

# HEAD OF THE CLASS:

Characteristics of Higher Performing  
Urban High Schools in Massachusetts



Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC

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FALL 2003

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts

Myriad attempts to reform American education over the past twenty years have failed to yield clear-cut solutions about how to attain high levels of achievement for all students. The problem is particularly stubborn in urban schools serving high concentrations of low-income and minority students. In Massachusetts, we know that despite a decade of promising reform activity, a significant proportion of low-income and minority students in urban schools are not meeting the high performance standards established by the state Board of Education and measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). With the generous support of the Trefler Foundation, the Center for Education Research & Policy at MassINC commissioned an independent research study to identify and provide preliminary information on the practices of high-performing urban high schools serving low-income, ethnically and racially diverse student populations.

#### SCHOOL SUCCESS IS IMPACTED BY:

- High standards & expectations
- Supportive school cultures
- Small learning communities
- Focused curriculum
- Community engagement

Our findings are quite startling: A review of available performance data revealed only one such Massachusetts school in which students consistently performed at high levels—University Park Campus School in Worcester. At University Park, all 10th grade students passed both the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math MCAS in 2002, with average scores substantially higher than state averages, despite high rates of poverty (70%) and minority enrollment (56%).

While the success of University Park Campus Schools is quite remarkable and deserves to be celebrated, it also highlights the significant achievement gap that remains for the majority of urban high school students. It is clear that educators and policymakers concerned about achieving high standards for all students in the Commonwealth need to attend to this state of affairs with some urgency. In an attempt to start this critical dialogue, we identified a small number of high-minority, low-income urban schools that appear to be on the road to success as defined by increas-

ing MCAS scores, high attendance rates, low dropout rates, and 2-year and 4-year college plans of their graduates. These improving schools are the schools discussed in this study. In the research reported here, we have attempted to characterize and understand the promising practices being utilized at both University Park and at eight improving urban high schools.

While the eight improving schools presented in this report have not witnessed student performance on par with the achievements of University Park, these schools are identified as the highest performing, non-selective urban schools serving secondary students in Massachusetts districts with high concentrations of low-income and minority students. To identify the factors associated with these schools' successes, our researchers analyzed students' 8th and 10th grade performance changes and visited each school to interview staff and students. The time frame for the research was the 2002-2003 school year.

An examination of the performance of students in these schools on both the math and English Language Arts (ELA) section of the MCAS reveals that most students did not experience a change in performance category between the 8th and 10th grade assessments. However, all schools have had some students improve in performance categories on either the math or ELA assessment, or both. Several schools—Accelerated Learning Lab, University Park, MATCH and Sabis International—witnessed significant proportions of their students increasing their performance level from 8th to 10th grade on either the math or ELA MCAS assessment. Nevertheless, at the lower end of the continuum (Needs Improvement, Failing), improvements were not as substantial.

From interviews and visits to the schools, study researchers identified five common practices employed across all nine of the study schools:

- **High standards and expectations.** Administrators communicate high standards and expectations for students and teachers.
- **Culture of personalization.** Each school has been able to develop a culture that personalizes instruction while offering significant supports for teachers and students.
- **Small learning communities.** All schools have small class sizes and small learning communities; these features

have been critical to students and teachers forming strong, trusting relationships, and the ability of teachers to respond to students' needs.

- **Data-driven curricula.** Curricula that are shaped and adjusted in response to data on student performance—including those that put a heightened focus on math and literacy—are present in these schools.
- **Strong community relationships.** Strong relationships with the community, engagement of parents, and support from higher education institutions and corporate partners, provide important supports to these schools' educational programs.

Study researchers were less successful in isolating the specific conditions that allow these practices to flourish. We know, for example, that many other urban schools have adopted similar strategies with less success, and many operate under similar organizational and governance mechanisms with fewer accomplishments. Still, this study has a number of lessons to contribute:

- **Focus on and support academics.** Study findings suggest that students in the nine schools are improving because they were sent a clear message about the importance of academics, and they were provided with the supports they needed to reach the high standards expected of them.
- **Community partnerships.** School partnerships with universities, businesses, and city institutions (such as museums, art centers, and libraries) appear to be powerful contributors to promoting student achievement and providing external resources that can promote professional communities and opportunities for teachers.
- **Size matters.** The nine study schools vary tremendously in their size and scope. Yet all of them, even the two large comprehensive high schools, have created structures that allow small learning communities to flourish. These structures foster relationships between teachers, students, and parents in a range of ways.

While the research reported here is a good first start, significant questions remain. An important area of focused inquiry concerns the need for a clear consensus about what exactly constitutes high performance, and what data and related indicators are available to determine if schools

are meeting standards of high performance. This issue, as well as numerous others must be considered for future examinations so that we can learn more about how to create successful learning conditions. Some topics for further policy research include:

- *How can high schools throughout the Commonwealth adopt promising practices?*
- *How do schools structure successful relationships with community agencies to support student achievement?*
- *How do we retain committed teachers and administrators?*
- *How do schools create cultures of collegiality and professional community?*
- *What happens to students after they leave nurturing high school environments?*

## INTRODUCTION

Standards-based reform has successfully focused the Commonwealth's attention on providing *all* students with the opportunity to learn and ensuring *all* students achieve high academic standards. Despite these efforts, many of the Commonwealth's students are not yet performing at proficient levels. Increasing the achievement of low-income and minority students in urban high schools has proven the most daunting task of all. Yet, strong evidence suggests that any kind of student, from any background or ethnicity, can achieve high standards if the teaching and learning conditions are right. Given evidence of its feasibility, we believe that educational reform efforts should now be focused on understanding these conditions and building the capacity of urban high schools to ensure that academic proficiency is a realistic goal for all students, regardless of their race, socio-economic status or cultural background.

Historically, urban high schools have proven to be the most challenging educational institutions in which to effect lasting, meaningful reform. While important gains in student achievement have been realized since the advent of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, there continues to be high failure rates in our cities, particularly among lower-income African American and Hispanic students. Despite the generally disappointing results of urban high schools throughout the state, some schools are showing promise. Not only have MCAS scores risen in these schools, but attendance is also high; dropout rates are low; and a substantial percentage of students are continuing their education after high school. Students, themselves, feel that they are getting a good education, and, importantly, they like school.

We begin with the assumption that all students can achieve at high levels given the right teaching and learning conditions. A 2002 report, commissioned by the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission entitled, "*Work in Progress: 42 Promising Practices for Improving the School Success of Students at Risk of Underachievement,*"<sup>1</sup> identified numerous practices in 40 Massachusetts schools that have helped to reduce the achievement gap between students from different racial, ethnic, and income groups. However, as the report also clearly stated, "We certainly haven't got it all figured out." We know that urban schools throughout the Commonwealth have been working since 1993 to adopt many of the instructional strategies,

practices, policies, and organizational infrastructures described in the research. Yet only a few schools have been successful in helping minority, low-income students reach high levels of achievement. To help all students succeed, we must identify and understand what these schools are doing that others are not.

In Massachusetts, no comprehensive analysis of the performance of students in urban high schools has been conducted. Consequently, policymakers and practitioners have little specific evidence to guide their decision-making on the conditions that work to improve student achievement. Seeking to address this gap and to highlight urban schools in Massachusetts that have been the most successful in increasing student performance, the Center for Education Research & Policy at MassINC commissioned an independent research study to provide preliminary information on the attributes of a selected group of promising urban high schools. Jobs for the Future and the Center for Collaborative Education, organizations that are deeply committed to the development of high quality learning opportunities for all K-12 students, have worked as advisors on this project. The Center contracted with Maxine Minkoff of Educational Transformations, an independent research and consulting group, to complete this study.

The primary goal of the Center for Education Research & Policy, in undertaking this work, is to identify best practices for improving the educational performance of low-income and minority students across the Commonwealth. Because much has been invested in raising the academic performance of these historically under-served groups, we feel that it is important to promote promising strategies for addressing the academic needs of this population. It is our goal to promote more effective educational practices and policies through the application of data rather than ideology. In this study we seek to document the positive strides and good work that are currently being accomplished. We believe this project is crucial in continuing efforts to equalize educational opportunities for *all* youth.

Our guiding research question for the study was:  
"What are the characteristics of the best performing low-income, high-minority urban high schools?"

1 The National Classroom, Inc., November 2002.



In addressing this question, we identified a group of nine high-minority, low-income urban schools in Massachusetts that have been more successful than others in improving the academic performance of their students. Our primary purpose was to identify the practices, or combination of practices these schools have adopted that might be associated with their apparent success. We hope that this report will forward the practice and policy discussion by providing a platform from which to assess current policies on urban high school organization and management while stimulating further discussion on accountability measures and defining success.

The following section discusses the study methods and data used for school selection and analysis. Subsequently, we provide two sets of study findings—a value-added analysis that examines changes in student performance and emergent themes based on interviews and observations of the schools. Prior to turning to the details of the research and its findings, however, it is important to understand two limitations of the research:

- **In-depth data were not collected.** The study was designed to help us identify what might be promising practices and/or conditions for success in selected schools. It was not intended to be an exhaustive look at the nine schools included in the study. Rather, we have made a preliminary review of the workings of these selected schools in an attempt to learn why these schools were performing better than others based on available performance indicators.
- **No comparison schools were included.** Given that the study was designed simply to lay the groundwork for further policy discussion, we did not employ a rigorous research design that would allow us to compare and contrast selected schools with similar urban high schools that have been slower to evidence progress in improving student academic performance. For the value-added analysis, we are similarly unable to compare the school level performance changes against a comparable set of schools because individual student data were not available for all schools.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to the development of this report, including our generous sponsors, the Trefler Foundation, who made this report possible. We are grateful to the study's researcher, Maxine Minkoff, and to our

advisors, Sue Goldberger of Jobs for the Future and Dan French of the Center for Collaborative Education for playing a key role in helping to shape the project and inform our understanding of critical issues. We are especially grateful to Fran O'Reilly and Jen Schimmenti for their instrumental support, review, and feedback on the final drafting of this report.

We acknowledge with thanks the administrators, teachers, and students at all the schools visited. Despite busy schedules, they gave freely of their time to share experiences and thoughts about their schools. We wish to extend special gratitude to Spencer Blasdale of the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School, Marie Galinski of the Accelerated Learning Lab School, Linda Nathan of the Boston Arts Academy, Peggy Kemp, Rosemary Sedgwick, Larry Myatt, and Luz Padua of the Fenway High School, Bill Frost of Lynn Classical High School, Michael Goldstein, Alan Safran, and Charles Sposato of the Media and Technology Charter High School, Maretta Thomsen of Sabis International Charter School, Thomas Galligani of Somerville High School, and Donna Rodrigues and June Eressy of University Park Campus School.

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## SCHOOL SELECTION

During the winter of 2002, study researchers completed a systematic, statewide review to identify the highest performing, urban schools serving high concentrations of low-income and minority students. The review proceeded in two stages, with school districts selected first. Schools within the selected school districts were then identified for the study. First, all urban centers in the Commonwealth were identified through data provided by the state Department of Revenue. School districts in these urban centers were selected for the study if they met the following two conditions:

- Poverty rate of more than 50% (as determined by the proportion of a school district’s population that was eligible for free lunch); and
- Minority population of approximately 50%.

Nine districts in the Commonwealth met these conditions, including: Chelsea, Lawrence, Boston, Holyoke, Springfield, Somerville, Lynn, Lowell, and Worcester.

In the second stage of the review, all schools serving high school aged students in these nine districts were considered for inclusion in the study except exam schools—schools that screen students on the basis of academic achievement. Selection was based on a two-step process. First, the top cluster of schools was identified based on 2002 MCAS scores and passing rates. A cutoff was established where there was a significant drop off in performance. Second, based on considerable discussion with advisors, a set of seven additional criteria was used to determine a school’s eligibility for inclusion in the study, including poverty and minority rate, dropout, attendance, and exclusion data, post-secondary plans of school graduates, and school improvement ratings posted by the Massachusetts Department of Education (see below).<sup>2</sup>

### Urban Centers Meeting Inclusion Criteria, 2001

District	% Low Income	% Minority
Chelsea	82	82
Lawrence	78	88
Boston	72	85
Holyoke	72	75
Springfield	70	76
Somerville	64	46
Lynn	63	57
Lowell	61	56
Worcester	52	48

### Identifying the Highest Performing Urban Schools

Our original intent was to look at high performing low-income urban schools with ethnically and racially diverse student bodies, but a review of the available performance data revealed only one school in which students consistently performed to high levels—the University Park Campus School in Worcester. Using the performance criteria, however, we were able to identify the highest performing urban schools in the Commonwealth (within the nine districts that were previously selected for having high concentrations of poor and minority students.) In addition to University Park, eight schools were identified that met all, or nearly all, of the performance indicators:<sup>3</sup>

### Criteria for School Selection<sup>4</sup>

Indicator	Baseline Criteria for Inclusion
Poverty Rate (%)	45
ELA MCAS pass rates (%)	80
Average 2002 ELA MCAS Score	230
Math MCAS pass rates (%)	65
Average 2002 Math MCAS Score	230
Dropout rate (2001) (%)	<5
Attendance rate (2001) (%)	90
Students excluded from school (#)	<2
Students planning to attend to a four-year or two-year college (%)	60
Minority pop. as proportion of total school population (%)	35
DOE ratings of school improvement, based on MCAS scores	At or above target

2 The selection criteria were determined in large measure by available school level performance indicators that could be used across schools within the state. We are aware that a different methodology or a different set of criteria might yield different results. Indeed a variety of other indicators have been set forth to identify successful schools within the Commonwealth (e.g., Effective Practice Schools in Boston, Vanguard Model Schools identified by the Building Blocks Initiative for Standards-Based Reform). Our intention is not to promulgate a new model, but to use available data to systematically identify successful urban high schools. It is our hope that additional data will become available in the future to allow a more nuanced selection of high performing schools.

