

**Minuteman High School  
Presentation for Town Officials on the Building Project  
Questions Posed at Meetings with Town Officials**

**Meeting on September 21, 2015**

1. Can the new state regulation allowing Minuteman to assess a capital fee for out-of-district students be applied to the Energy Services Company (ESCO) payments that Minuteman is currently making? That is, can we charge out-of-district towns to help pay for the ESCO project that Minuteman undertook several years ago? Why not? Has this been tested?

*As we currently understand the new regulation, the capital fee can only be charged to the debt associated with a Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) project. However, guidelines on how this fee can be charged and how it is calculated have not yet been issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).*

2. You said the Board of Selectmen should push for legislation on the building project. What kind of legislation are you talking about? Do you want to change the percentage of reimbursement?

*Yes. The MSBA reimbursement formula does not recognize the usual, customary, and higher costs of constructing and equipping vocational-technical education facilities. These higher costs have now been documented in at least five (5) recent renovation and/or new construction projects at vocational-technical schools. Legislation must correct the gap in reimbursement. There are several ways to do this:*

1. *Increase reimbursement by 20% for all eligible Chapter 74 shop and related space.*
2. *Increase reimbursement for furniture, fixtures and equipment (FFE) to \$5,000 per pupil for all Chapter 74 shop and related equipment.*
3. *Allow Chapter 74 approved projects to accept financial donations or new equipment donations without reducing state contributions. In fact, state contribution to construction and FFE should be matched, dollar for dollar, ABOVE the estimated state reimbursement in the event a vocational-technical school secures such donations.*

*We encourage Selectmen in the 16 member towns to work closely with the State Representatives and State Senators who represent towns in the Minuteman District.*

3. Concord and Carlisle just built a new regional school for 1,200 students for \$94 million. You want to build a school for 628 students for \$145 million. Why is it so much more expensive?

*First, we are building a vocational-technical high school, not a traditional academic high school. A vocational-technical high school is basically two schools in one. We provide a robust career and technical education, plus an academic education that meets the same standards as all other high schools in the state. Career and technical education requires a larger faculty and more space. The infrastructure is far more complex. There's a need for more equipment. There's additional state regulation and industry standards. There are minimum square foot requirements in career and technical areas. There's a need for additional safety features in those areas. While only two new vocational schools have been built in recent years (Essex and*

*Putnam), our costs will be in line with those projects. The MSBA will scrutinize all expenditures to make sure they are in line.*

4. Is it really fair that the per pupil cost for building a new vocational-technical school is so many more times higher than the per pupil cost of building a regular academic high school?

*Vocational-technical education is simply more expensive to deliver than traditional, academic education. It's more complex, requires smaller class sizes, and a larger staff. Just like Special Education, it costs more per pupil. We are working within the MSBA cost guidelines and are doing everything we can to hold down costs.*

5. Right now, you have about 380 in-district students. I don't see where the other 140 are going to come from. Where's your evidence? Doesn't the school need to be supported by member town enrollment?

*Several studies have been done to confirm the labor market demand for the programs we will offer in the new building as well the student demand for such programs. On our website, we have posted enrollment projection reports from the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), our communications with MSBA on the subject of enrollment, and MSBA's response.*

*In a July 21, 2015 staff memo analyzing all aspects of the project, MSBA Director of Capital Planning Mary Pichetti wrote that "the staff's review of the District's enrollment and application data demonstrate sufficient demand for program offerings to ensure the facility will be utilized." That MSBA staff memo can be found on our website.*

*A separate study done by The Education Alliance in late September 2015 showed that more than 75% of the middle school guidance counselors interviewed in the Minuteman district felt that more parents in their community would be willing to send their children to a vocational-technical school in the next five years. Further, 71.4% felt that students in their community would be more likely to apply to a vocational-technical school in the next five years. Not a single guidance counselor agreed with the statement that applications to vocational-technical schools would decrease during that time period.*

*Finally, recent political controversies surrounding the building project have created an atmosphere of uncertainty that has put a damper on student and parental interest. Once the District rallies around a new building, that impediment will be removed and interest will rebound.*

6. Where will this increased enrollment come from? From which towns? Where's the big increase going to come from?

*Increased enrollment will come from all our current District towns. It could also come from towns/cities that want to join the District because they now see such a move as being in their own financial interests.*

7. Have you verified with area principals that there's actually a demand for this kind of education? Is there really pent up demand out there? Have you done any surveys?

