

Vocational Education Options Working Group

How is vocational/technical education provided in Massachusetts?

- High school students have a right to opt for a vocational/technical education, either at an academic high school offering State-certified programs or, subject to the school's admissions criteria, at a vocational/technical high school.
- Most vocational/technical high schools are "regional" and serve many communities.

What is Minuteman Regional High School? Who Owns and Operates It?

- It is one of 26 regional vocational/technical high schools in Massachusetts.
- A legally distinct "District" entity owns and operates the school.
- Lincoln and 15 other towns are the District's "members" and appoint a School Committee.

What is the Regional Agreement?

- The District's 16 member-towns signed a contract known as the Regional Agreement.
- The contract defined the District's governance and cost-sharing understandings.
- Amendments and withdrawals require unanimous consent of the member-towns.

Who are the member-towns?

- Acton, Arlington, Belmont, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Dover, Lancaster, Lexington, Lincoln, Needham, Stow, Sudbury, Wayland, and Weston.

Where is Minuteman's campus?

- Located near the Route 128/2A intersection, the campus occupies 20 acres in Lexington (current building) and 47 acres in Lincoln (parking; fields; a few houses and house lots).

Is Minuteman planning a new building in Lincoln? Why? At what cost?

- What: A 260,000 sq. ft. total-replacement school on the Lincoln land.
- Why: no significant improvements and much deferred maintenance since the 1970s.
- Cost: \$145 million (\$44 million from the MSBA; \$101 million of debt).
- MSBA deadline: Obtain member-town approval by May 23, 2016 or lose the grant.

Why are we having a Special Town Meeting on February 23?

- Question #1: Should we withdraw from the District? Sudbury and Carlisle have voted to withdraw. Wayland will vote on February 11. Boxborough, Dover, and Weston will decide later in February.
- Question #2: Do we accept amendments of the Regional Agreement? These must be accepted or rejected as a single package. They are essentially the same as those that we passed over at our last two Annual Town Meetings, but with the withdrawal option added. Please see the School's summary at <http://goo.gl/Pw28UJ>
 - If we vote to withdraw, we must also accept the proposed amendments, since our withdrawal option will not otherwise legally exist.
 - If we don't vote to withdraw, we will decide whether to accept and become subject to the proposed amendments, including those that would reduce our vote and increase our cost, as described below.

What would withdrawal mean?

- It would be effective as of July 1, 2017.
- We would neither vote on nor be liable for the new building debt.
- We would forego our seat on the Minuteman School Committee.
- Our current Minuteman students would be able to complete their programs at Minuteman.
- Beginning with the 2017-2018 school-year, newly-enrolling Lincoln students would have the option to attend Minuteman, another vocational/technical school, or an academic high school that offers vocational/technical programs.

What are the other vocational/technical schools in our area?

- Assabet Valley Regional Vocational (Marlborough), Nashoba Valley Regional Technical (Westford), and South Middlesex Regional Vocational (a/k/a Keefe Tech; Framingham).
- Lincoln’s Superintendent of Schools and other members of the VEOWG visited Assabet Valley and Nashoba Valley, and plan to visit Keefe and Minuteman prior to the Town Meeting. The VEOWG has reviewed public data regarding the schools. The VEOWG has concluded that all offer worthy vocational/technical education options for our students. Nashoba Valley and Assabet Valley have affirmed that they are open to accepting our students, and we expect to know Keefe’s status after the site visit. We have assembled detailed comparative information on these schools, which is available at <http://goo.gl/395U6c>

If we accept being subject to the amendments, would our voting power be decreased?

- Yes. Each town’s School Committee member currently has an equal vote (1/16=6.25%). Instead, each town’s voting power would be increased or decreased based on enrollment.
- Lincoln’s enrollment is very small, and our voting power would be reduced to under 4%. In comparison, the largest town will have 21% and five other towns will have 6-10% each.

If we accept being subject to the amendments, would our debt obligation be increased?

- Yes. Part of the debt would be allocated so as to cause some member-towns, like Lincoln, to pay more and a few other member-towns to pay less. Our debt obligation would more than double compared to the current system.
- The current allocation of debt based solely on each year’s enrollment would be modified. Half of our debt obligation would be based solely on enrollment, but expanded to a four-year enrollment average . We would also be allocated 1% of the debt regardless of our enrollment. The remainder would be allocated by applying to our four-year enrollment average the same per-town “wealth” factors (average property values and household incomes) that are calculated by the State’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and that regional high schools are required to use to adjust their member-towns’ assessments for operating costs (but not capital costs).

What are the considerations in deciding whether or not to remain a member of Minuteman?

Governance: As a member, Lincoln would have a seat on the Minuteman School Committee, although our voting power would be reduced.

Access: As a member, our students would be guaranteed access to Minuteman. If we withdraw, our students would have access to several other quality vocational/technical options on an out-of-district basis. The VEOWG has also concluded that, at least for the foreseeable future, our students are likely to have continued access to Minuteman on an out-of-district basis.

