

# The Healing Hand: Modeling Catholic Medical Vocational-Technical Schooling

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## Executive Summary

Historically Catholic college preparatory and career vocational-technical schools have had contrasting approaches to secondary school education. Catholic schools have provided classical liberal-arts education, including religious instruction, with emphasis on the spiritual and intellectual potential of every student and an eye towards higher education. Vocational-technical programs have been for kids who weren't "college material," weren't plunging into William Shakespeare or the arts and who intended to find a career after high school working in the trades. Yes, one could find examples of the two being taught under the same roof, but in recent decades those examples have dwindled to a scarce few.

In the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (RCAB) today, many Catholic high schools are struggling with enrollment declines. Meanwhile, public career vocational technical education (CVTE) schools in Massachusetts are thriving, some with long lists of students waiting to enter.

Different factors have created both situations. The ironic outcome is that Catholic school leaders are starting to see vocational-technical education as a way to stop their enrollment slide. Not on a grand scale by opening a multi-discipline voc-tech school or adding a costly robotics or metal fabrication course to its curriculum. Rather, they are considering a program in the medical arts, where the barriers to entry are lower and opportunities are abundant. But large questions exist for those leaders:

Is it affordable?

Is it manageable?

Is it us?

Catholic schools are successful runways for college-bound students. According to the Archdiocese of Boston, Catholic high school students had an average SAT score of 1605 in 2016, higher than the Massachusetts average of 1552 and well above the national average of 1484. Among archdiocese Advanced Placement students, 75 percent scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam, a rate better than both the Massachusetts and national averages of 71 percent and 60 percent respectively. About 97 percent of archdiocese students graduate and 96 percent of graduates go on to college.

But business is slumping at many of the archdiocese's 30 high schools. The number of students passing through the doors fell from 17,673 in 2002 to 15,719 in 2017, an 11 percent drop. While the percentage loss varies and there are schools where enrollment has risen, a loss of students impacts the bottom line when tuition is such a large part of total income.

Changing demographics have played a part. Many suburban families are sending their children to local public high schools

at no cost. But that exodus is occurring as faculty payrolls rise. Nuns or priests, who once provided essentially free labor, have mostly been replaced by lay teachers who expect to be paid.

And Catholic high schools still feel the ripple effect of the clergy abuse crisis that was fully exposed in 2002. The Boston archdiocese was ground zero in the United States (*The Boston Globe's* reporting on it was the focus of the 2016 Academy Award-winning movie "Spotlight"). In 2003, the archdiocese paid \$85 million to 552 people who claimed they were sexually abused by priests who had served archdiocese parishes.<sup>1</sup> To finance the debt the archdiocese closed many churches and sold the real estate. It also spun off its high schools<sup>2</sup> and ended millions of dollars in annual subsidies. That left the schools to turn to tuitions, fundraising and occasional grants to afford expenses the church had previously covered. As private schools they are not eligible for public funding.

As those developments have played out, vocational-technical education in Massachusetts has surged. Despite the bias still held by some families, the image of vocational-technical education has changed. Rather than attend a college-prep high school, spend four years in college, then struggle to find a job, many Massachusetts students are choosing a voc-tech school. There they learn a skill and often have a job waiting upon graduation.

Vocational-technical schools also became more attractive when a 1993 state education reform measure required voc-tech students to pass the same Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests for graduation as college prep students. That raised the educational bar, enabling more voc-tech students to choose between going to work and continuing to college after graduation.

Vocational-technical schools have also done well engaging their students. Dropout rates are significantly lower than traditional high schools in their own cities or suburban communities.<sup>3</sup> Waiting lists to enroll in those schools have swelled into the thousands of students.

Catholic education leaders in Boston and elsewhere have noticed the rise in CVTE popularity and understand the economic opportunities that await graduates with such marketable skills. But in trying to stop their enrollment losses, they worry about blurring their clearly defined reputation as the schools to attend for college-preparation. Nationwide, 12th-graders in Catholic schools score an average of 20 and 26 points higher in math and reading than their public school counterparts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). They also score an average of 45, 43, and 53 points higher on their math, reading, and writing SAT assessments, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

"That has always been the brand that has identified us, so there

has been a little bit of pause when you think about the public perception if we were to introduce vocational education into a Catholic high school,” says Heather Gossart, senior consultant with the National Catholic Education Association. “Will we be looked at differently?”<sup>5</sup>

The Archdiocese of Boston has commissioned a study to explore vocational-technical education. It will include asking focus groups if they want to see voc-tech in Catholic schools. Kathy Mears, superintendent of schools with the archdiocese, thinks it’s a good idea.

