

Marblehead Community Charter Public School*Marblehead, Massachusetts*September 18, 2007

Marblehead Community Charter Public School (MCCPS), in its thirteenth year of operation, is chartered to serve 230 students in grades four through grade eight. As of the date of the site visit, enrollment information from the school indicated that approximately 43% of the current students were from Marblehead, 18% were from Swampscott, 14% were from Salem, 11% were from Lynn, 5% were from Nahant, and the remaining 9% were from Peabody, Beverly, Gloucester, and Saugus. As of September 14, 2007, there were 192 students enrolled at MCCPS. Seventeen percent of the student population receives special education services. Eight percent are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.

The school's mission statement is "Recognizing that children learn best in the context of community, our mission is to create partnerships among community members that assist our students in reaching their highest intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential."

The following participants conducted the site visit on September 18, 2007:

- Andrew Cabot, Conservatory Lab Charter School, Board of Trustees
- Cliff Chuang, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Ruth Hersh, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Joshua Lavine, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Emily Lichtenstein, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Mary Street, MA DOE Charter School Office

Before the visit, the team reviewed the MCCPS 2006-07 Annual Report, student assessment data, Board minutes and materials, and the 2006-07 Year 12 Site Visit Report. On site, the team reviewed curricular information, a teacher roster, and other information provided by the school. The team conducted observations in approximately 17 classrooms and conducted group and individual interviews. Eight trustees, two administrators, nine teachers, eight parents, and eleven students attended their respective focus group meetings.

The purpose of this visit was to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's Annual Report, to investigate the school's progress relative to its Accountability Plan goals, and to collect information that will eventually help the Commissioner and Board of Education make a renewal recommendation for the school's charter. The focus of the visit was on three central areas of inquiry:

- Faithfulness to the terms of the school's charter;
- Academic program success;
- Organizational viability.

The team's findings in each of these areas are presented below.

1. Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

Are the school's mission, vision, and educational philosophy clear and understood by the school community?

Finding: All stakeholders reported that the culture and climate of the school is strong. Families, teachers and the Board of Trustees appear to have made a renewed commitment to the school. Board members, teachers, administrators, parents, and students all reported that everyone seems happier and calmer this year, in contrast to the mood that pervaded the school during the past school year. Administrators stated that there is a sense of trust and comfort throughout the school. New parents were reportedly "thrilled" to be enrolled at the school.

Stakeholders reported that the school program includes many elements that foster the mission of MCCPS. For example, every day begins with a school-wide meeting that includes community-building activities such as games and performances. Parents are welcomed into the school at all times. Because the school is small and the culture welcoming, all students come to know each other, even across grade levels. A daily enrichment period offers students the opportunity to explore a wide range of activities under the leadership of parents and community members, as well as MCCPS staff.

Has the school met the faithfulness to charter goals set out in its Accountability Plan?

Finding: MCCPS operated without an approved Accountability Plan until July 9, 2007. The school has made progress towards meeting the goals in its former draft Accountability Plan. MCCPS has operated with and reported on, in its annual reports, a draft Accountability Plan which had not received approval from the Charter School Office. Site visits are conducted, in part, to corroborate the progress described against Accountability Plan goals as detailed in the school's most recent annual report. On July 9, 2007, the Charter School Office approved a new Accountability Plan for MCCPS, but for purposes of this site visit report, the previous draft will be used.

There were three goals in the former draft Accountability Plan that relate to the school's faithfulness to its charter, as discussed below.

- *All students will acquire and integrate knowledge, apply concepts to everyday life, and use knowledge meaningfully.*

Measurable outcomes for this goal are that all students complete at least three exhibition projects, that the majority receive a rating of at least "proficient" on their projects, and that all students create individualized learning goals (know as MAPs, see below) and reflect monthly on their progress towards goal completion. During the 2006-07 school year, all students were required to complete exhibition projects, MAPs and monthly (and this year biweekly) reflections on progress towards their MAPs. The school did not report on the ratings received by students on their exhibition projects.

- *The school will utilize volunteer resources as partners in school operations.*
Though the draft Accountability Plan set no measurable outcomes for this goal, the school did provide evidence that parent and community volunteers are very active in many aspects of school operations, including serving on the Board of Trustees and committees, developing an active Parent Organization, assisting in classrooms, fundraising, and leading enrichment classes.
- *The school will develop community service leaning activities for all students.*
Though the draft Accountability Plan set no measurable outcomes for this goal, the school did provide evidence that all students participated in a variety of community services projects, including park cleanup, recycling, and working with younger children.

