

Renewal Inspection Report

Somerville Charter School
Somerville, Massachusetts

Setting

The Somerville Charter School was founded in 1996 by a group of parents with the following vision: to prepare each student for success in college, to inspire a lifelong love of learning, and to foster responsible citizenship. The school serves approximately 675 students in grades kindergarten through eleven, with plans to expand to a full K-12 school in the fall of 2000. The school is currently housed in three separate facilities as the Board and SABIS work to find a permanent site for the K-12 school.

SABIS Educational Systems, Inc. is contracted to manage the Somerville Charter School and to provide its program of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The features of the program include whole class instruction, frequent and ongoing assessment, curriculum pacing charts, and a specialized program to enable students performing below grade level to attain grade level knowledge and skills.

Inspection Team

Carol Keirstead, Lead Inspector

Ms. Keirstead is a research associate with RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire where she specializes in research evaluation, training, and technical assistance for educational and human service organizations. Currently she is a member of a service delivery team assisting schools in Trenton, New Jersey. Carol has served as principal of a tri-lingual PreK-4 public-university collaborative school, as a Title VII coordinator at the Center for Field Services and Studies at UMASS -Lowell, and was the Project Director for the Indochinese Refugees Foundation in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Tom Buffett, Inspector

Mr. Buffett is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He began his career as an elementary teacher in California. Mr. Buffett has worked as a consultant to a number of educational reform organizations including the Boston Plan for Excellence. His company Carpe Datum provides evaluation services to schools and foundations.

Ledyard McFadden, Inspector

Mr. McFadden is the President of SchoolWorks. He was the founding Director of Operations for City on a Hill Charter School where he developed the school's management structure and budgeting processes. Prior to his work at City on a Hill, he was a founder and teacher of the Bridge School, a school-within-a-school at Chelsea High School in Massachusetts. Mr. McFadden has taught English as a second language at Chelsea High School and at both an elementary and high school in Costa Rica. He has also given workshops on fiscal management for charter schools in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. He presently serves on the Outcomes Committee for the Boys and Girls Club of Boston.

Karen Laba, Inspector

Dr. Laba spent thirteen years teaching science at the middle and high school levels prior to moving to higher education. For the last several years, She taught in the Science Department at Notre Dame College in Manchester, New Hampshire and supervised pre-service teachers at Notre Dame and at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Laba has been a curriculum consultant to FIRST, Inc., helping develop both the Junior Invention Challenge Curriculum and the National Junior Robotics competition for middle school students. She served as Curriculum Development Coordinator for the Scientist as Humanist Project in Contoocook, New Hampshire, helping teachers develop classroom units to link the sciences and the humanities. Her doctoral dissertation examined influences on teachers' curricular choices in project-based science classrooms.

Neal Brown, Inspector

Mr. Brown has served as a lead trainer for the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers for the past two summers. He has also served as a lead trainer for Mentor Teacher Training Institutes in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Education, where he serves as a consultant on special projects. Mr. Brown's previous experience includes teaching history/social studies at Brimmer and May School in Chestnut Hill,

Massachusetts; helping to start the Kokrobitey School in Ghana, West Africa; and, working as a coordinator for the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, where he facilitated school networks and coached Critical Friends Groups. Mr. Brown is also currently a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education with his research focusing on the induction experiences of beginning high school teachers.

John Collings, Monitor

Dr. Collings is a registered British inspector with specialization in Science, Information Technology, and Mathematics. He has taught all science subjects in England through ‘A’ level and has been a curriculum coordinator, in-service trainer, and supervisor of rural science.

Renewal Findings

I. IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

1. **Based on MCAS and CTBS scores, students at SCS are making satisfactory academic progress.**

Students at the Somerville Charter School (SCS) are making satisfactory academic progress based on the analysis of standardized test scores. On the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), students on the whole performed at or above average in reading, language, and mathematics. Trends showed average or above average growth in all academic areas from 1997 to 1998. From 1998 to 1999, scores either remained essentially the same or declined in some cases. A cohort analysis of CTBS scores in reading showed normal or average growth over three years in the Grades 2, 3, and 5 cohorts. In math, Grades 1, 2, 3, and 5 cohorts showed above average growth. Two years of MCAS scores reveal more mixed, yet positive, results. Scores in Grade 4 Language Arts reflect an increase in the number of proficient students and a decrease in the number of failing students. Grade 8 scores reflect an even more dramatic growth pattern. Grade 10 scores (1999 only) reveal students scoring above the state average. Math MCAS scores were less encouraging with half of the Grade 10 students reported as needing improvement in 1999 and nearly half of the Grade 8 students reported as failing. Grade 10 test scores for one year had equal numbers of students failing as proficient. In science, Grade 4 scores showed slight improvements, while Grade 8 scores showed a slight decrease. Students in Grade 8 took the social studies/history test for the first time in 1999, with just under half failing and just under half proficient. Students overall outperformed their Somerville Public School counterparts and were on par with state averages. In summary, scores on external measures indicate that students are growing academically at an expected or better than expected rate.

Narrative References: 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26

2. **A comprehensive internal assessment system is not functioning as designed. Therefore, the measurement of mastery is not yet reliable or valid.**

A key feature of the SABIS educational program adopted by SCS is a comprehensive internal assessment system. By design, this internal assessment system is comprised of: 1) weekly tests given by teachers to monitor ongoing progress; 2) the Academic Monitoring System (AMS), standardized tests given to assess student knowledge of Essential Concepts and designed to provide rapid feedback for teachers to tailor instruction for ensuring mastery; 3) Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT), standardized throughout the SABIS network, to assess knowledge covering one-third of a term's work; and 4) final exams given at the end of each of three academic terms. Scores on all of these assessments are

entered into a formula that determines final grades, defined as measures of student mastery in each subject area. At present, the assessment system is in various stages of implementation. The most fully implemented element of the system is the weekly tests administered by teachers. The AMS system is implemented only in mathematics at this time, with some limited use of a reading comprehension test reported. No evidence was collected to verify the use of CAT tests. Final exams are written by school administrators and are reviewed by teachers in advance of administration. Due to the system's limited implementation and variations in test development and administration, current claims about mastery are not valid or reliable. In addition, students in the Intensive Program are not graded in the same way as students in the "regular" program and, therefore, cannot be included in reports of mastery of students in general at SCS. The ongoing changes in standards and curriculum represent another confounding factor affecting the credibility of determinations of mastery in subjects other than math.

Narrative References: 5, 12, 26, 32, 33, 34, 50, 51, 52, 56, 57, 60, 61

3. Pacing charts, grade level team meetings, and an emphasis on coordination within grade-level teams promote coherence in curriculum and instruction within grade levels.

Pacing charts detail the material to be covered each week at SCS. As described in the school's Annual Reports, pacing charts are provided to teachers by the SABIS network. This is partially true at SCS. In math and science, pacing charts are provided to teachers by SABIS. In other subject areas, pacing charts are teacher-developed or augmented to enhance instruction and to meet student needs. Grade-level teams, with the assistance of the Lower School Coordinator and Upper School department heads, decide what material will be covered, incorporating a variety of goals – those embedded in commercial textbook series, SABIS curriculum materials, and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Grade level teams work together on a weekly basis to review and refine curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices. Particularly at the Lower School levels, there is a high degree of alignment within grade levels as a result of this close collaboration. The school supports this collaboration by providing daily common planning time necessary time for grade level teams to meet and through the support and direction provided by the Lower School Coordinator, Upper School Coordinator and department heads, and the SABIS Math Coordinator. This ongoing collaboration in curriculum, instruction, and assessment within grade levels has resulted in some coherence and consistency among classes of the same grade level.

