

Schools That Can
Validation Report For
ROXBURY PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL

BOSTON, MA

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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. Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, 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 Roxbury Preparatory Charter School in the STC network.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School-Boston

History and Mission. Roxbury Preparatory Charter School is a middle school serving 196 students in grades 6-8 during the 2005-2006 school year. It completed its sixth full year of operation in 2005, and in its relatively brief history it has been featured by the United States Department of Education as one of eight charter schools nationally to be highlighted as successful.

The school's mission is to prepare its students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Roxbury is founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to and can succeed in college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum is rigorous, engaging, and well-planned; 2) the school emphasizes student character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities; and 3) a community network supports students' academic, social, and physical well-being. Roxbury Prep helps students gain admission to outstanding public and private college preparatory high schools..

In order to fulfill its mission, Roxbury Prep adheres to a number of core values. These include:

-Scholarship, Integrity, Dignity, Responsibility, Perseverance, Community, Leadership, Peace, Social justice, and Investment.

The school's regular hours are from 8:15 A. M. until 3:15 P.M. After school programming includes performing arts and enrichment classes.

Because the school is a public charter, it does not charge tuition and students are selected on a first come first served basis.

Students. Roxbury Prep currently enrolls 196 students and has experienced a small, steady increase in enrollment each of the past few years, from an enrollment of 181 students during the 2002-2003 school year. For the past few years, and possibly longer, the school population has been exclusively minority, with no Caucasian or Asian students in attendance. About two-thirds of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch programs. Additional demographic data appear in Table 18.

Table 18
Demographics for Roxbury Preparatory School

Students enrolled	196
Pre K	0
Lower School (K-5)	0
Middle School (6-8)	196
Percent Caucasian	0
Percent African-American	74
Percent Hispanic	25
Percent Other	< 1
Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch	68
Percent mobility rate	15
Percent special education	9
Attendance rate	96%

Administration and Teachers. Roxbury Prep has two co-leaders, one of whom has been at the school for two years and the other for four years. The school has 29 staff members, 20 of whom are teachers. The student teacher ratio is 10: Of the 20 teachers, 75% are currently certified.

Parent satisfaction. Parent responses to the survey were not available from parents at Roxbury Prep. Their own literature suggests that 95% of the parents rate Roxbury Prep's academic program as either effective or very effective.

Curriculum. Roxbury Prep's academic program rests upon a curriculum focused on reading, writing speaking, and mathematics. All course work aligns with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), a graduation requirement for public high schools. Teachers meet for four weeks each summer to develop and refine the curriculum. In order to encourage student achievement through reflective teaching, improved practice and teacher collaboration, teachers are organized in Inquiry Groups. During summer and school year Inquiry Groups meetings teachers share their own work and analyze student work to consider efficacy, evidence of student learning, and achievement of goals.

Roxbury Prep teachers met for three weeks during the summer of 2005 to develop sixth, seventh, and eighth grade curricula. Teachers used standards from Massachusetts, Advanced Placement exams, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Core Knowledge, and other nationally recognized sources to establish rigorous, clear, measurable, and manageable academic standards that clearly define what each student should know and be able to do upon completion of each unity of each course.

Roxbury Prep teachers implement common instructional strategies to emphasize approaches to learning that facilitate academic success at Roxbury Prep and beyond and to reinforce important skills in multiple classes. These strategies include:

-Common Blackboard Configuration, which is designed to ensure that classes are focused and well-organized. As part of this approach, each day a number of items appear on the blackboard, including a specific and measurable “Aim” for that day, a “do now” or opening activity that immediately engages students in a writing assignment for two to five minutes, and the homework assignment due the following day.

-Common Approaches to Reading and Writing, where the writing strategy emphasizes the use of multiple drafts and continuous revision to ensure that student essays are well-organized, clear and grammatically correct. The reading strategy includes conducting a cursory study of reading, thinking about the subject, reading actively, and reviewing the reading.

-Common Homework Policy and the Homework Hotline, where students are required to record their homework on an assignment chart distributed to all students weekly. If a student is absent or wants to ensure that he or she correctly recorded the homework for the day, a parent can call the school after 5:00 P.M. to listen to the current day’s assignments recorded on the school’s voice mail system. The Roxbury Prep system of curriculum and instruction has resulted in student outcomes that are among the very highest in Massachusetts, as is evident from the data displayed in Table 19. It is also, for the second consecutive year, the highest performing urban middle school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Table 19
Roxbury Preparatory Charter School (2005 MCAS Results)

Grade	Testing Entity	Subject	Percent at Proficient or Advanced	
6	Roxbury Prep	Math	71	
6	Massachusetts	Math	46	
7	Roxbury Prep	English Lang. Arts	81	
			7 Boston Public Schools	23
			7 Massachusetts	44
8	Roxbury Prep	Math	82	
			8 Boston Public Schools	23
			8 Massachusetts	Math
8	Roxbury Prep	Science	35	
			8 Boston Public Schools	10
8	Massachusetts	Science	33	

The data appearing in Table 19 indicate clearly the superiority of Roxbury prep's academic performance over neighboring schools in Boston. On average, students at Roxbury Prep achieve or surpass State standards at about three times the rate of students attending Boston Public Schools. Students at Roxbury Prep also surpass State averages in performance for all middle school assessments.

Recommendations

Without doubt, Roxbury Prep produces very impressive academic outcomes of which the school is deservedly proud. Urban middle school students at Roxbury Prep outperform their peers Statewide in reading, and in math by a large margin in the sixth grade and an even larger margin in the eighth grade. The science scores were level with the Statewide average, which led me to wonder whether the emphasis on reading and math, with double periods daily in both subjects, was taking away instruction from science and possibly from social studies. I did not hear much mention of these two academic subjects. If the school administration has not already done so, it may wish to spend some portion of its considerable professional development time, developing curriculum units in reading and math that use an interdisciplinary approach that includes science and social studies content. There is probably little reason why the school can't substantially outperform other schools in the Commonwealth in science as well as in reading and math.

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.

