

Boston Renaissance Charter School (BRCPS) received its charter in 1994 to serve a maximum of 1,479 students from the City of Boston in grades Kindergarten through grade 12. BRCPS opened in 1995 with 640 students in grades K-5 and had expanded to 1,430 students in grades K-8 by 2005. When BRCPS opened in 1995, school leaders partnered with Edison Schools, Inc., to develop and manage the school's educational program. The school's partnership with Edison Schools, Inc., lasted for seven years, ending in 2002. The current Superintendent (formerly titled Headmaster¹) came to BRCPS in the school's third year and was hired to manage the school culture and climate and to manage the academic program. He continues in the role of Superintendent.

The school's mission statement, as reported in its 2006-07 Annual Report is "The Boston Renaissance Charter Public School is an urban K-6 school committed to providing a vibrant educational experience for Boston children. We strive to nurture and develop children academically, socially, and emotionally, in a stimulating supportive environment."

BRCPS is divided into three smaller schools: the Kinder School (grades K1-K2), the Primary School (grades 1-3), and the Elementary School (grades 4-6). Enrollment data submitted by the school shows that as of October 1, 2007, the school's students are 70% African American non-Hispanic; 15% American Indian Hispanic; 6% African American Hispanic; 2% Asian; 2% White Hispanic; 1% White non-Hispanic and 4% multi-race. Seventy one percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch; 3% are English language learners and 8% are in special education.

In 2005, at the time of the school's second renewal, BRCPS's charter was renewed with the following conditions:

1. BRCPS must demonstrate that it is an academic success by February 2007 by providing evidence that the school has met or is making substantial progress towards meeting annual benchmarks in its 2005-2010 Accountability Plan goals, approved by the Charter School Office, in the charter school accountability area of student academic success;
2. Based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations released in August/September 2005 and August/September 2006 (the end of Cycle IV), the school must not be, for accountability purposes, Identified for Improvement in English language arts, and must not be Identified for Improvement or in Corrective Action for mathematics; and

¹ In Spring 2007, the Board of Trustees voted to change the head of school's title from Headmaster/CEO to Superintendent effective for the 2007-2008 school year.

3. In collaboration with the Commissioner, BRCPS must develop a transition plan to be submitted to the Board of Education by its next regular meeting (March 29, 2005). Such plan must address the steps that will be taken to transition from a Pre-K through 12 to a Pre-K through 6 program, and should also include consideration of reducing the number of students the school will serve from 1,479 to 1,200.

(Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Education, February 15, 2005)

In September of 2006, the Board of Education, through the amendment process, voted to reduce the maximum enrollment of BRCPS from 1,479 students to 1,240 students. The new enrollment maximum took effect for the fall of 2007. At the time of the site visit, the school reported an enrollment of 1,254 students.

In February of 2007, after a review of the school's progress toward meeting the conditions imposed at renewal, the Board of Education placed the school on probation and imposed the following additional conditions on its charter.

1. By June 30, 2007, Boston Renaissance Charter School shall have submitted to and received approval from the Department of Education for the following items:
 1. A school improvement plan, consistent with the Department's standards for a District Plan for School Intervention, including allocation of resources to achieve the goals of the school's plan.
 2. A revised charter school Accountability Plan, including goals and annual benchmarks regarding academic success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to the terms of the school's charter. The Accountability Plan must be aligned to the school's plan for improvement as referenced above, and must include the school's plan for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate and for all statistically significant subgroups in English language arts and Mathematics.
 3. A report from the school on actions taken in response to the recommendations of a consultant hired by the school, upon approval by the Commissioner, to review the school's leadership structure and effectiveness.
2. By December of 2008, Boston Renaissance Charter School shall demonstrate that it is an academic success by providing evidence that the school has met or is making substantial progress toward meeting all benchmarks in its 2007-2010 Accountability Plan and has made Adequate Yearly Progress in the aggregate and for all statistically significant subgroups in English language arts and mathematics for 2008.
3. By December of 2008, Boston Renaissance Charter School shall have completed the necessary property acquisition and fundraising to permit a relocation of the school no later than September of 2009.

4. Boston Renaissance Charter School will reduce its maximum enrollment, without terminating the enrollment of any student currently attending the school, from 1,240 students to 880 students, beginning in the 2009-2010 school year.

The motion further required a review in October and April, by the Board of Education, of progress by BRCPS in meeting these conditions. The site visit conducted by the Charter School Office in October of 2007 had three purposes:

- to review the progress that the school has made in meeting the conditions imposed by the Board of Education in February 2007;
- to corroborate and augment the information contained in the school's Annual Report, and specifically the school's progress relative to its Accountability Plan goals, and
- to collect information that will eventually help the Commissioner and Board of Education make a renewal recommendation for the school's charter.

The focus of the inquiry is on three central areas: faithfulness to the terms of the school's charter, academic success, and organizational viability.