2. Academic Program Success

Does the school's instructional program, as documented and implemented in the classroom:

1. *address the skills and concepts that students must know and be able to do to meet state standards?*
2. *articulate school developed or identified internal standards for student performance?*
3. *establish and implement accommodation plans that address the needs of diverse learners?*

Finding: The school has a well-developed curriculum planning model, which uses backward design principles to develop integrated units.

Curriculum planning at MCCPS starts with global themes, broad ideas such as “Communities and Individuals,” “Time and Space,” “Conflict and Harmony,” and “Communication,” that become the school-wide focus for a trimester. There are seven global themes that are used on a rotating basis. Using backwards design principles, teams of teachers create integrated units that are connected to the global themes and include essential questions and goals for student learning. Within the units are daily lesson plans that include an objective, a detailed schedule of activities, materials to be used, assessments and the standards to be covered.

An ample amount of planning and meeting time is structured into teachers' schedules. There are both weekly department and grade level planning meetings. Both new and returning teachers reported that the planning process is highly collaborative. Unit and lesson plans reviewed by site visitors indicated that typically three or four teachers were involved in the development of each cross-curricular unit, including lead teachers, assistant teachers, special educators and teachers of the arts. All lesson planning is documented in a web-based database, accessible to all staff on- and off-site to facilitate collaboration and thematic integration. Because units are saved in the database, they can be revised, updated, and re-used by teachers in successive years.

Finding: This year, the school replaced internally developed benchmarks with the standards included in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.

In the past, the school used internally developed benchmarks as the basis for its curriculum and assessment system. The benchmarks were based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, but were translated into more accessible language and adapted slightly each year to meet the

student's learning needs. This year, in an effort to simplify curriculum planning and assessment processes, the school has replaced the internal benchmarks with state standards. State standards are now used for all classroom subject areas (English language arts, Mathematics, French, science, global studies, music, and art), but the school has preserved its internally developed standards for community service learning, a mission-driven aspect of the school's program.

Finding: Student performance is carefully assessed and tracked.

All lesson plans include a list of all state standards to be addressed in the lesson and a list of assessments that will be used to measure student progress towards meeting the standards. A wide variety of assessments are used including teacher-developed tests, teacher observations, written work, and summative exhibition projects. Student work is evaluated using teacher-developed rubrics that are reviewed and revised on a yearly basis and shared with students in order to clarify expectations. Student achievement is measured on a 4-point scale, using the descriptors Advanced, Proficient, Developing, and Emerging.

The school uses an internally developed web-based grade book system known as CUE (Communicating Understanding Through Evidence) to track and report on student progress. The CUE system is used to generate progress reports that are provided to parents on a trimester basis. Because feedback from parents had indicated that the system of reporting on each school benchmark was too detailed, this year's CUE reports aggregate student assessment data on numerous standards into fewer evaluations on broader content area strands.

Finding: MCCPS has a commitment to maintaining an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on meeting the individual needs of its students.

Stakeholders reported that the core mission of the school is to meet the individual learning needs of students. Site visitors observed many aspects of the program that furthered this commitment. First, the school maintains a low teacher:student ratio which includes five inclusion specialists (one for each grade level) and three teaching assistants. The school staff also includes additional specialists, including a reading specialist and two psychological counselors.

Individual student needs are also addressed through a personal achievement plan, known as a MAP ("My Achievement Plan"). Students meet with their teachers and parents every fall to develop these plans, which include individual goals for the student, and a list of the ways that their parents and teachers can help them achieve the goals. Students reflect on their progress towards meeting their goals every two weeks, and attend another meeting in the spring to evaluate whether their goals have been met. Though some students in the student focus group questioned the value of MAP, others reported that the process helped them to achieve in diverse areas, including learning a musical instrument, writing poetry, and getting homework done.

Finding: Most classrooms were observed to use a variety of instructional strategies with an emphasis on cooperative group and project-based learning. Students were generally highly engaged and disruptions were minimal.

Site visitors observed that teachers employed a number of different instructional strategies. Teaching strategies appeared to be geared appropriately to the lessons being taught. Site visitors observed whole group instruction and discussion, small group project work, partnering, and independent practice. Both teacher-prepared and commercial materials were in use. Teachers

were noted to be attentive to the needs of all students, engaging those who did not volunteer and stating their expectations in clear, positive terms. For the most part, students seemed engaged and eager to participate. Students who were off task were easily redirected with short verbal reminders.

