

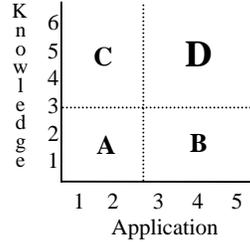
# Brockton High School

Brockton, Massachusetts

Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

**A Model of**  
Comprehensive High School  
Small Learning Communities  
Literacy  
Collaborative Instructional  
Leadership  
Inclusion  
Support for 9<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Personalization  
Use of Data for Instruction

## Rigor/Relevance Framework



## By the Numbers

4,300 students  
74% minority  
72% free/reduced lunch  
11% with disabilities  
11% English language learners  
58% first language not English  
25% grads w/state scholarships  
AYP met

## Executive Summary

Brockton High School is a comprehensive grades 9–12 school located in an urban center 30 miles south of Boston. The school’s approximately 4,350 students represent a range in diversity and socioeconomic levels. The education program follows a six-day block schedule that offers core and elective courses in academic, vocational, fine arts, and performing arts programs. High expectations and high standards help motivate students enrolled in each of the academic programs and levels: International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, Honors, and College Preparatory.

The school began a restructuring process in 1995 to increase student achievement and provide a more personalized educational experience for all students. The literacy initiative, which seeks to improve student skills by having all teachers assume responsibility for literacy instruction within their classes, has improved student performance to the point that the school was recognized as a Commonwealth Compass School by the state of Massachusetts in 2002. In 2006, Brockton High School became the recipient of the National School Change Award, and in 2008 and 2010 the school was a recipient of *US News and World Report’s* Bronze Medal, a Best High School in America award. Brockton High School was also featured at Harvard University’s Achievement Gap Initiative Conference with Ron Ferguson in 2009. Brockton High School was also selected as one of only 18 schools in the country to present in the 2010 CSSR/NASSP Secondary School Showcase.

As part of the initiative to establish smaller learning communities, students are assigned to one of four houses to ensure closer working relationships with teachers and to enable teachers to gain greater knowledge of student interests and career aspirations. Recent initiatives, including a Freshman Academy and Academic Success Programs, are now underway to increase the rigor and relevance of the curriculum and to support 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in the difficult year of transition to high school. Administrators operate in a collaborative and supportive fashion, involving faculty in decision making and ownership of key school initiatives.

The school has a long history and tradition of success in sports and performing arts. Extracurricular activities are numerous, and more than 3,200 students participated in one or more of these activities during the past year. The school makes consistent use of data to evaluate programs and to pinpoint areas in need for new or revised programming.

The school culture is student-focused and positive, which has resulted in success in improving the academic performance of students while maintaining the tradition of achievement in performing arts, theater, and sports. The school is dedicated to continuous improvement with a diverse population and an experienced faculty, many of whom grew up in the city where they now teach.

## 1. School Culture

Culture and tradition are intermingled at Brockton. The city's largest high school, the residents take pride in the school's past and present achievements. Support in the community for school activities is widespread and consistent. Frequently, school activities serve as the social benchmarks for the community. Even during the summer when few school activities occur, the city supports a Double A baseball team in a stadium near school property. A high percentage of teachers at the high school attended Brockton High School and continue to live in the city. The faculty is experienced and supportive of one another. The political and social life of the community is directly linked to the school in both support and pride.

Brockton has a population of 94,000. The median income of residents is well below the state average. The major industry in the city is health services, and the second largest employer is the City of Brockton. The city is called the "City of Champions" in honor of championship boxers Rocky Marciano and Marvin Hagler, and the students of Brockton High School (BHS) are surrounded by a tradition of success, with numerous state titles and awards for academic, arts, music, theater, and sports programs. The school prepares students for the future by using its long history of success as one of its foundations.

The high school complex—one of the largest east of the Mississippi River—comprises seven linked buildings housing almost 4,400 students in a grades 9–12 configuration. One building houses fine arts, vocational programs, two theaters, a TV studio, a nursery, and a culinary arts restaurant run by students; a second building for physical education has gyms, a pool, a weight room, and two state-of-the-art wellness centers along with lockers and offices. The four academic buildings, which are color coded for easy reference, occupy the four corners around the core building that is dedicated to science and business education, both programs maintaining numerous labs and computer centers.

The school's culture is one of continuous improvement built around the tradition of Brockton as the City of Champions. The Restructuring Committee challenges teachers to increase their expectations for student achievement. Each department has a steering committee to review and revise curriculum, programs, and definitions of quality student work. The Literacy Initiative reflects the emphasis on identifying student needs and provides a schoolwide emphasis to address these needs. The culture is an even-tempered, positive force that is student-centered and professionally stimulating. Literacy is integrated into all lessons across the grades and subjects. This approach has generated positive results in improving MCAS scores and led to the school's numerous state and national awards.

An array of resources is available in support of the major goals of the school. At the same time, district support is present in the school, in terms of both financial resources and talent. District or grant funds support community liaison personnel, adult advisement counselors, and a nursery program. In addition, the district administration has begun restructuring the grade configuration to move from a junior high to middle school grade alignment. The mayor's office is frequently included when the school addresses student needs. A video presentation to orient visitors to the high school links the success of the high school to district and city support.

A cornerstone of the successful school improvement effort is the creation of positive relationships among administrators, faculty, and students built on trust, vision, and consistency. The Brockton Public Schools system maintains a clear vision of the type of educational institution it wishes to be and how it will provide a high-quality education that motivates and engages students. Over the past five years, the school district has publicly and consistently maintained the challenge for all its employees that its schools will:

1. provide literacy in reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning
2. use best practices for effective instruction
3. have access to technology in support of teaching and learning
4. provide ongoing evaluation and revision of courses and programs
5. address standards set by state and national agencies
6. establish high academic standards using a variety of assessment instruments

7. foster effective communication among staff, students, parents, families, and the community.
8. continue efforts to increase the personalization of education for all students
9. examine the senior year
10. seek ways to improve community outreach

The hallmark of Brockton High School is the collaborative communication model operating among the administration, faculty, and student body. Issues are identified from several sources such as the Restructuring Committee, departmental meetings, Student Council, or community advisory groups which will assist the school in reaching its goal of increasing achievement levels of all students. When issues are presented, they are analyzed through open discussion groups before an action is contemplated or pursued. In this fashion, the administration uses the stated mission of seeking high-quality education for all students to refocus the staff's attention on reaching the higher proficiency levels on the MCAS rather than simply the passing level. Professional training is provided using data and best practices which, in turn, is followed by departmental discussions and demonstrations of effective lessons. In addition, the administration uses the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* to emphasize Adequate Yearly Progress in faculty discussion groups designed to generate exemplary lessons and materials to assist teachers from all disciplines to strive for continuous instructional improvement.

