

Renewal Inspection Report

Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School
West Tisbury, Massachusetts

SETTING

Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School, which opened in September of 1996, serves approximately 150 students in grades one through twelve. The school serves an island community and draws upon that community for programming, support and direction.

The small school's mission is to provide an individualized education that will result in both the attainment of students' own learning goals and various external goals recognized as relevant and meaningful by the school community. The commitment to striving for excellence through individualization also applies to the school's faculty, who develop unique curricula and teaching strategies to meet a commonly held set of academic standards.

The voice of the individual is also important in the school's broader community of parents and other stakeholders. The school values a forum for all views in its governance and day-to-day operations.

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 trilingual 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.

Claudia Grose, Inspector

Ms. Grose is a faculty member at Bank Street College in New York where she has recently been working on a U.S. Department of Education study of innovative literacy curricula in urban New England schools. She also consults with the Boston Plan for Excellence in the areas of whole school reform and professional development. From 1996 to 1998, she served as Director to the Cambridge School Volunteers Program, which was designed to help struggling 1st and 2nd grade readers. Ms. Grose has published numerous articles on the teaching of reading and presented her work to such organizations as the American Education Research Association. She conducts numerous workshops ranging from a three day training session for Americorps *America Reads* volunteers called "Catching the Sense of Literacy" to a literacy training specifically designed for staff developers called, "The Challenges and Opportunities of Literacy Coaches in School Change." Ms. Grose has also worked extensively in reading programs for learning disabled children both at St. Luke's/Roosevelt Hospital in New York and in private practice.

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.

Linda Gerstle, Inspector

As Executive Director of ATLAS Communities, a New American School Design, Linda Gerstle provides overall leadership, management, and supervision to ATLAS and its staff. Prior to joining ATLAS, Linda directed multiple and diverse initiatives in both public and private agencies that embraced school improvement and high student performance. As well, she has coordinated research efforts and overseen a series of reports on current trends in school restructuring.

Isa Zimmerman, Inspector

Ms. Zimmerman is the Superintendent of Schools for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District. She began her teaching career as a history and English teacher at the middle school level. She has served as an assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent before joining the Acton-Boxborough District. Ms. Zimmerman holds an Ed. D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Terry Mortimer, Inspector

Mr. Mortimer is a registered OFSTED inspector and one of the two founding partners of Full Circle, a British inspection company. He has been a primary teacher and principal in England as well as a curriculum and management consultant. Mr. Mortimer has been an equal opportunity administrator and consultant with a particular focus on multiracial and multicultural issues in British education.

Chris Hood, Monitor

Ms. Hood began her career as an English teacher in a London Comprehensive School. As well as serving as the Head of the English Department, she was responsible for equal opportunities across the curriculum. Ms. Hood has worked at the university level with English teachers in training at the secondary level. As a partner in Full Circle, a British inspection company, she is responsible for training of inspectors.

Renewal Findings

I. IS THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM A SUCCESS?

1. Student attainment as shown by standardized tests and student work indicates a successful academic program.

Students at MVPCS are demonstrating solid academic attainment and adequate improvement overall. Analysis of standardized test results show MVPCS students performing above state and national averages. Scores on state-mandated standardized tests (MCAS and IOWA) compare favorably with other island schools and state averages. Analysis of the school-adopted TerraNova test data for grades 3 – 11 indicate that, as a whole, the school consistently scores above national averages. Further analysis reveals a more positive trend for students who have been at the school for three years. Observations of students in their classrooms and reviews of student work samples are demonstrative of the success of MVPCS in adhering to its internal mission. Students are involved in goal setting and making choices about their learning. Students also show a notable metacognitive ability to reflect on their work and on themselves as learners. While the school currently lacks reliable criteria for judging high school portfolios and exhibitions, a review of sample portfolios demonstrate students' integration of learning standards, the ability to pursue an interest for in-depth study, and the ability to apply knowledge in a thoughtful and reflective fashion.

Narrative References: 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 47, 50, 83

2. The creation and implementation of a school-wide assessment instrument has enabled the linkage of state frameworks, instructional practices, and informal assessments.

The decision to develop the school's MVPCS Assessment Tool was a highly effective strategy both for providing a credible means to assess student performance and for infusing the state frameworks into the day-to-day work of teachers and students. The manner in which the tool is being implemented supports the dual mission of the school to support student-directed learning and to hold students accountable to a common set of standards. The Assessment Tool, comprised of five levels of performance indicators in Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies, is used by teachers in curriculum and lesson planning, and in working with students to assess their performance. Teachers are adapting and revising the standards in order to make them accessible to students and parents and are developing strategies for their utilization in the classroom. According to the external consultant who assisted teachers in creating the tool and process during the summer of 1999, staff at MVPCS has surpassed his expectations for implementation to date. As a result, all school

stakeholders now have an awareness of the academic expectations of students in the school.

The school is also creating a computerized Personal Education Plan Information System that will be used by students, parents, and staff for planning, assessment, reporting, and evaluation purposes. Students will use it for writing goals and for reporting and assessing their progress. Teachers will use it for curriculum and lesson planning as the information system provides links to the MVPCS Guiding Competencies, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the Performance Indicators, and Progress Reports. Staff will be able to aggregate and disaggregate data for reporting and analysis purposes.

Narrative References: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 24, 25, 29, 40, 41, 43, 72, 81

3. Implementation of this school-wide assessment instrument is underway, however, at present there is a lack of commonly agreed upon examples of work to illustrate the categories in the instrument.

Teachers are working to ensure efficient and effective utilization and integration of the Assessment Tool. The school's technology coordinator is developing the computerized Personal Education Plan Information System that will support data-driven planning, assessment, reporting, and evaluation. Lacking at present is credible criteria for judging student work against the performance standards, such as rubrics or exemplars that clarify for students, and for those assessing student work, what "novice" work looks like versus "practitioner." This is particularly critical at the high school level, where student portfolios and juried exhibitions are judged for meeting high school graduation requirements.

Narrative References: 5, 9, 11, 15, 42

4. The staff is hardworking and dedicated to the mission of the school.

The administration, faculty, and staff at MVPCS work diligently and collaboratively to implement the challenging dual mission of the school. Creating an academic program that requires attainment of rigorous standards while honoring and valuing the needs and interests of the individual learner is the ongoing challenge for staff at the school. There is clear evidence of a school-wide commitment to honoring and supporting this dual mission. The Director strives to maintain a balance in leadership between pushing the school-wide agenda forward while valuing the individual autonomy and contributions of staff. Staff struggle to balance the requirements for the attainment of standards and the unique needs, learning styles, and interests of students. Teaching at MVPCS is a form of art, and teachers at MVPCS work diligently to develop and refine their craft. The mission of MVPCS requires teachers to infuse common standards while meeting the needs and honoring the interests of every individual learner. It requires teachers to develop the school curriculum from

scratch, collaborating with colleagues in creating standards-driven, integrated and thematic units of study. It requires balancing individual, small group, and whole group instruction. It requires knowing how to effectively collaborate with a team teacher or grade-level colleague. It requires that teachers develop strategies and systems that will support students in developing capacities for self-directed learning. Faced with this multi-faceted mission, teachers at MVPCS have done a good job of remaining true to the mission of the school while developing the school's standards-driven educational program.

