



S u p e r i n t e n d e n t M e m o r a n d u m

To: Board of Selectmen
From: Dr. Toni Jones, Superintendent of Schools
Date: April 18, 2018
Re: Mill Hill Project: Clarifying Information

Over several years, the Fairfield Board of Education has consistently advocated for a four section, twenty-four general education classroom elementary school model (504) because research has consistently shown small class sizes and small neighborhood schools provide the best educational environment for children. The 504 model is also recommended for the Mill Hill addition and renovation project for the following reasons:

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

1. What is the ideal size for an elementary school?

Abundant research supports the idea that small elementary schools between 300-500 students reap the greatest benefits for children. (NAESP, Natl Guidelines, Community Works Institute...)

- a. Higher student achievement
- b. Greater family involvement in the school and community
- c. Greater teacher collaboration with parents
- d. Increased teacher to teacher collaboration
- e. Increased sense of safety and security for children and staff

FPS aims to gain maximum educational benefits while also capitalizing on the financial economies of scale by enrolling up to 504 students vs. 378, which is within the “small school” range while capitalizing on greater classroom efficiencies through the number of sections. Increasing building capacity allows greater economic efficiencies.

For Example:

- A 24 classroom school (504 seats) allows up to four sections in each grade level. In grades 3 to 5 class size guidelines are 25 students/class, so a grade level with 75 students will have three sections. With the addition of a 76th student, a fourth section is created, resulting in average classes of 18-19 students, Fairfield’s historic average.
- An 18 classroom school (378 seats) allows up to three sections in each grade level. In grades 3 to 5, a grade level with 50 students will have two sections. With the

addition of a 51st student, a third section is created resulting in average classes of 16-17 students in every classroom, which is below our historic average.

2. What is the difference in constructing the core spaces for a building for 378, 441, or 504 at Mill Hill?

No difference exists at Mill Hill because the core spaces required are too small currently, when compared to other Fairfield schools of 378 capacity. Regardless of whether Mill Hill’s renovation results in a capacity of 378, 441 or 504, the same expansion must occur in the cafeteria/APR, gym stage, and kitchen.

Square Feet= sf

School Sites	Functional Enrollment Capacity	Cafeteria APR sf	Kitchen sf	Library Media Center sf	Gymnasium sf
Mill Hill	378	1,959	865	2,048	3,897
Dwight	378	2,795	1,252	1,384	2,593
Jennings	378	2,704	1,527	1,621	3,495
Average 504	504	2,740	1,266	3,125	3,581
HH Post Construction	504	2,706	1,300	1,979	4,270
Planned Expansion Necessary as the Space is <u>Smaller than Current 378 Buildings</u>		X Take out stage to add the needed 800-1,000 square feet	X Add approx. 300-500 square feet to meet the average for any size school		
No Planned Expansion New Construction Rather 378, 441, or 504				X	X *Will require new stage construction regardless of size

- a. **Kitchen:** Regardless of whether the Mill Hill renovation results in a capacity of 378, 441 or 504, the same size expansion must occur in the cafeteria and kitchen. Dwight School is a 378 school and has a kitchen of 1,252 sf. Jennings, also a 378 school, has a kitchen of 1,527 sf. Mill Hill currently has the smallest kitchen in the district at 865 sf. The goal of this renovation is to bring it to approximately 1,300 sf, which is the average for all elementary school kitchens, regardless of enrollment capacity.
- b. **All Purpose Room (APR):** Regardless of whether the Mill Hill renovation results in a capacity of 378, 441 or 504, the same expansion must occur in the APR room.

Dwight and Jennings (378 schools) have APR rooms of 2,795 sf and 2,704 sf respectively, which is the average for all elementary schools, regardless of size. Mill Hill's APR room is 1,959 sf, again the smallest in the district. By moving the stage to the gymnasium (as was done at Riverfield and Holland Hill) it will bring the Mill Hill APR room to the 2,700 sf average for the district.

- c. **Library Media Center & Gymnasium:** These spaces at Mill Hill are 2,048 sf and 3,897 sf respectively. The Library falls within the middle range for our district and the gymnasium is already slightly larger than the typical gym, thus no expansion of those facilities is being proposed.

3. What is the impact for other small spaces impacted when building a 378, 441, or 504?

The required spaces do not change. In smaller buildings, a reading specialist may be part-time in two different buildings, but he/she still needs a space at each building to work with children.

