

It's Not 2008 Anymore

Miller-Driscoll enrollment was 1,050 in 2008,¹ when the first Statement of Requirements was produced for the renovation project. That SOR specified a need for 50 classrooms.

*Miller-Driscoll enrollment is projected to fall as low as 644 in 2019.²
The current project's Statement of Requirements³ also specifies a need for 50 classrooms.*

Sensible Wilton is in favor of significant improvements to Miller-Driscoll that have been needed for many years. We are all for a safe, healthy, quality school that provides an excellent learning environment at a fiscally responsible cost to the Town. We are opposed to the currently defined project because it does not meet fiscally responsible criteria.

The project does not meet fiscally responsible criteria because it has failed to incorporate Wilton Public Schools' significantly declining enrollment.

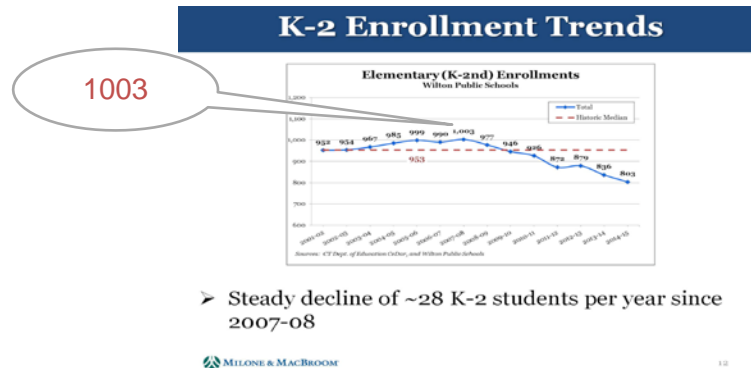
Unrealistic enrollment figures have been used for a design to accommodate as many as 362 more students than projections call for, while demolishing one of the newest parts of the building in the process. This demolition, in turn, creates a chain reaction of exorbitant expenses.

The issue of "a large decline in the student population"⁴ was front and center at the July 21, 2015 Board of Finance meeting and can no longer be disregarded by the Board of Selectmen and Miller Driscoll Building Committee. *To build to the current design wastes millions of dollars.* The renovation project must be reevaluated.

Also of concern is the projected enrollment figure used in construction forms/documents submitted to the State of Connecticut.⁵ This figure will be used in calculations related to reimbursement by the state, etc.

Enrollment reality

The chart below shows MD's K-2 enrollment decline 2008-2015. Projections by Milone & MacBroom,⁶ who produced the chart, as well as those by Peter Prowda,⁷ show continuing reductions in MD enrollment as well as for the entire Wilton school system.



¹ Statement of Requirements, Miller/Driscoll Construction and Renovation Project, Pre-School Building Project – Major Upgrades and Maintenance Project, March 31, 2008

² "Wilton Public Schools Enrollment Projected to 2023, January 6, 2014" by Peter M. Prowda, Phd

³ Revised Statement of Requirements Capital Project Miller-Driscoll School, February 7, 2013

