



## Program on Applied Demographics

CORNELL POPULATION CENTER

# ICSD Demographic Analysis & School Building Asset Review

**Ithaca City School District Board Meeting**

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# Goal of this presentation

## Key Findings of Demographic Analysis:

- Enrollment: what changed (2015–2025) and what is projected (2026–2035)
- Facilities: costs, utilization, and where excess capacity is concentrated
- Illustrative consolidation scenarios and what additional analyses are needed

# Executive summary

**-38%**

Drop in births in ICSD area (2007 → 2022), a key driver of smaller cohorts

**50-60%**

Elementary buildings currently operating at ~50–60% of capacity

**-20% to -27%**

Projected K-12 enrollment decline by 2035 (depending on K intake)

**+1,600 → +2,000**

Unused elementary seats in 2025 → 2035

**\$1.6–\$2.8M**

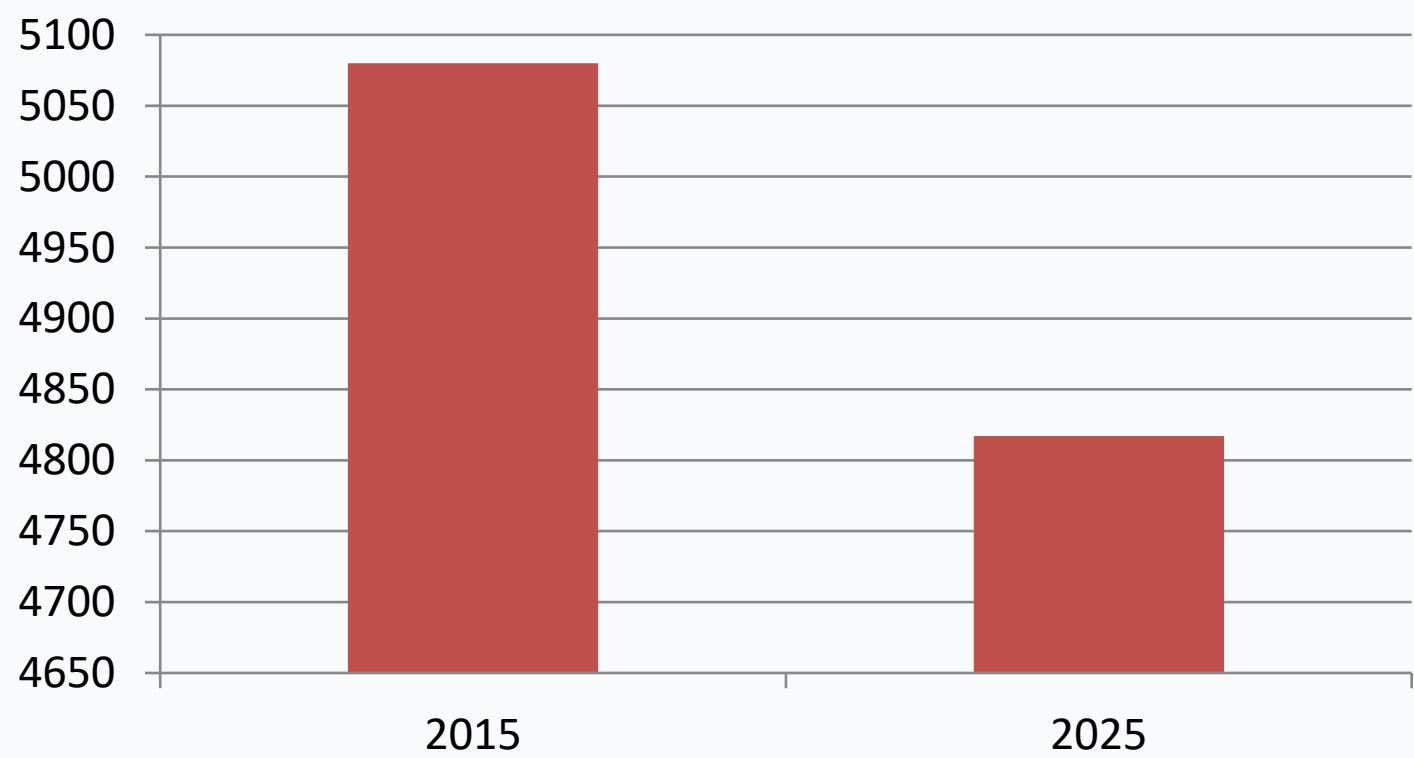
Estimated annual savings per consolidated elementary school

Takeaway: If enrollment continues to fall as projected, the district will face increasing fixed facility costs per student.

