

Notice of Motion: High school places in Canada Bay

Updated with revised recommendations as passed by Council.

Council meeting 28th September 2021
by Councillor Charles Jago

Background

Summary

Canada Bay LGA needs a new public high school. Council has a responsibility to lobby for the needs of its residents toward resolution of this key local infrastructure.

Underfunded and overcrowded, Concord High School operates at more than 40% over capacity, with approximately 1,300 students attending a school built for 900. Members of the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) of Concord High School has put out a [statement on their key concerns](#) about the school. They have also provided [photos showing the current state of disrepair](#) of the school.

At 25%, the percentage of students attending Concord High – their only local public high school – is far lower than the [NSW statewide average of 65% of students who attend public high schools](#). There are anecdotal reports of large unmet demand in this area, including a substantial number of would-be attendees of Concord High going to local Catholic high schools.

However, local population growth will add far greater demand, with recent data showing that the number of students in the Concord High catchment area will grow by nearly 2,000 students within 15 years. Despite the new high school scheduled to open in Wentworth Point close to the Canada Bay LGA and a reported planned expansion of Concord High by 240 places by 2031, an additional secondary school must be built in Canada Bay LGA by 2030 to meet the increasing need for high school places.

Planning for increased numbers of students is especially important because the NSW government is forcing a rapid increase in the housing density of Canada Bay LGA without ensuring additional high school places and other infrastructure and services.