The policies, programs, and activities represent tangible steps to achieve the goals and mission promulgated in the School Improvement Plan. The administration and faculty annually review the perceived strengths of the school and identify new initiatives to address areas of need. The Restructuring Committee is a vehicle to highlight and review issues related to the school's efforts to achieve its overarching goals: to increase student achievement levels and to personalize education for all students. The 32-member committee represents academic areas, resource staff, and administration. For 2009–10, the committee is structured to address five challenging issues in subcommittee discussions:

1. raising academic expectations for all students through the literacy initiative
2. improving school and classroom culture/personalization
3. pathways to success – dropout prevention, credit recovery
4. senior year expectations
5. community outreach

Because of the size and complexity of its physical facilities, the school initiated an organizational restructuring effort in 1995 with two goals: raising student achievement and personalizing education for the students. The school received a Smaller Learning Communities Implementation Grant from the United States Department of Education. The faculty and administration used the grant to focus on literacy across the content areas in grades 9–12. Freshmen are randomly assigned to one of the four houses where they experience closer links with teachers and guidance personnel. They remain in those for the duration of their time at Brockton High School.

Brockton places a heavy emphasis on the value of positive relationships among the faculty, administration, and students based on trust, vision, and professional expertise. Open channels of communication ensure that voices are heard and that appropriate action is taken after deliberation and thoughtful analysis. The principles guiding this process are the vision, mission, and district's School Improvement Plan for 2002–09.

## **2. Foundation Learning**

Principal Dr. Susan Szachowicz commented, "We are constantly looking in the mirror to use whatever data are available to assess where we are and what is working well, and correct what is not working well." This ongoing process has achieved a more rigorous and relevant academic program.

Over the past several years, student achievement levels on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade have increased to the degree that the Massachusetts

Commissioner of Education used the school as the site to announce the state test results. In 2009, 78% of Brockton's 10<sup>th</sup> grade students achieved either advanced or proficient levels in English language arts (this matched the state percentage) and 60% achieved similar levels in mathematics. Of the 2008 graduates, 97% went on to higher education, with 47% accepted at four-year colleges. Students represent a range of diversity and socioeconomic levels. The 2009–10 student body included 28.4% White, 57.6% Black, 11.2% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, and 0.8% American Indian students. Approximately 72% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 34.9% speak English as a second language, 13.7% are English language learners, and 10% are disabled.

Using a 2-day block schedule, students take core, elective, and special courses within their assigned house. Back-to-back instruction in English and math in Freshman Academy for at-risk students continues the personalization. Students with disabilities are included in the regular academic program and are supported in classrooms by special education teachers in a co-teaching environment. Senior and junior students mentor freshman as another academic support. The restructuring process is making personalization of instruction and student support ways to maintain the extensive opportunities afforded by the large complex as the “best of both worlds,” offering personal instruction targeted at individual needs while providing many options to meet individual interests.

The MCAS results for the graduating class of 2009 indicate that 98% of Brockton's students passed the math and English exam by graduation. Beginning in 2005, Massachusetts awards Adams Scholarships to students who reach proficiency levels on the MCAS. The Adams Scholarships provide tuition support for four years at any state college. In 2005, 2006, and 2007 over 20% of Brockton's graduating seniors were awarded these scholarships, and in 2008, 2009, and 2010 the number reached 25% of the senior class, the maximum allowable under program guidelines. The governor of Massachusetts along with the commissioner of education came to Brockton to announce the Adams Scholarship Program in 2005, recognizing the high number of Brockton students who achieved this distinction, especially noting that 35% of these students were minority. The percentage of minority recipients has increased annually, and for the class of 2010, 49% of the recipients are minorities, compared with only 19.8% statewide. It is noteworthy that 64% of the 2008 Brockton award recipients used the grants to further their education in public institutions, indicating that without the scholarships, many students would be financially unable to attend college. In addition, 50 seniors who qualified for the Adams scholarships participated in Brockton's STEP Program, which prepared students who are the first from their families to apply for college admission.

The faculty and administration continue to work cooperatively to determine the most appropriate goals for the high school. The 2009–10 School Improvement Plan lists five goals designed to provide a unified focus on achievement throughout the building:

1. to continue to implement strategies designed to improve the English and Math MCAS scores in the Advanced and Proficient categories;
2. to continue the schoolwide focus on literacy in all content areas so that all instructors are teachers of reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning and all students are able to demonstrate learned literacy skills in all classes;
3. to implement a comprehensive program of formative and summative assessment to improve instruction and increase students' level of proficiency;
4. to assist BHS students in developing higher level skills that will enable them to be better prepared for college, technical schools, or the workforce;
5. to personalize the educational experience for each student within the smaller learning communities philosophy to ensure that freshmen and sophomores have their academic classes in their own house and to continue to plan activities to help transition to the high school

Staff of the high school has achieved considerable success in improving student passing rates on the MCAS, which is now raising expectations that even more students will reach proficiency levels on this test. Past success has bred higher expectations of success in the future. The first faculty meeting of

the year focused on this topic, asking what student and teacher behaviors need to be changed in order that more students will perform at higher proficiency levels.

