

IMPACT OF RBT PROGRAM ON REVERE (MA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS HIGHLIGHTS

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Revere Principal

By participating in the RBT courses:

- Revere administrators and teachers gained a common language and concepts about teaching that helped foster greater communication and shared expectations.
- Revere teachers adopted effective classroom management and student engagement strategies.
- Revere teachers were introduced to proven instructional strategies that helped expand their teaching repertoire.
- Revere administrators developed and strengthened their observation, documentation, and communication skills to ensure that the feedback they provided to teachers was clear, meaningful, and grounded on documented evidence.

“I absolutely believe that RBT courses have contributed to the success of our students. If we didn't have RBT courses, we wouldn't have a common language for teaching or a common belief system. We would look at students differently and wouldn't have the high expectations that we have for them.”

Revere District Director

The RBT Program contributed to:

- A professional culture in the district that reflects high expectations for both student and adult performance
- A staff supervision system that emphasizes accountability, high standards, and support for professional growth
- Collaborative decision-making structures grounded on high-functioning leadership teams to drive adult growth, instructional change, and student achievement

“When teachers take the RBT training, you see differences. Teachers reflect more and have a different attitude about their students. They have better routines. They approach assessment differently. Teachers move away from whole class to small group activities. Cooperative learning increases. Wait time increases dramatically – allowing students to reflect more. By doing all of this, teachers push students to the next level of learning.”

Revere District Director

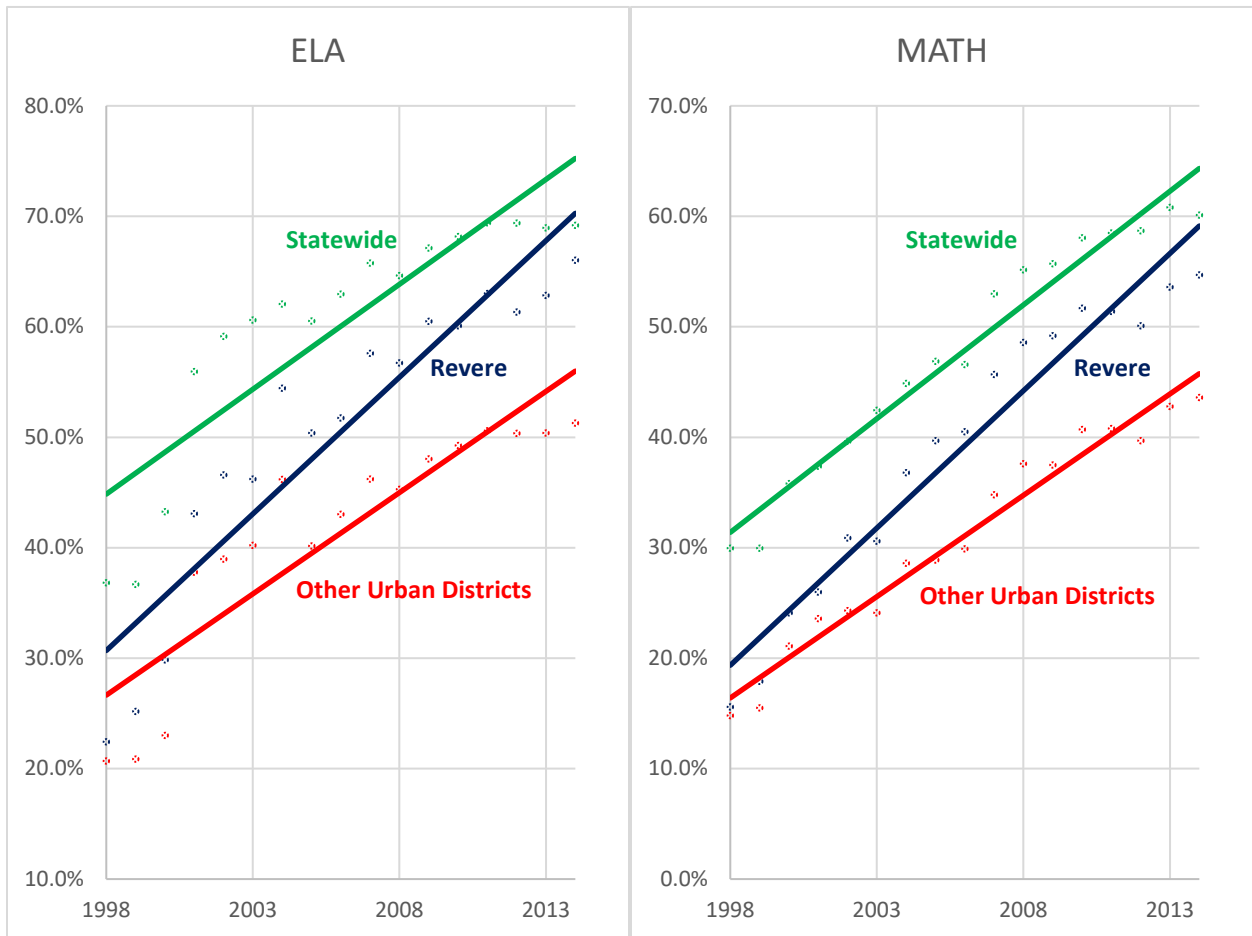
In 2014, Revere became the first urban district in Massachusetts to receive a Level II rating under the state’s school accountability system. This meant that all district schools were in the top two rating categories.

