

The Minuteman Building Project at a Glance
A New High School: Building a Competitive Advantage for Future Generations
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Introduction

Voters in the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School District will soon decide whether to endorse the Minuteman School Committee's decision to issue bonds to pay for the construction of a new Minuteman High School. They will make that decision in a special district-wide referendum on September 20, 2016.

Minuteman entered the funding pipeline of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the independent state agency that oversees school construction projects, in 2009. This project, therefore, is the culmination of *years* of planning by the District, its technical advisors and consultants, and town and state leaders.

During the project feasibility phase, Minuteman has held dozens of public meetings and answered hundreds of questions from town officials and members of the community.

Following are some of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and the written answers we have prepared in response to them. Most of these FAQs appear in documents already posted on our website. A few are of more recent vintage. I hope all of them are useful to you in learning more about our project.

For the convenience of readers, we have grouped the questions by general category: [About Minuteman](#), [Need for a New School](#), [Project History](#), [Project Benefits](#), [Impact on Students and Curriculum](#), [The New Capital Fee](#), [Building Location and Design](#), [Building Size and Enrollment](#), [Minuteman Recruiting and Marketing Efforts](#), [Out-of-District Students](#), [The Project's Impact on Local Tax Bills](#), [Reducing the Project's Cost](#), [Other Possible Options](#), [The Impact of Doing Nothing](#), [Projected Cost of Repairs](#), [Structure of the New District](#), [Attracting New Member Communities](#), [Future Minuteman Budgets](#), [Comparing Minuteman with Other School Districts](#), [Bond Rating](#), [The District-Wide Ballot](#), and [Learning More](#).

About Minuteman

- 1. What is Minuteman High School?** *Located in the heart of Lexington, Minuteman was established in the 1970s as one of more than two dozen regional-vocational technical high schools in Massachusetts. Over the years, the school has distinguished itself by building a reputation for excellence. Our students consistently excel on the larger stage and have won numerous awards at state and national competitions. Minuteman's technical offerings encompass more than a dozen high-tech career majors in rapidly growing fields, including Biotechnology, Engineering Technology, Programming & Web*

Development, Health Assisting, Early Childhood Education & Teaching, Culinary Arts, Electrical, Carpentry, Welding & Metal Fabrication, Automotive Technology, Design & Visual Communications, and Horticulture & Landscaping Technology. As an accredited member of the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC), Minuteman challenges all students to revolutionize their high school expectations by aspiring to their full potential, accelerating their learning, and achieving success in the 21st-century global community.

- 2. What does Minuteman do? What makes it different?** *At Minuteman, we've revolutionized the high school experience by integrating full academics with valuable career-focused education. Today, the synergy of academic knowledge and experiential technical skills is the single most important asset in the 21st-century American workforce — and Minuteman delivers this powerful edge during a student's high school years. Our strategy is to help students aspire to their full potential, accelerate their learning, and ultimately achieve a revolutionary competitive advantage. This benefits everyone, because successful students become productive citizens in our community. Together, we're working hard to maximize our resources and strengthen our local workforce and economy.*

At Minuteman, we serve a diverse student body with multiple learning styles. Because we believe every student deserves an outstanding education, we build the learning experience around each individual's unique needs. Far from limiting their options, Minuteman's engaging program majors expand every student's opportunities for college and career success. Our caring and professional instructors deliver a complete high school curriculum to inspire every student to reach their college and career goals. And with our proven college acceptance and success rates, it's easy to see how Minuteman makes the difference. Our students can earn college credit, national industry certifications, paid internships, scholarships, and more. We also offer personal enrichment opportunities to everyone in the community through our Minuteman Community Education program.