The following participants conducted the site visit to Boston Renaissance Charter Public School on October 2, 2007:

- Barry Barnett, Coordinator of Federal Programs, Massachusetts Department of Education, Charter School Office (MADOE, CSO)
- Andrew Cabot, Board of Trustees, Conservatory Lab Charter School
- Ruth Hersh, New School's Coordinator, MADOE, CSO
- Scott Knox, Vice President of National Expansion, The Steppingstone Foundation
- Joshua Lavine, Accountability Specialist, MADOE, CSO
- Emily Lichtenstein, Coordinator of Accountability, MADOE, CSO
- Sandy Matava, Professor of Public Management, Suffolk University, Boston, MA
- Mary Street, Director of Charter Schools, MADOE, CSO (present only for Board of Trustees focus group held on October 1 and telephone interview with the Board chair)

Before the visit, the site visit team reviewed the BRCPS 2006-2007 Annual Report, the school's Accountability Plan, the school's Plan for Charter School Improvement, reports from consultants to the school concerning leadership and governance structures, the school's responses to the consultant reports, and board minutes from the past year. On site, the team reviewed additional curricular information, data analysis information, and other materials provided by the school. The team conducted observations in approximately 25 classrooms and conducted group and individual interviews. Four trustees, eleven administrators, eight teachers, eight parents, and thirteen students attended their respective focus group meetings.

Meeting the Conditions of Probation

Condition #1(1) Finding: BRCPS engaged in the process of creating a Plan for Charter School Improvement, working closely with the Charter School Office.

The June 30, 2007 deadline was met for submission of the final draft of the Plan for Charter School Improvement and a draft Accountability Plan. Staff members in the Accountability and Targeted Assistance unit of the Department of Education reviewed the school's Plan in lieu of a state review panel. The school has received the comments of these reviewers and was informed in October that the Plan should be implemented and should conduct ongoing evaluation to

determine if the Plan is successful and if changes need to be made, in collaboration with the Charter School Office.

Condition #1(2) Finding: The school met the condition of submitting a revised Accountability Plan.

BRCPS submitted a revised Accountability Plan to the Charter School Office by the deadline specified in the probationary conditions. This Plan was approved by the CSO in June 2007.

Condition #1(3) Finding: The school met the condition of hiring a consultant to review the school's leadership structure and effectiveness and submitting a report on actions taken in response to the consultant's recommendations. After completion of the initial report, the consultant returned to review "the processes and structures employed by the Board of Trustees in governing the Boston Renaissance Charter Public School with particular attention to the development and use of an evaluation tool for assessing the performance of the Headmaster/CEO" (Memorandum to Dr. Harris and the Board of Trustees, July 18, 2007).

The school contracted with EDC to complete the work of reviewing the school's leadership structure and effectiveness. The consultant's report, issued on May 8, 2007, listed findings and recommendations responsive to two guiding questions:

- 1. Does the existing administrative structure provide clear lines of decision-making among administrators?*
- 2. To what extent do clear, aligned policies and practices inform the use and allocation of instructional resources?*

The consultant's report included multiple recommendations concerning the development of a performance assessment system for administrators, clarification of the roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority of administrators, and the setting of instructional policy and methods for monitoring policy implementation.

The consultant also produced a report, dated July 18, 2007, concerning the governance practices of the school's Board of Trustees and the Board's evaluation process for the Superintendent/CEO. The July 18, 2007 report listed findings and recommendations responsive to two guiding questions:

- 1. Through what structures and processes does the Board of Trustees govern and provide oversight to BRCPS?*
- 2. How has the Board of Trustees constructed and implemented a system for evaluating the performance of the Headmaster/CEO?*

Under the first question, the consultant's report made several findings concerning the Board's functioning, and made three recommendations: that the Board (1) articulate the actions that are available to the Board and the circumstances under which they might be taken, (2) identify what would constitute a formal proposal and when it would be needed, and (3) articulate what constitutes the work of the Academic Achievement/Curriculum and Instruction committee. In August 2007, the Board submitted, to the Charter School Office, a response to the consultant's

report, in which it committed itself to adopting these recommendations and articulated action steps with deadlines for completion of certain tasks.

During the Board of Trustees focus group, the site visit team found that some of the recommendations had been implemented, most notably the creation of a written charter for the Academic Achievement/Curriculum and Instruction Committee. This committee now holds a standing meeting immediately prior to every board meeting. Additionally, the Board has established committees on Governance & Nominations, Finance, Facilities, Development, and Human Resources. Board members interviewed by the site visit team reported that committees will also focus on monitoring pertinent aspects of the Plan for Charter School Improvement. .