Narrative References: 3, 10, 19, 24, 26, 39, 40, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 63, 64, 68, 71, 72, 74, 80, 82

- 5. Observed teaching practices indicate that: 1) teachers demonstrate appropriate subject knowledge; 2) there is a tension between whole group instruction and providing opportunity for individual learning; and 3) there is a lack of appropriate pacing, clearly stated purpose and expectations in some lessons.**

Across the school, teachers demonstrated competence and confidence in their knowledge of subject matter. This is critical in an educational environment where student self-directed learning is supported. Teachers are able to successfully build on students' prior knowledge and to help students extend their knowledge as well. Students, in many classes, were engaged in rigorous and challenging content. The delivery of instruction was more uneven. Because of the dual mission of the school, teachers must continuously strive to balance whole group instruction, small group-work, and individualized instruction. Teachers at MVPCS demonstrated varied capacities in providing a coherent balance of instruction that enable students to learn a common body of knowledge while providing individualized learning opportunities. In addition, students in some classes were observed to be off task and demonstrated confusion about the expectations of lessons. It was noted in these cases that teachers failed to set forth clear goals and expectations for the lessons. The informal approach to learning sometimes resulted in pacing that did not serve students well, as there were no clear beginnings, transitions, or endings to a significant number of lessons.

Narrative References: 31, 32, 33, 34, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 61

II. IS THE SCHOOL A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

1. The stable enrollment, financial solvency, and growing recognition of the school have secured its place in Martha's Vineyard's educational landscape.

The Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School has established itself as a well-known and respected educational enterprise on the Island. MVPCS has maintained a stable enrollment over the past four years, with the student waiting list ranging from 34% to 66% of the total enrollment. Due in great part to the efforts of the school's treasurer and founder, the school has maintained a budget surplus for the past three years and is in the midst of a school building program, supported by fundraising efforts and a loan refinancing. The Superintendent of the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools spoke favorably of the school, expressing an interest in learning about some of the school's features and describing the school as a viable model for a school-within-a-school. The school's partnerships with the island community through its Artist-in-Residence and Mentorship programs have resulted in invaluable educational links with members of the island community.

Narrative references: 36, 37, 38, 65, 85, 86

2. The Board of Directors and School Director are well aware of the innate tension between the school's mission for excellence against external measures and providing an individualized and self-directed educational program. They recognize the need to develop decision-making processes and information systems that can accommodate the needs of the individual and the whole school community.

Ensuring that the school remains true to its charter and that students meet the external expectations for academic success are two of the Board's primary tasks, according to the Board President. As a result, the Board is consistently challenged by this dual mission. Having resolved the tension inherent in the school's early history by hiring a school Director, the Board now works to support the Director in enabling staff to work effectively toward accomplishing the primary goals of the school. The Board engages very successfully with the school Director in discussions that continuously blend and balance the school's dual mission. Because one of the central features of the school mission is to support democratic participation in decision making and to support decision by consensus, the Board has had to consider how best to meet these goals while ensuring that decisions are made efficiently and within a transparent governance structure. In response to this challenge, the Board has developed, and is now piloting, a model for decision making that attempts to accomplish those goals. While this new decision making process is promising, there is presently an uneven awareness within the school of how decisions are made and what the plans are for moving forward in key school-wide initiatives. The Director recognizes a need for more formal communication practices and systems to ensure that all staff are aware of school-wide plans and initiatives.

Narrative References: 10, 41, 63, 64, 67, 69, 84

- 3. In conjunction with the teachers' self-directed professional development, the Board and Director have correctly determined the need for a more robust school-wide professional development plan.**

With the support of the Board of Directors, the Director of MVPCS has been highly supportive of requests of individual teachers to participate in professional development activities. This, again, mirrors the school mission to support self-directed learning. At the same time, the Director and some staff recognize the need for school-wide professional development that will serve to build the capacity of the school to meet its shared goals. The engagement of the staff in the development, implementation, and revision of the Assessment Tool has served as a very successful school-wide professional development activity. The Director now hopes to focus on professional development to support team teaching and the use of technology in the classroom.

Narrative References: 44, 47, 50, 55, 56

III. IS THE SCHOOL FAITHFUL TO THE TERMS OF ITS CHARTER?

- 1. MVPCS is highly successful in adhering to its mission of supporting the individual academic and social needs of students in a multi-age, project-based setting. The school has demonstrated an adept ability to achieve these goals while also enabling students to succeed in a standards-driven curriculum.**

MVPCS has artfully created a school environment, ethos, and educational program that embodies the challenging mission of the school. Attending to students' individual academic development, the school has created an educational program that supports students in becoming self-directed learners. Every student has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which enables them to participate in evaluating their own progress and in setting goals for themselves with the support of teachers and parents. To meet individual learning needs, the school provides substantial human resources to provide students with small group and individual assistance. Special education services are offered, not only through the state mandated IEP process, but also through the school-developed PEP process.

The school adheres to its commitment to multi-age learning through the mixed-age classrooms, school-wide activities and curricular offerings that involve mixed-age groups. Project-based learning is incorporated through school-wide project periods scheduled twice a year and through individual student projects that are embedded in the curriculum. Students are exposed to project-based learning early on and become increasingly involved in projects as they progress through the school. At the high school level, projects are an essential part of a student's learning experience. The school's mission to enable students to participate in a democratic community is enacted through the daily interpersonal exchanges of students and staff, through the

school's Advisory program, and through the daily school-wide morning meeting. These efforts have resulted in a school community that is safe, nurturing, and respectful.

To have successfully implemented this complex mission while working to weave the state standards into the school's educational fabric speaks to the commitment and capacity of the staff. Standardized test scores, reviews of student work, observations of students' abilities to reflect on themselves as learners, and their demonstrated respect for one another and for staff all point to the success of the school in adhering to its charter.

Narrative References: 1, 3, 10, 19, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 59, 80, 82

2. Through a variety of courses and community involvement opportunities, MVCPS demonstrates its commitment to making the community an integral part of the students' learning experience.

Graduates of MVPCS are expected to have mastered skills for lifelong learning, to demonstrate the ability to set goals and achieve them, to have done real work in the community, and to gain experience in a field of interest. Critical in achieving these goals are the school's Artist-in-Residence Program, Community Service, Mentorship, and Offerings programs. Management of these programs is the responsibility of the Assistant to the Director. She recruits and hires artists to teach in the ten-week, Wednesday afternoon Artist-in-Residence program and produces course descriptions and enrollment forms. The Community Service and Mentorship programs provide the venue for high school students to make connections to experts and resources in the community in pursuit of a field of interest. The Offerings program, for ten to fourteen year olds, is held two afternoons a week, providing students with a variety of academic enrichment opportunities and creative endeavors. Teachers design and implement offerings, which enable them to share a passion with their students. These initiatives were thoughtfully designed to instill in students the habits and skills of lifelong learning, to help them explore areas of interest, and to enable students to contribute to, and be involved in, their island community.

