

Quest for Expansion 1998 - 2005

In 1974, the North Shore Regional Vocational School District, which was established in 1972, failed to pass a referendum vote which would have funded 15.5 million dollars for the construction of a new regional vocational high school. With that failure, the North Shore Regional Vocational School District became the only vocational school in Massachusetts **not** to take advantage of the combined federal and state funding for construction of regional vocational schools.

The failure of the referendum forced the school district to rent space in a former shoe factory in Beverly for the next 20 years.

In 1992 a manufacturing building in Middleton was acquired by the North Shore Regional Vocational School District for three million dollars. It was subsequently converted for another two and one half million dollars into the present North Shore Technical High School.

The 2.5 million dollar figure was determined, not by the needs of the students, but by calculating the annual rent for the leased facility in Beverly. The amount proved to be woefully inadequate; creating a school facility with a capacity for only 400 students without benefit of chemistry labs, ball fields, an auditorium or a gymnasium.

To address their space needs the School District, in 1998 commissioned the Mount Vernon Group, Inc. of Gloucester to prepare and present a School Expansion Feasibility Study from which a schematic design and detailed cost estimates were prepared. This was to provide the basis for a bonding request to the District's 16 communities.

The Mount Vernon Group report stated that "because the school's programs were superimposed upon the space limitations of an existing building, several areas are undersized; while some needed programs do not exist." The report further stated that "many student learning areas are either under-sized or non existent. There is no auditorium, a cafeteria with a seating capacity of only 150, and no chemical storage space." In addition, there was a "continuous need for upgrades to the physical plant, due to code requirements (ADA) and systems deterioration."

Due to the enrollment projections of 3 percent per year, (the District's population was projected to grow to 460 in ten years and to 618 by 2013,) a design for a renovated facility with the capacity for additional education programs and space for over 200 additional students was presented to the school committee and voted upon. The plan received unanimous support and the cost of the new facility was expected to be \$32,829,000.

In 1998, members of the school administration and building committee were in the process of attending finance committee meetings within its 16 communities when, at the request of several area legislators, they put their plans on hold and withdrew their request for warrant and bond, to pursue the possibility of a merger between North Shore Regional Vocational School District and The Essex Agricultural Institute.

This request was a direct result of Chapter 300 (the abolition of Essex, Hampshire and Berkshire counties in 1998.) In a memo date 12/1/98, Commissioner of Education David Driscoll, stated that as a result of Chapter 300 “ a new governance and financing plan for the Essex Agricultural and Technical Institute will be needed.”

In April of 1999, Commission Driscoll stated in a letter to Senator Fred Berry and Beverly Mayor William Scanlon, that a planning committee should be established to study the possibility of a merger between the two schools . To defray the cost of a study, the Commissioner recommended the addition of \$100,000 to line item 7052-0006 of FY2000 state budget earmarked for this purpose. The *Merger Study Advisory Committee* was formed to oversee this. The committee’s work resulted in a report, submitted by MGT of America, outlining three merger options:

1. Option 1 – Separate schools on the same site. Projected cost \$61,472,000
2. Option 2 - Combined academics/separate vocational programs school on same site
Projected cost \$45,993.000
3. Option 3 – One school with unified campus Projected cost \$89,949.000

At the conclusion of the Merger Study Advisory Committee meeting in June, a motion from the floor was made to nominate a manageable, seven to eleven member sub-committee to further explore the consultants’ report and any local issues raised. This sub-committee was charged with recommending future action to the full Merger Study Advisory Committee.

The *Merger Study Sub-Committee* was named and authorized to proceed expeditiously and the first meeting of the sub-committee was held on August 9, 2000. During the next several months many issues were identified and addressed. The most notable accomplishment was the unanimous vote to pursue a unified/merged regional agricultural/technical school on the Essex Agricultural site.

To that end, legislation was filed in March 2002 by Senator Fred Berry which was to provide \$500,000 to the Division of Capital Asset Management for the preparation of a master plan site and feasibility study for the proposed district. To the best of my knowledge, less than half of the original amount was appropriated and of that, the architectural firm of Design Partnership in Cambridge received only \$75,000. The study was to include preliminary designs and cost estimates for such renovation and re-use of existing buildings as well as the construction of new buildings.

In 2004 Design Partnership presented Phase One of the feasibility study. This was a general overview including educational specifications, space program analysis of existing use, a site evaluation and siting alternatives. They provided the committee with three alternatives. The subcommittee voted to go forward on new construction on the north side of route 62 with a cost estimate of approximately 81.2 million dollars.

In December, 2004, Senator Berry filed further legislation which called for the merger of the two schools, defining a both a **Temporary Oversight Board** and the governance structure of the new school district. It further defined the procedure for existing members to vote for the

merger, and included a requirement for the School Building Authority to report on the conditions necessary to facilitate the opening of the school. The Temporary Oversight Board member were named in 2005 and to date, have met five times.

North Shore Technical High School, despite its overcrowded conditions, provides an exceptional educational opportunity for students on the North Shore. During the time that three separate boards, conceived to facilitate the merger and construction of a new school have met and discussed and reported, we have added playing fields to our property, purchased two portable classroom units to house programs, re-configured a special education program to create an electrical shop, updated an ineffective HVAC system and are presently replacing a failed septic system. These changes and renovations have led to:

- Our applications, for just 120 seats in the freshman class numbering over 350.
- Our academic programs putting us in the enviable position of making AYP (adequate yearly progress) every year due to our high scores on the MCAS exam.
- Our technical programs providing much needed skilled workers and craftsmen for the North Shore area, earning us the support of the North Shore Chamber of Commerce.

In conclusion, North Shore Regional School District has proceeded for several years to pursue this merger with the expectation of a successful conclusion. With every year that passes, over 200 students with the desire to access technical education on the North Shore are denied that access. These students are the future electricians, computer network administrators, plumbers, carpenters, cosmetologists, chef's, masons, machinists and commercial artists that will feed the economy on the North Shore.

The construction of a merged agricultural and vocational school that serves over 25 communities will be an efficient and effective use of taxpayer's dollars. It will help provide communities with easier access to needed services. It will maximize efficiency of public and private community resources for education and job creation.

An educated workforce is critical to increasing productivity and fostering innovation. The Department of Labor states that *knowledge based* jobs (those requiring vocational or post secondary training) are expected to grow to 33 percent of the total employment market by 2006. Areas with a more educated workforce will capitalize on this growth.

Respectfully submitted,

Amelia P.O'Malley, Superintendent
North Shore Regional School District

