

Attachment 1

Summary Report of Department of Elementary and Secondary Investigation of MCAS Irregularities at Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter School

January 15, 2010

In September 2009, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“Department”) began an investigation into irregularities in the administration of the 2009 MCAS testing at the Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter School (“RMH”) because of improbably high levels of improvement. To date, the Department has interviewed 16 current and former staff members of the school.¹ This addendum provides a summary of the interviews with the RMH staff members.

Of the 16 staff members interviewed, 8 reported being aware of and/or engaging in various acts of cheating. One or more of these 8 staff members reported the following:

- The principal or the MCAS coordinator instructed them to report to the MCAS coordinator’s office where they were given copies of the 2009 MCAS test prior to its administration.
- The principal or the MCAS coordinator instructed them to review the MCAS test and familiarize themselves with the answers so that they would be better prepared to identify incorrect answers on students’ tests.²
- The principal instructed them to read through the ELA MCAS test to ensure that the entire exam’s subject matter was covered in class and, if necessary, to take notes of the test.³
- The principal or the MCAS coordinator gave a staff member a copy of the MCAS test and told him to show the test to another staff member.

¹ As the investigation is on-going, the identities of the individuals have not been disclosed. For ease of reference, all individuals who were interviewed are referred to as “he,” regardless of actual gender. The Department also conducted brief interviews with the principal and another administrator. The interviews were conducted with the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General.

² The 2009 MCAS Test Security Requirements, outlined in the Principal’s Administration Manual, state: “No test administrator or other school personnel may view the contents of test or answer booklets before, during or after a test administration (except when necessary for specified accommodations) unless specifically directed to do so by the Test Administrator’s Manual.” (C. (2);

“No test administrator or other school personnel may reveal the secure contents of test books or answers verbally or nonverbally to any question that relates to the same secure content of a test before, during, or after a test administration unless specifically authorized to do so by the instructions in the Test Administrator’s Manual.” C.(3).”

³ “No test administrator or other school personnel may duplicate any portion of the test or answer booklet, including, but not limited to audiotaping, videotaping, photographing, photocopying, and copying by hand. The only exceptions are for test administrators who must transcribe student responses into an answer booklet for students with disabilities receiving certain accommodations or for students who did some or all their work in damaged, defective, or void booklets.” Principal’s Administration Manual, C (5)

- The principal instructed them to monitor the students' progress during the test and if they saw an incorrect answer, they were to tell the student to recheck the answer.
- One staff member said the principal told him that during the ELA MCAS, if a question called for restating the question in the answer and a student failed to do so, he was to instruct the student to restate the question in the answer. Upon questioning the principal's instructions, he was summoned to a private meeting with the principal and was asked by the principal if "he was on board." By being on board, he understood that the principal meant helping students by pointing out incorrect answers. He went along with the principal because he was worried about losing his job. He said he helped a student write an essay during the MCAS test. He further said that one of his students told him that the student did not think it was right that teachers gave the students answers on the tests.
- One staff member said that after his students completed the March 2009 MCAS test, he took them to a different room to watch a movie. During the movie, another RMH staff member came in and removed three or four students. When the students returned and were asked where they were taken, they replied that they had been "fixing their MCAS."
- One staff member observed the same RMH employee who had taken the students from the movie, give exam booklets back to students and inform them that they had not answered all of the questions.
- One staff member observed the same RMH staff member who had removed the students from the movie, seated in the RMH cafeteria administering the 2009 MCAS make-up tests with the March 2009 MCAS exam booklets on the desk in front of him. This RMH staff member was observed looking at the completed March 2009 MCAS exam booklets.
- One staff member told the principal he did not feel comfortable administering the MCAS in the way the principal directed because it would be cheating and requested a copy of the Test Administrator's Manual. His request was denied. A day after the request, he was transferred to teach a grade that does not take the MCAS. His contract was not renewed for the following academic year.

Of these 8 staff members, 7 also reported additional testing irregularities in connection with the administration of the MCAS, including that the principal did not ensure that all test administrators received appropriate training or did not ensure that they were provided with a copy of the appropriate test manual in advance of administering the test.

Of these 8 staff members, 4 reported that the principal and other RMH administrators engaged in behaviors designed to impede the Department's investigation after RMH was notified the their scores were under review. They reported the following:

- Once RMH's principal and an administrator became aware of the Department's investigation, they convened a general meeting with all RMH staff in attendance. At this meeting, the principal told the staff that the Department was coming to investigate that MCAS scores and that the Department thought there had been cheating. The principal reminded RMH staff about the steps RMH had taken to

- One staff member said that during the general meeting, the principal told staff members that they knew what they needed to say to the Department and that they shouldn't say more than asked.
- One staff member said the principal called him to a private meeting and asked him what he planned to tell the Department investigator. When he responded by stating that he had "coached the students," the principal told him that his response did not sound good. He was further instructed by the principal not to volunteer anything and that "less is better."

Of the 16 RMH staff members interviewed, 8 deny being aware of acts of cheating in connection the administration of the MCAS tests. However, it is noteworthy that of those eight:

- One administered the test in the same room with a staff member who admits to pointing out incorrect answers to students during the test.
- One received information from a staff member who expressed to him concerns about being asked by the principal to advise students to recheck their answers if they were incorrect.
- Two administered the test only to 1-3 students on Individualized Education Plans, not a full classroom of students

Conclusion

The information gathered during the Department's investigation demonstrates that there was widespread cheating on the 2009 MCAS tests, perpetrated by adults in the school.