

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding
School Enrollment and the B-SPACE Committee
LAST UPDATED 3-22-13**

The following FAQ has been prepared by the Brookline School Population and Capacity Exploration (B-SPACE) Committee to try to answer commonly asked questions about the enrollment crisis in the Public Schools of Brookline and potential solutions under consideration. *Have a question or suggestion that isn't addressed here? [Let us know!](#)*

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1. What's the Problem?

After several years of extraordinary enrollment growth (an increase of 1100 students in the elementary schools since 2006, resulting in an additional 37 sections), the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) will be, after 2015, at or over its physical capacity across the district. The PSB administration has explained that current and projected enrollments will require *at least* 18 more classrooms (serving 22 students each) than can be accommodated in its elementary schools. Along with

the additional classrooms will come the need (and associated costs) of teachers for those classes.

2. Why are enrollments growing?

There is no single explanation for the growth and therefore no reliable prediction of when it will end, or if enrollments will ever fall back to pre-2006 levels. The 2010 Census shows that, while the Town's population grew only slightly (by about 1600) between 2000 and 2010, it shifted significantly, with the proportion of residents age 10 and younger increasing dramatically. That coincides almost perfectly with the enrollment growth period. Live births are also up by about 100 per year, an increase that tracks reasonably closely with Brookline's enrollment numbers. Finally, some have speculated that Brookline's proximity to high job-growth sectors such as the medical area make it particularly attractive, especially given its reputation for excellent public schools, so some of the shift in the average age of the population and the consequent enrollment growth may be tracking that job growth.

The School Committee had a consulting team (MGT) look at the long-term capital needs of the schools several years ago as this growth began, and the same consultants revised their enrollment projections last year to inform space planning. Both reports are on the Schools website under Facilities Master Plan. The second ([Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization](#)) is the most current.

3. What is B-SPACE?

Because of the size and scope of enrollment changes and the financial implications for the Town, the School Committee asked the Board of Selectmen to empanel a joint committee to explore the problem and its long-term solutions (i.e. planning for 2015 and beyond). That committee is called B-SPACE (Brookline School Population and Capital Exploration), and is chaired by Betsy Dewitt and Alan Morse, chairs of the Board of Selectmen and School Committee, respectively. It has representatives on it from the Schools, Town, Advisory Committee, Building Commission, school parents, and at-large community members.

4. What is [B-SPACE's charge](#) and authority?

The B-SPACE Committee charge is to come up with [recommendations](#) to the School Committee and Board of Selectmen for expanding space across the district to accommodate the enrollment growth after 2015. It has no independent authority. Specifically:

The Committee on Brookline School Population and Capital Expansion (B-SPACE) is charged with gathering and analyzing data, and guiding a community discussion on programming and space planning that will accommodate rapid and unabated enrollment growth and support the educational goals of the Public Schools of Brookline.

Objectives/Deliverables:

By July 2013, the Committee will submit a plan (or plans) for approval by the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen for the following:

1) An additional school in Brookline, initially to be housed at Old Lincoln School. The Facilities Master Plan shows that space in all eight K-8 schools has been or will be maximized with recent and planned adaptations and renovations by fall 2014, while currently projected enrollments will continue to require increased space. To free up space across our schools, a new school must:

- a) draw 450-500 students proportionately from every existing school, and
- b) do so in a way that satisfies the PSB core value of educational equity.

The Committee will consider a range of concepts for a possible new school. The committee may also explore solutions other than a new school that have the equivalent effect of enabling existing K-8s to fulfill the educational goals and objectives of the PSB Strategic Plan with existing and planned space.

2) Use of space & necessary renovations across the rest of the PSB buildings to:

- a) anticipate growth at BHS to 2500 students in five years (a commissioned Concept Study for space at BHS will inform this discussion), and
- b) configure a permanent location or locations for the Brookline Early Education Program.

The SPACE Committee need not develop a plan for these, but consideration of these two priorities will inform the discussion around a new school and may result in recommendations for these areas.

3) Financing that enables the PSB to accomplish the above, including recommendations for budget efficiencies and/or raising additional revenues.

Any recommendations from this Committee should meet the following criteria:

- i. They have been discussed across the community in Brookline and received significant public support, and
- ii. They meet the objectives of educational excellence and equity across the school district.

5. What have the Schools done about enrollments so far?

The School Committee (BSC) has been addressing the problems of rising enrollments for many years. Five years ago, the BSC commissioned a Facilities Master Plan (see Question #2, above) that began a conversation about enrollments and expansion. Since then, the Town/PSB/School Committee have:

- renovated and expanded Runkle and Heath Schools, and created more than 40 teaching spaces for additional sections in our other elementary schools by dividing and/or repurposing existing spaces;

- moved pre-K classrooms out of elementary schools and into leased space (this will continue in future years)
- worked with Extended Day programs to begin using as regular classrooms what had been dedicated afterschool space
- expanded Buffer Zones to allow greater flexibility in assigning students to schools with space in a class
- allowed class sizes in the early grades to grow above their ideal targets
- contracted to expand capacity in the Pierce Auditorium
- moved to feasibility study phase for the renovation and expansion of Devotion School
- looked at the cost and feasibility of adding modular classrooms at Lawrence and Baker schools
- given the Superintendent permission temporarily to locate regular Kindergarten classrooms off site (i.e. at a building other than its assigned school)
- commissioned a Concept Study for Brookline High School expansion in anticipation of its enrollments increasing up to 2500 student by 2022.