In the early 1990s, the school's mission statement focused on establishing harmony and a celebration of diversity among students. Its mission was similar to many other schools in Massachusetts. However, too many students were graduating who did not have adequate thinking and literacy skills to function in today's highly competitive world. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 attempted to address the need for a curriculum framework and a statewide assessment program. Brockton High School was proactive in revising its mission and vision statements to parallel the needs for higher expectations reflected in quality student work and higher levels of student achievement.

Today's mission states that, "Brockton High School seeks to teach our students in a safe, supportive environment the knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors necessary to become responsible and productive members of a diverse society." Instruction focuses on enabling students to demonstrate the literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning and on preparing them to participate actively as citizens in a technologically advanced society. The faculty is focused on maintaining strong communication among students, families, and community. Teachers seek to build an education program that encourages students to develop their individual talents and to see Brockton as a great place to live and build a family.

Brockton uses the Massachusetts minimum graduation requirements of 95 credits and successful completion of MCAS exit exams. Freshmen and sophomores pursue core requirements with a small number of electives, while the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders finish their core requirement and take a larger number of electives. Throughout the four years of study, guidance staff and teachers provide personal advisement and consultation with students. Students are encouraged early to identify career plans and aspirations. Each student establishes an educational plan outlining high school courses, extracurricular activities, and community service that will assist them to reach their goals.

### **3. Stretch Learning**

The administration and the Restructuring Committee continue to seek new avenues that would increase the rigor and relevance of the curriculum. For 2008–09, the Restructuring Committee continued focusing on improving math skills across the curriculum areas and strengthening the 12<sup>th</sup> grade experience. In the spring of 2007, Brockton High School became an authorized International Baccalaureate Program school and in June 2009 will graduate the first class of IB diploma recipients.

The school has an open enrollment policy for Advanced Placement (AP) courses. One student pointed to the fact that students frequently ask to be placed in more demanding courses called "moving up." Brockton students participate in nine AP courses, but the administration is seeking ways to increase both the number of courses available and the number of students who participate.

The school encourages students to participate in local, regional, state, and national competitions. For the past five years, Brockton High has had state champions in the National History Day competition, all of whom went on to compete at the national finals at the University of Maryland. In an effort to increase the rigor of the annual Science Fair, the Science Department staff prepared a Science Fair Rubric for scoring. The rubric was available to all students prior to the event and was used by each judge to determine winners. The rubric also provided a mechanism to assist teachers in helping students improve their projects. It serves as a learning tool that demonstrates rigor and relevance.

The *Course of Study Guide* includes a Checklist for College Planning that advises students beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade what steps at each grade are necessary to consider for future college applications. Many students will be the first members of their family to attend college and therefore do not have parents experienced in the application process. The Guidance Department has also implemented Project Diploma, a comprehensive planning tool for students. This tool has been adopted by the Massachusetts Department of Education as its model. The School Training and Educational Preparation Program (STEP) assists students interested in attending college who will be the first in their family to do so. The program provides guidance, academic support, and SAT and essay-writing training as well as visits to local

postsecondary institutions.

In addition, the handbook provides guidance for students and parents with respect to interest areas for each course of study. Students review information about areas of interest to assist them in selecting electives and required courses. Career Pathways in Business and Finance, Communication and the Arts, Health and the Sciences, and Human Services and the Law provide students with sequences of courses to prepare them for their lives after high school.

The administration instituted good-citizen ID cards that provide discounts with merchants, admission to school events without charge, and other privileges earned by satisfactory quarterly department marks on report cards. Club Boxer is an after-school program designed to assist at-risk students with academic support, literacy training, and tangible rewards for attendance and performance based on a student's interests and skills. For the past several years, the faculty has operated a lunch detention for tardy students, which has reduced tardiness by 20% thus far.

The philosophy and mission statement of the school dictate that students should be offered as many opportunities as feasible to maximize their talents and abilities both within and outside the classroom. As expected with a school this size, extracurricular and cocurricular programs are extensive. When a group of students expresses an interest in forming a club, activity, or service, the school makes every effort to locate an advisor and to provide support for legitimate requests.

The Business, Technology and Career Education Department (formerly the Occupational Education Department and Business Department) plays a prominent role in reflecting the school's emphasis on a rigorous and relevant curriculum. The department has undergone major revisions to provide career pathways for students and places greater emphasis on the role of technology in order to provide students with skills that will carry them forward into this century. The curriculum offers a broad range of knowledge through integrated academics in math, science, communication, and technology. This past year, a specialized pathway in Engineering Technology was added.

Additional examples of the rigor and relevance of curriculum are found in the Business Department's Junior Achievement, Entrepreneurial Studies, and intern projects. Students are trained in business skills and knowledge in several courses that culminate in a semester-long internship project. Student teams are asked to invent a new service or product related to the career area of their choice. The final outcome is defined by examples from previous classes, topics to be discussed, and a model demonstration. The entire project is graded using a rubric shared with the students at the beginning of the semester. Samples of team projects included a desk of the future, automated shopping carts, remote voting machines, and robotic pill dispensers.

#### **4. Learner Engagement**

Currently, Brockton High School has more than 45 clubs and student activities. Teachers consistently seek out students who are not active in extracurricular activities and encourage their participation in the "life of the school outside the classroom." Again, the faculty operates with an expressed belief that students who participate in the fuller life of the school tend to be happier, higher achieving, and more productive. The clubs and activities range from the traditional Mathematics, Ski, and Yearbook activities to the Hip-hop Dance, Garden, and Amnesty International Clubs. The diversity of the student population is reflected in the Cape Verdean, Haitian, Latin American, West Indian, Asian, Jamaican, African American, and International Clubs designed to develop kinship and cultural awareness.

Several activities and organizations exist to foster student leadership. The National Honor Society, a very active JROTC program, class officers, and the Student Council establish leadership roles among students by participating in decision-making at the school. Senior privileges have been instituted as a result of the Student Council petitioning the administration. Senior students are also selected to mentor freshmen. Students also have the opportunity to provide service in the community. The TV Club is a unique organization operating at the school in support of the TV studio. TV programs link the community to sports, performances, and school issues. Also, the Video Yearbook was designed and produced by students in this club.