From 1998 to 2014, Revere students substantially improved their performance on the Massachusetts ELA and Math tests and substantially reduced their achievement gap with students statewide.

From 2001 to 2014, Revere made substantial progress in closing the achievement gap between its students of color and its white students on both the ELA and Math tests.

“Lots of factors went into having all schools in the district being Level 2 or better: having a common goal; having consistency among administrators and teachers; focusing on continuous improvement; focusing on students and learning objectives; having mastery objectives and criteria for success. These were the same principles that were taught in the RBT courses.”

Revere Assistant Principal



Comparison of Proficiency Rates on Annual Massachusetts Tests

**CASE STUDY ON IMPACT OF RBT PROGRAMS:
REVERE (MA) PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Noe J. Medina
November 2015**

Over the last 20 years, Research for Better Teaching (RBT) has worked in the Revere (MA) Public Schools offering courses for all teachers and administrators and providing additional technical assistance and consultation. This case study summarizes RBT activities conducted in Revere over that time and describes the impact of those activities on students, teachers, and administrators in the district.

Overview of the Revere School District¹

Revere is one of 22 urban school districts in Massachusetts. It is located just north of Boston in eastern Massachusetts. Currently, Revere enrolls over 7,000 students in 6 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, an alternative high school, and a comprehensive high school including three Expanded Learning Time Schools and one Innovation School. This makes it one of the smaller urban districts in Massachusetts. In 2006 and 2013, the district was recognized for its student achievement by the National Center for Urban School Transformation.

Over the last twenty years, the number of students enrolled in Revere schools has increased significantly and their demographics have changed dramatically. During that time, the population of Revere schools grew by more than 30% -- with half of that growth occurring over the last five years. Student population statewide has grown by only 7% during that time and has actually declined over the last decade. In urban schools, student enrollment has declined by 2% over that time.

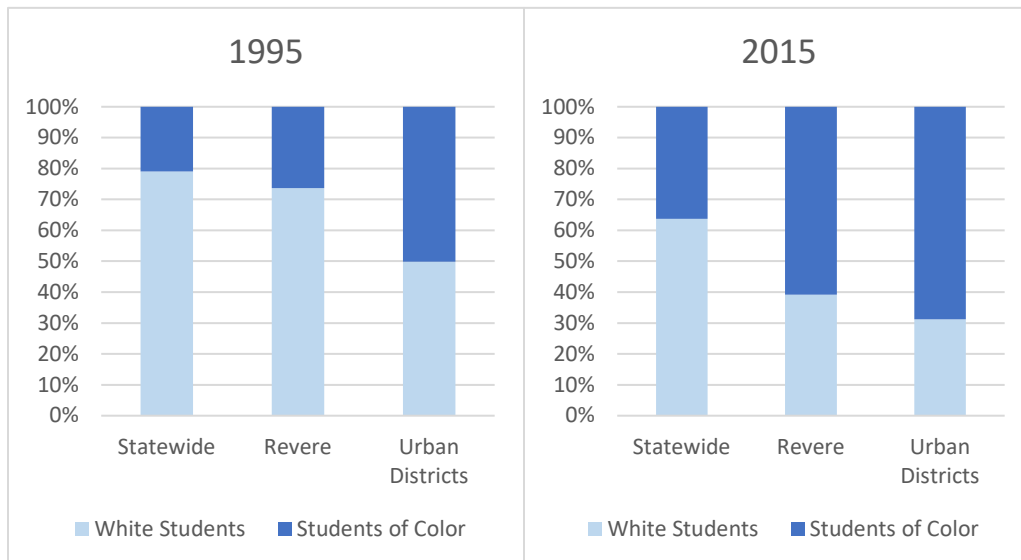


Chart 1. Public School Enrollment by Race

¹ Enrollment data in this section is drawn from public data on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

In 1995, the demographics of Revere’s student population resembled the statewide population more than it did other urban districts. Students of color accounted for 24% of the student population in Revere, 21% statewide, but 50% in other urban districts in Massachusetts. In Revere, 12% of the students were Asian, 9% were Latino, and 3% were African-American.

