

Madison Park Technical Vocational High School Turnaround Update

By William Donovan



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Executive Summary

Madison Park Technical Vocational High School in Boston is attempting a turnaround and has been for decades. In 2016, after having been designated a Level 4 school by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), a stamp that branded it “underperforming,” school officials created a plan they began implementing in June of that year.

It was a 111-page document that included a stark look at recent poor practices at the 43-year-old school, along with some of its unique challenges. More importantly it included a strategy to change the culture at Madison Park, stimulate academic improvement, provide more professional support for teachers, and reverse rising dropout and falling graduation rates, among other objectives.

Since the new plan began, some signs of improvement have appeared. The graduation rate, which was 57 percent in 2017, was above 68 percent in 2019. The dropout rate, once above 6 percent, is now under 5 percent. Enrollment, which tumbled by half from 2005 to 2017, has climbed more than 17 percent in the past three years.

Advanced instruction has emerged as a strong point for the school. Dual enrollment partnerships with several local colleges have enabled many Madison Park students to earn college credits before graduating. In 2020, two students earned their associate’s degrees.

Early results of the turnaround project have been recognized by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). In late 2018 NEASC, a regional education accreditation association, reported in the evaluation it conducts of schools every 10 years, that Madison Park was “poised to establish itself as an institution of first-class learning.”

If so, it would be a significant comeback. Despite the encouraging indicators, the school still trails other vocational technical schools in the state in academics. Its Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores rank at or near the bottom in all categories. It is the worst performer among them in terms of graduation and dropout rates, trailing the statewide average in those categories among vocational technical schools by large margins.

The attempted turnaround is also happening at a time when Boston Public Schools (BPS) is under fire. In March the DESE released a highly critical review of the system. It concluded that students in the district faced transportation problems, poor facilities, excessive leadership turnover, considerable disparities in access to resources, and “systemic disarray” of special education services.¹

Madison Park has struggled with frequent leadership turnover. Between 2010 and 2015 the school had five different headmasters. Another headmaster was removed in May of 2020 as part of a citywide shake-up among school administrations. At the same time it was announced that Kevin McCaskill, the executive director for the past five years who has led the turnaround effort, would be moving to the BPS central office to assume broader responsibilities. However, he has remained executive director and *interim* headmaster until a permanent headmaster is hired.

Each new principal has brought new priorities and approaches, interrupting continuity in planning and effort. In particular, after a much-heralded Innovation Plan was approved in 2012, BPS invested more than \$1 million in technology, textbooks and vocational-technical materials.² But as leadership changed support for the plan waned.

The challenges for Madison Park go beyond the headmaster’s office. Demographics have been a major factor in the school’s academic results. About 94 percent of students are students of color (57 percent Latino, 37 percent Black). During the 2019-2020 school year, 92 percent of the 1,021 students enrolled at Madison Park were classified as “high needs.” That was second only to Boston International High School, a college preparatory school designed to teach students English, including a program for students newly arrived in the U.S. who have little or no schooling in their home country or whose education has been interrupted.

In the 2018–2019 school year, 73.1 percent of Madison Park’s students were considered economically disadvantaged, the highest among vocational-technical schools in the state. Roughly 35 percent were English Language Learners, again the highest among voc-tech schools, and 30.6

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percent had disabilities, according to DESE. Absenteeism remains high, with 47 percent of the students missing 10 percent or more of school days in 2018–2019.

Those numbers certainly contribute to underperformance at urban college preparatory high schools. But they are more of a factor at urban vocational-technical schools. There, students who are English Language Learners must often negotiate textbooks that are more exacting and precise than college textbooks, creating a greater need for remedial services.

Demographics can create a difficult apples-to-oranges comparison when Madison Park is compared with schools whose enrollment includes fewer minority students and more students from higher income backgrounds. Many of the top performing voc-tech schools in Massachusetts are in upper-income suburban communities or rural areas.

Still, other urban vocational technical schools, such as Lynn Vocational Technical Institute and the Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy in Springfield, where McCaskill previously led reforms, have large minority, low-income, English Language Learner populations, and have managed to raise academic scores and graduation rates, while also seeing a decline in dropouts.

The question then is this: can Madison Park play a larger role in creating educational and economic opportunity in Boston by providing needed skilled labor for Boston-based businesses?

As noted, McCaskill was the principal at Putnam when it began its turnaround. But he says he's aiming higher than Putnam or Lynn Tech and wants to outperform top Massachusetts voc-tech schools such as Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School in Upton and Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School in Marlborough, two communities that are distinctly different from Boston. At Blackstone Valley 0.2 percent of the students are English Language Learners. At Assabet Valley, more than 78 percent of the students are white.

