

# Renewal Inspection Report

LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER  
PUBLIC SCHOOL

LOWELL, MA



October 31-November 3, 2004

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### **About the renewal process and site visit report**

Beginning in the spring of the third year of its charter (and ending August 1<sup>st</sup> following its fourth year), a school may apply for renewal of its charter for another five-year term. Following guidelines set forth in the *Application for Renewal of a Public School Charter*, an application for renewal should be an articulate, affirmative response, based on clear, credible evidence, to the questions that guide charter school accountability. It must also offer compelling answers to questions about the school's plans for the future. The application should be a sound, well-supported explanation of why the Board of Education should renew a school's charter.

Once this application has met a minimal review of its clarity and coherence, the Department of Education will appoint an evaluation team to conduct a 3-4 day visit of the school to corroborate and augment the school's application for renewal. This report is the result of one such evaluation.

The renewal site visit process and report provide a detailed and current portrait of a public charter school at the time of its application for renewal. While the renewal site visit report itself is a vital source of information within the renewal process, it is most effective when used in conjunction with the longitudinal school performance data available to the Department of Education. The combination of more general long-term data with the detailed information gathered by the renewal visit constitutes an evidence base rigorous enough to inform decisions about the future of public charter schools responsible for the education of students in the Commonwealth. In keeping with Massachusetts Board of Education's commitment to a public charter school accountability system that is based in robust and diverse performance data, the renewal site visit report does not make recommendations about whether or not a school should be renewed. It presents a detailed picture of the present state of the school as one of several key sources of information to be considered by the Board of Education in its renewal decision.

### **How to read this report**

The first section of this report describes the school's setting. Included in this section are information on the origin and history of the charter, student demographics, staffing and the school's educational program. This is also an opportunity to include any organizational history, such as changes in the board and leadership or challenges the school has faced, and its response to those challenges.

The core of the report is the Renewal Inspection Team's findings. Findings are the team's assessment of the school's strengths and areas for improvement that, in their judgment, have the greatest bearing on the school's achievement of its defined goals. Findings are organized under each of the renewal questions: *Is the academic program a success? Is the school a viable organization? Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter?* The team's comments on the fourth question, *If the school is renewed, what are its plans for the next five years?*, reflect their judgment of the quality of the school's proposed new goals and their assessment of the school's capacity to fulfill those goals. Each finding is typed in bold print followed by explanatory paragraphs reporting the evidence supporting the team's judgments. Finally, **Appendix A** illustrates the team's schedule during the renewal visit.

## RENEWAL INSPECTION TEAM

**Dr. Carol Keirstead, Lead Inspector**, is a Senior Research Associate with RMC Research Corporation. Carol has extensive experience as an educational administrator, educator, researcher, program evaluator, and technical assistance provider. At RMC, Carol serves as director of several projects: charter school inspections for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, a three-year evaluation of the New Hampshire Department of Education's alternative teacher certification and support program, and a quasi-experimental research study to test the effects of an American History curriculum program for middle school English language learners in Fresno, California. She is also one of several RMC staff conducting research for a LAB at Brown University study of state and district strategies for low-performing schools. Prior to joining RMC, Carol worked for twelve years as an educational administrator of programs serving Southeast Asian refugees, both in the U.S. and abroad. Carol holds certification as an art teacher and principal.

**Dr. Susan Auerbach**, founder and President of Engaging Results, provides consultation and facilitation to organizations in the public, private, and non-profit sector in the achievement of organizational goals. Training and consultation services include team work, organizational structure, and process design to increase productivity and improve services to clients. Prior to founding her company, Susan served as Project Coordinator for the New England Center for Civic Life at Franklin Pierce College providing technical assistance to 80 school/community teams participating in the New Hampshire Department of Education's Best Schools school reform initiative. She also served as Human Resources Administrator for the New Hampshire Department of Education for seven years. Susan has 15 years experience in education for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

**Michelle da Costa** is a Curriculum Resource Teacher for the Framingham, MA public schools, providing support for teachers of English language learners (ELLs) in grades K-5. In that role, she conducts model teaching, provides coaching, helps to create and adapt units of study for English language learners, and consults with teachers to meet the specific needs of English language learners. Michelle designs and implements professional development sessions to meet the needs of professionals working with ELL students in the district. Michelle is adjunct professor at Cambridge College, teaching courses in Sheltered English Methods and Materials, Assessment Practices for Second Language Learners, and Enhancing English Language Learning in Elementary classrooms. From 1993 to 2001, Michelle was a grades four and five bilingual educator in the Framingham Public schools.

**Angela Penfold**, a Research Associate at RMC Research Corporation, has extensive experience with the implementation of Reading First. Ms. Penfold is a member of the team that plans and organizes the Reading First technical assistance activities. Working with the federal Reading First office, Ms. Penfold has organized the Secretary's Reading Leadership Academies, the Writers' Workshops, several single topic workshops on assessment and professional development, and the 2003 Reading First State Coordinators' Meeting. In her capacity, she has worked directly with states to provide them with needed information for their Reading First applications including resources disseminated as part of the academies and writers' workshops. She also worked with Massachusetts districts as they applied to their state for Reading First

funding. Ms. Penfold holds a B.A. from Wesleyan University and an M.Ed. from Harvard University. She has also completed a teacher education program in Japanese language instruction at The Japan Foundation's headquarters in Urawa, Japan.

**Joseph Miller** is an educational consultant with extensive experience as an elementary and middle school principal in the state of Washington. He currently supervises student teachers at the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. From 1997 to 1999, Joe was the director a scoring center serving five school districts in Washington, training and supervising the scoring of writing samples from the five districts. Joe's teaching experience was also in the state of Washington and ranged from third to seventh grade. Joe has a master's degree in Educational Administration.

**Patricia Williams**, Associate Examiner for the MA Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, served from 1994-2004 as principal of Londonderry High School in Londonderry, New Hampshire. Before that, she was an assistant principal in two Fairfax County, Virginia, high schools. Also in Fairfax County, from 1989 to 1991, she was an area office English Language Arts Specialist. Prior to that, she was the English Language Arts Specialist for state of Maryland from 1982-1989. Ms Williams worked in the Prince George's County Public Schools as a curriculum developer and as an English and reading teacher. Ms Williams also taught English at Needham High School in Massachusetts. She began her career teaching English at Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan, and then at Emmanuel College in Boston. Her bachelors' degree is from Emmanuel College, and she has an MA from the University of Detroit and an M.Ed. from Boston State College.

## SETTING

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The Lowell Community Charter Public School (LCCPS) was chartered by the Massachusetts Board of Education in February of 1999 to offer a Kindergarten through grade 12 education to the children of Lowell. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2000 to 309 students in Kindergarten through third grade. Since then, the school has added a grade level each year and in its fifth year of operation enrolls 643 students in Kindergarten through seventh grade. This enrollment trend reflects the school's plan to add a grade each year until it reaches its K-12 enrollment goals. The school is located in a refurbished mill complex in downtown Lowell.

