



[Hawlemont, Agriculture and You program credited with helping students achieve above-average MCAS scores](#)

By Madison Schofield, Staff Writer, The Greenfield Recorder Published: 11-5-2025

CHARLEMONT — Hawlemont Regional School has been recognized by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for surpassing pre-pandemic MCAS scores in English language arts — a feat the school attributes in part to the hands-on learning students experience through the Hawlemont, Agriculture and You (HAY) program.

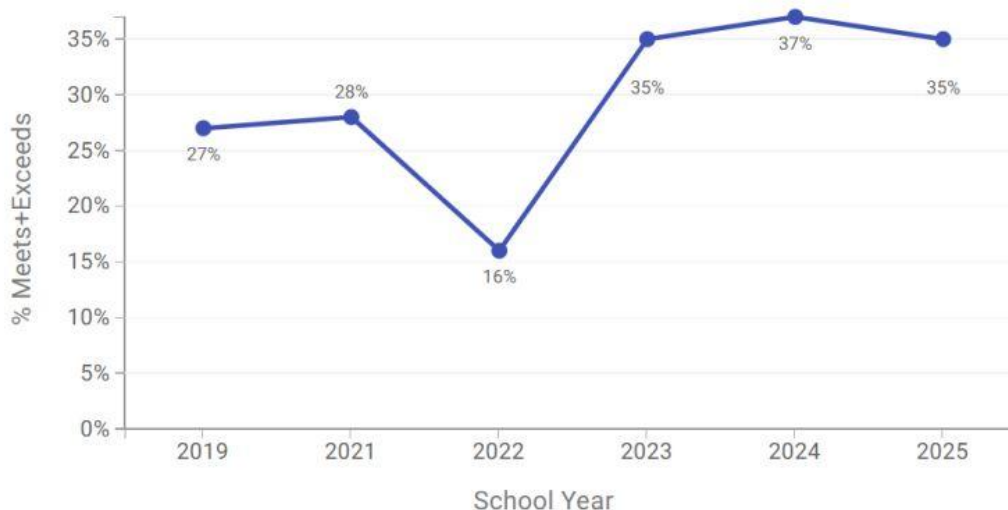
On average, schools across the state saw their MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) test scores [continue to drop](#) last spring, widening the gap between today's scores and pre-pandemic years. However, at Hawlemont, students surpassed pre-pandemic levels of achievement, earning the school a certificate of recognition from DESE.

Hawlemont students also surpassed pre-pandemic levels in 2023, and while the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations dropped by a couple percentage points from last year, Principal Amber Tulloch said the recognition is still exciting.

“It’s a great nod to the hard work that our staff and students have done so far,” Tulloch said. “We still have plenty of work to do, but it feels like a win. It feels like a victory worth celebrating, and recognizing that the shifts we made and the focus that our staff have put in, it’s paying off.”

MCAS Results by School

Percent of students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by school and year



Hawlemont

Regional School’s English language arts MCAS scores. Credit: MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATION-TO-CAREER RESEARCH AND DATA HUB

The school's fifth graders not only surpassed pre-pandemic levels in English language arts, but also exceeded the state average by 2%, with 40% of Hawlemont students meeting or exceeding expectations, compared to the state average of 38%.

Forty percent of the school's fourth graders met or exceeded expectations in English language arts, tying with the state average.

Tulloch said MCAS data isn't always the best way to measure student success, particularly in small rural districts where one outlier can skew school averages, but Hawlemont staff members regularly monitor student improvement in-house.

"It's hard to look at data when our school is small because every single student has a big impact," Tulloch said, adding that staff members monitor students based on their instructional level on a biweekly basis.

She said the learning growth seen in recent years can be attributed to investments in English language curricula, staff members who are dedicated to hands-on learning, and the weaving together of common themes across subjects and grade levels.

"We did a ton of professional development around the science of reading," she said.

Hawlemont School Committee member Ashley Sparks added she believes the students' success is in part due to the HAY program, and all the hands-on, play-based learning students do.

"It's so important to preserve agriculture education for the next generation," Sparks said. "Especially in the younger grades, it brings everything into a context they can understand and is part of their everyday life."

For example, Tulloch said preschool and kindergarten students do a project watching the decomposition of pumpkins to learn why and how it occurs. This provides a basic understanding for learning more about decomposition and food chains in later grades.

The art, music and physical education classes try to incorporate ideas that students learn in other subjects, Tulloch added.

She said students can learn about math, science, social studies and English language arts through conversations about food production and farming costs, labor laws, the experiences of immigrant farmers and reading "Esperanza Rising" by Pam Muñoz Ryan.

"They do a lot with animal husbandry, they talk about the cost of food, they talk about preserving food, they talk about water conservation, pollution ... It really spans everything," Tulloch said. "We make it fit the needs of our students."

She said the program lends itself particularly well to science education, leading to 60% of Hawlemont fifth graders meeting or exceeding expectations in science. The state average for fifth grade science was 46% of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

Currently, students are learning how to care for newborn piglets. Last week, the school's pig, Rosie, gave birth to seven healthy piglets, and the students now get to care for them, much to the excitement of sixth graders Jakob Merlob and Junie Koziol.

"They're so cute," Jakob said. "This morning they were in a piglet pile and one of them was trying to be sneaky and run out of the pile."

"The way they walk is so cute," Junie added.

The older students take on the morning chores, including cleaning out the stalls, while the younger students care for the animals in the afternoon, Tulloch said. The pigs, chickens, goats and cows at the school are on loan from local farms, which cover the animals' vet bills and care for them during the summer.

"We muck the stalls, we give them feed and we collect the eggs," Jakob said.

Tulloch said students raised Rosie from a piglet last year; now they're raising her piglets, which have yet to be named. Students also work in the school gardens and greenhouses.

"I think that, in a large part, is why our scores are the way they are," Tulloch said.

Source: <https://recorder.com/2025/11/05/hands-on-learning-boosts-hawlemont-results/>