Explaining catchment enrolment numbers

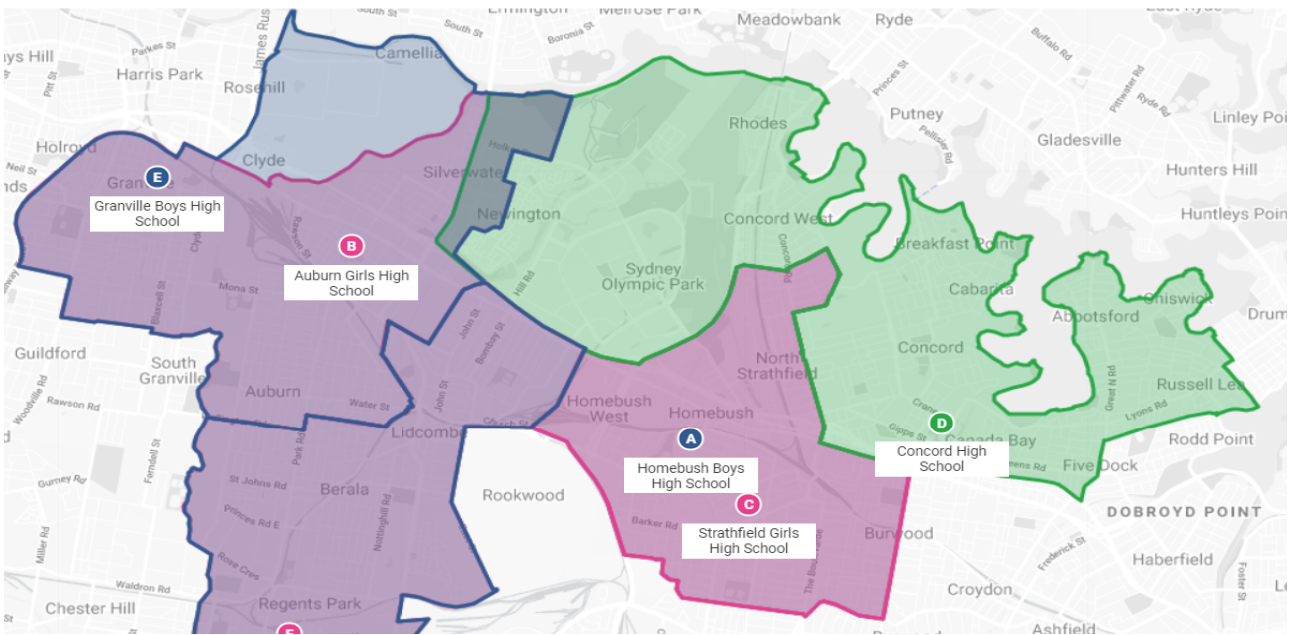


Figure 1: High school catchments

Figure 1 shows the Concord High catchment and those of some surrounding high schools. The Concord High School catchment area is shown in light green, extending from Russell Lea and Chiswick in the east to Silverwater Road in the west, with a small overlap with the area for Granville Boys/Auburn Girls. Strangely, students from Newington, Sydney Olympic Park and Wentworth Point have Concord High School as their designated high school, but not students in parts of Concord West, North Strathfield and Strathfield. However, those students are also close to other schools.

The catchment map does not apply to private schools. Two Catholic high schools exist within the catchment: Domremy College and Rosebank College. They take up 36% of catchment enrolments although they draw some of their students from outside areas. It should be noted that Canada Bay has a comparatively high proportion of Catholic residents: 33.2%, 9% above the Sydney average of 24.2%. Another private independent school is situated within Canada Bay close to the catchment: the McDonald College, most of whose students come from across Greater Sydney.

Rapid population growth drives greater student numbers

Table 1 shows the overall population and number of students in the Concord High catchment area, using figures from forecast.id.com.au as of July 2021. The last line shows overall population and student numbers for given years in the catchment area, including forecasts.

Year	Overall population				High school students			
	2021	2024	2031	2036	2021	2024	2031	2036
Part Canada Bay LGA	95,976	101,828	117,921	125,310	5,526	5,929	6,457	6,796
Part Parramatta LGA	29,189	38,881	56,196	61,046	1,035	1,381	1,848	2,059
Totals	125,165	140,709	174,117	186,356	6,561	7,310	8,305	8,855
Less North Strathfield-Strathfield	7,661	8,819	13,414	14,155	355	446	612	640
Less part Concord West	2,591	2,677	3,040	3,225	205	202	218	231
Less Drummoyne	13,383	13,760	13,907	13,995	721	766	753	753
Final catchment totals	111,782	126,949	160,210	172,361	5,280	5,896	6,722	7,231

Table 1: Feeder population & students in Concord High catchment area

Student enrolment figures

The pie chart below (Figure 2) shows enrolments of all students living within the catchment of Concord High School. Out of a total of 5,280 students, 3,200 (61% of the catchment) attend local private and public high schools, including the 1,300 students (25%) attending Concord High School. However, a significant proportion, 2,080 (39%) students attend schools outside the catchment because the three local high schools are already at capacity. Of course, a small number of local students attend other public high schools, notably selective schools like Fort Street High and Normanhurst Boys.