Over the next twenty years, the growth in the Revere student population was driven primarily by a 700% increase in Latino students. As a result, students of color now account for 61% of Revere’s student population compared to 36% statewide and 69% in other urban districts. In Revere, 48% of students are Latino, 5% are Asian, and 4% are African-American. During that time, there was also a corresponding increase in the percentage of Revere students who spoke a first language other than English and who were categorized as low-income when compared to students’ state-wide. Currently, 54% of Revere students speak a first language other than English (a 31% increase over the last twenty years) compared to 19% statewide and 78% are low-income (a 35% increase over the last twenty years) compared to 38% statewide.

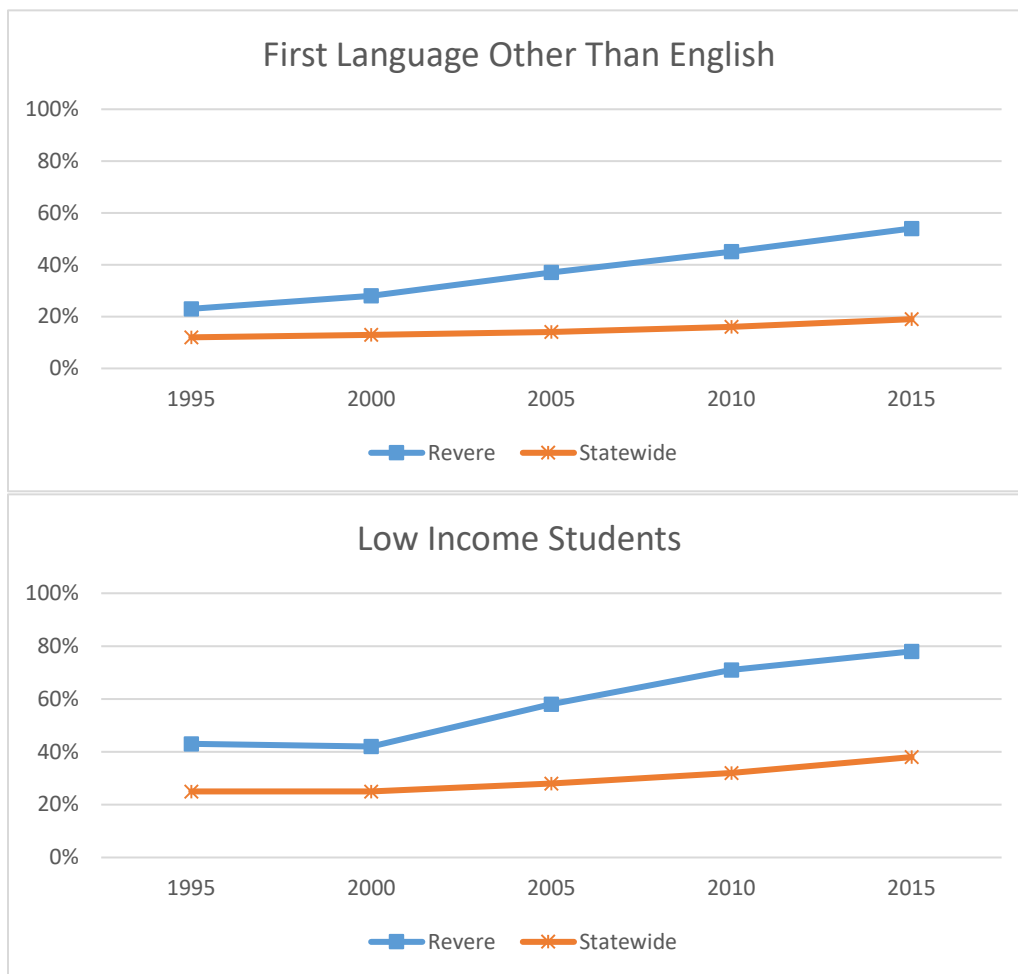


Chart 2. Public School Enrollment by Selected Characteristics

The Revere School District has developed the following mission statements to guide its services and support for its students:

“The Revere Public Schools provide personalized and meaningful education to all students so that they individually experience superior personal development by:

- *Engaging all members of our educational community in the decision-making process*
- *Ensuring rigor and relevance throughout all curricular areas*
- *Ensuring positive relationships among all members of the school community*
- *Fostering resilience within all members of the school community*
- *Fostering and celebrating innovation throughout our system”*

Description of RBT Program²

Teacher Course. RBT was originally brought into the Revere School District during the 1994-95 school year by its former Superintendent, Wayne LaGue, to train mentor teachers through a new grant from the state. RBT’s initial work under this grant involved delivery of its basic teacher course (*Understanding Teaching*) to the district’s mentor teacher candidates.