“There’s a New England bias looking down on vocational education,” she says. “But the Catholic Church believes in the dignity of work and that all work is good. We need to talk about that. There is no shame in not having a degree from Harvard.”<sup>6</sup>

This paper will explore the merits of medical vocational technical education, often called “health services,” as a possibility for Catholic high schools. The field includes nurse aide training, dental assisting, medical laboratory assisting and electrocardiogram (EKG) technician training. Students typically prepare for the American Red Cross Certified Nursing Assistant Exam and the National Health Career Association National Certification Exam for EKG Technicians, among others.

Through interviews with national representatives of Catholic schools and those in the Boston archdiocese, superintendents of public career vocational technical education (CVTE) schools, state officials and business leaders, the paper will address the financial and facilities requirements to start a vocational-technical program.

In the U.S. there is only one traditional career vocational-technical education Catholic high school, Mercy Career & Technical High School in Philadelphia. There have been others, including Don Bosco Technical High School in Boston, which closed its doors in 1998; and Gordon Technical High School in Chicago, which changed its name to DePaul College Prep in 2014, though its academic focus had shifted years earlier. But vocational-technical instruction in Catholic schools today essentially means programs in computer science or biotechnology at college prep schools. Yet that may be about to change.

“We’re having a real conversation,” says Gossart. “When you gather leaders around now who talk about the enrollment challenges facing Catholic schools, the subject of vocational enrollment comes into the conversation.”<sup>7</sup>

## Background

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. Catholic churches have operated parish schools, educating the children of Irish immigrants and other predominately Catholic ethnic groups. In

2017 there were 6,429 Catholic schools: 5,224 elementary and 1,205 secondary, according to the National Catholic Education Association.<sup>8</sup>

Enrollment peaked during the early 1960s, when there were more than 5.2 million students in almost 13,000 schools across the nation. But a steep decline occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. By 1990, the numbers had tumbled to about 2.5 million students in slightly more than 8,700 schools, which Catholic education leaders attribute to a move from cities to the suburbs and a decline in the number of families attending church.

Despite continued school closings, a slight recovery occurred from the mid-1990s through 2000,<sup>9</sup> but it was short lived. During the following 10 years nearly 1,100 schools closed, 14 percent of the total, while the number of students declined by more than 17 percent or roughly 409,400. Elementary schools have been the most seriously impacted.<sup>10</sup>

With its large Irish-Catholic population, the RCAB is among the largest diocese in the country in terms of the number of parish schools. But Boston has not been immune from the decline. In the early 1940s there were 225 parish, grammar, and high schools.<sup>11</sup> Today there are 124.<sup>12</sup> And high school enrollment, as stated in the executive summary, has fallen 11 percent since 2002.

As Boston archdiocese schools have struggled, the number of students in vocational-technical education has been climbing. There were 44,175 students in Chapter 74-approved programs in regional CVTE schools, district vocational or traditional public high schools in 2011.<sup>13</sup> This year there were 48,750, a 10.4 percent increase over 2011 and one that David Ferreira, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA), says was probably limited by available space in the commonwealth’s vocational-technical schools.<sup>14</sup>

Politicians and business leaders alike view voc-tech education as a way to raise employment and address a skilled labor shortage. They’ve backed expansion through funding for schools and research. In January 2016, Governor Charlie Baker announced \$83.5 million in funding for career vocational education over five-years.<sup>15</sup> The money includes \$9.3 million in workforce skills equipment grants to 35 high schools, community colleges and vocational training providers that were announced the following month.<sup>16</sup> It also includes another \$11.8 million in March 2017 for 32 vocational schools, community colleges, and traditional public high schools to purchase vocational-technical equipment and expand skills training programs for careers in growing industries.<sup>17</sup>

A coalition of business groups, community organizations and vocational high school administrators has formed the Alliance for Vocational Technical Education to promote CVTE

in Massachusetts. The group includes the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators, Massachusetts Communities Action Network, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Boston and Pioneer Institute, among others.

One of the coalition’s first actions was to raise \$60,000 to fund a study by the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University about public perceptions of vocational-technical education.<sup>18</sup> The study included a survey of more than 350 Massachusetts employers. More than 90 percent said they saw a need to increase the number of vocational high school graduates. Nearly the same percentage said voc-tech schools need more modern equipment to train their students.<sup>19</sup>

Within Massachusetts CVTE there are 11 industry clusters, including Agriculture and Natural Resources, Construction, and Information Technology Services. One of the most popular clusters is Health Services; which includes health, dental and medical assisting; and the many sub-careers found within each group. During their four years students typically prepare for tests such as the American Red Cross Certified Nursing Assistant Exam, the National Health Career Association National Certification Exam for EKG Technicians and the American Heart Association First Aid Certification, each required to obtain a license.

