

# The MATCH School E-Blast

MCAS Results Edition  
September, 2008



MATCH junior Ariel Alston, who took the MCAS exams last spring, and her mother react to the news that every member of Ariel's class passed the MCAS English, Math, and Biology exams.

**1. MCAS scores for schools and districts were released Wednesday in Massachusetts. We held an assembly with our kids to share the scores as a whole, and individually, and parents, teachers and Trustees attended.**

We take the results with a few grains of salt...

- a. MCAS only measures one group of high schoolers (10th graders, not 9th, 11th, or 12th).
- b. Passing MCAS is set at a low bar. Math, for example, tests sophomores on the basics of geometry and algebra. "Proficient" on MCAS does not equal "legitimately on track to be college ready."

**2. With that said, many Massachusetts 10th graders do not score proficient in math, English, and science. Particularly those who are black or Hispanic.**

Statewide in 2008

55% of black students, and 49% of Hispanic students, were proficient in English 48% of black students, and 46% of Hispanic students, were proficient in math

### MATCH Students in 2008 (almost all black or Hispanic)

94% were proficient or above in English  
93% were proficient or above in math

This puts them tops among open-admissions high schools in Boston.

They outperformed white and Asian averages by a wide margin--by this measure, they reversed the achievement gap. In fact, our sophomore class outperformed most of the suburban high schools in Massachusetts. Out of about 340 high schools, MATCH kids tied for 16th statewide in English, 17th in math.

Click [HERE](#) to see all 10th Grade scores by district.

**3. The usual response of charter school opponents is along these lines: "These kids were the cream of the crop. They arrived to MATCH School already strong academically. They had involved parents and wanted the rigor of MATCH. That's why they did well."**

*But that's false.*

We know from their 8th grade MCAS scores -- before they arrive at MATCH -- that our kids show up at MATCH with acutely low academic skills, roughly equal to the district average. They \*arrive\* as roughly 300th out of 340 schools statewide.

Another charge is that strugglers get booting out.

*Also false.*

Click [HERE](#) if you'd like to see our previous eblast, which discusses both our new middle school and attrition data.

At a more precise level, a Harvard economist currently is examining all charter schools in Boston to address this very question. He will look at the kids who win a charter school admissions lottery (random selection) versus kids who lose the admissions lottery (and therefore attend a non-charter school). These are apples-to-apples. He then asks: what happens to both groups of students? If charter lottery losers make learning gains as big as the kids who actually attend a charter school, then obviously the critics are right -- it's the motivated kids, not the charter school itself.

If, however, those who attend charters make big strides (lottery winners), and the identical

comparison group (those who sought admission to a charter, but didn't win the random lottery -- the so-called lottery losers) make small gains -- then no critics can continue to claim that charter gains are "because of creaming."

I suspect that the latter is true. Charter kids go much longer hours. They get pushed hard. Academic expectations are high. Teachers work relentlessly to build relationships with students and their parents. At some schools, including ours, there is mega-dosage tutoring to complement the teaching. It would be inconceivable if all this did NOT pay off with kids making gigantic gains in academic skills.

#### **4. A word about science.**

This is the first year of the state reporting high school science scores. 93% of our students scored proficient or above on that exam.

Out of 340 schools, that rate was 3rd best in Massachusetts.

Among these 56 sophomores, roughly 7% arrived at MATCH in 8th grade having scored proficient in science in their former middle schools.

#### **5. A reminder about those caveats listed above.**

\*It's a low bar. It's much harder at MATCH to pass for the year than to pass MCAS. Some of these students, with very high MCAS, will transfer out when their junior or senior load gets more demanding -- particularly if they are failing at our school (despite 10+ hours per week of personal tutoring), and perceive their choice as being "5 years to graduate from MATCH, or 4 years to graduate somewhere else."

Historically, those kids who do attend MATCH for at least two years, and then transfer back to local schools, end up doing very well. We tracked 30 such students who started with us in 2004. All passed the MCAS in 2006. If these 30 MATCH \*departed\* students comprised their own school, they would have been #1 among the open-admission Boston Public High Schools. And as of August 2008, all but two either graduated high school or are on track to do so--only two out of 30 dropped out (and both got GEDs)

\*As a school, we still to push much harder to improve. We are trying to build a ladder of students who, as juniors and seniors, can handle much more rigorous exams called Advanced Placement, and we have a long way to go to reach that goal.

\*With all that said, we could not get students to make such giant academic leaps without the tireless efforts of our staff and the generosity of our donors.

A final, more personal word. I wish you could have been here to see our kids' reactions, the tears. They worked hard for these results. One of our typical kids is Darquis, who lives in Dorchester with his mother and twin sister. It takes him and his sister about an hour to get to MATCH each day, and another hour to get home each night. He chose to attend MATCH because, as he says, "I want to get somewhere." He intends to major in business

marketing. He, along with 3 other boys and one girl, scored Advanced in all three of the Grade 10 MCAS tests.

Come visit us at MATCH.

Best,

Alan Safran

Executive Director

High School: 1001 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215

Middle School: 86 Wachusett Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

[www.matcheschool.org](http://www.matcheschool.org)

Cell Phone: 617-501-9401

Fax: 617-232-2838