

## Vocational Education Justice Coalition Examining 2023-2024 Admissions Data

**1. In 2003, the Board of Elementary & Secondary Education approved a selective vocational school admissions policy.**

In 2003, the Board of Elementary & Secondary Education (BESE) adopted new state vocational school admissions policies that enabled district and regional vocational schools to rank order and select applicants using grades, attendance, discipline records, guidance counselor recommendations, and interviews. The primary reason why vocational school superintendents and school committees successfully lobbied the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) for these new policies was that their respective schools would have low MCAS passing rates due to the student bodies they served, and with the advent of the MCAS graduation requirement, they would be labeled by the state as underperforming.

**2. The impact of the new state policy resulted in discriminatory and disproportionate underrepresentation in admissions of students of color, low-income students, English Learners, and students with disabilities in our state’s regional vocational schools.**

2021-2022 MA Statewide Data: Percent Offers Made to Applicants							
SOC	White	ED	Non-ED	SPED	Non-SPED	EL	Non-EL
62	72	60	76	60	70	51	69

**3. The VEJC expressed our concerns to BESE that the revised vocational school admissions policies, approved in June 2021, were too incremental and would not make a sizable difference. We were right.**

Gap sizes increased in all four comparisons for the 2022-2023 school year. Yet, DESE and the Secretary of Education told the Vocational Education Justice Coalition that they didn’t want to act to remedy the problem until they had two years of data post the June 2021 BESE regulatory changes. *The 2023-2024 school year data reveals that the gaps remain large. Thus, the state has waited one more year while students from protected classes have been denied opportunities to enroll in a vocational school that could provide them with a successful educational experience and a pathway to a middle-class life.*

MA Statewide Data: Percent Offers Made to Applicants												
Year	SOC	White	Gap Size	ED	Non-ED	Gap Size	SPED	Non-SPED	Gap Size	EL	Non-EL	Gap Size
2021-22	62%	72%	10	60%	76%	16	60%	70%	10	51%	69%	18
2022-23	55%	69%	14	54%	72%	18	54%	65%	11	44%	64%	20
2023-24	54%	64%	10	50%	68%	18	49%	62%	13	42%	60%	18

**4. DESE continues to claim that the disproportionality in admissions of students by race, income, disability, and language is a problem isolated to only a few regional vocational schools.**

In fact, disproportionality exists in the [vast majority of these schools](#).

- Twenty-three of the 27 regional vocational schools that submitted data<sup>1</sup>, or 85%, had one or more categories in which applicants of the protected class were offered seats at rates that were 10+ percentage points lower than that of more privileged students. Twenty-two schools, or 81%, had two

<sup>1</sup> Shawsheen Valley RVT does not have data entered on the DESE website.

or more categories in which applicants of the protected class were offered seats at rates that were 10+ percentage points lower than that of more privileged students.

- One school, McCann Technical School, offered seats to almost every applicant.

**5. DESE recently notified four regional vocational schools that their data indicated potential disparate impact on the admission of one or more protected classes of students, as if these were the only schools with wide admissions gaps that harmed students from protected classes.**

Percent of Applicants Offered Seats: 2023-2024 School Year								
Schools Targeted by DESE	SOC	White	Low-Income	Non-LI	SPED	Non-SPE D	EL	Non-EL
Bay Path RVT	47	59	47	63	50	57	27	57
Greater Lowell RVT	50	58	40	73	35	57	39	55
Gr. New Bedford RVT	58	66	51	80	49	65	53	63
Montachusett RVT	39	57	34	63	29	55	13	51

Yet, 17 of 27 regional vocational schools, or 63%, have one or more categories in which applicants of the protected class were offered seats at rates that were 20+ percentage points lower than that of more privileged students. Eight of 27 regional vocational schools, or 30%, had two or more categories in which applicants of the protected class were offered seats at rates that were 20+ percentage points lower than that of more privileged students.

**6. And yet, once students are offered seats, students from historically marginalized groups accept seats at higher rates than their more privileged peers.**

Students from protected classes have fewer opportunities for pathways to a middle-class life than do their more privileged peers.

2023-2024 MA Statewide Data: Percent Acceptance of Offer Made							
SOC	White	ED	Non-ED	SPED	Non-SPED	EL	Non-EL
86	79	86	79	84	82	89	82

**7. While statewide, the percent of English Learner (EL) applicants (26%) from the eligible population is comparable to the percent of applicants from more privileged groups (28%), there are a number of regional vocational schools with wide gaps in English Learner applicants versus their peers.**

In 12 of 27 regional vocational schools, or 44%, the percent of eligible EL students who applied was 10+ percentages points lower than the percent of eligible non-EL students who applied. In seven regional vocational schools, or 26%, this gap was 20 percentage points or greater. Clearly, there is still a systemic problem in the recruitment of English Learners.

In summary, the glaring gaps in admission rates between students from protected classes versus students from more privileged groups has continued, with BESE’s 2021 incremental changes to the state’s vocational schools’ admissions policies having no impact on these disparities. DESE refuses to acknowledge that the reason for the systemic disproportionate, discriminatory admissions is due to the state policy itself which enables vocational schools and programs to use criteria – including grades, attendance, and discipline - that research has shown to have bias by race, income, disability, and language. The state’s vocational schools’ admissions policy further embeds bias by enabling vocational schools and

programs to rank order select students for admission, further ensuring that disproportionately lower percentages of students from protected classes will be selected. Further, a disproportionate number of students from protected classes do not even apply, as they determine that the selective criteria will prevent them from being offered a seat.

The state continues to cling to the wrong interpretation of the federal law regarding discriminatory vocational school admissions by measuring disparate impact via whether the enrolled population of vocational schools is representative of the sending districts' enrollment. Rather, federal law requires that vocational schools "must not use criteria that have the effect of disproportionately excluding persons of a particular race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability unless they demonstrate that such criteria have been validated as essential to participation in vocational programs; and alternative equally valid criteria that do not have such a disproportionate adverse effect are unavailable." In examining the data on applicants who are offered a seat, there is clear evidence that grades, discipline, attendance, guidance counselor recommendations, and interviews result in exclusionary admissions. This data doesn't even include those students of protected classes who are discouraged from even applying due to the exclusionary criteria.