



Massachusetts Department of
**ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION**

Renewal Inspection Report

MARBLEHEAD COMMUNITY
CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL
MARBLEHEAD, MA

November 17 - 19, 2009

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Contents

Introduction	1
A. The Renewal Inspection Process and Site Visit Report	1
B. Overview of this Report	1
Renewal Inspection Team	2
Setting	4
Renewal Inspection Methodology	6
Findings	8
A. Faithfulness to Charter	8
Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures	8
Other Performance Topics	9
B. Academic Program Success	11
Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures	11
Other Performance Topics	13
C. Organizational Viability	21
Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures	21
Other Performance Topics	23
Appendix: Renewal Inspection Site Visit Schedule	30

Introduction

A. The Renewal Inspection Process and Site Visit Report

The charter renewal application process begins with the charter school's submission to the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (ESE) of a completed Application for Renewal of a Public School Charter. After the Charter School Office (CSO) has reviewed the application and determined that it is clear and complete, the school is notified of the application's acceptance. The ESE contracts with an independent organization to conduct a detailed review of the school's performance. The renewal inspection organization assigns a team of specialists to conduct a renewal inspection site visit and prepare a renewal inspection report summarizing the team's findings regarding the school's performance relative to its Accountability Plan and the ESE's *Common School Performance Criteria*. The inspection is conducted following the ESE's *Massachusetts Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol*, collecting and examining evidence relating to three areas of inquiry:

1. The school's faithfulness to the terms of its charter,
2. The success of the school's academic program, and
3. The viability of the school as an organization.

After the renewal inspection site visit, the team prepares a draft of the renewal inspection report and submits it to the CSO and the school for review. The renewal inspection report does not make any recommendations regarding renewal, nor does the report make any recommendations to the school regarding its operations. After incorporating any factual corrections, the team submits the final report to the CSO. This report is the result of one such inspection.

B. Overview of this Report

This renewal inspection report contains the following information:

- Professional biographies of the renewal inspection team members;
- A report setting that provides contextual information regarding the school;
- The methodology employed by the renewal inspection team in conducting the renewal inspection; and
- The renewal inspection team's findings and supporting evidence concerning the school's performance relative to its Accountability Plan objectives and measures and other performance topics, as discussed in the *Protocol*.

Appendix A of this report contains the detailed schedule of the renewal inspection site visit.

Renewal Inspection Team

Robin Coyne Hull, Team Leader. Robin joined the SchoolWorks team in August 2006 as a Project Manager. Each year, she leads multiple school quality review teams in charter schools across many states. Prior to joining SchoolWorks, Robin worked as a Massachusetts charter school leader for 11 years. She began her charter school work in 1995 at South Shore Charter Public School – one of the first to open in Massachusetts. Also, she was head of school for the Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School. Robin holds a dual license in Massachusetts – superintendent and grades 1-6 elementary teacher. She is certified as an AMS Montessori elementary teacher. During her 30 years in education, she has taught and led schools from pre-school through middle school levels. She has experience in public and private schools and has a broad knowledge in project-based education, classical education, multi-age programs, character education, and the Montessori method. Robin served four years on the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association as chair of the technical assistance committee. She has volunteered for the Massachusetts Department of Education, reviewing charter school applications and serving on school quality site team visits. She has presented at the Core Knowledge and KIPP Summit Conferences. Robin holds a BA in English from the University of New Hampshire and an M. Ed. from Bridgewater State College.

Gwendolyn Casazza, Team Writer. Gwendolyn is a Project Associate with SchoolWorks. As an educator and researcher, Gwendolyn has experience developing, managing, and evaluating educational programs for culturally and linguistically diverse audiences in the United States and Latin America. Prior to joining SchoolWorks, Gwendolyn examined the instructional practices of English/Language Arts teachers in New York City public middle schools for a study led by Stanford University and Education Development Center. Gwendolyn also led a southern California research team to conduct school visits and interviews with school and district staff to evaluate a statewide program that supported and monitored low-performing K-12 schools. Gwendolyn's previous experience includes managing inquiry-based programs at a hands-on science center and serving as an AmeriCorps volunteer in an urban elementary school in California's Sacramento region. Gwendolyn holds a BA in International Relations and Comparative Literature from the University of California, Davis, and a credential for bilingual instruction at the elementary school level from California State University, Sacramento. She received a Masters degree in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Chris Collins, Team Member. Chris is Chief Financial Officer of the Academy of the Pacific Rim (APR) Charter Public School located in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. He has worked in this capacity for the Academy since 1999. APR has grown significantly since then and now serves 475 students. In 2006, Chris worked with the Academy's Executive Director to facilitate the acquisition, financing, and renovation of their school building. Since joining the Academy, Chris has been primarily responsible for financial controls

and oversight of the facility. He has managed a multi-year expansion within their leased facility. Prior to joining APR, Chris served as Business Manager at the Somerville Charter School during their first two years of operation, opening in 1996. In addition, he supported Boston Preparatory Charter Public School during their planning year and served as Director of Finance and Operation through their opening academic year in 2004-2005. Chris holds a B.A. in English from Boston College and an M.B.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Katie Graves Maycock, Team Member. Katie is a consultant for SchoolWorks. In more than 12 years in public education, Katie has taught in, led, and supported the success of elementary and middle schools nationally. Most recently, she provided consulting services to the Chicago Public Schools through their new school evaluation process. Previously, Ms. Graves Maycock was the Director of Assessment for Lighthouse Academies, the school leader for the KIPP: Village Academy in Chicago and Co-founder and Director of Operations for Namaste Charter School in Chicago. A Teach for America alum, she also trained new teachers as a curriculum specialist for Teach for America. Ms. Graves Maycock holds a B.A. in Sociology and Anthropology from Carleton College and a Masters in Educational Leadership from Harvard University.

Setting

Marblehead Community Charter Public School (MCCPS) is located in Marblehead, Massachusetts. The school officially opened in 1995, serving students in grades 5-7. MCCPS added the eighth grade in 1996-1997. The fourth grade was added in 2004-2005 and, since that time, the school has served students in grades 4–8. Within this charter term, the school’s charter has been amended to update the school’s governance and enrollment policies.

The school’s mission states:

MCCPS fosters a community that empowers children to become capable, self-determining, fully engaged individuals who are critical and creative thinkers committed to achieving their highest intellectual, artistic, social, emotional, and physical potential. We are dedicated to involving, learning from, participating in, and serving our school community and community at large.

MCCPS provides students from the Marblehead community and surrounding communities with a standards-driven, performance-based instructional program. The school purposely aims to cultivate well-rounded learners, active citizens, and considerate community members. Students are given frequent opportunities to intensely engage in intellectual pursuits, interact meaningfully with their peers and teachers, and deeply connect to their school community. MCCPS works diligently to establish a safe and nurturing atmosphere for students, as well as a welcoming and participatory setting for parents and family members.

MCCPS uses a lottery system to enroll students for grades 4 through 8. Students predominantly come from Marblehead, Swampscott, and Salem. The school also has students from Lynn, Nahant, Beverly, Peabody, Saugus, and Winthrop. The maximum student enrollment permitted by the school’s charter is 230 students. MCCPS is currently enrolled at its optimal capacity. The tables below illustrate current enrollment by grade level and by ethnic subgroups.

Current Student Enrollment by Grade Level

Grade Level	Students Enrolled
Fourth Grade	45
Fifth Grade	46
Sixth Grade	48
Seventh Grade	46
Eighth Grade	45
Total	230

Current Student Enrollment by Subgroups

Ethnicity	Percentage of students
White	88.7%
Hispanic/Latino	7.8%
Multiracial, non-Hispanic	1.7%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.9%
Black or African American	0.4%
Asian	0.4%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	N/A

In the 2006-2007 academic year, MCCPS experienced an abrupt and controversial change in leadership – one that severely impacted school enrollment (110 students withdrew) and finances. Deliberate changes to the school’s governance and leadership structure helped resolve the institutional crisis, bringing stability to the school’s climate, finances, and enrollment. The school’s waitlist data, presented in the following table, demonstrate the fall and rise of the waitlist numbers during this time period. This school year’s waitlist figures are the highest in MCCPS history.