⁴ Board of Finance meeting minutes, July 21, 2015

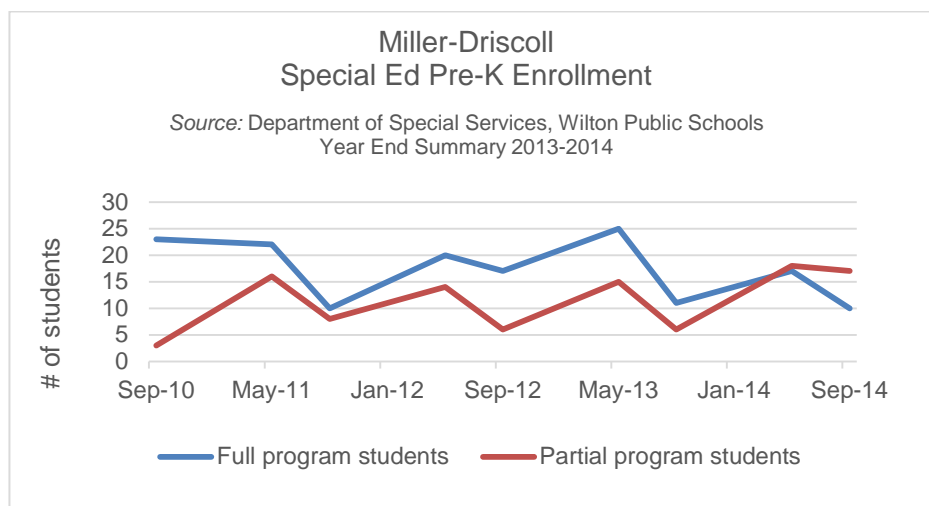
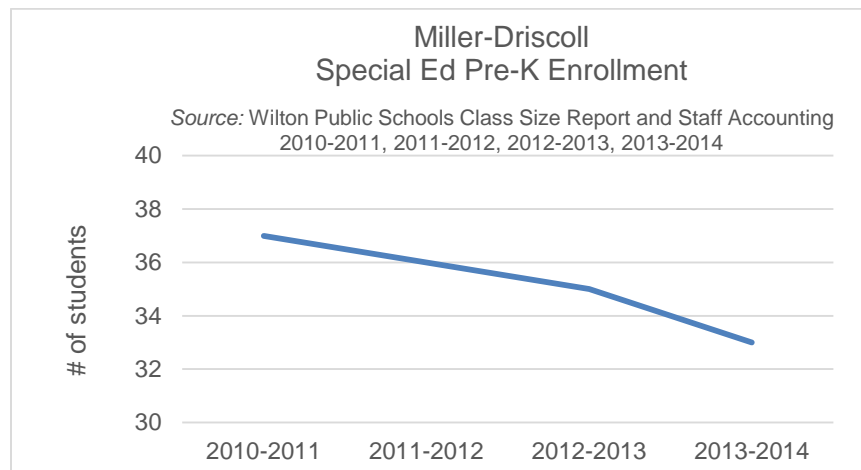
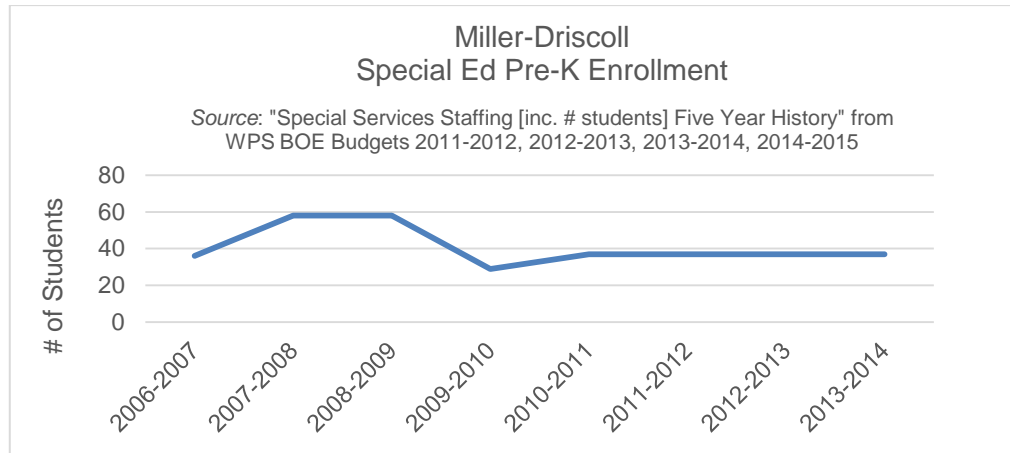
⁵ "State may give more money to Miller-Driscoll renovation," Wilton Bulletin, August 24, 2015

⁶ "Comprehensive Enrollment Study, Trends and Projections, Wilton Public Schools, March 26, 2015" by Milone & MacBroom

⁷ "Wilton Public Schools Enrollment Projected to 2023, January 6, 2014" by Peter M. Prowda, Phd

Unsubstantiated design requirements

WPS' Special Services' historical records (the next three charts) and Prowda enrollment projections (page 4) do not support one of only two MD Project Objectives touted to the community, "to add sufficient, appropriate and dedicated Pre-K space, per state mandate, to serve a growing pre-kindergarten special needs population"^{8 9}:



⁸ Miller-Driscoll School, Wilton Public Schools, Town of Wilton, Connecticut, "Building Committee Community Presentation"

⁹ As the charts indicate, WPS Pre-K Special Ed records of enrollment figures are inconsistent.

