

Minuteman Building Project
Frequently Asked Questions from Meetings in the Towns of
Lexington, Sudbury, Lincoln, Concord, and Belmont
October-November 2015

1. How are programs going to change in the new building?

The School Committee approved a new Educational Program Plan that calls for the phase-out of two programs, the merger of two programs, and the creation of two programs. Once these changes occur, there will be 16 career and technical education programs in two Career Academies in the new building. The new programs are Advanced Manufacturing & Metal Fabrication as well as Multi-Media Engineering. We will continue to have a robust offering of academic courses, including Advanced Placement (AP), music, art, and foreign languages.

2. What is the basis for the \$105 million estimate on repairs?

The School Building Committee established a Subcommittee to look into the cost of foregoing an MSBA project and instead simply doing repairs. The “Report of the Non-MSBA Building Plan Subcommittee” was issued in February of 2015 and is posted on our website. The 8-member Committee, consisting of building professionals and those experienced with school construction projects, concluded that doing the work without state help would cost more, take longer, and result in an inferior educational result. The District took the projects and costs identified in the report, determined a likely sequence, and determined those projects would cost the District \$105.3 million over the next five fiscal years.

3. Why are operating costs at Minuteman higher than the costs at other vocational-technical high schools?

There are multiple reasons. Among them: higher-than-average labor costs due to our proximity to metro Boston, high transportation costs due to the sprawling nature of the District’s geography, and higher-than-average Special Education costs caused by the high incidence of students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Minuteman has one of the highest percentages of students on IEPs of any school in Massachusetts. Higher operating costs are also connected to community expectations for a wide array of programs and services, as described in the answer to Question #4.

4. How can you justify having 16 programs in a school with only 628 students?

Townsppeople in our District expect a robust academic program and high-quality vocational-technical education program at Minuteman. Our District School Committee represents the people in our District. The Committee adopted a new Educational Program Plan for the new school. We believe that the 16 programs in the District’s approved Educational Program Plan best meet the needs of our students, our District, and the region’s economy.

5. Isn’t this project needed due to “benign neglect” of the current school?

No. The Administration annually requests – and the District School Committee annually approves – budgets that include funds for school maintenance and capital repairs. However, the school building is now more than 40 years old and no longer meets the District’s educational needs. Until now, the District had not attempted to secure bonding for a major overhaul of the building because the traditional route requires unanimous consent of the 16 member communities.

6. What is going to happen with enrollment?

Enrollment will increase. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the state agency that will help cover at least 40% of eligible project costs, believes that there’s sufficient demand to ensure the new school will be utilized. The New England School Development Council (NESDEC) issued a report showing there’s an adequate pool of students to draw from. Local guidance counselors surveyed by The Education Alliance indicated there’s growing demand for vocational-education in the Minuteman district. Based on what these agencies have found and on our own research, we are confident we will reach our enrollment projections.

7. What are your plans to cover the financial “gap” if you don’t get 628 students?

We built the budget for the new school from the ground up, factoring in the number and types of programs to be offered. We will only run programs if there is a demand for them. While we believe there will be ample demand for the 16 programs we plan to offer in the new school, we will downsize or eliminate programs if there isn’t.

8. Do you think it’s fair for member towns to “subsidize” out-of-district students?

The District does not subsidize out-of-district students. We worked hard to secure a change in state regulations to allow us to charge a capital fee for out-of-district students, on top of the out-of-district tuition calculation that is set annually by the Commissioner of Education. Previously, no such fee was in place. We want to make sure that out-of-district communities pay their fair share of a new building project.

9. If a sophomore student comes to Minuteman from a district with five or more Chapter 74 programs, do they pay the full capital fee or 75% of the capital fee?

If a student comes from a community with five or more Chapter 74-approved programs, the student’s community would pay 75% of the capital fee set by the state.

10. If the project is rejected by the towns, either by Town Meeting or a district-wide vote, have you thought about an alternative?

Yes. The alternative is outlined in the “Report of the Non-MSBA Building Plan Subcommittee” which was issued in February of 2015. The Report is posted on our website. In short, if the

project is rejected, the member towns in the District would be asked to pay for more than \$100 million in repairs, without State help, over the next few years.

11. Why isn't the building 3 stories to save space and lessen impact on the area?

A three-story building is not as practical for a vocational-technical high school with large pieces of equipment, including automotive lifts and the like. While academic classrooms can be located on upper floors, most career and technical education program simply cannot. Plus, the zoning bylaws in the Town of Lincoln don't allow it.