"I compare our data against what I consider the best vocational system in the country," says McCaskill. "We're behind with respect to performance of students. But that's the only way you catch up. Compare yourself to the best. Even though their demographics are nowhere near ours, nowhere near it, those are the schools we want to be compared to."³

Background

In the past 20 years there has been a resurgence of interest in career vocational-technical education. States have more than 100 new laws, policies, and regulations related to vocational education, many of which increased state funding for such programs.⁴ Many vocational education experts consider Massachusetts' CVTE system, with its unique approach of alternating educational focus—one week spent in the classroom on academics, the next focused on career technical skills—a role model.

A 2015 University of Connecticut study found that full-time vocational technical schools in Massachusetts (as opposed to college preparatory high schools that embed some vocational-technical courses within their curriculum) successfully promote improved graduation rates and lower dropout rates.⁵

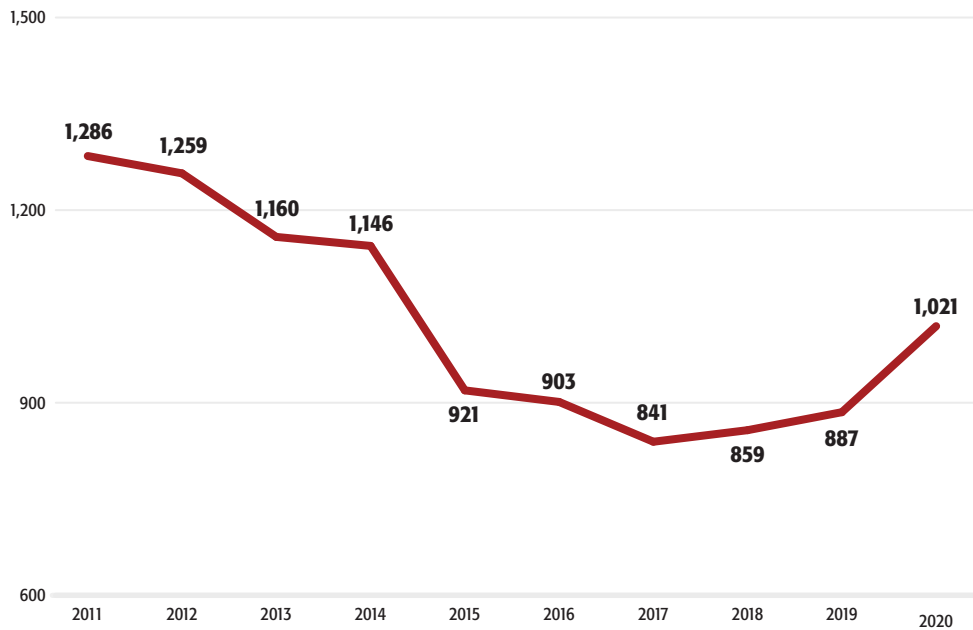
Other reports have found that students who received vocational-technical training scored higher on math exams, for example. Also, attendance and graduation rates at CVTE schools were generally above 90 percent and there were particularly strong benefits for low-income students.⁶ Together, they speak to the reputation that CVTE schools are developing as places where students can graduate equipped with practical skills and preparation for higher education.

Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, is a grades 9–12 high school, with more than 1,000 students in the 2019–2020 school year. It is the only school in Boston that exclusively prepares its students for careers *and* postsecondary education upon graduation. It offers training in 20 technical vocational programs, including Automotive Technology, Dental Assisting, Graphic Communications, Culinary Arts, Carpentry, Programing and Web Development. During their freshman year, students explore all programs and select a concentration. All students rotate their schedule every other week. Freshmen and sophomores alternate one full week of academic courses with a week in which they spend half of each day in CVTE. Juniors and seniors rotate a full week of academic courses with a week of full-time CVTE.

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Madison Park is a citywide option for high school-aged students. Every Boston neighborhood is represented at the school, but more than 80 percent of the enrollment comes from five neighborhoods: Dorchester, Roxbury, East Boston, Mattapan, and Hyde Park. The school does not have an admissions policy. Students are placed there through the BPS school selection process.