Narrative References: 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 50, 51, 52

4. SABIS, the school administration, and teachers do not share a common understanding of the K-12 curriculum.

Conversations with SABIS representatives, school administrators, and teachers revealed a lack of common understanding of the school's K-12 curriculum. SABIS representatives and school administrators were more likely than teachers to describe the standards and curriculum in terms of SABIS developed Essential Concepts. Teacher descriptions of standards and curriculum at SCS reflected a more complex combination of SABIS-, textbook-, teacher-, and Massachusetts Frameworks- driven goals and curriculum. School publications describe the school's curriculum as primarily, if not all, SABIS developed. In reality, staff members are working across the school to adapt the SABIS curriculum to meet the needs of students, to reflect the range of textbooks used, and to align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. While significant curriculum work is being done both at the school and SABIS corporate level, there is no strategic, coordinated system in place for retooling and developing the school's curriculum. While there is a degree of curriculum alignment within grade levels (horizontal alignment), the coherence across grade levels (vertical alignment) appears weak. Part of the issues appears to be a lack of sufficient training in the SABIS system coupled with a consistently high turnover rate.

Narrative References: 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 80

5. The Intensive Program is not effectively returning students to the regular curriculum. The school has recognized this and is working on plans to address the problem.

The Intensive Program at SCS, a critical element in the implementation of a SABIS educational program, is designed to provide additional and accelerated instruction to students performing significantly below grade in English and/or mathematics. With the school's mission to enable students to perform at a mastery level, the Intensive Program is intended to enable students to master Essential Concepts needed to return to their grade-level classrooms. During the first two years of the school, students performing two grade levels behind were placed into the Intensive Program. Only a small percentage of the students have been able to successfully return to their grade level classrooms due, in part, to the high number of students in the program with diagnosed or suspected special needs. Staff estimated that approximately eighty percent of the students in the Intensive Program this year were students with special needs. Some of these students were described as limited English proficient. The Intensive program was designed for neither of these populations of students. Other factors impeding the successful return of students to their classrooms include a lack of consistent coordination between the Intensive and "regular" education program, as well as the lack of consistency in teaching methodologies used. The school recognizes the need to both identify and appropriately serve special education students and to

address the inadequacies of the Intensive Program. Plans are underway for the evaluation of several students in the Intensive Program.

Narrative References: 4, 15, 26, 35, 36, 37, 38, 58

6. Significant progress has been made to address the needs of special education students.

Due, in part, to the persistent and concerned leadership of the school's Special Education Coordinator, SCS has made significant progress in addressing the needs of special education students. The stated approach to special education at SABIS has been inclusion, however, a review of school documents and interviews with staff reveal that there was never full implementation of an inclusion model of special education. The school employed a range of strategies in efforts to serve children that included pull-out instruction, in-class support, and the placement of students in Intensive classes. Lack of an articulated approach to meeting the needs of students with disabilities within the initial SABIS framework caused the school to start out without the capacity to address needs in a purposeful and comprehensive fashion. Since then, the Special Education Coordinator has served as a strong advocate and educator within the school around issues of special education. SABIS has supported the hiring of additional staff, various professional development activities, and the purchasing of needed testing and curricular materials, as well as specialized equipment. The Coordinator also now serves on the school's Leadership Team, helping to ensure that special education is handled on a school-wide, systemic basis. Plans are underway to establish two resource rooms to serve students who need specialized instruction and support. No evidence was collected as to the school's plans to address the needs of students with limited English proficiency.

II. Narrative References: 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 78, 82

II. IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

1. Professional staff are resourceful, hard-working, and committed to the well-being of students at SCS.

Staff at the Somerville Charter School demonstrated their commitment to the well-being of students in a variety of ways. There is a notable level of high expectations, respect, and care for students demonstrated across the school. Teachers, with involvement and support from school administration, work together in a collaborative fashion to strengthen and fine tune grade-level curriculum. Through the frequent classroom assessments, teachers are monitoring student progress on an ongoing basis. Many teachers work beyond the regular school day to provide academic support and enrichment in after school activities and the summer program. Many teachers, particularly at the high school level, were observed to demonstrate great resourcefulness in working within a resource-poor environment. Staff are credited by parents for keeping them well informed, for challenging students academically, and for treating their children with respect. Discipline personnel reported conducting meetings with parents until student issues are resolved. The current head of school has helped to focus staff on the school priorities related to student needs. The Special Education Coordinator has worked tirelessly to support students with special needs. The strong commitment to student well being at SCS is evidenced in an overall climate of respect, hard work, and of “doing whatever it takes.”

Narrative References: 13, 32, 49, 50, 51, 83, 84, 86, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99

2. The inability to retain qualified professional staff undermines the school’s achievement of its mission.

Significant staff attrition has taken place during the term of the Somerville Charter School. Each year, the school has had a different head of school, a critical factor in the school’s inability to create coherence and shared understanding of the school’s program. Other key administrative positions have turned over as well over the past four years. The Lower School Coordinator and the Special Education Coordinator have the longest administrative tenures – three years. Teacher turnover has been equally problematic with only ten of the original teachers remaining. The school lost forty teachers over a four-year period. Ten of these were special education teachers. This high rate of attrition has also contributed to the lack of coherence and shared understanding across the school. Staff cited the low pay and unclear promotion and retention policies as the reason for teacher attrition. The inability to retain staff was cited by board members, administrators, and teachers as greatly hindering the ability of the school to achieve its mission.

Narrative References: 46, 77, 87, 89

3. Performance expectations for all staff and related personnel decisions, including compensation and hiring, are unclear.

SCS lacks clearly defined performance expectations of staff. Job descriptions do not exist for key school positions, thereby leaving personnel to create and define their own jobs. Teachers report a high level of confusion about the terms of their hire, standards for job performance, and terms for promotion and remuneration. Performance evaluation is implemented as described in the school's handbook and by the current school head, however, the relationship between the evaluation and personnel decisions is unclear.

Narrative References: 80, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92

4. The current head of school has begun to foster stability by clarifying leadership roles and identifying critical needs and issues.

The current head of school, hired in the spring of 2000, has worked diligently to define and shape the roles of key personnel in the school. He has made strides in developing the capacity of the school's Leadership Team to function as a team and to take on increased decision making responsibilities. He meets with the Leadership Team weekly, setting agendas that focus on school-wide priority issues such as special education, the Intensive Program, and professional development. The head of school appears to have a strong sense of the school's priority needs and has developed plans for addressing them.

Narrative References: 72, 77, 78, 79, 80, 86, 92, 97

5. Parents are very satisfied with the academic program, school climate, and attention to student needs.

There was a consistently positive and supportive view of SCS among all parents interviewed. Parents spoke highly of the school climate, one they describe as orderly, structured, and one that supports academic learning. The consistently held expectations for homework were described as beneficial to their children and appreciated by parents. Parents interviewed believe that SCS's approach to discipline is effective and results in students' learning how to function in a social setting and how to focus on academic learning. They view the staff at SCS as caring and respectful of their children, and as having high academic standards for students. Communication with parents is viewed as open and effective, noting frequent written correspondences and opportunities provided to volunteer at the school. Several parents spoke of SCS's success in meeting the individual needs of their children.

Narrative References: 11, 31, 74, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101

6. Adaptations of the SABIS curriculum at the school and SABIS corporate levels are not coordinated.

Efforts are underway across the school to develop and adapt the school's curriculum to support the school's goals, to meet the needs of students, and to align it with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. SABIS is in the process of developing booklets that supplement the existing curriculum in order to meet the requirements of the state frameworks. SABIS is also in the process of developing AMS tests for English and for Spanish. The SABIS Math Coordinator works primarily at the Upper School level, aligning the math and science curriculum with the frameworks and meeting with teachers about curricular issues. Teachers at the high school work to adjust and enhance the curriculum in most subject areas to meet student learning needs and to address the state frameworks. Lower School teachers, with the support and guidance of the Lower School Coordinator, work on an ongoing basis to refine and enhance the curriculum. Teachers report that centrally-made curricular decisions and changes cannot adequately be implemented without preparation and planning. The school lacks a strategic plan for the development of a school curriculum that effectively incorporates SABIS standards, state standards, and the needs of students as determined by professional teaching staff.

