

Barnstable schools see MCAS success

Scores on the rise throughout district

By Kathleen Szmit

kszmit@barnstablepatriot.com

When students hear the letters MCAS, they often cringe. Teachers and administrators of the Barnstable Schools who received the latest test results, however, have reason to celebrate. "Overall, taking the district as a whole, I am certainly pleased with the progress that's been made," said Supt. Dr. Patricia Grenier. "There is a lot of progress all across the district."

While there are a few areas of concern, overall scores across the district are showing improvement, in some cases markedly.

At the Marstons Mills East Horace Mann Charter Public School student MCAS scores jumped dramatically between 2006 and 2007 in both English-Language Arts and Math.

"In regards to the math curriculum in particular," said MMEHMCPs grade four teacher Mike O'Toole, "a lot of attention across the grade levels was given in making sure that the scope and sequence of what we teach blocks up any gaps."

MMEHMCPs Interim Principal Ken Keenan feels the school's status as an Accelerated Schools Plus site and its subsequent focus on higher-level learning strategies is the key to the school's improvement.

"Test scores are just one indicator of a student's ability level," he said. "As an ASP school we use gifted/talented strategies for all students. They really make the whole school focus on that."

Keenan pointed out that through the ASP teaching styles teachers have a greater ability to focus on all students and their differing levels, while still finding ways to offer them educational challenges.

Another Barnstable school that saw success in its recent scores is Barnstable Middle School. "The middle school has not met AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for four years," said Grenier. "It was met in every area this year. That is cause for us to be both impressed and informed about what they did."

Grenier cites the schools' improvements as proof that teachers in the district are not simply "teaching to the test" as has been implied in the past.

Even at schools where there are issues, corrective steps are being taken. At Hyannis East Elementary School, which did not meet AYP for a second consecutive year, steps are being taken to gain approval from the state for an extended school day that would allow for more learning time for its diverse student body.

"I know that there are some very solid practices in place right now," said Grenier. "I have the confidence that they will turn things around. I think every day they have that discussion not just about AYP but how they can provide the best for their students in general."

At the Barnstable Horace Mann Charter School an appeal has been filed regarding the school's failure to meet AYP targets in certain subgroups and to correct data that was provided to the state incorrectly.

"Do I think we'll lose our designation as Needing Improvement? No," said BHMCS principal Kara Peterson. "But it's important to get your data straight."

Although Peterson is concerned with the school's AYP status, she notes that even before the MCAS results were made public, the school had already implemented changes to their Title I teaching that Peterson feels will greatly help struggling students.

"The way we provide service delivery in our Title I program has changed," Peterson said, explaining that there was a conflict in teaching math and reading that forced teachers to choose what to focus on. "Now there is no choice, no more choosing which we're going to help with. Because of this, we're already ahead of the game. I think it's very proactive."

With the next round of MCAS on the horizon, Grenier anticipates further successes from Barnstable schools, especially given the dedication of the teachers in the district.

"We're not just comfortable getting better results," said Grenier. "We're comfortable with each child being challenged at a level appropriate to them. Collaboration is huge. Teachers are no longer working in private practice. They're working together to help each student."

All information copyright OTTAWAY NEWSPAPERS, INC.

4 Ocean Street, P.O. Box 1208 Hyannis, MA 02601 - (508) 771-1427 - FAX: (508) 790-3997
EMAIL: editor@barnstablepatriot.com or publisher@barnstablepatriot.com