

University Park Campus School: An Unparalleled Record of Achievement

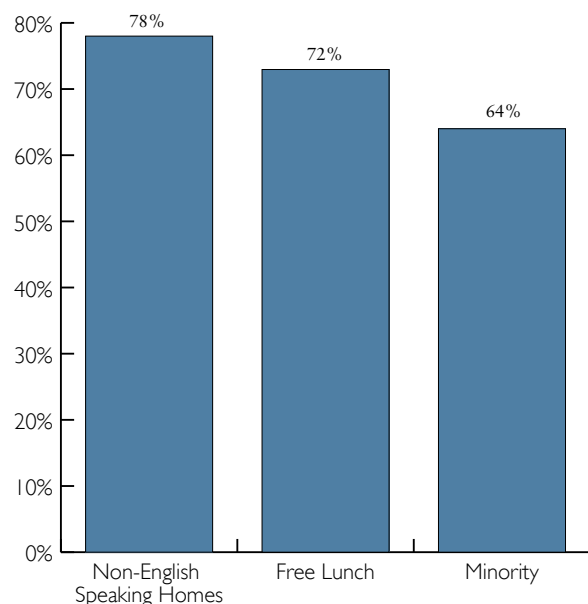


Recently named the top-performing urban high school in Massachusetts,¹ the University Park Campus School (UPCS) has compiled an unparalleled record of academic achievement since opening its doors in 1997. UPCS, a small, grade 7-12 school serving 200 students, has consistently ranked first among urban schools serving low-income students on state-mandated English and math graduation exams and in the top 10% of all high schools in the state. All members of its first two graduating classes have gone on to college.

The school's record of accomplishment is all the more remarkable given the low academic skills and limited English proficiency of its entering students. Located in the poorest section of Worcester, the second largest city in Massachusetts, UPCS has as its only requirement for entry that students live in the immediate neighborhood of the school. Chosen by lottery, the vast majority of students enter at least two grade levels behind in reading and math. Seventy two percent of students enrolled at the school qualify for free lunch; nearly 80 percent come from homes where English is not spoken. Reflecting the ethnic composition of the surrounding neighborhood, a third of the school's students are Latino, 19 percent are Asian Americans, and 7 percent are African American. Many of the white students are recent arrivals from Eastern Europe who enter the school speaking only a few words of English.

Located a block from Clark University, the school was founded in 1997 as part of a larger effort by the college and local community development organizations to reverse the economic and social decline of the neighborhood surrounding the college. Together the University and the Worcester Public Schools planned and opened the school, which was built around the promise to prepare every student for college. Operating on the same per pupil budget as other district high schools in the city, the success of UPCS is not the result of exceptional financial resources. Rather, it is a result of an exceptional school culture and academic program that refuses to let any student fail to achieve high standards.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UPCS STUDENTS



¹ Center for Education Research and Policy, MassINC, *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts*, Boston, MA: MassINC, Fall 2003. http://www.massinc.org/handler/cfm?type=2&target=Head_of_class.index.html.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AT UPCS

The school's powerful educational program and deep partnership with Clark have created a culture where academic success is universal. Beginning in the ninth grade, all students pursue a rigorous college-preparatory program consisting of all honors classes. At the same time, instruction is individualized to connect to each student's particular level of development. There is no tracking. Instead, there are small classes, personal relationship-building with a caring and competent faculty, 90-minute learning blocks, and homework sessions in the morning and evening. UPCS has no pull out classes. The school uses a full immersion model for its English Language Learners and special education students, meeting the needs of these students within its 20-student classes. In addition, teachers work to promote students' social and emotional development as a critical piece of their overall academic and life success. By offering a common curriculum with few electives, the school is able to deploy its teaching resources more efficiently than the typical high school, keeping class sizes low (20 or less) in core academic subjects.

