

## **Vocational Education Justice Coalition**

### **Analysis of Completed Applications Versus Offered Seats**

In 2003, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved regulations that enable vocational Schools to choose their students by ranking them by Grades, Attendance, Discipline, and Guidance Counselor Recommendations, and they have the option to add an Interview. Every regional vocational and agricultural school has adopted some form of selective admissions criteria, as has some district-based vocational schools.

The Vocational Education Justice Coalition analyzed Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on Chapter 74 schools' admissions. We compared the number of students who completed applications for enrollment versus the number of students who were offered seats by the receiving vocational school. **In particular, we computed the percent of students from historically marginalized groups versus the percent of more privileged students who apply and are offered seats in four comparisons: students of color vs. White students, economically disadvantaged vs. advantaged students, students with disabilities vs. mainstream students, English Learners vs. non-English Learners.**

Data analysis revealed the following findings:

#### **Regional Vocational Technical Schools (RVT, 24 schools)**

- In 89 of 91 comparison points, or 98%, a greater percent of more privileged students were offered seats than their peers from historically marginalized groups. On the other hand, in only one comparison point, or 1%, was there a higher percent of students within a historically marginalized group offered seats than their more privileged peers.
- In 71 or 78% of comparison points, historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a rate that was more than five percentage points less than their more privileged peers.
- In 56 or 62% of comparison points, historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a rate that was more than 10 percentage points less than their more privileged peers.
- In 28 or 31% of comparison points, historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a rate that was more than 20 percentage points less than their more privileged peers. Nineteen of the 24 vocational schools or 79% had at least one comparison point in which the percent of students from historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a rate that was more than 20 percentage points lower than their more privileged peers.

*(Note on the data analysis. There were 5 RVTs that had no English Learners (EL) apply and as such were not included in the analysis. There were 6 RVTs that had low numbers of EL students apply (from 1 to 5 students), with all six schools not offering a seat to any EL applicants. These six RVTs were included in the analysis if the rate of offered seats to non-EL students in that school were applied to the applicant pool of EL students and would result in an EL student being offered a seat; all six of these RVTs met this criterion.)*

#### **Regional Agricultural Schools (3 schools)**

- Agricultural schools had less disparity than did RVTs, with 6 of 10 comparison points or 60% in which students from historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a lesser rate than their more privileged peers.
- At Essex North Shore Agricultural School, students from historically marginalized groups were offered seats at a rate that was more than 10 percentage points less than their more privileged peers in each of the four comparisons.

- In two agricultural high schools, English Learner students were listed as being zero in the enrollment pool. Yet, Bristol County Agricultural School's catchment area includes Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton, and Norfolk County's catchment area includes Brookline and Quincy. Each of these districts has considerable numbers of English Learner students that should be listed in the enrollment pool and should be recruited to apply.

### **District Vocational Schools**

The coalition examined a sample of two district vocational schools to ascertain if similar patterns of disparity existed: Putnam Vocational Technical High School (Springfield) and Worcester Technical High School:

- Putnam Vocational Technical High School had higher rates of students of color and English Learners being offered seats than White and non-EL students, respectively. The school had slightly lower rates of economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities being offered seats than their respective more affluent and mainstream student peers.
- In Worcester Technical High School, all four groups of historically marginalized students were offered seats at a lower rate than more privileged students, with the gaps being greater than ten percent in three of comparisons.

### **Summary**

Data analysis reveals that, rather than enrollment disparities by race, income, disability, and language in regional vocational high schools being a localized problem, disparities are in fact a problem in almost every single regional vocational high school in the state. In addition, the selective admissions criteria discourage many students, disproportionately members of historically marginalized groups, from applying in the first place because they have little chance of getting in.

The cause is systemic, created by Board of Elementary & Secondary Education-approved regulations that enable vocational high schools to use selective admissions criteria that exclude students who have been historically marginalized in public education from gaining admission to valued educational opportunities. The state has created a discriminatory policy that is race-based, income-based, language-based, and disability-based.

The solution, then, must address the systemic cause, the state policy. Settling for incremental policy changes might result in slight improvement in glaring disparities, but will never attain true equity in admissions for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English Learners. The only means to attain equity is for the state to eliminate its inequitable vocational schools selective admissions policies.