

Year Twelve Site Visit Report

Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School

Franklin, MA

January, 2007

Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School (BFCCS), now in its twelfth year of operation, is chartered to serve the district of Franklin with a maximum of 450 students in kindergarten through grade eight. The school opened in 1995, and was granted renewals of its charter in 2000 and 2005. The school is located in Franklin, and serves students from Franklin and neighboring districts. There are currently 384 students enrolled at the school.

The school’s mission statement is “To assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children by providing the children with a classical academic education coupled with sound character development and opportunities for community service.”

The school reports that the racial and ethnic composition of the student body, during the 2005-06 school year was 90% white, .3% African American, 5.7% Asian, 1.0% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American, and 2.1% multiracial, and 9.4% special education. There are no students classified as low income or limited English proficient.

The following visitors participated in the site visit on January 25, 2007:

- Emily Lichtenstein, Charter School Office
- Sandy Matava, Suffolk University
- Christie McGrath, Edward Brooke Charter School
- Rose Samuel, Charter School Office
- Juna Snow, Charter School Office
- Kimberly Stedman, Edward Brooke Charter School
- Mary Street, Charter School Office

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the 2005-2006 Annual Report for the charter school, recent internal and external assessment data, and board materials. On site, the team reviewed curricular information and other documents provided by the school. The team conducted group interviews with trustees, administrators, teachers, families, and students. Team members visited approximately 25 classrooms across all grade levels and subject areas, spending an average of approximately 15 minutes in each classroom.

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 help the Commissioner and Board of Education make a renewal recommendation for the school’s charter. The focus of the visit is 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: Stakeholders understand and could articulate the unique aspects of the school’s mission.

Board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students were asked to describe the mission of the school. All stakeholders described the use of E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge program as the basis for the curriculum. They also talked about community service and character education. Many referred to the “four pillars,” which form the primary areas of the mission – Core Knowledge, character education, community service, and the recognition that parents are an integral part of the education process.

Finding: The site visit team found evidence that all aspects of the mission are being realized. All four aspects of the mission are being actualized in the day-to-day operations of the school:

- **Core Knowledge:** The school uses the Core Knowledge program as the basis of its curriculum, and is engaged in the work necessary to align Core Knowledge with alignment to the state curriculum frameworks. Using the Core Knowledge outline, students are taught the core academic subjects – language arts, history, geography, humanities, mathematics and science - and also French, Latin (beginning in grade 5), music, fine arts, drama and physical education. Site visitors observed Core Knowledge curriculum being taught in classrooms, and noted the references to Core Knowledge units in the school’s documented Scope and Sequences.
- **Character Education:** The Core Knowledge approach to character education is taught throughout the school by focusing on four cardinal virtues – justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude. Students are taught to recognize these traits in themselves, in their peers, and in the figures they study in literature and history. At regularly scheduled “Forest of Virtue” assemblies, students are given commendations for behavior that reflects one of the core virtues. All grade 8 students are required to write a personal narrative that reflects on their moral development over the course of their education at BFCCS. Students in grades 6-8 discuss character education issues during weekly advisory meetings.
- **Community service:** Community service is a required component of the school program for all students. All students participate in monthly service projects, such as fundraising for local charities. Grade 8 students design their own long-term service projects that involve volunteer work and fundraising.
- **Parents as Primary Educators:** The school’s mission is to support parents in their task of fostering their children’s academic and moral development. To this end, several publications are sent home, so that parents can work on the same skills and concepts at home that are being taught in school. Parents are given the Core Knowledge book for their child’s grade level every year through grade 6.. Every teacher sends home a monthly Scope and Sequence listing upcoming topics and community service projects. A detailed school newsletter is sent home monthly, and a shorter list of announcements is issued weekly. Broader parent involvement in governance and in the academic program

is welcomed: the majority of board members are also parents, parents are on the hiring committee and other subcommittees of the board, and parents often volunteer in classrooms.

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: Core Knowledge forms the basis of the school’s curriculum. Administrators and teachers are engaged in the process of aligning the curriculum with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Board members, administrators and faculty described a tension between the school’s commitment to following the Core Knowledge curriculum and the need to also cover the material contained in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. The process of alignment is ongoing. The school has a documented curriculum that blends and aligns the two for science in grades 3 through 8, and in social studies in grades 4 through 8. An alignment of the mathematics curriculum was completed in 2001, but teachers and administrators stated that it now needs updating and revising. In English language arts, teachers are given both the Core Knowledge curriculum and the state frameworks, but there is no documented school curriculum in this area.

