

## PATHFINDER REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT 2015

The Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School District Committee presents this report to the citizens of the District. Currently the Committee consists of 11 members: two members each from Belchertown and Palmer and one each from the remaining towns. Michael Cavanaugh and David Droz, both from Palmer, continue to serve as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively. Lorraine F. Alves continues to serve as secretary. Ashley Boudreau will serve another year as student representative.

### **CURRICULUM**

Based on the most recent MCAS scores, Pathfinder has continued to improve on narrowing the proficiency gaps, showing an increase in the graduation rate and a decrease in the number of dropouts for the 2014-2015 school year. However, Pathfinder has been designated as a "Level 3 School" by the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. This designation means that, despite the improvement in MCAS scores, there are subgroups of the student population (e.g., students with special needs; students with disabilities) that have not made sufficient progress toward "Proficiency" as expected by the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education.

As one strategy to increase academic rigor, honors level courses were added in all core academic areas in our ninth grade programs. In addition to the honors programs, online learning has been embraced to provide additional academic offerings to ensure students' continued academic success. Advanced Placement opportunities will be added to the program of studies for the 2016-2017 school year.

Pathfinder has continued to make advancements in technical offerings as well. All fifteen career areas have adopted the most recent state frameworks. Pathfinder continues to review all areas of curriculum for the staff and provides professional development opportunities to ensure they remain current in all areas of instruction.

### **2015 SKILLS USA**

Pathfinder is a "Total Participation" school, and all students are registered with both the state and national *SkillsUSA* organizations.

Pathfinder had been a member of the District 6, Western Mass. Qualifying Event held at McCann Technical High School since the districts were realigned six years ago. That alignment increased the number of schools from four to six. This past year, Pathfinder was moved to the District 5, Central District, because of proximity to Bay Path Regional in Charlton, and also to make room for two more schools that joined the West District Region. This new alignment has created a significantly more competitive event for Pathfinder than among schools in the previous configuration. .

**The District 5 Qualifying Competition** was held at Bay Path Regional Technical High School on March 11, 2015. Pathfinder brought 97 students to the event, competing in 30 different areas. The results netted the students 12 medals, including 1 gold, 7 silver and 4 bronze. Medal winners represented the following shops: Machine/Manufacturing, Collision Repair, Electrical, Cosmetology and Programming and Web Design.

**The State *SkillsUSA* Competition** was held the weekend of April 30 – May 2, 2015, at the Best Western Royal Plaza, in Marlboro and at Blackstone Valley Regional Technical High School. Pathfinder brought eight students who had qualified at the Districts in six technical areas and an additional three students who competed in two fields that had no qualifying event. The results netted Pathfinder 4 bronze medals in two technical areas--CNC Technician and Automated Manufacturing.

## **SELECTED MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS:**

### Collision Repair Technology:

- Belchertown Fire Department: Students continued to work on the refinishing of a Chevrolet Tahoe fire emergency vehicle.

### Machine Technology:

- Students machined several cribbage boards as donations to fundraisers for non-profit organizations. The students also machined several clocks. Recipients included:

Palmer Public Library  
Top Floor Learning, Palmer  
Machine Technology "Poker Run" (Pathfinder fundraiser)  
Pathfinder Car Show (*Skills USA* fundraiser)  
Local Retiring School and Town Officials

### Cosmetology:

- Cosmetology students continued their annual visits to area Senior Centers during which they provided "Spa Days" for seniors. The services they offered included manicures, pedicures, facials, and hair styles. Currently the cosmetology students provide these services in Palmer, Ware, Monson and Belchertown.

### Carpentry:

- Students completed a reception/entrance circulation desk for the Granby Public Library.

### Automotive Reconditioning:

- Auto Reconditioning students provided services for police, highway, fire and water districts.

### Horticulture:

- Horticulture students removed fallen trees and debris from cemeteries and town owned properties in several district towns.

## **COOPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Fifty One (51) students participated in the school's Cooperative Education Program which provides opportunities for paid, career-related jobs *in lieu* of attending their vocational classes. In this real work environment, the students enhanced their technical skills, developed interpersonal skills, and experienced valuable lessons in maintaining a balance among their personal lives, school academics, and their jobs. Co-op continues to be an excellent pathway to full-time employment.

A strong effort to work with area businesses and to strengthen Advisory Committees has been a driving force in obtaining cooperative education placements. The school is committed to providing students with this invaluable opportunity and intends to work closely with area businesses to continually expand the program.

