

Year Six Site Visit Report**Uphams Corner Charter School***Boston, MA*

October 2007

Uphams Corner Charter School (UCCS) is located in Boston, Massachusetts and currently serves approximately 175 students. Uphams Corner Charter School opened in 2002 with students in grade 5 and added one grade each year to reach a grades 5 through 8 program in the 2004-2005 school year. UCCS is a Commonwealth charter school, drawing students primarily from the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston as well as the surrounding neighborhoods of Roxbury, Mattapan, Roslindale, South Boston, Jamaica Plain, and Hyde Park. The school has an enrollment cap of 200 students and was chartered to serve students in grades 5 through 8.

The school's mission statement reads, "Uphams Corner Charter School, a middle and high school, offers an academically rigorous, rhetoric centered education in the liberal arts and sciences, leading to sound understanding, earnest reflection, self-discipline, integrity, and action. Our community is devoted to outstanding student performance and whole character formation. We will graduate all our students as powerful, articulate, moral citizens, working for the benefit of all." The school reports that its rhetoric-centered curriculum is the central operating principle of the school. School founders created the concept of using rhetoric--the use of language and persuasion in the expression and defense of ideas and concepts--to empower students in using words responsibly for social and personal change (2006 Annual Report, page 16). The school reports that its program includes rhetorical exercises known as progymnasmata; Friday Forum, a weekly debate event; and the Student Senate, comprised of student representatives from each class.

As reported by the school at the time of the site visit, the student population is approximately 84% African American, 12% Hispanic, and 4% other. Of the total student population, 9.9% are designated as limited English proficient students, 28% are special education students, and 90% are low-income.

On January 23, 2007, the Board of Education renewed UCCS's charter with the following conditions:

1. By June 30, 2007, Uphams Corner Charter School shall have submitted to and received approval from the Department of Education for the following items:
 - A Plan for Charter School Improvement, consistent with the Department's standards for a District Plan for School Intervention.
 - A charter school Accountability Plan, including goals and annual benchmarks regarding academic success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to 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.

- All relevant amendments to its charter, in accordance with 603 CMR 1.11.
2. By June 30, 2007, the school shall engage a consultant, who shall be approved by the Commissioner, to review the school's leadership structure and provide training and assistance to strengthen the school's management.
 3. By December 2007, Uphams Corner Charter School shall have met or shall be making substantial progress toward the benchmarks set forth in its approved Accountability Plan.
 4. By December 2008, Uphams Corner 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 2007-2012 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.
 5. By December 2008, Uphams Corner Charter School shall have completed the necessary property acquisition and fundraising to permit a relocation of the school to the Uphams Corner area no later than September 2009.

The following participants conducted the site visit on October 4, 2007:

- Barry Barnett, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Joyce Bowen, MA DOE Mathematics, Science & Technology
- Ruth Hersh, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Hannah Jones, Assistant Director, Teacher Training Course, Shady Hill School
- Kris Lane, Partner, Daniel Dennis & Company, Certified Public Accountants
- Eve Laubner, MA DOE, School and District Intervention
- Joshua Lavine, MA DOE Charter School Office
- Mary Street, MA DOE Charter School Office

Before the visit, the site team reviewed the 2006-2007 Annual Report for the charter school, UCCS's Plan for Charter School Improvement, the 2006-2007 Summary of Review, and recent internal and external assessment data. On site, the team reviewed curricular information, board materials, and other information provided by the school. Team members observed classes and conducted group interviews with trustees, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

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 and Plan for Charter School Improvement, 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 was on three central areas of inquiry:

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

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

Meeting the Conditions of Renewal

Finding: UCCS has partially met the requirements of Condition #1 of its charter renewal. There are three components to this condition, all of which were to be completed by June 30, 2007. The first component, requiring UCCS to submit a Plan for Charter School Improvement, was completed. The second component required UCCS to submit and have approved a new Accountability Plan aligned with the Plan for Charter School Improvement. UCCS is still working on fulfilling this requirement and submitted the most recent draft to the Charter School Office for its review in late October 2007. The third component required UCCS to submit and have approved all relevant amendments to its charter. A major amendment was submitted to and voted on by the Board of Education in October. A minor amendment is currently pending approval of the Acting Commissioner.

Finding: UCCS has met Condition #2 of its charter renewal. Condition #2 required the school to engage a consultant to review its leadership structure and provide training and assistance to strengthen its management. UCCS received approval from the Commissioner for and engaged a consultant, Ron Walker, in June of 2007.

Finding: Condition #3 of the school's charter renewal cannot be assessed at this time. Condition #3 requires that UCCS meet or be making substantial progress toward meeting the benchmarks set forth in its Accountability Plan by December of 2007. Because UCCS does not yet have an approved Accountability Plan, this condition cannot be assessed at the time of the writing of this report.