12. Can out-of-district students just come to Minuteman or does it require approval from their towns?

No one is entitled to simply "come to Minuteman." All students must apply for admission to Minuteman and students from member towns have priority over out-of-district students. In cases involving out-of-district students, the hometown Superintendent must sign a "Chapter 74 Vocational Technical Education Nonresident Tuition Application." If the application is denied, the local Superintendent must provide a reason. Denials by the local Superintendent may be appealed to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

13. I probably should have asked this question 6 years ago, but why couldn't you build on the Lexington side of your property, near the Day Care Center?

There simply isn't enough room to build it elsewhere on District land. There are many restrictions, including issues with wetlands and major electric power lines.

14. I've heard that the new capital fee that will require non-member towns to help pay for the project may be "challenged" by one or more of the non-member towns? Is that true? What's the status of the fee?

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved the new fee in February of 2015 as part of a larger package of changes in the regulations covering vocational-technical education. The regulations were adopted after public notice and comment. They carry the force of law.

15. If someone is watching this presentation on Cable TV and has additional questions about the project, where can they get answers?

Every document related to this project, including meeting minutes and reports, can be found on the Minuteman website: www.minuteman.org. Click on "About Us" and "School Building."

16. How do you increase in-district enrollment from 395 to 524?

We have already seen an increase in interest. We are confident that we'll get there with a new marketing strategy and new marketing practices, increasing demand for the type of education we offer, new state and national emphasis on vocational-technical education, increasing

recognition by parents of the importance of vocational-technical education, and unified support from the District for a new building.

17. How many years will it take to get there?

We expect to increase in-district enrollment to 524 within five years.

18. Why does it say “527” on the “Projected Annual Debt Service” chart when you keep saying member district enrollment will be “524”?

The District Agreement requires member communities to be assessed for 5 students, even if they actually have fewer. A handful do. That explains the slight difference.

19. Why can’t we charge out-of-district communities full tuition, including a capital fee?

We charge out-of-district communities the maximum amount allowed. The Commissioner of Education annually sets the out-of-district tuition rate and that is the rate we charge out-of-district communities. In addition, we charge a second fee if the student requires Special Education services. With the building project, we will add a third charge – for capital expenses.

20. Can we turn down out-of-district applicants if in-district enrollment increases?

Yes. The new state regulations require us to accept students from member towns first. If there’s no room for out-of-district students, there is no requirement that we accept them.

21. Do our local middle schools need to allow Minuteman to come in and recruit?

State regulations require academic school districts to give us the contact information for 7th and 8th grade students in order for us to recruit. Students have a right to information about all of their educational options, including the option to attend a high school in their hometown or Minuteman High School. Denying them such information may be deemed a violation of their civil rights.

22. Wouldn’t we be better off to sell the property and build the school somewhere else?

The current District Agreement requires that the school be located within the District. Changing the Regional Agreement would require approval from all 16 member towns. We have spent six (6) years planning to build on existing District land. The proposed school will be built on District land in Lincoln, immediately adjacent to the existing school in Lexington.

23. What efforts are you making to get other communities to join the District?

Over the years, we have had informal discussions with several cities and towns about the idea. And we have encouraged selectmen in the member towns to reach out to their colleagues in non-member towns. New state regulations allowing us to impose an additional fee for out-of-district students may make it more financially attractive for additional towns to join. Having a new school building would likely make membership more attractive as well.

24. Could postgraduate programs be a source of revenue?

Possibly yes. However, the Minuteman Technical Institute (MTI) offers limited opportunities for high school graduates to take career and technical education programs. For students from the 16 member towns, the student pays 50%, the town pays 50%. For out-of-district students, the student pays the full tuition.

25. In your budget projections, how do faculty costs get factored in?

We built the budget for the new school from the ground up, factoring in the number and types of programs to be offered. Since the new school will have a smaller staff than the current one, we are already taking steps to downsize.

26. If there are fewer students than you project, will employee costs be cut?

Yes. We will only run programs if there is a demand for them. We believe there will be ample demand for the 16 programs we plan to offer in the new school.

27. Is there a risk to the Belmont High School project if we go against the Minuteman project?

The staff and board of directors at the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) certainly support the Minuteman project. But there has been no public or private indication that they would link these two initiatives if Belmont were to reject the Minuteman project.

28. Wouldn't it make sense for Minuteman to visit the schools for recruiting purposes before the 8th grade?

Yes, and part of our new marketing strategy is to get information about career and technical education into the hands of parents and students in earlier grades. That strategy will play out fully over the new few years. We already engage young learners early through our Girls in STEM Camp, summer programs, vacation programs, and Technology Outreach Programs in five (5) area middle schools.