The perceived success of that course in improving teaching practices and changing the professional culture of the district led the Superintendent to expand participation in the course beyond the mentor teachers. Ultimately, a policy was established requiring all Revere teachers to complete the RBT course during their first three years of employment in the district (unless they had previously taken the course). This requirement was maintained by subsequent Revere Superintendents and continues to apply to the current version of the RBT teacher course (*Studying Skillful Teaching*). This course was designed to help teachers build their capacity to improve their practices and their students’ achievement, develop common language and conceptual frameworks about teaching, and strengthen the adult professional culture in the schools.

Administrator Course. Soon after they began to work with Revere, RBT was invited by the Superintendent to deliver its administrator course (*Observing & Analyzing Teaching*) to administrators in the district. Positive response to this course led to a requirement that all Revere district administrators, school principals, and assistant/vice principals complete that course during their first year of employment. This requirement has also been maintained under the current version of the RBT administrator course (*Analyzing Teaching for Student Results*). According to RBT, this course expanded an administrator’s capacity to influence the quality of teaching and improve student performance. It accomplished this by helping administrators understand what is critical to student learning, how to analyze teacher decisions and actions, how to communicate better about teaching, and how to provide strategic leadership to improve teaching and learning.

Administrator Seminar. In addition to the two courses, the lead RBT trainer working with Revere (Caroline Tripp) conducted a monthly administrator seminar in Revere. Each session would explore questions relevant to decision-making issues, instructional leadership, and staff supervision in Revere. The purposes of the seminar were to strengthen the leadership capacity of

² Information in this section was drawn from interviews with: Caroline Tripp, former RBT trainer who served as coordinator of RBT services in Revere for over a decade; Jon Saphier, founder and president of RBT who coordinated RBT services in Revere over the last few years; Paul Dakin, recently retired Revere Superintendent; and Dianne Kelly, the new Revere Superintendent and former Assistant Superintendent. Information was also drawn from RBT course enrollment records.

Revere administrators (both individually and as a team), improve the professional culture of the district, define shared expectations for teaching and learning in the district, and promote systemic change efforts.

Through the administrator seminar, RBT staff also assisted district leadership in Revere to develop and implement a staff evaluation and professional growth system. This system reflected essential RBT concepts for improving teaching and learning and was designed to hold administrator and teachers accountable for maintaining high expectations for their own work and for their students.

RBT trainers stopped conducting these seminars. However, Revere administrators continued to meet at the district level. These monthly meetings were directly led by the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent with the RBT trainer serving as an observer, advisor, and critical friend to the district leaders and the team. The RBT trainer attended 3 or 4 meetings each year.

New RBT Initiative. Four years ago, RBT staff led by Jon Saphier (founder and president of the organization) a new grant-funded initiative with Revere. This initiative was focused on implementing a new, more collaborative district-wide leadership and decision-making structure in Revere. It involved the establishment of a new Revere Education Leadership Board (RELB) including teachers and administrators from across the district. The RELB was responsible working collaboratively with central office leaders to guide and oversee district initiatives and change processes while creating structures and procedure for ensuring the sustainability of these initiatives. Working in association with the RELB were seven Leadership Councils – each focused on a specific topic (Recruitment, Hiring and Placement; Mentor/Induction; Professional Development; Professional Growth; Teacher Leadership & Career Ladders; Organizational Structure; Adult Professional Culture). According to district leadership, they are “still refining” this structure and its operation with the goal of ensuring that “collaborative decision-making becomes the cultural norm in the district.”

Impact of RBT Program³

Impact on Teachers and Teaching. Based on feedback from administrators interviewed for this report,⁴ participation in the RBT teacher course had three broad types of impact on teachers and teaching:

- Provided a common language and concepts about teaching to foster greater communication and shared understanding
- Provided effective classroom management and student engagement strategies
- Introduced many proven instructional strategies to expanding their teaching repertoire

As a result, most Revere teachers benefitted from participation in the RBT teacher course. Several administrators noted that benefits were particularly significant for teachers who had not been education majors in college and those who were career-changers.

³ Information in this section was drawn from interviews conducted in Spring 2015 with 28 district and school administrators in Revere, including the Superintendent, both Assistant Superintendents, 7 district directors, 8 principals, and 10 assistant/vice principals. At least one administrator was interviewed from each Revere school.

⁴ 70% to 80% of the administrators interviewed reported each of the three types of impact.

Almost all of the administrators⁵ who commented on the issue reported that most teachers taking the RBT course were more immediately successful in adopting classroom management and student engagement strategies while embracing new instructional practices took more time. This was generally consistent with their own experiences as well.

“When teachers take the RBT training, you see differences. Teachers reflect more and have a different attitude about their students. They have better routines. They approach assessment differently. Teachers move away from whole class to small group activities. Cooperative learning increases. Wait time increases dramatically – allowing students to reflect more. By doing all of this, teachers push students to the next level of learning.”