Waitlist from 2005-2006 to 2009-2010

Year	Number of students
2005-2006	84
2006-2007	0
2007-2008	146
2008-2009	145
2009-2010	200

The school is governed by a Board of Trustees with 10 members. (The maximum size is 15.) The tenure of current members ranges from eight months to seven years. The finance, governance, and personnel subcommittees are required by MCCPS bylaws. A community relations subcommittee was formed to spearhead the school’s outreach to local communities and restore public confidence after the 2006-2007 MCCPS crisis. The Board is currently looking to improve fundraising and development efforts, and has commissioned a task force to examine options for generating funding (e.g., recruiting a trustee with related experience).

Renewal Inspection Methodology

The renewal inspection team spent two-and-a-half days – November 17 through 19, 2009 – at MCCPS. They also conducted a three-hour pre-visit the prior day. The process entailed interviews and focus groups with school leaders, Board members, teachers, support specialists, parents, and students. Additionally, the renewal inspection team toured the school premises, observed classes, reviewed documents, and deliberated extensively to formulate findings that present a current picture of MCCPS.

- The renewal inspection team conducted interviews with the academic director, interim managing director, and student services coordinator, business manager, and mathematics/science department chair.
- Focus groups were conducted with the following school constituents:
 - Board of Trustees: six of the ten trustees were in attendance, including the chair, vice-chair, treasurer, clerk, and other Board members. Their tenure ranges from one-and-a-half to seven years.
 - Leadership Team: The renewal inspection team met with all members of the leadership team. The membership included the academic director, student services coordinator, director of special education, professional development coordinator, technology coordinator, mathematics/science department chair, and the humanities department chair.
 - Teachers: The renewal inspection team met with three teacher focus groups. A total of fourteen teachers and inclusion specialists from all grade levels and subjects (except for music and art) were interviewed.
- The following focus groups were conducted with parents and students:
 - Parents: The renewal inspection team met with two parent focus groups. A total of 19 parents with children in grades 4-8 were interviewed.
 - Students: The renewal inspection team conducted focus groups with six students representing grades 4-6 and seven students representing grades 7-8.
- Twenty-one classroom observations were conducted in grades 4-8 in all academic areas taught at the school. Beyond the traditional subject areas, renewal inspection team members observed Spanish, French, and music. The team utilized the MA DESE *Classroom Observation Evidence Worksheet*. Within the evidence tool, each observer noted classroom configuration, lesson objectives, classroom management, instructional practices, and levels of student engagement. The renewal inspection team also kept a running, time-sensitive record of teacher and student activities. Classroom visitations were conducted for approximately 20 minutes and all observation evidence was compiled and reviewed in the aggregate.
- The renewal inspection team reviewed the following data and documents:
 - MCCPS renewal application
 - Annual reports

- Staff Handbook
- Student-Parent Handbook
- Parent Fall 2008 Satisfaction Surveys and Results
- Parent Interim Academic Director Evaluation, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009
- Faculty Interim Academic Director Evaluation, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009
- Managing Director job description
- Academic Director job description
- MCCPS enrollment policy and procedures
- MCCPS application
- Sample student, teacher, and administrative My Achievement Plan (MAP) goals and reflections
- 2009-10 student enrollment, by community
- 2008-09 Faculty Interim Director evaluation
- MCCPS Special Education Overview
- MCCPS Promotion Policy
- MCCPS 5-10 minute observation form
- 2008-2009 Instructional Practice, Professional Practice/Collegial Relations, Administrative Review, and SPED Instructional Practice Evaluation Rubrics
- Academic Director performance report
- MCCPS Essential Habits
- MCCPS Global Themes list with essential questions and understanding goals
- Unit and lesson plan database
- Spring 2009 Time and Space Exhibition description
- Communicating Understanding through Evidence (CUE) reports (report cards)
- Mentoring meeting notes
- Grade-level meeting notes
- Staff professional development information
- Forming Units to Elevate Learning (FUEL) workshop notes
- MCCPS dissemination documentation
- Current staff list
- MCAS, AYP, and NWEA data
- Financial statements and audits
- Board of Trustees meeting minutes

The report appendix contains a detailed schedule for the renewal site visit. This renewal inspection has been conducted pursuant to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol*.

A. Faithfulness to Charter

Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures

Objective 1: MCCPS will prepare students to take responsibility for their own learning.

- *Each year, 100% of MCCPS students will collaborate with their teachers and parents to develop, document progress toward, and achieve individual learning goals.*

The school has met this measure. As reported by MCCPS staff, 100% of students met with their teachers and parents in fall 2009 to establish goals.

Each fall, the school provides guidance to students and their families to help each MCCPS student develop MAP (individual learning) goals for the academic year. The school sends a letter home with tips on how parents can prepare for the MAP goal-setting conference (e.g., assessing their child's strengths and challenges). School professional development records indicated that, in September 2009, teachers were trained on helping students develop measurable and achievable MAP goals and objectives. The renewal inspection team reviewed sample student MAP goals (e.g., student will read at least three books from four genres that s/he does not regularly choose). Parents and teachers develop corresponding goals that outline how they will help students achieve MAP goals (e.g., parents will help student obtain and choose appropriate books; teachers will provide student with a reading log to track reading each night).

Teachers conduct periodic reflections with students throughout the school year to assess progress toward accomplishing MAP goals. Some students shared their 2009-2010 MAP goals with the renewal inspection team and conveyed their investment in accomplishing these goals.

- *By 2010, at least 90% of all 8th grade students will earn a rating of Demonstrates or Demonstrates with Distinction for being responsible and reliable and persistent and self-directed, as determined by their teachers and recorded on the student's report card.*
- *By 2010, at least 75% of all 6th grade students will earn a rating of Demonstrates or Demonstrates with Distinction for being responsible and reliable and persistent and self-directed, as determined by their teachers and recorded on the student's report card.*

The school has not met these measures. As stated in the renewal application and confirmed by MCCPS, 65% of students in grade 8 and 71% of students in grade 6 earned a rating of Demonstrates or Demonstrates with Distinction for being responsible and reliable; 43% of students in grade 8 and 65% of students in grade 6 earned a rating of Demonstrates or Demonstrates with Distinction for being persistent and self-directed.

Objective 2: MCCPS will create and maintain multiple opportunities for community involvement in the educational program.

- *Each year, parent satisfaction surveys will indicate at least 80% of respondents rate the community atmosphere of the school as good to excellent.*

The school has met this measure. According to the fall 2008 parent satisfaction survey data, 93% (n=85) of the 95 families who responded to the survey reported that there is a sense of community present in the school most or all of the time. The total response rate was 53%; 86 of the 181 families did not respond to the survey.

- *Each year, over 50% of daily enrichment activities will be planned, organized, and supervised by community volunteers.*

The school has met this measure. School records verified that more than 50% of all enrichments were facilitated by community volunteers (e.g., students, parents, alumni, and outside community volunteers). Additionally, MCCPS records indicated that community volunteers are teaching 84% of the 2009 fall session I enrichment sessions.

The renewal inspection team visited various enrichment classes, including Government by the People, Saving the World, Street Latin Dance, Eco Art, and the wood working enrichment classes. The renewal inspection team also observed Cooking from the Garden – an enrichment class taught by a parent volunteer. During each 40-minute session, students in this cooking class prepare foods from scratch (e.g., pasta with fresh spinach, bell peppers, and basil) and compare their freshly-made dishes to canned foods. According to students in this class, food cooked from scratch is healthier, cheaper, and better tasting.

Other Performance Topics

1. All stakeholders have a common understanding of the mission and vision of the school.

A shared understanding and commitment to the mission and vision of MCCPS is evident at the school. Students, for example, indicated that MCCPS realizes its mission by pushing all students to attain their highest potential, while supporting each student according to his or her specific needs. Students reported that over the past two years, the mission has become a big deal – and is discussed during the school-wide community meeting, posted in all the rooms, and more visible.

Stakeholders described ways in which the MCCPS mission and vision are embedded within various structures of the school. For instance, parents stated that MCCPS teaching practices incorporate innovative, creative, right-brained instructional approaches, while simultaneously preparing students for careers and the real world. Parents, teachers, and school leaders reported that exhibitions of student work are an opportunity for the entire MCCPS community to gather and celebrate each student's intellectual, social, and artistic accomplishments. Parents described the school's daily enrichment classes, integration of the arts into the curriculum, and emphasis on community service.