The demographic make-up of the school reflects the school's mission to serve the city's Latino and Cambodian community. Data show that nearly half of students are limited English proficient, 65% qualify for free or reduced lunch, 44% are Hispanic, and 28% Asian. About one-fifth of the students are white (19%) and only 6% of students are identified as Special Education students. The school has experienced a relatively high rate of student attrition in its first four years of operation. While student attrition data provided to the inspection team were inconsistent, turnover rates for the school's second, third, and fourth years show about a 20% rate of attrition each year, including both student withdrawals during the year and students who did not return after completing the year. At the writing of this report, 31 students (about 5%) had withdrawn since the start of this school year.

The school employs three lead administrators, a director of special education, three social workers, 31 classroom teachers, two special education teachers, six aides, and 13 specialists, five reading teachers and an ELL director. All of the classroom teachers at LCCPS meet the criteria for Highly Qualified Teachers as set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act. Staff turnover has been high with over half of the staff leaving during or after the school's second year and about one-third leaving during or after years three and four.

The mission of LCCPS is to prepare a diverse cross section of Lowell children for success as students, citizens, and workers by providing them with a comprehensive curriculum in a supportive, challenging, multicultural learning environment. Toward that end, the school uses a combination of commercial and teacher created materials aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The school's academic focus over the first four years has been to ensure that all students read at or above grade level. A special feature of the academic program is the school's World Languages program that supports learning in Khmer and Spanish for native speakers and second language learners.

The school's board consists of eleven members, five of whom are founding members. The board includes leaders from the city's Latino and Cambodian communities along with members from a range of business, community, health and education affiliations. The school has remained financially stable over the term of its charter and has enabled the facilities expansion needed to meet the enrollment needs of the school. Parent participation is supported by significant outreach and involvement efforts of school staff, and through a formal parent organization.

The school has faced significant challenges during its first charter term. The school's first year was fraught with difficulty, resulting in a change in school leadership beginning in Year 2. The Board of Directors continued their contract with Chancellor Beacon to provide management operational services and hired the current school director. High teacher turnover has been a concern throughout the first charter term and the Board has been working to create policies to address the problem. Finally, the school's academic performance on MCAS was poor and declining up until 2004. In 2004, LCCPS showed marked improvement in MCAS scores, meeting its aggregate AYP improvement goals in English Language Arts and Math.

## FINDINGS

### RENEWAL QUESTION 1: IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

1. **LCCPS showed dramatic improvement in MCAS scores in 2004, in all subjects with two or more years of data, making AYP improvement targets in both ELA and Math. This one year growth does not reflect an overall trend in performance. LCCPS students are now scoring on par with their peers in the Lowell Public Schools.**

As shown in Table 1 below, the majority of students at LCCPS score as Needing Improvement or in Warning in each grade and subject tested by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Having experienced initial declines in grades tested from 2001 to 2003, the school made dramatic gains in 2004 in all grades and subjects tested.

**Table 1: Lowell Community Charter Public School  
MCAS 2001-2004  
Percentages of Students in Each MCAS Performance Category**

<b>Grade 3 Reading</b>						
	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>AYP</b>
<b>2001</b>	35	Na	23	49	29	na
<b>2002</b>	30	Na	17	47	37	na
<b>2003</b>	41	Na	7	56	37	na
<b>2004</b>	95	Na	36	51	14	na
<b>Grade 4 ELA</b>						
	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>AYP</b>
<b>2002</b>	30	0	7	50	43	na
<b>2003</b>	41	0	0	29	71	NO
<b>2004</b>	45	2	28	42	28	YES
<b>Grade 4 Math</b>						
	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>AYP</b>
<b>2002</b>	33	0	3	39	58	na
<b>2003</b>	41	0	0	37	63	NO
<b>2004</b>	45	2	5	51	42	YES
<b>Grade 5 Science and Technology</b>						
	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>AYP</b>
<b>2003</b>	45	0	2	36	62	na
<b>2004</b>	41	0	15	45	41	na
<b>Grade 6 Math</b>						
	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>AYP</b>
<b>2004</b>	45	5	28	37	30	na

n = number of students tested; A = Advanced; P = Proficient;  
NI = Needs Improvement; W = Warning; na = not applicable

In Grade 3 Reading, the school experienced a pattern of decline in scores from 2001 to 2003. In 2001, 23% of Grade 3 students scored as Proficient and in 2003 only 7% did. Scores in 2004 show a dramatic improvement with one-third of Grade 3 students scoring as Proficient. Similarly, Grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA) scores reflect a decline from 2002 to 2003, with substantially more students scoring in the Warning category in 2003 (71%) than in 2002 (43%). As in Grade 3 Reading, 2004 Grade 4 ELA scores show dramatic gains with 28% of students scoring as Proficient as compared to 2003 when no students scored in the Proficient category. Grade 4 Math scores reflect a similar pattern of performance with less dramatic, but still notable, improvements in 2004. In 2003, 63% of students scored in Warning as opposed to 42% in 2004. For the first time, a student scored as Advanced in Math.

Due to the grade level enrollments at LCCPS, there are two years of student performance data for Grade 5 Science and Technology and one year for Grade 6 Math. Performance in Science and Technology was very low in 2003, with 98% of students scoring as Needing Improvement or in Warning. Solid gains in 2004 resulted in 15% scoring as Proficient and a 20% reduction in the number of students scoring in the Warning category. Grade 6 Math scores show the highest number of students scoring as Proficient or Advanced of any subject and grade tested.

Table 2 shows MCAS scores for each grade tested in English language arts and math at LCCPS along with the Lowell Public Schools (LPS) and statewide averages. Review of Grade 3 Reading and Grade 4 ELA scores show LCCPS students scoring far below their Lowell Public School counterparts in 2001 and 2002. In 2004, however, students at LCCPS are shown to be performing on par with their LPS peers. In Grade 4 Math, students are scoring slightly below their LPS counterparts. Seven percent of LCCPS students scored as Proficient or Advanced as opposed to 20% in the Lowell Public Schools. Grade 5 Science and Technology scores show LCCPS students lagging behind LPS students and the school making only slight gains from 2003 to 2004. One year of Grade 6 Math data show LCCPS students outperforming students in the Lowell Public Schools.

Scores for students at LCCPS are substantially below statewide averages in all grades and subjects tested.