Revere District Director

Administrators⁶ reported that participation in the RBT teacher course contributed to improvement in several areas including:

- Demonstration and communication of high expectations for all students
- Student engagement and motivation
- Use of classroom rituals and routines for classroom management
- Use of small group instruction and differentiated instruction
- Lesson planning
- Developing effective learning objectives

“There are district-wide expectations that every lesson has posted objectives, essential questions, lessons with activators and summarizers. This isn’t just a checklist but it’s purposeful. Teachers understand the intent of these expectations, so they are really implementing the intent of these expectations for themselves and their students. This has all been influenced by the RBT courses.”

Revere District Director

Participation in the course also had lasting benefits for teachers. Two-thirds of the administrators interviewed reported that they continued to refer back to RBT course materials after the course ended. More than 80% reported that they and their colleagues used RBT course materials as a reference tool in coaching or supervising their teachers.⁷

Impact on Administrators and Supervision. One significant impact of the RBT administrator course (OAT/ATSR) was on the technical skills of the Revere administrators. Virtually every administrators interviewed reported that the observation, documentation, and communication skills developed and strengthened through the RBT administrator course helped ensure that the feedback they provided to teachers was clear, meaningful, and grounded on documented evidence. The CEIJ (Claims, Evidence, Impact, and Judgment) concept was characterized as a

⁵ 12 of 13 administrators interviewed reported this.

⁶ 60% to 75% of the administrators interviewed reported improvement in each area.

⁷ One administrator reported having “dog-eared books” from both courses that she still consults regularly and even using her mother’s RBT binder from 1992 when her mother took the course.

particularly effective tool developed through the RBT course. There was a general consensus that the RBT course helped build the capacity of Revere administrators to “observe and unpack real classroom issues – whether they involve the rituals and routines or relationships with students or other issues – and help teachers find the next steps to improve.”

“RBT principles allowed me to communicate consistent set of high expectations to my staff. They also allowed me to provide substantive feedback with specific evidence to teachers when our shared expectations weren’t being met. My school was a level 3 when I arrived four years ago. This process helped us to move up to level 2.”

Revere Principal

Through the administrator seminars conducted by the RBT trainers, Revere designed and implemented a staff evaluation system that was “heavily informed by RBT concepts” according to the recently-retired Revere Superintendent. The RBT administrator course aligned with and supported implementation of that system.

During the last few years, Revere has adopted a new staff evaluation system that emphasizes shorter and more frequent observations by administrators and feedback from administrators to teachers. The system is designed to promote much more reflection on teaching by both administrators and teachers in the context of an ongoing, interactive “dialogue” between them.

The recently-retired Revere Superintendent noted that “the new system seeks to move the RBT concepts to a higher level.” As a result, the observation and communication skills and methods developed through the RBT administrator course (including concepts around deep questioning, making thinking visible, and understanding the factors associated with good teaching) were still be relevant and valuable under the new system. All of the Revere administrators interviewed for this report agreed with this statement although several claimed that some “modifications” or “shifts” in the methods were required to accommodate the new system.

Like the RBT teacher course, the RBT administrator course also contributed to the development of common language and concepts related to teaching among Revere administrators and teachers. As one district administrator reported, “Every conversation among administrators, between administrators and teachers, and among teachers incorporated common RBT language.” This helped build a “shared understanding among all Revere staff of best teaching practices” and “ensured that everyone in Revere is on the same page.” Almost all administrators concluded that the creation of this shared framework made discussions about teaching among Revere staff more efficient, more frequent, more substantive, and more effective.

“The RBT courses are the basis for our teaching philosophy in Revere. They show us how our classrooms should be organized and run. They help teachers understand that their mindset and belief systems have an impact on how their students learn. They help us learn about structures and programs to make sure that student can meet high expectations. They help administrators learn that we must hold teachers accountable to achieve this.”

Revere Principal

Common language and concepts also promoted greater consistency in the nature of the feedback provided by administrators to teachers within each school and across the district. Revere consciously enhanced this level of consistency by conducting regular administrator meetings to review and calibrate observations and feedback.

“Revere is much more consistent in its observations and feedback than most other districts because of our efforts around calibration and expectations. That started with everyone taking the RBT administrator course.”

Revere District Director

Contribution to District-Level Change

The RBT program, particularly the informal consultation provided by Caroline Tripp, Jon Saphier, and other RBT staff, have directly contributed to several long-term systemic change efforts in Revere. This has included:

- A professional culture in the district that reflects high expectations for both student and adult performance
- A staff supervision system that emphasizes accountability, high standards, and support for professional growth
- Collaborative decision-making structures grounded on high-functioning leadership teams to drive adult growth, instructional change, and student achievement

At the same time, the RBT program has also indirectly contributed to the development and success of a wider range of district change efforts by providing a foundation (in the form of common language and concepts) or serving as an inspiration. Administrators reported the RBT program had elevated the quality of discussions in professional learning groups and promoted their effectiveness. Similarly, administrators reported that the RBT program supported and enhanced the work of the instructional coaches across the district – contributing to shared expectations, offering a source for best practices, and helping to promote an atmosphere of trust among the coaches and teachers. Revere administrators emphasized that there were “many programs, practices, and agencies that have contributed to the district’s success in recent years” but that “RBT program was an important piece of the puzzle.”

