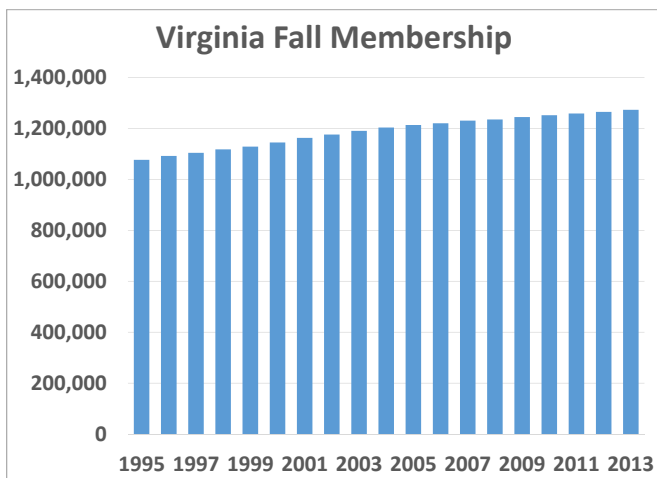


# Public School Enrollment Trends in Virginia

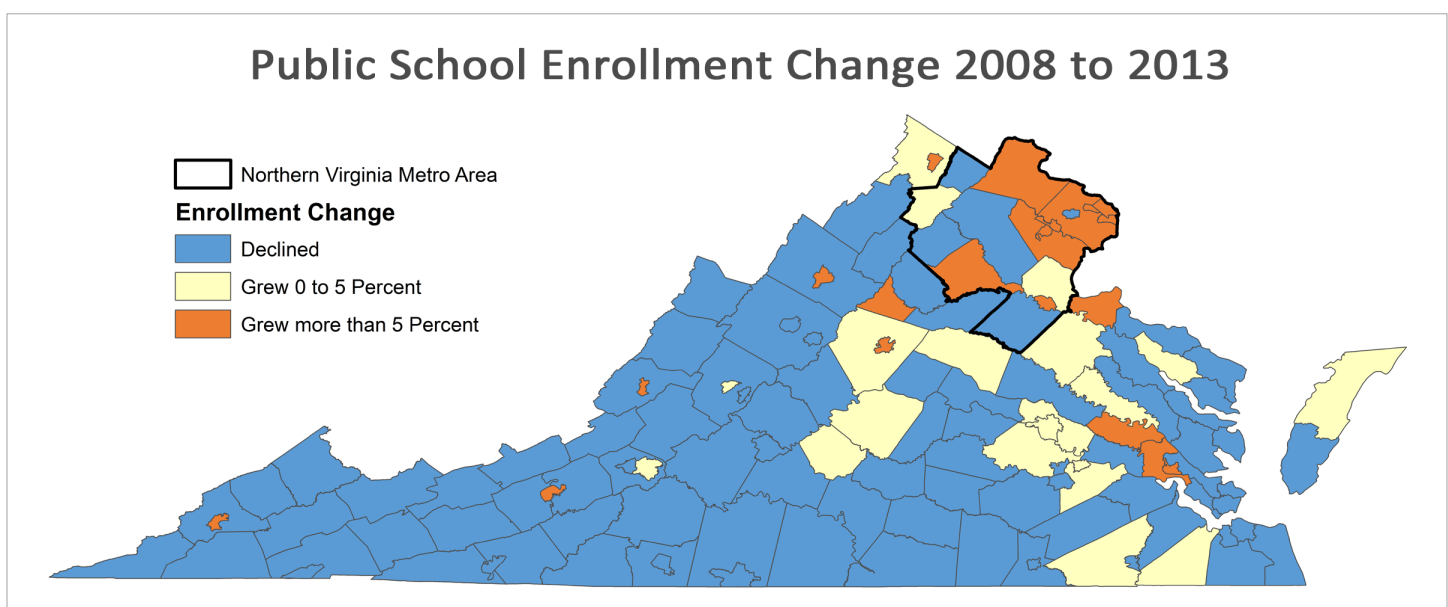
Over the past 20 years, total enrollment in Virginia public schools has grown steadily—but highly unevenly—across the state. While the overall population grew in 71 percent of Virginia localities between 2008 and 2013, public school enrollment increased in only 31 percent. In fact, a majority of school divisions in the Commonwealth reported enrollment declines.