Are students reaching proficiency on state standards, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)?

Finding: English language arts and Mathematics scores for MCCPS students have been strong over the last five years.

MCAS results for English language arts and Mathematics for the last five years are presented below in Table I. This table includes the Composite Performance Index (CPI), which reflects the distribution of student scores over the four MCAS performance categories. The CPI is a 100-point index that measures the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency.

Table I: Marblehead Community Charter School MCAS Results by Performance Category Annual Comparisons 2003-2007

ELA	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failed	CPI
Grade 4						
2005	46	2	41	52	4	79.9
2006	46	9	33	54	4	81.0
2007	46	13	50	35	2	86.4
Grade 5						
2006	46	7	78	13	2	94.6
2007	45	20	58	22	0	93.3
Grade 6						
2006	45	27	67	7	0	97.8
2007	45	2	77	20	0	93.2
Grade 7						
2003	43	0	79	19	2	92.4
2004	44	5	89	7	0	98.3
2005	45	13	76	11	0	96.7
2006	45	18	69	13	0	95.0
2007	37	22	73	5	0	98.0
Grade 8						
2006	45	33	62	4	0	98.3
2007	44	18	80	2	0	98.9

Math	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failed	CPI
Grade 4						
2005	46	11	17	67	4	77.2
2006	46	7	33	54	7	76.6
2007	45	18	38	40	4	82.2
Grade 5						
2006	46	13	28	41	17	74.5
2007	45	27	40	29	4	86.7
Grade 6						
2002	44	0	41	45	14	72.2
2003	43	5	26	51	19	68.6
2004	45	24	33	38	4	82.2
2005	45	40	29	18	13	83.3
2006	45	20	36	31	13	80.0
2007	45	11	47	36	7	82.2
Grade 7						
2006	46	33	26	22	20	76.1
2007	37	27	38	22	14	81.8
Grade 8						
2002	44	18	36	36	9	78.4
2003	44	14	32	32	23	71.0
2004	42	14	40	33	12	78.0
2005	40	10	45	40	5	81.9
2006	45	38	38	22	2	88.9
2007	43	36	40	22	2	90.6

In English language arts, MCAS scores show strong and stable performance. At all grade levels, most students have reached proficiency. Grade 4 is the only grade at which any students are in the warning/failing category, with 2% at warning/failing.

Overall performance in Mathematics continues to be less strong than in English language arts, though gains were made at every grade level in 2007. Most significantly, the percentage of students to have reached proficiency in grade 5 increased from 41% in 2006 to 67% in 2007, with a commensurate gain of 12.2 points in that grade level's CPI.

Finding: MCCPS has met Adequate Yearly Progress goals in English language arts and Mathematics every year from 1999-2007.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations are calculated by the state, in accordance with the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. A school that makes AYP is considered "on track" to have all students score in the Proficient or Advanced categories on the MCAS exam by 2014. MCCPS data shows that the school has made adequate improvement to achieve

AYP in both ELA and math in the aggregate and in all significant subgroups for all years from 1999 through 2007.

Has student performance been strong, or improved over time on other external assessments?

Finding: The site visit team was unable to make a finding concerning student performance on external assessments other than the MCAS examination.

During the 2006-07 school year, MCCPS introduced NWEA testing, and phased out the SRI testing that had been done in the past. Data included in the school's 2006 annual report indicated strong student performance on the initial baseline testing, which was administered in December of 2006. Results on this test administration indicated that between 89% and 98% of students scored in the proficient range in reading and math at all grade levels. Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, the NWEA will be administered in the fall and spring of each academic year to assess progress over the course of the year.

Has student performance been strong, or improved over time on internal assessments?

Finding: The site visit team was unable to make a finding concerning student performance on internal assessments.

According to the 2006-07 site visit report, the majority of students at each grade level were achieving in the advanced/proficient range as measured by internal benchmarks tracked in the CUE system. The school did not provide this year's site visit team with additional data concerning the second half of the 2006-07 school year.

Have students met the academic performance goals set out in the school's Accountability Plan?

Finding: The school has met virtually all of the academic performance goals contained in its draft Accountability Plan.