Need for a New School

- 3. Where's the evidence we need a new school?** *Since 2009, Minuteman has carefully followed the Feasibility Study guidelines of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). It has exhaustively explored all options ranging from repairs to replacement. After weighing all of the options, the Minuteman School Building Committee and Minuteman School Committee both agreed that building a new school was the best option for students and most affordable option for local taxpayers. The MSBA's Board of Directors endorsed this option by a unanimous vote. Documents related to this process are posted on the Minuteman website at www.minuteman.org.*
- 4. But isn't Minuteman accredited?** *Yes, it is. However, the New England Association of School and Colleges (NEASC) has placed our accreditation on "Warning" status solely due*

to the condition of the building. NEASC is carefully monitoring our efforts to address the building's structural, mechanical, and code issues.

5. **Have you kept up with repairs and maintenance on the existing building?** *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'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 webpages for more information.*

Project History

7. **It sounds like you've been working on this a long time but things have really heated up recently. What's happened with the project during the past year?** *Following are some key decisions since the start of the year:*
 - *January 27, 2016 – The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) votes unanimously to pay up to \$44,139,213 for a new school.*
 - *March 11, 2016 – The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education approves a revised Minuteman Regional Agreement that had been previously approved by all 16 member towns.*
 - *March 15, 2016 – The Minuteman School Committee votes to approve bonding for a new school under M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(d). This method requires all member towns to either approve the bonding (or not disapprove it) at Town Meetings.*
 - *April-May 2016 – 15 of the District's 16 towns vote to approve the bonding or take no action, a decision which is deemed as approval. All votes are by overwhelming margins, several unanimous. Five towns make their Town Meeting approval contingent on a later debt exclusion vote by their town. All five of the debt exclusion votes pass by wide margins.*
 - *May 4, 2016 – Belmont becomes the only town in the District to reject bonding for the Minuteman project, effectively blocking the project. The vote is 81 in favor, 141 against.*
 - *June 20, 2016 – Key stakeholders from the other 15 towns meet with Belmont officials to decide whether to ask Belmont Town Meeting to reconsider, or to move directly to a referendum.*
 - *June 27, 2016 – The Minuteman School Committee votes 12-1 to issue debt for construction of a new school pursuant to M.G.L Chapter 71, Section 16(n). The*

Committee's action is subject to approval by voters at a district-wide referendum on September 20, 2016.

Project Benefits

8. What are the main benefits of building a new school? *Building a new school will:*

- *Resolve long-standing structural, mechanical, and code issues with the existing building*
- *Create a modern school building that supports innovation and meets current and emerging educational needs*
- *Build a 21st century workforce that strengthens the region's economy and sustains healthy property values*
- *Invest in the most affordable option, using more than \$44 million in state funds that will go elsewhere if not used here*
- *Safeguard the school's regional accreditation*

Impact on Students and Curriculum

9. 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.*

10. How can you justify having 16 programs? *Townspople 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.*

11. What's the new design going to do for teaching and learning? *The new building will allow us to implement a true Academy Model that offers:*

- *Integration of Technical and Academic curriculum*
- *AP and College level courses*
- *Dual Enrollment*
- *Creativity and Innovation*

- *Common Planning Time*
- *Project Based Learning*
- *An Engineering, Construction and Trades Academy (9 Programs and 12 Majors)*
- *A Life Sciences and Services Academy (7 Programs and 8 Majors)*
- *New Career Majors*
 - *Advanced Manufacturing*
 - *Multi-Media Engineering (Technical Theatre Arts)*

The New Capital Fee

- 12. What is the new capital fee?** *The new capital fee results from a state regulation promulgated by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in February 2015 and it is the direct result of efforts by the Minuteman School Committee and Superintendent to ensure that out-of-district towns pay a fair share of the costs of building a new school. In short, the regulation will enable schools like Minuteman to charge a “capital construction and renovation increment” on top of the annual tuition fee set by the Commissioner of Education and paid on behalf of non-resident students attending the school.*
- 13. 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.*
- 14. 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.*
- 15. 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?** *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.*
- 16. 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? 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).