**Table 2: MCAS 2001-2004  
Lowell Community Public Charter School, Lowell Public Schools,  
and Statewide Student Performance**

<b>Grade 3 Reading</b>						
<b>Year</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	35	na	23	49	29
	<b>Lowell</b>	1333	na	34	51	15
	<b>State</b>		na	62	31	7
<b>2002</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	30	na	17	47	37
	<b>Lowell</b>	1177	na	43	44	12
	<b>State</b>		na	46	37	10
<b>2003</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	41	na	7	56	37
	<b>Lowell</b>	1136	na	38	43	19
	<b>State</b>		na	63	30	7
<b>2004</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	95	na	36	51	14
	<b>Lowell</b>	1146	na	39	45	15
	<b>State</b>		na	63	30	7
<b>Grade 4 English Language Arts</b>						
<b>Year</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	30	0	7	50	43
	<b>Lowell</b>	1301	2	26	51	21
	<b>State</b>		8	46	37	10
<b>2003</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	41	0	0	29	71
	<b>Lowell</b>	1185	3	26	47	25
	<b>State</b>		10	45	34	10
<b>2004</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	45	2	28	42	28
	<b>Lowell</b>	1146	3	26	47	25
	<b>State</b>		11	45	35	9
<b>Grade 4 Math</b>						
<b>Year</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	33	0	3	39	58
	<b>District</b>	1320	2	13	46	40
	<b>State</b>		12	27	42	19
<b>2003</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	41	0	0	37	63
	<b>District</b>	1191	5	16	47	33
	<b>State</b>		12	28	43	16
<b>2004</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	45	2	5	51	42
	<b>District</b>	1127	4	16	49	31
	<b>State</b>		14	28	44	14
<b>Grade 6 Math</b>						
<b>Year</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>W</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	45	5	28	37	30
	<b>District</b>	1281	3	14	34	49
	<b>State</b>		17	25	32	25

Tables 3 through 5 show the 2004 MCAS scores for subgroups of students at the Lowell Community Public Charter School, the Lowell Public Schools, and the state. These figures show that, by and large, the school is serving a proportionately larger number of ethnic minority students, of students identified as Limited English Proficient, and poor students than are served, on average, by the district or the state. The school serves smaller numbers of white students and students identified as Special Education students.

A review of subgroup performance data shows that in some cases, scores for particular groups of students are higher at LCCPS than in the Lowell Public Schools and the state and in other cases lower. Thus, while LCCPS serves a higher concentration of students in most subgroup categories, there is no clear trend in subgroup performance when compared to subgroup performance in the Lowell Public Schools or across the state.

**Table 3: MCAS 2004  
Lowell Community Charter Public School, Lowell Public School, and State  
Subgroup Performance in Grade 3 Reading**

Grade 3 Reading						
Subgroup		%N	A	P	NI	W
African American	LCCPS	13	na	50	33	17
	Lowell	6	na	44	37	19
	State	9	na	41	46	13
Hispanic	LCCPS	39	na	30	54	16
	Lowell	21	na	27	51	22
	State	12	na	33	49	18
Asian	LCCPS	34	na	38	50	13
	Lowell	27	na	35	49	16
	State	5	na	64	30	6
White	LCCPS	14	na	31	62	8
	Lowell	46	na	47	42	11
	State	74	na	71	25	4
LEP	LCCPS	54	na	37	49	14
	Lowell	32	na	27	55	18
	State	5	na	29	51	20
FR	LCCPS	83	na	33	53	14
	Lowell	62	na	32	51	18
	State	30	na	40	46	14
SPED	LCCPS	8	-	-	-	-
	Lowell	17	na	57	38	5
	State	17	na	35	45	20

**Table 4: MCAS 2004  
Lowell Community Charter Public School, Lowell Public School, and State  
Subgroup Performance in Grade 4 ELA and Math**

Grade 4 ELA and Math										
Subgroup		%N	ELA				MATH			
			A	P	NI	W	A	P	NI	W
<b>African American</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	5	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-
	<b>Lowell</b>	5	2	39	42	18	0	14	51	36
	<b>State</b>	9	3	29	49	19	3	15	52	30
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	35	0	20	47	33	0	0	53	47
	<b>Lowell</b>	23	1	11	51	37	2	8	42	32
	<b>State</b>	12	2	24	48	25	3	14	49	33
<b>Asian</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	35	0	20	47	33	7	7	40	47
	<b>Lowell</b>	28	1	24	46	29	4	19	45	32
	<b>State</b>	5	16	42	33	10	23	31	37	10
<b>White</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	26	9	45	18	27	0	9	55	36
	<b>Lowell</b>	44	5	33	45	17	6	18	55	21
	<b>State</b>	75	13	50	32	6	16	32	42	9
<b>LEP</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	37	0	6	63	31	0	6	50	44
	<b>Lowell</b>	32	2	16	51	32	3	10	47	40
	<b>State</b>	4	2	18	48	32	4	14	47	35
<b>FR</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	84	3	28	44	25	3	6	53	39
	<b>Lowell</b>	65	1	20	49	31	3	11	49	37
	<b>State</b>	29	3	29	49	20	4	17	51	28
<b>SPED</b>	<b>LCCPS</b>	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<b>Lowell</b>	17	0	6	31	62	1	3	34	63
	<b>State</b>	18	2	22	49	27	3	14	48	34

**Table 5: MCAS 2004  
Lowell Community Charter Public School, Lowell Public School, and State  
Subgroup Performance in Grade 6 Math**

Grade 6 Math						
Subgroup		%N	A	P	NI	W
African American	LCCPS	9	-	--	-	-
	Lowell	6	3	11	28	59
	State	9	4	12	34	50
Hispanic	LCCPS	53	4	30	30	35
	Lowell	22	1	7	28	64
	State	12	4	12	30	54
Asian	LCCPS	19	-	-	-	-
	Lowell	28	2	14	40	44
	State	4	32	26	26	16
White	LCCPS	19	-	-	-	-
	Lowell	43	4	17	35	44
	State	74	20	29	33	18
LEP	LCCPS	86	5	30	41	24
	Lowell	24	1	7	28	64
	State	3	4	10	27	59
FR	LCCPS	86	5	32	35	27
	Lowell	70	2	10	33	55
	State	30	5	15	34	47
SPED	LCCPS	9	-	-	-	-
	Lowell	16	0	1	16	83
	State	19	3	10	29	58

2. **Terra Nova scores in Reading, Language, and Math are, for the most part, below national averages. An examination of scores from year to year shows consistent gains being made in reading and a mix of gain and decline in math and language.**

The Terra Nova, used as the school's external standardized measure of performance, has not been consistently administered at each grade level each year. A review of available data shows that most students scored below the national NCE average 50 in reading, language, and math. In 2004, Kindergarten students scored slightly above, with scores ranging from 55 in Math to 59 in Language.

While the school's Accountability Plan sets forth performance goals for cohorts<sup>1</sup> of students, complete data were not available for the team to corroborate claims about the progress of cohorts of students. Data provided to the team included mean NCE scores for

<sup>1</sup> True cohort data refers to data for specific groups of students over time.

students by start year: 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, however lacked any indication of how students were selected for the analyses. Notwithstanding, these figures show no clear pattern of progress for students by start year. A review of approximate cohorts<sup>2</sup> using the data shown in Table 6 shows all grade levels making progress from 2001 to 2004 in Reading. In Language and Math, grade levels show a mix of improvement and decline from 2001 to 2004.

### **3. Internal assessments in reading show students making steady gains.**

LCCPS uses three reading assessments to gauge student progress in reading. Through the implementation of the Success For All (SFA) Roots and Wings programs, students are assessed approximately every nine weeks to determine growth for purposes of regrouping students for instruction and/or for providing additional supports. In Success For All reading instruction, students are regrouped across age lines for 90 minutes so that each reading class contains students reading at one level. Students in grades 1-5 are assessed every eight weeks to determine whether they are making adequate progress in reading. This information is used to assign students to tutoring, to suggest alternative teaching strategies in the regular classroom, and to make changes in reading group placement, family support interventions, or other means of meeting students' needs. These SFA assessments are valid for measuring student progress in meeting SFA standards and are not used in this inspection report as valid and reliable measures of reading.

