

Addressing Educational Inequities: Proposals for Narrowing the Achievement Gaps in Massachusetts' Gateway Cities

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE VIVA MTA TEACHERS IDEA EXCHANGE



Prepared for: The Massachusetts Teachers Association
Prepared by: Members of The VIVA MTA Teachers Idea Exchange Writing Collaborative on behalf of their peers in
The VIVA MTA Teachers Idea Exchange

Abstract & Summation: Empowered by cutting-edge technology, classroom teachers who work in 26 Massachusetts communities spent hundreds of hours sharing their ideas for closing the achievement gaps in their own classrooms, schools and districts. A small group of their colleagues then distilled those ideas into a list of actionable ideas – six major recommendations and more than 40 underlying proposals – for narrowing the achievement gaps in Massachusetts.

Partner: Massachusetts Teachers Association

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Preface

The VIVA (Voice Ideas Vision Action) MTA Teachers Idea Exchange invited classroom teachers who teach in 26 Massachusetts communities to call on their professional expertise to offer ideas for closing the achievement gaps in their schools, their districts and across the Commonwealth.

The online VIVA Idea Exchange uses technology operated by New Voice Strategies and powered by SocialSphere, with facilitation provided by veteran journalist Cindy Richards to ensure that the conversation is safe and productive.

The VIVA MTA Teachers Idea Exchange was open from April 9 through May 15, 2012. Every classroom teacher working in Cambridge and Somerville and the following 24 Gateway Cities was welcome to join: Barnstable, Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leominster, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, Methuen, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Quincy, Revere, Salem, Springfield, Taunton, Westfield and Worcester.

The VIVA MTA Teachers Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During **Phase I**, teachers in the 26 communities were invited to share their ideas on the following subject:

“Massachusetts is ranked first in the nation in delivering a quality public education to our schoolchildren, and there is a consensus that every child deserves a great teacher. Even so, in many schools across the Commonwealth, there is an ‘achievement gap.’ What are your ideas for closing the achievement gap in your classroom, school or district? What types of support do you need to make that happen?”

In response, more than 170 teachers offered 54 ideas and exchanged more than 100 comments with one another.

During **Phase II**, a group of five teachers whose active participation in Phase I was clear in terms of both quantity and quality were invited to join the VIVA MTA Teachers Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for closing the achievement gaps in Massachusetts.

Phase III of the process began on June 23, 2012, when members of the writing collaborative presented their ideas to the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. It continued on Aug. 5, when the teachers presented a revised version of their report, incorporating suggestions from MTA Board members.

At New Voice Strategies, we believe in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big changes. VIVA Teachers is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the teachers and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our schools and America’s democratic process.

Many thanks to the VIVA MTA Teacher Leaders: **Nancy Hilliard, James Kobiaika, Chelsea Mullins, Joel Patterson and Kathleen Sullivan**, whose biographies can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

New Voice Strategies is grateful for the partnership with and generous support of the Massachusetts Teachers Association as we worked on this project.

Introduction

“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they’re capable of being.” ~ Goethe

Gateway Cities teachers engaged in discussions answering the question:
How do we narrow the achievement gaps in our schools?

Data across a number of measures, such as graduation rates, college sending rates and state test results, indicate that Gateway Cities School Districts (GCSDs) are not keeping pace with other Massachusetts communities.

The recommendations here address what teachers define as the challenges they confront within their schools. The proposed solutions apply to policymakers, school and district leaders and educators, and to the Massachusetts Teachers Association and local education associations.

Our goal is to recommend positive actions to narrow the achievement gaps that persist between GCSD students and the highest-achieving students in Massachusetts. This is both a moral and an economic imperative: We must help urban students meet academic standards, successfully complete preK-12 education and become productive citizens. These actions are in the best interests of students, educators, our schools, our Gateway Cities and our Commonwealth.

If implemented, these recommendations will contribute to Governor Deval Patrick’s Gateway Cities education strategy – not only to challenge educators and students to achieve high standards, but also to revitalize the economic might of the Gateway Cities.

The recommendations in this report reflect what teachers participating in the **MTA VIVA Project** believe will help narrow achievement gaps in their districts. Their beliefs were affirmed by a vote of the MTA Board of Directors.

It is possible to narrow the achievement gaps by shifting the culture of learning through establishing culturally appropriate family engagement programs, restructuring both the school day and the school year, contributing to the professional learning and growth of educators and recognizing the resilience and positive attributes that urban students bring to our schools.

The linguistic, racial and cultural diversity represented in our Gateway Cities schools must be acknowledged as a resource for Massachusetts as we look to compete in the global economy of the 21st century.

Through the Gateway Cities Coalition, these school districts should share their experiences and knowledge of culture, adjustment issues and resources to assist transient populations. We recommend that Gateway Cities schools share common academic assessments that measure student growth and higher-order thinking skills to provide comparison data to identify areas for improvement.

Common outcomes will identify classrooms and schools that succeed with challenged populations, thus creating demonstration sites for teaching, learning and leading practices that contribute to narrowing the achievement gaps. Exchanging information about effective practices to address common problems shared by GCSDs is a key solution. By pooling resources, Gateway Cities create the critical mass to compete with Great City School systems such as those in Boston, Los Angeles or New York for federal or foundation funding and support to meet educational challenges.

Making our schools more effective and improving the lives of our students will make schools true communities that are bound together by shared goals, shared resources and shared solutions. The recommendations in this report are the first step in changing the way we think about education in our Gateway Cities.

In the following pages, we have summarized our recommendations, provided background on the Gateway Cities and delved into the specific steps we believe should be considered as the state moves ahead in this critical area.

Executive Summary

Massachusetts Gateway Cities have a high percentage of residents living in poverty, growing immigrant populations and multiple language-minority residents. The tremendously dedicated classroom teachers in these communities and the Massachusetts Teachers Association recommend that Gateway Cities work together to share resources, address common challenges and advocate for more financial support.