Student Enrollment, All Grades: Madison Park High School



MA DESE, Enrollment by Grade Report, by school, for all students, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/enrollmentbygrade.aspx>

In his 2012 State of the City address, the late Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino called Madison Park “one of our most important city assets,” which “should be the pathway to solid jobs and a strong future for city youth.”⁷

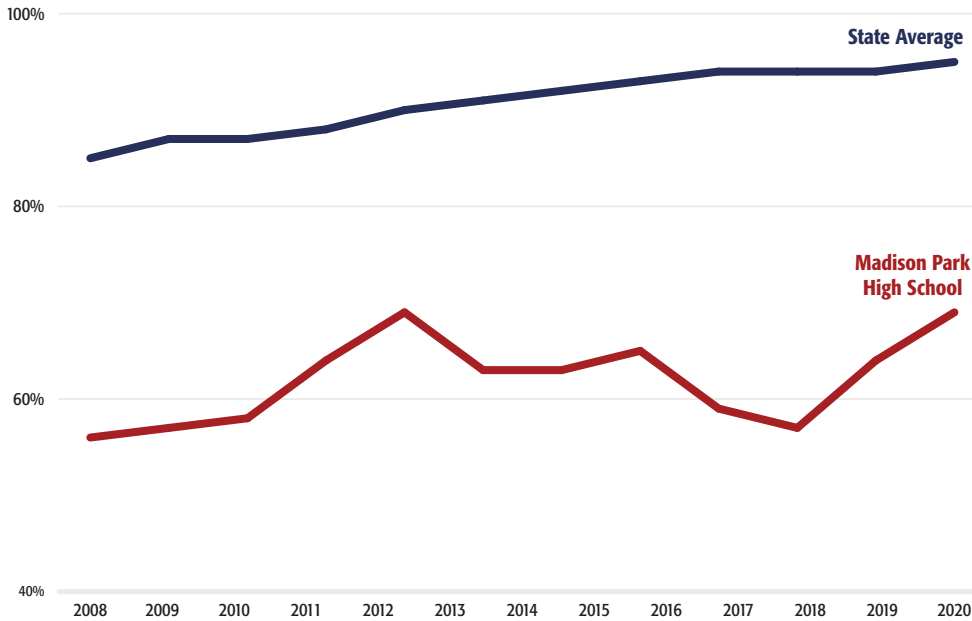
But as he spoke, Madison Park was far from being a successful CVTE school. For every 11 students at Madison Park at the time, just one was involved in a work-based cooperative. The average student was absent for more than one month out of every year.⁸

Academically, only 9 percent of students scored in the “Advanced” category on MCAS math exams. More than 26 percent finished in the “Warning/Failure” category, over 36 percent in “Needs Improvement” and 27.6 percent in “Proficient.” On the English exam only 1.6 percent scored “Advanced,” nearly 47 percent were “Proficient,” nearly 42 percent were in the “Needs Improvement” category and 10 percent in “Warning/Failure.” In the years that followed, the numbers did not radically change.

Around the same time Madison Park entered a period of leadership instability. A long-serving headmaster retired with little notice at the end of the 2011–2012 school year, leaving the school to begin the next year with an interim headmaster. That person eventually was removed amid a federal probe of his alleged role in a multi-state credit fraud ring. Ultimately, no criminal charges were filed. Another headmaster, who had been on the job for a year, resigned after the school department discovered she never gained certification to lead a school in Massachusetts.⁹ The headmaster who replaced her was placed on leave slightly more than two years later for undisclosed reasons. The latest headmaster was removed in May of 2020 when changes were made at several Boston high schools.

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Graduation Rate for Voc-Tech Schools



Graduation Rate Report (School) for All Students 4-Year Graduation Rate, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/gradrates.aspx>

In March 2014, the interim superintendent of the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union announced an “intervention” at Madison Park. A seven-person board was created to study the school. Four months later it produced a report that included 27 recommendations, including shutting the school down in three years and replacing it with an independent regional vocational school unless improvements were made.¹⁰

In August of 2014, the school was scrambling to hire dozens of new teachers and administrators before classes started, then opened in September with no schedules ready for students or teachers.¹¹

In December 2015, the state made its Level 4 determination following an analysis of four-year trends in absolute achievement, student growth and academic improvement. School officials were then required to develop a turnaround plan, which was completed in June of 2016.

The turmoil at Madison Park has often prompted critics to dismiss the school. But others suggest that BPS isn’t fully committed to its success. The 2018 NEASC report noted that the central office has encouraged creating additional vocational programs in at least 22 other high schools in the city, some of which directly duplicate programs already offered at Madison Park.

“The wide dispersal of technical programs throughout the city, including the duplication of programs already in existence, has decreased demand for programs at [Madison Park]. In turn, this has helped depress enrollment. . . . The team further finds that efforts to create dozens of additional technical programs elsewhere in the city, while perhaps started with the best of intentions, has served to help create uncertainty about [Madison Park], its importance to the city and its future as an educational institution.”¹²

The turnaround plan

Madison Park is implementing a turnaround plan within a broader partnership that was established in March of 2020 between DESE and the BPS. In the agreement the BPS has agreed to deliver measurable results on four priority initiatives drawn from the findings of the district review, and DESE agreed to support BPS on four complementary initiatives.

