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Beacon Hill Institute faults DOE rating system

BOSTON – In an analysis of statewide school district performance released today, the Beacon Hill Institute at Suffolk University faults the Massachusetts Department of Education for inaccurately rating the performance of Massachusetts school districts. According to BHI, the DOE rating system, released yesterday, portrays certain school districts as “Average” or “Below Average” when, accurately measured, their performance is “Above Average.”

The DOE provides a “performance rating” and an “improvement rating” for English and Mathematics for individual school districts. The performance rating runs from “very high” to “critically low.” The improvement rating runs from “above target” to “declined.”

BHI rates school districts according to two performance measures: (1) the fraction of students who succeed in registering an “advanced” or “proficient” score on the MCAS test (the “G” measure) and (2) the fraction who pass the test, which is to say, who avoid a “warning” grade (the “P” measure).

For comparison purposes, Table 1 provides a composite of the DOE ratings for English and for Mathematics and compares this composite to the BHI ratings for each BHI performance measure. The table provides this comparison for five selected school districts. The DOE rates Chelsea 4th graders as “Average” in English and Mathematics, while BHI finds Chelsea 4th graders to be “Above Average” according to both of its performance measures.

Table 1: Comparing DOE and BHI Ratings

School district (grade)	DOE*	BHI**
Carver (8 th)	Average/ Below Average	Above Average/Above Average
Chelsea (4 th)	Average/Average	Above Average/Above Average
Mattapoissett (4 th)	Average/Below Average	Above Average/Above Average
Monson (4 th)	Average/Below Average	Above Average/Below Average
Pioneer Valley Reg. (4 th)	Average/Below Average	Above Average/Above Average

*Performance in English or Mathematics, respectively.

**Performance according to BHI’s “G” or “P” measure.

Each year, the state tests 4th, 8th and 10th graders under the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Scores on the test fall into four categories: “Advanced,” “Proficient,” “Needs Improvement” and “Warning.”

The BHI rating system considers the socioeconomic character of a school district, its past performance, and the resources available to it, to determine how well that school district can be *expected* to perform on the MCAS test. BHI then compares each district’s expected performance to its *actual* performance. BHI combines the measured difference between actual and expected performance with a school district’s actual performance to establish that school district’s rating.

Table 2 identifies BHI’s top ten schools, rated according to their ability to get students to fall into the top two (Advanced and Proficient categories) on the MCAS test. The Hadley school district performs particularly well, with top ten ratings for both 8th and 10th grades.

Table 2: BHI Education Assessment Model “G” Ratings

Rank	Grade 4 (264 School Districts)	Rank	Grade 8 (234 School Districts)	Rank	Grade 10 (218 School Districts)
<i>Top 10 School Districts Based on BHI Model's Ratings</i>					
1	Eastham	1	Oak Bluffs	1	Hadley
2	Whately	2	Lynnfield	2	Sutton
3	Conway	3	Richmond	3	Frontier
4	Leverett	4	Wayland	4	Amherst-Pelham
5	Foxborough	5	Westford	5	Ipswich
6	Southborough	6	Acton-Boxborough	6	Mansfield
7	Arlington	7	Hadley	7	Georgetown
8	Pentucket Regional	8	Newburyport	8	Rockport
9	Belmont	9	Longmeadow	9	Needham
10	Marshfield	10	Holliston	10	Ashland

Table 3 illustrates the ratings as found on the BHI website. When ranked according to the fraction of 4th graders who actually score in the Advanced or Proficient categories (the “G” measure), Hadley comes in below average (e.g., 145th out of 264 districts). But, when rated by BHI, Hadley comes in above average (117th out of 264) for 4th graders. It ranks 7th for 8th graders and 1st for 10th graders.

This most recent update is the latest in a number of analyses following the January 2001 release of BHI’s policy study, *Promoting Good Schools Through Wise Spending*. In August 2002 the institute released its study, *Getting Less for More: Lessons in Massachusetts Education Reform*.

Interested parents, teachers and school officials can find where their school district ranks by visiting an online database at www.beaconhill.org.

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Table 3: Raw and BHI Model Rankings of Individual School Districts
 (Sample from beaconhill.org)

Beacon Hill Institute
 for Public Policy Research
 at Suffolk University
 (Ranking based on MCAS 2002 Scores)

School District **Hadley**

	Grade Level	4 th	8 th	10 th
	Number of Districts Reporting	264	234	218
Measure 1 (G)	Raw Score Rank	145	43	1
	BHI Model Rank	117	7	1
Measure 2 (P)	Raw Score Rank	144	45	1
	BHI Model Rank	138	10	6

Beacon Hill Institute Education Assessment Model Ranking

We ranked each district according to two measures:

(Measure 1 - G) Success in getting students to score in the Advanced or Proficient categories compared to what our Education Assessment Model predicted; and

(Measure 2 - P) Success in keeping students out of the Warning category, compared to what our Education Assessment Model predicted.

The lower the number assigned to each ranking, i.e., the closer that number is to "1," the higher a school ranks. The school with a "1" ranks first, the school with a "2" ranks second, etc.

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Go to: www.beaconhill.org to find out more on individual district rankings.