Our goal as teachers is the education of creative and critical thinkers. Our students deserve to learn the skills that we use to be successful: critical thinking, adaptability and a whole host of others. Our current system makes choices for students: what they learn, when they learn it, and even how well they are capable of learning in general. A powerful education system should have different characteristics. Instead of making choices for our students, we should be empowering them to make their own choices. Students are not buckets to be filled with information. They are fires to be lit.

Teachers are already working on this change. There are thousands of dedicated teachers who strive every day to get their students to read, write, think and apply their knowledge. They are not always supported. Some teachers need to bend the rules, sneaking in labs or writing projects in circumstances where they have been instructed to give practice tests and multiple-choice exams. When every teacher in a district is directed to follow the same timeline and scripted curriculum, then student questions and student engagement are not driving instruction. This is not a sustainable model of education. If we hope to help our students, to narrow the achievement gaps and to improve the quality of life in our Gateway Cities, we need policies to reflect the intensely personal and provocative nature of education. We need our schools to be growth-focused communities of learners.

Addressing Educational Inequities: Proposals for Narrowing the Achievement Gaps in Massachusetts' Gateway Cities outlines six broad recommendations and additional specific suggestions proposed by classroom teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Expand language acquisition programs by valuing the existing multilingualism in our Gateway Cities schools and enabling all students to achieve fluency in a second language.

- A commitment to second-language instruction leading to fluency for all students – in English for non-native speakers and in a second language for native English speakers – begins in kindergarten and requires additional teaching and learning resources.
- A commitment to early identification and intervention programs results in determining if learning disabilities are hampering second-language acquisition, especially for English language learners.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Break the school-to-prison pipeline through student engagement programs focused on positive behavior outcomes.

- A commitment to reducing student suspensions to all but the most egregious offenses and replacing punitive measures with positive disciplinary approaches helps address the root causes of negative behaviors.
- A commitment to adopting social justice curricula that address students' social-emotional needs leads to a welcoming school environment with extracurricular, athletic and community-school programs offered at the beginning and end of the school day.
- A commitment to establishing supervised safe spaces within schools allows students to center themselves rather than being sent to the office for discipline.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Transform teacher preparation and professional development to ensure that all teachers are prepared to address the challenges of a diverse student population; then give teachers the autonomy to apply professional knowledge and skills in their classrooms.

- A commitment to pre-service and in-service professional learning for all teachers results in teaching and learning strategies leading to student mastery of higher-order thinking skills.
- A commitment to fair, meaningful and timely performance evaluations conducted by experienced colleagues through Peer Assistance and Review programs provides educators with meaningful feedback, resulting in better teaching, learning and leading.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthen school-community relationships.

- A commitment to identify an educator to serve as the community liaison results in rich and engaging school-community connections.
- A commitment to rich collaborations with local colleges and universities, businesses and other community-based organizations contributes resources to the school and offers valuable real-world experience to students.
- A commitment to creating community schools that stay open beyond the school day results in an educational resource for the community, offering intensive support for new immigrants and other adults.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Lengthen the school day and reorganize the school year to better serve students.

- A commitment to school-year scheduling that aligns school vacations with the close of marking periods addresses student learning-loss issues.
- A commitment to appropriate scheduling of instructional time acknowledges that different and flexible configurations are needed based on subject matter complexity and the needs of students.
- A commitment to lengthening the school day for students through flexible staffing schedules allows adequate time for intensive tutoring of struggling students, as well as more non-core courses and activities such as music and art, recess, and collaboration and joint planning time for teachers.
- A commitment to expanded learning time encourages partnerships with community-based academic, athletic, arts and civic engagement programs.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Focus the existing Gateway Cities Coalition on identifying and sharing resources to support the recommendations in this report.

- A commitment to collaboration provides Gateway Cities with the critical mass needed to compete for governmental and non-governmental funding to enhance teaching and learning with the goal of narrowing the achievement gaps.
- A commitment to collaboration requires that Gateway Cities look at existing programs that meet “best practices” standards and create demonstration sites from which other district personnel can learn.

Background on Gateway Cities

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 23A, Section 3A, defines Gateway Cities as communities with populations between 35,000 and 250,000 and income and education attainment levels below the Massachusetts average. Gateway Cities are faced with a set of educational challenges on a scale not found in more affluent, less diverse districts, due, at least in part, to these communities being ports of entry for new immigrants to the U.S. Instead, the challenges that Gateway Cities confront are similar to those of large urban centers: They have high numbers of low-income, immigrant and non-white students. The result is a set of persistent achievement gaps that disproportionately affect children living in poverty, students of color, students with disabilities and students who are English Language Learners (ELLs).

All 24 Gateway Cities identified in the statute, as well as Cambridge and Somerville, were included in this project. The communities are:

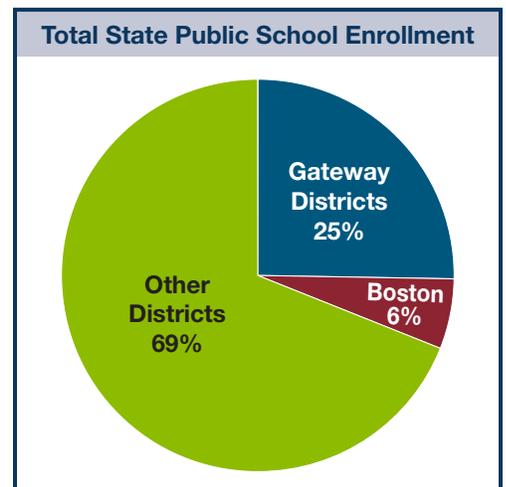
Barnstable	Brockton	Cambridge	Chelsea	Chicopee	Everett
Fall River	Fitchburg	Haverhill	Holyoke	Lawrence	Leominster
Lowell	Lynn	Malden	Methuen	New Bedford	Pittsfield
Quincy	Revere	Salem	Somerville	Springfield	Taunton
		Westfield	Worcester		