Finding: Curriculum is developed by teachers working alone and in teams. Commercial and teacher made materials are incorporated into the curriculum.

Teachers and administrators reported that over the years, teachers have worked both independently and in teams to develop curriculum and teaching materials. The school also utilizes commercially prepared curricula, such as Scott Foresman and University of Chicago math materials, and the Open Court reading program for grades one through 4. Teachers have developed month-by-month scope and sequence plans for each grade level which describe what is to be taught from Core Knowledge and the state curriculum frameworks in all academic subject areas, as well as in character education and community service. These plans are kept in central binders, and are used as a basis for revisions to the curriculum from year to year.

Finding: Instruction is activity- and project-based, with a high premium placed on student engagement and self-discovery. Team members observed a wide variety of successful instructional practices, high levels of student engagement, and many examples of academic rigor and creativity in student work.

The site visit team was able to make approximately 25 visits to classrooms. Observations were conducted in all levels, kindergarten through grade 8, in a variety of academic subject areas and a music class. Site visit team members observed high levels of student engagement

and a wide variety of effective instructional practices in the classrooms. Visitors observed small group work, whole group lessons, and independent work times. They saw students engaged in lively discussions, and listening attentively to teachers and peers. Student behavior was observed to be respectful and appropriate. Visitors observed some off-task behavior (though nothing that was disruptive to group learning) and noted that it took a while for the day's instruction to start in the elementary grade levels (grades K-5), with students in some classrooms spending until almost 9:15 getting settled in the classroom.

At the student focus group, students from all grade levels eagerly shared their schoolwork with the visitors. Students described their assignments articulately and were able to explain how their work was assessed by their teachers, as well as their own process of self-assessment. Additional student work was on display throughout the building. The observed work demonstrated creative interpretation and higher level thinking skills.

Finding: The school has systems in place to accommodate the needs of diverse learners. Administrators reported that there are interventions in place to assist struggling students. If a student appears to be "getting overwhelmed" the school will immediately involve the family, in keeping with the school's belief that parents are the primary educators. In addition to soliciting help from the family, the school offers tutoring in the early morning before school. Assignments are often adjusted to meet the needs of students, and students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. Students have the option of re-taking tests when necessary. Instructional aides are employed to assist students with special needs, and to assist in the kindergarten and grade 1 classrooms. In the focus group, students described teachers as being very willing to offer extra support and additional challenges as needed. At the middle school level (grades 7 and 8), one section of mathematics is more accelerated.

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

Finding: Student performance on the MCAS has been and continues to be strong; however, scores in some areas have declined over time.

MCAS results from 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 four MCAS performance categories. The CPI is a 100-point index that measures the extent to which students are progressing towards proficiency.

**Table I: BFCCPS MCAS Results by Performance Category
Annual Comparisons 2002-2006**

	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/ Failed	CPI
English Language Arts						
Grade 3						
2002	45	0	84	13	2	95.0
2003	46	0	78	22	0	94.0
2004	44	0	89	9	2	97.7
	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/ Failed	CPI

2005	45	0	76	24	0	92.8
2006	47	15	60	26	0	91.5
Grade 4						
2002	46	13	76	11	0	97.3
2003	42	21	64	14	0	96.4
2004	46	15	65	17	2	93.5
2005	44	18	68	11	2	95.5
2006	46	15	50	28	7	85.9
Grade 5						
2006	47	28	62	9	2	97.3
Grade 6						
2006	46	22	65	13	0	96.2
Grade 7						
2002	39	5	69	26	0	93.6
2003	30	3	83	13	0	95.0
2004	47	13	79	6	2	96.3
2005	36	14	83	3	0	99.3
2006	34	12	74	6	9	90.4
Grade 8						
2006	27	15	81	4	0	99.1
Math						
Grade 3						
2006	46	2	57	39	2	87.5
Grade 4						
2002	46	46	43	11	0	96.2
2003	42	24	55	21	0	93.5
2004	46	33	33	33	2	87.5
2005	44	41	39	14	7	90.3
2006	46	20	35	41	4	83.7
Grade 5						
2006	47	28	34	32	6	85.6
Grade 6						
2002	33	39	33	21	6	87.9
2003	46	43	43	11	2	95.1
2004	38	45	45	11	0	96.1
2005	43	49	28	19	5	90.1
2006	46	37	28	28	7	84.2
Grade 7						
2006	33	39	30	21	9	84.8
Grade 8						
2002	36	11	42	42	6	80.6
2003	35	29	46	20	6	89.3
2004	25	20	44	28	8	82.0
2005	46	37	39	20	4	90.8
2006	27	26	48	19	7	87.0