Within the Health Services cluster one need only look at health assisting programs in voc-tech schools and in traditional public schools with CVTE departments to see the growth in the medical disciplines. In 2011 more than 2,500 students were enrolled. In 2017 that number had risen nearly 17 percent to 2,952, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

In Massachusetts, 25 of 26 regional vocational-technical schools offer courses in the health assisting cluster.<sup>20</sup> Health assisting is included among the vocational-technical education offerings in 19 public school districts; academic regional school districts; independent vocational, agricultural school districts and educational collaboratives.<sup>21</sup> According to the latest research from Massachusetts Workforce Development and

Labor Statistics, there is a growing need for health and allied health professionals throughout the commonwealth. Teaching certificate courses in Catholic high schools is a way to ensure that graduates will either have a career to enter immediately or a very solid background for post-secondary study in the medical arts and sciences.

Students who complete a four-year health assisting program are prepared for a wide range of entry-level positions in the health care industry, leading to such careers as emergency medical technician, occupational therapist or eventual certification as a registered nurse. All are fields where there is great need for skilled workers. The number of home health aides in Massachusetts is expected to rise by more than 37 percent from 2014 to 2024. Opportunities for medical assistants will be up 15 percent compared to the same period and employment among physical therapists will increase by more than 25 percent.<sup>22</sup>

### The High Price of Voc Tech

Tempting as those numbers are, any school, district or diocese considering a CVTE program will pay a steep price. The typical cost to educate a voc-tech student is \$16,000 to \$17,000 per year, according to MAVA’s Ferreira. That’s about 35 percent above the \$11,000 average cost per-student in a Boston archdiocese high school. The difference is the cost of equipping and operating programs, which is much greater than at college-prep schools. Attracting private sector professionals also requires higher teacher salaries. Frequent upgrades are required to maintain equipment in programs such as advanced manufacturing or heating, ventilation and air conditioning. Minimum size requirements are needed to comply with student-teacher ratios.

Mears says money “is always a challenge.” She says once she receives the results of the ongoing feasibility study she’ll determine if CVTE should be part of a capital campaign. The study was paid for by a private donor. (Mears has not disclosed the cost.) One benefit of selecting a health assisting CVTE program is that it is one of the least expensive voc-tech programs to equip.

	# 2014 (MA)	2024 Projection	Delta	Current Avg. Salary
Home Health Aid	22,749	31,287	+38%	\$29,200
Cert. Nursing Assistant	42,356	46,534	+10%	\$30,920
Pharmacy Technician	2,634	3,164	+20%	\$33,810
Medical Assistant	16,275	18,686	+14.8%	\$38,990
Licensed Practical Nurse	16,459	17,605	+6.9%	\$55,190
Registered Nurse	81,259	94,080	+16%	\$89,060

“If you look at the costs of starting a health assisting program, they are minimal,” says Edward Bouquillon, superintendent-director at Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School in Lexington, Massachusetts. “If you look at the employment demand data, it’s significant. There’s a demand for people in the health industries.”<sup>23</sup>

Relatively speaking the investment to start and run a health services program is less, but it’s still not cheap, as reported by three regional vocational-technical schools:

- At Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School in Marlboro, the fiscal year 2017 budget for the health technologies program is \$340,652, according to Superintendent Ernest Houle. About \$336,000 of that is for teacher salaries.<sup>24</sup>
- At Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton, 80 students are in the health assisting program and salaries for four instructors total \$338,000 this year, according to Superintendent John Lafleche. A new dental program required about \$300,000 to outfit the lab, including three dental chairs. The instructor salary is \$61,000. The five hospital beds in the lab required by the Department of Health for the Certified Nursing Assistants program cost \$3,000 each.<sup>25</sup>
- Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School in Lexington is building a new school. Bouquillon estimates \$10,000 per student for furniture, fixtures and equipment. “So if you’re building a shop that’s going to hold the maximum of 15 students, you would need at least \$150,000 the first year just for furniture, fixtures and equipment.”<sup>26</sup>

Those superintendents know they have taxpayer-provided resources to support their programs. The archdiocese has no such support. Catholic schools do not receive public funds for operating expenses, equipment or facilities. In fact a state constitutional amendment was designed specifically to prevent Catholic and other religious school families from receiving taxpayer funds. The anti-Irish, anti-Catholic “Anti-Aid Amendment,” adopted in the 1850s under Massachusetts’ then-dominant Know-Nothing Party requires that local tax revenues for education be:

expended in no other schools than those which are conducted according to law, under the order and superintendence of the authorities of the town or city in which the money is to be expended; and such moneys shall never be appropriated to any religious sect for the maintenance exclusively of its own schools.<sup>27</sup>

Public vocational-technical schools also receive financial aid through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education grant program. This federal money can be used for staffing and equipment and flows through states to the schools.

Private schools aren’t eligible for Perkins money either, but Mears says the issue is not about being private, but being Catholic.

