

Validation Study Report for
SCHOOLS THAT CAN* Network Schools
ACADEMY OF THE PACIFIC RIM
BOSTON

By

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INTRODUCTION

Schools That Can (STC) is a national network of unaffiliated safe, high achieving schools located in inner cities and serving a largely poor minority population of students. Academy of the Pacific Rim, Boston, has been identified as one of these high-performing schools. As more schools are identified, they are included in the network subject to a validation of their education program. The network aims to celebrate, support and promote these schools' accomplishments. The entire list of criteria for inclusion into the network appears in Appendix A at the rear of this document.

After a school has been identified and initially vetted by Schools That Can representatives the actual validation begins. The validation process for each school is consistent, subject to variations in teachers' and school's schedules and parent availability. Typically the process includes the following steps:

- Two to three weeks before a site visit, administrators are mailed a one-page parent survey to be completed by a representative 15%-20% sample of parents and a one-page survey to be completed by all teachers. These survey forms are collected at the time of the site visit.
- Each site visit typically lasts for an entire school day, or close to that amount of time. Depending upon scheduling considerations, the visit begins with a brief meeting with the school administrator, who provides the visitor with the schedule for the day as well as any published or printed information about the school. Classes are then visited for about 20-30 minutes each when instruction is occurring. Usually five to six classes are visited. Classroom management styles, techniques for behavior management and nature and style of instruction are observed (e.g., whole class, small group, lecturing, modeling, active or passive learning requirements)) Time is allotted to interview teachers individually, although because of time constraints teachers are occasionally interviewed in small groups. Often but not always, a sample of curriculum materials is collected. Parents are interviewed either at the beginning or end of the visit, depending upon availability, and these interviews focus on their satisfaction with the program and why they sent their children to the school as opposed to their local neighborhood school.
- Academic performance data for the schools are then downloaded from the city or State website. Comparable data for neighboring schools, the entire city, and the state are also downloaded for comparison purposes. Occasionally, some schools do not participate in the state assessment process either because the state does not allow them to participate or because they opt not to. These schools invariably administer alternative standardized test data, and these data are used and compared to national norms the particular assessment device and/or are evaluated for performance over time.

- An exit interview is usually held with the school leader at the end of the day to provide him/her with a brief and general overview of the results.
- Information from the classroom observations, interviews and academic performance are then analyzed and a report is produced within two weeks of the visit.

This report provides results of observations, interviews of parents, administrators, and teachers, and a review and analysis of academic achievement data to support the inclusion of Academy of the Pacific Rim in the STC network.

ACADEMY OF PACIFIC RIM

Located in the Hyde Park section of Boston, the Academy of the Pacific Rim (APR) opened in 1997 and serves grades 6-12. Its mission is to empower urban students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve their full intellectual and social potential by combining the best of the East (high standards, discipline, and character education) with the best of the West (a commitment to individualism, creativity and diversity). The Academy has designed a college preparatory curriculum, and all students are required to take four years of English and math, and at least three years of science, history, and Mandarin Chinese in the high school. From the outset of its existence APR has used the Massachusetts State frameworks and combined them with the best benchmarks and standards nationally and internationally. Each year the administration takes a close look at student outcomes to make sure that they are line with state frameworks and that students are mastering the necessary content and skills. Grades are reviewed with students weekly in the lower school and bi-weekly in high school and then with families at home. This kind of communication helps to ensure that families know how their children are performing academically.

Students enter the next grade only if they have mastered the material in each one of the subject areas in their current grade. Middle school students must pass each course with a grade of 70 or better and high school students must have an overall average of 70% or higher. Students who have not mastered the standards by the end of the school year enter a month-long review period in June in order to demonstrate mastery. Students who still need help after the month-long review block may be eligible for summer tutoring. Otherwise they must repeat the grade. On the other hand, students who have mastered the standards are able to extend their learning through internships outside the Academy. These students have interned at University programs, the Museum of Science, daycare centers, Boys and Girls clubs, law firms, and other organizations.

Supporting the system of accountability is the cultural reinforcement of effort at the Academy. The importance of trying and not giving up is a central theme of the academic program. School uniforms are required, but this requirement is enforced less diligently at the high school. The Academy's hours are 8:05 AM until 4:10 PM, daily.

Leadership. A director and two principals supervise the school, one for the lower school and another for the upper school. Department chairs provide much of the day-to-day supervision, or mentoring, of teachers. Teachers indicated that the administration was responsive to their needs, and when issues arose with students, they were attended to quickly and effectively.

With regard to professional development opportunities, teachers described a five-day professional orientation session held at the beginning of the school year. The orientation session instructs teachers, especially newly hired teachers, in the mores of the Academy, including academic expectations and behavioral standards that are to be maintained and ways to achieve these standards. Teachers also mentioned the child study team that was available to help them and students with academic problems that arose. But teachers' evaluations of professional development focused mainly on the ongoing support they received from their department chair people. This ongoing, daily support was viewed as the most helpful.

CRITERION 1: POPULATION SERVED

The key demographics of the Academy appear in table 1.

**Table 1
Demographics for Academy of Pacific Rim**

Students enrolled	338
Lower school	0
Middle school	201
High school	137
Grade levels served	6-12
Percent white students	23
Percent African-American students	67
Percent Hispanic students	6
Percent eligible for free lunch	50
Percent mobility rate	9
Percent receiving special education	15

CRITERION 2: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A. State Assessments. Data in Table 1 indicate the academic performance of Academy students during the past three years for English Language Arts (reading) and math. The data represent the percentage of students who achieve or exceed state defined proficiency levels. The school's performance is compared to overall citywide averages as well as state averages. All data were obtained from the most recent reports provided by the Massachusetts State Department of Education's website. Math scores for 2004 were not available as of this writing for Boston and for Massachusetts as a whole.