## **STUDENT BODY**

Pathfinder's enrollment as of October 1, 2015 totaled 619 students, including the following numbers from member towns: Belchertown 104; Granby 19; Hardwick 24; Monson 101; New Braintree 11; Oakham 11; Palmer 155; Ware 94; and Warren 46. The remaining students were residents of out-of-district communities, the largest number of students coming from Ludlow (22). The 619 figure on October 1st represents a decrease of 1 student overall from the number reported on October 1, 2014.

In order to better meet students' needs and to more effectively accommodate parents, the Special Education and Guidance Department have been combined under a Pupil Personnel Director.

The Pupil Services Office—which also serves as the Admissions Office—once again received far more applications for the 180 ninth grade openings than the school could accommodate. Transfer opportunities into the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grades were also very limited. Consequently, the school experienced another year of waiting lists for each grade.

This school year students from all member districts visited Pathfinder on the Monday before Thanksgiving, and it was a great success. In early October, guidance counselors were invited to attend a breakfast meeting designed specifically to update them about the admissions policies and the new online application procedures. In October and November, Pathfinder's guidance counselors visited the 8th graders in member towns to provide an in-depth presentation about Pathfinder's offerings and the application process. In November, an evening Open House event was held for 5th-8th graders and their parents. The event featured a free dinner and a tour of the facility, including a visit to technical areas of interest.

During the pre-Thanksgiving date, interested students were invited to participate in a field trip with their school counselor to visit Pathfinder and get a first-hand look at technical programs, facilities, and to interact with current students. This visit is a great opportunity for the students to experience a typical day at Pathfinder. This year a larger number of students participated in these tours than the previous year. Students also had the opportunity to apply for September admission during their visit.

The Pathfinder Chapter of the National Technical Honor Society inducted a deserving group of new and existing members in an impressive ceremony. To qualify, students must have a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.5 or above and exhibit the qualities of skill, honesty, service, responsibility, scholarship, citizenship, and leadership. The induction ceremony is held in early spring so that senior inductees can include this recognition on college, scholarship, and work applications. The Chapter continued the practice of inviting as guests underclass students who had a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and who demonstrated potential for induction into the Society.

At the twenty-ninth Annual "Outstanding Vocational-Technical Student" awards dinner sponsored by the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA) and the Massachusetts Vocational Association (MVA), Electrical Student Michael Desjardins, of Ware, was Pathfinder's honoree. Michael is a remarkable young man with an unwavering work ethic. He was the top student in his class and had earned a cumulative GPA of 3.89. He had received a myriad of academic and technical awards for excellence and outstanding achievement throughout his high school career. Michael was also awarded the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship based on his excellent MCAS scores. He was a two-year member of the National Technical Honor Society. After graduation, Michael planned to attend Springfield Technical Community College majoring in Electrical Engineering while joining the Air Force Reserves.

The recipient of the M.A.S.S. Academic Excellence Award for Pathfinder was Shannon Kennedy, Of Palmer, who was an exceptional student in the Carpentry Program. Shannon ranked second in her class with a cumulative GPA of 3.788. Shannon, too, was awarded the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship this year based on her excellent MCAS scores. She was a two-year member of the National Technical Honor Society. Shannon planned to further her education after Pathfinder, majoring in Architecture.

In June 2015, the graduating class of 128 students received diplomas and technical certificates at commencement exercises. Fifty-one (51) graduates received awards totaling \$27,150.00 during the ceremony. \$224,000.00 was offered through scholarships, awards and grants to some of our graduates from the colleges and universities where they had been offered admission. Once again, state and local organizations and businesses, post-secondary institutions, as well as private individuals, continued to recognize the ability and potential of Pathfinder graduates in the form of generous donations. The school committee, administration-- and particularly the graduates-- are grateful for this support and are especially proud of the number of awards that have been made to honor the memory of former Pathfinder students and staff members.

### PUPIL SERVICES

Nicole Heroux serves as the Director of Pupil Services. Pupil Services is comprised of both the Special Education and Guidance Departments.

Mrs. Heroux scrutinized the school's programs for Special Education, English Language Learners and Civil Rights.in preparation for the Coordinated Program Review by staff from the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. During that review, Pathfinder was recognized for the strengths it has in its programs. The findings of the CPR were substantially improved over those from five years ago, and DESE staff members were complimentary regarding progress that has been made.

The Department continues to be committed to finding opportunities to offer different pathways to learning so that the diverse ability levels of the students might be accommodated. The guidance staff is working on revising the College and Career Readiness for students' best interests when it comes to their emotional and educational well-being.