Parents, teachers, and students remarked about the community feeling present throughout MCCPS. Various teachers indicated that the clear sense of community was one of the school's

greatest strengths, while parents reported feeling welcomed at the school. Parents also stated that the small size of MCCPS ensures that all students are constantly on the radar.

2. There is strong evidence that the MCCPS mission and vision are integrated into the school's curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.

The MCCPS academic program is intentionally aligned to the mission. Global themes reflect the school's experiential, hands-on, and interdisciplinary approach to learning, and exemplify the school's mission to develop well-rounded individuals for life beyond its walls. The school incorporates a series of essential habits into the MCCPS curriculum to nurture each student's social and emotional potential. The school's internally-developed assessments provide teachers with authentic evidence from which to draw conclusions on student learning.

Rotating global themes, essential questions, and understanding goals guide the curriculum choices for each trimester. Themes, questions, and understanding goals are linked to the Massachusetts Frameworks and purposefully connected to real life. Themes include: communities and individuals; change: cycles and transformations; conflict and harmony; and, communication. Teachers collaborate closely to infuse multiple content areas into each global theme (unit) plan. The renewal inspection team observed lessons that simultaneously incorporated different subjects, including foreign language and art, biology and mathematics, and geometry and community service. (For more information on the school's curriculum development and instruction, see Academic Program Success – Findings 1 and 6).

In addition to conducting external assessments, MCCPS utilizes the following internal, performance-based assessments to evaluate each student's mastery of the standards-based curriculum:

1. Public exhibitions of student work are the culminating projects that close each global theme. As stated in the renewal application and verified by school staff members, exhibitions are presented to the public at the end of each trimester. During each exhibition, students are expected to speak with visitors about their work, what they have learned, and why it is important. At the time of the site visit, the renewal inspection team observed students preparing to display, present, and perform their exhibition projects.
2. The CUE (or Communicating Understanding through Evidence) is the MCCPS report card. It is a web-based reporting platform where teachers document how and to what extent each student masters the standards covered in each global theme and embodies the essential habits. Renewal inspection team members were provided with an overview of the CUE and reviewed student reports. (For more information on the school's internal assessment practices, see Academic Program Success – Finding 2).

The school's behavioral code is grounded in the five essential habits: 1) responsibility and reliability; 2) persistence and self-direction; 3) reflection and inquisitiveness; 4) organization and attentiveness to detail; and, 5) respect and honesty – a series of values and personal characteristics incorporated into the MCCPS curriculum in order to promote effective citizenship and lifelong learning. A community service learning course is offered at each grade level. (For more information on the school's climate and culture, see Organizational Viability – Finding 3).

B. Academic Program Success

Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures

Objective 3: MCCPS will prepare students for future academic success.

- *By 2010, at least 90% of all 8th grade students will pass the MCAS math, science, and ELA tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure. The performance of students in grade 8 on the spring 2009 MCAS tests indicated: 100% of the students passed the English language arts test; 92% passed the mathematics test; and, 94% passed the science test.

- *By 2010, at least 75 % of all 6th grade students will pass the MCAS math and ELA tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure. The performance of students in grade 6 on the spring 2009 MCAS tests indicated: 100% of the students passed the English language arts test and 87% passed the mathematics portion of the exam.

- *By 2010, at least 80% of all 8th grade students will earn a proficient score or above on all MCAS tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure for ELA but not for mathematics or science. In 2009, 92% of the students in grade 8 scored proficient in ELA. (There were no students in the advanced category.) Progress is being made toward this goal in mathematics and science. In mathematics, 68% of the students scored proficient or above, while 61% of students in grade 8 performed at the proficient or advanced levels in science.

The following summary of MCAS results details in which years students in grade 8 met this measure for each subject:

Percent of Students in Grade 8 Scoring in the Advanced and Proficient Range (Results that met the measure are in bold type.)

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
ELA	95	98	91	92
Mathematics	76	76	73	68
Science	75	42	97	61

As stated in the renewal application and confirmed by MCCPS leaders, the high student turnover rate caused by the 2006-2007 crisis impacted student MCAS scores – that is, there were only nine students in grade 8 in the 2008-2009 class who attended MCCPS since grade 4. Of these students, 89% scored in the advanced and proficient range in both science and mathematics, while 100% of this subgroup scored in the proficient range on the 2009 MCAS.

(For more information on actions MCCPS is taking to analyze external assessment data and improve student performance, see Academic Program Success – Findings 3 and 5).

- *By 2010, at least 70% of all 6th grade students will earn a proficient score or above on all MCAS tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure for mathematics but not for ELA. In the 2009 MCAS mathematics exam, 71% of the students in grade 6 performed at the proficient or advanced levels, while 61% of the students in grade 6 performed at the proficient or advanced levels in ELA.

The following summary of MCAS results details in which years students in grade 6 met this measure for each subject:

Percent of Students in Grade 6 Scoring in the Advanced and Proficient Range
(Results that met the measure are in bold type.)

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
ELA	94	79	65	61
Mathematics	56	58	45	71

- *MCCPS will meet or exceed yearly AYP benchmarks.*

MCCPS has met this measure. In 2009, the school made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the aggregate and for all subgroups in ELA and mathematics. Currently, the school does not have an NCLB accountability status. The following table presents additional information on the school's AYP performance since 2001.

Student Performance

		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	NCLB Accountability Status
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No status
	All Subgroups	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	
Math	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No status
	All Subgroups	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	

- *By 2010, at least 90% of all 8th grade students will earn a proficient rating on NWEA (Northwest Education Association) mathematics and reading tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure for reading but not for mathematics. In the June 2009 administration of the NWEA, students in grade 8 reached the proficiency target in reading but not in mathematics. Specifically, 97.3% of students in grade 8 met or exceeded the proficiency goal on the spring 2009 NWEA reading test, while 64.9% of the grade 8 cohort met or exceeded the proficiency goal in mathematics.

- *By 2010, at least 75% of all 6th grade students will earn a proficient rating on NWEA (Northwest Education Association) math and reading tests.*

MCCPS has met this measure in reading but not in mathematics. In the June 2009 administration of the NWEA, 91.7% of students in grade 6 met or exceeded the proficiency goal on the spring 2009 NWEA reading test, while 70.9% of the grade 6 cohort met or exceeded the proficiency goal in mathematics.

- *By 2010, at least 90% of all 8th grade students will earn a proficient rating on all internally developed subject area benchmarks (strands).*

The school did not meet this measure in the 2008-2009 academic year – the most current data available. As indicated in the renewal application and confirmed by school records, 79% of students in grade 8 earned a proficient or above rating in mathematics, while 77% of students in grade 8 earned a proficient or above rating in ELA. In the aggregate, 75% of students in grade 8 earned a rating of proficient or above in all subjects.

- *By 2010, at least 75% of all 6th grade students will earn a proficient rating on all internally developed subject area benchmarks (strands).*

The school partially met this measure in the 2008-2009 academic year – the most current data available. As indicated in the renewal application and confirmed by school records, the grade 6 class met this goal in mathematics, but did not meet the set targets in ELA or in the aggregate. In the grade 6 class, 75% of students earned a proficient or above rating in mathematics, while 61% of the students earned a proficient or above rating in ELA. In the aggregate, 68% of the students in grade 6 earned a proficient or above in all subjects.

Other Performance Topics

1. The Massachusetts Frameworks are fully integrated into the MCCPS curriculum development and electronic archiving systems.

The MCCPS curriculum development and online archiving systems are clearly integrated with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Every summer, MCCPS teachers collaboratively refine the scope and sequence of instruction for the upcoming year. The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks are integrated into the language arts, mathematics, science, global studies, music, art, foreign languages, and health/wellness course plans. Standards are categorized according to strand (e.g., number sense and operations, civics / government, technology / engineering, reading and literature) for each subject. Across focus groups, teachers and school leaders described how the standards were the non-negotiable launching point for the school's teacher-generated curriculum.

Utilizing the principles of backwards design, teachers develop three interdisciplinary, project-based units (one per trimester) for the academic year. Each unit is closely aligned to state standards and school-wide global themes, essential questions, and understanding goals. Seven themes are used on a rotating basis and are selected for their open-ended, real world, and interdisciplinary potential.

