



New Fairfield Public Schools
New Fairfield, CT

2022-23 Letter of Analysis



2022-23 Enrollment Projections

TO: Dr. Kenneth Craw, Superintendent, New Fairfield Public Schools, CT
FROM: Karen L. LeDuc, Ph.D.
DATE: 10/27/22
RE: Enrollment Projections

Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the global economy has seen fluctuations in real estate markets and job trends, which have impacted student attendance patterns. Over the past few years, we have seen how school enrollment patterns can differ substantially from one district to another, with some districts losing students while others experience an influx of students.

We are pleased to send you the Enrollment Projection Report which displays the past, present, and projected enrollments for the New Fairfield School District. These ten-year projections are designed to provide New Fairfield with yearly, up-to-date enrollment information that can be used by boards and administrators for effective planning and allocation of resources. Included in this report are graphs representing historical and projected grade-by-grade enrollments, as well as historical and projected enrollments in grade combinations. We have received the figures given to us by the district, and we assume that the method of collecting the enrollment data has been consistent from year to year.

The NESDEC forecast for School Year 2021-22 fell within 20 students of the K-12 projected enrollment (2,051 projected vs. 2,071 enrolled). In Grades K-2, 410 students were projected vs. 408 enrolled; in Grades 3-5, 462 students were projected vs. 460 enrolled; in Grades 6-8, 509 students were projected vs. 496 enrolled; and in Grades 9-12, 670 students were projected vs. 707 enrolled.

Enrollment Projection Analysis: Over the next three years, K-2 enrollments are forecast to increase by a total of +11 students, Grades 3-5 enrollments are projected to decrease by -6 students, Grades 6-8 enrollments are projected to increase by +13 students, and Grades 9-12 are projected to decrease by about -21 pupils, as the classes move up the grades. Projections can serve as useful guides to school administrators for educational planning. Enrollment projections are more reliable in Years #1-4 in the future and less reliable in the “out-years.” Projections six to ten years out may serve as a guide to future enrollments and are useful for planning purposes, but they should be viewed as subject to change given the likelihood of potential shifts in underlying assumptions/trends, such as student migration, births as they relate to Kindergarten enrollment, and other factors. Building permits have begun to stabilize: see the “Additional Data” table. See the “Reliability of Projections” section for more details. The birth numbers used in the projections, through 2021, are from the CT Department of Public Health. Any “provisional” numbers reflect a total that is preliminary. Any “estimated” numbers are created using a rolling five-year average, which NESDEC has found to be the most accurate method of estimation. Local clerks have up-to-date information on local births, but do not have access to the number of New Fairfield residents born out-of-state, information which will eventually become known to the CT DPH Vital Statistics Department. Regardless, it is quite possible that real estate turnover will have increased further, bringing in additional new families: see the “Projections” page.

NESDEC has found that the following factors are relevant to the analysis of your Enrollment Projections.

Hidden Trends Within the District

The two factors now at work that will have the greatest effect upon future enrollments are: (1) a small increase in the number of births to New Fairfield residents, and (2) an expected continuation of the in-migration of families.

Births: The analysis of births as they relate to kindergarten is important to consider as it constitutes the potential enrollment pool for Kindergarten. The students currently in Grades 1-10 were born during a period when New Fairfield was averaging 102 births per year. More recently, and expected over the next 8-10 years, New Fairfield now is averaging about 105 births per year, about 3 more births per year than previously. The relationship between New Fairfield births and Kindergarten enrollments is displayed on the B-K graph. New Fairfield continues to experience an increased number of “net move-ins” of families with Kindergarten students. For example, in 2017 there were 98 births, and for school year 21-22, New Fairfield enrolled 129 Kindergarteners (an increase of 31 students). Kindergarten enrollments over the last five years have experienced a range of 112-143 students. Kindergarten is one of the more difficult grades to project, as the projection is based upon birth data recorded five years earlier and is influenced by new families moving to New Fairfield.