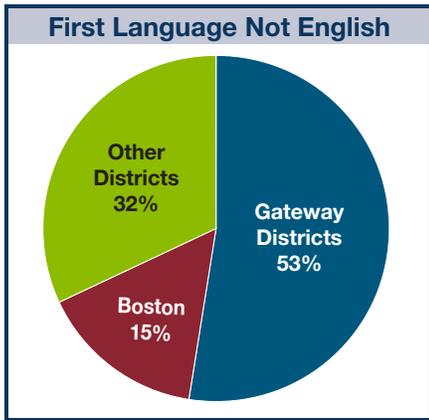
Student Enrollment

The enrollment in GCSDs represents about 25 percent of the total state public school enrollment. The Boston Public Schools enroll 6 percent of the total public school student population. Boston is a Great City School District, one of the 66 largest school districts in the country. GCSDs tend to have populations similar to that of Boston, but often lack the resources that Great City School Districts receive from state and federal government programs and private foundations. Compared to state averages, the GCSDs enroll a higher percentage of low-income students and ELLs. Students in GCSDs represent 48 percent of the students in Massachusetts

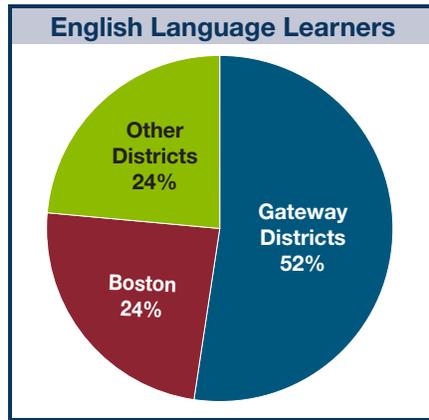
who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, 52 percent of the English Language Learner students and 53 percent of the students whose first language is not English.

The charts in this section illustrate the diversity and challenges that GCSDs confront. In each chart, the blue represents the percentage of all Massachusetts students in the sub-category enrolled in GCSDs. By comparison, the red represents the percentage of students enrolled in Boston and the green represents those students enrolled in all other Massachusetts school districts. In addition, low-income students and ELLs make up a large percentage of students enrolled in the GCSDs. In each of these categories, the student percentage in GCSDs is substantially above the rate in all other Massachusetts districts. The rates in Boston are provided for comparison. Poverty status and lack of English language proficiency are challenges that affect academic outcomes.

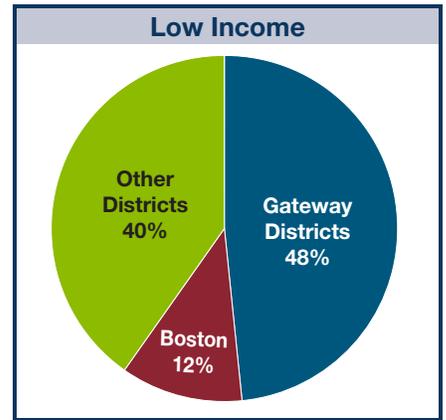




Fifty-three percent of all First Language Not English (FLNE) students are enrolled in GCSDs; **15 percent** are in Boston and **32 percent** in all other school districts.



Fifty-two percent of all English Language Learners in Massachusetts public schools are enrolled in GCSDs; **24 percent** are enrolled in Boston and another **24 percent** in all other districts.

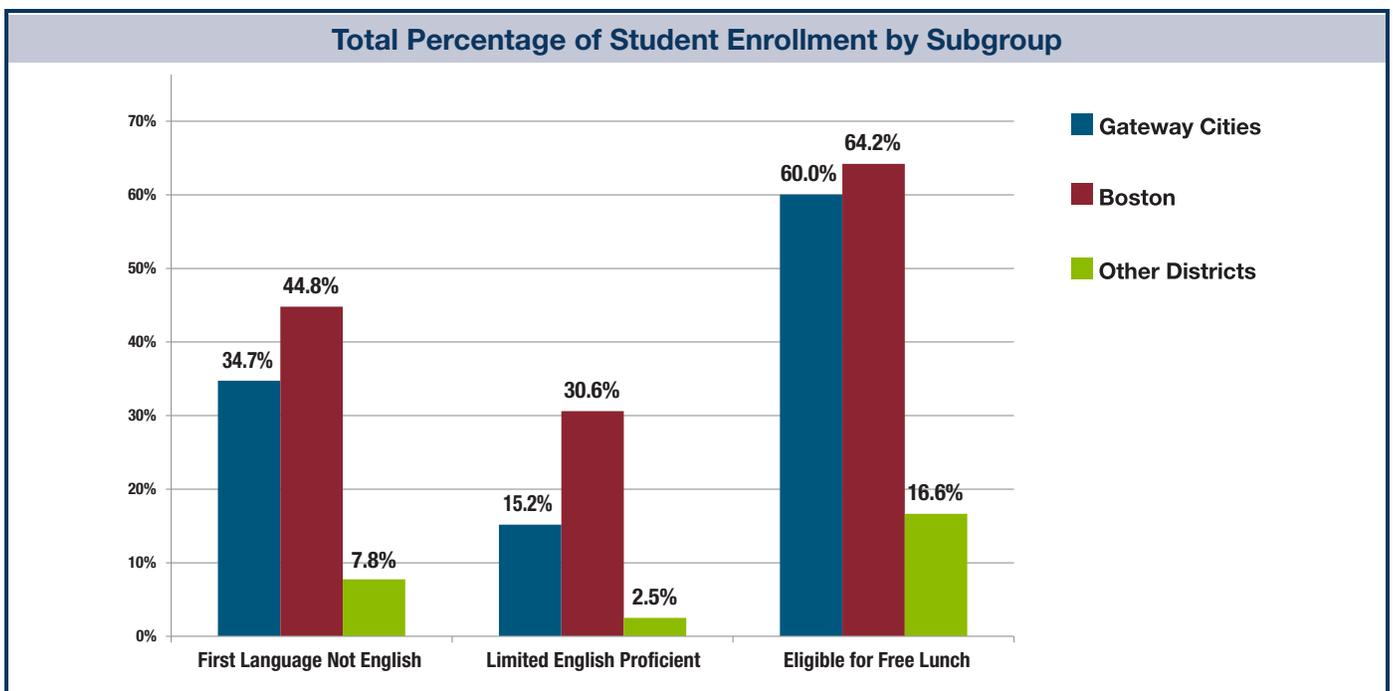


Forty-eight percent of all Massachusetts public school low-income students, as measured by those who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, are enrolled in GCSDs; **12 percent** are enrolled in Boston and **40 percent** in all other districts.