At the time of the site visit, instruction throughout the entire school centered on the theme of communication and the following essential questions:

- How does communication occur? and
- What are the purposes of communication?

In one classroom, the renewal inspection observed students implementing the *Bridges Build Communication* project. Working in company construction teams, students – assuming the roles of project director, architect, carpenter, and accountant – constructed matchstick bridges in accordance with their architectural designs, maintained balance sheets that accounted for construction costs, and described the day’s accomplishments in their journals. These tasks provided students with the opportunity to explore different methods and purposes of communication, the factors that influence communication, and the importance of communicating effectively – the understanding goals corresponding with this theme.

In order to determine that the right standards are covered and that adequate time is provided to address each standard, teachers reported that they apply what they learned from prior years and conduct pre-tests to determine what this year’s group of students knows. Teachers also indicated that the scope and sequence they develop over the summer is a road map. As they implement units during the year, there is flexibility to adapt the material to ensure that the curriculum addresses student needs. In focus groups, teachers reported that decisions to modify the scope and sequence are made during department meetings.

All curriculum documents are archived online and accessible to every staff member on-site and remotely. This electronic database allows teachers to revise, update, and re-use lesson plans. Each lesson is clearly named to facilitate access. The renewal inspection team reviewed the online curriculum database and found lesson plans that consistently identified standards to be addressed, the corresponding strand for each standard, the objective of the lesson, and the assessment approach. Archived lesson plans had multiple authors (e.g., one lesson was designed by the humanities teacher and inclusion specialist for that grade level, as well as the school reading specialist), highlighting the collaborative and integrated nature of MCCPS curriculum development. School staff reported that teachers consult external texts (e.g., Everyday Math, Algebra I, Writer’s Express) when developing curriculum. Ultimately, teachers are given the independence to consult these texts – as well as other resources – to design standards-based lessons that support the school’s mission and meet the individual learning needs of their students.

2. Internal assessments drive the pacing of instruction and curriculum planning, and provide teachers with comprehensive data on student performance.

MCCPS consistently implements an internal assessment system that gauges individual student performance and mastery of central concepts and state standards. The assessments results are reviewed regularly and used to plan and pace instruction.

At the end of each trimester, students conduct public exhibitions of their work to the school community, their families, and each another. At this event, every MCCPS student is required to present an exhibition, speak on behalf of their project, and demonstrate what they have learned during each thematic unit of study. In focus groups, teachers and school leaders explained how

these culminating projects drive the pace of instruction. Exhibitions are a clear goal at the end of the trimester from which teachers plan backwards. Unit plans have calendars indicating when particular components of student exhibitions will be completed. Each exhibition integrates various content areas, requiring grade-level colleagues to collaboratively coordinate their development and implementation.

The site visit took place the week prior to the fall 2009 exhibition of student work. The renewal inspection team observed students putting the finishing touches on their exhibitions, including battery-powered cars, replicas of Aztec, Inca, and Mayan temples, poetry, and bridges. The team also observed students providing each another with warm and cool feedback on the projects, oral presentations, and performances that they developed and were preparing to showcase.

Teachers create rubrics to assess student performance and proficiency on their exhibition projects. For instance, the rubric for the *Bridges Make Communication* exhibition project evaluated bridge plans, the bridge model construction, accounting, the bridge journal, and cooperative learning. School leadership reported that in order to ensure that exhibitions are rigorous and comprehensive performance-based assessments, teachers gather after the exhibition ends to provide one another with warm and cool feedback on the quality of their students' exhibitions. Professional development time was provided on November 4, 2009 for teachers to review and refine exhibition rubric drafts. Additionally, school leadership indicated that mentors, grade-level team mates, and department heads provide new teachers with support on writing rubrics that adequately assess the quality and degree of difficulty of their students' exhibitions.

In addition to gauging student performance on exhibition projects, teachers evaluate student academic performance on internally-developed and standards-based assessments. Each lesson that teachers develop is linked to at least one state standard. At the end of each lesson, teachers conduct assessments (e.g., quizzes, unit tests, written essays and stories, written reports, oral presentations, student journals, and student constructed models) to gauge student mastery of the standard(s) covered. Assessment results are continually posted on the CUE for parents and students to monitor. At the end of each trimester, teachers examine the series of assessments they have conducted throughout the term as evidence of student mastery of each strand (series of standards). Rather than assign letter grades, teachers across all subject areas rate student mastery of a strand as advanced, proficient, developing, emerging, or not yet assessed at the end of each trimester. They also provide additional descriptions of student motivation and performance. In focus groups, school leaders and teachers reported that, while they do not expect students to demonstrate proficiency across each of the strands at the beginning of the school year (or at the end of the first and second terms), they expect that students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in all of the strands by the end of the academic year.

By design, the MCCPS internally-developed assessments are authentic and comprehensive. They are used to determine whether each student understood the concepts and state standards covered during the year. As a whole, these ongoing assessments provide teachers with a representative sample of evidence from which to draw conclusions on student learning. However, the school reported that there are challenges to this system. For example, all of the strands are weighted equally, even though some strands may include significantly more standards than others.

Additionally, there is the challenge of ensuring that teachers are rating student performance consistently. To address the issue of consistency, the school has: 1) established a minimum number of 10 assessments to use as evidence of student mastery; and, 2) allocated time during school-wide professional development sessions to develop a common definition of proficiency and ensure inter-rater reliability among teachers. (For more information on the school's proficiency professional development focus, see Academic Program Success – Finding 3).

3. There are systems and structures for the analysis of external assessment data, particularly at the school leadership level.

The MCCPS leadership team has initiated efforts to analyze trends in student performance on external assessments – namely, MCAS and Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA, administered since spring 2007) results. In focus group interviews, the school leadership team reported that they are the high-level examiners of data. During their weekly, 60-minute meeting, the leadership team conducts the initial analysis of external assessment data – identifying school-wide trends (e.g., students tend to perform better in language arts than in mathematics) and assessing student performance. According to school leadership team members, a considerable amount of analysis takes place during this time.

The goals of this digestion of data during leadership team meetings are: (a) to provide a launching point for all-staff, department, and grade-level team discussions, and (b) to avoid over-saturating the teaching staff with too much information. Leadership team members – including the MCCPS student services coordinator, professional development coordinator, technology coordinator, and department heads (each of whom also teaches) – take the data and initial analysis to weekly department meetings (the mathematics/science/technology and humanities departments meet for one hour) and grade-level team meetings (each grade level meets for at least 90 minutes).

Specific actions have resulted from this process. In 2009-2010, for example, the school modified the sequence of mathematics and language arts instruction to better meet the needs of students. The pacing of geometry was modified to include a spring review of concepts covered earlier in the academic year. Additionally, efforts have begun to teach common vocabulary across content areas and grade levels. MCCPS staff developed a school-wide Google document to record this vocabulary list. Teachers have also introduced more open response questions into internal assessments and implemented a common grammar book across grade levels.

Examining student data has also prompted the school to make proficiency the central focus of professional development. The goal are: 1) to establish a common definition for proficiency, particularly with internal, teacher-developed assessments (e.g., exhibitions, ratings or grades for each strand); and 2) to identify specific activities, rubrics, and student work that best exemplify proficiency. A review of the professional development calendar and agendas indicated that an initial session to establish a common definition of proficiency took place on November 4 and that follow-up sessions are scheduled for December 9 and January 27. During the November 4 sessions, teachers worked in grade-level teams to answer the question, “What is proficient?” They also examined student exhibition samples that were identified as exemplars of proficient and advanced student work.

Leadership team members reported that, while the school is engaged in earnest efforts to examine school-wide trends and make changes accordingly, they are pushing to analyze external assessment data in more nuanced ways. New directions in data analysis include developing a deeper understanding of growth models, Lexile numbers and grade-level equivalencies. The leadership team is also using fall NWEA results to gather baseline data and set performance targets for the lowest performing students – those who performed in the failing and needs improvement categories on the 2009 MCAS and are receiving additional direct instruction. MCCPS staff will review these targets in the spring to confirm whether they were adequately set and if the projected student growth took place. During the site visit, school staff members reported that, as of November 2009, no students had been transitioned out of intervention groups.

