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Daily News-Record  
Thursday, May 25, 2006 9

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## High School Expansion Eyed

### Sixth Elementary School Also Up For Study As Enrollment Soars

By **JEFF MELLOTT**  
*Daily News-Record*

Harrisonburg's school enrollment is increasing faster than anticipated, crowding schools and outstripping plans to meet the demand, according to Superintendent Donald Ford.

In 2000, School Board members based their planning

for new schools on an annual growth rate of 2.2 percent. But the percentage has been 2.8 percent over the past five years, Ford said on Wednesday at a gathering of the Harrisonburg Education Foundation.

With signs of even more rapid growth, Ford said, it may be time to be thinking about expanding the high school and planning the city's sixth elementary school.

#### Increasing Numbers

The city expects to open its fifth elementary school and second middle school between

Smithland and Country Club roads in the fall of 2008. The opening of the dual-school complex is expected to relieve existing crowding and meet new growth, particularly in the city's northeast.

As evidence of the overcrowding, Ford said the school division has 22 classroom trailers at the city's four elementary schools. Stone Spring has the most with eight trailers. Waterman and Spotswood have five each and Keister has four.

The division pressed the trailers into use as the school

division set enrollment records for the first three months of 2006.

At the end of April, the school division had 4,352 students, a 6-percent increase over the same month in 2005, Ford said.

"I cannot positively predict what our growth will be next year," Ford said. "But I would say to you that there's no indication that we are not going to continue to see growth in the 3 percent to 4 percent range over



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Last February, Tony Nesselrodt of the Mill Cabinet Shop in Bridgewater was among the dozens of craftsmen putting the finishing touches on the new Harrisonburg High School, which opened in August. Now, school officials say an expansion at the school — as well as a sixth elementary school — may be needed to accommodate the city's soaring enrollment.

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# Ford Astounded At Pace Of Development

## School

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the next few years.”

### By the Numbers

Ford said he is astounded by the number of residential development projects that the city has either approved, or that are in the early stages of being planned.

Citing figures from Harrisonburg's Community Development Department, Ford said the city issued 1,633 building permits from 2000 to 2005.

“As our city continues to grow our schools continue to grow,” he said.

The growth is putting pressure on the new high school, which opened last fall. Expansion of the high school may become necessary, Ford said. Just over 1,300 students were enrolled at the high school in April.

Ford expects more pressure

on space for elementary students.

“We're also going to have to look carefully and see if additional growth in the city is going to require that we look at another elementary school. At some point, it is going to have to be considered,” he said.

### Space Equation

Contributing to the space crunch is the school board's desire to keep class sizes small to provide students with as much individual attention as possible.

The difference of 5 fewer students in a classroom, for example, from 24 students to 19, can mean the need for five additional classrooms in a school of 450 students, Ford said.

Also, the instructional needs of students plays a role, Ford said. Harrisonburg remains among the tops in the state in terms of the percent-

age of students who speak English as a second language and require additional instruction. In April, the division had 1,615 students in the English as a Second Language program — 37 percent of its total enrollment.

“We have to meet these needs if these students are going to become the contributing members of society that we desire,” Ford said.

### Shared Concerns

City Councilman Charles Chenault, who serves on the liaison committee between the council and the school board, attended the foundation's meeting and heard Ford's remarks.

“We are aware of it,” he said of the school system's growth issues. “This is a very legitimate issue.”

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