To make an accelerated college preparatory curriculum accessible to all students by the beginning of high school, the grade 7-8 curriculum is designed to address the significant academic and English language skill gaps of entering students. Literacy is a primary focus of these years, helping students to accelerate their reading and writing skills to grade level as rapidly as possible. Students also spend extended blocks of time on numeracy skills, learning both the hows and whys of basic mathematic operations. At the same time that students are developing basic literacy skills, they are introduced to the distinctive modes of analysis of the core disciplines, and begin to engage in projects where they learn to "think like scientists or historians". For example, incoming seventh graders with very low reading levels learn how to conduct a literacy analysis using picture books as their texts.

Entering seventh graders attend a month-long August Academy to help them acclimate to the school and begin their path to high academic achievement even before their first official school day. Whenever possible, teachers loop with students in seventh and eighth grade to ensure that no time is lost in those critical years and students are ready for the honors level curriculum beginning in high school.

The honors-level program in grades 9-12 is modeled after a prep school course of study that follows a curricular mantra of "minds thinking"- showing and explaining critical thinking through writing at all times. The school uses "writing across the curriculum" to continue to build and reinforce literacy skills in all subject areas. The school offers few electives; instead, juniors and seniors can take courses at Clark University, choosing from the entire college course catalog.

THE CULTURE OF UPCS

The culture of UPCS is one of excitement, engagement and support. Students come to school excited to learn. They are fully engaged in class and have deep personal relationships with the faculty. The teachers at UPCS are not simply teachers- they are mentors and advisors for their students on academic and personal issues. With their relentless passion and an unflinching belief that all students can achieve at high levels, teachers motivate students to succeed and drive the achievement of the school.

Education at UPCS is not driven by teachers, alone. Students at UPCS take collective responsibility for ensuring that their fellow students are successful. Juniors and seniors formally and informally mentor younger students, just as previous classes have done for them. Students support their peers in class, until every student fully grasps the material at hand. Even friendships within the UPCS community revolve around academic success and support. The importance of academic achievement is pervasive at UPCS.

For staff, UPCS has created a system of embedded professional development where all faculty members continually support each other and veteran teachers mentor their younger colleagues. Through analysis of student data, the sharing of student work, and continual dialogue among the staff during weekly common planning times, every teacher knows the strengths, weaknesses and plan for success for every student. This open door culture leads to a group of reflective teachers who are continually striving to improve their own practice.



PARTNERSHIP WITH CLARK UNIVERSITY

The educational program at UPCS is deliberately planned to help students prepare for college. The partnership with Clark University has the power to make the abstract concept of “college” real for students. The sense of being part of a college community helps students gain the motivation and confidence they need to persevere in demanding academic courses. Students and teachers are on Clark’s campus nearly every day, not only using the labs or the gym but also observing and interacting with Clark students and faculty. UPCS students take mini-seminars with college faculty in grades 7 to 10, and most enroll in college classes for credit during their junior and senior years. As they become more familiar with the campus culture, they begin to see a future for themselves in which college feels within reach. As early as the seventh grade, UPCS students walk through the campus and point out their future dorm rooms. They are “little Clarkies,” with college IDs to seal the deal. Upon graduation, students who meet the admission criteria can attend Clark tuition free for four years, eliminating real and perceived financial barriers to college.



The partnership with Clark University also provides the school with valuable teaching and professional development resources. UPCS serves as a clinical training site for the University’s teacher preparation program, with 4-6 student teachers working alongside UPCS master faculty for the full academic year. Many of the current UPCS staff started out as student teachers at the school. Several UPCS teachers lead courses in the education program and serve with college faculty on curriculum teams in each discipline to improve instruction through careful analysis of data, student work, and classroom practice.