In- or Out-Migration of Students: Like many nearby communities, New Fairfield continues to experience fluctuations in enrollment and in-migration in Grades 1-8. There are additional trends and countertrends to consider. More so than other grade levels, **Grades 1-8 in most districts, taken as a group, tend to be relatively stable in numbers.** Grades 9-12 are excluded from the calculation, as in many communities there tends to be additional fluctuation for reasons having little to do with students moving in/out of the community. Regarding the Grade 1-8

enrollment stability, if last year the Grade 1-7 total was 1,100 children, and if no one moved in or out, this fall's Grades 2-8 would equal about 1,100 – the same cohort of children. Because Grades 1-8 tend to be the most stable in total K-12 enrollment, these Grades 1-8 are potential places to discover “hidden trends” that otherwise might go unnoticed, and that provide a useful yardstick by which to measure a district's tendency toward in-/out-migration. In the case of New Fairfield, we know that the District had been experiencing an in-migration of school-age children (with increases in 7 out of 8 years, leading to a net increase averaging +19 students). The presence of in-migration in Grades 1-8 would be evidence of the complexity of enrollments in these unsettled economic times. Analysis of these hidden trends can provide an additional benchmark by which to assess enrollment trends.

Forecasting Kindergarten and Grade 9: The two most difficult grades to forecast in all districts are Kindergarten and Grade 9. The latter is difficult to anticipate, as there are so many options for Grade 9: vocational or agricultural schools, private or parochial non-public schools, etc. Kindergarten can be difficult to project based upon births alone, especially in a changing real estate market like New Fairfield-as many districts have large numbers of “net move-ins/move-outs” who are ages 1-4. Some districts take extra steps to track 3- and 4-year-olds with a local census, or report to NESDEC the known number of 4-year-olds in local pre-schools/nursery schools that typically enroll Kindergarteners in the district. Knowing this information helps NESDEC to project Kindergarteners more reliably, as does data from the Kindergarten Screening in districts, which also tracks 3- and 4-year-old siblings (or neighbors) at that time. New Fairfield's in-migration of residents remains an important variable in the new class of Kindergarteners each year and is well worth tracking in order to periodically update the estimated number of newly arrived children. The more data that is sent to NESDEC regarding the incoming Kindergarten class, the greater the chance that enrollment surprises will be minimized.

Trends in Real Estate Sales: Every day across America, 10,000 citizens celebrate their 65th birthdays, a phenomenon which will continue for the foreseeable future. Current real estate trends indicate that a large share of these mature citizens had planned to “downsize” their living arrangements but postponed doing so due to the fluctuating real estate market. Millennials, many of whom postponed home buying, are now purchasing homes in record numbers. School enrollments are influenced strongly by the number of real estate sales, as these contribute to new families moving into many districts. Generally, in our work we have become aware that the number of real estate sales is 4-5 times larger than the number of building permits for new residential construction. **Thus, the number of real estate sales can be a more important factor than the number of building permits.** The global economy continues to influence our nation's public health and economic stability in unpredictable ways, especially for our schools. In the case of New Fairfield, an average of 236 single-family homes were being sold annually in 2001-2007 “on the bubble” prior to the 2008 Recession, a pace which slowed to only an average of 121 sales for 2008-12. An average of 204 single-family homes were sold annually in 2013-2021. The number of homes sold through August of 2022 (142 single-family homes) is on a pace that could reach ~200 by year's end. The median sales price for single-family homes has ranged from \$300,000 - \$460,000 for the past 10 years and is currently \$474,500 through August 2022. (Data source: Warren Group)

Analyzing Your Enrollment

1. After the "YEAR" column can be found the "BIRTHS" column. The number of births to residents for each of eleven years is displayed. Note any trends, e.g., have births been decreasing? increasing? leveling off? Kindergarten and Grade 1 enrollments normally are quite responsive to these fluctuations.
2. Look **down** the K and 1 columns, noting the direction of the trend. This affords a comparison of these classes over a ten-year period. Add the K and Grade 1 enrollments of the first school year recorded and compare them with the sum of the current K and Grade 1 enrollments.
3. Take the first K class and follow it diagonally to trace its movement to Grade 1, 2, etc. up to its current 10th grade status. This comparison (which can be accomplished for other classes also) gives some measure of the effects of migration in your school district. If a sixth-grade class today is larger than it was as a K class six years ago, then net in-migration probably has occurred; if it is smaller, then net out-migration probably has occurred.
4. Compare each K class with the previous year's graduating class. Note which is larger and by what amount one surpasses the other. Larger graduating classes generally reflect declining enrollments; larger K classes generally indicate increasing enrollments.
5. In the "Grade Combinations" section, note the trends of elementary, middle school and high school enrollments. A significant and consistent trend in these summaries usually results in the corresponding trend for projected enrollments. If enrollments are leveling off in the elementary grades after a period of decline, then the secondary enrollments might be expected to continue to decline for several years until the leveling off experience has had time to take hold at the secondary grades.



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