Furthermore, school leadership team members stated that they need to transfer more data analysis capacity to teachers. The MCCPS leadership team is still determining how to build data analysis more fully into teacher professional development. In focus groups, teachers reported using data to group students, identify students for additional support or enrichment, and assess growth from grade to grade. Teachers also reported that, in addition to test scores, they rely heavily on ancillary evidence (e.g., anecdotal information about students provided by colleagues) about student performance and needs. The renewal inspection team found little or no evidence that teachers are systematically using external assessment data to modify their instructional practice or to assess the effectiveness of programs implemented in the classroom. A review of grade-level team meeting notes revealed that conversations among grade-level peers focused mostly on logistics and other administrative details (e.g., classroom management issues, IEP/SPED referral process notes, exhibition planning notes, verification of whether grade books were updated and lesson plans were recorded, parent contact notes, and parent volunteers or donations), with little evidence of discussions about instruction, student progress, and teacher practice.

4. The school environment is organized to flexibly support student learning and facilitate the integration of the curriculum.

Classroom and school spaces permit multiple configurations to flexibly support diverse instructional activities and student learning needs. In one classroom, work stations accommodated a pair of students; two work stations could be joined together if the lesson required small group collaboration. During classroom visits, the renewal inspection team observed tables organized into clusters or pods in classrooms in which cooperative learning was taking place. During classroom visits, the renewal inspection team noted that a variety of grouping structures (independent, pair, small group, whole group) were utilized across classrooms, varying to fit the objective of the lesson or type of activity.

Classrooms had a rich assortment of hands-on materials to promote authentic interaction with the concepts covered in lessons. In one classroom, for example, plants that students were growing for an integrated science and mathematics unit were on display. In one humanities classroom, globes were hanging above each cluster of tables and a podium was set up at the front of the room for students to practice their exhibition presentations. Between meals, teachers and specialists worked with small groups on the brightly colored round tables in the community

room. In the afternoon, the space was used for the school's independent study enrichment session.

Classroom and school spaces are designed to facilitate the integration of the curriculum across content areas. In addition to being the source of and staging ground for wholesome meals cooked from scratch, the school's organic garden and kitchen are spaces for students to learn about cooking, nutrition, and science. The school has a woodworking space equipped with a series of power tools for students to fashion elaborate pieces of furniture and deepen their understanding of measurement and design. With a basketball court, rock climbing wall, and open floor plan, the MCCPS gym is a space for students to explore fitness as well as the arts. The gym is the staging area for band rehearsals, exhibition performances, plays, assemblies, and other school-sponsored events.

5. There are structures to support students with diverse learning needs.

The school has implemented mechanisms to support struggling students, provide enrichment for high performing students, and accommodate individual learning needs.

MCCPS adheres to an inclusion model of instruction. Struggling students who are considered on the cusp (e.g., students closer to the proficient category on the MCAS) are supported primarily through classroom-based interventions (e.g., targeted small group instruction, heterogeneously mixed cooperative groups, study buddies, visualizations to accompany verbal instruction) and the support of a full-time inclusion specialist at each grade level. The school uses NWEA and MCAS results to determine which students need additional academic support. MCCPS staff members also use internal assessment and performance evaluations to identify specific skills or areas where students need help.

Outside of classroom instruction, the reading, mathematics, and ELA/writing specialists provide additional small group, direct instruction to the lowest performing students – students across all grades who performed in the needs improvement and failing categories on the 2009 MCAS for whom in-class support is deemed insufficient for effective progress. Small groups combine students receiving special education services with those who do not receive special education services. Students receive this support in lieu of foreign language instruction. Small group sessions are structured. For instance, the writing specialist begins each session with a grammar mini-lesson and covers MCAS writing prompts during the session. The writing specialist also reported linking small group instruction to the lessons covered in the classroom (e.g., persuasive essay that students are writing in the English class).

Students have access to specialists outside of the established small group meeting time. The renewal inspection team observed the mathematics specialist providing homework support to students during their advisory period. MCCPS offers struggling students free access to homework club tutoring and recommends that students who need additional help participate in electives in which they will receive academic support. Teachers are also available to tutor students before the start of the school day and during recess. In focus groups, students stated that teachers provide step-by-step guidance to help them tackle challenging material. Parents reported that teachers and staff members will do whatever it takes to help students who need additional

support (e.g., arrange to meet with students during their free time, hire speech and language therapist, provide short-term pull-out instruction).

In addition to the mathematics, reading, and writing specialists, 11 other staff members (the director of special education, an inclusion specialist for each grade level, a guidance counselor, a student services coordinator, a contracted psychologist, speech and language therapist, and occupational therapist) facilitate the implementation of the MCCPS inclusion model and work closely with students who need additional support. While these staff members primarily support students with individualized education plans (IEPs), they also work with struggling students who do not have diagnosed learning needs. There are structures to facilitate communication between classroom teachers and special education staff members. Teaching teams meet for 90 minutes each week with the director of special education and their grade-level inclusion specialist to discuss curriculum delivery, academic progress, and behavioral issues specific to students on IEPs.

The school uses external assessment data to identify high-performing students for academic enrichment. For example, the school used NWEA data to identify 17 students for an accelerated mathematics program. Grade 8 mathematics teachers work with this group of students in grade 7 and 8, providing them with high school level Algebra I instruction. Students who score high on the NWEA are also placed in more advanced book club groups. Additionally, all students are required to access the Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) mathematics lab – a web-based program that uses adaptive questioning to cover a wide range of mathematical concepts at each student’s pace.

The integration of the curriculum provides students who possess different learning styles with multiple entry points to access and master the content. In one Spanish lesson, for example, students were writing and illustrating a story with reflexive verbs. One student had completed a series of detailed sentences and was proceeding to illustrate her story. Another student had sketched a series of intricate illustrations and was using these illustrations as the base for his story. The lesson accommodated both approaches, allowing a student to choose the most appropriate way to accomplish the lesson’s objective.

Across focus groups, MCCPS teachers and school leaders described how the small school size and frequent opportunities to communicate among colleagues facilitated the customization of instruction. When a student is struggling academically or is acting out, staff members reported working together to identify the underlying cause of the problem that is impacting the child’s performance.

6. Instruction was consistent and closely aligned with the MCCPS charter.

The renewal inspection team conducted 21 classroom observations across content areas and grade levels, including classes in Spanish, French, and music. Observations were conducted for approximately 20 minutes. Classroom visits reflected an interdisciplinary, project-based, and hands-on pedagogical approach and an emphasis on self-directed and collaborative learning – practices that align with the academic program described in the MCCPS charter.

The site visit took place a week before the fall exhibition of student work. A majority of classroom instruction focused on preparations for the exhibitions and featured a high proportion of hands-on, indirect instruction. In other words, the teachers facilitated lessons and students played a prominent role in guiding the learning process. It is not clear how and to what extent instruction would have differed had the site visit occurred at a different time.

In the majority of classrooms visited (n=16, 76%), the renewal inspection team found evidence that lessons provided students with meaningful and engaging content. In one classroom, students were studying the digestive system by examining the effect of acid and tenderizer on meat. In a mathematics lesson with a community service learning component, students were preparing business letters with recommendations and architectural drawings for a wheelchair access ramp. These tangible real-world connections gave lessons a clear sense of purpose and effectively engaged students. The renewal inspection team found clear and consistent evidence of student engagement and participation in 71% (n=15) of the classrooms visited. The renewal inspection team had frequent opportunities to converse with students about their work. When prompted, students clearly and eloquently explained what they were learning and why they were learning it.

The renewal inspection team found clear and consistent evidence of lessons that prompted students to use higher-order thinking in 54% (n=11) of the classrooms, and partial evidence of this indicator in 33% (n=7) of classrooms visited. In various classes, students were using teacher-generated rubrics to evaluate peer performance and provide each other with specific feedback on exhibition projects (e.g., oral presentations, poetry, advertisements). In one mathematics classroom, the teacher prompted students to determine how they would teach their parents to measure the slope of an angle.

In the few lessons (4) in which direct instruction was observed as the predominant teaching strategy, the renewal inspection team noticed that instruction was less clear (e.g., examples or definitions were confusing). Additionally, although the material presented was just as challenging as the material covered through indirect instruction, teachers provided limited opportunities for analytic or inferential thinking and did not take as many opportunities to check for understanding or provide feedback. The renewal inspection team also noticed that a lower percentage of students (60% to 79% of students, as opposed to 80% to 100%) were actively engaged during these lessons.