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. 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.*

Building Location and Design

19. The new building would be constructed on the Lincoln side of your property, yet Lincoln will no longer be a member of the Minuteman District as of July 1, 2017. Is that allowable? *Yes. Section III of the new Regional Agreement expressly addresses the issue.*

20. 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.*

21. Why isn't the building three stories tall 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.*

22. 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.*

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. In addition, the Administration and Minuteman Futures Foundation, Inc. will work to secure equipment and financial donations to supplement state and District funding.*

Building Size and Enrollment

25. 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. In addition, large surges of enrollment are being reported in the lower grades in several member towns, especially Arlington and Belmont, adding to the potential pool of applicants for Minuteman. Based on what these agencies have found and on our own research, we are confident we will reach our enrollment projections.*

26. Where's the state and national data to back up your passion? *On the school's website: www.minuteman.org.*

27. What is the design enrollment for the school? *The new school is designed for 628 students.*

28. 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. The MSBA has further stated that the agency would not support a school built for fewer than 600 students.*

29. 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.*

- 30. How will you increase in-district enrollment from 395 to your projection of 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.*
- 31. How many years will it take to get there?** *We expect to increase in-district enrollment to 524 within five years following approval of the project by a majority vote on September 20. Admittedly, the poor condition of the building, uncertainty over the building's status, and the ongoing public controversy over the project and the District's future have had a detrimental impact on our efforts to attract more students. Having a school that meets building codes, educational requirements, and student expectations will only serve to help increase enrollment.*
- 32. 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.*
- 33. 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.*
- 34. Right now, you have about 380 in-district students. Where are the other 140 going to come from?** *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.*

- 35. Aren't your numbers for in-district enrollment 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 answers elsewhere in this section. A new building is imperative for future enrollment growth from all in-District communities.
- 36. Aside from anecdotal evidence, what data you have to support your enrollment projections? Have you done any surveys?** Yes. Please see the answers above and review the School Building Committee webpages, including the document "Why We Will Fill the School: 38 Reasons to Expect In-District Enrollment to Grow at Minuteman High School." That document may be found at <http://minuteman.org/Page/561>.
- 37. 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 design enrollment figure of 628. MSBA is solidly behind the project.
- 38. Where will this increased enrollment 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.
- 39. 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.

Minuteman Recruiting and Marketing Efforts

- 40. 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.

- 41. Would 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.*
- 42. Minuteman currently has far more male students than females. What are you doing to attract more female students?** *Over the past two years, we have taken significant steps to attract more female students to the school. First, we launched a Girls in STEM Mentoring Program. This highly popular initiative has already won state recognition and two national awards from SkillsUSA. Second, Minuteman now serves as the host school for efforts to create a Girls in Trades Program for young women wishing to explore non-traditional by gender careers. This is a statewide effort that attracted more than 400 female students to its First Annual Girls in Trades Career Fair in Dorchester. Through these and other marketing efforts, we have seen a marked increase in applications from eighth-grade female students.*
- 43. I've been told that some school superintendents are already trying to keep students from their towns from coming to Minuteman. Is 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.*

Out-of-District Students

- 44. 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.*

- 45. 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, it's our understanding that the student's community would pay 75% of the capital fee set by the state.*
- 46. 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.*
- 47. 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.*
- 48. 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.*
- 49. 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.*

The Project's Impact on Local Tax Bills

- 50. How much does the whole project cost?** *The total budget is capped at \$144.9 million. Within that figure is a construction budget of \$119.2 million.*
- 51. How much is the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) going to pay?** *The MSBA will pay an estimated reimbursement of \$44.1 million. That means MSBA will reimburse 44.75% of eligible projects costs or roughly a 30% effective reimbursement.*

52. Who pays the rest? *Taxpayers in the member towns in the District – and the out-of-district towns that send students to Minuteman – will pay the balance.*

53. How much will it cost an individual homeowner in the District? *It depends what member town you live in. It ranges from \$17.50 to \$116.93 annually per median homeowner. Here is what we expect the impact to be: Acton - \$40.34, Arlington - \$75.19, Belmont - \$33.25, Bolton - \$59.66, Concord - \$33.61, Dover - \$25.33, Lancaster - \$116.93, Lexington - \$36.84, Needham - \$17.50, and Stow - \$62.24. This is the estimated tax impact based on the median home value in each town.*

54. 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.*

Reducing the Project's Cost

55. 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 secured four (4) additional percentage points of reimbursement based on energy-saving and maintenance practices. We welcome efforts by local town officials to try to secure additional funds for the project through the Massachusetts Legislature.*

56. 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. Add 20 percentage points to the reimbursement rate 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.