# Historical Enrollment

Total K-12 enrollment declined from 5,080 to 4,817

District K–12 enrollment

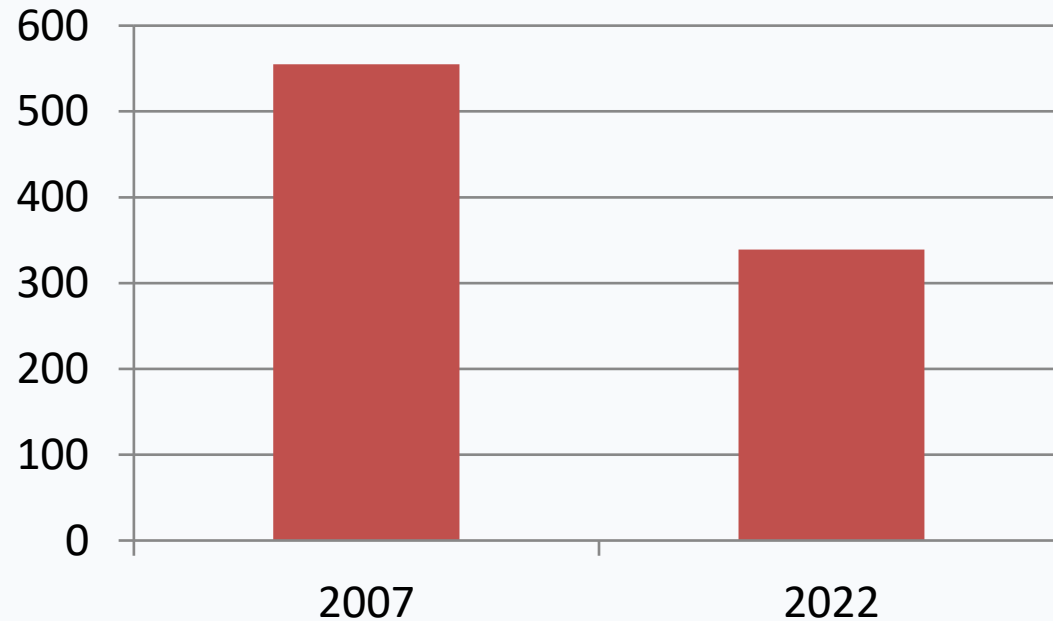


School	% change
Belle Sherman	-7.4%
Beverly J Martin	-17.7%
Caroline	-8.1%
Cayuga Heights	-28.9%
Enfield	-20.9%
Fall Creek	-7.4%
Northeast	-5.7
South Hill	+11.3%

# What's driving enrollment decline?

Local births have fallen sharply, leading to smaller kindergarten cohorts year after year.

ICSD Births



- **Historically strong relationship** between local fertility and kindergarten matriculation: 85% of district births appear in kindergarten five years later.
- The 2025 kindergarten class is 300 students (down from 400+ a decade ago).
- Fertility decline suggested in all elementary areas
- **Migration explains little** of any change (seen in grade progression ratios stably  $\sim 0.99$ ).

# How the projection works

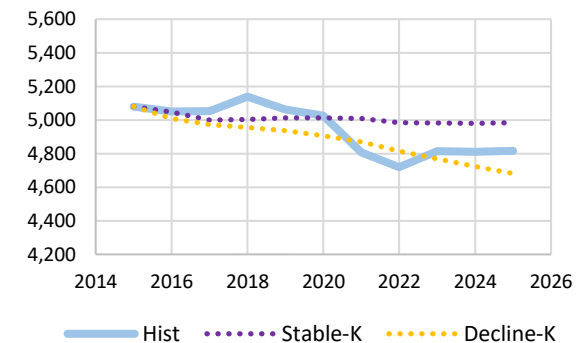
Model projects students forward grade-by-grade using recent ICSD patterns, repeating process many times to capture uncertainty.