3 Although City on a Hill Charter School in Boston was also selected for inclusion in the study based on 2002 performance data, the school was excluded after a visit to the school revealed that the leadership and practices of the school had changed and no longer reflected the practices that accounted for their 2002 performance data.

Thus, the selected schools comprise three charter schools (Academy of the Pacific Rim, MATCH and Sabis), two pilot schools (Boston Arts Academy and Fenway High) and four regular public schools, including two traditional comprehensive high schools (Lynn Classical and Somerville), and two non-traditional schools serving high school aged students (Accelerated Learning Lab and University Park Campus). A profile of each selected school, including the school’s mission and demographics is provided in Appendix A.

Only one low-income, diverse urban school could be labeled “high performing”  
— University Park Campus School in Worcester

The characteristics of the selected schools on the eleven performance criteria are shown in Table 1.<sup>6</sup> The table reveals that among the nine schools, most meet all or most of the selection criteria. Only two (Academy of the Pacific Rim and University Park) outperform the state on the academic indicators (i.e., average MCAS scores and passing rates, drop-out and attendance rates, and post-secondary plans of graduates). University Park is the only school in which all 10th grade students are passing both the English Language Arts and Math components of MCAS. Yet, for the four schools for which MCAS improvement data are available (Boston Arts Academy, Fenway, Lynn Classical, and Somer-

ville High), all are above target with respect to increasing MCAS scores for both English Language Arts and Math, and all have considerable percentages of their students passing the MCAS English Language Arts component. A number of the schools are outperforming the state on multiple indicators.

One key question in assessing MCAS performance that could not be answered definitively by these selection criteria concerns the loss (by dropout or transfer) of students whose presence could have significantly altered the school’s performance. Five of these higher performing schools showed, on the Department of Education web site, discrepancies of 30% or more between 9th grade enrollment in 2000-01 and 10th grade MCAS takers in 2002. There are a variety of possible explanations for these discrepancies. They could be the result of inaccuracies in enrollment data or differences in school district policies in classifying students by grade (i.e., by credits earned or years in school). On the other hand, students may have been retained, placed in special programs, transferred voluntarily or moved out of state, dismissed or otherwise “pushed out” of a school. Because of limitations in DOE data, we were not able to do a thorough analysis of these discrepancies. We did request and receive further data and explanations from all the schools in question. On the basis of that additional information, there was not sufficient reason to conclude that elimination of low performing students from the testing

### Schools Selected as Improving High Schools

School	Type of School	Grades Served	Number of Students <sup>5</sup>	Location
Academy of the Pacific Rim	Charter	6-12	242	Hyde Park, Boston
Accelerated Learning Lab (ALL)	Public School	PK-12	888	Worcester
Boston Arts Academy	Pilot	9-12	321	Boston
Fenway High School	Pilot	9-12	255	Boston
Lynn Classical High School	Comprehensive (1 of 2 in district)	9-12	1447	Lynn
Media & Technology Charter High (MATCH)	Charter	9-12	78	Boston
Sabis International	Charter	K-12	1176	Springfield
Somerville High School	Comprehensive	9-12	1761	Somerville
University Park Campus	Public School	7-12	135	Worcester

4 While ideally, we would have liked to include schools with at least 50% low income students based on free lunch eligibility, it is well documented that many high school students do not report such eligibility. Thus, we assumed that a reported poverty rate of 45% at the high school level is probably still higher.

5 Enrollment figures are based on 2001 data confirmed by the Massachusetts Department of Education for individual schools at the time the study was conducted.

6 When schools include more than the 9-12 grade span, indicators represent the entire school, where appropriate (e.g., poverty rate).

pool, by itself, accounts for their MCAS results.<sup>7</sup> We believe that the issue of attrition must be clearly included when developing future criteria for the determination of high performing high schools.

While there is little doubt that, except for University Park, the schools selected for inclusion in this study cannot be categorized as high performing, they do appear to be making progress despite the various mitigating circumstances that urban high schools often face. Among the subset of schools serving high concentrations of low-income and minority students in districts with high concentrations of these populations, these schools stand out as the highest performing among their peers according to the performance criteria adopted for this study.

**9th Grade & 10th Grade MCAS Enrollment Figures<sup>8</sup>**

School	2000-2001	Spring 2002	
	Student Enrollment Grade 9	MCAS Enrollment ELA	Math
Academy of the Pacific Rim	38	27	27
ALL School	48	32	32
Boston Arts Academy	78	92	94
Fenway	68	71	72
Lynn Classical	401	346	358
MATCH	78	50	50
Sabis International	72	48	48
Somerville High School	560	348	366
University Park Campus School	33	30	30

**Table 1: Characteristics of Selected Schools on Performance**

School (2001 enrollment)	Poverty Rate (%)	% Passing 10th grade ELA MCAS	2002 10th grade ELA MCAS Average Score
Academy of Pacific Rim (242)	61.6	89	251
Accelerated Learning Lab (888)	80.9	84	242
Boston Arts Academy (321)	50.0	89	240
Fenway High School (255)	58.0	91	236
Lynn Classical (1447)	47.4	83	238
Media & Tech. Charter (78)	75.6	94	240
Sabis International (1176)	53.2	94	246
Somerville High School (1761)	53.2	89	239
University Park Campus (135)	69.6	100	256
State Average	26.2	87	242

AT = Above Target; NA = Not Available; SSA = Small School Analysis

**A Value-Added Analysis**

Once the schools were selected for the study, we attempted a rough estimate of the value-added by the school in the students’ educational progress. We generated this value-added figure by comparing an individual student’s performance on the 10th grade MCAS exam with his/her 8th grade performance (where individual student data were available). This analysis was intended to examine whether or not evidence exists that these schools are indeed improving stu-

7 The MATCH School had an attrition rate of 28%, losing 22 of the 78 students who entered as freshmen in the fall of 2000 before the spring 2002 MCAS exam. Seventeen (17) of the 22 students who transferred failed to meet the school’s promotion standards, and opted to leave the school rather than repeat the 9th grade. Another six students who were also required to repeat grade 9 opted to stay at MATCH and eventually took the MCAS in Spring 2003. It is reasonable to assume that the loss of a significant number of low performing students improved the MATCH School’s scores overall. But with 77 percent of the 50 MATCH students who took MCAS in 2002 having failed the MCAS math test in 8th grade, it is also clear that the MATCH continued to serve a high need student population and still showed positive results on the 10th grade MCAS. Nonetheless, the departure of these students raises questions about the MATCH’s ability to hold onto a substantial segment of the low performing students they initially attract. Academy of the Pacific Rim had an attrition rate of 24%, with 9 of their 38 students who entered as freshman in the fall of 2000 transferring before the spring 2002 MCAS exam. However, only 3 of the 9 students who transferred could be presumed to be lower performing than the students who stayed. These three students transferred to other Boston public schools. Of the remaining 6 transfers, 3 gained admission and enrolled in private or parochial schools; and 3 moved out of state. Two of the 38 entering students were retained in the ninth grade and took the MCAS a year later. At Somerville High, 9th grade enrollment included students retained from the year before who nonetheless took MCAS with their original class—a policy since changed. While Somerville has a high rate of retention in grade 9—30%—its dropout rate of 3.3% per year is well below the state average for urban high schools (7.8%), making it unlikely that the departure of retained students before they take MCAS accounts for Somerville’s scores. The ALL School reports that students not enrolled for the 10th grade MCAS included 2 students who transferred to other Worcester schools, 8 who left the Worcester system, 3 students who dropped out, one student who was retained, and one alternative WPS student who did not take the test because his graduation date changed. At Sabis, five students transferred between the time that the school’s October 2000 report was issued and February 2001 updates were made. Before the end of the 2000-2001 school year, another 14 ninth graders transferred to another Springfield Public School, one went to a parochial high school, one moved out of state and 3 students repeated grade 9.

8 DOE noted that official enrollment is taken from October data. Since the MCAS is not administered until spring, it is possible that the number of students tested can exceed official enrollment (i.e., students transfer during the year, some have their grade status changed, etc.).

Indicators, 2001 (unless noted)

<i>% Passing 10th grade Math MCAS</i>	<i>2002 10th grade Math MCAS Average Score</i>	<i>Dropout Rate (%)</i>	<i>Attendance Rate (%)</i>	<i>Exclusions (#)</i>	<i>% 2 or 4 Year College Plans, 2002</i>	<i>Minority Enrollment (%)</i>	<i>ELA RS. Performance</i>	<i>ELA RS. Improvement</i>	<i>Math RS Performance</i>	<i>Math RS. Improvement</i>
85	245	0	95.5	0	NA <sup>9</sup>	78.9	NA	NA	NA	NA
63	229	5.7	94.3	1	79.3	61.8	Mod	SSA	Very Low	SSA
71	233	1.9	89.8	1	87.0	68.2	Mod	AT	Low	AT
69	226	3.1	92.9	1	72.2	79.6	Mod	AT	Very Low	AT
68	231	2.2	91.3	0	74.8	49.8	Mod	AT	Low	AT
80	233	0	95.1	0	NA	96.1	NA	NA	NA	NA
73	236	3.1	93.8	0	NA <sup>10</sup>	64.9	High	SSA	Low	SSA
73	235	3.3	91.9	1	49.5	42.9	Mod	AT	Low	AT
100	253	0	97.1	0	NA	55.6	Very High	NA	Very High	NA
75	237	3.5	94.9	1.5	72.8	24.9	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education and website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Data from this report was gathered from the Massachusetts Department of Education website. Data was circulated to schools for comment and in several cases, minor discrepancies were noted. In at least two cases, there were more serious cases noted, which are cited in footnotes 9 and 10.

dent’s academic performance. The results of the analysis, reported below, do suggest some improvements in student performance.<sup>11</sup> Still, each of the schools, except for University Park, continues to have considerable proportions of students who are performing poorly and some students who have experienced declines.

Using 2000 and 2002 8th and 10th grade MCAS scores, respectively, Tables 2 and 3 display the distribution of students across each of the four MCAS categories used by the state (i.e., Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, Failing) for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, respectively, by school and school type. Each table also shows the percent change from the 8th grade categories, indicating the pro-

portion of students for whom there was an increase in a category, a decrease in a category, or no change over the two-year period.

Table 2 reveals that in 10th grade, students across the schools tend to be categorized as proficient in English Language Arts. There does not appear to be a trend based on school type. The table also shows that across the schools the general trend was for most students not to experience a change in category between 8th and 10th grade.<sup>12</sup>

A more fine-grained analysis of the ELA changes are provided in Figures 1a through 1c, which display for each school, the changes in the proportion of students in each

9 Academy of the Pacific Rim reports that 100% of the Class of 2002 planned to attend 2-year or 4-year colleges, though DOE did not have this information available.

10 Sabis International reports that 100% of the Class of 2002 planned to attend 2-year or 4-year colleges, though DOE did not have this information available.

11 Data included in the analysis are based on individual change scores for students for whom such data were available in both 8th and 10th grade. The data do not include all tenth graders currently enrolled at each school as such data were not available. Of particular note is that we do not have any comparison data for similar districts or for the state as a whole. Thus, we do not know whether the changes reported are typical or whether they indicate something special about these schools. Still the data do reveal some general trends about the student performance in these schools.