Narrative References: 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59

III. IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO ITS CHARTER?

1. In accordance with its mission, the school makes a significant effort to emphasize math and English.

The school devotes a significant portion of the instructional day to mathematics and English, in support of its goal for students to achieve mastery in these two disciplines. In addition, the school devotes even more time, through its Intensive Program, to the study of English and mathematics for students performing significantly below grade level in one or both subjects. The mathematics program of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is closely aligned and is implemented according to the SABIS model. The SABIS English program has been significantly altered and enhanced for use in an American school setting and toward meeting the requirements of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Narrative References: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 50, 51, 52

2. The Spanish program is not currently preparing students for solid proficiency in a second language.

The school has dedicated a significant amount of instructional time to Spanish in accordance with its mission, and over the four years of the school's operation, students have been exposed to and learned aspects of the Spanish language. The Spanish program at SCS is not currently operating, however, in a manner that enables the school to reach its ultimate goals of mastery in Spanish for all students. Issues noted were: 1) the quality and use of the standards for planning; 2) instructional practices; and 3) professional development for faculty. While the SABIS standards for Spanish reflect a wide range of skills, they do not appear to be effectively informing classroom practice. In general, observations of different levels of instruction revealed that the higher the Spanish level the greater the gap between what students are supposed to be able to do and their actual performance. The primary issue concerning instructional practices is that many classes are conducted in English, contradicting the goals of the program and the specific mandates of the SABIS Spanish standards.

Narrative References: 7, 14, 27, 29, 54, 64, 65

3. The Student Life program, a key vehicle for developing an excitement of lifelong learning and for promoting ethical, moral, and civic values, is beginning to be implemented particularly in the lower school.

The administrator of the Student Life Program at SCS, new this year, has made significant strides toward implementation of a range of activities as part of the

Student Life Program. The program is in the beginning stages of implementation due, in part, to the school's inability to retain stable leadership. The current Student Life administrator serves as a member of the school's Leadership Team. In the Lower School, Student Life Guidelines are in use in classrooms as are student classroom prefects who participate as leaders and helpers. Some student prefect tutoring is also in place in the Lower School. In the Upper School, prefects are involved in a range of committees, each with different responsibilities and missions. This effort is also in the early stages of implementation. School spirit and social activities have also been carried out over the course of the year.

Narrative References: **46, 47, 48, 77**

IV. IF THE SCHOOL IS RENEWED, WHAT ARE ITS PLANS FOR THE FIVE YEARS OF THE NEXT CHARTER?

1. The Somerville Charter School has recognized the urgent need for the improvement of its induction and professional development of staff, particularly in the SABIS program.

Board members, SABIS representatives, the head of school, key administrators, and teachers all articulated the lack of adequate professional development at SCS. The current head of school correctly identified past professional development efforts as sporadic and lacking a school-wide purpose and focus. Teachers lack a full understanding of the SABIS program, citing the need for more training and ongoing support and assistance. This need was also identified through classroom observations that revealed inconsistent pedagogical practices and skill. Training once a year, prior to the start of school, is deemed inadequate to effectively equip teachers to implement the SABIS program. This issue is compounded by the aforementioned problems of staff attrition. A review of the professional development activities for the past year revealed a preponderance of off-site, one-day workshops where a limited number (often one) of staff would attend. Staff reported receiving support from SABIS to attend workshops and conferences. It is unclear how, or if, the school utilizes that training to develop knowledge and skill across the school. The current head of school communicated a strong interest and compelling need for a planned and comprehensive approach to professional development.

Narrative References: 14, 27, 29, 57, 58, 63, 64, 65, 78, 80, 86, 92

2. Plans for the school's future facilities are not sufficiently resolved.

Diligent and persistent efforts, along with a substantial investment of financial resources on the part of SABIS, have yet to result in the acquisition of a permanent school site. Board members and SABIS worked successfully to acquire and purchase a site, where they developed a new high school facility and planned to construct facilities to house the entire school. They are, as yet, unable to occupy the facility due to the City of Somerville's refusal to approve an occupancy permit. Initial discussions with SABIS, the school board, and school administration indicated a desire to continue pursuing occupancy of the newly developed site. They are also exploring plans for securing an alternate school site. While existing facilities are and will continue to house the program, the lack of definitive plans for a permanent location for the school, and thus for improved educational facilities, significantly undermines the school's ability to achieve its mission.

Narrative References: 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74

1. Student

According to the school's charter, students are expected to qualify for and succeed in college, to receive a well-rounded education that emphasizes mastery in English, math, and a world language, to sustain intellectual effort for long periods of time, and to develop an excitement for lifelong learning. The school devotes substantial instructional time in the core subject areas to support this goal. At present, the determination of mastery in each core subject area is not yet reliable as the school has not fully implemented an aligned internal system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Students are immersed in a program that is shaped, to some extent, by SABIS developed approaches and materials, but that is adapted and augmented by school personnel in an effort to meet local needs and to prepare students for success in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Efforts to integrate these multiple goals into a coherent set of standards continue. Overall, students at SCS are achieving at an average or above average rate, according to standardized test results. The school supports students in their academic pursuits by providing an orderly school environment, a culture that supports academic learning, and the provision of additional supports such as a summer school, tutoring, and a homework lab. A significant gap in the school's ability to meet the needs of individual learners is centered in the confounded issue of lack of school capacity to meet the needs of special education students and the inappropriate placement of students into the school's Intensive Program. The current administration is fully aware of this problem and has identified it as a school priority, with plans under way to rectify the problem.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOALS

1. SCS is working to develop a coherent set of Essential Concepts in each subject area. Essential Concepts, defined by SABIS as the building blocks of knowledge, are considered by SABIS, some administrators and staff, to be the academic standards for students at SCS. Written standards exist for each subject area, however, they are not implemented as such in each academic area. At the time of this inspection, the academic standards and goals for students at SCS are comprised of a combination of SABIS, teacher, and textbook driven learning goals.
2. In accordance with its mission to promote mastery in English, the school devotes substantial instructional time during the day to support this emphasis. The schedule allocates 8 hours per week for students in Grades 1-3, 9 hours for students in Grades 4 and 5 (including one period for Accelerated Reader), 7 periods for students in Grade 6, and 6 periods for students in Grades 7-11.
3. As in English, the school devotes a significant percentage of instructional time to support its mission to promote mastery in mathematics. The schedule allocates 9 hours per week for students in Grades 1-3, 7 for Grades 4 and 5, 5 for Grade 6, and 8 periods per week for Grades 7-11.

4. Students falling significantly behind in core subjects are placed into the Intensive Program, in which they receive additional time in English , mathematics, or both English and mathematics, depending on their needs.
5. SCS uses SABIS developed standards (Essential Concepts), pacing charts, and the SABIS developed AMS system in mathematics. Mathematics at SCS is the academic area in which the SABIS academic curricular and assessment program is most fully implemented. A SABIS Mathematics Coordinator is primarily responsible for the articulation of the school’s standards and curriculum. She is currently meeting with teachers in her efforts to align the mathematics standards and curriculum with the Massachusetts Frameworks.
6. In English, academic standards and goals for students reflect SABIS developed standards to a minimal degree. Because the SABIS standards for English were designed for teaching in schools overseas, the school recognized that they were not appropriate as a whole for use in U.S. schools. Learning goals are derived, to a great extent, from a series of texts, including SABIS readers, SABIS recommended commercial texts, and a school recommended commercial literature series and writing program. Grade level teachers develop pacing charts based on texts, incorporating grammar, reading comprehension and vocabulary, writing, and at the lower levels handwriting and phonics.
7. In the school’s third academic focus area, Spanish, there are standards organized into five levels. Standards are divided into reading comprehension, oral/aural vocabulary, grammar, composition, and memorization. The standards represent appropriate breadth, however, are inconsistent in their clarity and usefulness in setting forth expectations. For example, “watch videos and “comment on word choice” are not standards. The standards for Level V ask students to demonstrate a wide range of skills, appearing to meet the school’s goal to promote mastery. A vertical analysis of standards from Levels I through V revealed a lack of clarity in performance expectations across the levels. In other words, the standards do not provide teachers with clear guidance as to how student should progress over time. For example, a Level I standard states: “Read a text and recognize if a given statement about that text is true or false”. A Level V standard states “Read classroom readers and dialogs and recognize if a given statement about that text is true or false”. It is difficult to determine how these standards differ although they span four levels of instruction. Many other standards are almost verbatim from one level to the next. Thus, it is not clear, what the progression of expectations is across the levels of instruction.
8. Standards for science at SCS include those developed centrally by SABIS, with adaptations made by some grade level teams. In the Lower School, teachers received pacing charts from the SABIS Math Coordinator, detailing the concepts and chapters to be covered in each grade. Some grade level teams have constructed their own pacing charts based on the progress of students and the

context and use of materials. In the upper school, pacing charts are adapted in consideration of the commercial texts used in those levels. The Math Coordinator has worked to align the science standards with the Massachusetts Frameworks for grade 10. A review of her analysis indicated strong alignment, except in the area of science process skills.