With the implementation of the school's Reading First grant in 2003, the school began using two valid and reliable measures for assessing reading. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development. The measures were developed upon the essential early literacy domains discussed in both the National Reading Panel (2000) and National Research Council (1998) reports to assess student development of phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, and automaticity and fluency with the code. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency.

DIBELS reports three levels of performance data in each area of reading: At Risk, Some Risk, and Low Risk. Table 7 on page 15 shows the percentages of students scoring in the lowest (At Risk) and highest (Low Risk) categories. A review of Grades K, 1, and 3 DIBELS data show, that in Kindergarten, students made gains in two of four areas tested. In Grade 1, students made gains in all areas tested except Oral Reading, where figures show decline between winter progress monitoring and spring outcome data. In Grade 3, students made gains in Oral Reading.

Table 8 on page 15 reports the National Percentile Total Scores for students in Grades 1 through 3 on the GRADE reading assessments administered in the fall of 2003 and in spring of 2004. While scores are below the national average, the scores reflect overall gains at each grade level.

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<sup>2</sup> Approximate cohorts refers to an analysis of performance of groups of students over time without knowing if the individuals in the group remained the same.

**Table 6: Lowell Community Charter Public School  
Terra Nova NCE Scores  
2001-2004**

<b>READING</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 01</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 02</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 03</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 04</b>
Kdg	124	26	106	32	110	35	115	57
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	54	34	133	34	109	28	-	-
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	-	-	-	-	115	28	93	28
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	41	19	33	8	41	22	97	35
4 <sup>th</sup> grade		-		-	-	-	41	37
5th grade		-		-	46	29	41	22
6th grade in '01		-		-	-	-	45	30
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 01</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 02</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 03</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 04</b>
Kdg	124	46	106	44	110	56	115	59
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	54	41	133	51	109	35	-	-
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	-	-	-	-	115	18	93	29
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	41	28	33	14	41	25	97	41
4 <sup>th</sup> grade		-		-	-	-	41	32
5th grade		-		-	46	36	41	24
6th grade in '01		-		-	-	-	45	36
<b>MATH</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 01</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 02</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 03</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 04</b>
Kdg	124	35	106	39	110	36	115	55
1st grade	54	49	133	49	109	32	-	
2nd grade	-		-		115	25	93	33
3rd grade	41	43	33	17	41	25	97	33
4th grade					-		41	42
5th grade					46	22	41	14
6th grade in '01							45	47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 01</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 02</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 03</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>May 04</b>
Kdg	124	38	106	38	110	44	115	56
1st grade	54	39	133	43	109	28	-	
2nd grade	-	-	-		115	25	93	29
3rd grade	41	30	33	13	41	23	97	38
4th grade					-		41	39
5th grade					46	31	41	19
6th grade in '01					-		45	37

**Table 7:**  
**Lowell Community Charter Public School**  
**Grades K, 1, and 3 DIBELS**  
**Percentages of Students Scoring as At Risk and Low Risk**  
**Fall, Winter, Spring 2003/2004**

	<b>Kindergarten N=103</b>					
	<b>At Risk</b>			<b>Low Risk</b>		
	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Initial Sounds</b>	23	19	-	49	31	-
<b>Letter Naming</b>	41	28	28	40	55	51
<b>Phonemic Segmentation</b>	-	26	26	-	65	70
<b>Nonsense Words</b>	-	10	10	-	76	72
	<b>First Grade N=74</b>					
	<b>At Risk</b>			<b>Low Risk</b>		
	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Letter Naming</b>	43	-	2	35	-	91
<b>Phonemic Segmentation</b>	18	4	-	58	86	-
<b>Nonsense Words</b>	20	11	8	47	50	71
<b>Oral Reading</b>	-	13	21	-	53	51
	<b>Third Grade N=95</b>					
	<b>At Risk</b>			<b>Low Risk</b>		
	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>Oral Reading</b>	39	40	32	28	35	31

**Table 8:**  
**Lowell Community Charter Public School**  
**Grades 1-3 GRADE National Percentile Ranks**  
**Fall 2003 and Spring 2004**

	<b>Fall</b>		<b>Spring</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>29</b>

**4. LCCPS's emphasis on literacy and numeracy reflects the school's commitment to preparing its diverse population for success as learners. The programs implemented at the school, specifically the SFA, math, and writing programs, are providing adequate opportunity to learn for students. Science is in the early stages of implementation and Social Studies has yet to be developed as articulated in the school's charter.**

In its 2004 Annual Report, LCCPS describes the educational philosophy at the school as the promotion of academic excellence and high expectations for inner city children to go onto higher education. In order to accomplish this aim, the school has placed priority during this charter term on reading, writing, and math. With nearly half of its students identified as having limited English proficiency, the school has put in place programs and structures that focus on helping students to learn to read and write in English.

In June 2003, LCCPS developed a revised accountability plan which reflected the school's focus on reading and math as the primary student performance goals. The school again revised its Accountability Plan with its Application for Renewal, keeping its two goals focused on reading and math and adding a third goal to include an emphasis on writing.

The school implements the Success For All (SFA) program in grades one through six during the same dedicated block of time each day. SFA is a structured reading program in which students are grouped by level according to SFA assessment data for 90 minutes of reading instruction each day. The school also implements the SFA kindergarten program, a comprehensive, whole-day curriculum. The school employs an SFA coordinator to support implementation. While described as a two-hour per day block of instruction in the staff handbook, we observed SFA classes implemented from 8:30 to 10:00 each morning. Staff indicated that this change resulted from assessment of an 8-week pilot to try out the 2-hour instructional block. Teachers reported that 90 minutes was sufficient for the reading instruction and that 30 minutes more with their homeroom students would be beneficial.

During SFA instruction, all students in grades K-6 were working in groups established according to assessed reading levels. A total of 12 Roots (primary) reading groups, including two groups for ELL students, and 19 Wings (elementary) groups were in place at the time of the visit. Students who are lagging behind in reading receive tutoring services during the day by one of five Reading Teachers/Tutors. Students work in small groups (3 or 4 students) with tutors for twenty minutes of targeted SFA, ELL, or MCAS instruction.

The SFA curriculum was implemented consistently in all classrooms observed. Observations were conducted in each of the SFA classrooms for period of about 30 minutes each. Overall, we observed the majority of students to be successfully engaged with the lessons. Students, for the most part, appeared to grasp the purpose and content of lessons. In many classes, there were one or two students who appeared to be off task

for periods of time. In some cases, teachers worked with one or two students during the lesson to assist them and in other cases, teachers used classroom management strategies to help students participate more effectively. In other cases, teachers proceeded with lessons without attempting to ensure participation.

LCCPS received a five-year K-3 Massachusetts Department of Education Reading First grant for implementation in 2003/2004. This initiative provides a framework for reading instruction supported by assessment, targeted professional development and materials. A Reading First Coordinator works closely with the SFA Coordinator in the implementation of the school's reading program.

Daily instruction in writing and word study is also provided in all grades. Teachers have been trained in, and use, the Writing Process to teach the stages of writing and the various genres of written works. The school uses the Collins Writing Program to integrate writing across the curriculum. Words Their Way is being piloted to explicitly teach phonics, vocabulary and spelling.

