



**Responses to Joint Boards of Selectmen and Finance
Q & A for Mill Hill Addition and Renovation Project
April 3, 2018**

Q 1 – Why does the BOE employ a consultant to provide ten-year enrollment projections?

The CT State Department of Education (CSDE) requires enrollment projections in order to process reimbursement of school construction projects. Projections must be conducted by professional consulting firms and be based on the generally accepted Cohort Survival Method. The current reimbursement rate (established by legislative action) is approximately 26% of all eligible costs. We anticipate this rate will remain in effect through June 2019.

Additionally, 10-year enrollment projections are updated annually to guide budget development.

Q 2 – Who is the consultant and does the BOE have confidence in the firm’s quality of work?

Milone and MacBroom served in this role for three years and the BOE has confidence in the quality and accuracy of their conclusions. Headquartered in Cheshire, CT, Milone and MacBroom is one of the largest consulting firms in New England. It utilizes generally accepted methods of enrollment projections such as historical enrollment and quantitative data from state and local agencies. Differing assumptions on home sales, residential developments, birth rates and economic growth factors result in 3 levels of projections: low, medium and high. Due to Fairfield’s relatively stable community, Milone and MacBroom use medium projections as the basis for planning. This assumes status quo on home sales, modest growth in births and stable economic conditions.

Q 3 – Does the BOE have comprehensive plans that guide the district’s decisions?

Yes. We use a zero-based budgeting approach to our annual budget request. Each staff position is reviewed based on enrollment needs and each line item is reviewed based on projected costs for the following year. Facility expansion plans are based on the 2014–2025 Facility Plan that is reviewed and updated yearly by all town bodies at the fall Capital Planning Workshop. FPS has several planning documents that guide Board decisions:

1. The five-year District Improvement Plan guides our educational services and sets goals for student performance. First approved in 2015, the most recent report was given at the October 10, 2017 BOE meeting.

2. Facilities Plan for 2014 – 2025. This document was first created in 2011 under the chairmanship of John Mitola and Pam Iacono. Updated and approved by the Board of Education in June 2015, it is also updated annually by staff to coincide with the town-wide Capital Planning Workshop. The most recent update was completed on August 22, 2017.
3. Milone and MacBroom have provided three facilities planning documents:
 - a. Conceptual Redistricting Options for Racial Imbalance, dated February 16, 2016
 - b. Elementary School Facilities and Scenarios Planning, dated October 24, 2017
 - c. Enrollment Projections, Facilities and Scenario Planning, dated February 13, 2018
4. Milone and MacBroom have also delivered updated Enrollment Projections dated November 28, 2017.

Q 4 – Does the FPS plan in five-year, ten-year or longer term planning cycles?

Yes to all three cycles.

- *30 + years.* Major renovations and additions consider a 20-50 year building use.
- *10 years.* 10-year enrollment projections are provided to CSDE to qualify for reimbursement.
- *5 years.* FPS is in the third year of a five-year District Improvement Plan. The plan is reviewed and updated annually to ensure student performance goals are being achieved.

Q 5 – What improvements are needed at Mill Hill School that require investment now?

Based on the Facilities Plan created with the help of MGT of America, Inc., each building is reviewed for program deficiencies. For Mill Hill, the needed improvements fall into three categories:

- *Infrastructure:* Infrastructure upgrades for repairs due to prolonged use and to meet updated codes for building, fire, health and safety.
- *Specialized instruction:* Mill Hill is an older building that does not have smaller spaces to facilitate delivery of specialized instruction such as art, music, sciences, gifted, OT/PT, ELL, IIT, ELT, MRT, speech and language rooms and Sped services. These program deficiencies were identified in the 2010 MGT facilities report.

- *Enrollment needs:* Additional required spaces are based on long-term enrollment projections, including the future educational needs of students beyond the 10-year horizon.

The above items are outlined in the Ed Specs.

Q 6 – What is the estimated Cost for Mill Hill?

\$ 20,250,000 as shown in the Waterfall Chart reviewed at the 2017 Capital Planning Workshop last fall.

Q 7 – How much is being requested now?

\$ 1,500,000 to produce a good plan based on the best, most current information available and achieve better construction estimates. Building Committees take time to form, hire the development team, supervise work, and develop drawings and specifications. If the project planning phase is not approved now, the Building Committee will not have enough time to complete its work by spring 2019.

\$ 18,750,000 is the estimate to spend on construction, including the balance of soft costs. These are construction estimates and must be clarified by the Building Committee and the professional development team they hire (architects, engineers, etc.). Thus, the total cost contained within the Waterfall chart is \$ 20,250,000.

The FPS recommends the full \$ 1.5M be approved and that the appointed Building Committee plan for a 504 building (24 general purpose classrooms), but request a *deduct alternative* for a 441 school (21 general instruction classrooms). This will allow the town bodies to make a final decision on the size of Mill Hill in spring 2019, based on the best available information for the true cost of three additional classrooms

Q 8 – What are FPS class size policies for elementary schools?

FPS believes strongly that small class sizes lead to higher quality education and increased achievement. This belief is evidenced and supported in education research. For years, we have maintained class size guidelines that produce average class sizes of 19 in grades K – 2 and 21 in grades 3 – 5. These averages are a result of guidelines that allow a maximum number of 23 students for grades K – 2 and 25 students for grades 3 – 5 before a new section (classroom) of students is created. At McKinley Elementary, class size guidelines are slightly adjusted to a maximum of 21 in grades K – 2 and 23 in grades 3 – 5, to equate for the specialized services and needs of the student population.

Q 9 – How do FPS class size policies and practices compare with other school districts?

