

Urban Voc-Tech Toolkit: Best Practices for School Reform

By Elana Feinberg, David J. Ferreira, Warley Williams, Dr. Sheila Harrity and Kevin McCaskill.



Mission

Pioneer Institute develops and communicates dynamic ideas that advance prosperity and a vibrant civic life in Massachusetts and beyond.

Vision

Success for Pioneer is when the citizens of our state and nation prosper and our society thrives because we enjoy world-class options in education, healthcare, transportation and economic opportunity, and when our government is limited, accountable and transparent.

Values

Pioneer believes that America is at its best when our citizenry is well-educated, committed to liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise, and both willing and able to test their beliefs based on facts and the free exchange of ideas.

Pioneer Institute is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization funded through the donations of individuals, foundations and businesses committed to the principles Pioneer espouses. To ensure its independence, Pioneer does not accept government grants.

EDUCATION

This paper is a publication of Pioneer Education, which seeks to increase the education options available to parents and students, drive system-wide reform, and ensure accountability in public education. The Center's work builds on Pioneer's legacy as a recognized leader in the charter public school movement, and as a champion of greater academic rigor in Massachusetts' elementary and secondary schools. Current initiatives promote choice and competition, school-based management, and enhanced academic performance in public schools.

OPPORTUNITY

Pioneer Opportunity seeks to keep Massachusetts competitive by promoting a healthy business climate, transparent regulation, small business creation in urban areas and sound environmental and development policy. Current initiatives promote market reforms to increase the supply of affordable housing, reduce the cost of doing business, and revitalize urban areas.

HEALTH

Pioneer Health seeks to refocus the Massachusetts conversation about health care costs away from government-imposed interventions, toward market-based reforms. Current initiatives include driving public discourse on Medicaid; presenting a strong consumer perspective as the state considers a dramatic overhaul of the health care payment process; and supporting thoughtful tort reforms.

TRANSPORTATION

Pioneer Transportation seeks reforms that allow commuters to take full advantage of the coming mobility revolution—with access to a range of affordable and on-demand public and private transportation options, as well as transit-friendly real estate development.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary _____	4
Introduction and Background _____	4
Brief History of Voc-Tech in MA _____	4
Massachusetts is the nation’s “shining star” of voc-tech _____	5
Specific Challenges of Urban Schools _____	6
Madison Park: A Case Study _____	8
Springfield and Worcester _____	9
Best Practices for Urban Voc-Tech Schools _____	10
Recommendations _____	15



Executive Summary

Since the mid-20th century, Massachusetts has been a leader in vocational-technical education. This is due to legislative requirements and research-based best practices, but most importantly to combining occupational education and high-quality academics, school autonomy, and partnerships with industry. However, despite the high number of quality vocational-technical schools across the state, in some urban areas, voc-tech schools have lagged in both student outcomes and opportunities.

This paper explores the history of turnaround in urban areas such as Springfield and Worcester, the unique needs of urban voc-tech schools, and how these best practices can be applied to other urban areas, specifically Boston's Madison Park. Finally, the paper makes specific policy recommendations on how to improve urban voc-tech schools.

The author interviewed current and former vocational-technical school leaders, including:

- David Ferreria, communications director, Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators (MAVA)
- Fred Gallo, principal, Lynn Vocational Technical Institute
- Sheila Harrity, former principal, Worcester Technical High School
- Kevin McCaskill, principal, Brockton High School, former Principal, Putnam Vocational-Technical Academy (Springfield) former executive director, Madison Park Technical Vocational High School
- Warly Williams, principal, New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School

Introduction and Background

Until recently, vocational-technical high schools were considered by many to be “dumping grounds” for students who lacked the aptitude or interest to attend a college-prep school, including special education students and students of color. Their future was with their hands, and perhaps not their heads. That has changed. Today, Massachusetts's voc-tech schools are as much about academics as about vocational skills. In fact, the two are intricately connected. The Massachusetts voc-tech system has earned nationwide praise for its unique model in which students alternate a week in the classroom with a week in specialized voc-tech shops.

Massachusetts voc-tech schools are in high demand, with long waiting lists, high graduation rates, and a strong record of post-secondary placements in both higher education and work. But while the system is the envy of

the country, many of its best practices have not translated to some urban schools, particularly in Boston.

Brief History of Voc-Tech in MA

In 1906, A Commission on Industrial Education was established to develop a system of industrial schools independent of the public school system. With that, Massachusetts became a model for other states and a blueprint for the federal Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917 which created vocational-technical schools nationwide.

Vocational schools grew rapidly during the Great Depression and in the wake of two World Wars. By 1960, Massachusetts had 56 trade and vocational schools for boys, six for girls, and three county agricultural schools.

Passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) during the Cold War in 1958 expanded voc-tech programs in inadequately served areas and emphasized training in scientific and technical fields that met national defense needs.¹

Since 1984, a series of federal vocational legislative acts named for the late Rep. Carl D. Perkins have also supported voc-tech schools, providing for special needs students and improving accountability, secondary-post-secondary alignment, academic integration, tech prep, and business partnerships.

In 1993, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) was passed. This bipartisan legislation focused on academic quality, giving schools additional funding in exchange for accountability. It also established statewide academic standards, MCAS testing, and charter public schools.

“Perhaps the most transformative element of the state's landmark 1993 Education Reform Act was a requirement that voc-tech students be held to the same academic standards as their counterparts in comprehensive public high schools, including that they pass the same [MCAS] tests to achieve their diplomas.”—Bill Weld, former governor of Massachusetts and Tom Birmingham, former Massachusetts Senate president

This required voc-tech students to take many of the same academic courses as their counterparts in comprehensive high schools. As a result:

- Between 2001 and 2007, the Average Performance Index (API) for regional voc-tech and county agricultural schools rose from 53.2 to 82.4, the greatest increase of any subgroup.
- By 2008, 96 percent of voc-tech students were passing both the English and math MCAS tests—better than the 94 percent average for all high school students.

Despite having just half as much academic time as their peers in comprehensive high schools, voc-tech students succeeded precisely because their academic studies were *reinforced* by the technical aspects of their education.

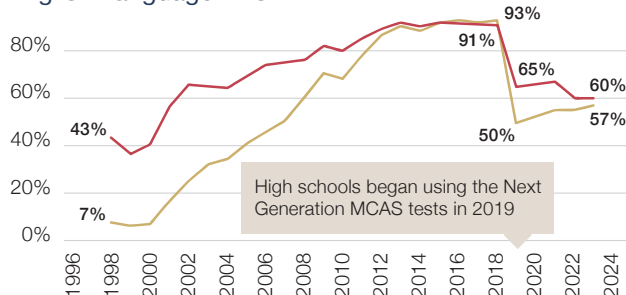
In 2015, Governor Charlie Baker aligned several executive departments to create the Workforce Skills Cabinet, which also provided grants for equipment and capital projects for voc-tech schools, allowing for necessary and continual upgrades to materials and equipment.