Narrative References: 36, 37, 38, 43, 69, 85

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

- 1. The MVPCS Accountability Plan has clear and appropriate school objectives. However, it lacks long term goals and measures for assessing progress.**

The Accountability Plan submitted with the school's December 1999 Renewal Application, sets forth a mix of short term and long term goals, and as written, reflects the characteristics of a school improvement plan rather than an accountability plan. The accountability plan lacks long-term measurable goals – those things that the school wants to be held accountable for over the next term of its charter. The plan also lacks indicators, measures, and procedures for determining progress and a baseline of data from which progress will be measured over the next five years.

Narrative Reference: 72

I. Student

As put forth in the school's charter, students at MVPCS are expected to demonstrate the skills of self-directed learning, to participate as members of a democratic community, and to participate in the life and work of their community. Through the incorporation of the state's curriculum frameworks and standards of performance into the school's curriculum, instruction, and assessment program, students are expected to demonstrate improvement and success in meeting standards in core curricular areas. Central to the school's mission is the support of the individual learner. Toward this end, the school employs a wide range of interpersonal, instructional, and organizational supports to help each child achieve success.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOALS

1. Central to the MVPCS mission is to instill in students the skills and habits for self-directed, life-long learning. A key support to help students achieve this goal is the school's Personal Education Plan (PEP) process. Students collaborate with parents and teachers in setting goals and in evaluating progress in meeting them during PEP conferences, held three times a year. Each PEP is the responsibility of the student's advisor, who meets regularly with students around their PEPs during their advisor/advisee periods.
2. Throughout the day, students are engaged in activities that require them to make choices about their learning, to reflect on their progress, to engage in learning activities with their peers, and to apply their knowledge and skill in real-life situations. Students work independently, in small groups, in classroom groups, and in activities with students across the school. Six and seven year olds demonstrate their ability to navigate their learning environment and to make choices for learning in activity centers. Eight and nine year olds learn about coordinates, perimeter and area in anticipation of applying their knowledge and skill in an archeological dig. Ten and eleven year olds research people who represent courage for them in preparation for independent projects. High school students plan and execute independent projects in preparation for juried exhibitions.
3. Early on, students are oriented to the expectations of functioning as a member of a democratic community. This expectation is a foundation to the daily interaction and experience of MVPCS students. All students gather in the morning for a school-wide meeting and participate as presenters and facilitators of those meetings. During "advisories", students contribute to discussions of issues of importance to them and to the school and learn to do so within the parameters of a consensus building environment. Teachers and staff model the democratic principles of listening to and showing respect for all voices to support this school-wide expectation of students.

4. The expectation that students will interact with the community, provide service to the community, and to do “real work” in the community is supported by the school’s Community Service and Mentorship programs. In order to graduate, students must complete 250 hours of community service and must have participated in a mentorship program with a community mentor. Students choose the types of activities they wish to engage in and are evaluated by their community mentor.
5. There is no systematic mechanism in place for measuring student’s growth in becoming self-directed learners. The PEP is the process currently used to discuss progress and support this development; however, the school at present is unable to report on the school-wide progress of students in this core area. The school has identified developing a system to track progress in self-directed learning as a goal in their current Accountability Plan.
6. Standards for the core academic subjects of study have been clarified and articulated through the school’s development and implementation of the MVPCS Assessment Tool. The tool sets forth performance indicators for Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies aligned to the state curriculum frameworks. Developed during the summer of 1999, the performance indicators serve as the school’s standards for student performance in core subject areas.
7. The manner in which the MVPCS Assessment Tool is being implemented and utilized supports both aspects of the school’s dual mission to support individualized, self-directed learning and to adhere to a common set of standards based on the state frameworks. Teachers use the indicators for planning purposes in all core curricular areas. Students are made aware that the indicators represent the school’s expectations for academic performance and are assisted in utilizing them to assess their own progress and to set academic goals.
8. The set of performance indicators inherent in the Assessment Tool represents a rigorous and comprehensive set of academic standards. They provide a strong framework for curriculum and instructional planning as well as student assessment. The decision to develop a standards-based assessment tool is an extremely effective strategy for embedding the state frameworks in the day to day teaching and learning of the school. The tool, having been developed only this past summer, is still in formation as staff work to revise it to meet the needs of students at every age level.
9. The adoption of the Assessment Tool has led to the articulation and understanding of academic expectations within each instructional level. Students, teachers, and parents expressed understanding and confidence about what students are expected to know and to be able to do at each instructional level. What is currently lacking is an articulation across the age levels, ensuring that there is coherence from level to level and that there is appropriate knowledge and skill building and reinforcement from one level to the next. The school acknowledges this gap and is planning to work on the articulation of standards across age levels.
10. The school has successfully incorporated a common set of standards while maintaining the central mission of the school to help students become self-directed learners. This dual mission of supporting individualized learning and adhering to a

common set of standards provides a healthy tension within which the school engages in reflection and development. The success of the school in managing this tension is reflected in comments by students, such as “It is challenging – they combine academics with what you want to do,” “The school is so challenging – but we don’t get spoon fed – we learn how to feed ourselves.”

11. The school is working to strengthen a common set of requirements for high school graduation. Students are required to complete portfolios and engage in juried exhibitions as part of their graduation requirement. Criteria for judging the quality of these performances have yet to be fully articulated.

ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

12. External assessments used to measure student attainment and progress at MVPCS include; 1) the TerraNova Survey for language arts and math in grades 3 –11, 2) the state required MCAS in grades 4, 8, and 10 in language arts, math, and science and technology (the MCAS Social Studies test was administered to 8th graders for the first time in 1999), and 3) the state required IOWA test of reading in grade 3. Internal assessments of student performance include a variety of teacher developed assessments, teacher observations, checklists, and review of student work to assess performance in meeting the school’s standards as defined by the Assessment Tool. The tool includes indicators in all subject areas, except for foreign languages and the arts.

**Terra Nova Mean NCE of Total Score
(Combination of math, language and reading)**

Cohort	Description	96-97	97-98	98-99
1	4 th in 96-97	54.1	63.9	54.6
2	5 th in 96-97	62.0	62.7	60.2
3	6 th in 96-97	57.5	69.3	56.7
4	7 th in 96-97	63.8	65.8	70.8
5	8 th in 96-97	57.0	57.5	71.3
6	9 th in 96-97	76.4	75.8	83.0

(Each row represents one group of children across three years of scores.)

13. Test results on the Terra Nova indicate that, as a whole, the school consistently scores above national averages. A cohort analysis of total scores in math, language and reading suggests that students, overall, are experiencing adequate academic growth from year to year. In an analysis of students who have been at the school for three years, a more positive trend is revealed. Claims about student performance, however, must be considered in light of the small number of students represented.