Finding: Condition #4 of the school's charter renewal cannot be assessed at this time. This benchmark calls for an assessment of the school's progress in December 2008.

Finding: Condition #5 cannot be fully assessed at this time. Condition #5 requires that UCCS be relocated to Uphams Corner by September 2009. The school is currently looking for a property to lease or purchase but has not yet begun raising the funds necessary for the acquisition of a permanent location. This issue is discussed on page 6 of this report.

Implementation of the Plan for Charter School Improvement

As one of the conditions imposed at the time of its renewal, UCCS was required to create a Plan for Charter School Improvement (Plan). Various constituent groups were involved in this process. UCCS administrators stated that the Plan was initially created by the head of

school and the principal, with help from one of the school's two consultants. Drafts of the Plan were subsequently shown to the board of trustees, teachers, and the parent council. The Plan was finalized by the June 30th deadline required in the renewal condition. Because UCCS began crafting and implementing a series of improvements in January of last year, the Plan contains a report on the execution of the steps it is taking in response to the analysis of deficiencies presented in the Plan.

The Plan calls for the implementation of various initiatives in six different areas: assessment, curriculum and instruction; professional development, supervision and evaluation; student support and remediation; school culture; family outreach and development; and leadership and governance. It includes a long list of initiatives tied to each area laid out under three time frames: spring 2007 and school years 2007-08 and 2008-09. In addition, each item is presented with resources and success indicators. Elements of the Plan for which the site visit team collected data are discussed below.

Finding: The school has a process for documenting lesson plans and having them reviewed by an administrator.

All lesson plans for a given week must be submitted and placed on the school's server by Wednesday of the previous week for review by the principal who examines math and ELA plans on alternating weeks. The site visit team did not review lesson plan documents. As part of its Plan for Charter School Improvement, the school intends to revise its benchmarks, scopes and sequences, and unit plans during the current school year. Future site visit teams will evaluate whether this work has been completed.

Finding: UCCS has implemented several changes in order to address the issue of low test scores.

Students at UCCS receive 90 minutes of math instruction every day. This is an increase from 55 minutes last year but short of the 120 minutes of daily math instruction called for in UCCS's Plan for Charter School Improvement. UCCS also uses Wednesday mornings for small group tutorials in math and English language arts. In order to keep these sections small, some groups are taught by teachers who are not in these departments but are given training in these subjects. In addition, UCCS has expanded the size of its math department from two positions to five, allowing it to halve the size of its math classes.

Finding: UCCS continues to work with the Massachusetts Public School Performance Project (MPSP) to train teachers and analyze student performance on MCAS-aligned interim assessments. The school has also begun to systematize a basic approach to analyzing data.

In August of 2006, UCCS began working with the Massachusetts Public School Performance Project, which provides MCAS-aligned assessments along with teacher training in the usage and analysis of data. MPSP worked with teachers for two weeks at the start of the school year and provides ongoing assistance throughout the year. In addition, the principal and teachers work together to analyze data and theorize as to the thinking behind students' incorrect answers. Utilizing graphic organizers and focusing on curricular and instructional gaps, the staff creates action plans and targeted teaching strategies that can be incorporated into lessons across the curriculum. Future site visit

teams should look for evidence of a data-driven approach to instruction and remediation, and significant teacher training around utilizing data.

Finding: UCCS has begun to implement several strategies to address both the academic and emotional needs of its students.

Last year, UCCS began an after-school tutoring program for students with low scores on standardized tests or identified by teachers as needing additional help in math or English (Uphams Corner Plan for Charter School Improvement, p.18). A part-time coordinator position was created to recruit, schedule, and oversee tutors who included stipended UCCS teachers, student volunteers from Boston College High School, and paid UCCS parents and students from Boston Latin Academy and local-area colleges.

This year, the school has begun to implement the program using UCCS teachers, but due to a shortage of staff, it is currently able to service only about one-half of the 65 students referred by teachers. While UCCS states that it expects to hire more tutors for the after-school tutoring program, at the time of the site visit (during the fourth week of school), the school had not yet begun the process of doing so.

In order to support students in the timely completion of their homework, UCCS has instituted an agenda/assignment book structure and a process to identify and assist struggling students. Students are expected to have their assignment books signed by parents or guardians nightly. If students do not complete a homework assignment, they are sent to the "Homework Club," which occurs in the afternoon between 3:00 and 4:00 pm when enrichment activities take place. If students do not complete assignments on a regular basis, they can be assigned to the Homework Club or to after-school tutoring for a month at a time. A review of individual students by the school's staff occurs during a "triage meeting" on the last Wednesday of every month with the goal of preempting the referral of students to the Student Support Team. If a student continues to struggle after more than a month or two in tutoring or the Homework Club, the school will consider testing for learning disabilities.

