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Superintendent Dr. Karen Baldwin and the Ridgefield Board of Education to Receive Capacity Study update on Monday, January 9th.

Ridgefield, CT: On Monday, January 9th, at the 7:30pm Board of Education Meeting, the demographers of the consulting firm of [Milone & MacBroom](#) will present the next level of its capacity study research related to the viability of five options that address the declining student enrollment and the utilization and capacity of school buildings.

This research began in July 2016 and has thus far resulted in a 10 year enrollment projection report, a capacity study, a combined enrollment projection/capacity study, and a report of how the latter study looks when a variety of current industry-wide school structuring systems beyond our current division of K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 levels are applied. At the December 9th, 2016 Board of Education meeting, 5 options were chosen for a deeper review with the greatest flexibility seen in the projected underutilization of our middle school facilities. (Visit www.ridgefield.org to see reports in our news/events section.)

“At the conclusion of last spring’s budget season there was a strong belief in the community that because of the declining enrollment in Ridgefield there was a possibility and reality that a school could be closed and effectuate savings and thereby reduce the burden to taxpayers. This was based on prior discussions between the Board of Education and the Board of Finance that stated that if K-5 enrollment goes below 2000, then a school should be closed. When our budget passed by only 16 votes, it became very clear to me and the Board that we needed to revisit this and vet it in a deep thoughtful way,” said Dr. Baldwin. “Not only would a school closing or restructuring need to create financial and operational efficiencies, but it should also meet the needs of student learning for our students graduating in 2026 and beyond.”

The study examined all our facilities and how each is currently utilized to provide and advance the essential 21st century skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. It takes into account square footage parameters, contemporary instructional arrangements,

specialized programs such as RISE, our intensive special education program, and the full context of each school's unique setting and program offerings. According to Dr. Baldwin, "The BOE have to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars and they also have to make sure the decisions they make will advance education outcomes for Ridgefield's students and that is how the capacity study helps to serve this."

On Monday, the Board will discuss the viable scenarios that are presented by Milone & MacBroom. At the conclusion of the meeting the Board may ask that the administration engage in more research into these options relative to implementation, i.e. effects on transportation, program offerings, and overall operations. The timeline for decision-making relative to the viable options is fluid, and is dependent upon the course of interest and action the BOE pursues. If the BOE has interest in pocket redistricting, changing feeding patterns to the middle schools, or a reconfiguration including restructuring or closing a school, the Board will implement a process for public input and then go back to Milone & MacBroom to fine-tune any proposed change. This process would take between three and fifteen months. A pocket redistricting could be implemented as early as next year if deemed viable. A reconfiguration of grade levels and the closing of a school would take more time and most likely not take place until 2019-20.

"As the discussions move forward, it is important to keep in mind that while K-5 enrollment is declining, it is not declining as significantly as ever projected," Dr. Baldwin states. For example, the 2009 ten-year enrollment projections predicted that in 2016-2017 our enrollment in K-5 would be 1,576. Our current enrollment is much higher at 1,986. This 410 difference is equivalent to an elementary school.

The Ridgefield Public Schools and Board of Education are committed to improving communication to all stakeholders in our public schools. We invite any interested persons to attend this important meeting on January 9th. It will be held in the [Scotts Ridge Middle School Auditorium](#) located at 750 North Salem Road and the public meeting begins at 7:30pm. Monday's agenda will be posted on our website at www.ridgefield.org/Board_of_Education by 7pm today and attachments will be posted on Monday by 6:30pm. The public may attend in person, or view the meeting and all BOE meetings live via the link on the Ridgefield Public Schools website.

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