6. What options is B-SPACE considering?

B-SPACE has been looking at a lot of data: enrollment projections, building space capacities, what has already been done in the schools and what is planned for the next two years. In addition to the possibility of using Old Lincoln School as a site for a new school, B-SPACE has discussed the potential impacts of a number of other options that might free up classroom space, including:

- Increasing allowable Class Size to 30
- Eliminating, reducing, or phasing out the staff Materials Fee Program
- Eliminating, reducing, or phasing out METCO
- Adding Modular Classrooms
- Suspending Neighborhood Assignment for Elementary School
- Leasing more space for school use

After looking at the possible impacts of these options, B-SPACE Committee members agreed that the only option that yields the 18 classrooms needed is to create a new school at Old Lincoln, which has up to 22 classrooms. Even in combination, the other options fall short of what is required, and many of them would yield either a substantial diminution in educational quality in Brookline, community uproar, teacher and staff disaffection, or all three.

For more detail on the B-SPACE discussion of these options, please see the minutes of meetings on the [B-SPACE website](#).

7. Why aren't we creating a new K-8 Neighborhood School?

There are two reasons a new K-8 *neighborhood* school is not a consideration. First, the enrollment growth is town-wide, and therefore a neighborhood school would not relieve the space crunch. Second, the original Facilities Master Plan concluded

that while a new school might be helpful, no existing facility or available land in Brookline met both the geographic and lot size requirements to make building a new neighborhood school possible. Although Old Lincoln School (OLS) is available, it is not in a location that makes it a useful additional neighborhood school.

8. If we use Old Lincoln, and it's not a neighborhood school, what would it be?

We don't know yet. B-SPACE is in the middle of its process, and discussing different options with the community is a crucial part of its agenda. The Superintendent has begun a discussion at B-SPACE to consider *different concepts* for what kind of school would or could be housed at Old Lincoln that meets the requirements laid out in the B-SPACE charge (see above, Question #4). B-SPACE will publicize those options and host several community conversations (including Public Hearings on April 8 and May 13) in order to gather public responses to various options.

9. Don't we use Old Lincoln as swing space for other renovations?

Old Lincoln has been used as swing space for both Town and Schools renovations, but many towns and cities renovate buildings without swing space and Brookline would find ways to do so as well. There are no current or planned projects that assume Old Lincoln will be available as swing space; that has already been factored into planning for future projects.

10. Will a new school at Old Lincoln solve the problem?

Not completely. A new school at Old Lincoln does not create sufficient space to bring pre-Ks back into the elementary schools, for example, and it may not allow for restoration of spaces at existing buildings or fully alleviate ongoing student growth pressures if enrollments continue to rise. Per its charge, B-SPACE will continue to look for additional ways to expand classroom space, including other potential sites for schools or pre-K, gradual enlargement of existing facilities, etc.

11. Have any other locations besides Old Lincoln been considered?

Yes, but only Old Lincoln meets the requirements for a school building of the size required and is available right away. Other potential buildings (owned by the PSB but used in other ways) looked at include the Lynch Center on Brookline Ave. (used now for pre-K), the Baldwin School on Heath Street (used now for a staff daycare program and BHS's Winthrop House), and the small house on the New Lincoln School lot that houses the Brookline Music School.

12. Is building an entirely new school a possibility?

Nothing has been ruled out, but building an entirely new school takes many years, in addition to the other considerations that make it impractical as a solution for 2015. For example: a) available land is scarce, expensive, and in the wrong places to effectively address the problem and b) would require tens of millions of dollars not currently contemplated in the already ambitious [Capital Improvements Plan](#).

13. How can the community be involved?

Community involvement is essential. Everyone is encouraged to help think through these issues, attend meetings, and send questions or ideas to B-SPACE through the link at the top of this document or through the co-Chairs (alan_morse@brookline.k12.ma.us or betsy@betsydewitt.com). B-SPACE posts information through [a page on the Town website](#) and will be working with community groups such as PTOs, neighborhood associations, Town Meeting Members, and many others to get information out, hold public hearings, and conduct focus groups. All B-SPACE meetings are public as well, and an audience is always welcome.

Public Hearings (a time for any member of the public to come speak to the Committee about its work and provide input on the options being discussed) will be held in the Selectmen's Hearing Room on the 6th floor of Town Hall on the evenings of April 8th and May 13th.

14. How can I learn more about the impact of enrollments on an individual school?

B-SPACE's charge is district-wide, looking at long-term growth and space. For information about how individual schools are managing space for the next year or two, or what the plans are for addressing the future needs of the High School, parents or individuals can contact the School Committee, attend School/Site Council meetings, go to a school's PTO, and/or attend any one of several [parent forums](#) the Superintendent will conduct in March, April, and May.