional 288 students. Based on current projections, we believe it is likely that we will open Lexington High School over capacity. **We respectfully request that you consider applying the 32% reimbursement rate to the 20,000 GSF designated for the Central Office/student overcrowding.**
5. In addition to basic classroom needs, we have significant concerns about the pressure on our large core spaces (auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, etc.). We have been told that the MSBA will reimburse us for 18,000 GSF for a gymnasium. Additionally, at a minimum, we are requesting a renovation of our existing 30,000 SF Field House, with no additional reimbursement for this space. **We respectfully request that the MSBA consider applying the 32% reimbursement rate to the Field House to help alleviate anticipated overcrowding.**
6. Lexington is part of the LABBB Collaborative, and we serve students from 62 Massachusetts communities at Lexington High School. We are over the MSBA's allotted square footage in special education by 9,000+ GSF. Although we serve children from communities with significantly higher needs and, therefore, higher reimbursement rates, we receive only 32%. We have had a post-pandemic influx of students with disabilities entering Lexington Public Schools, and we see this trend continuing with the zoning bylaw changes. For over fifty years, Lexington has done its part to serve other communities (e.g., LABBB, METCO). While we believe that the average reimbursement rate of the 62 districts we serve in LABBB would be a better metric to use, **we respectfully request that the MSBA considers applying—at a**

minimum—a 32% reimbursement rate to the additional 9,000 GSF designated for special education.

Neither the MSBA nor Town leaders could have predicted that Lexington would substantially exceed the zoning bylaw changes. There is significant community concern about the size of a new or renovated high school, and we know that no one, including the MSBA, wants to design and build a high school that will be undersized when it first opens. We respectfully request another meeting with the appropriate MSBA officials to collaboratively discuss and solve our most recent enrollment-related challenges.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie L. Hackett

Julie L. Hackett
Superintendent of Schools

Hackett,

Ed.D.