Table 2
Three-Year Performance on State Assessments
(Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards)

Organization	Reading 2002	Reading 2003	Reading 2004	Math 2002	Math 2003	Math 2004
7 th grade						
Academy	59	68	55			
Boston	40	42	47			
Massachusetts	64	65	68			
10 th grade						
Academy	81	63	82			
Boston	35	36	38			
Massachusetts	59	61	62			
6 th grade						
Academy				34	51	44
Boston				16	20	
Massachusetts				41	42	
8 th grade						
Academy				43	30	42
Boston				19	20	
Massachusetts				34	37	
10 th grade						
Academy				78	82	89
Boston				24	36	
Massachusetts				44	51	

While the three year data in Table 2 reveal variability in performance for Academy students, the important point to note is that for the two years data were available, Academy students performed uniformly better than Boston public school students, and they performed better than the Commonwealth averages at the high school level, frequently by substantial margins.

B. High School Graduation Rates and College Attendance

A second measure of academic proficiency, one that logically flows directly from high formal assessment scores, is high school graduation and college attendance. These data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
High School Graduation Rates and College Attendance

School Year	2003	2004	2005
Number enrolled	11	24	27
Number graduating	11	24	27
Number attending college	10	23	26
Percent attending college	91%	96%	96%

Comparative graduation data for Boston public schools and for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were not included in the table because of the enormous variability in graduation rates, depending upon the reporting source. Independent analyses of Boston graduation rates, conducted by the Urban Institute, indicate that 42% graduated in 2003. Data supplied by the Boston Public Schools indicate that close to 80% graduate. Clearly, both sets of data cannot be accurate. High school graduation data, in general, are highly unreliable because of differences in identifying the population of students for whom the graduation data are presented. For example, data may be presented on a cohort of students who entered 9th grade and graduated in: (a) four year, or (b) five or more years. Graduation rates may also be presented for students who entered the senior year and graduated at the end of the year. Further different states have different requirements for graduation with respect to passing state assessments. Still other states, such as New York, have different classes of diplomas, such as Regents (academic) diploma, local diplomas, IEP (special education) diplomas, each representing different attainment levels. The safest comparison group is the stable national graduation rate of 67%-68% for the past several years. The 100% of Academy students who are graduating is about 50% higher than the national rate. The graduation rate from the Academy can also be compared with the average graduation rate for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole, where in School Years 2000- 2002, between 77% & and 75% of high school students graduated. Put differently, Academy for the Pacific Rim graduates students at about a 33% higher rate than the average for Massachusetts.

For the current class of 27 Academy graduates, 26 students have at least two college acceptances; although as of this writing it is too soon to know which colleges the students will attend. Among the colleges that accepted students from the Academy of the Pacific Rim include, Boston College, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Smith and traditional black colleges such as Morehouse College and Howard University. The general conclusion is that regardless of the comparison group, Academy of the Pacific Rim graduates a substantially higher percentage of students than Boston, Massachusetts or the nation as a whole.

CRITERION 3: VALUED BY PARENTS

Parents’ ratings on a scale indicating the extent of their satisfaction with the school their children attend were as follows:

**Table 4
Parent Satisfaction**

Organization	Not at all	Just a little	A fair amount	A good amount	A lot
Academy of Pacific Rim	0	1 (1%)	7 (8%)	33 (36%)	52 (56%)

The data in Table 3 indicate that 92% of parents (36% + 56%) are satisfied with the school their children attend.

Summary

Overall analysis of the program at the Academy of Pacific Rim indicates that the school has in place policies that promote academic performance, well-regarded leadership and sound instruction. This combination results in outcomes that promote high caliber academic performance among students, high graduation rates from high school and college attendance rates that surpass, by a substantial margin, the overall rate for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The strengths of the program are its:

- Rigorous academic focus
- Effective leadership
- Strong professional development program
- Emphasis on and promotion of appropriate social behavior
- Development of good character in students
- Excellent and well-maintained physical facility

One weakness cited by parents was the lack of an adequate sports program to motivate many African-American adolescents.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

SCHOOLS THAT CAN member schools provide families and students from economically disadvantaged urban areas with an education based on the following criteria:

- 1. Located in the inner-city and primarily serving an economically disadvantaged population of students that are representative of its community, with at least 50% eligible for free lunch**
- 2. Striving to achieve superior levels of academic performance as measured by objective assessments and outcomes**
- 3. Emphasizing character based education**
- 4. Providing a safe, disruption-free, non discriminatory environment, where teachers can teach and children can learn**
- 5. Valued by parents and actively engaged within their communities**
- 6. Characterized by dedicated and effective leadership**
- 7. Attaining a high level of sustainability**
- 8. Willing to share “best practices” and assist other STC network schools.**

Appendix B

Biography

Jay Gottlieb is a professor of educational psychology in the Department of Teaching and Learning at New York University. He received his doctorate in 1972 from Yeshiva University in New York City and has spent the past thirty years conducting teaching and conducting research and evaluations in urban schools. His research focuses on the education of at-risk students and students with disabilities. Dr. Gottlieb has served as a special education expert for federal and state court cases involving special education, studied special education in the Oslo, Norway public schools, and participated in the drafting of reports to re-organize special and remedial education in the New York City schools. He has published 90 articles in various professional sources and has been the principal investigator of about two-dozen research grants and contracts as well as director of several training grants, including one to train doctoral level researchers in applied research. Dr. Gottlieb was a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a member of numerous other professional organizations, and at various points in his career, served on the editorial boards of half dozen professional journals. Dr. Gottlieb also served two terms as and elected public school trustee in his community