However, during the site visit focus group, it also appeared that the Board members present did not have a clear understanding of what was contained in the consultant's report or the Board's written response, and that there continue to be several areas in which the structures and processes of the Board are not clearly defined. The Board's response of August 2007 included a commitment to creating a clear definition of what constitutes a formal proposal and when it should be requested, including required components of the proposal. In response to an inquiry from site visit team members regarding creation of the definition, the Board members present reported that the Board had not created a clear definition, expressed confusion about whether Board's developed written policies, and stated that, generally speaking, any proposition that alters the school's charter, affects its budget, staffing needs, or location requires a formal proposal, and that "a lot of what we do is common sense."

The school's Response to Consultant Report of August 2007 also established a deadline of "the end of September 2007", by which time the Board would "establish a clear process and expected product for the evaluation of the Headmaster, accompanied by a set timeline" and would address concerns of the consultant about how the evaluation would be conducted, lack of clarity about who was intended to complete the evaluation instrument, and the role of school staff in the evaluation process. In the previous year's evaluation process, responses were received from five of eleven Board members, four administrators, and one parent. At the time of the site visit, while the Board had developed an effective evaluation tool, which was approved in April of 2007, the Board had not met its deadline of finalizing the process for evaluating the school's Headmaster, reporting that they are currently in conversation with the school's Human Resource Director about refining the evaluation process, but that these talks are still in "the brainstorming stage." The Board did indicate that they would start the process of evaluating the Superintendent a month earlier in the school year to have more time to collect and analyze the results, in April instead of May.

In the August 2007 response, the Board also stated that "the Board and Headmaster will discuss and establish goals for the 2007-2008 school year by the end of August 2007." However, the site visit focus group interview with Board members revealed that the Board had not yet acted on this commitment. In response to a question about setting goals for the Superintendent, the Board members present indicated that these goals would be based on the past year's evaluation, but that the goals have not yet been written for the 2007-08 school year. During the telephone interview with the Board Chair, the Chair indicated that goals for the Superintendent would be set in late October.

Condition #2 Finding: In the first year of the academic conditions imposed by the Board of Education in 2007, BRCPS met with partial success.

BRCPS made AYP in math and English language arts in the aggregate. The school did not make AYP in English language arts for the Hispanic and special education subgroups, and did not make AYP in math for the special education subgroup.

Condition #3 Finding: The school is making progress towards relocation.

As described below on page 16 of this report, the school has identified a site in a different area of Boston, and is in the process of selling the existing building and purchasing a new facility.

Condition #4 Finding: The school understands that its current enrollment cap is 1240, to be reduced to 880 at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year

Although current enrollment is approximately 1,254, school leaders understand that the school's maximum enrollment is 1240, and have budgeted accordingly for the current school year.

Additional Site Visit Protocol Questions:

1. Faithfulness to the Terms of the School's Charter

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

Finding: All groups in the school know, understand, and are committed to the mission of the school.

The mission of BRCPS is to nurture and develop academic, social, and emotional competence while building confidence, character and citizenship among its students. All stakeholder groups interviewed were able to articulate and give examples of the manifestation of the mission and vision of the school.

Has the school met the faithfulness to charter goals set out in its accountability plan?

Finding: The school has met the faithfulness to charter goal set out in its Accountability Plan.

As noted in the introductory section of this report, one of the terms of the school's probation was that it develop a new Accountability Plan. This new plan has been received and approved by the Charter School Office. The school's current Accountability Plan includes one goal related to the school's faithfulness to its charter. This goal is that the school will provide essential elements of the charter to each student, as demonstrated by providing all students with at least one of the following program areas for each academic quarter: dance, music, art, or physical education. A review of the school's schedule indicates that this goal was met in 2006-2007 and continues to be met during the current school year.

2. Academic Program

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

- **Address the skills and concepts that students must know and be able to do to meet standards?**

- **Articulate school developed or identified internal standards for student performance?**
- **Establish and implement accommodation plans that address the needs of diverse learners?**

Finding: Site visitors observed a variety of instructional techniques, including whole group instruction, small group work, and independent practice. Content was observed to be consistent across grade levels, and instruction was tailored to meet the individual needs of students.

It was apparent to site visitors that curriculum was well aligned within grade levels, with classes in the same grade covering the same content at the same time. During morning classroom observations, site visitors saw teachers employing a range of instructional strategies. Most class periods included whole group instruction. In many classrooms, students also spent time working on particular skills that seemed targeted at meeting individual needs, and included both instructional and assessment components. This type of instruction took place either in small groups or in one-on-one instruction. Students were also frequently pulled out of the room to meet with specialists. In many classrooms, site visitors observed one or two groups of students working with different teachers in small groups, while the rest of the class was expected to independently complete assigned worksheets.

Finding: Site visitors observed that most students appeared to be highly engaged when working with a teacher either in a small group or during whole class instruction. When asked to work independently, visitors observed many instances of off-task behavior.

Site visitors observed that during whole group instruction, students generally appeared to be attentive, particularly at the younger grade levels. Teachers used a variety of techniques to engage students and hold the students' attention, including gross motor activities, singing and chanting, and eliciting frequent participation from a variety of students. In contrast, it was observed that when students were working independently they were not always on task, and some teachers, who were engaged in small group instruction, seemed not to notice the off task behavior.