During the next three years, “a major focus of the district will be on making measurable improvements in the 33 schools that face the most challenges in student achievement.... Boston Public Schools will also address student success in high school, programming for students with

disabilities, English Language Learners and transportation challenges.”¹³ This effort is certain to involve Madison Park, with its large “high needs” student population.

In broad terms, the 2016 turnaround plan was aimed at the culture at Madison Park. Priorities included the uncertainty in leadership, addressing the special needs of the student body, and providing teachers with the professional development opportunities and time they lacked.

“The goal over the next three years is to stabilize the school through the commitment of a skilled and dedicated staff who will create a dynamic learning environment that prepares students for postsecondary success in academia and career pathways,” the plan stated.¹⁴ It was written by representatives from Madison Park, including McCaskill and others within BPS administration.

The plan made the case for consistent leadership by pointing out the negative impact on staff of the frequent changes in the headmaster’s office. There was a lack of “guiding vision,” according to the 2016 Monitoring Site Visit Annual Report of Madison Park, conducted by American Institutes for Research.¹⁵ That report also pointed out that the leadership turnover led to Madison Park’s Innovation Plan “not being truly implemented.” One teacher described the impact this way: “I think the hard thing about having a new headmaster every year or half a year in some instances is that it makes it so that teachers don’t want to spend their time planning things or doing things because...it’s made no difference for the next year. You work for a whole year doing something and then the next year you have someone new who doesn’t know anything about that and so your work just goes out the window.”¹⁶

That view was also apparent in Madison Park’s results on the Fall 2015 TNTP Instructional Culture INSIGHT survey, which provides leaders feedback on aspects of school culture that are important for teacher and student success. Only 29 percent of respondents affirmed that “When my school leadership commits to a program or priority, they follow through.”¹⁷

Peter Dewar, assistant executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA), credits McCaskill for addressing the turnover problem by sending Madison Park personnel to “Leadership Academies” at MAVA. The courses are “highly successful in creating folks ready for the next job when it materializes,” says Dewar. “That’s been the key to success across the state.”

McCaskill says nine teachers have completed or are currently enrolled in the MAVA Leadership Academies. One assumed a vocational director position at another BPS school and another was elevated from vocational instructor to co-op coordinator.

What’s changing?

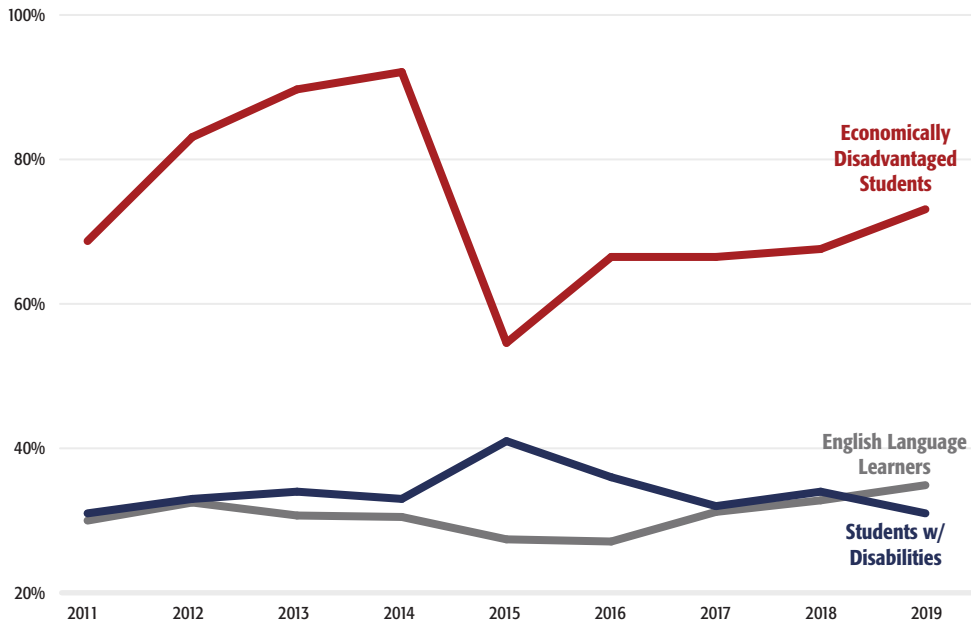
So what is the plan and what has happened since 2016? McCaskill says the program has not been 100 percent implemented. Budgetary issues prevented him from filling certain positions early on. The 2018 NEASC report noted that Madison Park per-pupil expenditures for Madison Park were lower than all but one of eight comparable vocational technical high schools in the region for FY2019. In one case Madison Park’s per pupil spending was only half of that at another school.¹⁸ The average per-pupil spending at the other schools was \$23,247, while at Madison Park it was \$18,242.