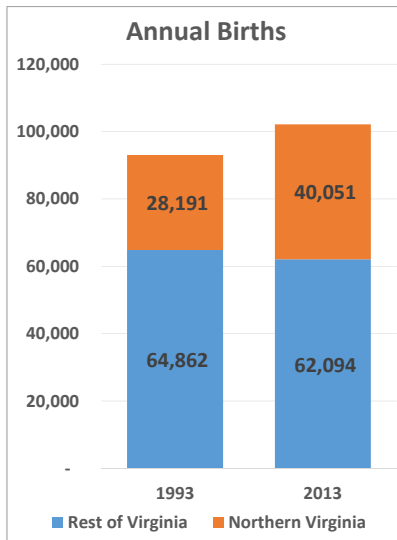
## Why is this happening?

Two factors (births and migration) determine whether school enrollment grows or not; and how these factors work in combination is important. For example, in some communities, a sufficient number of families moving into the area can offset the effects of declining birth rates and keep school enrollment growing. Since the recession began in 2008, the rate of family migration (moving from one state or community to another) has decreased, and birth rates have declined—and remained low—in many localities. As a result, by 2013, when children born five years earlier would be eligible to enter school, not only were class sizes for entering kindergarteners in many school divisions smaller, but also overall enrollment declined as fewer families moved in, or more families moved out. In some localities, the school-age population decreased even as the overall population increased.



As the map shows, total public school enrollment in





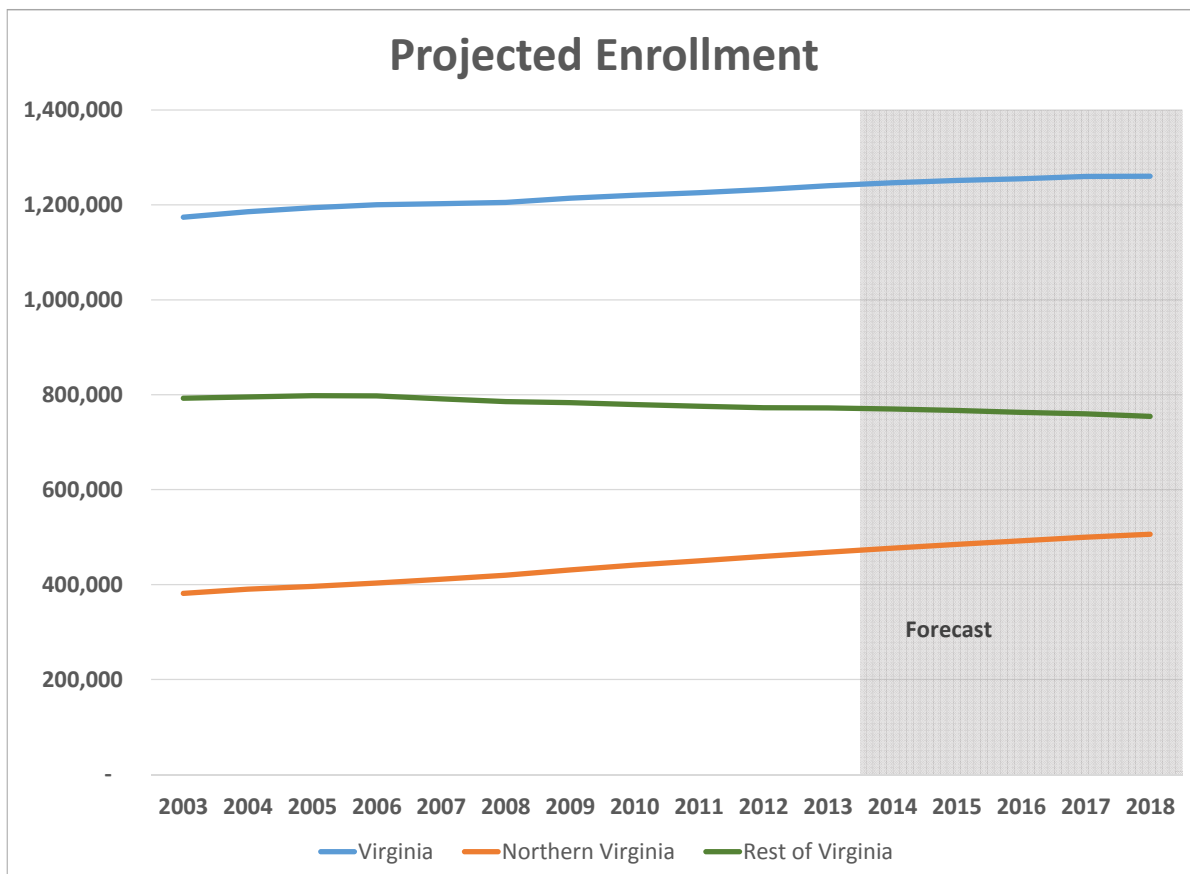
the Commonwealth in the last five years was largely fueled by highly concentrated growth in the Northern Virginia Metropolitan Area—in stark contrast to enrollment declines in the vast majority of Virginia localities. In fact, when all localities outside of Northern Virginia are combined,

