

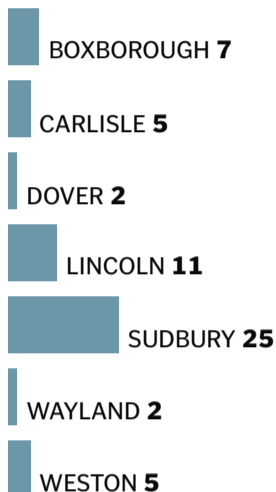
Enrollment breakdown

Officials want to build a new \$144.9 million Minuteman High School in Lincoln. All 16 member communities must hold special town meetings to approve a new regional agreement before March 1 to meet deadlines set by the state's School Building Authority. Seven towns will vote on whether to withdraw from the Minuteman district at their special town meetings. Current students or those who have already applied for next year will not be affected by votes approving withdrawal from the district.

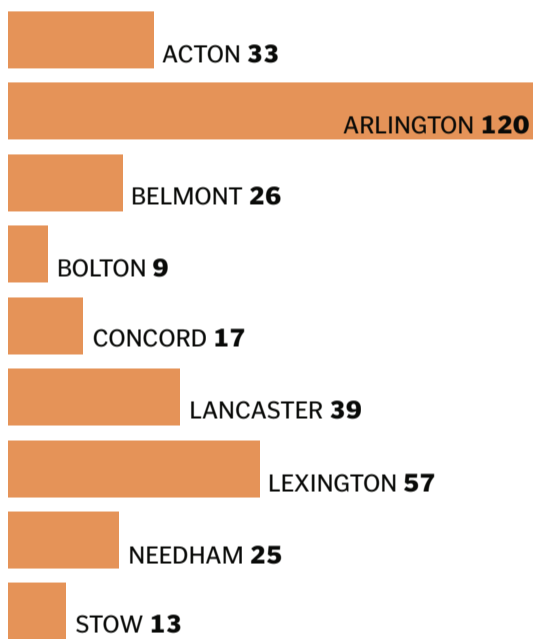
AS OF NOVEMBER 2015

- 673** total students
- 396** in-district students
- 277** out-of-district students

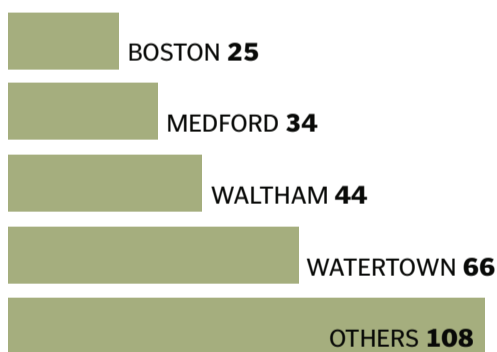
Students from member communities considering withdrawal



Students from other member communities



Students from nonmember communities



SOURCE: Minuteman High School

GLOBE STAFF



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Minuteman High students Isaac Peters (right) of Sudbury and Matt Collins of Watertown worked on a visual communications project.

SHRINKING OPTIONS

7 towns debate leaving Minuteman regional school district

BY JENNIFER FENN LEFFERTS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Debbie Peters wasn't convinced a regular academic high school was the best fit for her son, so the Sudbury family looked at Minuteman High School's vocational-technical program.

Four years later, Isaac Peters has flourished. He has a part-time job through the Lexington-based school at a local cable television station, has been accepted into a college, and is happy.

"If he went to LS," Peters said of Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, "it would have been a struggle. In this place, he was able to find himself and be successful."

Peters thinks all students should have choices and is concerned that Minuteman may soon no longer be an option for families in town. Sudbury is one of seven communities that will be voting at special town meetings before March 1 on whether to leave the 16-town district.

"My daughter goes to LS and that's fine for her. Everyone needs something different," Peters said. "I look at some kids and see that going to a typical high school might not be the answer. If Sudbury

backs out, then who knows if they could get into another school."

Minuteman is looking to build a new \$144.9 million school, and some member towns — Boxborough, Carlisle, Dover, Lincoln, Sudbury, Wayland, and Weston — will debate whether to pull out before the project gets off the ground and taxpayers are on the hook for funding.

Minuteman Superintendent Ed Bouquillon said regardless of how the towns vote, all existing students, and those who have applied for next year, will still be able to attend Minuteman until they graduate.

But after next year's freshman class, there is no guarantee that students from nonmember towns will have a spot.

Most of the towns considering withdrawal, except Sudbury, send fewer students in the district, so town officials have questioned whether it makes financial sense to stay as members. Sudbury sends 25 students; Boxborough, seven; Carlisle, five; Dover, two; Lincoln, 11; Wayland, two; and Weston, five.