12 The categorizations used by the state for MCAS performance encompass a broad range of scores that are not particularly sensitive to small changes. Thus, a student might make substantial gains in terms of his raw MCAS score, but still remain in the same category. This does not necessarily indicate that the student is not making progress.

of the four categories between 8th and 10th grade and the direction of those changes. Thus, for example, in Figure 1a, we can see that among the students at Fenway whose category on the English Language Arts MCAS increased between 8th and 10th grade, 40 percent of the students who were classified as failing in 8th grade moved to the needs improvement category, while 20 percent moved from failing to proficient. Nearly 20 percent of the students who were in the needs improvement category increased to the proficient category, and 4 percent of the students who had been classified as proficient increased to the advanced category.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Figure 1b shows the proportion of each category moving to a lower category and Figure 1c indicates the proportion of each category that experienced no change. In Figure 1b we can see that the trend is for only small proportions of students to experience a decline in category, and that the most common declines are from needs improvement

to failing, and from proficient to needs improvement.

In Figure 1c, we can see that substantial proportions of students in the advanced and proficient categories did not change between 8th and 10th grades across all the schools. Unfortunately, we can also see that in five schools (ALL, Lynn Classical, Fenway, Sabis, and Somerville High) fairly high proportions of the students who were classified as failing in 8th grade remained within the failing category classified two years later. In addition, all of the schools except for University Park also had a high proportion of students remaining in the needs improvement category.

The score distributions and category changes based on 8th and 10th grade Math MCAS scores are provided in Table 3. In general, performance on the Math component of the MCAS is lower than performance on the ELA component. Far fewer students are categorized as advanced or profi-

**Table 2: Distribution of 8th to 10th grade changes in MCAS English Language Arts Categories, 2000 to 2002<sup>14</sup>**

Schools, by Type	Distribution of 10th grade Math MCAS Categories (2002)				Change from 8th grade Math MCAS Scores (2000)		
	Advanced (%)	Proficient (%)	Needs Improvement (%)	Failing (%)	Increase (%)	No Change (%)	Decrease (%)
<b>PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS</b>							
Accelerated Learning Laboratory (n=27)	18.52	55.56	14.81	11.11	51.85	44.44	3.7
Lynn Classical (n=250)	10.4	46.40	31.60	11.60	17.60	62.40	20.00
Somerville High (n=268)	14.55	37.31	38.43	9.70	23.51	55.97	20.52
University Park Campus (n=25)	48.00	52.00	0	0	76.00	24.00	0.00
<b>PILOT SCHOOLS</b>							
Boston Arts Academy (n=57)	12.28	43.88	36.84	7.02	19.30	61.40	19.30
Fenway High School (n=48)	6.25	41.67	39.58	12.50	14.58	62.50	22.92
<b>CHARTER SCHOOLS</b>							
Media & Technology Charter (n=28)	10.71	46.43	35.71	7.14	25.00	64.29	10.71
Sabis International (n=42)	23.81	42.86	26.19	7.14	40.48	50.00	9.52

No data were available for Academy of the Pacific Rim  
 Change scores were calculated using individual student data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education.  
 Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

13 In some cases, the proportions reported in the figures are based on very small sample sizes and can be misleading. Thus, for example, if two students were categorized as proficient in the 8th grade, and one of them scored in the advanced category in the 10th grade, this would be reported as an increase of 50% for students formerly in the proficient category.

14 University Park Campus School and Academy of the Pacific Rim offer grades 6-12. The ALL School and Sabis International offer grades K-12.

cient, and many more are classified as either needing improvement or failing. Change from 8th to 10th grade was similar to the changes noted for ELA, however, with a general trend being that most students experienced no change. Exceptions are that a large proportion of students at MATCH experienced an increase in scores, and at Sabis, a higher proportion of students increased their score rather than experienced no change.

In looking at Figures 2a-2c, we can see that at MATCH a substantial proportion of students in all categories increased their scores with few students moving to the advanced category, while at Sabis, two-third of the students in the proficient category moved into the advanced category and nearly half moved from needs improvement to proficient. Figure 2b reveals that for math, many students who experienced a decline in scores moved from the advanced to proficient category or from proficient to needs

improvement. Similar to what we saw with the ELA scores, Figure 2c reveals large proportions of students remaining in the failing and needs improvement categories, even at University Park.

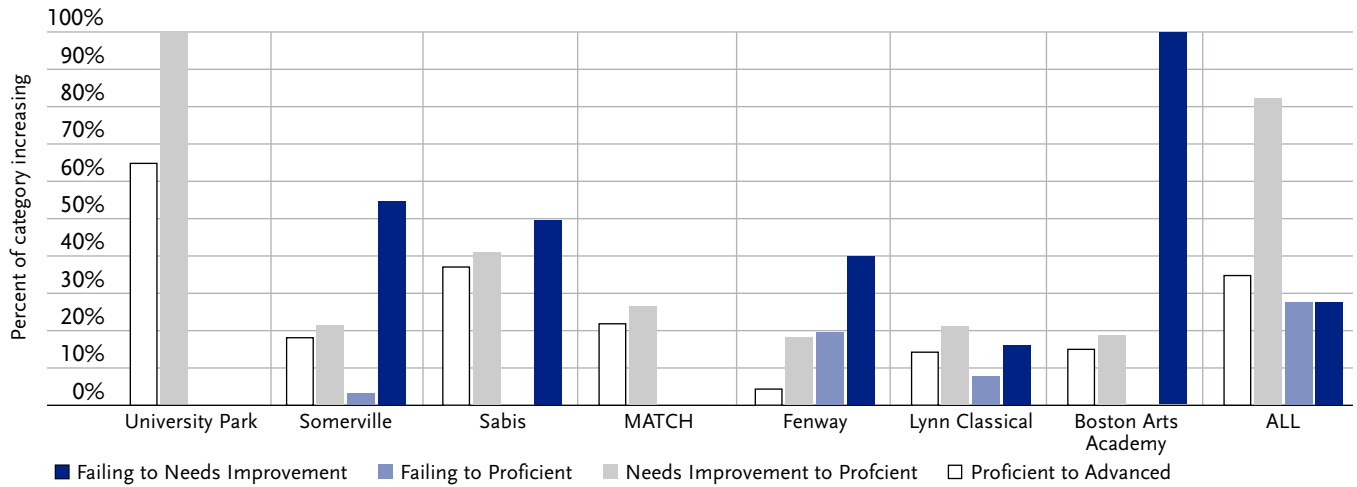
While these data suggest that with the exception of University Park, limited progress is being made with students at the lower end of the continuum, all of the schools have made progress with some students. In the following section, we explore some of the conditions that might be associated with this success.

**Table 3: Distribution of 8th to 10th grade changes in MCAS Math Categories, 2000 to 2002**

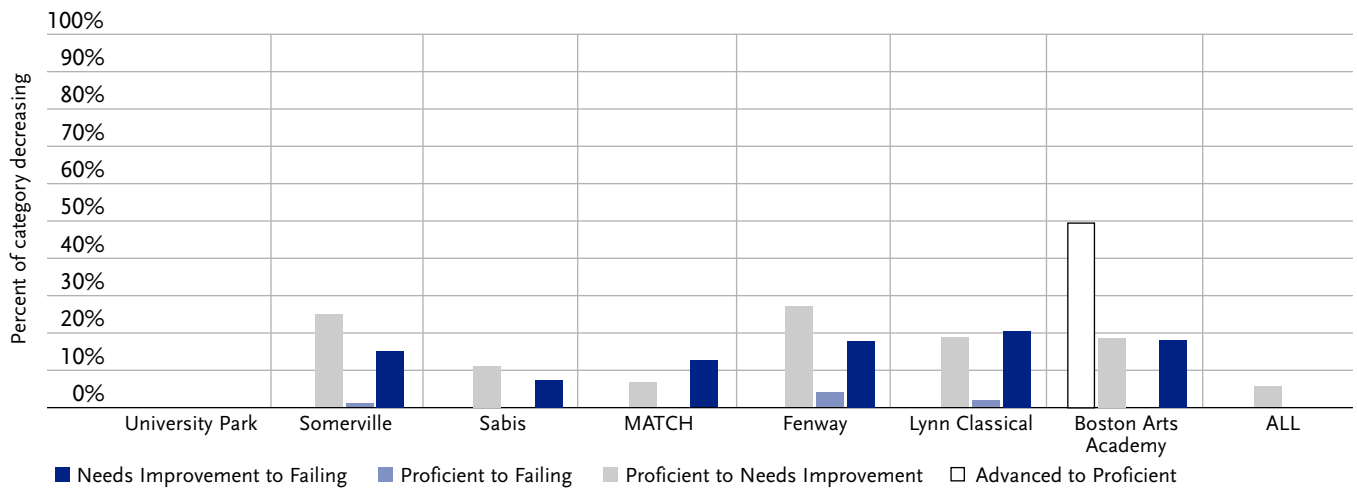
Schools, by Type	Distribution of 10th grade ELA MCAS Categories (2002)				Change from 8th grade ELA MCAS Scores (2000)		
	Advanced (%)	Proficient (%)	Needs Improvement (%)	Failing (%)	Increase (%)	No Change (%)	Decrease (%)
<b>PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS</b>							
Accelerated Learning Laboratory (n=27)	0.00	29.63	33.33	37.04	40.74	55.56	3.70
Lynn Classical (n=251)	9.56	25.50	39.84	25.10	43.43	51.39	5.18
Somerville High (n=272)	15.07	27.57	34.56	22.79	42.65	48.90	8.46
University Park Campus (n=25)	44.00	36.00	20.00	0.00	44.00	56.00	0.00
<b>PILOT SCHOOLS</b>							
Boston Arts Academy (n=61)	11.48	26.23	32.79	29.51	45.90	54.10	1.64
Fenway High School (n=49)	2.04	12.24	55.10	30.61	32.65	55.10	12.24
<b>CHARTER SCHOOLS</b>							
Media & Technology Charter (n=28)	10.71	35.71	35.71	17.86	75.00	17.86	7.14
Sabis International (n=42)	21.43	23.81	26.19	28.57	57.14	42.86	0.00

No data were available for Academy of the Pacific Rim  
 Change scores were calculated using individual student data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education.  
 Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

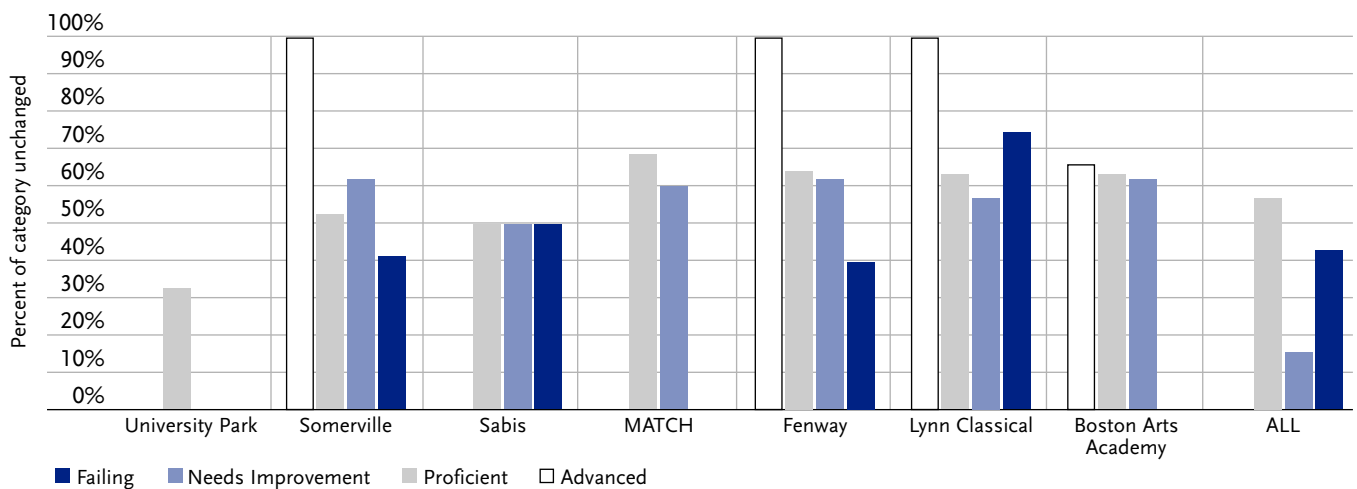
**FIGURE 1A:**  
**Percent of Students whose ELA MCAS Scores Increased from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



**FIGURE 1B:**  
**Percent of Students whose ELA MCAS Scores Decreased from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