*Yes. The Education Alliance, a higher education consulting firm based in Natick, conducted a survey of local guidance counselors from the 17 middle schools within the Minuteman district. This was done in late September 2015. Two of the key findings: (1) More than 80% of the local guidance counselors believe that perceptions about the value of vocational-technical education are improving. (2) Some 75% of the guidance counselors interviewed believe that parents in their community will be more willing to send their children to a vocational-technical school over the next five years – and 71.4% of them believe that students will be more willing to apply to a voc-tech school over the next five years. No guidance counselors agreed with the statement that applications to vocational-technical schools would decrease over the next five years.*

8. Why can't we simply provide this kind of education in our existing high schools?

*It's certainly possible, but it's also highly impractical, very expensive, and educationally inferior.*

*First, it would be a very expensive proposition. Schools would need to meet the 10 approval factors for Chapter 74 programs. Meeting these standards is expensive. The Minuteman curriculum simply could not be reproduced in 16 school districts. Capital and operating costs would be prohibitive.*

*Second, the vocational-technical delivery system in Massachusetts – integrating robust career and technical education with academics – is widely acknowledged as the best in the country. States that deliver their vocational-technical education within their academic schools look to Massachusetts with great envy. They recognize that our educational delivery system is superior.*

9. What's the impact of not having a Minuteman High School? Where would the students who want this kind of education go? What are the consequences of closing the school?

*This is not a realistic option or one the state would entertain. It would be catastrophic to students, both now and in the future, would cost our towns more money, and would hurt our state's economy.*

10. Is there capacity at other schools to take these students? Greater Lowell? Assabet Valley? Shawsheen Tech? Northeast Metro? Nashoba Valley Tech?

*No. Collectively, the vocational-technical high schools in this region don't have the capacity to absorb an additional 600+ students per year. Most are already filled. Several have waiting lists. Statewide, a recent survey conducted by the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA) showed waiting lists in at least 23 schools with Chapter 74 programs, with an aggregate waiting list of 3,197 students. As of October 2, 2015, MAVA's survey indicated that Greater Lowell had a waiting list of 86 students; Assabet Valley had a waiting list of 23 students; Shawsheen had a waiting list of 18 students; and Northeast Metropolitan had a waiting list of 15 students. Nashoba Valley Tech had no waiting list, but it only accepts a total of 225 ninth-graders.*

11. What happens if we reject the MSBA building project, then fail to make the repairs?

*Again, this is simply not an option. Multiple engineering and technical studies have documented the need for substantial improvements in the building. The need for action is no longer open to debate. Doing nothing would be irresponsible. Doing nothing would likely lead to unplanned, emergency repairs for many years ahead – entirely at the expense of local taxpayers. Doing nothing would result in the loss of Minuteman’s accreditation by the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC).*

*One further point: If we reject the MSBA project and then move ahead with repairs, we estimate that it will cost our towns upwards of \$100 million during the next five years alone. That’s far more than the costs of building a brand new school. And students and teachers will be stuck inside the same aging building with the same structural issues.*

12. Won’t the new capital fee make it even harder to attract students from outside the district?

*We don’t believe so. We believe that the new capital fee might even make it more attractive for some communities to think more seriously about joining the District. By joining, they would pay roughly the same amount – and get a vote on the school committee.*

13. I’ve been told that some school superintendents are already trying to keep students from their towns from coming to Minuteman. Isn’t this true?

*In Massachusetts, education dollars follow students. All school officials, including superintendents, are aware of this. Some school officials actively dissuade students from leaving their districts; some actively encourage students to make the educational choice that is best for them. It differs from one school district to another. Minuteman has generally had a positive relationship with area superintendents and their staffs, especially the guidance counselors in the 17 middle schools in the Minuteman district. However, a recent survey of those guidance counselors revealed that nearly six out of 10 (57.1%) indicated they knew of students who have been encouraged not to apply to a vocational-technical school.*

#### **Meeting on September 28, 2015**

14. When will you have hard numbers on the project?

*We will have harder numbers by November 17, 2015.*

15. MSBA is only going to fund 40% of eligible project costs. Which costs are not going to be eligible for reimbursement?