The Special Education Department strives to address the needs of *all* learners in grades 9-12. Through continued integrated efforts with students, parents, and other student support services, the Department focuses on promoting each student's self-awareness, ability to self-advocate, and sense of self sufficiency. All students admitted to Pathfinder are expected to fulfill the same requirements to receive a high school diploma as in local town high schools, and all students must have access to all academic and vocational programs. The staff at Pathfinder continues to work to develop an appropriate education for the students who were previously in the Substantially Separate program to insure their success at the school.

Team chairpersons conducted Team evaluations, annual reviews and re-evaluations for over 157 special needs students. The Pupil Services Department continued to be responsible for approximately 50 students who have 504 Accommodation Plans. Section 504 is a federal civil rights law which requires the provision of reasonable accommodations to students and staff who qualify as disabled under the law.

Work continued on the collaboration between special and general educators. Vocational and academic teachers have been receiving professional development on Differentiating Instruction and how to work with students with Social Emotional needs.

## **STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

Over the course of the school year, students worked together to plan a trip to New York City to see a Broadway show. During the planning, they needed to familiarize themselves with school rules pertaining to field trips, obtain estimates for things like buses and theater tickets, and also make a plan for this enormous undertaking. Students had to raise the \$2,000 cost of the trip themselves by having multiple dances, participating in a staff -supported senior initiative, and designing a Donors Choose website. Students also took the initiative to do some public speaking in front of the Pathfinder School Committee to explain their motives for planning this trip and to gain approval for out- of- state travel. In April, the students enjoyed the sights and sounds of New York City by beginning their day in Rockefeller Center, taking in a performance, and having dinner in the city before returning to Pathfinder that night.

Horticulture students participated in the FFA State Convention held at the Sturbridge Host Hotel. They participated in Floriculture, Team and Single Demonstrations, Job Interview and Science Project. They also competed in Safe Equipment/Tractor Operation, Forestry, Turf Management, and Arbor skills throughout the school year. Attendance at this event was supported by several fund raising activities throughout the year. Other Career Development Events were held at Technical High Schools throughout Massachusetts. Pathfinder boasts 100% FFA membership, including students in all four grades. Students are currently contemplating attending the National Convention this year.

Three blood drives were held during the year, the most recent taking place in November with 57 donors registered. After deferrals, 11 units of red cells and 34 pints of whole blood were donated for a grand total of 46 pints of blood. Since each pint of blood may help save the lives of up to 3 people, potentially 138 patients were helped!

The school's third annual Craft Fair was held in November, sponsored by the senior class with their advisers, Mrs. Rugg and Mr. Robertson. It featured over 35 vendors and various forms of crafts from the surrounding local area, filling not only the gym but the cafeteria as well.

The Breakfast with Santa was held on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and sponsored by the Business Technology students and staff. Children were able to meet with Santa and tell him their wishes as well as enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast served up by students, staff, and administration.

Once again, the Student Council ran a very successful Thanksgiving food drive. The donations were as follows: 58 Turkeys and 1451 boxed/canned goods.

## **ATHLETICS**

Participation numbers remained consistent with approximately 175 students taking part athletic programs. Of concern was the major decrease in freshman boys' participation in football and soccer. The co-op programs in wrestling and swimming with Ware and Palmer High Schools continued.

In 2015 the varsity girls' soccer, basketball, and softball teams qualified for the Western Mass. Tournament. The varsity baseball team qualified for both the Western Mass. and State Vocational tournaments and advanced to the second round of the Western Mass tournament.

Austin LeClerc and Sophia Hess were named the outstanding male and female athletes, respectively for 2015.

**GRANTS, DONATIONS AND CONTRACTS 2015**

Program Name	Amount	Application
Title 1	\$142,457	Retain Title 1 ELA instructor; purchase 4 Smart Boards, Summer Transition Program, Supplies
Title 2	\$22,048	<i>Retaining Highly Qualified Students</i> Professional Development; Math CVTE Trainings; Partial SPED teacher salary; Marzano Training
SPED Improvement Grant	\$5,194	Inclusion Training for Mixed staff
SPED	\$221,902	4 aides' salary; Inclusion Model Instructor; Supplies, E-SPED; one- half salary for on -site School Psychologist.
Perkins	\$99,515	<i>Fit Pick and Place</i> (Electronics Equipment); 2 Smart Boards; MAVA CVTE Conference; New Hospitality Instructor
Vocational Equipment Grant (Perkins)	\$33,139	<i>Pick and Place</i> equipment (Electronics)
Academic Support	\$17,400	Supported 4 week (48 Contact Hours) Project Based MCAS Prep summer program
WIA Program	\$40,414	Supported 5 weeks, @25 hrs./ week summer work for 24 participants; 2 Year- round part-time jobs.
WIA Bonus Program	\$4,600	Provided quarterly bonuses of \$50-100 for WIA participants meeting Pathfinder criteria (grades, attendance)
DSAC Grant	\$9,331	DSAC supported trainings In-House Learning; Embedded Reading and History Research Skills
TOTAL	\$596,002	

## **SPECIAL PROGRAMS**

The Summer Youth Enrichment Program was not offered due to the on-going roof replacement project during which students could not be in the building. The program will return in 2016 with a discounted rate in order to revive the program's enrollment.