The school implements Everyday Math in grades 1-6 and Connected Math in Grade 7. Kindergarten classes use Distar and SFA math. The school chose the Everyday and Connected Math curriculum because of its alignment with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. While the school's Staff Handbook states that Math is taught for 60-75 minutes a day, a review of teacher schedules shows inconsistency in times allocated for math. For example, in Grade 3, amount of time dedicated to math ranged from 30 minutes three times a week to one hour four times a week. Classroom observations revealed consistent implementation of the math curriculum and students, by and large, demonstrating attainment of lesson objectives. While the math curriculum is taught to heterogeneous classes of students, some students move to different grades for math instruction if appropriate.

At the time of the visit, Grades 1-7 Social Studies and Science curricula were in the early stages of development and implementation. Both are expected to be taught for 60 minutes once or twice a week. Social Studies is comprised of teacher developed lessons based on the state curriculum frameworks, often focusing on current events and culturally relevant content. During the renewal inspection, members observed instances of lessons about the national election and others focused on geography. A lead social studies teacher works across grade levels to assist teachers in developing an aligned Social Studies curriculum.

The science curriculum at LCCPS is comprised of teacher created lessons supported by the use of FOSS kits. No science was observed during the course of the renewal inspection. FOSS kits were not observed to be in use in any classroom visited. We were informed by the school director that most teachers rotate between science and social studies for one to two weeks at a time: they teach a social studies unit and then a science one. The inspection team visit was conducted during a social studies week.

**5. The academic program for ELL students, a significant portion of the student population, is in early development.**

Nearly half of the students at LCCPS are classified as having limited English language proficiency. For the first four years of its charter, the LCCPS lacked the capacity to adequately assess and to serve its substantial population of English language learners. While LCCPS tested every student according to state mandates each year and used the ELL strand of the SFA program for these students, the school lacked a coherent approach to serving limited English proficient students. This year, the school has made significant strides to address that gap. Two key positions were created and filled, an ELL Director and an ELL teacher. The ELL Director is knowledgeable in second language issues and program functions and has made great strides in the development of systems to bring the school on board with service to English language learners.

While still in its early stages of development, the school has made progress in laying the foundations for a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of English language learners. The school is working to implement state-mandated assessments and protocols for second language learners. All teachers have been trained to administer the state MELA-O oral language assessment. The school is beginning to integrate state-endorsed programs for ELL students, namely SIOP and Teach First. The ELL Director has developed and implemented tracking processes to monitor ELL student progress. Staff development has begun to build knowledge of language acquisition and sheltered instruction for second language learners.

These ELL specialists provide direct services to students during the SFA reading block. Based on language assessments, students with very limited English skills are placed in separate ELL reading classes. Instruction observed in these classes reflected high quality instruction for ELL students. One teacher observed used an engaging activity that moved from oral/choral to hand-on using the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach to reading and writing using graphic organizers. During the day, the ELL specialists provide consultation, in-class support, and pull-out ESL support when needed. The ELL specialists provide support to teachers in adapting instruction to meet the needs of second language learners. In one second grade classroom, five newcomer ELL students are grouped and received specialized support.

All teachers have been introduced to the state's new proficiency outcomes and benchmarks for ELL learners, yet work has not begun to align the school's curriculum with these indicators. Efforts are underway to develop a formal testing process for determining student learning needs that are language related and those that may be rooted in learning difficulties.

In an effort to infuse attention to the needs of ELL students across the school, one teacher per grade level has been assigned as an ELL resource for each grade level. These teachers work to access knowledge and resources to share with team members and to

serve as a link to the ELL administrator. School leaders stated that a goal is to have all teachers receive a state ELL endorsement.

**6. The World Languages program provides valued opportunity for Khmer and Spanish speaking students to develop their first languages and for other students to learn Spanish and Khmer as a second language at a young age.**

A unique feature of the LCCPS charter school is its World Languages program. The expectation that guides the program is that each student will be engaged in learning their own and other languages. Each day, every student receives 30 (Grades K-2) or 45 (Grades 3-7) minutes of instruction in either Spanish or Khmer, the Cambodian language. Children may choose to attend either Khmer or Spanish class where they study alongside grade level peers.

Classes are comprised of native language speakers in some cases and in other cases, a mix of native and non-native language speakers. In grades K-4, students are not placed by language proficiency, whereas in grades 5-7, assessments are used to group students by instructional level for Khmer classes only. Classrooms observed to have all native speakers saw students effectively participating and able to engage well in the lesson. In classes with a mix of native and non native speakers, lessons present some difficulty for teachers. Teachers report that they pair native language speakers with other students to assist and sometimes translate. The school has tried various approaches to implementing the World Language program and continues to “think about how these classes would best work”.

Teachers who work in the World Languages program teach in a staggered schedule, providing classes to students during the regular school day and during the after school program as well. Curriculum for the Spanish language program includes a Spanish textbook used in Puerto Rico along with a variety of Spanish language materials. Khmer classes use a variety of materials acquired through the Lowell Public Schools and overseas sources, along with teacher made materials. There are very few commercially produced materials in Khmer.

Parents interviewed during the renewal visit spoke highly of the World Languages program. Parents of native English speakers value the opportunity provided to their children to learn another language. They relayed instances of their children using the language at home. Parents of Khmer and Spanish speaking children value the opportunity for their children to continue to develop their native language.

**7. Teachers are working to adapt the curriculum to better meet the MA Frameworks and the individual needs of students. Core curricula at LCCPS have been documented to be aligned, grade-by-grade, with the Massachusetts Frameworks.**

Curriculum work over the past three years at LCCPS has focused on ensuring that students are engaged in curricula that will both meet their needs and will prepare them for success on the state assessments. Alignment of the SFA program to the Massachusetts

Frameworks is documented by the publisher however, the school continues to augment the curriculum based on identified needs. With the implementation of assessments through the school's Reading First initiative and the state's ELL assessments, staff can identify needs not addressed in the SFA program. The ELL Director developed an ELL curriculum component that parallels the SFA Program but is based on the ELL language development. The school is looking to implement additional reading intervention programs targeted to assist students with particular reading difficulties.

The school adopted Everyday Math and Connected Math because of its alignment with the Massachusetts Frameworks and developed an internal alignment document that demonstrates how it is aligned. The school is in the process of developing pacing guides for math, with Grade 1 complete at the time of the visit. While the program is well-aligned to the Massachusetts standards, there is concern about its effectiveness for ELL students because of its heavy reliance on language capabilities.

The primary mechanism for ensuring that the curriculum is helping students meet the state standards is the grade level meeting structure. Each grade level team meets daily is provided with common planning time daily while students attend World Languages, Art or Physical Education. During grade level meetings, teachers use the standards to guide their planning, analyze test data to identify gaps in student performance, and develop curricular responses to them. Lead teachers appear to have solid knowledge of the standards and provide valuable leadership to their colleagues in ensuring standards driven planning.