“The federal government has said that the Perkins grant money doesn’t extend to faith-based K-12 education,” she says. “The federal government doesn’t give money to Catholic schools, ever. They give goods and services but Perkins is about giving straight cash.

“We’re going to talk about God and sanctity of life and those are not typical things taught in these types of programs, so there’s going to be a big difference there,” she adds.”<sup>28</sup>

The taxpayer dollars that voc-tech schools receive is what enables them to run programs the way they do, says Ferreira. Without that support he says it would be unrealistic to expect the archdiocese to run a similar school.

“Whatever the school tuition is just for academic instruction is not going to be anywhere sufficient enough to provide this kind of school,”<sup>29</sup> he says.

Adding to Catholic high schools’ financial challenge is the fact that they do not receive an allowance from the Boston archdiocese, unlike high schools in most other diocese around the country. The allowance ended in 2003, in the wake of the clergy sex abuse scandal.

Instead revenues come primarily from tuition and fundraising. Mears says each high school in the archdiocese raises about \$200,000 to \$400,000 annually through fundraising. Beyond that tuitions vary widely. In the 2017 school year, Mactignon High School in Cambridge charged \$10,450 per student and Arlington Catholic High School cost \$10,600. Larger Catholic high schools such as Boston College High School and St. John’s Preparatory School in Danvers charged \$20,400 and \$22,835 respectively. Tuition at St. Sebastian’s School in Dedham was \$43,350.<sup>30</sup>

Total tuition income reflects enrollment. With 460 students, Mactignon’s income would be \$4.8 million. Arlington Catholic would derive \$6.36 million from its 600 students. On the higher end, Boston College High School’s 1,230 students would generate \$25.1 million. With enrollment of only about 270 students, St. Sebastian’s tuition income was \$11.7 million.<sup>31</sup>

But the math is not that straightforward. Most schools provide financial aid, including discounts for siblings attending simultaneously, so tuition income is likely lower. At Boston College High School, nearly half the students receive assistance, the average annual amount being \$8,300.<sup>32</sup>

Fundraising totals vary by school as well. Mears says order schools (Jesuits, Xaverian Brothers) such as Boston College

High School and St. John's Prep, have been in existence longer than most Catholic high schools and are all male. Since men tend to make more money than women, those schools are able to attract more money from alumni than all-girls schools such as Fontbonne Academy in Milton or Notre Dame Academy in Hingham. Smaller archdiocese parish schools such as Arlington Catholic have far fewer alumni.

"The tradition of going to BC High is real and huge," says Mears. "The network of Jesuits is huge; Xaverian Brothers as well. Boys' schools still derive more money."

Lower enrollments and the resulting decline in tuition revenue are happening at a time when Catholic schools in Boston and nationally are being pinched by rising costs. A major factor has been the collapse of vocations to the religious life. The number of women religious, once the primary educators in Catholic schools, declined from 179,954 in 1965 to 57,544 in 2010. Today, only 2.6 percent of Catholic school teachers are religious or clergy, with sisters representing 1.6 percent and brothers or clergy accounting for .05 percent each, according to the NCEA.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently Catholic schools have experienced a transition "from a basically free workforce in the persons of religious priests, brothers, and women (supported by religious communities) to one comprised predominantly of the laity, who rightly must receive just wages and benefits," says George Henry, former superintendent of Catholic education for the Archdiocese of St. Louis.<sup>34</sup>

"Loss of the living endowment contributed by the ministry of the religious had serious financial implications for operating schools," according to Dr. Dan Peters, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. "Within the last school year, the cost of K-12 education in our diocese was more than \$79 million."<sup>35</sup>

Chris Fay, principal of Christian Brothers High School in Memphis, Tennessee, says principals and diocesan school leaders are struggling to pay reasonable salaries to teachers without pricing their schools above what their families can pay.

"Our greatest challenge today is growing our annual fund so that we can continue to offer competitive salaries, full benefits, and a generous pension plan to our teachers, while maintaining an affordable tuition for our students' families," says Fay.<sup>36</sup>

## Cost-saving strategies

Even in a relatively low-cost voc-tech discipline such as health assisting, there are start-up expenses. Creating lab space is a big one. Students need such facilities to practice the medical care techniques they'll use in the field. The labs must be built to meet state specifications.

"Your facilities need to be a minimum size," says Bouquillon of Minuteman. "If the student-teacher ratio is maxed out at 15, you need to have at least 125 square feet per pupil and your shop size needs to be at least 1,900 square feet. That's just if you're doing health assisting," he adds. "If you expect to go into medical laboratory technology, you're going to need a larger shop area."