Massachusetts is the nation's “shining star” of voc-tech

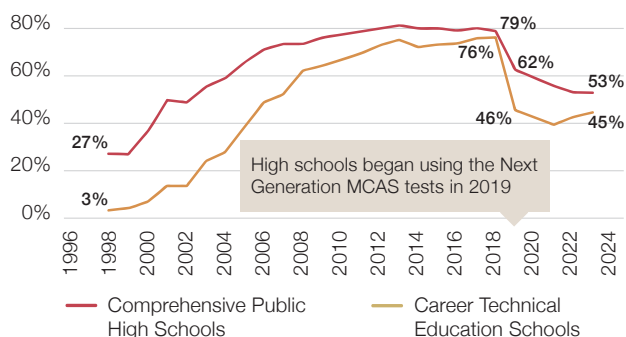
In June 2022, *Washington Post* education columnist Jay Matthews wrote a column entitled “Massachusetts Excels at Vocational-Technical Education,”² highlighting the best practices and encouraging their dissemination throughout the country. Voc-tech schools have achieved this success even as they enroll, on average, higher percentages of low-income and special needs students than traditional public high schools. These schools have higher achievement, higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates compared to both their peers in their districts and state-wide. Voc-tech students also leave high school much more prepared for the workforce and are often praised by industry professionals.

Figure 1: Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard

English Language Arts



Mathematics

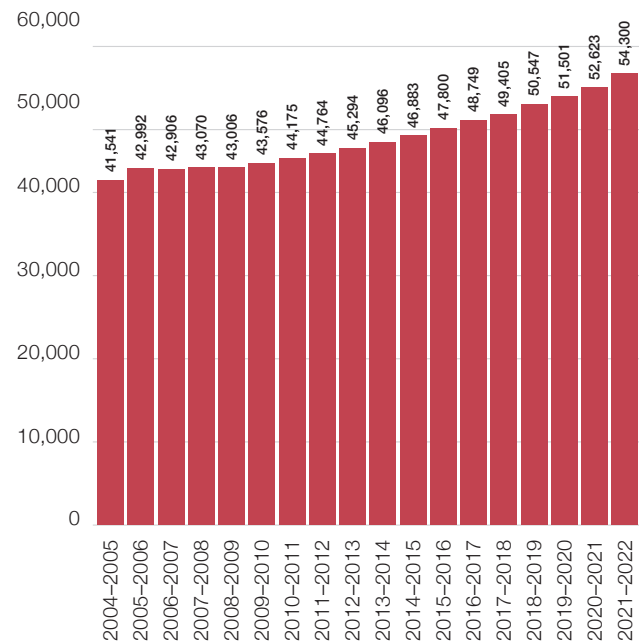


Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, MCAS Achievement & Next Generation MCAS Achievement Report, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/>

As a result of their success, voc-tech enrollment has been increasing year over year:

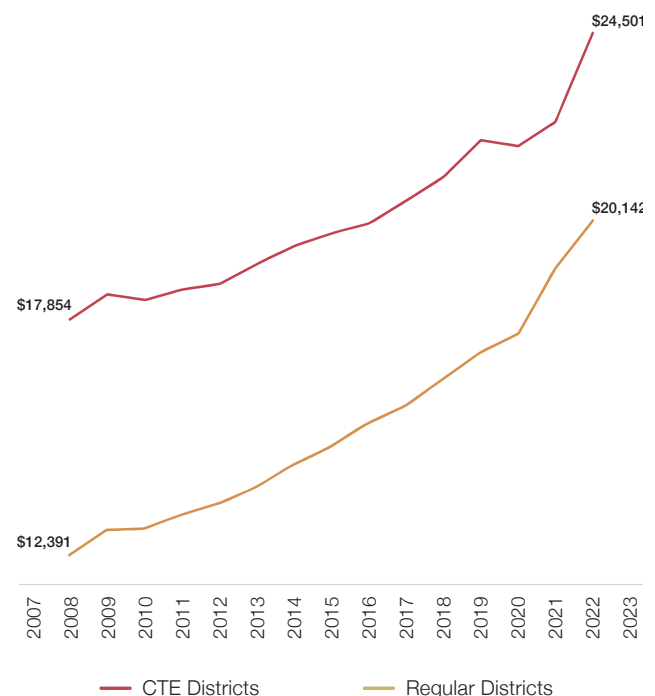
Figure 2: Voc-Tech Enrollment, 2004–2022

MA CVTE Enrollment Totals MGL Chapter. 74 Enrollment



Per-pupil spending has increased and is above the state average. This is because of the cost of the state-of-the-art equipment needed to deliver quality vocational-technical education.

Figure 3: Per-Pupil Spending Voc-Tech & Districts, 2007–2023





Voc-tech dropout rates are lower. Because of the success of partnerships with employers, co-op programs, and integrated learning, students can see the relevance of their school to work. They know that if they stay in school and obtain their degree (and probably a technical certificate) they are likely to land a high-paying job. Smaller class sizes in the vocational courses also create positive relationships and mentoring roles with teachers.

Figure 4: Annual Dropout Rates by School Type: 2014–15 to 2021–22

	'14–'15	'15–'16	'16–'17	'17–'18
Regular/Comprehensive Academic Schools (325)	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%	1.9%
Vocational-Technical Total (36)	1.0%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
City/Town(7)	2.4%	2.1%	1.7%	1.8%
Regional/County/Independent (29)	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Charter Schools (50)	3.5%	3.3%	3.3%	3.0%
Schools Located in Cities (200)	2.8%	3.0%	2.8%	2.9%
Schools Located in Towns (211)	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%
	'18–'19	'19–'20	'20–'21	'21–'22
Regular/Comprehensive Academic Schools (325)	1.8%	1.5%	1.5%	2.1%
Vocational-Technical Total (36)	0.7%	0.6%	0.5%	0.8%
City/Town(7)	1.1%	1.2%	0.7%	1.0%
Regional/County/Independent (29)	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%
Charter Schools (50)	3.4%	2.8%	2.0%	3.9%
Schools Located in Cities (200)	2.7%	2.2%	2.0%	3.0%
Schools Located in Towns (211)	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%	1.1%

Large numbers of voc-tech graduates also go on to post-secondary education.

Figure 5: Voc-Tech's Post Graduation Plans - 2022

	Career Technical Education Schools	Comprehensive Public High Schools
2 Year Private College	1.1%	0.4%
2 Year Public College	17.0%	12.9%
4 Year Private College	11.7%	30.3%
4 Year Public College	20.6%	31.3%
Apprenticeship	3.4%	0.5%
Military	2.4%	1.3%
Other	1.4%	2.1%
Other Post Secondary	2.9%	2.8%
Unknown	4.8%	6.7%
Work	34.6%	11.8%

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Plan of High School Grads Report*, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/>

Recently, this record of success has triggered a change in attitudes toward voc-tech schools in Massachusetts, particularly since the pandemic. Graduates can access high-paying jobs without incurring college debt, due to the high demand for skilled trade workers. According to Fred Gallo, head of school at Lynn Vocational Technical Institute, students are trained for career first and may attend college to enhance that career. Approximately 50-60 percent of voc-tech graduates will go on to a four-year college.