9. In social studies, the standards reflect a hybrid of SABIS generated standards in the Lower School to teacher-generated standards in the Upper School. Standards in the Lower School are based, to a large extent, on those adopted from a Minnesota SABIS school, incorporating a Houghton Mifflin textbook series. In the upper school, teachers have worked to develop their own standards in an effort to address the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
10. There are no written standards articulated for SCS students in the area of Technology. The academic program of technology at SCS is comprised primarily of computer instruction provided in the school's computer lab. The computer teacher has developed a program that represents a progression of skills in the areas of word processing, spreadsheets, and computer-generated presentations using text, tables, and graphs. Technology standards as defined by the Massachusetts Frameworks are not incorporated into the SCS academic program at present.
11. Teachers, parents and students interviewed reported the academic program at SCS to be rigorous and challenging.
12. The current performance standard for students at SCS in the core areas of mathematics, English, and Spanish is that 80% of all students will achieve 80% mastery within 5 years. Mastery at SCS is determined by achieving a score of 80, calculated by term exam grades (50%) and final exam grades (50%), and in the case of mathematics, the AMS test score is factored in as well. This standard for performance assumes that mastery constitutes a valid and reliable measure. At present, there exist a number of factors preventing the determination of progress against this standard with confidence. These factors include the lack of a coherent set of standards in English and Spanish, variations in exam development, and ongoing changes in curriculum. The school's assessment system as described in SABIS materials is not fully implemented; therefore, determinations of mastery based on that system are not conclusive.
13. The school recognizes the need to adapt its learning standards to align with the standards inherent in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and in consideration of student needs. Grade level teams work diligently to ensure that their academic program is consistent across grade levels and to ensure that they are attending to the school's mission and to the standards set forth by the state. These efforts have resulted in a strong horizontal alignment in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Vertical alignment, or what happens from grade to grade, is not well articulated.

14. There is currently a lack of common understanding across the faculty as to what constitutes learning standards for students. Some refer to pacing charts, others describe textbooks used, while others refer to written sets of standards, indicating in many cases that they use them as a guide and adapt them to meet their students' needs.
15. SCS strives to ensure that students attain academic goals in order to attain mastery and advance in the academic program. The four key strategies employed toward this end include: 1) the frequent and ongoing classroom assessments; 2) the Intensive Program; 3) a policy against social promotion that supports the retention of students; and 4) the provision of after school and summer school learning opportunities. In each of these areas, there remain gaps in implementation that prevent the school from fully realizing the benefits of these strategies. The Intensive Program is not yet functioning as intended. Parents may choose not to have the children retained, thereby undermining the effectiveness of that policy to meet its intended goals. Participation in summer and after school learning activities is voluntary, thereby not ensuring that students who need additional support to attain grade level knowledge and skill receive it.
16. Central to the mission of SCS is that students will be prepared for and will succeed in college, with an expectation that 90% of SCS students who apply to college will be admitted by 2006. In addition, the school has set forth the expectation that average scores on the SAT will be in the 90th percentile or better. PSAT scores for 11th graders showed that, overall, students scored well below the 90% percentile. SCS has recently developed graduation requirements to ensure that students leaving SCS possess the knowledge and skills inherent in this goal. It is not clear that the school has addressed the need for a clearly articulated set of standards from K-12 that supports graduation requirements and the requirements of the SAT tests.
17. The SCS, in its charter and current accountability plan, states that students will develop an excitement for lifelong learning. The performance indicator for this goal outlined in the school's current Accountability Plan is an annual increase in student participation in voluntary academic or intellectual activities. Toward this end, SCS supported a range of activities such as Charter Clubs, enrichment activities, and a science fair.

ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

18. A cohort analysis of the CTBS scores in reading, language, and math from spring 1997 to spring of 1999 show normal or above average growth overall. (Cohort 1 represents students in Grade 1 during the 1996-97 school year, Grade 2 during the 1997-98 school year, and Grade 3 during the 1998-99 school year. Cohort 2 represents students in Grade 2 during the 1996-97 school year, and so on, with cohort 6 representing students in Grade 6 during the 1996-97 school year and finishing up in Grade 8 during the 1998-99 school year. The cohort analysis was performed using normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores. When the NCE score remains the same from one year to the next, this indicates normal academic growth according to the standardized measure. It is important to note that these cohorts did remain identical from one year to the next as some students entered and some left the school. The school's application for renewal provides an analysis of a subset of students who remained in the school from year to year.) Trends in this NCE cohort analysis show a significant growth in all academic areas from spring 1997 to spring 1998, however, from spring 1998 to spring 1999 scores either remained the same, or in some cases, dropped significantly. In reading, all but cohort 4 showed normal or above average growth over the three years. In math, there was average or above average growth school-wide. Above average growth was shown in cohorts 1, 2, 3, and 5. Cohort 4 showed below average growth while cohort 6 remained about the same (see Tables 1-6 below).

TABLE 1
Cohort 1 (Grade 1 1996-1997, Grade 2 1997-1998, Grade 3 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	50.8	56	49.5
Language Mechanics	54.4	55.6	55
Math	48.6	65.1	56.6
Total Battery	50.9	59.4	53.7

TABLE 2
Cohort 2 (Grade 2 1996-1997, Grade 3 1997-1998, Grade 4 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	57.5	60.8	59.7
Language Mechanics	49.8	60.6	63.7
Math	65	60.8	66.4
Total Battery	55.9	61.3	64.4

TABLE 3
Cohort 3 (Grade 3 1996-1997, Grade 4 1997-1998, Grade 5 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	52.4	50.9	52
Language Mechanics	51.1	52.6	58.5
Math	50.9	58.1	62.9
Total Battery	51.2	54.3	58.3

TABLE 4
Cohort 4 (Grade 4 1996-1997, Grade 5 1997-1998, Grade 6 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	51.5	54.5	47.6
Language Mechanics	46.7	61.9	51
Math	59.8	62.8	55
Total Battery	52.8	60.4	51

TABLE 5
Cohort 5 (Grade 5 1996-1997, Grade 6 1997-1998, Grade 7 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	62.4	61.1	64.6
Language Mechanics	60.2	64.2	68.5
Math	65.4	68.8	70
Total Battery	63.5	65.2	68.9

TABLE 6
Cohort 6 (Grade 6 1996-1997, Grade 7 1997-1998, Grade 8 1998-1999)
CTBS National Curve Equivalent (NCE) Mean Scores

	Spring 1997	Spring 1998	Spring 1999
Reading	50.8	58.1	57.7
Language Mechanics	57.8	62.3	57.9
Math	56.9	61.5	56.7
Total Battery	55	61.3	58.4