Northern Virginia on total school enrollment is primarily a result of the birth rate, as illustrated in the chart to the left. Statewide, births increased between 1993 and 2013 with the entire growth in Northern Virginia offsetting the slight decline elsewhere. In addition, in-migration of families with school-age children was also concentrated in Northern Virginia, further contributing to sizeable enrollment growth in the area.

### What will happen next?

The Projected Enrollment chart below shows school enrollment trends over the past ten years, as well as five-year school enrollment projections, for the Commonwealth overall, for Northern Virginia, and for the rest of Virginia. As illustrated, a pattern of steady increase in total school enrollment is projected, with Northern Virginia continuing to drive nearly all

combined, the tale of public school enrollment is one of steady decline between 2008 and 2013, as shown in the Projected Enrollment chart below. The impact of



growth. By 2018, 40 percent of Virginia public school enrollment will be in Northern Virginia, compared to 30 percent in 2000. Overall, in the rest of Virginia, public school enrollment will decline, with the largest decreases outside of Virginia's Urban Crescent due to low birth rates and few families moving to these areas.

### What does this mean for schools, communities, and public education in Virginia?

Demographic pressures, coming from opposite directions, will challenge Virginia school divisions in the years ahead. In many divisions, particularly those in rural areas of the state, declining enrollment will force decisions to cut costs, or raise revenues. School boards and division leaders may need to consider eliminating selected programs and extracurricular activities, or closing or merging schools. Each program or sport eliminated risks creating a gap in educational quality between population- and resource-rich urban schools and those in rural communities – at a cost to the Commonwealth overall. Closing or

merging schools also comes at a cost and can generate community anxiety, disruption in the lives of students and teachers, and undermine community confidence in the viability of the school division.

At the same time, many communities in Northern Virginia, and some city school divisions elsewhere, will need to embark on construction projects to house growing populations of students. Building or expanding schools is expensive, and local resources will need to keep pace with growing demand. New schools change school enrollment districts, introducing uncertainty for parents and children. New facilities also create the imperative for recruiting and hiring more teachers and staff. Managing growth wisely and keeping school facilities ahead of population trends presents an ongoing challenge for growing divisions. The tale of school enrollment in Virginia is one of either running out of students, or running out of space in schools. Tracking demographic trends is vital to staying ahead of either version of the tale.

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