## Projection Process

- 1 Start with current ICSD enrollment by grade.
- 2 Draw next year's Kindergarten enrollment under two scenarios (Stable-K or Decline-K)
- 3 Age cohorts forward using historic grade-progression ratios (captures retention + net in/out migration).
- 4 Allocate district grade totals to schools using recent school shares
- 5 Repeat 1,000x → median projection + uncertainty band (e.g., middle 90% interval).

## Out-of-sample validation

- Evaluated model using historical data to project 2015-25 enrollments.
- Same two kindergarten assumptions
- Compare projected paths to actual enrollments.

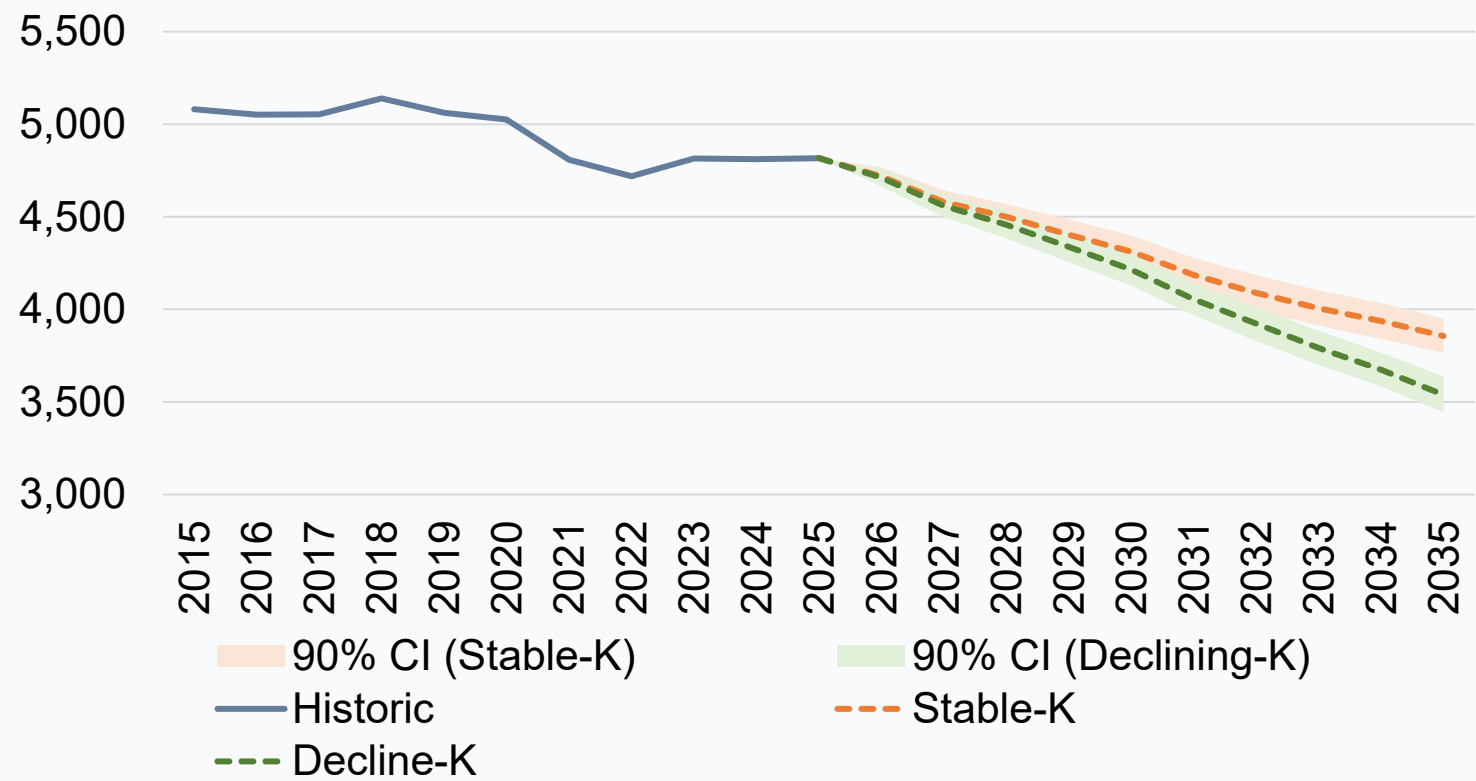


Bottom line: this historical check confirms the method behaves sensibly before applying it to 2025–2035.