The other member towns are Acton, Arlington,

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'If Sudbury backs out, then who knows if they could get into another school.'

DEBBIE PETERS
Sudbury resident whose son has thrived at Minuteman High School

'I've looked into other vocational schools for Sudbury residents, and the cost would be half.'

LEONARD SIMON
Chairman of Sudbury Board of Selectmen

ENDING SCHOOL DAZE

Committee is examining the implications of starting classes later at Newton North and Newton South

By Ellen Ishkanian
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Newton school officials are considering whether to implement later start times at the city's two high schools as part of a continuing effort to reduce student stress.

A study committee aims to have several options ready for a vote by the School Committee this spring, so that changes could be put in place by September.

The options are still being drafted, but the group is looking to push start times — now 7:50 a.m. at Newton North and 7:40 a.m. at Newton South — to possibly as late as 9 a.m. A public forum on the issue is scheduled at Newton North on Tuesday from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

School officials say there is compelling science indicating



SABPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

a later start time would benefit students' physical and psychological health, but that making the change would pose a chain reaction of problems that would need to be solved first.

Those problems range from changes in drop-off times at elementary schools to traffic

congestion — particularly on the city's south side, where a high school and two middle schools are in close proximity. It would also create issues with after-school jobs, activities, athletic practices, and game schedules.

The contract with the New-

ton Teachers Association would also have to be renegotiated.

"If it were easy to do, we would see this change occurring across the state," School Committee member Ellen Gibson, who is also on the High School Start Time Working Group, said in an e-mail to the Globe.

Momentum is growing, however. A statewide nonprofessional coalition of health professionals, educators, parents, and students, called Start School Later, is working to educate the public and make changes in school start times. State Senator Cynthia Creem, a Newton Democrat, has also filed legislation to establish a task force to study the issue.

In Natick, school officials studied various options to move the high school start time from the current 7:30 a.m. to 8:15 a.m., but the School Committee last year held off making changes. In Ashland, a study committee is now considering options to delay the high school start time.

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Inside

LOCAL FARE SOME LIKE IT HOT

Get ready for a messy, delicious Cajun-style seafood boil at Shaking Crab, located at the site of a former Italian restaurant in Newton.

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SPORTS PREP WORK

Wayland High's Sean Chase (above) and a number of other area wrestling coaches place a premium on matchups and prepping athletes for a 'chess match.'

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Newton ponders later school start

►NEWTON
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Duxbury officials successfully made the change and pushed the high school start time 45 minutes later to 8:15 a.m. in 2009.

“There is clear evidence that sleeping later brings health and wellness benefits to teens, whose biological rhythms change dramatically during adolescence,” Newton School Committee member Ruth Goldman, also a member of the start time working group, said in an e-mail.

The move in Newton is part of the School Department’s ongoing commitment to reduce stress and anxiety among high school students. According to a recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 79 percent of Newton high school students described their lives as “somewhat” or “very” stressful, compared with just 47 percent in the city’s middle schools.

Changing the high school start time to allow students more time to sleep would have a huge effect, according to proponents.

“The sleep cycle changes pretty dramatically in adolescence,” said Jeffrey Zabel, a member of the Newton North School Council and the father of a high school student. “It’s really hard for them to get to sleep early, and then get up early.”

Christopher Steele, a member of the Newton South School Council, agreed.

“I have an 11-year-old and I can see the changes now,” he said. “She used to easily get up at 6 every morning, and it’s getting later and later.”

Steele said he and other advocates of the change are in the process of “helping to facilitate the conversation” among parents in the city, some of whom may have a quick negative reaction because of the disruption and cost that could be associated

with making the move.

For example, fall sports such as field hockey, soccer, and football all practice outside. If the school day started and ended later, there would be less time to practice outside in daylight. Lighting fields costs money and can upset neighbors.

Scheduling games could also be an issue, with athletes perhaps having to leave school early to make it to away games if other districts don’t sign on to the change.

Bus routes would likely have to be reconfigured, and in some scenarios an estimated 16 or more buses must be added at an approximate cost of more than \$1 million, according to a School Department report prepared last year.

And considerations would have to be given for students who have after-school jobs, take care of younger siblings after school, and for other student activities.

Goldman said the working group will “systematically study the multitude of challenges, gather feedback from all constituents, and convene the community in conversations,” before making final recommendations to the School Committee.

Students and teachers will be among the speakers at Tuesday night’s forum, along with Dr. Christopher Landrigan, a Newton parent, physician, and researcher in the Division of Sleep and Circadian Disorders at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

The High School Start Time Working Group is also scheduled to make a presentation to the School Committee at its meeting on Monday. The meeting is at the Education Center and starts at 7 p.m.

Ellen Ishkanian can be reached at eishkanian@gmail.com.