Declining enrollment was dismissed in calculations used¹⁰ for the 2013 Statement of Requirements, calling for the design to accommodate up to 930 students.¹¹ And those figures were not adjusted after experts' studies in 2014¹² and 2015¹³ confirmed the ongoing decline.

Declining enrollment was not taken into account when the same number of general classrooms that had been specified in the original SOR in 2008 was used for the current SOR.

Bruce Hampson kindly confirmed the design's 50 classroom count in the email below.

Alex :
That count is essentially correct , however we count 41 toilets to your 31.
Regards,
Bruce

From: Alex Ruskewich [mailto:aruskew@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2015 4:50 PM
To: Bruce Hampson
Cc: Curtis Noel
Subject: MD rooms

Bruce, I checked the pages you referenced. The number of rooms I come up with related to students is listed in the table below. I'm sure I missed some but I feel these are the key ones. Are these the same numbers you are using?

Thanks

	MD Space planned
Classrooms	#
Pre-K	5
Kind	15
First	15
Second	15
Art	2
Media center	3
Speech	6
Computer	1
Resource	4
Music	3
Small Group	7
Toilet	31

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Alex Ruskewich

"Members of congress should dress like NASCAR drivers, with their sponsors displayed." -

¹⁰ Board of Selectmen meeting, December 3, 2012. Selectman Richard Dubow explained how he calculated an enrollment number for the BOS Statement of Purpose and Objectives for the Miller-Driscoll project. This document was made part of the 2013 SOR.

¹¹ Revised Statement of Requirements Capital Project Miller-Driscoll School, February 7, 2013

¹² "Wilton Public Schools Enrollment Projected to 2023, January 6, 2014" by Peter M. Prowda, Phd

¹³ "Comprehensive Enrollment Study, Trends and Projections, Wilton Public Schools, March 26, 2015" by Milone & MacBroom

The SOR's enrollment figures distort the actual needs of the school. Besides classrooms, declining enrollment also means the need for fewer offices, special classrooms, toilets, parking spaces, teachers, staff, etc. The chart below shows how the project's own enrollment figures far exceed the experts' projections.

	Pre-K Enrollment Projections*			Current project exceeds experts' projections		Current project exceeds enrollment projections	Current project exceeds # of necessary classrooms
	Prowda	Milone & MacBroom**	Current Project***	Prowda	Milone & MacBroom		
2015-2016	43	-	75	74%	-	32	2
2016-2017	38	-	75	97%	-	37	2
2017-2018	39	-	75	92%	-	36	2
2018-2019	40	-	75	88%	-	35	2
2019-2020	40	-	75	88%	-	35	2
2020-2021	40	-	75	88%	-	35	2
2021-2022	40	-	75	88%	-	35	2
2022-2023	40	-	75	88%	-	35	2

* Includes Special Ed and non-Special Ed students.

** Milone & MacBroom did not calculate Pre-K projections. Their report's Pre-K numbers were given to them by Wilton Public Schools.

