

April 8, 2011
 Gloucester, MA

School Profile

Gloucester Community Arts Charter School (GCACS)			
Type of Charter	Commonwealth	Location	Gloucester
Regional/Non-Regional	Non-regional	Districts in Region	NA (if Non-Regional)
Year Opened	2010	Current Enrollment	85
Maximum Enrollment	240	Students on Waitlist	0
Chartered Grade Span	K-8	Current Grade Span	4-7

Mission

The mission of the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School (GCACS) is to use the arts and community life to energize the learning of Gloucester's students. GCACS seeks to graduate students who are academically accomplished, intellectually curious, civically engaged, and prepared to succeed in higher education and contribute actively in the community.

Demographics

The school reports the following racial and ethnic composition and percentages of selected populations of the student body as of the date of the site visit:

Racial and Ethnic Composition and Selected Populations as reported by the school:

	Percentage of Student Body
African American	1.5
Asian	1.5
Hispanic	6.0
Native American	0.0
White	86.6
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0
Multi-race, non-Hispanic	4.5
Special education	23.9
Limited English proficient	0.0
Low income	44.8

The following participants conducted the site visit on April 8, 2011:

- Alison Bagg, Acting Coordinator of Accountability, Charter School Office
- Barry Barnett, Acting Director/Coordinator of Federal Programs, Charter School Office
- Ruth Hersh, Coordinator of New School Development and Governance, Charter School Office
- Judy Miller, Assistant Coordinator of Federal Programs, Charter School Office

On October 1, 2010, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) placed GCACS on probation until December 21, 2010, and directed GCACS to meet twelve probationary conditions by that date. On December 21, the Board determined that GCACS had made significant progress in addressing its deficiencies and had substantially complied with the conditions set by the Board. However, it was also determined that the school still faced significant challenges and required further conditions. During the December meeting the Board removed GCACS from probation, but imposed a further set of conditions that are outlined below.

1. The school's executive director shall attend the Office of the Inspector General's training program on Supplies and Services Contracting at the first available opportunity in 2011.
2. By February 1, 2011, the school shall have hired a qualified individual for the position of Director of Education.
3. By April 1, 2011, the board of trustees shall recruit and submit to the Charter School Office for approval at least one new member with experience and expertise in public sector management.
4. By April 1, 2011, the school shall submit a financial plan demonstrating viability based on pre-enrollment data for the 2011-12 school year.
5. By February 1, 2011, the school shall have submitted for Department approval a corrective action plan to address deficiencies in special education programs as noted in the Department's December 10 site visit, and by April 1, 2011, the school shall have demonstrated substantial progress in completing the corrective action plan.
6. GCACS must comply with the Attorney General's December 17, 2010, Open Meeting Order ("OML 2010-6") and any other such orders issued by the Attorney General's Office.
7. GCACS promptly and effectively must communicate with the Charter School Office regarding any and all significant matters within a reasonable period of time but in any event no later than 48 hours after the occurrence. GCACS must report to the Charter School Office any and all communications made or received by or on behalf of the school with any government audit, investigative, or law enforcement agency within a reasonable period of time of that communication but in any event no later than 48 hours after the communication. GCACS must copy the Charter School Office on such written communications sent by or on behalf of the school and send a copy of all such written communications received by or on behalf of the school within a reasonable period of time but in any event no later than 48 hours after the communication. GCACS must provide a report and copies to the Charter School Office of all such communications that occurred prior to its probation no later than October 8, 2010.
8. GCACS must report all changes in staff to the Charter School Office within a reasonable period of time of knowledge of the change but in any event no later than 48 hours after knowledge of the change.

The site visit conducted by the Charter School Office had the following purposes:

- to review the progress that the school has made in meeting the conditions imposed.

The team reviewed curricular documents and other information provided by the school including special education student records and student applications received for the 2011-2012 school year. The team conducted approximately 10 classroom observations and interviewed the acting

chair of the board of trustees and two other board members in a separate meeting, the executive director, the special education coordinator who also oversees the English Language Learner (ELL) program, the special education program's related services and testing services providers, and conducted a group interview with six of the school's instructional staff.

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

I. Meeting the Conditions

1. The school's executive director shall attend the Office of the Inspector General's training program on Supplies and Services Contracting at the first available opportunity in 2011.

Finding: The school's executive director attended and completed an Office of the Inspector General Supplies and Services Contracting training held on February 15-17, 2011. The executive director supplied the Department with a certificate documenting his successful completion of the training.