EXCELLENCE ON STATE EXAMS

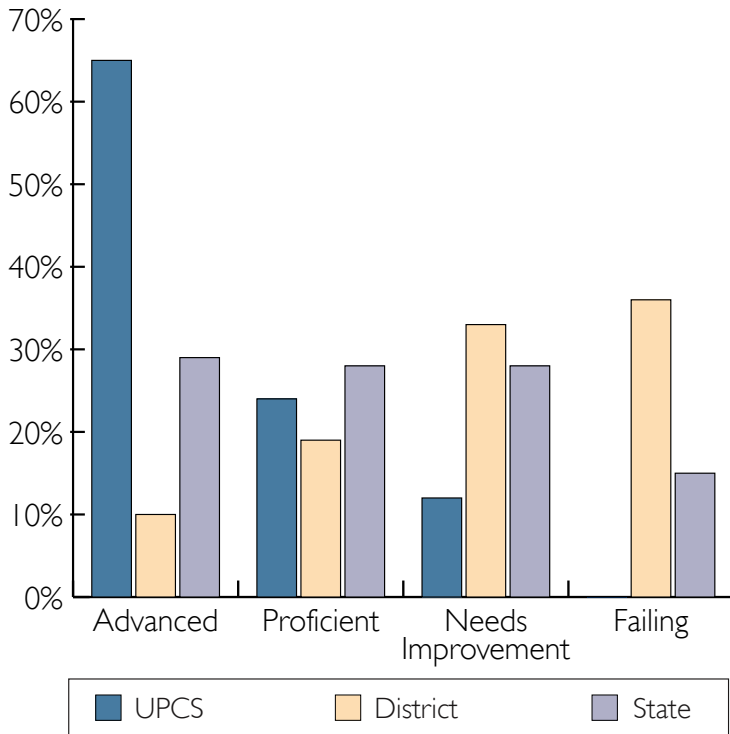
At UPCS, even the neediest members of the city’s neediest neighborhood achieve academic success. Since the inception of the state’s 10th grade graduation exams (MCAS), not a single UPCS student has failed the test. Averaging test scores from the past three years, 88% of UPCS students scored at proficient and advanced levels on the 10th grade MCAS math exam compared to 29% of their Worcester public school peers and 51% statewide. In English, 91% scored at proficient and advanced levels compared to 38% of students in the district and 61% across the state.

10TH GRADE MCAS PERFORMANCE, 2002- 2004

Year- Subject	Proficient/Advanced vs. Failing	UPCS	Worcester High Schools	Statewide
2002- Math	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	80% 0%	25% 41%	44% 25%
2002- English Language Arts	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	100% 0%	40% 28%	59% 14%
2003- Math	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	97% 0%	32% 37%	51% 21%
2003- English Language Arts	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	88% 0%	38% 24%	61% 12%
2004- Math	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	88% 0%	30% 36%	57% 15%
2004- English Language Arts	% scoring proficient and advanced % failing	85% 0% ²	37% 24%	62% 11%

² One student who was moved by the school district from UPCS to an alternative program with additional support for students with severe emotional disabilities did not pass the MCAS exams. The state listed her school as UPCS even though she did not attend classes at UPCS for the majority of her 10th grade year and was not classified as a UPCS student by the Worcester Public Schools.

2004 MCAS MATH PERFORMANCE: 10TH GRADE MATH



ALL STUDENTS GRADUATE & GO ON TO COLLEGE

But high test scores and college-going rates are not the only things that set UPCS apart from other urban schools serving low income students. In eight years of operation, only one student has dropped out of UPCS. At UPCS, even the most at-risk students make it to graduation day – and beyond.

The same study that identified UPCS as the top performing urban high school in the state singled out University Park as the only urban school able to implement a demanding academic curriculum without suffering significant student attrition as a result. Other urban schools that excelled on state tests did so at a high price – many of their academically weaker students were leaving the school within two years of entry.

But finishing high school is only the beginning. In keeping with the school's original promise to neighborhood residents, every graduate has left UPCS prepared to continue his or her education in college with 80% going on to four-year institutions including Brown, Georgetown, Trinity, Tufts, and, of course, Clark.

If you would like more information about the University Park Campus School and the Clark/UPCS Professional Development Institute or to arrange a visit to the school please contact Dan Restuccia, Training Coordinator at (617) 794-0726 or drestuccia@clarku.edu

2004 MCAS ENGLISH PERFORMANCE: 10TH GRADE ENGLISH