Proper funding is also important for Madison Park because of the demand for extra services that results when 92 percent of the students enrolled are considered “high needs.” The examiners in the NEASC study wrote: “...with the high number of students requiring support services, at risk, or special ed/504 services, staffing is less than adequate. Seventy-two percent of Madison Park students are identified at intervention level based... Two-thirds of all students are identified as special education or in need of ELL services. The school psychologist conducted a significant number of suicide assessments last year (2017–2018 school year). Although Madison Park has more than 300 students in need of English Language Learning, there is a shortage of bilingual teachers specifically in the trade areas, where a paraprofessional is utilized to support instruction, among other responsibilities.”¹⁹

The turmoil at Madison Park has often prompted critics of the school to dismiss it. But there are others who suggest the BPS isn’t fully committed to its success.

The NEASC report in 2018 noted that Madison Park’s expenditures were below other voc-tech schools. According to the review, per-pupil expenditures for Madison Park were lower than all but one of eight comparable vocational technical high schools in the region for FY2019.

Percentage of Students in Selected Populations: Madison Park High School



MA DESE, Selected Populations Report, by school, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/selectedpopulations.aspx>

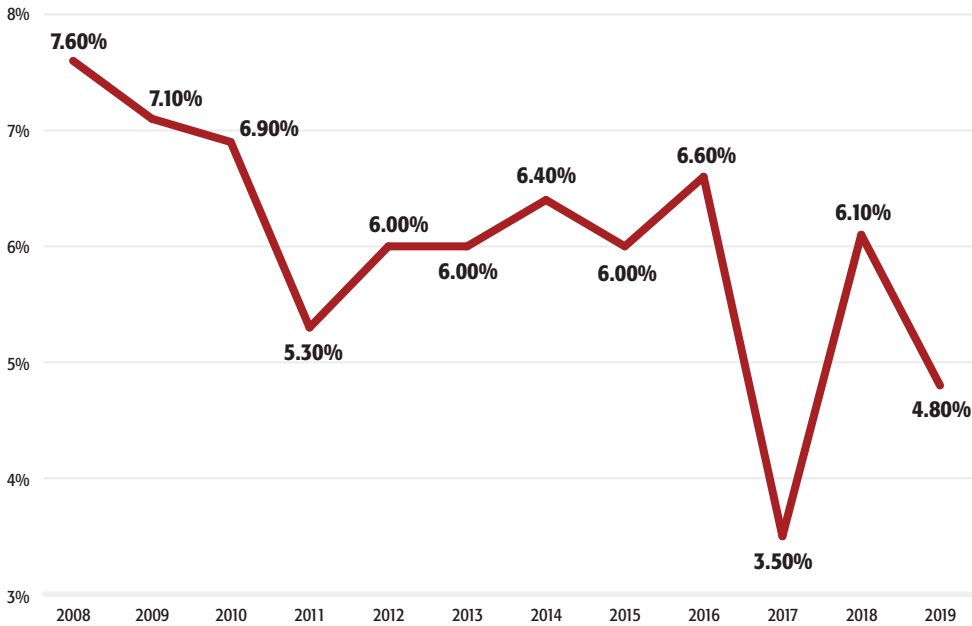
In the turnaround plan, school officials wrote that improving student performance and achievement was at “the foundation” of their design.²⁰ Unquestionably, academics need to improve before Madison Park can become the local economic powerhouse its backers want it to be. Under the plan the elements of that foundation include:

- **Creating small learning communities (SLCs).** SLCs are meant to build a strong and supportive culture among teachers and students and promote the integration of academics and vocational-technical education.
- **Establishing a supportive network for students and their families.** These networks are within the small learning communities. Not only do they lift student achievement, they also foster open lines of communication to families and elevate students’ overall well-being.
- **Enhancing community partnerships.** Stronger community partnerships are expected to lead to increased opportunities for shadowing, internships, and employment, as well as providing student support wraparound services. Wraparound services in schools are designed to give a child the academic, social and behavioral assistance he or she needs throughout the school day.

A comprehensive approach of this sort—small focused groups with clear communication between academics and vocational instruction, and inclusion of families—is vital when the percentage of high needs students at Madison Park is equal to what “alternative schools” have, according to McCaskill.

Small concentrated groups can also help address other problems, such as Madison Park’s chronically high absenteeism. In the turnaround plan, student attendance was highlighted as a priority. The average Madison Park student missed 21.5 days of school and 45 percent of all students qualified as chronically absent during the 2014–2015 school year.²¹ In the 2018–2019 school year the chronic absenteeism rate, meaning the percentage of students who have missed 10 percent or more days out of school, was 47 percent. In a 180-day school year, that is 18 days or more. In the 2019–2020 year, the number was down to 32 percent according to McCaskill.