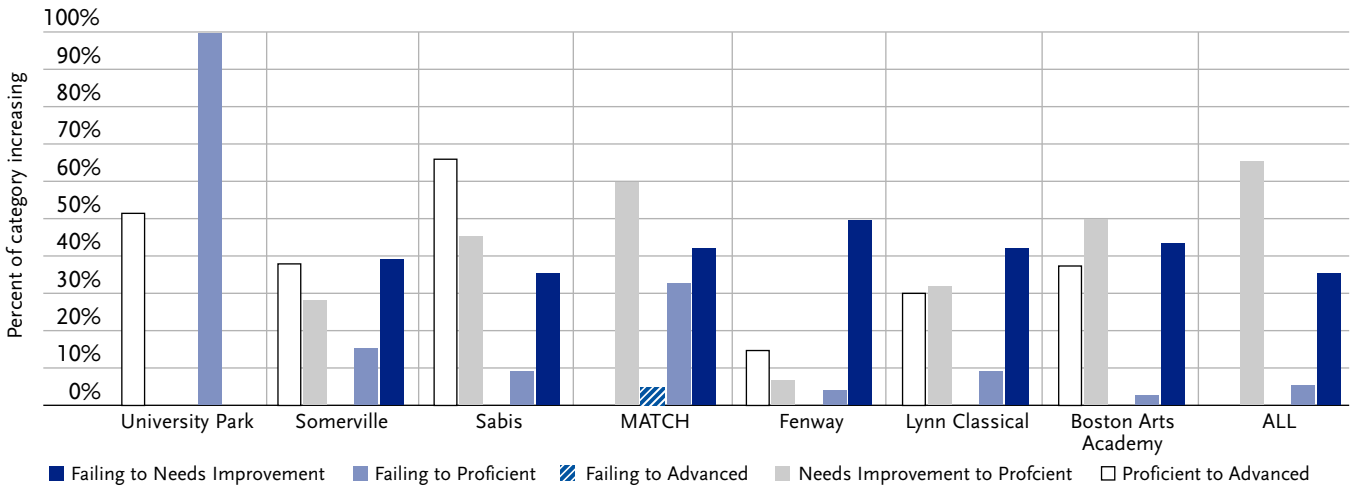
**FIGURE 1C:**  
**Percent of Students whose ELA MCAS Scores Did Not Change from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



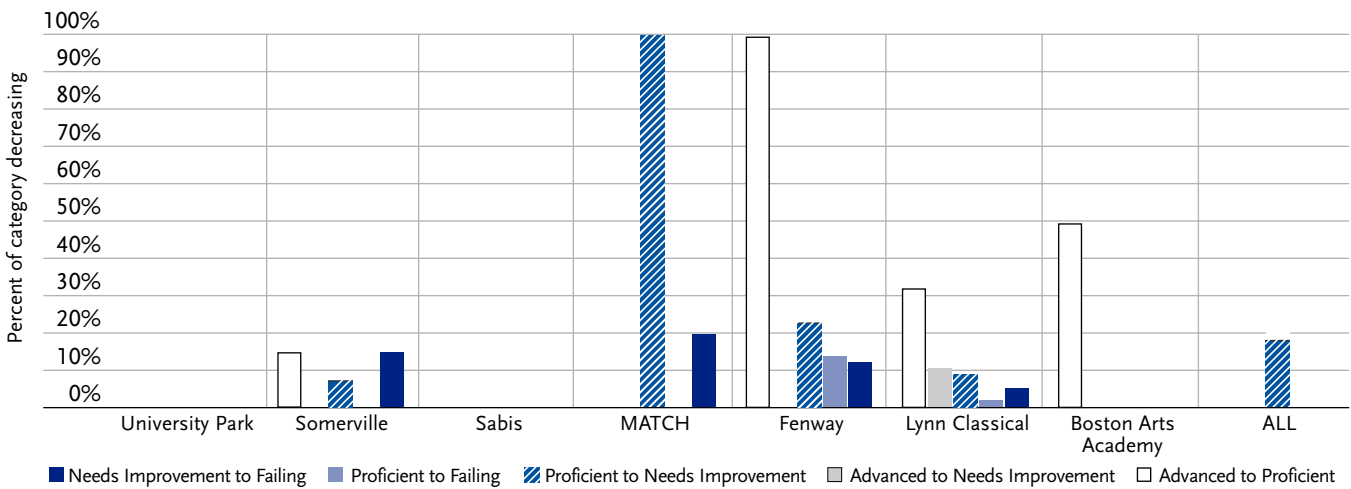
Source: Massachusetts Department of Education



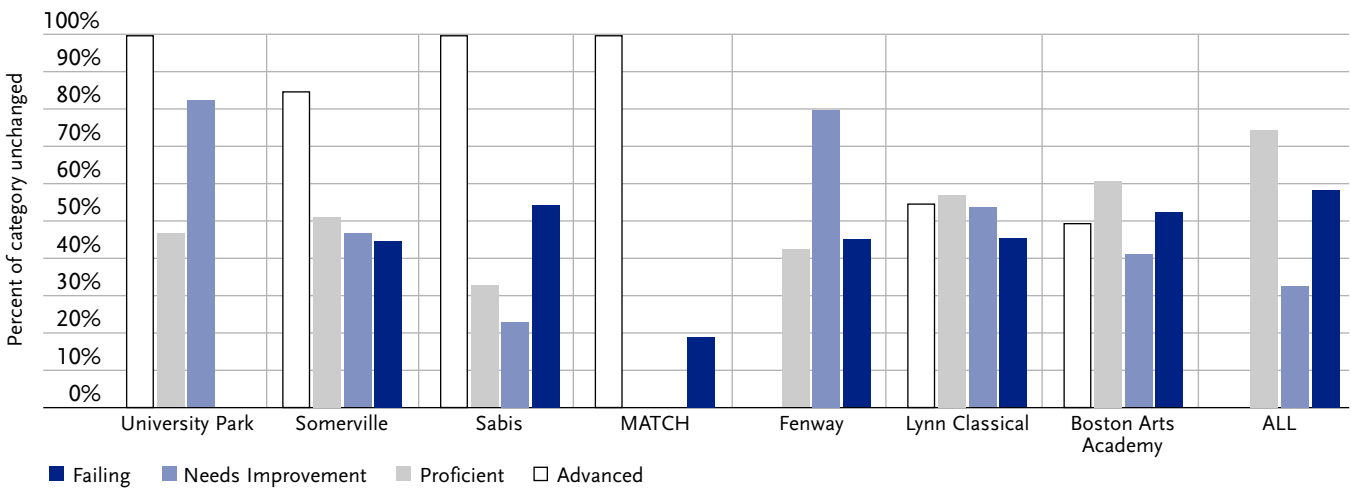
**FIGURE 2A:**  
**Percent of Students whose Math MCAS Scores Increased from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



**FIGURE 2B:**  
**Percent of Students whose Math MCAS Scores Decreased from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



**FIGURE 2C:**  
**Percent of Students whose Math MCAS Scores Did Not Change from 8th to 10th grade, by category, 2000 to 2002**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Education

## What Makes a Difference— Identifying Conditions for Success

Site visits to each school were completed during the Spring of 2003 to identify policies and practices that might be associated with the promising progress being made by the schools. We spent about a day at each school, interviewing administrators, teachers, and students. Classes were briefly observed, and documentation about the schools (e.g., courses offered, average class size, teacher turnover, and funding sources) were collected and reviewed.

During school site visits, all respondents were first asked: “Why are students performing better here than at other schools?” Although the time spent at each school was brief, the same answers were repeated from school to school, and a number of themes emerged:

- High standards and expectations for students & teachers;
- School culture that personalizes instruction, and provides supports for students and teachers;
- Small class sizes and small learning communities where students and teachers can form strong, trusting relationships, and teachers can understand and respond to students’ needs;
- Curriculum that is data-driven, emphasizes literacy and mathematics, and prepares students for college; and
- Strong relationships with parents and community members as well as support from universities and corporate partners who provide resources, as well as involvement in the educational program.

These five themes were echoed across the schools, despite the fact that the schools differ in a variety of significant ways, most notably in size, organization and governance structures. We are aware that the five themes, or identified conditions contributing to the relative success of the selected schools are not unique to the schools included in this study. Many high schools around the Commonwealth and indeed around the nation are using similar strategies in attempts to improve the academic performance of students. Although it is not entirely clear from our brief time at the schools how these approaches might be working to facilitate success, we believe it is the combination of approaches that contribute to the higher performance of the schools included in this study. In future work, we would also examine the importance of additional factors such as district leadership, availability of outside resources, or flexibility in governance structures that might also be contributing factors. What we have at this juncture is descriptive data that

can lay the groundwork for helping us to identify promising strategies for success. Based on our interviews and observations, the following sections provide details regarding how these five common strategies have been implemented at the nine selected high schools.

### SCHOOL SUCCESS IS IMPACTED BY:

- High standards & expectations
- Supportive school cultures
- Small learning communities
- Focused curriculum
- Community engagement

#### ■ High Standards and Expectations

**Expectations are clearly communicated to students and parents.** Expectations regarding academics, attendance, and behavior are clearly and repeatedly shared with parents and students. They are communicated to parents at school meetings, through phone conversations, and in written correspondence. Students are given the messages that: school is important; they are expected to work hard to succeed; and they will be supported in their efforts. According to the school principal at Lynn Classical, as soon as they arrive at the school, students are told that they are expected to take schoolwork seriously. They are told that teachers mean business and that attendance and participation are important. In the classroom, teachers send the same message by not allowing anything to disrupt them while teaching. The administration supports this by not interrupting class with messages over the intercom.

**Communication about standards and expectations are pervasive.** In each of the selected schools, teachers and administrators expressed their belief that all children can learn to high standards if gaps in their knowledge are identified and filled. These high standards and associated expectations are made explicit to students and their parents in myriad ways. Several schools post their beliefs or core values around the school. Sabis, for example, has posted in every classroom: “Always try; do your best; cooperate and actively help others; treat others with respect; manage yourself; respect the property and rights of others.” Posted at Fenway is “No shame, blame, or attack; try it on; 100% responsibility; maintain confidentiality.” At the Academy of the Pacific Rim, students have painted sayings on the staircase mural signifying that success comes from effort. Such

signs can be found in many, many schools. One student, however, articulated the difference: “In this school, they mean it.”

In class, students are expected to stick with their work until they reach mastery. Many teachers provide students with the opportunity to retake tests and resubmit papers that do not meet standards. Students are not promoted to the next grade level unless all requirements are met. Some students at Fenway will take only three classes and spend the rest of the day being tutored to assure they can meet standards. At MATCH, students are required to attend summer school if they fail a class. If they fail two classes, they are required to repeat the grade and attend summer school. A few of the schools tell students and their parents up front that it may take four, five, or six years for the students to complete high school.

The schools also communicate high standards through discipline and dress codes. Some schools require uniforms. Even though the “uniforms” can be quite informal, the expectations about them are clear: shirts must be tucked in, boys must wear belts; appropriate attire is expected at all times. At the Academy of the Pacific Rim, students are not allowed to go to class if they arrive at school late, are not in full uniform, act disrespectfully, or come to class unprepared. Absences and tardiness are not tolerated in any of the schools, and students who are late are sanctioned in various ways. In schools such as MATCH, there are consequences including detention and calls home for students who do not complete their work. Three incidents of lateness may lead to detention, demerits, and/or calls home.

### ■ Supportive School Cultures

**Support systems are in place to help students meet high expectations.** High expectations are held for students, but those requiring extra support can access the help. Students hear time and again that if they want to do well enough in high school to go on to college, they will be helped to succeed. This help comes in many forms. Typically, teachers come to school early and stay late to work with students. Tutors are available during the school day as well as before and after and tutoring sessions are often required for struggling students. Outside mentors and in-school advisors offer additional support.

At the MATCH, students receive an average of 100 hours of one-on-one tutoring each year. The younger students (ninth and tenth graders) receive 80-100 additional hours

## LYNN CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL

Lynn Classical High School is one of the two large high schools in Lynn. It enrolls over 1,400 students—47% of whom are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The school is 15% African American, 20% Asian, 14% Hispanic, and 50% white. The student population also includes students who speak 26 native languages.

### CURRICULUM

Math and literacy are priorities at Lynn Classical High School. All freshmen take algebra and alternate taking one extra math and one extra English period a week, ending up with the equivalent of one and a half years of math and English by the end of their freshman year. Most math and English classes have 20 or fewer students.

There has also been a school-wide focus on writing across the curriculum. Twice a year teachers submit student writing samples and assessments to the principal. The principal, academic dean, and department chairs review the student work and they, in turn, provide feedback to teachers.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

Lynn Classical High School has a history of a positive school culture that began in its previous, smaller facility, and has continued. The principal greets students in the morning and is in classrooms every day. At lunchtime, at every table, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds eat together. Any student stopped and asked about the school smiles and explains that he or she likes Lynn Classical because “the teachers really care and people are friendly here.” A clear message is also given to students that “if you want to go to college, we’ll work to get you there.”

### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

School improvement was jump-started in 1993 when Lynn Classical High School received a \$1 million grant from General Electric. This money enabled the school to increase professional development for teachers, add advanced placement courses, update technology, and increase classroom resources. Additional grant money has been used to bolster math and science in feeder schools, so that students arrive at Lynn Classical High School with prerequisite skills. General Electric also provided expertise to help the school analyze MCAS data, and sends employees to serve as mentors and tutors. This comprehensive public high school has successfully leveraged these resources to implement practices that have resulted in higher student performance.

of tutoring in the summer, and every tenth grade student is assigned a tutor. The school's founder feels strongly that tutoring is one of the most significant reasons for the school's success.

Schools understand that students may require additional time and learning to meet high standards and adjust the schedule of academic support accordingly. Like many other

schools, Somerville provides MCAS preparation on Saturday mornings as well as after school and during the school day. Lynn has an extended day for at-risk juniors and seniors where one teacher generally works with about five students. Lynn also has an MCAS Saturday School for preparation of sophomores, which is well attended and an MCAS Prep course is offered for students who failed MCAS or scored in the "needs improvement" category.

## **SOMERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL**

Somerville High School, a comprehensive school offering vocational and academic courses, has changed in recent years from a predominantly white, working-class student body to a multicultural population of over 1700. The student body is 57% white, 17.6% African American, 16.8% Hispanic, and 8.2% Asian. Fifty-one percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

### **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

Interdisciplinary work is encouraged at Somerville High School, and a major emphasis is placed on reading and writing across the disciplines. Each quarter students are expected to complete one interdisciplinary project that is created and graded jointly by teachers from different disciplines. They are also expected to complete, individually or in small groups, one interdisciplinary project related to formal research and use of technology. Students must also meet school-to-career standards related to workplace competencies in grades nine through twelve.

Each content teacher maintains a portfolio of student work on every student. Certain days are designated as "portfolio days" when teachers are required to give students portfolio assignments. Students select samples of work each quarter to put into their portfolios, which are given to guidance at the end of the year. Performance standards are clearly communicated to students. Teachers send home course syllabi with course outcomes, performance expectations, and a description of the school's grading policy.

### **LEADERSHIP**

The tone of respect evident in Somerville High School filters down from the Superintendent. He is available to all staff, and knows everyone by name. Similarly, the high school principal knows everyone in his building. Leadership in the building is shared through a faculty senate, active union, active PTA, and a School Council that meets regularly with the principal on school issues.

### **A NURTURING COMMUNITY**

There is a strong connection between the high school and the community, and among students and faculty. Relationships between teachers, students, and administrators extend beyond the classroom. The teachers are with students in the cafeteria, in extracurricular clubs, cultural clubs and at athletic events. Many faculty live in Somerville and frequently run into their students outside of school. One teacher remarked that the school is so nurturing because: "these are our kids." Other teachers expressed their commitment to students' social and emotional growth as well as to their academic achievement. Successful graduates return to the school to talk to and encourage students, and services such as off-site counseling for students also demonstrate the school's commitment to the "whole student."

### **SMALL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES**

Somerville High School is structured to facilitate this sense of community. Grades 9 and 10 are broken down into clusters of 100 students, enabling teachers to get to know their students well. Through three 66-minute cluster meetings every seven days, teachers also have the opportunity to discuss their students with colleagues.

The characteristics and practices of this comprehensive public high school combine to provide high expectations and high performance. It would seem that many of the practices in use here could be readily adopted in similar schools.

**Lengthening the school day and/or school year provides students with additional support.** High standards and expectations are supported by extending the school day and year. Students at the Academy of the Pacific Rim attend school for 210 days—30 days longer than the requisite 180 days. Their school day is also longer, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 4:00 p.m. MATCH, Sabis, Fenway High, and Boston Arts Academy also have longer school days. Until this year University Park and the ALL had longer school days, but lost them due to fiscal constraints.

**Teachers are supported through professional development and community.** Professional community plays a critical role in all of the schools studied. Time is set aside for teachers to meet together to discuss both students and curriculum. At Somerville High, teachers meet in clusters for three 66-minute blocks every seven days to discuss student progress. At the ALL, time is set aside for a “critical friends” program where teachers receive support from other teachers who are trained coaches. Teachers also look at student work together and are allotted additional time for interdisciplinary curriculum work. Fenway teachers meet together four hours a week, spending two hours discussing students and two hours in the content area. According to one teacher at MATCH, the school is “one of the greatest and toughest places I’ve worked, but people care about one another and there is a lot of collegiality.”

These schools also offer teachers different kinds of professional development, including content-specific training, instructional strategies, training on methods of assessment, and/or leadership skills. Teachers at the Boston Arts Academy receive on-going professional development throughout the school year to support their growth as writers and teachers of writing. Sabis teachers receive a week of training every year on curriculum, working with children of poverty, and positivism in the workplace. They are also encouraged to attend other professional development opportunities. Lynn Classical has enabled teachers to visit and learn from colleagues in other school systems. Two common themes were apparent in all schools: (1) teachers generally have choice over their professional development; and (2) teachers reported an enormous gain from working, planning, and teaching together.

**Shared, participatory leadership provides vision and unity.** The school leaders in all the schools shared some common traits. All were clear about their vision and able to communicate it to their faculty. All showed appreciation

for their teachers, crediting them for their schools’ successes. They understood the need and created the conditions, for teachers to have time during the day to meet together to discuss curriculum and students. They also all strongly believed that all students could achieve at high levels; in several schools, they talked about holding teachers, as well as students, accountable for student achievement.

School leaders also treat teachers as professionals... All these schools exhibit some degree of participatory decision-making.

School leaders also treated their teachers as professionals. In fact, school leadership in these schools does not reside in a single person. All these schools exhibit some degree of participatory decision-making. The Superintendent in Somerville sets a tone of respect. He is available to teachers and administrators and knows every teacher by name. Within the high school, teachers play an important part in decision making through the faculty senate. The PTA and teachers’ union are very active, and the principal meets with the School Council weekly. The staff at University Park Campus is involved in decision-making and a leadership team determines the school budget. A Board of Trustees that oversees school operations governs Fenway High School. The Board includes parents, teachers, and community members. With the approval of the Superintendent, the Board chooses the school head and reviews his/her performance. The School Leadership Team at Fenway includes several teachers, a school counselor, and program directors. Faculty input is solicited for major decisions. The Leadership Team at Boston Arts Academy includes the school’s administrators and department heads, two teachers from the teacher union and two elected by the faculty. They determine policy, staffing needs, and set budget priorities.

**Student involvement in decision-making promotes engagement.** Schools employ varying strategies for engaging students in school decision-making, but in most cases, students feel empowered to influence school decisions. The most unusual example of this is at Sabis, where students hold positions that parallel administrative roles. In other schools, students can: write petitions for changes in practices, take the initiative to start new activities, and run school assemblies or town meetings. Students at ALL feel that they have input into school decisions, and their requests for changes in practices are seriously considered. In Lynn, students are taken seriously as leaders. If the school council

has an issue, they can, and will, bring it to the School Improvement Council for consideration. These grievances tend to be concerns affecting students directly—such as changes regarding carrying backpacks to class. Students at University Park have a greater role—they are involved in more major decisions, including interviewing new teachers and writing the school’s mission statement. At the Boston Arts Academy, the students have written a constitution for their student council that is based on the U.S. Constitution. Executive members of the council meet weekly with the school’s leadership team.

### ■ Smaller learning communities

**Smaller learning communities build relationships between students and teachers.** Teachers, students, and administrators in the smaller schools we visited (Academy of the Pacific Rim, ALL, Fenway High, MATCH, University Park and Boston Arts Academy) strongly believe that the small size of the school contributes greatly to their success. Teachers and administrators know all of the students, and no one “falls through the cracks.” As one student aptly put it, “you can run, but you can’t hide.” Teachers are able to

call students when they are absent, keep in close touch with students’ parents, and quickly identify and meet the instructional needs of students. Students, in turn, feel a close bond with their teachers. “We respect and care about our teachers. We’d be embarrassed to come to class unprepared,” said a student at University Park Campus School. Other students told us: “Everyone gets a chance to be heard.”

When students in these schools were asked why they were doing better “here” than students in other schools, the universal answer was “the teachers really care about us here!” The small size of the schools and/or the substructures within them play an important part in creating a nurturing atmosphere which students say is so important. At Sabis, students talk about the close relationships between teachers and students. “We talk to teachers in and out of class.” In another school a student said, in a voice that still holds surprise, “The teachers even give us their home phone numbers!” Every teacher at the Academy of the Pacific Rim has his or her own phone and voicemail. Students call and leave messages if they need help and would like to meet with the teacher.

## WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE SUCCESS OF UNIVERSITY PARK CAMPUS SCHOOL?

University Park Campus School (UPCS) is a partnership between Clark University, the Worcester Public Schools and the University Park neighborhood. Opened in 1997, it is a grade 7-12 program adjacent to the Clark University campus. The school has been structured to support students in the University Park neighborhood in achieving higher academic performance. Performance expectations are made clear through the frequent use of rubrics in all classes. Student data is used to develop a prescription of every student’s needs, and all teachers maintain portfolios of students’ work to track progress. Courses are college preparatory and students have a minimum of two hours of homework each night. They run for 90-minute blocks with approximately 15 students in a class. Students in grades 7 and 8 are “looped,” so that teachers keep the same students for the two years, and little instructional time is lost to getting to know a new group of students. In addition, students have internships in the community, and are expected to perform community service. Currently UCPS serves over 200 students.

Many of the characteristics of UPCS—small size, a data-driven curriculum, internships, and community service are also found in other schools. But it is the combination of these characteristics, along with a number of other factors, that seem to explain the UPCS success story. These other factors include: the strength of the partnership with Clark University; the relationship between the school and the community; an intense curricular focus on reading in grades 7 and 8; capable school leaders; and the extended school day.

### THE PARTNERSHIP WITH CLARK UNIVERSITY

As suggested by the school’s location, the partnership with Clark University is very close. In fact, no school has developed a partnership characterized with commitments as extraordinary as those made by Clark University. Educators from Clark and Worcester Public Schools worked hand in hand for a year planning the school. Clark University facilities are open to UPCS students; professors, students, and administrators from the University have a daily presence at the school working as instructors, interns, and mentors. In their junior year students can also take classes at Clark. Most extraordinary is the offer Clark has made to UPCS students: any student who is accepted to Clark University through the regular admissions process is awarded free tuition.

In the larger schools, (Somerville and Lynn Classical), clusters are used to create small learning communities that make the school feel smaller. Teachers proudly say they know all the kids and can better keep track of them. As one teacher in Somerville High said, “We [teachers] are with students in the cafeteria, involved with them in extracurricular clubs, cultural clubs and at athletic events... We know every student who failed [MCAS] because we deal with them constantly: in the corridors, cafeteria, detention, and in the community.” Somerville High has created a house structure within the school for their 9th and 10th graders. This allows Somerville High School to act like a small school in some ways. Students stay in clusters with the same 100 students and same teachers throughout the day. This enables teachers to become better acquainted with their students and to work more closely with other teachers. Similarly, it allows students to familiarize themselves with a smaller group of peers, and to form stronger bonds within the cluster.

**Structures are developed to support and maximize the benefits of a small school.** Classes at Fenway are looped for

four years and at University Park for two—meaning that the same teachers stay with the students from year to year, and the students stay together as a class for their entire school career. The students say this generates a sense of family in which everyone supports each other. All of the smaller schools have implemented an advisor-advisee system, another way in which small schools can personalize attention. All students are matched with one adult in the building who can act as a mentor, advisor, and guide. This structure enables teachers to get to know a very small group of students particularly well, outside the classroom. It also provides classroom teachers with support because another colleague in the building knows the student and is helping to keep the student on track.

The schools also use advisories instead of the traditional homerooms. All teachers, and often, all adults at the school, have an advisory of anywhere from six to 20 students. The purpose of the system is to ensure that all students have at least one adult watching out for them. Advisories meet at different intervals—from once a week to daily—and are used for a range of activities, including: discussions on

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

From the planning stages of the school, UPCS has placed a great deal of emphasis on engaging the neighborhood. This resulted in considerable buy-in from the community when the school opened. The school’s philosophy (a school for the community, not merely a school in the community) and resulting actions have fostered the good will. When a student is having difficulties, the entire family is called in an effort to try to find solutions. The school routinely acts as an advocate for its families in matters related to legal problems and income assistance. A referral system has been established for mental health problems, free adult education classes are available at night (with free baby-sitting by Clark students), and a community health center has been established.

### FOCUS ON READING

Most students at University Park enter 9th grade reading at, or close to, their grade level despite the fact that 50% entered 7th school at a 3rd grade reading level. By utilizing 7th and 8th grade to focus on reading skills (e.g., very low readers receive phonics tutoring; all teachers read with their students in all subjects), students are better prepared for the high school curriculum. The school program is also enhanced by a school-wide literacy initiative and school-wide writing coach, ensuring that reading and writing expectations for students are consistent throughout the school.