One cost-saving approach for the Catholic schools could be to use the facilities of existing voc-tech schools during the school day or after hours, rather than building their own. Most regional voc-tech schools look to utilize their lab space or idle machines during off hours. Could a partnership with Catholic schools make sense?

Mears, who was the assistant superintendent of Catholic schools at the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and then executive director of the Elementary Schools Department at the National Catholic Educational Association before coming to Boston in 2014, says she saw such a partnership work in Indiana.

"We sent our kids to the public schools for voc-tech," she says. "The kids would start their day at the voc-tech and then go back to the Catholic schools and take their other courses or they'd start in their morning in the voc-tech schools. But they still took their English, math and other core subjects at the Catholic school. The voc-tech loved it because they counted as their students and they got the money from the state for them."

Massachusetts voc-tech superintendents are open to working with Catholic schools, but say that issues such as staffing, scheduling and financing would all need to be worked out.

"If a Catholic school were located near a regional vocational school, there are models that could be used," said Lafleche of Bay Path. "In our case, all of our models involve using our staff on a per diem after school. Whether or not some schools would take in other instructors to run a program for high school students, I'm not sure. But there is a lot of room to talk."

With 40 weeks in a school year, he said it would be "easy" to get to 300 to 400 hours in after school.

Minuteman Tech's Bouquillon of Minuteman Tech says he's committed to working with traditional schools, private schools and charter schools to provide access to high quality vocational-technical education. The "caveat" is if the district offering that program would be allowed to count each student as an enrolled student and therefore be compensated by the commonwealth.

Minuteman Tech has a program called "Minuteman in the Morning" with Lexington High School. Those students who have passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam attend Minuteman in the morning for two-and-a-half-to-three hours and then return to Lexington High for the remainder of the school day. When they graduate



they receive a diploma from Lexington High School and a certificate from Minuteman.

One reason that arrangement works is because Lexington is within Minuteman's district. The school and the town already have a cost-sharing agreement for Lexington students who attend Minuteman full time. In the Minuteman in the Morning program, Bouquillon has an agreement with Lexington that for every child in the program he will add an additional half of a student to the annual assessment he sends to the town.

"That allows us in the following year to capture some of the costs associated with that program," he says.

## Creating a Voc-Tech Program

Mears says the archdiocese is exploring a health services program because it fits well with the Boston-area economy. She points to the city's many hospitals and the employment opportunities in a growth industry such as health care, especially for low-income students.

"If kids who are economically disadvantaged can complete some kind of certificate program in the time they graduate from high school, then they will have a job that will probably pay between \$30,000 and \$40,000," she says. "They'll have opportunities to further their education because a lot of hospitals and medical organizations will pay for them to continue their education. It could be a total game changer for economically disadvantaged children." But the archdiocese faces a tall task if it commits to adding a vocational-technical program.<sup>37</sup>

Incorporating voc-tech into a school curriculum is different from adding any other course. It requires a lab or shop space, specialized instruction and a costly up-front investment.

In public schools, CVTE programs must meet the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 74, which governs career vocational technical education in public school districts and is administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office for Career Vocational Technical Education. To become a Chapter 74-approved program, the host school submits an application in which they must demonstrate why there is a need for their program. They must also show that students are interested in attending, offer data that the program will prepare students for high-wage, high-need jobs, and identify others in their area offering a similar program.

"Vocational-technical schools in Massachusetts come under a lot of unique regulations that allow our students to participate in a variety of work-based learning settings that traditional students are not allowed to participate in," says Bouquillon.<sup>38</sup>

Catholic high schools are not required to comply with those unique Chapter 74 regulations because they are private. But if the archdiocese is considering adding a voc-tech program in health services to attract new students, it needs to be competitive with other schools in that space.

"If School X has 1,000 students, the only way a program like this makes sense is if now you have 1,020 students, because 20 of them came specifically for this program," says Lafleche of Bay Path. "If the tuition is \$10,000 per year, there's an extra \$200,000 to work with. So if you're going to put this program in the high school and not grow your population, you're adding a heck of a lot of cost with no revenue."

When students graduate from a health assisting program in one of Massachusetts' regional CVTE schools, they typically hold one or more of several industry-recognized credentials such as a Nurse Assistant certification (CNA), First Aid certification, a license to operate an EKG machine, an EMT license and perhaps a phlebotomy license with some additional training. By choosing to prepare students in the allied health fields, the archdiocese is giving their students an advantage in college admissions into STEM fields, and especially into super-competitive healthcare-focused colleges or majors.

For instance, for a student who wants to be a pharmacist (with a current average salary of \$115,000), what better background for admittance into the Mass College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences' six-year Doctor of Pharmacy program than a Pharm Tech Certificate? Or, as anyone choosing a college nursing education knows, the most selective programs are the RN and Bachelors of Science Degree in Nursing (BSN) programs—often having selection rates of just 10 percent or less.<sup>39</sup> A certified background in an allied health or nursing field is a tremendous asset for any serious applicant.

