

May 24, 2019

# FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Superintendent Note

Dear Mill Hill Families,

I would like to update you on the renovation and expansion project as a result of the Board of Selectmen meeting this past Wednesday evening. As many of you know, the Board of Education has voted and advocated for a Mill Hill building capacity of 504 students. The Board of Selectmen passed a modified building size this week of 441 capacity. The project next heads to the BOF on June 4, with final confirmation by the RTM, date TBD. The BoE remains steadfast that building a 504 student school is best for FPS.

It is important to have factual information on which to form your opinion, should you wish to advocate for the Mill Hill project. The Board of Finance will be voting on the issue June 4<sup>th</sup>, and I encourage you to let your thoughts be known so that your elected officials hear from you, whatever your opinion.

1. Mill Hill is projected to rise in enrollment again, and reach 382 students by 2027, just five years after the building opens.
2. Elementary buildings are targeted to be no more than 90% capacity, in order to absorb and accommodate unforeseen events such as whole classroom relocation. This year, moisture issues at 2 schools forced classrooms to be moved entirely while clean-up took place over several months. District space is crucial to remaining trailer-free. Three nearby districts in Fairfield County relocated entire elementary schools due to unforeseen circumstances.
3. A building of 441 with 90% capacity leaves Mill Hill with 14 seats available before the building is at 90%.
4. A building of 504 leaves 71 seats available before the building is at 90%.
5. Mill Hill has required trailers for many years, and the construction project will eliminate all of them. Once eliminated, a 504 building will add 6 permanent classrooms, in actuality, only 1 more classroom than Mill Hill has functioned with for years. Permanent space attached to the building enhances safety for our children. It was only 9 years ago in 2010 when Mill Hill had 465 students in the building and enrollment is again starting to rise. A 441 will only add 3 classrooms, which is actually less than Mill Hill has now with trailers.

6. FPS is struggling with space around the district, and especially on the lower side of the district. Should the BOE need to find additional space, redistricting may be more impactful to Mill Hill families, due to having 3 fewer classrooms (given a 441 scenario). This statement is not intended to alarm, but presents the reality that some students may be moved to Dwight in a full-scale district movement to find space. Expansion plans were prepared years ago for a 504 and are still supported by the BOE and by consultant demographers who have studied the issue.
7. FPS is also struggling with rapidly increasing Preschool enrollment which is putting pressure on available seats district-wide. Preschool is required by federal law. Enrollment has grown from 75 students to 172 students over the past ten years. With current enrollment, the ECC site at Warde is over capacity, and the ECC program now has expanded space in Stratfield Elementary School. Next year, the ECC program will occupy 4 classrooms at Stratfield. More expansion is expected with increased enrollment, and in addition, all 11 elementary schools are projected to have increased by 193 students in 2027-2028. K-5 space will be at a premium.
8. The CT State Data Center shows that between 2015-2040, the Town of Fairfield is expected to see a population increase of 13.13%, the second-highest pace of any Fairfield County town.
9. The University of Connecticut forecast suggests that Fairfield will see an explosion in youth population - including a 92.56% rise in children age 0-4 by 2040. Next year is 2020, it's not that far away. This project is a 50-year project, and looking at a 10 year enrollment projection just scratches the surface.
10. Whether Mill Hill is a 441 or 504, an increase in bus traffic is not expected. Mill Hill currently has 8 buses, and in 2010 when Mill Hill housed 465 students, we still had 8 buses. Right now, most of the buses run only 1/3 to 1/2 full.
11. The difference between a 441 and 504 is anticipated to be approximately 6-10 cars during drop off and pick up, and the traffic lanes are being redesigned which will greatly enhance the traffic flow.

Please don't hesitate to ask questions, and I encourage you to get engaged in this project vote because it has long-term implications for Mill Hill.

Have a restful Memorial Day weekend as we pause to say thank you for the many women and men who have served valiantly and lost their lives for our freedom.



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Fairfield Public Schools