



BOJ
Approved
AKC



August 28, 2003

Acton Board of Selectmen
c/o Town Manager Donald Johnson
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

Dear Board Members:

I am providing this report to keep you informed on Acton/Minuteman issues. The news is:

1. On May 2, we formally notified you and the Town Manager and the Finance Committee that an unexpected (and in our view unfair) change in state minimums for our assessment base had forced a change in the Acton assessment figure for FY 2004. That notice complied with change guidelines and time schedules distributed by the state because of the statewide chaos created.
2. In recent meetings, some town committee members have expressed surprise at the changed assessments now approved in more than the necessary 2/3 of member towns. They are not happy with the change in Acton, and, of course, neither are those of us at Minuteman.
3. Chuck Olmstead and I have presented reports to the FINCOM on this. I have attached some of these reports for your review.

Please let me know if you would like any additional information on this matter. I would be pleased to supply more information or to attend a meeting to answer questions at your discretion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ron Fitzgerald
Superintendent

Minuteman Regional High School

758 Marrett Road ▾ Lexington, MA 02421-7313 ▾ tel: 781-861-6500 ▾ fax: 781-863-1747 ▾ TDD: 781-861-2922 ▾ www.minuteman.org

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

A. Basic * Assessment by Agreement

*NOTE: Does not include special program (SPED) addition, local middle school service, or CHOICE pass-through charges.

- Voted by member towns when joining the district.
- Assessment = (Budget-Revenue) $\left(\frac{\# \text{ Town Students}}{\text{Total Member Town Students}} \right)$

B. State System Replacing #1 Under Education Reform Law Unless #1 Retained by Town Meeting Vote in ALL Member Towns

1. Determine each member town's minimum calculated by the state = local S
2. Assessment = (Budget - Revenue - total S) $\left(\frac{\# \text{ Town Students}}{\text{Total Member Town Students}} \right) + \text{local S}$

NOTE: "A" was voted by 15 of 16 member towns but rejected by Arlington.

C. Superintendent's Agreement with Town

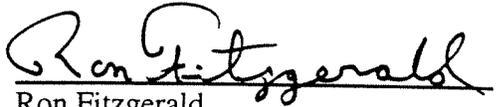
The superintendent's agreement was not a guarantee on the \$820,000 figure. It was what the motion said:

1. The Town would act with the intent of approving our budget.
2. The assessment amount would be \$825,918 (or less).
3. If that assessment amount changed, we would have to come to the town for new action.

Minuteman and the superintendent have remained true to this agreement.

Be aware that:

1. We had no idea that state calculations would change again as they did.
2. We are following the agreement and state law on coming back with no budget change but with assessment change just as has been done in regions all across the state thrown into chaos by changing state figures.
3. The only added factor now is that over 2/3 of member towns have approved revised budget/assessment figures, placing the entire package in approved status at this time.
4. Many of us do not agree with the impact of state calculations which are clearly unfair, in conflict with our original agreement, and in conflict with the expressed votes in 15 member towns. However, we have been forced into having to follow the state assessment system.


Ron Fitzgerald
Superintendent



August 27, 2003

Mr. Gim Hom
Fincom Chairman
14 Robert Rd
Acton, MA 01720

Thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Committee yesterday. I add these thoughts for Committee consideration:

1. Acton is not the community harmed most by the state system as you can see on attachment "C." However, you are "right on" in judging the system completely unfair.
2. I certainly hope that the town will expend its energy and time lobbying and working with us for a constructive solution, not one that attempts to "solve" it by withdrawing support from youngsters. The latter would create more problems, not solve the situation at all. In that context, I have attached my separate report to the School Committee on the topic.
3. Finally, I hope everyone realizes that, despite the state minimum impact, Acton is still getting good value for its investment. If the community had to find other appropriate and productive placements for its 52.8% SPED population in Minuteman, it would spend far more than the \$93,637 difference caused by the state minimums. More generally, ALL Acton student enrollees benefit greatly from the career education.
4. In summary, I agree with expressions of displeasure but hope that this will finally get translated into Acton joining us in working for a compromise or legislative solution along the path I am recommending to everyone. Frankly, as the advance copy of a REPORT ON MAJOR FACTORS THREATENING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE AT MINUTEMAN (which I've also enclosed) shows, the school needs unity and help from its member towns because of a collection of serious events.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you want my attendance or more information for any future meeting. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ron Fitzgerald
Superintendent

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August 27, 2003

Subject: Separate Comments on Impact of
State Assessment System

To: School Committee Members

Look carefully at the attached state calculation of minimums. See my handwritten minimum cost/pupil calculation.