"Managers in industry need people who have those credentials," says Bouquillon. "If students are not getting those industry recognized credentials, it's not really a health training program. It's just a career pathway or a career exploratory kind of thing. That's not the same as what a Chapter 74 state approval vocational program is doing."<sup>40</sup>

Mears says a Catholic school program would meet all Chapter 74 safety standards. She wants students to be able to pass certificate exams so a voc-ed program would also meet the requirements to be a certificate program.

While incorporating vocational education into a college prep high school is complicated, CVTE high schools in Massachusetts have proven the two can be successfully combined. Many of their students take Advanced Placement and honors courses and go on to higher education after graduation.

But there are major differences between the two. Unlike public school teachers, Catholic school teachers are not required

to be licensed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. But those teaching in a health-related voc-tech program, whether public or private, do need to be licensed in medical areas. To offer a program that leads to a certified nursing assistant certification, the school would need to hire someone with a BSN.

There is a short grace period, however. When Haverhill (MA) High School started a health assisting program in 2016, it operated while the school was applying for its Chapter 74 approval. During that time the teacher did not hold a nursing degree.

“During the first year when you’re operating as a non-CTE you can have a teacher with just a science background teaching it,” says Victoria Kelly, career academy coordinator at Haverhill High School. “We had a biotech teacher who taught it the first year. But in order to get vocationally certified for health assisting we need an RN.”<sup>41</sup> Though the town had posted an advertisement to fill the position, she said the search was taking time. “That’s been a big obstacle, finding someone either holding the vocational teacher certification or someone who has all the right experience to get certified in a reasonable amount of time.”

The size of the teaching staff is determined by program size. The commonwealth requires teacher/student ratios for each program. If a school offers EMT instruction with a lab in which the students are practicing, for example, Kelly says a teacher is required for every six students.

Daily schedules for voc-tech students differ from college prep. Voc-tech schools generally split their time in half each day between classroom and clinical instruction. The clinical experience is one of the foundational components of the voc-tech experience.

“If a Catholic school were looking at starting a robust technical-vocational educational program that serves industry and the kids, you need to have a schedule that is different from a traditional seven-period per day or even a traditional block schedule,” says Bouquillon. “You can’t have a substantive clinical experience unless you’re able to be on site for three or four hours a day while they’re seniors.”

While the academic side of a Catholic school education would not change, the other half of the day would include different laboratories and computers. In the health field, the various disciplines require some type of clinical affiliation in which a nurse goes out with the students to do hands-on care.

“They set up a contract with an individual long-term care facility if it is a CNA program,” says Ferreira. “If it’s a dental assisting program, then it would be with individual dentists or a dental practice where they’d... have hands-on experience

with actual patients as they become juniors and seniors. For the freshman and sophomores, it’s all mock training in the laboratory.”

Students are required to record a minimum of 120 hours of lab work to qualify for a CNA (in addition to passing an exam), but it’s not unusual for teenagers to take longer to be trained and ready for the test.

“It’s because of their age and maturity and the things that we’re going to have them do,” says Maura Stevens, a health technologies instructor at Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School, who estimates it takes more like 200-to-250 hours to prepare students to earn their CNA. “We’re going to have them bathe and toilet both genders, care for the dying and in the 17 years I’ve been doing this, no matter how hard they work, it just seems to take them a little bit longer than what the minimum mandate is to produce a qualified CNA.”

## Mercy Career & Technical High School

In Philadelphia, Mercy Career & Technical High School is a coed Catholic career vocational-technical education high school that proves the education model works, but also demonstrates that it might take unique circumstances to pay for it.

Founded in 1950 by the Sisters of Mercy as a three-year certificate technical school, it converted into a full high school in the 1970s and today has more than 340 students and a total budget of \$4.6 million. Mercy offers a curriculum that prepares graduates for continuing education or immediate employment. Students earn a high school diploma and study to achieve industry-recognized certifications in their chosen career and technical program.

In addition to the standard academic programs in English, math, social studies, science and others, Mercy has six career technical education programs: business, building trades, computer technology, cosmetology, culinary arts, and nurse aide training.

During their freshman year, students take a career exploration course of one period per week, which helps them in their career and technical program selection decisions at the end of that year. They take the CVTE curriculum for the next three years and during their senior year have a chance to participate in the school’s co-op program. Mercy reports a 99 percent graduation rate and a 97 percent attendance rate.<sup>42</sup>

Mercy is the nation’s only coed Catholic CVTE high school, a fact that Sister Susan Walsh, RSM, says is simply due to money.

