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Superintendent Thomas Anderson

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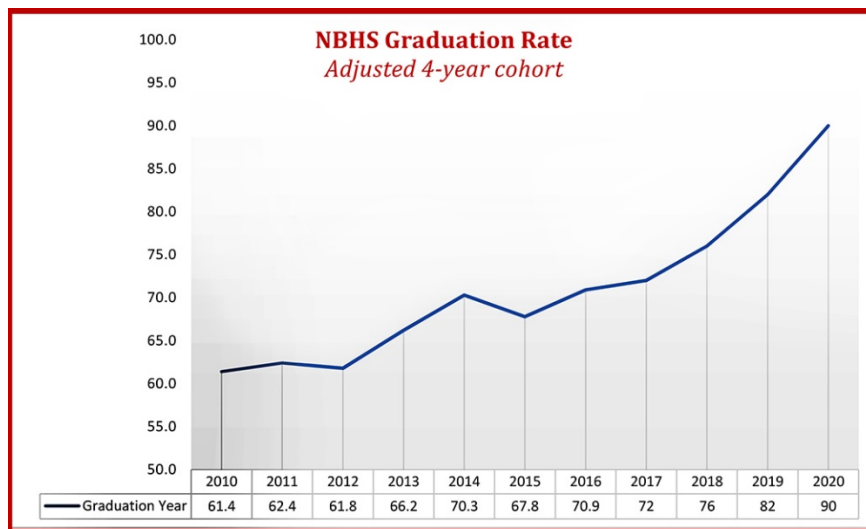
New Bedford High School Graduation Rate Soars To 90% – Highest Since State Tracking Began and a 30-Point Jump in 10 Years

Four-year cohort graduation rate increases by 7.5% from 82.5% in 2019 to 90% in 2020 – up nearly 30 points from 61.4% in 2011

Four-year rate graduation climbed 32 points from 55.8% in 2010 to 88.1% in 2020

New Bedford High School’s 2020 four-year cohort graduation rate has increased to 90%, a historic increase that marks a nearly 30-percentage point increase since 2010, based on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) recent reporting on statewide graduation rates.

New Bedford High School’s four-year cohort graduation rate of 90% in 2020 – an increase of nearly 30 percentage points, from 61.4% in 2010. The total four-year graduation rate has increased over 32 percentage points, from 55.8% in 2010 to 88.1% in 2020. The 2020 four-year cohort graduation rate was 90%, a 7.5% increase from the previous year. The 2020 dropout rate was just 2.1%, down from a high of 9% in 2009. While MCAS was not included as a graduation requirement in 2020, it was only one metric of several and appears to have had little impact on graduation rates; most schools’ graduation rates did not experience significant increases or changes. New Bedford High School’s graduation rate has improved consistently for the past consecutive nine years.



A milestone for New Bedford High School and the district

News of the graduation rate marks an important point in New Bedford High's history. In 2011, a report by DESE identified problem areas, among them struggles with attendance, graduation, and retention, given the high school's low graduation rate. The school was designated as "underperforming," resulting in monitoring by the state of the school and the district. In 2012, a major reform effort began, and thanks to years of hard work by the city's teachers, school staff, school- and district-level administrators, students in New Bedford have made significant gains over the past nine years. Student test scores have increased, a strategic plan for continuous improvement is in place for the district, and the district's success has been recognized.

In 2017, given the enormous progress made by New Bedford Public Schools, including the beginning of this increase in the high school graduation rate, state officials declared New Bedford "an extremely different district" than it had been at the start of monitoring in 2011. Citing "great strides to address the systemic concerns raised in the 2011 review," and "effective processes in place in order to continue meaningful improvement," the district was released from state monitoring in 2017. Since that time, New Bedford High School's graduation rate has continued to increase, as have test scores, and participation and success in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and college admissions successes.

Focus on equity: ensuring success for all students – EL graduation rate up 56 points since 2014

A critical component of success for New Bedford High School and the district has been ensuring success for all students through a lens of equity, since the start of the district's reform efforts nearly nine years ago. A focus on accurate and adequate identification of English Learners (EL) students, who had not been properly identified in the district before school improvement efforts began, led to a significant increase in English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. Among EL students, the graduation rate has also soared a staggering 56 percentage points in the past six years alone– from a four-year graduation rate of 29.2% in 2014 to 85.1% in 2020.