Almost **35 percent** of all students enrolled in GCSDs are designated First Language Not English. This is more than four times greater than the rate in all other Massachusetts districts and about **10 percentage points** below the rate in the Boston Public Schools. The five districts with the highest percentage of FLNE students in the Commonwealth are Gateway Cities: Holyoke, Lynn and Somerville, where the rate is at least **50 percent**; and Chelsea and Lawrence, where the rate is above **70 percent**.

Fifteen percent of all students enrolled in GCSDs are ELLs. This is more than six times greater than the rate in all other Massachusetts districts and about half that of the Boston Public Schools. Four GCSDs have ELL rates above **25 percent**: Lowell, Worcester, Holyoke and Lawrence. Boston is the only other district in the state with a rate above **25 percent**.

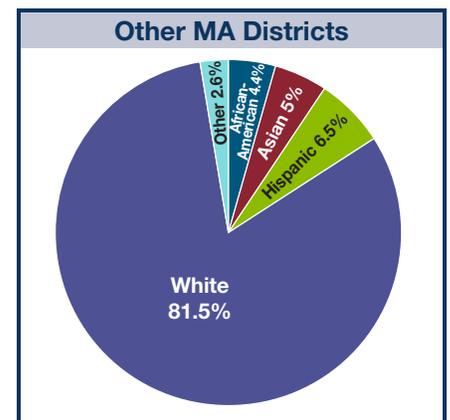
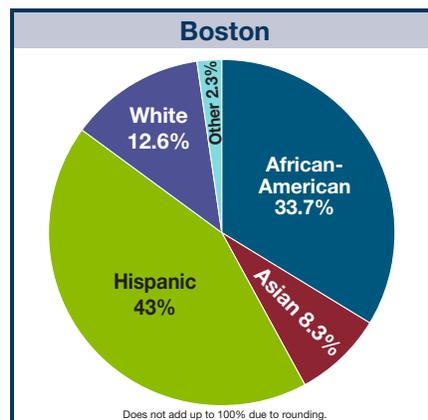
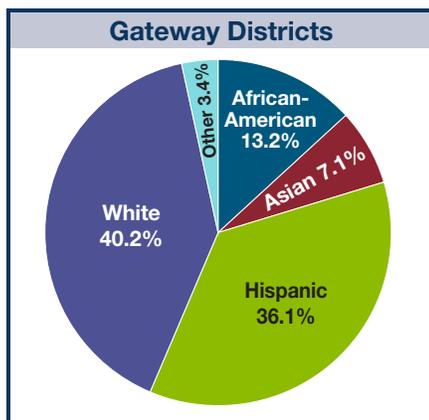
The percentage of low-income students in GCSDs, and in Boston, is **60 percent** or above – more than three times higher than it is in other Massachusetts districts. Twelve of the 26 communities covered in this report have low-income rates greater than **70 percent**; in Lawrence, Springfield, Holyoke and Lynn, the rate is greater than **80 percent**.



Student Demographics

Student enrollment in the GCSDs shows a substantially different racial/ethnic student population compared to those of all other Massachusetts districts.

- ➔ Nearly **50 percent** of the students enrolled in the GCSDs are African-American or Hispanic. In comparison, all other districts in Massachusetts – excluding Boston – have a white enrollment double that of the GCSDs.
- ➔ The racial/ethnic enrollment percentages among the GCSDs vary considerably.
 - Sixteen districts have a Hispanic enrollment greater than **25 percent**; in three, the figure is less than **10 percent**.
 - In four GCSDs, the African-American enrollment is more than **20 percent**; in seven districts, it is below 5 percent.
- ➔ The following GCSDs have the highest percentages in all Massachusetts school districts for a particular racial/ethnic sub-group:
 - Hispanic: Lawrence – **90.2 percent**.
 - Asian: Quincy – **32.9 percent**.
 - African-American: Brockton – **52.8 percent**.
- ➔ Data for Boston, which has a diverse student population, is provided for comparison.

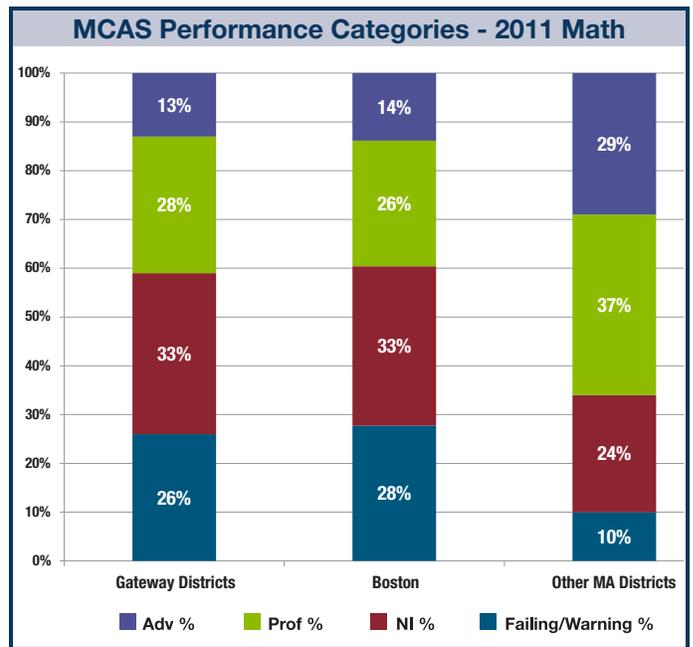
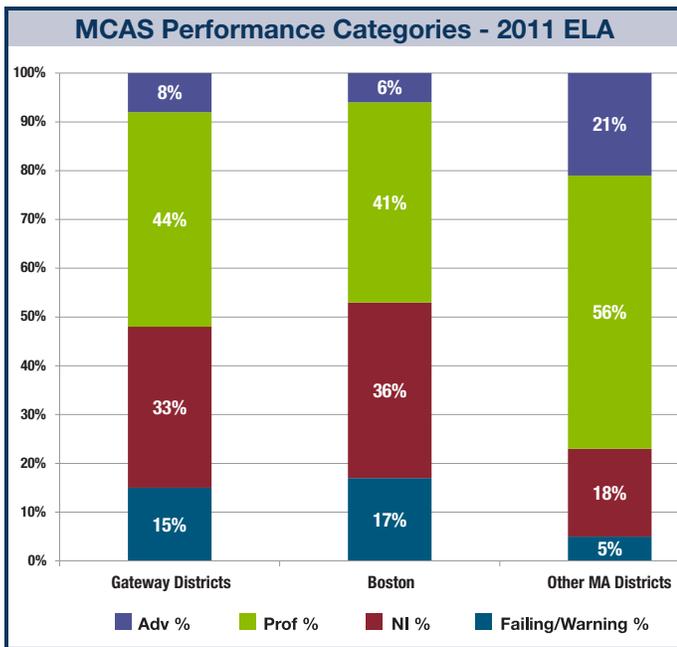