19. Grade 4 MCAS scores in English language arts reflect an overall increase in student scores from 1998 to 1999, with a 4% percent decrease in the number of failing students and a 4% increase in the number of proficient students. The Grade 8 scores reflect a more dramatic increase with a drop of 11% in the number of students failing, a 6% drop in the number of students needing improvement, and a marked 14% increase in students attaining proficiency. Grade 10 scores, only available for 1999, revealed students scoring above the state average.
20. In math, grade 4 MCAS scores declined from 1998 to 1999, with over half scoring as needing improvement. Nearly half of the 8th grade students tested scored as failing. Grade 10, tested for the first time in 1999, had 44% failing and 44% proficient.
21. In science, Grade 4 MCAS scores showed slight improvements from 1998 to 1999 with increases both in the number of proficient and advanced students. Grade 8 scores showed a slight decrease in numbers of advanced and proficient students.
22. Students in grade 8 took the MCAS social studies/history test for the first time in 1999. About half the students scored as needing improvement and one-third as failing. The number of students either failing or needing improvement was on par with the state average.
23. Students at SCS outperformed their Somerville Public School counterparts in all grade levels and all subjects on the 1999 MCAS tests, except for Grade 8 social studies/history where they were essentially the same. The most dramatic differences were in the higher percentages of Grade 10 students scoring as proficient or advanced in language arts and math.
24. Overall, students at SCS scored on par with the state average MCAS scores. Grade 4 students scored slightly below the state average in language arts, and about the same in math and science/technology (see Table 7). Grade 8 students scored higher in language arts, lower in both social studies/history and math, and about the same in science/technology (see Table 8). Grade 10 students scored higher in both language arts and math and about the same in science/technology (see Table 9).

TABLE 7
Grade 4 MCAS Results

	Level	May 98 (state)	Spring 99 (state)
English Language Arts	Advanced	0 (1)	0 (0)
	Proficient	9 (19)	13 (21)
	Needs Improvement	78 (66)	78 (67)
	Failing	13 (15)	9 (12)
Mathematics	Advanced	9 (11)	17 (12)
	Proficient	22 (23)	19 (24)
	Needs Improvement	47 (44)	57 (44)
	Failing	22 (23)	7 (19)
Science & Technology	Advanced	2 (6)	7 (10)
	Proficient	33 (42)	48 (46)
	Needs Improvement	55 (40)	39 (36)
	Failing	11 (12)	6 (9)

**TABLE 8
Grade 8 MCAS Results**

	Level	May 98 (state)	Spring 99 (state)
English Language Arts	Advanced	0 (3)	2 (3)
	Proficient	48 (52)	62 (53)
	Needs Improvement	39 (31)	33 (31)
	Failing	13 (14)	2 (13)
Mathematics	Advanced	4 (8)	7 (6)
	Proficient	17 (23)	12 (22)
	Needs Improvement	35 (26)	33 (31)
	Failing	43 (42)	48 (40)
Science & Technology	Advanced	0 (2)	2 (5)
	Proficient	35 (26)	27 (23)
	Needs Improvement	26 (31)	27 (27)
	Failing	39 (41)	44 (45)
History and Social Science	Advanced		0 (1)
	Proficient		7 (10)
	Needs Improvement		56 (40)
	Failing		37 (49)

**TABLE 9
Grade 10 MCAS Results**

	Level	Spring 99 (state)
English Language Arts	Advanced	6 (4)
	Proficient	56 (30)
	Needs Improvement	25 (34)
	Failing	13 (32)
Mathematics	Advanced	6 (9)
	Proficient	44 (15)
	Needs Improvement	6 (23)
	Failing	44 (53)
Science & Technology	Advanced	0 (3)
	Proficient	25 (21)
	Needs Improvement	44 (39)
	Failing	31 (38)

25. Scores on the Grade 3 IOWA reading test in 1999 showed 51% of the 72 students as either proficient or advanced, 39% as basic readers, and 8% as pre-readers. These scores are below the state average and roughly the same as the reported national norm. The scores represent a drop from 1997. That year, 62% tested either proficient or advanced and no students tested as pre-readers.

26. Reports of student attainment based on internal measures reveal an overall decline in students reported as having achieved mastery in English, mathematics, and Spanish. In English, numbers achieving mastery were 78% in 1997 and 64% in 1999. In mathematics, 79% were reported to achieve mastery in 1997 and 59% in 1999. Spanish figures represent the only increase, from 72% in 1997 to 75% in 1998. Scores dropped to 69% in 1999. These figures also do not include students who were enrolled in the Intensive Program, thus actual percentages of all students achieving mastery would likely be lower than reported. It is difficult to draw any conclusions based on these reports due to the inconsistencies and issues described above in #12. The school reports in its Application for Renewal that

- “SCS has made significant progress in meeting internally established educational goals of 80% mastery in English, mathematics, and Spanish”. It is unclear what data SCS used in stating this accomplishment.
27. On the whole, students were observed to be seriously engaged in academic work and demonstrated the ability to participate successfully in class. Throughout the school, students were observed to be on-task and engaged in the classroom learning activities as directed. In a first grade class, students were observed to be “eager to participate, raising hands to solve a problem at the board”. Enthusiasm was less evident at the high school level. Incidences of students being off-task and engaging in disruptive behavior were most prevalent in Spanish classes throughout the school.
 28. Student responses in K-12 regular classes indicated that, for the most part, students have a good grasp of the material being taught and can successfully engage with the material. Kindergarten students were observed to be eager and successfully engaged in their activities, some demonstrating their ability to read. Almost all observations of social studies classes noted that students were on task and learning in every classroom visited.
 29. Classroom attitudes and responses were most varied across the Spanish classes, ranging from complete engagement to almost no participation and, in some cases, disruptive behavior. Students in a Grade 3 class responded enthusiastically to simple questions in Spanish and could ask the teacher questions in Spanish. In other classes, students were unable to grasp or produce basic oral/aural vocabulary. A variation of teacher knowledge and skill was noted as well. There appears to exist a gap between what students can do and what they should be able to do in classes designated as levels I-V.
 30. Students overall demonstrated a high degree of respect for one another, for teachers, and for their studies. In some cases, students were observed to remind one another of classroom rules, and to participate as helpers in the classroom. Students responded to teacher requests and carried out classroom routines in a disciplined fashion. The overall atmosphere at SCS is orderly and conducive to the school’s learning activities.
 31. Parents interviewed reported a high level of satisfaction regarding their children’s attainment and progress at SCS. One parent commented “my son started in third grade and is now in sixth. His skills are excellent – the focus on math and English is important. If I could have done this for my older child, I would have.” Parents of grade 5 and grade 10 students reported a “positive impact of SCS on their children – both in academics and character.”

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT

32. SCS strives to understand and address individual learning needs through its frequent and ongoing program of internal assessment. Teachers test students weekly to determine the attainment of Essential Concepts in each subject area. Teachers report that this frequent assessment provides them with ongoing information about student progress.
33. In math, students take a weekly AMS test according to the preset AMS exam schedule. According to school documents, teachers receive results back within a couple of days in order to address learning gaps identified in results. Teachers report that results do not come back as described. If a student does not pass a test, they must take another test the following week to demonstrate mastery of the Essential Concepts. When test results are delayed, academic continuity is disrupted.
34. The AMS testing system, a key feature of the SCS charter, is not yet fully implemented in subject areas other than mathematics. SCS is therefore not capable of determining learning needs in subject areas other than math using this system. SABIS is working to finalize AMS tests for English to be implemented in the fall of 2000.
35. The Intensive Program at SCS has not been implemented as designed. Students with special needs have been inappropriately placed in the Program, thereby, defeating the purpose of the program and potentially placing students in inappropriate learning situations. Students with special needs were unable to successfully return to their classrooms, the goal of the Intensive Program. Staff reported that approximately 80% of students in the Intensive program have special needs or are students for whom English is a second language.
36. SABIS administration reported that Intensive Program teachers overall are not teaching according to the program's intended instructional approach. If teachers are not implementing the intended accelerated approach to instruction, students are less likely to catch up to their grade level peers and successfully return to their classrooms.
37. Some staff reported that students with behavioral and/or emotional difficulties are served in the Intensive Program due to the small size and individual attention provided in that setting. Again, this strategy may be undermining the ability of the Program to meet its intended purpose.
38. Staff reported that during the first four years of operation, SCS had a full inclusion special education program. The lack of a clearly articulated and supported program in the school's first year, however, prevented effective implementation of such a program. A number of students with special needs went

undiagnosed and were placed in the Intensive Program, rather in their regular classroom settings as described above in #36.