Specific Challenges of Urban Schools

Urban vocational-technical high schools face a number of unique challenges.

Skills Gap: Mismatch between voc-tech graduates and the skills employers need.

Employer needs are changing. There is a gap between the skills high school and college graduates possess and those that employers need. The top industries in Massachusetts now require a much higher-skilled workforce, especially in fields like high tech, life sciences, computers, healthcare, engineering, robotics and bioengineering.³ There is also rising need for qualified workers in construction trades such as electricians, pipefitting, plumbing, and HVAC.

Several demographic developments will impact the workforce over the coming decade:

- The region's population is aging and substantial numbers of workers will retire. Many of those workers

are highly educated and will leave roles that require substantial work experience and skill.

- The state's teenage and 20–24-year-old populations are projected to decline over the next decade due to the baby bust years following the Great Recession. This means fewer workers will be available to meet growth needs and replace those who retire.
- College enrollment declined sharply during the pandemic, which could lead to the first time in the state's history that its younger workers have lower education levels than those who are exiting the workforce. This will worsen talent shortages in many industries.
- The high cost of living is driving workers out of state and making it less attractive to move to this region.

In fact, a February 2025 state report said Massachusetts faces a “critical labor shortfall” in construction and related trades that imperils its ability to build enough housing, which stands to exacerbate current housing shortages.⁴

The industries most important to the region's success are healthcare and professional and technical services (particularly computer systems and design services). Other key industries that are growing are the life sciences, clean energy/climate tech, the creative economy, construction, and advanced manufacturing.⁵

Figure 6: Occupations With More Than 1,000 Projected Annual Openings in Greater Boston Region, 2020–2030

Occupation Title	Typical Education Required	Projected Annual Openings
General and Operations Managers	Bachelor's degree	6,872
Software Developers	Bachelor's degree	6,612
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	High school diploma or equivalent	5,345
Customer Service Representatives	High school diploma or equivalent	3,867
Management Analysts	Bachelor's degree	3,590
Registered Nurses	Bachelor's degree	3,154
Accountants and Auditors	Bachelor's degree	2,907
Office Clerks, General	High school diploma or equivalent	2,563
Security Guards	High school diploma or equivalent	2,478

Occupation Title	Typical Education Required	Projected Annual Openings
Sales Representatives of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel	High school diploma or equivalent	2,434
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	Some college, no degree	2,220
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	Bachelor's degree	2,213
Nursing Assistants	Postsecondary non-degree award	2,191
Financial Managers	Bachelor's degree	2,100
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive	High school diploma or equivalent	2,037
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	High school diploma or equivalent	1,995
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	High school diploma or equivalent	1,811
Computer and Information Systems Managers	Bachelor's degree	1,668

Programs in urban voc-tech schools must align with industry needs and their co-op and training programs must reflect that. Currently, training programs at Madison Park are not well aligned, particularly in healthcare and aviation.⁶ In contrast, Lynn, on the other hand, has responded by creating biotech and environmental science pathways in collaboration with local businesses, the city, and the local community college.

Employers in Boston and other urban areas require a different skill set, including employees with more technical skills than those in the trades. From 2022–2023, total employment in Massachusetts grew about 6 percent and Boston employment increased by nearly 7 percent, according to the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance. That amounts to 76,016 jobs per year in Boston and 434,937 statewide, according to the DUA.⁷ As reported by the Massachusetts Department of Economic

Research's Long-Term Occupational Projections, many of the fastest growing jobs do not require a college or advanced degree. For example, aircraft service attendants, cooks, and cargo and freight agents are all expected to grow by more than 25 percent over the next 10 years.⁸

Funding and Resources. In general, it costs more to run vocational schools, mostly due to equipment, technology, supplies, and larger staff. For regional schools, the per-pupil funding goes directly to the schools. Unlike regional schools, urban schools share resources and staff (curriculum directors, for example, or English learner services) with the district. This means some funds do not go directly to schools, particularly for materials and supplies. All the school leaders interviewed identified this as a top challenge. In Boston, several schools receive Chapter 74 voc-tech funding, so money is spread throughout the district. According to McCaskill, school leaders need to “think out of the box” for resource allocation, as they are often challenged to fund equipment, staff, materials, or other needs.⁹

Student Demographics. Regional schools pull from a more diverse student body, including higher-achieving students. Urban schools generally have higher-need students, including English learners (ELs), migrants, low-income students, and students who have experienced trauma. Although all Boston neighborhoods are represented at Madison Park, more than 80 percent of the students come from Dorchester, East Boston, Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Roxbury—areas that have traditionally been lower income, with higher populations of students of color and ELs.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers. Recruiting vocational teachers is difficult because of the pay differential. A plumber with 25 years of experience could earn more than \$100,000 annually, more than they would earn as a teacher. Former Madison Park Executive Director Kevin McCaskill says Boston tries to match industry pay with years of service in the teaching profession and gives salary credits similar to those for teachers with a master's degree.¹⁰ According to the Boston Teachers Union salary schedule, a teacher with a master's degree and five years of experience earned \$91,323 during the 2023–2024 school year under the contract with the city.¹¹ Urban voc-tech school teachers also earn less than their regional school counterparts, which presents a recruiting and retention issue, according to Gallo at Lynn Tech.¹²

Collective bargaining agreements and the state require that all teachers hold a degree and a credential. Many teachers come directly from industry without teaching degrees (or sometimes even bachelor's degrees), and

often lack training in basic teaching methods such as lesson planning, scope and sequences, classroom management or supporting special populations. Voc-tech schools spend additional time and resources supporting these teachers.

According to New Bedford's Williams, schools often hire teachers with the understanding that they will earn their credential. Within the approximately two years it takes to earn it, those new to teaching require support.

Chronic Absenteeism. Post-pandemic, the nation's schools face an epidemic of chronic absenteeism. This is particularly stark in urban areas. At Madison Park, 29.6 percent of students were absent 20 percent or more of the time during the 2023–2024 school year. Without improving chronic absenteeism, it is difficult to make academic progress and prepare students for work.

Enrollment. Unlike regional and suburban schools, urban schools are losing enrollment. Boston Public Schools enrollment is down 14 percent from 2019.¹³

Madison Park: A Case Study

Despite adopting some of the best practices from other Massachusetts vocational-technical schools, urban voc-techs, and Boston's Madison Park in particular, have not been as successful. Madison Park has a long history of intervention, and many factors have contributed to its failure to show consistent improvement.

Madison Park has had a history of challenges, including chronic absenteeism, leadership instability, low numbers of students involved in co-op, low enrollment and graduation rates, and poor academic results.¹⁴ Madison Park also exists in the context of both the city and the school district, which presents constraints and barriers such as union contracts and admissions policies.