“The cost of the education deters Catholic institutions from getting involved,” she says. “Career and tech education being

hands on, requiring more equipment, fewer students per teacher, is an expensive proposition, particularly if you're doing it in a low socio-economic environment."<sup>43</sup>

Much like Catholic high schools in Boston, tuition alone could not support the CVTE program at Mercy. Tuition is \$8,400, but the cost to educate each student is \$12,500. Closing that gap through higher tuition is not an option. More than 90 percent of Mercy's students come from families who qualify for assistance, according to the Federal Reduced Lunch Low-Income Guidelines, and receive financial aid towards their tuition. About 92 percent of families received more than \$1.25 million in grants and scholarships in 2016.<sup>44</sup>

As a private school Mercy does not receive state taxpayer funds or federal Perkins Grant money. Nor does Mercy receive an allowance from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, just as schools in the Boston archdiocese do not receive archdiocesan financial assistance. That's because Mercy is a private school sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, though it does not receive a stipend from the Sisters, and is not a diocesan school.

But Mercy does benefit from some unique state tax laws and agreements that contribute to its annual fundraising. In 2016, the school raised more than \$1.86 million in gifts and through its annual giving campaign. Included in that total was about \$353,500 received through two Pennsylvania state tax credits. The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) provides credits to eligible businesses that contribute to a scholarship organization, an educational improvement organization or a pre-Kindergarten scholarship organization.<sup>45</sup> The Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) extends tax credits to businesses contributing to an opportunity scholarship organization, which then uses the money to provide tuition assistance to eligible students residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school to attend a nonpublic school or an out-of-district public school.<sup>46</sup>

"We go after a lot of businesses for the tax money," says Catherine Glatts, vice principal for technology and career & technical education. "OSTC and EITC are big parts of where we get our money. That would hurt if they went away."<sup>47</sup>

In the 2015-2016 school year, 48 Mercy families received tuition assistance through the EITC. Gifts to the school through the program included more than \$50,000 each from BAYADA Health Care and US Liability Insurance Group. Nearly 100 families received tuition assistance through the OSTC.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to revenue from the tax credits, Mercy has shared in an annual \$1.5 million fund that the Pennsylvania Convention Center has given to three vocational-technical schools since 1992. In 2016 Mercy's gift was \$278,667, which financed three core training areas of Mercy CTE's curriculum: building trades, business education and culinary arts.

Mercy is also able to make its finances work because it does not pay a mortgage on its building. In the 1970s the Sisters of Mercy were considering closing the school. But the Philadelphia archdiocese offered them a building that once was an orphanage and the savings was enough to keep the school running.

"The Archdiocese of Philadelphia said we don't want you to close, you're a good alternative, so they offered a former orphanage to the sisters," says Sister Walsh. "They moved the technical school to our current location."

Mercy's Nurse Aide Training Program (NATP) prepares students for health careers over a period of three academic years. School officials say it exceeds the 75-hour minimum curriculum provided in other certified nursing-assistant programs. At the end of their junior year, students qualify to take the Pennsylvania Nurse Aide Certification examination. Once they pass the exam they become licensed by the State of Pennsylvania to give care to patients in healthcare and receive their CPR certification.<sup>49</sup> Students participating in the co-op program during their senior year work in emergency care, home health, hospitals, nursing homes, primary care and urgent care facilities.

In 2016, the budget for the program was slightly under \$100,000, with about \$96,000 of that going to salaries for two teachers. There were 42 students in the program.

"We're looking to add more to that program," says Glatts. "We could teach medical coding and medical assistance. Those aren't expensive. Our nursing is long-term care. We're looking to also bring in acute care. So it would just be a little more training for the students."

The president, principal, business manager and guidance counselor belong to the Sisters of Mercy order, but the faculty is all lay people.

Mercy has numerous partnerships with local businesses that support the school with materials and co-op opportunities. In 2016, Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers donated materials that Mercy students could not afford on their own. In return for their assistance, the IBEW and other business partners of Mercy use the school's facilities during after school hours.

"If you have a good technical school you have a lot of business partners and if you have good facilities, they'll come in and use it for their employees when we're not," says Glatts. "Or the community can come in and use it when the kids aren't here. That's the direction we're looking to go to remain sustainable for the future."

The Boston archdiocese has not yet approached potential partners from the area's medical community. But Mears sees the area rich in healthcare co-op and employment opportunities.

Hospitals in particular seem like natural partners to her.

“I think the hospitals would work with us,” she says. “They need qualified workers and if we can show them we can provide them with qualified workers who get it and get morally their obligation to patients and the care that we want these students to learn for others, I think they will work with us and help us.”

Health care, however, does pose a complication for Catholic schools that a program in HVAC or the culinary arts would not: abortion and reproductive issues.

“We’d have to make sure that students understand the Church’s teaching on abortion and how we don’t think that’s the right thing for women to choose and we have to be supportive of women because that is a healthcare issue,” says Mears.

