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Capuano Visits Computerized Education Pilot at Madison Park High School

US Rep. Michael Capuano visited a pioneering computerized education project at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School on Friday morning, May 13. The project, *JFYNet*, is a collaboration between Madison Park High School and JFYNetWorks, a Boston-based non-profit education and job training organization. Since the summer of 2000, Madison Park and JFYNetWorks have worked together to improve academic performance at the vocational high school through the use of computer-assisted learning. Capuano's 8th District includes Roxbury, where the school is located, and most of Boston. Madison Park is Boston's only technical-vocational high school, serving the entire city.

Madison Park is one of 26 high schools in the Commonwealth that have adopted the *JFYNet* program to improve student academic performance. The program is provided by JFYNetWorks through state, foundation and federal grants. Madison Park was the first high school in the state to adopt the program in the summer of 2000. Since then, Madison Park has reduced its MCAS math failure rate from 97% in 2000-- the highest failure rate in the state at that time-- to 53% in 2004, one of the most striking improvements in the state. With the technical and instructional support of *JFYNet*, Madison Park has become a pioneer in the use of educational technology.

Special Education math teacher Beth Madden told Rep. Capuano that in 30 years of teaching, the *JFYNet* program is the first instructional tool she has encountered that allows her to individualize instructional programs. With students whose skills are at widely differing levels, and whose learning styles and paces are very different, an individualized, self-paced instructional method is the only way they can learn, she explained. "For the first time in 30 years, I can give my students what they need," Ms. Madden said.

In the adjacent carpentry shop, carpentry instructor Jim Costello said he needed the *JFYNet* software to teach his carpentry students fractions and measurements. "They need work on basic math skills," he said. "I haven't got time to do that, I need to be out here at the bench. But with the software, I could give them the instruction they need to reinforce those measurement and basic math skills. That's vital for a carpenter and there's no other way I can give it to them."

Headmaster Chuck McAfee added that vocational schools are under immense pressure to produce academic performance on the MCAS. "The old days of voked are over," he stated flatly. "With No Child Left Behind, our kids have to perform just as well as kids in academic high schools. And the job market demands it anyway. No employer wants to hire a worker who can't read and compute, no matter what the industry. Academic proficiency is now a core goal of vocational education, that's all there is to it. This

program helps us provide the academic support our students have to have. It's a huge help.”

With the MCAS approaching, Madison Park's success with computerized instruction and its long-term improvement on the MCAS offer hope and a concrete method to other schools that need to make similar academic strides because of the pressure of No Child Left Behind.

JFYNetWorks developed the *JFYNet* program to help schools improve MCAS performance. Using PLATO software, JFYNetWorks provides network installation and technical support, teacher training, curriculum development and ongoing classroom support for teachers learning to use the software to support classroom instruction. Though the intended outcome is improved MCAS performance, *JFYNet* is not a one-dimensional test-prep strategy. The focus of the program is on developmental academic skill-building. The program provides solid academic support at a wide range of skill levels by connecting assessments directly to an instructional prescription so that each student receives the exact instructional content he or she needs. This kind of individualization, as noted by Beth Madden, cannot be provided any other way than through the use of software. *JFYNet* ensures the effective use of educational technology by working in the classroom with teachers on an ongoing basis to develop their familiarity with the software and their skills in integrating it into their curriculum and teaching styles.

Since 2000, JFYNetWorks has built up a statewide network of over 40 computerized instruction programs in schools and community agencies in 20 cities and towns—including six vocational high schools. Students in *JFYNet* programs have posted MCAS passing rates that average 25% higher than students not in the program.

The Madison Park *JFYNet* program is especially significant because vocational schools have come under pressure from the federal government to improve academic performance in accordance with No Child Left Behind. Madison Park is not only a vocational school, it is also an inner-city school with a preponderance of minority students. The minority achievement gap is the highest-priority federal performance issue: black and Hispanic students fail MCAS at 3 to 4 times the rate of white students. With its innovative use of *JFYNet* instructional technology and other classroom strategies, Madison Park is succeeding in both areas: improving academic performance in a vocational school, and improving minority student performance.

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