Parent and student satisfaction with the Youth Enrichment Programs has been extraordinary. Many students return to the program several times and express regret when they become too old to participate. It serves as an excellent introduction to Pathfinder and its environment.

Pathfinder offered two summer school programs designed to enable students to recover credit needed for their promotion or graduation. The on-line academic summer school ran during the month of July for four weeks, with students being expected to log the equivalent of 40 hours per course. Overall, students from 17 schools (including Pathfinder) completed 100 online courses. Vocational related theory courses ran during one week in July in a classroom setting at the school, requiring students to fulfill 20 hours per course. Three Pathfinder students completed this program.

## **FACULTY AND STAFF**

Currently the Pathfinder staff consists of 43 vocational teachers, 25.5 academic teachers, 1 teaching assistant, 1 part-time Athletic Trainer, 9 special education teachers, 3 counselors, a psychologist, a library-media specialist, a speech & language pathologist, a behavioral specialist, a nurse and 10 paraprofessionals. The school is managed by the Superintendent and a group of 7 professional administrators as well as a full-time grants coordinator. The support staff includes 7 custodians, 11 clerical personnel, and 2 cafeteria workers.

In June, the school said farewell to retiree Louis Disessa (Auto Body Instructor) and to Nick Jorge (IT Director) who departed for another opportunity during the summer. Subsequently Steven Sanders (Electrical Instructor), Josselyn Winter (Electronics Instructor), and Carol Gantor (Paraprofessional) retired during the year.

New Hires included Ashley Puls and Shaun Moriarty (Social Studies); Kevin Sloan (Mathematics); Richard Brown (Electrical); Veronica Darmon (Hospitality); Scott Desroches (Auto Body); Caitlin Phelps (Health Occupations); Lisa Marie Bordenuk, Kendra Wilson and Mary Brothers (Paraprofessionals); Ellen Garrepy (Math Inclusion); and Cole Rogers (IT Director).

Dr. Paist continued to serve on the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators and on the Board of Directors of the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce. An active member of the Assn. for Career & Technical Education, he is one of two Region I Directors for that organization's National Council of Local Administrators

## **BUDGET AND FINANCE**

In February of 2015, the school committee adopted a FY16 budget of \$13,360,207, representing a 1.59% increase over the previous year. Subsequently, Pathfinder's nine member communities unanimously voted favorably on their assessments during their 2015 town meetings, thereby approving the FY16 budget pursuant to the regional school budget statute. (Please note that Pathfinder's budget increased 2.97% in FY14 and decreased 0.34% in FY15).

While the Regional School Transportation reimbursement rate is historically unpredictable, the last five years of reimbursements have been in the range of 55% - 73%. Included in the FY16 approved state budget, the Regional School Transportation Reimbursement Rate was set at 73%, which was also the final reimbursement rate for FY15. While Regional School Districts welcomed the increase in transportation reimbursement rates in FY15 and FY16, those rates are still well below their previously promised 100% reimbursement rate, which, coincidentally, has never occurred.

As stated in past years, Pathfinder had historically generated substantial annual revenue from the enrollment of non-resident tuition students once all eligible in-district applicants had been accepted. These revenues have been used to subsidize the annual operating budgets and reduce District assessments. Since FY11, non-resident student enrollments have dropped, leading to decreased annual non-resident tuition revenues. In FY11, non-resident tuition accounted for nearly \$900,000.00 in annual revenue. In the current FY16 school year, non-resident tuition will account for approximately \$410,000.00 in revenue. Through the implementation of cost saving measures (e.g., Health Insurance Plan Design Changes, a new electricity Net Metering Agreement, and consolidation of professional positions), and with revenue increases in the areas of School Choice Aid and Regional Transportation Aid, Pathfinder has attempted to mitigate the reduction in non-resident tuition revenue.

Additionally, Chapter 70 Aid from the Commonwealth continues to be a concern. For FY16, Pathfinder's Chapter 70 Aid was increased a modest \$11,760 from the previous fiscal year. Pathfinder's total FY16 Student Enrollment of 620 students is nearly unchanged from the FY15 enrollment of 619 students. With the FY17 enrollment currently estimated at 620 students, we expect Chapter 70 School Aid to be relatively unchanged in FY17.

