

[https://www.newjerseyhills.com/randolph\\_reporter/news/mine-hill-school-construction-referendum-will-bring-zero-tax-increase/article\\_c05439cf-19ca-5e3c-ac69-29d6cb214c6c.html](https://www.newjerseyhills.com/randolph_reporter/news/mine-hill-school-construction-referendum-will-bring-zero-tax-increase/article_c05439cf-19ca-5e3c-ac69-29d6cb214c6c.html)

## Mine Hill School construction referendum will bring zero tax increase

By MIKE CONDON Editor  
Sep 11, 2021



Doors and windows are chief among things that will be replaced should Mine Hill Township voters OK a \$5 million construction referendum. Nittel points out the loose, drafty and out-of-compliance doors currently leading to the outside in the Canfield Avenue School's multiple entrances.

Photos by Mike Condon

**MINE HILL TWP.** - The grades K-6 school district will soon ask township voters to approve a \$5 million school construction referendum.

The state will pay between 30 and 40 percent of that total estimated cost and, most importantly, its passage, according to school officials, will bring with it a zero percent tax increase for homeowners.

The district has but a single school, the Canfield Avenue School. It enrolls about 350 students in grades PreK to six. Students in grades seven through 12 either attend school in the Dover district, or, they are enrolled in various other districts.

Board of Education Business Administrator Carolina Rodriguez and Superintendent Lee Nittel detailed the referendum, which will be up to voters to decide on Tuesday, Sept. 28.

Voting will take place between 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Mine Hill Civic Center.

Rodriguez explained that the district's existing debt, which is about to expire because it has been paid off, will simply be replaced by new debt to be incurred should the referendum pass.

"There is no tax impact at all. Our existing debt will end, and will be replaced with new debt," she said.

All of these projects will be done: paved walks, at a cost of \$72,500, a kindergarten playground at a cost of \$217,500, a softball field at a cost of \$15,500, window replacement throughout the building at a cost of \$552,000, multipurpose room window replacement at a cost of \$121,500, exterior door replacement at a cost of \$55,500, roof replacement at a cost of \$923,000, interior door replacement at a cost of \$422,500, floor finishes at a cost of \$255,000, classroom floors at a cost of \$349,500, classroom ceiling replacement at a cost of \$543,500, bathroom renovations at a cost of \$647,500, multi-purpose room stage improvements at a cost of \$312,000, nurse's office bathroom renovations at a cost of \$114,500 and electrical work at a cost of \$405,000.

Nittel said the state will pay for between 30 and 40 percent of "approved" projects. "They didn't approve everything, but we are planning on doing all of these things that are listed," he said. He said the district plans on taking a 20-year bond which will be paid just like a mortgage, with interest of \$1.3 million over the course of paying it back. The total, Nittel said, will be about \$6.3 million, interest included, by the time the district completes paying for it in 2042.

"The state is giving us a lot of money. We stand to get about \$2 million back," he said.

The other approximate \$4.3 million, he said, will be the district's responsibility.

"The payment we will be making is exactly the same as we are paying for debt service now," he said. "If we were to try and do all of these things within our budget, it would cost more because we would not get that 30 or 40 percent discount from the state," Nittel explained.

Nittel explained that over the years, and dating from the 50's, the building has been improved and added onto in a piecemeal style. "Now, even the newest part of the building is 20 years old," he said.

Rodriguez said windows are badly in need of being replaced throughout the building.

"We did a facilities assessment about two years ago. The architects walked around, and the Board (of Education) approved what we need sooner rather than later," she explained.

Nittel explained that the Canfield Avenue School is a "Choice District" and has more recently been named a "Lighthouse District" by the state. "Only seven districts in the state have that designation. Each year, we offer 95 choice seats. Everyone can apply for one of those seats. We have students from Dover and Denville here. When they leave us, some of them go to other choice districts like Wharton and Roxbury," he said.

In addition, and via a lottery system, the district sends five high school students to the Roxbury district.

Regarding the roof, Nittel said portions of it have been replaced over the years. One section was recently replaced. The largest portion of the roof, however, has not been done in 20 years. "I would say the roof and the windows are the biggest parts of this project," he said. Door replacements, meanwhile, would involve each classroom door and fire doors.

"Some of our classroom doors are out of compliance. You need to have an actual handle on the doors, not a round knob to turn. The windows have to be a certain size, and the glass can no longer have the wire inside, like they used to," he said.

Nittel said this entire referendum process has been about three years in the making.

"We've been planning for three years, from the beginning when we got the facilities plan together to work with the board and bond counsel. Then, we had to get the state approvals," he said.

Nittel said the facilities are well maintained, and said this entire project will allow the district to continue that.

"We aren't looking to put an Olympic sized pool in the building. We are just looking to maintain what we already have," he said.

"It's about \$5 million. We will get about \$2 million back from the state. That's about two-fifths of the total cost," he said, adding that right now, the cost proposals are just estimates. "We won't know the final numbers until it is passed," he said.

### ***Many Projects***

Nittel said that before the referendum proposal was put together, many projects were already undertaken, all within the annual budget.

"We have replaced all of our HVAC units in the building within our capital reserve budget, or we budgeted for them. The board was very interested in making sure we had air conditioning in all of the classrooms, and as of now, almost the entire building has air conditioning," he said.

By the end of the year, he said he expects the gym, the art room and the faculty lounge will have air conditioning installed. "By the end of the year, the entire building will have new units," he said.

In addition, eight heating boilers have all been replaced with more energy efficient units. Lighting fixtures were replaced with LED lighting, and sensors were installed, so lights turn off when no one is in the rooms.

"This building has really transformed since I walked in the door six years ago," Nittel said. "Carolina (Rodriguez) has worked in much bigger districts, and she knows how to manage all of these projects," he said.

The Media Center, for example, was revamped and redesigned four years ago.

### *Getting The Word Out*

Nittel said Mine Hill, which is only about a two square mile town, has a very loyal group of parents and community members who support the district.

Nevertheless, the referendum details will be transmitted on social media, and the town's "Swift Reach" program. A presentation will also be given on "Back to School Night" on Sept. 15.

"The most important thing for people to know is that we are retiring debt, and that money we will be saving will pay for the referendum. There is a zero tax impact. It will cost nothing more for the taxpayers and the state is giving us up to 40 percent, or 40 cents on the dollar," he said.

"It's zero impact on the taxpayers, and we are getting this building set up for the next five years at least of maintenance," he said.

As for the roof, he said the district will continue to keep up with the maintenance, and said a new roof, if approved, should last another 25 or 30 years.

If the referendum is passed, bids will be awarded in March of next year. Construction should take place between May of 2022 and January of 2023.