In order to foster a healthy school culture and address issues arising from the trauma that many of UCCS's students have experienced in their personal lives, the school has formed a relationship with the Boston Institute of Psychotherapy to provide group therapy to all students on Mondays from 3:00 to 4:00 pm. These therapy sessions had not yet begun at the time of the site visit.

Finding: The school has altered its schedule to provide time for professional development and faculty meetings and has instituted a mentoring program for new teachers that is popular with the faculty. The school does not currently have a literacy or math coach. This academic year, UCCS has begun using Wednesdays as early release days, with teacher meetings beginning at noon. These blocks of time are used for grade-level, departmental, and whole staff meetings. However, teachers made no mention of external presenters coming in to work with faculty, and no professional development schedule was shared with the team. Teachers did report that they were sent out to visit other schools, but it was not

clear how those schools were chosen or how observations were to be processed, shared, or utilized by the staff.

It was reported that administrators are a regular presence in teachers' classrooms and give frequent, informal feedback. In addition, teachers and administrators articulated a structure by which newer teachers are mentored by lead teachers who serve as mentor teachers. The lead teachers are chosen based on their experience, accomplishments, and success on prior evaluations. They are coached by administrators who try to give informal, written notes to them weekly along with suggestions for the teachers they are coaching.

Administrators report that the relationship between a mentor teacher and his/her mentee is considered confidential. Teachers are encouraged to bring issues they are working on to their mentor, who is expected to maintain confidentiality. If an administrator notes an issue that a teacher needs to work on, the teacher will be asked if he/she has discussed it with his/her mentor. Lead teachers will not receive a formal evaluation until March.

UCCS's Plan for Charter School Improvement, on page 34, calls for cross-curricular literacy coaching, although what this coaching will provide is not defined. UCCS hired part-time literacy and math coaches last year. The Uphams Corner Charter School Plan for Charter School Improvement, on page 24, also states that the school will provide ELA and math coaching for teachers on a similar basis to what was provided in 2006-07, i.e., work with teachers as a group in August and on a 1:1 basis during the school year. However, the school does not have a literacy coach on staff this year and reported that a math coach hired last spring decided over the summer not to join the school. Therefore, at the time of the site visit, no coaches were in place. The school reports that it is in the process of recruiting new coaches.

Finding: The teacher evaluation process is not clearly understood by teachers, particularly those who are new to the school.

Teachers are evaluated by the principal or one of the two assistant principals, utilizing an internally created instrument. Veteran and returning teachers receive more informal feedback, in the form of written notes, than they do formal evaluations. New teachers receive two formal evaluations during their first year at the school, with the first evaluation occurring in January. Teachers, especially the new ones, were not well informed about this process.

Finding: UCCS continues to look for a long-term lease or permanent facility.

This year, UCCS vacated its location in South Boston and secured a site previously occupied by a charter school on Huntington Avenue in Boston. The school reported this to be its home for one year. To assist it in finding a new home for the school, the board of trustees has put together a team including a real estate management company, an advisor on construction, and a board member who works for the City of Boston on initiatives involving commercial real estate and public support of private business development. While the real estate company located a number of potential sites in the Uphams Corner area last spring, none of these options had proved viable at the time of the site visit. The

board of trustees focus group reported that a capital campaign would be initiated when a site has been identified.

Finding: The UCCS Board of Trustees wishes to continue its own development and engage in strategic planning for the school.

The Plan for Charter School Improvement calls for the board to expand by three to add expertise in real estate, finance, and law. While the Plan also calls for UCCS to engage in a new contract with the Executive Service Corps (ESC), a non-profit consulting organization, UCCS has chosen to complete its work with ESC after this fall and utilize other consultants to work on strategic planning for the school.

Additional Site Visit Questions

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: Parents and teachers are aware of the mission and philosophy of the school.

Parents identified the mission of UCCS as teaching through rhetoric, which they interpreted as self-expression. They stated that providing an academically challenging, rigorous education focusing on public speaking was part of the mission as was developing students into people of integrity prepared for the next stage of life. Teachers stated that presenting a rigorous curriculum and developing well-rounded students who are also good people is the central mission of the school.

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

UCCS has operated without an approved Accountability Plan. A draft plan was submitted in June of 2007. The Charter School Office is currently working with the school to finalize the draft plan, and subsequent annual reports submitted by the school must report on the approved goals and measures.