BFCCPS students continue to perform very well on the English language arts portion of the MCAS test. The grade 8 CPI was 99.1, with all but four students achieving a proficient or

advanced score, and no students scoring in the warning category. It is noted, however, that for all grade levels for which longitudinal MCAS data is available (grades 3, 4 and 7), scores have declined since 2002. **Future site visitors should note whether this downward trend continues next year.**

Performance on the mathematics portion of the MCAS also continues to be strong over time, but results are more mixed than in ELA. While the CPI for grade 4 Mathematics declined from 96.2 in 2002 to 83.7 in 2006, the grade 8 mathematics CPI increased from 80.6 to 87.0 during the same time period.

Table II, below, shows Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for BFCCPS and its statistically significant demographic subgroups from 1999-2006.

Table II: AYP determination for BFCCPS

		Adequate Yearly Progress History								Accountability Status
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
ELA	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Status
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
MATH	Aggregate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Status
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

AYP determinations are calculated by the state, in accordance with the standards of the 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 test by 2014. BFCCPS’ data shows that the school has made adequate improvement to trigger achieving AYP in both ELA and mathematics. BFCCPS’s data shows that the school has consistently achieved AYP in the aggregate and for all significant subgroups in both Mathematics and English language arts.

Finding: Students at BFCCPS perform on a par with their peers in the district of Franklin, but well above state averages, on English language arts and Mathematics MCAS exams.

Table III is a comparison between the CPIs of BFCCPS, the Franklin school district, and the state on all ELA and mathematics MCAS tests taken by BFCCPS students.

Table III: 2006 Composite Performance Index (CPI) Comparison

	BFCCPS	Franklin	State
English language arts			
Grade 3	91.5	89.7	83.4
Grade 4	85.9	86.6	78.8
Grade 5	97.3	92.6	83.7
Grade 6	96.2	95.5	84.9
Grade 7	90.4	94.3	84.5
Grade 8	99.1	97.6	88.3
	BFCCPS	Franklin	State
Mathematics			
Grade 3	87.5	87.5	78.0

Grade 4	83.7	85.2	73.3
Grade 5	85.6	85.7	70.2
Grade 6	84.2	86.0	70.5
Grade 7	84.8	84.7	66.6
Grade 8	87.0	82.1	66.3

On all MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics taken by students at BFCCPS, the school's CPI was essentially on par with that of students in the Franklin public school district. The scores of BFCCPS students are significantly higher than state averages on all ELA and math MCAS tests.

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

Finding: Student performance on other external measures appears to be strong.

In addition to the MCAS tests, BFCCPS administers the Terra Nova California Achievement Test (Terra Nova), the Educational Records Bureau Writing Assessment Program (ERB), and the DIBELS reading test.

The Terra Nova is administered in reading/language arts and Mathematics every fall to grades 1 through 8. According to results provided by the school in its Annual Report, scores on this test are high and have remained essentially the same between 2004-05 and 2005-06, with the average class percentile score going from 88 to 86.9 in reading and from 86.2 to 84.8. Results for the 2006-07 school year were not made available to the site visit team.

The ERB is administered annually to all students in grades 4 through 8. This test is a criterion-referenced instrument that evaluates written compositions on six characteristics (e.g., overall development, sentence structure, mechanics) against standards established for the student's grade level. According to results provided by the school in its Annual Report, BFCCPS students' scaled scores are significantly above grade level at every grade, and between 2004-05 and 2005-06, increased at grades 6 - 8, stayed the same at grade 4, and declined slightly in grade 5. Results are not yet available for the 2006-07 school year.

The DIBELS reading test is administered three times per year to all students in Kindergarten through grade 4. This test is used to assess the progress of individual students and to drive reasing instruction; the data is not aggregated to determine overall student progress.

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

Finding: Student performance on internal measures appears to be strong.