7. The school leadership provides teachers with summative feedback on their performance. Formal processes for formative feedback are being developed.

In focus groups, school staff members reported that teacher performance is evaluated once a year. The academic director evaluates teachers and members of the leadership team, while the director of special education evaluates the performance of special education providers (e.g., inclusion specialists). Faculty members developed a series of rubrics for each of these evaluations. Each indicator (e.g., content knowledge, classroom management, varied methodology) is rated as either less than satisfactory, proficient, or exemplary. A separate rubric evaluates professional practice and collegial relations (e.g., collaborative effort, professional discourse, community contributions, parental communication, and MAP goal improvement). The goal is to attain proficiency in each indicator. Faculty members complete a rubric as part of the

end-of-year performance evaluation process and discuss these ratings with their supervisor (academic director or director of special education). School leaders reported that teachers who consistently perform below standard are placed on probation and monitored through a corrective action plan.

Additionally, at the beginning of the year, faculty members outline their own MAP goals, stating what they want to accomplish during the year (e.g., improve differentiation in mathematics instruction), as well as what support they need from the school. Faculty members write periodic reflections on these goals and discuss them with department heads. Faculty members complete a formal reflection on MAP goal completion for their end-of-year performance evaluation and debrief with the academic director or special education director.

There are strong channels for peer feedback and support. Across focus groups, teachers reported that they frequently rely on one another for advice on instruction. Teachers are encouraged to observe one another, particularly in their first year.

In focus groups, all teachers indicated that school leadership is visible, supportive, and accessible. According to the renewal application and teacher reports, the academic director conducts three formal observations a year for new teachers, and conducts periodic observations and discusses findings with veteran classroom teachers. At the time of the site visit, school leaders were developing a process for formative feedback and formal observations for the current school year had not yet taken place. MCCPS adapted the Boston Collegiate Charter School 5-to-10-minute observation form. School leaders plan to use the form to: 1) capture effective practice and progress toward improvement, and 2) document areas that need improvement. The goal is to conduct a series of ongoing, 5-to-10-minute snapshots and build a full picture of individual teacher practice. School leaders reported that, in addition to the academic director, they intend to have mentors and department chairs implement this tool. Acknowledging the importance of teacher buy-in, the leadership team is currently determining how best to introduce an observation tool that is intended to help, inspire, and support teacher growth.

Organizational Viability

Progress Toward Accountability Plan Objectives and Measures

Objective 4: MCCPS will hire and maintain a highly qualified, professionally satisfied faculty.

- *By 2010, 100% of teachers will be licensed and highly qualified as determined by federal and state guidelines.*

The school partially met this measure. Specifically, 100% of the 17 educators who are required to demonstrate highly qualified status have done so. Of the 28 educators who require licensure, 86% (24) are licensed. Three of the four unlicensed educators are new to MCCPS; three are inclusion specialists working toward licensure, while the third educator is a support specialist who took the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) on November 21.

- *In an annual survey given to teachers, 85% will agree or strongly agree with the statement, "MCCPS is a school that values teacher leadership."*

The school partially met this measure. According to school self-reports, 84% (n=21) of the 25 faculty/staff members who responded to the 2008 faculty/staff satisfaction survey indicated that "they are encouraged to participate in leadership decisions that affect them." The total response rate was 78%; five of the 33 MCCPS faculty/staff members did not complete the survey. (For more information on teachers' role in MCCPS leadership and decision-making, see Organizational Viability – Finding 2).

- *MCCPS overall faculty attrition will be less than 10% for other than family displacement, geographical reasons.*

The school did not meet this measure. As stated in the renewal application and confirmed by MCCPS staff, faculty attrition in 2008-2009 was 13.8%. Three faculty members accepted jobs offering higher salaries, two faculty members resigned mid-year, and one faculty member had been on administrative leave since 2006-2007 (this contract expired in 2008-2009). MCCPS leaders reported that they expect to meet this measure for 2009-2010.

Objective 5: MCCPS will maintain parental satisfaction with the school.

- *By 2010, MCCPS will achieve 100% student enrollment with a waiting list for every grade.*

The school has met this measure.

- *MCCPS overall student attrition will be less than 10% for other than family displacement, geographical reasons.*

The school has met this measure. As reported by MCCPS staff, student attrition in 2008-2009 was 1%. One student left during the academic year, while two students completed the year and did not return in the 2009-2010 academic year.

- *Mid-year parent satisfaction surveys will indicate 80% overall satisfaction with the school's academic program.*

The school has met this measure. In the fall 2008 parent satisfaction survey, 89% of families (n=85) reported that they are satisfied with the MCCPS academic program either most of the time or all of the time.

Objective 6: MCCPS will be soundly governed by an active and prudent Board of Trustees.

- *The Board will achieve 85% of its annual goals; members will attend 90% of Board meetings.*

The school has partially met this measure. As stated in the renewal application and confirmed by the Board of Trustees and school leadership, the average Board of Trustees attendance rate was 90.2% in the 2009 fiscal year. The MCCPS Board of Trustees recently updated its meeting attendance policy. According to the new policy, three unexcused absences result in a Trustee's resignation.

The Board of Trustees met 80% of its annual goals, or four of the five goals. The Board: 1) identified a bifurcated leadership model and hired an interim academic director and interim managing director; 2) developed a strategic plan; 3) stabilized the school's finances; and, 4) ensured sound governance by amending the bylaws to permit a bifurcated management structure and addressed Board of Trustee training at the committee level.

The MCCPS Board of Trustees was unable to address the fifth goal of increasing non-tuition income to 10% of the school's budget. Trustees reported that reaching the surplus is a Board priority and they are currently determining how to achieve this goal (e.g., hire a managing director or appoint a Trustee to focus on acquiring external sources of funding).

- *Yearly audited financial statement will show a balanced budget, success in securing outside funds, and an unqualified audit opinion.*

At the time of the site visit, the FY2009 audit had not been completed for review. Internal, unaudited financial statements for FY2009 reported net income of \$88,206. Internal, unaudited financial statements for the first quarter of FY2010 reported net income of \$114,171 for the period ended September 30, 2009. In addition, the FY2010 budget projects positive cash flow of \$52,043 after operating expenses, principal payments on an existing loan and capital expenditures. The most recent FY2010 Budget vs. Actual Year to Date Expense report revealed the school was on track to meet or exceed its projections.

The internal FY2009 and year to date FY2010 financial statements reveal an important change and significant improvement from previous fiscal years. While the school had an increase in net assets of \$100,207 in FY2007, the FY2008 audit reported a decrease in net assets of \$227,961. As described earlier in this report, FY2008 was a singularly challenging year in which the school was still recovering from an abrupt and significant decrease in student enrollment while incurring expenses related to the paid leave of absence of the previous school leader.

The management letter issued in conjunction with the most recently completed FY2008 audit offered an unqualified audit opinion.

As mentioned in the previous section, the school has not met its goal of increasing outside income to 10% of the school's budget.

Other Performance Topics

1. The Board of Trustees has established a stable governance and leadership structure for the school.

As described in the Setting section (beginning on page 4), MCCPS experienced an abrupt and controversial change in leadership in 2006-2007. This crisis severely impacted finances and school enrollment (110 students withdrew over a period of months). One half of the Board members resigned. Under the guidance of a newly formed Board of Trustees, deliberate changes to the school's governance and leadership structure helped resolve the institutional crisis, bringing stability to the school.

With ESE approval, the Board adopted new bylaws, shifting from an elected to an appointed Board of Trustees. Through this amended process, the governance committee of the Board

identifies institutional needs and recruits new trustees with the skills and abilities to meet those needs. Board members also reported that the shift to a formal recruitment process encouraged cooperation and increased harmony among Trustees. Each committee includes one Trustee and at least one teacher and one parent representative – ensuring equal representation of major stakeholders. Parents who were interviewed by the renewal inspection team expressed confidence in the reconfigured Board of Trustees. Board members reported that, as a result of changes to the MCCPS governance structure, committees are more productive, leadership duties are no longer concentrated on a few members, and there are clear distinctions between the Board of Trustee’s responsibilities and those of the school’s leadership.

