

## State's school building chief views Whittier's leaky roof

HAVERHILL – Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School administrators are one step closer to being able to replace their leaky roof after a visit this week from a state official who holds the purse strings for school building projects.

Katherine Craven, Executive Director of Massachusetts School Building



Michael Gilbert, Katherine Craven,  
William DeRosa

Authority toured the school Wednesday, making note of the unique system of rain water collection that has been put in place in recent years to avoid puddles in classrooms and hallways. Ceiling panels have been removed so hoses can divert the water that runs in, and buckets are placed strategically throughout the school.

Except for the 35-year-old roof that has leaked and been patched for many years, it's obvious the building is "very well maintained," Ms. Craven said. "It's apparent the district and students take pride in their school."

Whittier Superintendent William DeRosa has already filed a "letter of intent" for a new \$2.7 million roof with MSBA, and a decision on how much the state is willing to pay is expected in the spring. A technical review by architects and engineers will follow Ms. Craven's initial site review visit.

The amount awarded by the state is based on a formula that uses the wealth of the district communities and the cost of the project, she said. "We're hoping we can be there for you to take care of this," she told Mr. DeRosa and School Committee Chairman Michael Gilbert.

Like all districts in the state, Whittier administrators are facing up to a 10 percent cut in state aid. To anticipate that, Mr. DeRosa asked all departments to freeze spending as of Dec. 19 for the current year, and also asked department heads to reduce their budgets for next year. Whittier administrators also plan to research a "green" approach to replacing the roof, including solar panels to reduce the district's energy costs, said Mr. Gilbert. Whittier enrolls 1,100 students from 11 cities and towns, and offers 21 vocational-technical programs.

Ms. Craven has directed the MSBA since it was formed in Nov. 2004 to revamp the managing, financing and auditing of state-financed school construction projects. She and her 7-member board are responsible for making the decisions that reimburse communities hundreds of millions of dollars a year for more than 700 ongoing projects in the state.

Though she could not promise Whittier officials any amount of money at this time, she did give some hope when she quoted Mick Jagger. "Schools can't always get what they want... but they'll get what they need," she said. She also spoke highly of vocational-technical education, calling it "a great return on taxpayer's dollars. This kind of investment in kids is the engine that is going to push Massachusetts economy along," she said. "I've been very impressed the quality of students I've met."

Ms. Craven will be back at Whittier in May. During her visit, Mr. DeRosa secured her as a graduation speaker.