57. 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.*

58. Could you sell District land that isn't needed for the school? *Yes, all or part of the Minuteman property could be sold. It would require an Act of the Legislature.*

Other Possible Options

59. What would be 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.*

60. 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.*

61. Is there capacity at other schools to take Minuteman 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.*

The Impact of Doing Nothing

62. 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. I encourage you to read a four-page summary of the “Go It Alone” Option and a related spreadsheet outlining the work that would need to be done. Visit our website at <http://www.minuteman.org/Page/310>. Minuteman School Committee chair Jeffrey Stulin also authored a 6-page report that covers this subject. To read it, please visit <http://www.minuteman.org/Page/552>.*

63. 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.*

64. 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).*

65. What are the political and practical consequences if we reject this option (that is, building a new school) and instead renovate only? *A decision to reject the MSBA project would have several consequences. Among them:*

- *Loss of over \$44 million in State funds*
- *Over \$100 million of repairs remain on the shoulders of the member towns*
- *Loss of the 44.75% reimbursement rate*
- *Years waiting to get MSBA support – at a lower reimbursement rate*
- *Risk of escalating construction costs*
- *Likely loss of accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)*
- *Missed opportunity for innovation, creativity and cost savings*

- *Uncertainty for students and parents seeking a career and technical education*

Projected Cost of Repairs

66. 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. I encourage you to read a four-page summary of the “Go It Alone” Option and a related spreadsheet outlining the work that would need to be done. Visit our website at <http://www.minuteman.org/Page/310>.*

Structure of the New District

67. What towns will be in the new District? *The new Minuteman District will include 10 member towns: Acton, Arlington, Belmont, Bolton, Concord, Dover, Lancaster, Lexington, Needham, and Stow.*

68. What towns will be leaving? *Effective July 1, 2017, the towns of Boxborough, Carlisle, Lincoln, Sudbury, Wayland and Weston will no longer be members.*

Attracting New Member Communities

69. 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. Once the building project is approved, the Administration and School Committee will immediately restart talks with out-of-district communities about the advantages of joining the Minuteman District. We have been told by some (already interested) communities that they want two things before they seriously negotiate with us: a new Regional Agreement and a new school building. We have a brand new Regional Agreement. We can have approval of a new building on September 20.*

- 70. 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. Once the building project is approved, the Administration and School Committee will immediately restart talks with out-of-district communities about the advantages of joining the Minuteman District. We have been told by some (already interested) communities that they want two things before they seriously negotiate with us: a new Regional Agreement and a new school building. We have a brand new Regional Agreement. We can have approval of a new building on September 20.*
- 71. 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 member towns.*
- 72. 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.*
- 73. What about formal written agreements 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.*

Future Minuteman Budgets

- 74. 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.*
- 75. 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. In addition, 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.*

- 76. Are you required to charge a capital fee? In your budget projections, you show this as expected 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.*
- 77. 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.*

Comparing Minuteman with Other School Districts

- 78. 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 #8.*
- 79. Concord and Carlisle just built a new regional school for \$94 million. Why would Minuteman be 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.*

80. Why is the per pupil cost for building a new vocational-technical school higher than the per pupil cost of building an 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.*

Bond Rating

81. 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.*

The District-Wide Ballot

82. Is a district-wide ballot legal? *Yes. State law provides the Minuteman school district with two (2) ways to borrow money for capital projects (construction projects). Both of these options are outlined in Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 16. Subsection (d) allows the district to borrow with approval (or non-disapproval) from the Town Meetings in its member towns. Subsection (n) allows the district to borrow with approval by a district-wide ballot.*