Annual Dropout Rate: Madison Park High School



A DESE, Dropout Report, by school, for all students, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/dropout.aspx>

MCAS Prep

One example of academic support available to students, according to the NEASC study, is the MCAS “Bootcamp,” an opportunity for students to strengthen their skills in math, English Language Arts (ELA), or science for the MCAS exams. The program involves learning test-taking strategies, practicing open response writing, and studying the academic language they need to understand the test questions. MCAS Bootcamp is open to all students, including those on an individualized education program (IEP).

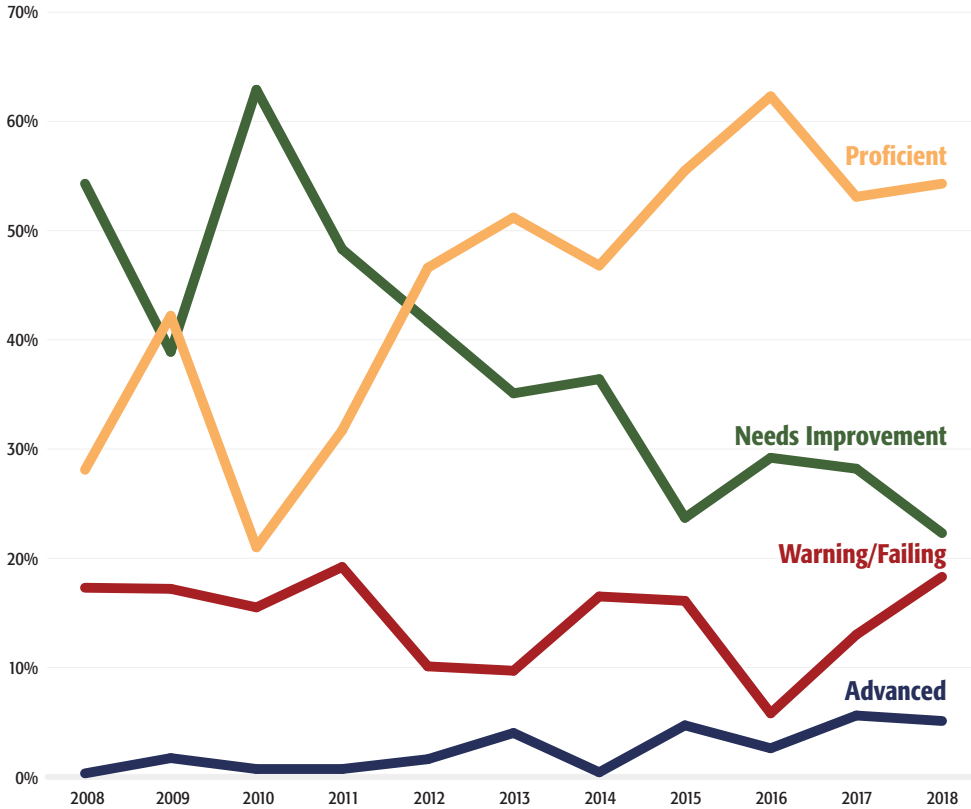
MCAS Bootcamps began when McCaskill became executive director five years ago. Since then math and ELA scores have been mixed. Students have produced their most consistent success rates in science. There, the percentage of students scoring “Advanced” has ticked up slightly to 2.7 percent in the 2019 exam. But the percentage of those scoring “Proficient” rose to 25.7 percent from 11.9 percent in 2018 and those in the “Needs Improvement” fell to 48 percent from 60.1 percent. The “Warning/Failing” improvement was less dramatic, but still a gain, falling from 28 percent in 2018 to 23.6 percent in 2019.

“From a teaching and learning perspective, a lot of work has gone in and we just haven’t seen the traction yet,” says McCaskill. “We have seen it in science. Math has been up and down, as well as English language arts.”

But when analyzing Madison Park’s MCAS scores, McCaskill says people too often are not considering the school’s population. Some students enter their freshman year reading at a fifth and sixth grade level.

“When we have moved the needle, it’s to the point where people say, ‘Yeah, but you’re still below the average,’” he says. “They’re not looking at the improvement... But that’s when you do have to look at the actual demographics.”

Percentage of Students in Each MCAS Achievement Category: Madison Park High School



MA DESE, MCAS Achievement Results, by school, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/mcas.aspx>

Another academic support initiative has been the “Pre-AP” courses started in 2016 for freshmen and sophomores to prepare them for Advanced Placement (AP) courses. A team of 9th grade teachers received Pre-AP training from Mass Insight Education and Research, an organization that has worked to help Boston Public School students succeed in Pre-AP and Advanced Placement courses. Members on that team then led a workshop for their colleagues at the start of the school year. Advance Placement courses at Madison Park include AP English Language Arts, AP Biology and AP Physics.