- 8. The clear strength of the instructional practices at LCCPS appears to be in the quality of the teacher/student relationship, in the consistency in implementation of the school's core curriculum, and the attention to addressing the needs of individual students. The ability of teachers to successfully engage all students and to employ differentiated instructional strategies is varied across the school.**

Based on over 40 class visits conducted during the inspection, this inspection team observed teachers across the school engaging with students in affirming and supportive ways. Teachers applied a consistent framework of language, cues, and responses with students. Teachers and staff across the school engaged in respectful, responsive behavior. Classrooms were calm and orderly overall. Teachers provided clear, positive feedback to students about their work and their behavior. In cases of disruption, students were given opportunities to address problems such as using the "Peace Path," completing a "Think-It-Through," or visiting the school's Opportunity Room.

Adherence to the SFA and Math curricula was strong across all classrooms observed. In some cases, teachers demonstrated a fluid approach to implementation while others appeared to rely heavily on the instructional manual to deliver the lesson. Whole class, aural/oral instruction and individual written work were the dominant instructional methods observed. As part of the SFA curriculum, students worked some of the time in pairs.

Teachers attempted to meet individual needs of students while getting through each lesson, with some demonstrating more success than others. In nearly every class observed, there were one or two students who appeared to be disengaged. In some cases, teachers provided one-on-one support while students worked individually or in pairs. One teacher observed students during their writing, and conducted a re-teaching lesson based on observations. An upper grade teacher, based on surprisingly poor class test results, took the opportunity to teach strategies addressing the gaps noted in the test.

In some cases, teachers proceeded with lessons without attending to students who were not effectively engaged. In at least two cases, a lack of effective classroom management skills prevented any substantial learning from occurring.

Meeting the needs of individual students is also accomplished through an array of school-wide supports. Individual and small group tutoring is available to students experiencing reading difficulties. Teachers confer with ELL, Reading Specialists, and Social Work and Special Education staff to review individual student cases and to construct plans for addressing them. ELL and Reading Specialists will model and coach teachers in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students.

## **RENEWAL QUESTION 2: IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?**

- 1. The Board and school administration provide clear and coherent leadership that enables focus, purpose, and ongoing efforts to assess and improve systems and practices in support of the mission. The school director is key to the articulation of the school's vision and implementation of the mission.**

The Board of Trustees and school administration convey clarity of the mission and purpose. The Board, comprised of some founding members, has worked over time to develop as a board, maintaining its role in policy setting and oversight, and avoiding micro-management. The Board has increasingly become more active in responding to the needs of the school by attending to data and engaging with the school to identify priority needs and then creating policies to address them. The Board became alarmed at the critical level of student performance on MCAS in 2003, initiating a wake up call for academic oversight and attention by the Board. More recently, the Board has begun to address the problem of teacher turnover through salary structure revisions and incentives.

The administrative/leadership roles at LCCPS continue to develop and evolve as the needs of the school change and grow. During this charter, the Board has contracted with Chancellor Beacon to provide business services to the school, including payroll and data analysis. A new management company has acquired Chancellor Beacon and the Board is in the process of deciding direction related to such contractual services.

The Executive Director has been with the school since the start of Year Two. She plays a critical role in communicating and enabling the school's mission. She does this through her recruitment and hiring practices, through the development and implementation of the school's professional development and support system, and in her daily interactive

presence with staff, students, and parents. She has also developed a leadership infrastructure at the school that enables the mission and provides for decision making and communication through the school's growth and development.

The school has a Leadership Team, comprised of the Director, an Assistant Headmaster, with the school since its inception, and a Primary Leader who came on board mid-year in 2002. The Assistant Headmaster focuses his role on the school operations and community outreach. The Primary Leader was brought on board to provide hands-on support and leadership for curriculum and instruction in the K-2 program. The Director provides this leadership in the upper grades. Also on the team are the school's Director of Student Support Services, ELL Director, Lead Social Worker, and Reading Specialists. The Leadership Team meets once a week and focuses on school-wide needs and development. For example, one of the roles is to work with faculty to develop their skills in using data to inform instruction. The Leadership Team meets with Lead Teachers from each grade level who, in turn, communicate and work with their grade-level counterparts during daily grade-level meetings.

The decision making structure and process is transparent to staff across the school. Decisions that are made by the Director alone are communicated to the staff with clear rationale and purpose. Most decisions are made within the Leadership Team structure with input from the larger school community. In some cases, decisions are brought out to the entire faculty for deliberation. Staff members understand that if they wish to initiate any changes at the school, they must present plans to the Leadership Team with clear rationales tied to the school's mission supported by data that "makes the case." Staff are then provided with support for pursuing ideas and enlisting others in their development.

Through this process, the school is able to maintain its mission yet is constantly working to address needs that arise. This flexibility and responsiveness is viewed as an attribute by staff and parents.

## **2. Teachers play a valuable leadership role in addressing content, curricular, and professional development needs across the school.**

As described above, teachers are involved as leaders at LCCPS through formal mechanisms designed to enlist and develop teachers' leadership roles. Teachers at the school are involved in ongoing dialogue and work to improve the school's curriculum and its ability to meet student needs. Each grade level has a lead teacher for each curricular area, thereby ensuring responsibility and support across the school for addressing curricular needs. The school Director meets regularly with the K-7 Teacher Leads.

Any teacher at the school is supported in working to make improvements. A teacher described her work to initiate the school's spelling and phonics program, Words Their Way. She saw the need, researched programs, and presented the plan to the school for consideration. Another teacher initiated interest among staff in a character education.

She has attended training and presented information to staff for consideration and is now the lead teacher charged with rolling out this character program.

Teachers highly value their opportunities to contribute to the school's development and growth. They describe their work as challenging and rewarding and express an appreciation for an administration that "always wants to know what we think – and also what we have done to address needs." They describe the professional environment at LCCPS as lively and collaborative, empowering teachers in support of the vision.

Through the school's Mentoring and Peer Coaching program, teachers are also helping to meet the professional development needs of teachers.

**3. Teacher turnover and the capacity to meet the needs of new and inexperienced teachers remains a paramount concern across the school.**

Teacher turnover at LCCPS has been a persistent problem, posing a threat to the school's viability particularly as it continues to expand. The rate of turnover has decreased since the end of the 2001 school year, when the school lost 60% of its teachers. The school reports that 11% of the teaching staff left at the end of the 2003 school year.

The teaching *staff* at LCCPS is relatively inexperienced with the average number of years teaching experience reported in the school's 2003/2004 Annual Report being 3.3. And as the school continues to grow each year, so do the numbers of new teachers the school needs to train and support. Finally, teachers at LCCPS work longer days and a longer year than do their counterparts in traditional public schools.

The school's Director and Leadership Team work to support teachers in a variety of ways on a daily basis. Yet the work is challenging and the days are long. The Board has taken steps to address the needs of its teaching staff. The salary structure has been increased such that it is commensurate with the Lowell Public Schools. Policies have been created to provide incentives for staff and others are being considered to support formal educational opportunities.

The challenge in meeting the needs of new, potentially inexperienced teachers along with retaining and supporting more experienced staff is likely to remain a primary challenge for LCCPS.

