

Frequently Asked Questions about Sudbury's relationship with Minuteman Vocational Regional High School (Minuteman):

Why are we having a Special Town Meeting on February 9?

All sixteen towns in the Minuteman Regional School District must hold a Special Town Meeting prior to March 1 to approve a new version of the Minuteman Regional Agreement. Those towns, including Sudbury, which have indicated they might withdraw also need to obtain Town Meeting's approval to withdraw from the district under the new agreement.

Why can't this wait until our Annual Town Meeting in May?

At our annual Town Meeting, Minuteman will present a request for capital funding for a new school building construction project to all towns in the Minuteman District. In order to present an accurate estimate of the costs of this project for each of the member communities, the composition of the district—who's in and who's out—must be known beforehand. Before May, Minuteman needs to know what we decide at our February 9 Special Town Meeting.

Why doesn't Minuteman wait and request capital funding next year in 2017?

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) has set a deadline of June 30, 2016, for approval of funding to construct a new Minuteman School Building by the member towns in the Minuteman School District. If the deadline is met, the MSBA will pay for a significant fraction, variously described as \$58 million or 40% of the total eligible project costs, of the \$144.9 million building. If the deadline is not met, the MSBA will withdraw funding for the project. Minuteman wants to meet the June 30, 2016, deadline to obtain the funds from MSBA to construct the new school building.

What's the urgency on the new school?

The Minuteman School Building is, by all accounts, in need of major updating and refurbishing. Minuteman is in danger of de-accreditation because of the poor condition of the building which hasn't had any significant improvements since it was originally built in the 1970s. Tackling the maintenance needs, including maintenance deferred in anticipation of a new building, needs to happen soon. Spending the

amount of money to address the building's problems will trigger the requirement that the facility be brought up to current code; up till now, many non-compliance issues have been grandfathered. Repairs and upgrades will run in the tens of millions of dollars, and MSBA is not expected to reimburse. Rather than spend money on the existing school, Minuteman would like to build the new school with current facilities and up to current code. If the building project is approved in 2016, the anticipated opening date on the new building is 2020.

So Minuteman needs approval from district member towns for capital funding for a new building by June 30, 2016. Why are they just now proposing this amended regional agreement for our approval?

The existing Minuteman Regional Agreement was adopted in 1970, and last amended in 1980. Amending the Minuteman Regional Agreement requires that each of the sixteen member towns approve the proposed amendment at its Town Meeting. Sudbury was one of six member towns not to adopt the most recent proposed set of changes in 2014 and again in 2015. Following this defeat, Minuteman declined any further attempt to modify the Regional Agreement and focused on getting approval for the building project under the current agreement. For various reasons it appears that funding for the new building project would not be successful. In November and December of 2015 selectmen from district towns negotiated the amended regional agreement containing a provision allowing withdrawal for some towns, which is now under consideration.

What are the provisions of the new agreement?

Check it out at <https://sudbury.ma.us/veoc/documents/> It's the Proposed Amended Minuteman Regional District Agreement (2015.12.21). The existing agreement is posted there, too.

Thanks. Could you just summarize the changes from the existing agreement?

1. Enrollment will be determined using a four-year rolling average of enrollment, rather than the previous year's enrollment, to calculate operating and capital budget assessments.
2. School Committee votes including that approving the operating budget are weighted based upon enrollment from the member town.

Capital projects require approval by a unanimous vote of the School Committee members present. In either case, 75% of the School Committee members must be present at the meeting for a binding vote to occur.

3. A member community is permitted to withdraw if approved by a majority of representatives on the School Committee.
4. Responsibility for the capital budget is determined as follows: 50% will be based on the four-year rolling average enrollment, 1% will be paid by each member town, and the remainder will be covered by the member towns based upon factors outlined by the state.
5. Any income identified as a contribution to capital costs will be applied to the capital budget to reduce member town obligations.
6. A member town will pay the capital costs for at least one student, even if no student from that town attends Minuteman.
7. Each of the member towns will have to approve any borrowing by the District at Town Meeting.
8. The School Committee is empowered to negotiate terms for capital assessments with any community wanting to join the District.
9. The regional school must be located in a member town, or within five miles of the intersection of Route 2 and Bedford Road in Lincoln. If a community in which the school is located leaves the district, the school may continue to be located in that community.
10. Towns sending out-of-district students must pay their share of both operating and capital costs. This restriction may be waived only by a weighted two-thirds vote of the school committee.
11. Any town seeking to withdraw and announcing this intention by a vote of its Board of Selectmen will be named explicitly in the proposed regional agreement and must vote at Town Meeting to withdraw during the same town meeting at which voters approve the new regional agreement. This constitutes a one-time guarantee that, if the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) approves the proposed agreement, Sudbury would be allowed to withdraw from the Minuteman District.