Interdisciplinary discussion groups operated successfully in past years by providing important feedback to the administration and by continuing the development of the concept of a community of learners. This activity continued, particularly in light of *No Child Left Behind*, meeting AYP, and grade distributions of freshmen and sophomores.

Recognizing that additional support is necessary before some students can successfully complete college prep courses, the school instituted a number of programs to address this need. Since 1984, My Turn, Inc. (Massachusetts Youth Teenage Unemployment Reduction Network, Inc.) has operated a number of programs designed to address specific areas of need. The programs offered include the following.

- School to Work targets seniors in need of employment skills.
- School Training and Education Preparation (STEP) assists seniors who will be the first in their family to apply to college.
- Recognizing Individual Success and Excellence (RISE) focuses on career, study, and life skills.
- Higher Education Reading Opportunities (HERO) emphasizes college prep, career exploration, and mentoring.
- Connections for Youth prepares students for learning and citizenship.

In summary, the school faculty and administration have created programs and support activities to assist students of all ability levels to be successful. The curriculum is rigorous, but additional opportunities exist for those students who learn at a different pace or have different learning styles. These combined efforts have produced high achievement levels for this urban school.

Brockton graduates consider the school's academic reputation outstanding. In 1990, changing demographics led to increases in the number of students needing English language training, special education assistance, basic literacy training, and more individual attention to learning styles in order to succeed. Introduction of the MCAS encouraged the faculty and administration to consider restructuring of curriculum, instruction, and philosophy. The work of the Restructuring Committee focused on establishing smaller learning communities. As a result of the house system, students stayed with 20–25 teachers who then were able to know students better, and one guidance counselor was assigned to a student for the four years. In addition, there was a more personalized approach to the delivery of instruction for ESL and students with disabilities. Teacher and student relations were strengthened, as was the alliance between the school and local colleges, businesses, and community agencies.

The administration uses the public address system daily to celebrate the successes and achievements of both students and teachers in athletic, academic, and other arenas. Students feel recognized as individuals, even within the large educational setting of the building.

## **5. Personal Skill Development**

The school seeks to establish a work ethic among its students in preparation for the world of work. The school operated a Summer of Work and Learning Program that places a number of students in local businesses and industry. During the school year, the school offers business training that culminates in an internship, which has generated considerable community interest and praise. Publicity about the school highlights the award-winning programs of band, chorus, and drama. School performers travel to local and national competitions and successfully represent the tradition of high achievement at Brockton. The administration and teachers invite students to join them in a Dress for Success Day as a reminder of their commitment to prepare for the demands of the job market.

Equally meritorious is the athletic program that fields competitive and noncompetitive teams. Numerous trophies, banners, and plaques attest to the proficiency of the students and their coaches. In fact, the May 2005 edition of *Sports Illustrated* recognized Brockton High School as one of the best high school athletic programs in the United States. In the pride of the school and community, state

championships and the development of lifelong participation in sports have equal respect. The physical education building has two state-of-the-art wellness centers, a free-weight room, and a pool used by the school and community each day and into the night.

The extracurricular opportunities are a legitimate source of school and community pride, especially considering that about 3,250 students participated in one or more of these activities during 2009–10. The school places a heavy emphasis on encouraging and supporting the development of student interests, aptitudes, and learning styles. The extensive extracurricular, after-school, and during-school support programs and the variety of instructional strategies used in the classrooms are evidence of the commitment to personalize education for all students.

Brockton High School is a safe and orderly school, which is quite an achievement considering its size, urban setting, diverse population, and complex of buildings. The security concerns of the administration remain in the forefront of policies and practices. Teachers are provided walkie-talkies in their roles as floor and cafeteria monitors, which are regular assignments. Since teachers move between classes to relocate to office units, most staff members are in the halls with students during passing times.

The school instituted identification cards, which permit staff to identify students entering the building and cafeterias or walking the halls. Teachers and administrators use the rules of conduct spelled out in the student handbook to uniformly enforce discipline. Many teachers post personal rules of behavior in their classrooms. Seldom are students sent to the office, but they are addressed with consistency when misbehaviors occur. Assistant housemasters in each of the four houses handle discipline. Brockton is safe and orderly because of the ongoing attention paid to procedures and the proactive stance taken by administration and the faculty.

Continuing the school's unwavering pursuit of its two stated goals, staff operates several programs designed to provide a more personalized education based on relationships. These initiatives include Adult Advisory, senior privileges, Boxer-2-Boxer, freshmen assemblies, an inferential thinking curriculum, and Freshman Academy; all are designed to address students with specific needs and interests. These initiatives join an extensive list of pre-existing programs: My Turn, Inc., Access Centers, computer centers, mediation process, guidance services, instructional resource specialists, and mentor teachers.

## **6. High-quality Curriculum and Instruction**

The focus of the Restructuring Committee has been to build an excellent academic program of high expectations and achievement while maintaining the long tradition of sports and performance champions. The faculty now believes that the quality of the academic program matches the other extracurricular awards. Improved student achievement data and increased rigor of the course requirements are evidence of the success of small learning communities. Teachers are quick to point out that student motivation, literacy skills, SAT scores, graduation rates, and college acceptance rates are also improving. Clearly, the school has pride in its instructional programs that continue to build a reputation of success.

High standards and expectations are set for students at all levels through the use of a variety of instructional approaches that accelerate academic and vocational learning. The 4-year curriculum is designed to build students' knowledge and skills needed for postsecondary education, technical training, or employment. Students select courses in one of three levels according to their abilities and interests; however, all levels are college preparatory. Honors has as its descriptor, "Expert mastery of key concepts with intensive examination of course content"; College Prep Advanced has as its descriptor, "Advanced mastery of key concepts with extensive examination of course content"; and College Prep has as its descriptor, "Proficient mastery of key concepts with comprehensive examination of course content." The Advanced Placement and the International Baccalaureate programs are both open enrollment.

The school administration and department chairs ensure that each of the four curriculum strands has a strong foundation of skills based on Massachusetts standards, a high degree of rigor defined by quality student work, and a relevance to student career aspirations. Teachers' instructional assignments are based on demonstrated skill and an expressed interest to work with particular student populations.

