

## SITE VISIT TO ASSABET VALLEY REGIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

On January 27, 2016, VEOWG members Becky McFall (Lincoln Schools Superintendent), Tim Higgins (Lincoln Town Administrator), Peter Braun (Lincoln Selectman), and Patricia Mostue (At Large Committee member and LSRHS School Committee Member) made a site visit to the Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School, located off of Route 495 in Marlborough. We spent over an hour meeting with the Assabet Valley Superintendent Ernie Houle, and Director of Technical Programs Russell Mangsen, followed by a comprehensive tour of the facility, technical programs, and academic classes.

The School is located in Marlborough near the Hudson line. Our commute took us down 117 through Maynard and Stow to 62 and through Hudson Center. Door to door the drive took 32 minutes.

The current In-District towns are Berlin, Hudson, Marlborough, Maynard, Northborough, Southborough, and Westborough. Out of District towns with significant student enrollment include Clinton, Lester, Shrewsbury, and West Boylston. More information is available at <http://www.assabettech.com>.

Current enrollment is 1138 students, consisting of 64% In-District and 37% Out-Of-District students. The special education population is 34% of the enrollment. The building's capacity is 1200 students. Post-grad classes are offered for students aged 18-22 (at no tuition to student if In-District and full tuition if Out of District). The School has experienced small, incremental enrollment increases and the Superintendent would like to increase their acceptance rate to meet their capacity of 1200 students. In addition to the Out of District towns listed above, small numbers of out of district students are accepted from other towns. Lincoln students would be welcomed for consideration although acceptance cannot be guaranteed dependent upon enrollment of In-district students. They anticipate consistent availability of 50 - 75 enrollment spaces for Out of District students. All students are evaluated for admission and provided access to programs regardless of residency within or outside the District. Most students (92%) are admitted to their first or second choice program with a few going into a third choice program.

The current operating budget is approximately \$19.6 million. Annual budget increases of 2.5% - 3.0% are anticipated. Their current State-capped tuition rate for Out-Of-District students is \$16,587, and there are no additional fees for special education or capital. Their tuition rates place them at #18 out of 26 vocational technical high schools in MA. Per pupil expenditure is \$18,650. They have a healthy non-member tuition fund that can be used for capital expenses. They currently have an OPEB Trust with \$120,000 against a current \$11 million OPEB liability. They are working with an investment firm to increase their fund and budget \$25-35,000 per year to go into their OPEB fund.

If Lincoln students attend Assabet, we would be responsible for arranging and paying for the transportation.

The facility is a large 380,000 square foot building that recently went through a comprehensive renovation project completed in October 2015. Assabet received 53.84% reimbursement from the MSBA. The renovation upgraded the boilers, heating, windows, science labs, roof, and life safety systems. In addition, the TV Media studio, computer labs, and Advanced Manufacturing program areas were upgraded.

The building has a large auditorium and a large lecture hall. There is a large modernized cafeteria space and a smaller “senior” cafeteria. The gym has been updated and the flooring will be refurbished this summer. The program areas are well designed for their needs with adequate space and state of the art equipment. The renovation project did not address all of their Furniture, Fixture, and Equipment (FF&E) needs and they are continuing to upgrade. We observed a great deal of furniture that was obtained at no cost to the district through an organization that provides furniture donated by businesses for use by schools and non-profit organizations.

The administration, including Superintendent-Director Ernie Houle who is just completing his first year at Assabet, is in the process of developing a capital plan. In addition, they will be conducting a program review to determine the types of programs that they should be offering based upon labor market needs.

Assabet offers a variety of programs. Programs offered that set them apart are an Engineering Academy that allows students to specialize in one area and also participate in an integrated curriculum project based experience. The Academy “provides students with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum rich in all Engineering/STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines throughout their four years of high school.” Students in the Academy are required to complete requirements beyond the standard graduation requirements and they receive an Engineering certificate at the conclusion of their high school studies. The Advanced Manufacturing program is state of the art. There are a large number of “machine shops” in the region that provide strong, viable opportunities for employment with a high need for a resurgence of highly skilled employees. This work has transitioned to a much more computer based process than the past manual labor intensive process. Assabet has a state of the art Auto Collision Technology program (auto body repair) that offers their services to the community with no labor costs included in the price. The Health Technologies program provides Certified Nursing Assistant certification along with certification in EKG, CPR, Alzheimer’s. We also observed the following programs; Biotechnology, Business Technology, Computer Programming and Web Development (includes robotics), Culinary Arts/Hospitality Management, Design and Visual Communication, Drafting and Design Technology, House Carpentry and Millwork, Metal Fabrication, and Painting and Design. Other programs that we did not observe are also available such as Plumbing, and HVAC.

The culinary arts program operates an on-site restaurant that is open to the public. All students participate in Co-ops (Internships) beginning in their Junior year. These are often paid internships and students can earn a significant rate of pay depending upon their area of expertise. Students earn industry recognized certification and 60-66% go on to two or four year colleges.

Because of their size, Assabet offers more opportunities to participate on athletic teams and in a variety of extra curricular activities. They have a focus on “Learn and Serve” working hard to build a strong student community that gives back through service in their communities.

In our visit to academic classrooms, we observed relatively small class sizes. In some cases, a co-teaching model was in place with a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and a teaching assistant all working in the classroom to support students. All teachers had clearly stated lesson objectives posted for the day and students appeared engaged and interested in their learning.