2. By February 1, 2011, the school shall have hired a qualified individual for the position of Director of Education.

Finding: The Director of Education position remains vacant as of the date of the site visit. On March 2, 2011, the Commissioner had a phone call with the acting chair, John Knowles who confirmed that the school had not hired a director of education due to budgetary constraints. In a letter, dated March 11, 2011, the acting chair reported on conditions and outlined the plan to hire a head of school. He stated that the school wishes to change the director of education into a head of school. During the site visit members of the board of trustees and the executive director confirmed that they are not going to hire a director of education, and instead will hire a head of school and a program coordinator. The Charter School Office (CSO) requested that GCACS provide job descriptions for the head of school, program coordinator, and executive director (if changed). As of May 18, 2011 the CSO has not received these job descriptions. As of May 18, 2011, the school has hired a new Head of School who will start on July 1, 2011.

3. By April 1, 2011, the board of trustees shall recruit and submit to the Charter School Office for approval at least one new member with experience and expertise in public sector management.

Finding: An individual with the required public sector background has not joined the GCACS board of trustees. Before the imposition of the above condition and in response to the October probationary conditions, on November 23, 2010, the school's board of trustees submitted the nominations of Arthur Beane and James Caviston to serve on the board, and the Commissioner approved these appointments as part of the earlier conditions of probation. Dr. Beane is a retired teacher, principal, and college instructor with extensive experience in the area of special education. Mr. Caviston has a background in law, finance, and management. He has practiced as an attorney, served as the CFO of a private corporation, and currently heads a non-profit organization. The GCACS board of trustees minutes list Mr. Beane as a board member as of January and Mr. Caviston as a board member as of March 2011.

4. By April 1, 2011, the school shall submit a financial plan demonstrating viability based on pre-enrollment data for the 2011-12 school year.

Finding: The required plan was submitted, but requires revisions.

5. By February 1, 2011, the school shall have submitted for Department approval a corrective action plan to address deficiencies in special education programs as noted in the Department's December 10, 2010 site visit, and by April 1, 2011, the school shall have demonstrated substantial progress in completing the corrective action plan.

Finding: The school has added staffing and administrative supports, but deficits remain in regard to special education program administration and service delivery. Compensatory services agreements with parents for services missed by students are in the process of being developed for implementation over the summer of 2011.

6. GCACS must comply with the Attorney General's December 17, 2010, Open Meeting Order ("OML 2010-6") and any other such orders issued by the Attorney General's Office.

Finding: Compliance with the Attorney General's order dated December 17, 2010 is ongoing, which is due to the nature of the order. There is currently one OML complaint still pending before the Attorney General on which they expect issuing a decision within the next few weeks. With respect to the public construction and bidding laws, again, compliance with the consent judgment is ongoing due to the nature of the order. But, the Attorney General's office is unaware of any noncompliance.

7. GCACS promptly and effectively must communicate with the Charter School Office regarding any and all significant matters within a reasonable period of time but in any event no later than 48 hours after the occurrence. GCACS must report to the Charter School Office any and all communications made or received by or on behalf of the school with any government audit, investigative, or law enforcement agency within a reasonable period of time of that communication but in any event no later than 48 hours after the communication. GCACS must copy the Charter School Office on such written communications sent by or on behalf of the school and send a copy of all such written communications received by or on behalf of the school within a reasonable period of time but in any event no later than 48 hours after the communication. GCACS must provide a report and copies to the Charter School Office of all such communications that occurred prior to its probation no later than October 8, 2010.

Finding: The charter school office has received updates on legal matters which fall under the condition. This includes resolution letters from the Attorney General's Office regarding Open Meeting Law complaints and correspondence between the school's legal counsel and the Office of the Investigator General.

8. GCACS must report all changes in staff to the Charter School Office within a reasonable period of time of knowledge of the change but in any event no later than 48 hours after knowledge of the change.

Finding: Staffing changes such as the dismissal of the Arts Integration Specialist and a grade 4/5 teacher were not reported to the Department as required. The replacement grade 4/5 teacher and the newly hired Dean of Students were not reported to the Department as required. Newly hired special education staff including a teacher, a contracted testing service provider, a dean of students, and an administrative assistant was not reported to the Department as required. Site visitors requested an update on staffing changes – explaining how staffing decisions were made and a current staff roster (indicating full or part-time staff). As of May 18, 2011, the CSO has not received this information.

Finally, the Board indicated that GCACS shall be operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00 and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations and such additional conditions as the Commissioner may from time to time establish, all of which shall be deemed conditions of the charter.

Finding: The school has not implemented a program of English language learner education as required by M.G.L. c. 71A, and does not presently operate a school nutrition program as required by M.G.L. c. 69 §1(c).