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: Although the school indicated that all elements were in place, curricular documents provided to the team were not complete. Consequently, it was not possible to determine if curriculum at UCCS is aligned with state or internally created standards. A four-page table containing a scope and sequence consisting of unit titles for content taught in all subjects and grades was provided to the team. It was difficult to see on the table to which grades these units applied. A curriculum binder was provided, but the level of detail in the documents varied greatly, and none of the documents included references to the state standards. Some subjects included course missions, scope and sequences, rubrics, unit plans, and core texts. Other subjects were much less detailed, containing only one or two of these items. The school indicated that unit plans and daily lesson plans were on the school's server, but the team did not review these documents.

Finding: The school has adopted a new math curriculum this year.

After introducing the Connected Mathematics Project curriculum (CMP) two years ago, the school chose to switch to Glencoe this year. Teachers had difficulty with CMP, finding that while it was aligned to the state Frameworks, it did not readily address the basic level math needs of many students. In addition, the curriculum's emphasis on writing made it less accessible to UCCS students. The UCCS math department and principal researched several math programs and recommended Glencoe, which was then approved by the head of school. Glencoe is aligned to the Massachusetts Frameworks.

Finding: Several factual errors were contained in the instruction provided to students.

Several factual errors were noted in the instruction provided to students in several subject areas. "Decimals" were referred to as "periods" in a math class, while in a science class the Big Bang theory was described incorrectly and "neutrons" were referred to as "neurons." In a social studies class, the present-day capital of Turkey was identified as Istanbul rather than Ankara, and a map of the Mediterranean was drawn with Turkey on the wrong side of Italy, which was corrected only after a student noted the error.

Finding: The site visit team did not see higher-order thinking and questioning in the classes they observed, although they were instructed to look for these indicators by the school. In addition, instructional practice was consistently teacher-centered and did not present a variety of teaching strategies. All students were not consistently engaged.

The site visit team was told that Bloom's Taxonomy is utilized when teachers develop their lessons and that higher-order thinking, learning, and questioning goals are standard elements on the template that the entire faculty uses for lesson planning. The team was instructed by the school to look for rhetoric-centered instruction in the form of teachers asking open-ended questions. This was generally not observed. Teachers asked factual questions to which a small number of students replied. In some cases, clarifying and synthesizing questions were asked. Instruction was focused more on skills than concepts, and there was little evidence of higher-order thinking skills and questioning. In only a few of the classes observed did teachers call on students who did not have their hands up. In many cases, other students did not appear to be engaged.

Finding: Objectives, agendas, and homework assignments were always posted in classrooms, and classroom practice was consistently organized. However, there did not appear to be a consistently applied protocol for transitions between classes.

Even though teachers move from classroom to classroom, which could make set-up for the period a logistical challenge, site team members saw objectives, agendas, and homework assignments consistently posted in classrooms. At times these were written in small letters making them difficult to read. All classes began with a greeting ritual and a Do Now and ended with a homework assignment and a review of each student's assignment book, which parents are expected to sign each night. Although site visitors did observe some regularity in that students were never left alone while teachers moved between rooms, some teachers prepared students for the transition at the end of class, and some did not. This led to changes between subjects that were not always smooth and orderly.

Finding: The school operates a program of special education that addresses a broad range of disabilities through a continuum that includes inclusion support and resource room placements.

At the time of the site visit, UCCS was serving forty-two special education students with four full-time special education staff members and one special education paraprofessional. The available placements for identified students range from an inclusion classroom, in which an aide is often present to support student learning, to a partial inclusion program in which students are pulled out of the regular education program to receive their rhetoric and mathematics instruction. The school operates a classroom that it refers to as a substantially separate placement, but students are there for, at most, rhetoric and math, thereby making it a resource room as opposed to a truly substantially separate placement. The range of disabilities served at the school includes neurological and behavioral disabilities, speech deficits, and specific learning disabilities.

Finding: Inclusion support in the regular education classes is peripheral to classroom instruction.

The support services offered in the general education classroom are peripheral. Because many of the classes are dedicated to teacher instruction and questioning, the special education staff is limited in its ability to engage students in a meaningful way. Most interactions observed were limited to check-ins and reminders for students to write certain items into their notes.

Finding: Teachers reported a high level of collegiality, with the sharing of ideas being a common part of practice. In addition, teachers share lesson plans in order to ensure alignment across classes and to prevent teachers who teach multiple grades from becoming overwhelmed by their workload.

Teachers interviewed were very enthusiastic about the new faculty office, which provides workspace for each teacher in a common setting. They reported frequently discussing lesson plans and teaching strategies in the morning prior to the start of classes. They also like visiting colleague's rooms and doing observations as part of UCCS's formalized peer observation system, which requires that teachers do ten observations with written feedback of fellow faculty members per year. While the teachers interviewed did not articulate a follow-up process for these observations, the head of school explained that after each classroom visit, the two teachers meet to discuss the observation and written report,

particularly as they relate to the observed teacher's formal goals. After signing off on the report, the teachers meet with the principal. Teachers reported having done two of these observations already.