What do these changes mean for Sudbury?

Let's start with #11. The Sudbury Board of Selectmen has voted to request that Sudbury withdraw from the Minuteman District under the amended agreement. Town Meeting will decide whether to withdraw or not at the February 9 Special Town Meeting.

Why should Sudbury withdraw from the Minuteman District?

The cost of educating a student at Minuteman continues to increase, now costing us about \$25,000 per student per year. By comparison, Lincoln-Sudbury costs about \$15,000 per student per year. Any capital costs incurred by building a new school will be in addition to the \$25,000 per student costs. If Sudbury is a member of the district when the building costs are incurred and leaves the district later, we are still obliged to continue paying our share of those capital costs until the debt is retired. Other vocational schools in the area have desirable programs which our students can attend at lower cost. Under the new weighted voting, our vote would be about 1/16 of the total—significantly less than towns like Arlington, Lexington, and Belmont which send many more students.

Why is the cost of sending a student to Minuteman so high?

Vocational education is generally more expensive than academic education, since it requires more specialized equipment and instructional space. However, the per-pupil cost of educating a student at Minuteman is the highest of all the state vocational schools. In addition, Minuteman admits about 45% of its students from out-of-district. These students currently pay no capital costs, and their tuition is capped by the state at about \$17,000 per year. Minuteman member towns must make up any operating shortfalls for educating these students as part of their annual assessments from Minuteman. In effect, member towns are subsidizing out-of-district students in addition to paying for our own students.

Why should Sudbury NOT withdraw from the Minuteman District?

In-district students have the first choice of their preferred programs; out-of-district students are permitted to enroll in whatever programs remain available after in-district students are enrolled. As a district member, Sudbury would have a seat on the School Committee to direct Minuteman school policy.

What are the options available to Sudbury's vocational students if we choose to withdraw from the Minuteman District?

Sudbury's students can attend approved Chapter 74 (vocational education) programs as out-of-district students. These programs are available at Assabet Valley Regional Vocational in Marlborough, Nashoba Valley Regional Vocational in Westford, and South Middlesex Regional Vocational (Keefe Tech) in Framingham. Sudbury students could also attend Minuteman as out-of-district students. The Vocational Education Options Committee has visited each of these schools, and believes they all offer an excellent vocational education for their students.

If Sudbury withdraws from the Minuteman District, what happens to our students who are currently attending Minuteman?

They will be allowed to complete their program at Minuteman.

I've heard that new regulations allow Minuteman to charge a capital fee for out-of-district students. Won't that require students from non-member towns to cover their costs?

Under the new regulations, Minuteman may charge a capital fee of between \$7,000 and \$8,000 per student for out-of-district students attending Minuteman, in addition to their tuition. This is a significant incentive for non-member towns which currently send large numbers of students to Minuteman not to send students to Minuteman but, rather, to accommodate these students at in-district vocational programs or to send them to other less-expensive schools.

Won't the new school be filled with in-district students?

Minuteman member towns currently send 388 in-district students to Minuteman. MSBA projected in 2012 that by 2020 the Minuteman district will send 435 students to Minuteman. However, MSBA also approved a plan for the new school with a capacity of 628 students, stating that they would not support any design for a school of less than 600 students. Filling this school will require continued significant out-of-district enrollment at Minuteman. Minuteman expresses optimism that with an attractive new facility the school will fill from within the district. The concern is that the MSBA projections are correct, and Minuteman's overstated. In that case the school committee may offer discounted rates to out-of-district students to attract sufficient numbers to fill the school, requiring the district towns to cover the shortfalls between the amounts charged and the cost of educating the students.

If we vote on February 9 both to approve the new regional agreement and to withdraw from Minuteman, does that mean we've withdrawn?

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) must also approve the new regional agreement for it to become effective. DESE will not approve it until all the towns currently in the district have adopted it; however, the Department has reviewed the new agreement and given preliminary approval.

If we vote on February 9 to approve the new regional agreement but do NOT vote to withdraw from Minuteman, what happens?

Assuming that all sixteen towns adopt the new regional agreement, Sudbury continues as a member of the Minuteman District under the new regional agreement and votes upon the proposed capital article for the new Minuteman school building at the Annual Town Meeting in May. We will, at that time, know the number and composition of the Minuteman District and be able to calculate our precise capital costs for the building project.

What if not all the towns in the Minuteman District approve the new regional agreement?

If all 16 towns do not approve the new regional agreement, then Minuteman would continue to operate under the existing agreement. To raise funds for the new school Minuteman would attempt to get approval for the building project under the existing (1970) agreement, probably by holding a district-wide election prior to June 30, 2016. Let's hope it doesn't come to that.