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Minuteman teacher Maria Galante (left) oversees a project with students Isaac Peters, Matt Collins, and Neva Coovert.

►MINUTEMAN
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Belmont, Bolton, Concord, Lancaster, Lexington, Needham, and Stow.

“Our decision to pursue withdrawal is driven by financial reasons, not dissatisfaction with the Minuteman educational program in any way,” said Cherry Karlson, chairman of the Wayland Board of Selectmen.

The per-student cost varies by community based on wealth and the number of students who attend, Bouquillon said. On average, he said, it will be less expensive for most communities to stay on as members, but there are some exceptions.

Based on current enrollment numbers, for example, Bouquillon said Weston would pay about \$49,000 per student as a member compared with \$40,000 as a nonmember.

Weston’s contribution for capital expenses would be higher as a member largely because of its wealth, Bouquillon said. “The question for Weston is — is that \$10,000 worth having a vote at the table and is it

Towns debate leaving Minuteman district



KAESTLE BOOS ASSOCIATES

A rendering of the new Minuteman High School, which would have an estimated cost of \$144.9 million.

worth our kids having full access to Minuteman and a career and technical education.” Bouquillon said.

While those seven communities will vote on withdrawal, all 16 member towns will vote before March 1 on a revised regional agreement that makes it possible for certain towns to

leave and for the new building project to move forward.

The agreement lays out rules for how capital costs such as the new building will be funded, how new member towns could be added, and how votes are weighted by community.

Assuming all towns approve the regional agreement, Bouquillon said plans will move forward on the new building. He said the Massachusetts School Building Authority is expected to vote Jan. 27 to support the next phase of the project. He said the School Committee will meet shortly after the last Special Town Meeting on Feb. 24 to authorize the borrowing.

The towns that remain in the district will not have to vote again on the project if they support it. If they are opposed, they must take a vote to shoot it down at another Town Meeting this spring.

If no town votes against the plan, officials will take the next year to complete the final design. Construction would start in spring 2017 and take just over two years to complete, Bouquillon said.

Leonard Simon, chairman of the Sudbury Board of Selectmen, thinks the town should leave the district. He said Sudbury officials have long been concerned about how the school is run and the high cost to member towns.

He’s also convinced that Sudbury students will have options elsewhere, whether it’s at Minuteman as a nonmember, Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School in Marlborough, or Keefe Regional Technical School in Framingham.

“I’ve looked into other vocational schools for Sudbury residents and the cost would be half,” he said.

“It just doesn’t make sense from a financial point of view to stay in the district, especially when we wouldn’t be locked into a 30-year debt for a new school and when the other schools are as good if not better than Minuteman.”

The departure of some towns from the sprawling district may make it easier for the school building project to move forward. Sudbury and Wayland officials in particular raised questions about the size and cost of the project.

And the void will have little financial impact, Bouquillon said, because so few students will be leaving. Currently, 57 students attend Minuteman from those seven towns, almost half of whom are from Sud-

bury.

Despite that, Bouquillon said he doesn’t want any members to leave.

“Will my life be easier with less than 16 towns? Probably,” he said. “But I’m not happy these families in these towns will not have Minuteman as an option. The biggest impact is those kids will no longer have access to high-quality career and technical education. A town like Sudbury believes their kids can simply apply to another vocational school, but they have secured nothing in writing that guarantees students will have access.”

Of the 673 students enrolled this past November, 396 were from within the district and 277 came from outside it.

In the short term, Bouquillon said, Minuteman will have room for out-of-district students.

“Beyond that, I can’t guarantee anything,” he said.

Bouquillon said he expects a large enrollment boost from member towns after the new school is completed. And if some towns do leave, he said he will seek other communities to replace them.

Watertown, for example, already sends 66 students; Waltham, 44; and Medford, 34.

Ernest Houle, superintendent-director at Assabet, said officials from Wayland, Sudbury, Boxborough, and Lincoln have reached out to the school to see if it could be an option for their students. He said he told officials that he couldn’t make any guarantees.

“They are looking for guarantees and unfortunately, I don’t see any way in which towns could guarantee enrollment unless they were a member of a district,” he said.

He said in addition to enrollment limits, students must also meet admissions criteria.

The lack of a guarantee worries Korinne Stephens of Boxborough. She is disheartened that the town may leave the district. Her son, C.J., got B’s and C’s in middle school but has thrived at Minuteman.

“He’s super engaged and talking about college,” she said.

But she knows there can be a stigma associated with vocational education.

“I know Minuteman gets a bad rap,” she said. “I think the general consensus is there is no value there because only a handful of kids go. It’s too bad they think that way.”

Jennifer Fenn Lefferts can be reached at jlefferts@yahoo.com.

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