Finding: The school-wide behavior management system is implemented with varying degrees of success across grade levels.

Site visitors observed that teachers in the kinder and primary schools focused a great deal of attention on implementing routines and strictly delineating acceptable classroom conduct. Students were given careful, detailed instruction in appropriate behavior, including how to manage their bodies and what to do during transitions. As a result, misbehavior did not interfere with learning, and students appeared to be safe and engaged in the tasks at hand. In the elementary school, visitors noted more off task behavior than in the lower grade levels and some disciplinary issues arose. Teachers exhibited a range of classroom management expertise. Though a uniform code of conduct and school-wide system of behavior management involving color codes for levels of behavior was clearly in place, the code was not always enforced consistently, with misbehavior being ignored in some classrooms.

Finding: The curriculum is closely tied to the Massachusetts standards. Curricular materials are drawn from a variety of commercial sources.

The curriculum is based on commercial materials, including the Harcourt Trophy Series for reading and Scott Foresman for math. Teachers reported that this year, for the first time, all of the curricular materials used in the school are integrated into specific scopes and sequences for English Language Arts and mathematics using the Massachusetts state standards as a framework. A review of daily lesson plans from various grade levels and subject areas indicated that all lesson plans include a listing of the standards from the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks to be covered.

Finding: In classrooms throughout the school, consistency is achieved through the use of a uniform blackboard configuration and a standard lesson-planning template.

Site visitors observed the same Lorraine Monroe blackboard configuration, including an aim, a Do Now, and homework, in use throughout the school, though in a more simplified version in the lower grades. Though all teachers listed the lesson's objectives on the blackboard, it was noted that sometimes these were not legible, and/or not written in terms that would make sense to students. Lesson plans from different grade levels and subject areas were laid out in slightly different formats, but all included an aim or objective, a Do Now, lesson steps including instructional techniques, assessment techniques and homework to be assigned, in addition to the state standards that were to be taught.

Finding: The teaching of writing is a school-wide priority this year. Writing is being integrated throughout the curriculum and across all grade levels.

A draft scope and sequence for a school-wide writing program is in place for the first time this year. Teachers reported that the new focus on writing was being implemented by devoting a daily block of time to writing, as separate from literacy time. A standardized developmental writing rubric that matches the MCAS assessment is being used throughout the school. Students will be given regular writing prompts that mirror those on the MCAS. At this point in the school year, site visitors observed that the writing program is still in its early stages, with younger students focusing on letter formation and handwriting, and older students completing unstructured journaling-type assignments, without yet making connections to particular content areas or writing techniques.

Finding: BRCS offers a full continuum of placements for students in need of special education.

The school offers settings for students with disabilities ranging from full inclusion to substantially separate placements. All inclusion classes are co-taught by a regular and special education teacher. There are two inclusion rooms at the 5th grade level but at the time of the site visit, there was one staff vacancy. Co-teachers have common planning time built into their schedule to facilitate information sharing between the regular and special education teachers, including discussion of accommodations and modifications to be made in the classroom. Two resource rooms serving a total of 20 students school-wide operate at a very low student teacher ratio, and two substantially separate classrooms serving a total of 5 students complete the continuum.

Finding: Staff training for sheltered English immersion is not complete.

While some staff have received training on accommodating the needs of English language learners in the classroom, there has not been sufficient school-wide training such that a program of Sheltered English Immersion is in operation at the school. The school reports that they intend to implement the required staff training during the course of the current school year. Two teachers at every grade level will receive training to qualify them to provide sheltered English immersion instruction in their classrooms. The school also has one reading specialist who has passed the English language learner MTEL exam and that person will be working with the school's principals on the further development of the school's programming for limited English proficient students.

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

Finding: MCAS results for 2007 demonstrate gains in the aggregate in both English language arts and Mathematics at all grade levels, with the exception of a slight drop in performance in grade 6 English language arts after two years of test administration.

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

Table I: BRCPS MCAS ELA Results by Performance Categories, 2003-2007

ELA	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failed	CPI
Grade 3						
2003	167	0	47	43	10	77.1
2004	187	0	37	46	17	70.3
2005	138	0	44	47	9	78.6
2006	141	8	37	48	7	78.9
2007	139	12	55	25	8	85.1
Grade 4						
2003	170	1	16	57	26	56.9
2004	168	4	26	49	22	64.0
2005	191	1	21	51	27	60.4
2006	140	3	24	50	23	63.6
2007	122	7	25	53	15	70.5
Grade 5						
2006	153	5	27	51	18	67.6
2007	115	5	40	43	11	77.2
Grade 6						
2006	110	5	44	40	12	77.5
2007	107	8	37	40	14	74.3

In 2007, BRCS made gains in English language arts in all grade levels except grade 6. In grade 3, the percentage of students reaching proficiency between 2003-2007 rose from 47% to 67%, and the CPI rose by 6.2 points. In grade 4, the percentage of students reaching proficiency

between 2006 and 2007 rose from 27% to 32% with a concurrent increase in CPI of 6.9 points. In grade 5, the percentage of students reaching proficiency rose from 32% to 45%, and the CPI rose by 9.6 points.