Student Outcomes – MCAS

In the GCSDs, more than half of the students scored below Proficient on the 2011 Math MCAS tests and slightly less than half on the ELA MCAS tests. The Needs Improvement and Warning/Failure rates are similar to those of students in Boston. For all other Massachusetts districts, the percentage of students scoring below Proficient is **23 percent** in ELA and **34 percent** in math, about half the rate in the GCSDs or in Boston.

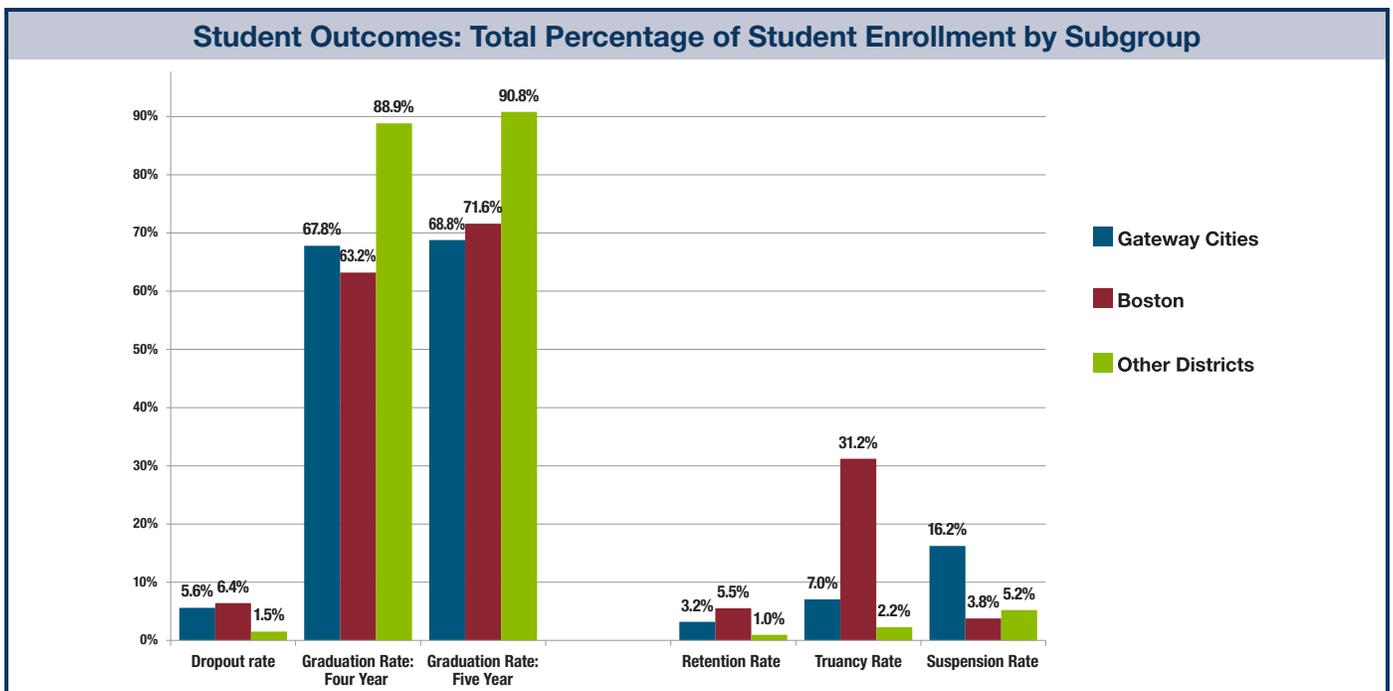
As the MCAS ELA Performance Categories bar chart indicates, **52 percent** of GCSD students scored at or above Proficient compared with **47 percent** in Boston and **77 percent** of students in all other Massachusetts districts. On the MCAS math tests, **41 percent** of GCSD students scored at or above Proficient compared with **40 percent** in Boston and 66 percent of students in all other Massachusetts districts.

Similarly, dropout rates, suspension rates, retention rates and graduation rates all show poorer outcomes for students in the GCSDs and in Boston compared to students in all other Massachusetts districts. Each rate is determined by adding the number of students in each category (dropouts, four-year graduates, five-year graduates, retention, truancy and suspensions) in Gateway Cities (blue segments of bars in “Student Outcomes” chart on page 9) or Boston (red segments of bars) or all other Massachusetts districts (green segments of bars) and dividing that number by the total enrollment for each category of district.



The following data describes characteristics of GCSDs compared to other districts in Massachusetts, excluding Boston.