39. Providing appropriate services to special needs students is a current priority at SCS. Over the past year, under the leadership of the Special Education Coordinator, the school has worked diligently to identify and develop services for students with special needs. The school continues to work to identify students with special needs and to hire trained staff to provide services.
40. Plans for the next school year include establishing three resource rooms for students needing services outside of the regular classroom. The school will continue to provide services in the classroom where feasible.
41. The school reports to have approximately 11% (73 students) of their student population as having Individual Education Plans. An additional 20 were identified at the time of the inspection for special education evaluation. This overall percentage is below the state average for the number of students receiving special education services.
42. The provision of special education services in kindergarten classrooms was observed to be soundly implemented. Two special education teachers worked closely with students with special needs while they engaged with their peers in regular classroom activities. Teachers worked in small groups and whole class activities, providing extra support and attention to the student with special needs when necessary. A specialist was also on-site providing one-to-one services to a student in a school office space.
43. Special services in the Upper School are provided using a resource room model. Students spend from one to several periods a day in the resource room working with Special Education staff on regular curriculum assignments and tests.
44. SABIS has been supportive of the Special Education Coordinator's plans and requests for additional special education teachers, materials, supplies and participation in professional development activities.
45. SCS may not be adequately addressing the needs of students for whom English is a second language. It is unclear how the school determines English language proficiency as there is a large numbers of students for whom English is a second language at SCS (230) yet only 6 have been identified as limited English proficiency. Staff reported that several students in the Intensive Program are there because of limited English abilities. There was no evidence presented during the inspection of school knowledge and capacity to address these needs.
46. At present, there is sporadic, yet developing, implementation of the school's Student Life Program, a central feature of the school's mission. The school has undergone changing leadership in this program since the school opened. Under

the direction of the school's new Student Life Coordinator, the school has begun to implement activities in each of the program's focal areas.

47. Student Life Guidelines, and related behavioral expectations, were observed to be posted in classrooms and to be implemented on a fairly consistent level. On occasion, students were observed to remind other classmates of one of the rules.
48. The Student Prefect System is partially implemented at present. In the lower school, student prefects were observed to assisted in classroom responsibilities. A group of three students were observed being tutored by a classroom prefect in a hallway. A student prefect was observed doing the school's morning announcements. In the Upper School, prefects are involved on school committees. Committees include: Academic, Social, Literary, and Community Service, Environmental Awareness, and School Management. Each of the committees has succeeded in implementing activities this year. One prefect interviewed, referring to her committee, commented that "it was a bit disorganized this year but this summer we are setting up a schedule- it will be more organized next year."
49. SCS offers additional academic supports beyond the regular school day for students who may be falling behind. A summer school is offered each year. Students attend on a voluntary basis, however, those deemed as needing additional help may be recommended to attend by a teacher. It was reported that 100 students attended in 1999. Teachers at SCS also offer tutoring to students who they feel need extra help, however, it is reported that there is low student response.

2. CLASSROOM

SCS's program of curriculum and assessment, as currently implemented, reflects a mix of externally developed SABIS standards, materials, and assessment protocols and those adapted and developed by school staff to meet local needs. The school's math program is the most fully implemented SABIS developed curriculum and assessment. The English program, developed for use in SABIS overseas schools, has been adapted and enhanced for use in American schools. The curriculum is primarily driven by a series of SABIS materials and commercial texts and programs. There is a lack of alignment between the standards, SABIS curriculum, and assessment in Spanish. The science curriculum is primarily SABIS developed, with teachers adapting and enhancing to extend student experiences. Social studies is a mixture of textbook driven curriculum and assessment in the lower school to teacher developed curriculum in the upper school. Efforts have been underway to align the school's curriculum to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Analysis of the mathematics and science curriculum reflects a generally strong alignment with some gaps noted. Staff have met both across grade levels and within grade level teams to align the English language arts curriculum to the Frameworks and that work continues. High school teachers worked to align the social studies curriculum. Teaching skills and practices are quite varied across the school. The most prominent feature of teaching at SCS are the SABIS methods and procedures of teacher-led, whole class-instruction, the use of Essential Concepts and points, the application of disciplinary procedures, weekly testing, independent seat work, and the assignment of homework. Some teachers, particularly at the high school, do not adhere fully to the SABIS teaching style. The ability of teachers to provide meaning, achieve coherence, and to engage students successfully in lessons was varied across the school. Curricular and consumable resources appeared adequate at the lower levels and inadequate at the high school. The most significant issue related to resources is the lack of a permanent site for the school, which is particularly difficult at the high school level.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

50. Grade level teams at SCS use the same pacing charts for the delivery of curriculum and instruction in each subject area. In math and science, pacing charts are created centrally by SABIS and provided to the teachers. Teachers, in some cases, add to these to provide additional material and learning experiences. In English, social studies, and Spanish, teachers create their own pacing charts based on textbooks and school developed learning goals. The use of the grade level pacing charts within grade level teams creates some vertical alignment and coherence.

51. Both top down and bottom up efforts are taking place at SCS to align the curriculum to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. In math and science, SABIS's Math Coordinator takes primary responsibility for the alignment of math and science to the frameworks. An analysis of the curriculum at present reveals close alignment in science in the content strands but with gaps in inquiry processes, and the science and society and technology strands. In math, gaps were noted in problem solving and narrative explanation. In English and social studies, the Lower School Coordinator works with grade level teams to align curriculum to the Frameworks. In the Upper School, department heads and teachers are working to align the curriculum. In English, teachers reported that a committee of teachers from each grade level worked over the summer to create a grade-by-grade curriculum aligned to the Frameworks and SABIS standards. An analysis of the curriculum revealed a gap between texts read by SCS students and those suggested by the Frameworks. The Upper School social studies curriculum appears to be more closely aligned to the frameworks than the Lower School, based primarily on a textbook series.
52. Standards, curriculum, instruction, and internal assessment are closely linked in mathematics. The AMS system and the SABIS pacing chart tightly circumscribes both what is expected, what is taught and when, and how students are assessed. In other subjects, the degree of alignment tends to be strong within grade level teams, however, weaker across grade levels. The English Department met during the summer to work toward the development of a K-12 curriculum. Social studies appears to have the least coherence as the relationship between SABIS learning goals, K through twelve curricula, and assessment is unclear.
53. SCS uses English reading materials developed for use in overseas SABIS schools. It was noted that readers contain variations of spelling and vocabulary that may be confusing to students and may lead them to be judged inappropriately by others. For example, on reader uses the spelling "learnt" rather than "learned", "aeroplane" and "petrol station".
54. The Spanish curriculum lacks alignment between the expectations set forth in the standards and the instructional practices. All classes observed, except for three, were conducted in English, although the use of Spanish is called for in many levels observed. Assessment practices are not adequately addressing the oral/aural proficiencies articulated in the standards and to prepare students for Final Exams as described in the school's annual report.
55. The kindergarten curriculum appeared to be well aligned to instruction and assessment. Assessment at the kindergarten level includes analysis of developmental skills that are embedded in the curriculum. Instruction in the two classes observed also appeared to be well aligned. The degree to which there is alignment between the kindergarten and first grade curriculum is unclear. Kindergarten is housed in a separate building, therefore, making communication

