

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

September 10, 2004

### **MCAS, The results are in**

Another school year, another MCAS assessment. And this year the results are the best ever. The state just announced that students at all levels performed better than ever on the spring tests. Teachers and students should be proud of their joint achievement.

Here is a summary of the results, beginning with the graduation mandate, passage of the 10th grade test.

Statewide, 80% of tenth graders met the graduation MCAS in both English and math the first time they took the test. When the two test scores are separated the results are even better, with 89% of students passing English and 85% passing math. Each student who has not met the requirement now has two more years to make the grade, so the senior class of 2006 is likely to set a new record for graduation.

Moving to other grade levels, the good news from MCAS goes well beyond the 10th grade results. Students take different portions of the tests at many grade levels, Each grade matched or outperformed the prior year's accomplishments in English, and every grade that was tested on math had higher scores, possibly the result of state officials asking schools to focus on math instruction last year.

One accomplishment of note is that the greatest growth came from black and Hispanic children, though those minority students still lag behind others. Black students improved by 16% in English and 20% in math. Hispanic 10th graders in this first year of mainstreamed classes increased their scores by 17% in English and 9% in math.

The challenges of educating inner city children is greater than that faced in towns like Longmeadow, and one of the original objections to MCAS as a graduation requirement was the belief that urban school could not be held to a high standard. It is now becoming more generally accepted that all children are entitled to a good basic education, an education measured in part by the MCAS tests. The significant improvements among minority students and the record overall results indicate that the Massachusetts is on the way to providing that education.

Last month I found a Boston think tank's magazine from 2001, featuring a cover story that raised a serious issue of that year: How would Massachusetts students deal with the looming MCAS graduation requirement? It was a worrisome question that year, and many writers felt that the bar was too high. The answer from today's vantage point is readily given. They are doing very well.