- GCSDs had an annual dropout rate of **5.6 percent**, almost four times the rate in other Massachusetts districts. In 2011, the last year for which data is available, just over 3,000 students dropped out of schools in GCSDs; they represent about **40 percent** of all of the dropouts in Massachusetts that year.
- Both four-year and five-year graduation rates in the GCSDs are below **70 percent**; rates in other districts in Massachusetts – excluding Boston – are about **90 percent**.
- The retention rate – the percentage of students who are kept back in grade each year – in GCSDs is more than triple the rate in other Massachusetts districts.
- The truancy rate – unexcused absences as defined by the district and reported to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) – in GCSDs is more than triple the rate in other Massachusetts districts.
- The suspension rate – the percentage of students who have had at least one in-school or out-of-school suspension reported to DESE – in GCSDs is more than triple the rate in other Massachusetts districts.



Specific Recommendations

In this section, we expand on the recommendations set forth in the Executive Summary and provide a list of key steps that will take us a long way toward helping the school districts in our Gateway Cities meet the many challenges they face as they seek to help students succeed.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Expand language acquisition programs by valuing the existing multilingualism in our Gateway Cities schools and enabling all students to achieve fluency in a second language.

- A commitment to second-language instruction leading to fluency for all students – in English for non-native speakers and in a second language for native English speakers – begins in kindergarten and requires additional teaching and learning resources.
- A commitment to early identification and intervention programs results in determining if learning disabilities are hampering second-language acquisition, especially for English language learners.

THE CHALLENGE

A primary challenge confronting Gateway Cities schools is the number of English language learners (ELLs) and students whose first language is not English (FLNE students) who are enrolled. Many ELLs come to our schools from countries throughout the world with varied levels of schooling and with cultural differences. Students must learn subject matter content while at the same time learning to read, write, speak and comprehend English and also preparing to take standardized tests. Often, the time frame for all of this is one academic year.

Additionally, Gateway Cities schools have high numbers of students living in poverty who do not bring with them the same social capital as middle-class students. Many poor students have not had the same educational and enrichment experiences as middle-class students. They often lack resources within the home such as books, Internet connectivity and attention from adults who are themselves well educated. As a result, many begin school already behind.

Too often, these students are seen as a burden on taxpayers. Yet their ability to speak more than one language and the resiliency they have developed through their challenging life experiences are strengths that must be acknowledged and built upon.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Establish a clear policy that all students in GCSDs should acquire a second language.
2. Increase funding to address staffing challenges leading to second-language education for all students.
3. Adjust MCAS rules to give ELL students more time to achieve enough English proficiency to allow them to understand the format of the testing instrument and to demonstrate their understanding of the content being tested.
4. Adjust evaluation systems so that ELL students are evaluated early for learning disabilities, then provide the extra supports they need, including a structured therapeutic education program for those who continue to be affected by the stress of the transitions.

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS

1. Implement both Sheltered English Immersion and Bilingual Education programs that allow the use of native language instruction for all ELL students.
2. Create “new arrival” programs in which students learn the school culture and focus on acquiring both vernacular and academic language.
3. Establish appropriate professional development cohorts for educators to meet new training requirements under the state’s Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners initiative, known as RETELL.
4. Develop professional learning programs focused on attaining cultural proficiency related to home cultures of dominant student subgroups.

LOCAL ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

1. Work collaboratively with the district to identify RETELL cohorts and establish professional development schedules.
2. Provide district educators with guidance from the MTA on statutory and regulatory requirements about second-language acquisition for all students.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Break the school-to-prison pipeline through student engagement programs focused on positive behavior outcomes.

- A commitment to reducing student suspensions to all but the most egregious offenses and replacing punitive measures with positive disciplinary approaches helps address the root causes of negative behaviors.
- A commitment to adopting social justice curricula that address students' social-emotional needs leads to a welcoming school environment with extracurricular, athletic and community-school programs offered at the beginning and end of the school day.
- A commitment to establishing supervised safe spaces within schools allows students to center themselves rather than being sent to the office for discipline.

THE CHALLENGE

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the school-to-prison pipeline is “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.” Too many low-income students in GCSDs and elsewhere enter the criminal justice system as juveniles as a direct result of out-of-school suspensions and court involvement beginning in the elementary and middle grades.

Students who already find school challenging often become demoralized, which leads to both attendance and engagement problems. Their schools often lack the resources to provide supportive academic and social programs, and some students become truants or dropouts. Human costs skyrocket in terms of lifetime stigma and lost learning. Municipal and state costs soar as money is spent to incarcerate individuals whom our system has failed.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Establish a School-to-Prison Pipeline Task Force to report to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education charged with:
 - a. Identifying practices to keep at-risk students in school.
 - b. Defining intervention strategies that teachers, counselors and administrators can employ to address behavioral issues while keeping students in school.
 - c. Clearly defining behavioral issues that would result in engagement with the juvenile justice system.

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS

1. End all “no excuses” or “zero tolerance” disciplinary programs and policies that criminalize minor infractions of school rules and limit both in-school and out-of-school suspensions to only the most serious disruptions.
2. Adopt discipline models that address the root causes of negative student behaviors and promote both positive behavior and restitution, including in-school mediation programs.
3. Develop student mentoring programs linking successful high school students with middle school and elementary school students.
4. Facilitate curriculum changes that include programs advancing higher-order thinking skills, social justice, civil rights and solutions to social-emotional issues.
5. Create a welcoming school environment that values the primary language of all students.
6. Evaluate disruptive students for specific learning issues that may be the root causes of negative behavior.
7. Offer educators professional learning experiences that help them provide intensive social-emotional and academic instruction to challenging students.
8. Develop positive behavioral programs to address the root causes of truancy and poor attendance.
9. Work with the teachers' association and administrators' organization to develop professional career paths to attract and retain educators through establishment of instructional leadership and educational management roles for proficient and exemplary educators.