Most teachers have a range of teaching assignments with different student ability groups, which strengthens the rigor of acceptable work across the entire school.

The faculty now works more on the “how” of instructional delivery since the “what” of curriculum is well established through state standards and assessments. Each department developed a program philosophy that clearly states program goals, guiding principles, and best practices. Each description discusses ways to help students become active learners, establish instructional groupings, and use technology in classrooms with an emphasis on feedback and evaluation.

The Literacy Initiative has had an immense impact on lesson structures and delivery systems. Literacy charts are displayed and used in each classroom as a result of teachers’ participation in yearlong training. Content lessons include information-processing strategies, open-response writing, vocabulary study, and attention to skills across disciplines. This project has unified the faculty and focused students’ attention on improving literacy skills, especially the open-response writing skills needed for the MCAS. Students’ questionnaires gave high marks to teachers for adjusting instruction based on learning needs and for how well courses are connected to what is needed to graduate.

### **7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels**

The district and building staffs have ample data. Staff analyzes information to assess success and areas of need. Annually, the school displays the SAT scores, which are increasing an average of five points per year in both math and verbal areas. The school gives attention to grade distribution by subject, grade level, and subpopulations to indicate the rigor of the instructional program across the four years. School personnel also keep track of the number of students taking upper-level courses and AP exams as an indication of higher motivation to challenge students’ abilities. Teachers are encouraged to conduct frequent informal assessments of learning and unit exams designed by departments. Student outcomes and exam results are then shared among the faculty. In addition, the MCAS results reflect the continuing emphasis on literacy skills as the scores are consistently improving.

Data have been used differently and more extensively at the school over the past 10 years. As one teacher observed, “When I first began teaching here, we publicized only the top student achievements. Now we use data to define how well we are doing with all student groups and to identify areas that need further attention.” The MCAS and SAT results are discussed and analyzed annually. There is a Data Analysis Team which meets regularly to analyze all student achievement data and present the information to the faculty and administration. In addition, the school prepares a School and Community Profile to display community and school information, demographics, student performance achievements, MCAS scores, and other school performance indicators. This public document also includes the new school initiatives and AP results to show accountability. The district makes every effort to establish a sense of good stewardship in the use of resources and goal setting.

Brockton’s administrators say, “We follow a process of targeting, responding, and assessing, followed by targeting and responding,” which is the district’s approach to continuous improvement. Data analysis is the responsibility of schoolwide committees and departmental steering committees, which are encouraged to identify successes and weaknesses to be reviewed. The 2009–10 school profile provides the results of semester and full-year courses and compares two years of grades earned by students enrolled. Two intervention programs, the Freshman Academy and Student Academic Success Plan, produced higher student grades compared with the grades of all freshmen following a restructuring of these programs.

The monthly faculty meetings and departmental steering committee meetings are devoted to reviewing data, preparing a recommended course of action, and conducting professional development to address areas of need. The annual School Improvement Plan is the culmination of these efforts to “target and respond.” In this plan, the data from MCAS and other assessment tools are summarized with the degree of attainment of the preceding years’ goals and activities. This document then lists the goals and recommended course of action for the next year based on the available data. Each goal statement includes a needs assessment, specific objectives, action plan, and evaluation. Staff uses the report to focus its

energy and resources on new or continuing objectives to serve the needs of students and the needs of faculty to deliver quality instruction.

Teachers are supportive of the public plan for improvement. Using data and analyses, they continue to emphasize a student-centered learning environment. The common focus of the staff serves the school well. The large size of the student body, teaching staff, and physical plant does not detract from the instructional focus on quality education in a personalized setting.

## 8. Transitions

The link between the community and the school is strong, vibrant, and symbiotic. The long-standing tradition of the City of Champions is seen in its mascot, the “Boxers.” The mayor of the city, parent association, sports booster clubs, and citizens’ advisory committees all contribute to the success of the school in rebuilding the reputation of Brockton. Like many urban areas in the Northeast, Brockton has seen changes in its industrial base, types of available employment, and its reputation as a growing community. The continuing success of the school in academics, sports, arts, and student performances is a major element in the rebuilding of Brockton.

The public’s perception of the school is sought and used to target new initiatives and to build community support. The administration recognizes the changing demographics within the city and changing work force needs in an information-rich technological environment. The basic belief of the school system is that parents have a critical role in the education of their children. They should be supported in that role and encouraged to be involved in all aspects of the school’s activities. Parents have expressed a concern about the transitions from elementary to junior high to senior high schools. The new superintendent identified “points of transition” as one of several issues needing attention. The high school has long been concerned about incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who may not have the academic preparation needed to complete the rigorous high school curriculum.

Over the past years, the school has provided an orientation session for freshmen, summer “camp” for students needing additional academic training, and several after-school and during-school programs. Begun in 2004–05, the Freshmen Academy targets academically at-risk students for early intervention; the Adult Advisory Program, designed for students experiencing problems, allows them to work with one teacher assigned for the freshman year. Freshmen Assemblies (Road to Success) provide information about the school and its policies (where to find support, attendance policies, discipline, and “due process” among other topics); a Freshmen Unit on Introduction to Inferential Thinking is also available. Seniors have said that students at Brockton are provided much extra assistance in their pursuit of academic excellence, beginning in their first year and continuing throughout their high school experience.

The school presents an annual school report card for all parents. This year’s report reiterated the basic belief of the staff by stating, “We believe that keeping parents and community members informed of our progress and our needs is an important part of our mission to provide a high-quality education.” The report described the student enrollment, MCAS results in English/language arts and mathematics, mid-cycle Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and facts about students at the school. The report listed some of the student achievements: one of the highest graduation rates in the state (97); 97% enrolled in college after graduation (up from 77% in 2005); 25% of students took AP courses; and students consistently win more art, music, drama, and sports competitions than any other school in the state.