Focus on success for all students has been seen at the high school and across the district. In 2020, the James B. Congdon Elementary School was recognized as a 2020 National Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education – one of just six such schools in Massachusetts and the only one outside an affluent suburb – and has been designated a statewide School of Recognition by DESE for the past two years. Congdon's student body includes 34% of students designated as ELs.

School leaders expressed pride at the overall increase in New Bedford High School's Advanced Placement participation rate from 45.5% in 2019 to 51.3% in 2020. English Learner (EL) students saw strong growth for the third consecutive year increasing from 66.7% in 2019 to 81.3% in 2020.

Superintendent Thomas Anderson stated, "This is excellent progress and clearly shows that when we invest in our students the possibilities are endless. New Bedford High School continues to show significant growth with more students graduating to what is now an all-time high – 90%. On a daily basis our students have demonstrated their ability to grasp rigorous subject matter and meet high academic expectations. We believe in them, and most importantly, they believe in themselves. New Bedford High School is delivering on its pledge of excellence – to foster critical thinkers who are college and career ready in the digital age. The staff is to be commended for this milestone."

Mayor Jon Mitchell said, "In 2011, the New Bedford Public Schools were placed under state monitoring and were threatened with full state receivership, due in no small part to the low graduation rate at New Bedford High School. In my campaign for mayor that year, I said that the graduation rate was unacceptable, and that although it would take time, we would not allow the doors of opportunity to be closed to our city's schoolchildren. It has not been easy along the way, but today's announcement shows that major reform in urban public education can be achieved with an unwavering, long term commitment to higher standards."

Such achievement would not be possible without strong leadership, and Mayor Mitchell recognized Superintendent Thomas Anderson and his team for their tireless and sharp focus on improving student achievement for all of New Bedford's children, including significant gains under the Superintendent's leadership, and Headmaster Bernadette Coelho and her team for their commitment to working with students to ensure every New Bedford High School graduate is primed for success.

The Mayor recognized his colleagues on the School Committee for their continued dedication to prioritizing the advancement of New Bedford's students, and their support, which has set the right conditions for significant advancement by the district. He also thanked those who have worked toward the end of maximizing opportunity for New Bedford's schoolchildren, including former district leadership and staff over the last decade that began this successful reform effort.

Mayor Mitchell, who serves as ex-officio Chairman of the School Committee, also singled out the role that education advocates played in turning the city's attention toward improving student outcomes in New Bedford Public Schools before he took office, including the New Bedford Education Roundtable, which was chaired by former NAACP of New Bedford President Bruce Rose. The Mayor cited the impact of consistent media scrutiny and thanked Bob Unger, former editor of The Standard-Times, for his dedication of resources and energy to draw attention to the issue of education reform.

Mr. Unger said, "These remarkable gains are the result of the steady commitment of the Mayor, Superintendent, School Committee, business and nonprofit leaders, teachers and principals, parents and children. This shows what happens when we work together to raise expectations for all our children, who will be prepared to contribute to their neighborhoods and their city and to lead happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives. It gives me such hope for the future of our city. I also am proud of the role The Standard-Times has played in reporting on public education and in advocating for improvement."

Headmaster Bernadette Coelho, said, "Getting to 90% has required building an enhanced scaffold of supports and programming that not only assists students throughout their four years but also enhances their academic and social experience. It is designed to appeal to them to want to be here and to actively participate.

"The hallmark of supporting our students is that every effort is highly personalized. From the first day they walk in as freshmen to the day they cross Walsh Field as graduates, they have had a designated support team of educators and staff that follows each of them throughout their four years. This is deep work; it involves constant interaction with students, including teachers knocking on doors when necessary.

"Frankly, MCAS is only one marker; our students must meet all of our local and state requirements for a diploma, demonstrating competency in rigorous coursework. In our regular meetings with DESE, the data shows that NBHS' progress and the numbers speak to the level of work we are doing here. We are gaining momentum, with new and enhanced programs such as the Academy of Honors, the NAF career academies, and full open access.

"Our commitment as a team is to work personally with every student to see them through to graduation and be ready for the next opportunity on their continued journey. It is the hard work and perseverance of our students with the ongoing support of teachers, staff and families, that makes this happen. I could not be prouder of our New Bedford High School students."

Photo: Mayor Jon Mitchell, ex officio Chair of the School Committee speaks at a press conference at New Bedford High School, which has seen its graduation rate soar to 90%, the highest since state tracking began. Joining him (L-R): Headmaster Bernadette Coelho, School Committee members Joshua Amaral and Bruce Oliveira, and Superintendent Thomas Anderson. (NBPS photo)