II. Other Areas of Inquiry

Faithfulness to the Terms of the Charter

Mission

At the time of the visit, CSO staff learned that GCACS had terminated the school's arts integration specialist, who also served as the art teacher. Central to the school's mission is the use of art to foster learning. Currently, a part-time art teacher provides classes on Mondays and a volunteer teaches art on Fridays. On the day of the visit, the volunteer only spent a half-day at the school and afternoon art classes were monitored by the Special Education coordinator. Teachers noted that the loss of the arts integration specialist has made it difficult to integrate arts to the degree that they would like.

Governance

Site visitors interviewed the acting chair of the GCACS Board of Trustees, and in a separate interview, two additional board members. The acting chair demonstrated an understanding of the conditions imposed upon the school, had a clear grasp of school strengths and weaknesses, and has experience with board operations and governance.

In a separate interview, two board members were asked about the school's progress in terms of the current conditions. The board members reported that they were under the impression that the December 2010 conditions were recommendations or guidelines, but not specific measures that the school had to meet. Furthermore, the board members reported that the board had established four committees – program, finance, governance, and outreach – and that the board had been working closely with the school on many ongoing projects such as recruitment of students,

fundraising activities, hiring a head of school, helping with arts integration, and recruiting potential new board members.

Academic Program

Instruction

Site visitors conducted 10 classroom observations of approximately 20 minutes each. During these observations, observers noted only a few explicit instances of arts integration. There was a range of effective instruction with uneven levels of student engagement, and in some cases classroom activities which were not aligned with the lesson objective. The degree to which students were challenged by the class work was sometimes low and pacing of activities was slow. For example, in one 6/7 grade class, students were cutting out pictures of animals and placing them in order of fastest to slowest, in another class students were drawing maps onto graph paper for nearly the entire period. Other classrooms observed exhibited clear instruction, individual and group work, students working on a variety of hands-on projects such as animal sculptures, and presentations of their work such as reading sonnets they had written about a local sculpture.

Professional Climate

Site visitors conducted a focus group interview with instructional staff. Teachers reported that the school had implemented many positive changes since a prior visit by the CSO, but that many challenges remain. As noted above, teachers indicated that the school's limited budget had led to the dismissal of the arts integration teacher which has impeded the school's ability to remain true to its charter. Also dismissed was a grade 4/5 teacher on account of an inability to effectively manage classroom behavior. A new teacher was hired three weeks before the CSO's April 8 visit. Instructional staff reported that they had not received any formal evaluations to this point in the current school year. Teachers also noted that it can be difficult to obtain the resources needed to deliver the academic program. They pointed to a need for additional support staff, phones to communicate with parents, and supplies. Teacher also noted that there have been positive changes in the school. GCACS recently hired a dean of students who has reportedly established a clearer system of discipline. The presence of the school's special education coordinator has increased in the classroom and the school had recently hired a part time special education teacher. Additionally, the school had started to hire substitutes to cover teacher absences.

Federal Programs

Special education

GCACS has taken steps to improve the delivery of special education services, but deficits remain in the program's operation and administration. Additional speech and language staff and a second part-time special education teacher have been hired, but a significant difference remains between the services specified in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and services actually delivered. Letters have been sent to parents stating that not all services included in student's IEP have been delivered, and indicating that compensatory services will be made available. The

school is in the process of reaching compensatory services plan agreements with individual families.

English language learner education

GCACS has not implemented procedures for indentifying limited English proficient students as required, therefore a count of students who may be English language learners is not possible. The school reports having issued a home language survey which is the first step in the identification process, within the past month to determine if students speak a language other than English at home and if they need to be assessed for English language proficiency.

Nutrition

The school does not provide a school lunch program to students as required. School administrators report that a contracted food service company providing school lunches unilaterally discontinued delivery in December without prior notification to the school. A replacement vendor has not been secured.

Organizational Viability

Pre-enrollment

On the day of the review, both pre-enrollment documentation and the applications supporting the school's pre-enrollment count of students were requested by the site visit team. The school had significant difficulty assembling the requested materials, and the subsequent review of the documentation by the site visit team indicated that a variety of inaccuracies existed in the count. Applications were co-mingled by year, by type of contact (inquiries v. applications) and by type of students (new v. returning). Some students were also double-counted as both new and returning, and a small number of students were included in the count with no form of supporting documentation. The projected enrollment by grade level also did not align with the school's reported numbers. Following the enrollment verification, the number of students included in GCACS's pre-enrollment is 197.

Conclusion

Nearly at the end of their first school year, GCACS is in the process of establishing systems and structures to fulfill its mission. However, budgetary constraints have hindered the school's ability to maintain many of these structures during the first year. All stakeholders reported an enthusiasm for the school. However, as indicated by the lack of responsiveness to the conditions and additional requests for documentation, it appears that the school is lacking effective leadership on both the administrative and board level in addressing some of the ongoing organizational and fiscal challenges that face the school.