The only goal directly related to academic performance the draft Accountability Plan provides that "all students will achieve competence in the basic skills: language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, oral and written communication, and technology", as evidenced by the majority of students scoring advanced or proficient on the MCAS subject area tests, and the number of students scoring in the needs improvement and warning/failing categories being reduced each year. In 2007, the majority of students scored advanced or proficient on all MCAS examinations, with the exception of the grade 8 science and technology examination, on which 42% of the students scored advanced (2%) or proficient (40%). The number of students scoring in the needs improvement or warning/failing categories declined or stayed the same in all subjects and grade levels except for English language arts in grades 5 and 6 (see Table 1, above).

3. Organizational Viability

Does the school have an effective leadership and governance structure for carrying out the mission, vision, and educational philosophy of the school? Does the school have systems and structures in place to guide improvement?

Finding: The school's current enrollment does not support the approved budget for FY 08. The school's enrollment, as of September 14, 2007, was 192 students. The amount of tuition revenue generated by this number of students is not sufficient to support the school's approved budget for FY 08, which is premised on full enrollment of 230 students. Unless expenditures are adjusted downward, the school projects that it will be facing an FY08 budget deficit of \$414,960 at the end of this fiscal year. The school reports that it has a cash reserve that could be used to cover the projected deficit. However, if expenses are not reduced, the school may be left with very little in current assets at the end of the fiscal year.

Finding: The Board of Trustees and administration need to move expeditiously to address fiscal concerns.

Board members reported that there has been "internal dislocation" around questions about the seriousness of the school's financial issues. Board members acknowledged that for the past several months, they have not been receiving detailed financial materials from the treasurer of the Board of Trustees. The treasurer resigned from the Board and the Finance Committee in mid-September, just before this site visit, and an interim treasurer was appointed. School leaders, the interim treasurer, and the school's business manager reported that priority would be given to developing contingency plans for the school.

Finding: The school is currently functioning under an interim leadership structure, however, the Board of Trustees has not yet articulated the process and timeline for determining the permanent leadership structure and hiring permanent leaders.

In August 2007, after an unsuccessful search for a full-time interim Head of School, the Board of Trustees created the positions of Interim Managing Director and Interim Academic Director to serve as co-leaders of the school. The school's former Assistant Head of School, who had been appointed Interim Head of School when the former Head of School was put on leave last spring, was hired to be the new Interim Academic Director. The Interim Managing Director position is part-time and was filled by one of the candidates for Interim Head of School. While the co-leaders appear to have a strong working relationship and a clear understanding of the scope of their individual responsibilities, the Board has not yet provided them with full job descriptions or employment contracts. Moreover, the Interim Managing Director reported that he views the current structure as a temporary arrangement that should be replaced with one leader as soon as possible.

The Board reported that the next major task of the Personnel Committee will be to decide on a permanent leadership structure and to hire leaders for those positions. The Board is not yet ready to commit to a particular leadership model for the future, and instead plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the current structure over the course of this academic year, and to make decisions about both structure and hiring using an inclusive process that includes community

member input. However, it has not yet developed a tool for evaluating the current leaders or the current structure, nor has it articulated the process it will use to move ahead with decision-making. It is urgent that the Board move forward with this process in order to have a more stable administrative structure in place by the start of the next school year.

Finding: Teachers continue to play a key role in leadership at the school.

The school's charter provides that "MCCPS is to be a teacher-led, student focused school; staff members will be an integral part of every aspect of school operations." In line with the charter, the school's bylaws have always provided for teachers to serve on the Board of Trustees. The number of teachers on the Board of Trustees and the concerns about conflict of interest were factors in the major conflicts that arose within the school community last year. This year, the school has revised its bylaws to clarify the permissible role of teachers on the Board while still allowing up to three teacher trustees to serve on the Board and additional teachers to serve on Board committees and task forces. As of the site visit, the only employees on the Board are the school's facilities coordinator and the Interim Academic Director, but teachers serve on the Governance, Finance, and Personnel Committees and the Security Task Force, and the Board anticipates that there will soon be at least one teacher appointed to the Board.

In addition to playing an important role in governance, teachers are also on the school leadership team. This team includes at least one teacher from each grade level, but is open to all teachers. The leadership team meets weekly with the Interim Academic Director to work on policy development and current academic issues.

Finding: Stakeholders report that the current Board of Trustees is high functioning and effective. They attribute this in part to a recent shift from election to appointment of new members. However, Board members reported that, despite the current positive climate, a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities has still not been institutionalized.