### LEADERSHIP

Both students and faculty spoke about the strength of the school’s leadership. Administrators are very clear about expectations, know students well, and include teachers in school decision-making. The school principal visits students’ homes regularly, routinely facilitating the connections made between the schools’ families and human service and local relief agencies. She lives in the neighborhood and has earned the respect and support of both school and community.

### INCREASED INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Through the 2002-03 school year, the UPCS school day was extended by 2 hours, thus students attended an additional 10 hours a week. Teachers and administrators believe this time to be an invaluable part of the program. However, it has been eliminated for the current school year, in part due to funding. A homework center, open one hour before, and one hour after school, is still available.

health-related issues, review of academic progress, peer interaction, college and career, group guidance, team building, and tracking student progress.

#### **Small learning communities foster student relationships.**

In the smaller schools, students all know and interact with one another. At MATCH, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Sabis, the students believe that this prevents student cliques from forming. According to a student at Sabis, “No one here is or isn’t ‘cool.’” Several students said that their schools were “like family.” Doing well academically is an accepted norm. Students help one another and support one another’s efforts. Developing good, caring relationships with teachers is also an acceptable norm. Students indicated that classmates, who have left to return to a larger school, often regret their decision. They miss their friends and their relationships with faculty. “They come back,” recalled a student, “and say that the teachers in the other school don’t care like they do here.”

#### **■ Focused curriculum**

While the curriculum and instructional methods vary across the schools, most employ the following practices:

- **Focus on literacy and mathematics.** Often there is a school-wide focus on reading and writing. Some schools require students to take extra classes in English and math, provide intensive tutoring, and emphasize reading and writing in all disciplines.
- **Development and use of an interdisciplinary curriculum.** Teachers at most schools develop their own interdisciplinary units of study. Instruction at some schools is organized into interdisciplinary offerings, such as Humanities.
- **Focus on preparing students for college.** All schools focus on college preparatory classes. In some of the small schools, teachers take students to visit colleges. In others, students are able to take college courses while in high school.
- **Use of portfolio assessment.** At every school, we observed use of some sort of portfolio assessment, with specific samples of student work collected over time and reviewed periodically to determine educational progress. The teacher and the student often determine the contents of the portfolio together.

- **Alignment with the state’s curriculum frameworks.**

Most schools have intentionally created curriculum that aligns with the state’s frameworks. Others, however, focus on maintaining high academic standards and teaching higher-level thinking skills with less attention to the specific frameworks. These rigorous standards, in and of themselves, appear to prepare students well for MCAS.

- **Use of student achievement data to make curricular decisions.**

The small schools test students before they enter school to determine proper class placement and tutoring needs. Many schools assess student progress frequently, use it to revise curriculum to meet identified needs, and share results with parents and students.

#### **■ Parent and Community Engagement**

**University and business partnerships offer more than financial assistance.** Each of these schools has formal partnerships with at least one university or corporation and benefit in numerous ways from these affiliations. Partners provide mentors, tutors, internships, funding, college courses, and in one case, even tuition. Partnerships with universities tend to be particularly strong. University professors offer professional development to teachers. High school students are given the use of university campuses. Business leaders help with data analysis and strategic planning. They also act as mentors and advisors to students who do internships at their place of work. The external adult presence also tends to lend credibility to the relevance of what students are learning.

Schools have developed partnerships with a diverse range of community organizations and private sector entities.

- Fenway has many partnerships, with schools, museums, businesses, and non-profit organizations such as Harvard Medical School, Boston University, Jobs for the Future, and the Museum of Science, to name just a few. In fact, students use the Museum of Science for their science labs, as they do not have one at their facility. Also a member of the Urban Teacher Training Collaborative, Fenway benefits from teacher interns who spend an entire year at the school observing and assisting teachers, tutoring, and teaching classes. Fenway students are mentored by professionals in the business world, and provided with work site experiences and internships.



- Boston Arts Academy also collaborates with organizations throughout Boston. These include, but are not limited to: the ProArts Consortium, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Institute for Contemporary Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts.
- Somerville High has interns, from the University of Massachusetts and Tufts University, who assist with teaching and provide tutoring for students. Somerville High also prides itself on having close connections to the community. This is evident in its extensive student support system. For example, the local mental health clinic provides clinical services to students at the high school. The Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism Rehabilitation (CASPAR) offers 7th to 12th graders group sessions on alcohol use and abuse. There is a health clinic within the high school run by Somerville Hospital. The Comprehensive Parenting Education Program (COPE) is available to pregnant or parenting students. Another program (Alpha) provides infant day-care for the children of teen parents while they complete high school. In addition, “Redirect” is a regular education program for students who are in danger of dropping out of school. Students work with a Redirect teacher/counselor during their study periods on academic and school-related issues; this counselor also maintains close communication with the student’s home.
- Lynn Classical has formed a strong alliance with General Electric. In addition to providing grants totaling over \$1.4 million over the last ten years, GE also has assisted Lynn Classical with an early analysis of MCAS scores and has been sending mentors to the school for years.
- For a year before University Park Campus opened, a team from Clark University and Worcester Public Schools spent a year jointly planning the school. University Park Campus students have full use of the Clark campus and feel they are a part of the university. In addition to providing tutors, student interns, and mentors for University Park Campus students, Clark admits some of the high school students to classes there and guarantees all students free tuition to Clark if they are admitted through the regular admissions process.
- MATCH resides next to Boston University and partners not only with this higher education institution, but also with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Boston

College, and Harvard University. Boston University provides tutors and student teachers and allows some high school students to take courses at the University. MIT contributes science fair and robotics team coaches. Students have also participated in the SEED project.

**Relationships with parents are on-going, extensive, and positive.** All of the schools place a high premium on communication with parents, going to great lengths to build bridges and to develop trusting relationships. Administrators and teachers make frequent calls to parents to talk about their children’s achievements, upcoming projects, and events. Disciplinary or academic problems are also consistently communicated through dialogue with parents. A few schools have phones in every teacher’s room to make it easier for teachers to call homes.

Schools emphasize to parents the important role they play in their children’s education.

Communication with families is prioritized through a range of methods. In some schools, teachers write in-depth narrative student reports twice a year. In the Academy of the Pacific Rim, for example, parents receive biweekly reports on students’ grades, assignments, classroom work and tests. The principal at MATCH makes a point of calling every parent at least once every other week. University Park Campus School’s principal visits homes to help parents understand what they need to do to help their children succeed and frequently helps them with housing programs, legal issues and mental health referrals. The school also offers parents free adult education classes at night, which are attended by 200 adults four nights per week. Clark students baby-sit the children of the parents for free.

In all schools, parents are invited to school frequently for parent conferences, literacy nights, math family nights and open houses. University Park Campus School invites parents to such events four times a year. Boston Arts Academy has parents in frequently to see their children perform. The school also has “Room Parents” for every advisory group. These parent leaders call other parents before school conferences as a reminder. In addition, students, as well as their parents, attend parent-teacher conferences. Parental attendance is 85-90%. Lynn Classical and the ALL both have open door policies for any parent who wants to come in to talk with the principal.

Schools emphasize to parents the important role they play in their children's education. MATCH parents must sign a contract when students begin. Fenway insists on a parent contact. Administrators report that because of these practices, parents cooperate with the school when a problem occurs with a student and help enforce consequences. The students, of course, do not always appreciate this. As one student moaned, "my parents have been brainwashed!"

### **Unique Elements Contributing to Higher Performance**

The foregoing discussion is not meant to suggest that the nine schools have employed identical means to achieve success. Quite the contrary is true. Despite their many similarities, the schools selected for this study have unique features that combine with the five common strategies to drive each school's success. Following is a school-by-school look at some distinguishing practices. Throughout the text we have also provided additional data on three of the study schools that we believe are worth extra note: University Park Campus School because of its unique consistent high performance, and Somerville and Lynn Classical High Schools because they are the only two comprehensive public high schools that were identified as eligible for this study. As most of the high schools in the Commonwealth are more similar to the comprehensive high schools than to the small pilot and charter schools that comprise the bulk of the study sample, we wanted to highlight the promising practices of these two schools.

#### **Academy of the Pacific Rim**

Academy of the Pacific Rim has been structured so that a focus on learning and respect for teachers and other students is prominent. As all students take Chinese language courses, Chinese characters line the walls of these classrooms. With the use of the school's common grading database, teachers provide students and their parents with a grade print-out every other week.

The Academy is centered on ritual and routines, and the principal makes conscious efforts to create a climate of respect. Teachers change classes, rather than students to eliminate lateness (maximizing instructional time) and noisy corridors. Every class begins with a ritualistic call to order; every class ends with a "thank you" from the teacher. The principal and the assistant principal stand outside the school each morning to shake each student's hand.

#### **The Accelerated Learning Lab (ALL)**

The Accelerated Learning Lab's emphasis has been on equipping students with skills that have a clear practical application after high school. For example, all students leave the school with a high degree of computer literacy. To this end, students participate in internships around Boston and are graded on how well they perform on the job.

For teachers at the school, a sense of professional community has been developed. Teachers meet once a week as part a critical friends program. Staff members work with trained coaches to look at student work and discuss common dilemmas. A goal for the end of the 2002-03 school year is to have all teachers attend one another's classes for the purposes of providing feedback to each other.

#### **Boston Arts Academy**

In an effort to create a rich arts environment, Boston Arts Academy has fully integrated the academic curriculum with an arts program. Students choose a specialty from one of five arts areas: visual arts, theatre, dance, instrumental music, or vocal music. In addition to carrying a full college prep course load, each student spends at least an additional 12 hours a week in his or her arts area. During senior year, students must write a grant proposal to fund an independent community outreach arts project.

The arts curriculum has been supported by the school's partnerships with local arts organizations. The school counts, to its credit, most of the major arts institutions in the Boston area among its partners. This includes: the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Classical Orchestra, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, etc. The school also has many renowned local, national and international artists in residence, or teaching "master classes."

#### **Fenway High School**

The curriculum at Fenway is built around authentic, performance-based learning; students are graded using performance-based assessments throughout their four years of high school. Freshman year, students are expected to share learning and knowledge publicly through exhibitions, math and science fairs, outside internships, and classroom discussions. In addition to coursework and standardized test requirements, senior year includes the development of portfolios in math, science, and the humanities, an internship, and the creation of an advisory portfolio that includes future plans, voter registration and a reflective essay.

The school has also chosen to focus on developing students' entrepreneurial skills. Students in grades 10-12 can participate in a Ventures Program, in which students learn basic business and entrepreneurial concepts, methodologies, and tools, such as market research, letter writing, finding the "bottom line," and networking with businesses and community groups. The program culminates in a full-time six-week senior internship.

### **Lynn Classical**

In addition to a focus on community building, Lynn Classical has become a data-driven school, increasing student success by emphasizing instruction in math and English literacy. As part of the partnership formed with General Electric (GE), the school has been able to do early data analysis of MCAS results. The school has chosen to focus its professional development on this analysis, making curriculum decisions around student performance. As part of this, all teachers get a copy of the MCAS results with an item analysis report by student.

Additional focus on math and literacy has been a by-product of this data analysis; ninth graders alternate between taking additional mathematics and English courses each week, ending the year having taken the equivalent of one and a half years of both English and math. There is a major school-wide focus on the John Collins writing program. All teachers maintain portfolios of student writing. Twice a year they submit samples of writing folders, course syllabi, and assessments to the principal and academic dean for feedback. Additional information on the program at Lynn Classical is provided in a sidebar elsewhere in this report.

### **Media and Technology Charter (MATCH) School**

The school philosophy at MATCH perceives students as making a contractual commitment when attending the school. That is, students are expected to abide by the rules of the school, including completing assignments; if they choose not to, students will face consequences. This concept is very prevalent at the school; parents must sign an actual contract when students enter MATCH, agreeing to cooperate with the school.

The MATCH School curriculum offers students diverse options, while upholding rigorous standards. MATCH has partnered with Massachusetts Institute of Technology resulting in course offerings on robotics and military chemistry. Students in ninth and tenth grades take two math classes, twice the number of most high school students.

With respect to the school's emphasis on literacy, students are expected to read twenty books a year, twelve as a part of their English class curriculum. Students also attend writing clinics where they receive one-on-one tutoring, if needed. Students who have demonstrated mastery of the basics can take courses at Boston University.

### **Sabis International**

Sabis places value on shared decision-making and student leadership, using an approach that differs from that of the other schools. Sabis has a unique organizational structure, with students occupying positions parallel to adults in the system. For example, the head precept—a student position—reports to the Student Life Coordinator and meets weekly with the school director. Other students are also given responsibility to perform various jobs in the school, for example, as a precept (another student position) assists teachers in every class. In addition, when teachers are concerned about a particular student, they may ask student leaders to talk to him or her. Students are paid for a number of positions, including running after-school programs and teaching a Saturday program.