“That’s one of the things I need to include when I talk to the hospitals,” she adds. “We can’t have our children doing anything that goes against Church teaching. I don’t think you’d have high school kids in those positions anyway, but I’d have to be very clear with the people who work with us.”

## Conclusion

Leaders of Archdiocese of Boston high schools face challenging times. Enrollment has fallen at many of its schools and the allure of a college-prep high school has faded as many college graduates struggle to get jobs. Instead, more families are turning to a career vocational-technical education in high school, where their sons and daughters can graduate with employable skills as well as a solid foundation for higher education.

In response, Catholic high schools are considering breaking from tradition to incorporate vocational-technical education into their curricula. The preferred discipline would be health care, a logical option given the enormous employment base that exists in metropolitan Boston. It’s also a form of voc-tech that presents the fewest barriers to entry in terms of start-up costs and operations.

But the money is still significant. Salaries for teachers licensed in various fields need to be competitive with the private sector. Equipment for labs and creating facilities of a size mandated by state law is beyond their present means. Tuition income is inadequate to cover costs, particularly when many students receive financial assistance. Fundraising income varies among the 30 high schools and the Archdiocese of Boston does not provide any financial assistance to the schools.

A study has been commissioned by the Catholic Schools Office to assist in determining if there is a strong enough demand among families of prospective students to add voc-tech to the curriculum. It’s a major consideration for the schools, who

view their brand as preparing students to attend elite universities. Would incorporating career vocational-technical education tarnish that image?

While it is too early to say whether a voc-tech program would be added to an existing school or a separate school opened, Kathy Mears, superintendent of schools with the archdiocese, says the archdiocese owns several empty buildings which could be used for a voc-tech program.

## Recommendations

### 1. Repeal Massachusetts’ two Anti-Aid Amendments

As has been recommended in previous Pioneer Institute papers,<sup>50</sup> the Anti-Aid or “Know-Nothing” amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution date back to the 1850s. In 2017, they are no longer legally appropriate and should be repealed. An enormous difference between the ability of Massachusetts regional career vocational-technical education schools to offer programs and that of the Catholic high schools is parental access to public education funds. Other states have enacted measures that give Catholic school parents and families access to public funds. Pennsylvania’s Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) both provide tax credits to businesses that contribute to organizations including Catholic schools.

### 2. Explore a partnership with regional public CVTE schools within the Archdiocese of Boston.

Startup costs, even for relatively low-budget health care vocational-technical programs, can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. That’s a large burden for a Catholic high school whose income is limited to tuition, fundraising and occasional grants. Regional CVTE superintendents are open to mutually beneficial cooperation with Catholic high schools. That could mean an arrangement in which Catholic school voc-tech students spend part of each day at the public CVTE and the other part at their high school, similar to an arrangement Lexington High School has with Minuteman Career and Technical High School.

Other possibilities could include leasing facilities from a regional school during after-school hours. Many of those schools already have arrangements with special needs programs or local trade unions to use their lab space in off hours. Practical issues would need to be addressed, such as compensation for the regional vocational-technical schools (e.g, whether they could include the Catholic students in their enrollment report to the state), staffing, transportation and more. But using public school

facilities would reduce the up-front investment for the Catholic schools and enable them to begin a CVTE program while creating their own lab space in a way that is financially feasible.

### 3. Investigate start-up assistance organizations

To mitigate start-up faculty and supply costs and other issues, there are a small number of licensed organizations nationwide that will do all the heavy lifting for a school wishing to include nursing and allied health programs in their curricula. For instance, Kaduceus, Inc. sells entire packages for a class of 25, including textbooks, classroom and lab supplies, online assessments, teacher guides, and more. It also includes up to five days of free training in teaching the course to one instructor for a flat rate of up to \$20,000 for courses in Certified Nursing Assistants, Pharmacy Technician, and the lucrative Medical Billing and Coding. Setting up new programs can be a huge commitment, but using these proven programs can get the process going very quickly.

### 4. Meet the Chapter 74 requirements – even if it’s not required.

Catholic high school leaders are contemplating adding a health care voc-ed program as a way to reverse enrollment declines. To be successful their CVTE program must be competitive with those offered by other schools. As private schools, the Catholic high schools are not required to meet the standards of Massachusetts’ General Law Chapter 74, which governs vocational-technical education in public school districts. But they would be more competitive if they did. The “Chapter 74 Manual for Vocational Technical Education Programs,” published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, is a resource for school districts in the implementation of vocational-technical education programs. The Vocational-Technical Education Frameworks, available on the website of the Office for Career/Vocational Technical Education, are organized under 11 career clusters including “Health Services.”<sup>51</sup>

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## About Pioneer

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