This system solved our Arlington deficit. It unfairly hurt other towns. (Chuck and I met with the Fincom on the evening of 8-26.) This factor:

1. Could eventually disrupt district unity if one or more towns reacts by withholding support from youngsters instead of joining in solving the problem.
2. Needs to be corrected by UNIFIED action.

This is not an Arlington vs. 15 other town issue. We need to get past that previous reaction and recognize that:

1. No matter what rationale is presented, the differences in minimum cost/pupil are indefensible.
2. If this destroys unity and support for youngsters and devastates the school, every town's citizens will suffer the loss.
3. Minuteman cannot solve it alone. Our towns, our legislators, some top state leaders must care enough to define and implement a solution.

To start, our School Committee should take the initiative again. The process I suggest is:

1. Form new sub-committees this year:
 - a. A legislative sub-committee (staff support = Tom Markham)

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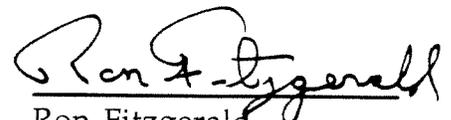
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C-1

- b. A budget-assessment sub-committee (staff support = Ron Fitzgerald, Jan Killeen)
 - c. An internal operations sub-committee focused on programs, negotiations, facilities, etc. (staff support = varies with topic)
2. Define specific missions and objectives for each sub-committee. For example, the budget-assessment sub-committee should start with a focus on promoting a solution to the assessment quandary in a sequence perhaps like this:
- a. Full School Committee discussion
 - b. Definition of options
 - c. Meeting with fincom and selectmen representatives again
 - d. Meeting with legislators (coordinate through legislative sub-committee)
 - e. Lobbying for a legislative solution.

I can offer suggestions for your consideration on the other sub-committees. However, I'll want to see if the concept advanced here appeals to you. Also the primary focus of this memorandum is the divisive assessment problem. Our school deserves and needs a better management context from the state and our towns. I believe most towns and our legislators will want to help with this and that we must try again and again until a decent management context is provided for our school and its youngsters. We each need to speak out against the "easy" approach of getting angry at Minuteman or suggesting no support for youngsters in vocational education and speak for the more difficult approach of a changed law or agreement.

Of course, change is especially difficult here because under the divisive system there are "winners" and "losers." The "winners" tend to resist any change across the entire state. However, a "win-lose" school management context represents a failure of government and our democratic system and ultimately a loss for all including youngsters.


Ron Fitzgerald
Superintendent

Final FY04 Chapter 70 Aid and Net School Spending Requirements

- Advance Notice: Regional Districts

330 - MINUTEMAN OR [Download File](#)

Forms the base for assessment

830 - MINUTEMAN

06/23/03

Member City & Town	B FY04 Foundation Enrollment	FY04 Foundation Budget	A FY04 Net Minimum Contribution	Minimum/Pupil = A/B
2 ACTON	41	464,494	501,272	-12,226
10 ARLINGTON	140	1,584,045	965,245	-6,895
26 BELMONT	27	309,663	391,059	-14,484
34 BOLTON	15	166,742	172,947	-11,530
37 BOXBOROUGH	11	119,101	20,086	-1,826
51 CARLISLE	7	83,371	53,765	-7,681
67 CONCORD	12	131,011	229,706	-19,142
78 DOVER	2	23,820	30,174	-15,087
147 LANCASTER	34	381,124	454,637	-13,372
155 LEXINGTON	43	488,315	517,628	-12,038
157 LINCOLN	7	83,371	70,970	-16,139
199 NEEDHAM	22	250,112	159,545	-7,252
286 STOW	51	571,685	467,925	-9,175
288 SUDBURY	20	226,292	109,159	-5,458
315 WAYLAND	9	107,191	83,072	-9,230
330 WESTON	2	23,820	9,242	-4,621
999 District Total	443	5,014,157	4,236,432	2,052,990 6,289,422

1. The variation is indefensible and far out of proportion to "equalization".
2. Multi-year averaging could soften enrollment shifts, but that is not the problem here.
3. The Weston base 4621/pupil; Lancaster 13,372 !! This state management context is distorted, divisive, and wrong. It creates negative reactions. Hardly the proper government gift to give youngsters in schools.
Tom Fitzgerald 