

WEBSTER - Students of Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton have performed the bulk of a construction project aiming to convert about 7,600 square feet of space at Bartlett High School into an administrative wing for Webster Public Schools, and they are close to wrapping up.

The project site is unused classroom space for graphic arts, woodworking and metal shops - trades that are no longer offered at the high school.

The work is similar to what Bay Path students performed for administration offices in the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District in 2010.

The project started with demolition in 2015, and Webster school administrators say they are eager to move out of their current office space in the aging Filmer School on East Main Street in the coming weeks.

“We’re hoping by the end of next week to be pretty well set,” said Mike Garceau of Woodstock, whom Webster schools recruited out of retirement from commercial construction to serve as the project’s clerk of the works.

In a longtime vocational school tradition of hands-on field training, Bay Path students from five programs provided free labor under the supervision of their instructors, while Webster schools benefited from cost savings and quality workmanship, albeit at a slower pace.

Ted Avlas, Webster schools’ assistant to the superintendent for business, said the project would come in at under \$1 million.

Had Webster schools not utilized the Bay Path students, he said, the project could have approached \$2 million.

“The original quote came in at 1.6 million,” Mr. Avlas said. “But we’ve added to that since. We’ve done other things that would’ve increased the price. We ran into asbestos that had to be removed, and a couple of the quotes came in higher than anticipated. That all added to the price. That’s why I say the original quote could’ve been \$1.8 or \$1.9 million. It’s still a considerable amount that we’ve saved by having the students do the work, there’s no doubt about it.”

Meanwhile, renovating the Filmer School would have cost \$2 million, and the 1899 building still would not have been big enough for the school department’s needs, Mr. Avlas said.

Students from Bay Path’s building and property maintenance program, taught by John Howard, did the demo work. Carpentry students were led by teacher John Koliss; electrical students were taught by Justin Verham, plumbing was led by Dan Vigeant and cabinet-making students were under the tutelage of instructor Dave Martinson.

Mr. Martinson’s class was at work when the newspaper checked in on the project Jan. 24.

The students put together cabinets for two kitchens in the large new wing, and had already installed drop ceilings and windowsills.

Juniors Tyler Wilson of Auburn and Adrian Demichele of Spencer spoke about the work while they formed counter space for the reception area.

Both called it an “awesome” learning experience.

“It’s fun working on an actual job site where people are going to be in here ... and using it for years to come,” Adrian added.

Overall, the students hung all of the doors, roughed and finished all of the plumbing and electrical, wired the data systems and smoke alarms and did some of the framing and drywall installation, Mr. Garceau said.

The Webster district contracted with professional companies for installation of fire alarms, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), and installation of flooring and steel and glass throughout the wing. The drywall, too, was mostly done by professional contractors because of the time involved with that detailed work, officials said.

Mr. Garceau, the supervisor, said he expected to see students fooling around, but that was not the case at all. They conducted themselves like professionals, he said.

“As far as the workmanship, it’s right up there. You have to take into consideration it’s being done by students. But overall, when it all gets done, it’ll be fine. I’m very impressed.”

Mr. Avlas said the project has been a long time coming.

“We’ve endured a lot of obstacles in trying to get this all done. Renovations are never easy because when you start tearing things down, you always find stuff you didn’t know you had. It’s not like a new building. But the kids did a great job. Just awesome.”