Results for Spring 1999 and Spring 1998 Martha's Vineyard Charter

All Students		Percentage of Students at each Performance Level					Ave. Scaled Score	Number of Students Tested
		Advanced	Proficient	Needs Imp.	Failing (Tested)	Failing (Absent)		
Grade 4								
English Language Arts	District-99	0	50	50	0	0	239	16
	District-98							9
	State-99	0	21	67	12	0	231	76,137
	State-98	1	19	66	15	0	230	74,452
Mathematics	District-99	44	31	25	0	0	253	16
	District-98							9
	State-99	12	24	44	19	0	235	77,007
	State-98	11	23	44	23	0	234	75,235
Science & Technology	District-99	31	69	0	0	0	254	16
	District-98							9
	State-99	10	46	36	8	0	240	77,003
	State-98	6	42	40	12	0	238	75,230
Grade 8								
English Language Arts	District-99	8	46	31	15	0	238	13
	District-98	0	65	24	12	0	240	17
	State-99	3	53	31	12	0	238	70,236
	State-98	3	52	31	13	1	237	68,486
History & Social Science	District-99	0	21	43	36	0	228	14
	State-99	1	10	40	47	1	221	71,269
Mathematics	District-99	7	21	43	29	0	230	14
	District-98	0	41	29	29	0	230	17
	State-99	6	22	31	39	1	226	71,326
	State-98	8	23	26	41	1	227	69,014
Science & Technology	District-99	21	21	36	21	0	235	14
	District-98	6	53	18	24	0	235	17
	State-99	5	23	27	44	1	224	71,311
	State-98	2	26	31	40	1	225	68,995

14. Results on the MCAS reveal that students are performing at or above state averages in all subject areas tested. This data represents different students from year to year and the small numbers tested must be taken into account.

Iowa Grade 3 Reading Test, 1999

	Reading Comprehension Performance Level (%)					Number of Students	Partic. Rate
	No Results	Pre-Reader	Basic Reader	Proficient Reader	Advanced Reader		
District	11	0	11	33	44	9	89%
State	5	5	22	37	31	79,537	95%
National norm group	0	13	31	37	19	N/A	N/A

15. Data from standardized tests indicates that, for the most part, students are performing consistently above average in language arts. Grade 3 IOWA test scores compare favorably with other island schools and state averages. Fourth and 10th grade scores on the MCAS compare well with other local schools and state averages, while 8th grade scores in 1999 were lower than other local schools and on par with state averages. Review of student language arts work suggests, particularly in the early grades, that students are showing steady progress and accomplishment. Attainment in the high school is harder to discern as criteria for portfolios and juried exhibitions is evolving. Student work samples at this level showed strong personal interest but revealed uneven skill and sophistication.

16. In Mathematics, students have consistently demonstrated adequate performance on standardized measures. Fourth and 10th grade scores on the MCAS show students performing above local schools and above state averages. Eighth grade scores were below other island schools but at or above the state average. Students observed demonstrated adequate to high levels of understanding of mathematical concepts and language. For example, students in the 8/9 classroom were designing and planning an archeological dig on school grounds for which they would be applying their knowledge of coordinates, symmetry, perimeter, and area.

17. On standardized tests in Science, students score above the state and national averages. Improvement in Terra Nova scores can be seen for many individuals who attended the school in its first three years. Student work revealed solid attainment as well. For example, 6/7 year-old students discuss the concepts of structure, gravity and relative sizes of the planets in relation to their student-developed presentation of the solar system displayed in the classroom. A student in the 10/11 classroom was designing a motorized battleship, employing both science and technology skills. Middle grade students used their knowledge of cell structure to write descriptions of the phases of mitosis. A high school student designed and built his own camera by calculating the mathematics and science of light.

18. Two standardized assessments are used to measure achievement in Social Studies. Cohort scores on the Terra Nova show seventh grades scores declining over the past three years, eighth graders staying about the same, and ninth and tenth grade scores improving. The 8th grade MCAS was administered in 1999 for the first time. Students scored above the state average and were on par with the top average for other schools on the island.
19. Student attitudes toward learning are positive, overall, and students appear to enjoy coming to school where a caring and supportive atmosphere promotes respect for all. Students generally cooperate readily with teachers and listen to the input of teachers and classmates as well. Students were observed to ask questions readily, demonstrating their interest in learning. Speaking about their experience at MVPCS, students offered comments such as “being at this school makes you want to learn and to extend because there are no boundaries” and “they teach you how to learn.”
20. Students overall demonstrate a notable self-awareness of their intellectual growth. Even in the youngest classrooms, children articulate knowledge of their progress, of their work, and of their learning. A student in the 8/9 classroom offered “this year I learned more about editing revising, and how to make my story more interesting.” In the 12/13 class, a student commented that “I am really thinking about reading in a different way.” Another said, “I am more comfortable with writing now because of having to write every week.” Another commented, “I used to not read very much. Now I read every night – I can’t not read.”
21. Limited review of high school portfolios demonstrate students’ integration of learning standards, the ability to pursue an interest for study and development, the learning experiences offered through community services, and to ability to apply knowledge of writing, presentation, and subject matter. One student’s *Portfolio of Teaching* captured the student’s experiences as a teaching assistant in the school, as well as a well-developed thesis about teaching.
22. Individual projects developed and executed by students demonstrate the school’s success in supporting students as self-directed learners. One high school student casually presented information about his project, describing how he designed a working camera. The work demonstrated a high level of knowledge of the science and mathematics of light. Another student built a working weather station on the roof of a school, and one student is learning and working off campus with a local boat builder. These projects demonstrate the commitment of MVPCS to assist students in developing goals and pursuing fields of interest.
23. Students demonstrate a spirit of cooperation and respect for their fellow students. Students work well with their peers and appear to respect each other’s work and levels of accomplishment.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DEVELOPMENT