83. Why haven't I heard about district-wide balloting before? *Good question. Regional vocational school districts have generally gone the "traditional" route to borrow for large capital projects, by securing approval from each of their member towns at Town Meetings. Subsection (n) – a district-wide ballot -- is also an option available in state law.*

84. Has district-wide balloting been done before? *Yes. Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton secured approval for a \$73.8 million renovation project through a district-wide ballot in October of 2012. Franklin County Technical School in Turners Falls secured approval for \$2.456 million in renovations through district-wide balloting on June 23, 2015. Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical School District in Franklin secured approval for a \$2.3 million bond through district-wide balloting in 1995.*

85. What does Minuteman have in common with Bay Path, Franklin County Tech, and Tri-County? *All four are regional vocational technical schools. Like the other three, Minuteman has a sprawling district, with multiple member communities. Bay Path has 10 member towns. Franklin County has 19. Tri-County has 11. Minuteman has 16.*

86. What quantum of votes is required for the School Committee to issue debt? *A simple majority vote is required under the "traditional" Town Meeting approach. A two-thirds vote of the School Committee (11 of 16 in Minuteman's case, without weighting) is required to initiate the district-wide ballot approach.*

- 87. When did the Minuteman School Committee call for a district-wide referendum?** *On June 27, 2016, the School Committee voted 12-1, with one abstention, to issue debt for the building project under M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(n) and to submit the vote for approval to the registered voters in the District in an election to be held on September 20, 2016 from 12 noon to 8:00 p.m.*
- 88. Why not just go the “traditional” route and ask Town Meetings for approval?** *We first tried the “traditional” approach under M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(d) and were not successful. The traditional process requires approval (or waiver) by all member town meetings. On May 4, 2016, one of Minuteman’s 16 member town meetings (Belmont’s) voted to disapprove the bond, effectively vetoing the project.*
- 89. Why not just ask Belmont Town Meeting to reconsider its initial rejection?** *Good question. Representatives from all the member towns met with key Belmont officials on June 20, 2016, exploring whether it would make sense to simply go back to Belmont Town Meeting and ask again. At the meeting, Belmont officials informed representatives from the other 15 member towns that they would not change their opposition to bonding for the project. Based on that, a clear majority of those present agreed that reconsideration did not have a reasonable prospect for success and that the better, clearer course would be to proceed directly to a referendum.*
- 90. How much time does Minuteman have to get local approval?** *Originally, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) had given us until June 30, 2016, to secure local approval for the project. After the rejection in Belmont, we sought an extension. On June 17, 2016, MSBA Executive Director John K. McCarthy wrote to us, granting an extension until November 30, 2016. But Mr. McCarthy’s approval letter also contained this warning: “Given the overwhelming capital needs of the school districts across the Commonwealth and the MSBA’s limited capital program funds, the MSBA cannot indefinitely tie up funds allocated to a project that lacks local support. Accordingly, no additional extension beyond November 30, 2016 will be considered.”*
- 91. What are the advantages of using a district-wide ballot?** *It gives every voter in the district an opportunity to be heard. It’s completed in one day. Most important, it allows for approval in a timely fashion that would secure state funding through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).*
- 92. What are the disadvantages?** *First, it’s not something that most town clerks, town officials, school officials, or voters in the Minuteman District are familiar with. It will be a learning experience for everyone. Second, it will be an expense for the Minuteman District.*
- 93. The district-wide election must cost money to run. Who pays for it?** *The regional school district pays for it. In this case, Minuteman will pay for the printing of ballots,*

programming of voting machines, publishing of legal notices, mailings about changes in polling places, mailing of absentee ballots, poll workers, police officers, constables, and other direct expenses related to the election.

