

Case Study:

Partnering for Change at Boston Green Academy

The Challenge:

Boston Green Academy (BGA) was ready and eager for improvement, but it needed effective outside expertise to frame their challenges and help push the school forward. BGA serves about 500 students, of which 30% are students with disabilities, 15% are English language learners, and 61% are economically disadvantaged. In 2016, BGA was among the lowest performing 20% of middle-high schools statewide. MCAS results (the statewide standardized test) in 2016 for grade 10 indicated 80% were proficient in ELA, 38% were proficient in math, and 36% were proficient in science. BGA needed to present DESE with a plan to improve its scores and begin the process of sustainable change.

Our Solution:

In partnership with Boston Green Academy, Mi pursued these strategies:

- **Facilitated a planning process with BGA instructional leaders resulting in an enhanced framework for professional development, focused on intellectual demand, engagement, and urgency and student as worker/teacher as coach.**
- **Implemented school-wide instructional rounds, a peer-coaching system, peer observations, and a consistent and high-quality evaluation and feedback system.**
- **Instituted a system that regularly monitors and distributes data on academics, behavior, and attendance, building a sense of shared responsibility.**

The Result:

During the 2018-2019 school year, the needle on student growth started moving in the right direction, when grade 7 math and grades 7 and 10 ELA met the state growth targets. Most recently, the 2019 state accountability classification indicates BGA has made “substantial progress toward targets,” a state classification deemed not requiring assistance or intervention. Additionally, the college acceptance rate is up, attendance has increased, and suspensions have decreased. The headmaster is especially proud that at the school’s last graduation, every senior walked the stage.



How We Did It

BGA turned to Mass Insight Education & Research (Mi) in 2016 to help the school emerge from partial academic probation — a status designated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The good news was that all the necessary core ingredients were percolating inside the school for significant improvement. BGA only needed the right plan and the right partner to provide the catalyst for change.

After extensive interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations with staff, Mi consultants zeroed in on several levers to boost learning and improve the academic culture in the school. Instruction was a key focus, specifically the need for expanded teacher professional development and a more consistent approach to instilling academic rigor in the classroom. Mi found there was a lack of active student engagement and “productive struggle” in many classes. Additionally, the crucial feeder to the high school — the middle school — was a behavioral hot spot that needed closer attention.

In order to raise the academic bar at BGA, the school needed more consistency around educational strategy. The school has a legacy of strong teacher autonomy and empowerment, having as many decisions as possible made by those doing the work. But that approach had created significant gaps in instruction. Teachers bought into the idea that some of their freedom had to be sacrificed to reach the bigger goal: an organized, systemic approach geared to yield more learning in the classroom. Instructional leaders at BGA knew they had work to do, and the flexibility from Mi won people over even more.

Three-plus years after the initial meetings with Mi, followed by a comprehensive school review and the creation of an action plan, BGA has seen significant academic growth with the expectation of more to come. Contributing to academic success, the learning culture at the middle school has improved markedly. In short, the plan, based on proven theory yet customized to the client, is working: scores are rising and the teaching and learning culture has improved.



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Testimonial:

“Mass Insight was very good at listening and adapting the process to us. The journey for us is not complete, but our team now has better tools to address challenges. There were great benefits to work with external professionals who could tell us we have something good here — but it’s not good enough. There was nothing they imposed on us. They worked with us.”

Matt Holzer
Headmaster
Boston Green Academy