



Middle School Aspirations and Pathways to College (MAPS)

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

The Roxbury Preparatory Charter School in Boston's Mission Hill neighborhood prepares its students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. A public, grades 6-8 school, Roxbury Prep is founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to and can benefit from college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum is rigorous and well-planned; 2) character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities are emphasized; and 3) a professional network supports a student's academic, social, and physical well-being.

When such an environment exists, as it does at Roxbury Prep, the results can be breathtaking. Some 85 percent of Roxbury Prep's first two graduating classes are enrolled in college, and more are on their way: 100 percent of the school's 2007 graduates gained admission to high schools with an explicit college prep mission.

To achieve this, Roxbury Prep created the Middle School Aspirations and Pathways (MAPS) to College Initiative in 2003, setting clearly defined goals, namely helping Roxbury Prep students to 1) enter and complete competitive high schools with explicit college preparatory missions; 2) prepare for standardized high school and college admission tests; 3) identify summer academic, social, and career opportunities; 4) select, apply to, and gain acceptance to an accredited college; and 5) secure educational funding.

The Roe Better Government Network researches and distributes public policy solutions for the benefit of the New England states. The Roe Papers are selected from among the most intriguing and original submissions to Pioneer Institute's annual Better Government Competition. Pioneer works with each submission's author to develop their ideas into detailed, actionable policy proposals.

We are appreciative of the Roe Foundation's generous support for this initiative. Their sustained funding has enabled Pioneer to vet these ideas with policy makers and experts as well as legislators and executive officials.

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PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Since its founding in 1999, Roxbury Prep’s enrollment has grown to 200 students. The student body is currently composed entirely of students of color. Most students live in single-parent households and 68 percent qualify for either free or reduced-price lunch. Roxbury Prep’s entering 6th graders arrive with poor basic academic skills, including one-third of students who enroll with scores on the Stanford 9 Achievement Test that are at least two years below grade level.

In 2006, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education, 43 percent of Hispanic students and 36 percent of Black students dropped-out prior to graduating high school. These rates are more than double the percentage of White students who dropped out in the same period. Furthermore, in Boston, even for students who do receive a high school diploma, only 34 percent plan to attend a four-year institution. In contrast, 90 percent of high school seniors in both Wayland and Weston, largely affluent, White suburbs of Boston, plan to attend a four-year college following their high school graduation. Without intervention, these figures indicate a bleak future for many of Boston’s students.

While college preparatory classes are not uncommon in high schools, many educational organizations and the U.S. Department of Education recommend that students begin planning for college as early as the sixth grade, before underachievement and lack of interest in school have become the accepted – and expected - norm. In low-income and minority communities where resources are often limited, families have little to no access to university planning information.

Recognizing the important link between where a student attends high school and whether they attend college, and understanding that starting a college preparation program in high school may be too late, Roxbury Prep has created a middle school culture in which college enrollment and graduation is the focus.

Many approaches accomplish this. Graduate Services Program Coordinators visited twenty-five high schools in the fall of 2007 to connect with students and their guidance counselors, while MAPS to College staff have sponsored two Mock Interview days for current 8th grade students to practice high school admissions interviews. Most importantly, Roxbury Prep has an extremely rigorous academic program that strengthens students’ core academic skills.

Academic achievement is celebrated in weekly Community Meetings and through a system of positive reinforcement and rewards. College banners adorn hallways and classrooms while discussions between staff, students, and families are often in the context of applying to, enrolling in, and graduating from college. To help students identify with college more closely, each grade visits a college campus every year.

Support does not end when students exit Roxbury Prep. Indeed, a key to the program’s success is following and supporting students throughout their high school careers. For example, MAPS staff offer SAT review courses to alumni enrolled in the Graduate Services Program, as well as individual SAT tutoring over the summer.

Appreciating the importance of continuity in personal relationships, especially between adults and adolescents, every MAPS staff member works with students for the seven years they participate in the program, minimizing the emotional disruption to students. The structure of the program allows students and families to develop trust in program staff, and provides the opportunity for staff to know each student, their family, and their individual circumstances deeply.

Graduate events are designed to support alumni in successfully completing high school and preparing for the college application process, and have included a seminar for families and students on saving money and finding scholarships for college, a ten-week study skills workshop for Graduate Services

freshmen, and college visits with Graduate Services Program juniors to several colleges including Boston College, Emmanuel College, Fordham University, Lesley University, Middlebury College, New York University, Providence College, University of Rhode Island, and Wesleyan University.

COSTS

When MAPS to College was formalized as a program in the fall of 2003, Roxbury Prep raised funds from individuals and foundations, and it continues to be funded through a combination of corporate, foundation, and individual donors. Currently, the annual cost of the program is \$143,000, with \$97,500 allocated to one fulltime MAPS Director and one half-time Graduate Services Coordinator. Test preparation courses and testing fees cost \$20,000, while another \$10,000 goes to some 30 scholarships. The remaining budget goes to Saturday programs, college visits, program analyses and professional development.

THE BENEFITS

An Intel and Scholastic School of Distinction, Roxbury Prep takes special pride in turning modest costs into impressive results. For example, on the 2007 8th grade math MCAS test, Roxbury Preparatory Charter School outperformed every school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and for the fourth consecutive year, has been the highest-performing urban middle school in the state.

Roxbury Prep's second graduating class, the Class of 2003, entered college this fall, with alumni enrolled at Boston College, Connecticut College, Howard University, Lesley University, University of Massachusetts Boston, Wesleyan University, and other universities and colleges around the country.

The MAPS to College Program has also trained its students, who come from families of limited financial means, to successfully compete for an ever shrinking supply of financial aid. The Class of 2007 earned over \$250,000 in financial aid while many students have won prestigious awards and scholarships. For

example, the school produced six John and Abigail Adams Scholarship winners – awarded to students who score “Advanced” on the 10th grade MCAS tests. Each recipient will attend a Massachusetts state university or college with a full scholarship. There were also three recipients of the Stephen Phillips Memorial Scholarship, which offers college scholarships to students who display academic excellence, strong citizenship and character, and a desire to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Roxbury Prep also recognizes the importance of exposing students to fun and exciting opportunities that also offer real-world experience. For example, during the summer of 2007, nineteen Roxbury Prep alumni participated in the Roxbury Prep PostPrep Summer Internship Program, garnering valuable work and life experiences at Boston Cares, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, the law firm of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, PC, and the office of State Senator Diane Wilkerson. With Roxbury Prep's help, both logistically and financially, students have attended NASA Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, Thompson Island Outward Bound, and many other summer programs.

APPLICABILITY TO MASSACHUSETTS

Programs similar to MAPS and serving an urban student population exist elsewhere, and have been very successful. For example, the TEAK Fellowship had 100 percent of the active Fellows in the Classes of 2004 through 2007 graduate from high school and be accepted to one or more colleges and universities, receiving, in the process, over 400 college acceptances.

Generally, students who attend urban public middle schools in Massachusetts do not have a college preparatory program like MAPS to College available to them. Students in urban schools need to start thinking about and preparing for college well before high school. Unfortunately, these types of resources are not in place. The MAPS to College Program can

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and should be replicated statewide on a school-level to enable students in urban public schools to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.

FUTURE GOALS

Having achieved excellent high school graduation and university admission figures, Roxbury Prep will begin to focus on increasing the number of college graduates. To accomplish this and pinpoint which programs and services work best, more in-depth tracking of students will be needed, including the correlation of students' performance at Roxbury Prep, in high school, and in college. This tracking will help identify predictive frameworks and high schools that are helping Roxbury Prep students reach their goal of a college education.



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