24. A core belief held at MVPCS is that all children have special needs. Their mission to support individual learners is enacted in several ways. A key strategy used to meet individual needs is the school's PEP process, designed to support individual needs, interests, and learning styles. All students have a Personal Education Plan. The PEP's are designed to be developmentally appropriate for various age levels. For the 6/7 students, they are assisted in identifying interests as well as academic, social, and personal goals. Older students are assisted in identifying personal and learning goals in each academic area and are asked to complete self-assessments about their work and progress in these areas.
25. Through the PEP process, staff work to identify student learning needs. Students may receive specialized instruction and support through this process. Forty-four students received special services through their PEP at the time of this inspection. Twenty-two of these students received support through an IEP, adhering to the state requirements for meeting the needs of students identified as having special needs. The approach the school employs to serve students is to start with the PEP process and to develop an IEP as necessary in collaboration with parents and staff. The staff describe this process as reconciling "the innovative approach with the mandated approach" in meeting student needs.
26. MVPCS demonstrates the founders' and Board's commitment to meeting the individual needs of students. Small student/teacher ratios, in combination with fluid classroom groupings, enable students to receive individualized support and accommodations in the classroom. The school employs an inclusion model of providing special education services. Specialists in reading, speech and language, and occupational therapy work with students in the classroom. The school also provides the services of a school psychologist and neuro-psychologist as necessary. A hearing impaired student is assisted by the school's use of specialized technology. The schools' Special Education Coordinator continuously collaborates with staff, including the school counselor, to develop systems to support students' needs. The school maintains a relationship with a special education collaborative on the island to support access to services.
27. Demonstrating its commitment to meeting the needs of its students, MVPCS hired an ESL teacher to work with a limited English proficient student in the 6/7 classroom. The student arrived in September "not speaking a word of English" and was observed to be conversant in English at the time of this inspection. Not surprisingly, the student was observed to have some difficulty in comprehension and would need continued support until she develops skills beyond basic communication.
28. The school counselor collaborates with staff in developing strategies to meet the social/emotional needs of students. The counselor provides individual and small group counseling.

Classroom

MVPCS has made great strides this year in the articulation of a common set of academic standards that are used for curriculum and instructional planning as well as assessment. The MVPCS Assessment Tool sets forth standards in language arts, math, science, and social studies for five levels of student performance. The decision to create standards aligned to the state frameworks through the development of an assessment tool provided high leverage for moving toward a standards-based program that still adheres to the internal mission of the school. Teachers are working with the tool to determine effective uses and to adjust the tool to make it accessible to students and families. In addition to the core curricular offerings at the school, MVPCS provides an array of learning opportunities through its Artist-in-Residence, Mentorship, and Offerings programs. Teachers at MVPCS demonstrate competence in the curricular areas, and the ability to work effectively to deliver an educational program that both supports self-directed learning and challenges students to meet a common set of standards. Classroom management was uneven throughout the school, with some students spending time off task and distracting others. Attention to the design of classroom environments, as well as the introduction and pacing of lessons is lacking. Sufficient attention to the resource needs of the high school and completion of the school's building program is also lacking. Finally, the climate at MVPCS is one that demonstrates the faithfulness of the school to its mission to support the individual learner and to enable students to participate effectively as community members. The school is a nurturing, supportive environment in which students learn how to learn.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

29. The curriculum at MVPCS is well aligned to the state curriculum frameworks. The school employed an effective strategy for the alignment of curriculum and assessment by developing the school's Assessment Tool based on the state frameworks. Teachers in all core subject areas refer to the frameworks and the Assessment Tool indicators in curriculum and lesson planning. In addition to incorporating the subject area standards, teachers are mindful of incorporating the state's Habits of Mind frameworks into their planning as well. In doing so, teachers are also able to offer curricular opportunities that support the school's internal mission of student-centered learning.
30. Curriculum is planned on a two-year rotation to accommodate the learning needs of students in the school's multi-age classrooms. The curriculum moves from integrated studies in the early grades, to thematic instruction in the middle grades, and to more distinct classes and curriculum at the high school level with a focus throughout on individualized, project-based learning. The curriculum appears to strike a good balance of depth and breadth as teachers work to incorporate the standards in a program that is designed to provide depth of experience through a project-based, interdisciplinary, hands-on approach. The curriculum is teacher-developed, incorporating a variety of materials and resources. Textbooks were not widely used but are used as one of many resources to support learning.

31. In language arts, the curriculum, which is closely aligned to the state frameworks, is literature based, using a wide array of personally chosen texts and assigned texts. There seems to be a strong emphasis on writing throughout the grades. An integrated unit of study in the 6/7 classroom incorporated lessons in math, science, language arts, and art beginning with the reading of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Students in the 10/11 class chose a novel to read for the next 5 weeks that represented the thematic study of courage. Middle school classes focused equally on reading and writing workshops, incorporating literature study and writing into the science and social studies curricula. In the 12/13 class, a study of the origins of myths culminated with student written and illustrated myths to be shared with younger students. A high school lesson focused on Joseph Campbell's interpretation of the Hero's Journey as a lens through which to interpret literature.
32. The mathematics curriculum aligns with both the internal expectations of the school and the expectations represented in the external state assessments. Faculty incorporate the standards into the curriculum through the use of the assessment tool's progress indicators and the learning expectations of the state frameworks. Students are taught mathematical concepts and skills that are then applied in thematic and project-based activities. An integrated unit in the 8/9 class involved students learning the concepts of coordinates, area, and perimeter in preparation for an archeological dig.
33. As in other curricular areas, science is incorporated into integrated, thematic studies in the early grades, and in more specific courses in the upper grades. Curriculum is teacher developed, whereby teachers in their age-level groupings collaborate to incorporate science into thematic units of study. In the early grades, science is taught in integrated studies such as a unit of study on the solar system that incorporates art and reading. In the middle grades, the curriculum is taught through a two-year rotation of earth and physical sciences. In the high school, students take science classes that continue to meet the expectations inherent in the state frameworks.
34. The social studies curriculum is primarily teacher developed through the use of the frameworks, assessment tools, and school goals in planning. Social studies are integrated in instruction in the same fashion as other subject matter. Projects, such as the study in the 12/13 classroom on the Holocaust, enables students to learn from primary source material and to incorporate research, writing, and presentation in the development of final product. Textbooks are used in the social studies curriculum to teach and reinforce concepts in history to enable students to be successful on the state MCAS test.
35. The curriculum for world languages is not, as yet, formally aligned to the state frameworks. A task force has been established to create indicators for the foreign language program. The foreign language curriculum has been designed to provide early exposure to both Spanish and French for all students from ages 6 – 9, and then to enable students to choose a language to study in the remaining years.

