

Voters Pass Vital Bond In Response To Growth

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To keep up with the high demand for a top-notch public education, Fort Mill voters approved the \$226.8 million bond to be used for local public education.

As the fastest growing school district in all of South Carolina, the Fort Mill School District attempts. District leaders project the development of 12,000 new homes being constructed within the next ten years, and an expected increase of 7,000 public school students. FMSD plans to accommodate and educate the large number of projected students with the \$226.8 million bond.

Teachers testify to the problems present population growth poses in the classroom. Biology teacher Kimberly Rathod explains how large class numbers make performing some educational labs impossible. The reasoning behind the reduction in labs stems from a lack of space to conduct them and not enough funding for needed materials.

"Keep class sizes small," Rathod said.

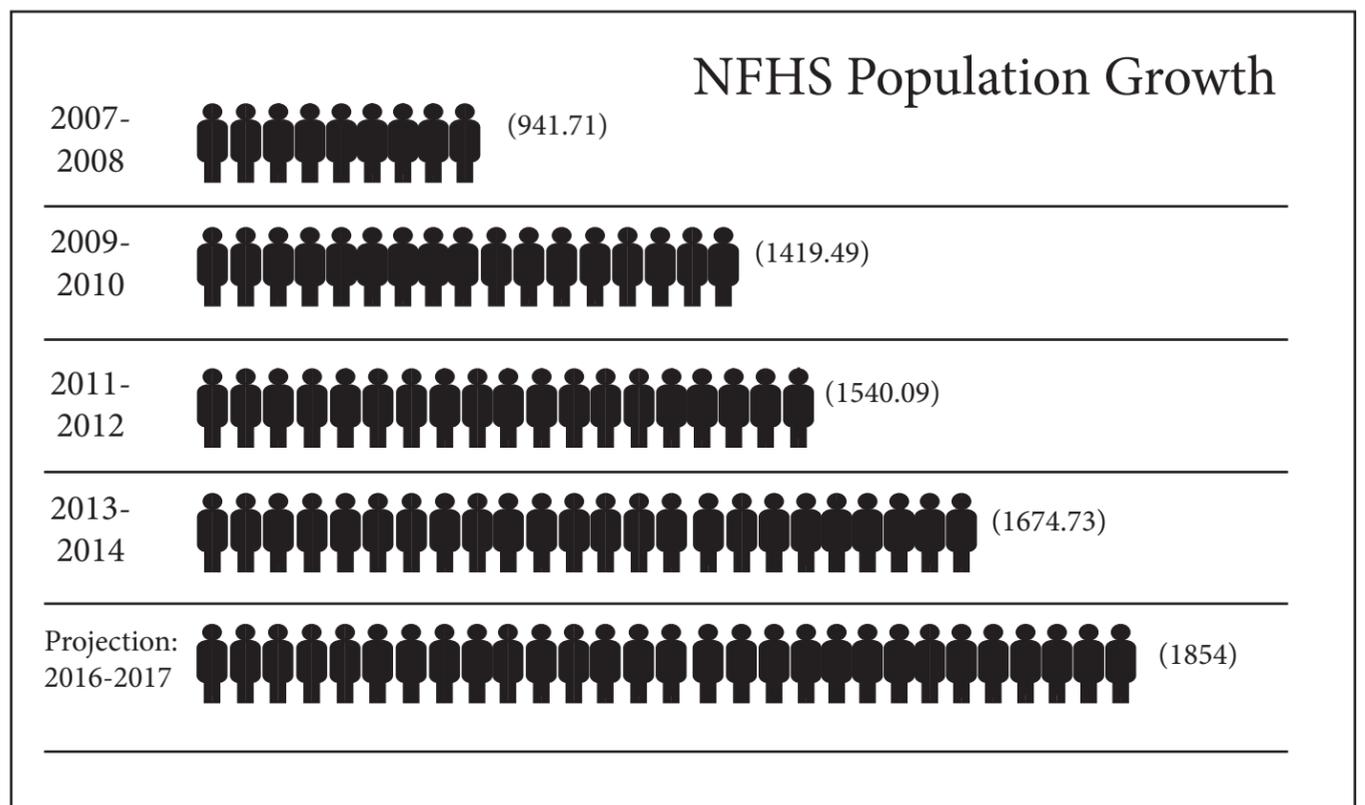
By creating more classes, the number of students per class would decrease, allowing a science teacher to conduct all science labs, rather than just some. The approval of the bond will allow schools to make this solution possible.

