



Recovery High Schools Legislative Report – Fiscal Year 2024

This report is submitted pursuant to Chapter 24 of Acts of 2023, line item 7061-9607. The report outlines “(i) the numbers of youths served per high school; (ii) outcomes measured for youths; and (iii) recommendations for new recovery high schools in fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025.”

November 2024

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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November 12, 2024

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit this Report to the Legislature: *Recovery High School Programs Legislative Report – Fiscal Year 2024*. As required by the statute, the enclosed report includes: “(i) the number of youths served per high school; (ii) outcomes measured for youths; and (iii) recommendations for new recovery high schools in fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025.” The data provided in this report was compiled from information submitted by schools to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department).

For adolescents in recovery from a substance use disorder, school is a setting that may result in interactions with peer groups who are actively using alcohol or other drugs. Unfortunately, after treatment, these students may encounter multiple risk factors when returning to the setting where their substance use problems originated. Recovery High School programs play an important role for these students by offering them another option for a school setting – one in which they can feel supported in their recovery while still working towards a high school diploma.

If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to contact Rachelle Engler Bennett, Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support, via RachelleEngler.Bennett@mass.gov.

Sincerely,

Russell D Johnston
Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) respectfully submits the Report to the Legislature: *Recovery High Schools Legislative Report – Fiscal Year 2024*, pursuant to [Chapter 24 of the Acts of 2023](#), line item [7061-9607](#), that reads in part:

“For ...recovery high schools... provided further, that not later than April 1, 2024, the department shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means that shall include, but not be limited to: (i) the number of youths served per high school; (ii) outcomes measured for the youths; and (iii) recommendations for new recovery high schools in fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025...”

[Recovery High Schools](#) (RHS) are public programs, operated by a school district or an educational collaborative, that serve as an educational option for students in recovery from a substance use disorder or dependency. They support students in their recovery while the students are concurrently working towards their high school degrees.

Recovery High School programs were initially established in Massachusetts in 2006 through a grant program administered by the Department of Public Health (DPH), funded through state line item 4512-0211. In 2009, [G.L. c. 71, § 91](#) was enacted to clarify several issues relating to these programs, including data reporting and fiscal responsibility. Under G.L. c. 71, § 91, Recovery High School programs receive the state average foundation budget per pupil for enrolled students from the students' districts of residence. Regulations related to RHS programs, [603 CMR 54.00](#), were adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in February 2017. An [advisory](#) (SPED 2019-1) was subsequently issued to address special education service delivery for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who are attending RHS programs.

In July 2018, the RHS program initiative was transferred from DPH to the Department, as directed by the Governor and Legislature through the 2019 state budget line item [7061-9607](#).

There are currently five [Recovery High Schools](#) in Massachusetts (listed by date of opening):

- [William J. Ostiguy High School](#) opened in September 2006 in downtown Boston and is operated in partnership with the [Boston Public Schools](#).
- [Northshore Recovery High School](#) opened in September 2007 in Beverly and is operated by [Northshore Education Consortium](#).
- [Liberty Preparatory](#) opened in September 2007 in Springfield and is operated in partnership with the [Springfield Public Schools](#).

- [Independence Academy](#) opened in September 2012 in Brockton and is operated by [North River Collaborative](#).
- [Rockdale Recovery High School](#) opened in September 2015 in Worcester and is operated by [Central Massachusetts Special Education Collaborative](#).

In the spring of 2019, the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES) was first commissioned by the Department to conduct an evaluation of the RHS programming. The primary purpose of this study was to help inform the Department of the current practices of RHS programs and assist with the Department’s efforts to better support these programs. Per the recommendations of the initial evaluations, the current phase of this work consists of the refinement of the set guidelines on program expectations in collaboration with the Department and RHS program leaders. The contract with CES, pending appropriation, will continue through June 2025 and will assist the Department with moving this work forward and help further develop best practices within the RHS programs.

The Number of Students Served Per High School

Enrollment numbers vary among the five RHS programs ranging from a low of three (3) students in one program to a high of thirty-three (33) students in another. The following table includes the number of enrolled students from the October 2023 Student Information Management System (SIMS).

Table 1: October 2023 Student Enrollment, by Recovery High School

October 2023 Enrollment	
Recovery High School	Students
Independence Academy	8
Liberty Preparatory School	7
Northshore Education Consortium	33
Rockdale Recovery High School	3
William J. Ostiguy High School	10

The table on the next page includes the October 2023 SIMS by grade level, with the greatest number of students being identified as 12th graders. [NOTE: an asterisk (*) in Table 2 indicates where grade level numbers are suppressed due to a total school enrollment of less than 6.]

Table 2: October 2023 Student Enrollment, by Recovery High School and Grade Level

Recovery High School	October 2023 Enrollment				
	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade	Special Education Student Beyond 12 th Grade
Independence Academy	1	1	4	2	0
Liberty Preparatory School	2	2	2	1	0
Northshore Education Consortium	0	6	9	16	2
Rockdale Recovery High School	*	*	*	*	*
William J. Ostiguy High School	0	1	5	4	0

Outcomes Measured for Students

Recovery High School programs serve a complex population of students that require a specialized approach to balance students’ unique academic and therapeutic programming needs. These programs enroll a significantly higher number of students with disabilities, and those who are considered low-income and high needs, as compared to [state averages](#) for those identities. Those factors, combined with the inherent issues of a school composed of students diagnosed with a substance use disorder, create particular challenges to addressing each student’s needs. Recovery High School programs support these individual needs by developing and following an individualized recovery plan while providing a comprehensive four-year high school education that supports students to reach success in their academic and personal lives.

Table 3: Student Group Percentages at Recovery High Schools Compared with All Districts

	Recovery High Schools	All Massachusetts School Districts (Average)
Low-income	82%	42.2%
Students with Disabilities	54.1%	20.2%
High Needs	89%	55.8%

Recommendations for New Recovery High Schools in Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025

The Department is currently in discussions with school districts, RHS programs, and other partners to determine how, collectively, to best meet the needs of students with a substance use disorder. At this time, a new RHS program is not recommended as the Department continues to evaluate these programs and establish best practices through the process referenced earlier in this report.