Therefore, while modest increases in the areas of Chapter 70 Aid, Regional Transportation Aid and School Choice Revenue have been helpful, District expenses in the areas of salaries, health insurance, and pupil transportation have increased at a substantially higher rate. As a result, Pathfinder will continue to explore cost saving measures in an effort to operate in a more efficient and resourceful manner.

In conclusion, Governor Baker recently commented that, "The skills gap is real across the country, and many companies cannot find the talent they need to fill positions and further develop their local economic impact." In regard to his comment, Pathfinder is committed to providing a challenging and rigorous academic and technical educational experience to all students in an effort to ensure that they are prepared to fill the "skills gap" in our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

**The following chart illustrates the FY16 assessments (voted in spring of FY15) to each member community:**

<b>ASSESSMENT CALCULATION FY2016:</b>						
	MINIMUM	ADDITIONAL	SHARE OF	TRANS-	RETIREE	
<b>TOWNS</b>	CONT.	CONT.	REGULAR CAP.	PORTATION	HEALTH INSURANCE	TOTAL ASSESSMENT
Belchertown	\$ 700,928	\$ 235,174	\$ 2,013	\$ 75,201	\$ 48,054	\$ 1,061,370
Granby	\$ 200,230	\$ 55,490	\$ 475	\$ 17,744	\$ 11,339	\$ 285,278
Hardwick	\$ 147,748	\$ 66,060	\$ 565	\$ 21,124	\$ 13,498	\$ 248,996
Monson	\$ 889,118	\$ 290,664	\$ 2,488	\$ 92,945	\$ 59,392	\$ 1,334,608
New Braintree	\$ 99,360	\$ 29,066	\$ 249	\$ 9,295	\$ 5,939	\$ 143,909
Oakham	\$ 123,200	\$ 36,994	\$ 317	\$ 11,829	\$ 7,559	\$ 179,899
Palmer	\$ 1,130,503	\$ 425,427	\$ 3,642	\$ 136,038	\$ 86,929	\$ 1,782,538
Ware	\$ 670,805	\$ 290,664	\$ 2,488	\$ 92,945	\$ 59,392	\$ 1,116,295
Warren	\$ 222,475	\$ 124,193	\$ 1,063	\$ 39,713	\$ 25,377	\$ 412,821
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>\$ 4,184,367</b>	<b>\$ 1,553,732</b>	<b>\$ 13,300</b>	<b>\$ 496,835</b>	<b>\$ 317,478</b>	<b>\$ 6,565,712</b>

## **FACILITIES**

A highlight of the 2015 year was the successful total roof replacement project, the first in the school's 42 year history. The project was approved for 62.04% reimbursement by the Massachusetts School Building Authority, and bids were opened on March 26, 2015. The low bid of \$1,524,000 was submitted by Allied Restoration Corporation of East Hartford, CT. Work began with minimal disruption of student learning before the end of the school year and continued at a fast pace during the summer months. Most of the heavy work was completed before the beginning of school in September, leaving minor details and inspections for the fall.

As of the date of this report, the District's cost for this project is \$686,787.32. The amount of \$50,000 had already been transferred from FY14 funds, leaving a balance of \$636,787.32 owed by the District. This amount will not require bonding and will be satisfied by the District's entering into a five-year serial note through Eastern Bank.

## **CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

As Pathfinder enters its forty-third year offering quality vocational education to our member communities, the school committee wishes to reaffirm its pride in the staff and students. They have made substantial contributions to the economic health of our District. The committee recognizes that, in this era of accountability and high expectations, many changes need to be made. The increased emphasis on academic skills needs to be maintained without diminishing the quality of students' technical studies.

Finally, the committee wishes to thank our legislators, town officials and the several town meetings for their support over these years. The committee especially thanks retired Senator Stephen Brewer for his unwavering assistance to education and his friendship to Pathfinder.

The committee is mindful of the prediction that FY17 fiscal picture will undoubtedly present another challenge. However—as always-- the goal will be to preserve the quality of education that the students deserve.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Cavanaugh (Palmer), Chairman  
David Droz (Palmer), Vice Chairman  
Lorraine F. Alves (Belchertown), Secretary  
Francesco Dell'Olio (Belchertown)  
William E. Johnson (Granby)  
Julie Quink (Hardwick)  
Kathleen Barrett (Monson)  
Shane Stafford (New Braintree)  
Jeffrey Nelson (Oakham)  
M. Barbara Ray (Ware)  
Thomas Rugani (Warren)  
Ashley Boudreau (Student Representative)

Gerald L. Paist, Superintendent-Director