Seniors and juniors say that the school organizes programs, curriculum, and activities that are rigorous and relevant to student needs and interests. By the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, most students express an appreciation of the educational preparation provided to them and the opportunities present in the diverse student body. When asked about future plans, seniors indicated that they have submitted applications to colleges and have heard favorably from many of them. They expressed the belief that colleges hold Brockton in high regard based on the performance of prior graduates attending their institutions.

The administration works with an advisory committee of community and parent representatives in conjunction with booster clubs and PTA groups to maintain parent involvement. The faculty acknowledges that parent involvement at the high school level is not as enthusiastic as it is at the

elementary level but that it is more universal with sports and student performance events.

## 9. Leadership/Systems Approach

Brockton Public Schools maintains 25 schools—14 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 2 K–8 schools, 3 alternative schools, and 1 comprehensive high school. The superintendent, Dr. Matthew Malone, assumed the chief administrative position in the district in July 2009.

Dr. Susan Szachowicz is the principal who advanced the concept of the Restructuring Committee in 1995. Maria LeFort is the associate principal who focuses on curriculum and instruction. Each of the four houses operates with a housemaster and an assistant. Department chairs and directors of activities are each responsible for curriculum, supervision, and steering committees. The Guidance Department has 19 counselors assigned to work with students. Each house has an Instructional Resource Center.

Four instructional resource specialists work with new teachers in literacy instruction, lesson development, and classroom management issues. These positions are recent additions to the staff and are part of the Literacy Initiative.

As the formal leaders within the schools, administrators participate in committee meetings, faculty sessions, and instructional decisions. Although they play an active role, decisions and idea development frequently emerge from the Restructuring Committee, steering committees, and teacher interactions. Teachers describe the role of leadership at the school as collaborative, based on mutual respect and with a clear focus on student needs. The Restructuring Committee spearheads faculty involvement in reform activities. Subcommittees focus on transition issues, scheduling, raising literacy levels, and ways to personalize education for all students. The administration utilizes an automated phone calling system to inform parents about attendance and tardy issues, school activities such as parents' nights, and open house events.

Teachers support one another in the development of materials, resources, and lesson activities. The school philosophy and its physical structure foster interactions among teachers. Most teachers believe that there is a need to support each other in a positive collegial atmosphere. The school assigns teachers to individual classrooms for instruction and provides cluster offices for the staff. This arrangement has six to eight teachers in a department sharing space, which provides an ideal opportunity to discuss issues and develop common materials within that discipline. With the mission statement and vision for the Brockton community, the faculty identified the specific targets that they wished for students. Each Brockton student will demonstrate proficiency in:

- literacy in reading, writing, speaking and reasoning
- self-expression
- productive use of technology
- responsibility for one's own behavior
- personal growth through self-assessment
- respect for differences among people
- ability to work cooperatively with others
- knowledge to participate in society and the democratic process.

The administrative and instructional leadership at the school work as a collaborative team. Teachers take an active role in instructional leadership and function as language arts teachers as a result of the Literacy Project and training. The success of the project may be based on the fact that it represents a shared decision by the faculty and supportive administration. The staff and students work to promote a common purpose, vision, and mutual respect.

## 10. Professional Learning Community

Professional development has a schoolwide focus on student needs. Teachers identify schoolwide goals and results, while still expressing pride in the achievement of their individual departments. Many teachers were educated in the Brockton schools and are part of the tradition of champions. Staff development is critical to the continuing success of the school in the shift to higher expectations for student achievement. The Restructuring Committee was charged with the two goals of increasing student achievement levels and personalizing the educational experience, and the outgrowth of the committee's work is a comprehensive, consistent, and sustained staff development program.

The School Improvement Plan identified a course of action to make every teacher a teacher of reading to address the low literacy rates and skills among students. Faculty meetings were devoted to literacy and math training and the sharing of best practices from each department. Evaluations of teaching staff include a component related to this goal. Each department's steering committee developed a program philosophy that included guiding principles, course requirements, and use of technology and best practices. Departmental meetings and informal office meetings were used to review and demonstrate these skills.

Poor writing skills, especially in the MCAS open-response portion, concerned the faculty. As part of the Literacy Initiative, training on open response across the subjects became a 2-year staff development process. Each department gathered examples of classroom activities related to open responses, which were shared with the entire faculty. The scoring rubric, revised in 2005, and writing principles are now familiar to all students and teachers in the high school. The universal emphasis on literacy training is reflected in the display of four literacy charts in every classroom of the school.

In 2004–05, Brockton Public Schools created activities to increase vertical articulation among schools. Teachers from different schools meet to discuss expected curriculum outcomes at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels. The major goal for the school is to implement the strategies that will assist students in achieving higher rates of proficiency on the MCAS. The administration has reviewed data to show the number of students who are close to that achievement level and has used professional training time to focus on reading passages, multiple-choice strategies, and classroom instructional strategies.

Each year, the school experiences a turnover rate of about 5–10% of the faculty. Approximately 16 new teachers joined the staff in September 2008. New staff members are assigned a mentor from their department and the classroom support of an instructional resource specialist. New staff members begin with a 4-day orientation divided between district and school matters. A new teacher handbook guides the early days. The *Teachers Helping Teachers* handbook supports the conversations that occur daily in the office units to which teachers are assigned. The mentor emphasizes the plan book, lesson checklist, lesson plan, classroom management, and curriculum materials. For the new teachers, much of the professional development is handled by one of the four instructional resource specialists. The specialists assigned to work with new teachers provide lesson demonstrations, comments after observations, and curriculum materials. Their work is nonevaluative and supportive.

Since 2004–05, the staff has used the time before students arrive for professional activities. This session focuses on a review of MCAS test items and strategies for dealing with multiple-choice items and unknown vocabulary. Following this session, departmental meetings are used to design instructional lessons using appropriate test-taking strategies. Additional training time for both administrators and teachers was devoted to teaching comprehension strategies to mainstreamed English language learners. This session employed the three principles to planning lessons: increasing comprehension, increasing interaction, and increasing thinking skills. The consistent and sustained staff development program is schoolwide with departmental support. The education plan has refocused teachers' attention to schoolwide needs and, at the same time, strengthened each department's use of subject matter expertise to advance higher expectations of student achievement.