36. The performing and visual arts program at MVPCS includes instruction in music for all grade levels, and visual art experiences in the school's Offerings and Artist-in-Residence program, as well as through integrated and thematic classroom units of instruction. The arts have not been aligned to the state standards as yet. The music teacher has been involved in creating standards for high school portfolios. The 12/13 teacher is an art teacher by training, and therefore, often integrates art into her curriculum.
37. Integral to the school's mission is the curricular offerings provided through the school's Community Service and Mentorship program. High school students engage in learning experiences in a variety of fields through these programs. These curricular offerings meet the internal goals for students to engage in self-directed learning, to do work in the community, and to identify and explore a field of interest.
38. The school's Offerings and Artist-in-Residence programs provide students with curricular experiences to enhance and extend their learning experiences. In the Offerings program for 10-14 year olds, held two days a week, teachers develop and offer learning opportunities of a varied nature intended to provide a balance of creative and academic enrichment experiences. It is an opportunity for teachers and staff to teach something they love and to expose students to learning opportunities beyond the traditional curriculum and often beyond the school walls. Eleven different offerings were provided during this semester. Examples of offerings included one teacher's class on how to care for horses in which students went to horse barns to work with and learn about horses. Another teacher offered an MCAS preparation class to provide help to students who felt they needed it. The Artist-in-Residence program happens each Wednesday afternoon. Artists from the community are paid by MVPCS to teach a variety of classes. One class observed, *Fabric Arts*, had students engaged in designing and making scarves.
39. The school has worked diligently this year to develop and utilize a teacher-developed Assessment Tool. During the summer of 1999, teachers worked with an external consultant to develop a common set of performance indicators that would serve to assess student progress and to guide curriculum planning. The tool was designed with both the internal mission of the school and the external expectations for performance as outlined in the state frameworks in mind. Performance indicators have been developed in language arts, math, science, and social studies and identify performance at five levels: novice, beginner, apprentice, and flyer. A task force has been established to develop performance indicators in foreign languages. Speaking about the progress the school has made in the development and use of the Assessment Tool, the consultant commented "In a short time they went from not doing any kind of assessment to working very hard to pull it all together. I have never seen a school work so quickly. The distance they have traveled is enormous."
40. The use of the Assessment Tool for student assessment and curriculum development has changed teaching and learning at the school. As one teacher commented "this has changed my teaching. Planning and assessments are now completely integrated." Teachers use the indicators to plan units and lessons and to work with students in evaluating their work. Staff have been adapting the assessment tool for

developmentally appropriate use at the various age levels. In addition, they have made accommodations to enable the indicators to be useful for them in planning and assessment. For example, a science teacher pulled out process standards from the assessment tool to create a separate strand. Student checklists have been created from the indicators to provide a tool for teacher and student monitoring of progress.

41. Efforts are currently underway in the development of the MVPCS Personal Education Plan Information System. The computerized database, when completed, will allow teachers to access the MVPCS Guiding Competencies, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the Performance Indicators for curriculum and lesson planning purposes. It will also enable teachers and students to enter and track student work and performance data. Staff will be able to aggregate and disaggregate data for reporting on student progress and for analyzing strengths and weaknesses.
42. The use of student portfolios for assessment purposes is still in development. At the elementary and middle school levels, student work is collected in portfolios; however, there are no rubrics or exemplars to provide for the assessment of student work. Some classes have students keep work folders and check off what they have done on a checklist of performance indicators. High school students are required to develop portfolios as part of their graduation requirement. Lacking at this time, however, are exemplars or rubrics from which standards of performance can be systematically judged. Community members serve to evaluate student performance as part of the required juried exhibitions.
43. Progress reports, issued three times a year, are detailed reports of student achievement that include qualitative descriptions of student progress as learners and in academic subjects. Included in the reports are student levels of performance in academic areas, as well as evaluations of performance in the Artist-in-Residence program, Mentorship and Community Service, and Offerings.

TEACHING

44. Team teaching is central to the instructional program at MVPCS. In the 6-9 classrooms, teams of two teachers work together to plan and deliver instruction. In the 10-13 and high school classes, classes are departmentalized with content area teachers collaborating with their colleagues to plan instruction and teaching in their respective curricular areas. The Director of the school recognizes the need to support team teaching and plans to provide professional development to assist teachers in working in a team teaching environment.
45. The teaching at MVPCS supports the school's charter by providing multiple learning opportunities for students including project-based activities, learning centers, hands-on learning, independent projects, individual work, small group work, and whole class instruction. Teachers support the individual learner by recognizing their needs and structuring activities that enable success for a wide range of abilities. Teachers show respect for individual students and appear to have good relationships with students. In all classes observed, teachers worked to support student-directed learning.

46. Predominant features of the language arts program include a focus on authentic literature, independent reading, a solid balance of reading and writing activities, and expectations for student analysis and interpretation of text. Explicit instruction in reading strategies throughout the grades was less evident. Also lacking was the use of Big Books or other enlarged text to support reading instruction in the early grades.
47. In the 6/7 classroom, teachers introduced guided reading this year, providing opportunities for small group instruction to emergent readers and more sophisticated literary discussion and analysis for more fluent readers. Teachers demonstrated sound pedagogical practice, building on prior knowledge, skill building, using running records to inform instruction, and conducting writing workshops two times a week. In the 8/9 classroom, homogenous groups are formed for reading instruction. In a reading/writing circle activity, students were jointly editing a paragraph and using their knowledge of editing symbols to edit their own work. Displays and charts such as writing process and interdisciplinary themes are displayed to support learning. Student writing notebooks were observed to lack clear goals or a systematic process for feedback from teachers. In the 10/11 class, there is a routine for reading, starting with the teacher reading aloud followed by a book club and student writing and grammar activities. There was no evidence of explicit reading strategies instruction. The class publishes a monthly literary magazine. Given the uneven test results in the upper middle grades, and in light of research that points to the need for the ongoing teaching of reading strategies throughout the grades, this gap should be noted. In the 12/13 class, students were engaged in a variety of literary activities. Students in one class gave highly reflective and analytic presentations on books they had read in connection with a unit on the banning and censoring of books. Students had also written to authors of interest and had received letters back, including from Michael Crichton, and had interviewed local authors. The 12/13 teacher has a degree in art, and therefore incorporates art into her lessons such as in the activity where students were to write, illustrate, and publish a book about the Vineyard. In the high school, students developed polemic speeches based on Dickens' *Hard Times*. Student speeches were videotaped and critiqued by their peers based on criteria for attire, thesis, evidence, conclusion, and presentation.
48. A reading teacher, newly hired to support reading instruction in the early grades, provides direct service to groups of children in the classroom and works to support teachers in the development of literacy instruction. She works with teachers in the 12/13 classes to strategize ways to integrate reading instruction in the content areas.
49. Teachers of mathematics demonstrate a strong subject knowledge base and the use of a variety of teaching strategies. In the 6/7 class, teachers used multiple modes of input including oral, visual, and kinesthetic. In the 8/9 classroom teachers employed verbal and written demonstrations in teaching the concepts of perimeter and area. Teachers listened to children's responses and scaffolded in an appropriate fashion. The high school math instruction was integrated with science and demonstrated rigorous math concepts and knowledge.

