

## East Boston students continue to Excel on MCAS exam

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Since its inception, the MCAS exam has been bogged down in a quagmire of controversy. While some say the test is racially biased, others believe it has become a heavy burden on students and teachers that concern themselves more with MCAS preparation than regular curriculum.

But for Eastie's sole charter school comprised predominantly of Latino students, the MCAS test has been no problem.

For the second year in a row, Excel Academy Charter School students outperformed their local

peers on the MCAS exam.

"Our scores are evidence that a structured learning environment, when combined with a rigorous curriculum, focused academic support, and an extended school day and year, promotes academic success," said Excel's Associate Director Scott Given. "Our results are also a testament to our dedicated staff that is committed to providing the best education to every one of our students."

On its most recent MCAS tests, Excel Academy students achieved impressive results on the sixth grade math MCAS.

A higher percentage of Excel students, 25 percent, scored in the Advanced and Proficient categories than students from East Boston (18 percent), as well as from the districts of Boston (23 percent) and Chelsea (20 percent).

Sixty-five percent of Excel students passed the exam while only

36 percent of East Boston public school students did. In the districts of Boston, 51 percent passed, while 53 percent of Chelsea public school students did.

Excel Academy's first class of students, who did notably well on the math MCAS last year as sixth graders, also posted strong scores on the seventh grade English MCAS.

Sixty-four percent of Excel students scored in the Advanced and Proficient categories compared with students from East Boston (27 percent), the districts of Boston (44 percent) and Chelsea (34 percent).

A much higher percentage of Excel students (93 percent) passed the exam than students from East Boston (68 percent), the districts of Boston (84 percent) and Chelsea (83 percent).

Excel Academy Advanced/Proficient rate of 64 percent was nearly identical to the state Advanced/Proficient rate of 66 percent, and students had the same exact passing rate (93 percent) as their state peers. This is particularly signifi-

cant, given many Excel students speak Spanish at home.

Yutaka Tamura, the school's founder and executive director, described additional factors that contributed to these achievements.

"Our success is a result of our fundamental belief that every child, regardless of race or socio-economic status, has the capacity to achieve academic excellence," said Tamura. "Excel Academy's 2005 MCAS results demonstrate that urban students and students of color can excel academically if given access to a high quality education."

Excel Academy currently serves seventh and eighth graders and will ultimately serve fifth through eighth graders, too. The school will enroll sixth, seventh and eighth grade students for the 2006-07 school year.

The school's mission is to prepare middle school students to succeed in high school and college, apply their learning to solve relevant problems, and engage productively in their communities.