In order to model lesson planning for new teachers and to align instruction, veteran teachers write lesson plans that are then utilized by others teaching the same subject and grade level. This helps prevent teachers with two or three different preps from becoming burned out. Teachers also do periodic modeling of lessons for one another.

Finding: The school has a new discipline policy, and behavior was not observed to be problematic in the majority of classrooms observed.

The school has changed its discipline policy this year. Students can be sent to a time-out room where they must write a reflective letter explaining what they did wrong. If the letter is acceptable, they are sent back to class. Teachers can also award merits and demerits. Students who receive three demerits are given a detention, which occurs between 3:00 and 4:00 pm. In a change from past practice, students are not permitted to read or do schoolwork during detention. Out-of-school suspension is also non-academic, with students not receiving schoolwork they missed during their absence until they return to school.

In most classrooms, students were quiet. Using the school's behavior management system, merits and demerits were observed to be given out in classrooms. However, it appeared that the system was not consistently recorded for purposes of follow-up. In some classes, students who were off-task were not refocused by teachers.

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

Finding: While UCCS saw improvements in its MCAS scores between 2006 and 2007, its scores remain low, especially in mathematics.

MCAS results for English language arts and mathematics for the last four years are presented below in Tables I and II. These tables include 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: UCCS MCAS ELA Results by Performance Categories
Annual Comparisons 2005-2007**

ELA	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failing	CPI
Grade 5						
2006	18	0	11	50	39	51.4
2007	15	0	33	47	20	66.7
Grade 6						
2006	53	0	23	64	13	62.3
2007	47	0	23	62	15	66.0
Grade 7						
2005	39	3	38	59	0	77.6
2006	51	0	25	55	20	67.2
2007	72	0	51	33	15	77.1
Grade 8						
2006	63	0	49	41	10	75.8
2007	52	0	48	44	8	79.3

- UCCS saw increases in ELA CPI numbers between 2006 and 2007.
- The percentage of students scoring in the Proficient category rose for grades five and seven and remained relatively stable for grades six and eight.
- The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories for all years above ranged between 48% and 89%.
- The average percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failed categories was 66%.

**Table II: UCCS MCAS Mathematics Results by Performance Categories
Annual Comparisons 2004-2007**

Math	Students Included	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Needs Improv.	% Warning/Failing	CPI
Grade 5						
2006	18	0	6	39	56	41.7
2007	15	0	0	67	33	50.0
Grade 6						
2004	65	3	11	51	35	51.2
2005	42	0	2	38	60	38.7
2006	53	0	4	26	70	35.4
2007	45	0	13	31	56	45.6
Grade 7						
2006	51	0	4	31	65	35.3
2007	72	0	10	36	54	43.1
Grade 8						
2006	63	0	2	29	70	34.1
2007	52	2	8	42	48	45.2

- The percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failed categories for all years above ranged between 86% and 100%.

- The average percentage of students scoring in the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories was 93.6%.

Finding: In 2007 UCCS made AYP in both ELA and mathematics for the first time. Table III shows the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for UCCS and its statistically significant demographic subgroups from 2004-2007. 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 exam by 2014.

Table III: 2007 AYP determination for Uphams Corner Charter Public School

		Adequate Yearly Progress History									Accountability
		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Status
ELA	Aggregate	-	-	-	-	-	-	No	No	Yes	Improvement Year 1
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	
MATH	Aggregate	-	-	-	-	-	No	No	No	Yes	Improvement Year 2
	All Subgroups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	

UCCS did not make AYP in mathematics in 2004, 2005, or 2006 and was designated as a school Identified for Improvement in math. It did not make AYP in ELA in 2005 and 2006 and was also given the status of a school Identified for Improvement in English language arts. UCCS made AYP in the aggregate and for all subgroups in both ELA and mathematics in 2007.

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

Finding: UCCS has seen inconsistent progress on assessments of English language arts and a deterioration in scores on assessments of mathematics.

UCCS assesses students in math using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Because the school could not locate some of its spring 2007 data, it was not able to report on these measures. For English language arts, the school uses the Group Reading and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) assessment, data for which was provided in its 2007 annual report. No GRADE data was provided for grades 5 and 6.

