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## Did Hillsborough really have to raise impact fees to build new schools? Two studies support that decision.

With \$30 million more each year, the district can come closer to meeting growing needs.



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By **[Marlene Sokol](#)**

Published Yesterday

Updated 29 minutes ago

TAMPA — You might not appreciate the need for more schools until you take a ride to Ruskin or Wimauma, and you get lost because nothing looks like it did on your last trip to Ruskin or Wimauma.

All those new houses mean new children who will need new schools.

On Wednesday, the Hillsborough County Commission approved a new developer fee structure that will provide much of the money needed to build those new schools. By doubling the impact fees, officials say they can raise nearly \$30 million a year.



- **Past coverage:** [Hillsborough Just Doubled School Impact Fees](#)

Just how many children are coming, and what will it cost to meet their needs?

*The Tampa Bay Times*  
[by the School Board](#)  
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From the district-commissioned study by Tindale/Oliver in May, 2017:

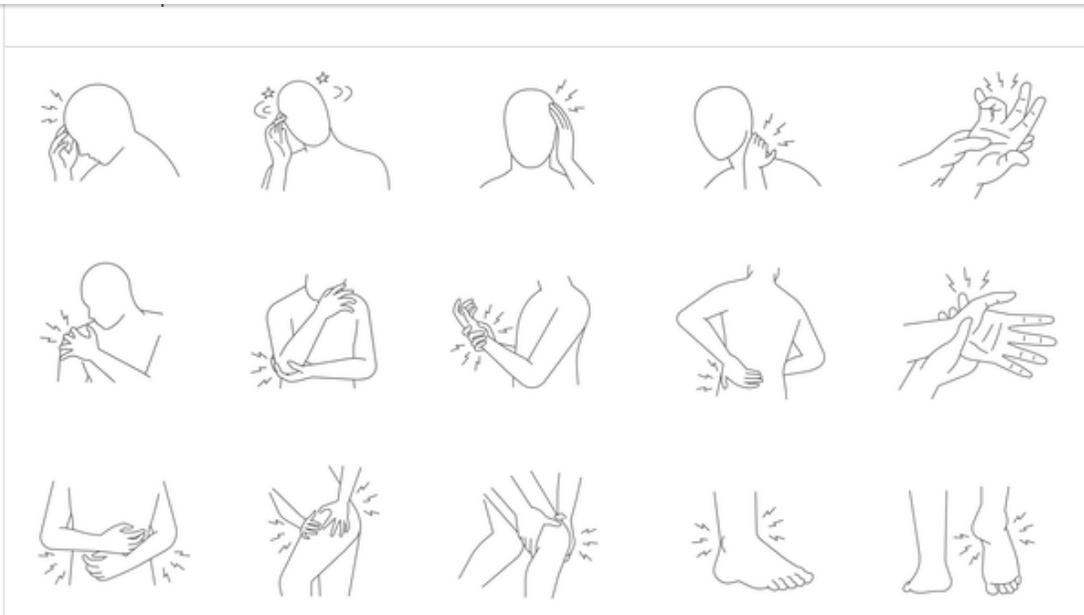
average of 10,000 new homes per year will be permitted over 15 years.

- When new homes are compared to older homes, the new homes have a 15 percent higher number of students.
- The northwest suburbs appear best able to absorb the growing population in existing schools. Slightly more need for schools exists in the Northeast and New Tampa. The most severe need is in south county.
- Tindale Oliver considers a reasonable construction plan to add 38 new schools over 15 years, or 2.5 schools per year, at a total cost of \$1.2 billion. Thirty-one would be in south county.

Duncan Associates, who submitted its report to the County Commission on Feb. 26, focused largely on the cost of building new schools, and how that has changed since rates were set in 2004.

- Per student, construction costs have almost doubled, from \$12,000 to \$22,000.
- Total costs — including land acquisition — have increased by 50 percent, from \$17,232 to \$25,000 per student.
- Growth in the district has also made it necessary to build other facilities for vehicle maintenance, furniture refinishing, technology operations, student services and other uses. The current value of these facilities is around \$130 million.
- Land is getting more expensive, Properties purchased in 2017 and 2018 for Dawson Elementary, the new Sumner High School in Riverview and other future schools averaged \$119,033 an acre. Rolling back acquisitions to 2000, the average cost per acre is \$103,288.

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How expensive are the new schools? The last estimate for Sumner, which is the first high school to be built in a more than a decade, puts the price tag at \$80 million.

The Duncan report also listed school-by-school occupancy levels, based on a report to the state called the Florida Inventory of School Houses, or FISH.

Those numbers are of limited use, as the much of the demand will come from families now arriving. If anything, they show the most alarming crowding levels in South Tampa, where schools draw from affluent families and are always in demand. Wilson Middle School is the most crowded, at 112 percent capacity. It is followed by Gorrie Elementary at 108 percent; Coleman Middle (107); and Mitchell Elementary (105).

But some schools in

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ing the scales.

Ruskin's Shields Middle is at 104 percent capacity, with 1,729 students.

Bloomington High School is at 102 percent capacity.

Ruskin’s Lennard High is near capacity, and last year was beyond capacity last school year, despite the fairly recent addition of a new classroom wing. When Sumner opens in August, that school will relieve some of the crowding at Lennard.

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More typical are south county schools that are close to capacity: 88 percent enrollment at East Bay High, 87 percent at Cypress Creek Elementary, 90 percent at Bevis Elementary, 97 percent at Randall Middle, another 97 percent at Plant City’s Robinson Elementary.

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