- 94. How much money are we talking about?** *Franklin County expected to pay about \$60,000 for the district-wide ballot in its 19 member towns. Bay Path paid approximately \$48,000 for the district-wide ballot in its 10 member towns. We project that Minuteman may need to spend as much as \$100,000 for the district-wide ballot in its 16 member towns.*
- 95. Where's the money for a district-wide ballot coming from?** *The Minuteman School Committee has voted to transfer funds from within its existing \$19.7 million budget to pay for the election. The district won't increase the budget to pay for the district-wide ballot. A district-wide ballot will not increase assessments to member towns.*
- 96. Who picks the date for the district-wide ballot?** *Under the statute, the Minuteman School Committee sets the date. The Committee has selected Tuesday, September 20, 2016, from 12 noon to 8:00 p.m.*
- 97. Who writes the ballot question?** *The actual wording has been drafted by Minuteman's bond counsel, Atty. Richard A. Manley, Jr. of Locke Lord LLP.*
- 98. How long is the election?** *The minimum and maximum number of hours are set by law. The law says that the election must be held on the same date, with uniform voting hours. The polls must be open for at least four (4) hours and no more than eight (8) hours.*
- 99. Can't the School Committee allow for longer voting hours?** *No. The law says the polls can be open for no more than 8 hours.*
- 100. Where do people vote?** *Under the statute, the number and location of the polling place(s) in each town are determined by the Minuteman School Committee after consultation with the towns.*
- 101. Will all 16 member towns participate in the voting?** *Yes. Even though six (6) towns are scheduled to withdraw from this District on July 1, 2017, and under the district agreement will not be liable for assessment as members on this debt, those towns and their citizens have full rights to participate in district decisions until the withdrawal date. Accordingly, their residents will have the same rights as in other district towns to vote in the referendum.*
- 102. I'm from one of the towns that will be leaving the District next year. Why should I bother to vote?** *First, this an opportunity for you to cast a vote about the value of vocational-technical education in the District and the importance of providing high-quality educational options for all students. Second, we expect that many of the towns*

that will be leaving the District will continue to send students to Minuteman on a tuition basis, if space is available, so students from your town are likely to benefit. Finally, your town won't be leaving until July 1, 2017. Until that point, the town remains a member of the District with full voting privileges. You are entitled to cast a vote in the election.

- 103. Is there a minimum number of voters – or percentage of voters – who need to go to the polls to make a district-wide election valid?** *No.*
- 104. How are the votes counted? And how do you decide which side wins?** *Local election officials count and certify the votes in their individual towns. Those votes are added together. The district-wide aggregate count of “yes” and “no” votes, with the majority prevailing, will decide the outcome.*
- 105. What happens if the ballot question is approved?** *The project moves ahead. Assessments to pay the debt move ahead consistent with the terms of the Regional Agreement.*
- 106. How would member towns pay the debt under the two options?** *Permanent financing for the project will be in the form of tax-exempt 30-year bonds with scheduled annual principal and interest payments. Member towns will pay their share of the annual payment on the bonds as part of the assessment pursuant to the current Regional Agreement. In the event that the District moves forward under General Laws Chapter 71, Section 16(d), member towns can authorize the project and their share of the debt service within the tax levy by a vote of Town Meeting, or the Town could make its approval subject to the passage of a debt exclusion override. In the event that the District moves forward under Chapter 71, Section 16(d), and if a given town meeting makes its approval of the issuance of the debt contingent upon the successful passage of a debt exclusion override, which requires a separate ballot vote, then a failure of that override election would mean that the project could not move forward. If the District moves forward with a district-wide ballot election under Chapter 71, Section 16(n) and the majority of voters in the District approve the project, the project will proceed and funding for the assessment would then be the decision of each member town. Towns may utilize debt exclusion funding for that portion of their district assessment, but that is a local decision that does not affect the assessment itself or prevent the project from going forward.*
- 107. If the voters in a particular town vote against the project in a district-wide election, will the town still be responsible for paying its share of the debt?** *Yes, with two exceptions. First, under the District Agreement the six withdrawing communities are not liable for district debt incurred after December 10, 2015. The withdrawing communities are Boxborough, Carlisle, Lincoln, Sudbury, Wayland, and Weston. Second, any town in which the majority of votes in the referendum are to disapprove the bond may, by two-thirds vote of its town meeting within 60 days after the referendum, approve a notice of*

withdrawal from the district, in which instance that town would not be liable on the project debt.