The Board is also committed to providing Trustees with training to clarify and institutionalize best practices. The Board’s goal is to facilitate two training sessions per year. In November 2007, the Board contracted a lawyer to facilitate an open meeting law training session. In August 2009, Board members attended a retreat to review policies and procedures, and to discuss the revamped bylaws and school charter. The Board of Trustees reported that the 2009-2010 training sessions will examine what makes a better Board member and work to ensure that the Board is stable and well-functioning (e.g., clarifying the differences between the governance and administrative structures of the school and providing new members with an overview of the school, committee duties, and MCCPS Board member responsibilities).

The Board of Trustees also amended school bylaws to permit a bifurcated leadership structure with a full-time academic director and managing director. In 2006-2007, the Board hired an interim academic director to oversee the school’s educational program. In 2008-2009, the interim academic director was offered the full-time academic director position and given a two-year contract. The Board developed a performance report to evaluate the academic director. Evaluation indicators are linked to the MCCPS accountability plan (e.g., academic program success, professional development, community relations). The academic director maintains a detailed, running record of specific actions taken to address each indicator on the performance report.

A part-time interim management director has been at the school since 2007-2008. The Board of Trustees hired an interim managing director to restore the school’s enrollment and reach out to local communities, particularly Marblehead. Under the interim managing director’s guidance, MCCPS has established positive relationships with the Marblehead superintendent. For example, MCCPS staff is now included in Marblehead Public School professional development. Additionally, enrollment is at maximum capacity and the waitlist is the highest in the school’s 14-year history. The interim managing director is also in charge of overseeing school finances and has worked with the Board of Trustees (the interim managing director is a member of the Board finance committee) to restore the stability of the school’s funding situation. The Board and heads of school reported plans to hire a full time, permanent managing director for the 2010-2011 school year, allowing the interim managing director to step down from this transitional role. Board members stated that they will develop a performance evaluation for the full-time managing director and a less extensive performance evaluation of the interim managing director.

There is clear evidence that the Board has delineated clear leadership roles and responsibilities for the new leadership structure, and that all stakeholders are aware and in favor of the bifurcated structure. Position descriptions clearly outline each role. In focus groups, teachers and students explained that the academic director is the visible, hands-on manager in charge of the school's educational program, while the managing director takes care of the behind-the-scenes work (e.g., organizational viability, Board of Trustees, community relations). Parents stated that the interim managing director lends credibility to the school and to the academic director. In the fall 2008 parent satisfaction survey, 89% of families (n=84) reported that they are satisfied with the present leadership model at MCCPS either most of the time or all of the time.

The Board of Trustees described how they first worked to stabilize a sinking ship. Having stabilized the school, the Board has shifted its focus to long-term planning. In April 2009, the Board of Trustees, under the academic director's leadership, finalized a five-year strategic plan and committed to an ongoing strategic planning process. The MCCPS strategic plan addresses academic performance and student wellbeing, family and community involvement, support of the school mission, the development of highly qualified and professional staff, facilities, and finances. Board members reported that this year's Board decisions tie back to the strategic plan. In committee meetings and at the task force level, for example, Board members ask themselves whether what they are doing is in line with the mission and vision of the school and whether it aligns with the strategic plan. Board members indicated that they are planning to establish quarterly or bi-annual check-ins to assess the progress the Board's progress toward achieving strategic plan goals.

The collective work of the Board of Trustees and school leadership (undertaken by the finance committee) has been instrumental in restoring the financial solvency of the institution. The finance committee, under the competent direction of the Board treasurer, other Board members and school administrators, has successfully identified the importance of increasing cash reserves while maintaining adequate funding of the academic program. Their conservative approach toward per pupil enrollment and revenue projections is important in the current fiscal climate.

The renewal inspection team met separately with the Board focus group (which included the Board treasurer and other finance committee members), the school's academic and managing directors and the business manager. Their candid and consistent responses regarding the school's previous and current cash position were important and positive indications that the issue was well understood by all responsible and that measures would continue to be taken to improve financial stability. While the school has made significant progress, additional time is required to continue to improve solvency. While it is evident that the Board has met its goal of stabilizing school finances since the close of FY2008, it has not yet attained its own benchmark of maintaining no less than \$500,000 in available cash. Internal, unaudited financial statements for the most recent fiscal quarter period ended September 30, 2009 reported approximately \$326,500 in available cash after repayment of \$310,000 due on the school's line of credit at the end of the quarter.

In addition, the school has approximately \$209,000 in principal payments due on a note payable with MassDevelopment in 2010. As reported by the Board treasurer, charter renewal would

permit the school to refinance the debt and that an additional five year charter would be a prerequisite to that important goal.

The school has effective controls to ensure adequate fiscal oversight. In addition, extensive planning and the regular and thorough review of detailed financial reports occur in monthly finance committee meetings. The interim managing director has brought important school finance experience to the organization and has helped identify additional revenue due to the institution (which are expected but had not yet been realized at the time of the site visit). The business manager has been with the school since its founding and has experience and understanding in projecting detailed enrollment and per-pupil revenue estimates that are based on tuition rates from several districts, in addition to Marblehead. The Board treasurer undertook his current role at a critical point in the school's financial recovery. He brings extensive knowledge to the group and fully comprehends the steps required to improve financial viability. In summary, the finance committee is an effective working group with a suitable mix of experience and responsibilities required to address the needs of the institution.

2. Teachers continue to play an active role in MCCPS leadership and decision-making.

The school's charter dictates that "MCCPS is a teacher-led, student-focused school; staff members will be an integral part of school operations." The renewal inspection team found clear evidence that teachers continue to play a central part in school leadership.

Five of the seven members of the MCCPS leadership team are teachers who also fulfill administrative duties (e.g., student services coordinator, department heads, professional development coordinator, technology coordinator). By design, the leadership team is a cross section of school staff and represents the MCCPS effort to implement a horizontal leadership structure and facilitate teacher input in school decision-making. According to leadership team members, the goal is to make decisions by consensus. In focus groups, teachers reported feeling empowered at MCCPS.

Faculty and staff meet regularly to discuss academic matters and school operations. The entire faculty meets every Wednesday for school-wide professional development and to address relevant issues. Colleagues discuss grade-level, subject-area, or special education-specific topics during weekly department, grade-level, and special education consult meetings. The five school leaders/teachers reported that they serve as conduits for communication between the faculty and the leadership team. For instance, department heads allocate time in their weekly meetings for teachers to relay concerns to the leadership team. Informal channels for communication are strong. In focus groups, teachers reported that they are constantly relaying information to one another outside of formal meeting times. Working lunches are a common practice.

Teachers serve on the MCCPS Board of Trustees. The technology coordinator/grade 7 language arts teacher is a voting member of the Board, while the student services coordinator/grade 7 global studies teacher serves on the personnel committee.

3. A focus on community building and a proactive approach to discipline create a safe and positive climate at MCCPS.

MCCPS has taken a proactive approach to discipline, deliberately organized safe spaces, and purposefully established a school climate in which all stakeholders take collective responsibility for maintaining a positive community.

In order to improve teacher capacity to proactively address behavior issues, middle school teachers read *Behavior Management in the Middle School Classroom* over the summer. During a professional development session on September 16, teachers discussed the book and established actions items. The renewal inspection team reviewed a series of reflections that teachers prepared in response to the book. In each reflection, teachers listed one or two gems (e.g., the value of getting to know students and teaching specific expectation) and brainstormed ways that these gems could be implemented at MCCPS (e.g., ask questions when at the lunch table, take time to teach and explain expectations with students).

This year, the school adopted a new behavior management rubric created with input from parents, teachers, and the student council. Students reported that the new system is more effective – for example, they noticed that there are fewer repeat offenders. In order to maintain a positive and harmonious climate, school leaders stated that issues are addressed immediately. As one school leader reported, “We discipline children for things that other schools would laugh off.” The student services coordinator tracks discipline and looks for trends. School staff reported that they focus on examining the underlying motives for student behavioral infractions.