Teacher Gina Perry agrees student growth must be dealt with soon. "We are growing by leaps and bounds," said she.

Her primary concern is the lack of attention some students receive from teachers. Due to student numbers rising, teachers can't provide as much one-on-one time as they used to. Many students need individual help to be successful, and because students are not getting this attention, some are failing.

Another result from the growth increase is the heavy traffic coming and leaving the school. Many students complain how they get to class late because of traffic. The addition of the new light on A.O. Jones Boulevard makes traffic even slower.

English teacher Rick Solt expressed concern about student growth as well. Currently, Mr. Solt has to take far more time than past years to grade papers and tests. A surplus of students means more papers to grade.



Reflecting on past years, Solt's class average was 24 students at the opening of the school, seven years ago, but now the average is 29 students per class.

Mr. Solt fears once the school exceeds the total student enrollment of 1,800 students, then the school will become more disconnected, meaning losing the sense of community. His fears may come true next year because the school projects student enrollment to be 1,854 students.

The construction of a new high school. This would make acceptance into competitive clubs and sports easier and would allow students to be more active in student life. FMSD plans on constructing seven more schools in town with the money from the bond.

Students also speak out against the student growth at NFHS. "It sucks!" Ellie Abraham ('15) said.

Abraham explained how the predicament annoys her because an increase in students makes it more difficult to achieve a good class rank.

She also identified the struggles of the crowded halls, which makes getting to class difficult in a timely manner. The school is presently constructing a new wing onto the back side of the school. However, while Perry believes adding more classes is a good idea, she fears the new wing will make walking from one end of the school to

the other take longer and more students may be late getting to class.

Anne Kaufman ('16) also expressed concern regarding student growth. "It's harder to talk to the teacher, harder to go to guidance, and there's definitely more traffic coming into the school in the morning."

Kaufman doesn't believe she's getting the one-on-one help necessary to do her best because of the increase of students in the classroom.

According to school records, NFHS enrollment as of the 45th day of its opening year was 942 students. However, seniors chose which high school in town they attended in the 2007-2008 school year. The next year's enrollment skyrocketed to 1,333 students. Clearly, student enrollment will eventually exceed the holding capacity of the school. Money from the bond will help the FMSD keep up with this dramatic population spike.

NFHS Principal Beverly Bowman feels differently than the teachers and students. "It's an exciting challenge," Bowman said. As the principal, she's excited that parents and students move to the district because of the superior education and because of the benefits which come along with growth. Because more families are moving into Fort Mill, school funding from taxes should significantly rise. In fact, taxes will be raised \$277 a year per home.

This raise is to make up for the money the town will spend, which exceeds the \$226.8 million from the bond.

Due to the fact that Fort Mill isn't a large industry town, funding from taxes has typically remained low, so the town welcomes growth. The surplus in funding allows the schools to hire teachers with more experience, if the funding is available. By hiring new teachers with varied experiences, existing staff can learn from them, Bowman said.

Nevertheless, student growth remains an issue. According to Bowman, the school just spent \$9 million on the new expansion to the school. On top of the expansion, the town is expected to build seven more schools priced at \$338 million. Besides the expansion, the money will go towards the construction of four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. School board chairman, Patrick White hopes taxes on Fort Mill residents will solve the school population problem.

"To get an idea of school growth, add about a hundred students every year, or five percent," said Bowman. With the assistance of the \$226.8 million bond and tax payer money, Fort Mill seeks to address the huge population explosion.