Massachusetts vocational training schools prepare students to excel in college and the workplace using Adobe® Creative Suite® software

Massachusetts was once at the center of the American Revolution. Today, the state is at the forefront of another transformation, this time in public education. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is a fully funded, state government agency. Through progressive outreach and partnerships with education leaders throughout the state, the agency has enacted legal guidelines that include special provisions, permanent funding, and programming parameters for vocational technical education programs in schools statewide.

Massachusetts’ Vocational Technical Education—often referred to as Career and Technical Education in other states—program requirements are established in partnership with educators across the state who sit on curriculum framework committees to draft a program framework. These advisory committees submit their proposals to the DESE for approval, which manages the guidelines throughout the state.

"A crucial part of the curriculum development revolves around which software and technologies should be considered to match the objectives of the guidelines," says Brian Trainor, co-chairman of the Design and Visual Communications (DVC) framework committee and a DVC teacher at Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School. "Our goal is to have our curriculum mirror what’s happening in the real world and overwhelmingly, the feedback from the professional community was that they used industry-standard solutions including Adobe Creative Suite software, in their everyday work activities."

Results
- Increased enrollment threefold
- Enabled more than 95% of graduates to pursue post-secondary or professional opportunities
- Supported teachers statewide with a robust, clear curriculum framework
- Provided a robust curriculum to help students develop marketable, professional-level design and digital communications skills
- Aligned curriculum with current workplace standards for skills and software aptitude

Massachusetts Vocational Technical Education Schools

Following the path to success
We can be heroes

The vocational technical education framework reaches every aspect of career training programs in schools throughout Massachusetts. Across the DVC curriculum—ranging from design theory, photography, illustration, and page layout, to video editing and web design—DVC teachers statewide have a roadmap for using industry-standard software to prepare students for success after high school. The framework identifies for teachers those skills which are most important to prospective employers, helping them to target their lesson plans and instructional methods. It also provides specific requirements to help prepare students to take and pass specialized industry certification exams, including Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) exams, that arm them with entry-level credentials as they leave high school.

As a teacher at Whittier, the framework helps Trainor use Adobe Creative Suite Design Premium software to engage students in projects that promote critical analysis, communication, and technical design skills. Trainor's students created a prototype for an online comic-style magazine called *The Heroes of Whittier*, in which students identify environmental issues and develop story lines featuring technical students as super heroes who save the day with their superior skills.

"Students use a range of Adobe Creative Suite Design Premium software to create imaginative stories about super heroes solving problems," he says. "We use Adobe Illustrator®, Photoshop®, InDesign®, and Flash® Professional to set the scene for resolving a complex issue, refining characters and animations, and output the comics to print, web, and other media."

According to Trainor, the combination of concept development, writing, traditional software skills, and marketing theory for the project, made it an effective way to tie together all the components of a typical project students would encounter in the real world. One of Trainor’s former students, Cassandra Pellegrino, is now a sophomore at Northern Essex Community College, studying graphic design and visual arts. Pellegrino credits her extensive experience using Adobe software throughout her time at Whittier as a primary factor in the success she’s achieving at the collegiate level.

"We spent five days a week learning how to properly use Adobe software to translate our ideas into visual messages," Pellegrino says. "Through a variety of projects, I learned about the business world, sharpened my presentation and communications skills, and reinforced my knowledge of company branding. I was well-prepared for college and went in confident in my abilities to deliver high-quality work in and out of the classroom."

Pellegrino also stresses the value of the opportunities for high school students to earn ACA certifications. "The certification lets people know that I know how to use Adobe software the way it was intended—meaning I can spend more time developing creative ideas that prospective employers will covet."
Reflecting the workplace

Trainor's DVC framework committee co-chair and DVC teacher at Assabet Valley Technical High School, Deborah Harper, has had similar success leveraging Adobe software in the classroom to encourage students to explore the boundaries of their creativity. Using Adobe Creative Suite Master Collection software, Harper’s students use Adobe Photoshop as the foundation for concept development and photography. Students take the work completed with Photoshop into other Adobe software including InDesign, Illustrator, Dreamweaver, Flash Professional, and After Effects to transform static images into dynamic, compelling animations, print ads, and other deliverables that express their values, beliefs, and perspectives. Students also use Photoshop and After Effects with Adobe Premiere Pro to enhance video projects in post-production.

"Adobe Creative Suite software components are the building blocks of our curriculum," Harper says. "Our training is project based and reflects the landscape of today’s workplace. Our students get hands-on experience with industry-standard tools and the work our students produce is often of the same caliber found in the professional arena."

At Northeast Metro Regional Technical School, Design and Visual Communications Instructor John Moore uses Adobe Creative Suite Design Premium software to help students navigate the path toward a career as professional designers and artists. Moore’s students use Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign to design classroom projects including movie posters and children’s coloring books; Adobe Flash Professional for animated designs; and Adobe Dreamweaver for website design.

A veteran of product development and packaging design himself, Moore began teaching in 2003. Today, he relies on Adobe’s involvement with the DVC Teacher Workshops® to refine his own skills and better understand how to relate his own professional experiences and new developments in software technologies with the needs of his students.

"Having a globally recognized software leader taking a vested interest in our vocational programs and providing expertise and guidance through workshops is invaluable," Moore says.

A clear path to success

The DESE framework is an innovative arrangement designed to enhance the effectiveness and value of vocational technical curriculums. The curriculum framework gives teachers across the state a clear roadmap for helping students develop professional-level, marketable skills using industry-standard Adobe Creative Suite software, while still allowing for flexibility in the classroom to tailor instruction and assignments to students’ strengths and evolve along with an ever-changing job market.
Vocational programs statewide are experiencing continuous growth in enrollment as student achievement continues to climb. Harper notes that her design and visual communications students have won several Boston Globe photography and digital imaging awards, and others are placing and medaling in local and national competitions.

"The success and recognition students are achieving has been great advertising for our programs," Harper says. "Over the past five years, our enrollment has nearly tripled and we've received nearly $150,000 in additional funding to keep up with demand."

Harper says that approximately 95% of students who graduate from the program continue onto college or land highly visible jobs with top local employers. Trainor’s students have had similar achievement rates, and his graduates have gone on to become teachers and graphic designers, or taken marketing or advertising posts at major corporations such as Disney.

Overall, Massachusetts vocational technical education programs prepare students to leave high school better equipped than most college-preparatory students. They are set to enter a workforce where their skills and talents can be utilized to the fullest. Over 50% of VTE graduates in Massachusetts continue their studies in pursuit of post-secondary education. VTE schools produce higher student retention rates than traditional high schools which tend to have higher dropout rates. The higher retention rates highlight VTE schools’ effectiveness in helping students identify early on their preferred career path and provide them with the essential skills needed to continue on that path beyond high school.

"Our vocational technical program is just the first phase of our students’ education," says Trainor. "We use business-critical software such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, and Flash Professional to help build a foundation and establish a competitive advantage as they move into the next phase of their education or career."

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John Moore
Design and visual communications instructor,
Northeast Metro Regional Technical School

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