Table II: BRCPS MCAS Mathematics Results by Performance Categories 2003-2007

Math	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failed	CPI
Grade 3						
2006	140	4	32	36	28	66.6
2007	138	14	45	28	13	81
Grade 4						
2003	170	0	8	43	49	44.3
2004	168	1	8	53	39	49.6
2005	192	0	9	45	46	45.4
2006	140	4	12	57	27	55.5
2007	122	7	16	53	24	62.7
Grade 5						
2006	152	2	16	31	51	47.7
2007	115	4	21	44	30	58.3
Grade 6						
2003	114	7	24	34	35	59.4
2004	135	6	13	26	55	46.5
2005	171	3	13	32	51	48.2
2006	109	6	18	30	46	52.8
2007	106	10	29	27	33	63.4

Mathematics scores over the past five years have been low, with nearly half of the students in grades 5 and 6 scoring in the warning/failing category in 2006 and CPI percentages ranging from 44.3 to 66.6. Results for 2007 showed improvement across all grade levels. Grades 3, 5, and 6 showed particularly strong gains, showing a CPI gain of 14.4 points for grade 3, and 10.6 points for grades 5 and 6. From 2006 to 2007, the percentage of students in grade 3 reaching proficiency rose from 36% to 59%. In grade 5, the percentage of students reaching proficiency rose from 18% to 25%, and in grade 6, the percentage of students reaching proficiency rose from 24% to 39%. Future site visit teams should continue to monitor these results, looking for trends over time.

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

Finding: Internal and external assessment results indicate that student performance is improving over time.

The school administers many internal and external standardized assessments throughout the school year, as detailed in the following table.

Table III: 2007-08 BRCPS Internal and External Assessment Program (excluding MCAS)

Assessment	Grade levels	When Administered	Subject Area(s)
PAR	1-6	Fall, winter, spring	Math, science (4-6), SS (4-6)

SRI	4-6 3	Fall, winter, spring Winter	ELA
GRADE	K2-6	Fall, spring	ELA
DIBELS	K2-3 4-6 at risk	Fall, winter, spring	ELA
Stanford 9	1-6	Spring	ELA, Math
MCAS-style mini-assessments	4-6	Sept., Nov., Jan, Apr.	ELA, Math

Assessment results, as detailed in the school’s 2006-07 Annual Report, indicate improvement in student performance. In English language arts, the DIBELS test of Oral Reading Fluency, Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Reading Evaluation (GRADE), and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) indicate a slight improvement from 2005 through 2007. On the DIBELS, a school-wide average of 46.5% scored in the Low Risk category in 2005 and 52.1% in 2007. On the GRADE, 77.1% scored average or above average in 2005, and 82.4% in 2007. On the SRI, 59.3% scored proficient or advanced in 2005, and 62.3% scored proficient or advanced in 2007.

In Mathematics, the PAR examination results indicate an increase in the school-wide average of students demonstrating proficiency, from 47.8% in 2005 to 65% in 2007, though results varied greatly from grade to grade, with 88% of grade 1 students and 32% of grade 6 students reaching proficiency in the spring of 2007.

Results for the 2007 administration of the Stanford 9 were not available for inclusion in the Annual Report or at the time of the site visit. Results of the mock MCAS examinations administered in 2006-07 were not included in the Annual Report and were not provided to the site visit team.

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

Finding: The school has partially met the academic performance goals set out in its Accountability Plan by making AYP in the aggregate and for subgroups, with the exception of failing to make AYP for the Hispanic subgroup in English language arts.

The school’s current Accountability Plan includes two goals relating to its academic program, one for English language arts and one for mathematics. Both goals have as their measures that the school will make AYP in the aggregate and in all statistically significant subgroups (African-American, Hispanic, and Low Income) in each year remaining in the charter cycle, 2007 through 2010.

In 2007, the school made AYP in the aggregate in both English language arts and mathematics. It did not make AYP for the Hispanic subgroup in English language arts. Although it is not specifically included in the Accountability Plan goals, it is notable that the school also did not make AYP in the special education subgroup in English language arts or mathematics, missing the improvement target in ELA, and the attendance target in ELA and mathematics.

2. 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: Since last year's site visit, substantial progress appears to have been made in the area of administrative capacity clarity of roles and responsibilities. Since the reorganization that was carried out in the summer of 2007, all stakeholders agreed that the current administrative structure is more effective and efficient.