Table IV: Average Grade 7 GRADE Comprehension Scores, Fall 2006 to Spring 2007

	Fall 2006	Spring 2007	Change
Stanine	4.35	4.69	+ 0.34
Percentile Rank	37.5	42	+ 4.5
Grade Equivalent	6.1	7.4	+ 1.3
Standard Score	94.7	97	+ 2.3
Normal Curve Equivalent	42.6	45.6	+3

Between fall 2006 and spring 2007, grade 7 experienced an increase of 4.5 points in its average percentile rank for a total of 42 points, a below-average number.

Table V: Average Grade 8 GRADE Comprehension Scores, Fall 2006 to Spring 2007

	Fall 2006	Spring 2007	Change
Stanine	4.31	4.15	-0.16
Percentile Rank	37.5	34.6	-2.9
Grade Equivalent	6.08	7.1	+1.02
Standard Score	95.2	92.9	-2.3
Normal Curve Equivalent	43.4	40.2	-3.2

Grade 8 saw a decrease in scores from fall 2006 to spring 2007, ending with an average percentile rank of 34.6.

In August of 2006, UCCS joined the Massachusetts Public School Performance Project (MPSP), which provides MCAS-aligned assessments six times a year along with guided data analysis and teacher development meetings. MPSP trains staff to understand, analyze, and use the data at the classroom level. It also provides links to a network of schools with expertise in the area of data analysis and usage.

Table VI: MPSP Comparison Data: English Language Arts 2006-2007, Percentage Correct by Grade

	Vocabulary	Basic Facts	Genre	Inference	Style and Language	Inference (Myth)	Average Increase or Decrease from Fall to Spring
	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	
5 th Grade	52%/100%	45%/75%	39%/46%	43%/96%	40%/na	43%/67%	+28.4%
6 th Grade	75%/65%	52%/53%	na	51%/73%	47%/30%	67%/50%	-4.2%
7 th Grade	43%/59%	41%/64%	49%/44%	44%/63%	49%/47%	38%/60%	+12.5%
8 th Grade	60%/68%	49%/67%	na	44%/74%	41%/46%	29%/54%	+17.2%

- On average, UCCS students experienced a 13.47% increase in correct answers from fall to spring.
- UCCS students were more successful from fall to spring on the MPSP ELA tests than they were on mathematics.

Table VII: MPSP Comparison Data: Mathematics 2006-2007, Percentage Correct by Grade

	Data Analysis, Statistics, and Probability	Geometry	Measurement	Number Sense and Operations	Patterns, Relationships, and Algebra	Average Increase or Decrease from Fall to Spring
	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	<i>Fall/Spring</i>	
5 th Grade	68%/45%	57%/57%	61%/52%	58%/40%	68%/na	-11.75%
6 th Grade	48%/30%	41%/na%	52%/45%	46%/42%	43%/55%	-4.25%
7 th Grade	46%/35%	48%/na%	24%/na%	42%/29%	45%/34%	-11.6%
8 th Grade	30%/39%	44%/40%	22%/19%	40%/na	44%/36%	-1.5%

- Of the 15 categories listed above for which there are both fall and spring numbers, there were increases in only two areas. Sixth graders increased their scores in the area of Patterns, Relationships, and Algebra from 43% to 55%. Eighth graders increased their scores in Data Analysis, Statistics, and Probability from 30% to 39%.
- On average, there was a 7.25% decrease from fall to spring.

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: UCCS does not have a person charged with the tasks of identifying monetary issues and doing financial projections.

UCCS has a part-time business manager who works four days each week. She is responsible for human resources, payroll, and accounts payable. In addition, the school employs an accountant for one day each week who is responsible for completing bank reconciliations. The team did not find evidence that anyone in the business office has been assigned the responsibility of identifying issues and creating financial projections. In a meeting with team members, it was stated that the school needs to update its policy manual on the school's business practices and that any check issued for more than \$5,000 requires a double signature.

Finding: UCCS does not appear to be engaging in proactive strategies regarding the long-term stability of the school.

In a number of areas, it appeared that the leadership of UCCS has not been proactive in addressing and responding to those issues most critical for the continued viability of the school. One of the most significant issues facing the school at this moment is finances and long-term viability. The current decrease in enrollment means that the school's original budget projections are no longer accurate. The school budgeted for 195 but had

approximately 175 students at the time of the site visit. Both the head of school and members of the board of trustees explained that the school has always made it through and that it had a surplus from the previous year. However, at the time of the visit, UCCS had not made its August payment to the Massachusetts Teachers' Retirement System. Furthermore, while staff members in the business office reported that the school was expecting to receive \$58,000 from the security deposit on its last location, it was also reported that the school continues to owe \$88,000 on that site.

The school budget had been revised to account for the lower rent payment at UCCS's new location. However, at the time of the visit, the budget had not been revised to account for the decrease in enrollment, because the finance committee did not meet in September, and the business manager had not been asked to make projections based on the new numbers.