In focus groups, students, staff, and families indicated that the school is safe and secure. In the 2008-2009 evaluation of the MCCPS interim academic director, 89% (n=67) of families who responded to the survey reported that the academic director ensures safe and adequate facilities for learning. The school indicated in its renewal application that a video camera was installed in the front entrance, while the renewal inspection team observed that a door bell is used to regulate entry through the front door during the school day. The renewal inspection team observed identified personnel utilizing walkie-talkies. The renewal inspection team also reviewed documentation demonstrating that regular fire drills are coordinated with the Marblehead Fire Department and that fire alarm and safety equipment are maintained. In addition to having a gymnasium on-site, the school has access to an adjacent, town-owned playing field in an area of low vehicular traffic. (For more information on the how the MCCPS facility supports student learning, see Academic Program Success – Finding 4).

Common spaces at MCCPS are organized to nurture community and cohesiveness. Every morning, students, faculty, and staff gather in the round, brightly colored community room tables for a community meeting. MCCPS staff reported that these meetings are a time for the school to celebrate its successes and address challenges. Students and staff members gather again for lunch. All students eat at the same time. Student seating is assigned for the community meeting/ breakfast and lunch; one staff person sits at each table. One day a week, the school implements a mixed-grade seating arrangement and facilitates a team-building activity. These seating plans change every month. Students reported that the school is a friendly and inclusive place. Students

really know one another and – regardless of “status” – get along. Also, students from the upper grades are role models for students in the lower grades.

Essential habits represents a series of five principles – 1) responsibility and reliability, 2) persistence and self-direction, 3) reflection and inquisitiveness, 4) organization and attentiveness to detail, and 5) respect and honesty – that guide the school. The essential habits reflect and are closely aligned to the school’s mission. Each trimester, students receive a rating for their implementation of essential habits. Teachers do not factor student mastery of essential habits when determining student academic performance (or grades). Although essential habits are assessed separately from academic performance, teachers incorporate essential habits into lessons. In one classroom, a teacher introduced the *My Homework Ate My Homework* short story by asking students to provide examples of tasks that they were responsible for at home (e.g., get ready for school in the morning, pack your own hockey bag).

In focus groups, teachers and students explained that the essential habits are part of the school’s social contract – a fundamental agreement that each community member accepts and embodies. As one student stated, “Teachers trust the students here to know the essential habits and to live them.” Students practice the responsible and reliable habit by reminding themselves of the 230 rule – “If 230 students were doing this, would it be okay?”

4. Parents report an overall satisfaction with the school.

There is evidence that parents feel an overall sense of satisfaction with the MCCPS academic program, as well as the school’s mechanisms to communicate with families and elicit parent feedback and involvement.

When asked what aspects of the MCCPS academic program they considered beneficial to their children, parents who participated in the site visit focus groups cited the innovative methods of teaching, a child-centered and integrated approach to learning, the benefit of having students publicly display their learning, and the service learning component. The results from the fall 2008 parent satisfaction survey supported parent focus group responses: (a) 91% of the families reported that MCCPS meets the need of their child most or all of the time, (b) 88% of the families indicated that working on exhibition projects increases their child’s interest in learning most or all of the time, and (c) 83% reported that their child benefits from participating in the enrichment program most or all of the time.

There is evidence that families are satisfied with the school’s accessibility and openness. In the 2008-2009 parent interim academic director evaluation, 84% (n=63) of families who responded to the survey reported that the academic director is open to suggestions and encourages open communication most or all of the time. Family members reported that the academic director is always on call and willing to listen, accessible to all members of community at all times, and very approachable and welcoming to suggestions. School staff members and parents indicated that the exhibitions of student learning are well attended by family members, and 21% (n=13) of the fall I enrichment sessions are facilitated by parents – additional evidence that families feel welcomed at MCCPS and are interested in participating in the school’s core activities.

There is also evidence that families are satisfied with the school's channels of communication. In the fall 2008 parent satisfaction evaluation, 86% (n=82) of families who responded to the survey reported that the school-to-home communication meets their needs. Family members noted that e-mail communication is frequent, timely, and very helpful. In the parent satisfaction survey and site visit focus groups, parents reported that the school's mechanisms provide families with feedback on student academic performance are effective. Parents described how the CUE reports enable them to understand where their children are excelling and specific areas where their children need additional support.

In focus groups, parents also expressed their satisfaction with the school's sense of community (see Faithfulness to Charter – Objective 2 and Finding 1); support for struggling students (see Academic Program Success – Finding 5); and new leadership structure (see Organizational Viability – Finding 1).

5. The school has intentionally disseminated best practices.

Over the past two years, MCCPS has purposefully and intentionally disseminated its best practices. These dissemination activities are described in the MCCPS renewal application and were corroborated by school staff members.

Organizations have provided financial and technical support to support MCCPS efforts to capture and build on effective practices. The ESE Charter School Office awarded MCCPS funding to revise and disseminate its *Fuel for Students: Performance-Driven, Standards-Based Curriculum* project. The school is also working with the Center for Collaborative Education's Performance Assessment Institute to create an accurate and reliable "across-school performance assessment system." This work has prompted the school to improve the consistency (inter-rater reliability) of its internal assessments. In October 2009, the MCCPS academic director joined the Project for School Innovation's Support Network for Innovative Principals (SNIP).

MCCPS takes advantage of opportunities to network with and share its expertise with local charter schools. The MCCPS guidance counselor helped organize a cohort of North Shore school counselors to meet monthly and discuss issues and concerns. In February 2009, members of the MCCPS leadership team presented the CUE reporting system to the Seven Hills Charter School. School staff members participated in study tours at Boston Collegiate Charter School and Boston Preparatory Charter School, sponsored by the Massachusetts Center for Charter Public School Excellence (MCCPSE). MCCPS was one of the five charter schools chosen to present at the MCCPSE *Expanded Learning Time: Making Every Minute Matter* workshop in May 2009. In July 2009, school staff members made a presentation on project-based learning at Westminster Elementary School.

Through a partnership with Endicott College, two MCCPS teachers taught *Measurement and Evaluation* – a graduate-level course examining charter school evaluation and assessment practices (e.g., portfolios, videotaping students) in 2008-2009. Teachers from MCCPS attended the course. MCCPS teachers also presented an *Organizational Strategy and Design* course through Endicott College in 2008-2009, and will continue its partnership with the college in 2009-2010 by offering a course on differentiated instruction.

Appendix: Renewal Inspection Site Visit Schedule

Day 1 – Tuesday, November 17, 2009

Team Member:	Team Member A	Team Member B	Team Member C
7:15	Team Meeting		
7:45	Community Meeting and Team Introductions Observe Band (8:00-8:15)		
8:15	Meeting with Heads of School		
9:10-9:20	Team Meeting		
9:20	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
10:00	Document Review	Document Review	Observe Recess Document Review
10:30	Grade 5/6 Teacher Focus Group	Classroom Visit	Grade 5/6 Teacher Focus Group
11:15	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
12:00-1:00	Team Working Lunch		
1:00	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Interview with Student Services Coordinator
1:45	School Leadership Team Focus Group		
2:30-3:00	Observe Enrichment Activities	Observe Enrichment Activities	Observe Enrichment Activities
3:00-4:30	Note Writing Team Moderation Document Review Follow Up Questions		

Day 2 – Wednesday, November 18, 2009

Team Member:	Team Member A	Team Member B	Team Member C
7:00	Team Meeting		
7:45	Document Review	Parent Focus Group A	Parent Focus Group B
8:30	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
9:15	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
10:00	Document Review		
10:30	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
11:15	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
12:00	Team Working Lunch		
12:30	Interview with MCCPS Data Coordinator		
1:00	Grade 4 Teacher Focus Group	Student Focus Group Grades 7/8	Student Focus Group Grades 7/8
1:45	Student Focus Group Grades 4, 5, 6	Student Focus Group Grades 4, 5, 6	Classroom Visit
2:30	Grades 7/8 Teacher Focus Group		
3:15-5:00	Note Writing Team Moderation Document Review Follow Up Questions		

Day 3 – Thursday, November 19, 2009

Team Member:	Team Member A	Team Member B	Team Member C/D
7:00	Team Meeting		
8:00	Document Review	Board of Trustees Focus Group	
8:30	Classroom Visit		
9:15	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit	Classroom Visit
10:00	Document Review	Document Review	Meeting with Business Manager
11:00 -1:00	Note Writing Team Moderation Document Review Follow Up Questions		