As of 2023, Madison Park, also serves a large number of high-need students, including special education (36.6 percent), low income (84.5 percent), and English learners (30.6 percent). These numbers are all above state averages, and all but the percentage of ELs are above the district average.

The number of students placed in paid jobs with local employers has often been below that of co-op programs at other voc-tech schools and mostly focused in just three or four of Madison Park's 20 industry disciplines. The reasons for low numbers of co-op students were:

- **Attendance.** Too many students fell short of the 90 percent school attendance requirement. Although students might be trained and skilled, attendance is about responsibility and dependability. The school can't send students out who don't attend school.

- **Extra Academic Support.** The second factor depressing co-op numbers was that many Madison Park students need extra academic support. McCaskill said students must meet graduation requirements first, making after-hours academic work a higher priority than the co-op program.

In 2016, Madison Park was designated a Level 4 school by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). School officials created a turnaround plan they began implementing in June of that year. Since then, there have been signs of improvement.

- Enrollment has steadily increased from 887 in 2019 to 1121 this year. Enrollment is up 7.5 percent since 2021, and this year, for the first time in many years, Madison Park—where 53 percent of students are Hispanic and 41 percent are Black—had a waitlist.
- In 2023, the graduation rate was 78 percent, a significant increase from 68 percent in 2019, and only slightly below the district average of 80.5 percent.
- There is now a program director for the co-op program and the number of students in co-op has increased.
- A Career Champions Network was created to advocate for Madison Park that includes a former state Secretary of Housing and Economic Development and 50 business leaders serve in various capacities, most commonly as members of the advisory boards of programs taught at the school, like carpentry and plumbing.¹⁵

But challenges remain. In 2023, MCAS scores still lagged the district and the state, with 13 percent Meeting Expectations in English language arts (versus 43 percent for the state and 25 percent for the district) and 5 percent Meeting Expectations in Math (42 percent for the state and 32 percent for the district). For 2024, 19 percent of Madison Park students met or exceeded expectations in English—up from 11 percent in 2022; in math, only 7 percent did so, the same percentage as 2022.

Attendance also lags the state and district at 81 percent versus 92.5 percent and 88.7 percent respectively. However, daily attendance is up 10 percentage points in 2025.

The school was specifically named in the DESE turnaround plan for Boston Public Schools (BPS) in 2020. It is rated “Broad/Comprehensive Support” by DESE, the lowest rating for a school, and a marker that it is still in turnaround. In terms of growth, it met only half its targets. In summary, despite making strides, the school is still not performing well. We will explore the reasons and make specific recommendations below.

One other bright spot for Madison Park is the promise of

a new, state-of-the-art building that should improve both recruitment and student outcomes. As of this writing, stakeholder input has been completed and designs are in process. Construction is set to begin in 2026 but will likely be delayed by funding issues.¹⁶ Many are concerned that delays may exacerbate the labor shortage.¹⁷ The school will also expand to serve grades 7–12, consistent with most of the high schools in the district.

Springfield and Worcester

Despite facing many of the challenges highlighted above, both Putnam Tech in Springfield and Worcester Tech managed successful turnarounds.

At Worcester Tech,

- In 2006, no students scored Advanced on the English language arts (ELA) MCAS in 2006 (27 percent were Proficient), yet by 2017 45 percent were Advanced (52 percent proficient), and in 2024 (after the scoring categories were renamed), 4 percent were Exceeding Expectations and 42 percent Meeting Expectations.
- The percentage scoring Advanced on the math MCAS rose from 10 percent in 2006 (and 25 percent Proficient) to 49 percent Advanced (and 32 percent Proficient) in 2017. In 2024, 28 percent were Meeting Expectations and 3 percent Exceeding Expectations.
- The graduation rate increased from 79 percent in 2006 to 99 percent in 2017. It was 96 percent in 2024

In Springfield (Putnam),

- The percentage of students scoring Advanced on the ELA MCAS rose from zero in 2006 (with 23 percent Proficient) to 45 percent in 2017 (52 percent Proficient). In 2024, 5 percent of students were Exceeding and 36 percent Meeting Expectations.
- On the Math MCAS, 6 percent were Advanced in 2006 (with 13 percent Proficient), rising to 22 percent in 2017 (27 percent Proficient). In 2024, 3 percent were Exceeding and 25 percent Meeting Expectations.
- The graduation rate rose from 49.2 percent in 2006 to 95.8 percent in 2018. It was 97.5 percent in 2024.

At Lynn Tech,

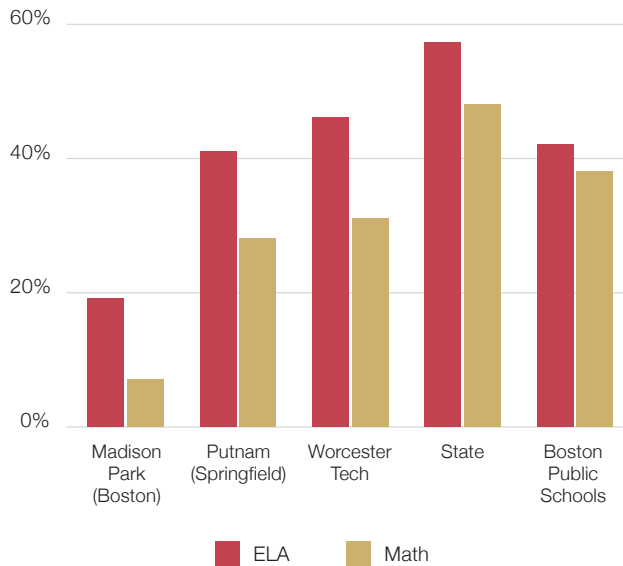
- One student scored Advanced on the 2006 ELA MCAS and 34 percent were Proficient. In 2017, 19 percent scored Advanced and 59 percent were Proficient. In 2024, 7 percent were Exceeding and 43 percent Meeting Expectations.
- For the 2006 Math MCAS, no students were Advanced and 8 percent were Proficient. In 2017, 18 percent were Advanced, and 32 percent Proficient, and in 2024 1

percent were Exceeding and 40 percent were Meeting Expectations.

- The graduation rate rose from 60.3 percent in 2006 to 87.8 percent in 2018 and 94.7 percent in 2024.

All these urban schools have significantly better outcomes than Madison Park and are on par with the state.

Figure 7: 2024 % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations - 10th Grade MCAS:



NOTES: BPS data also include exam schools, which can skew results.

The schools attribute their success to the best practices detailed below.

Best Practices for Urban Voc-Tech Schools

1. Strong vision and mission

Create a strong vision for excellence based on workforce training as well as school culture and academics. All-stakeholders should be aligned to the mission and vision. Then, create and commit to a three-to-five-year improvement plan. All stakeholders and any new leadership should commit to the plan. Schools should regularly track progress toward achieving plan goals, and plans must be implemented using strong change management strategies.

