

The success of Massachusetts' largest public school, Brockton High School, has been recognized by media outlets and academic researchers around the country—[New York Times](#), [CBS evening news](#), and [Harvard University](#) are just a few to have recently documented the school's success. In a school like Brockton High that has more than 4,000 students, 69% of whom are from low-income families, a dramatic turnaround would not seem likely. The key to the school's success has been its effective use of teacher collaboration time to strengthen instruction and drive impressive gains in academic achievement. Through teacher collaboration, teachers have developed and implemented common effective teaching practices throughout all grade levels and content areas in the following ways:

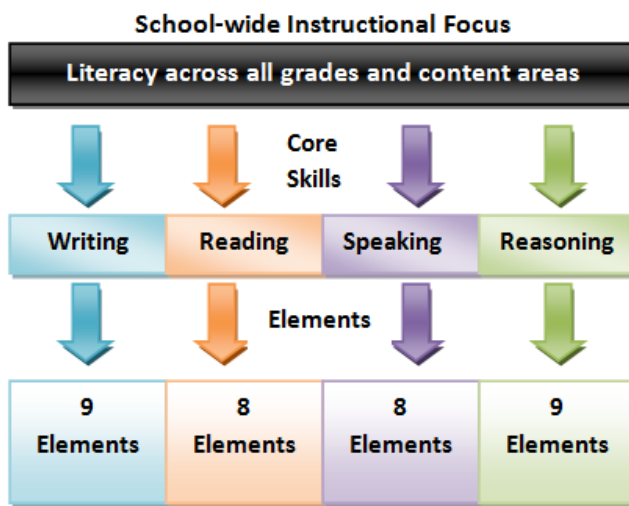
Brockton High School Basic Info	
Address	470 Forest Avenue Brockton, MA 23605 Tel: 508.580.7633
Grades served	9 – 12
Principal	Susan Szachowicz
Students	4,029
Teachers	273
School Day	7:20 – 1:59
Performance	2009-2010 MCAS Data

1. Creating a central, shared instructional focus around improved literacy
2. Developing common tools and expectations around instructional goals
3. Sharing tools and lessons with teachers
4. Providing time for teachers to reflect on implementation
5. Ensuring quality and consistency through frequent observations and feedback

In doing so, Brockton High School has relied on time outside of the school day. Each month, the school's Restructuring Committee meets for four hours on Saturday to investigate, plan, and develop effective strategies. Then, these strategies are shared with all teachers during their hour long professional development meetings, held after school on the first and third Thursday of each month.

Creating a Central Instructional Focus

In 2000, a group of Brockton teachers and administrators formed the school's first Restructuring Committee to identify instructional changes needed to improve student performance on the state's standardized test. Susan Szachowicz, now Brockton's principal, served on that first committee as a teacher. "No one wanted to be on it," Dr. Szachowicz recalls, "It was teachers just asking and begging their friends." Once Szachowicz and another teacher, Paul Laurino, had convinced 15 to 20 of their colleagues to join, the committee analyzed data and proposed changes to address one central question: What are the skills we want our students to have by the time they leave Brockton High School?



This guiding question led the committee to think beyond graduation rates and standardized test scores. Instead, the committee created an instructional focus to promote literacy in all grades and content areas. Named the ‘Literacy Initiative’, this initial effort of the Restructuring Committee identified four core skills—writing, reading, speaking, and reasoning—as essential to student success. Each core skill was further broken down into eight or nine elements per skill. For instance, several of the eight elements in the core skill reading include researching a topic, gathering information, and comprehending an argument. Each year, teacher collaboration and professional development focus on these elements, providing common strategies for teachers to utilize across all grade levels and content areas, from English and math to physical education and the arts. “We had one phys ed teacher,” explains Szachowicz, “who brought literacy into his class by having his kids write about the Native American mascot at another school, and arguing whether they thought the mascot was offensive to Native Americans.”