“Our best programs have involved lots of internal work but they were not developed completely internally. Good external critical partners like RBT offered stimulus from the outside in evolving these programs. They understand our philosophy and where we want to go and help us make the philosophy real.”

Revere Superintendent Dianne Kelly

Student Academic Performance in Revere⁸

During their interviews, district leaders in Revere articulated a fundamental belief that “all students can succeed if they are given the best education.” This belief was also reflected in the district’s written vision statement:

“Our school community is multicultural and diverse. Revere celebrates this rich tapestry of heritage and aspirations and remains united in its efforts to realize the full intellectual, social, and physical potential of every child. In this endeavor, we shall maintain a safe environment that nurtures curiosity, dignity, and the promotion of social responsibility.”

It appears that this belief has been present among district leaders since RBT began to work in Revere twenty years ago. Carol Tye was the Assistant Superintendent in Revere at that time and served as Superintendent from 1996 to 2001. She was identified in an article⁹ published in 2000 as a district leader who was promoting the powerful message that school administrators and teachers can make a difference for all children. She was quoted in that article as saying “We have to convince the administrators [in our district] that they and the teachers don’t have to stay the way they are, that they are good people capable of learning and growing. I wasn’t going to settle for less.” Current district and school administrators¹⁰ reported that this effort has been successful and that most of Revere teachers embrace high expectations for all of their students.

“Administrators in Revere hold and maintain high expectations for their teachers. The teachers maintain those same high expectations for their students and help convey what the students need to succeed.”

Revere Principal

This effort has resulted in long-term student academic improvement in Revere. In 2014, Revere became the first urban district in Massachusetts to receive a Level II rating under the state’s school accountability system. This meant that all district schools were in the top two rating categories. All other urban districts in Massachusetts had a rating of Level III or worse.

An analysis of student performance on the state tests comparing Revere students with students in all other urban districts and all students statewide provides clear evidence of long-term academic improvement by Revere students in both English Language Arts and Mathematics (see charts 3 and 4 on the next page).

⁸ Student test results and school assessment results are drawn from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

⁹ “Confronting Institutional Mediocrity” by Caroline Tripp & Alexander Pitt. *The School Administrator*, Oct. 2000.

¹⁰ Reported by about 80% of school administrators who were interviewed.