The new Minuteman building's capacity would be 628. The School projects that it will have 524 in-district students at some point after the new building is opened. To achieve that goal, the School would have to realize an 8% year-over-year annual increase for a number of years. Recent enrollment trends raise questions as to whether and when the 524 in-district target would be achieved. The table below shows in-District and out-of-district enrollment figures over the past 15 years:

	2000	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015
In-District:	422	520	445	440	420	396
Out-of District:	387	254	309	356	325	277
Total Enrollment:	809	774	754	796	745	673

There is also some risk that out-of-district enrollment may decrease if non-member towns are forced to pay a capital fee that may incentivize them to explore other options. New State regulations would permit Minuteman to charge non-member towns a capital fee for the new building (not yet set by the State, but estimated by the School to be about \$8,000 per year). In fact, enrollment of Boston students at Minuteman has already declined significantly as a result of Boston establishing its own improved vocational/technical facility, and Waltham's planned high school renovation/replacement is expected to include vocational/technical programs.

The VEOWG review demonstrated that vocational/technical options would be available to Lincoln students on an out-of-district basis at Nashoba Valley and Assabet Valley, and confirmation for Keefe Tech is being sought. They all offer comparable programs and are accessible. Assabet Valley and Nashoba Valley contemplate no significant capital expenditures in the near future (Keefe to be confirmed). Lincoln would have until the 2017-2018 school year to plan for and establish relationships with one or more of these other schools. Although these schools are not as conveniently located as Minuteman, they are in the range of 14-21 miles from our Ballfield Road campus. This distance is comparable to the distance traveled by our METCO students to Lincoln and comparable to the distance traveled by many students from Bolton and Lancaster who attend Minuteman.

Comparative Costs: Data available from the State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education lists Minuteman as having the highest per-pupil expenditures of all vocational/technical schools in the Commonwealth. Some of the reasons for Minuteman's higher costs appear to be relatively high administrative costs and teacher compensation. On a per-pupil basis, both Minuteman's average teacher salary and per-pupil administrative cost are the fifth highest in the State across all types of schools. The table below compares Minuteman and nearby vocational/technical alternatives.

	Per-Pupil Expenditures	Average Teacher Salary	Per-Pupil Admin Costs
Minuteman	\$26,528	\$93,036	\$2,100
Assabet Valley	\$18,380	\$76,778	\$952
Keefe (South Middlesex)	\$25,615	\$73,731	\$1,449
Nashoba Valley	\$16,165	\$69,117	\$716

In-district versus Out-of-district Expense: Paying for vocational/technical education for our students on an out-of-district basis would be less expensive than remaining a member of the Minuteman District. Minuteman has projected Lincoln's costs in FY'20 under both the current Regional Agreement and the proposed amendments assuming that there will be five Lincoln students in FY'17, FY'18, and FY'19 (plus actual FY'16 enrollment). Lincoln's total annual assessment for FY'20 would be over \$38,000 per student under the current agreement. Applying the proposed new formula, and assuming that we will continue to have five students in FY'20, our annual assessment for FY'20 would be nearly \$56,000 per student. See table below:

	Current Agreement: 2020		Proposed Amendments: 2020	
	Total	Per Student	Total	Per Student
Operating Cost	\$142,961	\$28,592	\$159,555	\$31,911
Capital Cost	49,183	9,837	120,000	24,000
Total Cost	\$192,144	\$38,429	\$279,555	\$55,911

In contrast, out-of-district tuition for Minuteman and the three nearby schools are projected to be:

	Per Student Out-of District Cost: 2020			
	Minuteman	Assabet Valley	Keefe (So. Middlesex)	Nashoba Valley
Out-of District Tuition⁽¹⁾	\$19,003	\$17,774	\$19,003	\$15,523
Capital Cost⁽²⁾	8,000	(included)	(included)	(included)
Transportation⁽³⁾	2,500	5,412	5,412	5,412
Total	\$29,503	\$23,186	\$24,415	\$20,935

(1) State figures for 2016 inflated by 2% annually. (2) Estimated by Minuteman. (3) Estimated by VEOWG.

Financial Risk of Remaining a Member under the Regional Agreement Amendments: (A) The debt reallocation among member-towns would impose a greater cost than under the current agreement, as shown above. (B) Both the operating and debt assessments would further increase if Lincoln is a member but any of the six other towns withdraw. We estimate that in FY 2020, Lincoln could incur up to \$45,000 per year in additional assessments if all six towns withdraw. (C) If Minuteman does not achieve its enrollment projections, any shortfall would have to be spread among the member-towns. (D) Member-towns subsidize the out-of-district towns, since the State caps their tuition (currently \$17,556 per student per year) at much lower than Minuteman’s average cost (currently \$26,528 per student per year). Additional subsidy would result if Minuteman continues to negotiate tuition discounts below the State-capped rate with certain non-member towns and/or negotiates discounts from the new State-regulated capital fee.

If Lincoln withdraws, can the Planning Board regulate the new building?

- Yes. “Reasonable regulation” regarding dimensional and site-plan elements is allowed.

Will the new building impose municipal costs on Lincoln?

- The School may request public safety services for the new building that cannot be accommodated by Lincoln’s current personnel. We anticipate negotiating an appropriate cost-reimbursement agreement.

Can we remain a member and simply reject the amendments?

- Yes, but there is significant risk that doing so could alienate Lincoln from all of the other member-towns that have worked to find a pathway for the building project to proceed by allowing towns to withdraw if they do not agree with the amendments and/or the building project.