Finding: The UCCS Board of Trustees has not yet developed a comprehensive strategy for meeting the condition that requires the school to be located in Uphams Corner or for raising additional funds for the school.

While the board of trustees seems well aware of the fact that finding a permanent home in Uphams Corner is paramount to the continued operation of UCCS, and while they have put together a team to assist in locating and securing a new site, they did not articulate a timeline or a plan for raising the funds necessary for purchasing a permanent home, stating that the board would not commence a capital campaign until the new location for UCCS was found. Furthermore, while the board was able to find funds for UCCS's new tutoring program last year, it has not been fully successful in its other annual fundraising efforts, and the tutoring program described in the school's Plan for Improvement has not been fully implemented in the current school year. The school wishes to hire a director of development to replace the former grant writer, but it was not stated that resources would be available or that a timeline was in place for hiring someone into this new position.

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

Finding: UCCS has two consultants who work on different aspects of the school improvement process. In addition, the board of trustees reports that it is working to institutionalize a process for monitoring progress towards attaining the goals outlined in the UCCS Plan for Charter School Improvement.

Two consultants worked with UCCS last year. This year, one of them will focus on creating a report for the Charter School Office and the Board of Education for the Board's meeting in February. The other consultant is now focusing on expanding capacity and developing a systematic year-long review process for monitoring progress made on the Plan for Charter School Improvement. This review process will contain a schedule of interim assessments of the plan. This consultant is also working on the school's new Accountability Plan as well as creating a supervision and evaluation process for the board to use with administrators.

The board of trustees explained that while in the past the monitoring of data and the school's academic progress was ad hoc, monitoring the Plan for Charter School Improvement is now done in both formal and informal ways. The head of school reports to

the board at its regular meetings. He also sends emails, including summaries of test scores, on a regular basis. The recently reconstituted Student Achievement Committee of the board intends to become conversant in student achievement data and the curricular strategies being implemented in the school. It will be important for future site visit teams to review the progress made by the board of trustees in building appropriate structures for oversight of the school.

Finding: Different stakeholders had varying degrees of familiarity with the Plan for Charter School Improvement.

Teachers interviewed reported that they had a general sense of the improvements called for in the Plan, but that the implementation of the Plan was, for the most part, filtered down to them through the administration. New teachers did not have much familiarity with the document. Parents were aware of the Plan primarily because a parent council meeting had been held to discuss MCAS results.

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

Finding: UCCS's current facility appears adequate and students report feeling safe.

Both parents and students asserted that the school is, in general, a safe place both physically and emotionally. The fact that the school's new location is in the YMCA building on Huntington Avenue in Boston means that there is a constant stream of outside individuals passing through the building. However, most of the school's classrooms are located away from the most trafficked areas in the building. Furthermore, administrators were identified as a visible presence in the school, and there are a large number of adults in the hallways during passing time between classes. UCCS reported intending to be located at this site for the current school year and does not appear to have the option of renewing the lease for an additional year.

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

Finding: Special education supervision and oversight at the school are diffuse.

The administrative oversight of the special education program at the school is diffuse, relying on three individuals to perform the duties of special education administration. The staff person primarily responsible for special education leadership at the school is considered a head teacher or "coach." She is delegated administrative duties including staff scheduling, student testing, and providing support for classroom teachers regarding modification of lesson plans and accommodations for both regular and special education students. This individual does not, however, function as the supervisor for special education services delivery staff. Another person involved with special education oversight is a school administrator who is responsible for direct supervision of special education staff persons but is not trained in special education.

The school also employs a certified special education administrator in a consultative capacity whose duties include conducting beginning-of-year trainings for staff, developing and reviewing IEPs, and consulting with the school on the legal requirements of special education program operation. The school's administrator works offsite and consults with

the head teacher for one hour each week to provide general administrative oversight of the program.

Finding: Accommodations and modifications in the school's District Curriculum Accommodations Plan are often generic. The structure of the daily schedule may present particular difficulties for students with special needs.

Much of the school's District Curriculum Accommodations Plan consists of generic practices that are routinely available to all students, rather than unique accommodations made available to students on an as-needed basis. The accommodations and modification page of the student support team materials contain many items that are redundant or merely good instructional practice, rather than accommodations *per se*. (For example: "Provide for all students to have access to materials.") Behavioral interventions are generic. The school implements a system of behavioral contracts that simply restates the school's rules and is not in any way customized to individual student needs. The accommodations and modifications sheets used by the school during the student support team process do not include a list of all accommodations available at the school as indicated in the DCAP.