## 11. Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Brockton High School believes that all students can become proficient in the skills that will make them successful beyond high school. To that end, the administrators and teachers of Brockton High School seek to find ways that will help struggling learners. Students with disabilities are provided with the support that will help them meet their highest potential. Students with disabilities are primarily mainstreamed into regular education classrooms taught by a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. In the co-taught classroom, all students access the same curriculum. Teachers are expected, through appropriate instructional strategies, to provide the support needed. In addition, students with disabilities are provided with a support class. It is through this class that students are expected to complete standards-based portfolios that keep students working on high level skills with the appropriate level of support.

While there is much support through bilingual and ESL classes for Brockton's high bilingual population, it is expected that students will access the same curriculum and aim for the same high standards. This is achieved primarily through the accommodations that are made in instructional strategies and through portfolio performance that is standards based.

## 12. Other

Each house's Instructional Resource Center is staffed by a certified librarian and is open both before and after school hours for student use. These centers have printed collections, computers with Internet access, and space for class demonstration projects with PowerPoint presentations. Teachers bring classes to the centers for training in the use of search engines and review of online collections. Technology is a centerpiece of instruction and support programs at the school. Teachers employ overhead projectors, TV monitors, and graphing calculators in classroom instruction. The use of such equipment allows the staff to present material for different learning styles. Most houses have multiple computer labs for use by individual departments in research, writing, and PowerPoint assignments. The business and information processing departments provide training to the student with computers.

The TV studio provides a hands-on opportunity for students to write, edit, tape, and produce both radio and television broadcasts. The school uses this facility to televise sports events and informational and interview programs about topics of interest over the local access channel. Students' proficiency with the excellent equipment and facility enable many to pursue their interest in communications at the college level, frequently with scholarship assistance.

## Lessons Learned

The following factors are the most significant in the school's success:

- *School leadership.* School leaders foster collaborative decision-making among faculty and support a more personalized educational experience through smaller learning communities. The superintendent and principal have used district and building resources to develop a rigorous curriculum and to make instruction relevant. Administrative leadership practices the concept of "top-down support for bottom-up leadership." Teachers express a degree of ownership in decision-making and have deep feelings of professionalism.
- *Literacy Initiative.* This effort focuses instruction on vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, and on writing open-response essays and research papers. The use of best practices in staff development and the display of scoring rubrics and literacy charts in each classroom give faculty a common purpose and language in the pursuit of schoolwide goals.
- *Restructuring Committee.* This committee has had a significant impact on the culture of achievement and student performance levels. The goals of the committee are to increase student achievement and to provide a personalized educational experience.

- *Safety nets.* The school has safety nets to support students with academic needs, students with disabilities, and English language learners, including after-school tutoring, an access center, directed academic programs, freshman summer academies, inclusion programs, and adult advisement programs. Support programs at the school include school adjustment counselors, a school nursery, wellness centers, and programs for nutrition, stress reduction, and peer mediation.
- *Instructional support.* The use of special support personnel is a valuable adjunct to content teachers. The instructional resource specialist, teacher mentors, and Informational Resource Centers provide instructional assistance to teachers. The existence of office units provides “face-to-face” informal daily assistance to teachers for sharing and discussions.
- *Passion for teaching.* Teachers enjoy working with young people and treat students as adults. Teachers capitalize on the advantages of humor in the classroom and demonstrate a respect for other teachers, students, and community members. They seek to instill a work ethic in course offerings and internships to help students succeed.
- *Small-group instruction.* Instruction frequently occurs in small work groups that emphasize vocabulary, information processing, and writing and note taking to ensure participation. The faculty maintains a student focus with motivating questions, discussions of relevancy, frequent checks of learning and individual assistance.
- *Civility.* Students have a sense of civility, purpose, and discipline necessary to achieve. Student rules of conduct are provided in a handbook and are supported by teachers and housemasters.
- *Support for families.* The faculty and administration pursue ethnic clubs, parent involvement from ethnic groups, and ESL instructional programs that support students who do not have English as their first language.
- *Use of data.* Staff maintains a “target and response” approach to the use of data. Data are shared with the community to demonstrate student performance levels and areas needing improvement.
- *Search for excellence.* The school strives for excellence in curriculum and extracurricular areas. Time, effort, and resources are devoted to support student interests and abilities in sports, arts, music, drama, JROTC, and academic competitions.

### **Principal’s List of Three Greatest Strengths**

Principal Susan Szachowicz identified the school’s three greatest strengths, as follows:

1. The schoolwide Literacy Initiative has identified literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning. Literacy charts detailing these skill objectives have been posted in every classroom, and all teachers in every department include these literacy skills in their lessons. The specific skills were identified and targeted based on the data analysis of the state assessment program. All teachers were trained in teaching literacy skills using a “train the trainer” model so that teachers can incorporate literacy skills in daily lessons, and administrators evaluate these skills in their formal and informal evaluations. This initiative has produced significant and impressive gains on the Massachusetts state assessment.
2. A continued commitment to academic excellence by the faculty and the students resulting in a school culture that celebrates students’ achievements. “High expectations, high standards, no excuses” has become the theme for both faculty and students, and the school celebrates these achievements in a variety of ways including honor roll assemblies, recognition programs, and the strong message throughout the school that academic achievement is a cause for pride.
3. The Leadership Team is the driving force behind substantive change, the conduit for communication across disciplines, and the foundation to improve the continuity of instruction and consistency of building policies and procedures. It is comprised of the principal, associate principal for curriculum and instruction, housemasters, assistant housemasters, department heads, instructional resource specialists, the Restructuring Committee, approximately 30 teachers, and

administrators representative of all disciplines in the school. The work of these groups provides a strong voice for the faculty in the school change process.

## **Effective and Efficient Practice**

### **Improving a Special Education Program**

Our special education students had failures rates: assessment exams in ELA and math revealed an alarming 78% and 98%, respectively. It is important to note that ALL students must pass the state's assessment exams in ELA and math to earn a diploma; there are no exceptions.