Governance issues at MCCPS in the 2006-07 school year created instability that affected the school most deeply at the Board and leadership levels. As divisive conflicts arose, membership on the board changed, as did officer positions. In the past seven months, six new members have joined the Board to replace eight members who resigned during this time period. In addition, the person holding the position of treasurer has changed three times in eighteen months, with the most recent incumbent resigning from the Board in mid-September after seven months in the position.

Stakeholders reported that the current Board appears to be functioning more effectively than in past years. Many attributed the improvement to the shift from an elected to an appointed Board. It was reported that in the past, potential Board members had campaigned for their seats on the Board, creating a situation where competition rather than cooperation was encouraged among board members and members saw themselves as representing a particular constituency. Pursuant to the school's revised, DOE approved bylaws, the current Board has adopted a process of using the Governance Committee to identify perceived institutional needs of the Board and to recruit individuals who have the skills and abilities to meet those needs.

Despite the improvement resulting from this change, some Board members reported that there are still concerns about institutionalizing practices that would ensure that the Board continues to

function effectively, despite turnover. The Board focus group reported that the school does not have an effective orientation process in place for new members and that governance training would be helpful. Future site visitors should examine what steps have been taken to implement structures or undergo training that would institutionalize best practices for the Board of Trustees.

Is the school safe and are the physical facilities adequate for the program of the school?

Finding: Staff have maintained high standards of professionalism to insulate students from recent turmoil, so that their educational experience has not suffered.

Parents of returning students reported that neither the events of last year nor this year's turnover in leadership has affected their children. They reported that the staff behaved in a consistently professional manner to insulate students and ensure that their school experience was not disrupted. Site visitors noted that the classroom climate appeared to be one in which students felt safe and comfortable. Despite recent upheaval and the large turnover in students, the school has maintained the programmatic elements that define its school culture, including the daily morning community meetings, the school-wide recess and lap-running program, the family-style lunch service, and the culminating exhibition nights. Students appeared eager to contribute and unafraid to show their enthusiasm and interest. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about teaching and learning. Student work is prominently displayed throughout the school.

Are professional staff members qualified by training and/or experience in the areas to which they are assigned?

Finding: This year's teacher turnover appears to be in line with past history and largely unaffected by recent events.

Table II shows the years of teaching experience for faculty at MCCPS.

Table II: Years of Teaching Experience for Faculty 2007-2008

	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-20 Years	21+ Years
Teachers with this number of years teaching	3	2	7	7	3
Teachers with this number of years teaching at MCCS	7	5	3	6	N/A

Of the entire staff and faculty, including administrators, assistants and support staff, 24% are new this year. However, only four lead teachers did not return to the school this year: one moved out of the country, one started a new business, one left for a better paying position, and one left because of general dissatisfaction with the job. Though last year's site visit team noted that teachers were questioning whether they would stay on, given the tense atmosphere at the school, it appears that since that visit matters have been resolved to their satisfaction. This year's staff reported that morale is high and that the school is filled with "renewed energy." New teachers reported that they have found the school to be an easy place to enter, with a useful orientation and ongoing mentoring program. Teachers are provided with extensive professional

development and planning time, including seven hours each week of common planning time, and ten full and five half-day professional development opportunities.

Are school community members satisfied with the performance of the school?

Finding: Parents, the Board of Trustees and students recognize that a major challenge for MCCPS is regaining the trust of the external community. Steps are being taken to address this issue.

When asked what major challenges are facing the school, all stakeholders spoke about the need to regain the trust and credibility of the school in the external community. Students are aware of recent events at the school, and experience the negative consequences of those events in their contact with the external community; they spoke openly about the discomfort they experienced when friends outside the school taunted them for attending “that school.” It is understood that until the “cloud that hangs over the school is lifted” it will be difficult to attain full enrollment, a step that is necessary to ensure the school’s long term viability.

To address this situation, the Board is moving forward with the creation of a new Community Relations Committee in order to take a more active role in community outreach and to foster a positive image of the school in the larger community. Also, the Interim Managing Director sees his primary role as one of reaching out to the community. Parents, too, spoke of rebuilding the community’s respect by publicizing positive news about the school.

Finding: Stakeholders have worked hard to successfully address the impact of the influx of new families to the school this year and to create a positive school culture and climate.

