



BEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

Every year at this time, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education publishes the MCAS results from the previous spring and publicizes schools' and districts' accountability ratings.

The MCAS results reflect achievement levels in ELA, Math and Science, relative to the Massachusetts curriculum standards, and are measured mainly in terms of how many students score at the Proficient or better (Advanced) levels. Accountability ratings, which use MCAS scores, follow a complex formula that combines level of achievement with growth and rate of achievement gap closing for identified subgroups. Schools are rated 1-5, with 1 being the highest. If a district has one or more schools rated at a level lower than a 1, the whole district is so rated.

Outstanding Achievement

Bedford has much to be proud of regarding its 2014 MCAS scores. Once again, Bedford High School* ranks at the very top of the state's 358 public and charter high schools. With 99% of its students scoring Advanced or Proficient in English Language Arts (ELA), BHS students performed better than Weston, Wellesley, Wayland, Newton, Needham, Brookline and other equally high performing schools.** Bedford High School was one of only 45 schools that received a special commendation from the state this year for our 10th grade MCAS achievement and for our closing of achievement gaps.

In math, our tenth graders scored 95 percent Advanced and Proficient, with a full 79% scoring Advanced, and with all of our subgroups scoring in the 90% range. At the same time, these scores reveal the continuing challenge of tipping the balance for the subgroups (students with disabilities, low income, African-American) so that more students are scoring Advanced than Proficient.

*Scores are reported both for individual schools and for districts. The district scores, which include those of students who are placed in special education programs outside of the school, are

typically 2 or 3 percentage points lower. Thus, BHS scored 99% Advanced and Proficient for 10th grade, whereas the district scored 97%.

**While these are outstanding scores, we urge our families to view the comparative ranking data with caution. Because there are a number of districts that scored 100% in ELA, as we did the previous year, our ranking is actually #24 along with 19 other districts that scored 99%. For Bedford High School, the difference between scoring 100% and 99% is a matter of one or two students, and this may be true of other districts of equal size.

Throughout the district, there are other outstanding MCAS performances: our JGMS eighth graders scored 91% Advanced and Proficient in ELA; our 7th graders scored 85%; our Lt. Job Lane 3rd graders scored 91% in math. Fifth grade was strong, with 80% and 79% respectively in ELA and math.

Important Challenges

At the same, our scores revealed some important challenges, particularly in math MCAS achievement at grades 4 and 6, and most particularly relative to our subgroups, especially students with special needs. This shows up not only in achievement level percentages where there are still too many students who score Needs Improvement or Failure, but also in the growth percentiles that dictate our accountability ratings. Because we did not achieve sufficient growth in certain subgroup categories like Students with Disabilities, we have been designated a Level 2 District this year: BHS (Level 1), JGMS (Level 2), Job Lane (Level 2).***

Improvement Steps

These achievement gap challenges, along with the need for overall improvement in certain grades, have been the subject of significant district-wide attention for the last two or three years. We have identified several contributing factors and have taken deliberate steps to address them. For one, a review of our K-8 curriculum two years ago revealed several salient disconnects at key transition points- grade 2 to grade 3 and grade 5 to grade 6. By clearly identifying end-of-year learning outcomes at each grade and in each subject (these are published on our website), teachers are better able to sequence their instruction and facilitate the students' transitions. Specific work has been done, for example, to align the 2nd grade math curriculum with the EnVisionMath program that is now used in grades 3-5. The Running Records method of evaluating students' reading has now been extended from Davis into Lane. A research tested phonics program, Foundations, K-3, has been introduced and will not only facilitate a better grade 2 to 3 transition, but will ensure consistency across all classrooms. All of these measures should begin to bear results in the next year or two.

At JGMS, a Skills Center, modeled in large measure on the very successful Skills Center at the high school, where students who come from all over the globe via Hanscom AFB are prepared to excel on the MCAS exams, has already born fruit, boasting a 60% to 70% growth rate for all of the students that it served. This year, the administration is expanding that model to help to close the gap for those students with disabilities who are still underperforming.

Our analysis indicates that these challenges are the consequence of a complex population. Even the high school, whose Hanscom students have long created a more complex student body than the other schools, and which has maintained outstanding scores for the past decade, has important work to do to move all of its students towards Advanced. We believe that each of our schools is capable of similar achievement, and because the MCAS ELA and math tests measure

key skills, closing those gaps will remain one of our major priorities. It is unacceptable that some students fall short of our high but reasonable standards while others excel.

MCAS Is Important But It Is Only One Measure

We would be remiss if we weren't clear that MCAS scores are only one out of many measures of student success that we hold ourselves accountable for. The Bedford Public Schools' curriculum and our emphasis on developing students' higher order thinking skills deepen student learning in ways that MCAS tests do not measure. This is the intent of the impending PARCC assessments that our students will take this year and that will most likely replace MCAS, but we are early in that process. Nor does MCAS measure the incredibly rich student learning that takes place in our social studies, foreign language, music, art and other subjects each and every day. Nor does it measure social or emotional development, team work, self-reflection and knowledge of one's own learning style, intellectual curiosity or tenacity, self-motivation or independence, creativity or imagination. The development of all of these attributes are important to the mission of the Bedford Public Schools.

Please feel free to contact your building principals, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jackson or me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Sills". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

Jon Sills