The program has teachers changing classrooms and students remaining in the same rooms and at the same desks for several hours at a time. This structure allows for extremely limited student movement and no significant physical activity for a half a day at a time. This program structure may pose unique challenges for students with physical or attentional issues who require additional opportunities for movement during the day.

Finding: Staff training in regard to implementation of accommodations and modifications for students with diverse learning needs is limited.

A brief special education overview session is conducted for staff at the outset of each school year. Staff training on implementation of accommodations and modifications has not been done in depth, however. The school reports that at least three hours of training on implementation of accommodations will be done during the current school year.

Finding: Summer services offerings have not previously included a special education component. A five-week summer school program is available. The school reports that beginning with the upcoming school year, special education services during summer school, previously unavailable, will be available to students for the first time.

Finding: The school's special education program self-analysis does not make use of assessment data in its evaluation of program performance or student needs.

The school's special education program self-analysis has calculated the performance of special education students on the most recent MCAS administration, but no comparison of special education students' scores to those of regular education students was in evidence, nor had the school extended its analysis to internal assessments.

Finding: The school does not operate a program of Sheltered English Immersion for Limited English Proficient students as required.

The school reports having approximately four English language learner students currently attending the school. There is presently no system in place for the identification or

assessment of students who may be Limited English Proficient. No capacity presently exists either for English as a second language instruction or for provision of sheltered English immersion in the classrooms. This issue was originally cited in the school's 2004 Coordinated Program Review report.

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

Table VIII: Years of Teaching Experience for Faculty 2006-2007

	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-20 Years	20+ Years
Teachers with this number of years teaching	6	8	3	3	0
Teachers with this number of years teaching at UCCS	15	4	1	n/a	n/a

Finding: UCCS reported that 100% of its faculty meets the definition of Highly Qualified under the No Child Left Behind Act. UCCS has experienced high levels of teacher attrition. In its most recent annual report, UCCS states that it lost four teachers out of eighteen during the 2006-07 school year: two for medical reasons, one for abandoning the job, and one for reasons not discussed in the report. Seven teachers who completed the year did not return for the 2007-08 school year: four relocated, one returned to school, and two took teaching positions elsewhere. Although the school indicated in documents provided prior to the date of the site visit that it had twenty faculty members this year, the head of school indicated that there are nineteen teachers on staff. Of the nineteen, eight are returning teachers, seven are replacements for pre-existing positions, and four are newly created positions. Three of the four new positions are additions to the math department, which is now a five-person department, up from two positions last year. All of the teachers in the math and science departments are new to the school this year.

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

Finding: Parents and teachers report satisfaction with various aspects of the school. Twelve parents were interviewed. They were pleased with the school's small class sizes, the level of attention paid to individual students, the fact that their children are happy at UCCS, and the ways in which the school focuses on students' strengths. However, it should be noted that, not counting graduating eighth graders, fifty-seven students out of approximately 138 students in grades 5-7 did not return for this academic year, raising a question about the general level of satisfaction within the school community.

Both parents and students discussed having opportunities for input into school policies and to present feedback to administrators. Parents also reported a high level of communication with the school, including an almost daily stream of email or calls from the school to parents who don't have or don't check email. Teachers send updates on students to parents quarterly, and families are updated on school improvements at parent meetings. The fact

that parents must sign their children's agenda books nightly serves to keep them current on homework assignments. Parents also reported being welcome to visit classes at any time. Teachers interviewed were very enthusiastic about the school and the level of collegiality they felt.

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

Because UCCS does not have an approved Accountability Plan, it is not possible to address this question.

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

Uphams Corner Charter School has experienced very considerable changes in the last year. In September, the school moved from its location in South Boston to a location near Symphony Hall in the YMCA building on Huntington Avenue.

Out of a faculty of nineteen, eleven are new and eight are returning teachers. In addition, UCCS experienced a complete turnover in its math and science departments from last school year to this one. This is especially significant because although the school did make AYP in 2007, it has adopted a new math curriculum and, based on AYP in previous years, has been Identified for Improvement in mathematics and in ELA.

There have also been changes made to the administrative structure along with a redistribution of the duties that go with each position. While the roles and responsibilities of administrators are clearly defined and understood by staff, these types of changes have occurred several times over the past few years.

Uphams Corner Charter School faces several challenges during this year of significant transition. The first of these is finding a permanent location in Uphams Corner as part of the conditions stipulated in its charter renewal. The second of these is finances. UCCS is supported primarily by tuition based on enrollment. All stakeholders described enrollment as a primary issue for the school and one that leads to concerns about financial viability, although the team observed that it was not an issue being addressed with urgency. Finally, the high level of student and teacher attrition poses a significant challenge to maintaining the culture of the school and the growth and stability of the academic program. Future site visit teams will look for progress in all of the areas mentioned above.