# ICSD enrollment forecasts

District-wide projections show continued decline under both scenarios.

Observed and Projected ICSD enrollment, 2015-2035



## Key numbers for next decade

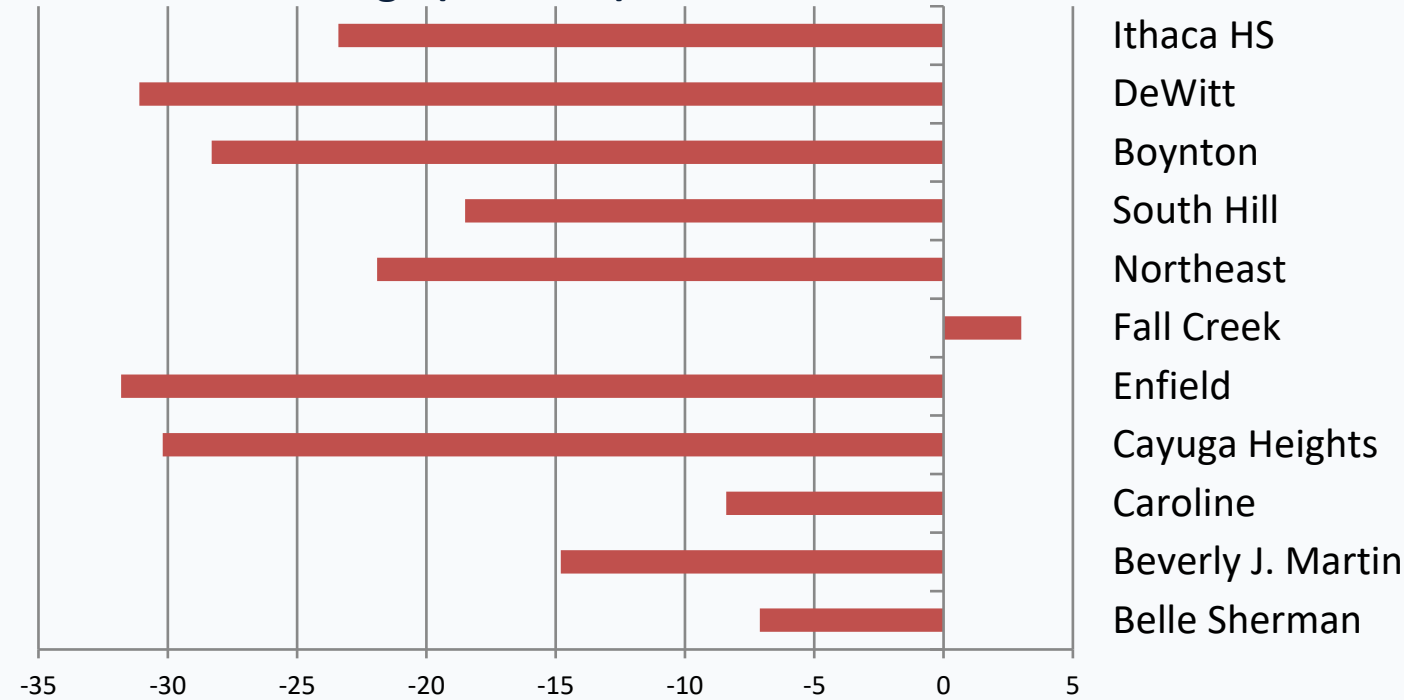
Stable-K: 4,817 to 3,854 (-20%)

Decline-K: 4,817 to 3,537 (-27%)

# Where declines are concentrated (Stable-K)

All schools are projected to be flat or down by 2035.