Students are assessed periodically during the school year using a variety of internal assessments, including tests and rubrics. Students reported that their work is usually graded by rubrics, distributed with the assignment so that they are aware at the outset of the standards against which their work will be judged. The school is beginning to create a collection of student work and assessment materials so that achievement measures can be better calibrated and standardized over time. Data presented in the Annual Report and at the time of the visit indicated that most students are demonstrating mastery on internally

developed tests and projects, as assessed by school-developed rubrics and benchmarks. Administrators reported that students are very rarely retained in a grade level.

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?

Finding: The Board maintains an appropriate role regarding the governance of the school and Board clearly defines and respects the lines of accountability between itself, the school leadership, and staff.

The site visit team interviewed eight members of the Board of Trustees. The entire Board includes twelve members, most of whom are parents of BFCCPS students. There is one staff representative on the board.

During the visit, board members reported that the school went through a period of major transition in 2005-06, during which time the Head of School resigned. There was also a significant turnover of board members during this time period. During this transition, the board brought in an organizational consultant to work with them on optimizing the administrative structure of the school, making the Board's processes more transparent, and improving communication between the Board, the administration, and the staff. To this end, the Board has established new committees, including a Faculty Development Committee and a Faculty Leadership Committee, and new policies, such as a policy on evaluation of the school leader and a teacher Code of Conduct. Additionally, lines of communication have been clearly established, with the Head of School reporting directly to the Board and serving as the primary information conduit for staff.

The school leadership, instructional staff, and the Board report that the Board of Trustees maintains an appropriate level of oversight and management and understands its role as a governing body. The Board reported that its role is to protect, embody and support the mission of the school, and not to engage in its day-to-day operations. The Board gathers information from a variety of sources in order to evaluate the school. Those sources include formal presentations from the director at every Board meeting, data analysis, their subjective assessment of the happiness of the students and faculty, and their experiences as parents.

The Board hired the new Head of School on an interim basis, entering into an open-ended contract that can be renewed at will. Board members described the Head of School as very professional, as having eased tensions within the school community, and as having gained the trust of the staff. The Board has established a new process for evaluating the Head of School which includes establishing goals each year, and obtaining faculty input before issuing a full report on the Head's performance annually in June.

Finding: Members of the school community reported that the current facility is not fully adequate for the school's needs. The Board intends to move forward with plans to develop property currently owned by the school.

BFCCPS currently leases a school owned by the local Catholic parish. The school is required to vacate the building by 3:45 each day to allow for use by the church. Board members, administrators, and teachers identified this as a limitation on the school's capacity

to fully implement all of the programs that could be envisioned in support of the school. Board members also cited this as a reason that older students leave the school and expressed a desire to address this issue to increase retention. The school currently owns two parcels of land and intends to develop this property as a permanent home for the school, although a timeline has not been determined. **Future site visitors should assess the Board's progress on moving forward towards this goal.**

Does the school have systems and structures in place to guide improvement?

Finding: The school analyzes performance data and uses the results to direct resources towards school improvement.

The school's Annual Report includes analysis of the results of the school's performance on the MCAS tests and other external and internal measures. The school analyzes assessment data in multiple ways, including over time by cohort, and by grade, and in comparison to local public school districts. Data is looked at to determine where individual students need remediation, and also to look at group and subject area trends and areas of weakness. Where the data shows the need for concern, significant resources have been directed towards remediation. For example, test results on the Science and Technology/Engineering MCAS tests showed a significant decline from 2004 to 2005. In response, the school did an item analysis to determine which areas the students were missing, and hired a science consultant to help align the Core Knowledge curriculum with the state frameworks and to provide professional development to teachers. Science kits were purchased for use by grades 3 and 4. Additional periods dedicated to science were added at the lower grade levels.

Another area of focus has been the teaching of writing. The first and second grade teachers attended a workshop on the Six + One Traits Writing System, and then helped the school adopt the program. The whole school now has a standard rubric and common language to use when discussing writing.

Finding: Teachers are given time to plan and to engage in professional development activities.

