

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OPTIONS COMMITTEE
School Tours Subcommittee
Minutes of Meeting on November 20, 2014
Thompson Room, Flynn Building
322 Concord Road, Sudbury

Present: John Baranowsky, Pat Brown, Elena Kleifges, David Levington,
Dave Manjarrez, Scott Nassa

Absent: Paul Lynch

Pat Brown drafted the minutes for this subcommittee meeting.

The meeting convened at 7:00 P.M.

Discussion:

During the past month, members of a subgroup of the Vocational Education Options Committee have visited one or more of the following four schools:

1. Nashoba Valley Technical High School (Westford)
2. Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School (Marlborough)
3. Joseph P. Keefe Regional Technical School (Framingham)
(also called the South Middlesex Regional Vocational School)
4. Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School (Lexington)

During the tours of these facilities led by administration and staff members we were considering:

- 1) Which vocational and academic services valuable to the students from Sudbury considering a vocational education do these schools provide?
- 2) How would we rank these schools with respect to one another as an option for Sudbury students?
- 3) Various contributory factors included:
 - a) Commitment to standards by the management team
 - b) The range of offerings, both academic and vocational
 - c) A sustainable business model for capital and operating costs
 - d) A focus on students
 - e) The services that the school will provide within those factors it can control
 - f) What circumstances affect the school that it can not control
 - g) Can the school accommodate Sudbury's students?

The following discussion highlighted characteristics of the schools (in no particular order):

- Nashoba has a “small school environment” which we found attractive. The superintendent is approaching retirement, and will probably promote her replacement from within. The school is roughly the same distance from Sudbury as Minuteman Regional. The presence of the engineering academy was attractive. The performing arts program, not just acting but backstage and broadcast production skills, was specific to Nashoba. The superintendent and administration is very politically active at the state level. Nashoba recently completed a major renovation and will use an MSBA grant to replace its roof soon.
- Assabet leadership will transition soon; the current superintendent returned after her replacement moved on after a year. The size of this school contributes to its exceptionally broad range of offerings and the range of equipment available to its students. Assabet also has an impressive engineering academy. It is closer to Sudbury than either Minuteman or Nashoba, reducing travel time and costs. There is a strong health and nursing program. Assabet is currently engaged in a \$60 million renovation program under its current regional agreement.
- Keefe’s vocational program is more traditional than that of the other schools we visited. Further, we sensed that the school was not actively seeking placements from out-of-town systems. Keefe has no language program, and no Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- Minuteman offers an impressive array of programs, but the physical plant is not attractive. Plans for a new or updated facility await approval by the district. The nature and size of the new facility, as well as its funding, are still in flux. Minuteman charges a fee for Special Education (SPED) students to both member and non-member towns; this may be changing but details are not available yet.

Generally, all the schools—both administrators and teachers—showed a strong sense of pride in their institutions, which they were enthusiastic to show us and very generous with their time and their follow-up. The kids we spoke with were also articulate supporters of their schools and pleased with their experiences. The subcommittee was very impressed with the opportunities offered in the vocational programs, the dual vocational/academic education permitting students to develop both hands-on

and intellectual skills. Many of us were surprised that over 50% of students in all of these vocational schools went on to two or four year colleges; indeed, some programs (e.g. biotech) require and expect a college degree for career placement. All the schools showed creditable MCAS performance, and all except Minuteman were planning on administering PARCC as well. The generally higher per-pupil education costs associated with providing the equipment used for metal-working, carpentry, robotics, laboratory work, and other programs were offset in part by various relationships with local industries and employers. All of the schools have the capacity to admit vocational students from Sudbury. Generally, the preferred path would be to send our students as tuition (non-member) students for a few years to allow us to test how the relationship with the new school would work, and then to proceed to join the district when our experience and future needs warrant it.

David Levington obtained statements from parents and former graduates of the vocational program at Minuteman, indicating a very high degree of satisfaction with their experience. It is difficult to determine how much of this satisfaction is due to the specific programs at Minuteman and how much is attributable to the vocational experience itself.

Questions addressed:

- 1) Are there vocational options outside the Minuteman Regional School District that would serve the needs of Sudbury students?
Yes, basically any of the schools we visited present an attractive vocational and academic offering.
- 2) How would we rank the alternatives to Minuteman based upon our site visits?
 - a) Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School
 - b) Nashoba Valley Technical High School
 - c) Joseph P. Keefe Regional Technical School

The subcommittee ranked Assabet ahead of Nashoba primarily on the basis of the size and concomitant breadth of offerings and its proximity to Sudbury (affecting both time and cost of transporting students). Nashoba was a very compelling second choice, while Keefe presents an excellent alternative that does not generate the enthusiasm of the top two choices.

Items recommending Assabet include:

- Language offerings (considering Mandarin)
- Global Certification
- Availability of Advanced Placement courses
- The Engineering Academy
- High level of female students (55 male/45 female)
- Health program, including nursing
- Level 2 school (one student away from level1)
- State of the art engineering facilities
- Engages in competitions (including SkillsUSA)
- Low instructor turnover, particularly technical instructors
- Many and varied elective offerings
- Breadth of programs
- Positive learning environment
- Offers both auto-body and auto-repair programs
- Close to Sudbury
- College psychology course offered through Quinsigamond College

The subcommittee agreed with this recommendation, and will present it to the overall Vocational Education Options Committee at its meeting on December 4.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Brown

Draft 1 November 24, 2014

Draft 2 November 29, 2014