For example, Worcester Tech created a three-year plan. There were weekly administrative and instructional leadership team meetings. Each month, progress reports were presented on steps taken to achieve the teams' goals and benchmarks.¹⁸

2. Unwavering Support and Focus from the State and District

For the vision to be realized, the superintendent must be a "champion" of vocational-technical schools and fully throw their support behind it. This includes funding, staff, capacity, partnerships and facilities. It also includes a focus on boosting the school's reputation and committing resources to marketing and recruitment.

After Dr. Catherine Latham, then Lynn's new superintendent of schools, threw her support behind improving Lynn Tech in 2009, the school's results improved. It had had fared poorly in an inspection by the DESE's Coordinated Program Review and in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation report. The current principal at Lynn Tech, Fred Gallo, reinforced this idea. "The strong support from the district is what allowed us to turn the corner; the district wanted us to survive and thrive."¹⁹

"We must set a tone for the school that puts teaching and learning first... we must have high expectations for academics with rigor at the forefront and believing in every single kid... that every single kid can learn at high levels...when you lower expectations you don't help kids."

—Principal Warly Williams

3. Focus on Academic Excellence and High Expectations

A clear vision must include a focus on academic excellence and fundamental skills. Until recently, many voc-tech schools had low expectations for students, especially in academics. "We must set a tone for the school that puts teaching and learning first... we must have high expectations for academics with rigor at the forefront and believing in every single kid... that every single kid can learn at high levels... when you lower expectations you don't help kids." This is key to success, especially at schools with large numbers of high-need students, says Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School Principal Warly Williams.²⁰

Specific practices for strong academics include:

- **A 50/50 Split Between Vocational-Tech Skills and Academics.** Students alternate between their vocational and academic studies weekly, ensuring

sufficient time on task to succeed in their chosen field while developing critical academic skills. For vocational schools to succeed, academics and hands-on training must be integrated and seamless. For example, carpentry is based in geometry and HVAC technicians must learn to use math to calibrate machinery. Students must be able to read complex technical manuals, which requires a strong background in ELA.

- **Requiring Mass Core Coursework.** In addition to vocational courses and co-op, voc-tech schools also require rigorous academic coursework to graduate. These includes four years of ELA, four years of math, three years of history/social-science, and two years of a world language.²¹
- **Smaller Classes.** Because enrollment in vocational courses is often 10–15 students, teachers can play much more of a facilitator and guide role. They are also able to forge deep relationships with students, leading to better attendance, better grades, and lower dropout rates.
- **Common Planning Time and Collaboration.** In the 2022 recommendations for Madison Park, teachers requested common planning time to support students in learning common skills and content such as literacy and math. This was offered during turnaround, when the school adopted extended hours. At Blackstone Valley Tech, teachers regularly collaborate with colleagues to integrate themes, topics and skills across both academics and vocational courses. Williams says collaboration and integrated vocational and academic programs are key to student success at New Bedford, especially as many of the math and ELA standards have crossovers with the Career Technical Education (CTE) frameworks. According to Williams, “if you can build in the structures of making the academic aspects of your vocational program a hallmark....it makes the students more whole.”²²
- **Opportunities for Early College and Dual Enrollment.** Students can take courses at local community colleges and many graduate with an associate's degree in addition to their high school diploma and a certificate in their vocation. 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. Students can earn up to 15 transferable college credits, including at

Bunker Hill Community College, Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute and Wentworth Institute of Technology.²³ In 2020, students earned 750 credits and became the first Boston students to earn associates degrees while still in high school.

Worcester Tech also partnered with local community colleges to improve students' higher education prospects.

- **Advanced Placement and Pre-Advanced Placement Offerings.** Students need access to advanced-level coursework to be admitted to higher education programs and be exposed to the level of academic rigor required for post-secondary work. It also opens pathways for students in college and beyond. For example, Worcester Tech had Certified Nursing Assistant certificate programs and Emergency Medical Technician programs, but no pathways for students who wanted to be nurses or doctors.²⁴ Advanced Placement courses were added to make academics more rigorous. AP Biology was the first course offered because none of the graduates from the Allied Health & Human Services Academy were being admitted into pre-med undergraduate degree programs.²⁵
- **Competency-Based Learning.** Voc-tech schools follow competency-based frameworks for each pathway. Each competency contains strands for technology, health and safety, employability, and management. These ensure alignment for career readiness.
- **Capstone or Senior Projects.** Most Massachusetts voc-tech schools also require a senior project, or capstone, that demonstrates deep learning and preparedness for the workforce. Many industry partners come to the schools and judge or grade these capstone projects.
- **Smaller Learning Communities.** A recommendation in the Madison Park turnaround plan, SLCs are meant to build a strong and supportive culture among teachers and students and promote the integration of academics and vocational-technical education. In addition to lifting student achievement, they also foster open lines of communication to families and elevate students' overall well-being. The success of Worcester Tech's turnaround is also attributed to splitting into four learning communities that offered 25 career paths, each with its own part of the building. Harrity also said smaller learning communities were essential in Worcester for career exploration, more personalized

learning, and for supporting students and giving them resources and assistance.²⁶

- **Professional Development in Teaching Vocational Tech to English Learners** who, in addition to academics and their subject-specific certification, may also have to learn about the “culture of work” in America. According to Gallo at Lynn Tech, they train vocational teachers in Structured English Immersion strategies to support English learners. EL students also feel like they belong and are supported by the school, and that teachers want them to do well.²⁷
- **Evening Programs.** Opening schools to adults in the community after hours also contributes to an efficient use of high-tech facilities and more workforce training. Worcester saw a large impact on recruitment and admissions, as well as an expansion of the adult workforce.²⁸
- **Data-Driven Instruction.** Schools should use best practices for data-driven instruction, including professional learning communities, data analysis, and making plans to re-teach skills and concepts. To prepare for MCAS exams, Putnam created five assessment teams, each including a math and ELA teacher. They would work with 22 students per MCAS class and assess their progress on six-week cycles.²⁹ At Blackstone Valley Tech, all students take a placement test upon entry and students must take an individualized remediation program until they are reading at grade level.
- **Elevating successful teachers.** In Springfield, Putnam identified several teachers who succeeded at building relationships with students and also teaching rigorous skills and content, and placed them in leadership and coaching positions.

4. Student Support

Urban students often have greater needs than suburban students, including both academic and social-emotional needs. Blackstone Valley Tech has individualized remediation so all students read at grade level, and assistive technology in vocational classrooms.

Similar to high academic expectations, teachers and leaders must have high expectations for behavior. If adults don’t address behavior issues, it hurts students later on, especially in their co-op programs, says New Bedford’s Warly Williams.³⁰ Furthermore, if teachers are not supported in terms of school and classroom culture, it causes them to potentially become jaded. Regular professional development on school culture,

behavior and supporting the whole child is key.