*** # provided by Wilton Public Schools

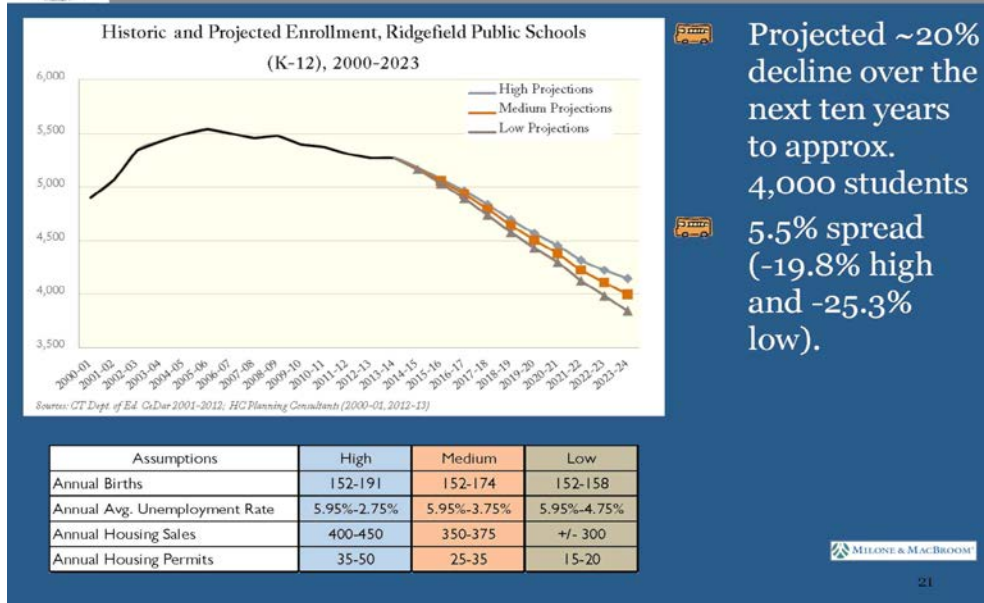
	K-2 Enrollment Projections			Current project exceeds experts' projections		Current project exceeds experts' projections		Current project exceeds # of necessary classrooms
	Prowda	Milone & MacBroom	Current project	Prowda	Milone & MacBroom	Prowda	Milone & MacBroom	
2015-2016	723	780	930	29%	19%	207	150	7-10
2016-2017	664	778	930	40%	20%	266	152	10-13
2017-2018	623	727	930	49%	28%	307	203	10-15
2018-2019	604	703	930	54%	32%	326	227	11-16
2019-2020	611	677	930	52%	37%	319	253	12-16
2020-2021	616	709	930	51%	31%	314	221	11-16
2021-2022	617	715	930	51%	30%	313	215	11-16
2022-2023	617	746	930	51%	25%	313	184	9-16

Not just a Wilton reality

It is well known that enrollments throughout Connecticut are dropping. Ridgefield, Redding, Easton, Newtown and Easton are only a few of the towns experiencing declining enrollments. The chart below shows Ridgefield's expected reductions in its enrollments. Articles have even appeared discussing the possibility of closing an elementary school.



District-wide Proj. & Assumptions



As pointed out in many studies, enrollments are being impacted by financial and cultural reasons.

- Many of the millennials are choosing to live in cities where there are more activities This is easily demonstrated by the increasing rents and housing prices in cities
- Many of the millennials are burdened by significant school debt that leads to later family formation
- Fairfield County has been severely impacted by the significant reduction of the financial industry in NYC and Fairfield County. This industry with its high paying jobs provided a significant market for Fairfield County and Wilton. A current example within the last month:

In Connecticut, the Twilight of a Trading Hub

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/business/dealbook/wall-street-pulls-in-its-horns-in-connecticut.html>

Summary

Sensible Wilton has repeatedly pointed out the issue of declining enrollment only to be dismissed, derided or ignored. So we appreciate the Board of Finance addressing this serious matter not only by discussing the associated fiscal implications of it, but by being willing to revisit how its own budget guidance will be prepared as a result.

We acknowledge that a school must be able to accommodate fluctuating enrollments, but that should be done with a plan that is prudent in its design and price tag. A plan that was based upon 2008 criteria, given a \$32-35 million budget,¹⁴ that escalated to more than \$50 million in 14 months, for a building that could possibly have 15 empty classrooms when the renovated doors open in December 2017, does not accomplish that.

The existing building has a capacity of 1,080¹⁵ -- many more students than projections forecast. A plan to perform interior reconfigurations and needed renovations could be accommodated within the current footprint without the need for significant demolition and rebuilds.

Sensible Wilton requests there be no further delay in thoroughly revisiting the MD project design in light of reality. The savings for the Town would be significant without sacrificing the needs of the students. To continue down the current path is fiscally irresponsible.

¹⁴ Miller Driscoll Building Committee meeting minutes, June 3, 2013

¹⁵ Final Official Statement Dated March 10, 2015, Town of Wilton, Connecticut, General Obligations Bonds, Issue of 2015