% enrollment change (Stable-K)



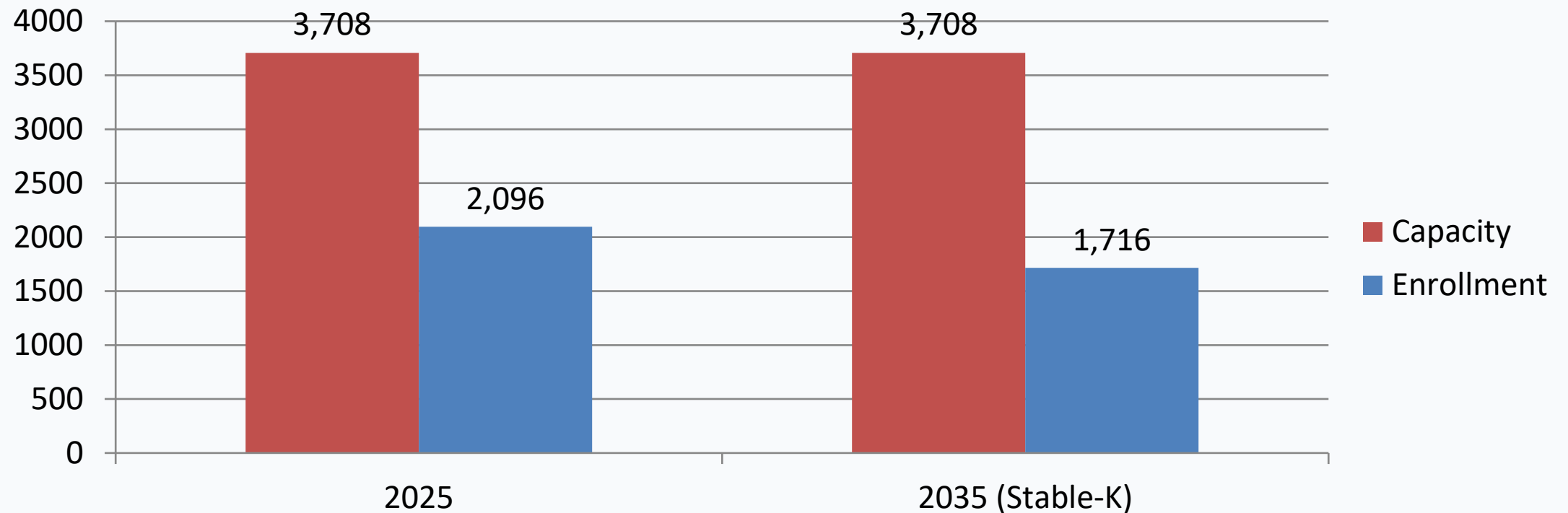
School	2025	2035
Belle Sherman	336	312
Beverly J Martin	223	190
Caroline	249	228
Cayuga Heights	258	180
Enfield	148	101
Fall Creek	200	206
Northeast	347	271
South Hill	335	273
Boynton	512	367
DeWitt	546	376
Ithaca HS	1,400	1,072