This year, a new Professional Development Committee has been established. The Committee includes teachers, administrators and board members. There are five professional development half days scheduled for the 2006-07 school year, as well as a three-day orientation before the school year begins. Topics for professional development half days include aspects of special education, using technology in the classroom, analyzing MCAS data, teaching writing, and discussion of ELA in the context of Core Knowledge and the state frameworks. In addition, the whole staff attends the Massachusetts Charter Public School Conference Best Practices Showcase. Funding is set aside to allow teachers to attend conferences and to take courses outside of the school

Teachers receive at least 5 planning periods per week, during which time they meet as grade level teams, or across grade levels as necessary. In addition, Tuesday afternoons are used for meetings of either the whole staff or smaller configurations. These meetings are typically led by the Head of School.

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

Finding: The school environment is safe. The facility is adequate to support the academic program.

Both parents and students described feeling safe in the school. They described a close-knit community feeling that has created emotional safety for all of the students. Students are closely supervised, and report that misbehavior is taken very seriously, and that there is very little bullying.

As noted above, various constituents of the school reported limitations in the current facility. Students expressed the wish that they had a “real gym.” Parents reported that they believe a lot of students who leave in the middle school grades do so because the constraints on the length of the school day limit both athletic and non-athletic extracurricular offerings.

Is the school operating in a manner consistent with legal and regulatory requirements?

Finding: BFCCPS recently underwent a Coordinated Program Review conducted by the Department of Education’s Program Quality Assurance unit. Results of the review are pending.

BFCCPS underwent a Coordinated Program Review (CPR) conducted by the Department of education’s Program Quality Assurance unit in January, 2007. The PQA team visited the school during the week of January 8, 2007 to evaluate the implementation of selected criteria in the program areas of Special Education, Civil Rights, Education for English Language Learners, McKinney-Vento Homeless Education, and Title I Services. A CPR report documenting the results of the PQA team’s visit will be issued shortly.

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

Finding: Although there are some who are new to the profession, most of the teachers at BFCCPS are experienced. All core subject area teachers are highly qualified, as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Table VII shows the years of teaching experience of BFCCPS professional faculty. As indicated, there are twenty-eight teachers with six to over twenty years of experience, and eighteen teachers who have had five or fewer years of experience. Only two lead teachers are in their first or second year of teaching.

Table VII: Years of Teaching Experience for Current Staff

Years teaching (including current year)	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-20	20+
<i>Number of teachers</i>	8	10	9	9	10

Table VIII: Years spent at BFCCPS for Current Staff

Years at BFCCPS (including current year)	1	2	3-5	6-10	11-12
<i>Number of teachers</i>	6	13	10	11	4

Table VIII shows the years of experience at BFCCPS. Only four lead teachers and two instructional aides are new to the school this year. The school reports that all teachers, with two exceptions, are highly qualified under the requirements of No Child Left Behind.

Finding: Measures to support and evaluate teachers are in place.

A mentoring program was developed this year in which new teachers are matched with more seasoned teachers by subject area or grade level. New teachers are observed three times over the course of the year, including one observation by the Head of School.

The school recently developed a new teacher evaluation system. The system incorporates input from teachers, and was approved as a policy of the Board. Under this system, the school's administrative team evaluates teachers on an annual basis. Teachers are evaluated against performance objectives and an individual personal development plan that each teacher creates. Teachers are observed once or twice a year, depending on seniority. Teachers and administrators meet before and after each observation to review what was seen. The Head of School is responsible for final decisions regarding employment, with input from the two Section Coordinators.

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

Finding: The school community seems very satisfied with the performance of the school.

Interviewees reported that, after a period of some tension and instability, the school is now back on track. Parents stated that they are very satisfied with the responsiveness and availability of the teachers. They said that the teachers are able to tailor assignments to meet the individual needs of the students and to push students to reach their full potential. Students in both of the focus groups were enthusiastic about the school, stating that the school is small and welcoming and the work is creative and engaging. They also spoke positively about the community service work, character education, and the variety of opportunities in the arts. Teachers were described as "willing to help," "always available," and "supportive."

During and in the summer following the 2005-06 school year, twenty four students left the school because they preferred to attend a different public, private or parochial school. This constitutes an attrition rate of approximately 6%. The Board reported that they are concerned about the number of students who leave the school before graduation, and would like to take steps to address this issue.

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

Finding: The school is meeting many, but not all of the goals set forth in its draft Accountability Plan

The school's draft Accountability Plan was adopted by the school's Board of Trustees in 2003 but has not been approved by the Department of Education. This draft Accountability Plan is organized into five Mission Objectives that combine the primary elements of charter accountability: academic success, faithfulness to charter, and organizational viability, with achievement standards assigned to each Objective.