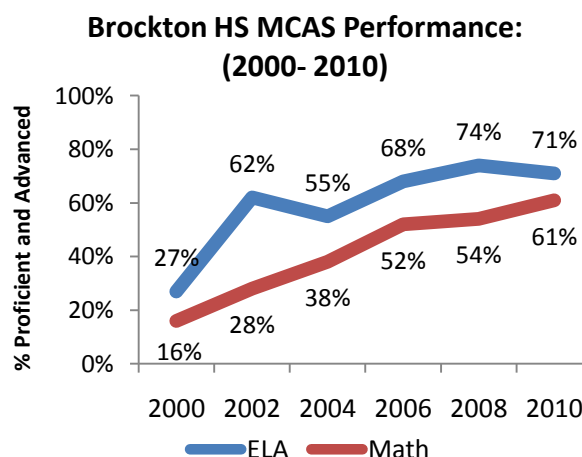
Developing and Sharing Common Tools

One Saturday each month, the Restructuring Committee meets for four hours to plan the lessons, strategies, and tools all teachers will use to address core elements in their classrooms. Teachers on the Restructuring Committee are compensated for this out-of-school time through the school’s regular professional development budget. Although participation in the committee had been limited in previous years, today, school administrators must choose from a growing list of applications from teachers who wish to become part of the committee. In selecting committee members, “We first make sure every department is represented by a teacher,” says Szachowicz, “then we like to bring in a mix of experience—from young to veteran teachers.” In the end, Szachowicz and other school administrators select a group of 30 to 35 teachers, who are tasked with the responsibility of creating the strategies all teachers will use to incorporate the core skills and elements that are part of the school-wide instructional focus.

To share these resources with and gain feedback from all teachers, Brockton High School uses its two monthly after school meetings, each one hour long, on the first and third Thursday of each month. In the first meeting, Restructuring Committee members share and model teacher-created strategies and tools with more than 270 teachers broken down into groups of 20 to 25, with each group comprised of teachers from different content areas. In the second meeting, teachers are regrouped by content area to plan ways to incorporate these strategies into their lessons. Through this process, teachers not only learn from their peers, but also develop a common language and set of expectations that students become accustomed to as they move from class to class and grade to grade.

Ensuring Consistency through Frequent Observations and Feedback

At a large high school with 4,000 students and 273 teachers, promoting instructional consistency can seem daunting. To address this challenge, Brockton High School’s administrators schedule teacher observations by department level, during which



teachers are instructed to teach the lessons and use the resources given to them during the two monthly after school Thursday meetings. “If we just did a session on Thursday about ‘explaining the logic of an argument or solution’ [one of Reasoning’s nine core elements],” says Szachowicz, “I’ll tell all my social studies teachers to teach this strategy the next week, and all my math teachers to teach it the following week, all my English teachers the week after, and so on.” This allows administrators and peers to observe the practice in all classrooms, and holds all teachers accountable to delivering the lessons and resources shared during the after school sessions. In addition, department heads routinely collect student work from teachers, and the Restructuring Committee analyzes student progress and teacher grading to ensure that all teachers are holding their students to the same high expectations.

Over the past decade, the Restructuring Committee and the Literacy Initiative have become institutionalized at Brockton High School. However, it was not until the school began to see substantial student gains that more and more teachers became receptive to using the resources and lessons in their own classrooms, and ultimately wanting to participate in their creation as a member of the Restructuring Committee. In 2000, the first year of the Restructuring Committee, student performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the state’s standardized test, were at an all-time low: 27% of Brockton’s 10th grade students scored proficient or advanced on the MCAS ELA, and 16% on the MCAS math. Today, student proficiency rates in ELA are at 71% and 61% in math. Initially some teachers—especially those in non academic content areas, such as physical education—were resistant. With the support from English and math teachers, however, soon non academic content teachers began to incorporate literacy into their instruction as well. Today, everyone teaches to the core elements and core skills of the Literacy Initiative. “If you want to work at Brockton High,” says Mike Thomas, the school’s Housemaster, “it’s your job. This is how we do things at Brockton High.”