Coincident with the receipt of the consultant's report, the school also found that it needed to implement a budget cut of approximately \$1.9 million this fiscal year in order to meet rising costs and a 40-student reduction in enrollment in response to a condition imposed at renewal. In an effort to both meet the recommendations contained in the report and reduce spending, administrative functions were streamlined in many areas. The positions of Chief Academic Officer and Director of Special Education were eliminated and the organizational chart reconfigured to create clearer lines of authority to the principals of the three divisions and the Unified Student Services Director, all of whom report to the Superintendent. This clarified model appears to have empowered staff and increased school-wide investment in meeting the school's mission. Administrators and teachers spoke with enthusiasm about the effectiveness and efficiency of the new administrative structure.

Finding: It will be critical for the board to develop strong leadership capacity.

Four members of the eleven member board attended the focus group held during the site visit. Two site visitors also conducted a telephone interview after the visit with the Board chair, who was unable to attend the focus group meeting.

The BRCPS Board of Trustees experienced a period of significant transition between 2005 and the present, resulting in new members. Of the four members who attended the site visit focus group, one had been elected to the Board in March of 2007 and the other three were elected at the end of 2005. The remaining seven members include one founding member, one (the current board chair) who was elected in 2002, three who were elected at the end of 2005, and two others who joined the Board in March/April 2007. Board members described a process led by the Nominating Committee, in close collaboration with the Superintendent, to identify and recruit board members who have the necessary skill sets to build board capacity. It was reported that the Board is currently searching for new members with expertise in the area of elementary education, finance, and marketing/public relations.

As discussed above, the current Board appears to be struggling with the development and implementation of policies and procedures to govern its work, and with the implementation of a clear process for the evaluation of the Superintendent. The Board chair reported that she has moved away from the Boston area and is planning to gradually phase out her involvement with the school. For this reason, she would like to ensure that a process is put into place for Board leadership succession.

Does the school have systems and structures to guide improvement?

Finding: Teachers and administrators appear to be energized and stakeholders reported a new sense of urgency regarding academic success.

Teachers reported that “There is a sense of urgency around AYP this year that we’ve never had before, and it means that everyone is included in the effort, from physical education teachers to lunch ladies.” This year’s budget cuts have necessitated the elimination of both administrative and some direct service providers, such as social workers and some paraprofessionals. Despite the reported need to do “more with less,” the staff reported that everyone is focused on meeting the needs of the students. Site visitors also noted a strong sense of collegiality, facilitating the sharing of ideas and practices, particularly within divisions [do you mean schools?] throughout the school. Teachers report that they receive a great deal of support from administrators, coaches, and colleagues, and that they are very comfortable asking for help. They also report that they are constantly learning from each other. New teachers, including new special education teachers, are provided with mentors and the principals review their lesson plans.

Finding: While the BRCPS Plan for Charter School Improvement (Plan) provides a broad overview of all the areas for improvement, the school is currently engaged in a process of prioritizing areas of emphasis for this academic year. Though not necessarily identical to the areas identified in the Plan, stakeholders share a common understanding as to what constitutes the most critical areas for school improvement.

The Plan for Charter School Improvement includes the following proposed improvements:

- Use of MCAS-like rubrics to assess student work,
- Use of standards-based report cards,
- Use of standards-based instruction,
- Demonstration of proficient teaching,
- Maximizing the effectiveness of the instructional block schedule,
- Developing meta-cognitive and higher order thinking abilities,
- Delivering school-wide writing instruction.

The Plan also proposes the following strategies for accomplishing the above-listed improvements:

- Professional development planning, including support from external consultants,
- Standards-based teaching and learning aligned with state frameworks,
- Work groups and professional development to establish writing instruction program, MCAS-like rubrics, and standards based report cards,
- Cross grade level gap analysis to establish a K-6 teaching and learning continuum.

The Plan calls for these improvements and strategies to be disseminated and implemented through the development of grade-level and department-level action plans, to be monitored by the Board of Trustees and the Instructional Leadership Team through the use of implementation and outcome benchmarks.

The Plan was drafted, in large part, by the school’s former Chief Academic Officer, who is no longer at the school. During the site visit, when asked what areas were the focus for school

improvement this year, administrators and teachers named the use of data, block scheduling, using the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks to plan lessons, the co-teaching model, smoothing the transitions between the kinder, primary, and elementary schools, the teaching of writing, and curricular consistency across grade levels. Though there was significant congruence between the areas for school improvement named by school administrators and teachers in focus groups, and those that are listed in the Plan, current administrators and staff view the Plan as a work in progress that has not yet been finalized. Teachers, administrators and Board members all spoke of the need to revise the Plan to reflect the results of this past spring's MCAS results, and particularly of the need to focus attention on special education and Hispanic students, the two subgroups that did not make adequate yearly progress this year, as measured by MCAS. The school is in the process of prioritizing the many goals contained in the plan, and that the action plans and benchmark measurement systems contemplated by the Plan have not yet been developed.

Finding: Data analysis has become a central focus for all staff. Staff is increasingly knowledgeable about what is assessed, what it means and how to translate data into classroom practice.