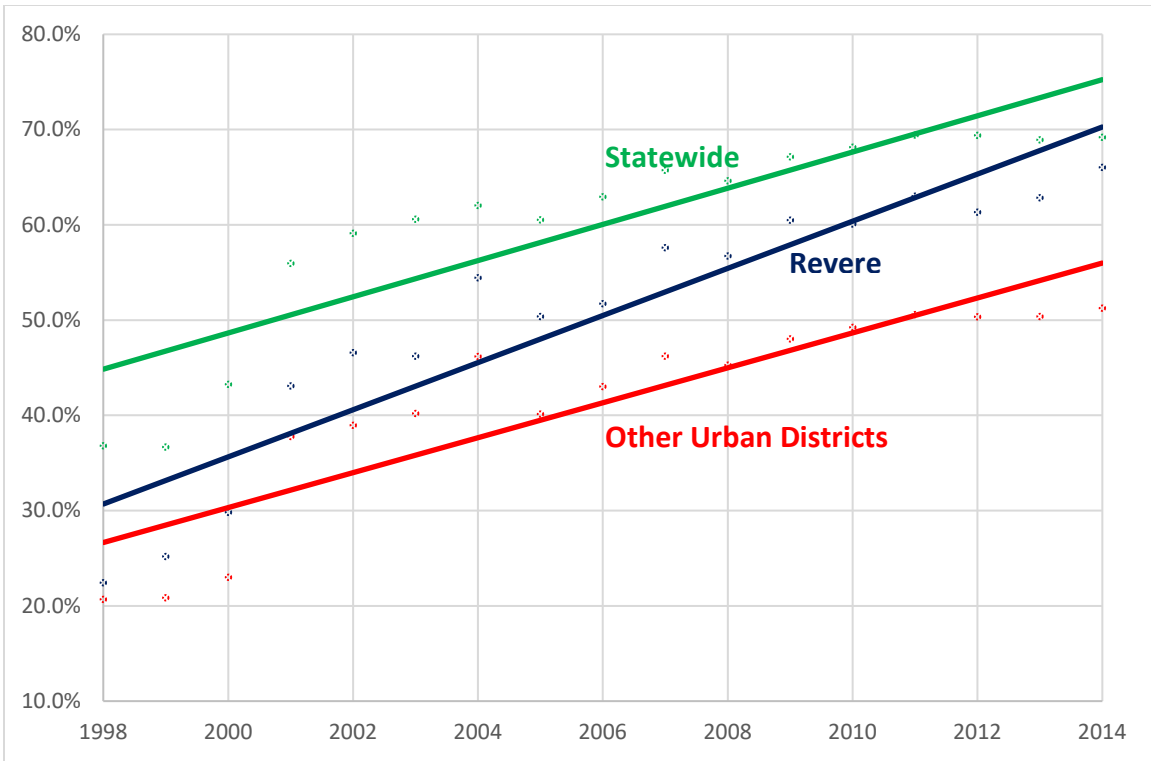


Chart 3. Comparison of Proficiency Rates on Massachusetts ELA Test.

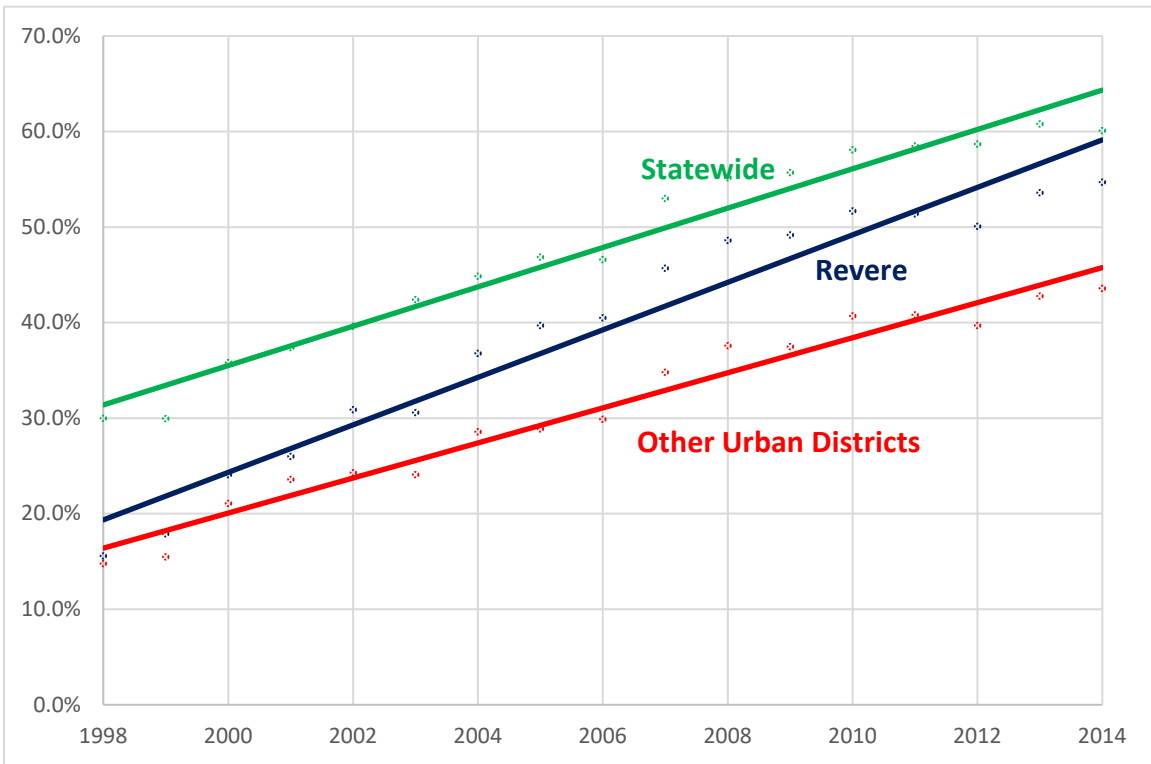


Chart 4. Comparison of Proficiency Rates on Massachusetts Math Test

In 1998, the proficiency rate of Revere students on the state ELA test was 61% of the statewide rate and barely above the rate for all other urban districts (56% of the statewide rate). By 2014, Revere students had almost eliminated that achievement gap with a proficiency rate that was 95% of the statewide rate and were performing substantially higher than students in other urban districts (whose rate was only 74% of the statewide rate).

The same pattern was observed on the state Math test. In 1998, Revere students had a proficiency rate that was 52% of the statewide rate while students in other urban districts had a rate that was 49% of the statewide rate. By 2014, the Revere rate was 91% of the statewide rate while the rate for other urban districts was only 73% of the statewide rate.

As chart 5 indicates, the district also made considerable progress in closing the academic achievement gap between students of color and white students. In 2001, students of color had proficiency rates that were 65% of the rates for White students on the ELA test and 52% on the Math test. In 2014, both gaps had declined substantially. On the ELA test, students of color had proficiency rates that were 91% of the rates for White students. On the Math test, they had proficiency rates that were 83% of the rates for White students.