Every student with special needs had an Individualized Educational Plan and educational services were delivered in a substantially separate model. In other words, these students were taught their academic subjects in separate classes by special education teachers. Classes were small (less than fifteen students), however, teachers were not necessarily certified in the subject areas they were teaching. In many cases students had the same teacher for English, math, science, and history. Students with IEPs were expected to meet state standards and pass the MCAS, however, they were not included in regular education classes. Essentially what resulted from this substantially separate model was that expectations were lowered for special education students, and they were not being required to meet the state standards. Data demonstrated that this model of special education was not successful in helping students meet the state standards and pass the demanding MCAS exam required for graduation.

A schoolwide literacy initiative resulted in a dramatic improvement in student achievement for the school, yet the special education students were still lagging significantly behind. By the 2004-2005 school year, Brockton High reduced the school failure rate in ELA to 15%, however the failure rate for students with special needs was at 51%. In math, the school failure rate was at 39% while the failure rate for students with special needs was at 65%.

### **A Call to Action**

Something had to be done to improve academic achievement levels of special education students. These students must develop the skills needed to pass the MCAS, meet graduation requirements, and be prepared for post-secondary education. Perhaps, the most important "other" goal must be to eliminate a separate environment for these students by instilling a understanding throughout the school that special needs students are included in every aspect of the educational process of the school, including the classroom itself.

There were many challenges to meeting this goal. For example, there was:

- An existing program based upon a "substantially separate" model of delivering educational services to students with special needs;
- Fiscal limitations – whatever changes were to be made within the special education program would have to be implemented with NO additional funding;
- A long time Director of Special Education who had come up "through the ranks" within the current system;
- A culture of low expectations for students with special needs among the faculty; and
- A culture of "empires" – the "regular" education department and the special education department were very separate entities with virtually no collaboration.

## Process/Implementation

A multi-step, multi-faceted plan was initiated to address the special education program. The expectations were that it would take several years to improve student performance.

1. Year One – present: First, a school wide literacy initiative was started to improve performance across all student groups. All teachers incorporated literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking and reasoning) into every class and in every discipline. Teachers were trained in teaching these skills in every content area. Also, a school wide writing rubric was developed to ensure consistency of assessment. Improvement in student achievement on the state assessment exams was immediate and significant.

2. Year Three- present: To examine consistency of standards and assessment, the Associate Principal begins collecting student work to monitor the implementation of the literacy initiative

3. Year Four: Attended the Model School Conference and participated in sessions presented by Larry Gloeckler supporting an inclusion model for special education.

4. Year Four – present: Implementation of an inclusion model requiring special education students receive instruction in “regular” classroom:

- Redistribution of special education staff to shift from substantially separate classes to full inclusion – This required that most of the substantially separate academic classes in English, math, science, and history were eliminated. Rather than teaching these subjects to fifteen special education students in a separate class, the teachers were reassigned to co-teach with regular education teachers in those areas. The students were then assigned to regular classes in English, math, science, and history learning alongside their regular education peers. This required an entirely new way of scheduling classes so that an appropriate ratio of special education students to regular education students would be maintained.
- Teacher training began for co-teaching model. This required extensive professional development and the development of co-teaching planning tools.
- Facilitating team meetings to revise students’ individualized educational plans to ensure that they will receive appropriate services within the inclusion model
- Each year the number of co-taught inclusion classes has increased, nearly all substantially separate academic classes have been eliminated.
- Frequent and regular performance assessment meetings with the Department Head of Special Education and the Principal and Associate Principal to monitor the progress of this inclusion initiative are implemented.
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5. 2005-present - An after school Academic Support program for all students with special needs is implemented using grant funding from the Special Education Department. This was a reallocation of grant funds to provide this extended day opportunity.

6. 2006 – The long time Department Head of Special Education accepts an early retirement. The new Department Head is a strong proponent of inclusion, and was a co-teacher herself when in the classroom. With her planning and support, the number of co-taught classes jumps significantly over the next three years.

7. 2006 – present – The school’s Data Team examines the state assessment data particularly for the subgroups as well as examining the student work collected. The school wide writing rubric is revised to increase the rigor and consistency. And to ensure that all students with IEPs are being held to the rigorous state standards, every student with an IEP is required to have a portfolio with required student work

products included (a checklist with the required list of work products is attached to the portfolio). This portfolio is assembled by the student's educational liaison, and is submitted twice a year to the Associate Principal for monitoring purposes.

8. 2008 –present- Benchmark testing in English, Algebra, Biology, and History is initiated to closely monitor students' progress against the state standards.

9. 2008 – present - Change in the academic levels across the school – all levels are now College Preparatory with academic supports

### **Success and Sustainability**

The chart below show what a significant improvement special education students made in academic achievement. Additionally, the increase in “inclusion classes” also shows the efforts made to create one school for all students. The work continues. In every initiative, the high school principal must not only address the challenges but ensure that the success remain well after the “initiative” has ended. To ensure that the significant gains in student achievement were sustainable, the following actions were also taken:

- Data is constantly reviewed by the Data Team, the Restructuring Committee, and the Administrative Leadership Team to determine what additional changes need to be made.
- Student work included in the portfolios is collected at least twice per year and reviewed by the Associate Principal. What gets monitored is what gets done!
- Continued professional development on the challenges of co-teaching. Various planning tools were implemented to assist with the smooth implementation of this.

### **A Testimonial from the principal:**

“Making the shift from a substantially separate model of special education to an inclusion model was one of the most difficult, but one of the most successful transformations we've made. When our special education students were being taught in separate classes, they were not being appropriately challenged, were not getting access to the state standards, and were not being appropriately prepared to succeed on the MCAS. Our co-teaching model in many cases is so successful that an observer cannot tell which teacher is the subject teacher and which teacher is the special education teacher. As well as improving the academic performance of our special education students, our inclusion program has helped to change the culture of the school. Now all students are held to high standards, high expectations, no excuses.”