- 108. So not every town needs to vote to approve?** *No. This election will be decided by the total district-wide vote. This is a district-wide referendum to gauge the wishes of the entire Minuteman district, not just the wishes of voters in a particular town.*
- 109. In prior district-wide votes, have some towns voted against?** *Yes. In 2012, seven (7) of the ten (10) towns in the Bay Path district in Central Massachusetts voted in favor of the \$73.8 million renovation project. Three towns – North Brookfield, Oxford, and Paxton – voted against the ballot question by slim margins. Based on the aggregate vote in the Bay Path district, the project was approved.*
- 110. What happens if the ballot question is not approved?** *If time permits, a couple of options may be available. The district could submit the issue to the 16 Town Meetings again. The district could try another district-wide ballot. But given the current timelines and project constraints, we expect that this referendum will provide the final decision, either “yes” or “no”.*
- 111. Has the option of a district-wide referendum been cleared by district counsel?** *Yes. Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane, LLP, Minuteman’s counsel, has carefully reviewed the statute and is advising the school on the process that must be followed. We have also consulted with Atty. Richard A. Manley, Jr. of Locke Lord LLP, Minuteman’s bond counsel, and Atty. Thomas Kiley of Cosgrove, Eisenberg, & Kiley, P.C.*
- 112. Who makes sure this is a fair election?** *The Office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State, the Office of Campaign & Political Finance, the State Ethics Commission, and local election officials all will be monitoring the campaign and the outcome of the election.*
- 113. Can groups run organized campaigns for or against the district-wide ballot?** *Yes, subject to the requirements of state elections laws.*
- 114. Can Minuteman employees take part in the campaign?** *Yes, but only to the limited extent allowed by the Office of Campaign & Political Finance and the State Ethics Commission.*
- 115. How are public employees limited?** *Public employees cannot use their public positions or public resources to promote a ballot question. They can prepare newsletters concerning a ballot question but may not send them to the public, unsolicited. Public employees can inform voters about the date and place for an election but cannot make any comments on the merits of the ballot question when doing so.*

- 116. Does this rule apply to everyone?** *As a general matter, policy makers such as members of the School Committee and the School Superintendent have more latitude. However, they still cannot use public funds to support or oppose a ballot question.*
- 117. Could Minuteman employees serve on a campaign committee?** *Yes. Public employees could serve on a campaign committee, but cannot solicit money or serve as the committee's treasurer. On their own time and using personal funds, they can do what other citizens do. For example, they can write a Letter to the Editor, supporting or opposing a ballot question. They can contribute money in their own name to a ballot question committee.*
- 118. How will Minuteman employees know what they can do – and what they cannot do?** *The school administration will provide employees with written materials and tutorial videos prepared by the Office of Campaign & Political Finance. We will also ask OCPF to conduct a training session at the school.*
- 119. Where can I learn more about the rules governing the conduct of public employees in political campaigns?** *Visit the website of the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) at www.ocpf.us.*
- 120. What does the new Regional Agreement say about district-wide voting?** *A new Regional Agreement was approved by the 16 member towns – and by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education – in the spring of 2016. Section IV (I) of the new Regional Agreement is titled "Incurring of Debt." This section provides for borrowing by the traditional Town Meeting route pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(d), and by a district wide ballot pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(n).*
- 121. Where can I find the new Regional Agreement?** *The new Regional Agreement, including a March 11, 2016, letter from the Commissioner of Education approving the new Agreement, is posted on our School Building Committee's web page. Visit <http://minuteman.org//site/Default.aspx?PageID=196> for more information.*
- 122. Where can I find the state law governing this election?** *The state law governing this special election is M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 16(n). You can find it at this website: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section16>.*

Learning More

- 123. If I have additional questions about the project, where can I 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."*

124. What if I have additional questions about the district-wide election or want to find out where I can vote? *Go to the “Quick Links” section on the homepage of the Minuteman website: www.minuteman.org.*