The NEASC report stated that most Madison Park students feel supported by the administration and staff when faced with difficult academic challenges. One 11th grader said “I’m from Colombia. This school gave me the support I needed to build my English. They provided me with an interpreter in my freshman year and MCAS Bootcamp. It made me feel confident, like I could do it... and I did.”²²

Credits for college

One program that has demonstrated success has been the Roxbury Massachusetts Advanced Post-Secondary Pathways (RoxMAPP), in which students take college level courses and earn college credit while still attending Madison Park. RoxMAPP is a dual enrollment/early college program for 10th–12th graders. Students are able to earn up to 15 transferable college credits at local colleges including Bunker Hill Community College, Roxbury Community College, Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT).

Since the 2014–2015 school year, the number of students participating in RoxMAPP has risen from 15 to 83 and the total number of college credits earned has jumped from 45 to 716. In 2020, two students earned associate’s degree before they graduated from Madison Park. One student was in liberal arts from Bunker Hill Community College and the other in biomedical engineering technology from BFIT.

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RoxMAPP Madison Park Technical Vocational HS Dual Enrollment/Early College Program²³

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
Number of Students	15	45	42	48	55	83
Credits earned	45	157	340	378	469	716

In addition to earning credits and degrees, RoxMAPP gives students a head start on their college and career exploration. They experience life on a college campus and the credits they've earned are worth thousands of dollars at the rates they would pay if taking the same courses after leaving Madison Park.

The Lynn Tech turnaround: it starts at the top

No two schools are perfectly alike, but they can be similar. In 2019 there were 1,026 students at Lynn Vocational Technical Institute in Lynn, Massachusetts. Seventy-two percent of the students are considered “high needs” and English is a second language for more than 63 percent of them.

Ten years ago the dropout rate at Lynn Tech was 7 percent and the graduation rate was 59 percent. Since then those numbers have changed substantially. The dropout rate in 2019 was down to 0.6 percent and the graduation rate was up to 89.5 percent. What happened?

In 2009 Dr. Catherine Latham, a new Lynn superintendent of schools, threw her support behind improving Lynn Tech. The school had done poorly in an inspection by the state DESE's Coordinated Program Review (CPR). Through the CPR, the state oversees local compliance with education requirements in several areas including special education, civil rights and career vocational technical education. The state required corrective action by Lynn Tech following the review. A second evaluation, the 10-year-assessment by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), also recommended changes.

Latham brought in Kathleen Conole, former director of curriculum and instruction at Greater Lowell Technical High School, as a consultant at the suggestion of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA). Conole worked with Lynn Tech for 18 months to implement the corrective actions.

Latham also authorized creation of a new position of MCAS coordinator, who oversaw teacher training and also gathered and analyzed data on MCAS results. In addition, Latham brought in a new co-op director who struck up new articulation agreements with colleges for students to earn credits.

Conole said the improvement was only possible because of support from the superintendent. “If you want change in a school, it has to come from the top,” she says. “There needs to be a superintendent committed to getting their hands dirty. You need someone who recognizes what needs to be done and empowers people to do it.”

Latham retired in 2018. Her successor was Lynn's Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, assuring continuity of support for Lynn Tech. Carissa Karakaedos, a former teacher at Lynn Tech, took over as principal in 2018. Her predecessor had been principal for three years, but at the school for more than 30.

“The district has been amazing,” says Karakaedos, who has had the administration's backing for a five-year plan she proposed upon becoming principal. “The superintendent and my deputy have been so supportive.”

Lynn Tech had 659 applications for 340 spots in its freshman class this year, which Karakaedos attributes, in large part, to the five-year “roadmap.”

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Summary

COVID-19 has made educating students a challenge for even the most exceptional schools. But it's more problematic for a school such as Madison Park as it works on becoming, as Mayor Menino once said, one of Boston's "most important city assets."

Madison Park's enrollment has bounced back in recent years, after a long, steep decline. More students are graduating and fewer dropping out. There's hope that a comprehensive turnaround plan begun in 2016 will eventually produce more skilled workers to fill job openings with Boston businesses.

Though the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has designated Madison Park a Level 4, or "underperforming" school, a team of examiners from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges concluded in the fall of 2018 that Madison Park "has the capacity as a learning organization to progress toward a Level 2 or Level 1 school."²⁴

Despite the encouraging signs, much work needs to be done to reach those classifications. MCAS scores in science have improved, but math and ELA remain disappointing. Just when there seemed to be stability in the main office, school headmaster Brett Dickens was removed in May of 2020 as part of a shuffling among leaders at several Boston high schools. Kevin McCaskill was given additional responsibilities in the Boston Public Schools central office. In the meantime, despite the lessons learned from constant turnover between 2010 and 2015, he'll also serve as the *interim* principal until a replacement is hired.