The gathering and analysis of assessment data has become a fundamental part of the school culture. Students are assessed by multiple measures at frequent intervals, as detailed in Table 2, above. The system for analyzing and disseminating information about data has been centralized and streamlined this year. The administrator who serves in the newly created position of Assessment Director has developed a system by which all teachers and administrators are trained to interpret data. Each teacher is then required to attend data meetings three times each year for both English language arts and Mathematics, at which teachers discuss the results obtained by their class with the Assessment Director, the Assessment Coordinator, their school principal and the subject area coach for their grade level. Teachers report that they use data to develop individual goal plans for students, and to determine teaching strategies and inform instruction.

Finding: The special education department has begun to utilize data to drive instruction in the classroom.

The school has conducted data strand analysis utilizing the data generated from MCAS scores for the first time this year, producing both individual and overall results for special education students. Results of the analysis were reviewed with the special education staff in conjunction with an instructional coach. The school reports that they intend to extend this practice to use with internal assessments during the course of the current school year.

Finding: The special education program has benefited from the administrative restructuring undertaken at the school last year.

Until this year, the special education department had been led by a single administrator who was responsible for all aspects of program operation including administration and policy, regulatory compliance (including ensuring that notices were issued and timelines met), supervising related services providers and chairing special education team meetings. As a result, the direct supervision of special education instructional staff was conducted by the school's principals.

Under the new administrative structure, the Director of Special Education position has been eliminated and replaced by a Director of Unified Student Services (USS) and a subordinate

Educational Team Facilitator (ETF). While the revised USS director position has expanded administrative responsibilities beyond the special education department, she maintains responsibility for supervision of the ETF and special education teachers, the related services providers and overall programmatic compliance with legal requirements. The ETF has assumed the duty of chairing special education team meetings and has primary responsibility for special education administration and paperwork functions. Staff members reported that the revised system is a significant improvement in that an individual knowledgeable about special education now conducts their supervision, and that special education team meeting efficiency has improved since the creation of the ETF position.

Finding: Boston Renaissance has implemented an innovative version of the student support team model.

As a result of this year's budget cuts that eliminated two social worker positions, the school identified new staff members to chair the student support teams known as the FASST (Family and Student Support Team). In making this change, BRCPS assigned the school's related services providers, such as the speech pathologist or the school psychologist, to act as chairpersons for those teams. Having the related services provider staff member chair FASST meetings (as opposed to the EFT or special education administrator) is a unique approach, and provides those staff persons an opportunity to develop and to demonstrate their leadership skills. In addition to the FASST teams, the school has also implemented a "Rounds" meeting. Full FASST teams consisting of up to 15-20 staff members meet on a bi-weekly basis. During the intervening weeks, a FASST subgroup consisting exclusively of the related services providers meet to review the progress of each student previously referred to the team. This unique approach reduces the time between check-ins on student progress.

Finding: Staff are well supported by extensive professional development opportunities and by the instructional coaches, specialists, and the administrative team.

Teachers are provided with support and ample opportunity for professional development. There is extensive training offered over the summer, and during the school year, the first Friday of the month is usually dedicated to professional development. On these days, teachers receive training on a variety of topics. Teachers identify areas for professional development, and topics are also chosen by school administrators to align with targeted performance areas, as determined by analysis of student performance data. Teachers are generally divided by school level and level of experience for professional development.

Teachers report that they are well supported by literacy and Mathematics coaches. According to the school's staff roster, the primary school and elementary school each have their own literacy coach and math coach (four coaches total). There are also two Reading First Facilitators, one for the kinder school and one for primary. Coaches have helped to develop scopes and sequences for all subject areas, and to align curriculum with state standards. The coaches are also in classrooms every day, and give teachers written (non-evaluative) feedback on teaching and learning every two weeks, tailored to meet the needs of the individual teacher. Lead teachers, who meet regularly with the school principals, also provide consistency and support as necessary across grade levels or content area. Teachers also receive formal evaluations twice yearly, from the division principals. In addition, the principals conduct informal walk-throughs of classrooms

virtually every day, with feedback provided through notes, emails and the completion of checklists.

Finding: The Reading First program has provided structure and consistency throughout the school.

Teachers identified the Reading First model as one of the school's greatest strengths. Components of this model include the use of progress monitoring assessments, a daily 150 minute instructional block, the three tier instructional model including intensive intervention opportunities, reciprocal teaching and the co-teaching model, which ensures that there are at least two teachers in a classroom during literacy instruction. These components were found to inform not just the school's literacy program, but also the rest of the instructional program, creating a culture that is characterized by the use of data to inform instruction, long instructional blocks, and targeted interventions.