- between grades difficult. A kindergarten teacher interviewed reported that she knows little about what happens in first grade.
56. Many teachers reported that they like the structure provided by the SCS curriculum. One teacher likes it for the ongoing assessment as she feels it makes teachers accountable for student attainment. Another likes it because it helps students to concentrate and to work on their own for sustained periods of time. A 3rd grade teacher likes the point system, focus, and prefects.
 57. Interviews with SABIS representatives, school administrators, and teachers revealed that there is not a school-wide common understanding of the K-12 curriculum. Individual teachers interviewed described various approaches and resources in the development of curricula, while SABIS representatives described the curriculum as having more uniformity with the original SABIS curriculum. While an administrator provided a list of Essential Concepts for each subject area and described these in conjunction with the pacing charts as the core curriculum, many teachers describe the curriculum only in terms of the textbook series used and show pacing charts that represent page numbers in texts, not essential concepts. Examples of this sort of inconsistency in understanding the curriculum were numerous across the school. Based on interviews and observations conducted by the team, the school curriculum as a whole has been generated from a variety of both internal and external sources. The school community does not share a common understanding of this amalgam.
 58. The curriculum in place for the Intensive Program is designed to cover the Essential Concepts taught in the regular classrooms in an accelerated fashion. This is not happening consistently at this time. In one case, the Intensive teacher reported that the curriculum is set independently of the regular curriculum and that there is no coordination with those teachers. In another class observed, the teacher presented the grade level concepts he would be covering and made connections to the grade level curriculum including referencing his conversations with grade level teachers.
 59. At present there is very little technology embedded in the SCS curriculum. The teacher in the computer lab has worked diligently to create a school computer curriculum and assessment program. The Math Coordinator for SABIS reported that they are moving toward including more technology in the curriculum. Equipment lists for science do not include the tools used in typical science programs such as spectrometers, CBL probes, and graphing calculators.
 60. Mastery of English, mathematics, and Spanish is defined by SCS as receiving a final grade of 80. The grade is calculated based on a formula that weighs quizzes, term tests, and finals (and in the case of Math, AMS scores) to compute the score. Except in math, the current system of internal assessment cannot provide valid or reliable measures of mastery as tests have not been standardized or tested to see if they are accurately measuring what they purport to measure. The complicated

process the school uses for calculating grades is undermined by the lack of valid and reliable test processes.

61. The AMS system is promulgated as a core feature of the SCS program and is designed as the assessment system intended to measure attainment of the curriculum's Essential Concepts. At present, the system is fully implemented only in math. In other subject areas, there is no assessment system in place that is directly aligned to the Essential Concepts in a standardized fashion. There was no evidence that standardized CAT tests are in place as described in the school's annual report for 1998-99. Grade level teams of teachers develop mid term tests and the Lower School Coordinator writes final exams.

TEACHING¹

62. Forty-two (42) out of 59 teachers were observed during the inspection. Most of teachers observed demonstrated adequate knowledgeable in the content of lessons and subjects they were teaching.
63. Much of the pedagogy observed in the Lower School represented the practices and approaches inherent in the SABIS methods and processes. Classes observed reflected primarily teacher directed, whole class instruction. Teachers were observed to write concepts on the chalkboard board, to use a point system, to utilize student prefects, and to assign and review homework. The SABIS style of teaching is less apparent in the high school, with teachers using interdisciplinary approaches and a variety of teaching methods. One teacher reported "most high school teachers are not doing SABIS teaching".
64. The overall pedagogical skill of teachers observed at SCS was varied. Many teachers observed were successful in conveying clear goals and objectives and in engaging students productively in lessons, whether using SABIS methods or not. Others, however, demonstrated a lack of pedagogical skill as lessons lacked coherence and students were not productively engaged. Pedagogy in math classes observed appeared to demonstrate the most successful pedagogical practices. Pedagogy observed in English and social studies was varied. In Spanish, the pedagogy observed was less than satisfactory overall. On the whole, classroom management at SCS is satisfactory, or excellent in some cases. Students, for the most part, participate in lessons, remain on task, and demonstrate respect for teachers and for peers. Not surprisingly, in cases where pedagogy was less than satisfactory, classroom management was also less than satisfactory.

¹ PLEASE NOTE: The inspection was conducted during "review week", therefore classroom observations were not conducted under typical instructional conditions. During review week, students are primarily engaged in working through "review packets" in preparation for final exams.

65. Instruction observed at the Kindergarten level reflected a sound, developmentally appropriate pedagogical program for students of that age. The only exception noted was the Spanish instruction observed which was not geared to the developmental or language level of the students. As a result, some students were distracted and somewhat disruptive.

RESOURCES

66. The current facilities are inadequate for long-term effective implementation and operation of the SCS charter school. The school is currently housed in three separate locations, impeding effective communication, programmatic coherence and consistency.
67. Issues of space currently create impediments to implementation of the educational program. For example, plans to implement two resource rooms to serve students with special needs will result in loss of space for regular classrooms, limiting the number of kindergarten students to be enrolled.
68. The school's kindergarten complex is adequate for the provision of an effective kindergarten program, however, its separate location prevents interaction and involvement of staff and students with the rest of the school.
69. The high school program is housed in an inadequate, somewhat sterile space in the basement of a local church. There are no lab or computer facilities at the high school. The school expected that the high school would have been in operation once the Clyde Street facility had been completed.
70. The building that houses the Lower School program is adequate as a temporary facility; however, is somewhat stark as a learning environment. There is little student work visible in classrooms or hallways, and furniture and equipment are relatively old. The school is clean and students often participate in the upkeep of classrooms.
71. The Board of Directors and SABIS have invested an enormous amount of human and financial resources in the development a new high school facility on the grounds where the school had been planning to house the entire K-12 school (Clyde Street). The high school facility is completed, yet it is uncertain whether SCS will be able to use the facility at all due to the inability to secure an occupancy permit from the City of Somerville.
72. The school recognizes that the procurement of a permanent site and proper facilities is a key to the school's viability. The development of a permanent site for the SCS is a priority for SABIS, the Board, and the new school Director. They are currently exploring alternative options, should the Clyde Street facility be inoperable.

73. Educational materials appear overall to be adequate given for the type of instructional program at SCS. Students each had textbooks and consumable supplies such as notebooks and folders. The Lower School and Kindergarten programs appear to have an adequate amount of manipulatives, equipment, and supplies. It was in the high school that the lack of resources was noted. Teachers lack materials, equipment, and supplies to effectively implement the curriculum, particularly in science and math. Teachers were observed to transport science equipment from storage locations in another building. The lack of safety equipment limits the range of experiences teachers could offer students.
74. Parents cited the greatest weakness of the SCS being the inadequate buildings, lack of sports, science, and computer equipment.

3. SCHOOL

The Board of Trustees of the Somerville Charter School, primarily parents of students at SCS, is a stable and committed governance body. The administration of the school has suffered significant instability over the past four years, with a different head of school each year and several changes in other key administrative positions. Two key administrators, the Lower School Coordinator and the Special Education Coordinator, have provided important stability and leadership during the school's transitions. The current head of school, brought in to provide stability of leadership, has identified the school's critical need areas and has begun work to address them, in part by developing the leadership capacity of the school's administrative team. In addition to the turnover in administrators, SCS has also lost a significant number of teachers over the past four years. Only ten of the original group of teachers remains at the school and the school has lost 40 teachers to attrition. The vast majority of staff cite the comparatively low pay scale and unclear promotion and retention policies as the problems. The school staff as a whole lacks a shared understanding of the expectations, processes, and systems that are intended to be in place. There is clearly a lack of full understanding of the SABIS program along with a lack of full knowledge of how to implement its content and processes. The current director stated his plans to make professional development, primarily in SABIS curriculum, instruction, and assessment, a top priority. The climate at SCS is orderly and calm, with students and staff working well together in a program focused on academics. The school's discipline program is credited as helping to create the climate at the school yet, at the same time, the school recognizes the need to address the increasing number of disciplinary incidents at the school. Parents of children at SCS are very positive about the program and staff at the school. They laud the efforts to create a safe and disciplined environment, to involve and communicate with parents, and to engage their children in an academically challenging program.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