*We should know some of the answers to this question by November 17, 2015. We will have even a clearer picture by the MSBA’s board of directors’ meeting in January 2016.*

*In the meantime, we will continue working to secure up to four (4) additional percentage points of MSBA reimbursement.*

16. In your projections of revenue, you are assuming that out-of-district students will generate 100% of the capital fee. But isn't the fee reduced by 25% for students from towns that offer at least five vocational-technical programs? Shouldn't the revenue number reflect that? What's the variability in the number?

*In our model, we are projecting 104 out-of-district students. We currently enroll approximately 71 students from communities that do not offer Chapter 74 programs and are not a member of a regional vocational-technical school district, and this enrollment has been consistent in recent years. Based on this data, about 33 students would be paying 75% of the per pupil capital fee. If we incorporate this lower capital fee for about 31% of our expected nonresident students, it would be a reduction of about \$62,100/year that would be paid by member towns as part of their capital assessment.*

17. How many non-member communities would not be inclined to send students if they need to pay a capital fee?

*It's impossible to know how many non-member communities, if any, might be less inclined to encourage students to apply to Minuteman once a capital fee is added to out-of-district tuition costs. However, the ultimate decision to attend Minuteman – or not attend – is largely in the hands of the student and the student's parents. Non-member towns cannot simply deny access to Minuteman.*

18. Are you required to charge a capital fee? You show this as \$779,000 in revenue. But isn't this up to the School Committee?

*This question attempts to raise doubts where none exist. The Minuteman School Committee and its Superintendent worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to establish the capital fee in the first place. They see the capital fee as a big win for local taxpayers. DESE will establish the size of the fee. We expect the School Committee will fully implement it.*

19. What about "side deals" (i.e. side agreements on tuition) with non-member towns?

*There are no current "side deals" with any non-member community on the amount Minuteman will charge for tuition. There haven't been any such agreements for more than five years. Minuteman charges non-member communities the full annual tuition fee established by the Commissioner of Education.*

20. You project an in-district enrollment of 524, but in-district enrollment hasn't exceeded 450 for the past five years. Aren't these numbers optimistic?

*Realistic might be a more appropriate word. Please review the School Building Committee website documentation and the process that went into arriving at a design enrollment of 628 students. Also review the answer to Question #5 above.*

*A new building is imperative for future enrollment growth from all in-District communities.*

21. Aside from anecdotal evidence, what data you have to support your enrollment projections? Have you done any surveys?

***Yes. Please see the answer to Question #5 above and review the School Building Committee website.***

22. Do you have a Moody's bond rating?

***The Minuteman School District does not have a bond rating, as the District has not issued debt since 1985.***

23. Is there money for Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FFE) in this project budget? How much?

***Yes. A school with a design capacity of 628 students x \$2,400 per student equals \$1,507,200 participation from MSBA.***

24. Is the \$2,400 per student for FFE sufficient?

***The \$2,400 per student number is not as large as we would like it and certainly not large enough for construction of a vocational-technical high school if we were starting from scratch. We aren't. We are moving from an existing, fully operational, vocational-technical high school. Modern, up-to-date, working equipment will be moved from the current school to the new building.***

***We encourage efforts to increase funding for furniture, fixtures, and equipment through the legislative process.***

25. What's the demand for vocational-technical education nationwide?

***Across the nation, interest in – and demand for – vocational-technical education is booming.***

***Please review the material on the School Building Committee website for more information.***

26. If the school isn't filled, wouldn't it mean a death spiral?

***This question seems designed to further the notion that Minuteman High School is in trouble or that a new school wouldn't be filled. Both notions are false. Minuteman remains an award-winning vocational-technical high school. Multiple studies have confirmed the labor market and student demand for the programs it offers. Perhaps most importantly, the MSBA has conducted its own independent analysis and supports the 628 design enrollment figure. MSBA is solidly behind the project.***

27. Where's the national and state data to back up your passion?

***On the School Building Committee website***

28. Can you resell this land?

*Yes, all or part of the Minuteman property could be sold. It would require an Act of the Legislature.*

29. Is 628 the magic number to make this work, to give this school the critical mass you need?

*628 is the number needed to support the two Career Academies – and the 16 career and technical education programs found within them. This is the model that the District School Committee supported. This is the model unanimously supported by the MSBA board of directors.*

30. In your operating budgets between now and the opening of a new school, are you taking into account the need to keep this building running with capital repairs/improvements?