It remains to be seen how the coronavirus will affect Madison Park's turnaround effort, especially given the school's "high needs" student population. All schools will be assessing how the pandemic has negatively impacted its students. Madison Park will also be determining how it complicates intended outcomes from steps included in its turnaround plan.

McCaskill says educators will need to examine how changes in instruction during the pandemic will affect high maintenance students who require more support.

"Some students might not have the right medium of learning available to them," he says. "It's not a matter of not having the technology. Is that the right medium for them when more hands-on, more tactile or more face-to-face learning is their most effective mode to be educated? That's been taken away."

Recommendations

Allow more autonomy at Madison Park.

There are 39 regional vocational-technical schools in the MAVA network. Like them, Madison Park needs to be independent district with its own superintendent and school committee. Allowing more autonomy would enable Madison Park to sharpen its profile as a standout vocational-technical high school.

Arguments against the idea include the fact that the city would still need to fund the \$15 million to \$20 million budget (other regional voc-tech schools are funded by the municipalities that send students); if it became a regional school it could entice students from other communities who would take seats intended for inner-city kids; and a blatant bias that Madison Park hasn't earned the opportunity to be an independent school considering its history of underperforming. But more autonomy in some form could open the door to more entrepreneurial management and academic growth at Madison Park.

The superintendent of BPS needs to be a Madison Park champion.

The turnaround at Lynn Tech was driven by support from Lynn's superintendent of schools. If Madison Park is to produce needed skilled labor for Boston-based businesses, the impetus must come from the top. Superintendent Brenda Cassellius needs to become a champion and be held accountable for improving the city's only dedicated vocational-technical school. But the spring shuffling of principals among several Boston high schools once again left Madison Park without a

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permanent headmaster, this time as the school tries to prepare for opening amid a pandemic. That gap would seem to be a major step backward.

Expand staff for greater support to students with special needs.

During the 2015–2016 school year, the most recent prior to release of the 2016 turnaround plan, the Madison Park staff was “unprepared to address students with special needs.”²⁵ According to the turnaround plan:

- In addition to a lack of knowledge and skills around creating new supports, staff also may not fully understand the supports Madison Park already offers.
- Madison Park has not provided consistent services to allow our students with disabilities and ELLs to fully participate in our academic and CTE programs.
- Madison Park’s staff lacks training in how to support all students in accessing the school’s programs fully.
- Madison Park lacks protocols to guide implementation and monitoring of our student supports.

Serious attention to at-risk students can make a difference when addressing issues such as attendance, discipline and graduation rates. With added staff, student services can become more proactive rather than reactive to student needs. Madison Park is underfunded compared to other vocational schools in Massachusetts. The school should be provided resources to increase the number of certified/licensed personnel required to fully serve its unique student population.

Approve an admissions policy

Madison Park is an open enrollment school. Students are assigned through the BPS selection process in which they list the high schools they would like to attend in order of preference. But that process has too often resulted in students being assigned to Madison Park because it’s where there was an open slot. Consequently, many students are enrolled who have little to no interest in vocational-technical education.²⁶ That situation can lead to lack of effort by unhappy students and an increase in absenteeism. About 80 percent of current students selected Madison Park either first or second, due to the school’s marketing and outreach to the city’s middle schools and K–8 community.

An admissions policy similar to those at other vocational-technical schools in the state has been approved by DESE but needs local approval. It was submitted to the Boston School Committee in 2015, but was tabled and has not been brought forward since. It needs to be revisited to ensure that students who are attending Madison Park are the ones who want to take advantage of the unique opportunities offered by a Massachusetts Career Vocational Technical School.

Review special needs placements at Madison Park.

Part of establishing an admissions policy requires Boston Public Schools to evaluate how special education placements are made at Madison Park. It should be a place where SPED placements are appropriate and SPED students can access high quality programs.

Ensure BPS vocational-technical programs are aligned, not duplicative.

The NEASC report in 2018 noted vocational-technical programs have been encouraged for at least 22 other Boston high schools, some of which mirror programs already offered at Madison Park. The BPS needs to address how to ensure that vocational-technical programs across BPS schools are aligned, and not duplicative.

Expand early college options.

RoxMAPP has become a success at Madison Park with Bunker Hill Community College, Roxbury Community College, Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology. Not only are students getting an early start on their college degrees, they’re saving money by earning credits while at Madison Park that would cost them thousands of dollars later on. The program is a winner. Expand the concept to other local colleges.

The NEASC report in 2018 noted vocational-technical programs have been encouraged for at least 22 other Boston high schools, some of which mirror programs already offered at Madison Park.

Endnotes

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Mission

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