Sabis's "Point and Precept" system of instruction standardizes the instruction given to students and tracks student mastery of concepts taught. With this system, all teachers teaching the same subject teach the same concept at the same time. Prior to the beginning of class every teacher is expected to write the day's objectives, or "points" up on the board. The teacher teaches to the "point," then students move into their small groups and individually practice the new skill to show written mastery. The precept manages the group's learning by acting as a coach and checking the work of group members. The teacher then checks with the precepts to ascertain if students have mastered the "point." If, when tested, the class average is under 70, concepts must be re-taught.

### **Somerville High School**

At Somerville, interdisciplinary curriculum is key. All clusters offer sequential, interdisciplinary, and thematic curriculum units developed by teachers representing the four core areas: English, math, social studies, and science. Teachers from different disciplines develop and assign projects together, then jointly grade them from their different perspectives. Students are expected to complete an interdisciplinary project each quarter of a full-year course in the English, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics Departments. They are also expected to complete, individ-

ually or in small groups, one interdisciplinary project involving formal research and the use of technology in accordance with the school's Study Skills Standards. School staff expended a great deal of effort aligning the curriculum (including the interdisciplinary components) with the MCAS.

Somerville also has a strong school-to-career focus; students must meet school-to-career standards in addition to academic ones. Grade 9 students are introduced to workplace competencies. Grades 9 and 10 explore School-to-Work strands, and Grades 11 and 12 choose a specific strand for a structured sequence of integrated worksite and school learning activities. More information on the program and practices at Somerville High School is provided in a sidebar elsewhere in this report.

### University Park Campus

A unique feature of University Park is its relationship with Clark University, which is adjacent to the school. Clark's commitment to the school has been unflagging. When the Worcester Public Schools ran into financial difficulties, Clark offered to provide assistance. Clark University provides professional development opportunities for University Park Campus teachers, and Clark faculty are frequent visitors to the school. University Park Campus School students use the Clark campus as their own, taking advantage of its library, athletic fields, and other resources. Some 11th and 12th grade students take courses at Clark, while Clark graduate and undergraduate students intern, mentor, and tutor students at the school. Additionally, high school students who are accepted to Clark under their regular admissions program are guaranteed free tuition.

University Park Campus School also has very close ties to the neighborhood, with an extensive adult education program and joint grants for the school and community. In addition, students have internships in the community and are expected to perform community service. For additional information on the University Park partnership with Clark University and aspects of school life, see the sidebar included in the report text and the case study appended to the report.

### Conclusions and Next Steps

Across the nation and within the Commonwealth, numerous efforts are underway to improve and revitalize the public schools. Nowhere has this task proved more daunting than in urban high schools serving large concentrations of low-income and minority students. While the

Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 helped focus attention on the need to address performance and accountability for all students, and recent evidence suggests many successes, the complex demands placed on urban high schools have created challenging conditions that sometimes thwart change efforts. This was clearly evident in our inability to identify more than one truly high performing urban high school.

Nonetheless, the nine schools identified in this study have made major strides toward improving student academic performance through a combination of strategies that support conditions for improvement: pervasive communication of high standards and expectations; creation of comprehensive support systems for both students and teachers; development of small learning communities that create personalized learning environments; an unwavering focus on academics with a commitment to college preparation; and extensive engagement with parents and community members. Yet each of the schools has a very different approach to teaching and learning. Some are very structured, while others are not. Rules are different; the curriculum differs. Schools vary in size and philosophy. Each school also has a set of unique attributes that appears to contribute to their success, such as flexibility in administrative and governance structures through charter or pilot school status, and external partnerships that provide resources and systemic supports such as professional development opportunities for teachers.

We know that there is no single panacea to ensure academic success. Ultimately, as our findings suggest, a confluence of factors determines whether or not a school “works” for its students.

We know that there is no single panacea to ensure academic success. Ultimately, as our findings suggest, a confluence of factors determines whether or not a school “works” for its students. We have been less successful, though, in isolating some key strategies that are critical contributors to success. We know, for example, that many other urban schools have adopted similar strategies with less success, and many operate under similar organizational and governance mechanisms with fewer accomplishments. Still, this study has a number of lessons to contribute:

- **Focus on and support academics.** Study findings suggest that students in the nine schools are improving because they were sent a clear message about the importance of academics, and they were provided with the supports they needed to reach the high standards expected of them. A common practice used to support academics is the provision of additional time. This can take many forms, such as an extended day, Saturday classes, or after school programs focused on academics.
- **Community partnerships.** School partnerships with universities, businesses, and city institutions (such as museums, art centers, and libraries) appear to be powerful contributors to promoting student achievement and providing external resources that can promote professional communities and opportunities for teachers.
- **Size matters.** The nine study schools vary tremendously in their size and scope. Yet all of them, even the two large comprehensive high schools, have created structures that foster personalization and allow small learning communities to flourish. These structures foster relationships between teachers, students and parents in myriad ways that contribute to student success.

Just how the study schools created the conditions for improvement and the extent to which their unique attributes may be a factor in their ability to make progress, are topics that warrant further consideration through a rigorously designed, comprehensive research study. Only in this way will we be able to systematically identify successful schools and isolate specific strategies that can be replicated and adapted in order to build on their success. Such a study would also inform policymakers about the need to support and target successful strategies and the importance of focusing on capacity building efforts among schools with the most complex needs.

While the research reported here is a good start, significant questions remain. Importantly, we need to develop a clear consensus about what exactly constitutes high performance, and what data and related indicators are available to determine if schools are meeting standards of high performance. This issue, as well as numerous others must be considered for future examination so that we can learn more about how to create successful learning conditions. Some topics for further policy research include:

- *How can the state and school systems “scale up” success?*
- *What set of policies, design and incentives can be created to make high-performing high schools the norm rather than the exception?*
- *How do schools structure successful relationships with community agencies to support student achievement?*
- *How do we retain committed teachers and administrators?*
- *How do schools create cultures of collegiality and professional community?*
- *What happens to students after they leave nurturing high school environments?*

In conclusion, we applaud the outstanding performance of University park Campus School. We commend the other eight schools cited for their promising performance, and we urge policymakers and education leaders to urgently turn their attention to urban high schools and their particular challenges.

## APPENDIX A PROFILES OF SELECTED SCHOOLS

### Academy of the Pacific Rim

Located in Hyde Park, Boston, Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School opened in 1997 and enrolls 242 students in grades 6-12. Students are primarily from Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Roslindale. The school is 64% Black, 24% White, 5% Asian, and 7% Hispanic. Approximately 51% of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunch.

**Mission.** The Academy’s mission is “to empower urban students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve their full intellectual and social potential by combining the best of the East—high standards, discipline, and character education, with the best of the West—a commitment to individualism, creativity, and diversity.”

**Additional Funding.** In addition to state entitlement monies, the Academy received \$250,000 in grants. This was used primarily for building classrooms and other building-related expenses, such as rent, which comes out of operating funds.

Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School  
1 Westinghouse Plaza  
Hyde Park, MA 02136  
617.361.0050  
www.pacrim.org  
Contact: Spencer Blasdale, Director of the Academy  
sblasdale@pacrim.org

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

SCHOOL SIZE (2001)	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
Total Enrollment	242	NA
9-12 Enrollment	53	NA
Grade Span Served	6-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	61.6 <sup>i</sup>	25.1

RETENTION RATES (%)	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
2001 (grade 9)	5	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	0	4.3

RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
African American	61.6	8.7
White	21.1	75.9
Hispanic	10.7	10.7
Asian	6.6	4.4
Native American	0	0.3

SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
SPED	14.0	16.4
Limited English Proficient	0	4.6

ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
Attendance Rate	95.5	94
Exclusion Rate	0	1.5
Dropout Rate	0	3.5

POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%) <sup>ii</sup>	Academy of the Pacific Rim	State Average
4 year	NA	53.6
2 year	NA	21.5
Work	NA	14.1

2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	33	19
Proficient	48	40
Needs Improvement	7	27
Failing	11	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	NA	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	NA	NA
MATH		
Advanced	22	20
Proficient	56	24
Needs Improvement	7	31
Failing	15	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	NA	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	NA	NA

## Accelerated Learning Lab (ALL) School

Established in 1992 as a Co-NECT School, the Accelerated Learning Lab (ALL) School is part of the Worcester Public Schools. A K-12 school, it currently has 888 students, 158 of whom are high school students. The school is 39% Hispanic, 38% White, 14% African American, 8% Asian, and nearly 1% Native American.

**Mission.** Started as a Co-NECT School, the ALL School maintains a strong emphasis on technology. Teaching and learning is outcome-based. Teachers develop projects designed to help students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills through investigations and thematic integration of content areas. Students are given considerable responsibility for their learning.

**Additional Funding.** The ALL School is primarily funded through the Worcester Public Schools.

Accelerated Learning Lab School  
15 Claremont Street  
Worcester, MA 01605  
508.799.3077  
<http://www.worc.k12.ma.us/all/home.htm>  
Contact: Marie Galinski, Principal  
galinskim@worc.k12.ma.us

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>	ALL School	State Average
Total Enrollment	888	NA
9-12 Enrollment	158	NA
Grade Span Served	PreK-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	80.9	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>		
2001 (grade 9)	10	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	2	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>		
African American	14	8.7
White	38.2	75.9
Hispanic	39.4	10.7
Asian	7.8	4.4
Native American	0.7	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>		
SPED	18.1	16.4
Limited English Proficient	.5	4.6

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>		
Attendance Rate	94.3	94
Exclusion Rate	1.1	1.5
Dropout Rate	5.7	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)</b>		
4 year	48.3	53.6
2 year	31.0	21.5
Work	3.5	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	16	19
Proficient	53	40
Needs Improvement	16	27
Failing	16	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	52	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	4	NA
MATH		
Advanced	0	20
Proficient	28	24
Needs Improvement	34	31
Failing	37	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	41	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	4	NA

## Boston Arts Academy

Boston Arts Academy, Boston's first public school for the visual and performing arts, is a pilot school with 321 students. Opened in 1998, the school does not screen students academically or solely by talent. Rather, it screens by students' enthusiasm for the arts. Forty-eight percent of the school's students are African American, 2% Asian, 18% Hispanic, and 32% white. Fifty percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

**Mission.** The mission of the Arts Academy is to provide "a rigorous academic and arts education for students who are eager to think creatively and independently, to question, and to take risks within a college preparatory program."<sup>iii</sup>

**Additional Funding.** Though funded through the Boston School Department, the Boston Arts Academy Foundation was created to raise additional funds. The Arts Academy's strategic plan calls for additional funds of \$1 million per annum.

Boston Arts Academy  
174 Ipswich Street  
Boston, MA 02215  
617.635.6470  
<http://boston.k12.ma.us/baa/>  
Contact: Linda Nathan, Headmaster  
artsacademy@boston.k12.ma.us

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

	Boston Arts Academy	State Average
<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>		
Total Enrollment	321	NA
9-12 Enrollment	321	NA
Grade Span Served	9-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	50.0	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>		
2001 (grade 9)	5	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	1	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>		
African American	48.0	8.7
White	31.8	75.9
Hispanic	17.8	10.7
Asian	2.2	4.4
Native American	.3	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>		
SPED	10.7	16.4
Limited English Proficient	2.5	4.6

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>		
Attendance Rate	89.8	94
Exclusion Rate	3.1	1.5
Dropout Rate	1.9	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)</b>		
4 year	63.8	53.6
2 year	23.2	21.5
Work	NA	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
<b>LANGUAGE ARTS</b>		
Advanced	13	19
Proficient	42	40
Needs Improvement	34	27
Failing	11	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	19	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	19	NA
<b>MATH</b>		
Advanced	11	20
Proficient	27	24
Needs Improvement	34	31
Failing	29	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	46	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	2	NA



## Fenway High School

Fenway High School is a 20-year-old pilot school that is part of the Boston Public Schools. Fenway was established to work with at-risk students and has transitioned to become a pilot school with enrollment initiated by students and their families. The school enrolls 255 students. Of those, 51% are African American, 4.3% Asian, 24.3% Hispanic, 20.4% White, and .4% Native American. A total of 58% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

**Mission.** Fenway describes itself as valuing “personalized relationships between teachers and students, integrated, flexible curriculum, on-site, shaped decision-making, and learning partnerships with outside organizations.”<sup>iv</sup> Fenway strives to help students to learn how to learn and to think deeply about complex issues. Students are expected to share learning and knowledge publicly through exhibitions, internships, and classroom discussions.

**Additional Funding.** Fenway received \$316,500 in grant money in 2000-2001, \$313,600 in 2001-2002, and has pledges for over \$500,000 in 2002-2003.