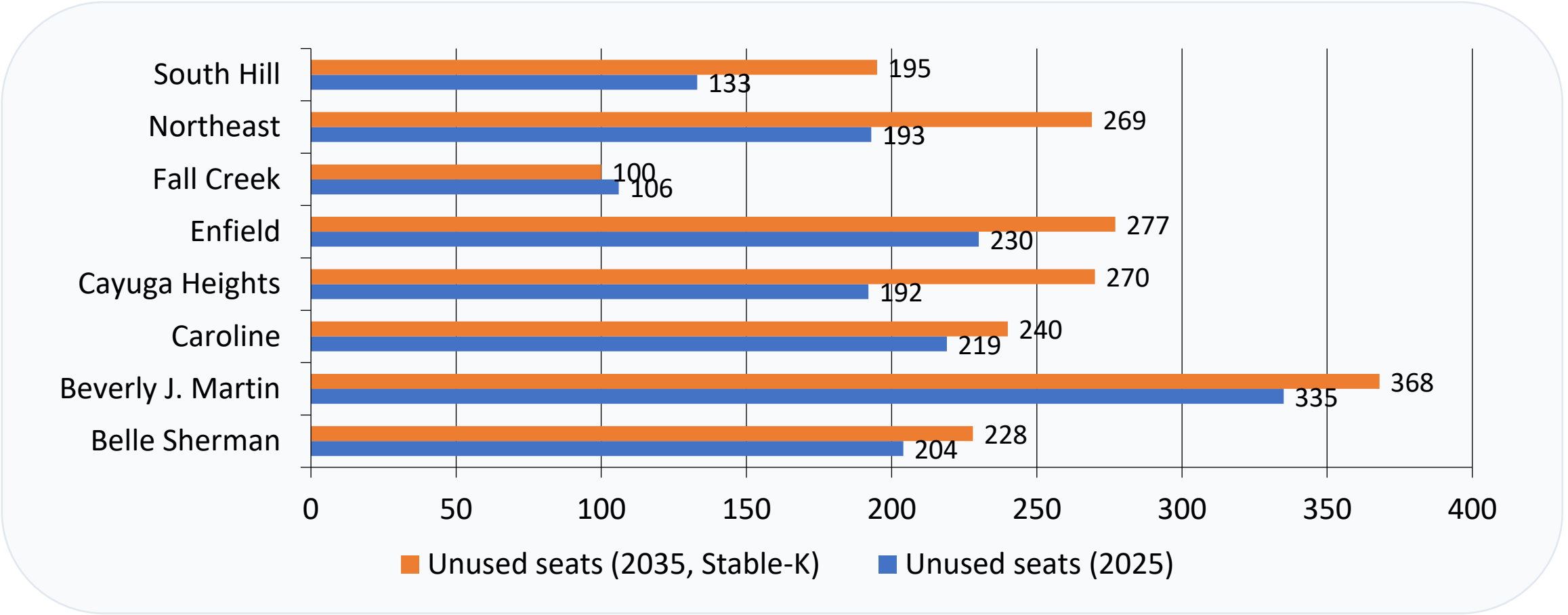
# Current and future elementary capacity

Using classroom counts as a proxy for capacity (18 students/classroom), unused seats grow over time.