At all levels, the school is taking steps to smoothly incorporate the large number of new families from outside of Marblehead that have enrolled this year. The Board now includes three members from Swampscott, and is recruiting additional members from other towns from which the school is drawing students. A new Parent Teacher Organization has sponsored several activities to welcome new families, including two school clean-up days and a social event before the beginning of school, a parent breakfast on the first day of school, and a buddy system that matches new families with others from their community. Communication is a priority, with school leadership sending out regular updates to all parents. A new Parent Handbook, with expanded information on community resources, is under revision and publication is expected soon. Teachers reported that they have doubled their efforts to build the school culture through team building activities such playing “Stump the Staff” at the daily morning community meetings. As a result, “the classroom situation has never been better.”

Finding: Students reported a high level of satisfaction with the school.

In a student focus group, students spoke enthusiastically about those aspects of the school that make it unique: the enrichment program, the small size and community feeling of the school, the engaging academic program, and the food service. It is clear that students appreciate the efforts made by the school to accept and value the unique qualities of each individual. They were also pleased with the recent influx on new students, seeing it as an opportunity to make new friends, including some who come from other towns and different backgrounds. Some students expressed the view that this year is “like starting over again” because of all the new faces, but felt optimistic about the direction of the school.

Finding: Parents are satisfied with the curriculum, teaching strategies, and academic success of the school.

Parents in a focus group interview described the school as “a little gem.” They spoke enthusiastically about the committed and nurturing staff, the challenging academic program, the extensive support system and the inclusive community culture. Parents appreciate the high level of communication and the accessibility of teachers and administrators. Several parents mentioned that the school community fostered participation and risk taking for their children, each citing their “shy” child coming out of their shells and performing in front of peers, staff, and families.

Has the school met the organizational viability goals set out in its Accountability Plan?

Finding: The school has made progress towards meeting the organizational viability goals in its draft Accountability Plan.

As discussed above, until July 2007 the school was operating under a draft Accountability Plan. There were four goals in the draft Accountability Plan that relate to the school’s organizational viability in its charter, as discussed below.

- *The school will develop and articulate a coordinated curriculum and assessment procedure for all grade levels.*
Measurable outcomes for this goal are that MCCPS teachers meet regularly to develop internally developed benchmarks aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, and used the benchmarks to track student performance. As discussed above, this year the school discontinued this practice, so this goal is no longer relevant.
- *The school will maintain a professionally challenging environment for MCCPS faculty and staff.*
Measurable outcomes for this goal are the provision of internal and external professional development activities throughout the school year. As discussed above, this goal is being met.
- *The school will integrate media and technology components in to the educational program.*
The measurable outcome for this goal is the provision of weekly technology-based classes to all students. This goal is being met.
- *The school will create and/or acquire sufficient space to meet the educational and enrichment needs of students.*
There are two measurable outcomes for this goal. The first is that the school will complete its expansion by the 2005-06 school year. This goal has been met. The second is that the school will provide enrichment activities for its students. This goal is being met.

Conclusion

Is the school becoming the school it promised to be in its charter?

In terms of its academic program, the school continues to fulfill the promises contained in its charter. Teachers and administrators are fully engaged in a collaborative process of curriculum planning using a backwards design model to create integrated units aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Though the school no longer uses its own internal benchmarks, it continues to use its internally developed electronic system (the CUE system) to collect and report on student achievement. Students are engaged, challenged, and supported. Academic performance, as measured by MCAS results, is strong and stable.

Last year's site visit report described a school that was "at a crossroads" in terms of organizational viability. At this point, the school appears to have resolved most of the internal disputes that threatened the school's viability. A functional, though interim, leadership team is in place. The bylaws and many of the policies and procedures have been revised to create more effective governance structures. The Board of Trustees appears to be united in purpose and well functioning. Stakeholders report that this school year has begun with a sense of renewed energy and purpose. However, the events of the past year have clearly taken their toll on the school. At the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, the school was fully enrolled, and had a waitlist of 84 students. At the time of the site visit, enrollment was at 192 students and there was a waitlist for grade 5 only (5 students). Moreover, though Marblehead residents are given preference in enrollment, the student demographic composition has shifted from 84 % Marblehead residents in 2006-2007 to 43% Marblehead residents at the start of the 2007-08 school year.

The school is now facing what it has defined as a two-fold challenge: it must strengthen its infrastructure by ensuring that the board and administrative leadership have the capacity and stability to guide the school through the challenges that lie ahead as the school rebuilds itself, and, in so doing, it must improve its relationship with the external community by regaining its reputation and renewing trust. As the school moves past this period of disruption, future site visitors and the Charter School Office will continue to monitor the school's progress towards meeting these challenges.