50. The knowledge base of faculty teaching science is very good across the school. Pedagogy is varied. In the 6/7 classroom, students were engaged in continuing studies of dinosaurs, coloring a sheet depicting bones scattered about a dig. The exercise was challenging and appropriate for the age level. In the room were books and displays related to this science unit. In the 8/9 class, students studied a plate of bones submerged in the ground. Over a number of days they were to draw the plate and hypothesize about the type of dinosaur they believed it to be. Students at an early age are introduced to the language and procedures of the scientific process. In the 10/11 class, students hypothesized about how different rock materials affect the movement of ground water. They then carry out their procedures and record their observations. A lesson on mitosis in the 12/13 class demonstrated a high level of knowledge of the cell by students and students explored slides to find cells in mitosis. High school science instruction was essentially a lecture format with questions and discussion. Content was challenging and appropriate for this age level.
51. Limited observation of social studies instruction revealed teachers to be thoughtful in the planning and delivery of social studies lessons. Staff are highly qualified to teach the content, and work to make experiences for their students both challenging and meaningful. In the early grades, social studies is woven into integrated and thematic units of study. A middle school teacher took a substantive course in *Facing History and Ourselves* in order to prepare for teaching a unit on the Holocaust. The high school social studies teacher is highly qualified with a certificate in history and is diligent in her efforts to develop her own skills in order to provide meaningful learning opportunities for her students.
52. Teachers of foreign language were observed to be both very passionate and committed to their work. Pedagogy appeared to be a traditional approach to language learning comprised primarily with oral and aural call and response and rote repetition of vocabulary words.
53. Music instruction is comprised of basic content including singing and listening activities, and the teaching of basic musical concepts. The teacher collaborated with the 10/11 group to help them research songs for their study of the revolutionary war. The songs were incorporated into a student play. The issues of inadequate space and materials for group music instruction is a barrier to the delivery of engaging music activities. The integration of music into thematic study, as demonstrated to be effective, could be explored further for incorporation throughout the school. The music teacher expressed enthusiasm for the development of the program at the school.
54. In addition to the Artist-in-Residence program offerings, art is integrated into classroom activities by teachers. Teachers in the 6/7 and the 12/13 classes have formal training in art, and this is reflected in the integration of art into students' work. At present, there is no coherent program for the arts throughout the school, although the 12/13 teacher expressed a desire to develop a program.
55. The overall strengths of teaching at MVPCS include a solid knowledge of subject matter, a high degree of commitment to providing the intricate balance of student-centered learning and the infusion of common standards, and the commitment to

providing varied learning opportunities to meet the needs of individual learners. Areas for development include attention to pacing, lesson beginnings and endings, making goals clear and expectations explicit and bringing closure at the end of lessons.

56. Classroom management was varied across the school. Students in some classes were observed to be off task for significant amounts of time. In some cases, students distract others from learning. There is some lack of attention to clearly setting forth expectations as well as to managing the classroom environment. The classroom management in the 6/7 classroom is facile and developmentally appropriate. This classroom is thoughtfully designed to allow for student movement through various learning activities and allows for whole class, small group, and individual space. Attention is given to beginnings, transitions, and endings. The middle school grades are faced with inadequate space to create such an environment at present. In designing the new environments planned for construction, attention to the developmental needs of middle school students should be considered, as well as ways to help students focus.

RESOURCES

57. The allocation of human resources in support of the school's mission is noteworthy. The low student-teacher ratio enables teachers to provide individual support and monitoring of student progress. The allocation of additional staff in support of educational goals is also commendable. The school is diligent in providing students with extra support as needed, as evident in the hiring of an ESL instructor for one young limited English proficient student, and the hiring of a reading teacher to provide extra support for literacy development in the younger grades. The school has also provided support to students with special needs above and beyond the requirements of the mandated IEP process through their PEP process.
58. MVPCS has clearly succeeded in creating a nurturing and respectful environment for students, staff, parents, and guests. Staff members and students, on a first name basis, demonstrate regard for one another and staff maintain a respectful approach with students, even in trying situations. Students and staff move about the cramped facility with ease and without the types of disturbances common to transitions in schools. Students across the school appear to genuinely respect their teachers and the staff. It is undoubtedly this approach that has resulted in students with prior histories of behavior problems in school commenting positively about their experience at MVPCS. It is also this feature that attracts students with challenging behaviors to the school.
59. Students are assisted in working together in a multi-age environment and are "raised" in an environment where all individuals are to be respected for who they are. Students respect one another's work and support one another's learning, regardless of the level of accomplishment. The school's philosophy that every child has special needs has resulted in a community where diversity is a construct that represents more than race, ethnicity, gender, or other socially assigned attributes. The school enrolls a small number of students of color, and outreach efforts are made by the Director to local racial and ethnic communities.

60. The adequacy of material resources to support learning at the school is varied. Generally, there is an adequate amount and variety of resources in the early grades, however, the lack of enlarged texts for shared reading was noted. There appeared to be an adequate supply of books, both related to themes of instruction and to provide a variety of reference, fiction, and non-fiction. Resources to support science, social studies, and math were evident as well in the early grades. A paucity of materials was noted to support learning in the upper grades. The school's science lab is seriously under-equipped and under-developed to support ongoing science inquiry. The library, at this point in time, is largely "virtual". The new librarian, however, is developing an extensive database and works closely with teachers and local librarians to supplement resources. The school also lacks sufficient computer technology in the classrooms. The Director has ordered additional computers.
61. The 6/7 classroom is an appealing and inviting room, with activity centers, discovery, authentic literature, and walls covered with student work. It is highly organized to support young students learning how to become independent learners. The 8/9 classroom, while also arranged with centers, is less organized and could serve to provide unintended confusion for students. Some classroom settings for the middle school students are inadequate to support instruction. These are being replaced by new construction. The high school space lacks some resources such as a science lab mentioned above.
62. Instruction is sometimes hampered due to the limited facility. This is an ongoing struggle for the school. New construction already planned will add two more classrooms which will offer an opportunity to consider physical space and resources to support effective teaching and learning for middle school students. The facility at present is inadequate to support food service, library, staff meeting and workspace, and space for small group instruction. The Board is working to raise funds and is refinancing to support their building program, which includes installing sprinklers, building the two classrooms, a kitchen, three rooms in the high school and meeting rooms.

III. School

The leadership of the Board and administrative staff is well suited to support the continued growth and work of the school. The Board has developed into an effective governance body and works to address issues in a responsive and efficient fashion. The school Director is lauded by parents, teachers, and Board members alike for his ability to move the school toward common goals and to support the autonomy and contributions of teachers and staff. Creating effective mechanisms for communication in a school founded on the principals of consensus and school-wide involvement is an ongoing challenge for the Board and school Director. While further work in this area is needed, strides have been made in that parents and staff now report a shared understanding of the academic expectations of students at the school. Relationships among all the school stakeholders appear to be positive and supportive of the direction of the school. Professional development opportunities for individual staff have been supported, with a recognition of the need for more school-wide professional development tied to school goals. The school does a credible job of communicating and collaborating with parents and of providing bridges between the students and their island community.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

63. The Board of Directors of the MVPCS had moved away from day to day management of the school since the hiring of a school Director. The Board is a cohesive and committed group of individuals who see their roles now as carrying out four primary functions: 1) ensuring that the school remains true to the charter; 2) ensuring academic success; 3) ensuring the school is financially viable; and 4) serving as spokespersons and “cheerleaders” for the school. The Board has designed a decision making process that honors the commitment to democratic decision making by consensus and that also produces results in a timely fashion and moves the school away from an ad-hoc model of decision making. The Board arranged for a retreat with a facilitator in January for the purposes of designing a model for decision making. The Board is now piloting their model in which issues are brought to the Director or a committee, sent out for community input, and forwarded to the Board for consideration. The Board only considers proposals that have broad implications for the school.
64. The leadership of MVPCS, including the Board and school Director, is very conscious of the tension that exists between the school’s mission to support student-directed learning and to meet the external state standards of performance. This tension provides a healthy catalyst for ongoing reflection, questioning, and development at the school.
65. For the past three years, MVPCS has demonstrated financial solvency and a healthy student enrollment and wait list. In each of the past three years, the school has maintained a budget surplus, and the number of students on the school’s wait list has ranged from 34% to 66% of the total enrollment. Board members expressed concern for the school’s financial viability due to the need to raise substantial dollars for the school building program.