Elementary capacity vs enrollment



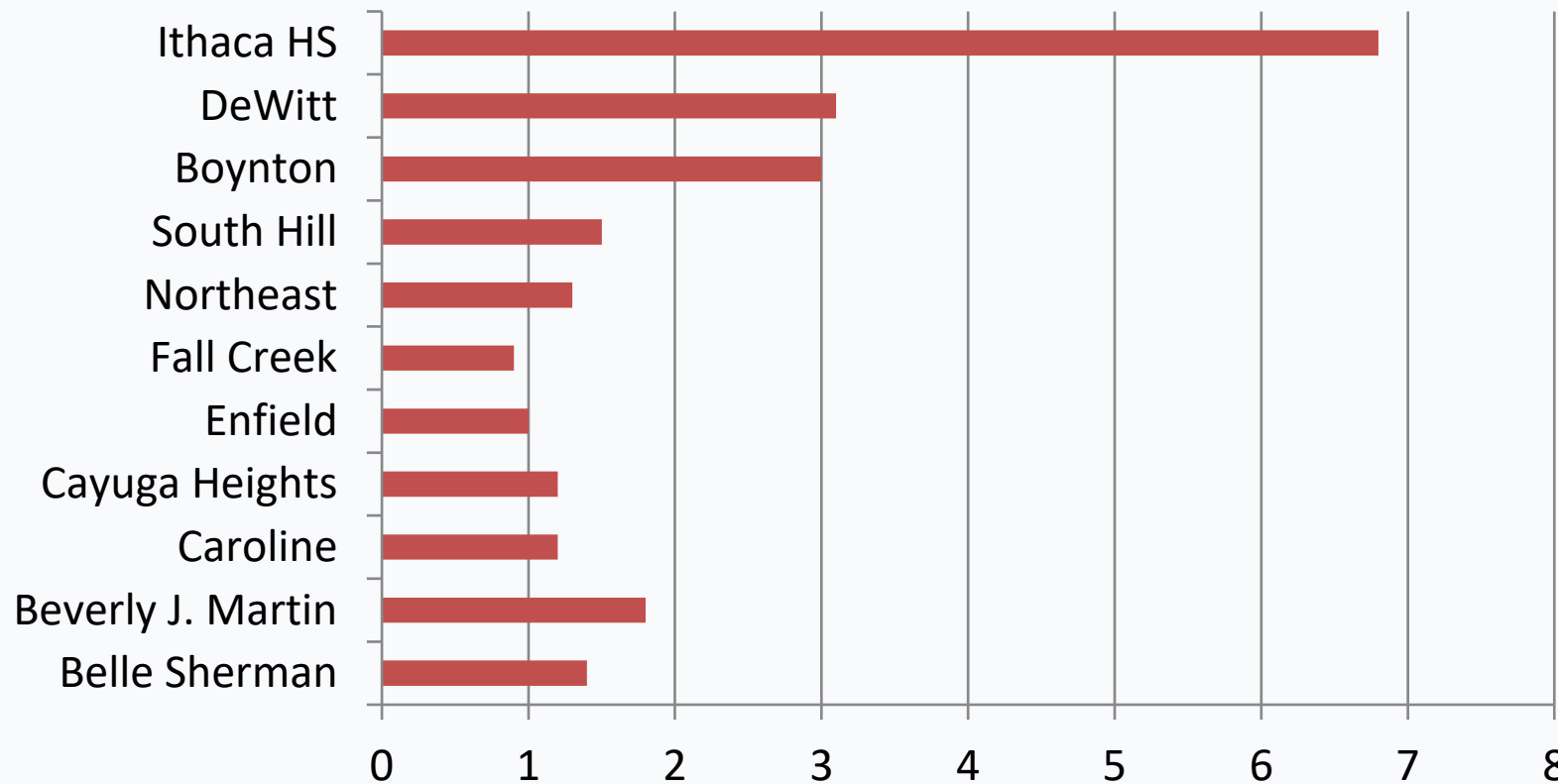
# Elementary excess capacity by school



# Facilities: operating costs are largely fixed

Annual operations & maintenance (O&M) costs persist even when enrollment falls.

Facility operating & maintenance by building (in \$M)



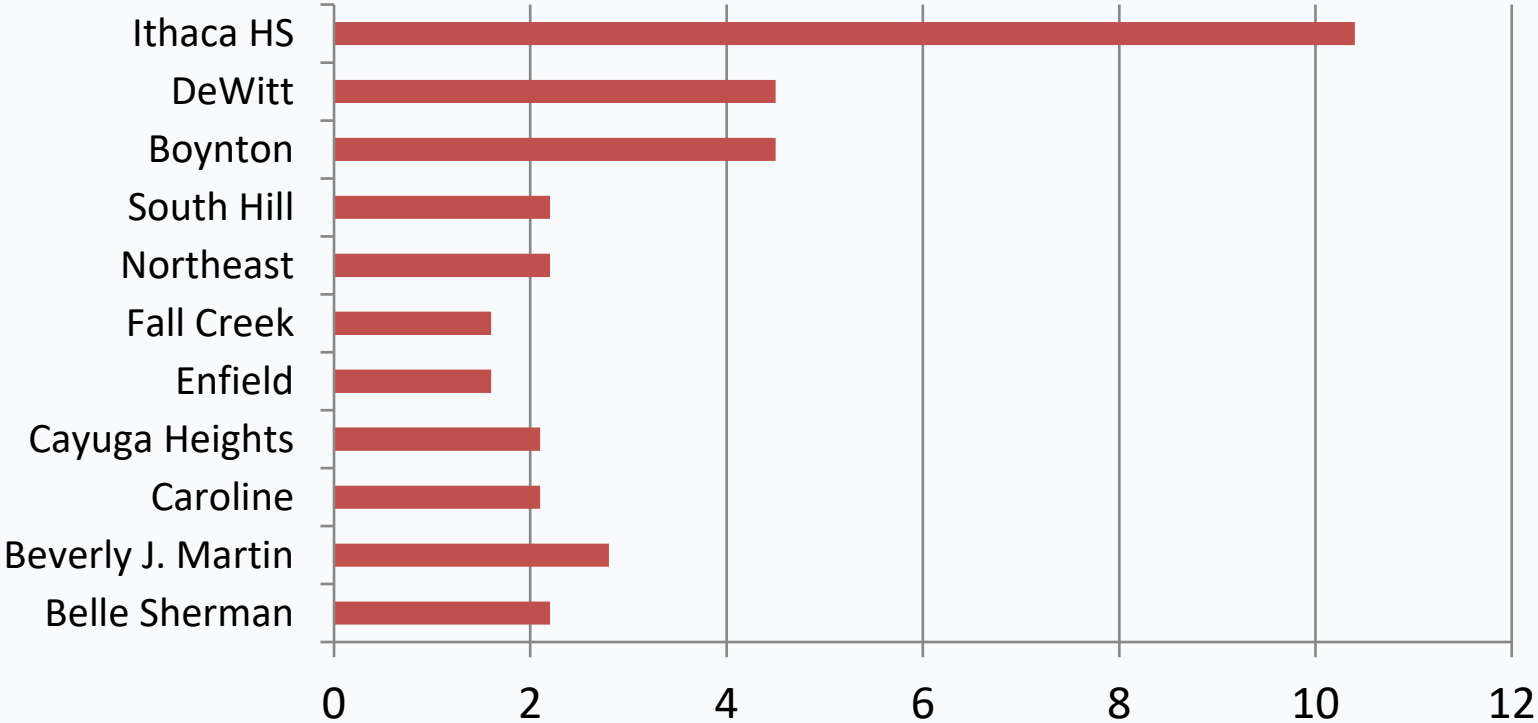
- Elementary buildings carry roughly \$0.9 to \$1.8M in annual O&M.
- Most facilities are mid-20th century or older and have multi-million capital needs.
- Fixed costs per student rise as enrollment falls.