Fenway High School  
174 Ipswich Street  
Boston, MA 02215  
617.635.9911  
<http://fenway.boston.k12.ma.us/>  
Contact: Peggy Kemp, Director  
[fenway@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:fenway@boston.k12.ma.us)

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
Total Enrollment	255	NA
9-12 Enrollment	255	NA
Grade Span Served	9-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	58.0	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
2001 (grade 9)	5	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	4	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
African American	50.6	8.7
White	20.4	75.9
Hispanic	24.3	10.7
Asian	4.3	4.4
Native American	0.4	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
SPED	9.3	16.4
Limited English Proficient	8.2	4.6

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
Attendance Rate	92.9	94
Exclusion Rate	3.9	1.5
Dropout Rate	3.1	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)</b>	Fenway High School	State Average
4 year	61.1	53.6
2 year	11.1	21.5
Work	7.4	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	4	19
Proficient	46	40
Needs Improvement	39	27
Failing	9	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	15	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	23	NA
MATH		
Advanced	0	20
Proficient	11	24
Needs Improvement	58	31
Failing	31	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	33	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	12	NA

## Lynn Classical High School

Lynn Classical High School is one of the two large high schools in Lynn. It enrolls over 1,400 students—47% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school is 15% African American, 20% Asian, 14% Hispanic, and 50% white.

**Mission.** As described on the school’s website, Lynn Classical High School is a diverse urban community dedicated to encouraging self-reliance, to fostering personal and social responsibility, to appreciating diversity, and to developing the ability to succeed in the world as a lifelong learner. The principal and teachers tell students, “If you want to go to college, we’ll try to get you there.”

**Additional Funding.** In 1993, Lynn Classical received \$1 million from General Electric (GE). This enabled the school to increase professional opportunities for students, add advanced placement courses, and update technology and other equipment. A few years later Classical received from GE a \$250,000 K-12 College Bound grant for a pilot program with the elementary and middle schools that feed into it. The following year, Classical received a \$150,000 Math Excellence Grant, and last October, in partnership with Tufts University, they were awarded a three-year \$350,000 grant for a GE/Tufts engineering initiative. Lynn Classical’s feeding middle school is the recipient, as the grant’s focus is to improve middle-school math and science and lay a foundation for high school engineering classes.

Lynn Classical High School  
235 O’Callaghan Way  
Lynn, MA 01905  
781.477.7404  
www.lynnschools.org  
Contact: Bill Frost, Principal  
frostw@lynnschools.org

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

SCHOOL SIZE (2001)	Lynn Classical High School	State Average
Total Enrollment	1447	NA
9-12 Enrollment	1447	NA
Grade Span Served	9-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	47.4	25.1

RETENTION RATES (%)		
2001 (grade 9)	3	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	1	4.3

RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)		
African American	15.3	8.7
White	50.2	75.9
Hispanic	14.3	10.7
Asian	20.0	4.4
Native American	0.2	0.3

SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)		
SPED	8.3	16.4
Limited English Proficient	8.2	4.6

ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)		
Attendance Rate	91.3	94
Exclusion Rate	0	1.5
Dropout Rate	2.2	3.5

POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)		
4 year	45	53.6
2 year	30	21.5
Work	17	14.1

2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	10	19
Proficient	43	40
Needs Improvement	30	27
Failing	17	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	18	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	20	NA
MATH		
Advanced	8	20
Proficient	25	24
Needs Improvement	35	31
Failing	32	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	43	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	5	NA

## The Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH)

The MATCH School, located next to Boston University, opened in September 2000. There are 78 students enrolled in the school. The student body is 64% African American, 28% Hispanic, 5% white, and 3% Asian. A total of 73% of students live in poverty.<sup>v</sup>

**Mission.** The MATCH School's mission is to reverse the underachievement of inner-city students and prepare them to succeed in college by integrating technology directly into math, English, science, and history; holding students to high standards; providing tutorial support to help students reach the standards; and developing strong relationships with parents, businesses, and universities.

**Additional Funding.**<sup>vi</sup> MATCH receives approximately \$300,000 per year in grant money. In 2003, they received an additional \$250,000 against their \$7 million debt for capital expenditures and start-up costs.

Media and Technology Charter High School  
1001 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston MA 02215  
617.232.0300  
www.matcheschool.org  
Contact: Michael Goldstein, CEO & Founder  
michael.goldstein@matcheschool.org

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

SCHOOL SIZE (2001)	MATCH School	State Average
Total Enrollment	78	NA
9-12 Enrollment	78	NA
Grade Span Served	9-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	75.6	25.1

RETENTION RATES (%)		
2001 (grade 9)	41	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	0	4.3

RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)		
African American	68.0	8.7
White	3.9	75.9
Hispanic	20.5	10.7
Asian	7.7	4.4
Native American	0	0.3

SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)		
SPED	8.7	16.4
Limited English Proficient	0	4.6

ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)		
Attendance Rate	95.1	94
Exclusion Rate	0	1.5
Dropout Rate	0	3.5

POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)		
4 year	NA	53.6
2 year	NA	21.5
Work	NA	14.1

2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	6	19
Proficient	48	40
Needs Improvement	40	27
Failing	6	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	25	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	11	NA
MATH		
Advanced	8	20
Proficient	26	24
Needs Improvement	46	31
Failing	20	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	75	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	7	NA

## Sabis International School

Sabis International in Springfield, is a K-12 school and part of a private international chain. It has been operating in Springfield since 1995 when it took over the second lowest performing school in the city. Beginning with 450 students in grades K-7, the school added another grade of students every year over a five-year period. The student population at Sabis is 36% African American, less than 1% Asian, 28% Hispanic, and 35% white. Fifty-three percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

**Mission.** Sabis strives to create a school culture in which parents, administrators, teachers, and students work as partners to enable each child to succeed. The shared vision of the school community is to prepare all students for college while developing character.

**Additional Funding.** Sabis is supported by district funds, but the international chain provides \$100,000 for paid student jobs.

Sabis International Charter School  
160 Joan Street  
Springfield, MA 01129  
413-783-2600  
www.sics-sabis.net  
Contact: Maretta Thomsen, Executive Director  
mthomsen@sabis.net

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>	Sabis International School	State Average
Total Enrollment	1176	NA
9-12 Enrollment	224	NA
Grade Span Served	K-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	53.2	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>		
2001 (grade 9)	4	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	1	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>		
African American	36.3	8.7
White	35.1	75.9
Hispanic	27.8	10.7
Asian	.8	4.4
Native American	0	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>		
SPED	7.3	16.4
Limited English Proficient	0	4.6

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>		
Attendance Rate	93.8	94
Exclusion Rate	0	1.5
Dropout Rate	3.1	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)<sup>vii</sup></b>		
4 year	NA	53.6
2 year	NA	21.5
Work	NA	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
<b>LANGUAGE ARTS</b>		
Advanced	23	19
Proficient	46	40
Needs Improvement	25	27
Failing	6	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	40	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	10	NA
<b>MATH</b>		
Advanced	23	20
Proficient	23	24
Needs Improvement	27	31
Failing	27	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	57	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	0	NA

## Somerville High School

Somerville High School is a large school with 1,761 students that has rapidly transformed from a predominantly white working class student body to a multicultural student body. Fifty-seven percent of the students are white, 17.6% African American, 16.8% Hispanic, and 8.2% Asian. A total of 51% of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunch. Somerville is a comprehensive high school, and offers vocational as well as academic courses.

**Mission.** Somerville High School's goal, as stated in its Program of Studies<sup>viii</sup> is prepare students to: communicate effectively; think critically and creatively; solve problems resourcefully; use technology efficiently; work productively with others on the job and in the community; and develop as self-directed learners. To this end, the high school places a strong emphasis on project-based interdisciplinary learning.

**Additional Funding.** Information about grant funding was not available.

Somerville High School  
81 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143  
617.625.6600  
www.somerville.k12.ma.us  
Contact: Thomas Galligani, Principal  
tgalligani@k12.somerville.ma.us

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: [http:// profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

	Somerville High School	State Average
<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>		
Total Enrollment	1,761	NA
9-12 Enrollment	1,761	NA
Grade Span Served	9-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	53.2	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>		
2001 (grade 9)	31	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	14	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>		
African American	17.6	8.7
White	57.1	75.9
Hispanic	16.8	10.7
Asian	8.2	4.4
Native American	.2	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>		
SPED	13.4	16.4
Limited English Proficient	13.5	

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>		
Attendance Rate	91.9	94
Exclusion Rate	0.6	1.5
Dropout Rate	3.3	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)</b>		
4 year	29.9	53.6
2 year	19.6	21.5
Work	4.4	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
<b>LANGUAGE ARTS</b>		
Advanced	13	19
Proficient	38	40
Needs Improvement	38	27
Failing	11	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	24	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	21	NA
<b>MATH</b>		
Advanced	13	20
Proficient	24	24
Needs Improvement	36	31
Failing	27	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	43	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	8	NA

## University Park Campus School

Enrolling 64 high school students, University Park Campus was established in 1996. It is situated in one of the highest crime areas in Worcester, adjacent to Clark University. A total of 70% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ten percent of the students are African American, 14% Asian, 31% Hispanic, and 44% white.

**Mission.** The school's goal is "to prepare every child for the academic and intellectual demands of any competitive four year college or university through rigorous, but supported, academic expectations." Graduates from University Park, who are accepted into Clark University through the standard admissions process, receive free tuition.

**Additional Funding.** University Park receives the same per-pupil expenditure as all other Worcester public schools. In the past three years it has received \$25,000 in grant money for its summer program, and another \$85,000 grant—\$40,000 of which was earmarked a neighborhood program. University Park also receives considerable in-kind resources from Clark University including facility use, professional development, planning, and student coursework.

University Park Campus School  
12 Freeland Street  
Worcester, MA 01610  
508.799.3591  
[www.wpsweb.com/universitypark/home.htm](http://www.wpsweb.com/universitypark/home.htm)  
Contact: June Eressy, Principal  
[eressyj@worc.k12.ma.us](mailto:eressyj@worc.k12.ma.us)

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education; website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> for all 2002 data.

MCAS increase and decrease percentages are based on data available for individual students enrolled in the school in 10th grade for whom 8th grade MCAS scores also were available.

NA- signifies that data was not available from the Department of Education.

<b>SCHOOL SIZE (2001)</b>	University Park Campus School	State Average
Total Enrollment	135	NA
9-12 Enrollment	64	NA
Grade Span Served	7-12	NA
Poverty Rate (%)	69.6	25.1

<b>RETENTION RATES (%)</b>		
2001 (grade 9)	0	8.4
2001 (grade 10)	0	4.3

<b>RACIAL BREAKDOWN (2001) (%)</b>		
African American	10.4	8.7
White	44.4	75.9
Hispanic	31.1	10.7
Asian	14.1	4.4
Native American	0	0.3

<b>SPECIAL POPULATIONS (2002) (%)</b>		
SPED	5.3	16.4
Limited English Proficient	.7	4.6

<b>ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT AND EXCLUSION RATES (2001) (%)</b>		
Attendance Rate	97.1	94
Exclusion Rate	0	1.5
Dropout Rate	0	3.5

<b>POST-SECONDARY PLANS OF 2002 GRADUATES (%)</b>		
4 year	NA	53.6
2 year	NA	21.5
Work	NA	14.1

<b>2002 MCAS PERFORMANCE (%)</b>		
LANGUAGE ARTS		
Advanced	43	19
Proficient	57	40
Needs Improvement	0	27
Failing	0	13
Increase 2000 to 2002	76	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	0	NA
MATH		
Advanced	43	20
Proficient	37	24
Needs Improvement	20	31
Failing	0	25
Increase 2000 to 2002	44	NA
Decrease 2000 to 2002	0	NA

## Endnotes

- i This data was provided by the school, but was not confirmed by the Massachusetts Department of Education
- ii Academy of the Pacific Rim reports that 100% of the Class of 2002 planned to attend 2-year or 4-year colleges, though DOE did not have this information available.
- iii Taken from Boston Arts Academy web site <http://artsacad.boston.k12.ma.us/mission/mission.html>
- iv Quotation was taken from Fenway brochure
- v Figures from the 2001-02 MATCH School Annual Report
- vi Based on an informal report in the MATCH Annual Report for 2001-2002 prior to an audit.
- vii Sabis International reports that 100% of the Class of 2002 planned to attend 2-year or 4-year colleges, though DOE did not have this information available.
- viii Somerville High School Program of Studies, 2003-2004, p.4.

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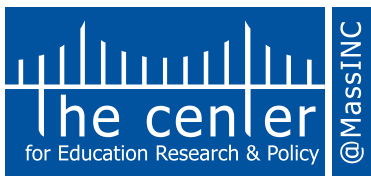
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