**4. LCCPS is highly committed to the professional development of teachers, providing substantial time, financial resources, and training to support teacher development.**

Teachers at LCCPS are provided with a number of supports to help them develop as professionals and as members of the LCCPS community. New teachers participate in nine days of professional development prior to the start of school. This pre-service professional development has focused on school curriculum, with particular emphasis on reading, instructional practices, and classroom management. Returning teachers receive five days professional development prior to the start of school. During the year, staff

participate in additional professional development during monthly early release day sessions. Beginning in 2003, professional development has focused on training to support the for the school's Reading First program and training in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Teach First state initiative for teaching ELL students.

Other mechanisms for professional development include support provided by the schools' instructional specialists for Reading and English Language Learning. Specialists provide consultation, resources, coaching and modeling in best practices as well as formal training opportunities. A Mentoring/Peer Observation program is also in operation where teachers learn how to mentor and be mentored. Teachers at LCCPS value this source of support and view it as effective. Teachers across the school describe the professional development support they receive from LCCPS as "way beyond anything you get anywhere else."

**5. Communication and collaboration across the school and with families is outstanding. Working together, staff members at LCCPS utilize a range of flexible and responsive procedures and services to support the well being of all students.**

Facilitated, in part, through the school's leadership structure, communication across the school staff is focused on professional matters related to service to students and their families. Staff across the school meet with their colleagues in formal meetings and professional development venues. Throughout the school, the team observed teachers and staff conferring with one another, either formally or informally, about students and about their work. Staff meetings are focused on professional matters and matters of housekeeping and announcements are handled through voice mail. The Director, Assistant Headmaster, and Primary Leader are highly visible throughout the school day, interacting with staff, students, and families. These formal and informal communication opportunities help to keep the school focused on its mission while addressing issues and problems in a timely and responsive fashion.

Communication with families happens in a variety of ways. Formal communication is provided through weekly Friday Letters from the Director and teachers, parent/teacher conferences four times a year, and a newly created in-take process. School social workers and counselors work with families on a regular basis. Teachers are expected to maintain regular communication with families in whatever form is necessary. It is not uncommon for teachers to go to a family's home or place of work to meet.

The overall goal for communication and collaboration at LCCPS is so that "every child will be known by many people". Staff members work as a team to bring resources to bear to help students and their families. Parents interviewed during the visit view the school as caring and responsive to students needs. They feel that teachers and staff listen to them and make time for them, working with them to address students' needs. One parent spoke of the school's work to create behavioral plans for her son – "We tried a variety of approaches 'til it worked." Others spoke of the school's ability to adapt the curriculum and instructional program to meet the varying needs of students. Parents of

students who were high achievers said they felt their children were being challenged. Other parents said that their children were provided with necessary supports because they were struggling.

**6. LCCPS is financially solvent and well resourced. Facilities are adequate for all school activities except for physical education and recreation. While there is concern about safety in terms of school location, the school provides structures and systems to provide a safe environment for students.**

Throughout its charter term, LCCPS has been financially stable with surpluses in budget at the end of each fiscal year that are used to support the school's future expansion or facility acquisition. Classrooms are well-equipped and students and teachers are provided with adequate teaching and learning resources. The school facility is expanding to meet the growing student population. At the time of the renewal inspection, the school was awaiting approval to move into a new addition. While the space is adequate in size, it poses important limitations for the implementation of a full curriculum. There is no adequate outdoor space for physical education and free play.

The school is located in a refurbished mill complex in a run-down section of the city. Concerns for safety are paramount at the school, and as a result, several measures have been enacted to ensure that students are safe. The school is secure and visitors must show ID to enter. School staff are always outside during arrival and dismissal. Notices and pictures of sexually dangerous persons are posted outside as the school is located near transient and homeless shelters. Staff are in the hallways and open spaces during transitions to ensure safety and orderliness. Parents interviewed report that while they feel their students are safe, they do not like the school's location because of the safety risks it poses.

**7. Deeply embedded in the school culture is an emphasis on character, citizenship and conflict resolution.**

While the school has yet to implement a formal social studies curriculum, LCCPS has done a notable job of teaching social skills throughout the school day. As described above, teachers and staff throughout the school use the same language, cues, and procedures for responding to student conduct. The procedures are non-punitive and are designed to enable children to learn about appropriate behavior, to self correct and to engage in resolving conflicts with others. Teachers and staff treat one another and students with respect, thereby modeling respectful behavior for students. Students engage in formal activities for conflict resolution, such as the Peace Path when problems arise. As they move through the Peace Path students are guided through a process of communicating feelings, listening, acknowledging and responding, and resolving the conflict.

Other efforts to create a climate of respect include posting of procedures for hallway flow, use of school uniforms, and respect for student language and culture as reflected in the school curricular offerings. The result of these efforts is that the school climate is

respectful, calm, and orderly. Happenstance evidence pointing to the success of these efforts was provided to the team when on Day Two of the visit, the school lost its electricity for a full morning. Staff, teachers, and students rallied and, without crisis or fanfare, found alternative solutions so that classes could continue.

**8. LCCPS has a system in place to make accommodations for some students with disabilities. The school, at present, is not equipped to serve students with a wider range of disabilities.**

In the first three years of its charter, the LCCPS struggled to provide services to students with severe special needs. In a May 2003 Coordinated Program Review (CPR), the school was found to be lacking procedural systems and supports necessary for the ensurance of Civil Rights. Since has made great strides in developing and implementing systems to support students with special needs.

The school, at present, provides services to students with mild to moderate communication, learning disabilities, and some neurological disabilities through a combination of pull-out and in-class supports. Two special education teachers provide classroom instruction to small groups of students, and provide consultations and in-class support to students as well. The school provides contracted services as needed such as neurological and psychological evaluation, speech, language, and occupational therapy. The school is fully accessible for individuals who use wheelchairs. At present, there are part-time nursing services available.

The school has referred back to the local public school system students with more severe or complicated special needs, i.e. students diagnosed with autism and Pervasive Developmental Delay (PDD). The number of students receiving special education services is relatively low compared to the numbers served in the Lowell Public Schools. At the time of the visit, the Director reported that between six and eight percent of students (41 students having Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with 10 students in the referral process) were being served. In the Lowell Public Schools, on average, about 13% of the student population have IEPs.

The school's procedures include pre-referral to school administrators, team meetings with teachers and specialists to discuss and develop strategies and to decide upon need for further evaluation. If a student comes to the school with an existing IEP, this often means follow-up with previous school to get needed information. In some cases, the school rewrites IEPs, with parent consent, in order to provide adjusted and/or additional accommodations and services. For example, a 4th grader enrolled having received one hour per day of services in the former school. The student was not reading at all and the school rewrote the plan to provide additional support. Another student, considered to be at-risk of dropping out, was provided with a range of social supports and a revised schedule to enable him to function in the school environment. The Director reported that she is able to design services with the needs of the child first, and that the school is flexible in its approach to offering services to meet the needs of students.

The school recognizes the need to provide professional development to all teachers in meeting the needs of special education students in the classroom, another criticism noted in the 2003 CPR. Since then the school has provided training in Differentiated Instruction, in modifying lesson plans, and on federal and state laws, regulations, and procedures. The school is working to build the capacity at the school to better serve students with special needs by recruiting and hiring teachers with special education training, who will provide ongoing training and professional development to existing staff. School administrators described the school's intent to develop additional programs for students with disabilities.