Lynn Tech and Putnam Tech in Springfield have large minority, low-income, and EL populations, and have managed to raise academic scores and graduation rates while also reducing dropouts. At Lynn, Gallo says students feel supported by teachers and know the teachers want them to succeed. They spend additional time in 9th grade in ESL courses and supporting ELs. Additionally, all teachers, including vocational teachers are trained in supporting high-needs students, particularly English learners. They also provide “push in” services and supports for ELs and special education students in the shops. In addition, students support each other in the native language and make sure they understand what is being asked. This has resulted in Lynn Tech having the best student outcomes in the district and a low attrition rate among ELs.³¹

Students need opportunities for growth, learning outside the classroom, and co-op programs. This is especially important for students of color and low-income students who may not otherwise be able to access such opportunities. “We want students to have an experience that excites them, we want them to have a story to tell when they come back that excites people and forces us to expand our boundaries,” says McCaskill.³²

- **Expanded staff for more support to students with special needs.** The 2022 Madison Park Turnaround plan identified a need to provide additional support and staff for students, and also to help existing staff support students with special needs. This includes systems and referral protocols.

In New Bedford, Williams identified the need to assist teachers who are inexperienced in supporting behavior, especially for students who may have experienced trauma. Teachers “need to learn where some of the behavior is coming from, and what their lives are like in order to address the behavior,” says Williams.³³ They also need specific behavioral supports to create a positive and safe school culture.

Collaboration among support staff is also key. At New Bedford, attendance and school safety staff, counselors, administrators and teachers all work together to identify students who are in need and work together to support these students and give them what they need.³⁴

- **Wrap-around services in partnership with local organizations.** In addition to partnerships

for co-ops, several schools within BPS, including East Boston High School, Boston International Newcomers Academy, and Mattahunt Elementary, have improved outcomes by providing services such as counseling, health care, etc.

5. Visibility, Accessibility and Collaboration of the Administration Across the Board

School principals are busy. However, having school leaders available for support, questions, or for problem solving does not cost extra money and is beneficial to staff, students, and families. Principals need to know students, their families, and staff personally. They need to be visible in hallways, making announcements, at school events, and in classrooms. According to McCaskill, this is a hallmark of a successful school because it allows families, teachers, and students to get the help, resources, and support they need.³⁵

Williams cited McCaskill for administrative visibility, and how it creates positive energy, and added that administrators need to be collaborative and consistent in terms of instructional vision, high expectations, teacher feedback, and behavior protocols. We want administrators to be facilitators and coaches, not just observers.

6. Autonomy

The state's regional voc-tech districts have their own school committees, superintendents, administrators, and budgets and enjoy independence and respect on the state level.

One reason why the Worcester Tech turnaround succeeded was that it was allowed autonomy from the district. It was not "just another Worcester High school" and they "needed to address the rigor of the academics connected to the technical programs... we needed the integrated, targeted approach that really made student education relevant" stated former school leader Harrity. Becoming an innovation school also allowed them more autonomy, especially in hiring.

There are 39 regional vocational-technical schools in the MAVA network. Like them, urban schools need to be independent districts with their own superintendent and school committee. For example, the BPS central office does not have deep knowledge of voc-tech schools and tends to see turnaround through a more academic lens. This creates conflict with the school because those dictating policy don't necessarily understand the school's needs or operations.

Allowing more autonomy would enable Madison Park to sharpen its profile as a standout vocational-technical high school. Finally, it would free the school from some of the politics of the city and district.

7. Fundraising

A successful turnaround requires significant fundraising, particularly from corporate partners and outside sources. Both were critical to Worcester Tech's turnaround. For example, of the \$90 million price tag for the school, the city was able to secure \$60 million in state financing. The other \$30 million was raised by the Worcester Vocational Schools Advisory Board, made up of area business leaders. The board devised a program to attract contributions from local and national firms. The effort was led by Edwin "Ted" Coghlin, owner of Coghlin Electrical Contractors, whom Harrity calls "the godfather of Worcester Tech." Harrity also said that he provided access to people and connections she did not have access to as a school leader.³⁶

In Worcester, local companies jumped at the proposal, but so did high-tech giants. Each corporation's investments allowed them to advise on the equipment's instructions and have access to a facility where they could train their employees, sales staff, and prospective clients. Another innovation was the Skyline Technical Fund, a 501(c)(3) account created to acquire state-of-the-art computers and peripheral equipment. The goal was to ensure that the equipment at the school would never fall behind industry standards.

"In most school districts, when you're working on a transformational model, there are additional dollars that come with it," said Harrity. "We did not receive any. There was not an additional pot of money to create additional initiatives. We only received \$200,000 per year in supplies, equipment, and for professional development from the city. So we made use of the resources we had and the Skyline Technical Fund."³⁷

8. Partnerships and Co-Op Programs

- **Co-Op Programs.** Partnerships with industry are key to the success of successful urban schools. This includes having auto shops and beauty salons, for example, that are open to the public. In Massachusetts, 95 percent of voc-tech schools have cooperative programs for juniors and seniors in which students alternate between academic classes and co-op weekly. Students can also be offered a paid job in the summer after 11th grade from the co-op partner, and they are paid during the co-op program in 12th grade.³⁸ To participate in co-op, students must maintain high academic standing, good behavior, and consistent attendance. Co-ops provide an incentive to stay in school, do well and graduate. They are also key for extracurricular activities. Partnerships

extend to unions, guilds, and small business owners. Partnerships with business have included equipment donations, co-op jobs, and business leaders who serve on school advisory committees.

“Partnerships with industry are key to the success of successful urban schools. This includes having auto shops and beauty salons, for example, that are open to the public. In Massachusetts, 95 percent of voc-tech schools have cooperative programs for juniors and seniors in which students alternate between academic classes and co-op weekly. Students can also be offered a paid job in the summer after 11th grade from the co-op partner, and they are paid during the co-op program in 12th grade”

—Harrity

At Springfield, McCaskill said, “We also made a big effort to get partners. Between Springfield College, Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, we had so many people with their hands on that school to provide holistic support to our students. It was tremendous.” Partners also included industry entities such as Baystate Health Systems, Smith & Wesson, and Square One to name a few.³⁹

- **Advisory Committees.** By law, each voc-tech school has an overall advisory committee of 10-15 business and community leaders, plus committees for each vocational program. The committees help ensure the curriculum remains relevant to the real world, that capital equipment needs are accurately gauged, and ties with the business community remain strong. Advisory boards have a list of criteria for board members, and many of them come from local industries, and those are different in different parts of the state.⁴⁰ These advisory boards help “connect the dots” for students to move into high-paying careers.⁴¹ More importantly, the advisory committee provides partnerships for co-op programs.

Putnam Academy was important to Springfield’s future because of the skilled workers it could provide to local employers. A failed voc-tech school would have been a lost opportunity for the city. Momentum began to build from promoting Putnam Academy at the middle schools and strengthening connections with area businesses.

9. State-of-the-Art Facilities: “New Building, New Attitude”

In both Springfield and Worcester, new buildings were

key to the turnaround. In Springfield, the industry representatives on each board helped design the shops for a new building that opened in 2012.⁴² Technology upgrades were happening so fast that facilities in many departments were revised between the initial blueprint and the start of construction.

