



# Watertown Public Schools

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Watertown School Committee  
From: Dr. Theresa McGuinness, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment  
CC: Dr. Dede Galdston, Superintendent of Schools  
Date: December 4, 2017  
RE: MCAS 2017 Elementary Results

The focus of this memorandum, the Elementary MCAS Results PowerPoint, and the Elementary Strategic 3-Year Improvement & Professional Development Plan is on three major areas:

1. Understanding the next-generation of MCAS Assessments: What is MCAS 2.0?
2. An Examination of 2017 Watertown Elementary MCAS Data
3. Strategic Action Plans

### Introduction

Student performance data is used to identify areas of strength and areas of opportunity for the district. Grade level, cohort, and individual data in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science represent one set of point-in-time data that, *when combined with other assessments*, can inform instruction at a programmatic level as well as for targeted instruction and intervention.

The 2016-2017 school year was the inaugural year of MCAS 2.0, ushering in the next-generation of MCAS assessments for students in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in mathematics and English Language Arts. In grades 4 and 8, Watertown students took the assessments on computers, using Chromebooks. Next Spring, all 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be assessed on computers.

Because *legacy* MCAS, PARCC, and MCAS 2.0 are all different assessments and are reported differently, there will be no year-to-year assessment analysis. It would be impossible to make comparisons with three unique and different tests. The 2017 assessment results will serve as the new **baseline** for target setting in 2018 and beyond. The MCAS 2.0 is designed to assess more rigorous standards and higher expectations. Most students in the State did not perform at the levels they did in the past in this baseline year, with only 50 percent of students in MA at "Meeting Expectations". All MCAS 2.0 schools meeting participation rate requirements will not receive an accountability level, school percentile, or Progress & Performance Index (PPI) for 2017.

MCAS scores are categorized as Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Warning. PARCC scores were categorized in five levels: Exceeded Expectations, Met Expectations, Approached Expectations, Partially Met Expectations, Did Not Yet Meet Expectations. MCAS 2.0 returned to four levels: Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, and Not Meeting Expectations.

**Data**

The *next-generation* MCAS data illustrate that in the WPS, student achievement scores increase significantly in both math and ELA on State assessments from grades 3 to 5. For example, 31 percent of students scored ‘meeting expectations’ in grade 3 ELA, 45 percent in grade 4, and 41 percent in grade 5. A similar pattern follows in math (See Figure 1). While students in grades 4 and 5 performed near the State proficiency levels for the ‘All’ students category, our grade 3 students performed significantly lower. Our High Needs<sup>1</sup> subgroup performed significantly below the State in most grades with the exception of grade 4 ELA, in which students performed above the State. Science *legacy* MCAS is only administered in grades 5, 8, and 9 or 10. WPS is at the same achievement level as the State with 36 percent of our fifth-grade students scoring proficient or above.

<i>Subgroup &amp; Grade</i>	<b>Grade 3 ELA</b> District % (State %)	<b>Grade 4 ELA</b> District % (State %)	<b>Grade 5 ELA</b> District % (State %)
<b>All (state)</b>	31 (47)	45 (48)	41 (49)
<b>High Needs</b>	19 (29)	29 (28)	11 (28)
<i>Subgroup &amp; Grade</i>	<b>Grade 3 Math</b> District % (State %)	<b>Grade 4 Math</b> District % (State %)	<b>Grade 5 Math</b> District % (State %)
<b>All (state)</b>	33 (49)	47 (49)	42 (46)
<b>High Needs</b>	21 (31)	25 (30)	19 (26)

Figure 1. ELA, Math 2017 MCAS Results, Grades 3 - 5

**Implications**

These data indicate that we have a curriculum alignment problem and that we need to be fully immersed in standards-based instruction, across schools and classrooms. Understanding our current reality, these results serve as our baseline from which we will measure student achievement and growth annually. As Superintendent Galdston messaged in her November newsletter, at the District level, teams of teachers and administrators thoroughly reviewed our results and are using the information that we gathered to continue those practices that are producing strong results and to improve in areas that indicate opportunities for improvement. Watertown educators have become far more reliant on local assessments. Importantly, teachers utilize a wide variety of formative and summative assessments throughout the year to tailor and adjust instruction that responds to the unique needs of their current students.

<sup>1</sup> High Needs subgroup: All students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and former ELL students, or economically disadvantaged students.

These are the *Guiding Strategic Improvement Goals* we used to develop our Elementary Strategic 3-Year Improvement & Professional Development Plan:

- Increase teacher instructional leadership opportunities
- Increase job-embedded professional development/training experiences
- Build capacity of 'in-district' expertise; leveraging teacher knowledge and expertise
- Focus on the core subjects (math, literacy, science)
- Ensure consistency across the three elementary schools and cohesion across general instructional practices and curriculum maps
- Design and support a balanced literacy program by the 2018 - 2019 school year, across all elementary classrooms

Professional learning and development are the essence of the idea and strategy of *professional capital* — that is, if you want a return, you have to make an investment (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) describe professional learning as focusing on learning something new that is potentially of value and professional development as growth in terms of who you are and what you can do. Our elementary teachers are participating in ongoing professional learning and development in both literacy and math. The District has formed a relationship with the Teaching and Learning Alliance (TLA) to support a balanced literacy model at the elementary level, focusing on targeted, small group instruction to support students at their appropriate level of need. New to the District this year are math teacher leaders and a dedicated math coach who support teachers throughout the District to enhance student learning and the conceptual understanding of math. And in science, we've implemented STEMscopes in grades 1 through 5 and adjusted our curriculum maps to align with the new science standards. Collectively, we have made significant progress in the past year toward full curricular alignment in ELA, math, and science and are continuing to hone this work.

The number one factor influencing student achievement is collective teacher efficacy (CTE), which refers to a staff's shared belief that through their collective action, they can positively influence student outcomes, including those who are disengaged and/or disadvantaged (Hattie, 2012; Donohoo, 2017). There are three conditions for collective teacher efficacy to flourish: (1) structures for teacher influence and leadership (Ex. delivery of curriculum, professional learning); (2) that schools have the capacity to meet clear and specific goals that the staff is committed to; and (3) that administrators are responsive leaders who demonstrate an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and protect teachers from issues and influences that detract from their teaching time or focus (Donohoo, 2017). **Our central goal as administrators is to maintain these conditions in support of teachers' best work in the classroom. We believe that WPS has an excellent cadre of skilled and caring teachers who are open to continuous growth and improvement.**

Across the District we've begun to focus on evidence of student impact in our professional learning teams (PLTs), as team of educators select a problem of practice, design a SMART goal around it, then measure student impact after having implemented a new strategy. During the PowerPoint presentation at the December 4<sup>th</sup> school committee meeting, principals will share a few of the teachers' student learning goals derived from the 2017 MCAS data.

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Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Routledge. NY, NY.

Donohoo, J. (2017). *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning*. Corwin. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Fullan, M. & Hargreaves, A. (2016). *Bringing the profession back in: Call to action*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.