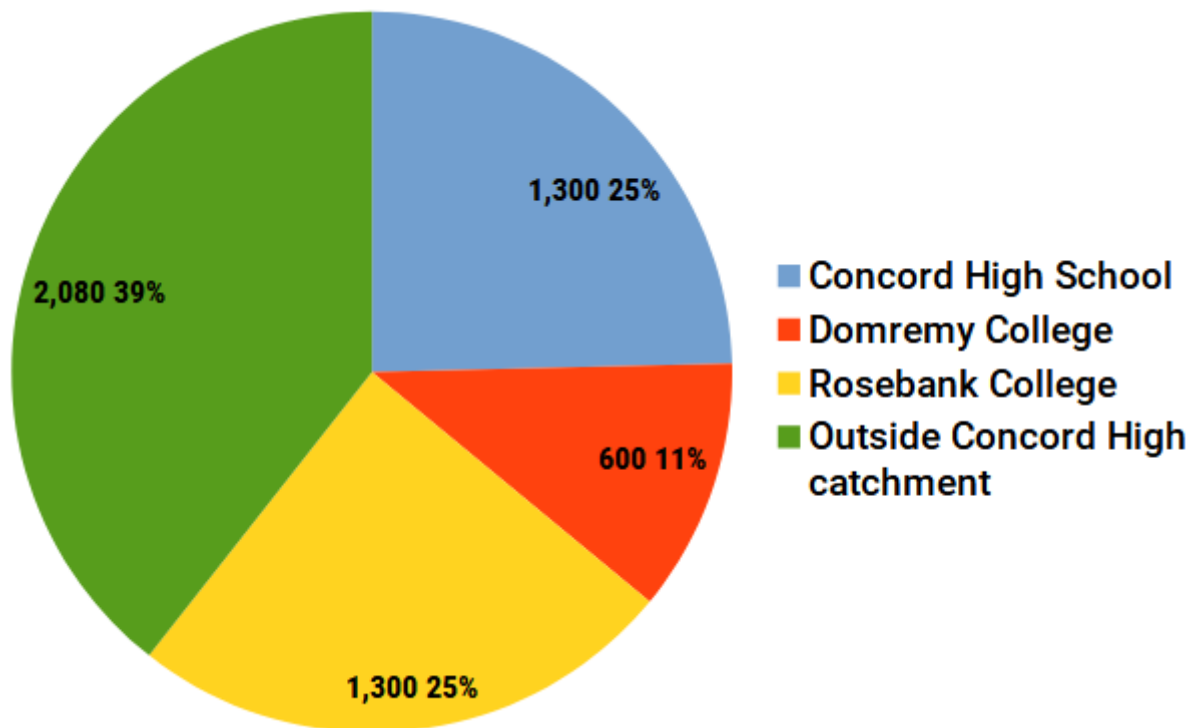


Figure 2: Enrolments of high school students living in Concord High School catchment area

Many students are currently forced to attend schools outside their local area

Anecdotal evidence indicates that many local families want the option of a local public high school for their students, but are discouraged by the [lack of basic facilities, inadequate maintenance](#) and understaffing. A long-standing issue of insufficient toilets for female students has recently been resolved with installation of 16 toilets in demountables, in addition to the existing 17 demountable classrooms. Because of the long-standing problems, many parents and students want higher

standard facilities and send their secondary age students elsewhere. These problems aren't the fault of the principal or the teachers; it's because the NSW Government doesn't provide sufficient funding.

The key problems currently affecting Concord High School include:

- Concord High School is already well beyond 40% capacity.
- Chronic underfunding, leading to poor maintenance and facilities, as well as understaffing (evidenced by a [one-day teacher strike on 12th May 2021](#) on the grounds of "multiple unfilled teaching vacancies" – apparently a shortage of 17 teachers).

These problems cannot be solved without a substantially greater financial commitment by the NSW government. If families were offered a modern, well-staffed local high school, we could expect a large number of families who have not viewed Concord High as a suitable choice to reconsider.

Reasons to reconsider include:

1. Not wanting or able to continue spending tens of thousands on private school fees.
2. Wanting to improve their connections to the local community.
3. Less stress in students commuting to school. Many could walk or cycle to school.
4. A belief in public education. Offering another high school and fixing Concord High's problems would mean that families with a belief in public education would have a strong option for acting in accordance with their views.

The question arises – how many more students would attend Concord High School if there was sufficient space, improved facilities for more students and the school was properly funded? The expectation that a substantial number of students would attend the school is supported by several facts:

- Compared to the 65% attendance at public schools across NSW, only 25% of local students attend Concord High. That means that over 70% of students are attending private schools (including both Catholic and independent schools), compared to the NSW average of 34% and a substantial proportion of local students attend schools outside the catchment.
- There are anecdotal reports that a substantial number of would-be attendees of Concord High are attending local Catholic high schools, because they have no other local alternative.

Given the above average Catholic population, it is not surprising that demand for public schooling in Canada Bay would stand below the NSW average. It is also reasonable to expect that relative local affluence would be consistent with some increase in private school attendance, although many poorer communities also have significant rates of private school enrolments.