75. The Board of Trustees of the Somerville Charter school, comprised primarily of parents, has served as a committed and stable force in governance of the school over the past four years. While the number of board members has fluctuated between 11 and 13, 5 of those members are school founders and have served since the school's inception.
76. The relationship between the Board, SABIS, and the school administration resembles a triad of school governance. SABIS, hired by the Board to manage the school, hires the head of school. The head of school serves as a critical communication link between the Board and SABIS. One Board member stated "we rely on the Director to communicate Somerville to SABIS". SABIS, responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school, is working to adapt its

- program and practices to meet local needs but its centralized efforts are not sufficiently coordinated with the ongoing faculty efforts at the school.
77. The administrative leadership at SCS has been highly unstable over the term of the school's charter. There has been a different head of school every year, and other key administration positions changed each year as well. The Lower School Coordinator and the Special Education Coordinator, in their positions for three years, have provided important stability. The current head of school communicated his desire to provide stability for the school over the next 5 years.
 78. The current head of school demonstrated a clear understanding of the school's priority needs. He has begun to develop the capacity of the school's Leadership Team toward enhancing decision making, leadership, and communication across the school. The leadership team meets once a week and works on priority issues such as special education, the Intensive Program, curriculum alignment, and professional development.
 79. The administrative system at SCS still lacks role and responsibility clarification and implementation. It appears that roles have been defined primarily by the individuals hired rather than as part of a system. Job descriptions are not available for key administrative positions. Key administrative staff commented on defining their own roles. The school recognizes this as an issue of school viability and addresses it in their current Accountability Plan. The current head of school has begun to shape and clarify administrator roles and responsibilities.
 80. There is an inadequate system and practice for communication and decision making across the school. Gaps were noted in several areas. SABIS representatives describe the program in ways that conflicted with observations and reports of actual practice and understanding within the school. The lack of vertical coherence in the curriculum is also an indicator of communication gaps in the system. When asked to describe "how things work at SCS", staff are not, by and large, able to respond with consistency and confidence. The current school head has begun to address this issue by solidifying the Leadership Team's roles and responsibilities and in identifying professional development in SABIS curriculum, instruction, and assessment as a priority.
 81. The school's Accountability Plan, ideally a strategic planning resource, is currently underutilized at SCS. Administrative staff and Board members contributed to the writing of the document but report that it is not used for ongoing evaluation and planning purposes. One of the School Performance Goals in the school's Accountability Plan toward developing accountability for student performance at SCS is continuous monitoring and the use of data for planning. This is happening to some extent at the classroom level; however, it is not apparent that it is practiced at the organizational level.

82. The Special Education Coordinator has served as the primary leader in advocating for and meeting the needs of special education students. She has worked tirelessly and diligently to move the school toward compliance and appropriate practice. She now functions as a member of the Leadership Team, where special education issues are being addressed as a school-wide priority.
83. School discipline at SCS, a system based on consistently applied rewards and consequences related to school rules, is highly structured at SCS. The result of this system is a school climate that is orderly and calm. The climate at SCS is highly and consistently supportive of students developing and maintaining an academic orientation.
84. Students at SCS, representative of a wide range of ethnicity, language, and background demonstrate a notable ability to work well together. There are also generally positive relationships between staff and students.
85. Students in the high school program tend to be more dissatisfied and disgruntled than other students at SCS. They reference the lack of electives, adequate facilities, and a lack of extracurricular activities as reasons for their dissatisfaction.
86. The head of school and the discipline coordinator recognize the need to address the high, and increasing, numbers of disciplinary referrals at SCS, as well as the variations in frequency of disciplinary referrals among staff. The range in number of student referrals to the discipline coordinator is wide, from 7 to 66 over the year, with one teacher referring 17 times in one month. The administration plans to develop the capacity of the school to act proactively to prevent disciplinary actions. The school discipline coordinator has begun to provide informative resources to teachers toward that end.

FACULTY AND STAFF

87. There has been substantial attrition of teachers from SCS over the past four years, causing significant impediments in the school's ability to fulfill its mission. Only 10 teachers from the original staff remain at the school. Since 1996, the school has lost 40 teachers. This is a significant factor contributing to a lack of coherence and shared understanding of the school's mission, organizational processes, approaches, and expectations.
88. There is a lack of clear understanding of performance expectations, both from teacher and administrative perspectives. Job descriptions do not exist for key positions and some staff reported "creating their job as they went along."
89. The majority of staff interviewed reported that the primary reason for staff attrition at SCS is the low level of salary and the lack of clarity and consistency in

- personnel remuneration and retention decisions. Salary is reported by teachers to be lower than other public schools, affecting both recruitment and retention. An administrator lamented about not being able to hire a highly qualified applicant who declined employment at SCS as it would mean a significant pay decrease.
90. The vast majority of teachers stated that they have no idea what the basis is for pay raises or rehire at the school. One teacher commented, “it is hush-hush. Pay is a big mystery.” Teachers report being told that they are “paid what they are worth to the company”; however, there are no clear standards defining the terms of that “worth.”
 91. Performance evaluation of teachers is implemented as described in the school’s handbook and by the head of school. Teachers are observed formally once a year, and informally throughout the year. The head of school uses a standardized evaluation form that contains a set of criteria from which to evaluate the performance. It is unclear to teachers, however, how this is tied to rehiring and remuneration decisions.
 92. The school administration recognizes that a focused, purposeful approach to professional development is needed at SCS. A review of the professional development activities over the past year revealed a lack of focus and a myriad of activities, with little to no school-wide involvement indicated. Training and ongoing support in the implementation of SABIS teaching methods has been limited to a few days before the start of school. Teachers report a lack of ongoing mentoring and support for teachers new to the system. The current head of school articulated that training in SABIS is a priority for this upcoming year.
 93. Staff at SCS are hardworking and demonstrate care and concern for students overall. Parents interviewed spoke highly of the regard and care given to their children by staff at SCS. A parent commented “the teachers are wonderful in how they treat my son – with a great deal of respect.” Teachers at the high school also demonstrated a high level of resourcefulness in accessing resources to support the academic program.
 94. Teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment to students through their involvement in school activities beyond the regular school day. Some teachers work in the school’s Charter Club, providing enrichment and academic support activities. Others offer tutoring services to students needing extra help. Teachers also staff the summer school program.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

95. Parents interviewed are very satisfied with the academic program at SCS. One parent commented “teachers push kids to the limit – as a result, my son is ahead of the other kids in school.” Parents like the consistency in homework and the availability of the homework lab after school. Parents of fifth and tenth grade students said that they sent their children to SCS because they were not being academically challenged in their other public school. These parents are very pleased with the academic progress their children are making.
96. Communication between parents and the school is viewed positively by the parents interviewed. They see the school as responsive when they bring concerns to the school and feel that the school does a good job of keeping parents informed. They report receiving weekly newsletters, announcements, policy notes, and lists of opportunities to attend meetings and to volunteer for the school. One parent stated “I feel that I am given many opportunities to be involved.”
97. The chairperson of the school’s parent organization, the Parent Connection, feels that more parents need to be involved in the school. She believes that the current school head is working toward this in an effective way. As chairperson of the parent organization, she meets with the school head once a week, demonstrative of a commitment on the part of the school administration to partner with parents.
98. A key strategy for achieving the school’s goals of shared accountability for student performance described in school documents is the development and use of a Parent Compact. No staff or parents interviewed were aware of a Parent Compact.
99. Many parents commented on their appreciation and support for the safety and structure of the school. They like the emphasis on discipline, described by the Dean of Students as “we will have one to three days of meetings with parents to address issues when we need to. Kids at SCS are held to standards of behavior more consistently here than in other public schools.”
100. Parents interviewed who attended schools in other countries report that they like the structure, homework, and focus on academics as it reminds them of schooling in their countries of origin.
101. The areas of weakness described by parents were the lack of adequate facilities, the lack of sports programming, and the lack of computer equipment.