Fairfield has expectations for a high quality public school system. Comparing FPS with New York City, Stamford and Bridgeport is not appropriate given the large differences in demographics and social and economic needs.

Comparable school districts are:

Fairfield	(23 for K-2 and 25 for 3 – 5)
Trumbull	(20 in K, 22 in 1 – 2 and 25 in 3 – 8)
Easton	(no policy, small classes)
Westport	(22 in K – 2 and 25 in 3 – 5)
West Hartford	(23 in K – 3 and 27 in 4 – 6)
Greenwich	(21 in K – 1, 24 in 2 – 3 & 26 in 4 – 5)

Q 10 – What other factors are considered in determining the number of students in each elementary school?

It is not reasonable to assume that each classroom will always be filled to maximum capacity, given that FPS has supported the concept of neighborhood schools for decades. As a result, established attendance areas for each elementary school are based on the following criteria reaffirmed in November 2015:

- Maintain established neighborhoods based on natural and manmade boundaries.
- Consider the impact on bussing (avoid long bus rides) and existing walkers should remain.
- Consider any safety issues unique to school locations such as traffic and walking patterns.
- Phase out all portable classrooms.
- Strive for 90% facility utilization to allow for headroom.
- Consider feeder patterns from elementary to middle and high schools.
- Maintain District Guidelines for class size.
- Create the least amount of disruption.

Q 11 – How do you determine the capacity of elementary schools?

In determining building capacity, Fairfield uses an average of 21 students per classroom. Effective and reliable class size planning is based on actual student enrollment, not the expectation to eliminate all vacant seats or increase the average class size.

Capacity is based on the number of students that can be accommodated, given the specific education programs that are offered. It is defined by the number of classrooms available for

general instruction (Homerooms) for grades K – 5. After allowing for specialized instruction spaces for art, music, sciences, gifted, OT/PT, ELL, IIT, ELT, MRT, speech and language rooms and SPED services, the large classroom spaces available for general instruction are multiplied by the average number of students planned per grade. Buildings designed in the 1950’s to 1970’s do not have the number of smaller classroom spaces used for specialized instruction. To avoid delivering those specialized services on a cart, in an all-purpose room, on stages, in storage rooms or hallways, or in divided larger classrooms, those spaces are planned when renovating older schools. This ensures large classrooms will be used for general instruction.

In addition, classrooms built in the 1960’s era are not large enough to hold more than 25 students in terms of square feet. Since the 1960’s, teaching styles have changed with movement around the room, fire codes have changed, and egress in and out of the classrooms require adequate clearance.

The Connecticut School Construction Standards and Guidelines provide 900 sf as an example for 24 students (37.5 sf per student). FPS is already maximizing classroom space around the district by operating above the guidelines for 21st Century elementary school classrooms. By example:

<u>Year Built</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Classroom Size</u>	<u>Maximum # of Students</u>
1955	Mill Hill	870-875 sf	23 students max
1962	Dwight	750 sf	20 students max
1967	Jennings	775-825 sf	22 students max

Q 12 – What is the operational capacity of our elementary schools?

Milone and MacBroom calculated our operational capacity at 4,891 for K – 5 capacity only. However, that included calculating 8 students per classroom for the spaces used by CLC at Burr, Dwight and Jennings. In addition, they calculated Holland Hill’s capacity as 504 students, which is the projected capacity after construction.

We currently have 4,233 elementary students (not counting ECC or pre-K students). Capacity for 2017–2018 is at 87% capacity, slightly below our target of 90%. Vacant seats will always exist to some degree, as explained in Q10. The 3% of seats (87% vs. 90%) below planned occupancy are spread over eleven elementary schools and 200+ classrooms. FPS currently operates from an operational capacity, with designated space for specialized instructional programs and services including art, music, technology, speech, OT/PT, psychologists and social workers, Gifted, Spanish, and Resource Rooms.

Q 13 – What will the operational capacity be after Holland Hill and Mill Hill Elementary Schools are completed as 504 schools?

In looking ahead to 2027-2028, Milone and MacBroom recommends planning for the middle-range projection of K – 5 student enrollment of 4,378. After both HH and MH are renovated, the operational capacity of 5,017 will result in an overall utilization rate of 87% (based on mid-range projections).

Q 14 – Why can't we fill every empty seat in each classroom?

See answers to questions 10, 11 and 12.

Q 15 – Why does Fairfield use a loading factor of 85% to 90%, since Milone and MacBroom thinks 90% is a good loading factor and MGT of America, Inc. (previous enrollment projection consulting firm), used 95%?

It is the result of a long-standing commitment to small class sizes and neighborhood schools.

As stated in Q11, good planning is based on actual student enrollment, not the expectation to maximize classroom size or increase the class size average. The operational capacity for Fairfield is between 85% and 90%. However, some of our elementary schools will frequently be in the 90% to 95% and a few (Sherman and Mill Hill) operate above 100% operational utilization.

Q 16 – Why does the FPS have a goal of eliminating the use of portable classrooms?

During the last peak growth of students in the 70's and 80's, Fairfield decided to use portables as temporary classrooms. This resulted in 61 portables at elementary and middle schools by 2002. Starting in 2010, FPS adopted a practice of eliminating portable classrooms when buildings had significant upgrades. Portables have an average 10-year life span and require students to walk between the portable and main building, regardless of the weather, to use restrooms, attend specials, have lunch, and go to the library. This is not ideal.

Mill Hill currently has 18 large brick and mortar classrooms for K – 5 use, and five portables that are used as teaching spaces. The Ed-Specs include a requirement to eliminate those five portable classrooms and replace them as part of a 504-enrollment building with 24 large classrooms.