66. One Board member described the Board's desire to see an articulated "through-line" curriculum, reflecting the Board's awareness that the school has yet to vertically align its curriculum.
67. The school appears to have made a successful transition from a school founded and opened intentionally with no school Director to a school that values and supports the school Director. The hiring of an interim Director appears to have enabled that transition to happen successfully.
68. The school Director is highly valued by Board members, staff, and parents. Board members value the Director's collegial relationship with them and his commitment to implementing the intricate dual mission of the school. Staff members report that the Director's leadership provides support and direction for the school while supporting individual teachers' autonomy. Parents value the opportunity to discuss issues with the Director. As one parent commented, "Bob is always open to suggestions."
69. Conversations with school staff indicated, and the Director recognizes, the need for a more structured mechanism for school-wide communication and planning. The Director's leadership style has him in classrooms on a daily basis, interacting with teachers on a one-to-one basis. This activity is an important strategy for supporting a central vision in the school that defines quality work and school-wide expectations. This one-to-one interaction in the classroom provides a mutual benefit to both teachers and the Director. Utilizing the existing meeting structure to explicitly review plans and next steps may allay concerns and confusion among staff.
70. In addition to the Director, school administrators include a part-time Business Manager and former school founder who oversees the payroll, equipment and supply needs, and other business functions. As he described his job, "My role is to help Bob focus on instruction." There is a full-time administrator, also a school founder and charter school parent, who oversees enrollment and manages the Artist-in-Residence, Mentorship, and Community Service programs. As a parent of students herself, she also serves as a link between parents and the Director. The Special Education Coordinator works full-time to support the administrative and educational needs of the program. This delineation of leadership tasks appears to be effective in meeting the needs of the school.
71. Morale at the school appears to be very positive, with all staff demonstrating high levels of commitment and energy in their work. At the same time, the school maintains a somewhat calm, relaxed, and friendly tenor.
72. Teachers are continuously engaging with students, monitoring their progress, and adjusting curriculum and teaching to meet students needs and interests. Following an analysis of the results of its MCAS tests, staff identified gaps and developed strategies for improvements in curriculum. The Assessment Tool now enables teachers to use it to assess individual progress. When the database is complete and in use, the school will be able to aggregate and disaggregate data to identify school trends, gaps, and strengths.

73. The school's current Accountability Plan is inadequate to effectively function as an Accountability Plan. The plan in its current form is similar to a school improvement plan that outlines specific short-term objectives and activities. The school lacks an Accountability Plan that; 1) sets forth the critical, measurable goals against which the school will be held accountable over the next five years; 2) identifies the measures by which it will report its progress over time; and 3) creates a baseline of data from which the school will measure progress over time.

FACULTY AND STAFF

74. Board members, administrators, parents, and students all spoke highly of the teaching staff at MVPCS. They were lauded for their care, commitment, competence, and the willingness to "go the extra mile."

75. The hiring process at MVPCS includes the establishment of an interview committee comprised of a student, parent, Board member, and teachers. The committee makes a recommendation to the Director who has the final decision.

76. Support for new teachers is intended to be provided through mentorship by a veteran teacher. This initiative was begun just this year and has had uneven success. The school is also working to develop a teacher handbook to support the information needs of new teachers. Some teachers report that hiring staff in the summer provides a good way for new staff to be oriented.

77. The Director conducts formal teacher evaluations on an annual basis using the teacher evaluation instrument designed by the interim Director. The evaluation form is a thorough and credible evaluation tool. The Director has teachers use the form to do a self-assessment, and they use this as a springboard for conferencing. Teachers report that the evaluations are relaxed and supportive. Peer evaluation is intended to be part of the process as well.

78. Teachers report having good professional relationships with the Director and with co-teachers. They expressed a desire to have more understanding of the program across the entire spectrum of age levels. Again, this is reflective of the need for vertical articulation of the curriculum.

79. Professional development has been primarily focused on the needs and desires of individual teachers. Teachers have been supported in attending conferences and workshops. One teacher offered, "you can get any kind of professional development you want." This level of support speaks highly to the Board and Director's support for teachers. On the other hand, the Board, Director, and some staff articulate a need for focused school-wide professional development. Areas mentioned for faculty-wide development include technology in the classroom, team teaching, and creating clarity and effective pacing in the delivery of instruction.

80. The nature of the MVPCS school is highly collaborative and, therefore, dependent on healthy and productive relationships among staff. Staff were observed to engage collegially and collaboratively across the school, thereby modeling their roles as members in a community.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

81. Parents reported having clear understanding about the school's expectations. Homework assignments were reported to be clear, as well as the expectations for the parents' roles. The school invited parents in to be oriented to the Assessment Tool. Progress reports are now clearer to parents as they better understand what the levels of performance mean.
82. Parents speak highly of the school's ethos and climate. They are grateful that their children are able to go to adults with problems or when they need help. They describe the school as a caring place, where "kids care about each other and where teachers care about kids." They feel that the school takes their children seriously and also helps them to develop responsibility for learning and for being members of a community.
83. The quality of the educational program is viewed by parents as solid. One parent expressed that she initially had concerns but that she came to see that her daughter was getting a deeper understanding of concepts. She also mentioned that her daughter is able to explain the rationale behind the educational program at the school. Another parent spoke highly of the project-based curriculum, reporting that the projects are very illuminating in demonstrating what students can do. She also likes the aspect of student self-assessment.
84. The Director holds regular meetings with parents to involve them in discussing school issues. Parents are integral to the PEP process and, therefore, collaborate with their children and teachers in reviewing progress and setting goals. A weekly bulletin is sent out by the school Director. Parents report that they feel comfortable walking into the school and communicating with staff.
85. The Island community is an integral part of the MVPCS in two significant ways. The Artist-in-Residence program brings in community artisans to provide students with a variety of art experiences as well as to expose them to vocational life in the community. The mentorship program links each high school student with a mentor in the community, providing exposure to a field of their interest and training from experts in their respective fields.

86. The Superintendent of the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools conveyed a positive perspective on MVPCS as well as an interest in providing support and learning from the school. He described the school as having solid core ideals, with a difficult mission to implement. He sees the school as a "good model for a school-within-a-school." He is interested in learning more about the school's Assessment Tool. His only concern is in the school's capacity to serve students with severe special needs. The school's Special Education Coordinator stated that the school is prepared to do so.