### **RENEWAL QUESTION 3: IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF THE CHARTER?**

#### **1. LCCPS adheres to the goals set forth in their accountability plans and they modify plans based on successes and identification of needs.**

A review of the school's Accountability Plans over the five year charter term shows improvement over time in the plans' specificity and clarity of goals in relation to the stage of development and needs of the school at each point in time. The school's 2001 Accountability Plan set forth very general and overly ambitious goals. For example, one goal stated that students will demonstrate superior performance in all areas of the MCAS and every student will receive and master the same ambitious curriculum. This student performance goal lacked specificity and measurability and was not realistic given the reality of the school at the time. During the first three years of the school's operation, student performance was far below district and state levels of performance.

The school's revised 2003 Accountability Plan set forth measurable and targeted goals that are more closely aligned to the school's priorities and capabilities. A revised student performance goal reads *students who have been at the school since kindergarten, or for three consecutive years, will demonstrate progressive improvement of reading skills on the MCAS, TerraNova, Success for All, and Reading First assessments*. The two student performance goals in the 2003 plan – one for reading and one for math – reflect the true focus of the school's academic program. The reliance on cohort data and analysis set forth in this goal is somewhat problematic given the school's lack of internal systems for cohort tracking as well as a relatively high rate of student turnover.

A revised Accountability Plan submitted in August of 2004 includes two additional Student Performance Goals, one for writing and one targeted to high school graduation. These additional goals reflect new areas of emphasis and development for the school.

The LCCPS School Performance Goals have reflected key viability goals for the school over the past five years, including enrollment, finance, and parent satisfaction, and the quality of professional staff. The new Accountability Plan reflects changes that account for goals that have been accomplished, new priorities, and ongoing organizational

priorities. Fiscal solvency and parent satisfaction remain as organizational goals, with Board Governance and teacher retention added as organizational priorities.

2. **Several tenets of the school's mission are solidly in place, including the school's abiding belief in students and families, its commitment to student success in reading and social skills, a longer day and school year, an array of services provided to support student success, and support for culture and language as learning assets. The school has yet to achieve its goal of providing its students with a comprehensive curriculum as described in its mission.**

While not explicitly stated as a tenet of the school's mission, a core feature of the school noted by this inspection team is a shared belief that all students and families are contributing members of the school community. This strengths-based approach to students and their families is evident in the observed interaction between staff and students and in the actions taken by the school to reach out to, engage with, and support families. The school embodies a "Do whatever it takes" attitude to support children and their families. Driven by this commitment are the school's efforts to ensure students develop the skills to be successful in school. The school's priority focus in this regard has been on the development of reading, writing, and math skills along with the development of work habits and social skills.

The school's commitment to the development of a viable multicultural environment is often summed up by the staff as helping students "learn together to live together." Initially conceived as a need to ameliorate conflict and violence between the city's Hispanic and Southeast Asian communities, the school takes an assets-based approach to ethnicity by infusing the language, history, and cultures of students and their families into the school curriculum.

The school has established an array of services and supports that are brought to bear to assist students and their families. Social workers, academic specialists, and school administrators work in tandem to provide responsive and flexible services to meet the complex needs of students and their families. The after school program offers an array of academic and enrichment activities for children of working families and for children needing additional academic support. Students who are falling significantly behind are required to attend after school and/or Saturday classes in which targeted instruction is provided based on student performance data. Others receive homework assistance.

World Languages teachers and Specialists, including Art and Physical Education teachers, work after school to provide an array of enrichment and recreational activities for students.

The school is clearly lagging in its commitment to providing of a comprehensive curriculum. This inspection team saw no evidence of a clear timeline and plan for the full development and implementation of social studies curricula. The school director reported that a calendar for implementation of science topics has been developed.

**RENEWAL QUESTION 4: IF THE SCHOOL'S CHARTER IS RENEWED,  
WHAT ARE ITS PLANS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?**

**1. The school's new accountability plan sets forth measurable goals that reflect a credible analysis of current need and projection of future direction.**

The Accountability Plan submitted to the state in August of 2004 reflects an appropriate set of student and school performance goals based on past progress and future direction. Student performance goals continue to focus on reading and math with additional focus on writing. A fourth goal reflects the school's intent to expand through twelfth grade. School performance goals, as described above, show a renewed focus on Board governance and attention to teacher retention.

The new plan does not reflect any particular goals related to the needs of English language learners or special education students while external reviews of LCCPS point to these areas of challenge for the school. This inspection team also found that the school is in its early stages of developing capacity to effectively meet the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities.

## APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE OF THE RENEWAL INSPECTION VISIT

### Day One: October 31, 2004

3:00-4:00	Presentation by school leaders
4:00-6:00	Team meeting:

### Day Two: Monday, November 1st

8:00 – 8:45	School Tour Review task assignments					
8:45 – 10:00	Observe SFA Reading Classes					
Break 10:00- 10:45						
10:45 – 11:15	Observe in K classrooms	Observe in grade 1 Classrooms	Observe in Grade 2 classrooms	Observe in Grade 3 classrooms	Observe in Grade 4 classrooms	Observe in World Language Classes classrooms
11:15 – 12:15	Meet with Leadership Team					
LUNCH						
1:15- 2:15	Meet with Special Ed Director	Meet with Reading Facilitators, ELL	Meet with School Director		Meet with Reading Facilitators, ELL	
3:00- 6:00	Review and Code Notes Team Deliberation					

### Day Three: Tuesday, November 2nd

7:30-8:30	Board Breakfast			
8:30 – 9:00	Feedback to School Leader(s)			
9:00 – 9:30	Kinder meeting	Class Observations/Document Review		
9:30-10:00	Class Observations	World Language Teacher group	Specials and after school staff mtg	
10:15 – 11:30	Class observations/Document Review		Reading Teacher Group	
<b>LUNCH</b>				
10:45-11:15	Grade 5,6,7 Teacher Group		Meet with Assistant Headmaster	
11:30-12:00		Grades 3+4 Teacher Group		
1:15-1:45	Grades 1+2 Teacher Group	Meet with After School Program	Meet with Operations Admin	Meet with After School Program
3:30-4:30	Parent Group		Parent Group	
3:00-3:30	Review and Code Notes			
3:00-6:00	Team Deliberation (4:00-5:00 Observe After School Program)			

### Day Four: Wednesday, November 3rd

8:30 – 9:00	Feedback to School Leader(s)				
9:00 – 9:30	Follow-up interviews  Follow-up observations  Coding and summarizing notes				
9:30-10:00					
10:15 – 11:30					
<b>LUNCH</b>					
10:45-11:15	Grade 5,6,7 Teacher Group		Art Rm 218		
11:30-12:00			Grades 3+4 Teacher Group		
1:15-1:45	Grades 1+2 Teacher Group	Meet with After School Program	Meet with Operations Admin		Meet with After School Program
3:30-4:30		Parent Group			Parent Group
3:00-3:30	Review and Code Notes				
3:00-6:00	Team Deliberation (4:00-5:00 Observe After School Program)				