Taking these factors into account, it is entirely possible that 40% or more of catchment students would attend Concord High if it met reasonable expectations, an increase of 15%, amounting to an additional 800 students or more. The unmet demand for local public high school education could well be more than that.

What about the new high school at Wentworth Point?

Approved in 2018 and proceeding slowly, the new high school in Wentworth Point ("Sydney Olympic Park High School") is now due to open in 2024 with an expected capacity of 800 students. Upon opening, it will absorb students from the western side of the Concord High catchment especially Wentworth Point, Sydney Olympic Park and Newington. In the medium term, it will absorb additional students from Sydney Olympic Park. However, Concord High School will still be crowded.

In another widely discussed option, the Wentworth Point school might be built to accommodate 1,500 students rather than 800. If that were the case, , Wentworth Point's extra capacity would help Concord High for a while. However as shown in the discussion below, population growth will continue to suck up the remaining capacity across the current catchment. The future need for capacity is so great that it can only be met with another high school in addition to Sydney Olympic Park High School.

Future needs

Even an expanded and improved Concord High School and a new high school at Wentworth Point with a capacity for 1,500 students won't be able to handle the forecast level of population increase.

Figure 3 illustrates the anticipated unmet demand for student places across the catchment for Concord High School over the next 20 years, compared to new places expected through extra capacity at Concord High and the new school at Wentworth Point. The graph assumes that the NSW Department of Education implements its plan to increase enrolments at Concord High from the current 1,300 up to 1,540 students by 2031. (This information was provided to Canada Bay Council in 2018.) The graph also assumes that Sydney Olympic Park High school will open in 2024 with capacity for 1,500 students.

Anticipating unmet demand in the Concord High catchment

Figure 3 shows two levels of unmet demand at Concord High, by students from families who were interested but remain discouraged by the 17 demountables, poor maintenance and constricted school funding. The first tranche of 400 students (shown in red in Figure 3) represents a conservative estimate of the number of students who would be extremely likely to respond to additional places at Concord High or another nearby public high school.

The second tranche (shown in yellow in Figure 3) represents an additional 400 students who would be likely to respond to additional places at Concord High or another nearby public high school. Each of these tranches represents only 7.5% of students in the catchment based on 2021 figures. It is quite possible that unmet demand would be higher than modelled in Figure 3.