	# of Rooms Required 378	# of Rooms Required 441	# of Rooms Required 504
Art	1	1	1
Library	1	1	1
Music General	1	1	1
Music Strings	1	1	1
PE/Gym	1	1	1
Resource Rooms <i>Sp. Education, ELL</i>	4	4	4
Sp. Education Speech and Language	2	2	2
OT/PT	1	1	1
Program Facilitator Office	1	1	1
Psychologist	1	1	1
Social Worker	1	1	1
Gifted	1	1	1
Math/Science	1	1	1
LA Specialist	1	1	1
Spanish	1	1	1
Nurses Station	1	1	1
Conference Room	1	1	1
Principal's Office	1	1	1
Secretarial Stations	3	3	3

4. What is the difference between building an 18 classroom (378), a 21 classroom (441) or a 24 classroom (504) school at Mill Hill?

- a. The Fairfield Public Schools do not calculate capacity based on temporary portable classrooms. However, the 18 classrooms in the main building available for general instruction, together with the five portables currently at Mill Hill creates 23 general instruction classrooms, for an effective (vs. official) capacity of 483 students.

- b. Reducing the school to 378 or 441 would create a smaller school space for the population that is currently served.
5. **What is the approximate cost of reducing or expanding a project by three classrooms (24 vs. 21)?**
- a. Each general educational classroom in Fairfield averages 800 sf. 800 sf x 3 additional classrooms = 2,400 sf additional space needed. Adding 30% for planning factor and core spaces for hallways, etc. brings the total to approximately 3,000 sf.
 - b. At a cost of \$450/sf (based on state recommended costs and our experience at Riverfield and Holland Hill) the estimated cost for three classrooms is \$1,500,000. We (FPS and the Board of Education) support the plan to spend money now for added capacity.
 - c. The choice is between adding portable classrooms in the future -- classrooms that have 10 to 15 year life cycles with diminished educational value and increased security concerns - or facing the additional cost and upheaval of additional construction, OR adding three permanent classrooms now with a life cycle of 50 years.
6. **Enrollment: Currently, to maintain neighborhood schools and small class sizes, all elementary schools average 87% Operational Occupancy.**
- a. Following construction of both Holland Hill and Mill Hill as 24 classroom (504) buildings, and with the projected enrollment in 2025-26, we will remain at 87% operational capacity.
 - b. Attempts to operate at a higher occupancy rate will result, over the long term, in one or more of the following: increased class sizes, more frequent re-districting, pocket redistricting, the need for more portables, art on a cart, and/or providing educational services in hallways or other inappropriate spaces.
 - c. A 504 school assists with making the low, medium, and high enrollment projections provided by Milone and MacBroom manageable over time across all 11 schools.
 - d. If Mill Hill is built as a 24 classroom model (504) the low projection will result in 76% operational occupancy (similar to Jennings now), 87% operational occupancy based on the medium projection (our current district average) and 102% operational occupancy if the high projection by Milone and MacBroom is realized.

7. Other Considerations

- a. The \$1.5 million in “seed money” is essential to start planning.
No reimbursement may be obtained on any planning which occurs before the three state-required resolutions are passed through the RTM. Thus, any funds spent prior to that are not reimbursable, regardless of who does the planning.
- b. Building Committees generally take 12 to 14 months to form, hire the development team and produce schematic design plans that result in realistic budget estimates, similar to Riverfield and Holland Hill. Continued delay in approving the three resolutions will likely result in not meeting the June, 2019 deadline.

This could cost a year, or add an additional 4% escalation (\$880,000) to the project **and** result in another legislative session where the reimbursement rate could be reduced. Currently we anticipate a 25.36% reimbursement rate on all eligible costs.

- c. We (FPS and the Board of Education) firmly believe the district is best served by remaining with a 24 classroom (504) enrollment model. It would not change the current education specifications during the planning phase, but realistic plans and costs should be identified before engaging in any “value engineering” to reduce the scope of the project.
- d. We (FPS and the Board of Education) do not believe that reducing the capacity of post-construction Mill Hill (to 378 students) will meet the BOE’s state constitutional and town charter responsibilities to plan facilities that meet the needs of students in the long-term.

8. If Mill Hill is not built to a 504 there will be:

- Inadequate space on that side of town to resolve overcrowding issues
- Inability to maintain neighborhood schools
- Risk of pocket redistricting, which goes against the principles for Fairfield school construction
- Long bus rides for some students