*Yes, we have taken this into account this year with a \$500,000 allocation for capital repairs. We will do so in future budget years as well. Over the past five years, the District has spent more than \$1.5 million on building repairs and building maintenance. And the District made more than \$5 million in capital improvements through a performance contracting project (also known as an ESCO project), paid by energy savings.*

31. Have you developed a schedule – a “framework for approval” – so towns know what dates you are shooting for?

*Not yet. This idea is under consideration by the Administration and School Committee and with the future involvement of our District communities.*

32. Is the proposed configuration of the new school building more expensive than a traditional rectangular structure?

*In an ideal world, the building if squared up on a horizontal plane would be less expensive. That being said, the issue of wetlands and required setbacks, the ledge, peat, the topography of the land, high bays, and the need for multiple access locations does not allow for that.*

#### **Meeting on October 2, 2015**

33. What about the town(s) that voted to get out? Would they still need to pay the debt service?

*Yes. Towns that are members of the District when debt is issued would be responsible for the debt service in accordance with the terms of the Regional Agreement. Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane, LLP, the District’s legal counsel, issued a detailed opinion about the “Process for Withdrawal under the Current Regional Agreement” on January 26, 2015. This opinion can be found on our website.*

34. How much will the capital fee be?



*The fee has not been established yet. It will be set by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The numbers we have used in our projections are based on discussions with DESE leadership.*

35. Will you actually charge a capital fee?

*This question attempts to raise doubts where none exist. The Minuteman School Committee and its Superintendent worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to establish the capital fee in the first place. They see the capital fee as a big win for local taxpayers. DESE will establish the size of the fee. We expect that the School Committee will fully implement it.*

36. What about MOUs with out of district towns? Are they going to be required?

*Working with member towns, the Minuteman School Committee has developed a template for Intermunicipal Agreements (IMAs) with non-member communities. It requires non-member towns to pay the state-established tuition fee; special education fee, if applicable; and capital fee. It is the intent of the School Committee and Administration to execute IMAs with non-member towns so that non-member communities' financial responsibilities are clear.*

37. What about out-of-district enrollment? How do we know we can rely on big feeder towns like Watertown?

*See the answer to Question #17.*

38. Isn't the capital fee a disincentive for them to send students here?

*See the answer to Question #17.*

39. What are you doing to attract "major tenants" to the "mall"? That is, what are you doing to attract new member towns to the district?

*The School Committee and Administration are concentrating their time on designing a new building that meets the needs of students and the region, at the lowest possible cost. While we have had some informal discussions with potential new member towns in the past, we are not having any such discussions at the present time.*

40. What would be the process for Watertown to get in? Does it need approval from the 16 towns?

*Adding another member community would require a change in the District Agreement. Changes in the District Agreement require approval from all 16 member towns.*

41. Since Watertown is a city, does it also need Legislative approval?

*Yes, it is a technical action and not an obstacle. It is not a question for which we have sought a legal opinion.*



42. In the event the project is rejected and we need to undertake major repair projects, does that debt still need to be approved by the member towns?

***Yes. Major capital improvements not funded in the annual budget and requiring bonding would need approval from local communities. The District School Committee could seek approval via the traditional Town Meeting route or via a district-wide ballot. Both options are allowed by Massachusetts General Laws Section 71, Sections 16(d) or 16(n).***

43. Right now, Arlington is shown as bearing 38% of the construction costs? If we don't reach the enrollment target, how would that change?

***A community's percentage share of the project depends upon the town's actual enrollment divided by the total enrollment. Shifts in either of those numbers -- or both of them -- would change the percentage.***

44. Could the school committee set a date for a referendum now in the event the Town Meeting process fails?

***Yes. The School Committee can use either approval option outlined in M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16.***

45. Can we sweeten the pot by working together for a greater MSBA reimbursement?

***We are doing everything possible to reduce project costs and increase project revenue. Through MSBA's regular application process, we are trying to secure up to four (4) additional percentage points of reimbursement.***

***However, we welcome efforts by local town officials to try to secure additional funds for the project through the Massachusetts Legislature.***

***Document last updated: October 19, 2015***