The new building instilled a sense of pride among the staff and students, and assisted with recruitment, according to George Johnson, former principal at Putnam Tech and assistant principal in 2012. “We had an admissions policy enacted then on how to get into Putnam based on certain scores and academics, attendance, recommendations from counselors at the middle school,” he said. “Now the high-achieving kids wanted to come to Putnam.”⁴³

- **Partnerships and Advisory Boards Support Facilities Improvements.** Not only are partnerships key to the co-op program and fundraising, they are also critical to upgrading and maintaining state-of-the-art facilities. Many advisory board or co-op program partners donate equipment that allows students to train with state-of-the-art equipment.

10. Adequate Training for Teachers and Leaders

Teachers need opportunities for growth and professional development. Many industries require continual development and updating of skills, particularly when it comes to technology. Teachers need to be willing to continually try new things, adapt, be nimble and to stay up to date with industry trends.⁴⁴

11. Marketing and Recruitment

Voc-tech schools need to market and recruit in a way that is similar to other magnet or special focus schools. These should be schools of choice and competitive, not places of last resort. Regional schools have largely achieved that goal. Vocational educators and administrators know that students who choose a voc-tech education, particularly in a regional district, are not settling for less than what is available to them in their hometown. They are actively choosing a rigorous, comprehensive, and career-oriented education.

In six years, Putnam went from having a poor reputation to becoming a school of choice. Worcester did the same and now has a waitlist. Madison Park has about 80 percent of students listing it as their first or second choice, but it has not yet achieved the type of turnaround seen in Worcester and Springfield.

According to Gallo, Lynn changed its admissions policy and now has twice as many students wanting to attend than available seats. This was due to district

marketing support, gaining access to open houses and speaking to students at the middle schools. Their primary focus is also the CTE programming, and their interview questions focus on this aspect of the school to ensure that entering students are interested in CTE and not just a high-performing school.⁴⁵

Recommendations

1. Increase funding for voc-tech programs.

Although Massachusetts spends more than some other states, many schools rely on private grants to ensure access to the materials and supplies they need. Voc-tech schools are funded by the state and by federal Perkins Career and Technical Improvement grants. Much of the Chapter 74 state money (approximately \$5,000–\$6,000 per student to help with the high cost of voc-tech programs) goes to districts and not directly to schools. Additionally, facilities, supplies, equipment and materials quickly become outdated. Schools need to train students on the most up-to-date technology and equipment to ensure that the students are prepared for the workforce.

2. Ensure 8th Grade students are fully aware of voc-tech options.

To ensure the broadest possible pool of qualified applicants, vocational-technical high schools must have unobstructed access to 8th grade students. Only by providing complete information about the academic and vocational opportunities available to students can voc-tech schools ensure equal opportunity to all who have both the ability and interest to pursue career technical education.

Voc-tech advocates, in Massachusetts or any other state, should insist that they—like charter public schools—have an equal claim to promote their brand of public education under principles of equal access and treatment under the law.

There are multiple ways that schools could ensure awareness beyond standard recruitment events and open houses. Middle Schools could do half- or full-day “shadow” days or experiential days at the voc-tech schools. The voc-tech schools can also offer summer or vacation programming. The important thing is exposing middle school students to the various offerings and programs so they can make informed high school choices.

In 2018, Madison Park started doing a “roadshow,” visiting approximately schools across Boston, in addition to mass mailings. They also brought students with them to talk directly about the school.

3. Expand access to voc-tech education.

By law, every student in Massachusetts has access to either a regional voc-tech program or a district vocational program. However, many of these schools have long waitlists. The largest waitlists are in lower income communities and communities with high numbers of ELs.

Even as K–12 enrollment in Massachusetts public schools declined in the early 21st century, the popularity of voc-tech schools increased by 17 percent between 2004 and 2024. There are 54,300 students in Massachusetts voc-tech high schools and at least 6,000, and potentially up to 11,000, remain on waitlists. Many of the newer buildings are larger, and other schools, such as Nashoba Valley Tech, have received grants from DESE to conduct renovations that increase space and can therefore accommodate more students.⁴⁶ At a 2024 Pioneer Institute panel discussion, school leaders called for expanding voc-tech programs in Massachusetts,⁴⁷ noting that expansion is necessary to meet demand and provide lucrative career opportunities.

Just as importantly, there are 52 Massachusetts cities and towns in which students have no ready access to district or regional vocational-technical education. Many of these “voc-tech deserts” are in Berkshire and Hampshire counties, highlighting a divide in Massachusetts between urban/suburban and rural students.

4. Establish autonomous voc-tech representation at the state level.

DESE should establish a Division of Career/Vocational-Technical and Agricultural Education under the leadership of an associate commissioner. The Division of Occupational Education was eliminated by the MERA, although vocational education divisional status had been maintained since 1909. The roughly 20 percent of Massachusetts high school students who participate in some form of career voc-tech education should have appropriate visibility and representation within the DESE.

5. Allow Urban Schools to be more autonomous.

There are 39 regional vocational-technical schools in the MAVA (Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators) network. Like the regional schools, urban voc-techs should each be their own district with its own superintendent and school committee. Allowing more autonomy would enable these schools, particularly Madison Park, to integrate more of the best practices and improve student outcomes.

