

NORTHEAST METROPOLITAN REGIONAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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David S. DiBarri
Superintendent-Director

Mr. David Hoff, Chair
City of Melrose, Commission on Disability
562 Main Street
Melrose, MA 02176

RE: New Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical School

January 17, 2023

Dear Mr. Hoff:

We are in receipt of your January 3, 2023 letter to Mr. Jack McCarthy of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). In response to the MSBA's request, we are responding to your letter.

Thank you for your concerns on behalf of individuals with disabilities regarding the accessibility of the future Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical School. In response to the concerns raised, we offer the following:

Our proposed project is designed to fully comply with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board Regulations (521 CMR). Specifically, the accessible route from the upper campus to the lower playing fields which concerns you is compliant with 521 CMR 20.00: Accessible Route, 521 CMR 24.00: Ramps, and 521 CMR 27.00 Stairs. Furthermore, it conforms to Universal Design principles by providing a common path of travel for all individuals to the extent possible.

In addition, let me reassure you that our staff will also make accommodations to utilize the convenient and compliant parking and loading zones at the upper and lower campuses to transport people with disabilities by vehicle, if necessary; a common practice between academic and athletic facilities on large campuses.

We duly note your concern about the safety of all students in regard to the maintenance requirements that this accessible route will require. Pedestrian and vehicular routes have been designed to allow appropriate snow removal equipment and the maintenance requirements have been reviewed with our facilities staff. We in the administration will ensure that this route is kept clear and passable at all times.

We also call your attention to the fact that our existing campus has similar challenges (stairs, ramps, hillsides) currently and our staff has experience in dealing with these maintenance issues. Also, we note that there is only one location (not two) where the accessible route between the upper and lower campus crosses the main driveway (not a road). At this location, compliant markings and signage will be provided.

We also note your suggestion to relocate our proposed building to a different location on our property. We can assure you that our Feasibility Study process as dictated by the MSBA was rigorous, comprehensive, and thoughtful. Numerous design and programming options were considered, and detailed criteria developed to evaluate the many options objectively. The current proposed project was overwhelmingly supported as the preferred option by our Building Committee, our School Committee, and ultimately approved by the MSBA Board of Directors. It is the project that was overwhelming approved by the voters throughout our 12-town region. It is the project that is currently progressing through the permitting process.

In regard to your concern with our Special Education program, we believe that you are misinterpreting the data. The proposed project includes 7,070 square feet of Special Education Space. The MSBA template includes 9,060 sf; the difference is only 1,990 sf (not 9,060 as you state).

Yes, Northeast Metro Tech does have a high percentage of students with Individual Education Plans, but comparing our proposed space allocations to the MSBA Space Summary template is not a proper indicator of our responsiveness to the needs of these students. The MSBA template is not prescriptive of space needs; they are generic guidelines with no reference to Northeast's curriculum or educational delivery model. Here at Northeast we pride ourselves on our inclusionary approach of delivering services to special needs students. Therefore, we have no substantially-separate programs with students in dedicated full-size classrooms (which the MSBA template allows). With the inclusion model our special needs students are integrated to the greatest extent possible into academic classrooms, often accompanied by aides. Supplemental services, when needed, are provided in more personalized settings in small group rooms and resource rooms. This methodology results in more efficient use of space. We would suggest to you that our responsiveness to student needs is better measured by our students' high graduation rates and post-high school success than by the amount of space devoted to Special Education.

We therefore reiterate our belief that this is the right project for the students in the Northeast region.

Sincerely,
Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical School



David DiBarri, Superintendent

Cc: J. McCarthy, MSBA