LOCAL ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

1. Collaborate with district leaders in developing a menu of teachers' and administrators' duties to incorporate direct support services for challenging students and work to identify new resources to meet the goals.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Transform teacher preparation and professional development to ensure that all teachers are prepared to address the challenges of a diverse student population; then give teachers the autonomy to apply professional knowledge and skills in their classrooms.

- A commitment to pre-service and in-service professional learning for all teachers results in teaching and learning strategies leading to student mastery of higher-order thinking skills.
- A commitment to fair, meaningful and timely performance evaluations conducted by experienced colleagues through Peer Assistance and Review programs provides educators with meaningful feedback, resulting in better teaching, learning and leading.

THE CHALLENGE

Teaching in Gateway Cities schools is a challenge. Educators must be provided with the professional learning necessary to be successful. Teacher preparation programs should partner with GCSDs to provide pre-service teachers with learning experiences that may encourage them to seek positions in urban schooling. GCSDs must improve the professional development provided and connect this learning to educator needs as identified through the new Massachusetts evaluation system.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Require every teacher preparation program to partner with at least one Gateway Cities district.
2. Embed within teacher preparation courses instruction about educational practices designed to assist challenging populations to become academically successful.
3. Create incentives for Gateway Cities to adopt Peer Assistance and Review programs in which experienced teachers observe and provide feedback to both newer teachers and those needing to improve their practice.
4. Mandate that districts report to the DESE the connection between educator evaluation and professional development offerings, especially as it relates to instructional practices addressing the learning needs of challenging students.

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS

1. Develop partnerships with teacher preparation programs that provide two-way communication and learning between preK-12 educators and higher education faculty.
2. Collaborate with the teachers' and administrators' associations to ensure that the professional learning needed by all educators is provided by skilled and knowledgeable instructors.
3. Require that evaluators and peer reviewers identify recommended professional development at the end of each evaluation cycle to inform the district plan.

LOCAL ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

1. Encourage educators to clearly articulate their professional development learning needs through the required Professional Growth Plans and at the end of each evaluation cycle.
2. Collaborate with district leaders to schedule professional development offerings to address identified needs.
3. Negotiate Peer Assistance and Review programs.
4. Ensure that locally negotiated teacher evaluation systems meet the state requirements.
5. Work with district leaders to establish "new teacher developer" positions to be filled by teachers rated as Proficient or Exemplary who will work with teacher preparation programs.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Strengthen school-community relationships.

- A commitment to identify an educator to serve as the community liaison results in rich and engaging school-community connections.
- A commitment to rich collaborations with local colleges and universities, businesses and other community-based organizations contributes resources to the school and offers valuable real-world experience to students.
- A commitment to creating community schools that stay open beyond the school day results in an educational resource for the community, offering intensive support for new immigrants and other adults.

THE CHALLENGE

Gateway Cities have many service agencies and community organizations that should be working in concert with district schools to provide wraparound services. Some community resources may be disengaged from our schools for lack of invitation.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Invest in the coordination and outreach of community-based early education and care programs and services to ensure that all eligible families and children are receiving support.
2. Provide resources to address the specific academic and social needs of teen parents to keep them in school.
3. Keep schools open as a community resource to counter latchkey issues and provide parent participation programs, homework help and enrichment or athletic programs.
4. Create programs that inform students in GCSDs of affordable post-secondary education opportunities and the educational requirements to be accepted.
5. Develop a statewide plan to make Internet connectivity available to all residents that acknowledges the technological challenges confronted by families living in poverty and families of ELL students.
6. Provide funding for before- and after-school programs, especially in the arts, physical education, academic tutoring, vocational studies and other areas of student interest that supplement but do not supplant the instructional program.

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS

1. Extend school building hours to allow students to have a safe place for before- and after-school activities and a quiet space to study.
2. Establish home-school visitation programs modeled on the Springfield program.
3. Expand the use of school buildings after instructional hours to allow adult community use.
4. Establish and fund a community liaison position for an educator to develop and oversee school-community connections to bring valuable expertise and services to students.
5. Create New Citizens' Centers to assist parents in understanding the educational programs and services provided by the district and the community to new arrivals.

LOCAL ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

1. Establish collaborative decision-making communities at each school that stress the importance of teachers and administrators identifying potential problems and determining solutions that may narrow the achievement gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Lengthen the school day and reorganize the school year to better serve students.

- A commitment to school-year scheduling that aligns school vacations with the close of marking periods addresses student learning-loss issues.
- A commitment to appropriate scheduling of instructional time acknowledges that different and flexible configurations are needed based on subject matter complexity and the needs of students.
- A commitment to lengthening the school day for students through flexible staffing schedules allows adequate time for intensive tutoring of struggling students, as well as more non-core courses and activities such as music and art, recess, and collaboration and joint planning time for teachers.
- A commitment to expanded learning time encourages partnerships with community-based academic, athletic, arts and civic engagement programs.

THE CHALLENGE

Today's school schedules are driven by a 19th-century commitment to an agrarian society. Changes to the schedule are often determined by busing schedules and athletic matches. Our students and teachers require more and better use of time than the traditional school-year and school-day schedule.

The 2012 TeLLMass survey results indicate that, in an average week, 60 percent of teachers spend more than five hours and 30 percent spend more than 10 hours on school-related activities outside of the regular school day. This includes preparing for classes, grading tests and papers and meeting with students or parents before or after school. Any restructuring of a school day must bear in mind all of the functions that a teacher performs.

In addition, many teachers currently lack time during the school day to work collaboratively with other teachers on developing curricula and improving instruction. Any plan designed to extend the school day should include time for teachers to work collaboratively with one another.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Establish an Expanded Learning Time Task Force to determine optimal school year and day schedules for both students and teachers in Gateway Cities and to identify best practices from existing ELT schools and programs.
2. Acknowledge that money matters in expanding the student learning day and year and identify sources for the needed revenue.