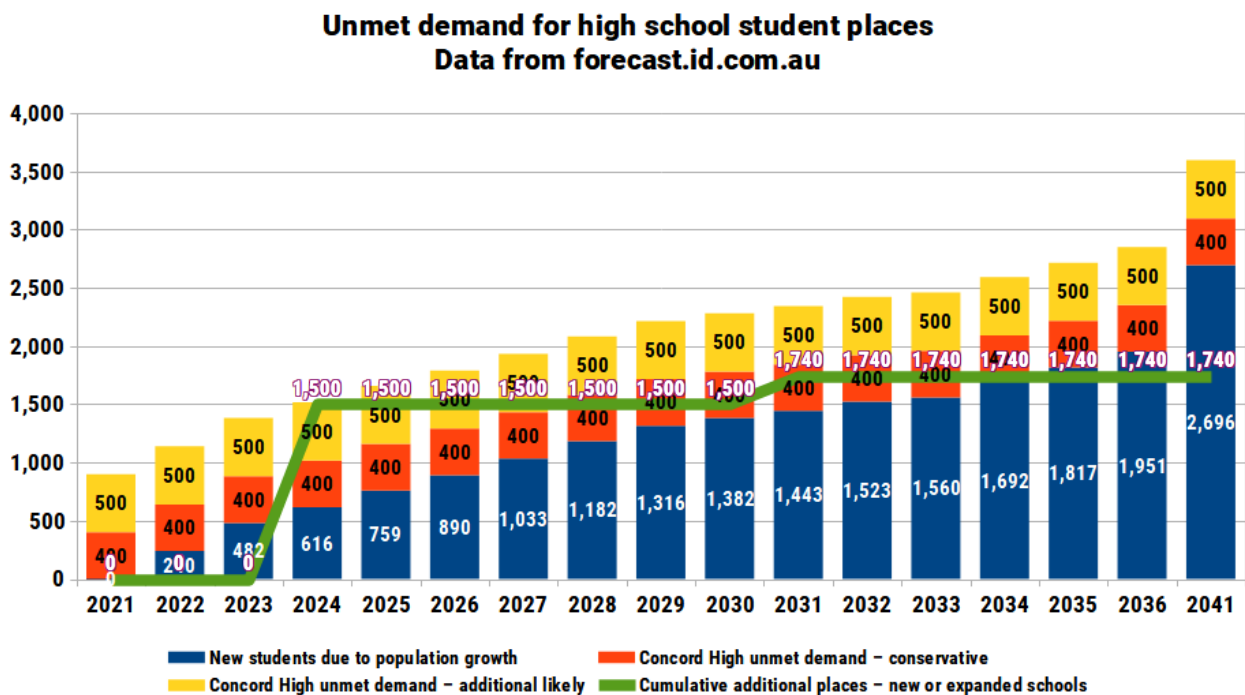


Figure 3: Unmet demand for high school student places

Figure 3 demonstrates that even based on a conservative view on the level of unmet demand, there will be a shortfall in student places by 2028. A less conservative view (both yellow and red demand) shows the shortfall begin to emerge in 2025, rising to over 600 places by 2029 and 880 by 2035. Over that period, public school enrolments would still represent less than 56% of all catchment students – an entirely possible scenario. The figures for unmet demand will of course be correspondingly higher if the NSW government chooses to build only an 800 student high school in Wentworth Point.

These figures demonstrate a growing and unmet demand in the Concord High catchment for another public high school, which will remain hidden while Concord High is underfunded with poor facilities. The only requirement to unleash that demand is for the NSW government to properly fund Concord High School. Concord High and any other public schools in the catchment at that time will then have to admit those new students.

Parents have a right to expect a good public education for their children

Concord High, the only local public secondary school in the catchment now, already does not meet existing demand. Given the anticipated increases in population, future student numbers will substantially exceed public high school capacity within 8 years, possibly earlier.

Concord High School opened in 1980, ten years after the government purchased the property, and the school in Wentworth Point is due to open in 2024, six years after being funded by the government in 2018. On that record, action on a second high school within Canada Bay LGA is now urgent.

Planning for a new local secondary school must begin now in order to meet the additional educational need that we know is coming. Because of NSW government inaction, Council must act to commission an independent study surveying residents to determine the level of public school places that residents will need for their children.

Public education is a right, not a privilege. Local residents should not be forced into sending children to private schools to receive an adequate education.

Like other residents with families in this area, I believe that parents will want their children to be able to attend local public high schools with modern facilities and adequate staffing. That requires proper, increased funding of Concord High School and action on an additional public high school in Canada Bay LGA. These can only be achieved through strong Council and local resident lobbying of the NSW government.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. **Notes** that Concord High School is already experiencing substantial pressure on its current facilities, including 17 demountable classrooms.
2. **Expresses** concern that Concord High School is already at capacity with the figures indicating the likely need for a second public high school within Canada Bay LGA, and writes again to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, following up on previous unanswered correspondence.
3. **Investigates** commissioning an independent, comprehensive study of future needs for primary and secondary school places within Canada Bay and nearby areas, taking into account committed and likely developments, with the study to be completed as quickly as practicable in liaison with Concord High School Parents and Citizens Association.
4. **Receives** a report from the General Manager detailing costs and a funding source for the study referred to in 3 above.
5. That in the event that Council proceeds to commission the study, the completed study will be **submitted** to Council for consideration with a view to Council calling upon the NSW Government to commit to implementing its recommendations.
6. **Commits** to a campaign in liaison with the community to ensure that the NSW government provides adequate public high school student places for students in Canada Bay LGA.