

**2013 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT**  
**Sheila Harrity, Principal**

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Opened in 1910 as Worcester Boys' Trade High School, Worcester Technical High School (WTHS) was once at the forefront of vocational education in Massachusetts and the nation. By 1997, however, student scores had plummeted and the failing, antiquated school was faced with closure. A vigorous effort by city officials, parents, and business and community organizations raised funds for a new 400,000 square foot state-of-the-art vocational/technical facility. In 2006, Worcester Technical High School moved into its new building under the leadership of a new principal, Sheila Harrity.

Harrity seized the opportunity to change the school's culture, implement small learning communities, and empower teachers so all of the school's nearly 1,400 students would graduate and thrive in the 21st century. Accolades have poured in. In 2011, WTHS was named a National Breakthrough School by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), one of only five high schools in the U.S. recognized for achieving outstanding student gains in high poverty areas. This year, Harrity herself was named the NASSP-MetLife National High School Principal of the Year—the first from Massachusetts in the program's 20-year history.

In a shift from traditional "top down" vocational school leadership, Harrity's team-oriented approach embraced collaboration, valued opinions, and honored staff expertise. It involved stakeholders, not only faculty and staff, but more than 350 representatives from industry, organized labor, postsecondary institutions, registered apprentice programs, parents, and students to define and steward a challenging college- and career-ready curriculum.

The result is a saturation of project-based learning, real-world application, and authentic assessment. Students operate a 125-seat restaurant, a salon and day spa, a 16-bay automotive service center, a full-service bank, and a state-approved preschool. Most recently, Worcester Tech and Tufts University launched Tufts at Tech, an affordable animal care clinic for low-income families.

Colleagues credit Harrity with a powerful ability to identify and organize resources to support curriculum and assessment. Recognizing the need for Advanced Placement classes, she began with AP Biology, adding AP Language, Literature, and Statistics the following year, and AP Physics and AP classes in the technical trades, such as Computer and Environmental Science, after that. In three years, WTHS student enrollment in AP math, science, and English grew by 141%; qualifying scores grew 105%.

Harrity also secured funding through the local chapter of the National Math and Science Initiative for student books and supplies, professional development, and student support to close the achievement and access gap. Today, with an overall graduation rate of 96%, WTHS students outperform the district and state in all sub-group populations for graduation rates.