# Illustrative savings from facility disposition

Recurring savings = avoided annualized capital expenses (~6.7% of identified improvements) + building O&M + modest instructional/staffing savings (~10% of select costs).

*Excludes one-time transition costs, transportation changes, renovations at receiving schools, and state-aid impacts.*

Estimated annual recurring savings by building (in \$M)



Building	\$/student (2035)
Belle Sherman	\$6,972
Beverly J. Martin	\$15,113
Caroline	\$9,057
Cayuga Heights	\$11,523
Enfield	\$15,633
Fall Creek	\$7,706
Northeast	\$8,177
South Hill	\$8,231

# Illustrative consolidation options

These are ideas – not recommendations – based on projected enrollments and facility fixed costs.

Option A: Close 1 school	Option B: Close 2 schools	Option C: Close 3 + grade redesign
<p><b>Estimated annual savings: \$1.6-\$2.8M</b></p> <p>Possible candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Enfield:</b> \$1.6M (~\$15.6k per projected 2035 student)</li><li>• <b>Cayuga Heights:</b> \$2.1M (~\$11.5k per projected 2035 student)</li><li>• <b>Beverly J. Martin:</b> \$2.8M (~\$15.1k per projected 2035 student)</li></ul> <p>Key considerations: boundaries/capacity, transportation, equity &amp; access to supports.</p>	<p><b>Estimated annual savings: \$3.7-\$4.9M</b></p> <p>Possible combinations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Enfield + Cayuga Heights:</b> \$3.7M</li><li>• <b>Enfield + BJM:</b> \$4.4M</li><li>• <b>Cayuga Heights + BJM:</b> \$4.9M</li></ul> <p>Key considerations: larger boundary shifts, transportation impacts, equity balance.</p>	<p><b>Estimated annual savings: ≈\$6.5M</b></p> <p>Possible set:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Close Enfield + Cayuga Heights + Beverly J. Martin</b></li><li>• <b>Reconfigure middle schools into lower (5-6) and upper (7-8) grades</b></li></ul> <p>Key considerations: Large savings &amp; high flexibility, but requires space planning &amp; educational assessment, plus impacts on transportation &amp; equity</p>

# Suggested additional analysis

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## **Transportation analysis**

Route modeling, travel time distributions, fleet requirements, incremental operating costs.

## **Space utilization study**

Room-by-room accounting including specialized spaces (SPED, art/music, labs), not just classroom counts.

## **Disposition & reuse strategy**

Timeline, sale/lease options, maintenance liabilities, and community-use alternatives.

## **Equity & integration assessment**

Projected socioeconomic/racial shifts by receiving school; disproportionate burdens; mitigation strategies.

## **Net fiscal model**

One-time and recurring transition costs; state aid rules.



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