Mission Objective 1: To teach students the enriched classical academic curriculum based on E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Core Knowledge Sequence and through this experience to build a high degree of competence in and a strong command of the content base that will comprise the foundation of their future education.

This Objective encompasses all of the school's academic achievement goals in the subject areas of language arts, history, humanities, mathematics, science, Latin, French, art, music, physical education and drama. For each subject area, the Plan includes several internal and external Standards, which can be summarized as

- outperforming students in the Franklin public school district on all MCAS tests,
- meeting prescribed benchmarks on other external tests, and
- meeting internal benchmarks on tests and holistic assessments.

MCAS performance results have been discussed on pages 4-7 of this report. In 2006, BFCCPS's performance on the MCAS tests was similar to that of the Franklin public school district, so these Standards were partially met. Performance on other external measures is discussed on page 7 of this report. In this area, the Standards in the Accountability Plan were partially met, with some but not all grade levels meeting the Standard set forth in the Plan. The results of internally developed benchmarks for the 2005-06 school year are similarly mixed, with some goals being met (such as the goal that 80% of all students will master the skill elements articulated in the school's rubrics for humanities projects), others being met in most grade levels (such as the goal that 80% of all grade 5-8 students will master the skills delineated in the school's rubric for science projects), and still others where the data is incomplete and/or the goals are not written in measurable form.

Mission Objective 2: To foster the development of a virtuous life through a program of character education based on the four cardinal virtues.

The Plan includes three Standards for this Objective:

- all students will understand the meaning of the four cardinal virtues,
- all students in grades 6-8 will set goals each term, and
- all grade 8 students will write a personal narrative that reflects on their intellectual and moral development.

The first of these Standards is not measurable, although it is clear that the school program includes many inputs designed to teach students about these virtues, including the interweaving of character development into the academic curriculum, and holding regular "Forest of Virtue" commendations assemblies. The second Standard was not mentioned by anyone interviewed during the focus groups, and is not addressed in the Annual Report. The third Standard was met, in that all grade 8 students handed in a reflective essay focused on what they learned from completing their final community service project in terms of character education.

Mission Objective 3: To build self-esteem and the ethic of giving to others through a program of regular community service at all levels.

The Plan includes three Standards for this Objective:

- all students in kindergarten through grade 5 will participate in a class monthly community service project,

- all students in grades 6 and 7 will perform individual and group monthly community service projects, and
- all students in grade 8 will choose, design and conduct long-term service projects.

The Annual Report states, and all focus group participants confirmed that these Standards have been met.

Mission Objective 4: To recognize parents as children’s primary educators who work with the School to develop students academically and morally.

The Plan includes three Standards for this Objective

- the Parent Enrichment Committee of the Board will provide yearly focus group meeting for parents,
- all parents will sign a Family Pledge annually, and
- the school will support parents in their work as the primary educators of their children.

The first Standard was not mentioned by anyone interviewed during the focus groups, and is not addressed in the Annual Report. The Annual Report states that 90% of all parents signed the Family Pledge in 2005-06, so this goal was partially met. The third Standard is not readily measurable, but, as stated above (see page 2 of this report), many initiatives are in place to facilitate parent participation in the school, and parent involvement in their children’s academic and moral development

Mission Objective 5: To remain a thriving organization that is trustworthy, responsible, open and well managed.

This section of the Accountability Plan sets forth a number of Standards having to do with the viability of the institution, including the number of applications received, the attrition and attendance rate, fiscal stability, and sound governance.

The Annual Report reports that all Standards in these areas were met, with the exception of the Standard of having the Board review 50% of all of its policies and procedures annually. With regard to this Standard, the Report stated and the Board focus group members confirmed that the Board instead rewrote a major policy concerning Board communications, meetings and duties, and drafted a new employee Code of Conduct.

Conclusion

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

The Board reported that its vision for a successful school five years from now is to be in a new building, possibly with more students at the higher grade levels, where some students are currently lost to attrition. They hope to have higher test scores and even more satisfied families and faculty. Their aspiration is to gain broader recognition for the school model that they have built. While they expect to engage in a conversation about expansion of the school to more grade levels and/or greater enrollment, maintenance of the mission is paramount. This is a commitment shared by all stakeholders, all of whom agree that the school’s commitment to character development and community service is as important as its ability to reach high academic achievement goals.