DISTRICT SOLUTIONS

1. Collaborate with teacher, administrator and parent groups to determine an appropriate school calendar that puts student learning first, addresses the collaborative non-instructional time needs of educators and acknowledges community needs and concerns.
2. Collaborate with teacher, support staff and administrator groups to develop expanded learning day schedules that may use a variety of staffing patterns to create flexibility and include significant non-instructional time for teachers to work together.
3. Collaborate with teacher, support staff and administrator groups to develop compensation models to accompany flexible expanded learning time schedules.
4. Work with teachers and administrators to determine the appropriate amount of learning time needed per subject/course based on the complexity of the knowledge and skills students are to acquire and the learning challenges educators must address.
5. Establish after-school clubs and activities in elementary schools that provide students with enrichment opportunities.

LOCAL ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

1. Collaborate with district leaders in establishing a school calendar that prioritizes academic learning and addresses learning-loss concerns.
2. Collaborate with district leaders on expanded learning schedules for students while providing flexible scheduling for educators that acknowledges the complexity of their work.
3. Collaborate with district leaders on developing a fair and competitive salary structure reflecting the time commitment needed to make expanded learning time programs successful.
4. Collaborate with district leaders to ensure that teachers have common planning time within every school day to strategize, coordinate and collaborate in determining the best ways to reach each student.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Focus the existing Gateway Cities Coalition on identifying and sharing resources to support the recommendations in this report.

- A commitment to collaboration provides Gateway Cities with the critical mass needed to compete for governmental and non-governmental funding to enhance teaching and learning with the goal of narrowing the achievement gaps.
- A commitment to collaboration requires that Gateway Cities look at existing programs that meet “best practices” standards and create demonstration sites from which other district personnel can learn.

THE CHALLENGE

Money does matter. GCSDs are often unsuccessful in attracting new and innovative funding streams to support their work. Great City School Districts, such as the Boston Public Schools, historically have been more attractive to foundations. Federal support dollars are awarded on a per-student basis, so larger districts are awarded significantly more funding than smaller ones. Some Gateway Cities schools are more successful than others. Identifying these schools as demonstration sites and inviting educators from other districts to come and learn from their more successful colleagues enhances the professional practice of all.

PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

1. Use the state’s purchasing power to ensure that financially struggling districts have the tools they need to teach many students in many different languages, including computer programs, books with pictures for schools, home picture cards, etc. Language acquisition (first or second) is facilitated by visual aids and multi-sensory instruction and practice.
2. Identify specific outcome metrics by which demonstration site schools will be determined.

Conclusion

Change is possible. In some cases, it’s already here. Some of our recommendations represent current practices in certain Gateway Cities. Sharing our strategies through demonstration sites and a Gateway Cities Collaborative Conference would be cost-efficient mechanisms.

We have suggested many actions, including some that cost nothing, others for which grant monies could be sought and still others that would require additional federal, state or local resources. Inter-district collaboration and shared professional development and exchange of ideas could lead to improved services while yielding savings in the short, medium, and long term for everyone in our Gateway Cities – especially our students.

Recommended citation: VIVA MTA Teachers Idea Exchange (2012). Addressing educational inequities: Proposals for narrowing the achievement gaps in Massachusetts’ gateway cities. Boston: Author.

Bios



NANCY HILLIARD tutored in the Charles Street Jail in the 1970s when she was in school at Harvard-Radcliffe College. Co-chair of the Phillips Brooks House, Nancy worked with Dr. Jeanne Chall to establish a course titled “Diagnosis and Treatment of Reading Disabilities” to enable her fellow volunteers to meet the needs of their incarcerated students. Nancy realized that Massachusetts was receiving a rapidly growing immigrant population, so she moved to Puerto Rico to learn Spanish and Caribbean culture. She studied law at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, not recognizing her name for several weeks of roll call. She also lived in Greece and Argentina, two countries where English is seldom spoken. Thus, Nancy brings a wide learning experience in addition to her education: a BA in Psychology and Social Relations and an M.Ed. in Moderate Special Needs. Currently, Nancy is certified to teach Moderate Special Needs preK to 12, ESL 5-12 and Middle School Math.



JAMES KOBIALKA is a science and English teacher who has taught at the University Park Campus School and Worcester Technical High School in Worcester, Massachusetts. He teaches his classes holistically, integrating scientific method into reading and writing and vice versa. His classes are focused on

students and their development as readers, writers and thinkers, regardless of the subject. He received his Master’s in Teaching from Clark University in 2011.



JOEL PATTERSON’S mother taught math and chemistry to African-American students in the segregated Catholic schools of Virginia, Alabama and Tennessee in the 1960s, and in later decades to students in public schools in Arkansas. Joel attended both tiny and large public schools in Arkansas and earned a BA in

Physics from Rice University in Texas. For a total of 12 years, he has taught scientific and mathematical ways of thinking to diverse students in urban public schools including Houston’s Westbury High School, Seattle’s Cleveland High School and the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. This teaching experience plus experience as a Princeton Review test prep teacher and in quality assurance at a laboratory have given him additional perspective on the nature of student understanding, lesson quality and measurement through standardized testing.



CHELSEA MULLINS began teaching in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as an art student teacher at Freedom High School. After completing her degree in Art Education, she moved to New York City and taught elementary art at a special education public school in Brooklyn. Next, she earned a Master’s in Student Development

and Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Chelsea started this school year teaching U.S. history special education at the High School of Commerce, a Level 4 school in Springfield, Massachusetts. Later in the school year, she began teaching art at Commerce. She is developing a cross country team at the school and helping to integrate social justice into the curriculum. She is passionate about growing as an educator and learning about the connection between holding students accountable and nurturing students’ instincts for leadership and engagement in improving social issues.



KATHLEEN M. SULLIVAN teaches fifth grade science at Salemwood School in Malden. She’s been a science teacher there for six years. Prior to that, she was a substitute teacher in Malden for five years while she completed her college course work in education. Currently, she holds a master’s degree in elementary education

and general science. In addition, she is certified in teaching English language learners. Working in a Gateway school district has opened her eyes to the multitude of challenges facing new immigrants learning the English language, the social effects of poverty, and the work we need to do in order to close the achievement gaps facing our communities.