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

Both parents and students asserted that the school is a safe place, both physically and emotionally. All stakeholders acknowledged that the physical facility is not adequate for the program. The downtown traffic and congestion, the lack of outdoor space and parking options, and the verticality of the building make it an impractical site for an elementary school. As noted above, one of the conditions of probation was that the school complete the property acquisition and fundraising in order to relocate by September 2009. The Board and administration reported that a new site has been identified, and that the school is in the process of selling the existing building and purchasing a new facility, with both purchase and sale documents currently under development.

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

BRCS underwent a full Coordinated Program Review activity in January 2004 and a mid-cycle review was conducted in June 2007. The next compliance review event for this school is scheduled to occur in FY 2010

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

Finding: Staff retention continues to be an issue for the school, although steps are being taken to address this concern.

Administrators described staff retention to be an issue for the school. School administrators reported that approximately 25% of the staff resigns each year. The school's Annual Report notes that the average number of years of service for classroom teachers has decreased slightly in the past few years, from 4.6 years in 2003-2004 to 4.1 years in 2004-2006, to 3.5 years in 2006-2007. However, the number of teachers with Master's degrees has increased from 55% in 2005-2006 to 63% in 2006-2007, and the number of teachers who meet the NCLB requirements for highly qualified status has also increased from 81% in 2005-2006 to 87% in 2006-2007.

School administrators attribute teacher attrition to budgetary constraints that prevent the school from implementing salary steps and benefits comparable to local public school districts, and to situational issues, such as the lack of parking and commuting difficulties. A Quality of Life Committee has been formed to examine the issues that impact staff retention. Also, the school has made a commitment to promoting from within when possible, and did so when all three of the division principals began as teachers at the school.

Are school members satisfied with the performance of the school?

Finding: Consistent with last year's site visit, parents and students are enthusiastic about their experiences at the school.

Site visitors met with a focus group of eight parents, half of whom had more than one child at the school. Parents of students at every grade level were represented. The parents were very positive in their comments about the school. They like the support the school offers to students and their families. They appreciate the consistency and high standards set by the school's discipline policy. Most importantly, they appreciate the fact that even though the school is very large, their children are really known and cared for by the staff. The strongest complaint voiced by the parents is that the location is difficult to access, and the building is impractical for young children.

Site visitors met with two focus groups of students, one with six fifth and sixth grade students and one with seven third and fourth grade students. Most of the students had been in the school for several years, and none were new to the school. Students had nothing but praise for their teachers, who they described as strict but kind, patient and able to provide clear explanations for difficult concepts. They also liked the library, the computer room and the specialty classes, such as physical education and music.

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

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

The school's current Accountability Plan includes three goals related to organizational viability. Some of the goals have multiple measures. Each goal and measure will be discussed, below.

The first organizational viability goal requires that the Board of Trustees provide the governance and support required for the school to meet its accountability goals. This goal is measured by three objectives. The first is that the board will complete an annual self-assessment and retreat. The Board reported that it held an annual retreat in April 2007. The retreat was organized and facilitated by the board chair. The agenda included reviewing the committee structure, reviewing responses to a board self-assessment survey, and affirming goals for the year. The second objective is that the Governance and Nominations Committee develop a board that includes people with expertise in identified areas of weakness. As discussed above, board recruitment continues to be an ongoing challenge. During the spring of 2007, the board added one educator and two attorneys to the board, and continues to seek new members with expertise in the areas of education, financing and marketing. The third objective is that the Board will evaluate the Superintendent on an annual basis using a predetermined evaluation tool and

including feedback from board members, staff and parents, and providing strengths and suggestions for improvement. As discussed above, during the 2006-07 the Board developed and used evaluation tool to conduct the Superintendent's evaluation. It has not yet finalized the Superintendent's goals or the evaluation process for the current school year.

The second goal is that the school will maintain an average daily attendance of at least 92% for grades 1-6. According to the school's Annual Report, average daily attendance for 2006-2007 was 93%, so this goal was met.

The third goal is that the school will demonstrate sound use of its financial resources and responsible financial decision-making. This goal is measured by two objectives. The first is that the school will submit yearly audited financial statements demonstrating sound practices and policies in managing public resources. The second is that the school will annually reduce its level of outstanding debt. Both of these objectives were met in 2006-2007.

Conclusion:

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

There are some areas of particular challenge identified by the site visit team that will bear continued monitoring. One is whether the cuts to direct student services necessitated by this year's reduced budget, and especially the elimination of social work positions, will have a detrimental effect on student life. A second is the high teacher attrition rate. While it is certainly understandable that the school would lose staff to better-paid positions and changes in life circumstances, this high turnover poses challenges. A final concern identified by this year's site visit team was board leadership capacity. As discussed above, many board members are new to the school, and the board does not yet include expertise in all of the areas that it has identified as priorities. Moreover, the Board chair will be phasing out her involvement, and the Board will need to identify new leadership. Future site visit teams will look for the board to have developed a plan for succession, a strong system for orientation of new board members, a procedure for the evaluation of the Superintendent, and other documented policies and procedures to guide the board as it moves forward in its governing role.