Endnotes

- 1 National Defense Act of 1958, see <https://history.house.gov/HouseRecord/Detail/15032436195#:~:text=The%20law%20provided%20federal%20funding,mathematics%2C%20and%20modern%20foreign%20languages.>
- 2 Matthews, J. "What's better for students, the trades or college?" *Washington Post*, June 19, 2022. Accessed on January 28th, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/06/19/massachusetts-vocational-technical-high-school/>
- 3 Ferreira, D. and Sinicola, C., Editors. *Hands-On Achievement: Massachusetts National Model Vocational-Technical Schools*. Pioneer Institute: 2021.
- 4 Unlocking Housing Production Commission "Building for Tomorrow: Recommendations for Massachusetts Housing Crisis" February, 2025. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/building-for-tomorrow-a-report-from-the-unlocking-housing-production-commission/download>
- 5 MassHire Boston Workforce Board, MassHire Metro North Workforce Board, and MassHire Metro South/West Workforce Board "Greater Boston Regional Blueprint." 2024 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2024-greater-boston-regional-workforce-blueprint/download>
- 6 Madison Park Technical Vocational School. <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/academics/career-and-technical-education/madison-park-technical-vocational-high-school>, Accessed on January 28th, 2025
- 7 Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, <https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/LongTermOccupationProjections/LTOPResult?A=15&GA=000010&Cmd=Go&Type=long&Dopt=TEXT>
- 8 Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, "Long Term Occupational Projections: Boston" accessed January 15th, 2025. <https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/LongTermOccupationProjections/LTOPResult?A=15&GA=000010&Cmd=Go&Type=long&Dopt=TEXT>
- 9 McCaskill, K. Interview on January 24th, 2025
- 10 Donovan, William. "Madison Park II: Capitalizing on Employment Opportunities." Pioneer Institute: March 2021, No 225.
- 11 Boston Teacher's Union Salary Schedule. <https://btu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Salaries-Traditional-Teacher-Salaries.pdf>
- 12 Gallo, F. Interview on January 22nd, 2025
- 13 Peter Ciurczak, "Empty Desks: The Enrollment Crisis in Boston Public Schools" *Boston Indicators: Measuring What We Value*, June 17, 2024. Accessed on January 24, 2025. https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2024/june/empty_desks_enrollment
- 14 Donovan, William. "Madison Park Technical Vocational High School Turnaround Update." Pioneer Institute, 2020, No 215.
- 15 Garcia, M. "Boston cannot wait 10 years to rebuild Madison Park" *The Boston Globe*, February 25th, 2025.
- 16 Madison Park Technical Vocational School. <https://www.boston.gov/departments/environment/madison-park-technical-vocational-high-school>, Accessed on January 28th, 2025
- 17 Garcia, M. "Boston cannot wait 10 years to rebuild Madison Park" *The Boston Globe*, February 25th, 2025.
- 18 Sheila Harrity, 2014 MetLife/NASSP High School Principal of the Year," National Blue Ribbon Schools Program website, see <https://nationalblueribbonschools.ed.gov/awardwinners/history>
- 19 Gallo, Fred. Interview on January 22nd, 2025.
- 20 Williams, W. Interview, January 30th, 2025.
- 21 Massachusetts Department of Education, Office of College, Career and Technical Education, Mass Core Requirements. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/courses-learning/masscore/default.html>. Accessed January 27, 2025.
- 22 Williams, W. Interview on January 30th, 2025.
- 23 Donovan, William. "Madison Park Technical Vocational High School Turnaround Update." Pioneer Institute, 2020, No 215.
- 24 Harrity, S. Interview, February 14, 2025.
- 25 Donovan, William. "A Tale of Two City Schools: Worcester Tech and Putnam Academy become models for recovery." Pioneer Institute: September 2022, No. 254
- 26 Harrity, S. Interview on February 14, 2025.
- 27 Gallo, Fred. Interview on January 22, 2025.
- 28 Harrity, S. Interview, February 14, 2025
- 29 Donovan, William. "A Tale of Two City Schools: Worcester Tech and Putnam Academy become models for recovery." Pioneer Institute: September 2022, No. 254
- 30 Williams, W. Interview, January 20th, 2025
- 31 Gallo, Fred. Interview, January 22nd, 2025
- 32 McCaskill, K. Interview, January 24, 2025
- 33 Williams, W. Interview, January 30, 2025
- 34 Williams, W. Interview, January 30th, 2025.
- 35 McCaskill, K. Interview, January 24, 2025
- 36 Harrity, S. Interview, February 14, 2025
- 37 Donovan, William. "A Tale of Two City Schools: Worcester Tech and Putnam Academy become models for recovery." Pioneer Institute: September 2022, No. 254
- 38 Ferreria, D. Interview, January 23rd, 2025
- 39 McCaskill, K. Interview, January 24, 2025.
- 40 Ferreria, D., Interview, January 23rd, 2025
- 41 Harrity S. Interview, February 14, 2025.
- 42 Donovan, William. "A Tale of Two City Schools: Worcester Tech and Putnam Academy become models for recovery." Pioneer Institute: September 2022, No. 254
- 43 Johnson, G., Interview, Dec. 16, 2021.
- 44 McCaskill, K. Interview, January 24, 2025
- 45 Gallo, F. Interview, January 22nd, 2025
- 46 Ferriera ,D. Interview on January 23rd, 2025
- 47 Boruody, K. "More investment for expansion tops list of what voke leaders want to see from state" *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, July 12, 2024. Accessed January 24, 2025. <https://www.telegram.com/story/news/education/2024/07/12/massachusetts-vocational-ed-leaders-tap-state-for-expansion-dollars/74371158007/>

About the authors

Elana Feinberg has 25 years of experience as a teacher, school leader, counselor, and consultant. She has worked with district and charter schools, educational technology companies, and other social enterprise and educational organizations. Her consulting practice focuses on designing and redesigning schools to be innovative, and more equitable, in order to prepare all students to succeed in a global workplace. She has additional expertise in curriculum and instruction, multi-lingual learners, social-emotional learning, and executive coaching. When project managing and leading launches or supporting leaders, she is involved in every aspect of the work, including design, operations, talent and hiring, governance, and programs.

Elana has an M.A. in Education and a teaching credential from Stanford University and a B.A. in Political Science from Barnard College, Columbia University.

More about Elana can be found on her website at elanafeinberg.com.

About the co-authors

David J. Ferreira spent his professional career as a vocational-technical teacher, coordinator, and principal, 16 years as superintendent of a regional school district, and was inducted into the Diman Regional Voc-Tech Hall of Fame. As Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators, he advocated for high-quality programming for voc-tech district and collaborated with postsecondary institutions and apprenticeship programs. Mr. Ferreira received his master's degree in Secondary School Administration from Providence College. He served on the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Commission on Technical and Career Institutions and the state's Vocational Technical Advisory Council and was an adjunct faculty member at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Fitchburg State University.

Warley Williams, a proud 2002 graduate of GNBVT, currently serves as Principal of his alma mater after five years as Assistant Principal and leadership roles at Whaling City Jr./Sr. High School and Keith Middle School. He earned both his undergraduate and master's degrees from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, building a strong foundation for his commitment to educational excellence. Williams is deeply dedicated to empowering youth across Southcoast

Massachusetts, with a focus on the Greater New Bedford community. Known for fostering strong student relationships and championing student-led initiatives, he views meaningful connection as a key measure of leadership success. Beyond education, he serves on the Board of Directors for the Nativity Preparatory School of New Bedford and remains active in youth support programs like the Fresh Air Fund.

Dr. Sheila Harrity is the Extended Campus Program Coordinator for the Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators. From 2014–2022, she was superintendent of the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School District, and from 2015–2022 served as vice chair of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. In 2006, Dr. Harrity became principal of the new Worcester Technical High School, a \$90 million building that included a bank, spa, bakery, veterinary clinic, restaurant, graphics shop, and automotive garage. Worcester Tech was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education, establishing it as one of the 286 best public and private schools in the country, and she was named 2013 Massachusetts Principal of the Year. In 2014, Dr. Harrity was named the National High School Principal of the Year and honored at a White House reception. President Barack Obama, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and former U.S. Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell were all featured graduation speakers at Worcester Tech. In 1997, she was named the Worcester Public Schools Teacher of the Year and taught mathematics, career exploration, and basketball. Sheila earned an undergraduate degree from Providence College in social work, while playing college basketball and during her junior year the team finished first in the Big East and qualified for the NCAA Tournament. She earned two master's degrees in education from Worcester State University and received a doctorate in educational leadership from Northeastern University.

Kevin McCaskill is the principal of Brockton High School and former executive director of the Madison Park Technical Vocational High School within the Boston Public Schools.