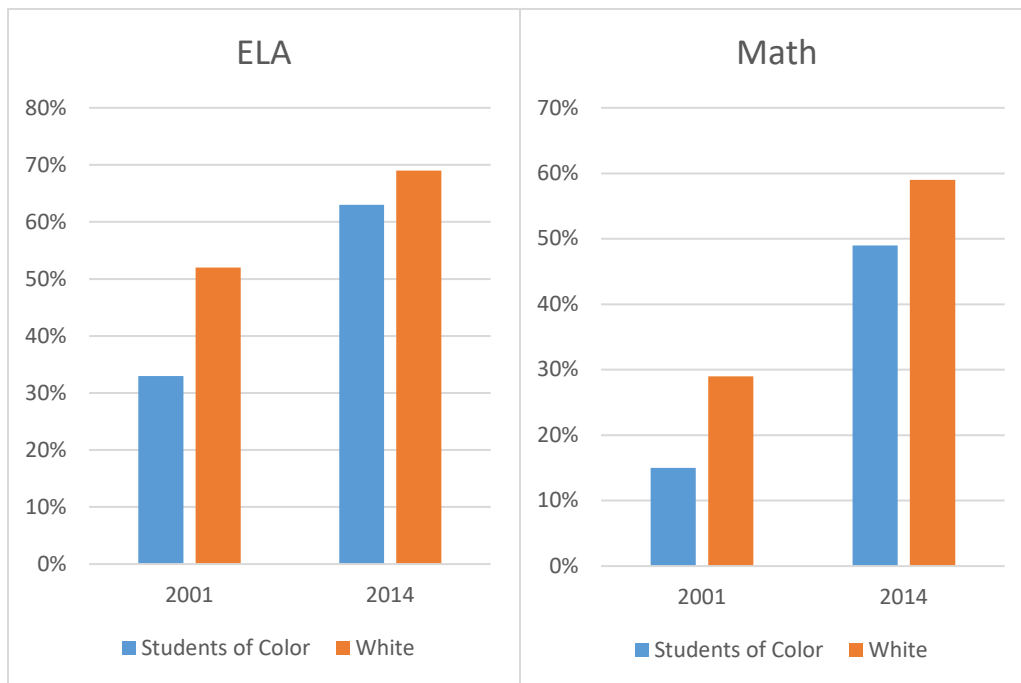


Chart 5. Comparison of Proficiency Rates by Race/Ethnicity

In the interviews, Revere administrators confirmed that the RBT programs had made important contributions to Revere students’ improved academic performance over the last two decades:

- “The high school has received awards from several sources for the performance of its students. A combination of approaches have helped them to succeed but RBT has been important part of those approaches. These approaches have helped teachers embrace the cause of high-quality education and build a growth mindset for adults and students. This

has absolutely helped teachers to teach better and students to learn better. It's all about sharing and learning from each other.” (Principal)

- “The RBT courses helped perpetuate and advance the overall mission of the district that ‘all students can succeed.’ When we look at what we’re doing, we’re always thinking about that. It’s a belief that we’ve instilled in students that I know you can do your best. Our schools have been getting students with greater challenges but those students continue to succeed.” (Principal)
- “Lots of factors went into having all schools in the district being Level 2 or better: having a common goal; having consistency among administrators and teachers; focusing on continuous improvement; focusing on students and learning objectives; having mastery objectives and criteria for success. These were the same principles that were taught in the RBT courses.” (Assistant Principal)
- “The RBT courses have definitely contributed to student success in our district. The teaching course provides initial support to teachers during their first few years to fine tune their teaching through common language and best practices. The administrator course leads to more consistent and high quality feedback from administrators to help teachers continue to improve their practices.” (District Director)
- “I absolutely believe that RBT courses have contributed to the success of our students. If we didn’t have RBT courses, we wouldn’t have a common language for teaching or a common belief system. We would look at students differently and wouldn’t have the high expectations that we have for them.” (District Director)

Conclusion

Over the last two decades, RBT has offered its teacher course to all Revere teachers and its administrator course to all Revere administrators. RBT staff have also provided consultation and technical assistance about staff evaluation systems, collaborative leadership and decision-making, and high-leverage teaching. The RBT program has contributed to a common language and belief system in the district that embraces high expectations for all adults and all students. It has improved teaching practices in the classroom, improved the quality of feedback and observations provided by administrators to teachers, and improved the adult professional culture. This program has also provided a foundation for other district improvement efforts and work with other service providers. Ultimately, the RBT program has contributed to consistent and considerable improvement in the academic performance of Revere students and a substantial reduction in the academic achievement gap that previously existed between Revere and the state.